

The forgiveness of sin

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The apostle John wrote his first epistle so that we would understand how to fellowship with the Father and the Son, and with John himself, who was a messenger as part of a presbytery. 1Jn 1:1-3.

In Chapter 1 of his letter, John showed us *the Father*. He explained how our sins can be forgiven, and how we can find fellowship with the Father. The word of the Father, which is from the beginning, addresses us concerning our name and sonship. It also addresses our estrangement from the Father and from His household, because of our sins.

In Chapter 2, John explained how we fellowship with *the Son*. He told us that we can only approach the Father for forgiveness when the Son comes with us as our Advocate. 1Jn 2:1. The word of the Son, which is also from the beginning, is the word that He speaks as our Advocate. John explained that for Jesus Christ to become our Advocate we must follow the example of His obedient sonship, and obey His commandments as His disciples. 1Jn 2:3-6.

Writing to little children

Through his letter, the apostle John spoke to us as a spiritual father. He addressed three *spiritual age groups* – little children, young men and fathers. 1Jn 2:12-14. While John wrote to all three spiritual age groups, most of his letter was addressed to those whom he called ‘my little children’. 1Jn 2:1. 1Jn 3:7. 1Jn 4:4. 1Jn 5:21. The focus of his message was overcoming sin and living as a son of God.

Having made the point that we all sin, John wrote, ‘My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin.’ 1Jn 1:8,10. 1Jn 2:1. Then, in the rest of his letter, he explained the process and pathway that we are to join so that our sins are eradicated and do not lead to our eternal death. In his letter, John also documented the progression of a person’s reprobation, which leads to eternal death. These are the carnal attitudes and positions of those who love the darkness of their own way. As they walk in darkness, they stumble, and eventually go out from among God’s people. They are finally destroyed when they are forgotten by God in the lake of fire.

John highlighted these two ‘ends’ as he concluded his letter, writing, ‘If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin which does not lead to death, he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit *sin not leading to death*. There is *sin leading to death*. I do not say that he should pray about that. All unrighteousness is sin, and there is sin not leading to death.’ 1Jn 5:16-17.

It is helpful to note that the pathway for dealing with sin, which does not lead to death, and the pathway of reprobation, which leads to eternal damnation, were exemplified by the two thieves who were crucified with Christ on Mount Calvary. Luk 23:39-43. One thief received illumination as the blood of Christ spoke to him. His confession, as a God-fearer, was that the judgement of God upon him because of his sin, was just. Yet, he recognised

that Christ was dying his death with him. He joined the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings, and obtained the reward of eternal life as a son of God. The other thief remained in bondage to the fear of death. As he was dying under the judgement of God, he continued to insult and abuse Christ, demanding, 'If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us.' Luk 23:39. He was hostile to God and died as an enemy of the cross. Luk 23:40. Rom 8:6-7. Php 3:18-19.

God does not want any of us to perish in this manner. 2Pe 3:9. Let us, therefore, stay in discussion with John as he teaches us how to overcome sin. To do so, we must maintain the attitude of 'a little one' who is receiving the kingdom of God. Mat 18:3-5. Then we will learn how our sins are forgiven. Furthermore, we will know how to assure our hearts before God as those who are being delivered from self-condemnation. 1Jn 3:19-20. This is the focus of our meditation today.

The knowledge of good and evil

John said that he had written to spiritual 'young men' because they had overcome the wicked one, who is the devil. 1Jn 2:13. His point was that 'little children' were ceasing from sin and were spiritually maturing when they were being delivered from the other law that had been fathered in them by Satan through the fall of mankind.

When a person lives by the other law, in bondage to the spirit of Satan, they accuse or excuse themselves in relation to their sin, from the basis of their knowledge of good and evil. Rom 7:23. Rom 2:15. This disposition is not godly; it is driven by fear and shame, which are the heritage of mankind because of Adam's rebellion.

God had said to Adam, 'Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.' Gen 2:16-17. However, through the use of a lie, Satan created the illusion that Adam and Eve could have life and become the source of their own destiny, outside of their fellowship with God. Gen 3:4-5. Adam and Eve disobeyed God and ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil to satisfy their desire to be '*like God*' but not '*of God*'.

The only substantial thing that Adam and Eve found as a result of eating the fruit from the tree that gives the knowledge of good and evil is that their eyes were opened and they realised that they were *naked*. This was not just their awareness that they were not wearing any clothes. They realised that they were cut off from God, and from His life, and had no name or works of enduring value outside of Him. Adam confessed that he was afraid *because* of his nakedness. Gen 3:10. His nakedness implied that he was now vulnerable. He had cut himself loose to time and chance. Ecc 9:11. He had no covering or defence other than his own capacity to survive through the use of the knowledge of good and evil. Death was the inevitable consequence of Adam's nakedness, and he was afraid.

When God came looking for Adam and Eve, He found them hiding among the trees of the garden of Eden. Gen 3:8. God addressed them in relation to their sin, asking them, 'What is this *you have done?*' Gen 3:13. Their response was to accuse one another, and Satan, as the reason for their fallen condition. Gen 3:12-13. God addressed each of them and rewarded them according to their works, which were the fruit of their disobedience.

The same is true for us today. When we sin, Christ comes to us as our Advocate, telling us that forgiveness will depend upon a repentance that is commensurate with our sinful behaviour. Our behaviour cannot be excused. Nor can we blame our sin on others or upon

any other factor, such as a disadvantaged background or some temperamental disposition or lameness that we have as a consequence of our fallen condition.

Lameness

Following the fall of mankind, the identity, or spirit, of every person was affected by sin and the other law. For this reason, we all have identity frailties and complexities that require healing and regeneration. The apostle James noted that many of our faults, or trespasses, spring from our spiritual 'lameness'. In this regard, he wrote, 'Confess your *faults* one to another, and pray one for another, that you may be *healed*.' Jas 5:16.

The apostle Paul addressed this same matter in his exhortation concerning striving against sin and enduring the chastening of the Father. Heb 12:4-7. He said, 'Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be turned out of the way, *but rather be healed*.' Heb 12:12-13.

We were all born with personality traits that need modification through training and discipline. For instance, some people are more prone to anxiety and depression than others. Some tend towards a lack of motivation and laziness. Others are compulsive or driven. Some of us have more acute difficulties, such as personality fractures that may even be identifiable as personality disorders.

Most people do not deliberately, or purposefully, endeavour to sin against others. As we have understood from the writings of James and Paul, many of our sinful motivations and behaviours spring from these identity, or spiritual, frailties. However, this does not excuse our sin; nor does it relieve us of our accountability for our sin and its effects upon others. The Lord wants to bring deliverance from sin through the healing of our lameness, so that we are able to know peace and balance in our lives as sons of God.

Following Christ's example

In relation to finding deliverance from sin, the apostle John directed us to follow the example of Jesus. As we noted earlier, he wrote, 'By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And *we also ought* to lay down our lives for the brethren. 1Jn 3:16.

Similarly, the apostle Peter wrote, 'For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, *leaving us an example*, that you should follow His steps: "Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth"; who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously.' 1Pe 2:21-23.

Jesus Himself also called us to follow His example in relation to washing one another's feet. He said, 'If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you.' Joh 13:14-15.

The Son will only be our Advocate with the Father if we obey His commands as disciples, and follow His example of offering. We do this by laying down our lives in offering for our brethren. 1Jn 2:1-6. That is, we love one another, not only in word, but in deed and truth. 1Jn 3:18. This is only possible when we are born of God and joined to the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings.

To live in the truth is to live together in open-hearted fellowship. This is the implication of walking in the light of God's word. 1Jn 1:7. As we abide in the light, we are being delivered from the propensities that cause us to stumble and sin against God. 1Jn 2:10. However, John warned that he who hates his brother, or does not obey the commands of Christ, is in darkness. He does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes. 1Jn 2:11. In other words, his spirit remains sick, or lame. Unless he finds repentance, he will be turned out of the way. Mat 6:23. Heb 12:13.

When we live in open-hearted fellowship with one another, we abide in the Son, and He is our Advocate with the Father. Importantly, we *know* that we are of the truth. Our heart assures us before God. We find rest for our souls as we cease striving to attain righteousness through our fleshly endeavour to pursue what we perceive to be good and avoid what we believe to be evil. This way of living inevitably results in condemnation and in further attempts, motivated by shame, to appear acceptable to God.

When our souls are at rest, as we are yoked with Christ and are learning from Him in the fellowship of His offering and sufferings, we no longer react to others from the basis of fear and shame, which are sourced from the other law. Instead, we speak according to our name as a son of God. This is the expression of the love of God, and is pleasing to Him.

Forgiveness is the fruit of fellowship

The Son of Man was given power on earth to forgive sins. Mar 2:10. Even though Jesus has the authority to forgive sins, John teaches us that it is the Father who forgives our sins when Christ advocates for us. 1Jn 2:1. He is our Advocate with the Father when we pray in the manner that He instructed us. Jesus said, 'In this manner, therefore, pray: our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name ... forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.' Mat 6:9,12.

Forgiveness is the fruit of fellowship whereby people find relational healing and connection with the Father and with Christ, and with one another. It is not found through the confidential confession of sins by a person who is seeking counselling and absolution from a professional, religious leader. This kind of religious activity is carnal in its motivation and does not minister forgiveness or life.

In summary

Let us summarise the key points of our meditation today by reading the words of the apostle John's letter.

'By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.' 1Jn 3:16.

'My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him.

'For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God.

'And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight. And this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as He gave us commandment.' 1Jn 3:18-23.