

Text: Hebrews 4:14-5:10

Our passage in Hebrews for today, and thus our lesson in the book, discusses how Jesus' work on the cross provided a way for us to receive mercy and forgiveness. We're going to talk about that in a moment. I want to start with a different question: Why do we, as Christians, need to confess our sins? Assuming we really are Christians, we've already been saved, forgiven, sanctified, right? The Bible says we have:

10By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. (Hebrews 10:10)

9that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; (Romans 10:9)

38Peter said to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39"For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself." 40And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation!" 41So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls. (Acts 2:38-41)

24"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life. (John 5:24)

Judging by these Scriptures, it sure does look like salvation is a one time, "git-r-dun" event. So, I ask again: Why do we need to continually confess our sins? If we are saved, if our names are in the Book of Life, if we are heaven-bound, if Jesus' work on the cross was sufficient to make restitution for all sin, why bother with confession of sins after being saved? I will offer you three reasons:

A. Jesus *commanded* it.

9"Pray, then, in this way:

**'Our Father who is in heaven,
Hallowed be Your name.**

10>Your kingdom come

**Your will be done,
On earth as it is in heaven.**

11'Give us this day our daily bread.

12'And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

13'And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. [For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.]' (Matthew 6:9-11)

The "Lord's Prayer," as it is called, is Jesus' model prayer for us. It is not a mantra that should be repeated because it has some inherent power (it does not, and mindless repetition is against God's intention for prayer—see **Matthew 6:7**). Instead, it is a model which includes all of the elements that should be present in the content of our prayers. Note that Jesus did not say "Try this. It might do." He said "**Pray, then, in this way.**" Since the type of prayer Jesus modeled and mandated for His followers included the asking of forgiveness, we must conclude that the Lord considers this a necessary part of our prayer experiences. And, remember, if being saved means that Jesus is our *Lord*, we will follow His commands.

B. Ongoing confession is a mark of a true believer, and is necessary for fellowship with God.

5This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. 6If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; 7but 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. 8If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. 9If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us. (1 John 1:5-10)

Verse 9 is frequently quoted, and rightly so—it presents a tremendously comforting truth! The passage as a whole seems a bit bizarre at first. Verses 6 and 7 state that only those that “walk in the Light”—that is, those that are without sin—have fellowship with Him, but then we see that those that “walk in the Light” are being cleansed from sin by Jesus’ blood. Note that the word “cleanses” is present tense—it doesn’t say only that we “were cleansed” or “have been cleansed”—the word suggests an ongoing process. Then, verse 8, **“If we say that we have [PRESENT TENSE] no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us.”** John says that if we don’t acknowledge the continuing presence of sin in our lives, we are self-deceivers and, according to verse 10, not true Christians. This continuing presence of sin causes separation from God—walking “in the darkness”—unless we confess and are forgiven (verse 9), thus being brought back to the light. No Christian lives a sin-free life (unfortunately). A professing believer that does not regularly acknowledge and confess sin is lying to himself and to God, and may well be a professor only. By contrast, the true believer is cognizant of, if not repulsed by his sin, and his life is therefore marked by ongoing confession to restore fellowship with God and with other believers.

C. Ongoing confession is required if we are to be effective as God’s servants.

4“Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. 5“I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. 6“If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned. 7“If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. 8“My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples. 9“Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. 10“If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love. (John 15:4-10)

In verses 4 and 5 we see that “abiding,” or “standing firm” in Christ is necessary if we are to bear “fruit” for His Kingdom. The question is, how do we “abide?” The answer is found in verse 10: **“If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love.”** That seems straightforward enough, but what does it have to do with confession? In the previous passage what did we learn about our ability to keep His commandments? (We don’t do it—we sin.) Whatever obedience we have exercised is tainted by the fact that we have also on certain occasions disobeyed—sinned. BUT, we learned in **1 John 1:9** that our sins are forgiven when we confess them. Confession (which, by the way, is itself an act of obedience) removes the acts of disobedience from our records and leaves only a clean record of unmitigated obedience to His commands. This satisfies the prerequisite Christ stated for being used by Him to bear fruit for the Kingdom. If we fail to confess our sins, we are sinning (in addition to the sins we are not confessing), and therefore not obeying His commandments, and therefore not abiding, and therefore He will not enable us to bear fruit.

Before we move on to the actual lesson for today, I have an observation and a question: The first passages we read today suggested that we are saved and forgiven at the moment we become Christians, yet the last several passages call for a continuing cycle of confession and forgiveness. Is this a contradiction? No. It only illustrates that our salvation experience consists of *both* events and processes:

5He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, 6whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. (Titus 3:5-7)

I am speaking in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, resulting in further lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification. (Romans 6:19)

16The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, 17and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him. 18For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. (Romans 8:16-18)

What we have here are three “Church words:” *justification*, *sanctification*, and *glorification*. The first is what occurs at the moment we are saved. God calls us to Himself (**John 6:44**) and declares us justified and made heirs by His grace. *Sanctification* is the ongoing “pruning” (**John 15:2**) of sinful attitudes, behaviors, and associations that should be an ongoing part of the Christian’s life—confession of sin is a part of this. *Glorification* is what true believers can expect at the last day, when Jesus returns and the dead are raised and we all receive glorified bodies to live and reign with Him (**Revelation 20:4**). In other words, we are immediately *justified* before God at the moment of salvation, but He continues to *sanctify* us in preparation for the day when we look forward to being *glorified* with Him!

Our passage in Hebrews today concerns not why or that we must confess our sins, but the basis upon which we can expect to receive God's mercy and forgiveness.

14Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. 15For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. 16Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (Hebrews 4:14-16)

Jesus Christ, our "great high priest," didn't enter into the earthly temple to make atonement, as the Levitical priests did—He entered into the Heavenly tabernacle! Not only that, He did not have to take a sacrifice for His own sin—he *had none*. The blood wherewith He entered was His own, by which He made atonement for our sins.

7but into the second, only the high priest enters once a year, not without taking blood, which he offers for himself and for the sins of the people committed in ignorance. (Hebrews 9:7)

11But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; (Hebrews 9:11)

We are again exhorted to "hold fast," a trait of all true believers that we discussed at length a couple of weeks ago, and are then reminded that Christ Himself is not an unsympathetic mediator—He understands our temptations:

1Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led around by the Spirit in the wilderness 2for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And He ate nothing during those days, and when they had ended, He became hungry. 3And the devil said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread." 4And Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'MAN SHALL NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE.'" 5And he led Him up and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. 6And the devil said to Him, "I will give You all this domain and its glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. 7"Therefore if You worship before me, it shall all be Yours." 8Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'YOU SHALL WORSHIP THE LORD YOUR GOD AND SERVE HIM ONLY.'" 9And he led Him to Jerusalem and had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down from here; 10for it is written, 'HE WILL COMMAND HIS ANGELS CONCERNING YOU TO GUARD YOU,' 11and, 'ON their HANDS THEY WILL BEAR YOU UP, SO THAT YOU WILL NOT STRIKE YOUR FOOT AGAINST A STONE.'" 12And Jesus answered and said to him, "It is said, 'YOU SHALL NOT PUT THE LORD YOUR GOD TO THE TEST.'" 13When the devil had finished every temptation, he left Him until an opportune time.

Thankfully, Jesus did not fall to these temptations, but Satan certainly knew how to "fight dirty," appealing first to Jesus' physical desire for food, then the human lust for power, and finally trying to convince Jesus to essentially mock God the Father by abusing His position and mission in throwing Himself from the temple. Certainly this was not the only time Jesus was tempted, but it is sufficient to illustrate that Jesus was indeed tempted as we are, in the manners in which we are generally tempted. His empathy toward us makes Him even more sufficient—if that were possible—as a priest, mediator, comforter, and helper.

Next passage:

1For every high priest taken from among men is appointed on behalf of men in things pertaining to God, in order to offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins; 2he can deal gently with the ignorant and misguided, since he himself also is beset with weakness; 3and because of it he is obligated to offer sacrifices for sins, as for the people, so also for himself. 4And no one takes the honor to himself, but receives it when he is called by God, even as Aaron was. 5So also Christ did not glorify Himself so as to become a high priest, but He who said to Him, "YOU ARE MY SON, TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN YOU"; 6just as He says also in another passage, "YOU ARE A PRIEST FOREVER ACCORDING TO THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK." (Hebrews 5:1-6)

In verses 1 and 5 of this passage the author emphasizes that the high priestly office is one ordained by God, and those that serve in the office are likewise ordained. Jesus did not seek to exalt Himself by assuming the office of High Priest—self-glorification is antithetical to His character:

5Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, 6who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. 8Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. 9For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, 10so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:5-11)

Instead, the Father ordained Jesus as Priest not only to “to offer both gifts and sacrifices,” but indeed to offer *Himself* as that sacrifice:

17If you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay on earth; 18knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, 19but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ. (1 Peter 1:17-19)

Verses 2 and 3 of the passage in Hebrews again emphasize the Priest’s empathy toward us, though Jesus, of course, did not have to offer a sacrifice for Himself. Verse 6 contains the interesting statement “**You are a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek.**” What in the world does that mean? Who was Melchizedek, and what is his order? I’m going to hold off on a thorough explanation because we will encounter this in Hebrews 7 in a couple of weeks. The main point to be made about this at present is that the order of Melchizedek is considered to be superior to the Levitical priesthood, and therefore Jesus’ High Priesthood is greater than that of Aaron, which the original recipients of this epistle undoubtedly held in such high regard:

4Now observe how great this man was to whom Abraham, the patriarch, gave a tenth of the choicest spoils. 5And those indeed of the sons of Levi who receive the priest's office have commandment in the Law to collect a tenth from the people, that is, from their brethren, although these are descended from Abraham. 6But the one whose genealogy is not traced from them collected a tenth from Abraham and blessed the one who had the promises. 7But without any dispute the lesser is blessed by the greater. 8In this case mortal men receive tithes, but in that case one receives them, of whom it is witnessed that he lives on. 9And, so to speak, through Abraham even Levi, who received tithes, paid tithes, 10for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him. (Hebrews 7:4-10)

Final passage:

7In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His piety. 8Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. 9And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation, 10being designated by God as a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek. (Hebrews 5:7-10)

Recall that Jesus did not *want* to die on the cross...in a certain sense, but He was obedient because of His reverence for the Father and His love for us.

And He went a little beyond them, and fell on His face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will." (Matthew 26:39)

Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Philippians 2:8)

The reference to being “**made perfect**” doesn’t mean that Jesus was less than perfect before His death; what this refers to is the perfection—or completion of His atoning work for us, enabling us to be saved through faith in Him. Moreover, Jesus remains our High Priest. There’s that term again. What does it mean that He is our Priest? Webster’s dictionary defines a priest as “one authorized to perform the sacred rites of a religion especially as a mediatory agent between humans and God.” In other words, Jesus’ sacrifice served “**once for all**” (Hebrews 10:10) for our atonement, but also the Father appointed Him to continue to serve as our High Priest—our mediator—so that we may approach God’s throne to receive His mercy, comfort, grace, and forgiveness. As the Scripture says:

For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus. (1 Timothy 2:5)

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