

WHY BAPTISTS BELIEVE WHAT BAPTISTS BELIEVE, PART 28

I want to begin by answering the question that was asked last week: “What do Baptists believe in regard to politics and our involvement as believers in social issues?” I went to see what the Baptist Faith and Message had to say and this is what I found under the heading “The Christian and the Social Order”:

“All Christians are under obligation to seek to make the will of Christ supreme in our own lives and in human society... In the spirit of Christ, Christians should oppose racism, every form of greed, selfishness, and vice, and all forms of sexual immorality, including adultery, homosexuality, and pornography. We should work to provide for the orphaned, the needy, the abused, the aged, the helpless, and the sick. We should speak on behalf of the unborn and contend for the sanctity of all human life from conception to natural death. Every Christian should seek to bring industry, government, and society as a whole under the sway of the principles of righteousness, truth, and brotherly love. In order to promote these ends Christians should be ready to work with all men of good will in any good cause, always being careful to act in the spirit of love without compromising their loyalty to Christ and His truth.”

That’s rather lengthy but it’s a good segway into our topic this morning, of how we as Christians deal with sin in our own life.

DEALING WITH SIN, PART 1

As a springboard to the topic, I wanted to begin with a quote. This is from Bill Bright in “The 10 Basic Steps Toward Christian Maturity.” This is what he says:

“If the Holy Spirit was sent to give me power to live a victorious life, why do I feel so powerless, so defeated? We often yearn for spiritual power and do not have it because of impure

motives, selfish desires, or unconfessed sin. God does not fill a dirty vessel with His power and love. The vessel of our lives must be cleansed by the blood of our Lord before it can be filled with the Spirit of God.”

That’s certainly something to chew on, to think about. Whether you agree with Mr. Bright theologically or not – and he says some really good things that go along with the Word of God – we all can agree that the sin in our lives must be dealt with. That’s at the heart of what we are going to talk about this morning.

I am going to begin in James Chapter 4, where he uses strong language:

“You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask.

You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions” (James 4:2-3). Verse 4 says, “You adulterous people!” James doesn’t mince words. He continues, “Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded” (James 4:8).

James says that many of us believers have become attached to the things of the world, which puts us at odds with God. He calls such people “double-minded,” meaning they have divided loyalties. On one hand we say that we are followers of Jesus, but then we turn around and pursue after the pleasures of this world. James encourages us to take action – “Draw near to God... cleanse your hands... purify your hearts.” So, we have some work to do, don’t we?

In the Bible we have the Good News, the Gospel – salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. But the reason it is good news is because, first, we had the bad news. The Baptist Faith and Message under the heading “Man” says, “In the beginning man

was innocent of sin and was endowed by his Creator with freedom of choice. By his free choice man sinned against God and brought sin into the human race. Through the temptation of Satan man transgressed the command of God, and fell from his original innocence whereby his posterity inherit a nature and an environment inclined toward sin. Therefore, as soon as they are capable of moral action, they become transgressors and are under condemnation. Only the grace of God can bring man into His holy fellowship and enable man to fulfill the creative purpose of God.”

The bad news is that we are all sinners. The good news is that God saves us by His grace!

“But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear” (Isaiah 59:2). “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). Psalm 14:3 says, “There is none who does good, not even one.” Paul quotes this verse in the book of Romans. First John 1:8 says, “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” So, clearly, the Bible teaches that we are sinners.

[Question 1] Based on Isaiah 59:2, what is the result of sin in our life? It causes **a separation between us and God**. To put it in New Testament terms, our fellowship is broken.

[Question 2] As a result of **sin** in my life, I lose **fellowship** with God. But then there is some good news...

“If we confess our sins, He [God] is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9)

When I **confess** my **sin**, that **fellowship** is completely **restored**. When John says that we are cleansed from all unrighteousness, that means that we are forgiven. And that paves

the way for our fellowship with God to be restored, renewed, revitalized. Notice it says “that fellowship,” not “that relationship.” That is an important distinction.

Earlier in our study we saw this in the Baptist Faith and Message under the heading “God’s Purpose of Grace”: “All true believers endure to the end. Those whom God has accepted in Christ, and sanctified by His Spirit, will never fall away from the state of grace, but shall persevere to the end. Believers may fall into sin through neglect and temptation, whereby they grieve the Spirit, impair their graces and comforts, and bring reproach on the cause of Christ and temporal judgments on themselves; yet they shall be kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.”

So then, that relationship with God does not change – just the fellowship.

I love Jesus’ Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15). A wealthy man has two sons. The younger son decides to leave the love and comfort of home. He’s lured away by the things of the world. Satisfied for a season, he eventually becomes empty. He finds himself in a spiritual drought, bankrupt and abandoned by his so-called “friends.” He gains employment feeding the pigs. While there in the pig pen he comes to his senses. He realizes he’d be much better off working as one of his father’s hired hands than to be here with the pigs. He comes up with a plan. He’ll return home to his father, confess his sin and ask to be hired on as one of his father’s servants. He rehearses his speech and heads for home.

Luke says this: “But while he was still a long way from home his father saw him, and his heart went out to him; he ran and hugged his son and kissed him” (Luke 15:20). The father’s reaction to the return home of his younger son is not one of condemnation or reprimand. The father runs to welcome his son home. It doesn’t matter to him what his boy has done in the past. He’s just thrilled to see that his boy has made it home safely. The

father doesn't even consider making his son one of his hired hands. This young man is still his father's dear son. That relationship hasn't changed! So, the father celebrates and he restores his son to full fellowship.

Happy ending, right? But the story does NOT end there.

The father has another son, the older son. While the younger son had left home, the older son had remained loyal to his father. So, when the older son hears all the commotion and finds out that his younger brother is back, he becomes angry and resentful. He refuses to embrace his younger brother and to join in the celebration. The older son is so self-absorbed that he doesn't care that his younger brother has returned home safely.

The parable closes with the older son expressing his resentment to his father. He basically says, "You never threw a party for me!" The father explains to his son that day in and day out he has poured out his blessings on his older son. But the son never appreciated it. He had just taken it for granted. The father tells his older son, "Son, you are always with me, and everything that belongs to me is yours. It was appropriate to celebrate and be glad, for your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost and is found" (Luke 15:31-32).

Now, the real focus of that parable is NOT the two sons, but the father. The father is the main character of that parable. He represents God. Both of the sons went astray, but in different ways. The father welcomes his younger son back with open, loving, and non-condemning arms. And the father initiates an attempt at fellowship with his ungrateful older son. And just like God, the father in this parable pours out his blessings on two completely undeserving recipients of his love.

It's a powerful parable to help us understand the heart of God. Here is the application - WE are those sons, aren't we?

[Question 3] What characterizes an individual who is not in fellowship with God?" Let's look at some scriptures.

"Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy" (Proverbs 28:13).

From that passage what characterizes an individual who is not in fellowship with God? **B**. Attempts to hide their sin from God.

"And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold" (Matthew 24:12).

From that passage what characterizes an individual who is not in fellowship with God? **E**. Love grows cold. The Message says that "nothing will be left of their love but a mound of ashes." Basically, they lack love.

"I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants" (Luke 15:19). This is the speech the Prodigal Son rehearsed before returning home.

From that passage what characterizes an individual who is not in fellowship with God? **C**. Feelings of personal inadequacy. That is how the younger son felt.

"But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him" (Luke 15:28). The heart of the second son is revealed.

From that passage what characterizes an individual who is not in fellowship with God? **D**. Feelings of anger toward God.

"But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways" (James 1:6-8).

From that passage what characterizes an individual who is not in fellowship with God? **A.** Divided loyalty between the world and God.

I want to go to Psalm 66 next...

“If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened” (Psalm 66:18). To cherish means to hold something dear.

[Question 4] How does the Lord respond to an impure heart? **He does not listen.** That is a sobering verse. You see, God is holy and He cannot come in contact with sin. So clearly something has to change!

[Question 5] This next verse explains David’s actions when faced with his own sin...

“I acknowledged my sin to You, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,’ and You forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah” (Psalm 32:5). That word “Selah” means to pause and reflect on the truth just stated. Then you lift up or exalt God. It is like we would say today, “Praise the Lord!”

David took two actions to deal with his sin. He decided never to do it again. No, that wasn’t it. He blamed his parents – “It’s Jesse’s fault! Dirty rotten dad!” No evidence of that in scripture. He sought counseling to deal with it. No, that’s more commonplace today and certainly at times we may need that. This is what David did: **he acknowledged his sin and confessed it** directly to God. That’s exactly what we’re to do. We need to be completely honest with God and tell Him what is on your heart.

[Question 6] The word “confess” means that I **agree** with God about my **sin**. I see my sin the way that God does. Sometimes it

takes us a while to get to that point because we cherish sin so often in our lives.

How does God view my sin? He hates it. He abhors it. He can't stand it! If I truly love God, then why would I continue to do something that I know He hates? Good question.