

MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR
MARRIAGE

Session 2 | *Expectations & Conflict in Marriage*

1. The _____ of Conflict in Marriage (James 4:1-3)

_____ → _____ → _____ → _____ → _____ → _____¹
"I wish" "I will" "I must" "You Should" "You didn't" "Because you didn't
now I will/won't..."

2. The _____ of Conflict in Marriage (Rom. 1:22-25, Ezek. 14:1-8)

3. The _____ of Conflict in Marriage (Matt. 7:3-5)

4. The _____ for Conflict in Marriage (James 4:6-10, Phil. 2:2-4)

¹ Adapted from *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands* by Paul Tripp and *Gospel Treason* by Brad Bigney

Drawing Out the Purposes of the Heart

Adapted from the Journal of Biblical Counseling, fall, 1996

Instructions: The Scriptures give us many windows into the heart and what functionally rules it. Here are a few examples. These questions are meant to help you examine personal heart themes of thought, motive, and desire so that you can begin to understand the true treasures of your heart. They will also help you to begin to see how these desires have shaped the way you have responded to God, others, and the situations of life.

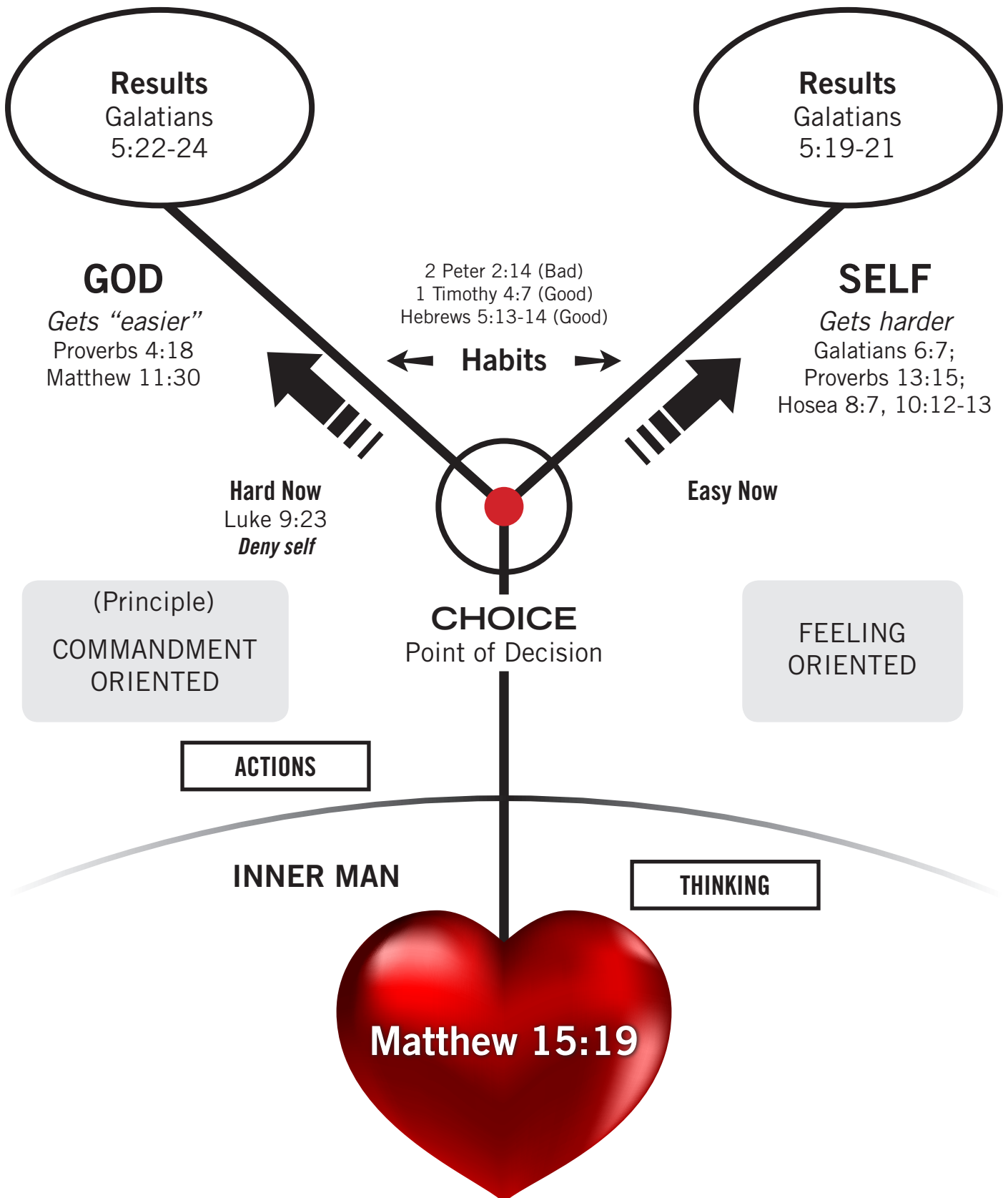
1. When do you tend to experience fear, worry, or anxiety (Matthew 6:19-34)?
2. Where have you struggled with disappointment (Proverbs 13:12, 19)?
3. In what situations do you struggle with anger (James 4:1-2; Proverbs 11:23)?
4. Where do you encounter problems in relationships (James 4:1-10)?
5. What are the situations of life that you find particularly difficult (1 Corinthians 10:13-14)?
6. What things do you find yourself seeking to avoid?
7. Where have you experienced regular problems in your relationship to the Lord?
8. In what situations do you tend to doubt the truths of Scriptures?
9. What is a good relationship? What do you expect of others?
10. In what type of situations do you struggle with bitterness?
11. Where have you struggled with regret, being tempted to say, "If only..."?
12. In what experiences from the past do you have a hard time letting go?
13. Where do you tend to struggle with envy? What do you find yourself wanting that others have and you don't?
14. Whose opinion really matters to you?

Fill in the blanks:

1. Life would be all right if _____?
2. I really wish I had _____?
3. I need _____?

2 Corinthians 5:9

Only two choices on the shelf: pleasing GOD or pleasing self



DISCIPLESHIP "Y" DIAGRAM
(B i b l i c a l C o u n s e l i n g)

Repentance and Confession

Our spiritual forefathers rarely mentioned repentance and confession separately as means of grace because they were considered as essential elements of prayer. In other words, any talk of prayer as a means of grace would have naturally included repentance and confession. Nevertheless, because there is so much misunderstanding and neglect in the contemporary church with regard to repentance and confession, I feel the need to write on them separately as means of grace.

In contemporary culture and in much of evangelicalism, repentance and confession of sin are often looked upon adversely, or at best as necessary evils. Modern psychology has taught us to protect our egos at all cost, even if we must deny reality or lie to each other and ourselves. To make matters worse, much evangelical preaching seems designed to leave every stone unturned so that the light of the Scriptures never exposes our wrongdoing or makes us uncomfortable. We seem dead set on maintaining the status quo of "I'm OK... You're OK," even though all the evidence points to the contrary. As a result, our conscience is afflicted by a gnawing sense of guilt.

our peace is overruled by a deep and abiding sense of estrangement from God, and victory is swallowed up by near-perpetual defeat.

What is the remedy for this frequent malady that besets the Christian? As is often the case, the medicine we need is the very medicine we are most inclined to avoid—repentance and confession! Viewed through the eyes of the world, the carnal, and the uninstructed, repentance and confession are demeaning and destructive. Viewed biblically, they are a gift from God, a means of grace that leads to restoration, peace, and joy.

If we are to walk with Christ with the confidence and joy that He intends, we must turn from the world's ideologies and embrace the cure that is found in the Scriptures. The opposing potions of the world and the Word cannot be mixed and prescribed together, except to the patient's harm. We must reject the remedies of the world that would have us merely cover the festering wound of sin. We must embrace the remedy of the Word that tells us to remove the scab and cleanse the wound.

Repentance

In the New Testament, the word "repent" is most frequently translated from the Greek verb *metanoeó*, which is constructed from the verb *noéo* (to perceive or understand) and the preposition *meta* which denotes change. Repentance, therefore, involves a radical change in one's perception of things or in one's view of reality itself. In the Scriptures, this change of mind is never confined to the intellect, but has an equally radical effect upon the emotions and will.

A Hebrew term that adds to our understanding of repentance is the verb *nacham*. It is derived from a root which reflects the idea of "breathing deeply," communicating the physical display of one's feelings, such as sorrow, regret, or contrition.¹ Thus, biblical repentance not only involves a change of mind regarding sin but also a genuine sorrow for sin.

The slightest true comprehension of our sinfulness and guilt will lead to genuine sorrow, shame, and even a healthy hatred or loathing of our sin and our flesh. Ezra the scribe declared that he was "ashamed and humiliated to lift up" his face to God because of Israel's sins (Ezra 9:5-6). The prophet Jeremiah cried out, "We lie down in our shame, and our reproach covers us. For we have sinned against the Lord our God" (Jer. 3:25). The prophet Ezekiel was even so bold as to declare that when disobedient Israel finally recognized the heinous nature of its sin against the Lord, it would loathe itself in its own sight for all the evil things that it had done (Ezek. 20:43). Finally, writing to the believers in Rome, the apostle Paul noted that they were still ashamed of the things that they had done prior to their conversion (Rom. 6:21). Such talk seems out of place in a world and an evangelical community that are overrun with the psychology of self-esteem. Nevertheless, sorrow, shame, and self-hatred are biblical truths and an essential part of genuine repentance in either Testament.

1. *Theological Workbook of the Old Testament*, R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., Bruce K. Waltke (Chicago: Moody, 1980), 2:570.

To understand repentance we must consider it from two perspectives—repentance unto salvation at the moment of our conversion and ongoing repentance unto sanctification throughout the full course of the Christian life. At the moment of our conversion, the Holy Spirit regenerated our hearts, illuminated our minds, and exposed our error and sin by a revelation of divine truth. As a result of this divine work, our mind was changed and our view of reality was radically altered—especially with regard to God, self, sin, and the way of salvation. We turned from unbelief and autonomy to faith and submission to the will of God. After conversion, the Holy Spirit continues the work of repentance by continuing to reveal divine truth to us, so that with greater and greater clarity we will see God's character and see ourselves in ever-increasing light. And it is in this light that our sins are exposed and we are brought to repentance and confession. This is what many of the old school theologians and preachers referred to as the "Calvary Road,"² and it is the only way to freedom and joy!

To understand how repentance and confession lead to life we must first understand that sin of all kinds is a deadly malady to the Christian life. It pollutes,³ enslaves,⁴

2. The book *The Calvary Road* by Roy Hession (Fort Washington, Pa.: Christian Literature Crusade, 1990) is a wonderful work on the topic of biblical repentance that leads to life, joy, and greater sanctification.

3. "But we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags" (Isa. 64:6). "And you have polluted the land with your harlotries and your wickedness" (Jer. 3:2).

4. "Jesus answered them, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin'" (John 8:34). "Do you not know that to

makes miserable, and eventually kills everything it touches.⁵ Most of all, it hinders the believer's fellowship with God and usefulness to God. While it is a truth worthy of all acceptance that nothing can separate the believer from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 8:39), it is equally true that sin hinders earthly communion with God. The psalmist cried out, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear" (Ps. 66:18). The prophet Isaiah boldly declared to wayward Israel: "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear" (Isa. 59:1-2).

A cursory view of the defiling and deadly nature of sin in the believer's life and its effect on our communion with God should prompt us to seek a quick and worthy remedy. It should make us willing to administer that remedy to ourselves over and over again throughout the full course of our lives. That remedy is repentance and it is most effective when we saturate our minds with the Scriptures, have fellowship with a biblical local church, and are determined to deal radically with sin when it is exposed.

First, we become sensitive to our sin and our need of repentance as we saturate our lives in the Word of God.

whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness" (Rom. 6:16).

5. "Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death" (James 1:15).

As David said, there is a direct connection between the filling of the heart with the Word of God and its ability to flee sin (Ps. 119:11). Here we must acknowledge the absolute essentiality of the Word of God in making the believer increasingly sensitive to sin. Although conviction of sin is the work of the Holy Spirit (John 16:8), the sword or scalpel that the Spirit wields to cut the heart is the Word of God. Again, we must reiterate what was stated earlier. The more we see of God's light through our study of the Word, the more we will see ourselves in that light. As we grow in the Word, sins that were previously hidden are exposed and we learn to see sin as God sees it: to hate it with a holy passion, and to reject it without compromise. The Spirit's work in exposing the hidden sin in our lives may often be very painful, gut-wrenching, and heartbreaking, but it is the sure route to a cure. A person who is unaware of the cancer lying within them may be quite happy in their ignorance, but it is a deadly ignorance that will bring certain death. However, the patient who is made aware of his or her cancer may mourn for a season, but the news that breaks their heart ultimately saves their life.

Second, we become sensitive to our sin and our need of repentance as we live out our Christian lives in fellowship with genuine believers in a visible local church. This is often overlooked and even neglected in this present generation. Nevertheless, it is absolutely essential. God has determined that each believer should grow in the context of godly elders, faithful teachers, and the fellowship of the saints. The Old Testament affirms, "As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance

of his friend" (Prov. 27:17). The New Testament is even more explicit. The apostle Paul writes that one of the primary tasks of Christ's ministers is to "Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching" (2 Tim. 4:2). This kind of ministry is not limited to Christ's ministers, but extends to the entire congregation. Again, Paul writes to the church in Colossae, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" (Col. 3:16). With this the writer of Hebrews concurs: "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching" (Heb. 10:23-25).

If we hold to the inspiration, inerrancy, and sufficiency of the Scriptures, we cannot entertain for a single moment that we can live the Christian life in its fullness or attain to the maturity that pleases God apart from our consistent and practical participation in a biblical local church. There we will find encouragement to press on, direction in the way that we should walk, correction when we have erred or strayed, and discipline in the event that our hearts have become hard and our necks stiff. If this cannot be found in your church, then your church is simply not biblical!

Third, once sin is exposed by the Spirit through the Word, it must be dealt with severely, radically, and without excuse or delay. Jesus declared to His disciples, "If

your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell" (Matt. 5:29-30). This is of course a hyperbole,⁶ but it correctly and powerfully communicates how we must deal with our sin once it is revealed—we must renounce it without hesitation, compromise, or excuse. We must execute swift judgment upon it, driving the Word of God through its very heart, and casting it from us with great contempt.

Confession of Sin⁷

It is extremely important to understand that genuine repentance not only involves an inward sorrow of the heart and a genuine turning from sin, but it also includes an open confession that God's opinion of us is true and His verdict is just: *we have sinned!* In other words, biblical repentance always involves an owning up to what we have done.

This truth runs contrary to our contemporary culture. We are a self-excusing and self-justifying people who are never truly at fault, but always victims of some malicious,

6. Hyperbole: An exaggerated statement that is not meant to be taken literally, but is intended to emphasize the importance of the truth being communicated.

7. Some content in this section has been adapted from Paul Washer, *The Gospel Call and True Conversion* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2013), 1-21.

often nameless, power beyond our control. We find or invent the cleverest means of attributing our sins to anything or anyone outside of ourselves. We self-righteously point the finger at society, education, upbringing, or circumstance, and are appalled and even angered at the slightest suggestion that guilt should be laid at our feet. Nevertheless, at the moment of conversion, this opinion of the age is radically altered. For the first time in our lives we turn our indicting finger back upon ourselves and honestly own up to the wrong that we have done. Our mouths are shut and we see ourselves as accountable to God (Rom. 3:19). We offer no excuse and seek no avenue of escape except His mercy that is made possible through the vicarious suffering of Christ.

This personal acknowledgement of guilt—this attitude of taking full responsibility for our deeds—will also be accompanied by an honest transparency before God and a heartfelt confession of sin. The word “confess” is translated from the Greek word *homologeo*, which is a compound of the words *homo*, meaning “same,” and *logos*, meaning “word.” It suggests the idea of *speaking the same thing*—that confession is to verbally agree with God that we have sinned and that our sin is heinous. When such confession is genuine, it is also accompanied by sorrow, brokenness, remorse, and regret. When the Holy Spirit through the Word or the rebuke of another tells us that we have sinned, we must speak the same thing back to God in confession. For example, if we have been shown to be self-centered, impatient, and unloving, then we would confess, “Lord, what You say about me is true. I have been self-centered, impatient, and unloving. Please forgive for

the sake of Your great name and on the basis of Your Son’s atonement.”

Notice three essential elements of biblical confession. First, the one confessing does not say, “If I have sinned,” or speak of sin in general, but confesses specific sins that have been revealed to him or her by the Holy Spirit according to God’s infallible Word.⁸ Second, genuine confession offers no excuse, nor does it attempt to transfer blame to another, but it accepts full responsibility for the sin or sins that have been committed. Third, the hope of forgiveness is not founded upon the believer’s stored up merits from past good deeds, but solely upon the vicarious sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The mature believer recognizes that his or her only ground for expecting forgiveness from God is “that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures” (1 Cor. 15:3–4).

There is a fourth essential element of confession that is not explicit in the above prayer that must be marked and emphasized, for without it repentance is nonsensical and useless. This is faith. We must believe the promises of God that offer forgiveness and cleansing for even the greatest sins of the broken and contrite. One of the most difficult things for even the most mature believer to do is to comprehend the magnitude of God’s forgiveness. When rightly understood, His grace will seem too good to be true—even wrong! And it would be, if not for the

8. It is important to note that the subjective convicting work of the Holy Spirit will always be in agreement with the sound doctrine of the written Word.

cross of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who paid sin's debt to the satisfaction of divine justice and the appeasement of divine wrath. Apart from a correct view of the cross, we will be prone like Peter to cry out in the midst of our sin, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" (Luke 5:8). But one true look at Calvary will prove to the most fragile heart that a fountain has been opened for sin and for uncleanness (Zech. 13:1). And it will embolden that fragile heart to cry out, "Pardon the iniquity of this people, I pray, according to the greatness of Your mercy" (Num. 14:19).

We must hold firmly to the promises of God because we are too prone to think that He is somehow like us (Ps. 50:21), and that His mercy, grace, and forgiveness bear the same limits and restrictions as ours. We must always remember that "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts" (Isa. 55:9). We think of ourselves as magnanimous because we boast of extending forgiveness up to seven times, and we forget that God's grace is still not spent at seventy times seven.⁹ We are also hindered from comprehending and availing ourselves of God's forgiveness because of the devil's accusations against us, his slander of God's character, his depreciation of the efficaciousness of the cross, and his denial of the unconditional nature of grace. If the devil cannot downplay our sin so that we see no need of

9. "Then Peter came to Him, and said, 'Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?' Jesus said to him, 'I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven'" (Matt. 18:21-22).

repentance, then he will magnify our sin so as to make us believe that though forgiveness is needed, it cannot be obtained, and that we have run beyond the boundaries of divine grace and into the realm of hopelessness. If this cannot be achieved, the devil will at least seek to make us doubt God's goodness and convince us to draw away from Him until a proper period of time when God's wrath has subsided and we have proven the sincerity of our brokenness. The lies of the devil are strong and have taken down greater saints than you and me. The only shield or bulwark against his flaming arrow is holding fast to the promises of God. A good rule of thumb in this warfare of ours is this: although God may expose our sin with a terrible frankness and a painful rebuke, He will always end the matter with the exhortation that we run to Him and not from Him. Any voice that sends the sinful believer away from God is of the flesh, the world, and the devil. It is not from God! It is the testimony of Scripture that godly sorrow for sin is highly esteemed by Him:

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart—These, O God, You will not despise. (Ps. 51:17)

For thus says the High and Lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: "I dwell in the high and holy place, with him who has a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones. (Isa. 57:15)

But on this one will I look: On him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word. (Isa. 66:2)

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. (Matt. 5:4)

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled. (Matt. 5:6)

It is this kindness and willingness of God to forgive that makes genuine repentance and confession a means of grace and a cause for great joy. As believers, we should not neglect the Word or close our ears to the Spirit when sin is exposed in us. Rather, we should humble ourselves, acknowledge our sin, turn from it, and run to the throne room of God, the doors of which have been forever thrown open wide by the blood of Jesus Christ. The writer of Hebrews explains and exhorts: "For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:15-16).

The Marks of Faith

Before we advance any further, it is important to note that sensitivity to sin, repentance, and confession are not merely the marks of Christian maturity, but the hallmarks of genuine conversion. Even the most recent converts will demonstrate a new and adverse disposition toward sin and will practice repentance and confession. Conversely, the lack of repentance and confession may be evidence

that a person is still in an unconverted state. Regarding this matter, the apostle John wrote, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us [that is, we are not Christian]. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness [that is, we are Christian]. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us [that is, we are not Christian]" (1 John 1:8-10).¹⁰

One of the greatest evidences of true conversion is not sinless perfection, as some have erroneously supposed. Instead, it is a sensitivity to sin, a renouncing of sin, an open confession of sin, and the joy of forgiveness. For this reason, genuine believers will appear as something of a paradox to outsiders. On one hand, they may be described as "those who mourn" (Matt. 5:4), but on the other hand, they are marked by "joy inexpressible and full of glory" (1 Peter 1:8).

As believers grow in their knowledge of the character and will of God, they begin to see their sin and lack of conformity to God in a greater light. This leads them to a more profound brokenness or mourning over sin. Thus, they may properly be identified as "those who mourn." At the same time, as they grow in their knowledge of God, they also behold more of His mercy and grace in the person and redemptive work of Christ. This leads them to a more profound joy in the God of their salvation. Thus, with each passing year their mourning and their joy increase hand in hand until the end of their days when

10. The statements in brackets are mine.

they will be found utterly broken and yet filled with "joy inexpressible and full of glory." When asked how such a mixture of mourning and joy might be found in the same person, they reply, "I am a great sinner, but Christ is a greater Savior." Also, take note of the great transition. Their joy is no longer found in their tarnished virtue or mutable performance, but in the cross of Christ and the grace of God that flows from it!

The Joy of Application

Having learned these important truths, we must now examine our lives and our Christian profession in light of them. Are we growing in our knowledge of God's holiness and in turn becoming more and more sensitive to the sin in our own lives? Do we react to our sin with a greater sense of repugnance and disdain? Do we battle against it? Does the weight of our sin coupled with the kindness of God lead us to repentance and confession (Rom. 2:4)? If we have answered in the affirmative, there is evidence that God has done something of a saving work in us, but there is need to persevere and to grow. Let us always be of the mindset to "search out and examine our ways, and turn back to the Lord" (Lam. 3:40). If God were a harsh and unloving deity who condemned without mercy, then we would be right to do everything in our power to hide our sin or outright deny it. But our God is "merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy" (Ps. 103:8). He has sent His only Son to pay for every one of our transgressions from the first to the last. The Scriptures prove that He has "no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live"

(Ezek. 33:11). Therefore, let us turn from our evil ways and live. The Scriptures argue that wrath is God's "awesome work,"¹¹ but He longs to be gracious and He waits on high to show compassion (Isa. 30:18). Because of these truths regarding the character of God, we must never view repentance and confession as executioners leading us to condemnation and death, but as handmaidens of our God that lead us to Christ's blood which washes us white as snow and returns us to His presence.

Chapter Questions and Reflections

1. Write a biblical definition of repentance. Incorporate into your definition the meaning of the Greek verb *metanoëō* and the Hebrew verb *nacham*.
2. Sin is a great malady in the Christian life. Explain how unconfessed sin is a detriment to the believer's life.
3. How is genuine repentance dependent upon our knowledge of the Scriptures?

11. "For the Lord will rise up as at Mount Perazim, He will be angry as in the Valley of Gibeon—that He may do His work, His awesome work, and bring to pass His act, His unusual act" (Isa. 28:21).

4. How is genuine repentance dependent upon our fellowship with other believers in the context of a local church?
5. How should the Christian react to sin or deal with sin once it is exposed?
6. Write a biblical definition of the word "confession." Incorporate into your definition the meaning of the Greek verb *homologéō*.
7. What are the four essential elements of biblical confession?
8. Why is it so important to grow in our knowledge of God's promises regarding forgiveness and to hold tenaciously to those promises?
9. Why should the discovery of sin cause the Christian to run toward God in hope rather than away from Him in fear?
10. Why does the devil seek to cause God's people to doubt God's forgiveness? What can we do to withstand him?
11. What is God's disposition to the believer who is broken over his or her sin and seeking forgiveness? What are some of the most important Scriptures regarding this matter?

12. Explain how the Christian can be described as both mourning and joyful.
13. Explain how repentance and confession are a gift from God, a means of grace that leads to restoration, peace, and joy.
14. Explain the following statement: "Because of the gracious character of God, we must never view repentance and confession as executioners leading us to condemnation and death, but as handmaidens of our God that lead us to Christ's blood which washes us white as snow and returns us to His presence."

