

## 12. Learning to Confess Our Sins to One Another

In our last topic, we saw that one of the ways that we show the love of Christ is by learning to have compassion one of another. Today, we will be looking at another key way that we as Christians show love to one another. James 5:16 says, “Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.” Here, we see that when we have committed a sin or a trespass against another Christian that we are to go to the brother or sister and confess our sin to that person. This is also a very important principle to teach our physical and spiritual children.

The word that is translated “trespasses” is used 23 times in the New Testament and is translated by the words “trespasses”, “offenses”, “sins”, or “fall”. Christ used the word three times in Matthew 6:14-15 where we read, “For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” It speaks of a sin or deviation from the truth.

Galatians 6:1 says, “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.” Here, we see that it speaks of a person that is caught in the very act of sin. When that happens, this verse also teaches that our goal is restoration of a brother not condemnation. Christ demonstrated this desire when He said to the woman caught in the act of adultery in John 8:10-11, “When Jesus had raised Himself up and saw no one but the woman, He said to her, ‘Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?’ She said, ‘No one, Lord.’ And Jesus said to her, ‘Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more.’” Here, we see that the goal of Christ was to restore the woman so that she could begin a new life.

However, today one of the greatest needs between Christians is the healing of relationships. Many Christians have created barriers between themselves and other Christians by their sin. As a result, there is no fellowship or meaningful communication between those Christians. The context of the verses leading up to James 5:16 show that the elders of the church are to be called to pray for a Christian that is sick. Then, it goes on to tell us to confess our trespasses to one another. This is an indication that some of the sickness that Christians experience is the result of unconfessed sin and conflicts between Christians. As a result, the context shows that confession of sin can lead to both physical and spiritual healing as well as the restoration of relationships. We want to show our children how to heal broken relationships.

Christ gave a pattern for the healing of relationships that have been broken by sin in Luke 17:3-4 where we read, “Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, ‘I repent,’ you shall forgive him.” In these verses, we see that we are to pay attention to what we do. We are to try and avoid anything that might cause broken relationships. However, we cannot control what others do so it is possible for another person to sin against us and break a relationship. In that case, Christ said this is what we are to do to try and heal that relationship.

We want to show our children the importance of going to a brother or sister that has sinned against us with the goal of healing the relationship and not to condemn the person. To heal the relationship, we see that we are to rebuke the brother or sister. This means that we talk directly to the person alone and not tell others what has happened. To “rebuke” means *to tell the person the sin that the person has committed and tell how that sin has affected our relationship with that person*. As we are talking to the person, Galatians 6:1, quoted above, says that our goal is to restore such a person with a spirit of gentleness so that we will not be tempted to sin ourselves.

Next, Christ told us what we are to do if the person repents of the thing that the person has said or done. Christ said that if the person repents, we are to forgive the person. To “repent” means *to have a change of mind about the thing that a person has said or done*. It means that a person realizes that he or she has done wrong and has changed their mind about that word or action and asks to be forgiven. Christ said that our part is to forgive that person. To “forgive” means *to let go of that sin*. When we let go of that sin, it means that we will no longer hold that sin against the person.

In fact, Luke 17:4 points out the fact that we are to continue to forgive the person even if that person sins against us seven times in one day. Each time the person sins against us we are to go again to that person and tell how the new sin has affected our relationship with that person. As we did the first time, we are to restore such a person in gentleness. This means that we will also follow the instructions of Ephesians 4:15 where we are told to speak the truth in love. Regardless of how many times a person sins against us, we are to make it our goal to restore the relationship. As our physical and spiritual children see us put this principle into practice in our actions, they will learn from our example the importance of restoring relationships.

However, James 5:16 talks about something even more personal than when a person has sinned against us. James 5:16 talks about what we are to do when we have committed sin against someone else. That verse says, “Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.” When we have committed a trespass against another person, we are not to wait for them to come to us and rebuke us for our sin. Instead, we are to go to that person or persons and confess that we have committed sin against that person or persons.

As parents, there are times when we speak or do things against our children that are sin. Ephesians 6:4 says, “And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.” When we realize that we have sinned against them, we need to go to our children and ask them to forgive us for what we have said or done. In this way, we are showing them by our example the importance of going to others when we have sinned and not waiting for them to come to us. In this way, our children learn to confess their sins when they sin against others.

James 5:16 tells us to do a second thing when we have confessed our sins. We see that once we have confessed our sins, we are to pray for one another. One of the most powerful ways we can

show our love for our children is to confess that what we said or did was a sin against them and then ask that child or children to pray for us. As our children pray for us, they realize that we have humbled ourselves before them. We will be modeling for our children the meaning of Philippians 2:3 which says, “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.” They will realize the importance of setting aside all pride and confessing their sins when they sin against others.

This can also be a time to encourage our physical and spiritual children to pray for us every day and ask the Lord to give us His strength to be a godly example for them. This helps them to realize that we need the prayers of others just as they need the prayers of others. We can even suggest that they use a passage like Ephesians 3:16-19 which gives five specific things that they can pray for us. Those verses say, “That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.” Help your children realize that they can pray:

1. That Christ would strengthen you with might through His Spirit in the inner man.
2. That Christ would dwell in your heart by faith.
3. That you would be rooted and grounded in love.
4. That you would know the love of Christ that passes knowledge.
5. That you would be filled with all of the fullness of God.

We see the results when we confess our trespasses to one another and pray for one another. James 5:16 says that we will be healed. This confession and prayer for one another will certainly heal our relationships with one another and remove those sins that have been a hindrance to our fellowship together. The context shows that such confession and prayer for one another may even bring emotional or physical healing to one another. 1 Corinthians 11:28-30 says, “But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep.” These verses remind us that unconfessed sin can lead to emotional weakness or physical sickness and even physical death.

The Lord gives us a great privilege to impact the lives of both our physical and spiritual children as we set an example by confessing our sins to one another and praying for one another so that any relationships may be healed. James 5:16 promises us that the effective, fervent prayer of a righteous person accomplishes much. May the Lord richly bless you as you show love to your physical and spiritual children by modeling for them how their prayers can have a great impact even in your life.