

Confession of Sin and Restitution

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Following a recent discussion on this topic, I thought it good to commit to paper my thoughts, based upon Scripture, and my understanding as to why we as Apostolic Christians believe that confession of sin and restitution are an inherent part of the conversion experience.

When John the Baptist began his ministry, he declared, "Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Matthew 3:2). Those who responded to the message " ... Were baptized of him in Jordan, *confessing their sins*." (Matthew 3:6). Many of the Pharisees and Sadducees who came to his baptism without being willing to experience a change in their lives were rebuffed by John the Baptist with, "O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance" (Matthew 3:7-8). It is clear from the above Scriptures that what was expected in the way of "fruit" was acknowledgment of specific sin in people's lives, and that part of the repentance experience was to confess these sins. It also appears that this confession was not a simple statement of acknowledging that "I am a sinner," but that the repentant persons were so sincere that they had the desire to be unburdened of their sins in response to Proverbs 28:13: "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy."

Jesus began His ministry with the same message: "Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Matthew 4:17). We see the sincere response by Zacchaeus after his encounter with Christ, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold." (Luke 19:8). As a chief among the publicans who had become rich, probably through "false accusation", his conscience urged him to be willing to make this right. What a testimony of the power of Christ working through him! He did not *earn* his salvation by confessing and making restitution, but his faith convicted him of the need to be free of the guilt brought on by wrongdoing no matter how embarrassing. Christ recognized both his faith and humility, and thus declares, "This day is salvation come to this house, forso much as he also is a son of Abraham." (Luke 19:9).

Repentance is not just a momentary feeling sorry for sins committed. The Holy Spirit inspired the apostles to give a clear understanding of the depth of true repentance. To the members at Corinth, the Apostle Paul rejoiced that those in the church who needed to repent truly did so. They did not just feel bad for what they had done, "But that ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing. For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation ... " (II Corinthians 7:9,10). Also the Apostle John writes, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (I John 1:9). Repentance includes *Godly sorrow*; confession — making the sin known; and a *turning around* — no longer continuing the sin or the sinful practice.

I believe that in today's evangelical world many have tried to provide an easier road of repentance by counseling souls that they need only confess sins to God. That is an interesting concept. Since God already knows everything about us, telling God the sins one has committed is really only an acknowledgment, not confession. While acknowledgment is indeed a necessary first step as part of repentance, the humbling experience that comes through confession especially to those whom we have

wronged - is part of the fruit of repentance. It is both a true testimony of the sincerity of the convert's having received the grace of God to repent, and a testimony to other unconverted people of the reality of the power of the Holy Spirit to change lives. What if an unconverted person were fully aware that a convert had not asked him for forgiveness of something they both knew was an unforgiven trespass? Does not Scripture clearly indicate that the convert should ask for forgiveness of man as well as of God? The Apostle Paul writes, "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men." (Romans 12:18). If this exhortation is addressed to the believer, should not the convert seek to make things right, as much as is possible, with all men?

Another scripture indicating that confession is part of the healing process is to be found in the General Epistle of James: "Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms. Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him. Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." (James 5:13-16). Some have argued that this scripture is directed to physical healing only; however, verse 15 specifically mentions *committed sins* prior to the direction to confess one to another, coupled with prayer, to effect healing.

My personal counsel to those who have come to the point of wanting to be freed from the guilt of sin, is to remind them of what happens to sins that are specifically brought to the foot of the cross to be washed "white as snow" (Isaiah 1:18). It is through Christ, "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace" (Ephesians 1:7). As converts confess their sins, they are, in effect, being brought to the foot of the cross to be washed by His blood, and we then can be assured of the promise that "... thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea." (Micah 7:19). What a graphic word picture: to visualize our sins to be washed away and then buried into the deepest sea, never to be raised again with a feeling of guilt. Satan cannot then come later to tempt us by saying, "You have only acknowledged your sin." We can rejoice that we have fully understood and experienced "... repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." (Acts 20:21).

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