

Confess to One Another 07-05-20

James 5:16

*Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed.
The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.*

When James gives us the command to confess our sins to one another, why are we to do this? Most would agree that they are not comfortable confessing their sins; so why is it so difficult? As well, what should the confession of sin look like?

Why Confess Sins

Perhaps to understand the reasons we are to confess sins it might be best to begin by saying those reasons that do NOT apply. First of all, we do NOT confess our sins to each other for forgiveness. 1 John 1:9 tells us that we confess our sins to God for forgiveness. Our forgiveness is a matter between us and God; Mark 2:7 reminds us that *"who can forgive sins but God alone?"* We are not confessing to each other for forgiveness, but another purpose. Some might see that this leads to a second reason we do NOT confess: to give a power or authority of forgiveness to the church. Misunderstandings of John 20:23 (see the parallel of Luke 24:47) have created an illegitimate authority in denominations which claim to possess the power to absolve sins directly.

So why do we confess our sins to one another? First, it is because sin is not something easily overcome. Like the alcoholic or drug addict, sin has a control of our life that often requires the aid of others to overcome. So the primary reason we are to confess our sins is that we are seeking to be helped by others. This is stated in Galatians 6:1-2. How does this help us? In part, we are seeking the aid of others by prayer and encouragement, but it is also seeking to be accountable for sin (Hebrews 12:14-15). Accountability is a means to overcoming. Finally, in confessing our sins to others, we are actually encouraging others to see us as fellow travelers in the world, and revealing that we all have weaknesses. Consider the many confession of Paul in the Scriptures; he did so to encourage others to see that the grace of God was the means to perfection (2 Corinthians 12:7-10).

Confession is Hard

But we all have to acknowledge that confession is hard. There are two reasons for this. First, it is because there is often a lack of trust between brethren. Paul acknowledged this in Galatians 5:15; sometimes we hurt each other with worldly judgments, and failed to demonstrate the proper mindset for others. When someone confesses sins, they do not need judgment, they need mercy. In our legal system today, when someone pleads guilty, they are passing up a trial, and asking for mercy from the court. So it is with confession. Secondly, many wont confess because they have a prideful heart that cannot see sin. John saw this in I John 1:8-10 (Proverb 20:9). Too many cannot see that they need to confess their sins, and will not do so.

What Does It Look Like

Confession is not (necessarily) coming to the front pew at the end of services. It is most often a private conversation between trusting brethren that is made because of a desire to overcome weakness. It is a conversation absent of judgment. It is a conversation that seeks to encourage others to overcome sin by using the example of ourselves. It is statements that sound like "I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor" (1 Tim. 1:13) that might end with "Yet I was shown mercy". That is the power of the confession of sin.