

“CONFESSION”

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. Selah
(Psalms 32:5 NKJV)

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. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us. (1 John 1:8-10 NKJV)

Either on television or in the movies most of us have seen a priest hearing confessions. The penitent kneels at the confessional, crosses himself, and says, "Bless me, father, for I have sinned. It has been four weeks since my last confession." The penitent then recites the sins that he can remember. The priest may ask questions to stir up his memory. The priest may then give some advice, prescribe a penance, and then says, "I forgive you." Except for the priest being a go-between or intermediary, that is the pattern for our confession to God.

When my wife was a girl, most of her girl friends were Catholics. The Catholic girls took turns whose week it was to go to confession. The other girls would wait in the sanctuary for the girl who was confessing. When she came back to the group, she would tell what penance she received. If it was 20 hail marys and 5 our fathers, they would divide it up. Each one would take 4 hail marys and 1 our father. They would be saying them on the way home. By the time they got home the girl who was the penitent was 99 and 44 one hundredths percent pure!

There used to be a magazine called True Confessions. They were really salacious braggings. When the police detective shows a criminal the volume of evidence they have, he is trying to obtain a confession. Neither of these is the kind of confession the Bible calls for us to do.

1.) Why Do We Confess Our Sins to God?

We might say, "What is the sense in confessing our sins to God? He knows everything we do, He already knows our sins." That is correct. God knows the full extent of our sins, more than we know. God knows all the people our sin affected and hurt. He knows all its damages. He has a written record of all our transgressions.

And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. (Revelation 20:12 NKJV)

There are many sins we are unaware or ignorant of because we have not given due diligence to studying God's Word. That is what He has given to us to know right from wrong, good from evil, righteousness from wickedness. Without a thorough knowledge of His Word, we will often go astray. There are many more sins we deceive ourselves in thinking that the circumstances excuse us from doing wrong. There are multitudes of stories on television which seek to convince you that although one of the characters broke the laws of both God and man that it was really all right in that circumstance. Such stories did not begin with television. That was Victor Hugo's agenda in *Les Miserables*. That is why John says not to deceive ourselves.

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The most important purpose of confessing our sins is to acknowledge to God that we have broken His laws, that we are casting away all our excuses, and that we accept full responsibility for what we did, that we are casting ourselves before Him, begging for His forgiveness.

2.) How Do We Know What All We Need To Confess?

The Holy Spirit is at work in the heart of every person who has trusted Christ as their Savior and Lord. The Holy Spirit will trouble us when we sin. “Quench not the Holy Spirit.” We will know that our fellowship with God has become distant and we won’t be as eager to read the Bible or to go to church. When I was a teenager I learned this adage about the Bible, “This Book will keep you from sin, and sin will keep you from this Book.” When David sinned with Bathsheba and ordered her husband killed, there was a period of more than a year before he repented of his sin. He writes,

When I kept silent, my bones grew old
Through my groaning all the day long.
For day and night
Your hand was heavy upon me;
My vitality was turned into the drought of summer.
Selah (Psalms 32:3-4 NKJV)

Both the Westminster Shorter Catechism and the Westminster Larger Catechism have sections on the Ten Commandments. You may not think you have broken some of the commandments but after you read their explanations, you will realize how often you have broken all of them. Just take one question a day for your prayer time.

The most moving Christian film I ever saw was “Centerville Awakening”. A missionary had to come home because of health problems. He became the pastor of a small town church. After seeing many people come to faith in Christ on the mission field, he couldn’t understand the deadness of the churches in his homeland. Eventually he asked his session to tell him if they saw any sin in him that might be hindering the Holy Spirit working in their church. Then he asked them to ask someone they trusted to tell them the same thing. After the pastor and session confessed and repented of their sins, they called on

the congregation to do the same thing. Within weeks a revival had begun in that town.

Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. (James 5:16 NKJV)

3.) What Kind of Confession Should We Pray?

I said at the beginning that the kind of confessions in True Confessions and the kind of confessions the police are seeking are not what God is waiting for from us. I said that God already knows the details of our sin better than we know them. Then what kind of confession does God desire from us?

In one of the episodes of M*A*S*H a soldier asks the nurse to call for the chaplain, Father Mulcahey. The soldier asks the priest to put on his stole that he wants to make a confession. After the soldier confesses his sin, Father Mulcahey asks him if he is going to turn away from this sin and make things right. The soldier absolutely refuses. He asks Father Mulcahey if he isn't going to grant him forgiveness. The priest says that he cannot forgive his sin since the soldier will not turn from it. He explains that confession must be accompanied by contrition and repentance or else it is just empty words.

"if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land. (2 Chronicles 7:14 NKJV)

"How blest the man whose trespass Hath freely pardoned been,
To whom the Lord hath given A covering for sin.
How blest to whom imputed His guilt no more shall be,
The man in whom his spirit, From all deceit is free.
My trespass I acknowledged, Nor hid my sin from Thee;
I said, I'll make confession, Then Thou forgavest me.
For this shall all the godly In pray'r to Thee abound;
In seasons they shall seek Thee When Thou art to be found." Bible Songs 65

