

Thoughts on Confession

Confession is an important part of a praying life but is often overlooked and misunderstood. God has commanded us to confess our sins to Him (Leviticus 5:5, Numbers 5:7). This means to openly declare or admit to one's fault before God. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word for confession means to know and to respond to what you know. In the New Testament, the Greek word for confession means to say the same. Basically, when we sin against God (which is anytime we sin, Psalm 51:4), we are to acknowledge what we have done and agree with God that it is wrong.

Often this process begins with asking God to examine our hearts and show us any sin that we need to confess to Him. Like the psalmist in Psalm 139:23-24, we can pray, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (see also Lamentations 3:40-42). We must honestly evaluate ourselves through the direction of the Holy Spirit as it is often easy to justify or blame our sins on others. Once we are able to see the sin that is hindering us from growing in our relationship with God, we must acknowledge it. Tell God we have sinned in that exact area or areas. We should not just ask God to forgive us of all our sins, using it as a blanket statement because we are too busy, feel guilty, or do not care about what we have done wrong. We need to be specific. Look at the example from Isaiah 59:12-13, "For our offenses are many in your sight and our sins testify against us. Our offenses are ever with us, and we acknowledge our iniquities: rebellion and treachery against the Lord, turning our backs on our God, fomenting oppression and revolt, uttering lies our hearts have conceived." Acknowledging the precise sin is important because then we are better able to see how our sin grieves the heart of God as well as take the next step necessary to continue to grow in relationship with God. We will have heartfelt remorse when we realize we have grieved God. This will lead to repentance (2 Corinthians 7:10).

Repentance is what should follow confession. It is a deep radical change of both perspective and commitment resulting in spiritual transformation. The Hebrew word for repentance means to turn, and the Greek word means a change of mind or a life transforming choice. Once we have confessed our sin to God, we then need to turn from the sin by the power of the Holy Spirit. Both confession and repentance should be an important part of a believer's life. We cannot get to the point of restored fellowship with God if we do not start first with admitting our sin to God. He already knows. He just wants us to be totally honest before Him as this promotes fellowship and allows you to work together toward walking in victory in the area where you are sinning. If we do not turn from our sin, then we will never experience the fullness of life that God has for us.

This process may occur quickly or may be slow. For example, when you have a negative thought, you may recognize it right away and then need to admit to God at that moment. Then, make the choice by the power of the Holy Spirit to think about scripture or something else positive. In contrast, the sin you are struggling with may be something that has been a stronghold for years. It may have become a habit, so it is hard to even recognize it as a sin anymore. God's intervention will be needed to help you realize where you have fallen short. Once you confess the sin, it may take a little longer to turn from it. You must not give up for victory is found in Christ.

Let us not neglect these essential aspects of our praying lives. If we neglect confessing our sins in order to move onto repentance, we will feel the same as the psalmist in Psalm 32:3-4, "When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer." At some point after feeling this way, the psalmist decided to confess his sins to the Lord and was able to experience God's amazing forgiveness. "Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit." (Psalm 32:1-2)