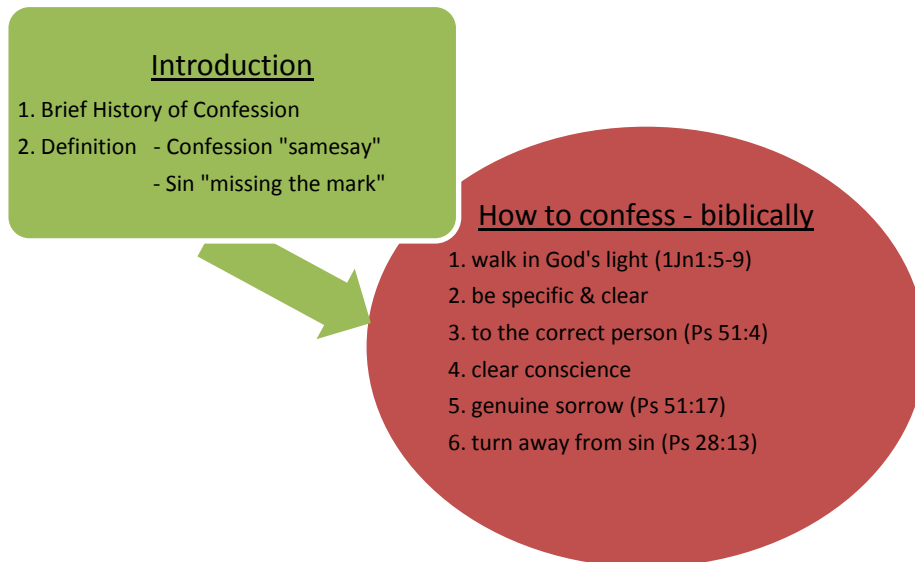


The Art of Confession

Melville Junction Church

Dean Donaldson - 17 .01.2010

Overview:



Introduction

- This is the 3rd sermon in a 6 part series called The Art of Spiritual Discipline.
- I want to explore The Art of Confession (probably a lost discipline in our church circles)
- It's quite a difficult topic to discuss because there is history and conflict around the subject.
- It's one of those things that we prefer not to go into too much.
- But I have come to see that if we learn to practise it correctly it can be hugely freeing and help us in our walk with God.
- Why are we looking at spiritual disciplines?
- Richard Foster quote: "Superficiality is the curse of the age...The desperate need today is not for a greater number of intelligent people, or gifted people, but for deep people"
- Sometimes we can be those who spend a lot of time discussing and reading about the different philosophies about God and the meaning of life.
- But the spiritual disciplines give us practical handles on how to live in community with God.
- Paul R helped us put things in perspective last week by reading Revelation 4 to us, a picture of God seated on His throne...
- If what we are doing does not point us to that then we are wasting our time.
- **The thing is that God is seated on His throne**, but we often live lives that don't reflect it.

- So we practice the spiritual disciplines to help us live lives that reflect God seated on His throne. God is permanent; we have the problem of drifting away from centre.

So what do we understand about confession or the confession of sin?

- Some have the idea of a confessional booth and a priest behind some impersonal barrier
- Some hold it as intensely private, between me and God.
- Telling somebody else – accountability partner etc.
- Public confession?
- Some of us don't think that it's necessary
- The history of confession takes us through most of these phases, back and forward, which does not help us today.
- I want us to look at a practical way in which we can start to practice this discipline, in a way that is uplifting, refreshing and glorifies God. (The Victorious Life, John Coblentz)
- 1 John 1:5-9 (main text)

⁵This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. ⁶If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. ⁷But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. ⁸If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. ⁹If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

- If we confess our sins...
- The Greek word for confession is *homologeō*, meaning "to say the same thing," or to agree with.
- The Greek word *hamartia* (ἁμαρτία) is usually translated as sin in the New Testament. In Classical Greek, it means "to miss the mark" or "to miss the target"
- To agree, or to admit that we missed the mark, that we fall short of the standard that Jesus set.

So how do we do it?

1. Walk in God's light (in close fellowship with God)
 - In 1 John 1, what leads up to the instruction to confess: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.
 - We are not like God though, we have all sinned.
 - Even after we are born again and no longer walk in sin, we do at times "miss the mark"
 - If we walk in the Light these sins are revealed.
 - To deny our sins in such a revealing Light is essentially to lie.
 - So when you sin, confess it. Agree with truth. Refuse to deny anything revealed to you in the light of fellowship with God.
2. Name the sin (how you missed the mark) specifically and clearly
 - If you called someone an ass, say "I am sorry I called you an ass"
 - Sometimes saying sorry like this is only dealing with the symptom and not the root cause.
 - The root cause might be an unloving or uncharitable heart which will be revealed if you walk in God's light.
 - Agree about missing the mark at the root level as well as the symptom level.
 - "God I have a hard and uncharitable heart"

3. Confess to the correct person

- Psalm 51 is a Psalm that David wrote after his adultery with Bathsheba.
- He sinned against Bathsheba, against Uriah (her husband), against his own family, and against the nation of Israel.
- But in Psalm 51:4 he acknowledges that the sin against God was most serious...

⁴ Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge.

- All sin is against God first and foremost, we need to clear the record with God through Jesus because He is able to forgive us.
- We should also clear it with the person or people that we have sinned against.
- If I have sinned against Rachel, I should tell her.
- If it is a private sin deal with it in private
- If it is public, deal with it in public
- So if I called you an ass in public like from the front of the church, then from the front of the church in front of all these people I should say sorry I called you an ass, I have a hard an unloving heart...
- **James 5:16**

¹⁶ Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.

- This text suggests that it is good for us to confess our sin or our faults to each other.
- For our healing, for the effectiveness of our prayer.
- This is where it is good to be accountable to a person or group of people. You may not share the intimate details of the sin with them because you have done that before God and the person you sinned against.
- But it will be helpful to share the root of the problem.
- I am still struggling with a hard heart; I called somebody an ass the other day.
- This helps us deal with our pride, it allows for open honest and real conversations between people and it allows us to pray specifically for each other.

4. Seek a clear conscience

- There is a German proverb that says; “a clear conscience is a soft pillow”.
- But that’s not really what I am talking about; let’s go back to **1 John 1:9**.

⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

- So clearing the conscience is about being made righteous by Jesus.
- The benefit of tell it as it is, being specific and thorough is that we receive thorough forgiveness for those specific sins.
- A clean slate.

- Often we will confess a sin to someone in the hope that the relationship with that person will improve.
- But how often have you swallowed your pride, confessed to somebody only to be told that sorry is not good enough etc.
- The aim of the confession is righteousness before Jesus.
- You should feel released from feelings of guilt which can and do affect the way we live.
- But more importantly it gives us the ability to stand before people and talk about things like love, honesty, forgiveness and truth with a clear conscience.

5. Heart of the confession

- The thing that stops me from making a true confession is my pride.
- How often do we go through the motions because we know that we are supposed to but in our hearts we are not genuinely sorry?
- If we look at Psalm 51 again, David making his confession: Ps 51:17

¹⁷ The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

- Or 2 **Corinthians 7:10**

¹⁰ Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret...

- Our pride allows us to look for “the good thing” that came out of our wrong doing etc.
 - Or finds excuses for why we behaved that way we do.
 - I am the king of these excuses; I find it really difficult to just agree with the truth of my sin.
 - I am always looking or comparing my sin with your sin, the part you played etc.
 - But a broken and contrite heart allows us to focus on our missing of the mark, our wrong doing.
- John Coblenz puts it like this: Brokenness gives us freedom from all the pitfalls of pride. Brokenness gives us the freedom to deal with sin without delving into the sins of others. Brokenness gives us the freedom to be honest.
- So a broken and contrite heart is the correct response to facing the truth about our sin.

6. Turn away from the sin

- **Proverbs 28:13:** ¹³He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will find compassion.
- At times I am good at naming my sin with no real intension of changing my behaviour.
- “You’re an ass”
- No seriously, true confession is an agreement with truth.
- Not only the truth about the sin but also the truth about the righteousness as well.
- We agree that what we have done is not right but at the same time we are agreeing that God’s way is correct, it is truth.
- Then we turn and follow that truth, that way.
- We turn away from our sin and turn towards God.

Summarise...

Pray