

Eddie Hyatt: Whatever Became of Sin?

A mature Christian friend shared how that, in her younger days, she became filled with such bitterness toward her verbally abusive husband that she decided to murder him. He was an unbeliever and she said God told her not to marry him but she did anyway. The honeymoon was hardly over before he began to vehemently oppose her and her Christian faith.

As the months passed and he became more antagonistic and verbally abusive, the anger and bitterness built in her heart until she finally made plans to kill him in his sleep and then dispose of the body. Of course, she told no one of her plan.

During this time she went to a small revival type meeting with some friends, who probably sensing her struggle, urged her to go forward and receive prayer. She did so but when the minister started to lay his hands on her and pray he suddenly withdrew. He was silent for a moment and then said, "Sister I can't pray for you; you have murder in your heart."

My friend burst into tears and blurted out, "Yes I want to kill my husband." At that moment the intense anger and bitterness lifted. The confession of her sin brought immediate relief and she was able to deal with the situation in a more appropriate and Christian manner. She is a vibrant follower of Jesus today.

A Secular Psychiatrist Gets It

The well-known psychiatrist Dr. Karl Menninger, who was no evangelical Christian, wrote a book in 1973 called *Whatever Became of Sin*. In this book Menninger, who taught in the Harvard Medical School before founding the Menninger Clinic in Topeka, Kansas, discussed the tendency in psychiatry and society to do away with the concept of sin and to exonerate

individuals of personal responsibility by shifting the blame for their bad behavior (sin) to others, *i.e.*, to parents, circumstances and society.

Menninger considered this to be a harmful trend and said that what many psychiatric patients really need is an old fashioned mourner's bench where they can open their hearts and pour out their fears and their sins to God. He also argued that by terming "sin" as a mere "symptom" or "disease," the behavior is defined downward removing any sense of personal guilt and responsibility. This, in turn, reduces any real hope for change and recovery because mental health and moral health go hand in hand.

Since the publication of his book over forty years ago, our politically-correct society has taken this trend of banning "sin" to places Menninger probably could not have imagined, including church.

The Truth About 1 John 1:9

I agree with those today who say that we as Christians should live in a consciousness of who we are in Christ and of the righteousness that has been given us through faith in Him. I do not, however, agree with those who insist there is no place for a believer confessing his/her sins. Such teaching is neither biblical nor reasonable and robs individuals, like my friend, of the relief and forgiveness that comes through walking in the light and confessing our sins to God.

Those who insist that believers do not need to confess their sins argue that 1 John 1:9 does not apply to believers because it was written to Gnostics. The passage reads, *If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* Such a claim, however, is like a sieve that does not hold water for at least three reasons.

First of all, there is no evidence of an identifiable movement

known as Gnosticism or people called Gnostics when John wrote this letter. The earliest evidence for a Gnostic movement is not until the latter part of the second century in the writings of the church father, Irenaeus, in his book *Against Heresies*.

Second, John is obviously addressing believers in this passage for he uses first person plural pronouns (we and us) throughout the letter. If he were addressing outsiders he would have used the third person plural, *i.e.*, they and them. Also John, throughout this letter, addresses its recipients as *my little children* and this is further evidence that he is addressing fellow believers. The idea that he addresses Gnostics in the first chapter and then switches to addressing Christians is, to me, playing fast and loose with the text.

Third, from the time of its composition, 1 John was recognized as a letter to Christians. Polycarp, a disciple of John and bishop of Smyrna, quotes 1 John 4:3 and uses it to warn the church in Philippi to beware of false teachers who deny that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh. Indeed, it is obvious that 1 John was written, not as an evangelistic letter to nonbelievers, but as a letter to warn the faithful to beware of false teachers.

The Oxford Companion to the Bible, edited by the eminent New Testament scholar, Dr. Bruce Metzger, expresses the prevailing view of both history and contemporary New Testament scholarship regarding this letter. It states that 1 John was written to Christians, "evidently addressed to a particular church situation in which problems of belief and behavior were being encountered."

In summary, this letter bears all the marks of a standard apostolic letter, addressed to believers and meant to be read in their public assemblies.

The Importance of a Two-Fold Confession

Very early in my walk with the Lord I learned the importance of a two-fold confession: (1) confessing the “position” that is mine through the salvation God has accomplished for me in Christ, and (2) confessing my “condition” as I walk out this salvation He has provided for me. John calls this *walking in the light* (1 John 1:7).

This lesson began one day when I sensed the Lord speak in my heart to do something that I found intimidating. I struggled for weeks but would not confess that I was afraid. My confession was, “God, I am your man and you just make clear that this is what you want me to do and I will do it.” Do you see the pride in that confession? And all the time my heart was afraid and in turmoil.

One day I decided to come out of denial and have an honest conversation with God. I got down on my knees and said, “God, I am afraid to do this.” As soon as those words were out of my mouth the heaviness lifted and my soul became settled and peaceful for the first time in weeks. I went on to say, “But I know that if this is what you want me to do, you will give me the strength and courage to do it.”

I waited for a couple of days and then obeyed the word He had spoken to me some weeks before. I went to a family in the community and told them what God had put in my heart. It resulted in an entire family coming to Christ, and I learned a very important lesson about the importance of a two-fold confession.

A Key to True Revival

Scripture, personal experience and history is replete with examples of God’s power being displayed when Christians walked in the light and admitted that they had sinned. In his *Autobiography* Charles Finney tells of one congregation that was so convicted of their “condition” that the leaders drew up a public confession that was signed by all the adult

members and then read in public.

The confession asked forgiveness from God and the community for their selfish living and for not being true witnesses of Jesus Christ in their community. When it was read publicly it had a powerful effect on the church and the entire community, and resulted in many turning to Christ.

Now, there is no question that our witness must be centered in Jesus. We must preach Christ and what He has accomplished for the human race. We must, however, also be open to the convicting power of the Holy Spirit in our midst and be willing to confess the sins that He makes known to us.

This was the message of Jesus to the lukewarm church of Laodicea when He said, *As many as I love, I rebuke and discipline. Therefore be zealous and repent.* (Revelation 3:19). Only when we are open to the disciplining, convicting work of the Holy Spirit in our midst will we see the needed change and true revival in the churches of America. As Peter said in 1 Peter 4:17, *“For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?”*

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