

The Life You Have Always Wanted (But Need Spiritual Discipline to Obtain) #4 The Practice of Confession

Introduction

In our culture, we do not take sin very seriously.

“Where sin is concerned...people just mumble now.” (Dietrich Bonhoeffer)

There are two “kinds” of confession in the Bible

1. For Salvation- The basis of our salvation/redemption is Christ’s finished work on the cross. See Eph. 2:8-9 (It is a gift of God, based on His merits.)
See Romans 10:9-10-our confession is an agreement, an understanding that God has done the work on our behalf
2. For Fellowship (with God and others)- daily sin “separates us” from our heavenly Father. Our relationship is strained by our disobedience.
See I John 1:8-9-we acknowledge our sin and say the same thing about it that God says. It repairs our ongoing relationship with the Lord

The Purpose of Confession

“CONFESS”-to say the same thing out loud

Confession is an act of contrition that gets us “on the same page” with God.

We agree with Him that an attitude, a behavior, an omission or an act is wrong and should not be repeated.

People Involved in Confession

1. A private confession is just between God and me- see I Tim. 2:5·
“*Distinguish between secret sins and those which directly affect others.* Orr gives a good principle: “If you sin secretly, confess secretly, admitting publicly that you need the victory but keeping details to yourself. If you sin openly, confess openly to remove stumbling blocks from those whom you have hindered.” (J. Edwin Orr)
2. A shared confession is between me, someone (or several someones) I have wronged and the Lord- see James 5:16
Note: the context for this verse involves someone who is sick. Occasionally sickness is the result of sin (see I Cor. 11:30). In that situation, transgressions are the violations of the rights of another. And in that particular situation, we are called upon to confess and pray.

However, there is a principle in this passage that applies to other circumstances as well.

The Practice of Confession

Step 1. Preparation...it begins with a thoughtful decision

Place yourself in the care of the Holy Spirit. "Open yourself to the gaze of God."
See Ps. 139:23-24: "Search me O God and know my heart, test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

Step 2: Self-examination...it continues with a resolve

It takes time and intentionality. An example might be the focus of Alcoholics Anonymous when they call for a "fearless or ruthless moral inventory"

Psalm 26:2 "Test me O Lord and try me, examine my heart and my mind."
Confession requires that we take responsibility for our actions. "I made a choice. I was wrong. Test me O Lord..."

Perhaps reviewing the Ten Commandments or considering the seven deadly sins (pride, envy, lust, greed, sloth and gluttony) or looking at the list of seven things God says He hates (Prov. 6:16-19) may help focus our confession.

Step 3. Adjust your perception

Confession requires that we see sin from God's perspective. We agree to call it what God calls it. No excuses. No "passing the buck" ("Well, I wouldn't have lost my temper if the kids were...."). No hypocrisy as we reflect on all the sin around us (See Matt. 7:5).

Step 4. Embrace Godly sorrow

Bob Pierce, the founder of World Vision once said, "God, break my heart with the things that break yours."

Sin, in all its forms should disturb us. We should have Godly sorrow over our own weaknesses, sins, transgressions, selfishness and our willful spirit.

There are two kinds of sorrow outlined in the scripture: See II Cor. 7:8-10

- A. Godly sorrow results in repentance- an act of grace that can be built upon. It is productive.
- B. Worldly sorrow leads to death- an endless tumbling with no resolution. It brings "emotional death" and is not productive. We just spin...

Step 5. Take action towards restitution or resolution

This is the action of confession. We determine to change. We take action.

Some Biblical examples:

Leviticus 6:5: "...add a fifth to the value."

Zacchaeus (Luke 19:8): "...and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount."

The church in Ephesus (Acts 19:18-19): "...brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly."

Step 6. Immerse yourself in grace

David wrote two psalms after his sin with Bathsheba: Ps. 51 and Ps. 32. Scholars believe he wrote Ps. 32 after Ps. 51 as an expression of how he was fulfilling his vow (see 51:13).

Consider the results David anticipated after his confession:

Vs. 13 "Then I will teach..." Then I will have a productive ministry, I will have a chance to participate in God's great plan for my life. I will not be up on the shelf discarded or unloved.

Vs. 14 Then "my tongue will joyfully sing..." Joy will fill my heart again I will have an active celebration of God's goodness to me.

Vs. 16-17 Then "You will delight in sacrifices of righteousness..." Those activities of my life will be a sweet-smelling sacrifice to God. I can go on...

So What?

1. Is confession a regular part of your daily devotional life? Why or why not? Is there any unconfessed sin in your life right now?
2. Consider the last time you had to confess your faults to someone? Was it difficult for you? How did you feel when it was finished? As time went on, did that confession help you avoid that particular sin?
3. How specific are you when you confess things to the Lord? Do you include attitudes?
4. How do you think a vibrant confessional life contributes towards "the life we have always wanted?"

