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In Search of a Standard

The Abuse of Confession

By Reimar Schultze

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

In some churches confessions are woefully lacking. In others, confessions are grossly abused.

There is an old saying, “Confession is good for the soul.” However, there is another saying that “too much of a good thing can kill you.” Both of these folk sayings are supported by the Holy Scripture in reference to confession. When confession is used to soothe the conscience with no intention of turning from sin, it does nothing but perpetuate evil and is detestable in the eyes of God. The purpose of confession is deliverance and not repetition of sin over and over again. Jesus told the adulterous woman in John 8:11 “go and sin no more.”

Now, let me give you a practical illustration why repeated transgressions and confessions are wearisome. George, a neighborhood teen-ager, plays baseball in his backyard. Soon a stray ball shatters your basement window. George politely apologizes. He is embarrassed and sorry. You forgive him. Later, the baseball lands in your living room. Another window has to be replaced. George apologizes again, less remorseful and more routine. Next it is the kitchen window. . . I believe you get the message. With each apology, it becomes more meaningless to say, “I forgive you.” What you really want is for George to stop breaking your windows. You want him to fix the root problem: he should stop practicing close to your home.

Just as we are not pleased with repeated confessions that lead nowhere, God is not pleased either. I hear it over and over again, “Pastor Schultze, “I can’t shake this sin, but I believe if I keep on confessing it I will be alright.” I have to let you know that you are singing the devil’s song. Indeed, there are thousands of church choirs who sing it with you. Friend, confession is not a panacea for guilt and sin. Church people happily point to many a great saint who has sinned at one time or another. They think this gives them a platform of excuses to sin a little also, or to treat sin as a cold that afflicts all of us once in a while. This thinking is buttressed by taking several Scripture verses out of context, attempting to make sinning legitimate.

The overwhelming truth of Holy Writ is that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. He has paid a high price for us: first in forgiveness, removing our sins as far as east is from the west; and second to keep us from falling back into it. Since the beginning of time sin has never been excusable, but it has become much more inexcusable since Jesus brought us an abundance of grace through the Holy Spirit. Paul said in

Romans 5:20, “When sin abounded, grace did much more abound.” Let’s look at the Amplified Bible: “But where sin increased and abounded, grace (God’s unmerited favor) has surpassed it and increased the more and super-abounded.” No one could hardly understand that super-abounding grace anymore than John who leaned on Jesus’ breast. Sensing the very heartbeat of heaven John said years later, “ And whosoever is born of God does not commit sin, for his seed remaineth in him, and he cannot sin because he is born of God... he that committeth sin is of the devil” (1 John 3:8, 9). The same John who wrote 1 John 1:9 about our need for confession also wrote 1 John 3:8 and 9 to get us to stop sinning in the first place. It must be remembered that John was fiercely anti-sin. He must have been even more against sin six years after this epistle when he looked into heaven and received the revelation of Jesus Christ as found in the last book of the Bible.

Beloved of God, have you lived close enough to Jesus’ heart to give an affirmative ‘Yes’ to what John said about the power of this “seed” within you? Or have you neglected the necessary spiritual disciplines, siding with sin, giving the devil the glory? God deserves more from all of us than for us to commit the same sin twice, or over and over again; continually confessing, rather than drawing on His grace to not sin. In the light of this, let us not cheapen our confession by saying “O, forgive me for I did not really mean that.” O, my friend you did! You did mean it “for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh” (Luke 6:45). Had it not been in your heart, you would not have said it nor done it. We need to ask ourselves as responsible Christians, “Why did I say this” or “Why did I do this again?” Since grace abounds over sin, when you repeat a transgression and confess again, you cheapen your confession, finally turning it into hypocrisy. You need to hear the words of Jesus, “Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me” (Mark 7:6). In the whole process, you lose your credibility with both man and God.

Confession is an absolute pre-condition towards repentance, but without repentance it brings no smiles in heaven. If you repent and let God deal with the root cause of your sin then all the angels in heaven will rejoice (Luke 15:7). In other words, the party in heaven begins when you turn your back on sin and end your relationship with it altogether. From henceforth you reckon yourself indeed dead unto sin. Observe how Paul put this all together in Romans 6:11 (Amplified Bible) “Even so consider yourselves also dead to sin and your relationship to it broken, but alive to God (living in unbroken fellowship with Him) in Christ Jesus.” Marvelous! Your relationship with sin is to be broken altogether so you can walk with God. That’s the gospel and nothing less than that.

When I got married, I committed myself to one woman from then on. I considered all other options as dead. I became a “one option husband.” Three days after I was converted I considered sin, missing church or prayer, or backsliding, no longer an option. I became “a one option Christian.” God calls us to this, but we have a terrible time understanding it and a worse time accepting it. We keep playing games with the opposite sex and with sin at large. The people who will bring revival, who have the anointing, are the “one option people,” who say with Paul “this one thing, I do... (Phil. 3:15). Let us remember that God always, always, gives us an escape route so we never

have to let sin into our hearts. Sometimes we must run like Joseph (Gen. 39:12). Sometimes we must break up relationships and some of us need to throw the TV into the dumpster. Sometimes escape from temptation comes by being faithful to prayer and prayer meetings. For often repeat sins are nothing but the result of the neglect of spiritual disciplines. Sometimes being on our knees a little or much longer to refresh our love relationship with Jesus will put a death sentence to sins that have choked us for years. Paul says, "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (1 Cor 10:13). There is always an exit sign. Oh, how much stress we are spared when we no longer engage ourselves in the struggle: Shall I or shall I not yield to temptation every time it comes my way? Why don't you settle it once for all that you will be one hundred percent pro-God?

Some of you say, "It is hard to live a holy life. That takes will power; I don't have that much will power." Friend, it takes more than will power: if you rely on your will power, you will never be able to resist temptation. It is not in your power, it is in God's power (Jude 1:24). How much of this divine power do you have? It depends on your involvement with Jesus. If you enjoy spending Sunday afternoons watching professional football players break the Sabbath day; that is doing your own pleasure, (Is. 58:13) you're not likely to experience what you really have in Jesus. However, if you spend much time in meditating on the things of God thus keeping the Sabbath day holy by doing HIS pleasure; your awareness of the riches and treasures in Christ Jesus will be truly enlarged, making you an invincible warrior.

How bad is it to sin once? How much worse is it to sin twice with the same transgression? Jesus said, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 4:17 and Luke 13:3). Confession without the fruit of repentance is abominable to Jesus. You can only stretch a rubber band so far before it will break. "The Lord said, 'My spirit shall not always strive with man'" (Gen. 6:3). King Saul confessed too many times without repenting. He came to a point where his heart was no longer capable of repentance. That was true of Esau and Judas Iscariot as well. Every time you confess without repenting, you harden your heart. Watch out, because the repeat transgressor is playing games with the grace of God: "Who considers the blood of Jesus wherewith he was sanctified an unholy thing... It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb. 10:29, 31).

Finally, consider one of the greatest pictures of confession: the prodigal son. His father desired to forgive him, but he could not until his confession was backed up with repentance: returning to the father's house. In summary, to some I must say, "Repent of your stubbornness and confess." To others I must say, "Be careful not to abuse confession." Confession is good for the soul provided it leads to repentance.