

RESTORE
HONEST CONFESSION

Friday, May 29

Reading: James 5:13-20

James 5:16 *Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.*

In the middle of his discussion about the power of prayer, James makes a statement that scares a lot of Christians today: “confess your sins to each other.”

“Confession is a difficult Discipline for us because we all too often view the believing community as a fellowship of saints before we see it as a fellowship of sinners. We feel that everyone else has advanced so far into holiness that we are isolated and alone in our sin. We cannot bear to reveal our failures and shortcomings to others. We imagine that we are the only ones who have not stepped onto the high road to heaven. Therefore, we hide ourselves from one another and live in veiled lies and hypocrisy.”¹

In our “Me-first” society, we have lost the fellowship and power of being open and honest with each other about our struggles and sins. Spiritual healing comes when we “live life together.” This does not mean that everyone must stand before the church congregation and list out their transgressions. But it does mean that we need accountability. Real fellowship occurs when people are known, cared for, and held accountable. We need to have someone we can go to and admit, “I am struggling with such-and-such a sin and I need your help.”

There are many benefits² of confessing to one another:

- (1) It helps us know we are not alone. Hiding our sin isolates us. Sharing it with other godly believers makes us realize others are struggling with similar sin issues. It gives us a support system.
- (2) It leads to freedom from our sin. Sin tends to fester and grow when we keep it in the dark recesses of our heart. When we expose it to the light by confessing it to another believer, we begin to break its’ power over us.
- (3) It restores relationships. While all sin is ultimately against God, it usually affects other people as well. When we confess and ask forgiveness from the person we have wronged, it usually brings healing to that relationship. And even if the other person is unwilling to forgive, it brings healing to our hearts as we release the guilt through confession.

These are just a few of the benefits we receive from being open and honest with each other.

To whom should we confess? Perhaps it is a spouse, a pastor, a member of your small group, a close friend, etc. For each person it will be different. Remember that the purpose of confession is that we can better pray for one another and bring healing. You need to seek out someone you can trust. Richard Foster suggests “the key qualifications are spiritual maturity, wisdom, compassion, good common sense, the ability to keep a confidence, and a wholesome sense of humor.”³ To this list we might add a person who is not judgmental. They have been where you are now and can give sympathy and support. One who is a good listener and does not have to always put in their “two cents.” This person realizes that “the ground is level at the foot of the cross.” We all struggle and we can all help each other in our struggles. One of the most important things we can do is pray for each other – not just for physical needs, but for spiritual health and victory over sin. And these prayers become more “powerful and effective” when we are open and honest with each other.

¹ Richard J. Foster. Celebration of Discipline, p. 145

² Some of this is from Vince Antonucci. Restore, p. 152

³ Foster, p. 153