

The Safety Net

National Church Growth Research Center

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“Confession As Prayer”

Dear ones,

There are so many wonderful facets of prayer that I could keep this subject in the newsletter for many months. But I only want to talk about one more at this time and that is confession.

Confession is another one of those things that is misunderstood. As a kid, I remember that a routine “first prayer” at church included the phrase, “Oh Lord, forgive us our sins since we last asked pardon.” Then, two or three songs later, we would have the “main prayer.” And it too included the phrase, “Lord, forgive us our sins since we last asked pardon.” I once asked my mother what sins anybody could have possibly committed at church in between the two prayers? I think she gave a complicated answer.

But confession is not complicated. It is simply a matter of honesty. Or as someone said, “saying the same thing about something that God says about it.” No cover-ups, no justification, no shifting the blame, no denials. Just honesty. David said, “I have sinned.” That was it. The publican said, “Lord, forgive me, a sinner.” That was it.

Now I don’t mean to imply that that is easy. Just because it’s simple, doesn’t mean it’s easy.

In fact, as long as we can deny our wrongdoing, or justify it, or blame someone else, we’ll probably keep doing those things. It’s usually when we’re caught red-handed that we finally have to bow our heads and say, “I have sinned.”

Parents understand this whole thing quite well. Sometimes we know exactly what wrong our kids have committed. So we confront them with it. If they deny it, or justify it, or blame someone else, we know we have an additional problem. The lack of contrition and honesty is added on to whatever the offense was in the first place. In fact, that attitude of falsehood may be even worse than whatever the original offense was.

So parents are relieved when their kids honestly and contritely admit to their wrongs, even if things still need to be fixed or punishments endured.

In I John 1:9, John says, “If you confess your sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive your sins, and cleanse you of all unrighteousness.” That’s a wonderful promise. And it’s also the reason that confession should be a part of all our prayers.

To understand confession, we also need to consider some things it is not.

It is not penance.

It is not begging.

It is not groveling.

All those things short-change the seriousness of sin and imply that there are acts and attitudes that we can do that somehow make up for our wrongs.

But our sins are serious enough that the blood of Christ, our Savior, can only erase them. So what He wants is contrite honesty.

He asked the lame man, “Do you want to be healed?” And I think, when we go to Him in penitence He wants to know if we want to be forgiven? Are we ready to stop the denial, and the justification, and the blaming?

If so, there is grace. And to spare.

In my own prayer plan, I find it best to put in confession after praise and a time of listening. I am more aware then of things that I need to be honest about.

I also find this to be a rather personal thing, just between God and me. I’ve never seen much benefit in the “confessional,” whether in the Roman Catholic Church or the “discipleship” churches of Christ. Oh, there is value, at times of “confessing your faults one to another” and “praying one for another,” but I’m not sure that scripture is talking about our need to be explicit about every bad deed or thought we’ve ever had to someone who is also a sinner. I happen to think that that verse is still talking about honesty.

Close relationships, whether between God and man, or man and man, or man and woman, are all enhanced and solidified by honesty. Not brutal honesty, but contrite honesty again. No denials, no justifying, no blaming. Just honesty.

I’m going to make this letter short. I’m feeling the need for a time of confession.

In Christian love,

Silas