

CONFESSION

1 John 1:9, Psalms 32:3-6

By Raymond White

Confession is admitting guilt. Why would someone do that? A confessor might confess because he was caught and had no other choice *but* to confess. But we would not consider that genuine, nor would that move us to consider pleas for leniency. What might move us to leniency would be a sincere confession motivated by true contrition and a burdening sense of guilt. And what would evidence that? Spontaneity and submission.

[1] SINCERE CONFESSION

Spontaneity means that it comes from the confessor without prior discovery, without being confronted with the truth; that is, the confessor would have gotten away with it, but personal guilt will not tolerate “getting away with it” and so confession drives its way to the surface.

Submission means accepting consequences and penalties and just judgment without conditions or demands for clemency. This is why prayer (which means plea) is offered with bowed head — a bowed head is simply offering one’s neck, just as a dog does to end a lost fight by rolling on its back and offering its jugular. Although a confessor does not demand clemency, the confessor may (or may not) plead for clemency, for unearned mercy.

In some extreme situations, the guilt may be so pressing that the confessor begs for the full penalty to be executed, as was the case of Judas who begged to be arrested.

Matthew 27:3 Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he [Jesus] was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders, *:4* Saying I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? See thou to it. *:5* And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself.

“I have shed innocent blood” is a confession to a capital crime and a plea to be arrested and executed. But they wouldn’t accommodate that (“What is that to us?”) because his confession would implicate them and they couldn’t have that. So, at their suggestion, “See thou to it,” Judas executed a just penalty against himself, “and went and hanged himself.” That’s how completely guilt can overwhelm a person. He did not seek or want forgiveness, he wanted justice against himself because his guilt demanded it.

This invites an interesting question: Was Judas’s death an act of suicide or an act of justice rightly executed? And is there a difference? If I were Judas’s defense attorney at the final judgment, I’d argue the second — that he did indeed pay for his crime and therefore ought to receive some clemency, although Judas would probably reject it.

It occurred to me years ago that perhaps the best plea for forgiveness is not one that requests acquittal but one that requests no consequences to our victims. After all, every sin has a victim, that’s why a sin is a sin. What guilt really demands of us is that we hope that the bad thing we’ve done turns out to have harmed no one. If that is the case,

then acquittal becomes a moot point. So that a best prayer for forgiveness might be, “God, I pray that I have harmed no one,” rather than, “God acquit me.” The first is directed to others while the second is directed to self.

That is not to say that the second is less valid, I am merely saying that when we pray out of concern for ourselves, should we not as well pray out of concern for others, particularly our victims?

[2] EXAMPLES OF CONFESSION

The Bible has many examples of confession — some sincere and some not — and there is much we can learn from them.

***Psalms 31:9** Have mercy upon me, O LORD, for I am in trouble: mine eye is consumed with grief, yea, my soul and my belly. **:10** For my life is spent with grief, and my years with sighing: my strength faileth because of mine iniquity, and my bones are consumed.*

The point is: my problems are my own fault. The writer is not blaming God for his miseries, he is blaming himself, and he is begging God for mercy. Please fix my mistakes.

***Psalms 32:3** When I kept silence, by bones waxed old through all my roaring all the day long. **:5** I acknowledge my sin unto thee, and my iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Selah. **:6** For this shall every one that is godly pray unto thee in a time when thou mayest be found...*

This text is David’s confession over Uriah and Bathsheba.

One might ask, why did David receive forgiveness when he predecessor, Saul did not? The answer may be that David felt tremendous guilt and Saul never did. Saul blamed God while David blamed himself.

Everyone sins. So what’s the difference between a good man and a bad man? A good man knows what sin is, he acknowledges it in himself, and his guilt eats at him until the fear of punishment is dwarfed by the need to be free of the guilt. “I did this, so forgive me or punish me, but I have to get this out.” That’s the road to forgiveness.

Whenever we’re asked to forgive someone, our natural impulse is to wonder if that someone is being sufficiently punished by his or her own guilt. If yes, we’re more inclined to forgive. If no, then we’re disinclined to forgive. At the very least, we want to see some real sorrow, not sorrow for getting caught, but sorrow for guilt. When someone says, “I’m sorry,” we want to know, do they really mean it? If so, then we’re inclined to say, “It was nothing, don’t worry about it.” Well, God feels the same way.

***2 Corinthians 7:9** Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing. **:10** For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.*

“Sorrow of the world” means sorry for getting caught while “Sorry after a godly manner” means sorrow from guilt, and there is all the difference in the world.

***Psalms 38:4** For mine iniquities are gone over mine head as an heavy burden they are too heavy for me :**18** For I will declare mine iniquity; I will be sorry for my sin.*

This author feels that the only way to get out from under the burden of sin is to confess and submit.

[3] GOOD MEN

But now this question: What about really good men? What do they have to confess? For in instance, Isaiah. How did he feel about himself?

***Isaiah 6:5** Then said I, Woe is me! [Cursed am I] for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the king, the LORD of hosts.*

***Isaiah 59:12** For our transgressions are multiplied before thee, and our sins testify against us: for our transgressions are with us; and as for our iniquities, we know them.*

***Isaiah 64:5**...we have sinned...:**6** But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags...*

Isaiah feels guilt because he had stood in the presence of the holy God. It is a shared guilt to be sure, “our transgressions,” but he does not exclude himself, he does not see himself as more innocent than others. All claims he might have to righteousness are “as filthy rags,” so how can he or anyone use any such “righteousness” as a defense?

***Jeremiah 14:20** We acknowledge, O LORD, our wickedness, and the iniquity of our fathers: for we have sinned against thee.*

***Daniel 9:5** We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from thy precepts and from thy judgments.*

Jeremiah and Daniel shared Isaiah’s sentiment, I’m not better than anyone else. I don’t know if this is encouraging (that good men are as bad as we are), or discouraging (if good men are so bad, then what chance do we have?) Take your choice.

***Luke 5:8** Depart from me for I am a sinful man.*

And this is Peter. The message is: Be as good as you can be, that’s bad enough.

[4] REGULAR CONFESSION

Also, we should make a habit of confessing. Apology, for instance, is a form of confession and we now do it so often that it has become a matter of standard courtesy.

One thing that a habit of confession does for you is it puts the brakes on sin and deters you from committing some great sin that you really don't want to have to confess because it will hurt everyone. Here is a life controlling thought: "Whoa! I'd better not do *that* (even though I want to) because I really don't want to have to confess it." That's a good thought and I think what James had in mind.

James 5:16 Confess your faults one to another...

[5] CONFESS FOR FORGIVENESS

And finally, of course, confession puts us on the right path to forgiveness. Confessing to be forgiven is not disingenuous, it is what God wants and expects from us. Confession is an essential part of the repentance process, and God really wants us to repent and he really wants to forgive.

Ezekiel 33:11 I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked.

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.