

“If We Confess Our Sins...”

By Paul R. Blake

(A brother asked me the following questions regarding public confession of sin: “I understand your position to be ‘Public confession of grievous public sin is mandatory for salvation of the erring Christian.’ Please explain this concept to me by command, example, or necessary inference. What scripture identifies this practice in the New Testament Church? What scripture mandates public confession of sin as a requirement for salvation?”)

It is possible that some may be shocked by these statements, but read on; they are scripturally based. First, one cannot scripturally demand that all confessions be made to the preacher so that he in turn can relate it to the congregation. The individual can make his own statement, or ask another devout disciple if he or she is uncomfortable, or if someone is too distressed to speak up. Second, one cannot scripturally require that another come forward only during the invitation and sit on the front row to make his confession. The individual can speak to one of the elders or preacher who can announce the statement at any appropriate time. Third, there is no scriptural imperative that confession can only be made at an assembly of the church. One can confess his faults to another on any day of the week (James 5:16), prayer can be made, and the good news of his restoration made known at the next assembly. And fourth, detailed specificity in the confession is limited to that which is seen in scriptural examples of confession. Confessions in the New Testament ranged from specific to general depending on the demands of each occasion. Having stated the above, let's now examine the scriptures in a study of confession.

First, begin with the nature of confession. Confess in Romans 10:9 and 1John 1:9 are the same word: homologeo. Strongs defines it as “to assent, covenant, acknowledge; confess, confession is made, give thanks, promise.” Thayer writes: “not to deny, to confess, to declare” (1John 1:9). Vine defines it as: “to confess by way of admitting oneself guilty of what one is accused of, the result of inward conviction” (1John 1:9). In James 5:16, confess is: exomologeo: “to acknowledge or agree fully; confess, profess, promise” (Strongs). In Vine, “to confess forth, freely, openly, is used of a public acknowledgment or confession of sins.” Exomologeo is used in Mark 1:5: “And there went out unto him all the land of Judaea, and they of Jerusalem, and were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins.” Wuest observes regarding exomologoumenoi (confessing): “His confession was the outward indication of that repentance. The preposition prefixed to the participle ek (out) shows that this confession was an open one to those who were also waiting for baptism, not a private one to John. The word confess is homologeo, made up of lego (to speak) and homos (the same), the compound word meaning to speak the same thing that another speaks, thus to agree with someone else. Thus, confession of sin is more than a mere acknowledgment of sin in the life.”

From homologeo and its intensive form exomologeo, confession can be defined as an open declaration, the expression of conviction. I recognize that the lexicons are not authoritative, but they do provide a better understanding of the word's denotation.

The scriptural context of the use of the word “confession” demonstrates that it was verbal in nature, rather than a manifest life change alone. “*Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins*” (Matt. 3:6). “*Then all the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to him and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins.*” (Mark 1:5). “*And many who had believed came confessing and telling their deeds.*” (Acts 19:18). McGarvey says: “It is not to be understood that the believers who confessed had continued to practice magic after they became believers, but only that they now confessed and declared the secret processes by which they had formerly deceived the people.” They told the people about their sin.

In Philippians 2:10-11, Paul writes: *“That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”* The changed life is seen in the illustration of the bended knee, the verbal nature of exomologeō is seen in the tongue confessing.

In Romans 10:9-10, it is written: *“That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.”* Whiteside writes: “To believe in Christ is to recognize him for what he is, to put our full trust in him; to confess him is to pledge our allegiance to him.” Turner writes: “If you confess with your mouth implies and open, unashamed acknowledgment of Jesus as Lord, having every right to rule your life.” McGarvey says that the confession, as a declaration of faith and the inward changes of heart that faith has wrought, precedes the obedience of faith in baptism.

1John 1:8-10 states: *“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.”* “Say” in verses 8 and 10 is epo: “a verb; to speak or say (by word or writing); answer, bid, bring word, call, command, grant, say, speak, tell” (Strongs). John is telling us that the pronouncement of personal sinlessness is a declaration made to others. He tells us that the one declaring his sinless state deceives himself, regardless of who else might be taken in by it. By implication, John wants us to understand that God is not deceived. It is inconsistent for one to exposit this passage in such a way that John sandwiches a verse that speaks of privately confessing to God in between two verses that speak of one who publicly denies his sin. It makes no sense to suggest that when one is in sin that he publicly lies to others in denying sin, but when he repents he can keep it between him and God. In addition, John is not talking about a general acknowledgment that one is a sinner, but is talking about one confessing his sins and having his sins forgiven. The grammar of the text will not support the former.

James 5:16 records: *“Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.”* “One to another” is allelon: “one another; each other, mutual, one another, selves together” (Strongs). The confessing here is done verbally to one another; confession is not something that we do to God alone. Furthermore, the grammar does not support the premise that we must confess that we have faults one to another, but rather it is telling us to confess our faults one to another.

While it may be uncomfortable to confess our faults (paraptoma: “a side-slip, lapse or deviation, unintentional error or wilful transgression; fall, fault, offense, sin, trespass” - Strongs) to one another, nevertheless that is what the text says. There are reasons why this may be distressing to some, especially contemporary folks:

- 1) It appears to be similar to the Catholic doctrine of confessing to a priest,
- 2) It looks like the cultic control of the Boston church system of prayer partnerships,
- 3) Personal fear that to allow another to know one's weakness will give them power over him,
- 4) Pride that moves one to protect his high station and public image.

However, the reason does not void the direct command to verbally confess our sins to one another.

Luke 17:3-4 reads: *“Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, ‘I repent,’ you shall forgive him.”* The Lord's order for obtaining forgiveness from a brother against whom we have sinned is to go to him and say “I repent” (“saying” -- lego: “a verb; to lay forth, relate, discourse; ask, bid, call, describe, give out, name, put forth, say, shew, speak, tell, utter” - Strongs). In short, the scriptures use the word “confess” to mean a verbal, audible expression of conviction, whether it is a personal confession

faith in Jesus Christ or an individual's acknowledgment of his sins. A confession is a statement made with the mouth. Actions or manifest life changes do not constitute confession, although they do validate one's confession.

What passage mandates public confession of sin? If by "mandates" one means what scripture explicitly states that one must make a public confession for public sin, then that text does not exist. Nor does the verse exist that says, "Thou must eat the Lord's Supper every first day of the week."

First, the command is to confess our faults one to another (James 5:16). In light of the example of the ex-magicians in Acts, the one to another is not limited to the individual level. The Divinely approved example is found in Acts 18:19: the ex-magicians telling their deeds. The Divine implication from which we draw a necessary inference is in 2Corinthians 2:6-10: Paul instructs the Corinthians to forgive the fornicator of 1Corinthians five.

1) The Corinthian brother's sin was against the church at Corinth. It had to be; otherwise Paul would not have told them to forgive him. He would have said that it was a matter between the man and God.

2) The Corinthian brother had repented of his sin and confessed it to those he had sinned against. Jesus instructed his disciples to forgive one when he turned to them and said, "I repent" (Luke 17:3). Paul would not have told the Corinthians to forgive the ex-fornicator if he had not repented and told them so.

Some mistakenly believe that the practice of public confess is a form of public humiliation of a repentant sinner. There are three incorrect assumptions inherent in this:

1) That public confession of sin is "public humiliation of a repentant sinner." This is nothing more than an expression of personal distaste based on one's own observations. Applying the same standard to baptism, it seems to be a pretty silly, superstitious, and embarrassing ceremony when viewed by the ignorant and biased. What efficacy can dunking another person under water have? This is a subjective matter of uninformed opinion.

2) That those who invite the erring to repent are doing so vindictively. This seems to be excessively judgmental, especially as no empirical evidence exists to even suggest that it may be so.

3) That those who invite the erring to repent are deriving a dysfunctional form of emotional satisfaction from the weakness and grief of others. While these attitudes might exist, I believe they are rare. It is not reasonable believe that the practice of public confession was taught by inspired apostles with personality disorders.

Paul writes to Timothy: "*Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear*" (1Tim. 5:20). This practice is quite humiliating as is the practice of withdrawing fellowship. The intensity and technique of the rebuke is intended to humble and sharply stimulate the sinner to repent. When an erring, unrepentant sinner is moved to sorrow over his sins (2Cor. 7:10), it is an occasion for rejoicing. 2Corinthians 7:10 reads: "*For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death.*" It is as much a cause for rejoicing as it is when an unbeliever comes forward to confess Christ and be immersed. We rejoice because the one who was lost is found. Now, despite how happy we are when the sinner comes to be baptized, we know that he is not truly saved until such time as he confesses faith in Christ with his mouth (Rom. 10:10) and is immersed. We are happy that the erring brother has changed his life, but he is not in a saved condition until he confesses his sins and has appealed for forgiveness. If his sin is between him and God, he confesses to God. If his sin is between him and a brother, he must confess to his brother (Luke 17:3-4, Matt. 18:15). If his sin is against the body of Christ that meets in a local church, then his confession is to the same.

Finally, why would a truly penitent Christian continue to practice deceit and risk his return to fellowship with God by hiding his sins or refusing to disclose his repudiation of those sins. Confession is a communication. When a believer confesses the name of Christ before

baptism, he is communicating his faith to witnesses. When an erring Christian confesses his sins, he is communicating his repentance and desire for forgiveness. If he does not confess his sins, he has not communicated, and therefore has failed in his goal... to be restored.

Five Un-Recoverable Things:

The stone -- after it is thrown.
The word -- after it is said.
An opportunity -- after it has passed.
The time -- after it is gone.
A person - after they have died.

A Moments Wisdom

--Live each day so that you will neither be afraid of tomorrow nor ashamed of yesterday.
--It takes an honest man to admit whether he is just tired or merely lazy.
--A good leader takes people where they want to go. A great leader takes people where they don't necessarily want to go but ought to be.
--How much easier it is to be critical than it is to be correct.
--When I have extra money I get rid of it quickly as possible, lest it find its way into my heart.
--A sweet spirit can make a plain face beautiful.
--You cannot hold back the ripples once a pebble has broken the calm of a lake's surface. Neither can you control the ever-widening, ever-damaging effects of an unkind word once it is spoken in the ear of another.
--Fear is the firstborn child of ignorance.
--Ideas are like children: no matter how much you admire someone else's, you can't help liking your own best.
--When there is room in the heart, there is room in the house.
--A sharp tongue and dull mind are usually found in the same head.
--If you are going to get caught in the act, make sure it is an act of kindness.
--Life's evening will take on the character of the day that preceded it.
--You fall the way you lean.
--Many people claim to hate to talk about themselves, but few actually hate it enough to refrain from it.
--Remember to dig the well before you get thirsty.
--Greatness lies, not in trying to be somebody, but in trying to help somebody.
--He who loses his integrity has nothing else to lose.
--It is hard to hate someone you pray for.

On Words
By Stephen Auman

Guns and knives
Can ruin lives
For victim and for user.

If sticks and stones
Are breaking bones,
We all come out the loser.

Each one of us

Has many cuts
That no one else can see.

A word can mar
And leave a scar,
So use them carefully.

How to Become Normal When You are not and How to Stay Normal When You Are

- 1) Life is difficult. Accept it.
- 2) Reality is perceived through your senses.
- 3) Change is one of the toughest things a human can do.
- 4) You cannot impose change on another person; you can only change yourself. Once you change, they may change.
- 5) I am responsible for everything I say and do. I am not responsible for your response to it.
- 6) The future and the past are seldom as good or bad as we anticipate or remember.
- 7) No one is without mistakes and weaknesses.
- 8) The only moment over which I have control is the present.