

Spiritual Discipline: Confession

May 2016

Many believe that the discipline of confession is more of a Catholic doctrine and, by default, feel that we as Protestants do not really believe in confession. The truth is that as Protestants we do not agree with confessing ones' sins to a priest in order to receive forgiveness, however, we strongly believe that the spiritual discipline of confession is a vital part of our growth as a Christian.

That God calls us to confess our sin is clearly supported by Scripture. The Bible teaches us much about confession. In **Leviticus 16:21**, the priest laid his hands on the scape-goat and confessed the sins of the nation. And **Psalms 32:3-5** shows the burden of unconfessed sin. David says that while he refused to confess his sin his bones wasted away, God's hand was heavy upon him and his strength was sapped. At the close of the psalm we see a radical transformation as David is glad, singing and rejoicing in song.

Most Christians have, at one time or another learned the acronym A.C.T.S. as a model for prayer. Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving and Supplication is a good and a logical way of ordering prayer. Giving God the adoration due Him will prepare us for confession. Focusing on God's attributes will help us see where we have fallen short of His standards. This is evident in **Isaiah 6:1-5** where Isaiah experiences the majesty of God in the temple and his response is to immediately fall down and confess his sins and the sins of his people. Once forgiven, feelings of thanksgiving will overflow out of us and then we can begin to pour out our requests. So, if confession is such an integral part of this process, why does it seem that little time and teaching is dedicated to how one should confess.

So what does confession actually look like? Here are a few pointers:

- **Confession is specific.** Like most things in life and in the Christian life in particular, speaking in specifics is superior to speaking in generalities. We commit specific sins and need to confess them specifically.
- **Confess the consequences.** True confession involves looking not just at the sin we commit but also at how this sin has affected us. It is more than an admission of guilt, but is a process of soul-searching to see where sin has taken root in our lives.
- **Confession precedes forgiveness.** Confession leads us to ask for forgiveness. Confessing leads us to fall on our faces before God, literally or figuratively, to ask for forgiveness. A confession is not, in itself, enough. We need to ask God for His forgiveness, not just confess our sins to Him.
- **Confess before someone we have harmed.** There may be times where our sin requires us to confess and ask forgiveness from someone our sin has affected. One must be careful with this, especially if revealing it to others would only hurt them and damage relationships. The general rule-of-thumb is that the sphere of confession should be as big as the sphere of sin.
- **Confession before other believers.** At times it may be wise to confess our sins before a friend or other trusted individual. This person can then pray with us, pray for us, and help us believe in God's assurance of forgiveness.

Having confessed and asked for forgiveness, we have God's assurance that He has forgiven us. "As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us." **Psalms 103:12**. We need to believe in this promise, knowing that our sins have been paid for by Christ. Our reaction, then, should be to live each day in the joy of Christ's forgiveness.

Throughout the month of May, live out the spiritual discipline of Confession by working through the items below and discussing them with your 222 Group.

- Spend time each day in prayer confessing any known sinful attitudes and actions and asking for forgiveness.
- Confession should be a natural part of your 222 Group's experience. Share with your 222 Group which of the pointers above you find most difficult to live out.
- Commit to be a trustworthy and confidential bearer of the confessions of others – an agent of forgiveness.