

**Reforming the Mess of Modern Marriage #4:
Keeping Short Accounts
Proverbs 28:13; Galatians 6:1; 1 John 1:9**

Introduction

I once asked evangelist and pastor Jim Wilson what he thought it would take to bring reformation and revival to America. His answer was simple: Christians need to learn to confess their sins. Why is this? When you are living with a pile of unconfessed sins, you are not living as a forgiven person. If you believe in Christ, you are forgiven. But are you living as if it is true? Are you living out your objective justification? One of the most potent witnesses to the gospel is a faithful marriage, and where marriages are not prospering it is most often due to the husband and wife covering over their own sins.

Study of the Texts

The covering of sins is necessary and a blessing because sin is shameful (Ps. 32:1, 1 Pet. 4:12), but one who covers his own sins will not prosper (Prov. 28:13). Rather, they must be covered by Christ (Rom. 4:4). We instead ought to confess our sins and receive the blessing and forgiveness of the Lord (Ps. 32:5, 1 John 1:9). Because we live as the body of Christ, we are exhorted to restore others who are caught in their sin (Gal. 6:1). The exhortation is qualified, though. We must first ourselves be spiritual and it must be done in humble gentleness. The motivation for confronting a spouse (or other brother or sister) needs to be your love and care for that person's well-being. Most often, our motivation comes instead from a desire to put down or shame the other, to get even, or to "win" in some other way. This kind of motivation disqualifies you from bringing up any offence. So, we need to learn what it means to confess our own sins and to forgive the other's sins, all of it rooted in the grace and forgiveness we have received because of the death of Christ.

Principles and Mechanics of Confession

Two Christians living together in the covenant of marriage ought to have and experience the joys of unity and fellowship in Christ. Because both are sinners, that unity and fellowship is frequently broken, and it can be broken by the smallest of bumps and the ensuing reactions. Thus, there regularly is a need for things to be put right. This is what confession and forgiveness between husband and wife does. Because the need is everywhere, here are some principles to apply in confessing sin.

First, *name the sin*. The Greek word for "confess" (see 1 John 1:9) is a compound word that woodenly means "to say the same." We need to confess our sins as sins, no excuses, no euphemisms, no justifications. We need to say about our sins the same thing that God says about them in His Word (this includes not asking forgiveness for that which is not a sin). Naturally, then, sin should be confessed first to God (Ps. 51:4). The vertical relationship should be restored so the horizontal relationship can be restored. So, name the sin and ask for forgiveness instead of merely offering an apology ("Please forgive me for..." instead of "I'm sorry that...").

Second, *don't delay*. There is an implied time element in our Proverbs verse. Covering your sin will keep you from prospering as long as you are covering it, but confessing it *now*

renders mercy *now*. In God's kindness, you can get back in fellowship as quickly as you got out of it. Paul exhorts Christians not to let the sun go down on their anger, indicating that to do so opens the door to the devil (Eph. 4:26-27). The principle here applies to all sins. Sins come in clusters, and one sin unconfessed greases the skids for the next. Sin should be dealt with immediately (Ps. 95:7-8). When in a bump between a husband and wife where both parties are at fault, both should seek to be the first to confess.

Third, *confess as if you are the only person to have ever sinned*. Often, God uses one person's confession to soften the hard heart of the other. Our deceitful hearts like to manipulate this kindness by using our confession to get the other to admit their wrongdoing. If the other person has sin to confess, you may bring it up to them, but only after you have honestly confessed your own sin, free of any motive to pin down your spouse (again, Gal. 6:1).

Fourth, *start with the top of the pile*. When sin has gone unconfessed between two people for a long time, you end up with a "cluttered marriage." It is like the garage which you have only touched for several years by throwing things into it. If your marriage is in this state, it is overwhelming. The temptation is to look at the pile, and then close the door. Don't delay! But also, don't try to move the whole pile right now. Start with what is right on top.

House Rules

Once you have committed to keeping short accounts and begun the work of decluttering your marriage, it can be helpful to have some house rules or fences for your marriage. These are the kinds of rules a couple can adopt and hold one another to in order to keep the pile from building back up.

- Don't separate with unconfessed sin.
- Don't have people over with unconfessed sin.
- Don't go to someone else's house with unconfessed sin.
- Don't have sexual relations with unconfessed sin.
- If you are in public and something needs to be confessed, have a predetermined hand sign to signify "Please forgive me" and then "I do." And, if the sign is given, it must always be answered.

By faith, be ruthless on your sin and gracious to your spouse. Then, in Christ, your marriage will be glorious. And a ton of fun. A couple that treats sin in this way will prosper.

Conclusion

Faithful Christians are not sinless, but they are dealing with their sin. Faithful and joyful marriages are not sinless marriages, but they are marriages in which sin is swiftly dealt with. Included in this is swift forgiveness. Love covers a multitude of sins (Matt. 18:21ff, 1 Pet. 4:8). Jesus taught us to pray that God would forgive us as we forgive those who sin against us, warning that if we refuse to forgive, neither will the Father forgive us (Matt. 6:12-15). Yet, in Christ, you have great promises that you have been forgiven much, and if that is true and you truly believe it, then you are ready to love and forgive much. And so, in the dance of Christian marriage, there should be an abundance of honest confession and joyful forgiveness. This is how we show the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ to the world.