

A Fresh Start- Part 2

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[0 : 00] If you have your Bible, sorry. It's been an emotional weekend for me. So I've been trying to hold you in for about a week. And just hearing Robbie sing.

Just touch my heart. If you have your Bible, look with me to 1 John 1, verse 9. Those of you who don't know, my daughter got married two days ago. And, boy, it's been a rollercoaster ride. So just indulge me for a moment this morning. 1 John 1 and verse 9 is going to be my text for today. And let me just go back and set the stage for the message.

I began a series a week ago, just a two-part series, so it's short, about a fresh start with God. And for those of you that weren't here, I don't have time to go back in that message, but let me just bring you up to speed where we are.

We talked about last week the toll that unconfessed sin takes on people's lives. We have all seen folk who at one time in their life they were on fire for God.

[1 : 01] They had a sense of peace about them every time you saw them. They would engage in ministry with a sense of power and purpose. And, boy, they were just on fire for God. And they never declared they didn't believe the things they used to believe.

They never did something necessary that took them way away from God or the church. But you just look at their life years down the road, and they seem to be going through the motions.

They have no power. They have no peace. There doesn't seem to be a sense of purpose that directs their lives. And you just wonder sometimes, what happened? Well, that happened in David's life.

We don't know how long a period of time it was. But here this man who had written psalms, who had fought giants, who had just been a soldier of the cross even before the cross had come yet, this man who was just a great warrior for God, suddenly he just finds a low place spiritually in his life. And it was because not only the fact that he had committed adultery and then he had tried to cover it up by having her husband Uriah killed, but the fact that those things happened and he never dealt with them with God.

[2 : 10] He never repented of his sin. He never confessed his sin to God. He just covered everything up. And apparently he kept trying to go through all the motions that he had previous to that point in time, but to no avail.

He finally is confronted by Nathan the prophet. Nathan points his finger in David's face and says, David, the man that you just heard about, you are the man. And conviction just overwhelmed him. And he ultimately wrote Psalm 51 that we looked at last week. It is a gut-wrenching psalm. I mean, he pleads seven times in just a few verses for God, please cleanse me, blot out my transgressions, create a clean heart in me, make me whiter than soul.

He just begs God over and over and over again to do a spiritual work in his life. He says, God, cast me not away from thy presence. Please restore to me the joy of my salvation.

He wants to be in the same place he had previously been with God. Then we close the service out with Psalm 139, looking at verse 23 and 24. After David had said, God, you're omnipotent, you're omniscient, you're omnipresent, you see everything, you're everywhere, you know everything, you're all powerful.

[3 : 24] He invites God to do a full-scale investigation of his life. And the reason I said the close of the service was, he never wants to go back to life the way it was in those dark days when he hid sin in his life and he wasn't transparent with God.

And you'll recall last week I told you that I wish this week you would pray that prayer. I'm trusting that many of you did that. Many of you prayed that same prayer that David prayed during the course of this last week.

And you said, God, I want you to reveal sin in my life. Anything that's there, I know you're aware of it. I pray you would expose it. And that's where we find ourselves beginning this morning. If we are going to deal with our sin as David dealt with his sin, how do we do that? Baptists have a wrong idea about confession. I'm fearful in days to come, they'll write in the history books, that there was an era in Baptist life.

We thought the way a person confessed their sin was to come forward and take a pastor by the hand and say, preacher, I want to rededicate my life. The pastor prayed, the person went back to their seat, and nothing ever changed.

[4 : 32] I want to tell you, that is not biblical confession at all. This morning, if nothing else, I hope you leave, whether you confess your sin or don't, at least with a clear understanding of here's what confession really looks like.

Here's what it's all about. Let's read together our verse. Many of you could stand right now and quote this verse. In fact, they're probably putting it on the screen. I see it there now. I want you not even to look at the screen.

You might just drop your head or just look here at me and not focus on the screen. And I want you to, in your mind, if you know this verse, and I know most of you probably do, I want you to see how you would quote this verse.

Would you quote it this way or a second way? Would you say, if we confess our sin, he is faithful and just to forgive us of our sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness? Or would you say, he is faithful and just to forgive us of our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness?

If we confess our sin, he is faithful and just to forgive us of our sins. Would you say the word sins plural or the word sin singular? You ever thought about it?

[5 : 44] Well, you've seen it on the screen now, so you know the answer is obviously the plural form, right? If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us of our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Before we get into what it means to confess our sin, there are two key words in this text you need to understand clearly or you'll miss it. The first is that word sins.

What is the difference in sin singular and sins plural? When we talk theologically about the word sin in the singular, we're not talking about adultery or gossip or those kind of things.

When we use that word in the singular, we're talking about that rebellious spirit that man has toward God that keeps him apart from God.

And I want to say to you, sin in the singular is what sends us to hell. Remember David in that psalm we looked at last week in Psalm 51?

[6 : 47] At one point David says, Lord, in sin I was conceived. What did he mean? Did he mean the act of his mother and father coming together and his being conceived was a sinful act?

No, not at all. There's nothing sinful about that at all. Did he mean when he was first born, when he drew his first breath, that he sinned immediately against God? No, not at all.

What David was saying is this, I was born because of the sin of Adam and Eve. All humanity has been born with a bent towards sin. We have a sin nature.

And it's evidenced by our own experience. I don't even need the Bible to tell me in Romans 3.23, for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. In Romans 3.10, there is none righteous, no not one.

Because I know that from experience. Every human being I've ever met, they're all sinners. Every one of us in this room, we're all sinners. We know that we are.

[7 : 44] We readily admit that we are. The only one who has never sinned is the Lord Jesus Christ himself. Now, you have precious little kids at home and grandkids, right?

I'll promise you this is true. You had to teach them social graces to say thank you and to say welcome and to say yes ma'am and no ma'am and yes sir and no sir and all the rules of society that allow us to get along with one another.

But there's not a parent in this room who ever sat their child down and said, now today, you're getting a little older now and I need to give you a lesson on sin. I need to tell you how to be selfish. I need to tell you how to want your own way. I need to teach you how to talk back. Have you ever thought about, where'd they learn those things? You never said to them, balk at something a parent or adult says.

You never said to them, hey, you need to be more selfish. You never said this. How is it they learned them? You know how they learned? The same thing David said. They have a bent toward sin.

[8 : 53] We have a sin nature. Every one of us in this room are sinners. So what's the difference in sin and sins? My sins are the outward, individual, personal ways that that inner rebellious nature is expressed.

You get that? I'm a sinner because I have a sin nature. I want to say, God, not your way, my way. But the ways in which I act that out and flesh that out are different and unique, person to person to person.

Let's just be real honest about it and take the gloves off this morning. Some of you in this room have a problem with gossiping. You know you do. The folks who run with you know you do. But that doesn't mean everybody does.

Everybody at one time or another has gossiped. But not everyone is a habitual gossip. But some of you are. That's your problem. That's a sticking point for you. And some of you have explosive tempers.

And some of you, you don't like to admit it, but you're a flirt. You call it just being friendly. But the truth of that is, you step over the line and you actually flirt with other folk who you're not married to.

[9 : 59] Some of you have a problem with honesty. And those are our sins. You understand that? My sin is my inward rebellion nature toward God. My sins are the ways in which I express that openly in my life.

File that away. Put it on the side of the table for just a moment. Let's look at that second word. The second word is the word confess. Confess. Confess. In the Greek, it is a compound word.

Two words joined together. Homo legio. Now the word homo, every person in this room, 12 years of age and older, you know it. You know that prefix because we talk about homosexuality and we mean same sexual relationships, right?

So the word homo means same. Legio, probably a lot of you don't recognize that word, but you will in just a moment. If you teach Sunday school, you see in your quarterlies in the month of December, John 1, 1 is often used and sometimes they'll put that Greek word in the quarterly and it'll say this, In the beginning was the logos and the logos was with God and the logos was God and we know logos is the word.

When you take it out of its noun form and put it in its verb form, legio is to speak. So what we have in homo legio is the same to speak or to speak the same or more fluidly in our vernacular to agree with.

[11 : 24] That's what confession is. Confession is nothing more nor anything less than our coming to the place we are in complete agreement with God about our sin.

When I look at Ralph Carter's sin, I see it exactly the way God sees it and I say, God, you are right. You're right. I've been wrong. Everything you think about it is right.

Everything I think about it is wrong. That's what confession of sin means. So here's the big question. What does confession then of sin involve?

Four things I want to tell you and I want to promise you, you won't remember them. So if you got a sheet of paper and a pencil, this will be worth your writing down. I seldom tell you that, but I want to tell you today, these four things, if you want to really deal with confession in the days to come, you ought to write them down.

Here's the first thing it involves. I must recognize the point at which I am sinning against God. How can I agree with God if I don't understand how I'm sinning against God?

[12 : 30] Now, I know what some of you are thinking, let's get on to point two and three and four because you see, you'd have to be a nut not to know when you sin against God. Sounds reasonable enough, but can I just tell you the truth?

King David is much brighter than probably any of us in this room. He wrote many of the Psalms and when Nathan came to David and he began to tell him this crazy story about this man who had the one lamb and this rich man who had a lot of lambs and this rich man has stolen this poor man's lamb and used it for his own purposes and he's done him wrong.

I'm going to tell you something, if David had been very much of a thinking man at that point in time and had been sensitive to his sin, guess what he had done? I'm not the sharpest pencil in the box, but I'm going to tell you, if I'd been there and I knew of David's sin and I'd overheard that

conversation, I'd been saying, David, somebody's been reading your mail.

I mean, he knows about you. He's on to you, buddy. And David is so just unaware when he gets through, he's so visibly shaken.

He says, Who is that guy? I'll punish him. And Nathan says, Well, it's you. It's you. Can I tell you something? We can sin and so rationalize away our guilt and so conceal our guilt and suppress our guilt that we pretty much convince ourselves it never happened.

[13:54] Or I'm justified and it happened. Or it wasn't so bad. And David, because he got away with it, he pulled it off. He had Uriah killed.

Nobody was the wiser. Joab never spilled the beans on him. Joab, David just thought, Well, I've gotten away with this. He was paying the price spiritually.

He felt distant from God, but he thought he had somehow pulled it off. Now let me prove it to you experientially. I'm not going to do what I'd like to do, but you'll get the idea.

If I walked out in the audience and I looked at Robbie Stocks and I said, Robbie, you're a sinner. You're not going to argue me over that because he knows it, right? And I know it. And you know it about Robbie, even though you just met him.

If I said to Mark, Okay, you're sinners. No problem with that. I can go to anybody in this room today and say, You know what, y'all? They're a sinner. Georgia's a sinner.

[14:48] You don't get mad about that. Nobody's going to get mad about it because we all know it's obvious, right? But if somebody were to walk up to you today and say, Whispering to you, I don't want anybody else to hear this, but just between me and you, when he was talking about that person gossiping, it's you.

You're a gossip. Ooh, son. That wouldn't go over so well, would it? Or if I went out into the crowd and said, Hey, you know what? I don't want to embarrass you. I don't say this to hurt your friends or anything, but the women of the church have been coming to me and telling me, You're a flirt.

How do you think that would go over? Or if somebody came up to you and said, You know what he was saying today? I just want to help you out here. You're pretty stingy. You're greedy. You know that?

Or boy, you just are so negative all the time and so critical and so backbiting. You see, the way we like to pray is this. Lord, forgive me of my sins and my shortcomings.

Okay, now pass the potatoes. Right? You think that's what he's talking about when he says confession? No, what he's talking about is this.

[15:58] When I get mad at my wife and say something to my wife, well, I better fall on my face before God and say, God, here's what I said. And the reason I said it is because I'm arrogant and I'm impatient.

And I analyze that and I see it just the way God sees it. That's what real confession looks like. So I first got to realize the point at which I'm sinning against God.

I want to tell you, that's the reason I asked you to pray that prayer last week and all this week because I'll tell you something. I've done that before. When I pray that prayer and I say, God, I don't want to know the truth about me. I know I tend to rationalize away my guilt and I tend to suppress my guilt and I tend to find a reason why I did what I did.

But I want you to expose sin in my life. I'm going to tell you something. God will always oblige you. The Holy Spirit of God will always come and he'll penetrate the inner recesses of your heart and he'll expose everything about you that's not right.

Secondly, confession is best done by verbally, orally saying it aloud to God. Now, I don't make too much of this, but the word homologos means to speak the same.

[17:10] I want to be real clear. Do you have to verbally say it to God? No. And you know why.

Because God knows everything and the moment I feel contrition in my heart for my sin and repentant spirit for my sin, before my lips ever move, before the first word is ever said, God sees it, knows it, and he forgives me.

You understand that? He doesn't forgive me the moment I say that word out loud. I don't want to confuse you about that. He forgives me the moment I feel repentance in my heart before I ever step out of an aisle and walk forward before I ever fall on my knees.

God sees my heart. He forgives me instantly. But here's the trick. Sometimes, in the absence of our hearing ourselves say it, we have difficulty remembering that God did forgive us.

psychologists recognize years and years and years ago, there's something therapeutic about somebody telling somebody else about their sins. That's the reason so many people spend thousands of dollars sitting in a shrink's office telling them about what's going on in their life. Because there's something therapeutic about getting that out and getting it out in the open and seeing it and dealing with it. Years ago, when I pastored in Statesville, one of the godliest ladies I ever knew in my life was a member of our church.

[18 : 34] She was about 15 years older than I was. Two daughters and a son. She gets cancer and she's dying. This lady had been in discipleship groups I'd been a part of.

Just a wonderful, sweet lady. One of the godliest ladies, me and my wife, and everybody agreed, one of the godliest ladies you ever meet. But have you ever met folk that every time you're around, you can just tell they had this thing about them that they feel like a second-class citizen? They always walk with their head a little bit hung. You can just tell they don't have a good self. They just don't feel good about themselves. And I never could figure it out because she was so godly. She calls me one day.

She's in the latter stages of her cancer. She's a patient at Iredale Memorial Hospital. It's about a minute and a half, two minutes from where I worked at the church. She calls me and she's in tears and she says, Pastor, I need to see you real bad.

Could you come? I'll be there in about 10 minutes. Got in my car, took off, went to the hospital, walked into her room. She said, will you shut the door? I shut the door. She says, I don't know how to tell you this.

[19 : 36] I'm so ashamed, but I've got to get this off my conscience. And she began to tell me that when she was about 18 years of age, she was dating this man that was once her husband. At that point, they were still dating.

He pressured her into having sex. She kept saying no. He kept saying yes. She was fearful she would lose him, and she gave in to his desires. And she said, ever since that time, I felt so filthy. And it doesn't matter how much I serve the Lord, I always feel like I come up short. And I said, have you talked to God about that? She says, well, yeah, in my mind, in my heart, I've told God how sorry I am.

And obviously she had. Do I believe God had forgiven her previously? I said, yeah, I do believe he had way, way, way back right after it happened. I said to her, going out on a limb, have you ever told anybody other than me this?

She said, never. Have you ever spoken those words of repentance to God out loud where God could hear them, where you knew God heard them because you said them? No, I just felt like that would be too shameful to say.

[20 : 41] I said, can I ask you to do something? Right here in this hospital bed, just me and you, if you need me to, I'll step outside. Would you just have a conversation with God where you spoke verbally with God and you just told God what you just told me?

And she said, I'd be glad to him. Before I could say anything, to my surprise, this lady is dying. She gets out of the bed on her knees in the hospital room and she begins to pray and to cry and to tell God how ashamed she was.

And as soon as she finished, she got up off her knees and got back to bed. And I'm going to tell you something. You could take one look at her face and know, boy, God had just done her work. She had just had that burden lifted off her shoulders.

I'm telling you something. You'll never surprise God with anything you ever say to Him. Do you understand that? There are things you shouldn't confess publicly. There are things you shouldn't say to your wife, to your husband, to your friends, to your pastor.

But my dear friend, if you want to be clean with God and you want to feel His forgiveness, have that conversation. Get alone in the woods. Find a closet somewhere.

[21 : 45] Just say, God, I need to talk to you about this and openly tell Him those things in your life that you know are keeping you from having fellowship with God today. Thirdly, it means I must come to the place that I feel about my sin the way God feels about my sin.

Now, this is really important. So long as you hold on to any bit of that sin in your life and think, well, you know, it was wrong and I shouldn't have done it, but you've never agreed with God. Because the only way God is ever going to agree with you is when you come completely to His side and see the horrible nature of what you've just done. Do you understand that?

Here's how I know that. Four verses before this verse. In 1 John 1.5, here's what it says. Just look up and listen as I'm going to quote it to you. God is light.

That's John's testimony. He says, God is light. And in Him, English teachers, close your ears, there is no none darkness at all.

[22 : 51] If you read the Greek word for it, that's what it says. We translate it rightly. God is light and in Him is no darkness. But literally it says, God is light and in Him is no none darkness at all.

You know what he's saying? Greek language allows you to do that for the sake of emphasis. He's saying, listen, you can look at the whole fabric of God's being and He is perfect light.

That's so different from you and I. We like to think that we're mostly light and a little bit of darkness. But the truth is, we're a whole lot of darkness with a few specks of light. Would you agree with that? We're a whole lot of darkness with a few specks here and there of light. A ray occasionally of light. But I want to tell you something with God. He is complete light. And you can take a magnifying glass and look all over His being. And you won't find one trace of darkness anywhere in the nature of God.

That's why your sin is so atrocious to Him. That's why my sin is so offensive to Him. It nailed His Son to the cross. So as long as you say, well, I sinned but my wife. No. Well, I sinned but my boss.

[23 : 57] No. It's either sin or it's not. You're either wrong or you're in the right. And that's the only place God will ever allow you to be. Thirdly, or fourthly rather, finally, it means I must not be willing to repent.

Are you listening? But I must repent of my sin. I've got to be honest with you. I've even heard preachers say this. I can't believe I want to hear it, but I've heard them say it.

You've got to be willing to repent. No, you don't. You've got to repent of your sin. It don't matter if you're willing or not. You've got to repent of your sin.

There is command in the military. My dad spent 20 years in the Army. Was a drill instructor much of that time. And there's command in the Army that teach young soldiers it's about faith.

You know that command. And a lot of preachers have mistakenly said that repentance is like about faith. I'm looking in this direction. The order is given about faith.

[25 : 00] And I turn and I'm looking 180 degrees in a different direction. That is not repentance. There is a command in the military that is indicative of repentance.

You know what it is? To the rear march. Watch this. I'm marching in one direction. And suddenly that order is issued. And I stop and turn.

And I'm now walking in a new direction. I can about faith but go nowhere. Watch this. If I am told about faith and I do this.

I'm looking in a new direction but I haven't moved anywhere. And that's what a lot of people think about repentance. Is that you just turn and you begin to think differently. And you look in a new direction.

But you don't go anywhere other than where you already were. That's not repentance. Repentance is when I have a change of mind and heart that results in a change of action. And I turn and go in a new direction.

[25 : 56] My daughter Ansela who got married two days ago became a Christian when she was about eight years of age. One night after Sunday night service. I don't even have a clue what I preached on. But I got in one car with her.

And she got. Or my son got in the car with his mom. And we headed to our home. And on the way home. We pulled up to this red light at Ray Street. I'll never forget it. In Statesville, North Carolina. And big tears are streaming down her face.

And I said, baby, what's wrong? And she said, Betty, when you were preaching. I thought about something I've done in school. She was about fifth grade, fourth grade. She said, I thought about this thing I did in school.

And I just sinned against God. And she just boohooed in the car. We got to the house. And I knew when we went inside, it would be wild with my little boy there. And so I said, how would you like to just take care of that thing right here in the car?

And she said, that'd be good. So she prayed. I said, just tell God what you told me. And she talked to God about it. And when she got to the end of the prayer, it's been 40 years.

[26 : 56] I've never forgotten this. She said, Lord, I want you to know I'm so sorry for what I've done. And I ain't never going to sin against you again. We got out and went in the house.

Next day at lunch, I'm with this buddy of mine, another pastor. Name is Bill. We're sitting there at the table eating lunch. And it comes to my mind. And I share it with Bill. Bill. And I said, Bill, guess what I need to do to let us know.

And I told him that whole thing I just told you. He looks at me and he says, did you correct her? No. You didn't tell her that she's not going to be able to live in sinless perfection?

No. No. No. Why didn't you tell her? You know she's going to sin again. Yeah, I know she is. But I don't want her to think that that's a given. And I don't want her to think that that's an acceptable way to live.

You understand that? When we repent, we ought to have it in our mind whether it ever happens or not. God, I'm never going there again.

[28 : 09] I'm going to walk in a new light. I'm going to live differently from this day forward. If you don't have that intention, you have not really repented of your sin.

Now, I'm bringing it all to a close. You say, preacher, that's not like just walking forward and shaking a preacher by the hand. No, it's not. It's not. I've got to be honest with you.

What I'm talking about is grueling. You can't do it at three minutes at an altar. It's going to take you some time. It's gut-wrenching. But I'm going to tell you why it's worthwhile.

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just. You hear that? Faithful and just. To forgive us of our sins.

And to, get this, cleanse us of all unrighteousness. Well, I'm going to tell you something. Nothing like a great spiritual bath, is there? You ever had one before?

[29 : 06] Where you just washed it clean? Get a fresh new start? Isn't forgiveness great? I could tell you story after story in my life where people have forgiven me.

Where I've done atrocious things and horrible things to hurt them. And I get up my courage and I go and I say, would you forgive me? And you can look in their face and tell when they really do and when they really are not sure.

I can remember my dad and my mom and my wife and my kids and friends who through the years I've offended somehow. I didn't necessarily mean to, but I did.

And I've gone back and I've just said, would you forgive me? I'm sorry I didn't mean to say. And boy, when you look in their eyes and you just know, they really did forgive me. We're good to go now. It's okay again.

Boy, what a great feeling that is. I'm going to tell you something. It sure beats the fire out of playing church. It sure beats the fire out of taking a preacher by the hand and saying, would you pray for me to really like it in my life?

[30 : 04] It's gut-wrenching. It's grueling. But the payoff, goodness, how wonderful it is to walk out of this room and know I am right with the Almighty God.

Do you know that today? If not, Robbie's going to lead us right now in a hymn, just as I am, without one plea. But that thy blood was shed for thee, Lamb of God, I come.

Would you, whether you come forward or right there in your seat, maybe you just need to stay seated. Would you begin a conversation with God? Listen, even in a whispered tone, begin to talk to God about your sin.

Would you do that? Those who will stand, stand. Those who need to sit and pray, you do that.

Whatever you need to do, if you need to come. We're going to sing just two or three verses of this just to give you a chance to begin that process of working through your confession with God.

Let's stand as we do that. Let's stand as we do that.