

Confession

1 John 1:9

The church of Jesus Christ is the company of the forgiven. We enjoy the forgiveness of sins as we confess our sins to God, and in the worship service it happens near the beginning. Understanding and practicing this trains us for a life of consistent joy and strength.

Overview of the Text

The apostle John speaks in blanket categories: God is light and in Him is no darkness at all (v. 5); if we say we have fellowship with Him and then walk in darkness, we lie (v. 6); if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with Him, and the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin (v. 7). This does not mean we become perfected and without sin for the rest of our lives. In fact, to say this is to be self-deceived and without truth in us (v. 8). Walking in the light entails honest, consistent, and frequent confession of sin. He really does cleanse us from all of it, which doesn't mean we won't get dirty again, just as giving your toddler a bath doesn't mean he won't need one tomorrow. Individually we are children of God, and together we are the bride of Christ whom He is loving and increasingly sanctifying from sin (Eph. 5:26). Therefore, we confess sin both individually and together the body of Christ.

At the Beginning

We come with joy to worship the Lord: "Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, and bless His name. For the Lord is good; His mercy is everlasting, and His truth endures to all generations" (Ps. 100:4-5). He calls us to come, renew covenant, and be transformed by His grace and wisdom (Psalm 25:14). When a worshipper came to the tabernacle or temple, he would first offer a purification or sin offering, then an ascension offering, and last, a peace offering (Lev. 9:2-4). The sin offering happens first for the same reason you wipe your feet on the way into someone's house. We're not tracking in dirt, but sin against the Lord of heaven and earth. This puts many people off from coming in the first place. How can I come to the one whom I have wronged, whose moral law I have broken, whose perfect righteousness I have offended? But this is why we can only come through Jesus, through the one who said: "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (Jn. 14:6). Many churches have abandoned confession of sin in the worship service because some Christians, as well as non-Christians, are put off by it. It's humbling and confrontational about who we are what we do, and right in line with Scripture: "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me" (Ps. 66:18). If we confess our sins, naming them the way God does, then He will hear and answer, granting the mercy He promises in Jesus.

Corporate Confession

When people encounter the Lord in Scripture, they are made aware of their sinfulness and those around them. Isaiah sees the Lord on His throne, high and lifted up, and responds, "Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts" (Is. 6:5). The problem is not just his unclean lips, but those around him. Jesus is the Lord of the nations whom He has received as an inheritance, and so kings and judges are told to serve Him with fear and rejoice with trembling (Ps. 2:8-12). The psalmist says, "Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD, the people He has chosen as His own inheritance" (Ps. 33:12). As a praying, interceding, priestly nation, the church prays for the nations and confesses on their behalf. We repent of our own sins and plead with God to have mercy on our people, following Jesus who wept over His city (Lk.

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19:41). And we are also part of the global church, connected to all other Christians, united by one Lord, one faith, one baptism (Eph. 4:5). We don't want God to send an emotional flare up, a revival that goes up like paper towel soaked in gasoline, but a long, slow, hardwood burn driven by fearless proclamation of the gospel and its application to all of life. This means repentance. If we want the world to come to Christ, we must lead the way in repentance, starting with confession of sin. We must model what humble repentance looks like, how to believe and follow the Lord, how to take responsibility for what the Lord has called us to. So we confess as individuals but also as a church.

Assurance of Pardon

It's common for young believers to struggle with assurance of salvation. How can we know we are really saved by the death and resurrection of Jesus? Do we really love Him, or do we only believe because of circumstances? This is why He assures us. To confess means "to say the same thing" (*homolegeo*), to name the sin the way God does: idolatry, worshiping images, bearing His name in vain, breaking His Sabbath, dishonoring parents, hating your brother or sister, adultery and lust, stealing, lying, coveting, and every sin against God and our neighbor. Sin is by definition inexcusable, and when we feel the weight of it at all, it's gross and terrible. And God doesn't downplay or rename it. Instead He sent His Son to be the propitiation, the turning away of His just wrath, for us: "And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins" (1 Jn. 2:2). The assurance of pardon declares the forgiveness of God to everyone who truly confesses. Forgiveness is the promise to not bring up your sin ever again in order to accuse you. He takes your sin away as far as the east is from the west (Ps. 103:12). A minister of the gospel is required to assure God's people that you are forgiven, and it doesn't matter if you feel like it or not. Your feelings don't change the fact of Christ's death and resurrection, nor His efficacious love. Feelings are our problem but they don't control God's grace. In fact, His grace will eventually overcome them, and all the faster if we confess our ungodly emotions, including not feeling forgiven. God alone forgives sins, but Jesus told the apostles, the foundation of the church that we rest on with Christ as the cornerstone, to declare the forgiveness of sins through Jesus for all who repent (Matt. 16:17-20, 18:18; Jn. 20:21-23). When we confess, God doesn't think about it, or consider it, or dwell on the number of times we have committed that same sin before (70 x 7?). In other words, He is not like us. He has already forgiven us in Christ, and He rejoices over us with singing. But we need to receive His forgiveness, and as soon as we ask, it's ours. We should never save up sins to confess in the service, but rather learn here that honest and immediate confession results in forgiveness, assurance, joy, and singing. You can let your sins pile up like rocks in a backpack until you can't spiritually move an inch, or you can toss them aside immediately. You are the forgiven people of God, so confess your sins in the morning, in the evening, when you step in it during the day, and live free.