***The Technique of Confessing Sins, No. 8  
  
Techniques of the Christian Life  
  
TL05-02***

This is the Technique of Confessing Sins. We have had seven sessions. This one will be the eighth one which will tie it up. As you know, upon believing the gospel, and thus receiving Jesus Christ as Savior, you and I as believers immediately enter not only into eternal fellowship with God, but also temporal fellowship here in our walk on this earth. A believer who is in this born again status takes with him into his Christian life the old sin nature, intact and fully powered. If we yield to the old sin nature, this temporal fellowship relationship is broken, and then we are committing sins and worthless human good. When we are in this condition, we have guilt feelings within us. We have tensions in the soul, and these, in one way or another, must be released. We looked at some wrong ideas on releasing those tensions which have come from Freudian psychology principles. Then there is the biblical and correct way.

We have pointed out that the Christian way of life on earth is based on certain divine techniques. One of the techniques is the confession of personal sins to restore this temporal fellowship with God the Father. The use of this technique simply breaks the old sin nature's control, and thereby we are also released from the sense of guilt of the sin that we have committed as a Christian. We have pointed out that confession of sin is to be made to God against whom all sin is committed. Thus David, in Psalm 51:4 says, "Against thee and thee only have I sinned and done this evil in thy sight." 1 John 1:9 specifies that we are to confess our sins to the Father.

It is important to acknowledge also among ourselves, as per James 5:16, that we have an inclination to sin. We are all in the practice of sinning, and therefore we should pray for one another as believers. All of us are capable and guilty of this. That's why James tells us to acknowledge that fact, and then pray for one another that we will not fail to use the confession of sin technique. If a sinning Christian uses the confession technique, there is hope for him. So we are to pray for one another. Christians who fail to confess become the hypocrites; they have a mounting discipline; they go deeper into sin; and consequently, there are a lot of people in the process that increasingly get hurt. So failure to use this technique will not only bring discipline but it will bring discipline in the form of physical breakdown and also mental breakdown. And when you refuse to confess then the discipline piles and piles up.

**David**

In the case of David, that we had referred to in the sin of adultery and murder on his part, he refused to confess for almost a year. Consequently, the discipline piled up and piled up. Finally when he was confronted by Nathan the prophet with his sin in the form of a parable, he inadvertently, without realizing what he was doing, declared the nature of his own discipline. In 2 Samuel 12:5, David reacts to the parable which was a description of what he had done in the adultery and then the murder. Verse 5 says, "And David's anger was greatly kindled against the man in the parable, and he said to Nathan, 'As the Lord liveth, the man who has done this thing shall surely die, and he shall restore the lamb fourfold.'" And David knew not what he was saying, that he was now bringing a specification of discipline of judgment upon himself. He was acting in hypocrisy. He was acting in this smug self-righteousness. Therefore he was acting with this great show of virtuous indignation. He was forgetting the warning of James 5:16.

So, he says, "May he restore fourfold," because he did this thing and because he had no pity. And, Nathan said, "Thou art the man." Now David, when he was confronted with this, finally after almost a year comes to his senses. 2 Samuel 12:13 says, "And David said unto Nathan, 'I have sinned against the Lord.' And Nathan said unto David, 'The Lord shall also put away thy sin. Thou shalt not die.'" He was guilty of death on both accounts. However, God, in His mercy and grace and because of the plan that he had for another almost 25 years for David, did not execute the sentence of death upon him. David had come to his senses, and he did confess.

We can read through Psalm 51 about all the agony, as we've referred to before, that he went through--the internal emotional guilt feelings and tensions. He had, all during this time, accumulated a fourfold discipline. He had declared it on himself. And here's how it historically came to pass. The child which was the result of the adultery died (2 Samuel 12:14, 18). The second-fold discipline: the family in David's lifetime was to experience violent death as did Uriah by the sword on the field of battle (2 Samuel 12:10). As it worked out in David's family, you remember that Absalom murdered David's son Amnon (2 Samuel 13:22-29). And Absalom, who was David's favorite son, was killed in the process of a rebellion against his father (2 Samuel 18:14-15). Then David's oldest living son was killed by Solomon (1 Kings 2:24-25). All of these dying by the sword just as the prophet said, that would be one-fold of the discipline.

A third-fold element in the discipline was that the children of David were to be a grief to him. Very often this is what happens in discipline upon parents. The calluses build up enough that the children become the means of grief to the parents. So, David's son Amnon raped David's daughter Tamar (2 Samuel 13:1-14). Absalom, David's beloved son, plotted against his father. He formed a conspiracy (2 Samuel 15:18). This was grief in the family through the children. Then the fourth discipline that came upon David was that the wives of David were to be sexually violated in broad daylight as Bathsheba had been in secret (2 Samuel 12:11, compared to 2 Samuel 16:21-22).

This was very severe, but it points out to us that ignoring this technique that we have been studying is a very dangerous thing. It puts you in a position of mounting difficulty and of intensity of discipline. So, the moment you are aware that you have sinned, get back in. Confess, and get things square, and avoid this building up of discipline upon your life. Please remember, however, that all of the discipline that God brings is motivated by love (Hebrews 12:6). After this fourfold discipline upon David, he walked as God's friend, a man after his own heart, for about 25 years. So, a great Christian, I again remind you, is not one who has something special about him or some kind of particular godliness. A great Christian is one who uses the grace provision of confession when he sins. He bounces back in the fellowship. He moves on. He is not the one who tries to create some super godliness image about himself. This guilt for unconfessed sin is very very real. A Christian's mental and physical well-being is affected by it. You might want to read Psalm 32 on your own sometime, and see again the descriptions that David gives here of the consequences of unconfessed sin and the effects that it has on body and mind.

**Yielding**

I want to bring together one other factor that you are often told to do. You as believers are told that you should yield yourself to the Lord. Yielding and confessing sin have a direct connection. The word "yield" looks like this in the Greek: "paristemi." It is used in Romans 6:13, Romans 6:16, and Romans 6:19. The first part of the word "para" means "to be beside," and the "istemi" means "to stand" or "to place." So, when you put it together, the word "yield" means simply "to stand beside." This means to stand beside in the sense of being subservient to someone. In other words, to give control to.

Now let's take a look at these words as they're used in Scripture. We have it used first of all in Romans 6:13. Here it is translated as "neither yield." This word, "paristemi" is used in the present active imperative, and it has the negative "me." Present imperative means you are doing something already, and you are to stop doing that thing that you are doing. In Romans 6:13, the thing that they are doing is using their body for sinful purposes. He says, "Stop yielding your body as instruments of sin," and that is unto sin meaning the old sin nature. The active indicates that it's an active choice. You are to decide. The imperative means a command. God is telling you not to use your body for sin; that is, not to make your body subservient to sin--yielding to sin by nature of negative volition from your negative viewpoint.

Then it is used in that verse a second time. This time it's translated "yield," and it's an aorist active imperative. Aorist means that you are to yield at some point in time, and when is that? Well, that's where 1 John 1:9 comes in. That's how you yield at any point when you are out of fellowship. You yield to God by confession of that sin. So again, Roman 6:13 says, "Neither yield as instruments of unrighteousness unto the old sin nature," which is what you are already doing, "but instead yield yourselves unto God." And again it is a command. It's imperative. It's an active choice. It's aorist, which means yield at every point that you sin and need to make confession. You are to do this as those who are alive; that is, spiritually alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. So you may live as those who are in Christ. Or, you may ignore your eternal union, and live as those who are enslaved still to the old sin nature. So, a Christian who yields to the Lord is a Christian who is using the technique of confession, and that's all that's needed.

Here's another point where we have all kinds of misconception. If you were going to yield to the Lord, much of it ends up in legalism. That is not yielding--going through some part of monkeyshine motions. Yielding is 1 John 1:9, and you do it on every occasion when that's necessary.

Roman 6:16 also uses this Greek word and it is translated as "yield." This one is a present active indicative. This says that a Christian is controlled by whomsoever he chooses to go to. He may yield to sin, meaning his old sin nature, and he will experience temporal spiritual death. Or, he may yield to the Holy Spirit in obedience to doctrine, and produce righteousness; that is, divine good. Roman 6:16 says, "Know you not that to whom you yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants you are who you obey, whether of sin unto death or obedience unto righteousness." This is present. You do this constantly. It's active--a statement. In Romans 6:19, it is used twice. The first time it's translated "have yielded." This is aorist active indicative. Aorist, again, means every time you sin. Active means that you choose to give the old sin nature that control. Indicative means that it's a statement of fact.

The second time it says, "Now yield." In contrast, this is aorist active imperative. Here is a command. It is aorist again, meaning every time you sin, confess to the Father that you have fallen out of fellowship, at that particular point, exercise your active volition, and thus yield to the Holy Spirit.

So, Romans 6:19 says, "I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh. For as you have yielded your members servants to uncleanness unto iniquity, even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness." How are you going to do that? 1 John 1:9: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all righteousness," and in that moment, you move from unyieldedness to yieldedness. This word is also used in Romans 12:1. There it is used in the translation of "present:" I beseech you therefore brethren by the mercies of the living God that you present your bodies a living sacrifice," and so on. Again, every time you need to yield, every time you sin, you actively need to perform the act of confession of sin. This is a personal yielding that he is calling for.

What you have to do then is determine, "Am I in fellowship?" If I am not, confess, and thus biblically to yield myself. So, I hope you have this straight. It is important that you understand the meaning of yieldedness. It means to allow the Holy Spirit to control your life as a Christian. That's what all these verses are saying. God the Holy Spirit is absolute righteousness. He will not direct a believer's life if the old sin nature is in the life in control (Ephesians 4:30, 1 Thessalonians 5:19).

The old sin nature controls a life just because we decide to let it. We have yielded to it instead of to the Holy Spirit. A Christian cannot be yielded to the old sin nature and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit at the same time. When we use 1 John 1:9, the technique of confession, we break the back of the old sin nature's control. When it is in control, we're out of fellowship. When the Holy Spirit is in control, we're in fellowship. That's the state of yieldedness. In other words, yieldedness is the result of being in that inner circle. A believer in fellowship is therefore also in yieldedness. It's not something else. Put it this way: yieldedness is the principle (Romans 6:13). Confession is the mechanics (1 John 1:9). Yieldedness is the principle. 1 John 1:9 gives us the mechanics to achieve that. Volition breaks our yieldedness. Volition restores it.

Therefore, yieldedness is not a one-time experience. This is what sometimes we are told. Sometimes when the professional preacher is not getting people to make many public moves in the service, he will fall back upon yieldedness. He will call upon those of you who are now ready to make your stand to yield yourself to the Lord; to give your life to Him; and to put your life on the line. You are given the impression that here is something that you have never done. Just like you were called at one point to make a decision to receive Christ as Savior, you are now called at one point to yield yourself to the will of God. You are given the impression that it's a one-shot decision. It is not. It is done upon every occasion that we fall out of fellowship. That's when we need to yield. Therefore, it is a condition that is going to be repeated. Yieldedness means being in a condition where God can use you as a believer. Yieldedness means being willing to follow the will of God before you know what it is. The only time you're going to do that is when you're in the inner circle of fellowship with the Lord.

**The Prodigal Son**

In bringing this all together, we're going to look at a scriptural case history in Luke 15 concerning the confession of sin. This is the story of the prodigal son. In Luke 15, we'll pick the story up at verse 11. Verse 11 says, "A certain man had two sons." This certain man in the parable represents God the Father. He has two sons. You must understand from the beginning that these two sons are both believers. They are both in the outer circle. They are both, as we would say, in union with Christ. They have eternal fellowship. You will notice that at verse 11 they are called "two sons." If you will drop your eye down to verse 32, you will discover that he is speaking to them again as sons, for he speaks about one brother to another brother. In verse 31 he calls the elder brother "son." In verse 32 he calls the younger one "brother." They're still sons. Nothing has changed from one end of this parable to the other, relative to their being sons.

Therefore, we're not talking about salvation. Once you're born into God's family, there is no reversing, no matter the conduct. Even the prodigal son, whose conduct becomes very very bad, still remains a son. John 10:27-29 and Romans 8:38-39 establish that principle of security in our sonship. You and I become sons by faith in Christ (Galatians 3:26). You cannot leave your natural family that you were born into, and you cannot leave your spiritual family even if you wanted to. 2 Timothy 2:13 tells us that. So, no matter what your conduct is, you are a child of God. Salvation is one thing. Your spirituality is another thing. Both of these sons, at the beginning of this story, are in the inner circle of temporary fellowship as well.

So, this man, representing God the Father, has two sons. The younger of them said to his father, "Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me, and he divided unto them his living." Now the portion of goods represented what was to be the younger son's inheritance. This was already his. He had a right to this and the father was putting it aside for him eventually. In the parable, this represents the spiritual operating assets which God the Father provides for you and me. This is "what falls to us," as a result of what the Lord has provided. That consists of something like 36 specific different things, all of which happened to us at one time, at the point of our salvation. Those are our operating assets. God the Father is waiting to make these real in our experience. That's what Isaiah 30:18 indicates. He's just sitting there twiddling his thumbs waiting to bless us. In other words, you and I are spiritual millionaires.

So, we're told that the father divided his capital between the sons. He gave them what belonged to each of them, just as our God has given us promises; He's given us doctrine; and, He has given us prophesy as our operating assets. In this story the Bible, as always, reflects a capitalistic system. When it thinks about an economic system, it is always capitalism, because it is always based upon the principle of private property possession. So this was the son's private property possession. The father gave him his portion.

Verse 13 says, "And not many days after that, the younger son gathered all together and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living." He took a few days to get ready, and then he took his journey. He leaves home. Here's a Christian with his operating assets moving out into the privacy of his own priesthood and under his own responsibility. Now that's what the son was doing. At this point, we cannot say that the prodigal was out of fellowship. He hadn't done anything wrong as of this point. What he received was his right. To leave was his right, as of this point of maturity in his life. He was moving out to the independent operation of his priesthood. But, he went, we're told, to a far country, and there he does get into trouble. Here he falls out of fellowship while the older brother is still at home in fellowship operating with his father. The condition of the younger brother is described in the words "riotous living" which means "wastefully." It implies that he began living without restraints. He spent his money freely, and he lived without moral restraints. He was, in other words, in a state of carnality. He was now unyielded to his father. This describes the state of the Christian who is in sin, out of fellowship, and unyielded.

At this point it's very difficult to distinguish between the behavior of a carnal believer and of an unbeliever. 1 Corinthians 3:3 tells us that a carnal Christian walks like a man, meaning a natural unsaved man. It is very difficult when a Christian falls into the state of carnality and persists in it, and it eventually becomes hard to tell them apart. At that point, people come up with notions like, "Well, he never was born again. That's why he's living like this. He used to sing in the choir. Now he's boozing it up down there and doing all these things out there in the world as a fantastic immoral character. He never was born again." Not at all. He could well have been born again. Once he is in carnality, he will become worse than the moral unbeliever who holds himself in restraint because of his esteem for himself and his moral ideals. This leads to a fallacy that we have a difference such as head knowledge and heart knowledge. You have a head knowledge, and a head "belief," or a head "unbelief." That's all you have. You may distinguish that there is a head knowledge and then a head belief or a head unbelief. Everything in your relationship to God is in your head. And that's why the information of the Word of God in the form of doctrine is crucial to your functioning in your life as a believer.

This is an unbeliever compared to a carnal Christian, and it is hard to see the difference between them. Every one of us, in one way or another, plays the role of a prodigal. Every one of us has his own besetting sin. 1 John 1:8 and 10 declare, just as James 5:16 does, that we have a besetting sin. The reason this is confusing is because you meet some Christians who are really pretty nice people--you think. That's because they have learned to put on a front. One of the first things that a new convert in the average church discovers is that he's expected to put on a front. He quickly picks up certain words and certain performances and certain things that he does in order to maintain that front. He looks upon people, and he thinks that they're sweetness and light, and he doesn't realize that, on the inside, they're really a bunch of finks. No one is good (Romans 17:14-15). The respectable Christian just knows how to con other people. He puts on a grim face, and then he's very vocal about certain sins and certain taboos, while he himself is proud; bitter; envious; hypocritical; and, filled with worries and fears on the inside. Legalism is not spirituality. That's what's going to happen to the older boy here. He is going to fall into legalism a little later on.

So the younger son is off in a far country. He's wasting his inheritance; he is out of fellowship; and, he is descending into sins. Please notice that it does not tell us what the sins are. You can make up anything you want, but we don't know. Verse 14 says, "And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in the land, and he began to be in want." He squandered his capital and, like a Christian, he had cut himself off, because of his carnality, from his divine assets that enable him to live the Christian life, which is a supernatural act, and he found himself in want. God brings discipline. He puts him in want. He judges him because of his status (verses 15 and 16). The son makes a decision. "He went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine." He's going to sublimate. He's lost his father's care, so he's going to get somebody else's care.

A Christian in the church who rejects the care of his true pastor-teacher finds himself some other pastor-teacher's care. Very frequently he will think that he has found exactly what he wants, and that he is having needs fulfilled, never realizing that the need that is being fulfilled is soothing of his old sin nature that was once ruffled and disrupted.

So, now this son is in want. He doesn't know how bad off he is. And he goes to somebody else to fill what his father was providing for him. Consequently, he apparently is outside of Jewish territory, and he finds himself where they're raising pigs. He hires himself out to a pig owner. Verse 16 says, "He would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat, and no man gave unto him." The husks that the swine did eat means the food, and the analogy is to a Christian who is now operating on human viewpoint and his old sin nature human good. Imperfect fain meant that he was constantly desirous of getting into the trough with the pigs. This is a pathetic picture of a Christian who is wallowing in the world's confusion, misconceptions, and disorientation. Notice that he is a Jew. If you know anything about Jewish law, there was nothing more humiliating than for this Jew to have to be slopping the pigs, and that's what he has ended up doing. The carnal believer degenerates in his tastes the same way. This son once delighted on lamb chops. That was the feast. Now he's fighting the pigs for the husks that they're eating. Now that's generation of tastes.

This is what happens in the carnal believer. If you stay carnal, one of the things that it does is that it cheapens you. It begins to show itself in many ways in your tastes and your choices. Sometimes people are disturbed because of the way some women dress. Admittedly, some women do dress in a way that is cheap and unbefitting of their calling as princesses of the living God. The reason they're doing that is because of their carnality. Their carnality has caused them to descend into a cheapness of taste. Consequently, that's why they go around dressed the way they do. The unbeliever very often, again, will be nicer in his tastes than the carnal Christian. There is something about carnality that really runs a person down.

So, this man is degenerating. He hasn't allowed his stomach to be filled with what his father provided, but he will allow it to be filled with pig's food. Furthermore, the words "no man gave him" meant that they wouldn't let him do it. He was having to sneak around and try to muscle in with all the pigs where they wouldn't see him. They weren't allowing him to go to the trough. This is often the basis of the false excuse that people have when they say, "I don't like that church because it's full of hypocrites." Here was this man who was a child of God. Here he is acting like one of the pigs. That's pretty hypocritical.

By the way, don't let that disturb you if somebody says, "I don't like your church. There are too many hypocrites there." You can always come back and say, "I don't like it either, for the same reason. You're so right. And I had the same problem with your church. As a matter of fact, I had the same problem with the people you do business with. Did you ever notice that? And you know some people your kids go to school with, and their teachers, they're hypocrites. You know that fellow who came and fixed your air conditioner. He's a hypocrite. You're really a grace person for letting him fix your air conditioner, considering the fact that he's such a good hypocrite." Let's not pretend that we are moving through a world where the hypocrites are only in church. We're dealing with them everywhere, and that's no argument.

Well, what happens to this man? Verse 17 says, "And when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough to spare and I perish with hunger?" He suddenly admits that he's out of fellowship. There is bread enough at home. There are enough operating divine resources. There are enough techniques. There is enough Bible doctrine, putting it in spiritual terms. So what does he do? He says, "I will arise and go to my father and say unto him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee.'" He decides to confess his wrong thinking and his wrong actions. No emotion is requisite in this. He doesn't talk about feeling sorry, just as 1 John does not ask you to feel sorry for your sins. You may feel sorry for your sins. It's okay if you do. If you're more the emotional type, you will. But don't go through that foolishness that we read out of the Youth Conflicts folder last time that gave you that little paragraph on how you should systematically develop sorrow so that you can get forgiven for your sins--that kind of idiocy.

This man doesn't reflect that he has any emotion at all. He's just sitting there. The pigs were all fighting around him. He's elbowing them out of the way. He's trying to think. They're all, "Oink, oink, oink, oink." He's trying to think this thing through. Very unemotionally he is saying, "You know, I'm really stupid sitting here in this slop hole this way. My father's servants eat better than I do, and I'm the son in the family--the heir." He says, "I'm going to go home. I'm going to go tell daddy, 'I'm wrong.'" So he kicks the last pig out of the way; opens the gate; and, out he walks.

Then in verse 19, he gets out of line. He says he's going to add this to what he says to his father: "And am no more worthy to be called thy son. Make me as one of thy hired servants." Now, it's true that he was not worthy, but he could not forfeit his place as a son no matter what, because his sonship was not based upon whether he was worthy or not. And you and I are not worthy to be sons of God, but we cannot forfeit that no matter what we do. He could never again be a hired servant, and you and I can never again be hired servants. The prodigal is confused here on his doctrine, and he's ignoring the fact of all that his father has done for him. It is false for you and me to suggest to a carnal Christian that we can return to the Lord by some act of self-abnegation, of some humility. That's what he was doing here in verse 19: "I am not worthy to be called your son," in some act of emotional humility. He was going to emote a little bit at this point. That's what we are often told, that we should rededicate ourselves in order to demonstrate our misery as believers. None of that has any effect.

Some of you may get emotional when you are saved. Some of you may not, but you're still saved. Some of you feel saved and some of you don't, but you're still saved. I know that there are many people who say, "Father, I used this obscene word. Will you please forgive me?" What do you think God does? He forgives him. That's what He does. God forgives him. Now, you were wrong to say, "Would you please forgive me?" But, the Father, in his grace, overlooks that because you have admitted the sin, and that's what He's after. I understand that people can achieve the desired results by saying, "Will you forgive me?" Still, this is not God's order. It is God in His grace who is bringing you through and restoring you to fellowship. You don't have to emotionalize.

Sometimes somebody likes to say that we make too much of 1 John 1:9. Here's this one verse that says, "Confess your sins." Well, you don't have to have God say a thing more than once for you to establish it. But the truth of the matter is that the Bible says the same thing in different ways, the idea of confession of sin. In Romans 12:1, we have the word "present." In Ephesians 5:14, we have "awake from the dead," that is, temporal fellowship. In Colossians 3:5, we have "mortify," that is, put to death. That's again the same thing, the idea of confession. In Colossians 3:9-10, we have the phrases "put off the old man" and "put on the new man." That's confession of sin, "put off the old man." "Put on the new man" is building a spiritual maturity structure in the soul. Hebrews 12:1 says, "Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin," that again is confession. Ephesians 6:11 says, "Put on the whole armor of God." Initially, one puts on the armor of God by confession. 1 Corinthians 11:31: "For if we would judge ourselves." That's the confession technique. Romans 6:13 that we looked at again uses the word "yield." That also is confession. In the Old Testament too, this same concept of the technique of confession is there. It is not only in 1 John 1:9 as an isolated verse.

Now, back in Luke 15:20, he says, "And he rose and came to his father, but when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him." He came to his father; followed his decision; the father saw him; and, that approach was, in effect, confession. The father had been sitting there just waiting for the son to come back, as our Father in Heaven taps his foot waiting for us to come back to him in the yieldedness of confession. "And the father had compassion." It is the love of God that motivates his treatment toward us, just like it is your love that motivates your treatment toward your son when he admits that he has been wrong in his dealings with you. The Father falls on the son's neck, and he welcomes him home. That's what that means. "He fell on his neck," doesn't mean he started beating on him. It meant he put his arms around him; hugged him; rejoiced that he was there; and, kissed him, with grace extended. And do you know what? The father kissed the son even though he knew that the boy would probably do something wrong again. And God kisses us even though He knows we're going to get out of line again.

Verse 21: "And the son said unto him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight. I am no more worthy to be called thy son." He makes his confession as he had previously planned, and the chastening that's described in Hebrews 12:11 has come. Now he's ready for confessing. He's back in fellowship with the father. You notice that he has sinned against heaven, that is, against God, but in the sight of men. That is very important. I have sinned against heaven ("against thee and thee only have I sinned"), but in the sight of men. That's the difference. We sin only against God, but we do sin in the sight of people.

Now he is getting ready to add the rest of the thing that he planned to do. In verse 22, he was going to add, "I'm no more worthy to be thy son." However, the father interrupted in verse 22: "And the father said to his servants, 'Bring forth the best robe and put it on him; put a ring on his hand; shoes on his feet.'" He doesn't let him go to the improper part. The best robe is restored fellowship, experiential righteousness from the Holy Spirit. The ring was like a signature. It meant he had the father's account to draw on, his divine operating assets (in spiritual terms). The shoes signified that he was ready to walk again in service for divine good production. Please remember that it is always your privilege to get back to work for the Lord once you have confessed sin, no matter how far out of line you have fallen.

Verse 23 says, "Bring the fatted calf, and kill it, and let us eat and be merry. The fatted calf represented restored fellowship. He was feeding on doctrine. To be merry meant to be relaxed and happy in temporal fellowship. Verse 24 says, "For this my son was dead." That is, he was out of fellowship. "He's alive again." He's back in fellowship. "He was lost." That is, he was producing human good. "He is found." He's producing divine good. "They begin to be merry."

"Now his elder brother was in the field, and came and drew near to his house and he heard the music and the dancing which signified fellowship. And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant, and he said to him, 'Your brother has come. Your father has killed the fatted calf because he has received him safe and sound.'" He gets the scoop on what's taking place. The word for "called" in verse 26, where it says "he called one of the servants and asked," is in the Greek imperfect. He kept asking around, "What's happening? What's happening? What's happening?" So he hears.

Here's his response in verse 28: "And he was angry and would not go in. Therefore came his father out and entreated him." You would have thought that he would have been delighted that his younger brother had come home; that he had been restored; and, that the father's treatment was evidence that the son had changed. But he wasn't. He stood out there pouting. He wouldn't go in. He was resentful that his father was exercising his right to forgive his brother. He fell into self-pity and into carnality himself. At this point, he falls into a legalistic tirade to his father as to why the father should not be treating his younger brother in this way. In other words, he fell into the mental attitudes of jealousy.

Verse 29 says, "And he answering said to his father, 'Lo, these many years do I serve thee; neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment. (Now, that may or may not have been.) Yet, you never gave me a kid that I might make merry with my friends.'" This was real sad potato pouting, just as big and as fat a case of self-pity as you could find, and that's why we know he was out of fellowship. Anytime you fall into self-pity or pride, it's a sure sign of being out of fellowship.

Verse 30: "But as soon as this thy son was come, who had devoured thy living with harlots, you have killed for him the fatted calf." Here he starts slandering his brother. How did he know that his brother had devoured his living with harlots? He didn't. He was just so seething to make an assumption, and what he was doing was showing his own frame of reference. People, when they accuse other people of certain sins and slander other people when they have no way of knowing if that's true or not, are simply revealing that if they had the chance, that's the kind of sinning they'd like to do. What this brother was saying was, "If I had a chance to have my part of the capital and go to a far country, this is what I would do." So we know something about his thinking and his daydreams.

A person who is carnal immediately loses his spiritual orientation. He goes spiritually insane. He becomes irrational. Carnality brings out the worst in us. What the younger brother did was none of his business, and what the father did was none of his business. It is not our business what other believers do, and what our God does in forgiving and restoring and using them. It is the Lord's business, and the Lord's business alone, and we are not the judge.

Most of you would probably say, "That's right." That obviously is the way, and this story certainly reflects that. However, I'll tell you that this sits hard with most Christians. Most Christians have the desire to be legalistic and to put their noses in other Christians' business. In fact, some Christians are so pained by being told in a church to mind their own business and to leave judgment with the Lord that they just cannot stand it, and they go to some other church where they can act like church age Pharisees. They can portray their self-righteousness and walk around as the paragons of virtue and example. They can stomp over Christians like the younger brother here whose prodigal ways are open whereas their own are hidden. Sometimes a whole congregation has been trained to be legalists. They just enjoy finding out that some poor church member has become a little prodigal, and they like to stomp on him.

Well, they kill the fatted calf which is a sign of rejoicing. The brother was out of line in trying to bring punishment upon his younger brother. I warn you again on the basis of Romans 14:4 to leave vengeance with the Lord and to live your own life as unto the Lord. If you start attacking another believer's actions, you may get between the Lord and the whip that he's exercising on that believer. The way David meted out in his self-righteous judgment to the man in the parable is the way it was meted out to him. The discipline that you exercise, the attitude you exercise toward another, is the judgment that will come upon yourself. If you enjoy it, just go ahead and have a good time.

Verse 31: "He said to him, son, you are ever with me and all that I have is yours." We can appropriate as believers all that the Father has, no matter what any other believer does. The older brother had lacked nothing here. He was now out of fellowship simply because he could not rejoice over the father treating the younger brother in grace.

Verse 32 says, "It was fitting that we should make merry and be glad for this your brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found." It is fitting. We rejoice when Christians use the technique of confession. All of Heaven rejoices when you use this technique that we've been studying. God help you if you don't use this technique because this is a basic one. We're going to study some other very important ones beginning next time, but this one is crucial. If you don't do this one, everything else is out the window. And that's why we spent a little more time on it.

The brother was dead, out of temporal fellowship. He's alive. He's back in temporal fellowship. He was lost, he was out of service, doing human good. He is found. He's back in producing divine good. No matter how many times you have to use this technique, 1 John 1:9 works, and it works every time. Read through this story at your leisure, and rejoice in the grace of God which is reflected here in this parable. You will find this a classic example of how God works--very easy, very regular, and not emotional to cover up froth. I'm not saying that you will not be emotional because when God forgives you, you can get very emotional. If you're that type, that's perfectly in line. But don't think that your emotion is what God is looking for. He is looking for the simple statement, "Father I have sinned against heaven and in the sight of man. I'm not worthy. Period." And God says, "Come on in. Let's have a party. You're on your way. No matter how far you have fallen, you're ready to go on. You cannot live the supernatural Christian life if you do not use the technique of confessing of sins. That is number one.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1973

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