

Reconciling with One Another: Confession

Selected Scriptures

January 1, 2017

I mentioned last week at our Christmas service that the holidays are sometimes a time when family comes near, and people you haven't seen for awhile come into your home, or you go to their home, and oftentimes it's a joyful thing, a wonderful thing, and sometimes it's acrimonious. Sometimes it's difficult, isn't it? Family that you have long-standing issues with or people whom you've had difficulty and trouble with, you know, people who push your buttons. You don't always respond the best way. They don't always respond the best way to you. I just mentioned last week how Christmas holidays, Thanksgiving are times of the year when sometimes that comes out. I mentioned how we're going to get into a little series that has to do with relationships. What I'd like to talk about this morning is biblical reconciliation. We'll cover that for a couple of weeks, and then we're going to talk about what biblical repentance looks like, how we work out reconciliation and repentance in our



own lives, our life with our families, our life with other Christians in the church, even with people outside of our church as well.

One of the most precious gifts from God that any church can enjoy is the gift of Christian unity, of harmony between Christians. And it's been such a joy for me, personally, to watch over this previous year as our church has grown in unity, in harmony and in genuine Christian fellowship. If you've been with us over that time, you know what I mean. We elders like to joke that whoever has the duty to lock up the building at the end of the service, at the end of the day, has a difficult time, which is a very, very good thing—don't change anything—to get you all out of the building, so we can go home and have lunch and that kind of thing. Don't change anything, though. Keep that up! We love to see people cheerfully talking with each other and enjoying each other's company. We don't want that to change. We actually want that to improve and strengthen and grow.

The unity, the harmony that has grown among us, is something that we have just started to enjoy together. And it

truly is a gift from God. It's one indication that God has started a mighty work in our midst, and I think we need to realize that. Like Paul said, "I also am certain of this," Philippians 1:6, "that he who began a good work in us is going to bring it to completion at the day of Christ Jesus." I am confident of that; that's a promise of his holy Word. We know that "He is able to do exceedingly, abundantly beyond all that we ask and think," Ephesians 3:20. But as to how he intends to fulfill his promise exactly as to the precise shape that all of that takes, well that's his to reveal, and it's our privilege to discover, our joy to witness that together as a church family. But I know this: He is just getting started, and that is an exciting thing to behold.

The platform for growth, for fruitfulness, for Gospel effectiveness in and through any local church, including this church, is church-wide unity and harmony that points to the triune God. The God that we worship is One. He is One. The persons of the God-head are perfect in holy harmony with one another. So when we are unified, when we are in harmony with one another, we are reflecting and glorifying God truly. And God will bless us; he will accomplish great Gospel work through us.



That is one of the profound and abiding joys of our time here on earth is to share in the propagation of the Gospel with Christians, fellow Christians in a local church setting of one heart and one mind.

That's the nature of our fellowship, partnership in the Gospel ministry. We have the privilege of being together to build a strong, healthy, mature church body. And we get to do that together. That's a great, great privilege. That's something that can only be accomplished here on earth because when we get to heaven, there is no evangelism going on. We evangelize here; we build here. There, perfection! Here, we work. That's something that can only be accomplished here, also in a spirit of unity and harmony as we all move forward together in one mind and in one heart.

As a collective body, as a spiritual temple built to honor God, our witness is of an orderly, unified, harmonious God, who is known in and through the love that his people have for one another. Love: The first fruits of the life of the Holy Spirit, the first evidence of his life working in and through his

people. That is the chief virtue: love. It's the foremost of all Christian virtues, and that practical, operative presence of love is the evidence that the Holy Spirit is operating among us, that he is free among us, unhindered among us. Where love is active, the fullness of his presence is going to be manifest in and through us, isn't it? Galatians 5:22, "The fruit of the spirit is love." Also, joy and peace, patience. Patience is only demonstrated when there is an opportunity not to show patience, right? We give each other plenty of opportunity to show patience and kindness and goodness and faithfulness and gentleness and self-control. Those are the virtues are being manifest increasingly in and through this church. Those are the virtues, primarily love, that unite us. They bring us together one to another; they enable us to live together in harmony, in joy, in patience and understanding, in a spirit of forgiveness and of grace. That is the mark of a truly Christian assembly, which in the church promotes safety and security among our fellowship, promotes acceptance and love, increases satisfaction and contentedness in the church. That is the very work of the Holy Spirit in our midst, which is manifest clearly in the unity and the harmony that we are seeing and enjoying. It is a precious gift. I want you recognize that. I want you to appreciate it, give thanks to God for it, and I also want you to be committed

in a deep, abiding conviction to keep on pursuing that unity, and be very careful to protect it.

Above all things, Satan wants to destroy our unity. When he sees a church coming together in unity, harmony, and joy, you know what he wants to do? Destroy it. He wants to target it. A unified, harmonious church is a mortal threat to the kingdom of darkness. Christians who are of one heart and one mind together in common cause for the sake of the Gospel, Christians like that cause the enemy to shift strategies. They cause the enemy to adjust tactics, to redirect fire to this emerging threat that he sees. The devil, make no mistake, the devil himself wants to fracture our unity because it is clear evidence of the Holy Spirit having an effect. Only the Spirit is able to unite such a disparate group of people such as we. We are not similar in any human sense; we're very different, every single one of us. And only the Holy Spirit is able to bring us together, unite us together, redeemed from all different backgrounds, different families, different cultures, different ethnicities, even different languages. Only the Spirit can cause such a divergent group of people to come into the unity of the faith, Ephesians 4:13, to come into the unity about the knowledge of the Son of

God. Doctrinal clarity, biblical fidelity, a corporate common commitment to that are the marks of genuine spiritual unity produced by the Holy Spirit. And that terrifies the enemy.

So the enemy works, labors, connives, schemes to sow the seeds of disunity in our midst. He's always trying. Often, he experiences varying measures of success. The seeds of disunity can be summed up in one word. What causes disunity in the church? You know the word. It's sin. Sin destroys our unity. Sometimes the enemy sows the seed of disunity in the form of a divisive person sent into the congregation, and at first, he or she appears to be one of the sheep. But time goes by and reveals that this person is not a true sheep, but a false convert, someone whose life or doctrine is out of step with the Christian faith. And Paul told Titus to deal with someone like that quickly, decisively because that person is a threat to church unity. Titus 3:10-11, "As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned." Strong words! But it's serious. It's a threat. Sometimes the enemy sows the seed of sin in families of the church, whether immediate or extended families. Sometimes all of

that disunity can enter in through a difficult family situation. When sin strikes close to home, it's sometimes hard for us to see its true nature, its true form. We're too close to it. It's hard to see its destructiveness. It's hard to see the threat that it is to the health of the body. Maybe we're too close. Emotionally speaking, maybe we're too sympathetic. With human relationships, we're compromised in our weaknesses; we prefer people over God. But sin compromises us; it creates inroads for the enemy to disrupt the unity of the church. That can happen, too, through our families.

Most often, though, the most common method of the enemy sowing the seed of sin in our midst is through that pernicious ally that he finds within each and every one of us. It's the sin nature. It's the enemy within. We all feel it. We all know its devices, its temptations, its enticements, its alluring, always creeping, always ready to take us captive. The sinful proclivity is what the Bible calls, the flesh, the old man, the old nature, what Paul called, this body of sin. And at the root of all that sin, that which animates this body of sin, is the sin of self-centered, self-interested pride. The sin of pride is what is at



heart of destroying Christian unity even as a root of pride
bears all manner of rotten fruit.

That's why Paul's opening rebuke to the Corinthian church in 1 Corinthians 1:10 started with an appeal to Christian unity. He said, "I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ," 1 Corinthians 1:10, "that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and in the same judgment." You know what? After that appeal, Paul proceeded in the next four chapters to confront their particular outworking of pride in and through the sinful divisions in the church, how all these people on the outside looked like great people. I mean, you had the Peter camp, and the Paul camp, and the Apollos camp. Apollo's camp loved eloquent preaching. Paul's camp loved great theology. Peter's camp more faithful to the Jewish ways. And then there was that one camp that trumped them all, the Christ camp. I mean, who's going to differ with the Christ camp? Outworking of pride, and all of it was distasteful.

The letter continues, identifying and confronting and rebuking all kinds of sins that were different expressions of that root sin of self-centered pride: sexual sin, lawsuits among believers, ignoring those with a weaker conscience, the unloving abuses that came out of spiritual gifts, even doctrinal deviation, the perversion of denying the Resurrection, the principle of Resurrection. All that was happening even among—yes—the Paul, the Peter, the Apollos, the Christ camp, people in their church. Pride is a pernicious and insidious sin. It causes divisions, destroys unity.

So whether we're talking about so-called, private sins of the mind and the heart, or the more public sins that disrupt the harmony of Christians relationships, sowing discord, causing temptations to bitterness, at the heart of all those sins is a heart of pride. And the enemy most often uses our own pride to lead us to sin against one another. He loves that sin because it's so hard to spot sometimes, and it disrupts, fractures our unity, disrupts our harmony. It destroys the bond of loving fellowship that we have together. That is why we are repeatedly in Scripture commanded to strive for unity to keep pursuing unity, to keep protecting our unity. Ephesians 4:3, "You must be eager to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace." Philippians 1:27, We are to "Stand firm in one spirit, with one

mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel."

Philippians 2:2, We are to "be in full accord and of one mind with one another." Listen, we will only have the same mind, be in full accord, unified in kleet, in complete harmony, that is only going to happen if we are all in pursuit of one mind: the mind of Christ. The mind of Christ. If we think like he thinks, then we're going to be of one heart and one mind. It'll be his mind that governs us, that leads us, that directs us, that comforts us, that shepherds us. But if sin enters the camp, by whatever means, whoever it is, well, then we depart from his thinking. In which his thinking, there is no sin in his thinking. Our minds and our hearts will enter into a darkness that actually divides, where there is no unity. Sin is what creates disunity. Remove sin, unity returns. Without sin, all are of one heart and of one mind. All is unity, all is harmony. That sounds really good, doesn't it! Perfect unity, perfect harmony, listen, that's what heaven is like. That's what heaven is like: no sin, no division, no disunity, all is harmony, all is peace, all is joy. Why? Because that's what marks the fellowship of the Godhead itself: Father, Son, Holy Spirit, perfect unity, perfect harmony. And if our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ, 1 John 1:3, then our

fellowship is going to be marked and distinguished by that same kind of blessed unity and joy-filled harmony.

But while we're here on earth, our fellowship is not perfect, is it? And that's what brings us to our subject of the morning, which is the subject of biblical reconciliation. Since unity is so vital to the health, the harmony, the vitality of the church, and since it's inevitable that we will sin against one another, as long as we wrestle with the sin nature in this earthly tent, then our sin against one another is going to be there. And that sin is going to jeopardize our unity. It's like cancer. Some of our church members have recently suffered from cancer. I've never heard any of them—not one of them—who, when they got the news from the doctors, saying, we've found a tumor, not heard one person saying, Oh, that's okay. Just leave it there. I've kind of gotten used to the tumor. It's okay. No! They want that thing gone! They want it cut out, they want it biopsied. They want to see whether or not that cancerous tumor has metastasized to other parts of the body. Why? Because they want to chase it down and get rid of it because it's going to kill them.

Sin is spiritual cancer. And when it goes unresolved, when it goes unconfessed, sin is infinitely more destructive and deadly than cancer. You want to destroy this church? Ignore your sin. Cover it over. Deny it's there. Because what it's going to do is fester, it's going to sour, it's going to grow deep roots and tentacles that go around your whole life, and it's going to produce poisonous fruits of bitterness, jealousy, anger, and suspicion. We need to get rid of it! We need to get rid of it right away; do not wait. Sin is so common, though, isn't it? It's like a weed. As much as you try to dig them out, put weed-killer on them, dig down the roots and pull them out, those weeds just keep coming back. It's like our sin. Sin in each and every family. Husbands sin against wives; wives sin against husbands. Parents sin against children, children against parents. Every cross or unkind word, every instance of impatience or sharp-tongued reply, every critical-spirited expectation you hold over other people's heads, there's sin in families.

There's sin among church members. Someone treaded on someone else's ministry turf. Someone didn't get recognized for their great sacrifice and service. Someone's feelings got hurt.

Someone's critical comment or ungracious remark or back-biting gossip, all of that is so prevalent even in the church, isn't it? So destructive. So what are we going to do? How are we going to keep our sins from doing the devil's work? How are we going to keep our sins from dividing us and destroying our unity? How are we going to correct the source of division that our sins can potentially cause in our midst? And when the sins come, how are we going to repair the breach that the devil wants to use to gain entry and divide us and keep us divided and ineffective?

Here's the answer: We reconcile with one another. We reconcile with one another. As fellow members of Christ's body, we're members of one another, and we need to reconcile with one another. Reconciliation is first and foremost a matter of love toward God, and reconciliation is inextricably linked to love for God, to love for one another. If we truly love God, we're going to be quick to reconcile with other people as well. That's what John, the Apostle of love, tells us in 1 John 4:20, "If anyone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen." You follow the logic, there. It's the outworking of love for God and one another to reconcile

broken relationships. Those who claim to be Christians but refuse to reconcile broken relationships, refuse to pursue harmony in the body of Christ, you know what, it doesn't really matter what they say. If they refuse to love others by reconciling with them, then the Holy Spirit condemns them as liars. Strong language! But it's strong because it's so serious. Husbands, you must reconcile with your wives, wives with your husbands. Parents, you must reconcile with your children when you sin against them, children, obviously, with parents. Church members must reconcile with one another. In fact, so serious is our duty to reconcile with one another, that Jesus said, Matthew 5:23-24, he said, "if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift at the altar and then go. Go, first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift." Why? Because your worship of the God you have not seen is blatantly hypocritical if you refuse to be reconciled to your brother, whom you have seen. God doesn't want you to be hypocritical in your worship. Hypocritical worship is not worship. It's a veritable stench in his nostrils. It's an offense against his holy mercy and his costly love.

Just to show you that, turn over to 2 Corinthians, chapter 5, just so you can see how serious this issue of reconciliation is. The entire message of the Gospel, the entire ministry of the Gospel, the whole reason that God left us here on earth, that can be summed up in what Paul calls in 2 Corinthians 5:18 "The ministry of reconciliation." The ministry of reconciliation that's the Gospel ministry. It's a synonym. 2 Corinthians 5:18, Paul starts by saying, "All this is from God." All this. All what? Well, looking back, it's all the sovereign working of God to save the sinner, the compelling love of Christ, the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ, the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit. All of this is from God. He did everything. "All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation."

Look, who is the subject of all those verbs in verses 18 and 19? You see the verbs, there: reconciled, gave, was reconciling, not counting, entrusting. Who's the subject? God. God is the subject of those verbs. Salvation is his initiative,

not ours. It's all of grace, "not of works lest any man should boast." That's what he's saying. Look at verse 20, "Therefore," on the basis of the fact that God saved us, reconciled us, "therefore we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

You know what he's saying there? He's appealing to them; he's imploring them to be reconciled to God. Why? Because God took the initiative. God did everything. He did everything to secure our salvation, so be reconciled to him because in Christ, God has reconciled us to himself. Don't delay! To refuse to reconcile, knowing how God has made haste to reconcile us to himself, that is a slap in the face of our redeemer. And God didn't reconcile us here with cheap grace, did he? He didn't overlook our sin, not at all. God confronted our sin. He dealt with it head-on. He called it what it is. He didn't forgive us by ignoring it. He forgave us all of our assaults, and he didn't do it by being non-judgmental. He was clearly judgmental, and he was condemning of our sin and in calling us to repent. He called sin, sin and he didn't sugarcoat it. It was an unvarnished look

at who we really are before his holiness. And when he saw it, he poured out his wrath, but not on us. Not on us. He poured out his wrath on his son. He forgave us by imputing our sin to Christ, by reckoning our sin to Christ, counting it against him and punishing him instead of us so that he could let us go free, we who did not deserve it.

That's reconciliation, that "one who knew no sin," Jesus Christ, "God put him to death so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." Just as our sins were imputed to Christ, and God treated Christ the way we deserve to be treated for our sin, bearing the terrible weight of the holy wrath of God, so also God imputed Christ's perfect righteousness to us, and he treated us the way we certainly don't deserve. He treated us the way Christ deserves to be treated. Christ and Christ alone merited the favor of God, and we're brought into that favor because of God's great love with which he loved us. Isn't that good news? He reconciled us to himself through the sinless death of Christ and the perfect righteousness of Christ. That is the Gospel that saved us, that is the message that we have received to tell others: Be reconciled to God. And that it is why it is so utterly out of step to refuse to reconcile with people that we

have offended or with people who have offended us. Why would we do that? If God has forgiven us such a great, unpayable, eternal debt, infinite debt. We can never repay it. Why would we refuse to reconcile with another human being? That human being whose sin is really not against us, it's against God. We just got the spillover effect.

Look, we need to deal with these things. We cannot, we dare not come to the altar with our worship when we're refusing to reconcile or when we are withholding reconciliation from another Christian. That is the height of hypocrisy. We can't do that! We reconcile with one another, because it is the true outworking of our love and devotion to God, who reconciled us to himself. We reconcile with one another to please God, to honor Jesus Christ, and to restore the body of Christ to perfect unity and harmony for effective and fruitful service to Christ.

That's a quick description of what reconciliation is. How do we do it? How do we do this? It's easier said than done, right? Practically speaking, how do we practice biblical reconciliation. Let me give you a simple outline. There are

three basic steps of reconciliation. Step one: Confess your sin. And folks, that is going to take the rest of the time this morning to talk about that one point. Just preparing you, just setting your expectations, so you don't get bent out of shape, sin against me, and then have to come and reconcile; preventing that from happening, okay? Step one: Confess your sin. Step two: Ask for forgiveness. Step three: Grant forgiveness. Simple! Very simple outline. So hard to practice!

So for today, just this first point, several subpoints though just for you writers, note-takers; I've got several subpoints, and you can write away happy to your hearts content to jot these things down in your notes. But step one, main point: Confess your sin. Confess your sin. James 5:16, write that down. James 5:16. James commands us, "Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed." What a great verse! "Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed." You know what confession of sin is? It's dealing with the past. It's dealing with the negative. You know what praying for one another is? That's going in a positive direction. Prayer for other people, you know what that is? That's genuine love.

It's hard to pray about anything, it's hard to pray.

Prayer is that grace that we have that requires the most faith because we're praying to a God we cannot see. He never visits us with a loud, audible voice that says, here's the answer, Travis. Just, you know, make this decision and go in that direction, and don't do that, but do this. He doesn't do that, does he? No, he leads us to Scripture; he brings things to mind. He brings things, it's very difficult to pray, isn't it? But to pray for someone you've had a conflict with, that's hard. To pray for somebody, someone is love. Confess your sins to one another, that's dealing with the negative, the past. Pray for one another, that's, that's the positive command, that's, that's pursuing the future. That you may be healed that's the result of that. Confession of sin, prayer for one another; those are the ways we work out love for each other. That's what marks our fellowship in the body of Christ. But when we sin against each other, if we sin against each other and we don't confess those sins, we incur from God a temporal punishment for those sins.

There were a number of sinful people in the Corinthian church who were failing to deal with their sins and particularly

at the Lord's Table. They were coming to the Lord's Table with unconfessed sin. Paul pointed out what they all knew, their failure to examine themselves before coming to the Lord's Table to partake of the, the bread and the cup. That's why in 1 Corinthians 11:30, "why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died." Temporal punishments. God was inflicting disobedient Christians with punishment, some quite severe, for failing to deal with their sins before coming to celebrate the Lord's Supper. It's serious! James is describing the same thing as something we need to be healed from. It's unclear as to whether he's talking about a spiritual issue, physical malady, but it's a temporal punishment, a form of temporal punishment sent by God because we've refused to confess our sins to God and to one another. He's gracious. He uses those punishments to awaken us. I believe that many of the maladies that people face today, often psychologized and often given drugs for, I believe that so much could be solved if we just confessed our sins to one another and pray for each other because you know what will happen? God says he'll heal. Again, that's why Jesus said, "If you are offering your gift at the altar, and there you remember that your brother has something against you," that is to say, God brings to mind an unresolved sin between you and another Christian, stop your worship. "First be reconciled and then,"

and only then, "return to worship God," but now with a clear conscience, now with no sin, no bitterness, no anger, no hatred, no jealousy, nothing hindering your worship. That's one way to become conscious of your sin; when, when God brings something to mind.

Another way God brings something to mind is when someone comes to confront you in your sin. That's what's going on in Matthew 18:15, "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you've gained your brother." So that's another way to become conscious of your sins, when a fellow Christian comes to you and says, hey, I think you've sinned in this way. God's doing that. Notice the concern for keeping the matter private between you and him alone. That's very important. Most sin in the body can be dealt with just like that, just with a conversation, confessing sin, following these steps, very simple.

So let's say you believe you've got something like that in hand. You believe that there is a sin; whether it's yours or someone else's, you believe you may need to reconcile with

someone over some issue. Let's lay down a few guidelines, and I guess you can call these subpoints under step number, step number one. Step number one: Confess your sins and there's a sub-point A. Subpoint A, here's the first sub-point: Clarify whether or not this is truly a sin. Clarify whether or not it's truly a sin. If it's a sin, you need to confess it. If it's not, you don't need to confess it as a sin. Fair enough? It's a confusion of category when you ask someone to forgive you, but all you did is neglect to greet them that morning. You didn't wave hello, or maybe you accidentally collided with someone in a crowded hallway. That's not a sin; it's just a mistake, an accident, it's okay. So if it's not a sin, don't use sin language like, would you please forgive me? Don't say that. It's not a mortal sin, it's not bad for you to make that mistake. I, I kinda make that mistake in joking all the time. Please forgive me, when I know it's not a sin. But you say, okay, how do I know whether or not something I did is a sin? Man, I've got something that's bothering my conscience a little bit, or something, you know, someone's brought something to me and said, hey, I think you did this. How do I know whether or not that's truly a sin? Just because they say it's a sin doesn't mean it is. Just because it's bothering my mind doesn't mean it's necessarily a sin, does it? So how do you know? That's easy. Do the daily

Bible reading plan over the year, and you'll get very familiar with what is and is not a sin, okay? Open your Bible, find chapter and verse. If it's listed in the Bible as a sin, and you did it, take the hit. It's okay. We all do it. It's called a sin. Admit it. In the words of the Westminster Shorter Catechism, "a sin is any want of conformity unto or transgression of the law of God." You ever do anything like that? Any want of conformity to or transgression of the law of God?

Here are a few verses we can keep in mind. Let's start with the Ten Commandments, just the second half, just the second part of the Ten Commandments. "Honor your father and your mother." Any want of conformity or transgression of that? Exodus 20 verse 13, "You shall not murder." Now, remember Jesus took murder down to a heart level, didn't he? He said, "If you're angry," angry, "with your brother, you've committed murder in your heart." So don't say, well, there are no bodies buried in my backyard. I'm good! Been angry? Had unrighteous anger in your heart? You've been guilty of that. Exodus 20:14, "You shall not commit adultery." Again, remember, looking with lust, adultery of the heart. "You shall not steal." You say, well, I don't steal

anything. Okay, wait a couple of commandments, Exodus 20:16, "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor." And if you say, I haven't stolen, be careful, you've probably borne false witness about that, so Exodus 20:17, "You shall not," here it goes, "covet your neighbor's house, wife, servants, animals," anything that belongs to your neighbor. Stealing? Maybe you didn't do it on a hand-level; maybe you didn't grab somebody's wallet and put it in your back pocket. But if you've ever coveted what they have, reputation, you coveted their money, you've coveted their position, status, oh, yeah, you're guilty. Those are just Old Testament verses.

Jesus said all those things go right to the heart. Turn in your Bibles to Ephesians, chapter 4. Ephesians, chapter 4. There's a really good section that convicts all of us. This is awesome. Ephesians chapter 4 and starting in verses 26-27. There's that verse again, "Be angry and do not sin and do not let the sun go down on your anger." That is, don't let anger sit there and simmer all, you know, over a week's time or a month's time, or over many, many years, and hold something against somebody. Don't let your anger simmer. Don't give opportunity to the devil. Ephesians 4:31, "Let all bitterness and wrath and

anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice." Instead—Ephesians 4:32, "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you." I like Colossians 3:8, it's kind of a parallel to this section. "Put away anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth."

Listen, any want of conformity to those, any transgression of those, I, I mean, I'm certainly guilty. Listen, if the Apostle Paul testified that he, himself, is the chief of sinners, and if he actually confessed the root sin of that covetousness in Romans 7:8, which is at the heart of so many other sins; if he could confess in Romans 7:19, "For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing," do you think we also might be guilty of any want of conformity unto or transgression of the law of God? Can we have just a little humility and start with admitting our sin? We have to confess our sins. We have to admit it because John tells us, 1 John 1:8, "If we say we have no sin" ever met somebody like that? Just point him to 1 John 1:8, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us." Look, we have

to confess our sins to one another and pray for one another so God may heal us.

Going back to Ephesians 4, take a look at single verse, there, Ephesians 4:29. Let's, let's just see how we all do. Let's just do a little self-examination and see how we do with this one, "Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, that it may give grace to those who hear." Isn't that a wonderful verse? Don't you want to teach it to your children? "Let no unwholesome word proceed." So convicting, isn't it, when you really pay attention to this? Let's, let's apply the Westminster's definition of sin, "Any want of conformity or transgression of the law of God." Let's start with transgression. Don't let an unwholesome word proceed from your mouth. If you've ever let one of those, just one slip out, well, then you've violated the law of God. That's the law of God. It's not a suggestion. It's a law. But you say, what if I haven't slept enough. I didn't get my beauty rest, and this kid is on my very last nerve, or but that guy provoked me, and he had it coming. He's a knucklehead, and someone needs to let him know; here I am, the pointy edge of the spear.

You know what? In all those verses I read earlier, I didn't find one single footnote that excused us from full and complete obedience. No footnotes that say, the command above applies to all unless you suffer from any of the following: migraine headaches, backaches, body aches, PMS, fibromyalgia, bi-polar disorder, hormone imbalance, having a bad day, or insomnia. If you're off your medication, you're not responsible for anti-social behavior and or language, doctor note required. Nothing in the text like that! In fact, I found a rather troubling verse, a bit of Scripture spoken by our Lord, which said, "You, therefore, must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect." No footnotes, no qualifications on his perfection, no exceptions for us. We're never let off the hook. Bad biology, chemical imbalances, family dysfunction, every other excuse provided by an overly psychologized, secular age. listen, we are all affected by all of those maladies. It's called the curse. We all suffer. It's called the physical, noetic, temporal effects of sin, all of which cascaded out of the Adamic fall. We are all adversely affected by sin, whether it's in our biology, our chemistry, whatever. We're all adversely affected by sin; none of us gets a pass. "Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect." That still stands. It's comprehensive, condemns us

all, which means, folks, we're all in this together. Okay? The doctrine of total depravity is a hard doctrine, but it's a relieving doctrine. We're not here to put up pretentious show and put on face in front of each other. We know what we are. We've all come to the Cross; we all realize that that Cross where Jesus was nailed to the cross for our sins, it's meaningful. So let's not put on a face in front of each other. We're sinners. "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." So all of us need to keep admitting and confessing our sins to one another. There are no exceptions.

What about the other side of the Westminster's definition of sin, that want of conformity to the law? When we fail to conform to Ephesians 4:26, we fail to be discriminating about our speech. That's want of conformity to this law. We have to submit every word that proceeds out of our mouths to this criteria. Number one: Is it good for edification? Number two: Does it edify for the need of the moment? Number three: Does it give grace to those who hear it? Look, if not, that's want of conformity to the law, and we are once again guilty because we have not conformed to what God commanded us to do clearly. I have a feeling that we're all going to have a very quiet

afternoon. Everybody's scared to speak, now. Look, we just don't know how deep our sin goes. We're just so superficial, so trivial about our life and our sin before a holy God. He does bring things to mind for us to confess, but there's so much that we do that don't even, we're not even aware of. But his grace covers that, we'll get to that in a second.

If the issue under question is a biblically identifiable as a sin, if it's any failure to conform to God's law, or if it's a violation of God's law, then it's a sin. And you can proceed to sub-point letter B, sub-point B: Clarify whether or not this sin is known to others. Clarify whether or not this sin is known to others. Look, if it's a sin of the heart and the mind, that's not something you want to confess publicly, but if it's a sin that you've, has had a social effect, others know about, confess that one publicly, to the person. Usually, a good rule of thumb is to ask the question, can you take a picture of it or can you record it on audio? If so, then you need to deal with this issue that's become known to somebody else or to other people. Sexual sins like fornication or adultery; sins of the tongue like gossip, slander, spreading false reports, even grumbling, complaining; sins of anger like an outburst of anger, impatient

words, unkind words, all those things are things you can take a picture of or record or both, and you need to deal with them. But when they're internal sins, sins only God knows about, those sins between you and God, like pride, maybe some anger, confess them to him. Okay? Don't drag those out publicly. Exposing sinful thoughts will probably do pretty significant damage, especially when it has to do with sexual impurity, makes people very uncomfortable.

I remember when I was a young Christian, very zealous to please the Lord, but not very well taught on this principle. I was working at a college student union building with a number of state employees. One in particular was incurably lazy, an embarrassment to the male gender. I struggled daily to be around this guy. I had angry thoughts and resentment about his laziness, which was, was true, he was lazy, but I had judged him to be a somewhat worthless human being, which is a bad thought, I know. I admit it. In my prayer time, I became convicted of that thought, of my sinful thoughts toward him, which is a good thing. I confessed those thoughts to God, which was good. But then I confessed them to this man, who up to that point had no idea of the sins of the mind, and I said something like this, Mr. So-and-So, I need to confess that I have resented you because you are so lazy in the workplace. I've been sinfully

angry over that fact. Will you please forgive me? The look on his face said it all. He sputtered out some word of forgiveness. Right intention on my part, but terrible execution. And I learned at that poor man's expense not to do that.

So first, clarify whether or not this sin is truly a sin, and if it is a sin, clarify whether or not this sin is known. Make a distinction between a sin that's public and a sin of the thought life. It's a, if it's an outward sin, then we're going to go to subpoint C: Confess your sin to God, the one you've ultimately offended. Confess your sin to God, the one you've ultimately offended. Turn to 1 John 1:9 because that's where we sin this principle so clearly explained for us. 1 John 1:9 you probably know from memory, especially if you're a grown-up AWANA kid. "If we confess your sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." "If we confess our sins, he is faithful." Faithful to what? Faithful to his promise to forgive his children. "Faithful and he is just." Just? Why does justice enter into there? Because we already talked about the ministry of reconciliation, for God did not overlook our sins, but he was just to deal with our sins. So he's faithful to his holy character, and he is just, consistent

with his holy character "to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." The word confess; it's the Greek word, *homologeó*, which literally means *homoú*, same, and *légō*, to say or to speak. It literally it means, to say the same as. In other words, we are, when we confess, we are to say the same thing about our sin as God says about our sin.

Because you've clarified the nature of this issue, that it is biblically identified as a sin, you know what it's called. Use his language. This matter is an instance of the want of conformity unto the transgression of the law of God, and use the words that God has used to identify that when you confess. That is, to say, first of all, don't call it, I made a mistake. It's not a mistake. It's a sin. So call it a sin. Take responsibility for that thing. And secondly, don't use worldly terms that are often filled with psychological baggage. That is to say, don't confess your OCD, your obsessive compulsion disorder or whatever. If it's sin, I mean if your just washing your hands too much, that's okay just to have clean hands. Okay? But if it's truly a sin, identify the sin, whether it's a matter of self-centeredness or trying to control yourself or other people or circumstances. Perhaps it's pride that's causing you to be

what they call OCD, wanting everything to look perfect all the time. Don't blame OCD. Blame yourself. Blame your sin. Take responsibility for your sin. And don't confess alcoholism or substance abuse. That's the language of disease and recovery. That's not biblical language. Confess the biblical sin of drunkenness. Don't excuse your sins, like lack of self-control, lack of self-discipline. Don't blame them on your parents, your dysfunctional family, faulty wiring, bad biology. Don't use the therapeutic, blame-shifting language of this godless, secular age.

Listen, it is so important to take responsibility for your sin. Why? Because when we take responsibility for our sins before God, we have hope. We have hope! He offers grace for salvation, grace for mind-renewal, grace for life-transformation. But if we excuse our sin and re-categorize it, if we don't deal with it, there is no hope. It's just perpetual recovery, continuing treatment, managing, coping. That's all you're left with. The therapy professions will tell you all the time that there is no full and final deliverance from these conditions, disorders, diseases. Once an alcoholic, always an alcoholic. You're just either on the wagon or off of it. That's

not hopeful. You're either in recovery or you've fallen off the wagon. There's no hope or true healing in the world of biology and psychology, just coping and managing, that's it. No remedy for all those conditions.

But that's not the biblical promise. The biblical promise of 1 John 1:9 offers this hope. If we confess our, not disorders, not conditions, "if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." If we'll submit to God's Word, if we'll define these issues like God defines them, if we'll use his terms and not the world's words, words like sin and unrighteousness, you know what? We can find forgiveness for our sins, and we can find cleansing from our unrighteousness. What's the distinction there? That is, if there's a sin that God brings to mind and you confess it, he'll forgive that. But when he says he will "cleanse us from all unrighteousness," that's all the stuff you've done between the last time you confessed and this time that you don't even know about it. He'll wipe all that away, too. Isn't that awesome?

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Grace

In the coming weeks, we're going to learn more about mind renewal, mind transformation, increasing freedom from the power of sin, what God calls sanctification through repentance. We're gonna learn more about that. Now, look, all known sin must be confessed to God, right, whether it's public or private. Why? Because everything is public before a God who sees everything. So we confess everything that comes to mind because "everything is open and laid bare before God," and all of our sins, get this, all of our sins are against God and God alone. Write down a couple of verses. First of all, 2 Samuel 12:13, 2 Samuel 12:13, and also Psalm 51:4. Psalm 51:4. This is the incident of David and Bathsheba and him coming to a knowledge of his sin. You may remember, David committed horrible sin in this matter of Uriah the Hittite, Uriah's wife Bathsheba. He committed adultery with Bathsheba while Uriah was out fighting one of David's wars. Then he tried to cover over the resulting pregnancy. David had his commander Joab put Uriah in an exposed position on the battlefield which guaranteed his death. It was tricky, but actually the term is murder. That's what he did. He killed Uriah. He murdered Uriah to cover over his own sin, and then he lied about it. Psalm 51:4, David confesses to God, "Against you, and you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight." Are you for real? Uriah's dead, Bathsheba's pregnant,

having a baby, and you've sullied the entire kingdom with your sin. You're going to tell me, "Against you and you only have I sinned?" How could he say that? There's no flippancy on David's part. There's no audacity. Psalm 51:4 is an incredibly accurate confession, and it helps us to understand the true nature of sin. We learn in James 4:12 that there is "only one lawgiver and judge, and he is able to save and to destroy." In other words, it's not Uriah, Bathsheba, or Joab who gave those commands, "You shall not murder; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife." Who gave those commands? God did. God is the only law-giver. He is the only judge. He is the only one able to save and to destroy. Therefore, all sin is ultimately and finally against God and God alone. David is accountable to God in the sin that he committed. David would have responsibility to confess his sin to the living: to Bathsheba, to Joab, to his servants. Uriah, though, is dead. He can't confess to him; can't reconcile with him and the only justice that comes as a result of that is what God possesses and doles out.

Okay, so you've clarified this issue as a sin. You realize it's a sin that needs to be confessed, and it needs to be

confessed to God. But you also, subpoint D, confess your sin to the human being that you've offended, provided you haven't murdered that person and you can't go and get them and talk to them. Confess your sin to the human being that you've offended. In the same way that you identified that sin as sin before God, use biblical terms to identify it to him, do the same thing with the human being that you've offended. So husband, say to your wife, Wife, I have violated Colossians 3:19, what it warned me against. That verse says "Husbands, love your wives," and do not be harsh with them. Honey, I've sinned by being harsh with you yesterday, when I said thus-and-such. Wife, say to your husband, husband, I have violated Ephesians 5:33, where God commands me to respect you. He had to command me to respect you because... Never mind. I disrespected you in front of the kids this morning when I said thus-and-such. That was a sin. Parents, say to your children, kids, we've violated God's Word in Ephesians 6:4, which tells us not to provoke you to anger. We realize that by cutting you off, not allowing you to speak, being harsh with you, snapping at you, putting unrealistic expectations on you, or whatever it is, it was sinful. Get the picture?

Confess your sins to one another. Just as applicable in the body of Christ as well. We have to be about this business of confessing our sins to one another. What is so difficult about confessing our sin? It's back to that root sin of pride, isn't it? Oh, we hate to admit when we're wrong, but we are. "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." That's the principle in Proverbs 28:13, "Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy." "God opposes the proud, but he gives grace to the humble."

So this is so easy, this first step. Step 1: Confess your sin. This is so easy; just, just humble yourself. Confess your sin, remember whom you truly are before a holy and righteous God, that before him we are completely undone. And then come

before one another in meekness, in humility, and confess your sin. God will bless you. There is no shame in your confession. The shame is attached to your sinning. If you've sinned, that's shameful; that's where the shame resides. Confession, righteous! God smiles on you when you confess your sins to one another. It's a holy thing.

Well, we're out of time. We're going to finish the steps next time. But for this week, I'm going to give you homework. Okay? Here's the homework. You know what it is. Confess your sins to one another. Confess your sins; just start there. If you practice that all week, we'll tell you what to do in steps two and three next week, and you'll be ready, believe me. So your homework: Practice confessing your sins. I'm sure you can find one or two this week. And then we'll finish the outline next week. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we do want to thank you this morning for starting the year out with a recognition and gratitude that we can offer back to you for the unity and the harmony that we are enjoying in our church. That is a gift from you. That is

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evidence of the fruit of the Holy Spirit, who causes love and joy and peace, gentleness, all of that, to be produced in our midst and in our body. We're so grateful for that, and we just ask that you continue your good work in us. And when we do sin, and we do risk violating that unity in harmony and being a source of division, father let it not be us. Help us to be quick to confess our sins to you first and then to other people we've offended. We ask that you give us wisdom in this matter. There are so many ways that we can step afoul of what your Word actually teaches, and we want to be wise in the application of this. We don't want people to be hurt. So help us with that. Help us even in our confession. We can mess that up, too, as I clearly have in my life. We just ask you to help us to obey. Give us the grace to obey what you clearly commanded us. In Jesus, name. amen.