

# What about corporate Confession?

## What is and is not appropriate?

One of the most common questions asked regarding corporate prayer and revival is, "How should we handle the topic of public confession? What is appropriate and what is not?" This is an important question and worthy of comment as many are afraid or uncomfortable of where corporate confession might lead.

In 1 John 1:9 we are told, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

First, we know that God is the only one that can forgive sins. Confession before our fellow man holds no merit in and of itself. What matters is what God hears and sees, and He reads the motives of our heart. And only He can forgive sins.

However, having stated that, there is need of public confession for many reasons. In the *Spirit of Prophecy* we find the following principles regarding public confession, which we have paraphrased here for simplicity.

- Public confession is humbling to our souls! We need to be humbled!<sup>1</sup>
- Public confession is a witness to others that need to humble themselves.<sup>2</sup>
- Public confession is taking responsibility for what we have done wrong against God or others and seeking to make it right. When we do this, there is healing!<sup>3</sup>
- Public confession fosters unity and love as we begin to pray for one another and bear each other's burdens.<sup>4</sup>
- Public confessions of sins like selfishness, over-reaching, dishonesty toward God and our neighbor, pride, prayerlessness, sins in the family and many other such sins that have brought the frown of God upon His people need to be acknowledged. These are appropriate to be shared in public, for we all bear responsibility!<sup>5</sup>
- Public confession is often urged by the Holy Spirit, and we need to obey. Of course, what is private to some may not be private to another, but if the Holy Spirit prompts us to confess, we must not refuse that call.<sup>6</sup>

Speaking to Ministers specifically, Ellen White writes:

"The health of your soul, the unity of your brethren, may depend upon the course you pursue in these things. Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time... Some see their faults, but thinking confession will detract from their dignity, they excuse their wrong, and shield themselves from the discipline that confession would give to the soul.... In passing out of the path of confession, they fail to be faithful examples to the people. They see the errors of others; but how can they have courage to give the advice, 'Confess your

faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed,' when they have failed to follow this instruction in their own lives? It is not agreeable; because it does not flatter their pride, but reproves and pains? Ministers and people, if saved at all, must be saved day by day, hour by hour. They must hunger and thirst for the righteousness of Christ, the illumination of the Holy Spirit."<sup>7</sup>

"All are fallible, all make mistakes and fall into sin; but if the wrong-doer is willing to see his errors, as they are made plain by the convicting Spirit of God, and in humility of heart will confess them to God and to the brethren, then he may be restored; then the wound that sin has made will be healed. If this course were pursued, there would be in the church much more child-like simplicity and brotherly love, heart beating in unison with heart."<sup>8</sup>

Again, she states, "Confession of sin, whether public or private, should be heartfelt and freely expressed. It is not to be urged from the sinner. It is not to be made in a flippant and careless way or forced from those who have no realizing sense of the abhorrent character of sin. The confession that is mingled with tears and sorrow, that is the outpouring of the inmost soul, finds its way to the God of infinite pity. Says the psalmist: "The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit."<sup>9</sup>

Oh how beautiful is the heart of a truly repentant soul!

Unfortunately, the Devil likes to take us to one extreme or the other. His goal is to get us to either shun confession and keep things generic and general (which protects pride and keeps self in tact), or he works to get us to spill all the ungodliness of our hearts out which in turn can lead other minds astray.

While Ellen White encouraged corporate and public confession and the need for greater brokenness, she also emphatically shared that there are many confessions that should *never be spoken* in the hearing of other men or women. In the context of her writings, she is almost always speaking specifically regarding sins of a sexual nature, or referring to "thought sins" like lust, jealousy, evil surmising, or emotional adultery. Of course, we need to confess these sins, but they should be confessed to God alone, or only shared with a mature few who can help us gain the victory—if victory is still needed. However, it is dangerous to confess these type of sins publicly, especially sins of a sexual nature, because they not only can neutralize the witness we have for Christ (for example, "Oh, if she struggles with this, it must not be so bad after all!), or worse yet, these confessions can plant seeds in the hearts of other Christian that will spring up and bear fruit when they fall under similar temptations (for example, "These sins cannot be so very grievous to do; for did not those who have made confession, Christians of long standing, do these very things?" etc).<sup>10</sup>

We need to ask God what we should and should not speak of publically. However, one thing is quite clear. *Much more public confession should be happening than is*

*currently happening!* All known sin needs to be specifically confessed and put away. That always means making things right with God in our prayer closet, but often it also means individual confession to a brother or sister who we have injured, and sometimes it may mean taking responsibility for our sins before our whole church family.

James 5:16 tells us, “Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.”

“Fall on the Rock and be broken,” sister White urges, “and Christ will give you the true and heavenly dignity. Let not pride, self-esteem, or self-righteousness keep anyone from confessing his sin that he may claim the promise. ‘He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy’ (Proverbs 28:13). Keep nothing back from God, and neglect not the confession of your faults to your brethren.”<sup>11</sup>

[Excerpts of this handout were taken from the chapter titled “Understanding the Heart of United Prayer: Embracing True Prayer Revival,” from the book *Daring to Ask for More: Divine Keys to Answered Prayer*, p. 261-264, published by Pacific Press.]

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<sup>1</sup> *Selected Messages*, bk. 1, p. 326

<sup>2</sup> *Fundamentals of Education*, p. 239

<sup>3</sup> *Review and Herald*, Dec. 16, 1890

<sup>4</sup> *Review and Herald*, Dec. 16, 1890

<sup>5</sup> Bible Commentary, vol. 2, p. 997.1

<sup>6</sup> *Counsels on Health*, p. 373

<sup>7</sup> *Fundamentals of Education*, p. 239

<sup>8</sup> *Review and Herald*, Dec. 16, 1890

<sup>9</sup> *Mind Character and Personality*, vol. 2, p. 456

<sup>10</sup> *Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 645-649

<sup>11</sup> *Selected Messages*, bk. 1, p. 326