

Finding Intimacy with God / COB / 07.27.14

Introduction

- † **[Slide 1: Title]** What if I asked you to stand up and confess the worst thing you did this week? Would you be anxious about it? Would you refuse? Would we be shocked? Would public confession bring healing or further emotional burden?
- It might not have occurred to you, but I have confessed to you several times. I have told you about my past struggles with sin and confessed some mistakes I have made since I arrived here. Do you think less of me for admitting I am flawed and constantly in need of God's grace?
- † Evangelical Christians tend to think of confession as a private matter, just between us and God. But most biblical references to confession are public in nature!
- The Jews receiving John's baptism of repentance confessed their sins as part of the process [Mark 1.5]. Both Jews and Gentiles who accepted Christ in Ephesus then came forward confessing their sins [Acts 19.18]. James tells us to confess our sins to each other, so we can be healed [James 5.16].
 - We'll talk more about confession today, but first let's talk about trying to avoid the need.

Resistance of evil

- † Last week, we discussed that if we believe the scriptural evidence about our identity in Christ and what Christ has done for us, then we can have victory over sin and can resist the influence of evil in our lives. There are four primary attacks we must learn to resist.
- **[Slide 2: temptation]** The first attack we must resist is temptation: Romans 13.14 HCSB: "...put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no plans to satisfy the fleshly desires."
 - Sometimes, the obstacle to breaking free of spiritual bondages is that there is a part of us that is not ready. We want to be free, but we are not yet ready to say, "never again." We must say it, we must commit to submit to Christ in all things, and not tolerate sin in our lives [James 4.7].
 - When you feel tempted, flee the source of temptation, flee the environment that makes temptation possible! The Bible says to flee sexual immorality [1 Corinthians 6.18], to flee idolatry [1 Corinthians 10.14]. If the source of your temptation is your computer or phone, turn it off, put it down, and go be with others so you cannot look; if your source is a bottle, then don't bring any bottles home and don't go to places that serve out of bottles.
 - When you are tempted, call a friend, find accountability and encouragement for yourself in that moment [Hebrews 3.13; 1 Thessalonians 5.11]!
 - When you are tempted, pray [James 5.13]! Pray for God to strengthen you, pray the scripture that says there is no temptation you cannot resist, that God will provide a way out [1 Corinthians 10.13]! Then believe it and resist!
- † **[Slide 3: distraction]** The second attack we must resist is a form of temptation called distraction.
- We see an example of distraction in Luke 10.38-40 NET: "Jesus entered a certain village where a woman named Martha welcomed him as a guest. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he said. But Martha was distracted with all the preparations she had to make..."

- This shows us even good things can be a distraction from what is better for us. Martha was working to be a good hostess, but in the process was missing out on what Jesus had to say.
- For us, the distraction might be our leisure time, our hobbies; are they good things which have become too important in our lives, keeping us from our calling to the gospel mission?
- Our distraction might be our jobs or even ministry work or good deeds that are keeping us from more important deeds or the ministry God has for us. I once was involved in many ministries, but that distracted me from teaching, which was the ministry God had for me at the time.
- Please pray about whether there are good things in your life that might be distracting you from something better God has for you.

† **[Slide 4: deception]** The third attack we must resist is deception.

- 1 Corinthians 15.33 NASB: “Do not be deceived: ‘Bad company corrupts good morals.’” Our friends can deceive us because we trust them and like them. Other verses say we can be deceived by sin, false teachers, and demons.
- There are a lot of lies out there, trying to taint your perception of the truth about yourself and Christ. We must resist with the scriptural evidence. That means we must study scripture so we really understand the truth, memorize scripture so we can recall it to refute deceptions, and reflect on scripture so we can allow it to change the way we think and act.

† **[Slide 5: accusation]** The fourth attack we must resist is a form of deception called accusation, which is negative or wrong thoughts.

- We see an example of this in John 13.2 NET: “the devil had already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, that he should betray Jesus.”
- You are going to have stray thoughts that are negative, deceptive, maybe even evil, about yourself or others. Like we discussed last week, take every thought captive in the name of Christ [2 Corinthians 10.5] and then counter those thoughts with the positive truth of scripture.

† **[Slide 6: world]** From where do these attacks arise? Many times, we are vulnerable because of our love for the things of the world which are not of God.

- 1 John 2.15-17 [NET]: “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father [God] is not in him, because all that is in the world [here John explains what he is talking about] (the desire of the flesh and the desire of the eyes and the arrogance produced by material possessions) [this stuff] is not from the Father, but is from the world [our fallen culture]. And the world is passing away with all its desires, but the person who does the will of God remains forever.”
- Even after the fall, creation reflects a lot of God’s goodness, so it is good to enjoy being out in nature, to enjoy the gifts of life God gives us. John is warning us to avoid the treats our fallen culture promotes: self-indulgence, self-reliance, selfishness, gluttony, materialism, lust, drunkenness and getting high, and so on. Jesse and I have to keep in mind that getting a ride in an Aston Martin would be a good thing, shelling out a hundred grand for one would not.
- James 1.27 NET: "Pure and undefiled religion before God the Father is this: to care for orphans and widows in their misfortune and to keep oneself unstained by the world."

- † **[Slide 7: flesh]** Sometimes our impulses are of our own fallen flesh, and those we must resist also:
 - Galatians 5.16-17 NET: “But I say, live by the [Holy] Spirit and you will not carry out the desires of the flesh. For the flesh has desires that are opposed to the Spirit, and the Spirit has desires that are opposed to the flesh, for these are in opposition to each other, so that you cannot do what you want [in the flesh].”

- † **[Slide 8: demons]** We also must resist all actions of our spiritual enemy.
 - 1 Peter 5.8-9 NET: “Be sober and alert. Your enemy the devil, like a roaring lion, is on the prowl looking for someone to devour. Resist him, strong in your faith, because you know that your brothers and sisters throughout the world are enduring the same kinds of suffering.”
 - In all the passages that command us to resist evil, the context makes clear that we can do so if and only if we are relying on God to empower us. So we keep focused on God, on what Christ has done for us and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit who is with us, and we resist anything that is opposed to them.

- † **[Slide 9: resist]** If we can resist all these evil influences in our lives, we can be obedient to God and live the Christian life of victory. How hard should we resist?
 - Let’s have X come up here for an illustration. Suppose I am evil, trying to push X off of the stage. How hard should he resist me? X, what will happen if you only resist half-heartedly as I start to push you toward the edge? You will fall and break your head. As evil comes with temptation, distraction, deception, and accusation, X needs to resist with all of his strength!
 - Hebrews 12.1-4 NIV “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses [the past heroes of our faith], let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles [we have a net of deception over us and temptations entangling our feet! We must throw them off!]. And let us run with perseverance [endurance, not giving up] the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart [and thus resist half-heartedly]. In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.”
 - Jesus, our example, resisted to the point of shedding blood; he died not only for us, but in obedience to the will of God the Father. Rather than sin, he went to his death to take on the burden for all our sin. We must resist with all our ability, to honor and follow Jesus.

Confession leading to cleansing and healing

- † **[Slide 10: reasons to confess]** We learned last week that we can have victory over every temptation, that God will provide us with the a way out if we seek it. That means we can eliminate willful sin, the type of sin that is open rebellion, our choice in that moment to walk with evil instead of with God.
 - But even so, we will continue to slip up at least in unwillful ways. The remedy for all our mistakes of sin is immediate confession.

- † There are many reasons we should confess our sins to God.
 - First, if we are submitted to Christ and resisting sin, then we will want to get right with God.

- Second, the Holy Spirit will prompt us, we will sense the conviction in our hearts that we have sinned and need to confess.
- Third, if we have accountability in our Christian fellowship, then our friends will confront us about our sin and urge us to get right with God.
- Fourth, what we learn in God's Word will encourage us to make confession a regular activity.

† **[Slide 11: 1 John 1.9]** 1 John 1.9 [NASB]: "If we confess our sins, He [God] is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

- Wow, look at that! If we sin, does God demand we feel guilty? does he demand we serve penance? does he require something to make up for it? No... he says, come to me, my child, come and tell me how you messed up, confess your error, and I will forgive you.
- The two parts of the Greek word translated as "confess," ὁμολογέω, literally mean "to say the same thing," and so the word was used for agreement, admission, confession: you say the same thing as God with regard to your action, that you know it was against his will and character.
- Now I would say, in this context, confessing your act of sin would include repenting of it. When I was doing youth ministry, one day three of the high school boys stopped by my house to say hello. As we sat in my kitchen and they consumed all my beverages, they started confessing to each other their sins, and I threw them out of my house, because this was not a repentant confession, they were bragging!
- That's not what John is talking about in this letter, right? Of course not. God says to come to him repentant – which means to turn away from sin and walk again with God – not only acknowledging you did wrong, but determined again to walk with God in freedom instead of with Satan in bondage to sin.
- If we do this, then God forgives us. Now, if you are a Christian, God already has forgiven you legally for every sin you will ever do, because Christ already has paid your debt to God, your penalty for sin. But this verse is talking about your relationship with God. Sin is walking away from God to be evil; coming back to God and being sorry for your waywardness restores your relationship with him: he is faithful to fulfill his promise of deliverance through Christ, he lets go your transgression and restores your intimacy.
- Some of you know the parable of the prodigal son from Luke 15. One son goes out from his father, sins against him, then returns repentant, confessing his sin, and is welcomed back.
- We have a covenant relationship with God as his children regardless of how badly we screw up; but while we are sinning – while we are turned away from God and walking with evil – we lose some of the blessings of that relationship. When we return repentantly confessing our error, our relationship with God is restored, as are the blessings of greater intimacy with God.
- As a bonus, still looking at 1 John 1.9, God promises not only forgiveness, but cleansing! Every act of sin defiles you, taints you, but when you confess it to God, you let it go, you give it to Jesus, and God cleanses you of that defilement from sin because he has attributed to you the righteousness of Christ. This allows him to restore your relationship with him.

† It is important to realize that repentant confession to God is the only action we need to take in response to our sin when we want to restore our relationship with God.

- Because we are appropriating the work of Christ on our behalf, because we believe in the promise of deliverance through Christ's sacrifice, we know that Christ paid the penalty for our sin, so there is no need in God's economy or justice system for us to be punished again. Instead, when we confess and repent, the promise of God is that he will cleanse us, forgive us, instantly.
 - Lasting guilt actually is a trick of Satan. He wants us to feel bad about ourselves, to succumb to negative thoughts about ourselves, because he knows our guilt will tear us down and keep us from restoring our relationship with God and from being effective in ministry for God.
 - **[Slide 12: Romans 8.1]** God's truth is in Romans 8.1 NASB: "Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."
 - If Christ paid your penalty, if he took your guilt and condemnation, then there is none on you. Confess it and then let it go, do not let Satan tear you apart with his condemning lies.
 - If you willingly choose to be in rebellion against God, then you have a real problem, and you need to come to a change of heart, a repentant decision to commit to following Christ, to submit to Christ in all things. But if you simply screw up despite your best efforts, then fall on your knees and admit to God your sin, thank God for his forgiveness and cleansing, and ask God for his help to do better going forward.
- † **[Slide 13: James 5.16]** The Bible says you can go directly to God when you confess. You do not need a priest or pastor to mediate for you, because you have Christ mediating for you in Heaven.
- However, the Bible does recommend confession to at least one other person, perhaps especially a pastor/elder. James 5.16 NASB: "Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much."
 - Supportive prayer for each other and confessing our sins to one another are seen as essential aspects of Christian fellowship, which can bring healing. Now this is not about our relationship with God at all, this is about us carrying on in life free from isolating secrecy, from interpersonal consequences of our sin, and from guilt and emotional baggage associated with our sin.
 - Much of our struggle is due to keeping our problems inside, which creates emotional obstacles to health and prevents us from getting the love, acceptance, prayer support, encouragement, and accountability offered in the Christian community, which God says we need.
 - As a biblical counselor, mentor, and now pastor, I have heard many confessions over the years. I have heard about drug use and drug dealing; about homosexuality, adultery, and other sexual sins; about lying, stealing, cheating, and intentionally hurting; about wavering faith and a wavering walk. The most difficult to hear probably was one about sexual abuse of teenagers.
 - But here's my point. When those people confessed to me, if I was able to acknowledge their sin and encourage repentance while showing them unconditional acceptance and love, then they were able to begin healing from the sins they had committed; then they could experience grace, forgiveness, and mercy through God's people in such a way that made grace, forgiveness, and mercy from God real. So they became stronger in faith and hope, more determined than ever to follow Christ.
- † So we confess to God to restore our relationship with him and get cleansed from our sin; and we confess to each other to get healing internally and relationally from our sin. This cleansing and healing that come from confession will help us to continue walking in obedience with God.

Obedience

- † **[Slide 14: Obedience as love]** Obedience is how we show love to God.
- 1 John 5.3 HCSB: “For this is what love for God is: to keep His commands.”
 - John 14.15 NET: [Jesus speaking] “If you love me, you will obey my commandments.”
 - Other ways we show love, like worship and serving, are in obedience to God’s commands.
- † **[Slide 15: obedience as evidence]** Increasing obedience also is one evidence of our relationship with God through Christ.
- 1 John 2.3-5 NET: “Now by this we know that we have come to know God: if we keep his commandments. The one who says “I have come to know God” and yet does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in such a person. But whoever obeys his word, truly in this person the love of God has been perfected. By this we know that we are in him.”
- † **[Slide 16: available]** When we are obedient we can be the willing vessel for Christ’s ministry.
- 2 Timothy 2.21 HCSB: “So if anyone purifies himself from anything dishonorable, he will be a special instrument, set apart, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work.”
- † **[Slide 17: not grieve]** We also are obedient because we do not want to grieve God. When we sin, we turn away from God and walk with evil, we choose in that moment to associate ourselves with evil instead of with the character of God that is in us. And this does grieve God [Ephesians 4.30].
- † **[Slide 18: effects of sin]** We have learned before that the Bible says there are repercussions for sins, even for believers.
- We might experience earthly human consequences, such as civil penalties [Exodus 21.15] or church discipline [1 Timothy 5.20].
 - We might experience earthly corrective action from God [Hebrews 12.5-6; Psalm 39.11].
 - We might experience physical illness [John 5.14].
 - We will suffer in conscience [Romans 13.5].
 - We will experience deception of the mind and hardening of the heart [Hebrews 3.13].
 - We can experience spiritual bondage to sin [John 8.34; Romans 6.16-18],
 - Since we are not yielding to the Spirit in the moment of sin, we will lose our sense of peace, joy, and the other fruit of the Spirit [Galatians 5.19-25].
 - We will experience a loss of heavenly treasure [Matthew 6.20; 2 Corinthians 5.10].
 - We will miss out on earthly blessings [1 Peter 3.8-12; James 1.25].
 - And we will cause negative effects on other people.
- † **[Slide 19: Romans 6.15]** Because of all that we have discussed so far, we must be careful to avoid an attitude of license: Romans 6.15 NIV: “Shall we sin because we are not under the law [Mosaic Law] but under grace? By no means!” We must not tolerate sin in our lives.

- **[Slide 20: Galatians 5.1]** At the same time, we must also avoid an attitude of legalism. Talking to those who were considering a need to obey in order to earn righteousness, Paul wrote in Galatians 5.1 NET: “For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not be subject again to the yoke of slavery.”
 - So we must not impose extra-biblical moral codes on others nor adhere to a works-based righteousness theology for ourselves. We cannot be righteous in ourselves; we are righteous only because God accounts to us the righteousness of Christ. We obey because we have received that gift, not to earn it.
 - We should honor that each individual believer will be progressing in the sanctification process at a unique pace, on a unique path, in cooperation with God, bathed in grace. Our responsibility to each other is to provide encouragement and teaching on biblical principles of obedience while maintaining an environment safe for individual choice, expression, and growth. Accountability is a necessary part of Christian community, but we have to provide it in a loving environment.
- † **[Slide 21: New Covenant]** One last thought about obedience. The modern day believer is under the “New Covenant” with God [Luke 22.20; 1 Corinthians 11.25; 2 Corinthians 3.6; Hebrews 9.15]. Obedience in this New Covenant is to the teachings and example of Jesus and his apostles.
- This new “Law” is called the Law of Christ [1 Corinthians 9.21], the Law of the Spirit [Romans 8.2], the Royal Law [James 2.8], and the Law of Liberty [James 1.25].
 - We have talked about this New Covenant in other sermons, but if you still have questions about it, please come talk to me.
 - The Mosaic Law of the Old Testament, while still very useful to us as revelation, is no longer a binding covenant [Hebrews 8.13; Galatians 3.23-26], now that the new has come.

Intimacy result?

- † **[Slide 22: intimacy]** The best reason to resist sin, confess sin, and seek to obey in all things is that this leads to greater intimacy with God.
- † 1 John 1.5b-6 NET: “God is light, and in him there is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him and yet keep on walking in the darkness, we are lying and not practicing the truth.”
- God is pure and holy. The penalty for acts of sin is a loss of fellowship or intimacy with God, because we defile ourselves and because in that moment of sin we are walking away from God.
- † John 14.21 NET: “The person who has my commandments and obeys them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and will reveal myself to him.”
- So by resisting sin to the point of obedience and confessing when we fail, we can remain in an intimate loving relationship with God and Christ, and even have Christ reveal himself to us.
- † Let’s pray...
- **[Slide 23: chart]** If you need help getting started with confession, we are posting on the website some confession guiding questions. I did not create these questions, but I have found them useful in my own life, to help me confess and to help me see what I need to confess.
 - Your handout includes a chart like this one, reflecting what we have learned so far in our study of spiritual growth or progressive sanctification. Let me know if you have questions...