"If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1Jn 1:9)

THE PROMISE COMES WITH A COMMAND

The first thing you'll notice about the promise is that a commandment is attached to it, and we must keep the commandment if we want the promised blessing. If we obey the commandment to confess our sins, all our sins will be forgiven and cleansed.

This promise is not unique—or even unusual—among the promises of God. In fact, most of God's promises have commandments attached.

It is rare for God to make an unconditional promise—like the rainbow promise for example (Gen 9:8-17). That promise requires nothing of those to whom it is made.

The promised blessings of knowing God and having fellowship with him, however, come with commandments to keep.

"The one who says 'I have come to know God' yet does not keep his commandments is a liar and the truth is not in him" (1Jn 2:3-6).

THE COMMAND COMES WITH A PROBLEM

Now on its face value, the promise seems to be saying that any sin you confess, God will forgive. But on the other hand it seems to imply that any sin you fail to confess God won't forgive! Now that presents a problem. It would seem to make the blessing of full forgiveness dependent upon one's perfect performance in remembering and confessing all one's sins—every single one!

That would very likely leave us condemned, and not counted righteous, because we didn't get the confession of our sins 100% right. This is the principle that "whoever keeps the whole law yet stumbles in one point, has become guilty of all" (Jas 2:10).

Now we cannot answer this problem with a "soft God" approach, because God's love is never indulgent—it's tough love. Paul says, "work out your salvation with fear and trembling" and "prove yourselves blameless and innocent" (Php 2:12-15) —not 80% blameless and innocent.

God's standard is exacting. "God is light and in him there is no darkness at all" and we must "walk in the light as he himself is in the light" —no less a standard will do (1Jn 1:5-7). That's the problem.

THE PROBLEM COMES WITH A SOLUTION

If you go before a judge, you usually have a qualified barrister to put your case for you—because the law court is so exacting.

John says, "If we sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1Jn 2:1-2).

We ought to make our confession of sins only through the priest God has appointed and anointed, namely Christ Jesus (Heb 4:14-16, 10:19-23).

Both the Holy Spirit and Christ intercede for us when we pray.

"The Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings which cannot be uttered... Christ also intercedes for us" (Rom 8:26-27,34).

So, although our very best efforts at confession may be far from perfect, our confession will be perfected by Christ's intercession.

This demonstrates our reliance upon the perfection and authority of our High Priest. He meets God's exacting standards on our behalf.