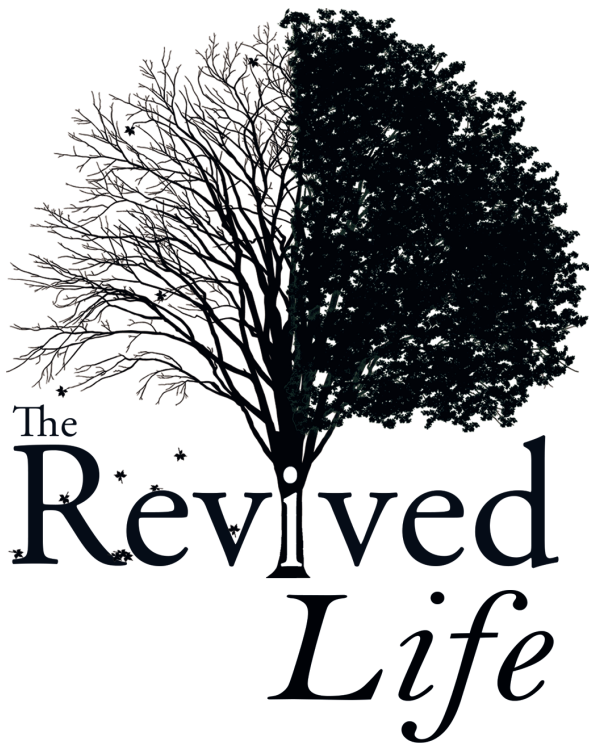


THE REVIVED LIFE

*Exploring the Glorious Freedom of
the Spirit's Cleansing, Enabling and Authority*

Exploring the Glorious Freedom of
Divine Cleansing, Enabling and Authority



The
Revived
Life

JOHN R. VAN GELDEREN

FOREWORD BY RICHARD OWEN ROBERTS



The Revived Life

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Italics in Scripture quotations are the emphasis of the author.

DEDICATION:

To Mary Lynn

My faithful wife and companion on our journey
to know and experience Christ's life.

CONTENTS

Foreword	9
Acknowledgments	11
1. The Longing Soul: <i>The Beginning of the Adventure to Freedom.....</i>	13
2. The Clean Heart: <i>The Provision of the Cleansing Power of the Blood.....</i>	19
3. The Exchanged Life: <i>The Provision of the Enabling Power of the Spirit.....</i>	35
4. The Throne Seat: <i>The Provision of the Authoritative Power of the Throne</i>	53
5. The Surrender Exchange: <i>How to Make the Exchange.....</i>	69
6. The Overcoming Life: <i>How to Take the Way of Escape in the Face of Temptation...87</i>	
7. The Overflowing Life: <i>How to Impact Others with the Life of Christ.....</i>	105
8. The Whole Package: <i>The Baptism of the Holy Spirit.....</i>	117
Appendix.....	139
Endnotes	141
Bibliography.....	143

FOREWORD

As a young man, I remember hearing a sermon on “The Three Deadly D’s: Disappointment, Dissatisfaction, and Despair.” Although the speaker’s name was long ago forgotten, the heart of his message is still with me.

Disappointment with the Christian life is rampant today. This disappointment is clearly heard and seen in the murmuring, the complaining and the grievous unrest that is so popular and prevalent in today’s church.

When disappointment is left uncured, it can easily lead to levels of dissatisfaction with both Christ and His Church that result in abandonment. Multitudes have already left the organized church. Unless they come quickly to repentance, they are soon likely to abandon Christ Himself. Disappointment with Christ has already led many back to the same evil practices from which they once claimed deliverance. Dissatisfaction has already reached such levels that we find little real distinction between the moral conduct of the church and that of the world.

Dissatisfaction, left unresolved, eventually leads to despair. In consequence, multitudes who still think themselves Christians have entertained an escapist mentality and hope that Christ will hurry back and save them from this mess. Others have simply given up hope and returned to their own fleshpots of Egypt.

The compromised lives of defeated Christians dot the landscape of the church everywhere you look. Observing this sad scene, one might unwisely suppose that Christ can only save believers from the penalty of sin, but has no power to save from sin itself.

Did the angel who confronted Joseph at the time he was struggling with being betrothed to a pregnant girl misspeak, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for that which has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bear a son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins”? Was He really speaking of Jesus saving people in their sins instead of from their sins? Or, was He suggesting that Jesus would save His people despite their sins? Or was He possibly suggesting that Jesus would save His people from the penalty of their sins while leaving them to struggle with their sins?

If Jesus saves His people from their sins, precisely as the angel said, why are there so many who call themselves “Christians” who are still trapped in their life of sin? Must that be their lot throughout life, or is there a way of escape for them?

There is a wonderful life of victory and joy in the finished work of Christ which is available to every true believer. John R. Van Gelderen’s book *The Revived Life* makes that way of escape plain.

Read it with a hungry heart!

Read it with an open mind!

Read it in faith, believing!

Read it and rejoice in what the Holy Spirit does in empowering you to live the exchanged life in all its fullness and fruitfulness!

Richard Owen Roberts
International Awakening Ministries

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

More than any other publisher at the present time, CLC Publications prints books for the deeper life, sometimes called the higher life, the victorious life, or the Spirit-filled life, but all of which address accessing and experiencing the very life of Jesus Christ. A special thanks to CLC director, Dave Almack, and the team at CLC for adding this volume as another twenty-first century articulation of the Christ-life truth; to senior editor, Dave Fessenden, for his enhancing editorial work; and the graphics designer David Montgomery, for yet another great cover design and layout. May the Lord, the Life Himself of the revived life truth, give life to all who read this volume.

THE LONGING SOUL

The Beginning of the Adventure to Freedom

For he satisfieth the longing soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness.

PSALM 107:9

Greater than any craving for food and water is the deep longing within the soul of many of God’s children to be like Jesus—in a word, *to experience Christ’s life*.

Over the centuries of time, multitudes have echoed Paul’s words, the cry of the heart that epitomizes “the longing soul”: “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” (Rom. 7:24). There is a deep agony of soul in the painful admission of one’s wretched condition and the seeming prospect of inevitable defeat. Evidently, Paul had exhausted the possibilities of “What shall deliver me?” and found them all futile. So he cried out, “*Who* shall deliver me?”

Our loving heavenly Father desires to satisfy the longing soul and to fill the hungry soul with goodness. Truly there is hope! Many saints from the past testify to this reality. The following examples demonstrate what can happen when ordinary people learn to access an extraordinary God.

The first testimony we consider is in a chapter entitled “The Darkest Hour” from the two-volume biography of Hudson Taylor (nineteenth century missionary to China):

But “the heart knoweth its own bitterness,” and the load Hudson Taylor was carrying was almost more than he could bear. It was not the work with all its difficulty and trial: when consciously in communion with the Lord these seemed light. It was not shortness of funds, nor anxiety about those dearest to him. It was just—himself: the unsatisfied longing of his heart; the inward struggle to abide in Christ; the frequent failure and disappointment.¹

At that time Taylor began to read a series of articles on “the deeper spiritual life . . . the life of habitual victory over sin, the life that is in deep reality ‘Not I, but Christ’ for which [his heart] longed.” His biographer writes, “To know *that* redemption, that love, in fuller measure was Mr. Taylor’s deepest longing; but oh, how different were the actual experiences of his soul!” The pressures of the mission increased, and demanded so much of Hudson Taylor’s time, yet, “oh, how deep the heart-hunger, in and through all else! *That* did not diminish.”²

But in the providence of God, he received a letter from a colleague in the mission named McCarthy. God blessed the contents of this letter by illuminating a life-changing truth to Hudson Taylor. He wrote, “As I read, I saw it all. I looked to Jesus; and when I saw, oh, how joy flowed!”³ This moment turned the tide. Hudson Taylor began to experience Christ’s life in far greater measure.

The second account is that of Rosalind Goforth, a missionary to China with her husband Jonathan in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the early years of their ministry in China, Rosalind overheard a conversation of Chinese workers. Unaware that she was on the other side of a thin wall, they

talked about Rosalind. Admitting she obviously loved them and was a zealous worker, they begrudged her impatience and quick temper. Then one said, "If she only would live more what she preaches!" The remark cut deeply into Rosalind's heart and angered her, but she knew it was far too true. Grieved, she fled to her room knowing her life lacked usefulness if she could not even live Christ before the Chinese workers.⁴

A little later in their ministry at Changte, they had a house built. To dispel vicious rumors about the "foreign devils," they allowed their house to be an open house for weeks so the curious Chinese could investigate. Once when a small group of Chinese women entered, one exclaimed loudly, "Oh, these foreign devils, the smell of their home is unbearable!" Rosalind tells the story of her response in her autobiography *Climbing*:

My temper rose in a flash and, turning on her with anger, I said, "How dare you speak like that? Leave the room!" The crowd, sensing a "storm," fled. I heard one say, "That foreign devil woman has a temper just like ours!"

Now, I had not noticed that the door of my husband's study was ajar, nor did I know that he was inside, until, as the last woman disappeared, the door opened and he came forward, looking solemn and stern. "Rose, how could you forget yourself?" he said. "Do you realize that just one such incident may undo months of self-sacrificing, loving service?"

"But Jonathan," I returned, "you don't know how she—"

But he interrupted, "Yes, I do; I heard all. You certainly had reason to be annoyed; but were you *justified*, with all that is hanging in the balance and God's grace sufficient to keep you patient?"

As he turned to re-enter his study, he said, "*All I can say is I am disappointed!*"

Oh, how that last word cut me! I deserved it, yes, but, oh, I did so want to reach up to the high ideals he had. A tempestuous time followed alone in our inner room with my Lord.⁵

Rosalind longed for victory, but she did not know how to access it. Then in the providence of God, while at home on a furlough, she read a sermon on Galatians 2:20 by Charles Trumbull entitled “The Life that Wins.” The Holy Spirit illuminated life-changing truth to her heart, the scales of hindrance fell off, her eyes were opened, and she began to experience Christ’s life. The transformation continued. She writes:

Many months (I forget just how long) had passed after our return to our Changte station when one evening one of our leading evangelists came in just when my husband was about to start for the street chapel. The evangelist showed plainly he wished to speak to my husband alone, so I left the room. When he had gone, I returned to find my husband standing by the table with a strange look on his face. He seemed deeply moved, yet glad. I exclaimed, “Whatever is the matter?”

“Rose,” he said, “you could never guess what he came for. He came as a deputation from the other evangelists and workers, yes, and servants, too, to ask what is the secret of the change in you. Before you went home, none of the servants wanted to serve you, but now they all want to be your servants.”⁶

The “secret of the change in you”—this is the secret all with a longing soul yearn to know.

Thankfully, the secret is out! It all revolves around Christ in the believer and the believer in Christ—in short, the Christ Life, the revived life. Jesus Christ is the answer to the question, “*Who* shall deliver me?” The purpose of this book is to help readers experience Christ’s life more abundantly by exploring the provision and accessibility of Christ’s life. To do so we will first focus on three provisional truths. Then we will consider the key turning point in accessing that provision. Next we will address the day-by-day, moment-by-moment access of Christ’s victorious life for both personal holiness and effective service.

After exploring the details of our blessed provision in Christ and our simple access to that provision by faith, we will step back to see how this whole package fits together from a scriptural standpoint.

Jesus said, “If any man thirst . . .” (John 7:37). Do you thirst? Jesus said, “Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled” (Matt. 5:6). Is this the longing of your soul? Do you echo the cry of Paul, “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” (Rom. 7:24).

The answer is, “I thank God *through Jesus Christ* our Lord” (Rom. 7:25). Jesus lovingly said, “I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly” (John 10:10).

The answer is Jesus—*the Christ Life Himself*—in all His abundance!

May we cry out with the psalmist, “O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is; to see thy power and thy glory” (Psalm 63:1–2). The promise is sure, “For he satisfieth the *longing* soul, and filleth the *hungry* soul with goodness” (Psalm 107:9). You may join the ranks of those who have *sought* Jesus and *found* Him to be the delight of their souls.

If you have a longing soul, you have begun the adventure to freedom. The next chapter points you to the first necessary provision.



Questions for Personal Reflection

1. In what ways can you relate to the longing to be like Jesus?
2. What similarities or differences do you have with the examples of longing for victory represented by Hudson Taylor and Rosalind Goforth?
3. What hopes do you desire the Lord to fulfill through reading this book?

THE CLEAN HEART

The Provision of the Cleansing Power of the Blood

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his son cleanseth us from all sin. . . . If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 1 JOHN 1:7, 9

IN the early twentieth century, a young Christian man named John George Govan attended church in Scotland. He looked like a fine Christian man, but actually he pursued his own selfish ambitions. These ambitions were not intrinsically evil; they simply were not God's will for his life.

Then, in God's goodness, he heard some preaching on the subject of consecration. As he listened, he realized he was not consecrated. Later he wrote in his journal that he tried to consecrate himself on several occasions, but it didn't work. Notice *he tried to consecrate himself*—no wonder it didn't work! Many try to do this and end up frustrated at the lack of change.

In the providence of God, he heard a sermon on a clean heart and a filled life. The realization dawned upon him that he could not cleanse his own heart; he needed the Lord Jesus to do

a cleansing work in him. He also realized that in order for this cleansing work to take place, he must yield to the Spirit's work of conviction. He would have to surrender anything the Spirit of God indicated had to be given up—including his life's dreams. This he felt he could not do.

At that time his brother led in some special meetings at a nearby church. So John George Govan attended. That night the message addressed a clean heart. Again the Spirit brought conviction. But again he resisted the Holy Spirit. The next day he was miserable. However, he attended the evening meeting. This time, unlike his normal practice, he sat as far away from the pulpit as possible. Many, with radiant faces, testified to the power of a cleansed conscience. The Spirit bore witness with his spirit that the blessing to which they testified could have been his, if he had but yielded.

The preacher spoke and invited others to yield. Tragically, Govan resisted again. Then his brother, who led the meeting, noticed him in the back of the audience. Not knowing the spiritual turmoil he experienced at that moment, his brother called on him to close the service in prayer. Govan decided he would not attempt to just go through the motions. He knew he must decide which way he would take—the way of God's will or his own. So he stepped out into the aisle and paused to think it over. The whole audience waited. Then he got down on one knee, and with the entire congregation listening, he came clean with God. He surrendered his will and therefore surrendered all to God.

After the last "Amen," he stepped outside the church building into the cold Scottish air and commented to a friend, "I have a clean heart, I have trusted the Lord, and I know He has done it, though I don't feel any different." This claim revealed faith regardless of feeling. Later he wrote, "When I got home that night and

went down before the Lord, then I knew the difference. The glory of God flooded my soul, and it has been different ever since.”⁷

This difference soon led to an understanding of the “filled life.” Later in God’s leading, John George Govan founded the Faith Mission of Edinburgh, Scotland. Through this organization God used Govan to train young people in revival work, and many villages and towns were set aflame with revival fire as a result. In fact, it was Govan that God used to fan the flame of revival in the heart of a young man named Duncan Campbell who had come to the Faith Mission. Campbell saw the Lord bless in many revivals, including the Lewis Awakening of 1949–53. God used the watershed moment in Govan’s life regarding a clean heart to bring much blessing to many others. Is there a need for this in your life?

The text states, “and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.” The blood is the provision for cleansing. Without question this is true for the legal cleansing of salvation. Hebrews 9:22 explains, “without shedding of blood is no redemption.” Ephesians 1:7 affirms, “In whom [Jesus Christ] we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins.”

But the blood is also the provision for the practical cleansing of sanctification. In fact, the writer John used the personal pronouns *we*, *us* and *our* throughout the first chapter of his epistle, indicating he had a cleansing for believers in mind. The blood of Jesus is the provision for both the legal cleansing in salvation, which affects our standing before God, and the practical cleansing in sanctification, which affects our walking with God. There must also be a cleansing beyond salvation.

Jesus illustrated this distinction when He washed the disciples’ feet as recorded in John 13. When Peter protested, Jesus responded by saying, “If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with

me.” Then Peter reacted by saying, “Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head.” It was then that Jesus clarified the point of the illustration: “He that is washed [past tense] needeth not save to wash [present tense] his feet, but is clean every whit.” In other words, the phrase “he that is washed” represents the full-body bath of salvation. However, as someone walks across the town of this world, his feet may pick up the dirt and defilement of the way. The phrase “needeth not save to wash his feet” represents the foot washing of sanctification. The former represents the legal cleansing, and the latter represents the practical cleansing.

Theologically speaking, Romans 4:7–8 explains this: “Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.” The moment you trusted Christ as your Savior, your past sins were forgiven, and your future sins will not be charged to your account. All of your sins—past, present and future—are “covered” by the blood of Jesus. But even though your future sins will not be charged to your account, and in that sense you are legally “safe,” your future sins do break your fellowship with your heavenly Father and therefore need forgiveness and cleansing. First John 1 explains this specific provision.

Do you have a clean heart? Do you know it?

The blood is the provision for a clean heart, and you must avail yourself of Christ’s provision. But how? First John 1:7 explains what to do, and verse 9 explains how to do it.

What to Do: Walk in the Light

First John 1:7 begins with a condition: “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light . . .” The conditional “if” reveals that this involves human responsibility. It is not automatic. The condition is “if we walk in the light.” This statement does not yet explain how to do this, but it does inform us as to what to do.

The standard for this condition is amazing: “walk in the light, *as he is in the light.*” Whatever this is, it is a high standard. God dwells in the absolute light of His holiness where the seraphim ring out the anthem day and night, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty.” And we are to “walk in the light, as he is in the light.” How are we to do this?

Before answering that question, let’s pause to consider the promise connected with the condition, “we have fellowship one with another.” Who is the “one” and who is the “another”? The context provides the answer. Beginning two verses earlier, it states, “God is light, and in him [God] is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him [God], and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he [God] is in the light, we have fellowship one with another.” The flow of the context indicates that the “one with another” is the believer and God. The emphasis is “vertical.” According to verse three, there are “horizontal” ramifications. When we are in fellowship with God, we can be in fellowship with other believers who are also in fellowship with God. In fact, according to the next chapter, it is impossible to be in fellowship with God and hate your brother. But the emphasis of First John 1:7 is vertical.

When you walk in the light as God is in the light, you are restored to fellowship with that holy God, who dwells in the absolute light of His holiness. This is a stunning promise. Even while we still live in a sin-cursed body, the blood of Jesus can be so applied that we are restored to fellowship with our holy God this side of heaven! Truly there is power in the blood! “The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.”

But how do you walk in the light, especially as He is in the light?

How to Do It: Confession and Faith

What are the steps on the pathway of walking in the light? First John 1:9 reveals two steps. The verse begins with a condition, “If we confess our sins,” then follows with a promise, “he is faithful and just to forgive our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” The first step is confession, based on the condition. The second step is faith, based on the promise.

Confession

The word “confess” literally means “to say the same thing.” In the context it means to say the same thing that God—our holy God in heaven—says about our sin. This is walking in the light as He is in the light.

To say the same thing God says about sin involves at least three issues.

1. Call it sin.

Call it sin *accurately*. The corpse of sin must not be put in a beautiful coffin to make it seem not so bad. People often want to beautify the “deathliness” of sin by calling it a mistake, a disease or a syndrome, but they do not want to call it sin. However, confession means we must say the same thing God says about our sin.

Yet this leaves us in a dilemma because Jeremiah 17:9 states, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” With such a deceitful heart, how can we “call it sin” accurately? Thankfully, Jeremiah 17:10 answers with, “I the LORD search the heart.” We may ask God to give us a glimpse of what He sees in our hearts, so that we can say what He says. If you sincerely do this, God will give you that glimpse, and you will not like what you see. In fact, you will be mortified. But then you can say what God says about your sin.

Call it sin *thoroughly*. One of the several reasons for spiritual dullness is partial confession. A teen, who had been rebellious, responded to God's working during a real season of refreshing from the presence of the Lord at his church. He even went on to a Bible college to prepare for the ministry. A couple years later he mentioned to his pastor that he felt spiritually dull and wondered as to why this was the case. While acknowledging this young man had been turned around during the revival, the pastor suggested that perhaps he had never really recognized the wickedness of his teenage rebellion. The pastor then encouraged him to get alone with God and ask God to show him how wicked his rebellion really was. This would open his eyes so that he might deal thoroughly with his sin. Over a cup of coffee, this young man told me he followed his pastor's advice. Then he said, "Oh, what a day! I've never been the same since." God restored spiritual vitality through thorough confession.

Call it sin *without excuse*. We are masters at excusing our sin. We say things like, "Lord, I shouldn't have responded that way to so-and-so, but Lord, You know he provoked me." One man who had been confronted by his pastor regarding some severe marriage problems agreed he had blown it, but then said, "But let me tell you why I did it"—and blamed his wife. No wonder he had marriage problems!

Our flesh does not like the light. Even if we "confess," we often seek to excuse our sin, to justify it, to cover it up by blaming others or even the situation. All of this is an attempt to get out of the light. Ironically, this is walking in darkness in the name of walking in the light.

We do not like to think we are so bad. We con ourselves by thinking, "It's not really my fault. I would have never said that or done that. It was the situation. It was that other person; he just drew it out of me." However, in reality, "he" simply exposed

what was already in you. Confession is getting honest and saying, “Regardless of anyone or anything else, I made sinful choices.”

For example, some years ago I got in a “tiff” with another preacher. It was a carnal exchange at least on my part. As I walked away from it, the Holy Spirit was all over me with conviction. My first response was, “Well, he started it.” In retrospect, I would suspect he thought I started it. But there was my attempt to shift blame.

The Holy Spirit would not let me off and continued to convict me. After several days and several states away in my travels, I decided to write a letter of apology. Today I am ashamed of this letter. It went something like this: “Dear Brother So-and-So: Because you did such-and-such, I did such-and-such. I should not have done that. Please forgive me,” and so forth.

It should not be surprising that when I mailed the letter, I got no relief. Over the next period of weeks and months, the Lord kept convicting me. I remember arguing with the Lord, “Lord, I wrote a letter of apology, and Lord, it was a long letter.” It had to be by the way I had written it.

Finally, I cried out, “Lord what is wrong?” Then the still small voice replied, “You’re arrogant. Here you were supposedly writing a letter of apology, and all you did was to blame him.” It was then I caught a glimpse into my own heart, and I did not like what I saw. In fact, I was mortified at what I had done. So I said, “What do You, Lord, want me to do?” The next letter was much shorter, and when I mailed it off, the burden rolled away and has never come back. Also, the Lord brought about reconciliation with that brother.

2. Give it up.

Proverbs 28:13 declares, “He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.” Inherent in true confession is the necessity of forsaking

the sin or simply giving up the sin. To go through the motions of confession while hanging on to the sin would be contradictory.

Confession is not merely confessing your guilt but confessing your sin. Many do not like the way they feel when they sin. They do not like the guilt. But quite frankly they still want their sin. Sadly, there is no sense of truly desiring a clean break with sin. Therefore, when they go through the motions of confession, they do not ever move on to victory.

How many men confess impure thoughts only to indulge their flesh at the next opportunity? When temptation arises, they do not look to God for deliverance. In fact, when temptation offers itself, at that point they do not even want deliverance. The reason is they have not given up the sin. They may have confessed their guilt, but they have not truly confessed their sin.

Some confess their sin even with emotion but then think, "Well, I'm sure I'll do it again." Or "If the circumstances are conducive, I'm sure I'll blow it." Undoubtedly they will, because they gave the ground by not giving up their sin. This is a form of nonsurrender. True confession says, "God, I give up this sin. I do not hold the right to ever take it again. But Lord, You know this is beyond me. I need supernatural deliverance." This is true surrender, which is true dependence upon God. This is the heart that, in the face of temptation, looks to the Deliverer and accesses His deliverance.

A man once told me that, although he had been a believer, he had a bad habit of cursing. He said he prayed for God to deliver him, but no deliverance came. Then a Christian brother told him God would not play tug-of-war with him—God would not deliver him while he was still hanging on to his end of the rope. He challenged him to let go of his end of the rope and then ask God for deliverance.

“The lights went on,” my friend said. He told the Lord he was giving up the cursing, and there would be no more tug-of-war. Then he asked the Lord to deliver him. With a smile he testified to me that God then delivered him from the habit of cursing.

Just as waving the white flag of surrender involves giving up, so true confession involves giving up the issue. Some only mouth words of confession or even words that ask for deliverance (while still hanging on to the sin). But God says, call it sin, and *give it up*.

3. Make it right.

True confession also implies the readiness to make matters right. Generally speaking, the tenor of Scripture indicates that private sin demands private confession, personal sin (sinning against another person) demands personal confession, and public sin demands public confession. James 5:16 says, “Confess your faults one to another.” The implication is that you have sinned against someone, and they know it (which will usually be obvious), or they have a right to know it.

Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:23–24, “Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.” When a brother has “ought” or something against you, it implies you said or did something offensive. Jesus said essentially, “Go make it right.” Then you can come and offer your gift.

Many desire the Spirit-filled life. For its fullest reality, this demands the presentation of one’s all to be a living sacrifice as Romans 12:1 urges. This “gift,” however, must be left at the altar until you are first reconciled with those who have something against you. You will short-circuit personal revival if you have

those with whom you need to reconcile, and you disobey on this point. In fact, one of the greatest hindrances to revival is an unwillingness to humbly walk in the light in this fashion—especially if the other person “started it.” But Jesus said, “Go make it right.”

Is there anyone who has something against you because you sinned against them? In one of my local church meetings, a teenage girl responded during the invitation after I had addressed this truth. She sobbed her heart out to God. She had some tension with an unsaved girl at her public school. God convicted her of this, and the next day she went to the girl and apologized. Then she invited her to attend the service that night.

This unsaved girl, undoubtedly moved by this teen’s humility, came to the service. The church girl led them to sit on the front row along with another unsaved teen she brought. God blessed, and both of the unsaved teens accepted Christ as their Savior. As the service dismissed and this young lady wiped tears from her eyes, I asked her if she had really done business with the Lord the night before. She acknowledged she had. I said, “You have just experienced a clean heart and a filled life, and God used you.”

A lady from another meeting came to me on a Friday night and said, “I’ve apologized to three people.” Then with an earnest face she said, “I have one more to go, and I’m going to have a clean heart.” She followed through, and several years later when I returned, it was apparent she was well down the revival road.

These stories include “making it right” on the personal level. But the same principle is true on the public level. Several times I have seen people respond during an invitation and, after speaking to their pastor, have made matters right publicly. This has always been moving—sometimes dramatically so.

On one occasion a young Christian school teacher admitted to the congregation she had spoken evil to many of them of the other school teachers. Amid the sobs she asked for their forgiveness. Later that week she came by my book table with a gloriously radiant face. She had a clean heart.

In another meeting a lady came under conviction because she and another church lady had not spoken to each other for six years. The animosity toward each other was apparent to the church. So after getting right with the lady during the day, she publicly got right with the church that night. It was a powerful moment to eyewitness.

In summary, the first step on the pathway of walking in the light is confession. This step involves calling it sin, giving it up and making it right to the extent that it is appropriate. But there is another vital step to having a clean heart—and knowing it.

Faith

First John 1:9 does not stop with confession. The condition is followed by a promise: “he is faithful [every time] and just [because legally all your sins are covered by the blood] to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” This promise is the foundation of faith for a clean heart.

Understanding the Promise

The promise is threefold. First, God *releases* your debt. The word “forgive” means so much and includes the idea that God releases your sin debt and sends it away. For example, suppose someone borrowed a certain amount of money from you. That person would then owe you that amount of money. But suppose you decided to forgive the debt. You would be releasing the amount involved. Similarly, when you come clean with God,

He releases your sins and your guilt. What an amazing promise! Without this provision we would be forever in debt.

Second, God *removes* your sin. The phrase “cleanse us from all unrighteousness” is a glorious promise. The word “cleanse” conveys the idea of washing or purging. This implies God removes the “dirt” of sin. Although there are some sins which may have continuing ramifications, the sin itself can be cleansed. For example, when my father ministered in the Chicago area, he illustrated this truth by noting that if you got into a street fight and someone cut off your arm, you could be forgiven, but you would not get your arm back.

However, the glory of the promise is that the blood of Jesus does cleanse you from all your sin. The blood applied clears your conscience. What matters here is not how you may feel. What matters is that, from God’s perspective, when you come clean with Him, the blood of Jesus cleans you up—completely.

Third, God *restores* your fellowship. Not only does God release the sin debt and remove the sin itself, He restores the contrite one to a place of fellowship (1 John 1:7).

Taking God at His Word

The promise is real. You must take a clean heart by faith. You must simply depend on the reality of God’s promise and say, “I have a clean heart. I have trusted the Lord Jesus for it, and He has done it.” Regardless of how you feel, just take God at His word.

The accuser of the brethren may suggest to you that this is too easy and you need to confess it all again. But if you confess the issue again without a new issue of stumbling, then you are listening to the wrong voice and stepping backward into unbelief. In one of my meetings where I had just dealt with this truth, a lady said to me, “I’ve done that for 50 years!” Then she sighed with relief at the thought of the promise and said, “Oh, what freedom!”

Some confess their sins, but then think they will have to wait several days or weeks before God will bless them again. But that is unbelief in God's immediate promise; it is also merit-based thinking. In reality, we do not ever merit blessing. Blessing comes only through the merit of Jesus. The fact is this: when you confess your sins, God releases, cleanses and restores so that you can trust Him to bless you right then and there—and He will.

Sinless Perfectionism

Occasionally, some charge those who explore the glorious truths of the Christ life with "sinless perfectionism." This is a gross misunderstanding because one of the great truths of the Christ life provision is the cleansing power of the blood. Interestingly, the verb "walk" in the phrase "walk in the light" in First John 1:7 and the verb "confess" in First John 1:9 are both in the present tense, emphasizing continuous action. The idea is "If we are walking in the light . . ." and "If we are confessing our sins . . ." The use of the present tense implies you do not ever come to a point of sinless perfection where you no longer need to walk in the light by confessing your sins. While it is true the provision for victory over sin is perfect—Christ in you; it is not true we access that provision perfectly.

Walking in the light is not sinless perfection; it is immediate confession. Immediate confession accesses immediate forgiveness. Consequently, the highway of holiness is the highway of lowliness. This is the heart that says, "Lord, if I stumble, please shine the light that I might walk in the light, that You might cleanse me and restore me and set me back up, that I might keep walking with You." Satan's lie is that since you stumbled, you might as well wallow in your sin. But this lie leads into "the slough of despond." God's truth is to walk in the light for cleansing and restoration.

As Samuel Rutherford said in days gone by, "The closer you get to God, the less you sin. But the closer you get to God, the more you realize your sinfulness." The reason is that the closer you get to the light the more dirt you see that prior to that illumination you did not notice. In fact, when God began to bring me down the revival road, there was a period of time when God brought things to mind that I had not thought about for years. This light led to my being able to deal with those issues with both God and man. Soon the past was dealt with and settled.

It is a wonderful thing when, based on the promise of God, you know that you have a clean heart. If new issues arise and taint your heart, then you can immediately walk in the light of the Spirit's conviction and quickly know again the blessing of a clean heart.

Do you have a clean heart? Once at the end of a service where I had preached on this subject, a man came to me with tears in his eyes. As he shook my hand, he slowly and emphatically said, "I have a clean heart." Then he gripped my hand and exclaimed, "I have it!"

On another occasion a man testified that there were certain sins that had plagued him for years but now those sins were dealt with by the blood of Christ. As a tear rolled down his face, he said that, for the first time in a long time, he had a clean heart. The weight of his statement, spoken with such conviction, moved the audience.

At the end of another service, a lady stayed in her seat with her head resting on the chair in front of her. She sobbed quietly. After most of the church folk had left, she came out into the lobby where I was. A smile broke through a swollen face like a rainbow after the storm as she said, "I can finally say, *I have a clean heart!*"

Do you? What to do: walk in the light. How to do it: confession and faith. Whatever the Holy Spirit convicts you of, call it sin, give it up and make it right. Then by faith take the clean heart based on the sure promise of God. Once you have a clean heart, the way is cleared for you to move on to the filled life.



Questions for Personal Reflection

1. What situations came to mind, if any, regarding confession without making excuses or seeking to shift blame?
2. What people came to mind, if any, regarding making matters right to the appropriate extent?
3. What issues came to mind, if any, regarding the need to take the step of faith for a clean heart?