



NAC-USA  
DEVELOPMENT  
INSTITUTE

**Belief and  
Justification**

**Acknowledg-  
ment of, and  
repentance  
for, our sins**

**Confession**

**Reconciliation  
and Resolution**

# MIDWEEK SCRIPT

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**2017**

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March

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## Session 1 — Belief and Justification

Many in the Christian world observe Lent, which this year began on March 1<sup>st</sup>. The purpose of Lent, for those who observe these six weeks before Easter, is to draw nearer to God through prayer, doing penance, repentance of sins, almsgiving, atonement, and self-denial.

The New Apostolic Church does not observe Lent as a 40-day period once every year. Rather, our understanding is that we are to walk a path to forgiveness every week, Sunday to Sunday. We believe preparatory work is necessary as a path to forgiveness. This preparation happens through these steps, which we will examine this month as we move closer to Holy Week:

1. Belief & justification,
2. Acknowledgment of, and repentance for, our sins,
3. Confession, and
4. Reconciliation & resolution.

We will start by talking about how believers in Jesus Christ are justified by the grace received through the gift of faith.

The great struggle of mankind is that we are all sinners and are unworthy to be in the presence of a holy God. How can the unrighteous have fellowship with the righteous? How can one who is unjust be at peace with the One who is just? As sinners, we are like fugitives on the run from the God who created us, just as Adam and Eve behaved after the fall into sin (Genesis 3:8).

The Bible is clear about what the sinfulness of man will reap. Apostle Paul told the Romans that “the wages of sin is death...” (Romans 6:23). But his explanation doesn’t end there, nor does God’s love. Despite mankind’s disobedience, God still loves and continues to care for all. His love for His creation is so great that even before the foundation of the world, He made a plan of salvation to rescue us. The love of God, which covered mankind even after the fall into sin, was revealed in the sending of His Son, Jesus Christ, who came and defeated sin. His sacrificial death is a gift of freedom to us, which Paul explained in the conclusion of Romans 6:23: “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Through Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross, all have the opportunity to become justified and receive the forgiveness of their sins. Our God is just, and He is the justifier. Theologically, to be justified means, “to declare innocent or guiltless, absolve, acquit.” For us to stand guiltless before our holy God, we must put our faith and trust in Jesus. Listen to what Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5:21: “For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” So Jesus took all of our sin upon Himself, rescued us from a life of separation from God, and opened a path for us back into His presence.

Though Jesus fully opened the way for us, the final step of justification is ours to take. This final step is that we must have faith in Jesus Christ. Faith is a gift of grace from God, as stated in Ephesians 2:8-9: “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.” Our God loves us so much that He did all the work for it to be possible for us to be redeemed, forgiven, and justified. We need only to take hold of the gift He has given and believe in Jesus Christ as our Savior.

## Session 2 — Acknowledgment of, and repentance for, our sins

Today, as we continue on the path to forgiveness, we will discuss acknowledging and repenting for our sins. To be forgiven for our sins, we must first be aware of them. We could start this self-reflection with the Ten Commandments. Holy Scripture describes the following as “sins”: any violation of the Ten Commandments, the breaking of vows made to God, refusal to believe in Christ, as well as things that go against Jesus’ teachings and the two commandments of love that He gave. All human beings break the law, and thus all human beings are sinners.

Sin is not only things that we have done or committed that we shouldn't have, it can also be failing or neglecting to do something that we should have. If we think about this, we realize just how often we do sin.

Let us go back to the Ten Commandments and read them again and acknowledge to ourselves where we may have sinned.

1. *1<sup>st</sup> Commandment: I am the Lord your God. You shall have no other gods before Me.* God is the only one to whom worship is due. The worship of any other living creatures, real or imagined spiritual beings, natural phenomena, or objects, is sin.
2. *2<sup>nd</sup> Commandment: You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain.* As a Christian, the believer bears a special responsibility toward the divine name. If those called by His name were to behave dishonorably, they would thereby dishonor the name of God.
3. *3<sup>rd</sup> Commandment: Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.* This commandment refers to conduct in everyday life. It calls upon believers to structure the Sunday as a day dedicated to the Lord, but the Bible passage goes on to state: "Six days you shall labor and do all your work." The individual is therefore obliged to use his energies for his own welfare and that of his family, as well as on behalf of the society. It is the will of God to give mankind their daily bread, but they must also do their part toward this end. Christians are obligated to conscientiously discharge the tasks assigned them in daily life.
4. *4<sup>th</sup> Commandment: Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you.* The relationship that we have with our parents, whether we are younger or older, should be characterized by love and trust. The commandment extends beyond just our parents and also includes the obligation we have to acknowledge all authority.
5. *5<sup>th</sup> Commandment: You shall not murder.* Jesus deepened our understanding of this commandment in the Sermon on the Mount, explaining: "Whoever hates his brother is a murderer."
6. *6<sup>th</sup> Commandment: You shall not commit adultery.* Jesus further taught: "But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart." The violation of this commandment is already committed when it is played out in thought.
7. *7<sup>th</sup> Commandment: You shall not steal.* This commandment is an admonition not to touch or unrightfully diminish the property of one's neighbor, nor to rob him of his honor, reputation, or dignity.
8. *8<sup>th</sup> Commandment: You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.* In the expanded sense, the Eighth Commandment can also be seen as a prohibition against any dishonest conduct. Christians are to give truthful testimony by believing in the gospel, proclaiming it to others, and living a lifestyle in accordance with it.
9. *9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Commandments: You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor's.* The Ninth and Tenth Commandments assign human beings the task of safeguarding the purity of their hearts, through self-control and self-restraint, to prevent the beginnings of jealousy from escalating into covetousness.

We can only come to repentance once we have recognized our own shortcomings or misconduct. Remorse—the feeling of suffering caused by wrongs committed in deed or omission— must also be a part of repentance, as well as the earnest endeavor to change our attitude and improve. If we acknowledge, repent, and feel remorse for our sin, we turn away from it and turn towards God and can hope in His grace.

### Session 3 — Confession

Hello! Today we will continue on our theme for March, the path to forgiveness. We have discussed the importance of belief, justification, and acknowledging and repenting for our sin. Today we will talk about confession.

Confession is not a term that we talk about a lot. We often associate it with the Catholic practice of confessing to a priest. However, confession is a very important step in *our* path to forgiveness. Genuine confession is a part of repentance and reconciliation. We may have thought of confession as a way to relieve our guilt or conscience, but confession isn't about making us feel better about ourselves. Genuine confession leads to genuine change in our lives.

There are three types of confession that we will discuss.

The first is **confessing to God**.

Psalm 32:5 reads, "I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,' and You forgave the iniquity of my sin."

Confessing our sins to God is the acknowledgment of sin – not simply the acknowledgement that there is sin, or that sin is wrong, but that *we* have sinned against God in specific thoughts, words, or actions. This is difficult. It is easier to dismiss our sin as just a mistake. But when we take the time to examine ourselves and think seriously about our sin, we see that we can't fix our sin on our own. Through confession we adopt a position of dependence on God and turn to Him seeking forgiveness, with a desire to conform ourselves to His character. Confession doesn't mean that we say, "I did it again; that's just the way I am." Confession means that we say, "Forgive me, for I have done it again, *but I don't want to do it again*. Please help me."

Apostle John encourages us to be genuine in our confessing in 1 John 1:8-9: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

In the Catechism, it suggests that we confess our sins to God during the Lord's Prayer when we say, "Forgive us our debts..." However, in some cases it is necessary to take more time in confessing our sins to God. We can come to Him in prayer and talk to Him truthfully about who we are and what we have done, our struggles with our sin, and our need for His grace and strength to overcome.

The second type of confession is **confessing to those you have wronged or hurt**. This confession begins the process of reconciliation. It may be easier to simply talk to God in secret about those you have wronged, but reconciliation can only happen when you go to the person, acknowledge what you have done, and ask for forgiveness. "If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men" (Romans 12:18).

We can look to James 5:16 for our source here: "Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed." We may think the word "healed" is a little strange, but it holds a beautiful significance. The letter of James is written to people struggling in hardship. This verse comes close to the end of the book, as a conclusion to everything that James addressed in his readers' lives, and describes a healing of their relationships with God and with each other.

Their relationships *needed* healing. As a first result of their hardships, their relationship with God had been broken through doubt, blaming, and trying to bargain with God. As a second result, their relationships with one another had suffered. James warns them against playing favorites, speaking against each other, fighting, slandering, and judging each

other. James uses this exhortation of confession to point out the oneness we have with each other because of our common need for forgiveness. When we stand together before God with this awareness:

- instead of judging each other, we confess.
- instead of blaming each other, we are eager to forgive.
- instead of criticizing each other, we pray and intercede on one another's behalf.

When these changes take place, a spirit of reconciliation permeates the church, which helps us speak the truth in love. Our confession to God heals the brokenness in our relationship with Him, and confessing to what we have done to each other heals the suffering between us.

The third and last type of confession is perhaps one of the most difficult. At times in our life, we find that we are struggling with a sin over and over again, one that we can't seem to conquer on our own. It is then that we can **confess to someone who can help us**. This could be a friend or family member, a mentor, a spouse—someone that you trust. There are things in our lives that we can't do on our own, and that's why God gives us community, to strengthen us, to hold us accountable, to encourage us, and to pray for us.

Confessing our sins, whether to God, to someone we've hurt, or to someone who can help us, can be a very difficult and uncomfortable thing to do. But genuine confession is powerful and can lead to genuine change, healing in our relationships, and a closer relationship to God and those around us.

#### **Session 4 — Reconciliation and Resolution**

Welcome back! This month we've journeyed on a path to forgiveness that started with being justified through our belief in Jesus Christ and progressed through the stages of repentance and confession. In our last session for March, we will explore reconciliation and resolution. These steps are very closely tied to repentance.

Reconciliation is not just a part of the gospel message; it is the *primary purpose* of the gospel message. Through the fall and original sin, mankind was separated from God. Because of this separation, God enacted a plan of salvation that would provide access for mankind to come back to Him and to reconcile that broken relationship. Apostle Paul describes it eloquently in 2 Corinthians 5:18-19: "Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation."

When God forgives us, He reconciles us to Himself, but reconciliation and restoration are also necessary in our relationships with others. When we forgive our neighbor, it allows us to be reconciled with God, as we say in the Lord's Prayer, "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors."

A biblical example of reconciliation can be found in Jesus' interaction with Zacchaeus found in Luke 19. We may know of Zacchaeus as a "wee little man," but there is more to this story than just a catchy tune from a Sunday school song. This short, ten-verse account contains an impactful lesson for us, beginning with the context. It was almost the last week of Jesus' life. He was on His way from Galilee to Jerusalem, where He would soon have the triumphal entry on Palm Sunday. On this journey, He passed through Jericho, where He met Zacchaeus, as it is recorded in Luke 19:1-10. Verse 2 says, "Now behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus who was a chief tax collector, and he was rich."

Zacchaeus wasn't just a tax collector, but a chief tax collector; he had other tax collectors under him. Jericho was under Roman rule at the time, and private businessmen, called "publicans," would try to get various government jobs, including the collection of taxes. A certain amount of money would need to go to Rome, but the tax collectors could

collect whatever amount they wanted. This arrangement, fueled by greed, would often lead to extortion, corruption, and unfair treatment of citizens in many ways.

Verse 3 tells us that Zacchaeus “sought to see who Jesus was, but could not because of the crowd, for he was of short stature.” We do not know why Zacchaeus was so determined to see Jesus. Perhaps he had heard about Jesus dining with tax collectors, as recorded in Luke 5, and wanted to see what the fuss was about. Whatever the reason, Zacchaeus was so determined to see Jesus that he wasn’t going to let the crowds, or his short stature, stop him. Verse 4 continues, “so he ran ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see Him, for He was going to pass that way.”

Jesus indeed passes that area, sees Zacchaeus in the tree, tells him to come down, and declares that He must stay at Zacchaeus’ house that day. Those are the only words documented that Jesus said to Zacchaeus before we read his response to Jesus in verse 8, “Then Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, ‘Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore four-fold.’”

To this, Jesus simply replies, “Today salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham...”

Jesus didn’t confront Zacchaeus about any potential wrongdoing; Zacchaeus may have already felt that his behavior was not right. But after his one encounter with Jesus, Zacchaeus provided a concrete and practical promise to give to the poor, as well as to pay back anyone he had cheated, not only the 20% that was required by the law, but 400%!

As this story demonstrates, the steps of reconciliation and resolution on the path to forgiveness are more than just inward, warm feelings; they require observable actions and a change in behavior. Whereas reconciliation is the act of repairing something that was damaged in the past, resolution is the act of vowing not to make those same mistakes again in the future. We can’t resolve to be different in a certain area, and then our thoughts, behavior, and reactions in that area of our life remain completely unchanged.

Jesus’ interaction with Zacchaeus ends with Jesus explaining that “the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). This includes you and me today. He came to save *us* and does so by having provided the path to forgiveness. Continuously and purposefully journeying on this path, we learn to make better decisions in our lives, and thereby bring glory to God, our Father.