

Genesis, Part 18

Last session we then took a side trip into a brief study of the subject of Sins of Ignorance. We defined them and considered the culpability of any who had committed such sins. The conclusion was that, yes, we are responsible for any sins, including sins of ignorance we might have committed. Ignorance is no excuse. Man is held accountable for *all* sins he commits, whether intentional or unintentional, or known or unknown.

Israel had a system under the Law by which they were to deal with sin through the intermediary of the Temple priests and blood sacrifices. Though outlined in detail in the Law, this system of blood sacrifices was taught as far back as Adam and Eve when they were kicked out of the Garden with God supplying animal skins to cover their nakedness, which was symbolic of their sin. An animal died to deal with their sins. This was a foreshadowing of the blood offering of our Lord Jesus Christ on the Cross. We also see blood offerings in use with Cain and Abel. Abel brought a blood sacrifice from his flock, but Cain brought an offering from the field – “the fruit of the ground”. Cain’s offering was rejected by God; only Able’s offering was accepted, and that is because it was a blood offering. So God has revealed the need for a blood sacrifice to deal with sin ever since the very first sin.

Throughout human history, God has progressively revealed His plan. The ultimate culmination of the blood offerings, Jesus Christ at the Cross, was not explained to Adam and Eve, nor Cain and Able, or the other pre-Cross believers. They believed in (faith) however much of His plan God had revealed to them, as limited as that may have been. In each successive generation and each successive dispensation, God revealed more and more of His plan. Even though Jesus, speaking in parables, revealed much more of God’s plan, He didn’t reveal it all in detail, and His disciples did not understand even what Jesus had revealed until after His death. God’s whole plan, or at least as much of it as He wants us to know, was finally all revealed after the Cross through the Apostles and their teachings. This revelation was concluded with the completion of the Canon of Scripture about AD95.

Even though the Plan of God has come to us through “progressive revelation,” all along from Adam to today, the means of salvation has always been through faith in however much of that incompletely revealed plan that was available to mankind during the various dispensations. Furthermore, the experiential spiritual life of the believer, his daily fellowship with God, depended on that same faith that saved them in whatever promises God had revealed to them, for example, a son for the aged Abraham and Sarah. Daily fellowship with God depended on faith and obedience to the leading of God. That was true for Adam, Abel, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Paul, and is true for us today. Salvation is by faith and so is our ongoing daily fellowship with God.

It must be clearly understood that salvation and fellowship with God are two entirely different things. Our eternal salvation is our being saved (delivered) from the fires of Hell and is clearly defined as eternal (John 3:16). Our fellowship with God, however, is not eternal, at least in the sense of living in the temporal realm. It will, however, become eternal when the believer transitions at death from this temporal realm into eternal glory. One thing that both have in common is that both are appropriated through faith.

Fellowship

Perhaps we should define “fellowship with God” and examine what is required to experience such fellowship, how we can lose it, and how we can recover it after it was lost. Again, I am not here speaking of salvation which is eternal and cannot be lost ever, regardless of what others might say. Your salvation depends on God and your faith in what Christ did at the Cross for you. You can do nothing to earn or deserve it. Likewise, you can do nothing to lose it. Your maintaining possession of it depends entirely on God. (I refer you to our study on Eternal Security for the details on this subject.)

“Fellowship” in Greek is *koinonia* /koy·nohn·ee·ah/ which means fellowship, association, communion, joint participation, and intimacy. It is from the Greek *koinonos* /koy·no·nos/ which means a partner or companion. In the context of our usage here, the “partner” that we enjoy “intimate companionship” with is God. This is not the same as salvation but rather refers to the believer’s day-by-day relationship with God. Such a relationship with God is only possible under certain conditions:

1. The person in fellowship must first be a born-again believer. “Remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.” (Eph 2:12-13)
2. That believer must be free of any known sins. “This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. ⁶ If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.” (1 John 1:5-6)
3. That sin-confessed (sin-free) believer must conduct his life in such a manner as to demonstrate faith toward God and His calling, that God will sustain the believer by supplying the guidance, logistical support, and empowerment to accomplish whatever God is calling that believer to do so that he leads a faith-based life that is honoring to God. This faith is based on the established promises of God: that God is who He says He is, that He is *capable* of bringing to pass any promises He makes and that He *will* fulfill such promises. And the believer’s response should be, “I can do all things through him who strengthens me.” (Phil 4:13)

Regarding the second condition, a believer with sins on his soul cannot have direct fellowship with God. Fellowship is broken because of sin. This does not imply the sinning believer has lost his salvation, but only that he is in a state of carnality, and since God can have nothing to do with sin, He cannot fellowship with that believer until that condition is rectified. The ministry of the Holy Spirit, during those periods, is limited to chastisement, as He attempts to convict and correct the wayward believer and get him to have a change of mind, confess his sins, and return to a place of fellowship. Failure to respond can result in increased levels of pain. In the event of continued disobedience, and if the believer becomes a threat to God’s plan, he may be removed from this life under the penalty of the Sin Unto Death. But his eternal security remains eternal and secure. (Again, see my study on Eternal Security for more details on this.)

1 John 1:6 If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. ⁷ But if we walk in the

light, as he 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 we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

During our study in Genesis, we have seen this in action regarding Abraham and his fellowship with God. We saw it when he dallied in Haran, again when he became afraid of the famine in the land and, not trusting God, he went to Egypt for safety, and again when he lied to Pharaoh about his wife, and yet again when he and Sarah cooked up the plan to have the “promised child of God” through her handmaiden. All these cases can be described as simple disobedience, a lack of trust in God to do what He promised, or both. In every mentioned case, God ceased speaking to Abraham because his sins caused a break in that personal fellowship, and that break lasted until Abraham repented and returned to where he was supposed to be and doing what God had called him to do.

About Repentance

In Hebrew, “repent” is *shuwb* /shoob/ which means to turn back or return. It is the Hebrew word that most closely approximates “repent” or “repentance” and is translated into English as “return,” which basically means “to turn around and go in the opposite direction.” In theological contexts, the implication is to turn from a road characterized by rebellion toward God to a road characterized by obedience to God. The emphasis is upon actions that necessarily proceed from turning one’s orientation toward God. The concept of repentance differs slightly in the Hebrew and Greek minds, but an emphasis on right behavior is consistent with both.

Ezek 18:30 “Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, everyone according to his ways, declares the Lord God. **Repent and turn** from all your transgressions, lest iniquity be your ruin.”

Shuwb is used in Jonah of both man *and* God.

Jonah 3:8 but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and let them call out mightily to God. Let everyone **turn from** his evil way and

from the violence that is in his hands. ⁹ Who knows? God may **turn** and relent and **turn** from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish.”

It points to a change of mind with no suggestion of emotions involved, however, a change of action is called for.

Job uses a different Hebrew word, *nacham* /*naw·kham*/ which means to console oneself, regret, comfort, be comforted, or suffer grief.

Job 42:6 therefore I despise myself, and **repent** in dust and ashes.”

The translation might have been more accurately rendered as, “I despise myself, and *am comforted* in dust and ashes.” Job finds “comfort” in his self-abuse of “dust and ashes”.

Repentance in Greek is *metanoeo* /*met·an·o·eh·o*/ which means to have a change of mind for the better, to reject a former position, a change of attitude and action from sin toward obedience to God. The Greek word for “repentance” derives from a verb meaning “to radically change one’s thinking.” “Repentance” refers to an event in which an individual attains a divinely provided new understanding of their behavior and feels compelled to change that behavior and begin a new relationship with God.

Heb 6:1 Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God.

Acts 20:21 Testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

In both examples above, we have the idea of turning one’s actions from one thing to another: “*from* dead works” (Heb 6:1) and “*toward* God” (Acts 20:21).

While the Greek language can represent the concept of repentance as an independent action, the Semitic background of the New Testament writers demanded that appropriate actions follow the event of repentance.

Repentance is manifested as a change of actions that is a consequence of the change of mind.

Mat 3:8 Bear fruit in keeping with repentance.

Acts 26:20 ...that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance.

When repent is used in the context of your sins, it does not mean to feel sorry for your sins, although the one repenting may indeed experience that emotional response. That is okay, maybe even desirable, but it isn't a condition of repentance. The emotional baggage attached to the modern usage of the word is not found in the original text. Pure and simple, when used of sin, it means to agree with God that what you thought or what you did was wrong, and it was an offense to God's perfect righteousness. Resulting from that awareness will naturally come a change in how one acts relating to what was repented.

Damage Control

What causes that break in fellowship that needs repentance? Sin is the short answer, but we should include disobedience only because many do not think of simple disobedience as sin, but it very much is. Though not as "glamorous" as murder, plundering, rape, lying, stealing, judging, etc., it is just as "distasteful" to God. There are no mortal and venial sins; all are "mortal" in the sense of "killing" your spiritual walk with God.

For example, the break in fellowship can be caused by something as simple as God bringing someone into your circle for you to witness to them – and you fail to do so. And we have a case of disobedience and the resulting broken fellowship. The disobedient one is out of fellowship because he has sinned. Once in that condition of carnality (fleshly), we often start piling sins on top of the original sin. We call that "chain sinning". Once in a state of carnality, one sin often leads easily to another.

That is what "wrong" looks like, but what does "right" look like? We see "right" in terms like "walking" or "abiding". Both words carry the idea of a lifestyle – a way of living.

John 15:4 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. ⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

“Abide” in John 15:4 is *meno* /*men·o*/ and means to remain, dwell, or continue. It is about a state or condition, to remain there and not to become something else or different. The condition we are called to remain in is this close and personal relationship with God expressed here as attached to the Vine. The metaphor implies that the “Vine” supplies the nourishment the branches (you) need to be productive in the Plan of God. There is no production apart from this abiding. Abraham was productive for God only when he was not in a condition of disobedience. He was productive only when he was in fellowship (abiding) with the source of his spiritual “fruit” production. God only spoke to him when he was in this condition of obedient and faithful “abiding”.

Paul in Galatians uses a different term but with the same idea.

Gal 5:16 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

“Walk” is *peripateo* /*per·ee·pat·eh·o* and carries the meaning of regulating one’s life or conducting one’s self. “Walk by the Spirit” is calling for the believer to conduct his life under the power and leading of the Holy Spirit. That is a walk of faith that the Spirit will lead you and empower you to do whatever He is calling you to do. Furthermore, a believer in that condition of faith/resting will “not gratify the desires of the flesh” because he will have the power of the Spirit to resist temptation.

1 John 2:5 ... By this we may know that we are in him: ⁶ whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.

The successful use of the Holy Spirit's power to have victory over sin and accomplish God’s calling still depends on the *will* of the one wielding that power. Will he use it to resist that temptation or give in to it? The one who

will use that power remains in that “walking” faith condition, and his life is free of sin and characterized by the “Fruit of the Spirit”.

Gal 5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

That list of characteristics is a nine-word description of the very lifestyle that Jesus Christ lived while He was here on earth. Yes, it is possible for a believer to live exactly as Christ lived. He is calling us to live that lifestyle. All one must do is *walk* by the Spirit. *Abide* in Him. This is “Christ formed in you” that Paul is referring to in Galatians 4:19.

But the one who does not remain in that faith/rest/walking/abiding condition but yields to the temptation of sin enters into carnality and loses that intimate and personal fellowship with God. He no longer has the power of the Spirit, is no longer enjoying the Fruit of the Spirit, is in carnality, and is out of fellowship. That person looks like this:

Gal 5:19 Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, ²¹ envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

That statement at the end, “those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God” does not refer to eternity or loss of salvation. The Kingdom of God here is possessing the attributes of the eternal Kingdom in the form of the Fruit of the Spirit here on earth now.

“Inherit” is *kleronomeo /klay·ron·om·eh·o/* and means to receive a part of an inheritance, to receive the portion assigned to one. An inheritance belongs to the heir. It is his forever, and he will eventually take possession of it at some point. The passage is saying the sinning “heir” of the promised inheritance is not *then* taking possession of that portion of his inheritance that is rightfully his. The sinning believer forfeits access to his spiritual inheritance. With sins repented and confessed, he regains possession of his spiritual inheritance, which is seen in verses 22 and 23 as the Fruit of

the Spirit that represents and describes the attributes of the kingdom experience in eternity, *as experienced while here on earth*.

How does one get it back into fellowship?

In the context of Abraham, he had to repent and return to the place God had called him to be in and do what God was calling him to do, but most of all once more faith/resting in the promises of God. He must return to a condition of obedience to and faith in God, and that calls for him to agree with God that he was in the wrong place and doing the wrong thing – change his mind – in other words, repent.

For us in the Church Age, we have it explained this way:

1 John 1:7 But if we walk in the light, as he 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 we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

The word “confess” is *homologeō* /*hom·ol·og·eh·o*/ and means to say the same thing as another, to agree with, to concede. We agree with God that our actions were offensive to Him. *Homologeō* is simply another way to say “repent”.

Note that we are forgiven and “cleansed” and the word is *katharizo* /*kath·ar·id·zo*/ which means to make clean, cleanse from physical stains and dirt. In a moral sense, it means to be free from the defilement of sin and faults, to purify from wickedness, and to be free from the guilt of sin.

We transliterate the word as “cauterize”. Cauterizing a wound means burning it with fire to stop the bleeding and cleanse it of any possible infection. In the days before antiseptics and antibiotics, this was the only way to prevent the infection of a wound. Painful but effective. Upon confession of our sins in the privacy of our souls, God will *cauterize* our wounded soul to heal it and rid it of the infection of sin.

And note that this forgiveness and cleansing is from *all* unrighteousness – not just the sins we confessed but the other maybe dozen or so we committed in negligent haste, didn't know was a sin, or have simply forgotten. And all this means the one confessing is restored to fellowship – back in that walking and abiding (faith-based) productive relationship – at least until the next sin, and there *will* almost certainly be a “next sin”.



