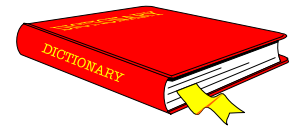


Teaching Believing Children about Confession

Someone has said the most important word for the unsaved person to understand is *believe*, while the most important word for the saved person is *confess*. These statements are true because these are the concepts that affect one's relationship with the true and living God. One who never comes to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation remains under condemnation for his sin (John 3:18). One who has believed, but never understands or appropriates confession of sins committed after believing, will never enjoy the fullness of the new life God has given him, nor will he ever develop spiritual maturity.

Because confession of sins is essential for spirituality in children, we should always seek to teach it to those we counsel for salvation and assurance. However, because believing children will struggle with sin all of their lives, it is also important to teach them about confession throughout the year. The following are some of the foundational truths about confession that all saved children need to be firmly established in.

I. The Definition of Confession (for Believers)



To confess your sins as a Believer is to:

- 1) Agree with God that what you have thought, said, or done is sinful in His sight (something He does not like).

- 2) Be willing to turn from that sin because you are genuinely sorry for grieving God by what you did.

- 3) Choose to ask God to help you never do it again.

This definition comes from an understanding of the original Greek words that the Holy Spirit led the Apostle John to use in the key New Testament verse on confession, 1 John 1:9. The original word for *confess* is "homolegeo". *Homo* means *the same*; and *legeo* means *to speak or say*. Thus, the literal meaning is *to say the same thing, or to agree*. Genuine confession is agreeing with God that what you have done is indeed sin. If you are in full agreement with God about what you have done, it also means that you will want to turn from that sin. You will be sorry you have done it. If there is no sorrow or expectancy to turn from sin, then genuine confession has **not** taken place. Remember that sin caused the suffering and death of God's Son. He hates sin and He wants you to hate it too . . . enough to turn from it. This does **not** mean that you will never commit that particular sin again. It does mean that you are genuinely grieved over committing that sin and you are willing to ask God to help you never to do it again.

II. Key Verses on Confession

A. 1 John 1:9



"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

B. Psalm 19:12 (a Psalm of David)



"Who can understand his errors? Cleanse me from secret faults."

C. Psalm 33:5 (a Psalm of David)



"I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, 'I will confess my transgression to the Lord,' and You forgave the iniquity of my sin."

D. Proverbs 28:13



"He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy."

III. Important Teaching on Confession

A. **What** is confession of sin?

Confession of sin is agreeing with God that what you thought, said, or did was sin, being sorry for it, and asking God to forgive you and to help you never to do it again.

B. **Who** can confess their sins?

There is a confession of sin that unbelievers are urged to make, but this confessing also includes the idea of confessing or agreeing with what God has said about the person and substitutionary death of Christ (Romans 10:9).



"That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead you will be saved."

This confession is based on a heart of belief that Christ, the sinless Son of God, died in your place and was raised from the dead. This confession brings salvation or everlasting life. You no longer stand condemned before God because of your sin.

However, the confession being spoken of here is for those who have already accepted this salvation, but who have committed sin after receiving eternal life. The believing child does **not** stand condemned for this sin because that was settled when he placed his faith in Christ. What is affected now is the degree of fellowship he can have with his Lord.

That **Believers** are exhorted to confess their sins after salvation is revealed in the key New Testament verse on confession, 1 John 1:9. John is writing this to Believers, as is seen by the fact that:

- 1) John uses special terms that indicate those he is sending this letter to already have a spiritual family relationship (*my little children, brethren, sons of God*).
- 2) The writer, John, who we know was a believer, includes himself in 1 John 1:9 with the plural pronoun "we."
- 3) He makes specific statements elsewhere stating that those he is writing to are saved (1 John 2:12-14,21; 3:2; etc.).

C. When Should the Believing Child Confess His Sin?

If the believing child truly desires to fully agree with God about a sin he committed, then he will want to confess it **immediately**--as soon as he recognizes what he has done is, in fact, sin. God is holy and cannot tolerate the presence of sin for a single moment. A true Believer should feel the same way and be alert to the presence of sin in his life, whether in thought, word, or action--and immediately want to confess it to God. It is so sad that so many Christians seem content to tolerate sin in their daily lives. There are too few searching to see if there is any sin present to confess. The believing child needs to become like the psalmist who cried . . .

"Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; And see if there be any wicked way in me . . ."
--Psalm 139:23,24



Rather than having such a heart that seeks to search out sin and confess it, most seem satisfied to speak a general prayer of confession only occasionally, perhaps only a few times a year. However, the Bible informs us that the old sinful nature we were born with is not removed until we are in heaven. Until then, we will experience the struggle between this old nature and the new nature we received at the moment of salvation (Galatians 5:17). Although God has provided us the power to have victory over this old nature, too often Believers fail to appropriate it and they fall into sin. When this happens, the first thing to do is confess the sin.

Thus, all Believers need to:

- 1) Recognize they do sin even after salvation (1 John 1:8)
- 2) Recognize the need to keep short accounts with God concerning that sin (confess it **immediately**)
- 3) Recognize that because one often yields to the power of his old sinful nature (and the temptations of the world and Satan), confession should be done **frequently**, probably several times a day.

D. To Whom is Sin Confessed?

The answer found in 1 John 1:9 is God. Why? Because all sin is, first of all, is against Him and His standards (Psalm 51:4). He is the only One who can grant true forgiveness (Mark 2:7). The pronoun "he" used in 1 John 1:9 is clearly referring to God (mentioned in 1 John 1:5). There are no mediators between God and man today except the Lord Jesus Himself (1 Timothy 2:5).

The Lord Jesus Christ has opened the way for all Believers to have direct access to God's presence. No earthly priest can truly grant forgiveness. Only God can. So we need to teach believing children to go directly to God in prayer whenever they need to confess their sin.

Elsewhere in Scripture the principle is taught that one should also confess his faults to the ones he has openly offended (James 5:16a; Matthew 5:23,24). This means that if the child has said or done something against another person, after he confesses it to God he should go to that person and ask his forgiveness.

E. How Should the Believing Child Confess His Sins?

The basic pattern a believing child can follow when confessing sin comes from understanding the teaching in 1 John 1:9.



When--confess immediately, as soon as you realize what you thought, said, or did was sin.

To **Whom**--Confess it directly to God Himself. He already knows what you did, but He wants you to admit it.

What--Agree with God that the specific thing you thought, said, or did was sinful in His sight. Name your sin.

1. Name your sin specifically

*"I realize that I sinned against you when I
_____ (name the specific sin)."*



2. Express your sorrow for sinning

"I am sorry for displeasing You. Please forgive me."

3. Express your desire to turn from that sin

"Please help me to never do this again."

Where--Wherever you happen to be when you are convicted of your sin

Why--Because God wants you to confess your sin. Not confessing sin regularly leads to many serious consequences.

F. What are the Results of Confession?

The promise from God in this verse is precious. When the condition is truly met by the believing child, then God promises to **forgive** and **cleanse** from all unrighteousness.

The word *forgive* means *to send, to cancel, or to remove*. When God promises to forgive our sins, He is promising to remove them and no longer hold us accountable for them. They have all already been paid for by the Lord Jesus. When one believes on the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation, the eternal punishment all sins deserve is forever canceled and forgiven (past, present, and any future sins; Acts 10:43). However, fellowship with our heavenly Father is only restored when one confesses his sin.

It is important to teach that although God promises to forgive the sin, He does not always send away all the consequences that may come to you because of your sin (see 2 Samuel 12:7-14; Numbers 20:12).

Confession also brings a **cleansing** from spiritual impurities that sin brings. This brings about the restoration to purity in one's life that is needed in order to have close intimate fellowship with a holy God (1 John 1:6). Notice 1 John says that one will be cleansed from **all** unrighteousness, or anything that is hindering fellowship with God. The only condition is confession (total agreement with God about that sin).

G. Consequences of Unconfessed Sin in the Believer's Life

The affects of unconfessed sin in a Believer's life are quite serious. A careful study of the following scriptures should motivate one to take the matter of teaching believing children about confession very seriously. Without confession, believing children will experience:

1. Loss of joy in the Christian life (1 John 1:4 shows 1 John 1:9 was part of what was written to experience full joy as a Believer; also see Psalm 51:12).
2. Loss of fellowship (intimate sharing together and closeness) with God (1 John 1:6).
3. Loss of fellowship with fellow Christians (1 John 1:7 says only as we are walking in purity will we truly have fellowship with each other; see also 2 Thessalonians 3:6 which tells us to separate from Believers who are living in sin).
4. Loss of assurance of salvation (1 John 2:3-5 says one can only experience assurance of his salvation as he is obeying God's commands--one of which is confession).



5. Loss of ability to understand spiritual truth (1 Corinthians 3:1-4; their continued sin kept them from being able to understand deeper truths).
6. Loss of answered prayer (Psalm 66:18; James 4:3).
7. Loss of special opportunities to serve God on earth (1 Corinthians 9:24-27; Paul shared his fear that overlooked sin in his life would lead him to be a "castaway" who would be disqualified from further ministry for God).
8. Loss of blessing and prosperity in life and ministry (Proverbs 28:13).
9. Loss of good health is possible (1 Corinthians 11:30; James 5:16).
10. Loss of physical life prematurely is possible (1 Corinthians 11:30; 1 John 5:16).
11. Loss of sensitivity to sin in your life (1 Timothy 4:2 says a "seared" conscience can come from continuing in sin and ignoring the Spirit's conviction).
12. Chastisement from God in your life circumstances (1 Timothy 6:10; Hebrews 12:5-7).
13. Loss of reward in heaven (1 Corinthians 3:10-15; 2 Corinthians 5:10; unconfessed sins such as pride or selfish motives in serving God will cause some good deeds to be burned up as "wood, hay, and straw," causing a loss of rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ).

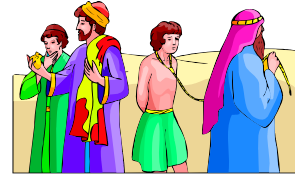


In light of all of the above consequences for unconfessed sin, does it not seem imperative that the believing teacher and parent practice confession of sin on a regular bases, as well as teach it to the children he has responsibility for? How long has it been since **you** confessed your sin?

IV. Ways to Teach about Confession

A. Through Specific Bible Lessons (make confession your main truth in these lessons):

1. Joseph forgives his brothers
2. Aaron and the golden calf
3. Miriam and Aaron criticize Moses
4. David sins with Bathseba
5. The Judges series
6. Jesus washes the disciples' feet
7. The parable of two debtors
8. The martyrdom of Stephen



B. Through Special Lessons

1. The Three Thrillers (Ralphie Story)
2. Object lesson from soap (or other cleansing products)
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

C. Through Songs 🎵

1. Cleanse my Heart O God
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.



D. Through Making and Using a Counseling Tool about Confession

1. This tool can be made small enough to use with believing children one-on-one as they express the need for help in this area.
2. This tool can be made large enough to use before the entire class. You can select which truths to share from week to week (teaching it all over several weeks).

