

Doctrinal Summary of Repentance: The Prerequisite to Confession

In 1 John 1:9, John identifies the believer's need to maintain fellowship with God through the confession of personal sin.

"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

The word "confess" is translated from the Koine Greek word ὁμολογῶμεν ("ho-mo-lo-goh-men") which more literally means, "if we might perform the continuous type of action to speak one's agreement with another about a specific matter." It identifies that a person personally agrees with the view or claim of another and that he identifies his agreement through speaking. It requires first that the individual speaking actually agrees with the other one (or else he is lying), and second, that the individual speaks his agreement with the other. The result of this stated agreement is a mutual understanding that the two individuals think and believe the same thing about the same matter. Thus, they share commonality with one another in that matter in which they had previously held differences of thought and belief. In the believer's relationship with God his sins have been paid for by the blood of Christ once and for all (cf. 1 Jn. 2:1-2) and he cannot be charged for his sin (cf. 1 Jn. 3:9). But he only has fellowship (commonness) with God as he walks in agreement with God (cf. 1 Jn. 1:5-10).

When the believer sins it is because he disagreed with what God said concerning that about which he sinned. While the believer continues to hold the same beliefs concerning that which he disagrees with God on he cannot have fellowship with God. To restore fellowship between himself and God the believer he must speak his agreement with God about the nature of his sin. This cannot legitimately happen if the believer does not actually change his thoughts and beliefs to match God's. According to Romans 2:4, God's kindness toward the believer leads him to change his thoughts and beliefs.

"Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?"

The word "kindness" is translated from the Koine Greek word χρηστόν ("chrae-ston") which more literally means, "the quality or characteristic of a gracious mentality that readily provides for the needs of another at one's own expense, being a tool or instrument used to accomplish something." Kindness is a characteristic that describes someone has having a gracious mentality towards others for whose needs he takes responsibility, providing what is necessary for them at his own expense. It is used in Romans 2:4 to describe that characteristic which belongs to God from which He provides for the needs of others at His own expense. Those who are recipients of God's kindness are led by Him to repentance.

The word "repentance" is translated from the Koine Greek word μετάνοιάν ("meh-tah-noi-ahn") which literally means, "a change of mind regarding previously accepted information which was being relied upon to accomplish something specific by rejecting and replacing it with newly accepted information for reliance upon." The believer must change his mind about what he was disagreeing with God on, rejecting and replacing his erroneous belief with God's belief instead. If he does not change his mind and attempts to confess, then he is merely lying to God in his attempted confession. It is only after the believer repents of his perspective and accepts God's perspective that he can legitimately speak his agreement to God. Therefore, repentance must precede confession as its prerequisite.