



THE COMPASS

A TOOL FOR DISCIPLERS

Confession

Conversation On the Journey

Relationship vs. Fellowship

For a Christian, sin doesn't hinder our relationship with God (we are still in God's family even when we sin), but rather our fellowship. So how do you want to teach this?

I've found it's a good idea when discussing this issue to rely heavily on the metaphor of our earthly family relationships, because everyone knows that sin does not get you "booted" out of your family, but it certainly can shatter family harmony. So, go to John 1:12. Here it says that having believed, we became "children" of God.

Now, building on this foundation and the "family" metaphor you might ask: "What is the result of sin within your earthly family?" or "When was a time you got your parents really mad, what did you do?"

However you say it, you want to make the critical distinction that their sin does not change the reality of their adoption into God's family. It does, however, affect their fellowship, just like it does within a family.

Results of Broken Fellowship

Before moving immediately to the remedy for broken fellowship (confession), you might want to park on some of the results. Psalm 32, as well as Psalm 66:17-20, capture some of the results. Psalm 32 describes David's wrestlings with guilt (and insomnia), and Psalm 66 underscores the effect broken fellowship has on our prayer life. Take a good look at these Psalms and see what else you might pull out as an example of the consequences of unconfessed sin.

These psalms are not exhaustive on the effects of being out of fellowship with God. There can also be feelings of fear, numbing of the heart, lack of confidence, desire to avoid fellowship, etc. You may share some other ways you've felt, or ask them how they feel when they've had unconfessed sin.

This Week's Excursion

There are two teachings concerning confession that are life changing for a follower of Christ. The first is to understand that it is not their relationship with God that is jeopardized when they sin, but their fellowship. The second is understanding the basic mechanics of how to confess sin when it arises.

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Restoring Fellowship

Getting back to our family metaphor, what do you do to restore fellowship within your family when you've hurt someone? The answer is, "Confess." Own-up to what you did wrong, and take responsibility for your actions. (You might want to share, or ask about a time they did this.) This is also how we restore our fellowship with God.

1 John 1:5-9 is really a defining passage on confession, so it would be good to turn there together:

This is the message we have heard from Him and declare to you:

God is light; in Him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with Him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. 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, purifies us from all sin. If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make Him out to be a liar and His word has no place in our lives.

Verse 5

First, you may want to ask what light is symbolic of in the Scripture (holiness, God's revealing of truth, etc.). Then ask, "What does it mean to walk in the light?" The most common answer you should expect to this question is something along the lines of "being good," or "following Jesus." The correct answer, however, isn't "being good," but "living exposed to God's holy knowledge," or "leaving the shadows and bring your sin into the light." The Bible uses the word "confession" to describe this state.

Verses 6-7, 8-9

One way to understand the concepts in verses 6-7 more clearly is to also read verses 8-9 and compare the two passages. Together, they form a parallelism. A parallelism is a literary structure in which one idea is expressed in two different ways. It's a device used for emphasis or clarity. The book of Proverbs is full of parallelisms. (Proverbs 16 is a good place to go for an example.) Although not all clauses have a direct parallel, the overall correspondence should be apparent, and may help your disciple to see that "walking in the light" is a term John uses to mean "confession."

Verses 8-9

The Greek word for "confession" literally means "to say the same thing along with someone" or "to agree with someone." This sheds some interesting light on what is involved in confession:

1. We are agreeing with God that we have sinned. This stands in contrast to justifying, or denying that what we did was wrong. You may want to give an example, or ask them if they can think of a time they've justified or denied their sin.

Next Steps

The application is for your disciple to go through these steps when they sin throughout the week. But there is another important application. Make sure they are confessing as soon as they sin, not waiting until the end of the day to square up accounts with God.

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2. We are agreeing that what Christ has done paid for our sins. This stands in contrast to “beating ourselves up” for what we did wrong. Sometimes it’s helpful to draw a time line, marking on it the year of their birth, the year they trusted Christ, and some sort of guess of when they will die (be gracious and give them a long life). Then draw a line from all three dates on the time line back to a wonderfully rendered cross and make it clear that Jesus died for all of their sins, past, present, and future.

3. We are agreeing to turn from our sinful course and back to God. This is repentance. John also emphasizes that God is “faithful and just.” These two concepts are important. In confession, there is a component of faith. We are trusting that God is faithful to us as our Father and will forgive us. We are also trusting that God is just, that sin needs to be dealt with, and that Jesus dealt with it for us. It is critical for your disciple to see that when they beat themselves up for sinning, they are not acting in faith, and, in fact, are further grieving God by not accepting the forgiveness provided by Christ.

Steps of Confession

1. Agree it’s sin.
2. Agree it’s forgiven.
3. Agree to turn from your sin and back to God.

Summary

For a non-Christian, sin prohibits a relationship with God. Christians are in God’s family, and that relationship will never change. Fellowship with God, however, is hindered when we sin. Confession of sin restores fellowship with God. Confession involves three things: Agreeing we’ve sinned (not rationalizing or denying); agreeing that it was Christ’s death that paid for our sin; and agreeing to turn from our sin and back to fellowship with God.

†End

Side Trails

Transferable Concept: How You Can Experience God’s Love and Forgiveness. Bill Bright. New Life Publications.

Order at crustore.org



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