

# 1 John 1:9

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

## Analysis

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**If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.** This verse provides assurance of God's forgiveness while establishing the means (confession) and ground (God's faithfulness and justice) of that forgiveness.

"If we confess" (ἐὰν ὁμολογῶμεν/ean homologōmen) uses a third-class conditional—a condition that's assumed to be fulfilled. Homologeō means literally "to say the same thing as"—to agree with God about our sin, neither minimizing nor excusing it. This isn't mere acknowledgment but agreement with God's assessment.

The present tense verb indicates ongoing action: "if we keep confessing." This isn't one-time confession at conversion but continual acknowledgment of sin in the believer's life. John writes to believers (v.4, "that your joy may be full"), addressing ongoing sanctification.

"Our sins" (τὰς ἁμαρτίας ἡμῶν/tas hamartias hēmōn) is plural, indicating specific acts. We confess particular sins, not vague unworthiness. God wants honest specificity, not generic admission.

"He is faithful and just" (πιστός ἐστιν καὶ δίκαιος/pistos estin kai dikaios) grounds forgiveness not in God's mere mercy but in His faithfulness and justice. "Faithful" refers to God's covenant commitment; He promised forgiveness through Christ's blood. "Just" points to Christ's atonement—God justly forgives because Christ bore

sin's penalty. Forgiveness doesn't compromise justice; it fulfills it through substitutionary atonement.

"To forgive" (ἵνα ἀφῇ/hina aphē) means to send away, dismiss, cancel debt. This is complete pardon, not mere overlooking. "To cleanse" (καὶ καθάριση/kai katharisē) goes beyond legal forgiveness to moral purification. God not only pardons our guilt but purifies our nature.

"From all unrighteousness" (ἀπὸ πάσης ἀδικίας/apo pasēs adikias) encompasses the totality—every moral failure, every deviation from God's standard, every unrighteous act, thought, motive. Nothing is excluded from God's cleansing work.

## Historical Context

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First John likely dates to the 90s CE, written by the aging apostle to churches in Asia Minor facing early Gnostic teaching. Gnosticism devalued the physical body, teaching that what one did physically didn't affect spiritual purity. Some concluded sin didn't matter (antinomianism); others claimed they hadn't sinned (perfectionism).

John confronts both errors. Against those claiming to be "without sin" (v.8, 10), he insists all have sinned and need confession. Against those treating sin lightly because "it's just physical," he insists on confession and cleansing. True spirituality requires honesty about sin.

The concept of confession had deep roots. Old Testament confession (Hebrew yadah) meant acknowledging both sin and God's righteousness in judging it. Leviticus 5:5 required verbal confession with sacrifice. Psalm 32:5 and 51 model confessional prayer. The Day of Atonement involved national confession (Leviticus 16).

Early Christian practice included confession (James 5:16, "Confess your faults one to another"). The Didache (late first century) instructs: "In the congregation you shall confess your transgressions." This wasn't sacramental confession to priests but honest acknowledgment before God and community.

The ground of forgiveness—God's faithfulness and justice satisfied through Christ's atonement—was revolutionary. Pagan religions offered appeasement through sacrifices but no assurance. Mystery religions promised purification through rituals. Judaism offered forgiveness through temple sacrifice. Christianity proclaimed once-for-all sacrifice securing certain forgiveness based on God's character and Christ's finished work.

For believers wrestling with post-conversion sin, this verse offered assurance: ongoing sin doesn't negate salvation but requires ongoing confession. God's faithfulness ensures His commitment to cleanse; His justice ensures Christ's sacrifice suffices.

## **Related Passages**

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**Romans 1:17** — The righteous shall live by faith

**Hebrews 11:1** — Definition of faith

## **Study Questions**

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1. What is the difference between merely acknowledging sin and truly confessing it (agreeing with God about its seriousness)?
2. How does grounding forgiveness in God's 'faithfulness and justice' (not just mercy) provide greater assurance than if it were based on mercy alone?
3. What does it mean that God cleanses us 'from all unrighteousness,' not just forgives specific sins?
4. How should the ongoing nature of confession ('if we keep confessing') shape our daily Christian walk?
5. In what ways might we be tempted to minimize sin (like the Gnostics did) rather than honestly confessing it?

## Interlinear Text

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ἐὰν	ὁμολογῶμεν	τὰς	ἁμαρτίας	ἡμῶν	πιστός	ἐστίν	καὶ
<b>If</b>	<b>we confess</b>	G3588	<b>our sins</b>	<b>our</b>	<b>faithful</b>	<b>he is</b>	<b>and</b>
G1437	G3670		G266	G2257	G4103	G2076	G2532
δίκαιος	ἵνα	ἀφ᾽	ἡμῖν	τὰς	ἁμαρτίας	καὶ	καθαρίσῃ
<b>just</b>	<b>to</b>	<b>forgive</b>	<b>us</b>	G3588	<b>our sins</b>	<b>and</b>	<b>to cleanse</b>
G1342	G2443	G863	G2254		G266	G2532	G2511
ἡμᾶς	ἀπὸ	πάσης	ἀδικίας				
<b>us</b>	<b>from</b>	<b>all</b>	<b>unrighteousness</b>				
G2248	G575	G3956	G93				

## Additional Cross-References

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**Psalms 32:5** (Sin): I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Selah.

**Proverbs 28:13** (Sin): He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.

**Jeremiah 33:8** (Sin): And I will cleanse them from all their iniquity, whereby they have sinned against me; and I will pardon all their iniquities, whereby they have sinned, and whereby they have transgressed against me.

**1 John 1:7** (Sin): 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.

**Ezekiel 36:25** (Parallel theme): Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you.

**Hebrews 10:23** (Faith): Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;)

**1 Timothy 1:15** (Faith): This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.

**Nehemiah 1:6** (Sin): Let thine ear now be attentive, and thine eyes open, that thou mayest hear the prayer of thy servant, which I pray before thee now, day and night, for the children of Israel thy servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel, which we have sinned against thee: both I and my father's house have sinned.

**Ezekiel 37:23** (Sin): Neither shall they defile themselves any more with their idols, nor with their detestable things, nor with any of their transgressions: but I will save them out of all their dwellingplaces, wherein they have sinned, and will cleanse them: so shall they be my people, and I will be their God.

**1 Corinthians 1:9** (Faith): God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

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