

Warnings and Encouragement

Sermons From Pastoral Rule, Book 3

August 28, 2016

- I. My original intention for today's teaching was to talk about the contrast between those who confess their sins and even feel bad enough to weep over their sins yet continue to practice them, and those who rarely confess their sins and hardly feel bad or weep over them, yet make commendable efforts to put an end to the sins they have practiced.
 - A. However, in preparing for that topic, I decided to focus today's teaching on a part of it which I believe is important enough to stand on its own. Therefore, we are going to look at how we are to respond – toward ourselves, toward God, and toward those we have harmed – when we sin.
 - B. Scriptures to consider as support for this teaching
 1. 1 John 2:3-4 . . . By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. [4] The one who says, "I have come to know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.
 2. 1 John 3:4,7-8 . . . Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness. [7] Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; [8] the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil.
 3. James 4:4 . . . You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.
 4. Matthew 6:14-15 . . . If you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. [15] But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.
 5. Isaiah 1:16-18 . . . Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from My sight. Cease to do evil, [17] learn to do good; seek justice, reprove the ruthless, defend the orphan, plead for the widow. [18] Come now, and let us reason together, says the LORD, though your sins are as scarlet, they will be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they will be like wool.
 6. Isaiah 55:7 . . . Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return to the LORD, and [the LORD] will have compassion on him, and [let him return] to [a reconciled relationship with] God, for [God] will abundantly pardon.

7. 1 John 1:9 . . . If we confess our sins, [God] is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.
8. James 4:8-10 . . . Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. [9] Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom. [10] Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.

C. Prayer

II. The scripture's teaching concerning our response to having sinned.

- A. Most Christians are aware of the need to confess our sin in order to gain forgiveness, and regain good standing with God after having sinned. However, confession is only part of how we are to respond to having sinned. The larger list of responses that scripture speaks of includes –
 1. humility – so that we humbly confess our sin,
 2. repentance,
 3. mourning and weeping over our sin – and specifically over what our sin has done to God and anyone else we have harmed,
 4. repairing and making right the damage our sin has done to those we have wronged,
 5. receiving God's forgiveness and returning to fellowship with God,
 6. and proceeding to amend or correct our ways so as to minimize the likelihood of sinning again.
- B. According to God's word, this last response – taking serious and measurable steps to amend or correct our sinful ways – is vital, because failure here will, in time, result in God withholding forgiveness in spite of our confession. For example –
 1. God's word teaches that no one who is born of God practices sin. That is, no born again believer willingly or carelessly repeats the same sin over and over (1 John 3:4-10).
 2. And God's word says that if we go on sinning willfully – after receiving the knowledge of the truth regarding sin and God's provision to free us from the power, practice, and penalty of sin – there are no additional sacrifices to cover our continued willful sinning. In other words, to go on committing the same sin, knowingly and willfully, puts our eternal redemption at great risk (Hebrews 10:26-31).
 3. Jesus affirms this when He says that those who see themselves as born again, spiritually mature believers, and yet continue to willfully or carelessly practice sin to the end of their life (i.e., live lawlessly), they will be excluded from eternal life with God (Matthew 7:21-23).

C. Does this mean that if Christians sin they will be eternally lost? No, for we know from Bible stories, church history, and personal experience that Christians sin – at least on occasion.

1. So then, what is God looking for from us when we sin? And what ought we to be looking for from ourselves when we sin? I have already given you a general answer to these two questions, so now we will turn our attention to the details of those general answers.
2. First, we must be honest with ourselves, with God, and with those we have harmed by our sin, for without this honesty there will be NO genuine confession of sin and NO subsequent effort to move forward in the pursuit and practice of godliness.
 - a. King David is an example of this need for honesty. We can reasonably assume that David was mature enough, knowledgeable enough, and spiritual enough to know he had grievously sinned by committing adultery and murder. And yet, he was not honest enough with himself, or God, to feel compelled to confess his sin to God and begin to amend his ways. And he remained in this state of dishonesty until Nathan came and drew a picture of his sin that he could not deny (2 Samuel 11–12).
 - b. But when David came to his senses, through Nathan's help, he stopped lying to himself and he stopped trying to hide his sin. And so we read in 2 Samuel 12:13, that David said, out loud – which means all those who were there could hear it – “I have sinned against the LORD”.
 - c. My reason for reminding you of this story is because until we, like David, are honest with ourselves about our sin, we will not be honest with God and others about our sin. Honesty about our sin is a must if we are going to properly deal with having sinned.
3. Second, God expects us to work hard at not sinning, and at putting an end to whatever sins we repeatedly commit. In other words, for confession of sin to be acceptable to God, it must be accompanied by a resolute and persistent effort to put off our old nature and put on Christ-likeness in relation to sin in general, but especially in relation to those specific sins we are prone to repeat again and again. This truth is affirmed in scripture. For example:
 - a. Leviticus 26:40-42 . . . If they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their forefathers, in their unfaithfulness which they committed against Me, and also in their acting with hostility against Me – [41] I also was acting with hostility against them, to bring them into the land of their enemies – or if their

uncircumcised heart becomes humbled so that they then make amends for their iniquity, [42] then I will remember My covenant with Jacob, and I will remember also My covenant with Isaac, and My covenant with Abraham as well, and I will remember the land.

- (1) Notice that the first requirement in these verses is to confess our sin to God. The second is a double requirement of humbling ourselves and changing our ways.
 - (2) Without diminishing the importance of the second requirement, I want us to consider what it means to confess our sin?
 - (3) To confess our sin to God is to acknowledge the specifics of the sin we committed. For example, confession includes stating the sin committed, admitting that we knew better, that we did not have to sin, that we have no excuse for sinning, that in sinning we have made ourselves God's enemy and the devil's friend, that we have needlessly added to the list of sins Christ paid for, that we have saddened – if not broken – God's heart, and that we are committed to getting back up and making a worthy effort to put an end to sin in our life.
- b. A second scripture that affirms that our response to having sinned must include a renewed effort to stop sinning is Proverbs 28:13 . . . He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will find compassion.
- (1) Notice that confession of sin and forsaking sin go hand-in-hand. In other words, they are inseparable – which means confessing the same sin, over and over, without making a worthy and measurable effort at forsaking that sin, becomes offensive and unacceptable to God.
 - (2) But why must confessing and forsaking sin go together? Because confession is the admission to God that we know we have sinned, and though confession is intended to lead to forgiveness and the restoration of good standing with God, it does not remove the desire to sin again or remedy all the disorders caused by sin, such as ungodly fears, desires, thoughts, words, and deeds. Those things are remedied by putting them off and replacing them with Christ-likeness.
- c. A third scripture that speaks to the inseparable link between confession and putting away sin is 1 John 1:6-9 . . . If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we

lie and do not practice the truth; [7] but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. [8] If we say that we have no sin (there is nothing to confess), we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. [9] If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Notice that walking in the Light as God is in the Light is a requirement for having fellowship with God, which means after sinning and confessing that sin, we must return to pursuing holiness of life in order to return to walking with God.

4. Third, God's word tells us that He looks favorably on those who, after sinning, come to Him with a humble, broken and contrite heart, and with mourning and weeping. We read this in:
 - a. Psalm 51:16-17 . . . For You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; You are not pleased with burnt offering. [17] The sacrifices [that please and impress and bring us back into good standing with] God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.
 - (1) A broken spirit is a humble mindset and prevailing attitude of humility.
 - (2) A broken and contrite heart is a grief stricken, sorrowful heart over having sinned.
 - (a) Now I suppose we can see why humility is a must, but why is a grief stricken, sorrowful heart essential?
 - (b) The grief stricken, sorrowful heart verifies that you love God, and in loving Him, you care about how you treat Him. For example, when you love God, or anyone else for that matter, it grieves you to know you have hurt them.
 - (3) Therefore, when those who love God, sin, and then come to their senses, they become grief stricken and sorrowful, and they mourn and weep over the fact that they have treated God so poorly by rebelling against Him, displeasing Him, and breaking His heart – especially after He has been so gracious and loving to them.
 - b. Jesus told a story about the contrast between arrogance over one's supposed righteousness and the kind of humility and mourning spoken of in Psalm 51. In Luke 18:10-14, we read that two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other

a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: “God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.” But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast (an outward sign of humility, sorrow and unworthiness), saying, “God, be merciful to me, the sinner!” I tell you, Jesus said, this man went to his house justified rather than the other.

- c. James supports what we just read in Psalm 51, and so we read in James 4:8-10 . . . Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. [9] Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom. [10] Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.
 - 5. Now if you are thinking that Psalm 51 and James 4 are calling us to a morbid, depressing mentality, remember Jesus words found in Matthew 5:4 . . . Blessed are those who mourn (over their sin), for they shall be comforted. In other words, Jesus is affirming that a humble attitude and a broken heart that weeps over having sinned does not make us morbid or leave us depressed, but rather leads to a Godly comfort and a blessedness that raises us God-ward and leads to true joy.
- D. What do you think about after having sinned? Are you mostly focused on gaining God’s forgiveness so that you can maintain good standing with Him, and maybe even be freed from the earthly consequences of your sin? Or are you humble and sad – to the point of mourning – that you have treated God so poorly after He has treated you so graciously and lovingly?
- 1. One of the problems we face is being honest about the effects of our sin on God, His kingdom, and on whomever else our sin affects.
 - a. Something that has helped me see the effects of my sin on God and others is to use Bible language to describe my sin and myself when I sin. For example –
 - b. I read in Hebrews 10:29 that when I go on sinning knowingly and willfully, I am trampling under foot the Son of God, and regarding as unclean the blood of the covenant by which I am sanctified, and insulting the Spirit of grace. When I admit that in sinning I have treated God this badly, it brings a deep sadness to my heart and sometimes tears to my eyes.

- c. Another portion of scripture that helps me label myself and my sin in ways that reinforce the effects of my sin is James 4:4 where James says that in wanting my own way, in being selfish and self-centered, I am acting like an adulteress. And when I act like an adulteress, I am siding with the world. And when I side with the world, I am acting hostile toward God. In fact, as James says, when I choose to act like a friend of the world, I am making myself an enemy of God.
 - d. My point here is that when I use Bible language to label my sin and myself when I sin, it is very sobering, and it moves me toward humility, a broken heart, and mourning and weeping over having treated God so poorly.
2. However, our sin not only affects God, it affects those around us. You know how you feel when other people's sin negatively effects you. Do you feel as upset, hurt, frustrated, and angry over the harmful effects of your sin on them? Those who love their neighbor as themselves do feel a deep sadness for having sinned and in so doing, having unnecessarily harmed one or more people around them.

III. Conclusion

- A. Today we looked at what our response is to be when we sin, and in looking at this we have talked about confessing sin, working at changing so as to minimize sinning again, and we have looked at having a humble, broken heart over our sin that mourns and weeps for having treated God and those around us so poorly.
- B. None of these parts stand alone. Rather, each part fits into an integrated whole that brings God's forgiveness and restores the joy of our salvation.
- C. So in summary, after sinning, the path we are to take to restored peace with God, to comfort for our sorrow over having treated God and a neighbor so badly, and to regained joy in the Lord, is through a humble confession, a broken and contrite heart that mourns and weeps, the commitment to throw that sin overboard and replace it with godliness, and getting back up and moving forward, hand-in-hand, with God.