

*Up From the Well – Reconciliation with God*

*God decided to leave man's conduct to his own free choice,  
and if he had not sinned, he would have been immortal.  
—Bereshit Rabbah 8,11*

**How can I get right with God?**

**Step one.** Rabbinic Judaism and Christianity agree that the first step to reconciliation with God is confession of the disobedience that separates us from Him. But why does God expect this? To understand, consider the following comparison...

*"Suppose I have jumped into a deep well. If I refuse to admit that I am down in the well, how can I be convinced to grab a rope? ...But I am embarrassed to find myself down here and frustrated that I cannot climb out on my own. So although God has dropped a rope and stands at the top ready to pull me up, I go to unusual lengths to ignore him. I pretend there is no rope. I pretend there is no well. I pretend I can climb out anytime I like without his blasted rope. I pretend I am supposed to be exactly where I am. Sometimes I even pretend that God is not really up there or not really willing and able to pull me out. Anything seems preferable to the humiliating admission that I am in a situation beyond my control. But until I admit that, how can I grab the rope?" (TGAM)*

There are many reasons why we might choose not to confess our disobedience. Continuing with the same comparison, consider these examples...

- |                                 |      |                                      |
|---------------------------------|------|--------------------------------------|
| There is no rope                | i.e. | The Gospel is not true               |
| There is no well                | i.e. | I'm not a sinner                     |
| I can climb out without a rope  | i.e. | I can be good enough for heaven      |
| I'm supposed to be here         | i.e. | I'm so bad even God can't forgive me |
| God's not really up there       | i.e. | God does not exist                   |
| God's not willing to pull me up | i.e. | God does not care about me           |

- ▶ What are some scriptures that indicate God wants lost people to confess when they come to him?
- ▶ What does it mean to "confess" in the context of an unbeliever's spiritual salvation? Does it have to include a recitation of specific sins? Does it have to include a specific acknowledgment of sinfulness? What does it mean to "acknowledge sin"?
- ▶ Why is confession a condition of an unbeliever's spiritual salvation?
- ▶ Does the role of confession change after we are "born again"? (See **Ro 7:21-25**)
- ▶ Instead, confession becomes a mode of reminding believers of ongoing sins, and asking God to remove us from the fallen word so we can get on

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with living as He wants us to live. Confession is part of being “rescued” on a daily basis.

**Step two.** Why isn't it enough to admit disobedience? To understand why God expects something more, consider our comparison again...

*“The words translated as “repent” in both the Hebrew and the Greek Scriptures carry the connotation of “turning,” that is, facing away from my past sinful behavior and back toward God. I cannot hold the rope yet continue to simultaneously splash around in the muck and mire. Experience has shown that people who try to do both lose their grip and fall right back down.” (TGAM)*

- ▶ What is “repentance”?
- ▶ Consider **James 2:18-19**. What insight does it offer on the purpose of repentance as a part of reconciliation with God?

**Okay, I've followed God's little formula, now what?**

**It's really not about a “formula.”** Confession and repentance mean nothing without the proper motivation...

*“I used to believe the sole purpose of confession and repentance was to instill humility, as if God only cares about being in charge, like a bully demanding I ‘say uncle’ before he lets me up. But at Chever Torah I have come to understand that confession motivates me to grab the rope and repentance inspires me to hold on tight.” (TGAM)*

- ▶ How do you feel when you realize you have hurt a loved one? How do you feel after you go to them and admit what you have done was wrong, and apologize?
- ▶ Who benefits most from an unbeliever's confession and repentance, the unbeliever, or God?

**The problem of justice**

**I did it, I admit it, and I really am sorry. Can God and I move on now?**

There's one more problem to be solved, as we can see in our comparison...

*“Remembering what I learned before in my study of why bad things happen to good people—remembering that even the Lord cannot make sense of nonsense in a logical universe—I suddenly see that even God cannot lift a person who does not grasp and hold the rope. But of course, it is not really that simple. The truth is, I have muddied the water with my floundering about below. I am covered with the muck and mire I stirred up. I have even swallowed some of the filthy stuff in my desperate attempts to escape on my own. So as I am drawn closer to God, a second question comes echoing down the shaft. ‘Can you leave this well the way you found it?’” (TGAM)*

- ▶ See **Nu 15: 22-29**. What kind of sins can be atoned for with an offering? (For more on this, see **Lv 4**, the entire chapter.)

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- ▶ Now see the rest of the story in **Nu 15:30-36**. What kind of sin does this address? What kind of offering is acceptable for this kind of sin?
- ▶ In addition to, see also **Ex 23:7**, **Dt 29:19-20**, and **Nu 15:31**. What is the status of the sinner before God in each of these scriptures?

**Can I make it up to God?** Rabbinic Judaism teaches that the Torah does provide one sacrificial offering for defiant sin, which is given once each year on the “Day of Atonement,” or *Yom Kippur*...

*“According to Rabbinic Judaism, this is the one ceremony that atones specifically for defiant sins against God. And indeed, the kind of sin forgiven on Yom Kippur is called pesha, which means “rebellion,” or willful deviation from godly living. So although many verses in the Torah specifically say defiant sins will not be forgiven, it seems possible that Yom Kippur might make up for the mess I’ve made at the bottom of the well...” (TGAM)*

- ▶ Read **Dt 12:13-14**. What difficulty does this present for those who believe the offerings of Yom Kippur can atone for defiant sin? (Hint: see **Mark 13:1-2**)
- ▶ Read **Ps 50:9-12** and **Job 41:11**. What difficulty does this present for those who believe the offerings of *Yom Kippur* (or any other compensation we might offer God) can atone for defiant sin? (Hint: see **Dt 19:21**)
- ▶ Given your answer to the question just above, would justice be served if a sinner offered his own life to God as a “life for life” sacrificial offering? What does this tell us about why punishment for those who die without being reconciled to God might be eternal? (See **Mt 25:41 & 46**)