



**SOLUTION TO SIN  
PART ONE  
MISCONCEPTIONS**

In the coming new heaven and earth, believers will finally be delivered from sin's presence. In the meantime, sin is a reality for both the Christian and non-Christian alike. Unfortunately, there are a number of misunderstandings concerning sin that have led to erroneous teachings in the Church. Let's look at eight major misconceptions. Each one begins with a question that must be answered to gain clarity relating to the effect of sin on mankind.

[**Note:** Zane Hodges in his book *Harmony with God* provides critical insights to understanding the distinctions between (1) payment of sin and forgiveness of sin, (2) the "judicial issue" concerning Christ's sacrifice on the cross and the "personal issue" regarding forgiveness, and (3) repentance and forgiveness. These important biblical distinctions are key elements in the following material.]

**FIRST  
QUESTION**

*Must you believe in Christ to be saved from your sins?*

You have probably heard the statement: "You must believe in Christ to save you from your sins."<sup>1</sup> The *Saved-from-Your-Sins Teaching* is typically associated with "being saved (delivered) from the penalty of sin" at salvation. Confusion exists because of a *misunderstanding of man's problem*. We must remember that non-believers are spiritually dead and unable to please God (e.g., Eph 2:1, "dead in your offenses and sins"; e.g., Rom 8:8, "who are in the flesh cannot please God"). Alienated from God, they not only face physical death but also eternal death or separation from God. Non-believers' desperate need is life, eternal life, which comes through faith in Christ (e.g., John 3:16, "everyone who believes in Him...have eternal life; e.g., Eph 2:8, "saved through faith"). Notice the need is not to be delivered from sin, but to be delivered from death. Make no mistake being spiritually dead is the direct result of sin inherited from our ancestors, in particular Adam (e.g., Rom 5:12). In fact, "saved from the penalty of sin" at conversion would be a theologically correct statement if it was actually understood to refer to being "saved from spiritual death, a *result of inherited sinfulness*." In view of the fact that Jesus has already paid for the sin of all mankind and God is satisfied by Christ's sacrifice on our behalf (1 John 2:2, see *Question Two* below), it is *not* deliverance from our sins we need but rather deliverance from spiritual death.<sup>2</sup>

**SECOND  
QUESTION**

*When are sins paid for by Christ?*

Another familiar expression goes as follows: "Christ paid for all your sins (past, present and future) when you trusted Him for salvation." The *Paid-for-All-Your-Sins-at-Salvation Teaching* is supported by faulty illustrations. Consider the following:

Appearing before a judge in a courtroom, a teenager pleads guilty to the actions for which his is accused. Being guilty, the judge renders the verdict—the teenager must pay a fine for his misdeeds. But this young person doesn't have the resources to pay. At this point, the judge stands up, removes his robe, and comes down from behind the bench and pays the fine for the youngster. As the judge and the young person embrace one another, it becomes apparent that the judge is in fact the guilty teenager's father. Justice is served as the judge pays the penalty on behalf of his own son and thus satisfying the verdict's demand.

This is the situation every person faces when they realize their sinfulness. They stand guilty of their sin and the justice of a holy God demands the death penalty. However, Jesus left heaven to die in our stead, paying the penalty for all our sins when we trust in Him at salvation. Just like the earthly father/judge, the justice demanded by our Righteous Father/Judge is satisfied and a relationship between God and the new believer is established through faith.

Unfortunately the takeaway from this illustration is that the believer's sins are paid for at the moment of salvation. That conclusion leads to a *misunderstanding when sins are actually paid for by Christ*, resulting in a *Paid-for-All-Your-Sins-at-Salvation Teaching*. At the moment of new life we do not appropriate (take for one's own use) to ourselves Christ's payment for our sins. In fact as explained *Question One* above, *sin is not the problem at salvation*. Jesus took care of the sin problem 2,000 years ago. On the cross, Jesus paid for all our sins then and there. At that moment in time, our heavenly Father's justice was satisfied for the sin of the whole world, for believers and non-believers alike. First John 2:2 tell us that Christ "is the satisfaction for our sins; and not ours only, but also for the sins for the whole world." This is the very reason we can come to Christ for salvation. The sin barrier between a holy God and sinful man has been removed and a person can respond to Him in faith.<sup>3</sup>

### THIRD QUESTION

#### Legal Approach

#### *Are all paid for sins automatically forgiven at salvation?*

The typical perception of forgiveness of sins is derived from a *misunderstanding that all paid for sins are automatically forgiven sins at salvation* and is stated in this manner: "Christ paid for all my sins (past, present and future) at salvation and therefore He forgives all my sins (past, present and future) at salvation." This *Forgiven-All-Sins-at-Salvation Teaching* comes in two forms: (1) legally based and (2) positionally based.

Espousing the *legal approach*, one proponent writes,

Forgiveness is the *legal act* of God whereby He removes the charges that were held against the sinner because proper satisfaction or atonement for those sins has been made. . . . Forgiveness forever solves the problem of sin in the believer's life—*all sins past, present, and future* (Col. 2:13) (*italics added*).<sup>4</sup>

The legal approach indicates that a new believer is legally or judicially forgiven for *all* his sins (past, present and future) at the moment of salvation.

However, to intertwine Christ's payment for sin at the cross with God's forgiveness of sin is biblically unwarranted. There is a better way to understand forgiveness. Zane Hodges indicates that "payment for sin" and "forgiveness of sin" are two separate and distinct issues. He explains that while righteousness, becoming justified, is a legal or judicial issue; "*forgiveness is not a judicial issue between man and God, but a personal issue between man and God.*"<sup>5</sup>

When a person receives the gift of eternal life, a relationship with God is established through faith in Christ based on His work on the cross. All sins (past, present, and future) were judicially paid at the cross so that the justice of God was satisfied. Consequently, God judicially declares the believer legally righteous at the moment of salvation. Based upon that pronouncement, the believer's past sins are forgiven,<sup>6</sup> allowing for the establishment of harmony between him and God.<sup>7</sup> Hodges explains, "Since God's judicial demands against sin have been met, the cross makes possible the repair of the *personal barrier* between sinful men and a holy God."<sup>8</sup> The barrier of hostility between the believer and God caused by sin is repaired through the reception of forgiveness at salvation. As a result, "God and man can have fellowship with each other."<sup>9</sup>

Positional  
Approach

The *positional approach* believes “[forgiveness] is a positional truth like justification and redemption,” linking “forgiveness with justification through faith.”<sup>10</sup> This perspective’s support also comes from Colossians 2:13: “[Christ] made you live together with Him, having forgiven us all our wrongdoings (sins).” The “all sins” in their argument is believed to refer to all (past, present, and future) sins, being forgiven positionally at salvation. Their reasoning is that “all” sins “include even future sins because all the believer’s sins were future when Jesus died on the cross.”<sup>11</sup>

While it is true that Christians are positionally justified (being declared righteous in the sight of God), believers are in turn out of gratitude expected to walk in obedience, experiencing righteous living. This is same manner in which James explained that Abraham was justified in two ways (Jam 2:21-24): *positionally by faith* and *experientially by works* (see *Hold Fast*, 144-46; *Escape*, 14-16). Abraham was justified positionally at salvation and experientially in his obedient walk. Abraham’s walk reflected his standing with God. However, the rub comes when one tries to apply a positional standing to forgiveness since no text teaches positional forgiveness of sin. Yet, one proponent erroneously defends “positional forgiveness” using John 13 when Christ made a distinction between a “complete cleansing” (“bath”) and the “washing of feet.”<sup>12</sup> On that occasion, however, the central teaching concerns “loving service” and not forgiveness.<sup>13</sup> While there are parallels between cleansing of sin in one’s daily walk (1 John 1) and the necessity of washing dirty feet (John 13), notice that “forgiving” and “cleansing” are entirely different concepts in 1 John 1:9: “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous, so that He will *forgive* us our sins and *cleanse* us from all unrighteousness” (italics added). Consequently, to overlay positional (“bath”) and experiential (“washings”) forgiveness teaching onto John 13 is biblically unwarranted. It is particularly egregious to infer that the “bath” of John 13:10 refers to forgiveness, since “bath” in that context obviously has to do with justification, being declared completely righteous, not forgiveness.

Whether from the *legal approach* or the *positional approach*, both assume “forgiven us all our wrongdoings” (Col 2:13) refers to past, present and future sins at salvation. Remember they believe “if all sin has been paid for, they are all automatically forgiven.”

Better  
Approach

There is a *better approach* to understand forgiveness of sin, pointing out two distinctions. *First*, payment of sin is distinguished from forgiveness of sin. Christ accomplished the former on the cross 2,000 years ago. The latter is experienced throughout one’s Christian’s life. *Second*, forgiveness of sin is distinguished in relation to the time in which sin is experienced in the life of the Christian. While Colossians 2:13 does address forgiveness of sin, “[Christ] made you live together with Him, having forgiven us *all our sins*” (italics added), the “all sins” does not necessarily refer to all sins (past, present, and future) being forgiven at salvation. In fact, no text actually clarifies the extent of forgiveness at salvation. Whenever faith, the basis of justification, and forgiveness are linked at salvation (see Luke 5:20; 7:48-50; Acts 10:43; 26:18), the scope of forgiveness is not indicated.<sup>14</sup> Consequently, even though “all” indicates comprehensiveness, it becomes a *theological conclusion* as to the actual extent of forgiveness. Unless one’s position (*legal* or *positional*) mandates that “all paid for sin must automatically be forgiven,” the “all” of Colossians 2:13 simply refers only to a person’s “past sins” up to the point of salvation. Thereafter, the 1 John 1:9 principle comes into play, addressing forgiving “present and future” sin in daily living. In so doing, the better approach makes a distinction between *forgiveness of past sins (relationship forgiveness) at salvation* and *forgiveness of present and future sins (fellowship forgiveness) in one’s daily walk*.<sup>15</sup>

Notice the *better position* does not require Colossians 2:13 to refer to forgiveness of a person’s present, and future sins at salvation. In so doing, it also does not require the identical sin to be forgiven twice: once at salvation and then again in the Christian life when sin is confessed. A *forgiving-the-already-forgiven-sin teaching* is the required outcome of both the legal and positional positions. This theological dilemma of *double-forgiveness* is addressed in *Question Four*.

*Is it necessary for sin to be forgiven twice?*

While Christ’s substitutionary death provided the payment for the sin of the whole world and all sins are fully paid, a person remains spiritually dead until he believes in Christ alone for eternal life. At that point of belief, a person is declared righteous, establishing a *relationship*

FOURTH  
QUESTION

between God and new believer. But in order to experience *fellowship* with Christ, those sins of the person for which Christ died must be forgiven in order for the hostility between the believer and God can be removed. Notice that Peter linked forgiveness and faith at regeneration when he wrote, “through His [Christ’s] name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins” (Acts 10:43). Consequently, at salvation sins are forgiven and fellowship with God becomes a reality. A state of harmony and fellowship between the believer and God is established. Notice, however, that the continuation of the believer’s fellowship with Christ is totally dependent on the believer’s obedience (e.g., 1 John 1). Any sin must be confessed in order for fellowship not to be interrupted (see article *Critical Concept #4—Insight to 1 John 1:3-2:2*).

Inherent in both the *legal* and *positional approaches* (see *Question Three*) is the understanding that *a paid for sin is a forgiven sin*, requiring the forgiveness of past, present, and future sins at salvation. Consequently, fellowship is experienced at salvation since a relationship has been established and forgiveness is received from God. But then a problem arises when the believer sins in his daily walk with the Lord. The believer can continue in fellowship with God by confessing, agreeing with God’s assessment, of those sins. As 1 John 1:9 states, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous, so that He will forgive us our sins.” Notice, however, in both the *legal* and *positional* view all sin was already forgiven when the person was saved. Why then does God need to forgive someone in his walk when He has already forgiven him the moment of belief? We are faced with a theological dilemma, requiring a *Forgiving-the-Already-Forgiven-Sin teaching*. This double-forgiveness teaching is the result of *misunderstanding that all paid for sins are automatically forgiven at salvation*, which requires the identical *sins to be forgiven twice*.

The *better approach* (see *Question Three*) conforms to the scriptural evidence, eliminating the dilemma of “double forgiveness.” Remember, to intertwine Christ’s payment for sin at the cross with God’s forgiveness of sin is biblically unwarranted. “Payment for sin” and “forgiveness of sin” are two separate and distinct issues.<sup>16</sup> All sins (past, present, and future) were paid at the cross so that the justice of God was satisfied. The believer is declared righteous at the moment of salvation and, based upon that pronouncement, the believer’s past sins alone are forgiven,<sup>17</sup> allowing for the establishment of harmony (the absence of hostility) or fellowship between himself and God. Maintaining that harmony depends on the believer. If the believer chooses to walk disobediently, 1 John 1:9 applies. Christian confesses, God forgives, and harmony is restored. This process continues until the believer dies or Christ returns. Making a distinction between forgiveness at salvation and forgiveness in daily walk is not only logical but also no other text contradicts this distinction in forgiveness. That is unless one imposes an unnecessary interpretation on Colossians 2:13. *Relationship forgiveness* (for past sins) at salvation is automatic as a result of faith in Christ for eternal life; while *fellowship forgiveness* (for present and future sins) in the Christian life is based on confession of sins by the Christian and provides an unhindered walk of fellowship experiences with Christ. Consequently, double forgiveness in the Christian walk is not supported biblically.

## FIFTH QUESTION

### *Do you need to ask God for forgiveness?*

Another familiar expression goes as follows: “You need to pray and ask God to forgive your sins.” This statement is based on a *misunderstanding that you must ask God for forgiveness*. This misconception leads *first* to an *Asking-for-Forgiveness-at-Salvation teaching* and *second* to an *Asking-for-Forgiveness-in-the-Christian-life Teaching*. Yet, neither concept is taught in the New Testament. Nevertheless, this teaching is cultivated in ordinary situations like when becoming aware of a dispute between her children a mother tells her son, “Never do that again! Now go tell your sister that you are sorry and ask for her forgiveness.” Notice, however, that while apology and possible compensation would be in order, a request for forgiveness is inappropriate and baseless. The offended person is under no obligation to forgive the offender until the offender puts right the issue. Nevertheless, the Scripture instructs Christians to forgive others even if the offender does not rectify the situation (e.g., Matt 18:21-22), since believers are to forgive others as Christ forgave them (Eph 4:32; Col 3:13). Of course, if a gracious person does forgive a wrongdoing even without restitution being made, it would be in a sense of entitlement for the offender to expect forgiveness by merely asking for it.<sup>18</sup> Consequently, forgiveness is usually the result of the offender rectifying the issue that produced contention between individuals.



## Non-Believers

When we come to the Scriptures, we find the remedy that results in God's forgiveness for the non-believer differs from the believer. In either case, "asking for forgiveness" is not the remedy.

*Non-believers* are not required to ask for forgiveness to be saved. The only prerequisite for salvation is to believe in Christ for everlasting life. Obviously when a person comes to the realization that he is spiritually separated from God and needs Christ as his Savior, his concern is not forgiveness of his sin but rather his need of a Savior, Who accepts him just the way he is. Everyone comes to Christ in the same manner because the sin barrier between God and men was addressed at the cross when the payment for the sin of the whole world was made and God's justice was fully satisfied. Nevertheless, the non-believer remains spiritually dead until he believes in Christ and receives eternal life and forgiveness of his past sins (e.g., Col 2:13). While the new believer may thank God for forgiving his sin, he certainly does not ask for forgiveness. Rather, forgiveness is graciously granted not as a result of a request but rather due to faith in Christ for eternal life.

## Believers

As a consequence of faith, the new believer not only experiences the establishment of a *relationship* with God but also the reality of experiencing *fellowship* with God, since the hostility between the new believer and God has been repaired. The new believer now possesses "life" and can experience "abundant life" as he continues to walk in fellowship with Christ (e.g., John 10:10b; 1 John 1:7). Remember, the issue at salvation is not one's sinfulness but rather one's faith in Christ. *At salvation, God's forgiveness is one result of faith in Christ!*

Likewise, forgiveness for the *believer* in the Christian life is not the result of asking for it. Rather than asking for forgiveness, he is to confess (agree with God's assessment of his thoughts or actions) the sin, and God, who "is faithful and righteous, so that He will forgive us our sins" (1 John 1:9). Sin in the Christian walk is an act of renewed hostility toward God and forgiveness from God is the result of confession. Notice again that forgiveness by God must take place in order for fellowship with God to be a reality (1 John 1:6). On the other hand, without confession fellowship with Christ is forfeited. *In Christian living, God's forgiveness is the result of the confession of sin!*

God's forgiveness is the result of faith in Christ at salvation or confession of sin in the Christian walk. Whether a non-believer or a believer, asking for forgiveness is never the means by which forgiveness is received from God.

SIXTH  
QUESTION*Is confession of and repentance for sin the same thing for the Christian?*

While eternal life usually thought only to refer to a believer's continual presence with God at the end of time, that is not the only benefit of faith in Christ. A born-again person can experience that life now. The abundant life (John 10:10b) in this present world becomes a reality as we walk in fellowship with Christ. Yet, everyday choices a believer makes that are contrary to God's Word is an act of hostility toward God, resulting in a loss of fellowship with Christ.

In Romans 8, we learn that believers can "live with respect to the flesh" (Rom 8:13), meaning they are actually walking in the realm of death (see article *Critical Concept #1—Insight to Romans 8:1-14*). A living death is the separation from fellowship or communion with Christ because of sin.<sup>19</sup> "Walking in respect to the flesh" is to walk in darkness—to walk in sin outside the revealed light of God's truth (1 John 1:5-6) and forfeit fellowship with Christ (1 John 1:7-9).

For sinning believers to respond to God and walk in the light, John pointed out two requirements: *confession* (e.g., 1 John 1:9) and *repentance* (e.g., Rev. 2:5). As a result, many have come to the misunderstanding that confession and repentance are interchangeable ideas. Consequently, a *Confession-Equals-Repentance Teaching* is prevalent in the Church. While to confess a sin is to agree with God in His assessment of our sin, it has to do with keeping short-term accounts, immediately addressing one's improper behavior or thought life in order to continue in fellowship with Christ (see article *Critical Concept #4—Insight to 1 John 1:3-2:2*). On the other hand, repentance is a realization of prolonged waywardness from God, including the decision to turn from sin.<sup>20</sup> [see detail information on "repentance" see *Myth #8*, 105-16 and *Appendix B—Historical Context of Repentance*, 185-95 in *Hold Fast*.]

Confession and repentance remove the barrier of hostility between the believer and God, caused by sin.<sup>21</sup> When the believer confesses or repents, God forgives those sins and harmony between the believer and God is restored. No matter the length of time a wayward believer

strays, having his fellowship with God restored depends simply on the believer. God eagerly awaits for the errant child to repent so fellowship can be restored.

The parable of the Prodigal Son (or better still the parable of the Waiting Father; Luke 15:11-32) directly addresses the concept of repentance.<sup>22</sup> In the development of the parable, we first see the willful defiance of the youngest son. After some time away and realizing the futility of his foolish decision, the son decided to go home.<sup>23</sup> The passage tells that the father caught a glimpse of him some distance away. Rather than waiting for his wayward boy to make the long walk home, the father ran to meet him, smothering him with hugs and kisses. It is obvious that the father's first thought was, "He has returned to me."

Yes, it is a fact that for an extended time the son experienced a way of life in the "far country," poles apart from the one he had left. However, on his return, the father's major concern was not what the young man had done, but rather that he had chosen to come back. Amidst a flood of tears and an emotional outpouring of love for his son, the father's first words would have been, "Welcome home." If you are a parent, you can identify with him as you reflect on the times your own children have made foolish choices, maybe even left home and then returned.

Luke wrote that the son's return home was a matter of life and death. The father said, "This son of mine was dead and has come to life again" (Luke 15:24; cf. 32). Knowing a word's meaning and use in a particular context is critical, particularly the words "dead" and "life." Obviously, the father was not speaking of physical life and death. Rather the wording "has come to life again" indicates a prior life that preceded the son's travel to a far county, which Luke equated as being as good as dead. The point is that death in this passage signifies the loss of companionship or fellowship, the mutual sharing of life experiences by the son and the father. When the son was absent, common experiences were absent. Only after returning home could their intimacy be restored. To impose a singular-salvation interpretation on this passage is to fail to understand a significant portion of the text. An established relationship between father and son is understood. The variable is their fellowship—did it exist or not? When there are shared experiences with God, there is life, without them there is death, a living death absence of fellowship with Christ.

For the Christian, confession continues harmonious fellowship with Christ and repentance reestablishes it. They are distinguished by the amount of time in which the Christian has wandered from fellowship.

## SEVENTH QUESTION

### *Do people go to Hell because of sin?*

Many in the Church hold the misunderstanding that people go to Hell because of sin. Consequently, a *Sins-Keep-You-from-Heaven teaching* is prevalent in the Church. Nevertheless, we already established that "God's judicial demands against sin have been met" (see *Question Two*).<sup>24</sup> Having sent His Son to die on the cross, sin (past, present, and future) of every human being was paid for 2,000 years ago—believer and non-believer alike (1 John 2:2). Sin is not the issue regarding going to Heaven or Hell. Nevertheless, "the removal of sin as a barrier to God's saving grace does not automatically bring regeneration and eternal life."<sup>25</sup> A person remains spiritually dead (Eph 2:1; 4:18) until that one believes in Christ for eternal life (e.g., Eph 2:5, 8; John 3:16).

## FOLLOW-UP QUESTION

### *So why do people go the Hell?*

John wrote concerning the Great White Throne Judgment of unbelievers at the end of time (see Rev 20:12-15).

And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds (v 12).

Sin will not be the issue at this final judgment.<sup>26</sup> All sins have been paid for and God is satisfied through the death of His Son. The final judgment of the unsaved concerns their works.<sup>27</sup> They will be shown that nothing they did gained any merit before God. No one can earn his way to

heaven (Eph 2:9). No matter how good their works may have been, their names will not be found in the book of life, and they are destined to an eternal separation from God (Rev 20:15). The only means to heaven is God's life-gift, which is solely through simple faith in Jesus Christ.<sup>28</sup>

## EIGHTH QUESTION

### *Can Christians go to Heaven with unforgiven sins?*

Question Eight also relates to the *Sins-Keep-You-from-Heaven* teaching of *Question Seven* and also comes from a misunderstanding that people go to Hell because of sin.

The sacrificial death of Christ resulted in the full payment of all sin (past, present, and future) for every human being—believer and non-believer alike (1 John 2:2c). God's judicial demands were satisfied on the cross, making possible the establishment of a relationship with God through faith in Christ for eternal life (e.g., Eph 2:5, 8; John 3:16). At that moment forgiveness for past sins is received, enabling God and man to now experience fellowship with one another.<sup>29</sup>

Once a relationship with God takes place, the person's position in Christ is eternally secure. On the other hand, the believer's fellowship with Christ is based on obedience to God's Word (e.g., 1 John 1:5-10). While one's relationship with God does not change, fellowship between God and the believer are dependent on the believer's choices. When the Christian becomes aware of sin (present sins) in his life, unhindered fellowship is the result of confessing (agreeing with God's assessment) that sin. If confessed, the sin is forgiven and fellowship continues (1 John 1:9). If not, fellowship is forfeited.

While sin cannot negate a Christian's positional righteousness in Christ since all sin (past, present, and future) has been paid for on the cross, the believer's sins do result in forfeiture of fellowship with Christ. Consequently, Christians who are sinning at Christ's return or at their death will have unforgiven sin, yet their destiny is secure.

## FOLLOW-UP QUESTION

### *If Christians can go to Heaven with unforgiven sins, then Can Christians live anyway they want and still go to Heaven?*

Jesus taught that those who believed in Him for eternal life would never "come into judgment" (John 5:24), meaning the Great White Throne judgment of non-believers (see *Question Seven*). At a different judgment, the Judgment Seat of Christ, each believer's works, "whether good or bad," will be evaluated (Rom 14:10-12; 2 Cor 5:10). Like unbelievers, believers will be judged according to their works.<sup>30</sup> These are not works to prove that a believer merits salvation (Eph. 2:9). Rather, these are the "good works" of Ephesians 2:10, that result from walking in the light of truth. Consequently, John appeals to believers, "Now, little children, remain in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not draw back from Him in shame at His coming" (1 John 2:28).<sup>31</sup> The context has to do with the believer's shame if he disappoints Jesus by not continually abiding in Him by keeping His word. The return of Christ and the coming Judgment Seat of Christ is a strong motivation for faithfulness and obedience.

Differing from a future event, the writer of the Book of Hebrews speaks to the here and now. By straying from fellowship with Christ (e.g., 1 John 1:9), wayward believers can experience God's discipline, just as a father disciplines his own son out of love and for his good (Heb. 12:8-11). In 1 Corinthians 11:17-34, the taking of the Lord's Supper is addressed. There Paul warns the Church prior to participating in the Lord's Supper that each believer should examine his life in order that the elements not be taken in an "unworthy manner" (vv 27-28). Paul follows this warning with the consequence of taking the Lord's Supper unworthy, meaning with having sin in one's life: "For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number are asleep" (v 30). Notice that "asleep" in the context means "dead"—"dead" not in reference to being "spiritually dead" (Eph 2:1) or a "living death" (Rom 8:6-7) but rather to losing one's physical life (Acts 5:5, 10), a life that is shortened as a result of sin.

From a negative perspective those previous texts bring to light the "reap-what-you-sow principle" found Galatians 6:7. On the other hand, motivation is not always negative in the Scriptures. In fact, more of the time than not the Scriptures provide positive motivation based on our gratitude for God's graciousness to us. For example, in John 15 numerous benefits for "abiding in Christ" are pointed out: (1) "ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you" (v 7), (2) "prove to be [Christ's] disciples (v 8), (3) "abide in Christ's love" (v 10), and (4) "your

joy may be made full” (v 11). But the greatest motivation for faithful obedience is the love that God demonstrated in sending His son to die for us: “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:16). However, benefits for obedience not only occur in our present life but in the future as well. Remember, believers will be judged according to their works (2 Cor 5:10). Through good works Christians are storing up “treasures in heaven” (Matt 6:20), as they “do business” for Christ with a view to rewards (Luke 19:13), and looking forward to hearing Christ say, “Well done, good servant” (v 17).

With privilege comes responsibility and thus accountability. While believers by choice can wander away from God, they remain eternally secure just as the relationship between the Prodigal Son and his father could never have been severed (e.g., Luke 15:11-24). Nevertheless, like the Prodigal Son’s father, our heavenly Father eagerly awaits for the errant believer to return to fellowship with Him.



## Endnotes

1. A person is not saved or delivered from his sins when he believes in Christ. In fact, Christians will experience physical death because of inherited sinfulness, unless Christ returns before physical death occurs. Christians were dead *because* of their inherited sinfulness, but were made alive *by* God *through* faith (e.g., Eph 2:1-8). On man’s part, that change of status is through faith in Christ, the object, for eternal life, the promise (John 3:16). Additionally, the “saved from our sins” concept leads to an *Assurance Issue*. If a person’s concept is that he is “saved from all his sins” when he puts his faith in Christ, what happens when he sins? He then questions his salvation!
2. Spiritual death is rectified only by belief in Christ for life.
3. Zane Hodges, *The Epistles of John* (Irving, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 1999), 71.
4. Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology* (Chicago: Moody, 1989), 325, italics added. Enns further explains, “Forgiveness forever solves the problem of sin in the believer’s life—*all sins past, present, and future* (Col. 2:13). This is distinct from the daily cleansing from sin that is necessary to maintain fellowship with God (1 John 1:9).” Others who advocate this view: L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1939), 514 and John Murray, *Collected Writings of John Murray*, Vol 2 (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1977), 218-19.
5. Zane C. Hodges, *Harmony With God* (Dallas, TX: Redencion Viva, 2001), 72.
6. Henry Clarence Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 276.
7. Hodges, *Harmony With God*, 75.
8. *Ibid.*, 74 (italics his).
9. *Ibid.*
10. Charlie Bing, “Do Believers Need to Confess Their Sins for Forgiveness?,” *Grace Notes* #58, [www.GraceLife.org](http://www.GraceLife.org), 1.
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Ibid.*, 2.
13. The central teaching in John 13 given to the Twelve concerned love, which is to be demonstrated in service to others. Jesus “loved them” (v 1) and He was “going *back* to God” (v 3) set the stage for what comes next—He serves the Twelve. Having washed their feet, he asks, “Do you know what I have done for you?” (v 12). The answer: “I gave you an example, so that you also would do just as I did for you” (v 15) and He continues “If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them” (v 17). Then in verses 33, He says, “Little children, I am still with you a little longer...Where I am going, you cannot come.” At that point he again connects love and service:



I am giving you a new commandment, that you love one another; just as I have loved you [context being the example of washing their feet], that you also love one another (v 34).  
By this all *people* will know that you are My disciples: if you love one another (v 35).

The central teaching of John 13 is loving servanthood. It isn't about forgiveness! Yet while there is a parallel with 1 John 1:9, that is at best secondary to the overarching theme of "loving service" in John 13. Even in the interaction between Peter and Christ (vv 6-10) about how much washing is required, forgiveness is not the issue. Yet many assume that to be the case. Consequently, they superimpose forgiveness teaching on John 13. That is the reason a proponent writes,

The reference to bathing and complete cleansing is a reference to positional forgiveness, but the washing of feet pictures the ongoing necessity of forgiveness and cleansing from sins committed as a Christian (Bing, 2).

Granted the cleansing of sin in 1 John 1:9 can parallel washing the daily sins from feet in John 13. But then to infer that the "bath" of John 13:10 refers to forgiveness is certainly biblically unwarranted. Rather the "bath" of John 13 should be understood to refer to justification, being declared righteous. The context concerns the standing of His disciples, rather than associating "bath" with forgiveness of past, present, and future sins.

14. In addition, whenever "blood" (Matt 26:28; Eph 1:7; Heb 9:22) or "redemption" (Eph 1:7; Col 1:14) and forgiveness are linked at salvation, the extent of forgiveness is not indicated but also assumed to refer to past sins.
15. John's taught on "confession of sin" in 1 John in order that Christians would continue to walk in the light, thus keeping short accounts with God. His appeal was that the believer would immediately confess a sin when he or she became aware of it. In so doing, the Christian would continue to experience unbroken fellowship with Christ. On the other hand, "repentance of sin" for long-term wayward living refers to past sins during the Christian's walk as illustrate by the Prodigal Son (see *Escape*, 27-30; *Hold Fast*, 107-14).
16. Hodges, *Harmony With God*, 72, 74.
17. Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, 276.
18. Entitlement assumes having the right to forgiveness by merely requesting forgiveness from the offended person.
19. Death means separation. The context determines from what something or someone is separated. In a *temporal* context "death" refers to separation from shared experiences. In an *eternal* context "death" has to do with eternal separation from God.
20. Hodges, *The Epistles of John*, 63.  
While confession and repentance are similar in their meanings, the context must determine the interpretation. Zane Hodges suggests that the difference concerns the duration of sinful activity. "In John's usage, Christian repentance is appropriate when a pattern of sin is persisted in and needs to be changed (see Revelation 2:5, 16, 21, 22; 3:3, 19). In our text [1 John 1:9], John is talking about those who *discover* sin while in fellowship with God, not those who have wandered away from Him or have lost some previous spiritual attainment" (italics his).

Hodges, *Harmony With God*, 18.

In 1 John 1:9 ("If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness"), John provides the remedy for recognizing sin and maintaining fellowship.

In Revelation 2:5 ("Remember therefore from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you, and will remove your lampstand out of its place—unless you repent"), John urged believers who had wandered away or gone astray for some duration of time to repent.

21. Hodges, *Harmony With God*, 73.
22. The historical context of the Prodigal Son parable concerns the coming of the promised King and His offer of the promised kingdom to God's chosen people. The rebellious, covenant nation was being called back to God in preparation for the establishment of the kingdom as John the Baptist appeared announcing, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 3:2). The calling of the covenant nation to repent from its waywardness and turn again to God is the setting of the Baptist's and Christ's earthly ministry and the intent of Luke 15 as well. As such, Luke 15 concerns needed national repentance and individual trust in their Messiah, which leads to fellowship with God.

The concept of repentance must conform to its historical framework. This particularly is true for the major passage universally used in order to explain repentance—Luke 15. This familiar text contains three parables that build to a crescendo, moving from the lost sheep (vv 3-7), to the lost coin (vv 8-10), to the lost son (vv 11-32) [Dwight Pentecost, *The Words & Works of Jesus Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 333]. In Luke 15:1-2, the issue is the religious leaders' continual

- fixation on Christ's association with sinners, those for whom He has come to "call...to repentance" (5:32). Jesus' seeking-and-calling ministry was addressed primarily to the nation Israel, wanting them to repent and return again to their God. This is the intent of Luke 15. When something is lost and then found, whether a sheep or a coin or a son, it is cause for rejoicing (vv 7, 10, 22-24). [Each parable illustrates the character of God in reference to sinners versus that of the Pharisees. However, do not miss the point that the owners possessed both the sheep and coin before they were recovered and found. Also the father and son continued to have a relationship with one another before the restoration of fellowship occurred. The parables concern a restoration of what was once possessed. Seemingly the restoration of the covenant nation to fellowship with God is in view.] When a sinner repents and returns to his heavenly Father, joy in heaven is the result. The wayward son finally came to the realization that he had sinned against his father through his defiant and ungrateful behavior (v 18). The parallel between the rebellious nation and the unruly son is in view.
23. This son had not only squandered his wealth but, in fact, his life. Only as he realized that his financial resources were depleted did he reevaluate his squandered life and return to his father.
  24. Hodges, *Harmony with God*, 74.
  25. Hodges, *The Epistle of John*, 71.
  26. Hodges, *Harmony With God*, 69.
  27. Hodges, *The Epistles of John*, 71; and Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1986), 515.
  28. Hodges, *The Epistles of John*, 72.
  29. Hodges, *Harmony with God*, 72, 74.
  30. Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 512; Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, 351; and Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology* (Dallas, TX: Dallas Theological Seminary, 1948), 4:377.
  31. The phrase "remain in Him" does *not* refer to "a possible loss of salvation" but rather it refers to "continually to walk with Christ," which is the context of "fellowship" in 1 John 1 and "abiding" in John 15.