

Confession

by Harmon A. Baldwin

Confession is necessary for spiritual growth and is a means of humbling the soul and turning to the blood that cleanses.

Scripture: Psalm 32:5, Proverbs 28:13, Romans 10:10, 1 Timothy 6:12, James 5:16, 1 John 1:9

Topics: "Sin And Confession", "Spiritual Repentance"

Description

Harmon A. Baldwin preaches about the importance of confession of inherent sin as a Bible requirement, emphasizing the need for honesty and humility in acknowledging the depravity of the heart. Confession is not for penance or priestly absolution but for truth to the conscience, convictions of the soul by the Holy Spirit, and the demands of the church. The act of confession is a vital step towards seeking forgiveness and cleansing from God, requiring an honest acknowledgment of one's sins and shortcomings.

Transcript

When to one is given this deep view of the inward workings of carnality, he will just as naturally confess it as he will confess his actual sins when seeking pardon. The fact is that such a view of self will be accompanied by confession almost as inevitably as a person is accompanied by his shadow; the discovery and confession can scarcely be separated in experience, and we have separated them here only for convenience. Then his heart in its honest moments will groan its complaints to God, no matter how contrary to his theories such a course may be. If this is true, it seems strange that there should be holiness teachers who would oppose confession; and yet it is not so strange either when we know how the natural heart opposes everything vital in religion. But confession of inherent sin is a Bible requirement, the doctrine of those "holy men of old" who "spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."

Dr. Jesse T. Peck, in his "Central Idea of Christianity" (pages 220-221) says:

But you will find some stubborn difficulties in your way. There are some unavoidable implications in the confessions you are called upon to make, that will be deeply humbling to the soul. You have probably been long known and recognized as a Christian -- perhaps a faithful, fervent Christian; you may have been a leader in the armies of Israel -- a minister in the church of God -- even an eminent minister among your brethren. In either case, it is not quite easy to confess that you have been all this time without a pure heart -- that your religion has been a religion of contests with yourself, as well as with the world and Satan, and that, though you have advocated for years a religion of purity, you have never yet fully availed yourself of the purifying provision of the gospel. * * * * Nor is it upon any principle of penance, or self-mortification, or

with any view to priestly absolution, that confession is required. The grand principle of this whole concession is truth, truth to the conscience; truth to the facts of the present and the past; truth to the convictions of the soul by the Holy Spirit; truth to the vows you have made, and the demands of the church; all of which requires, and must have, candid expression; and you will be gratified, you will be thankful to God for the benefits it confers.

Dr. Adam Clarke, in his comments on 1 John 1:9 says:

Guilt, to be forgiven, must be confessed; and pollution, to be cleansed, must be confessed. In order to find mercy, a man must know and feel himself to be a sinner, that he may fervently apply to God for pardon; and in order to get a clean heart, a man must know and feel its depravity, acknowledge and deplore it before God, in order to be fully sanctified. Few are pardoned because they do not feel and confess their sins; and few are sanctified, or cleansed from all sin, because they do not feel and confess their own sore, and the plague of their hearts.

One condition of pardon is that a person confess his sins, and one condition of cleansing is that the depravity of the heart be confessed and deplored. A sinner confesses his actual transgressions because he seeks forgiveness for them; but the Christian confesses his sin or depravity because it is this from which he now seeks to be delivered. But in either case God requires of the seeker an honest confession before he will do the work for which he seeks.

In order to make our meaning concerning the necessity of confession clear let us quote some things that are not and some things that are implied in the scriptural confession of inbred sin:

I. Some things we do not mean when we speak of confession.

1. We do not mean auricular confession, -- confession to some human being, as the Catholics confess to their priests. This is the first thing that occurs to the minds of many when confession is mentioned. This may be from the fact that this matter of confession has been almost entirely excluded from our Protestant theology, and is scarcely mentioned any more, except in speaking of the errors of the Papists. But because Papists run to extremes in confession and works, Protestants are not excusable for running to the opposite extreme of secrecy and so-called faith. No, God's way always lies between the two extremes of rabid radicalism and flesh-pleasing conservatism. If we regard it as necessary to confess all the thoughts of our hearts to some human being, we shall be involved in several difficulties:

(1) No person can pray through to victory alone. If the confession must of necessity be made to some person, this is the inevitable conclusion.

(2) There must be a confessor, or some person who will consent to listen to our tale. Now some persons are so situated that this would be impossible, and when the depths of depravity are being unfolded it would take a person with a great deal of nerve and grace to stand quietly by and listen. Such persons are hard to find.

(3) It would necessitate telling all. Roman Catholics hold special penitents to this line, and, if they forget, or hesitate the priests have a series of questions as reminders.

(4) Confession could not be made to one of the opposite sex. True, Catholics do this, but our Protestant hearts revolt from such a procedure and it is well that they do. Some things could be confessed, but not all.

It seems to me that these four considerations effectually do away with the necessity for such a confession as some seem to teach.

2. We do not think it is either necessary or possible to see and confess all the unclean movings of the soul. It is comparatively easy to remember our worst sins, but when we undertake to remember every sin and tell the motives that have impelled us to every action of our lives, the absurdity of such a course is apparent in a moment. Enough only is necessary to cause the soul to turn with loathing from carnality to the blood that cleanses.

3. There are some confession which it is improper to make under certain circumstances:

(1) It is improper to tell in public the secret movings of the soul to such an extent as to bring reproach on the cause of God. Such errors have been committed, done by honest souls who wanted to do their best at getting right with God. The enemy likes to crowd such persons too far.

(2) It is improper for a husband or wife who has in reality been true to the marriage vow to tell too much of the involuntary infidelity of the heart. Involuntary heart wanderings, if promptly and firmly resisted, involve no actual guilt, and such confession may only cause alienation of affection in the party to whom it is made.

(3) Do not confess to this or that just to break up your heart. Such a course is liable to run into great extremes, for if the heart must be broken in this way, of course the worst things imaginable will be the first things to be told. Hold steady before the light till the sight of your own heart breaks you down; then pour your heart out to God, and it will do you much good.

(4) Do not berate and belittle yourself. Carnality will grow fat on such things. Calling yourself mean names and extravagant expressions will do no good. Simply tell the truth.

(5) Do not exaggerate. Hold yourself to the absolute facts in the case. Overstatement is just as wrong as understatement. Don't hunt for some fearful thing that will astonish yourself and others. Truth is bad enough without such exaggeration.

(6) Do not descend to trifles and whimsicalities. Tell them out to God if necessary, but do not annoy and degrade others with such things. Hold yourself to the real issue.

(7) Do not ramble over the whole country, but hold steady before the white light of heaven. This hurts. This will kill. So do not fall into aimless bush-whacking, but with tears and groans march against the enemy. Amen. By Jesus' help you can dislodge him.

II. The proper kind of confession, as taught by the Bible and early Methodism:

1. Public confession. Under this head we quote from Peck's "Central Idea" (pp.217, 218):

We must suggest that this conviction for holiness and resolution to obtain it can in no case be made a secret. * * * * And yet you must be consistent. God will not allow you to be one thing to your own consciousness, and another in the reasonable apprehensions of others. You may not inwardly reckon yourself a seeker of entire salvation, and outwardly appear to be content with the ordinary Christian state. You cannot ask God to look upon you as a determined seeker of holiness and ask your brethren to look upon you as having no peculiar convictions, or purposes, or feelings in regard to this great question. No duplicity can be allowed here or elsewhere. Honestly, just what you are, you must be willing to be

considered.

There are, no doubt, certain lines of confession that God requires of certain individuals. No line can be specified that will cover every case, as God suits his requirements to the case in hand; using only the means and amount necessary to bring each individual down at his feet. It is manifestly as impossible to particularize, and lay down iron-clad rules that will suit every case, as it is perfectly to understand every case, and when we do understand to incorporate them all into one; or as it is to read the mind of God. There is no doubt that in separate cases he makes known to the soul the special direction to be taken under its peculiar circumstances, but these leadings are as various as the various individuals and their different temperaments and necessities. But general rules can quite easily be laid down that will cover the separate cases in a general way.

(1) There should be a general confession of the condition of the heart. You might say something like this:

"I have been professing holiness for so many months, or years, but now find that I was mistaken. All the while I have been harassed with doubts as to whether my heart was actually clean, but I laid these embarrassments to temptation. Sometimes I would be really blest, and would then feel quite clear and comparatively easy in claiming the glorious experience; but now I find that this was the blessing received by every truly justified soul, yet God did not reject me for misrepresenting matters, because he saw that I was honest. At times I have felt the stirrings of pride and jealousy in my soul, and have had a hard time to keep the victory. Impatience came involuntarily boiling up, and because the Spirit of God that was in me did not allow me actually to give way, I turned it off as merely a temptation. When I looked away from it to Jesus I was happy, but I now see that God always blesses honest souls when they look to him. I have felt sin struggling against grace, and grace against sin. At times it has seemed that sin would gain the day in spite of all my efforts; then again grace so triumphed that I scarcely realized the presence of sin. But now I see my true state. The light shines clearly. I mean to press my case until deliverance comes." Much the same course in general could be pursued by those who never have professed holiness.

(2) More detailed confession might profitable be used at the altar, if you have the privilege of one where you can pray as you choose. If not, tell it to God in secret. When your soul is broken up and you see your true standing, pour your heart out to God. Mourn because your heart is unclean. Tell God how it has dishonored him, and taken to itself the glory due to him only. Tell him how pride has hindered your prayers, and how jealousy has infused your spirit. Tell him of the deadly strife, of the clashing of arms within. Tell him how impatient and envious you have been of the rise or promotion of another. In short, confess out in general your heart's deep strivings, but do not descend to particular events. Reserve this for a more private place. The ears of God are always open to hear your complaints.

Do not consider this an irksome task, but thank God for the privilege of hunting your foe to the death. Let a godly glorying in this "revenge" you are obtaining against the "old man" arise in your heart. Persecute him to the death. Hew him to pieces before the Lord. Cry out for God's aid. It shall be given.

2. Individual confession should sometimes be made. By this we mean confession to parties you have injured, or toward whom you have manifested bad tempers. Peck says,

We refer not to minute details; -- these are not due except to individuals who you may have injured and to whom you owe reparation; and this, it is presumed, you have not knowingly withheld, or you would have lost your justification

(Central Idea, pp.220, 221). But it may be that in a moment of severe pressure you have let some unkind or hasty word escape your lips, which stung some one to the very heart. Perhaps they spent hours of weeping as a result, and constantly feel that you have a lack of true love for them. Now when the Holy Spirit brings this to your remembrance, make all haste to go to the one injured and cast out the fire from your bosom. Tell them of that ill word you spoke, or that injurious tale you helped to keep going. It has stung your own soul ever since. If it has not kept you under absolute condemnation, it has chained your soul so that it is impossible to rise. You may find right here that something like this has been holding you back for months. Now be honest. Let the light pour in; and, when it comes, walk in it, for you are now after God, and to find him you must take the track that leads to him.

3. Private confession. It will no doubt be admitted by all, or at least by the radical branch of the holiness movement, that if a seeker for heart purity will take some friend to one side and tell the troubles of his soul, pointing out specifically under what circumstances he felt certain tendencies arise in his soul, that he will be greatly helped.

Dr. Adam Clarke, in his comments on James 5: 16, says:

This is a good general direction to Christians who endeavor to maintain among themselves the communion of saints. This social confession tends much to humble the soul, and to make it watchful. We naturally wish that our friends in general, and our religious friends in particular, should think well of us; and when we confess to them offences which, without this confession, they could never have known, we feel humbled, and are kept from self-applause and induced to watch unto prayer, that we may not increase our offences before God, or be obliged any more to undergo the painful humiliation of acknowledging our weakness, fickleness, or infidelity to our religious brethren. It is not said, Confess your faults to the ELDERS, that they may forgive them, or prescribe penance in order to forgive them. No; the members of the church were to confess their faults to each other. therefore auricular confession to a priest, such as is prescribed by the Romish Church, has no foundation in this passage. Indeed, had it any foundation here it would prove more than they wish, for it would require the priest to confess his sins to the people, as well as the people to confess theirs to the priest.

Dr. Benson, in his comments on the same passage, brings out the same thoughts, and it is not necessary to transcribe the passage here.

Wesley, in his notes on this passage, says:

Confess your faults -- whether you are sick or in health -- to one another. He does not say to the elders. (This may or may not be done; for it is nowhere commanded.) We may confess them to anyone who can pray in faith. He will then know how to pray for us, and be more stirred up so to do; and pray one for another, 'that ye may be healed' -- of all your spiritual diseases.

Again, in his "Christian Perfection," Wesley says:

And if any of you should at any time fall from what you now are; if you should again feel pride or unbelief, or any temper from which you are now delivered; do not deny, do not hide, do not disguise it at all at the peril of your soul. At all events go to one in whom you can confide, and speak just what you feel. God will enable him to speak a word in season, which shall be health to your soul. And surely he will again lift up your head, and cause the bones that have been broken to rejoice.

In speaking of confession in his "Central Idea" (p. 222), Dr. Peck says:

It will, moreover, secure a strong sympathy for you, and the most fervent prayers from those you love. You will feel the power of this collateral support. It will sustain your resolution mightily, and the richness of blessings called down in answer to united intercessions, from faithful believing ones, will more than compensate you for the cross you have borne.

There is in man a desire to unburden himself, a desire to find some one to whom he can make his condition known, and of whom he can obtain assistance. St. James says, "Confess your faults one to another." There is a wonderful tendency in this kind of confession to humble the soul, melt it like wax in the fire, and make it feel its utter depravity and great need of the cleansing blood. When all these things are locked up in your heart, and you flatter yourself that no one knows, there is great liability that a feeling of vanity may arise; but in telling out honestly the workings of your soul this vain feeling is crucified, and a sense of shame and self-abnegation takes its place.

Then, again, it is the nature of sin to hide itself. The first thing Adam and Eve did when they fell was to hide their shame, and from Adam and Eve to Ananias and Sapphira this tendency is clearly disclosed in the Bible. Now, to drag out these things from their lurking places and set them up in full view of God and a fellow man will wither them as the scorching August sun "withers the worms that are turned out" by the plow. Although it is true that we naturally want a friend in whom we can confide, and to whom we can tell our troubles and obtain help, yet it is also true that carnality hates detection, and will shrink from public view as long as possible.

Oh, how your heart will shrink and rebel from this process! Your tongue will almost cleave to the roof of your mouth, but why should it? Every one has the same unclean nature. It is in men's hearts, even if they have not seen and acknowledged it. But now you see it. Thank God for that fact, and urge the sinful thing to the cross.

We do not wish to be misunderstood as teaching this confession as meritorious, but only as an aid to humble the soul and bring it to the blood. Confessing our faults one to another in the Spirit will seldom or never fail in humbling and helping our souls.

The more persistently you drag these things out to the light, the more desperate your soul will become, and the more fearful you will discover the deceitful lurkings of inbred sin to be. Under the light now shining you will be as one in a charnel house, beset on every side with pride, anger, jealousy, love of praise, carnal confidence, envy, suspicions, lust, evil eye, softness, sinful self-love, unbelief, and innumerable other unclean spirits, like so many venomous serpents striking at your trembling soul, infecting their deadly poison and hissing with infernal hate against the things of the Holy Spirit. Awakened thus to a sense of your need, you will soon find the cleansing blood. Yea, you will find your way to Calvary's Victim, and, broken and mangled, you will prostrate yourself at his feet and receive the warm flow of the sin-cleansing tide on your awakened soul. Amen. Even so, Lord Jesus.

It is comparatively easy to make a general confession of sin, but to come to particulars and say, "There and there I felt so and so," is harder to do. After all it is not these tendencies that are the trouble, but these lead into the trouble. The real trouble is way back in the heart, and these tendencies followed up will lead you into its very midst, as the trees blazed in the forest will lead you to the settlement within its depths. Follow them up, and confess them out. There is efficacy in the blood to cleanse.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/harmon-a-baldwin/confession/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net