

Confession of Sin

Introduction

- I. In some local churches, someone confessing sin before the congregation is a very frequent occurrence – hardly a Sunday goes by without someone confessing sin to the church
- II. On the other hand, in some churches, someone confessing sin before the congregation is a very rare occurrence.
 - A. I am sure you have heard it said that “confession is good for the soul,” but sometimes we miss out entirely on the spiritual good that can be derived from confessing sin
 1. I believe that, in many cases, what the Bible actually says about confessing sin is altogether ignored – and something else, something falling short of confession, is substituted in its place.
 2. This is a serious mistake. The Bible teaches:
1Jn 1:9 9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.
 3. That little word “if” indicates that forgiveness is conditioned upon confession
 - B. So confession is not only good for the soul, it is necessary for the soul...
Pr 28:13 13 He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, But he who confesses and forsakes them will find compassion.
- III. The difference in practice from church to church with regard to confessing sin is due, at least in some large part to two things:
 - A. First, the fact that many do not understand what the Bible really teaches about confessing sin. Sometimes, what they perceive to be confession is not really confession at all.
 - B. Second, is the fact that real confession is really hard – and the humility it takes to truly confess sin is missing.
- IV. So, I want to talk with you about what the Bible teaches about confessing sin, and I want to encourage all of us to practice it – even though it is hard and sometimes very unpleasant.

Discussion

I. The Bible Teaches That Confession Of Sin Is PERSONAL

- A. Saying “We all sin” or “We all have our faults” is to acknowledge the obvious, but it is not confession – and neither is it hard to do. Sometimes we attempt to hide our sins behind the ambiguity.
- B. To the contrary, a true confession of sin says: “**I** have sinned. **I’m** sorry. Please forgive **me** for what **I** have done”

- C. Sin is personal. Guilt is personal. Therefore, a personal confession of sin is the only thing that will do...

Lv 26:40-42 40 'If they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their forefathers, in their unfaithfulness which they committed against Me, and also in their acting with hostility against Me —
41 I also was acting with hostility against them, to bring them into the land of their enemies — or if their uncircumcised heart becomes humbled so that they then make amends for their iniquity,
42 then I will remember My covenant with Jacob, and I will remember also My covenant with Isaac, and My covenant with Abraham as well, and I will remember the land.

1. Consider David's personal confession...

Ps 32:5-6 5 I acknowledged **my sin** to You, And **my iniquity** I did not hide; I said, "I will confess **my transgressions** to the LORD"; And You forgave the guilt of **my sin**.
Selah.

6 Therefore, let everyone who is godly pray to You in a time when You may be found; Surely in a flood of great waters they will not reach him..

Ps 51:1-4 1 Be gracious to me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; According to the greatness of Your compassion blot out my transgressions.

2 Wash me thoroughly from **my iniquity** And cleanse me from **my sin**.

3 For I know my transgressions, And **my sin** is ever before me.

4 Against You, You only, **I have sinned** And done what is evil in Your sight, So that You are justified when You speak And blameless when You judge.

- a. In these two psalms, David talks about "my sin," "my iniquity," "my transgressions"

II. The Bible Teaches That Confession Of Sin Is DEFINITE

- A. There is no confession of sin in saying, "If I have done anything..." or "If I have sinned or offended someone..." These are easy statements to make, sometimes they may sooth the feelings of other people, but they acknowledge nothing and to say either or both is simply *not a confession* of sin!
- B. If you are unsure as to whether you have sinned, you need to find out
1. Until you know that you have sinned, and until you have admitted to yourself that you have sinned, you cannot make a real confession.
 2. "If" confessions are a farce. Confession must say "I have SINNED" -- no doubt about it
 - a. **Bob Crawley**: "We have not confessed sin when we come before the brethren to say, 'If I have offended anyone, I am sorry.' This is but to apologize for a social mis-step. One who says, 'If I have done wrong, I want you to forgive me,' is usually saying by implication, 'Of course, I don't think, myself, that what I did was wrong.' This kind of 'confession' is convenient to give one the power to say later, 'I asked for your forgiveness.' But it also gives him the power to say, if he chooses, 'I didn't actually admit that I was wrong.'" (*"Confessing Sins," The Hazelwood Messenger, Jan. 25, 1985, p. 2*)

3. David was definite

Ps 51:3 3 For I know my transgressions, And my sin is ever before me.

C. Consider these examples:

1. Achan

Josh 7:19-21 19 Then Joshua said to Achan, "My son, I implore you, give glory to the LORD, the God of Israel, and give praise to Him; and tell me now what you have done. Do not hide it from me."
20 So Achan answered Joshua and said, "Truly, I have sinned against the LORD, the God of Israel, and this is what I did:
21 when I saw among the spoil a beautiful mantle from Shinar and two hundred shekels of silver and a bar of gold fifty shekels in weight, then I coveted them and took them; and behold, they are concealed in the earth inside my tent with the silver underneath it."

2. Saul

1Sm 26:18-21 18 He also said, "Why then is my lord pursuing his servant? For what have I done? Or what evil is in my hand?
19 "Now therefore, please let my lord the king listen to the words of his servant. If the LORD has stirred you up against me, let Him accept an offering; but if it is men, cursed are they before the LORD, for they have driven me out today so that I would have no attachment with the inheritance of the LORD, saying, 'Go, serve other gods.'
20 "Now then, do not let my blood fall to the ground away from the presence of the LORD; for the king of Israel has come out to search for a single flea, just as one hunts a partridge in the mountains."
21 Then Saul said, "I have sinned. Return, my son David, for I will not harm you again because my life was precious in your sight this day. Behold, I have played the fool and have committed a serious error."

3. David

2Sm 12:13 13 Then David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD." And Nathan said to David, "The LORD also has taken away your sin; you shall not die."

4. Judas

Mt 27:4 4 saying, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood." But they said, "What is that to us? See to that yourself!"

D. And then there is the specific instruction of Scripture...

Lk 17:3-4 3 "Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him.
4 "And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' forgive him."

III. The Bible Teaches That Confession Of Sin Is SPECIFIC

A. “Confess” (*homologeō*)

1. **Vine:** “lit., to speak the same thing (*homos*, same, *legō*, to speak), to assent, accord, agree with, denotes, either (a) to confess, declare, admit.... (b) to confess by way of admitting oneself guilty of what one is accused of, the result of inward conviction.... (c) to declare openly by way of speaking out freely, such confession being the effect of deep conviction of facts.... (d) to confess by way of celebrating with praise....” (Vine, Logos Research Systems, Vol. 2, p. 120)
2. **Thayer:** “1. prop. *to say the same thing* as another, i.e. *to agree with, assent*, both absol. and w. a dat. of the pers.; often so in Grk. writ. fr. Hdt. down; hence 2. univ. *to concede*; i.e. a. *not to refuse*, i.e. *to promise....* b. *not to deny*, i.e. *to confess; declare....to confess*, i.e. to admit or declare one’s self guilty of what one is accused of.... 3. *to profess....i.e. to declare openly, speak out freely*, [A.V. generally *confess...*].... *tina, to profess one’s self the worshipper of one....* 4. Acc. to a usage unknown to Grk. writ. *to praise, celebrate....*” (#3670, p. 446)
3. **BAGD:** “1. to commit oneself to do someth. for someone, promise, assure ... 2. to share a common view or be of common mind about a matter, agree... 3. to concede that something is factual or true, grant, admit, confess... with a focus on the admission of wrongdoing 4. to acknowledge someth., ordinarily in public, acknowledge, claim, profess...” (708)

B. There are circumstances where a general confession of sinfulness is in order ...

Lk 18:13 13 "But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!'

1. A confession of a general sort may be proper when an unfaithful Christian has been away from the Lord for so long that specific sins are impossible to remember.
 - a. In this case, the confessor should not be attempting to conceal sin – specifically and humbly confessing that he had rejected the Lord’s way.
2. A confession of a general sort is proper when the sin is not known to the members of the church and the confessor is wanting the help, encouragement, and prayers of the members
 - a. This is not so much a “confession” of sin as much as it is a plea for help in overcoming area where one is weak.

C. But a but a general confess of sinfulness is not in order in all situations. The confession of sin that is known to others, and required by the Lord, of necessity involves an admission of the particular sin...

1. This is the specific instruction of the Scriptures...

Lv 5:5-6

5 'So it shall be when he becomes guilty in one of these, that **he shall confess; that in which he has sinned.**

6 'He shall also bring his guilt offering to the LORD for his sin which he has committed, a female from the flock, a lamb or a goat as a sin offering. So the priest shall make atonement on his behalf for his sin.

- Num 5:5-7 5 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,
 6 "Speak to the sons of Israel, 'When a man or woman commits any of the sins of mankind, acting unfaithfully against the LORD, and that person is guilty,
 7 then **he shall confess his sins which he has committed**, and he shall make restitution in full for his wrong and add to it one-fifth of it, and give it to him whom he has wronged.
- Jas 5:16 16 Therefore, **confess your sins** to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.
- 1Jn 1:9 9 If we **confess our sins**, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

- a. These passage do not instruct me to “confess that I am a sinner,” nor that “I have sinned.” Rather, *they instruct me to confess my sins!*
- b. Now I don’t believe the Scriptures to teach that...
 - (1) You must confess your sins to a priest (as the Catholics teach), or a preacher (as if we are someone’s special representative to God)...
 - (2) You must confess every sin to everybody all the time..
 - (a) If the sin is private, then confess it privately.
 - (b) If the sin is only between you and a few individuals, confess it to them.
 - (c) “Public confession” is made necessary only when one’s sin is so generally known, so public, that has “given occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme...” (2Sm 12:14).
 - (d) If the sin is private and it was confessed privately, but later on it becomes public, a public confession may be the most expedient way to let others know that this sin has been repented of

2. This is what sinners in Bible times did

- a. David...

Ps 51:4,14 4 Against You, You only, I have sinned And done what is evil in Your sight, So that You are justified when You speak And blameless when You judge.

14 Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, the God of my salvation; Then my tongue will joyfully sing of Your righteousness.

- (1) David confessed, not just that he was a sinner or that he had sinned, he confessed his transgressions

Ps 32:5 5 I acknowledged my sin to You, And my iniquity I did not hide; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD"; And You forgave the guilt of my sin.

- (2) David specifically confessed bloodshed

Ps 51:14 14 Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, the God of my salvation; Then my tongue will joyfully sing of Your righteousness.

- (a) He did this in a psalm that would be read/sung by all Israel, even though, at least in the beginning, his sin was known by only a very few (Bathsheba and Joab)
- b. Achan
- Josh 7:19-21 19 Then Joshua said to Achan, "My son, I implore you, give glory to the LORD, the God of Israel, and give praise to Him; and tell me now what you have done. Do not hide it from me."
 20 So Achan answered Joshua and said, "Truly, I have sinned against the LORD, the God of Israel, and this is what I did:
 21 when I saw among the spoil a beautiful mantle from Shinar and two hundred shekels of silver and a bar of gold fifty shekels in weight, then I coveted them and took them; and behold, they are concealed in the earth inside my tent with the silver underneath it."
- c. Judas
- Mt 27:4 4 saying, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood." But they said, "What is that to us? See to that yourself!"
- d. The Israelites
- Ezra 10:1-3 1 Now while Ezra was praying and making confession, weeping and prostrating himself before the house of God, a very large assembly, men, women and children, gathered to him from Israel; for the people wept bitterly.
 2 Shecaniah the son of Jehiel, one of the sons of Elam, said to Ezra, "We have been unfaithful to our God and have married foreign women from the peoples of the land; yet now there is hope for Israel in spite of this.
 3 "So now let us make a covenant with our God to put away all the wives and their children, according to the counsel of my lord and of those who tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law.
- Ezra 10:10-12 10 Then Ezra the priest stood up and said to them, "You have been unfaithful and have married foreign wives adding to the guilt of Israel.
 11 "Now therefore, make confession to the LORD God of your fathers and do His will; and separate yourselves from the peoples of the land and from the foreign wives."
 12 Then all the assembly replied with a loud voice, "That's right! As you have said, so it is our duty to do.
- Neh 9:1-3 1 Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the sons of Israel assembled with fasting, in sackcloth and with dirt upon them.
 2 The descendants of Israel separated themselves from all foreigners, and stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers.
 3 While they stood in their place, they read from the book of the law of the LORD their God for a fourth of the day; and for another fourth they confessed and worshiped the LORD their God.

e. The Jews baptized by John the Baptist

Mt 3:5-6 5 Then Jerusalem was going out to him, and all Judea and all the district around the Jordan;
6 and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, as they confessed their sins.

Mk 1:5 5 And all the country of Judea was going out to him, and all the people of Jerusalem; and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins.

f. The Ephesians

Ac 19:17-18 17 This became known to all, both Jews and Greeks, who lived in Ephesus; and fear fell upon them all and the name of the Lord Jesus was being magnified.

18 Many also of those who had believed kept coming, confessing and disclosing their practices.

g. Paul

1Tm 1:12-15 12 I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service,
13 even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. Yet I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief;
14 and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are found in Christ Jesus.
15 It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all.

3. Real confession names the sin...

a. A real confession says:

- (1) "I have been a gossip"
- (2) "I lied about you"
- (3) "I have been a trouble-maker"
- (4) "I have stolen"
- (5) "I cursed you"
- (6) "I have committed adultery"

D. Now, let me ask, is that the kind of confession we usually hear when someone comes before the church to "confess" sin?

1. Real confession is so hard, it take so much contriteness, that few will do it.

Ps 51:17 17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.

2. **Bob Crowley:** “It is a remarkable thing in our own day to hear a man confess his sins. This is a vastly different thing from making a general admission that at some unspecified times in the indefinite past one has been more or less guilty of things that he should not have done. We frequently hear the plea made in public prayers, ‘Lord, forgive us for we are only human beings and often do things that we should not.’ True as this statement is, it does not amount to the kind of confession of sin that we so often need to make. It is somewhat easy for a man, speaking of sin in the abstract, to admit that at some indefinite time he has been guilty of it. It is far harder for that man, speaking of a particular thing he has done to say, ‘I have sinned.’” (*Confessing Sins, The Hazelwood Messenger*, Jan. 25, 1985, p. 2)

E. Often in our “public confessions” sin is renamed; the crime is reduced

1. This is a common practice in civil law. The criminal is allowed to plead guilty to a lesser charge; he is allowed to admit to a misdemeanor rather than the felony he actually committed
2. That is not allowed in God’s court!
 - a. You cannot confess to “hurting someone’s feelings” when you have slandered the person
 - b. “Accidentally misrepresenting the facts” or “exaggerating” will not do when what you really did was lie
 - c. You can’t confess that you’ve failed as a husband or wife when you have committed adultery

F. One of the real problems with generic confessions is that others who may know about the sin may be left in doubt as to whether or not there has been specific repentance

1. And that’s a problem, because if there has not been specific repentance, there can be no forgiveness (Lk. 17:3-4); therefore one is still in his sins, and Christians have a responsibility to try to restore erring brothers (Gal. 6:1-2)

Lk 17:3-4 3 "Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him.

4 "And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' forgive him."

Gal 6:1-2 1 Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.

2 Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ.

- a. “Am I my brother’s keeper?” (Gen. 4:9) God says “Yes!”
2. If other people don’t know about my sin, then they don’t necessarily need to know about my repentance, but if other people do know about my sin, they need to know that I’ve repented
 - a. Not so they can take some kind of sadistic pleasure in knowing that I’ve “messed up.” God’s word specifically condemns that kind of thing

Pr 24:17-18 17 Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, And do not let your heart be glad when he stumbles;
18 Or the LORD will see it and be displeased, And turn His anger away from him.

- b. But so they can forgive me (if I've sinned against them) and help me and encourage me and treat me right
- 3. Of course, if you have a question, you could easily go to the confessor and ask

IV. The Bible Teaches That Confession Of Sin Is To Be MADE TO THE ONE WHO HAS BEEN SINNED AGAINST

- A. Every sin that is committed is against God -- by definition, sin is a transgression of God's law.

1Jn 3:4 4 Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness.

- 1. So every sin committed ought to be confessed to God

- B. But the sin committed is often a wrong committed against someone else, and the sin ought to be confessed to the one who has been wronged, and his forgiveness must be sought ...

Lk 17:3-4 3 "Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him.
4 "And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' forgive him."

- 1. The Prodigal Son said: "...Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son." (Lk. 15:21)

- C. There is, sometimes, a fellow on the front pew who has no business being there. He walked down the aisle and confessed sin to the church when he sinned against his neighbor!

- 1. What he needs to do is go back up the aisle, and out of the assembly, to the door of the man he wronged. Look that man in the eye and say, "I lied about you"

- a. That is confession!

- 2. A dozen times down the aisle would be easier, but it would not be true confession

- a. Confessing to the church is necessary when the church knows of the sin, but confessing to the church cannot substitute for confessing to the one who was sinned against

- b. This clearly is the Lord's teaching

Mt 5:23-24 23 "Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you,
24 leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering.

- D. Sometimes, there is another fellow on the front pew who has no business being there. He walked down the wrong aisle and confessed to the wrong church!

- 1. He sinned against the church across town when he sowed discord there

- a. He needs to go back too make his confession where he sinned

- 2. Or the sin he committed is known among the members of the church across town

- a. He needs to go back to make his confession where his sin is known

V. The Bible Teaches That Confession Of Sin Involves An Acknowledgement Of REPENTANCE

- A. Confession of sin certainly involves an acknowledgement of specific sins, but that alone is not enough
1. One may confess specific sin without repentance
 - a. King Saul (1 Sam. 26:21, 25 & 27:1)

1Sm 26:21,25 **21** Then Saul said, "I have sinned. Return, my son David, for I will not harm you again because my life was precious in your sight this day. Behold, I have played the fool and have committed a serious error."

25 Then Saul said to David, "Blessed are you, my son David; you will both accomplish much and surely prevail." So David went on his way, and Saul returned to his place.

1Sm 27:1 1 Then David said to himself, "Now I will perish one day by the hand of Saul. There is nothing better for me than to escape into the land of the Philistines. Saul then will despair of searching for me anymore in all the territory of Israel, and I will escape from his hand."
 - b. Judas

Mt 27:3-5 3 Then when Judas, who had betrayed Him, saw that He had been condemned, he felt remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders,
4 saying, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood." But they said, "What is that to us? See to that yourself!"
5 And he threw the pieces of silver into the temple sanctuary and departed; and he went away and hanged himself.
- B. Confession of sin also involves an acknowledgment of repentance
- Lk 17:3-4 3 "Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him.
4 "And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' forgive him."
- Pro 28:13 13 He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, But he who confesses and forsakes them will find compassion.

VI. The Bible Teaches That Confession Of Sin Is To Be Followed By A PLEA FOR FORGIVENESS

- A. A truly penitent person will confess his sin and ask for forgiveness
1. A man may admit his meanness -- in fact, he may even be proud of it. That is not the Bible kind of confession

2. A man who seeks no pardon is not confessing sin

a. David

Ps 51:1-2 1 Be gracious to me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; According to the greatness of Your compassion blot out my transgressions.
2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity And cleanse me from my sin.

b. The Prodigal Son

Lk 15:17-21 17 "But when he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger!
18 'I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight;
19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men."
20 "So he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.
21 "And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

Conclusion

- A. Confession is good for the soul, but it is mighty hard -- especially on your pride
- B. Confession is good for the soul when:
 - 1. It is personal
 - 2. It is definite
 - 3. It is specific
 - 4. It is made to the one who has been wronged and to those who know about it
 - 5. It involves an acknowledgment of repentance
 - 6. It is followed by a sincere plea for forgiveness
- C. Do you need to confess sin?
- D. Will you do that as God instructs you to do it?