

How Does God Forgive Sins? (Part 2)

by J. Edwin Orr

To receive forgiveness from God, we must confess our sins specifically, reconcile with others, and treat others with kindness and respect.

Duration: 35:30

Scripture: Psalm 32:5, Matthew 18:15-17, Matthew 23:24, James 5:16

Topics: "Revival Theology"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker addresses the issue of conflicts and misunderstandings within churches. He emphasizes that many troubles in churches are social in nature, with people struggling to get along with one another. The speaker refers to the words of Jesus in Matthew 23:24, highlighting the importance of confession and agreement in resolving conflicts. He cautions against a dangerous doctrine that suggests one can continue in sinful behavior as long as they agree it is wrong. The speaker also discusses the need for thorough confession and repentance, referencing Proverbs 28:13. He shares a personal anecdote about resolving a quarrel and emphasizes the importance of seeking reconciliation and making amends.

Transcript

Now the first question I'm going to ask is, to whom do we confess? What would you say? Only to God? I remember at Forrest's home, during a conference, a girl came to me and said, she said, well I've confessed but I don't feel forgiven. Well I said, Scripture says, if we confess, he's faithful and just to forgive us our sins. Well she says, I've confessed but I don't feel forgiven.

Well I said, I don't know what to say to you then. I said, what was the problem? She said, I told a lie about my roommate. But you confessed? Yes.

And you don't feel forgiven? No, not a bit. Well I said, what did she say to you? Oh she said, I didn't confess to her. I confessed to God.

Well she told a lie about her. Well she said, I didn't want to confess to her, I didn't want her to hold it against me. Do you see the point? It's true that all sin is an offense to God.

It's very clear in Scripture we should confess to the persons we've wronged, or those who have been hurt by our sin. Now Leviticus 5 and 5 teaches us the necessity of specific or particular confession. He shall confess that he has sinned in that thing.

We commit specific sins, we should make specific confession. Now it's true that sometimes we join a congregation in confessing generally. In the Episcopal Church, in the Lutheran Church, there's what we call the general confession.

Almighty and most merciful Father, we've erred and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep. We've followed too much of the vices and desires of our own hearts. We've offended against thy holy laws.

We have done those things we ought not to have done. We have left undone the things we ought to have done. There's no help in us.

Spare thy them, O God, who confess their faults. That's called the general confession. And a whole congregation can recite that.

But if we want the forgiveness of God, we must be prepared to make specific confession of specific sin. During the great time of revival in Brazil, we used to see the churches packed at 6 o'clock in the mornings for prayer. What wonderful prayer meetings.

I remember one, I think it was in a place called Campinas. Different people were praying. For instance, a man got up and said, I've just had a telegram from Goiania, in the interior, to say that all the churches are enjoying a revival, and my own brother-in-law, that I thought was too hard ever to be converted, has just been converted.

Gracias Dios! Hallelujah! Up got a man and said, Oh God, I've got a brother up there in the same place. Lord, have mercy upon him. Amen.

Up got a mother. Please pray for my boy. I don't know where he is.

He ran away. He's been keeping bad company. Up got someone and began praying for this mother's boy.

That was the sort of meeting that was going on. Up got a lady, and she said, Please pray for me. I need to love people more.

I said to her, gently, in Portuguese, Sister, that's not a confession. Well, anyone could say that. Billy Graham could say, I need to love people more.

Pope John XXIII could have said, I need to love people more. Jimmy Carter needs to love people more. Everybody needs to love people more.

Is there anyone who doesn't need to love people more? Well, when you confess you need to love people more, you're not saying very much, are you? But I didn't want to say too much in the way of rebuke, so I just said gently, Sister, that's not a confession. The meeting went on, but about 20 minutes later she got up, and she spoke again. She said, Please pray for me.

What I should have said is that my tongue has caused a lot of trouble in this congregation. Her pastor was sitting beside me. Do you know that pastors can talk out of the side of their mouth just like gangsters? The pastor said to me, Now she's talking.

Because she was a troublemaker in the congregation. You see, to confess that you need to love people more isn't enough. You should confess what God has spoken to you about.

It's true, if you loved people more you wouldn't cause all that trouble. I have a special typewriter in my office. Supposing you, in a moment of weakness, stole my typewriter.

What, five years later, during a time of revival, you get convicted about it? So you write me a letter, Dear Brother Owen, I have a request to make. Please pray that God may give me a greater respect for other people's property. Yours sincerely.

And your name is signed. I'd be puzzled by a letter like that. I'd say to my wife, What do you make of that? Do you know this person? I'd say, No, I don't remember the name.

But it was written from coast to mesa. I wonder who it could be. And my wife says, Hey, Remember that typewriter you lost? That letter was typed on that typewriter.

Look at it. See? Is it enough to confess that you need a greater respect for other people's property when you're actually in possession of somebody's property? No, you confess specifically. He shall confess that he has sinned in that thing.

You say, But supposing I don't know what's wrong? You're not asked to confess anything that you don't know about. If you feel uneasy or unhappy, you could pray the prayer, Search me, O God, and know my heart. Try me and know my thoughts.

See if there be any wicked way in me. He'll show you. But once he shows you, don't make a general confession.

That's the first lesson about confession. The second one is Proverbs 28, 13. It must be thorough.

You must have done the thing you confessed. It says, Proverbs 28, 13, He who covers his sins shall not prosper, but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy. I remember when I was a charge clerk in an engineering shop in Ireland.

Two of the men came to blows. Then they wouldn't speak to each other for four or five days. Until the other men ganged up on them.

Come on, you've had your fight. Now shake hands and apologize. And so, because of the pressure, they apologized and shook hands.

When William Buick turned away, Joe Kelly said to me, Boy, I apologize, but if he ever says a thing like that to me again, I'll punch him right in the nose again. He had never even repented, let alone confessed. In Mullingar in the Republic of Ireland, a man went to see his parish priest.

He said, Father, I hear you're going to Dublin tomorrow. Is that right, Dan? Could I go to confession first? The priest said, We have confession on Saturday night. But if it's urgent, all right, let's go to the church.

So the two Irishmen walked across to the confessional box. Then Dan began his confession. Father, I want to confess that I stole two bags of potatoes.

The priest, who knew everything went on in the village, said, Did you steal them from Mr. Kelly? Yes, Father. How did you know, Father? I was talking to Mr. Kelly this morning. He said someone had broken in last night into his shed.

But he said, Mr. Kelly said, One bag of potatoes. He said, That's right, Father. I only stole one bag, but I was going to go back this evening and steal the other one.

But I thought I'd better confess before you went to Dublin. Now, there's no Irish priest would offer absolution for that. You must have done with it.

No good apologizing for bad temper if you intend to lose your temper at the very next opportunity. You must repent. Then we have two other verses.

We've switched around out this lesson. The words of the Lord Jesus Christ himself. Now, I don't know things in Costa Mesa the same as everywhere else that I travel, but I find that most trouble in churches is social.

People who can get along with the Lord can't always get along with one another. They have bickerings and misunderstandings. They get offended and so forth.

Is there anything here? Yes. The words of the Lord Jesus, Matthew 23, 24. Matthew 5, 23, 24.

So, if you're offering your gift at the altar, there remember that your brother has something against you. Leave your gift there before the altar and go first be reconciled to your brother, then come and offer your gift. What gift? I used to think it was like a farmer giving a turkey to the minister.

No, a gift for the work. No, no. It takes you back to Leviticus 5 and 5. In Old Testament days before Christ died, if a believer wanted to get right with God, he brought a gift, a lamb or a dove.

He laid his hand upon the head of the offering and said he shall confess that he has sinned in that thing. In other words, he didn't come along and say, I want to bring this lamb to you. No, no.

He put his hand on the head of the lamb and said, I want to confess my sin. Now, today we don't do that because we have the Lamb of God that's taken away the sins of the world. But when we come to God, we say, Lord, forgive me for Jesus' sake.

Nothing else. We don't say, Lord, forgive me because I'm a member in good standing of such and such a congregation. We don't say, Lord, forgive me because I tithe.

Or, Lord, forgive me because I'm supporting a missionary. Lord, forgive me because I've paid an income tax. We say, Lord, forgive me for Jesus' sake.

The blood of Christ. That's our offering. Now, therefore, this verse means, and the words of Jesus himself, when you are kneeling before God, seeking forgiveness, and you remember that your brother has something against you, leave the business with God for the moment and go and put things right with your brother first.

Is it more important to be right with God or with man? I would say with God. With whom should we put things first? Right. With God or with man? The Lord Jesus says with man.

Why? God knows whether or not you've sinned. Your brother doesn't know until you confess. God knows whether or not you've repented.

Your brother doesn't know until you say so. So the Lord says, I'll wait. Go and put it right with him first.

That's hard to do. I spoke in a church in Portland, in Oregon. The chairman of the board of deacons came to me and said, I've been listening very careful to what you've said.

And he said, I agree with you. If I find I've wronged a brother, I think it's my obligation to go and put things right with him. But, he said, by the same token, if somebody wrongs me, I'm going to wait for him to come and put things right with me.

Am I right? I said, you're wrong. But he said, that's not fair. If it's my fault, I'm supposed to confess.

If it's his fault, why shouldn't he confess? I said, he should. But it doesn't mean you shouldn't take the initiative. I think it's Matthew 18, 15.

Again, the words of the Lord Jesus. If your brother sins against you, go and tell him it's fault between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you've gained your brother.

If he will not listen to you, take one or two others with you, that every word may be established in the mouth of two or three witnesses. If he will not listen to them, tell it to the church. If he will not listen to the church, treat him like a heathen and a tax collector.

If your brother sins against you, who's the innocent party? You are. Who's the spiritual party? You are. Who takes the initiative? You do.

You say, well, why? Why should I have to take the initiative? Because any quarrel in the body of Christ is a wound in the body of Christ. I think I could say of my home, where seldom is heard a discouraging word and the skies are not cloudy all day. But on one occasion, we had two relatives staying with us, a relative of mine and a relative of my wife, both feminine gender.

And they had a big fight in my home. It's what my son called a big deal. Actually, what the quarrel over was, whose responsibility it was to put on the potatoes while we were at church.

But it was a nasty fight. Oh, I don't mean they scratched each other like that. It was all verbal.

I still remember my daughter, who was a teenager, saying, but auntie, that's not true. She said, who are you to talk the way you treat your younger brothers? And she starts criticizing my little girl who had her in tears, too. He went through these two womenfolk, eating my bacon and eggs, sleeping on our sheets.

They never once came to me and said, please, can we have a fight in your house? They just had their fight and upset the whole household. And how like some Christian people that is. They have their fights in the house of God.

Some even get miffed with the Lord and say, I won't darken the door of that church again. And they take it out on the Lord. Now it says here, if your brother sins against you, you go and tell him it's a fault between you and him alone.

You take the initiative. If you don't, you haven't obeyed the scripture. If you go and tell somebody else about it first, you haven't obeyed the scripture.

Now this is for a brother or a sister. I'm not speaking of some ungodly person that you can't expect anything from. But it's your brother or your sister, spiritually speaking.

If he listens to you, you've gained your brother. People won't do this, though. Now I don't know the names of the congregation here, but I'll say the way they say in novels, no character bears any resemblance to any living person.

Supposing Mrs. Smith comes to church and meets Mrs. Jones. And Mrs. Jones says, Mrs. Smith, did you hear what Mrs. Johnson said about you? She said, what did she say? She said that when you were living in Oakland, thus and so. And there's a bit of nasty gossip.

Now what does Mrs. Smith say? Does she say, Mrs. Jones, I'm awfully sorry this has come up, it's not true, but don't say a word about it now, go and see Mrs. Johnson. No, she doesn't say anything of the sort. She says, did Mrs. Johnson say that? Yes.

Well, what do you expect from a pig but a grunt? Or some other sweet expression like that. Then Mrs. Smith meets Mrs. Peterson. And she says, did you hear what that Johnson woman said about me? No.

I don't know whether I should tell you or not. She says, well, all right. You can tell your friends, you know.

All right, I'll tell you. So she tells Mrs. Peterson. And Mrs. Peterson says, well, what a thing.

And so it goes on. Now there's a whole body of opinion building up against Mrs. Johnson. But the next one Mrs. Smith speaks to is Mrs. McGregor.

She's Scotch. She says, well, when I was sick, it was Mrs. Johnson that looked after my baby, not those other women in the church. So now they're taking sides.

All because Mrs. Smith didn't do what the Scripture says, and go straight to Mrs. Johnson. If he listens to you, you've gained your brother. Does this work? Yes, indeed.

I remember a famous Presbyterian preacher came to Los Angeles and criticized me from the pulpit of the South Hollywood Presbyterian Church. It wasn't a matter of character. It was about some doctrine or other.

I heard about it six times. And so I better go and see the man. He'd left town.

So I wrote him a letter. And I like to say in passing, don't write letters if you can avoid it. You can say a thing with a smile.

You can't write a letter with a smile. Sometimes people get even madder after they get their letter. So I wrote him a nice, sweet Irish letter.

I said, if you had taken the trouble to read my book, Full Surrender, you would have seen I taught no such thing. However, I ended the letter by saying, I don't expect a big shot like you to apologize to a small fry like me. But please allow me to say that you were misquoted or misinformed.

He wrote back a most gracious letter of apology. He said that the following night, Miss Mears came to him with a copy of my book and said, you mentioned Edwin Orr last night. Read this.

Oh, he said, that contradicts what I said. So he said, I withdrew the criticism from the pulpit. But nobody told you that.

Bad news travels ten times as fast as good news. He wrote so graciously, I got deeply convicted. I wrote and apologized to him for not expecting him to apologize to me.

It was really very snooty of me. Now, did I win my brother? About six months later, he sent me a check for \$500. He said, I hear you're going to India.

I know how poor the people are there. This is from our private fund. I think anyone that sends me a check for \$500 is downright friendly.

Far better to make friends. But if he won't listen to you, take one or two others with you. Whom should you take? Your wife and your mother-in-law? No, he might think you're ganging up on him.

If I had a quarrel with Billy Graham, and by the way, I have not had. I had a nice letter from him the other day. If I had had a quarrel with Billy Graham and wanted to settle it, whom should I take with me? Carl McIntyre and Bob Jones Jr.? Billy might think I was ganging up on him.

No, I would say, let's see, Paul Rees. We both love Paul Rees. Per se.

Okay. Why? Because I want to be friends. And if he won't listen to them, tell it to the church.

How do you interpret that? Would you say, Pastor, the best time to tell it to the church would be after the response of reading, or before they take up the offering? You get up and say, I want to say I've had a big row with so-and-so. No, no. The word church there is the Greek word ekklesia, which simply means gathering.

If you're both members of the choir, surely there are enough spiritual people in the choir to help you settle your difficulty without it getting all over the church. If you're both ministers of the gospel, surely there are enough spiritual men in the minister's fraternal to help you to settle it without all the lay people gossiping about the ministers fighting. If you're both assemblies of God, why should the Lutherans and Presbyterians hear all about it? In other words, tell it to the church.

And if he won't listen to the church, treat him like a heathen and a tax collector. A big Irishman in Toronto said to me, that means you give him one, two, three chances to put it right. And then if he doesn't, he says, you can really take him to town.

Now, you must understand. How do you treat a heathen? You walk into a Chinese restaurant, and a Chinese Buddhist says, Good evening. You say, I only speak to assemblies of God.

No, you speak to Buddhists too. Somebody falls down and breaks his leg. Do you say, are you Protestant or Catholic or Jewish? No, he's your neighbor.

In other words, if a brother won't behave right, still treat him kindly like a neighbor, but don't treat him like a brother anymore. You don't need to confide in him. I remember a man who wronged me greatly overseas.

Two years later, I bumped into him. I could see he looked a little apprehensive. He was afraid of what I might say.

But I just said, kindly, how's your wife? What about the children? We had a Billy Graham rally, so the two of us sat together and talked. Then he wrote me a letter, asked me for our recommendation. I said, I can't give you a recommendation until you put things right in New Zealand.

You're not compelled to treat him as a brother if he won't behave as a brother. Treat him as a tax collector. How do you treat a tax collector? You never try to get your own back.

Don't try to put one over on him. I remember in San Diego, a woman came to me and said, that helped me a great deal. She said, for some reason or other, I've always had trouble with Sears Roebuck.

She said, I thought, now just wait. And sure enough, she said, they made a mistake. They undercharged me \$100.

So I thought, well, serve them right. She said, now I see that's wrong. This is what the Lord Jesus said.

And then a last verse, James 5, 16. Therefore confess your faults one to another and pray for one other that you may be delivered. The effectual fervent prayer of the righteous availeth much.

That seems to warrant public confession. Therefore confess your faults one to another. It doesn't say in the Greek, one to one other.

It's in the Greek verb, it's confess among yourselves. Actually, therefore share your faults among each other. And pray for each other that you may be delivered.

You say, couldn't this result in scandal? Yes, sometimes has. But not if you read the verse right. What's your object? Deliverance.

What's your method? Get people to pray for you. How much then should you confess in public? Just enough to get people to pray for you. The pastor of the great Tremont Temple in Boston told me that he had had a deacon who was what they called a sourpuss.

A pain in the neck. Anything the pastor did, this deacon objected to. In fact he objected to almost everything.

Then the Oxford group in the 1920s came along and he went to one of their house parties and got straightened out. He became a radiant Christian. One day he said to the pastor, I'd love to give my testimony sometime, pastor.

The pastor said, we're waiting to hear it. So up got this deacon before 2800 people in Boston. He said, as some of you know, I was a thorough sourpuss.

The trouble I gave the pastor and my fellow deacons. He said, I went to this house party and the Lord met me there and he told what a change God had made in his life. So far so good.

People are saying amen. Isn't it wonderful? Then he said, the first thing the Lord spoke to me about was, and he mentioned an adolescent sex aberration that people don't generally discuss in public. That he preferred to normal relationship with his wife.

And immediately the congregation was shocked. His wife was shamed. Next Sunday when they came to church, the woman never raised her eyes from the ground that he had mentioned this in public.

He shook hands with people, but the pastor said they stopped coming to that Tremont Temple. Then they actually left Boston. There is something that some people misunderstand.

The Holy Spirit brings conviction, but it's not the Holy Spirit that confesses. We confess. And our confession is conditioned by our temperament, our upbringing.

There are some people who don't mind talking about the most private things. There are others to whom it's shocking. Therefore I always say, let the circle of the sin be the circle of the confession.

If you sin secretly and nobody in the world knows about it but God, you can tell nobody but God. That's sufficient. If on the other hand it's private, somebody else has been hurt by it, your spouse or your children or your neighbor or your workmates or your pastor or someone, put it right with the person concerned.

If it's known openly, put it right openly. I give that as a rule. And it's worth keeping in mind.

Let the circle of the sin be the circle of the confession. If someone got up in this meeting and said, please pray for me, I have a bad temper, could we pray for him? Of course we could. Would we think badly of him? No sir.

He really had courage. We'd pray for him. But if he gets up and tells all the details of the last row he had with his wife, no, you've got gossip, not prayer.

What's your object? You want people to pray for you. Don't distract them, just tell them what your need is. Confess your fault.

Don't confess somebody else's fault. Your fault. Confess your fault, asking for prayer, and you'll be delivered.

And it says, the effectual prayer of the righteous availeth much. The prayers of those who are right with God can help a lot. Now I want to give one word of warning, and I'm sorry I'm going to have to mention a book.

A young man that left youth for Christ wrote a book called Love Is Now. Some of you may have seen that book. It's published by Zondervan.

He had a chapter called Obsession with Confession. Now I have known some people to carry confession so far that they get up in the morning thinking of something they have to confess. And sometimes they come to a meeting and, shall we say, prime the pump by confessing something.

I remember in India, an evangelist getting up and saying, I want to confess that I've criticized the chairman of the meeting. And he was staying with the chairman. The chairman said to me, why didn't you tell me that when you were sitting at a table with me instead of bringing it out in church? I was in a meeting in India.

I wasn't preaching. When a woman got up and said, I want to confess having committed adultery with the chairman of the meeting. The chairman was an Englishman.

And he got up and he spluttered. He could hardly speak. He said, I would like to assure this congregation of God's people that I have never been alone with this lady in my life.

She said, oh, I was only confessing adultery in thought. Well, you understand what I mean by obsession with confession. Some people make it a kind of self-exhibitionism.

That's what I thought this chapter would be. But the author of this book took a strange line. He said, the word confess means to agree.

All you need do is to agree that was wrong and you're forgiven. And a group of young people in Covina said, isn't that great? You can shack up every weekend so long as you agree that it's wrong. That's a deadly doctrine.

Now, the word confess doesn't mean to agree. It has three roots. Ek means out of.

Homo means the same. Logos, word. That's the word confess in Greek.

Out of the same word. When the Lord Jesus said to the disciples, who do men say that I am? One said, some say you're a prophet. Another said, some say you're Elijah.

And who do you say that I am? And Peter said, you are the Christ, the Son of the living God. We call that the confession of Peter. He expressed outwardly what the Holy Spirit showed him inwardly about the deity of Christ.

Because the Lord Jesus said, flesh and blood didn't show that to you. You received that from heaven. That's confession of faith.

We talk about confessing Christ in baptism. That's confessing what you believe. Confession of sin is the same thing.

You express outwardly what the Lord has shown you inwardly about your sin. Instead of bluffing, instead of pretending there's nothing wrong, you admit it openly. As far as is necessary.

Now, do you remember my original diagram? The unbeliever is forgiven on the basis of the cross. The price is nothing. The condition is repent and be converted.

The object is salvation. But for the believer, who is converted? Who is saved? The basis of forgiveness is the blood of Christ. The cross.

The price is nothing. The condition is repent and make confession where necessary. The object is restored fellowship with God.

During the great revival in China, there was a Chinese deacon who got up and said, I want to confess that I've hated the missionary. Because he's a white man. And the white men have always exploited the Chinese.

The white men have done this, that and the other thing. There he was denouncing white men. It was true that the Europeans had exploited China.

But he had turned a confession into an accusation. On the other hand, sometimes in unwisdom, I remember at one particular college, some of the kids thought it was so great to get up and confess that they didn't like Professor So-and-so. After about a hundred kids had confessed that they didn't like Professor So-and-so, Professor So-and-so felt awful.

They were actually abusing it. That's because they don't understand what confession is for. You confess in order to be delivered of your fault.

Not to accuse the other person. Now, why do I tell you this? I'm what you call a long-term preacher. I don't try to get people to parade up.

I could give invitations for this, and many would like to love Jesus more, come forward and, you know, make quite a parade out of it. I never do that. It's just this.

I understand the Lord's moving in this congregation. There's a sort of wistfulness, a hunger for something deeper. If revival comes, you'll know what to do.

The first thing that'll happen will be a great burden of prayer. But the second thing will be a conviction of sin. And you'll go and put things right at home, at work, in the church.

Then will come the forgiveness and the cleansing, and then will come the power. Let's bow in prayer.

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