

The Confession of Sins

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Many Scriptures speak of the need to confess our sins. In *James 5*, brother James wrote these words:

James 5.16 – 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.

When David committed adultery with Bathsheba and then arranged for the death of her husband, he was consumed with guilt. In *Psalms 32*, he wrote of the awful guilt he had over what he had done. He wrote these words:

Psalms 32.3-6 – 3. When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. 4. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; my vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer. 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. 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.

As soon as the prophet Nathan told David that his sin against Bathsheba and her husband Uriah was known to God. David said:

2 Samuel 12.13 – "...I have sinned against the Lord." And Nathan said to David, "The Lord also has taken away your sins; you shall not die.

We are, therefore, first of all to confess our sins to God. He will forgive us, if we are sincere in our confession.

Secondly, we are to confess our sins to the person we have sinned against. When the Prodigal Son came to his senses and decided to return home, he knew that he had to confess his sins to his father. He statement was:

Luke 15.21 – Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.

Notice that the son did not stop on the way back home and find someone along the way that he could confess his sins to. What good would it have done if he had confessed his sins to someone that he had not sinned against? He had sinned against his father, and therefore he had to return home and confess his behavior to his father and ask for forgiveness.

The best rule to go by came from our brother Guy N. Woods, when he preached on this subject many years ago. He said, "The confession should be as public as the sin." If we commit a private sin that no-one knows about but our Father in heaven, then we confess that sin to him and accept his promise of forgiveness. If we have sinned against a brother in Christ, we go to that brother and state clearly what we did that was wrong and ask for his forgiveness. If we commit sin that everyone in the congregation knows about, then we go before the congregation and admit our error and ask the church to forgive us.

There are two abuses of confession of sins that we need to be aware of.

First, some of our denominational friends confess their sins to the local priest. The priest listens to their confession and then "absolves" them from their sins

But there are two big problems with this practice. First, it cannot be found in the Bible, and secondly, under the New Testament we are all priests to God.

1 Peter 2.9 – But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood....

We are not to have a special class of people known as "priests." We do not have a special priesthood, such as the Levites under the Law of Moses. Under the New Testament, we approach God directly through his son Jesus Christ. We receive forgiveness only through our savior and the blood he shed on the cross, not through a man who wears the title "Father" and wears a black shirt with a white collar.

The second abuse is the idea that we pick out someone in the congregation and confess our sins to that person. That practice is not found anywhere in the Bible

Matthew 6.12 – And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

For us to forgive those who have sinned against us, we have to know what they have done. Therefore, if we have sinned against a fellow Christian, we go to that person and ask for forgiveness for what we have done.

The first time that the concept of forgiveness is mentioned in the Bible is in *Genesis 50.17*. Joseph's brothers had sold him to slave-traders and now were afraid of what Joseph might do, since he was the second in command in the nation of Egypt. But they knew what they had to do: confess their sin to Joseph and ask for his forgiveness:

Genesis 50.16-17 – 16. So they sent a message to Joseph, saying, "Your father charged before he died, saying, 17. 'Thus you shall say to Joseph, "Please forgive, I beg you, the transgression of your brothers and their sin, for they did you wrong.'" And now, please forgive

the transgression of the servants of the God of your father." And Joseph wept when they spoke to him.

This was handled perfectly, according to the Scriptures. The other brothers did not stop on the way to Egypt and confess their sins to some other person, but they went to Joseph himself and confessed their sin against him and asked for forgiveness. This should be our practice today.

The great danger in choosing someone in the congregation whom we have not sinned against and then to confess our sins to that person is this. Is that person able to bear the burden of knowing what we have done? What effect will our confession have on that person in knowing our secret sins and our weaknesses? Will that person be led into sin by our example? Will our influence with that person be destroyed by knowing our secret thoughts and private sins?

There is also the concept of controlling others with the knowledge of what they have done. This is one tactic that is used by cultic groups to control their members. Please see the documentation of how this shameful tactic was used to control members in the International Churches of Christ:

www.rickcross.com/reference/icc/ICC107.html

When we have offended, hurt, or sinned against someone else, we should go to that person and offer a sincere apology and confession and ask for forgiveness. Whether the forgiveness is granted is up to the person we sinned against. But our responsibility is to genuinely repent, confess the sin, and ask for forgiveness.

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