

# CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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<b>Series:</b>	<b>Scripture Memory</b>		Pastor/Teacher
<b>Number:</b>	<b>115</b>		Gary L.W. Johnson
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## CONFESSION OF SIN (Part 1)

How do we read the Bible? All of us (without exception) come to Scripture with a personal framework with which we read the text. None of us approaches the Bible with a neutral or purely objective mindset. A number of factors go into the grid through which we interpret the Bible.<sup>1</sup> First and foremost, it is no exaggeration to say that interpretation is all about language. If we don't know the meaning of the words, we will never know the meaning of the text. The problem that we must constantly confront is the tendency to read *into* the meaning of the scriptural terms a meaning that is quite foreign to what the biblical writer intended. This happens all the time, but it is becoming more and more common in our therapeutic culture where the vocabulary of psychology has replaced what was handed down to us by our evangelical forbears. We have to constantly guard against our own proclivity to adopt the habits and mental conventions of our therapeutic culture (cf. Romans 12:1,2). *Sin*, for example, in the minds of many who fill our pews on any given Sunday, has either totally disappeared from our vocabulary or its meaning has undergone a profound change. Biblically, sin has always had a theological and moral definition. Today it is primarily understood psychologically, not so much with sin in relation to God, but with sin in relation to ourselves.<sup>2</sup> Likewise, the word *grace* has been psychologized and sheared of its theological overtones. Today it is often understood *in our churches* as a power that brings psychological wholeness, a therapeutic sense of well-being wherein our anxieties are addressed, rather than as God's unmerited salvific favor by which we are delivered from wrath by Christ's mediation.<sup>3</sup>

As I have stated repeatedly, we must always have a solid grasp of the Biblical teaching on *sin*, *grace* and the *holiness of God* if we are ever going to really appreciate the doctrine of election. What does the biblical expression "I have sinned," mean? How are we to understand this critically important aspect of salvation? At least *seven* times in the Bible the phrase "I have sinned" occurs -- and we will examine each one.

- I. **THE HARDENED SINNER (Exodus 9:27).** *Pharaoh* is an example of those who respond in repentance *only* in difficult circumstances -- but once these change, they repent of their repentance!
- II. **THE DOUBLE-MINDED MAN (Numbers 22:34).** *Balaam* is a type of person that says *I have sinned* and actually means it, but as Spurgeon once observed, "is so worldly-minded that he *loves the wages of unrighteousness.*"<sup>4</sup> Our Lord said clearly that no man could serve two masters (Matthew 6:24) -- and this was what *Balaam* sought to do -- and, therefore, his confession was worthless.
- III. **THE INSINCERE MAN (1 Samuel 15:24).** *Saul* also confessed that he had sinned, but unlike *Balaam* who was sincere in two entirely different things, *Saul* is not sincere at all. He simply *says* what he thinks the situation demands. If it's Sunday, this kind of person will be a religious man -- but if the situation requires otherwise, he will be non-religious.

- IV. **THE DOUBTFUL PENITENT (Joshua 7:20).** *Achan* is another who made this confession. He apparently appears to repent, but it is hard to determine if the repentance is valid. *Achan* did not freely make this confession; like many, his acknowledgment of guilt was made only after circumstances forced him to come forward.
- V. **THE REPENTANCE OF DESPAIR (MATTHEW 27:4).** *Judas* is the worst case of all. This was really not genuine repentance, but only the remorse of conscience.<sup>5</sup> If all we have is regret or remorse over the troubles that we have experienced or caused, we are no better off than *Judas*.
- VI. **THE REPENTANCE OF THE SAINT (JOB 7:20).** *Job*, like *David* (2 Samuel 12:13; Psalm 51), is an example of biblical repentance that is part and parcel of the life of every true child of God. Earnest penitence will be the experience of the redeemed all the days of their lives.
- VII. **THE BLESSED CONFESSION (Luke 15:18).** *The prodigal son* is the example of sinner's confession unto salvation.

**CONCLUSION:** Imagine that you have been diagnosed with a life-threatening disease which medical science can do nothing to cure. Your demise is imminent, and you are confronted with the obvious. Would this not make you sober-minded and serious in your mindset? Would you be jovial and carefree? Would you go on with life as usual? "Joy," wrote old Matthew Henry, "is a forbidden fruit to wicked people."<sup>6</sup> When we lose the biblical concept of sin as an evil committed against God, we do not stop sinning, but our lives become inexplicable to us. Much like the person who denies he is terminally ill, this loss of grasping reality is lethal. We stand to lose more than a proper understanding of the doctrine of election – we stand to lose the gospel if we lose the biblical notion of what it means to declare, "I have sinned." The grace of God can never be appreciated until it is seen in the light of the Bible's graphic description of the seriousness of sin. All have sinned and all stand guilty as such before God (Romans 3:9-20). It is only by grace that sinners are saved (Ephesians 2:8). This has been best captured by the stanza written by Augustus Toplady in his famous hymn *Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me*: "*Not the labors of my hands, can fulfill thy law's demands; could my zeal no respite know, could my tears forever flow, all for sin could not atone; thou must save and thou alone.*"

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> "Whether we mean to or not, and whether we like it or not, all of us read the text as interpreted by our theological presuppositions." M. Silva, *Explorations in Exegetical Method* (Baker, 1996), p. 209.

<sup>2</sup> David F. Wells has written that this distinctively non-biblical notion of sin "begins with our anxiety, pain, and disillusionment, with the world in its disorder, the family or marriage in its brokenness, or the workplace in its brutality and insecurity. God, in consequence, is valued to the extent that he is able to bathe these wounds, assuage these insecurities, calm these fears, restore some sense of internal order, and brings some sense of wholeness." *Losing Our Virtue: Why the Church Must Recover Its Moral Vision* (Eerdmans, 1998), p. 42.

<sup>3</sup> "No one will doubt," wrote Warfield, "that Christians of today must state their Christian beliefs in terms of modern thought. Every age has a language of its own and can speak no other. Mischief comes only when, instead of stating Christian belief in terms of modern thought, an effort is made, rather, to state modern thought in terms of Christian belief." *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield*, X (Baker, 1981), p. 322.

<sup>4</sup> C. H. Spurgeon, *The Parables of Our Lord* III (rpt. Baker, 1979), p. 343. "At times," Spurgeon went on to say of Balaam, "no man could speak more eloquently and more truthfully, and at other times he exhibited the most mean and sordid covetousness that could disgrace human nature."

<sup>5</sup> The word translated *repented* in Matthew 27:3 is the word *metamelomai*, which means "to be sorry afterwards." It does not denote a sense of wrongdoing. Paul uses it in 2 Corinthians 7:8 to refer to his sorrow over his sharp letter to the Corinthians – but he is not saying he regretted ever having to correct them.

<sup>6</sup> Matthew Henry, *The Young Christian* (rpt. Christian Focus, 1993), p. 39.

