

ENSURING FELLOWSHIP & FILLING

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When an unbeliever is saved from the condemnation of sin and therefore becomes born-again, his sin nature is not removed. It will eventually be taken away when the believer dies or is raptured; whichever happens first. Until then, the believer will continue to sin throughout his earthly life. The more the believer grows to spiritual maturity and learns to walk by means of the Spirit, the less he will sin. Because Jesus Christ paid for these sins, the believer is no longer condemned to the Lake of Fire (Romans 8:1). However, the believer's sins are not without consequence. When the believer sins (no matter how overtly), he cannot lose his salvation but he does break fellowship with God. This state is called carnality. Sins are thoughts, words and deeds that are contrary to God's holy character. For example, mental attitude sins are things like bitterness and revenge motivation. Sins of the tongue can be things like slander and gossip.

There is a difference between temptation and sin. Temptation is not a sin. We know this because scripture tells us that Christ, who is sinless, was tempted in every way (Hebrews 4:15). Temptation is a bit like a door that opens; inviting the believer to walk through it and sin (Genesis 4:7). Only if the believer walks through the door does he sin. For example, if a married man is physically attracted to a woman (other than his wife) that he encounters on the street; his attraction is not a sin. Attraction to the opposite sex is a natural reaction. The man can walk away or turn his eyes in a different direction. However, if the man continues to pursue his attraction, he will lead his mind to begin lusting for the woman by imagining himself with her. Lusting after a woman with the eyes and mind is sin. Many married people make comments like: "It's alright to look at other people as long as you go home to your spouse" or "I'm only looking at the menu" or "I'm only window shopping". Jesus Christ disagrees with such comments. He revealed to us that this type of behaviour is mental adultery (Matthew 5:28). Sin is not limited to overt acts like murder. Sin begins in the mind and can pursue its course through the tongue and hands. All sins have pride at their source.

Fellowship is tantamount to a father holding a child's hand. When the believer sins, he willfully lets go of God's hand and runs away. This is called breaking fellowship (carnality). When a child runs away, he no longer has an intimate relationship with his father and the longer the child is away; the more he becomes disoriented and lost. However, a child always remains a child even if he runs away because his identity cannot be lost; salvation is secure. What the

child loses is access to his father's provisions. In order to be restored to fellowship, all the believer has to do is apply 1 John 1:9. By simply naming the sins he has committed, the child is cleansed and restored to fellowship. The simplicity of restoring fellowship is only possible because God was legally satisfied with Christ's payment for sins. By simply naming his sins, the believer recognizes that he cannot cleanse himself through means like guilt, penance and good deeds. The believer fully recognizes that God must be the one to cleanse him by grace and that God's grace is fully in line with his other attributes such as justice and righteousness because Christ already paid for these sins. Naming your sins is not a meritorious work; it is about appropriating God's grace.

When the unbeliever is born-again, his soul is completely washed by the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5). This type of washing is a one time event at the moment of salvation and the effects are eternal. In the same way, high priests in the Old Testament had to bathe themselves prior to entering the presence of God on set dates, in the tent of meeting or in the temple. Every Church Age believer is a priest (1 Peter 2:5, 9). However, we can enter the presence of God at all times because our bathing was with the blood of Christ (Hebrews 10:22). Once bathed (saved), the believer never needs to bathe again (Hebrews 7:27, 10:10). When the believer sins; he sort of gets his feet dirty. A child cannot enter his father's clean house with dirty feet. He must first have his feet washed and then he can enter the house of his father.

When the believer sins; he leaves his father's house (fellowship with God). In order to come home, the believer's feet must be washed by God. This is why Jesus Christ washed Peter's feet; to teach him, in part, about no longer needing to bathe the whole body but simply needing to make sure to keep clean feet (John 13:8-10). As Christ washed Peter's feet, so to God is the one to clean the believer. The believer cannot cleanse himself just like he could not save himself. By simply naming his sin, God washes the feet of the believer, including the dirt that he was not aware of. When a believer confesses his known sins, God will wash away his unknown sins as well that have been accumulated since breaking fellowship (1 John 1:9 cf. 1 John 5:17). By the time a believer realizes that he is in a state of sin, he most probably has accumulated a lot of other sins he is unaware of. This is why 1 John 1:9 states that God cleanses the believer from all sins (known and unknown to the believer) at the moment of confession of known sins.

When the believer confesses his sins by simply naming them, he is restored to fellowship. Things like penance and punishing oneself are tantamount to

blasphemy because the believer then tries to cleanse himself through good deeds; which implies that the blood of Christ was not sufficient to pay for these sins. The believer can continue to feel guilty after he confesses; this is a normal reaction when the Holy Spirit convicts the believer of his sins. However, even if the believer does not feel cleansed, he must not rely on his feelings to know that he is back in fellowship. God's word is clear and simple. All the believer has to do is name his known sins when need be.

The believer can wonder: "what if I don't know that I committed sins; how will I know that I have broken fellowship?" One sin, even if unknown, is all it takes to break fellowship. Once in carnality, sins start accumulating pretty fast; and the believer will become aware of his state of broken fellowship soon enough. The believer may only become aware that he has sinned once he reaches sin number 520, for example, but as soon as he is aware that he has sinned at least one sin, he must confess right away through prayer and he will also be cleansed of all other sins that he is was not aware of (519 sins is this example). This is why feeling guilty and punishing oneself through penance is blasphemy. Once cleansed, God keeps no records of wrong. The next time you sin is as if you had sinned for the first time.

Ensuring fellowship doesn't mean that the believer should confess when there is nothing to confess. Ensuring fellowship is something that must be done 24/7 by examining oneself. For example, the believer can pray and ask God to reveal to him if he is in a state of broken fellowship so that he can confess as soon as possible. As the believer has more and more Bible doctrine in his soul, he will be able to recognize the presence of unconfessed sin a lot faster. He will be more aware of its presence and thus he will sin less and less as he grows to spiritual maturity. He will recognize sin before it becomes sin; at the phase of temptation. This is why God gave us the provision of confession. He is fully aware that the believer keeps his sin nature after salvation and thus, He provides, in grace, a simple solution to the believer's struggle. Just like the unbeliever had to let God bathe him from the condemnation of sin at the moment of salvation by grace through faith alone in Christ's work alone, the believer must also allow God to wash his feet when in need. This is why being consistent in the intake of Bible doctrine is important. Only with doctrine in his soul can the believer recognizes more subtle forms of sin.

Once saved, God wants us to be in fellowship at all times. When we break it, all we have to do is apply 1 John 1:9. Broken fellowship means that we cannot come into God's clean house because we have dirty feet. Only inside God's house can we access all of our provisions. Outside of God's house, we are like

runaways living on the street; we have access to nothing. Examples of provisions that are only accessible in God's house (fellowship) are things like answered prayer, understanding the meaning of Bible doctrine, and all of the ministries of the Holy Spirit in the believer's life (see clockwork chart in this book).

Without fellowship, it is impossible to understand the true and deep meaning of scripture. Because God has gifted all humans with intelligence, a person can understand some things from scripture even if he is not in fellowship. However, in order to fully grasp the intended meaning of scripture to the point where it becomes digested, metabolized and set apart to one's soul, a person must be a born-again believer, be in fellowship and fully depend upon God's Holy Spirit to make sense of the doctrine. The Holy Spirit assumes many functions in the life of the believer such as guiding him to the truth (God's word) and illuminating him to the deep meaning of God's word, which He keeps a secret from the unbeliever and the carnal believer (1 Corinthians 2:14).

Many passages of scripture like Romans 8:4 and Galatians 5:16 speak of walking by means of the Spirit. This means staying in the house of God with clean feet. However, a child can decide to not actively take part of what's going on in the house. In the house (fellowship), the believer has access to all of his provisions (to know more about these provisions, please order a free copy of *The Divine Works of Grace* at www.graceatlanta.org). Nevertheless, the believer can choose to use these provisions or to ignore them. His malleability will influence the degree of controlling influence (filling) the Holy Spirit has over his soul while in the house. The less malleable, the less the controlling influence and the faster the believer will end up back into carnality with dirty feet. The degree of malleability to God's will for your life, when in fellowship, is directly related to how successful you will be in walking by means of the Spirit and not fulfilling the desires of the flesh. It is impossible for us to say no to sin by ourselves. God give us His strength which requires being in the house and malleable to receiving it.

Just like runaways, many believers run away from God's house if they don't like their Father's will for their lives. Like any caring parent, God will pursue his runaway children. He does so through discipline (Hebrews 12:5-11). God's discipline is very gradual and is designed to encourage the believer to confess his sins and be restored to fellowship (Revelations 3:20). The more the child rebels and refuses to confess his sins, the more God will increase the discipline. If death is the only way the child will be restored to fellowship, then God will bring the child home and that child will have forfeited countless rewards that

God wanted to give him during his earthly life. This is called the sin unto death. Scripture tells us that a believer who engages in communion while in broken fellowship; brings upon him a great deal of unnecessary suffering, even possible death (1 Corinthians 11:28-30). Many Christians do not realize that the main reason why they experience suffering is broken fellowship and engaging in communion while in that state of broken fellowship. Even through they have logged thousands of hours of Bible class, they are unable to apply doctrine to their lives in a time of adversity because they have never been in fellowship for more than two seconds at a time. Only in fellowship can one understand scripture and how it must be applied.

To summarize, the believer must maximize his time in fellowship throughout his life. This does not mean confessing when there is nothing to confess. However, when in doubt, there is no harm in confessing sins that you regularly commit. For example, after examining yourself prior to communion, if still in doubt, you may confess that you generally commit many sins of pride or gossip for example. At that moment, if you indeed were in a state of broken fellowship, you will be restored. One must be careful not to become a compulsive confessor, who confesses out of paranoia. Bible doctrine in your soul is what will help you discern all things (Romans 12:2).

Fellowship is crucial because without it, the believer cannot access his provisions and thus cannot live the spiritual life as God intends it. This includes being able to understand scripture and how to apply it. In fellowship, the believer must also be malleable to God's work and will for his life if he wishes to experience a greater controlling influence (filling) from the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit's controlling influence is not about feelings and bouncing around speaking in weird words as many Christians sadly do today. God commands us to be filled at all times. The Greek text reveals that the command of Ephesians 5:18 is a continuous, unending one. Imagine bouncing around on the floor and speaking weird words 24/7. Every believer would die of a heart attack pretty quickly. Filling means being malleable to the Holy Spirit's work in your life by means of Bible doctrine in your soul. Filling is about being in fellowship and being malleable to what God wants you to do, wants you to be and to where He wants you to go.

In light of this, please make sure that you are in fellowship. If you are, you do not need to confess. If you are not, please apply 1 John 1:9 and then you will be able to access all of your provisions such as the Holy Spirit explaining Bible doctrine to your soul.

If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

(1John 1:6-9)