

Session Two

*Climbing Higher*

**THE ASCENDING LIFE**

**God's Golden Stairway to Glory**

PRINCIPLES OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH

**THE PRINCIPLE OF CONFESSION AND REPENTANCE**

Ps. 32:1-5, 38:18; Prov. 28:13; Ja. 5:16; I Jn. 1:5-10



Confess and Repent (Mark 1:4-8)

**Introduction.**

This principle involves the recognition of sin, confession of sin and repenting of sin. **The ascending life begins with admission of our imperfection and need for growth.** If we agree that Jesus himself is our ideal, then we should also agree that we have not yet reached that ideal.

- I. What IS the biblical view of sin so that we may recognize it?
  1. Sin is violation of the holiness of God. Holiness means moral and ethical perfection. It means all LIGHT and no darkness. It means absolute purity. It means literally to be separate, or separated from, evil in any form. Anything less than this is sin. Anything which keeps us from being like Jesus or hinders our growth toward that ideal is sin. The character of God revealed in Jesus is our ideal. Adam and Eve enjoyed this perfection after they were created and while they lived in the Garden of Eden before they sinned by disobeying the direct command of God.
  2. Sin is failure to love God and others. The first and greatest commandment in the Law of God is found in Matt. 22:37-40: <sup>37</sup> He (Jesus) said to him, 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. <sup>38</sup> This is the greatest and most important command. <sup>39</sup> The second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself.' <sup>40</sup> All the Law and the

*Prophets depend on these two commands.* Therefore, failure to love God supremely and to love others as ourselves must be the essence of sin.

3. Sin is "falling short" of our goal, which is the glory and holiness of God as it was revealed to us in Christ. Rom. 3:23 says that *all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*. This is the literal meaning of the Greek word for sin in the New Testament. The picture is that of an archer shooting an arrow at a target, but it falls short of the mark. The target is the perfection of God and His holiness. We fall far short of that.
4. Sin is *lawlessness*. I John. 3:4 declares *Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness*. This refers primarily to the Law of God revealed in the Ten Commandments. It is the moral law and not the civil nor ceremonial law which have both been altered because they were temporary and limited in application and have changed over time. Jesus is the *end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes* (Rom. 10:4).
5. *Sin is transgression of the Law* (I John 3:4 KJV). Transgressing means "crossing over." It means stepping over the line from what we ought to do into what we ought not to do.
6. Sin is *Lack of faith*. Romans 14:23 says: *Everything that does not come from faith is sin*. If you are not sure something is the right thing to do, don't do it! If you doubt, don't!
7. Sin is failure to do good. James 4:17 declares, *Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins*. A good example would be the priest and the Levite in the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-35) who failed to help the man who fell among robbers on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho.
8. Sin is rebellion against God's will as expressed in His Word (Gen. 3:1-7). Adam and Eve sinned against God by disobeying His direct command. It was rebellion against His revealed will. Since they became sinners before they had any children, therefore their children also inherited that sin nature; and that includes all who are descended from them, including every one of us. We sin because we are born with that inherited sin nature which is why we also sin by choice
9. Sin is an attitude of the heart which desires any of the above. According to Mt. 5:21-24, and 27-28, the motivation for the sin of murder begins with anger which progresses to insult and then to judgment on the person with whom we are angry, thus producing self-justification for the sin of murder. Jesus calls on us to reject anger, insult and judging others because they are the root of the sin of which murder is the fruit! The way to overcome these sinful attitudes is to replace them with the attitudes of love and reconciliation (vs. 27-28).

10. Sins of the spirit are deadlier than sins of the flesh because they are the seed-bed of sinful actions (Gal. 5:19-21, Eph. 4:22-32, 5:1-6, Col. 3:5-10).

Galatians 5:19-21 (HCSB) <sup>19</sup> *Now the works of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, moral impurity, promiscuity, <sup>20</sup> idolatry, sorcery, hatreds, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambitions, dissensions, factions, <sup>21</sup> envy, drunkenness, carousing, and anything similar. I tell you about these things in advance—as I told you before—that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.* In these verses, please note that while *sexual immorality, moral impurity, & promiscuity* are understood to be sins of the flesh, involving our bodies, yet *hatreds, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambitions, dissensions & factions* are all sins of the spirit and attitude but are still included in this list of the “works of the flesh.”

The biblical view of sin also includes Ephesians 4:24-29 (HCSB) <sup>24</sup> *Put on the new self, the one created according to God’s [likeness] in righteousness and purity of the truth. <sup>25</sup> Since you put away lying, speak the truth, each one to his neighbor, because we are members of one another. <sup>26</sup> Be angry and do not sin. Don’t let the sun go down on your anger, <sup>27</sup> and don’t give the Devil an opportunity. <sup>28</sup> The thief must no longer steal. Instead, he must do honest work with his own hands, so that he has something to share with anyone in need. <sup>29</sup> No foul language is to come from your mouth, but only what is good for building up someone in need, so that it gives grace to those who hear.* Thievery may be considered a sin of the flesh, but foul language indicates a sinful, rotten spirit.

Ephesians 5:1-6 and Colossians 3:5-10 give us a pretty clear list of sins of both body and spirit: <sup>1</sup> *Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children <sup>2</sup> and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. <sup>3</sup> But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God’s holy people. <sup>4</sup> Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. <sup>5</sup> For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person--such a man is an idolater--has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. <sup>6</sup> Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God’s wrath comes on those who are disobedient.*

Colossians 3:5-10 (NIV) *Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. <sup>6</sup> Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. <sup>8</sup> But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language*

*from your lips. <sup>9</sup> Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices <sup>10</sup> and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.*

**Conclusion:** A study of the above scriptures reveals that sin is basically selfishness. It is rebellion against God and against doing His will. It is an attitude of independence from God, rejecting His control in favor of being controlled by our personal wants and desires. We are experts at justifying our attitudes and actions. We ask, "Does God really know what is best for my situation at this time? How can He know my needs?"

**II. Having recognized sin for what it is, we must be willing to confess it.** This is much more difficult than it seems at first. What are some of the **hindrances to confession** (to "confess" means to agree with God about what needs to be confessed as sin)?

1. **Pride.** -- The attitude which says, "I'm okay just as I am. I accept myself as I am and others will just have to accept me as I am also." The trouble with "I'm okay" is that, deep down inside, we all know we are NOT okay, at least not always.
2. **Comparing ourselves with others.** -- "Well, maybe I'm not perfect, but neither is anyone else." Instead of comparing ourselves with others we must compare ourselves with JESUS, our ideal.
3. **Failure to understand how much room we have for improvement.** -- Many are content to stay where they are with no desire to improve. They don't understand the rewards of the struggle or of the attainment of an improved personality.
4. **Failure to be specific.** -- Daniel was very specific in confessing the sins of his people (Daniel 9). If we are to enjoy the blessing of God's forgiveness, we need to be very specific in naming our sins to God so that we will know when they are forgiven.
5. **Lack of sensitivity to the Spirit's conviction.** -- When God brings conviction, we rationalize and make excuses and procrastinate and end up doing nothing. Most of us are experts at rationalizing our behavior! This happens usually when we fail to listen to the voice of conscience which God has given to each of us to help us feel guilty about anything we know we have done or should have done so that we will confess and repent of it and seek God's forgiveness for it.

**III. Why should we confess our sins?** Why should I confess when nobody else is willing to confess? Why should I be first? Surely others need it more than I do!

1. We should confess because we **cannot** move on to higher ground until we recognize that we **need** to move up -- that we are falling short, failing to be all that God wants us to be. We cannot improve until we are **dissatisfied** with where we are. This holy dissatisfaction with our level of maturity in the Christian life is the key to growth and climbing higher. We should confess because confession is the first step toward repentance and faith and GROWTH in grace.
2. We should confess because confession breaks down pride and all other barriers to relationships between us and God and between us and others and allows God's Spirit freedom to work out our problems and give us peace.

#### IV. **HOW should we confess our sins?**

1. Allow God time to point out each area of weakness and lack and failure. (Example: A missionary friend became convicted of her sinfulness and asked God what she needed to confess. When she confessed one thing to the Lord and asked, "What else, Lord?" He kept her awake all night long!)
2. As soon as you become aware of God's Spirit bringing conviction, don't defend yourself or argue with God or rationalize or justify yourself. Rather, **let go, admit it and confess it immediately!** Agree with God about it. It may hurt your pride, but it is the ONLY way to grow!
3. If you have wronged someone, **confess it** to that person and ask for his/her forgiveness--and LOVE that person whether he/she forgives you or not! If the response is negative, don't go away thinking, "Ha! I knew it wouldn't do any good anyway" and feeling very self-righteous. That, too, is sin! Our responsibility is to seek reconciliation in love no matter what the other person's response may be (Mt. 5:23-26).
4. **Keep on confessing every** fault, weakness, sin or failure to God DAILY. This should be part of our daily worship time with the Lord. Sometimes, in the evening, before going to sleep, it is good to review the day and to ask the Lord to convict us of anything we should confess to Him. Detailed public confession is NOT usually necessary or wise. Only public sins require public confessions. Personal sins are best confessed first to God and then to a trusted friend, confidant, pastor, spouse or anyone who will love you anyway and NEVER betray your confidence. It works best if the other person also confides in you so that you are mutually accountable to each other (James 5:16).

5. Make **restitution** wherever and whenever that is possible. After the Philippian jailer believed in Jesus and was saved, Luke, the author of Acts, records that <sup>33</sup> . . . *he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds* (Acts 16:33). He did what he could to relieve the pain Paul and Silas were suffering after having been beaten for healing a young woman of possession by an evil spirit. If we have wounded anyone with words or actions, let us do what we can to relieve any suffering we may have caused.
  
6. **Accept** the other person's forgiveness. So often, in our pride, we refuse to accept forgiveness when it is offered! (More on this later!)

V. **What should we confess?**

1. Sins of commission or of omission (things we have done or things that we have failed to do). Some sins involve our flesh and some involve our minds and spirits and attitudes. (See Gal. 5:19-21, James 4:17, and also see passages from Romans and Ephesians, above.)
  
2. Secret sins--the "little" things tucked away and nourished in the secret places of the heart and mind which we may never show openly. Song of Solomon 2:15 speaks of the "*little foxes that spoil the vine.*" Sometimes we have mice which get into our pantry and spoil the food stored there. We may think the damage is too small to give any concern but, over time, they take their toll and destroy much that is good. Let us not overlook them but confess these "little" sins to God and claim His forgiveness (I John 1:9).

ALL of these may block the flow of God's Spirit and hinder our spiritual growth and keep us from ascending and therefore need to be confessed and gotten out of the way (clear the road-blocks). The following parable illustrates the principle:

There was once a tall bamboo tree which stood in the midst of a beautiful garden. One day the gardener came and stood in front of the lovely bamboo and said, "Dear Bamboo, you are the most beautiful tree in my garden, and because of you many come to visit; but I need to cut you down and take my long sharp knife and cut out all of your inner core, your very heart." The bamboo objected, "But sir, you must not cut me down. People can see me from far away and they know that I mark the location of your most beautiful garden. People come from far and near to see both me and your garden. Please, Sir, don't cut me down." But the gardener cut him down anyway and took his long knife and cut out all the inner core, even the heart, of the bamboo.

Then he put the bamboo on his shoulder and carried it up the hill to a spring of fresh water. There he placed one end of the bamboo in the spring and the other end in the edge of the garden. The life-giving water spread to all parts of the garden making it more beautiful than ever. Then he said, "Now, beautiful Bamboo, you see why I needed to cut you down and hollow you out so that you could be a blessing to the whole garden."

Even so we must be cut down and our inner being be cut out and empty so that we may be good conduits of God's grace to those whom He wishes to bless.

**CONCLUSION.** -- It is time now to begin to confess and to claim God's forgiveness. I John 1:9 says: *<sup>9</sup> If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* Forgiveness and cleansing are yours/ours for the asking because Jesus made it all possible on Calvary. Pray that God will make your spirit sensitive to His conviction, then agree with God immediately and claim His cleansing. His blessing will follow immediately.

Repentance goes one step further -- turning away from the sin and leaving it behind! Confession must lead to repentance or it is of very little value (next lesson!)