

Spiritual Disciplines Series: Confession

1 John 1:5-10

WRCoB

Thus far,

We have completed eight of twelve spiritual disciplines

- Inner Disciplines
 - Meditation
 - Prayer
 - Fasting
 - Study
- Outer Disciplines
 - Simplicity
 - Solitude
 - Submission
 - Service

We look now to the four corporate disciplines

- Confession
- Worship
- Guidance
- Celebration

Today we look at confession.

Confession, according to the Cambridge Dictionary is *the act of admitting that you have done something wrong*

Confession is the act of bringing to light

What is kept in the dark.

Christianity and Psychology do not agree on many things
But they agree on this.

Matt Woodley, managing editor of Preaching Today writes

Two diverse sources—ancient Christian monasticism and modern psychology—agree on at least one thing: keeping dark secrets can destroy us, and confessing them can set us free. The fifth century Christian spiritual leader John Cassian claimed that ‘as soon as a wicked thought has been revealed [to God AND AT LEAST ONE OTHER CHRISTIAN] it loses its power.’ The demonic stronghold of sin is ‘drawn out as it were into the light from its dark and [deep] cave by the power of the confession For [Satan’s] harmful counsels hold sway in us as they lie concealed in our heart.

Nearly 1,500 years later, a contemporary textbook on psychology reached a similar conclusion. The book Coping with Stress claims that ‘people who tend to keep secrets have more physical and mental complaints, on average, than people who do not ... [including] greater anxiety, depression, and bodily symptoms, such as back pain and headaches.’ Like Cassian, this book also argues that finding healthy places to share our secrets leads to freedom: ‘The initial embarrassment of confessing is frequently outweighed by the relief that comes with the verbalization of the darker, secretive aspects of the self.’

King David knew the freedom confession gives.

Following his adulterous affair with Bathsheba
And his complicity in the death of her husband, Uriah

David weighed down by guilt and shame
Goes to God seeking forgiveness.

Psalm 32:3-5 is a superb description
Of what it feels like to carry the burden of sin

Psalm 32:3-5 NRSV

**³ While I kept silence, my body wasted away
through my groaning all day long.**

**⁴ For day and night your hand was heavy upon me;
my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer.**

King David found release through his confession.

**⁵ Then I acknowledged my sin to you,
and I did not hide my iniquity;
I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,"
and you forgave the guilt of my sin.**

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One of the unique characteristics
Of the God we know from the Bible
Is God's willingness to forgive.

We find it throughout the Old Testament
And we find it at the heart of the Gospel.

For the fullest expression of forgiveness
We look to Jesus Christ.

Certain theologies expound the doctrine
That God was so angry with humanity
For their sin and disobedience

That God's justice required someone to pay the penalty.

And since everyone has been found guilty
This someone had to be big enough
To cover the sins of all of humanity.

In this particular strain of theology
This someone was God's very own Son, Jesus Christ.

The sin of humanity was transferred to Jesus
And God's wrath was inflicted upon him instead of us.

But this is not my theology.

For it wasn't out of anger
That God sent his Son Jesus
But out of love.

John 3:16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only begotten Son so that whosoever believeth in him shall not perish but have everlasting life.

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Calvary happened
Not because of God's thirst for revenge
But for his incredible love and desire to forgive.

On the cross, Jesus absorbed the fury of hate and sin
Willingly and submissively sacrificed himself
As the way to heal, to forgive
And to redeem humanity.

When we discover God's magnificent love in Jesus Christ
We confess our sin
And we profess Jesus as Lord.

In that initial confession, God forgives us completely.

And we become a new creation, born anew
Given a second chance.

But the reality is that we're still human
And we still make mistake
We continue to sin
We continue to fall short.

And consequently each of us
Need opportunities to confess
And seek forgiveness for those sins committed.

Our second text reminds of this.

1 John 1:8-9 NLT

⁸ If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth. ⁹ But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness.

Confession is one of seven Catholic sacraments.

It is one of the main function of the church
To hear confession and make absolution.

Unfortunately, only 2% of Catholic actually make confession.

Protestants do not have any ordinances
That gives us this kind of outlet.

Many congregations have opportunities
For corporate confession in worship.

It may be in some form of liturgy
Where there are prescribed words
For the congregation to read.

It may be in the form of a congregational prayer
The pastor might pray asking God
To forgive the sins of the church.

Some Protestant traditions have altar calls
To come forward at the end of a worship service
To confess sin and seek prayers for forgiveness.

But we, Brethren, do not have any channel to confess sin.

Maybe it's because Brethren don't sin.

Not!

It's probably because we're embarrassed to admit it.

We need to create opportunities for confession.

To confess sin to God
Happens best in the company of another.

There is nothing quite as relieving
As sharing and bearing your soul to a confidant.

In my years as a pastor
I have had many people come to me
With the need to confess past sins.

We carry the burden of guilt.

Sin gnaws at us
It won't let us be
It will not give us peace.

Confession helps us experience the deep cleansing
Of God's forgiving Spirit.

It is good to confess before God alone.

It is better to confess to God
In the company of a trustworthy and faithful friend.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer in *Life Together* writes

A [person] who confesses his sins in the presence of a brother [sister] knows that he is no longer alone with himself; he experiences the presence of God in the reality of another person. As long as I am by myself in the confession of my

sins everything remains in the dark, but in the presence of a brother [sister] the sin has to be brought into the light.

1 John 1:6-7 NRSV

⁶ If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; ⁷ but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.

So now that we know confession is good for the soul
What do we do?

Foster quotes from

St Alphonsus Liguori,

From his writing, "A Good Confession,"

For a good confession, three things are necessary: an examination of conscience, sorrow, and a determination to avoid sin.

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In an examination of conscience

We look deep within ourselves

For those hidden dark secrets.

Conviction of feeling something is wrong
Comes in many different ways.

It may come as a piercing of the heart.

It may come through some reflection and meditation.

It may come as a secret that we've harbored for years.

Someone did something to us that was wrong
And we've kept it a secret
Because we felt shame and guilt.

Though, no wrongdoing was done on your part
A sense of sin and shame is still there
And needs to see the light of day.

There are things hidden deep within the soul
That need to come to light.

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The second thing necessary is sorrow.

Sorrow comes as regret for wrongs committed.

It is the realization
That you have done something against God.

And more than likely caused deep hurt to those you love.

It is remorse, regret, guilt and shame
All wrapped up in the awareness
That things aren't right.

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Thirdly, there must be a real desire to change.

There must be the determination to avoid sin.

If we feel bad every time we sin
But we do nothing to dodge the temptation

We'll find ourselves in a perpetual and vicious cycle
Of sinning and feeling guilty
Of sinning and feeling guilty,
On and on, ad nauseam.

The desire to escape from sin's temptation
Has got to be as strong as the need for forgiveness.

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This is what the Apostle Paul discovered.

1 Corinthians 10:13 NLT ¹³ The temptations in your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will not allow the temptation to be more than you can stand. When you are tempted, he will show you a way out so that you can endure.

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Now, none of this is complicated.

Confession is the easiest of the Spiritual Disciplines.

But it takes courage.

You also need someone to confess to.

Someone who has some spiritual maturity
Wisdom and common sense.

It can be your pastor, but doesn't have to be.
It can also be a counselor, good friend or mentor.

If we openly confess our sins to God and one another
We experience God's forgiving graces

We experience the transforming work of the Holy Spirit.

Frederick Buechner

To confess your sins to God is not to tell God anything God doesn't already know. Until you confess them, however, they are the abyss between you. When you confess them, they become the Golden Gate Bridge.

Your sins confessed to God through Christ
Begins the journey toward salvation.

James 5:16 Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.