



CONFESSION

QUEST LESSON D-4

The Problem: William D. Arnot once said: "Confession of sin comes from the offer of mercy. Mercy displayed causes confession to flow, and confession flowing opens the way to mercy. If I have not a contrite heart, God's mercy will never be mine; but if God had not manifested His mercy in Christ, I could never have a contrite heart." That statement contains the most important elements of confession as taught in the Scriptures. God's mercy comes first. He has manifested His love by giving Christ to die for our sins and to be a heavenly Mediator. His great love awakens within the human heart the craving for freedom from guilt and for purity of heart and life. God's mercy engenders penitence on the part of the sinner. Then confession follows as a heart response to a caring heavenly Father. Our confession results in further extension of mercy from God; He freely forgives because Christ has already atoned for the sin. Hence, the door to true confession by a contrite heart is opened wide by the infinite love of our heavenly Lord. We want to be right with Him because His love invites our confidence and our loyalty.

That is why human substitutes for true confession are always unsatisfactory. The idea that your sin must be confessed to some human being before it can be forgiven is quite unbiblical. No priest or minister is capable of extending the infinite mercy that flows naturally from Christ to every human soul. There is nothing in the Bible indicating that humans are more righteous than you have the power to forgive your sin and purify your life. The attempt by religious leaders to take over that responsibility usurps the prerogatives of God.

No psychiatrist has the capacity to relieve your guilt. It helps sometimes to pour out our woes to some other human being, but taking away guilt is Christ's province, not man's. No other human being has paid the price for your sin, and no other human being can lift the burden from your shoulders.

The problem so many face today results from a refusal to accept the only way that sins can be forgiven. They try all kinds of substitutes and spend large amounts of money in an effort to free themselves from the load of guilt earned by their lives of sin. Jesus Christ offers forgiveness because He has earned it on Calvary. His peace cannot be bought or earned. It does not result from painful sessions with priests or psychiatrists. It is freely offered to the one who will respond to His mercy and accept His forgiveness. God's forgiveness is free, immediate, and lasting. There is no substitute for it. And it is for you!

Objectives

- First, we emphasize the danger of retaining guilt.
- Second, we study the conditions under which we can have God's mercy.
- Third, we stress the need for specific confession of particular sins.
- Fourth, confession implies reformation of life.
- Fifth, true confession is inspired by the Holy Spirit.

I. The Danger Of Retaining Guilt

Guilt not dealt with is the cause of manifold spiritual and psychological problems. Feelings of insecurity or inadequacy naturally result when guilt is not destroyed by true confession and forgiveness. Unhandled guilt is often the reason for strange modes of behavior. The individual tries to convince himself that he is not guilty, or he may try to cover up his sin because the thought of it is hurtful. The effect is to push the guilt feelings deeper into the recesses of the mind, and later they become the abscess from which springs personality and character abnormalities. Unreasonable fears, anxieties,

compulsions, obsessions often result from retained guilt. There can be no peace of mind because there is no peace with God.

The Word

1. What did the wise man say about the danger of covering sin instead of confessing it? Proverbs 28:13
2. According to Isaiah, what is God's attitude to the person who conceals his sin? Isaiah 29:15; 30:1
3. What vision was Ezekiel given of the secret sins of God's professed people? Ezekiel 8:2.
4. How can we be sure that we can never hide our sins from the inspecting eye of God? Psalm 90:8; 139:7-10.

Explanation: Sin cannot be hidden from God. You can bury your head in the sand, as it were, hoping to forget that you are guilty, but God has seen it all and knows that you can never have peace until you come to Him for forgiveness. It is not God who tortures your soul; you are torturing your own soul and allowing the devil to destroy you. The Bible condemns the individual who tries to conceal his guilt. He has no real self-respect, no peace of mind, no freedom from constant demonic accusations, and nothing in life provides any lasting satisfaction.

Relevance: There is only one solution, admit to Christ that you have sinned against him and seek His forgiveness because he died on the cross for you. It is fatal to spiritual and psychological health to harbor guilt, but there is a wonderful healing virtue in confession and forgiveness. Try it; it works!

II. The Conditions Of Obtaining God's Mercy

Throughout the history of mankind, it has been thought by many that God must be placated. They think that God's anger must be turned away by some kind of sacrifice or penance. The ancient Canaanites offered human sacrifices to the gods. Medieval men went on long pilgrimages, gave money to the church, repeated prayers over and over again, afflicted their bodies in various ways, or enlisted in risky crusades against infidels. Some of these practices are still current even in some Christian churches. What these people don't know is that such attempts to earn forgiveness are all totally futile. The Bible never commands human works of penance and never suggests that God's mercy can be earned. How then can we have forgiveness?

The Word

5. What is the simple Bible method of obtaining God's forgiveness for sin? 1 John 1:9; Isaiah 55:6-7.
6. On what basis can we have confidence that God will, indeed, hear our confession and receive us? Hebrews 4:15-16.
7. What must be the attitude of the person who comes to God for forgiveness? Psalm 34:18
8. When he was convicted by the Holy Spirit of his sins of adultery and murder, what kind of prayer did David pray? Psalm 51:1-17.

Explanation: "If we confess our sins," is the Lord's condition for forgiveness. Sins were not automatically forgiven at Calvary, as some people believe. We confess because we believe that the cross paid the penalty for our sin; but confession is essential to forgiveness. We are not told to confess to any human being, but directly to the Lord. We will see in the next section that when we have wronged others we must make restitution, but no man or woman is to be our confessor. Our sins are heard only by Christ, and if we come to Him in true penitence of heart, pleading His mercy and claiming the cross as the sacrifice for us, He will willingly forgive us. The reason David was not rejected as king and put to death for his gross sins is that he came to the Lord in humility and brokenness of soul, pleading for forgiveness and divine cleansing. We can know for certain that Christ hears that kind of prayer and blots out the guilt of the sin. He too has lived on our earth; He knows what it is like to be fiercely tempted, He understands our human weakness, He took on Himself our guilt, and although He never sinned, He is able to sympathize with our failings. The Lord is not waiting to cut you off for eternity because you are a sinner. He is waiting to receive you with His open arms of love because you respond to His mercy and accept His forgiveness.

Relevance: However sinful your life may have been, you can come to Jesus for healing and cleansing. That is what forgiveness is! When we forgive someone else, we agree to forget the past, but we cannot change a heart. When the Lord forgives us He delivers us from Satan's dominion and gives us new hearts, new desires, and the power to live His way.

III. The Need For Specific Confession

The Bible teaches that confession of sin should go as far as the sin has gone. That means that there are times when we must put things right with others, not because they are our confessors who have the power to take away our guilt, but because we have wronged them and the word asks us to do all we can to put right the wrong.

The Word

9. If the sin was a private matter that did no harm to any other human being, to whom do we confess it?
Psalm 32:5
10. If we have wronged another person, in addition to confessing our sin to God, what do we do? Matthew 5:23-24
11. If your brother sins against you, what procedure should you follow? Matthew 18:15-17.
12. If the sin is a public matter that has affected the lives of a large number of people, what should the Christian do?
1 Samuel 12:19.

Explanation: Private sins are confessed to God alone, sins against someone else should be made right with the wronged person, and public sins should be publicly confessed. It should, however, be remembered that only God can take away guilt. Every sin is rebellion against God, and He is the One who forgives because of Christ's sacrifice. If the person or persons that we have wronged cannot be contacted for some reason, the Lord does not withhold His forgiveness because we have not made things right with them. The individual may now be deceased, or we may have completely lost contact with them and do not know where they are. To go on feeling guilty is to insult the Lord who is offering you forgiveness. Restitution is important if we have wronged someone, but we do not earn God's forgiveness by making restitution. The Lord knows your heart and is well aware of your willingness to make things right with a wronged person or persons.

Relevance: Putting things right in God's way is prerequisite to wonderful peace and happiness. If making restitution involves suffering for you, remember that the person you hurt has suffered too, and your effort to make things right results in priceless peace of mind for you. If they refuse to forgive you, that is not your fault. You have done your part, and their Christian duty is to forgive. When you have done all you can to make things right, your responsibility ends. Meanwhile you have God's love and forgiveness because of your sorrow for your sin and your noble intentions.

IV. Confession Implies Reformation

Confession of sin is only acceptable to God if we are willing to turn away from it in the future. Reformation of life through the power of Jesus Christ is part of true confession. That is why God rejects the confession of the individual who wants to live a life of constant sinning and confessing with no effort to put the sin away. It is not that the Lord will not forgive us if we fall again into our besetting sin. But if we have no genuine intention of putting it away tomorrow, we cannot expect to be forgiven for what we have done today.

The Word

13. What did the prophet Isaiah urge the people of Israel to do in connection with their confession of sin? Isaiah 1:16-17.
14. What kind of reformation of life did Ezekiel envision for confessing sinners? Ezekiel 33:15.
15. How did the Corinthians' lifestyle change after they had confessed and been forgiven? 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; 2 Corinthians 7:11.

Explanation: Living faith always results in good works that God can accept. (See James 2:14-18). If you have faith enough to believe that Christ forgives your sins, you have faith enough to trust Him for power to overcome in the future. Isaiah and Ezekiel both urged that the confessing sinner should stop doing the wrong things that marred his past record and should devote his life to helpful service for God and humanity. Only thus would it be evident that he possessed genuine faith in the Lord. Such noble deeds of service do not earn God's love and favor; you have that already! But such deeds demonstrate that your life is now indwelt by Christ and He is working through you (Galatians 2:20). When criminals respond to Christ they become gentlemen; when prostitutes receive the Lord's forgiveness they become pure; when thieves seek divine healing they become honest; nasty natured people become sweet-tempered, proud people become humble, selfish people become thoughtful of others. Finding Christ's love and forgiveness always results in the reformation of life, a change that is a source of wonder to both men and angels. (See Zechariah 3:4; 8).

Relevance: You do not have to give up on yourself; you too can be changed by divine power. Come to the Lord confessing your sins, surrendering your heart, and His life of holiness becomes yours (1 John 2:19; 3:70).

V. True Confession Is Inspired By The Holy Spirit

It is impossible for us to be so sorry for our sins that we want to confess them unless we are convicted by the Holy Spirit. That is why it is so dangerous to resist His conviction; it may not be possible for Him to speak so forcefully to you in the future. Each time you reject Him, you make it just a little more difficult for Him to reach you.

The Word

16. What is the work of the Holy Spirit? John 16:8-11.
17. When people are resisting the Holy Spirit's conviction, what do they do? Genesis 3:2-13.
18. When sinners respond to the Holy Spirit's conviction, what do they do? Acts 26:10-11; 1 Timothy 1:15.

Explanation: It is the work of the Holy Spirit to convict of sin, to teach people how they can have the gift of Christ's righteousness, and to warn them of divine rejection if they spurn His love. When sinners are resisting the Spirit's conviction, they blame everyone but themselves. They strenuously make excuses for their sins. When they accept the Spirit's conviction the story is totally different. Now they humbly admit their sins and plead God's forgiveness. If they have wronged others, as Paul had, they do all they can to make restitution.

Relevance: When Jesus Christ speaks to your heart by the Holy Spirit, telling you that you are a sinner in need of forgiveness, do not resist His loving appeal. By turning to Him simply in prayer, confessing your sins and pleading His divine merits on your behalf you can be forgiven. It is a glorious relief to know that your sins have been cast into the depths of the sea (Micah 7:19). It is a source of tremendous joy to know that it is the Lord who "forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases" (Psalm 103:3). What peace you have when you know that your transgressions have been placed as far from you "as the east is from the west" (Psalm 103:12). And that is an infinite distance because the world is round. The truth is that, through Christ, your sins are forgiven. Rejoice in it! Praise the Lord for it! Have faith to believe it continually, and don't bring your guilt back by doubting that you are forgiven! What love it is that has transformed us into sons and daughters of God! (1 John 3:1). Do you believe it?

Review Questions

1. True or False
 - a. Our sins should be confessed to priests and ministers
 - b. We have to do special works of penance before God will forgive us.
 - c. It is alright to go on committing sin as long as you wipe the slate clean by confessing once in a while.
 - d. When you confess your sins in the Lord's way your heart is changed by the power of the Holy Spirit.
2. Discuss: What do you do if you cannot remember your past sins? Will God forgive them just the same? Does God's forgiveness depend on your memory? (See Psalm 19:12).

Further Study: Ellen G. White, Steps to Christ, Chapter 4.