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## ON THE CONFESSION OF SINS

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### CONFESSIONS THAT DON'T CONFESS

In the Old Testament, confession of sins to Jehovah is mentioned a number of times. David said, in Ps. 32:5:

"I acknowledge my sin unto thee, And mine iniquity did I not hide:

I said, I will confess my transgressions unto Jehovah; And thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin."

It seems plain enough that the servant of God, when he sins, must confess that sin to God and pray for forgiveness. Of course, that implies repentance. If only you and the person who sinned with you know of that sin, the public need not know anything about it. In fact, it is far better that they never know. Repent of it, make confession unto God, and pray for his forgiveness, and let that end the matter. Don't be a fool; don't parade your sins before people that otherwise would not know anything about them. But if you have maligned, slandered, and persecuted your brother before the world through every available avenue, you can't make that right with God by sitting in your home crying about it. The mischief of your deed was aimed at your brother, but the sin of it reached high heaven. A public wrong must be publicly corrected, or it is not corrected at all. Of course, to graciously make public amends would be considered very humiliating, but to do so would be such an outstanding example of Christian manhood at its best that every right-thinking person would applaud the deed; and such a deed would ease the conscience and make the one feel more content with himself. "Too much pride for that," do you say? Remember, "Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall." (Prov. 16:18.)

And sometimes there are other cases that seem to demand a public confession, though I know of no scripture that requires that a public confession be made. When a member of the church indulges in drunkenness, immoral practices openly, so that people know about it, or if he has engaged in contention and strife, or in any other sin, so that he brings shame upon himself and injury to the church, and then wishes to reform, how can he clear himself without publicly confessing his sins, and praying God for forgiveness, and asking the church to pray for him and to help him?

An evil practice by some preachers has grown out of a wrong application of a part of James 5:16. A part of the verse is quoted and the connection not considered; and it is thus perverted. Then, in a rousing exhortation, brethren are exhorted to come forward and confess their sins; but do they confess any sins? Oh, no; likely each one says, "I have not been living right;" or, "I have not been living as a Christian should," etc. Others do not know what these people, hitherto regarded as upright men and women, have done; and many will wonder what secret meanness they have done. But if you good and faithful Christians feel that you must make public confession of sins, name the sins you are confessing. A blanket confession is really no confession of sins. Besides, people who know you, and have regarded you as faithful Christians, will likely think you have been doing things in secret; and your influence will never be so good any more. And you will notice that the preacher who calls for such confessions never does any confessing himself. Did you ever try to figure out why he does not practice his own preaching on that point?

### The Psychological Effect of Movement

Did you ever note the action of a denominational preacher in a protracted meeting, or the performances of a union meeting preacher? They know the value of getting a movement started, and so they try various schemes to get people to move. A long time ago I saw that worked in getting people to make some move. They had never heard of psychology, but they knew they could get the "Christians" to come to the altar to pray for the unconverted, such a movement would be contagious and would spread to some they wanted to influence to come to the mourner's bench. It worked. But now, since the mourner's bench has been practically abandoned by the more conservative denominations, some of "our brethren" have instituted a sort of mourner's bench for Christians! Yes, "Come forward, confess your sins, and pray for forgiveness, and be prayed for." Great is the denominational garbage can!

But we must wait till another time for a closer examination of James 5:16. In the meantime read carefully verses 14, 15, 16. Note how "therefore" connects verse 16 with what went before, and note also the purpose of the confession of sins.

## CONFESSION OF SINS

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Frequently passages of scripture are made to do service in a way the Lord never intended, and that is one way to wrest the scriptures. No group of people are entirely free from this evil, though some groups do so more than others. The apostles had a special work to do, a work that no one now is expected to do or can do. For that work they needed special powers for their work; work which no one today can do or needs to do. They needed to be inspired to enable them to reveal the gospel, and they needed power to perform miracles as signs that God was speaking through them. Their work was for all time, and needed no repetition down the ages. And yet denominational preachers of various sorts will quote passages that applied to the apostles, and argue that such passages apply to people today, as if people now receive the same powers that were conferred on the apostles.

### Spiritual Gifts Then Needed

Others besides the apostles had spiritual gifts, enabling different ones to do different things. When many churches were established, the apostles could not be present at all of them. So they needed inspired men in these many churches, for the New Testament had not then been written; and those inspired men needed miracle working powers to convince the people that they were God's representatives. As the elders were to feed the flock, we conclude that some of them were endowed with spiritual gifts.

### Comments on James 5:14-16

Having stated some points that really need fuller development, we pass to a consideration of James 5:14-16: "Is any among you sick? 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 him that is sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, it shall be forgiven him. Confess therefore your sins one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The supplication of a righteous man availeth much in its working."

James MacKnight thought James here referred to miraculous healing. But a discussion of that point does not belong in this essay; but there is one clause in verse 15 that must be noted. That is the statement that the healed person, if he had committed any sins, "it shall be forgiven him." But there is no record that God ever forgave sins without repentance. Verse 16 comes in as part of this healing. The word "therefore" shows this. "Confess therefore your sins one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed." And therefore as a condition of healing the sick, he was required to confess his sins—to whom? The elders? Not unless he had sinned against an elder, and then only to the one he had sinned against. God did not appoint elders to be priests to whom confessions were to be made, and no elders should assume the role of Roman Catholic priests. It is therefore certain that the confession here commanded was not to be made to the elders as such, but to the person who had been sinned against; and when things are made right with the injured brother, then pray for one another, "that ye may be healed." But if the healing of verse 16 means spiritual healing, so must the sickness of verses 14, 15, refer to spiritual sickness! But we must stick to

our subject, and not be side-tracked.

It is amazing how some people can see things in a passage that are not in it. Some preachers quote a part of verse 16 as a basis for calling on the brethren to come forward and confess their sins before the whole congregation, though the verse does not even hint at such a practice. They quote the statement, "confess therefore your sins one to another," and make it mean, confess your sins before everybody. That is a hurtful practice, because the scriptures are perverted to sustain it, and also because it leaves some of the best people in the church under suspicion, as was pointed out in a former article. But such confessionals help the preacher get a movement started and swells his report to the papers.

After a brother had publicly confessed that he had sinned, another brother said to me, "He made his confession, now we ought to forgive him." We forgive him? I could not forgive him, for he had never done me any wrong. In fact, he had always been as kind and nice to me as one could wish. I am not God, and I cannot forgive anyone who sins against God.

### MISSION - - -

(Continued from Page 2)

very end also. Consider these passages in view of that:

Heb. 13:7-17 — "Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation. . . . Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you."

2 Thess. 3:13-15 — But ye, brethren, be not weary in well doing. And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother."

Acts 20:26-32 — "Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God. Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears. And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified."

To this end—mutual edification—many of the worship services of the church are dedicated. Teaching, exhortation, admonition, and instruction in righteousness are all required. The word of God is designed to fill each one of these needs, and must only be taught to do so. (2 Tim. 3:16, 17.) The church is designed to do the teaching; hence, all that is needed is for the church simply to carry out God's plan, and do that which God designed it to do.

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