

Confessing Sins and Repenting

Hearing inconvenient truth is hard, especially when that truth concerns ourselves and we would need to change. Generally, we would rather look for the problems in other people's lives and talk about what they should change; but if we honestly look at our lives, we can daily find thoughts, words or actions that are not good.

Rather than confronting the truth, we often act in one of three ways. 1) We ignore the problem. We sweep everything under the rug and try to hide the sin. We act as if nothing had happened, either because we're too proud to ask for forgiveness or because we're ashamed.

Or 2) we compare ourselves with others and we conclude that they're no better than us: "It's not that bad. We're all human." Finally, 3) we justify ourselves by blaming the circumstances or the past and say we didn't have another option: "I couldn't help it!"

These strategies are an expression of our complacency and our attempts to save face. But in reality they lead us further down paths of injustice and we create a web of lies to prevent things from being found out. We live in fear of the truth coming to light. At the same time, we allow our conscience to become dull and therefore, we see less and less how much we're actually harming ourselves and others.

Anyone who hides his sins doesn't succeed. But anyone who admits his sins and gives them up finds mercy. (Proverbs 28:13)

What is sin?

Firstly, the word "sin" is used in a general meaning to refer to a power that is ruling over the world and over people. Sin traps us in destructive thoughts and behaviors. But God offers us a way to get free from the power of sin. If we choose His way, He will give us a new life – we become "born again".

If you're not born again or you're unsure: Go through the worksheets "God's Story" and "Baptism" which explain the process of new birth in detail.

Secondly, the word "sin" can refer to specific, individual violations of God's orders. He alone has the right to define what is good and what is bad. He has set up rules that serve for our own protection. Sin is not only about behavior, though. Our actions actually come from our thoughts and our desires. Jesus explains this in Matthew 5:27-28:

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

God wants us to be perfect (Matthew 5:48). That means it's not only about avoiding the wrong, but also about taking responsibility to do the right: *"So when you know the good things you should do and don't do them, you sin."* (James 4:17).

In summary, sin is all thoughts, words, and actions that are against God's standard.

The consequences of sin

We can sin against ourselves, against others, and against God. The consequences of sin can be more or less serious, depending on who was affected: Was it only in my thoughts? Did I act and others have to suffer from the consequences? Or did I even actively involve others into the sin?

In any case, it is sin before God and damages my relationship with Him. When we don't do what God wants, we do what the devil wants. And he always wants the opposite of what God wants.

When we sin, we open a door for the devil and give him influence in our lives. To put it differently: Sin always brings a curse (examples: someone who lies becomes suspicious; greed leads to constant dissatisfaction; feelings of guilt paralyze us). The only way to get free from that curse and close the door again is to confess our sin and completely turn away from it.

Repenting step by step

Pray at the beginning: *God, open my eyes to see my sin as you see it.*

1. Recognizing the sin

I stop whitewashing the issue and become completely honest: What I did was wrong. My sin is also no little thing that can be neglected, but it has negative consequences for me and others. I now take responsibility for that.

2. Confessing the sin

I admit my offense to God and say that I'm sorry. If I sinned against other people, I confess my sins to them as well. I ask for forgiveness.

3. Making amends

If others were harmed by my sin, I do everything I can to make up for the damage.

4. Thinking and acting renewed

After turning away from the sin, I now turn to what God wants instead. I check my mind and my habits and start to think and live according to His ideas. I ask Him to support me in doing so.

Ask at the end: *Am I sure that God has forgiven me for this sin?*

If your answer is no, then look for the support of a helper.

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)

More hints

Remorse: If I try to omit a step it's a sign that I don't really regret all of what I did.

Using the support of a helper: On our own it's often very difficult for us to go through all the necessary steps of repentance. But when sin is no longer a secret, it loses its strength. This is why James 5:16 encourages us to not go through these steps alone: *"Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed."*

Our conscience: Like an inner voice, our conscience can warn us when we're about to break a rule. It is shaped by the environment we grew up in and what was considered "right" and "wrong". But those aren't necessarily in accordance with God's standards. This means we can't rely only on our conscience. Sometimes our conscience may give us false alarms, while in other areas it may be dull and so doesn't warn us even if something is a sin in God's eyes. We need to check with God if He sees something as sin, and let Him change our thoughts and emotions accordingly.

Whom should I ask for forgiveness? Sin should always be confessed to the people who are affected by its consequences. This means I need to ask forgiveness from all I harmed. If I sinned against someone only in my thoughts, I confess it to God and should not take it to that person. If you're unsure how and with whom you need to talk, ask the person helping you through this process.

Examining myself

Read Galatians 5:19-21. Take two minutes to ask God the following question and make notes:

God, where have I sinned against You or against others?

Application

Which things do I want to deal with first? Who should support me in this?

Clarify specifically how you will continue!