



HEBRON

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## CONFESSION FOR THE PURPOSE OF GODLINESS

[Compiled from *The Bible, Confess Your Sins* (Stott), *Celebration of Discipline* (Foster), *Disciplined for Life* (Loftness/Mahaney), and *Spiritual Disciplines* (CHBC)]

### I. Introduction to Confession

#### a. Confession has two meanings.

- i. One meaning is to declare faith in, or adherence to, God.
  - Hebrews 3:1 *Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess.*
- ii. The more common meaning is to acknowledge guilt before God.
  - This “confessing” means admitting to having sinned: to have transgressed, broken, or disobeyed (synonymous terms) one or more of God’s commands, or laws.
  - Leviticus 5:5 *When anyone is guilty... he must confess in what way he has sinned.*

#### b. Confession results in forgiveness.

- i. 1 John 1:9 *If we confess our sins, he... will forgive us our sins...*

#### c. Christ is the basis for God’s forgiveness.

- i. Hebrews 10:4 *...it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.*
- ii. Hebrews 10:9-10... *we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.*
- iii. Forgiveness is offered to us by God on the sole ground of the death of His Son.
- iv. Romans 10:9-10... *if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe... you will be saved.*
- v. The confession of sin is necessary to receive the forgiveness of God, and that forgiveness is only possible if we also confess Christ.
- vi. Without the cross, the discipline of confession would only be psychologically therapeutic. But because of the cross, it involves both a change in our relationship with God and a change in us.

#### d. Confession must be accompanied by repentance.

- i. Ezra 10:11 *...make confession ..., and do his will.*
- ii. Acts 3:19 *Repent... so that your sins may be wiped out...*
- iii. Confession isn’t genuine if it’s not accompanied by determination to live your life differently.

## II. To Whom, and What, Should We Confess?

### a. Confess to God all of your sins.

- i. Every sin is ultimately against God. (Psalm 51:4)
- ii. But we have a problem being honest with God about our sins. We get so good at concealing our sins from others that we sometimes lapse into thinking we can conceal them from God.
- iii. Adam and Eve are not the only ones who thought they could hide from God.
- iv. Romans 14:12 *...each of us will give an account of himself to God.*
- v. Luke 12:2-3 *There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed.*
- vi. 1 Samuel 16:7... *the LORD looks at the heart.*
- vii. Matthew 5:27-28...*committed adultery with her in his heart.*
- viii. So even those sinful thoughts of our hearts, which are known only to God, should be confessed.

### b. Confess to another person your sins against them.

- i. The Bible places great importance on maintaining right relationships with our fellow men, teaching that a right relationship with God is otherwise impossible.
- ii. Numbers 5:5-7 *'When a man or woman wrongs another in any way...that person... must confess the sin he has committed.*
- iii. Matthew 5:23-24 *First go and be reconciled to your brother...*
- iv. Confessing our sins against others, to them directly, is mandatory. This includes our brothers and sisters particularly, but it is not limited just them. We have the same obligation to neighbors, co-workers, etc.

### c. Confess your sins to your church.

- i. We collectively confess, to God and one another, our sins of commission and omission.
  - Ephesians 6:17 *always keep on praying for all the saints.*
- ii. We confess to the church with our baptism.
  - Mark 1:4-5 *Confessing their sins, they were baptized...*
- iii. Personally confess to the church in conjunction with church discipline for serious sin, in which we have willfully persisted.
  - 2 Corinthians 7:8-9. <sup>8</sup>*Even if I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it. Though I did regret it—I see that my letter hurt you, but only for a little while—<sup>9</sup>yet now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance. For you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed in any way by us*
  - While such confession to the church may be painful, it is a blessing nonetheless.

### d. Confess your sins to another Christian to whom you wish to be accountable.

- i. James 5:16 *...confess your sins to each other...*
- ii. If your fear of God fails to keep you away from habitual sin, add the fear of your friends!
- iii. With the exception of personal confession to the whole church under church discipline, as we just discussed, we find this the most painful type of confession. That's because we cannot bear the humiliation of someone else seeing us as we really are.

- iv. The truth is that we all have something shameful that we want to hide. Any Christian with a healthy understanding of sin will not reject you or seek to humiliate you when you confess your sin. They will instead seek to encourage you to overcome that sin, by practical advice, prayer, and a regular questioning about your progress. They will probably ask you to reciprocally pray for them in their own struggles with sin, recognizing the power of God's command in Galatians 6:2 *Carry each other's burdens...*
- v. A few words of advice regarding confession to others:
  - Most of our daily, non-habitual sins can be adequately handled in our private confession to God. Don't feel you have to call your accountability partner each time you lose your temper or envy someone's new car.
  - Beware of confessing something that releases you but hurts someone else in the process.
  - Be careful picking an accountability partner.

### III. The Wisdom of Confessing Sin

#### a. Confession yields forgiveness and reconciliation.

- i. Micah 7:18-19 speaks powerfully to the wonderfully merciful nature of our God.

- <sup>18</sup>*Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy.* <sup>19</sup>*You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea.*

- ii. Although not guaranteed because of human sinfulness, confession to another person or a church **should** also result in reconciliation.

#### b. Confession enables us to prosper.

- i. Proverbs 28:13 *He who conceals his sins does not prosper...*
- ii. Psalm 32:2-5...*When I kept silent,...your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped*

#### c. Confession can overcome relational barriers.

- i. Confessing our sins against another should serve to restore a right relationship between you. Proverbs 15:1 tells us that "A gentle answer turns away wrath." How much further does an apology go towards overcoming anger and resentment?

#### d. Confession can commend the gospel.

- i. Because it is unusual, confessing your sins against another is also a powerful testimony to the transforming power of Christ in your life. Thus it commends – gives credibility to – the gospel.

#### e. Confession can overcome the fear of rejection.

- i. Do you think that if people knew about your sins they'd kick you out of the church? Not so! Shame for your sin and the humility of confession demonstrate your desire to grow in obedience to Christ. That's all God requires and it's all we require.
- ii. The entire church is made up of people who struggle with sin in one form or another. Confessing will affirm these truths to you and convince you your fear of rejection is unjustified.

- f. **Confession can overcome self-condemnation.**
    - i. Some of us develop the unbiblical notion that our behavior determines our status before God. Others are susceptible to Satan's accusations that our sin is so bad we can't really be a child of God. Still others have an overly sensitive conscience. While not feeling God's rejection, they constantly sense his displeasure. All of these can be helped by confessing their sin to someone with a strong grasp of what the Scriptures say about sin.
  - g. **Confession can help overcome the enemy.**
    - i. If we refuse to confess our sins to others, their ability to pray for us is limited, for they will be unaware of the nature of the spiritual battle raging within us. As a faith family, we should exercise an affectionate care and watchfulness over each other. Hiding our sins prevents them from caring for us.
    - ii. Conversely, confession enables the prayers of the saints on our behalf. We're in this battle together.
    - iii. Like a trumpet blown in battle, confession rallies others to our side.
- IV. **Signs of True Confession**
- a. **True confession is accompanied by repentance.**
    - i. Confession isn't genuine if it's not accompanied by determination to live your life differently. The person confessing should be able to describe specific things that they have done, or will do, to prevent a recurrence.
  - b. **True confession is specific.**
    - i. Leviticus 5:5 requires that a sinner "*must confess in what way he has sinned.*" The offender need not give every detail, but the confession must be specific enough to clarify the nature of the sin. It's not going to accomplish God's purpose merely to say, "Pray for me – I'm struggling with sin."
  - c. **True confession includes motive.**
    - i. Sinful actions are often just the symptom of something deeper, more fundamental.
      - What motivated that lie? Was it pride?
      - Why did you denigrate something someone said? Was it jealousy?
    - ii. Confession should go to the heart of the issue.
    - iii. If you desire to change, the "why" of your sin must be included in your confession of the "what."
  - d. **True confession is sorrowful.**
    - i. There's a huge difference between admitting you were wrong and feeling remorse about it. And the remorse must be over having sinned, not over getting caught!
    - ii. 1 Corinthians 7:10 *Godly sorrow brings repentance.*
    - iii. The sorrow God seeks is a deep regret at having offended the heart of the Father.

- e. **True confession is made in light of the cross.**
  - i. An attitude of true confession includes acknowledgment that the sinner, by this sin, participated in nailing Jesus to the cross. Likewise, the sinner's plea for forgiveness should recognize that forgiveness is only possible because of Christ's atoning death on the cross. Humble confession of the one leads to thankful confession of the other.
- f. **True confession is followed by intercessory prayer.**
  - i. A prayer of supplication, asking for forgiveness and help not to so sin again, is the proper follow on to a prayer of confession. It moves from the negative (our past failure) to the positive (requesting God's help in our struggle not to fail again).
- g. **True confession results in an experience of forgiveness.**
  - i. A heartfelt confession, made in light of God's promises in Scripture, should release us into the joy of forgiveness. It cleans our conscience and gives us fresh power to live like Jesus. If we refuse to accept God's promised forgiveness, we show we do not trust him and so our confession to him is not sincere.

## V. **When is Confession Required?**

- a. **Confession should be ongoing.**
  - i. Romans 7:18-19 *...the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing*
  - ii. As sin continues through this life, so too confession is to be the routine practice of every child of God.
  - iii. Some of us have a hard time recognizing we have sinned. We tend to shift the blame for our sinful behavior to others. Husbands excuse their indulgence in lust by blaming their unloving wives. Wives blame their bitterness on their pre-occupied, insensitive husbands. But the apostle John makes it clear that if we think we are without sin we are sorely mistaken.
  - iv. 1 John 1:8 *If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves...*
- b. **Confession should be immediate.**
  - i. We should confess as soon as we are conscious of our sin. Don't save it for Sunday.
  - ii. Acts 24:16 *strive always to keep my conscience clear...*
- c. **Confession should precede communion.**
  - i. A time of careful examination and confession should occur before taking the Lord's Supper.
  - ii. 1 Corinthians 11:28-31 *A man ought to examine himself before...*
  - iii. Recognizing the body of the Lord includes remembering that he died for our sins and confessing any sins we have not confessed previously, whether that requires confession to God or to our fellow man.

## VI. **Choosing an Accountability Partner**

- a. **Look for someone who:**
  - i. Is clearly growing in godliness and correctly handles the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15).
  - ii. Is of the same sex, unless it is your spouse.
  - iii. Is compassionate and has a healthy view of sin, so they will neither be shocked by your sin nor smother you in mercy when you need a rebuke.

- iv. Listens carefully and withholds counsel until he or she fully understands the situation.
- v. Will respect your confidence and treat it with great discretion.
  - Absolute confidentiality should not be expected or promised. The sinner may be involved in something criminal or something requiring the help of others better qualified to deal with the particular situation and care for the person. The accountability partner must be free to contact others when that is warranted, but must have the wisdom and discretion to only do so under such exceptional circumstances.
- vi. Not only seek, but seek to be, such a person.

VII. **Moving Toward Godliness**

- a. **Will you commit to fully confessing your sins to God?**
- b. **Will you confess your sins against others?**
- c. **Will you turn from your sinful pride and commit to finding an accountability partner to help you defeat any stubborn sins?**
- d. **Will you remember the truth of Hebrews 12:11? <sup>11</sup>*No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.***
- e. **Will you place your hope in the One who died on the cross so that you can be forgiven?**

Will you trust God's promise that *"If we confess our sins, he ... will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."*?