

## THE SECOND STEP

Last month we talked about the first step in the salvation process, which is repentance. That is, repentance is our first step as we receive it, but it's not God's first step. There's a step on God's part before repentance can take place, and that's conviction of sin. Unless we understand that there's a right and a wrong, conviction can't bring us to repentance. For instance, there are millions of Christians today that don't realize that violating the fourth commandment is sin, and since they feel no guilt for breaking the Sabbath, how can they repent of something they're not convicted on? God winks at that kind of ignorance, but when people know what sin is, then conviction can bring repentance, and it's their part to receive the gift. **Acts 17:30** says, *“And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commands all men every where to (what?) repent.”*

Now it's true, we do have to study the Bible to know what's right and wrong; we have to educate our conscience properly in order for conviction of sin to bring guilt, but it doesn't always come from studying the Bible directly. This is true more so after we come to Christ and accept Him as our Saviour, but at first this is not necessarily the case.

Thinking of my own experience; when I came to Christ I don't think I ever held a Bible in my hand, let alone read one. I mean, I had a basic and limited understanding of right and wrong like most people, but I didn't know that sin is the transgression of the ten commandment law as it says in **1 John 3:4**. I didn't even know what all the ten commandments were. I knew it was wrong to kill, and steal, and lie; but that's about it! And most of us know there's a lot more to the ten commandments than just killing, stealing, and lying.

And so, when I say repentance is the first step in the salvation process, I'm coming from my own personal experience, and not that there isn't something before repentance that God must do to prepare us for it.

And remember this, the third angel's message is “justification by faith in verity”, as we read last time, and you can't be justified by faith without repentance, can you? No! And neither can you be justified by faith without confessing your sins.

And so, confession, or acknowledging the fact that you have violated the commandments of God and are just as guilty of the crucifixion of Christ as those that drove the nails through His hands and feet, is part of the third angel's message as well, and the next step after God gives you repentance and makes you feel all sorry for what you have done.

Now, just as repentance is not natural to the fallen sinful nature, and that's why we need divine help to bring us to that point, neither is confession of sin something that comes naturally to the fallen nature. I mean, who thinks it's easy to tell someone you've done wrong? Who in their carnal mind wants to admit that they're guilty of committing a sinful act? Most of us are pretty good at trying to cover up our sins, but admit them? No! Nevertheless, confession is something that is necessary for us to do in order to avoid receiving the mark of the beast, is it not? Absolutely!

**1 John 1:9** says, *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."* And so, it's absolutely impossible to be justified by faith and have unconfessed sins. You can't be cleansed from all unrighteousness and have the faith of Jesus and the patience of the saints, as it says in **Revelation 14:12**, without confession.

And so, once true repentance comes, which is sorrow for sin and a God given desire to turn away from it, confessing our sins is something that must follow; it has to!

Too many times, and I've been guilty of this myself, we get caught up in all kinds of arguments and debates and quibbles over things that have nothing whatsoever to do with the three angels' messages we're supposed to take to the world; nothing whatsoever to do with the one thing we're supposed to be absorbed with. And so this morning I want to talk about that part of the everlasting gospel that deals with the importance of confession. But before we get into it, let's pray.

In **Proverbs 28:13** it says the one *"That covers his sins shall not prosper: but whoever confesses and forsakes them shall have mercy."* Isn't that reasonable? God doesn't require us to do penance, or whip our backs till they bleed, or run around the house ten times as some kind of punishment, or anything like that. The Bible simply says if we confess and forsake our sins we will receive mercy, and mercy means to treat an offender better than he deserves. We don't deserve mercy, but God is a merciful judge. And I want you to notice that confession is not enough; it says, *"Whoever confesses **and forsakes** his sin shall have mercy."* The word "forsake" means to completely abandon sin with no intention of ever repeating it. Is that possible? If you talk to most professed Christians today, they will tell you no, it's not possible to go and sin no more, as Jesus told Mary to do, but that we can be saved in our sins. And where do you suppose they get such an idea? That's what they're being taught by their spiritual leaders, and those leaders will one day have a fearful price to pay for their negligence to rightly divide the word of truth.

**Proverbs 28:13** doesn't say we will still have to pay for our sinful actions like the civil courts would make us do, because Jesus already paid the price, and when it's paid, nothing is due, at least in a spiritual sense. Now if you kill someone, you may still have to spend some time in the pokey, but God can and will forgive and cleanse you of that sin, or any other sin, and make it as though you never did it, and it happens the moment we confess that we sinned and ask forgiveness. That's justification by faith.

And not only are we to confess our sins to God, who alone can forgive them, but **James 5:16** says we are *"to confess our faults to one another and pray for one another that we may be healed."* In other words, if we have wronged someone, we are to acknowledge it to that specific person and ask forgiveness, but that person can't wipe out your record of sin in the books of heaven; only God can do that. **Matthew 5:23, 24** says if we have wronged someone we are to go to that person and make things right, and then God will accept our worship, but to go to another sinful human being that knows nothing of your sin and open up the secret recesses of your soul and follow the instructions of a man that may be more sinful than yourself won't help you one bit; in fact, it will do you much harm.

There are millions of people that do this every day, but they're none the better for it, because they're going to the wrong source to find the kind of forgiveness they need. They may feel better afterwards because they think they've done what God requires, but their sins are still registered in the books of heaven and can only be atoned for by the shed blood of Christ.

The Catholic church teaches what they call "auricular confession." Auricular confession is the revealing of sins by word of mouth on the part of the one who has sinned, into the "auris", or ear, of a priest. That's what the confessional-box in every Catholic church is for, but there's no such thing taught in either the Old or New Testaments. This is purely a man-made teaching that should never be practiced, because it does much harm to the one that hears, and the one that confides in a man that claims to be able to forgive their sins, which is God's prerogative alone. And so, we should never confess our sins to any person we have not sinned against.

The other problem with auricular confession is that it teaches the sinner that if they just keep their sins confessed they're in good shape with heaven. No need to actually overcome sin; no need to have victory over it; no need to stop committing sin, just keep them confessed and go on living life believing God accepts you the way you are with no real change necessary. And there are millions of people going to Christless graves because of it, and all Catholic priests and Protestant ministers that teach this error, or any variation of it, will one day reap what they have sown.

Now, getting back to confessing our faults to one another. If you have offended someone, you are to acknowledge your wrong to that person and to no other, and it's his or her duty as a Christian to forgive you, and if they don't, it then becomes their problem, not yours. Once that's done, then you go to God and seek His forgiveness, because the person you wronged is His property, by creation and redemption, and by doing wrong to him or her you have sinned against God.

And here's another thing about the false teaching of auricular confession; the Bible says, *“there's only one mediator between God and man, and that's the man Christ Jesus.”* **1 Timothy 2:5**. In **2 Samuel 22:7** David said, *“In my distress I called upon the LORD, and cried to my God: and he did hear my voice out of his temple, and my cry did enter into his ears”*, not the ears of your church leaders. Why would we want to tell our sins to another sinful human being when we can go directly to God and cry into His ear? One of the founding principles of Protestant Reformation is the priesthood of all believers. In other words, we can come boldly to the throne of grace through the merits of Christ, and not have to go through some other person.

The Catholic priest, or your pastor, or your church leaders, or your spouse, or your best friend are not your mediator, it's the man Christ Jesus! Your case is to be brought before Him, and Him alone as your High priest in the sanctuary above, and the One who *“was tempted in all points such as we are, yet without sin”*, will cleanse you from every stain of wrong doing and give you the power, through His Spirit, to go and sin no more; and to go and sin no more is the difference, after confession, between true and false religion.

So if you're attending and supporting a church that teaches you are in a saved condition even while you have ongoing sin in your life, I would advise you to find another church without delay, because it's dangerous for you to go there; and besides, don't think God won't hold you personally accountable for attending and supporting a church like that, because He will.

You see, it's the devil's goal to trick you into one of two errors: to fool you into thinking you can be saved by your own merits, or that you can be saved in your sins, and sad to say, nearly all churches today teach one or the other of these two falsehoods.

If we would find true forgiveness, and acceptance, and power to live the Christian life, we must humble our souls before God and acknowledge that we have sinned. If we have not confessed our sins, and hated them because of what they've done to Jesus, then we've never truly sought for the forgiveness in the first place, and if we have not truly sought forgiveness in this way, we have never found the peace of God. And that's one of the main reasons why so

many people feel continued guilt and have to ask over and over again for forgiveness for the same sins. If you don't have peace with God after you confess your sins to Him, then you don't know the Lord as you should.

If you believe what it says in **Micah 7:19**, that God *"Will have compassion on us, and will subdue our iniquities, and cast all our sins into the depths of the sea"*, then you can never have the peace that Jesus came to give. In **John 14:27** Jesus said, *"Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world gives, give I unto you."* And once you find that kind of peace after confession of sin, no one has the right to go deep sea fishing and bring up the sins that God has cast there; not even yourself! Leave your sins where God has put them and you will have real peace.

**Psalm 103:10-12** says, *"God has not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us."*

How far is the east from the west? It's a long way, isn't it? Friends, the east is so far from the west that your sins can not be retrieved, but we make God a liar when we don't believe Him and continue to fret over our past mistakes as if His word is an empty promise. Listen; God loves you, and He wants you to have peace knowing that your sins are forgiven for good. Not that you can't be eternally lost if you sin again, but friend, don't be an Indian giver and take back what you've given to God to dispose of.

Notice what it says in the book ***Steps to Christ, page 37***, *"The only reason why we do not have remission of sins that are past is that we are not willing to humble our hearts and comply with the conditions of the word of truth. Explicit instruction is given concerning this matter. Confession of sin, whether public or private, should be heartfelt and freely expressed. It is not to be urged from the sinner. It is not to be made in a flippant and careless way, or forced from those who have no realizing sense of the abhorrent character of sin. The confession that is the outpouring of the inmost soul finds its way to the God of infinite pity. The psalmist says, "The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit."*

I remember very clearly, when about 20 years ago my wife and I began worshiping with a small group in a home church setting, because we were seeing and hearing things in the church we were members of that we knew were wrong, and we knew of a few others that felt the same way. So we decided to start meeting together on Sabbath to study and worship in a

way that would be more acceptable to God, and in a way that would not violate our conscience, and I believe that first Sabbath we all listened to a taped sermon that had to do with confessing and forsaking sin, and at the end of the sermon the speaker asked everyone to have a moment of silent prayer and ask the Lord to reveal any sins that needed to be confessed.

Well, I didn't think I had anything to confess and wasn't doing anything I was aware of to violate any of the commandments of God, but I did pray that if there was anything in my life that needed to be confessed, or if I was doing anything ignorantly that I shouldn't be doing, or if I had wronged someone, or if there was anything at all registered against my name in the books of heaven, that the Holy Spirit would reveal it to me so I could do what needed to be done to be right with God and my fellow man. And like a bolt of lightning, three things popped into my mind that I had done in the past that I had forgotten all about; things I had never taken care of in the way prescribed in the Bible, and one of the things was something I did long before I became a Christian even, and it was the one thing I didn't want anyone else to ever know about, but God knew about it and He let me know that things needed to be made right.

Well, I went home that day with a very heavy heart because I didn't want to do what the Lord was asking me to do, and I struggled with it for two weeks, whether or not I was going to obey the prompting of the Holy Spirit. During that two weeks, every time I tried to pray, this thing would come into my mind, and I couldn't pray. So finally I said, "Ok Lord, I'll take care of it", and I set about doing what needed to be done.

Now remember, this had to do with something I did before I became a Christian; in fact, it was something I did when I was 17 years old, and I was now in my 40s. Well, what had happened was, I had stolen some money. I was working for a butcher shop delivering meat to restaurants in the area and this particular day I made a delivery to a restaurant where the owner lived upstairs. After I delivered my order to the kitchen downstairs I was to go upstairs with the bill to get payment. So I climbed to the top of the stairs and knocked on the door and a voice said, "Come on in." So I opened the door and there sat an old man at the kitchen table wearing only his underwear, and I knew immediately that this man was an alcoholic.

You see, my father was an alcoholic and I knew the smell very well. An alcoholic can chew gum or take breath mints or whatever to try to cover it up, but the smell comes out your pores and it's a very distinct smell and it nearly made me sick because of how it affected my dad and the family.

Anyway, the man paid me in cash and I was in such a hurry to get out of there that I forgot to mark his receipt paid, and about half way down the stair the thought came into my mind that I could pocket the money and pretend he hadn't paid me and no one would be the wiser, because surely, being an alcoholic he wouldn't be able to remember whether he paid me or not, and when he got a reminder in the mail a few weeks later that the bill was due, he'd pay it thinking he still owed it.

Well, about two weeks later the boss called me into his office and asked me if the man had paid me in cash, and I said no, that I had left the bill and I figured he'd send a check in the mail in a few days, and he said, "Ok, that will be all", and I left his office and heard no more about it. I didn't know if he believed me or not, but I didn't hear any more about it and never went back to that restaurant again.

I eventually moved on to a different job and totally dismissed it from my mind until the day I prayed that the Lord would show me any of my past sins that needed to be confessed.

Now here was my dilemma, many years had passed since this happened and I was pretty certain that the man I stole from was dead, so how was I to make things right? And there was only one way to find out if the place I worked for was still in business. You see, my brother-in-law had gotten me the job because he was one of the butchers, and I couldn't remember after so many years what the name of the butcher shop was or the owner's name, so I had no way of finding out except to call my sister and ask some questions. She still lived in the same town, but I had moved clear across the country by then and couldn't check it out myself. So I called my sister, and after a few minutes of small talk I asked her, "Do you remember that butcher shop Bud and I used to work for?" and she said, "yes," and I asked, what the name of the shop, was it still in business, and was it still under the same ownership, and she said, "yes, why do you ask?"

Then I had to explain the whole thing to her and that I had become a Christian since then and was convicted that I had to make things right, and as I was telling my sister these things she began to cry; and I said, "Joyce, what's wrong?" And she told me how touched she was that her little brother would be man enough to own up to his mistake and do what he could to rectify the situation after so long a time.

Well, long story short, she gave me the name and address of the butcher shop and I wrote my former boss and explained the whole thing to him and that I was now a Christian and had to get it off my conscience and make restitution because Jesus was coming soon and I wanted to

be ready for that great day, and I included a check for the amount I stole, plus interest, and asked him to forgive me.

I never did hear back from him, but I know he received my letter because the check got cashed. I don't know what he thought about it, but the letter was sent with a prayer and some literature that he would hopefully think seriously about his own relationship with God and about being prepared for the coming of Christ.

And so, I'll probably never know until I get to heaven what effect my testimony had with this man, but now my conscience was clear and I could pray once again as I used to without these thoughts interrupting my communion with God.

And friend, I tell you these things because there might be something you need to make right; some sin that you need to confess; some particular person you have wronged, some situation that needs to be rectified, and I urge you to do it, no matter how difficult it may be, because I can tell you one thing for sure, the books of heaven are accurate and God doesn't forget. If the Holy Spirit is convicting you to do something, please do it as quickly as possible so you can have unbroken communion with God and have the assurance of eternal life.

Because it only takes one unconfessed and unforsaken sin to bar your entrance to the Holy City. If you confess all your sins except the hard one, whatever it might be, it's still registered there against your name in the books of heaven. If the Holy Spirit is convicting you, you can be sure that it's something that needs to be dealt with, and I hope you'll do it.

Now just to be clear; there are sins that should be confessed to God alone and no other person has to know about it, but if it involves another human being, you must make it right with that person. If the person has passed away, and there's no other way to make things right, God has made provision for you to give a trespass offering to His cause and be relieved of that burden.

In ***Testimonies for the Church, volume 5, page 339*** it says, "You cannot make every case right, for some whom you have injured have gone into their graves, and the account stands registered against you. In these cases the best you can do is to bring a trespass offering to the altar of the Lord, and He will accept and pardon you. But where you can, you should make reparation to the wronged ones."

And the Bible backs this up in **Leviticus chapters 6; 7; & 27**, and **Numbers chapter 5**, but I'll let you read that for yourself if any of this applies to you.



Friend, I want to meet you in heaven; I want to be there myself. I don't want any of my loved ones or those I've preached to over the years to have to search the record books of heaven to find out why I'm not there; to see what sins had not been confessed and forsaken, and most of all, I don't want Jesus' sacrifice for me to have been in vain, do you? I know by experience that confession is hard, really hard, and some harder than others, but I believe what the wise man wrote when he said, *"He that covers his sin shall not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them shall have mercy."*

That's God's promise. Let's pray together and claim that promise this morning, and for courage to do what we can to make all wrongs right.