

The Building Blocks of our Beliefs:
We Believe in the Forgiveness of Sins

1 John 1:5-2:2

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Ernest Hemingway wrote a story about a father and son who had a serious misunderstanding. In the story, the boy finally runs away from home. The father, however, is not content to let his son go. In an effort to find the boy, the father puts an ad in the Madrid, Spain newspaper. It contained these words:

Dear Paco,

Meet me at the town square at noon on Sunday.

All is forgiven.

Your father.

That Sunday 800 males by the name of Paco showed up at the town square. They all came seeking forgiveness from their fathers.

We believe in the forgiveness of sins.

One of the great promises of the Bible is found in the scripture lesson today. *“If we confess our sins, God who is faithful and just, will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness”* (verse 9).

THE PROBLEM OF SIN

A friend of mine who raised four sons used to say, “When one of the boys calls up and says, ‘Dad, we have a problem,’ things are not good.” We have a problem. The problem has been around since Adam and Eve. The problem exists in every person here today. The problem is sin. Paul said, *“All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. No one is righteous, no not one”* (Romans 3:23). John said, *“If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us”* (1 John 1:8).

We sin when we break the law. Sin is transgression. Max Lucado, in his book The Grip of Grace, says, “My route to the office is south to the intersection where I and every other person in Texas try to turn east. Each morning as I waited in a long line, for long minutes, at a long light, I mumbled there must be a better way. I found it. A half mile from the light I spotted an alley behind a shopping center. I tried it. It worked. I couldn’t wait to tell my wife about it. So the next time she was with me, I said, ‘Watch this.’ Like a hunter on safari I swerved from the six lanes of traffic into that alley and out on the other road. ‘What do you think, Sweetheart?’ I asked. My wife replied, ‘I think you just broke the law. You went the wrong way on a one-way street.’ My road less taken was a route not permitted. The real problem presented itself when I came down the road the next time. Now I knew it was against the law. But I could find a number of reasons to

do it anyway.”

I ask you today, what part of honoring God, not using his name in vain, respecting parents, keeping the Sabbath, and not killing, stealing, lying, coveting, and committing adultery don't you understand? When we break the laws of God we sin against ourselves and others. For sin is a transgression of the law.

Sin is trespassing on other people's personhood. David was a man after God's own heart, but when he let his lust lead him to adultery with Bathsheba, then tried to cover it up by having her husband, Uriah, murdered in battle, God held him accountable. He had the legal right to do as he pleased, but God would not allow him to be morally irresponsible.

When we spread gossip, repeat rumors, defame character, destroy reputations and otherwise rob people of their personhood, God will hold us responsible. Trespassing is sin.

Sin is missing the mark of High Calling. The word is *harmartia*. It is failure to be what we are created to be. It is refusing to see what we need to see. It is more than wrong deeds; it is missed opportunity. Jesus said I was hungry and you gave me no food, thirsty and you gave no drink. A stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me. We have left undone those things we ought to have done. We need God's mercy.

We can do something about it. Consider THE POWER OF CONFESSION.

If we confess our sins—confession is still good for the soul.

Confession is not BLABBING SECRETS. If talking about sin were the same as confessing sin, our society would be on a confessional binge. No people on earth has ever let it all hang out the way we do. We rush to tell our own private gossip to a nosey public producing a nation of peeping Toms.

Confession is not MAKING EXCUSES. In Tolstoy's novel, War and Peace, the main character is forced to face himself and make an honest analysis of his life. In so doing he says, “Yes, Lord, I have sinned but I have several excellent excuses.” Confession is more than talking a good game; it's living a good life.

Confession is GETTING REAL. Confession is not absorbing all the woes of the world but it is taking realistic responsibility for ourselves. It's not my father, not my mother, not my early toilet training but it's me O Lord, standing in the need of prayer.

In a *Dennis the Menace* cartoon, Dennis is sitting in a corner, obviously placed there by his mother for disciplinary reasons. When his dad comes home Dennis says, “I hope you didn't bring home any nonsense, Dad, because Mom isn't gonna put up with any more of it.” Confession is getting beyond the nonsense.

Confession is TURNING UP THE LIGHTS. God is light and in Him is no

darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true. But if we walk in the light as He, Himself, is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin.

Keith Miller said: For years I tried to clean up my life without confession. I was like a man who kept fumigating his house but had a basement full of dead dogs. Things somehow looked clean but they never smelled quite right. Confession is good for the soul because it opens the doors of forgiveness.

THE FREEDOM OF FORGIVENESS

If we confess, God who is faithful and just will forgive. When it comes to forgiveness, God takes the initiative. God invented forgiveness as a remedy for the past that even He could not change. Forgiveness is of God. *“Either our sins have been forgiven by God or they remain in us as sin.”*

When the Pharisees accuse Jesus of blasphemy they ask, *“Who can forgive sins but God?”* Of course, they are right. To err is human; to forgive is divine. Arthur Dimmesdale in the Scarlet Letter, with his unconfessed and unforgiven sin, reasons, I am a person of intellect, I will absorb myself in thought. But reason is not a remedy for sin. I am a minister—I will preach sermons and save souls, but ministers stand in need of grace they proclaim for others. I am a servant. I will go door to door helping others, but days are not long enough to rid our souls of guilt. There is one remedy, and only one to the guilt that grips us. It is the unearned, undeserved, unconditional forgiveness of God.

When it comes to forgiveness, GOD PAYS THE DEBT. I learned as a father never to loan my children money. I learned it the hard way. When Brad was young he wanted a Moped in the worst way. He had a little paper route, so I bought him a Moped with the understanding he would repay me by the month. But you know how paper routes are. You never make as much as you think you will. The debt hung over Brad like a heavy load. So, one Easter in the midst of his candy, we placed a note inside a plastic egg. *“Just as Jesus died on a cross to forgive our debts, so this Easter your debt has been forgiven. Rejoice! You are free!”* It may have been the best Easter Brad ever had.

The cost of our sin is more than we can pay, the gift of our God is more than we can imagine. When it comes to forgiveness, our self-esteem is restored. When Jesus said to the woman caught in adultery, *neither do I condemn you,* she got her real-self back. When Jesus said to Zaccheus, *salvation has come to your house today,* Zaccheus got his integrity back. Out on the shore of Galilee when the risen Christ met up with the denial-driven Peter, and meticulously restored each denial with affirmations of love, Peter knew that he had only just begun to follow his Lord.

JOY OF CLEANSING

God cleanses us from all unrighteousness. A church putting in a new baptismal pool was required by the city to install a whole new septic system. At first the pastor was irate. Why would you need a septic tank for a baptismal pool? Then, thinking about the powerful image of our sins being washed away, the pastor became grateful that the city would allow the installation at all.

Whiter than snow, yes whiter than snow
Now wash me and I shall be whiter than snow.

We are Cleansed. God gets the stain out whereby we feel no condemnation. I am alive in Christ.

Leslie Weatherhead once said, "The forgiveness of sins is the most therapeutic idea in the world. It is like the dawn breaking after a long night of torture." O, would that today, down in the privacy of somebody's soul a confession would be forming that would result in forgiveness flowing until we are cleansed completely and set forth to live freely for the glory of God and the good of people. Amen.