

**Notes for Children's Talk & Sermon Outline for  
Sunday, 16 January 2022**

# Children's Talk: It's Always Better to Admit It When We've Done Wrong

- I'm looking for a volunteer to carry something heavy.
  - Pick it up and carry it around for a bit.
  - And now please try to act as though you're not carrying anything.
    - Pretty hard, hey?
  - We'll talk about this more in just a bit.
- Last week Mr Glenn was talking about when we've done something wrong, we don't want to tell anyone because we're worried about getting punished.
  - But that actually it's much better to admit when we've done something wrong because even if we do get punished, it will be to help us get better the next time.
- Today, I want us to continue thinking about when we've done something wrong but today we're not going to focus so much on worrying about getting punished but instead thinking about what it feels like on the inside of us when we've done something wrong and haven't told anyone.
  - Let's imagine a teenage boy who has just gotten his learner's drivers' license.
    - That means that he's allowed to drive a car but only if there's a licensed driver with him, like his mom or dad.
  - And then one Saturday his parents go out to run some errands and leave him at home to work on his homework.
  - And he decides to take his parent's second car for a little drive while they're gone.
    - It's just a little drive around the neighbourhood.
    - Within 5 minutes he's back home; he didn't damage the car or anything.
    - And when his parents get home, they find him at his desk working on his homework.
- How would you guess that that boy is feeling on the inside? (Excited, nervous, guilty, ashamed)
  - Do you think he feels like telling his parents what he did? (No!)
    - He might be worried about getting punished.
    - He probably doesn't want them to be disappointed in him.
  - But, until he tells them, he's going to feel like he's carrying a heavy weight and having to pretend like he's not carrying anything.
- There's a Psalm in the Lord's Word that talks about this and there's just so much wisdom in it.
- It starts by talking about how happy people are who have done wrong but are not hiding anything on the inside:
  - Psalm 32:1-2 (Kempton Project Translation, modified)
    - 1 Happy is he whose transgression is lifted,  
Whose sin is covered.
    - 2 Happy is the man to whom Jehovah does not count iniquity,  
If only in his spirit there is no deceitfulness.
- A person who has admitted what they've done feels like a weight is lifted from them, their sin is covered, and they don't feel like they're lying on the inside.

- Then it talks about how it feels when we've done something wrong, but have *not* admitted it:
- Psalm 32:3-4 (Kempton Project Translation, modified)
  - 3 When I was silent,  
My bones were worn out by my roaring all the day.
  - 4 For day and night Your hand was heavy on me;  
My moisture was turned into the droughts of summer. Selah.
- Imagine the boy.
  - He has this secret roaring within him.
  - Maybe his dad says to him, "Let me know when you're done your homework and we can take the car for a drive and you can practice your driving."
    - Can you feel how the boy would struggle to look at his dad and how he would feel weighed down by the secret of what he did?
- And then the Psalm talks about the person choosing to admit what they'd done to the Lord:
- Psalm 32:5 (Kempton Project Translation, modified)
  - 5 I made known my sin to You,  
And my iniquity I have not covered;  
I said, "I will confess unto Jehovah concerning my transgressions,"  
And You have lifted the iniquity of my sin. Selah.
- And then the Lord tells the person what He will do for them:
- Psalm 32:8 (Kempton Project Translation, modified)
  - 8 I will make you to have intelligence and instruct you in the way you shall go;  
I will give counsel with My eye upon you.
- It feels like it's going to be worse if we admit to having done something wrong.
  - But it will actually be better.
  - The Lord will lift the weight of it off of us.
  - We will feel honest on the inside again.
  - And the Lord will be able to help us figure out what to do.
- Maybe that teenage boy would start by confessing what He did to the Lord and the Lord could help him to figure out what to say to his parents.
- "I'm very sorry for what I did. Whatever punishment you think is fair, I will take. I took the car without asking while you were away. I'm sorry for lying to you and for disappointing you."
- That would be really hard but can you feel how much lighter the boy would feel after that?
  - Can you see how then it would be done and he could take whatever consequences and move on, rather than feeling the weight of it whenever he talked to his parents or thought about driving in the car?
- So when you mess up, pay attention to how it feels inside.
  - And admit it to the Lord.
  - And ask for His help in figuring out how to tell your parents or teacher or whoever you need to tell.
    - It will be much, much better.
      - "Happy is he whose transgression is lifted,  
Whose sin is covered" (Psalm 32:1). *Amen.*

# OK and Not OK

A Sermon by Pastor Malcolm G. Smith  
16 January 2022

## Intro

- Imagine that you were driving somewhere and suddenly someone rear-ended you.
  - That's a quick way to ruin your day!
- And we can imagine a range of severity to the accident.
  - Maybe they just scratched and dented your bumper a bit and startled you.
  - Or maybe they totalled your car and gave you whiplash that you will be dealing with for the rest of your life.
- And we can also imagine a range of different reasons why the accident happened.
  - Maybe you had to slam on your brakes to avoid hitting the person in front of you and the person behind you also slammed on their brakes but their car just couldn't stop in time.
  - Or maybe they were looking at something on their phone and crashed into you.
  - Or maybe they were drunk.
- We would probably have very different reactions to the situation depending on its severity and what led to it.
  - But what I want to focus on is the significance of what happens *next*.
  - The thing itself is bad but what happens next matters a whole lot.
    - Does the person stop, get out of their car, acknowledge that it was their fault and apologise, make sure that you're alright, and stick around till everything is sorted out?
    - Or do they immediately drive off before you've even figured out what's just happened?
- What they decide to do afterward will make a huge difference to your experience of the whole thing.

## Preventative Work vs After the Accident Has Happened

- Often, when we're talking about sin or doing the wrong thing, we're talking in a preventative way.
  - These are the 10 Commandments—don't break them!
  - Here's how to avoid going down this bad path or that bad path.
  - Watch out for this selfish tendency!
- That stuff is really useful and important and can help us and others avoid a lot of pain.
  - It's like all of the rules of the road and inspecting cars to make sure that they're roadworthy and all of the signs and lights and things to tell you when you need to stop and when you can go and how fast you can safely go.
    - All very important.
- But we also need to spend time on what to do once an accident has happened.
  - Just wishing and hoping and holding thumbs that it won't ever happen to us is not actually enough.
  - It's going to happen sometimes and we need to know what to do then.
    - We need to know what to do when we've broken one of the 10 Commandments or done something hurtful or selfish.

- Last week Joel preached about the importance of admitting we were wrong and then changing our behaviour.
  - And that's the goal to get that point of willingness to acknowledge that we've messed up and willingness to actually change our behaviour going forward.
  - I want to dig into this a bit deeper and look at some of the dynamics involved with this.
    - What gets in the way of us acknowledging when we've done something wrong?
      - What are the dangers there?
    - And how can we cultivate within ourselves a greater willingness to admit it when we've done something wrong?

## What's OK and Not OK in Ordinary Life?

- And I'm particularly interested in how these dynamics show up in ordinary, day-to-day decisions.
  - Because when we talk about breaking the 10 Commandments and sinning, we probably all think first of big, obvious sins—someone cheats on their spouse or gets so angry that they beat someone else up—something big and obvious.
    - And what we're going to talk about today will be useful if you're dealing with that kind of thing.
  - But I'm more interested in how these same issues around not admitting when we've done wrong can show up in our mundane daily lives and decisions.
    - What sins are we committing on a daily or weekly basis and dismissing as OK with hardly a second thought?
    - Each day each of us does many, many different things and likely some of those things will be somewhat good and some will be somewhat selfish.
      - And which of those are OK and which are actually *not* OK?
- Let me give you a few examples to get you going:
  - A person shouts in anger at their kids.
    - OK or not OK?
  - A person working from home stops working 20 minutes before quitting time.
    - OK or not OK?
  - A person looks at pornography.
    - OK or not OK?
  - A person swears at their employees under their breath.
    - OK or not OK?
  - A person talks to a friend about something that their family member did and exaggerates the story somewhat.
    - OK or not OK?
  - A person daydreams about being able to boss everyone around and make them do what he wants them to do, in *his* way, on *his* schedule.
    - OK or not OK?
- For many of these examples you might say, "Well, it depends on a bunch of factors as to whether it's OK or not.
  - We'll come back to this.
  - For now I want to start with some good news and share some surprising teachings with you about times when even pretty big sins are not held against a person.

## When Sins Are Not Held Against Us

### - *Married Love* §529

- If [people who are in a state of good from the Lord]... purposefully and deliberately refrain from one evil because it is a sin, they refrain from them all; and this still more if they refrain from several evils. For as soon as anyone purposefully or deliberately refrains from some evil because it is a sin, they are kept by the Lord in the intention to refrain from the rest. Consequently, if that person then does evil unknowingly or under the sway of some overwhelming lust of the body, still it is not imputed to them, because they had not intended it, nor do they defend it in themselves.

A person can achieve this intention if they examine themselves once or twice a year and repent of the evil that they find in themselves. This is not the case if they never examine themselves.

- So, if someone doesn't know any better they are not spiritually blamed for the sinful things that they do.
  - As Jesus said, "If you were blind, you would have no sin...." (John 9:41).
- But it's even more than that: if someone knows better but then is overwhelmed by lust, then they are also not spiritually blamed for their actions.
  - If... if they didn't intend to do the sinful thing and if they don't defend it in themselves afterward.
- This teaching is explained in more detail in a section about degrees or levels of adultery.
  - The section begins by explaining that the first and mildest form of adultery is when a person doesn't even realise that committing adultery is wrong.
  - It then goes on to explain that the second and next most mild degree of adultery is when a person gets overwhelmed by lust or seduced and so they're not in their right mind.
  - And then we read this:
    - *Married Love* §489
      - Adulteries [of the second degree] committed by... people are imputable to them depending on whether their intellect afterwards approves them or disapproves of them. The more the intellect approves of evils, the more a person takes them to themselves and makes them their own. Approval is consent, and consent induces the mind to love them. .... The opposite is the case if the adulteries are not afterwards approved.
- Now adultery always has major consequences—it's always a car crash, even if the person is not held spiritually responsible for it happening, it still has big and longterm consequences and this is true of any sin.
- We want to acknowledge that reality but can you again see how much the time *after* the sin matters?
  - This is the good news—that we can mess up pretty badly but still have a path back towards the Lord and heaven, if after we sin we don't start defending, excusing, and approving of the sinful behaviour.
  - But that's a very big if.
    - And, unfortunately, there is also a very strong pull and appeal for us to go in a bad direction.

## The Tendency to Justify Evil

### - *Heaven and Hell* §533

- It is important to realise... that the difficulty of... resisting evils increases to the extent that we deliberately do evil things—in fact, to that extent we become used to doing them until ultimately we no longer see them. Then we come to love them and to excuse them to gratify our love and to rationalise them with all kinds of self-deceptions and call them permissible and good.

- Scary, right? Because it's so easy to picture going down that path.

- Here's another passage describing what happens when a person plunges so deep into evil that that evil governs their mind all the time:

### - *Secrets of Heaven* §6203

- When this happens the person looks around for ideas such as will support the notion that the thing is not an evil, until they become thoroughly convinced it is not. At this point they strive so far as they can to get rid of external restraints and to make it allowable and smart, and at length even attractive and honourable, to engage in adulterous practices, theft involving trickery and deceit, various forms of arrogance and boasting, contempt for others, insults,... and other things like these.

- This is the terrifying trajectory that we can get on when we start doing evil things and then start justifying those evils and telling ourselves that they're all fine.

## What's the Alternative?

- So what can we do instead?

- We can work on cultivating within ourselves a culture of owning our mistakes and never justifying or excusing evil.

- Here's how one passage describes it:

### - *Divine Providence* §278

- Evils cannot be removed unless they appear. [A person]... must examine themselves, not only their actions, but also their thoughts, and what they would do if they did not fear the laws and disgrace—especially what evils they make allowable in their spirit and do not regard as sins, for these they continue to do.

.... From the higher or inner thought [that a person has been endowed with in their intellect] they may see what their will is doing in the lower or outer thought. They see this as someone sees their face in a mirror, and when they do, and know what sin is, they can, if they beg for the Lord's help, stop willing it, refrain from it, and subsequently behave contrary to it. If they cannot do this readily, still they can overcome it through struggle, and at last become averse to it and despise it.

- With these ideas in mind let's return to our examples.

- Which of these are OK or not OK?

- Shouting in anger at kids.

- Quitting work 20 minutes before quitting time.

- Looking at pornography.

- Swearing at employees under their breath.
  - Exaggerating a story.
  - Daydreaming about bossing everyone around.
- We could spend a long time discussing the particular details of each situation and why any of these might be very understandable and relatively minor in the big scheme of things.
    - But, in general, it feels like a much safer approach to say that none of these things are OK.
      - Any of them could count as breaking one of the Lord's commandments.
    - And rather than spending our energy on trying to defend them, excuse them, or justify them, we could use that same energy to try to look at them honestly and see what might be harmful or sinful in each of them.
  - We can try to be open to what the Lord might want to show us about our behaviour.
    - As the Psalmist does in Psalm 139 we can pray,
      - Psalm 139:23-24 (Kempston Project Translation, modified)
        - <sup>23</sup> Search me, O God, and know my heart;  
Test me, and know my anxieties;
        - <sup>24</sup> And see if there is any way of grief in me,  
And lead me in the way everlasting.
- We can say, "Lord, what do you want me to think about when I shout at my kids or when I swear at my employees under my breath?"
    - And the Lord might help us to see that there could be some desire to harm our kids or our employees or to get revenge on them at the heart of those behaviours.
    - And that would be breaking the commandment against murder.
      - As Jesus said, whoever calls someone a fool or an idiot will be in danger of hell fire" (Matthew 5:22).
    - That can feel overwhelming and unfair, like the Lord is being unreasonable—"If I get angry and shout at my kids or if I sometimes swear at people, I'm in danger of hell fire?!"
      - And we can want to get into a defensive, justifying mode.
        - "Have you met my kids or my employees?"
        - "I'm sure I don't shout or swear as much as lots of other people do!"
        - "Is it really that big a deal?"
          - We're trying to make ourselves OK.
          - And there's a better way to do that.

## **Our Behaviour Doesn't Have to Be OK for Us to Be OK**

- Our *behaviour* doesn't have to have been OK for *us* to be OK.
  - We can feel like we have to be perfect in order for God to approve of us.
    - And if we fall short, then we are going down.
- But our *behaviour* doesn't have to have been OK for *us* to be OK.
  - Our behaviour *does* matter and I'm certainly not recommending the version of Christianity in which it doesn't matter how you behave as long as you throw yourself on the mercy of Jesus to wash you clean.

- What I'm saying is that you will be more OK with God if you can be open and honest with Him about your behaviour and can be willing to acknowledge when it was not OK.
- Let's try this out with some of the other examples.
  - Did you quit working 20 minutes before quitting time?
    - There might be lots of legitimate reasons for this.
    - And maybe you worked late another day this week.
    - So it might be entirely OK.
    - And if you talk to the Lord about it openly and honestly He might help you to see that sometimes you quit a bit early in a dishonest way and that if you do that regularly you will be stealing from your employer.
    - Just sit with it and see whether it seems true.
  - How about exaggerating a story?
    - Again the justifications come up, "I wasn't exaggerating *that* much. Everybody exaggerates to some degree."
    - Breathe.
    - There could be some bearing false witness against your neighbour in there.
    - Sit with it and let the Lord show you if your behaviour is not OK.
- If we can get this right, it's a whole paradigm shift in how we relate to our behaviour.
  - We will likely see a lot of behaviour that is not OK.
  - That can be overwhelming but it's also what will help us to do the work that we need to do.
  - Remember that passage that we read earlier about how certain people can be overwhelmed by lust and commit sin but it's not imputed to them?
    - Those people are people who purposefully and deliberately refrain from one or several evils because they are sins.
    - Then it said, "A person can achieve this intention if they examine themselves once or twice a year and repent of the evil that they find in themselves. This is not the case if they never examine themselves."
- Maybe January 2022 will be a useful time for you to examine yourself and your behaviour to find some evil to purposefully and deliberately work to stop doing.
  - We will be starting up Bible Study again in a few weeks and each month we're going to be looking at a different commandment.
    - That could be a way for you to spend time throughout the year growing in your awareness of where you might be going off track.

## Conclusion

- It's no wonder that we don't like admitting that we might have done something wrong.
  - We feel guilt and shame, embarrassment, regret, pain, fear of being found out and fear of being despised, fear of going to hell, and just feeling like we're a terrible person.
- If you're working on admitting some things to yourself and to the Lord and you're feeling some of those painful feelings, think of the story of the prodigal son.
  - The prodigal son had done some stupid and sinful things.
  - But finally he came to himself and decided to go back to his father and admit that he had sinned and just ask to be one of his father's servants.
  - We'll pick the story up there.
    - Luke 15:20-24 (NKJV)
      - <sup>20</sup> "And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. <sup>21</sup> And the son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.'
      - <sup>22</sup> "But the father said to his servants, 'Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet. <sup>23</sup> And bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry; <sup>24</sup> for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.'"
- Your Heavenly Father can't wait to welcome you home with a big hug.
  - You've probably done some things that were not OK but, with commitment from you to work on it and with the Lord's help, everything will be OK in the end.
- *Amen.*