

THE



“The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth laborers into his harvest” (Luke 10:2)

March 2022

No. 435

A LIFETIME OF CONFESSION

Confession has been a hallmark of Christianity. Jesus attached great importance to it during His time on earth:

Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven. (Mat. 10:32-33; see also Luke 12:8)

At this time the belief in God and Jesus as the prophesied Messiah was not as widespread as it has been in our lifetimes. So does confession mean the same thing today as it did in the

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times of Jesus' teachings? Briefly, let's examine what confession is and the role it plays in our lives today.

Most often we picture confession of Christ through words spoken aloud, such as the confession Peter made in Matthew 16:16: "*And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.*" Similarly is the famous verbal confession of the Ethiopian eunuch's confession:

And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. (Acts 8:37)

Is confession simply saying aloud that you believe in Jesus Christ as the prophesied Messiah?

A deeper look suggests that beyond an announcement of such belief, confession represents more than words. Paul similarly echoes Jesus' words:

For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed. (Rom. 10:10-11)

Here and through the previously referenced words of Jesus, we can see that confessing Christ is a public acknowledgement of the Lord. Wholeheartedly, this includes belief in God's almighty power, promises and fulfillment of them, and great love and mercy, all of which have manifested through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. All of which subsequently provide those who answer the call to have the incorruptible hope of salvation and reconciliation with Him in eternity (Rom. 8:24-25; 1 Pet. 1:3-5).

With this public acknowledgement, you thus commit to living as His servant. That is, living before mankind, in public, as God's servant. So, confession involves a statement and obedience, because confession is a demonstration of faith via this public acknowledgement and obedient life. A verbal announcement alone is not enough if the life lived afterwards is incongruent with obedience to God (i.e., not living Christ-like):

Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works. Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. (Jas. 2:17-19)

Must confession be verbal and does it occur only once? Especially from the example set forth with Philip in the Ethiopian eunuch, we see a verbal confession preceding an act of obedience, baptism (Acts 8:37-38). However, is this the only confession we make in our life? No, this should not be the only public acknowledgment of our belief we will make in our life.

Confession made aloud is so emphasized during Jesus' time on the earth and throughout the establishment and growth of the early Church because to openly confess Christ in those days was a trial of faith. To confess a belief so contrary to the pagan dominance of the times, which often included claims that emperors themselves were deities, was a real threat to the life of the confessor. That is, a verbal confession in public was risking your life. Those making a confession were willing to give their life in service to God. We have such a word for this: Sacrifice. Additionally, notice that no promise of salvation is offered for a concealed faith - an entire lack of confession.

If we view confession as an act of sacrifice, we see that this should not be a one-time acknowledgement of our belief. In fact, it seems that confession is a lifelong process:

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. (Rom. 12:1-2)

A living sacrifice may be best thought of as a lifetime of confession. It is a sacrifice we make considering the sacrifice Jesus made on our behalf to provide us the access to salvation. Note,

when Paul says a “*reasonable service*,” reasonable does not mean moderate as we often conflate in defining. Best translated, “*reasonable service*” is a thoughtful service resulting from deliberate logic and reasoning. Our living sacrifice, our lifetime of confession, is effortful and meaningful (as opposed to going through the motions).

We confess our belief not only when we make the same great confession as the Ethiopian eunuch, but also through the words, decisions, and actions we make during our life. Sometimes even more notable may be the things we do not do or say. Now, let’s take a moment and be brutally honest with ourselves. What confessions, or what sacrifices, have we made for God in our lives?

Throughout our lives we are met with crossroads. Often, these present unique opportunities for us such as a dream job or school, a once-in-a-lifetime vacation, game, concert, or event, or maybe even a friend or potential spouse who seems to match us so perfectly. There’s nothing wrong with any of these potential crossroads in themselves, but what if we were left with the choice between one of these versus service to God? Would you sacrifice the dream vacation because it would keep you from being able to attend services and partake in the memorial of Jesus’ sacrifice on the first day of the week? Would you decline the job opportunity because there was no congregation near you to attend? Would you sacrifice a close friend or “love of your life” because they did not believe or were even tempting you to draw you away from your belief? As we’ve noted ad nauseum, the congregations become smaller and we see too many fall away - ranging from

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no longer attending services to no longer believing altogether. Many of those we've seen leave chose not to sacrifice at some of those crossroads listed above. Christ gave His life for us; would we not sacrifice what is essentially a worldly pleasure for Him?

Beyond these crossroads, the world around us continues to change. Closer draws the day when those who believe in God and service to Him, those who confess, may be persecuted again. Currently the persecution may be in the forms of being labelled too conservative, unprogressive, bigoted, or closed-minded, but what if one day it becomes institutionally enforced or even violent? Will we continue to confess under the same threats present during Jesus' and the early Church's time? Jesus called on us to confess then, so we must confess now. Jesus sacrificed His life to offer eternal salvation for us, the undeserving. He has asked us to sacrifice our short years in this mortal body on Earth in exchange. Confession is not a "one and done" acknowledgement of our belief in God and that Jesus Christ is His son. Christianity is a lifetime of confession.

BEN

THE SPIRITUAL PERSPECTIVE

In the Sermon on the Mount in the book of Matthew, Jesus gave teachings that were different from the commonly held teachings of His day. For example, Jesus taught in Matthew 5:21-22,

Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.

The commonly accepted teaching was that you were not guilty

before God unless you actually killed another. To be angry with your brother without a cause implies that you do not like him and perhaps even hate him. To say to him “Raca!” is to call him empty or worthless; it is a term of great contempt. To say “You Fool!” was to call him evil or a rebel against God. To be angry with your brother without a cause or to say to him “Raca!” or to say “You Fool!” did not physically kill him. But Jesus taught that such a spirit of contempt for your brother makes you guilty before God.

Jesus went on to teach in Matthew 5:27-28,

Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.

The seventh commandment in Exodus 20:14 states, “*Thou shalt not commit adultery.*” The commonly accepted teaching was that you were not guilty unless you actually committed the act of adultery. But Jesus declared that with God, looking lustfully at another woman was just as bad as physically committing the sexual act.

With these two examples, I believe that Jesus is teaching a very important principle. The Jews of Jesus’ day were guilty of trying to keep the letter of the law without keeping the spirit of the law. By the “spirit of the law”, I understand that God’s requirement for righteousness and holiness of His people extends beyond what was written in the law. God, through Moses, had given many commandments and regulations. The scribes and Pharisees attempted to keep every rule as much as they could but they had missed the true meaning behind the rules.

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithes of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone. Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel. (Mat. 23:23-24)

They were making sure that they gave to God a tenth of their garden herbs in an attempt to completely keep the law. But they had missed the spiritual principles of justice, mercy and faith.

You and I can be guilty today of the same kind of attitude that the scribes and Pharisees had. We can take the commandments and admonitions we have under the New Covenant and follow the letter of what is written, but miss the spiritual principles. For example, it is stated in Hebrews 10:25,

Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching. (Heb. 10:25)

It is easy to take the position that one should not miss an assembly of the church whenever it meets. A person might be judged as a faithful Christian if he attends all of the assemblies. While that person could physically be present at an assembly, his heart might be somewhere else; he might only reluctantly be at the assembly and when the assembly is over, leave as soon as possible. Yes, we should not forsake the assembling of ourselves together. But what are the spiritual purposes of the assembly? One of the main spiritual purposes of the assembly, as stated in Hebrews 10:25, is to exhort one another to remain faithful and zealous for God. We should want to be at the assemblies because we love our fellow Christians and we want to do what we can to encourage and exhort each other.

My encouragement to you is to find out what God really wants from you. What are the spiritual principles behind the commandments and admonitions of the Bible? Instead of murdering or having contempt for your brother, love him with a pure heart (1 Pet. 1:22). Instead of committing adultery or lusting for a woman, walk according to the Spirit and not according to the flesh (Rom. 8:4). Seeking God's spiritual principles should apply to all areas of your Christian walk from your praying to your giving to how you dress yourself. Seek to discover in all areas what pleases God.

GOSPEL MEETINGS

DATES	PLACE	SPEAKER
April 7 - 10	Oak Grove Eubank, KY	J. D. McDonald (Woodbury, TN)

Masks and social distancing are recommended at these meetings. Please check the website calendar for the latest updates.

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. (Rom. 12:1)

Jesus always did what pleased His Father (John 8:29); follow His example. Don't just keep the "letter of the law." Have the attitudes, the actions and the faith that He desires. Avoid anything that might displease Him. Serve God from your heart. Love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength (Mark 12:30).

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SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

Remember last month's questions?

1. After the first king of Israel failed God, what was the name of the second man who was anointed king?
DAVID (1 Sam. 16:1,13)
2. How did the wise men know that the King of the Jews had been born? THEY SAW A STAR IN THE EAST (Mat. 2:2)
3. Whose father was so pleased to see him that he gave him the best robe and killed the fatted calf?
PRODIGAL SON (Luke 15:23-24)
4. The field that Judas Iscariot purchased with his betrayal money was called Aceldama, but as what was it also known? FIELD OF BLOOD (Acts 1:19)
5. For how long was the dragon bound in the bottomless pit?
1,000 YEARS (Rev. 20:1-3)