

**THE
BON AIR
PULPIT**

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Scripture: 1 John 1:9

The First Step - Facing the Problem

If this happens then so many other things can take place. In the book of 1 John there are six *if* statements and one of them has to do with the very basis of our relationship with God and that is, how do we find forgiveness? In 1 John 1:9, if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. There is a parallel passage in Matthew 7. I will begin reading at verse 21. *“Not everyone that says unto me Lord, Lord shall I enter into the kingdom of Heaven? But he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say unto me in that day Lord, Lord have we not prophesied in your name, have we not cast our devils, have we not done many wonderful works? Then I will profess unto them, I never knew you, depart from me you who work iniquity.”*

In the south, many times when people want to start a discussion about religion they will ask another person, “Do you know the Lord?” The background of that statement is that those people believe that you can have an intellectual understanding that there is a God, but not have a personal relationship with God. If someone asked you that question, what they want to know, is, have you come to the sense where you can truly call God your Father and you can understand that you are one of His children. Do you really know the Lord? As fascinating as that question is, it is interesting to me that it never appears in the Bible. Rather the reverse question does appear. It is in this passage of scripture when Jesus sketch for us standing before God at the final judgment. There are going to be many people there who are going to say, Lord, we knew you, we called your name, Lord, we even did things for you. But He said the Lord is going to turn and say, *“You are going to have to depart from me,”* because He said, *“I do not know you.”* Jesus is teaching us that one of the greatest barriers between us and God is our honesty with Him. One of the problems all of us have is that we will not let Him in on our deepest secrets, we will not let Him know who we really are. We are always in kind of a perpetual Halloween syndrome in that we always want to wear a mask in front of Him. He said when I look at you, then you are trying to portray something that you are not. You have spent a life time always trying to portray who you are not. Therefore I do not know you. If a person is ever going to come to a relationship with God, they are going to have to become honest with Him, transparent with Him, open with Him and confess to Him what their real needs are.

People tell us that in almost all human relationships one of the greatest causes of problems is that we are not honest with each other. Dr. Ellis, one of the great psychotherapist of America, says it this way. “In back of almost all mental and emotional problems, is the fact of self deception.” Dr. Harowich, one of the great marriage counselors of America says, “At the root of almost every marriage that is going through difficulty, on both sides, there is self deception.” Jesus says not only does it help to destroy us, not only does it help to destroy our most intimate relationships but it stands in the way between us and God. Until we come to the point, where we can be honest with Him, open with Him, transparent with Him, the Bible says then He can not have a relationship with us.

Many times you will sit in a service and you will hear someone say *amen*. The word *amen* means I agree with what you are saying. In the passage of scripture I read in 1 John says you and I are going to have to start saying *amen* to God. We are going to have to start saying God, you say this about me. I agree, *amen* to what you are saying about me. John says it this way. John says you are going to have to confess your sins, if you are ever going to find forgiveness for your sins. Now look at the word. The word *fess* means, *to say*, the word *con* means *with*, when you confess something you are saying I am saying the same thing you are saying. When I confess my sins, what I am saying, God I am saying the same thing about myself as you say. What ever you are saying about me, I agree with you. I am saying the same thing and I want to become honest and open with you. The Bible says until I am willing to do that, there is absolutely no possibility of forgiveness. Forgiveness rests in transparency. Forgiveness rests with honesty. Forgiveness rests when I come broken before the Lord, and say Lord, here I am, with all of my faults, and all of my needs and I want to confess them to you.

Because confession is so absolutely essential, I wanted this morning to walk through some principles of confession that all of us need to understand as we come to confess our sins to God. The first one is this. Confession has to be made first to God. You remember over in the Old Testament David, the great king of Israel, sinned a great sin. Remember he had Uriah, one of his soldiers sent to the front line where he would be killed. Then he took his wife, Bathsheba, to be one of his queens. Later on he was confronted with his sins, and he began to confess his sins and two of the great Psalms in the Bible, Psalms 32 and Psalms 51 were written after that experience. They talk about confession. One of them says it this way, "Dear God, against You and You only have I sinned and done this evil in your sight." The first time I read that I said, "I don't understand that all. He didn't just sin against Him. He sinned against Uriah, he sinned against Bathsheba, he sinned against all of the people in his kingdom. He ought to confess to everybody" He said, "First of all Oh Lord, I have sinned against you." Let me tell you why that is true. Everything that we do, ultimately is built upon a relationship with God. It is God who gave the rules. It is God who gave the laws. It is God who gave the commandments and when I break them the first thing I have to do, I have to get my life right with Him.

Judy and I have one daughter. When she was a teenager, I used to welcome into our home on a regular basis, some of the ugliest fellows I ever saw in my life. Like every father, I was very protective of who would take her out. Let us suppose Sam showed up and Sam takes her out. In the middle of the date, Sam becomes very agitated at my daughter and slaps her. When she comes home, I greet them at the door and I say, "How was the date?" She said, "It was very good except Sam slapped me." You understand that if he is ever going to date my daughter again, he is going to have to make peace with her. There is another part to that story. He has to make peace with me because I am not going to let her go out with Sam again unless Sam makes peace with me. David needed to make peace with everybody else but ultimately he had to make peace with God. Because ultimately we are all His children and when we do anything against another person we are really sinning against the Father. I need to come to recognize that sin in not just something I do against you, ultimately sin is something I need to answer unto God. I need to find forgiveness from Him.

The second thing I need to understand is that I need forgiveness not just from the consequences of my sin but from the act of my sin. This is where we get in trouble. So many times we come to God and we say, "God I have made a mess in my life and what I want you to do is I want you to take care of all the consequences." I made somebody mad and I want you to help them not to be mad at me anymore. I did this. Lord, I pray that maybe nobody else will find out about it. Lord, I want you to re-arrange all of the consequences that I had. No where in the prayer am I saying Lord, by your strength help me not to do that anymore. Only as I am willing

to come and to say, "Dear God, I want not only for you to forgive me of what I have done but I want you to help me not to do it anymore. Can I ever find forgiveness?"

It is interesting in the Bible that there are eight people who used three words together, I have sinned. Fascinatingly enough seven of them were all asking God to take care of the consequences. Only one of them was asking God to take away the sin within their life. When I ask forgiveness I need to say, "Dear God, help me not to do that anymore. I need to move away from it." The third thing about confession. Confession has to do with being particular and not just being general. This is the way a lot of people pray. "Lord, give me, give me, give me. Forgive me. Amen" Lord, just forgive my sins and if you pray that on a regular basis, what you are going to hear Him say back to you is, "*Why don't we talk about some of them. What about anger? What about greed? What about lust?*" What He is going to start focusing in on are those things that really need to be worked on in your life. As you begin to pray you need to get honest and say, "Lord, help me in these areas in my life." It is almost like going to a doctor and the doctor asks, "What is wrong with you? You say, "I just feel bad. He says, "It would help if I knew a little bit more than that. It would help if you would help me to direct the healing power to what the problem is." When I come to God, He says, "Dear God, I have a problem." He says, "*All right let us talk about the problem.*" I need to get very particular to help Him to be able to grant me healing. Especially, I need to know about confession. Confession means that when I confess I am also saying I want to turn away from what is wrong in my life.

When I was growing up I lived with my mother and father. I used to sleep in the same room with one of my brothers. We always used to say our prayers together at night. I always remember when I was praying, on one occasion, he began to notice that night after night I said, "Dear God, I want you to forgive me" and I kept naming the same sin. One of the vivid memories in my mind is when I prayed and said, "Lord, forgive me for so and so. My brother said from the other side of the bed, "He is not going to hear you." I said, "A great theological discussion, what do you mean He is not going to hear me." "You can't keep doing the same thing and every night keep asking for forgiveness." Sometimes it takes a little while for us to work through what is going on in our life. We may have to pray about it many times. Prayer for forgiveness ultimately has to mean, Lord, I want to turn away from it. I want your help to be able to be a different person within my life.

The next thing about confession. If necessary, and if possible, I need to make restitution for the wrong I have done. If I steal five dollars from you, and I say, "God, forgive me for stealing five dollars from Sam." What God is going to say to me is "Why don't you work on getting the five dollars back to him?" If I do something that I can make amends for what I have done, then that is part of confession. It is part of saying, "God, I want to just deal with what is wrong and what I have done in my life." The next part of confession is it needs to be regular. The passage of scripture I read awhile ago says, *if we confess our sins*. Really what it means, if I keep on confessing. I need to keep on asking, I need to keep on responding, I need to keep saying, "Dear God, here I am. I don't want to hide from you anymore."

The first time I read 1 John 1:9, I thought it was a mistranslation. I understand that if I confess, He will forgive. Then it says because He is faithful and I thought the word ought to be loving or merciful. But it said, just. I said "Lord, how can you be just and forgive my sins?" This is what I learned. Forgiveness never means that somebody doesn't have to pay. We have in our church some great Christian judges. If you break the law and go before them, you can say to them, I want you to forgive me. The Christian judge would say I can forgive you but you have broken the law. Do you understand that if I am to be just, somebody has to pay for that. What I understand is that He who paid all of my sins is Jesus. He can be just because Jesus has already paid the penalty for my sins. Now He can forgive me

One of my vivid memories is when I was a sophomore in college. I came back home and made a very special appointment with my mother and father. I asked them to sit down at our talking table which was the dining room table. I confessed to them and asked for their apology for things I had done in my life. I always remember looking at my mother that day and realizing that because of actions that I had taken, that I had hurt her. I asked her forgiveness. When I looked at her and realized what my actions had done to her, I made a commitment that day to myself. I said, "I never want to do anything to hurt her again." One day sitting in a church service like this, I came to confess my sins. I understood that Christ had to pay the penalty for my sins. Deep in my life, there is a feeling that says, *I never want to do anything again to make Him have to pay for my sins.* I never want to do anything else again to hurt Him. Once you come to understand forgiveness, there is something inside of you that says I don't want to do that anymore. I want to live like He wants me to live. Let me ask you. Could you walk out of this building today and say I know I have been forgiven. Have you ever come honest with God and said, "God here I am. I need your forgiving touch." If you haven't, you need to be able to make a decision for Christ today. You can walk out of the building and say that.