

XVII. The Apostles' Creed in Biblical Perspective

"I Believe..."

"The Forgiveness of Sins"

I John 1:5–10

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We will be looking at two passages in particular in this study, with one we will primarily focus on which is I John 1:5–10 and then one I'll open with from Luke 18. This is the Word of God. Luke 18:9 says, [9] *He (Jesus) also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: [10] "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. [11] The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. [12] I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.' [13] But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' [14] I tell you, this man went down to his house justified (forgiven of sins), rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted."*

The grass withers, the flower fades, the Word of God abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

I want to further expound on this text in Luke 18. People who are saved by grace love communion with the saints. People who are saved and think they are saved by their works, delude themselves into thinking they are saved by works always treat others with contempt. A Pharisee would have been extolled and a tax collector would have been despised. We are saved personally but we are saved to enjoy the communion of the saints and it wouldn't have been a surprise to see a Pharisee standing by himself. When you personally think you save yourself you don't need anyone else or the means of grace. In the Pharisee's prayer the problem isn't fasting and tithing, the problem was he thought his fasting and tithing was what was going to save him. So here you have a Pharisee commending himself and his righteousness, tax collector confessing his sin and its sinfulness and calling upon the Lord for salvation for he can only be saved by grace and mercy. We see the confessing sinner and the arrogant, self-righteous commending themselves and their self-exaltation.

We have arrived at our 17th study of the Apostles' Creed and what I believe is the heart and soul of the creed and the Gospel. It is the heart and soul summed up with three statements of Gospel blessings – forgiveness of sins, resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. I was going to combine those statements in one study but could not bring myself to do it. One of the reasons I couldn't do it is because I think they all build on each other and need to be understood individually in order to be appreciated together. In other words, you won't have eternal life without a resurrected body and you won't have a resurrected body to be joined to your perfected soul for everlasting life without the forgiveness of sins. If there is no forgiveness of sins there is no resurrection of a body to eternal life but there will be a resurrection of a body to eternal damnation. This is the heart and soul of the Gospel. I know we all have interesting points that we want to be solved in the creed but I think this is what amazes me. All the essentials come together to make this three-fold statement of Gospel promises that are fulfilled and given to us as blessings in Jesus Christ.

I propose to answer two questions in this study. I'm not sure if you have these two questions but I will answer them. Question number one, why is this Good News (these three statements) offered universally, infallibly, inevitably rejected for it is considered a scandal and those who bear this Message scandalized and even martyred? If I told you I had a 20 million dollar house and I told you that you could have one and the only thing you had to do was come and ask me for it tomorrow, what would you do? You would probably come and ask me for it. Here is eternal life. Jesus said in John 14:1-3, [1] *"Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. [2] In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? [3] And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also."* I am making a statement I have to prove so stay with me.

My second question is, why is the forgiveness of sins in the third stanza of the creed that is devoted to the work product of the Holy Spirit? Isn't it the Father that forgives sins, so why not put this statement in the first paragraph of the Apostles' Creed? Isn't it through Jesus through His work sets the basis for our forgiveness, so why isn't it this statement in the second stanza of the creed? So why is it located in the third paragraph as a work of the Holy Spirit?

The Apostles' Creed is as follows;

I believe in God the Father Almighty, (first affirmation/1st Person of the Trinity)

maker of heaven and earth;

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, (second affirmation/2nd Person of the Trinity)

who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,

born of the Virgin Mary,

suffered under Pontius Pilate,

was crucified, died, and was buried;

he descended into hades.

On the third day he rose again;

he ascended into heaven,

is seated at the right hand of the Father Almighty,

and will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, (third affirmation/3rd Person of the Trinity)

the holy catholic church,

the communion of saints,

the forgiveness of sins,

the resurrection of the body

and the life everlasting. Amen.

As we get to the work of the Holy Spirit, His first work product is securing the church universal, invisible, triumphant in heaven. His second work product is He works in and through the church visible and militant on earth that she celebrates the communion of the saints – sinners saved by grace in Christ. Then comes the last three statements and the foundation of those three is the forgiveness of sins. So why is that statement in this third stanza? Let's start answering these two questions by looking at I John 1.

My favorite discipleship book is in fact I John. Many like to use the Gospel of John and I commend that also, but the reason I love I John is it is devoted to speaking how the Christian should live once you are in fellowship by salvation with the Triune God. The way John arranges this book is by selecting three attributes of God. I John 1 he speaks of God is light. In I John 2 and 3 God is righteous. In I John 4 and 5 God is love. His whole point is that if you have been

adopted into the family of God (born again) then you have a vital saving relationship with God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and you will reflect those three attributes – what does the life in Christ look like if you belong to the God who is Light, righteous and love?

In the passage we will look at John focuses on the God who is light. I John 1:5 says, *[5] This is the message we (Apostles) have heard from Him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all.* In this verse it says God is light but that is not all He is for He is love, righteous, wise, gracious, merciful, holy etc. There are multiple attributes of God. What does it mean that God is light? It means there is no darkness at all. In other words, God's nature is to reveal Himself and when He reveals Himself He reveals everything else. The way to get rid of darkness is not to tell darkness to leave but to turn the Light on and then darkness has to leave. When God reveals Himself to us then He reveals who we are and there are a number of things He says to us about our fellowship with Him.

So He goes into four hypotheses or you can see them as four rhetorical statements whereby He is making a point with each one of them that will be true to some measure in your life. The first one is found in I John 1:6 which says *[6] If we say we have fellowship with Him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.* Is He saying that every Christian is perfect? No. He is talking about your walk, your lifestyle. Every Christian has sin living in them but Christians don't live in sin. We are no longer under the dominion of sin for we have been born again. II Corinthians 5:17 says *[17] Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.* Are we perfected yet? No, He will make that abundantly clear in just a moment. Right now He is saying your walk with determine, declare and reveal your fruit, your root – what you really believe and whose you really are.

If we walk in darkness and exude darkness, then we're lying because we don't practice the truth. Believers, imperfectly, fallibly but intentionally they want to obey the Lord. Why? It is because they love Him who first loved them. *If you love Me you will keep My commandments* (John 14:15). He is not talking about perfection, He is talking about practice. What is the practice of the individual? Let's say I was going to help you because you had an abscess around a tooth in your mouth. I then took you in the car to a mechanic in order for him to work on that abscess but you were unclear as to why I took you to a mechanic instead of a dentist. Would you actually let that mechanic work on your abscess? No, because you would look at the mechanic's practice to determine he was not qualified to help you with your abscess. The practice of our life reveals who is Lord and Savior in our life. Are we under the dominion of grace or the dominion of sin in our life? The second one is in the next verse.

I John 1:7 says *[7] But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.* One of the evidences that someone has a personal relationship with Christ is that they don't walk individually, they walk in the communion of the saints. They have fellowship with one another of like precious faith. Because His blood cleanses us from all sins we are personally right with the Lord. The third one is in the next verse.

I John 1:8 says *[8] If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.* In other words, if you deny you have sin you deceive yourself so clearly He by no means thinks a Christian is perfect for He wouldn't say this if He did. A Christian walks in grace dealing with sin and they are free to deal with sin, why? Are you saved by your obedience or Christ's obedience? It is by Christ's obedience. Are you saved by your perfection or His perfection? It is by Christ's perfection. Now that you know the basis of your salvation is in His

righteousness and His obedience then you are now free to own your disobedience. You don't have to hide it. You can confess it and that is where He goes next.

I John 1:9–10 says [9] *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* [10] *If we say we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.* My granddaddy has told me many things in my life that have been very helpful and one of those was 'Son, you're a sinner and you will either fess up or cover up and cover up won't work.' The reason cover up won't work is because you can't be forgiven if you don't confess.

This is the reason I included the text from Luke 18 where the tax collector confessed his ownership of sin and confession says 'I own my sin.' Not only do you own your sin, you own the sinfulness of sin. I am guilty of cosmic treason against a Thrice holy God. I have stood on my own two feet that He gave to me to shake my fist and say to Him, "I will not have You to rule over me for it is not Your glory, it's all about me."

Have you ever heard someone say about some heinous crime, 'This was terrible and if there is a hell then that person is going there'? Here is what Christian says, 'There is a hell and I am headed there and my only hope is that God will forgive me.' It's not the Pharisee looking at the tax collector to send him, while commending ourselves. It is the full ownership that I'm a sinner. Romans 3:23 says [23] *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*

Romans 6:23 says [23] *For the wages of sin is death* (physical and spiritual death – the lake of fire – then comes the greatest word in the Bible), *but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* How do you get this gift? There is only one way – you must confess your sins and that you're a sinner in your conversion, then you have the great blessing, freedom and joy of confessing your particular sins particularly that mar your fellowship and witness as you grow in sanctification and discipleship. This is why believers love to confess.

Here is one more point on confession. You can't confess your sins until you are convicted of your sins. You can't be convicted of your sin with repentance until you believe and trust that the Lord will forgive you. Confession comes from faith and repentance. Why do all people reject the Gospel? It is because it's a scandal. In the flesh we don't want to be told we're sinners nor do we want to be told we need a Savior nor do we want to be told we can't save ourselves. This is offensive to people. In the flesh, we think we can save ourselves. We're all sinners and we're all scandalized by the Gospel message unless there is Divine intervention.

Who is the Intervener? It is the Holy Spirit. Now you know why the statement forgiveness of sins is in the third stanza of the Apostles' Creed. The Holy Spirit gives us eyes to see and ears to hear. He works in our life so that our scandal is replaced by surrender. We are ready to surrender to Him and confess – I'm a sinner, I acknowledge the sinfulness of my sin. I sin, I see the sin, I see the sinfulness of it. God, I confess my sins, is there any way You can forgive me? Do you realize how bold it is to ask for forgiveness of sins? When you ask for forgiveness, what you are really asking is God, I'm under Your righteous judgment, I'm hopeless and is there any way that you can make a way for me to be saved and You still be glorious, holy and just? You are really saying even more than that. You are saying 'God, I'm headed for hell and it is a righteous judgment and can You find someone who can take that judgment of hell due to me and can You place it on them?'

It is here that I give you God's answer with joy and with awe because He says 'yes, I have made a way. It's My Son for He is the way, the truth and life and out of love He has surrendered to take your place. My Son will pay it so that you are forgiven of your sins.' That is how the promise is there. When I was a pastor in Charlotte, I used to see this fellow come in

right before the pastoral prayer that led into the sermon so I went to him one day and said ‘Why do you come in late every Sunday?’ He said ‘Oh Harry, I just miss the preliminary stuff. I get here for the most important, the preaching of the Word.’ Then he smiled at me but I didn’t smile back. I said ‘I’m not flattered by that. One of the most glorious moments is when one of the pastors say ‘let’s prepare to worship by confessing our sins.’ We don’t have to cover up.

The Gospel message gives you the freedom to ‘fess up’ as my granddaddy would say. Otherwise you deny your sin and you cover up. Where is the first sin among humanity? Adam sinned. Did God give him the opportunity to confess? Yes, for God asked him if he sinned and that’s a big opportunity. What did Adam do? He didn’t fess up, he covered up. He tried three different ways to cover up and none of them worked, because they never work. When sin entered the Garden what came? Fear, shame and guilt. There is only one who can handle this and that’s God, but we’ll always try to handle it.

The first thing Adam did after he sinned was sew some leaves into loin coverings. He then told God he didn’t come because he was naked but he wasn’t naked because he had made loin coverings but they didn’t work. He still felt fear, shame and guilt. Then he hid in the trees. We tend to hid in the tree of religion, the tree of possession, the tree of materialism, of power etc. and that doesn’t work. Then Adam hid in the trees of therapy – he tried to blame it on his wife saying she was dysfunctional and he claimed he had a dysfunctional religion because God is the one who set them. The woman You gave me, gave me the fruit and I ate, says Adam. I’m not the violater, I’m the victim.

When the Holy Spirit gets a hold of your heart, you see there is a Savior who you believe, He shows you the problem of sin and you believe Him, He tells you what He did for you on the cross, you’re convicted of your sin, you turn from your sin to trust Him, then you come confessing – God, be merciful to me, a sinner. There is only One who can give you the desire to do that. No one else can do that for you. The only One who can give you faith and repentance manifested in true confession of the ownership of sin, the sinfulness of sin, the fact of sin and the humbling of yourself before God, is the God of glory Himself by the Holy Spirit. That is why it is the third stanza of the Apostles’ Creed.

A prostitute heard it and she believed. Pharisees, like Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, heard it and they believed. Murderers, like David, Paul and Moses heard it and they believed. Tax gatherers like Matthew and Zacchaeus, heard it and they believed. He is calling you today. Do you believe Him? If you don’t, please tell me what you are going to do with your fear, guilt, and shame in this life and what you’re going to do about hell in the life to come? You might be thinking, ‘Pastor, you don’t know my sins.’ I don’t but I can tell you that He will forgive you of any and all your sins and *[1] There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus* (Romans 8:1).

There is only one sin that puts you in a position of no forgiveness and that’s when you say ‘no’ to the Holy Spirit who is calling you to Christ. You blaspheme Him by rejecting the One He is calling you to and the reason that is the unpardonable sin is because saying ‘no’ to the Holy Spirit calling you to Jesus is to say ‘no’ to Jesus. And He is the only One who can forgive you. No one or no thing can do it for you and you can’t do it for yourself. I hear people many times say ‘you need to forgive yourself’ and I know what we’re trying to say when that is being said but don’t say ‘you need to forgive yourself.’ You can forgive yourself when you can make an atonement for your sins. The only person who can forgive you is the one you sinned against and the One who can provide an atonement and that’s God.

If I sin against several different people I go to each one to ask them to forgive me and there is one thing I have in common in my sin against each one for each one of those sins were against God. So I also need to go to Him for forgiveness. I am going to the only One who can forgive me and atone for my sin. No one can atone for my sins but He can. You're really saying 'you need to believe that when Jesus said He forgave you, you're really forgiven.' It's not forgive yourself, it's believe Jesus who forgives you and there is no condemnation if you confess your sins – that's what you're believing.

If you came up to me and really ticked me off and I just pummeled you to the ground, broke your nose, your jaw and you're gasping for breath. 911 is called and they come and take you to the ICU, then I go home and start feeling pretty bad about this so I want to handle my shame and guilt. So the next morning I get up and look in the mirror and say 'I want you to know I forgive you.' That is so ridiculous. What would be even more ridiculous is if I drove to the hospital to tell you that I forgave myself for what happened as you are suffering. No, you go to the One you sinned against and ask forgiveness and the One you sinned against has made a way and found Someone who could take your place – It's His Son. *[1] There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1). I John 1:9 says [9] If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

He is faithful and just. Why can we say He is just? When you confess, led by the Holy Spirit and Jesus goes to the Father, He says 'Father, forgive Harry Reeder, I paid for that sin.' I call it the 3 R's. The first is remission. When you get a bill, the invoice tells you to remit the payment – take care of it. How do you remit it? You send it away to them. About seven years ago I was diagnosed with prostate cancer and this last year they told me that it was in remission. But many times a doctor will say 'it's in remission, *now*, but it may come back.' Jesus has remitted your sins and it will not come back for they are removed from you as far as the east is from the west or as we would sing in Reliance Youth Fellowship;

Gone, gone, gone, gone!

Yes my sins are gone.

Now my soul is free, and in my heart's a song;

Buried in the deepest sea,

Yes that's good enough for me;

I shall live eternally, Praise God! My sins are g-o-n-e, gone.

Your sins are gone and are not coming back. The theater of the Old Testament has now come to fulfillment. At Yom Kippur the lamb of God was slain to pay for the sins and the scape goat of God had the sins laid on Him and took them away out of the camp. Jesus is the Lamb. Jesus is the Scape Goat. You're sins have been remitted and you have been redeemed. The second R is redemption for He has bought you back. Here is the best illustration I have.

I grew up in a home where when we had to buy groceries we went to the A & P because we could use green stamps. When you buy something they give you green stamps back and then you put those green stamps in a book. Once you have filled like 700 books you get a can opener. That was good stewardship for my mother. So she took me to the A & P grocery store and still remember it to this day. My mother would make sure I helped her take the groceries out to the car so we wouldn't have to tip the grocery boy and I would have to take them into the house but she would not let me help her put them away. If you looked up OCD in the dictionary you would probably see my mother's picture there. She would put newspaper under the cuckoo

clock just in case (smile). This COVID stuff we're living through right now, if my mom were alive she would love it and say something like 'Why haven't we been living this way all along?'

So what was my job with all these green stamps? I would sit at the dining room table and lick, by sheets, all the green stamps she had collected and put them in the books. The first week after I got married I said to my wife Cindy 'We're going to the A & P to buy groceries, right?' She said 'Yeah.' I then asked her if she did green stamps and she said 'yes' so it was nothing new to me. I went from my mom to my wife when it came to using green stamps. We went and bought groceries, came home and I started licking the green stamps to put them in the books. My wife said 'What are you doing?' She went and got this bowl out with water in it and wet a sponge, slid it across the back of the green stamps as it wet them and slapped it in the book. Why didn't my mother tell me about this?

Then you would take the books to the redemption center, put them on the counter, they would take the books and give you your can opener. Then you went home. At the cross Jesus sent your sins – remission – He remitted them – sent them away and He bought you. He put Himself on the bar and the counter of God's justice. He took you from the shelf of sin to bring you home. Now where will you go to deal with fear, shame, guilt and hell, but to Him, because when He remits your sins and redeemed you, then you're reconciled to Him for all eternity and that's the message we have. Every time we take that message out to into the world we know it will be a scandal unless the Holy Spirit goes before us, just as the Holy Spirit went before you.

The takeaway would be simply this; Forgiveness of sins by **God the Father** is assured for any and all who come to **Christ** alone, by confessing their sins by faith and repentance and all who come to Christ are brought to Him by the relentless power and grace of the **Holy Spirit**. The Holy Spirit is the One who has brought you to Jesus. The only unpardonable sin is to say 'no' to the Spirit because that keeps you from the only One who assures you of pardon and that is Jesus Himself. So many have heard and believed as the Spirit has called them so will you come to Him and put your trust in Him alone?

God the Father made a way and found Someone – it was His Son. The Holy Spirit is telling us that you need this Savior. You're a sinner, come! If you confess your sins He is faithful and just to forgive you and cleanse you from all unrighteousness. If you don't come to Him please let me know what you're going to do about fear, shame, guilt and hell. Perhaps you are ready to come to Him, then come for I'm going to pray in a minute. If you want to talk to me just let me know. You can call me at (205) 776-5200. I invite you, not to me for I can't forgive you, but to Him for He will forgive you – if you confess your sins for He will send them away, redeem you and you will be reconciled to Him for now and for all eternity. That's the blessing He promises.

This reminds me of that wonderful moment in John Bunyan's book, Pilgrim's Progress, when he (Pilgrim) sees the cross and his burden rolled away into the empty tomb. Our sins are carried and buried away from us. Do you know what Pilgrim did next? I love what he did for he leaped three times for joy. People tend to want to know why Bunyan wrote that he leaped for joy three times and I think it was because he was doing the doxology of praise the Father, praise the Son and praise the Holy Spirit when those burdens rolled away. The Holy Spirit brought me to Jesus, Jesus brought me to the Father and the Father has forgiven me – I'm right with God – I'm saved – I'm redeemed – and there is nothing now but for me to rejoice, worship and bear witness of Him in this world until I go to be with Him. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together in Your Word. I'll never forget the time I came to Christ for I had heard the message so many times and the Holy Spirit gave me eyes to see and ears to hear and O the joy of being able to leap to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit by confessing so just confess your sins today. There is no formula here. 'I'm a sinner and I abhor the sinfulness of my sin. I no longer want its shame, guilt or death. I don't want its despair now and its judgment then. I want You and I heard of Jesus, Your Son.' The Spirit of God has brought you to the Father today to hear Jesus – just pray 'Forgive me the sinner through Christ.' Father, I ask You to help all who know Jesus to bear the marks of those who have been forgiven – humility, courage, worship, prayer, communion of the saints and telling others of this Jesus, knowing they will be scandalized unless the Holy Spirit does His work, but also know that the Holy Spirit uses what we say to do the work and bring them to Himself. Father, that is what we ask today, in Jesus' Name, Amen.

Power Point

"THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS"

The Content of I John 1:5–11

The Context of the Apostles' Creed

LIFE TAKEAWAY

Forgiveness of sins by God the Father is assured for any and all who come to Christ alone confessing their sins by Faith and Repentance, and all who come to Christ are brought to Him by the relentless power and grace of the Holy Spirit.