



COUNTERFEIT CONFESSIONS

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The bible says that we must confess our sins to be forgiven of them. But when is a confession not really a confession?

Good morning and welcome to Let the Bible Speak. It's my privilege to join you today to open and study the divinely inspired Word of God. The statement "confession is good for the soul" is especially true when it comes to spiritual matters. In fact, it's not only GOOD for the soul, but also necessary for the soul. God makes confession of sin a prerequisite to His forgiveness of that sin. Listen to the Apostle John in 1 John 1:8-10. He writes: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us."

The word "if" makes forgiveness conditional. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." In other words, if we refuse to confess our sins, He will not forgive. A refusal to confess our sin is a refusal to repent of that sin. Repentance involves more than a change of behavior, though it will always result in such. Part of repentance is the act of confessing what we have done. Many misunderstand the word "confession". Confessing something does not mean that we reveal something to others they know nothing about. Nor does it merely mean acknowledging something. There is more involved in a genuine confession of sin and our pride often stands in the way of us doing so. We have, in the bible, several examples of people acknowledging their sin but, in many cases, their confession amounted to very little. We want to see what a true confession of sin looks like and why it is so necessary to having a right relationship with God.

When we hear that someone confesses a sin, perhaps a crime, we think of someone coming out of the shadows and bringing the truth to light. When we think more about it more deeply, however, we see that to confess doesn't necessarily mean to divulge something that others didn't know about, but rather, it really means to admit to what a person is already accused of. It may very well be that the deeds we confess comes as a surprise to people but never in the case of God. In fact, when it comes to

confessing sin to God, it goes even farther than just an admission of guilt. When the scripture says that we are to confess our sins, it means that we are to not only to acknowledge our sin, but we are to openly and unreservedly agree with what God has said ABOUT our sin. When John writes "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins", he wrote the Greek word "homologeō". It is a compound word that means to 'say the same thing as another' or 'to agree with another'.

God does not need us to inform Him of the fact that we have sinned, but He does require that we agree with His assessment of our sin if we expect Him to forgive us. If we dodge, obfuscate, and deflect blame for our sin or in any way refuse to be honest and take responsibility for our sins, God will withhold His forgiveness according to His word. Why is that? Why is God so insistent that we confess our sin before He extends forgiveness? Because TRUE and genuine confession is part of repentance and God refuses to forgive any sin for which a person refuses to repent. I emphasize the words 'true' and 'genuine' because there are confessions that are not really genuine; they are counterfeit. And many people go through life spiritually substituting excuses, alibis, and stubborn rebellion for true humble repentance and confession before God. The result is that their hearts are far from God and from His will regardless of what things they may say.

Confession and repentance go hand in hand, and you may confess sin without repenting but you can never repent without confessing. To illustrate this fact, I want us to look at several confessions people made in the word of God. Some of them even consist of the very words "I have sinned" but they weren't really confessions. Let's see if we can tell the difference.

The first COUNTERFEIT confession I want to talk about was made by the wicked Pharaoh of Egypt during the ministry of Moses and he made what we'll call a HORRIFIED confession. There is no power like God's power and when His power is on display, it can't be ignored. The Egyptian Pharaoh was a powerful man himself. Egypt was a rich and powerful nation, and the Pharaoh was a fierce and formidable man. The children of Israel were slaves there, as we well know, and had been for several generations. It would take more than an eloquent appeal from Moses to get Pharaoh to let the people go free. It would take God showing His power in an incredible way to break the will of Pharaoh and even that would not change what was in his heart. Catastrophes and disasters can bring individuals and even nations and their leaders to their knees but still not change truly turn their hearts to God.

We see that time and again in our own history. When some horrendous tragedy shakes the nation and the world, you'll see a momentary revival of religious interest but in more cases than not, people's hearts are not really moved to repentance and thus lasting change. We see this in the case of Pharaoh. When God sent Moses to declare His command to free the Hebrew people, He determined that each of these declarations would be followed by a successive series of plagues in Egypt. These afflictions and disasters would be increasingly hard on Pharaoh and were designed not only to punish him for his treatment of God's people but to display God's sovereign power and His superiority over the imaginary God's the Egyptians worshipped. He turned the water of the Nile River into blood. He caused an infestation of frogs; and then lice; and then flies. He diseased their livestock and afflicted them with terrible boils. None of these things moved Pharaoh, so God sent Moses back to Pharaoh to tell him in Exodus 9:18, "Behold, tomorrow about this time I will cause very heavy hail to rain down, such as has not been in Egypt since its founding until now." Some of the people listened and brought their cattle inside but others ignored Moses' warning. So, the bible says "And Moses stretched out his rod toward heaven; and the LORD sent thunder and hail, and fire darted to the ground. And the LORD rained hail on the land of Egypt. So there was hail, and fire mingled with the hail, so very heavy that there was none like it in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation." This was no ordinary storm. You didn't see it on

the Weather Channel, I can tell you that. It was enough to scare anyone out of their wits – and it did Pharaoh! "And Pharaoh sent and called for Moses and Aaron, and said to them, "I have sinned this time. The LORD is righteous, and my people and I are wicked. Entreat the LORD, that there may be no more mighty thundering and hail, for it is enough. I will let you go, and you shall stay no longer.'" It sounds like Pharaoh finally got the message. Doesn't it? But he didn't. He was just shaken by the storm but once the sun came out and the birds started singing again, he reneged on his promise and stiffened his neck again. Isn't that the way many people are even today? Have there been times when you have been frightened for your life and you went to praying to God and making vows and making promises that you never kept? A lot of people do that.

When you thought you were having a heart attack; or when you thought you might have cancer did you say that you need to turn to God? How many people, when the Covid pandemic started and the world ground to a halt and we were hearing all the frightening reports, how many started talking about returning to God, getting back to reading the bible and praying? Did all of that go by the wayside as the world began to return to some sense of normal? After 9-11, there was a brief religious revival in America and church buildings were full for a short time. But it didn't last. By many metrics, we're worse off now spiritually than we were then. What happened? People make counterfeit confessions and cry out to God but there's no real repentance. That's the problem.

But then you have what we'll call a HYPOCRITICAL confession. This was the kind of confession that was made by a sad excuse for a prophet of God named Balaam. I wish we had time to go into his story in great detail and maybe we'll do that in a future sermon, but it's a pathetic story, to say the least. Now, Balaam was a good preacher, at least that's how he appeared on the surface. He could be firm, authoritative, and resolute. In fact, Balaam's kind of preaching was what we need today. The problem is, Balaam was not the kind of preacher that we need. He was a hypocrite. He could preach a stirring sermon and call people to be faithful to God's word while he tried to find every way around doing God's will himself. His underlying problem was that he loved money and if there was anything that could shake his resolve to stand for the word of God, it was someone coming along and waving money under his nose. And that's exactly what happened here.

The story is found in Numbers 22. Again, this would be a good study for us another time. For now, though, suffice it to say that the king of Moab wanted Balaam to do a terrible thing and curse the people of God. Well, as you might imagine, God wasn't about to do that but the king, Balak, offered Balaam a lot of money if we would go against God and this put Balaam on the horns of a dilemma. He wanted to find some loophole to allow him to make a deal with Balak and to be right with God at the same time. No man can serve two masters, however, and Balaam immediately started to compromise his own rhetoric. He sounded good when he said that he would not do one thing more or less than what God had said but that was just a sermon. He didn't mean it. He started to wheel and deal with Balak and God had to go to the extreme of sending an angel to either stop him or kill him. If you read the story, you learn that he was riding a donkey and God's angel appeared to the donkey but not to Balaam and he came a hair's breadth away from getting himself killed when God opened his eyes to see the angel and when He did, it scared Balaam half to death. When he saw that angel, the bible says in Numbers 22:34 "Balaam said unto the angel of the Lord, I have sinned..."

Well, just like Pharaoh, that sounds good. It sounds promising. But he didn't mean a word of it. Read the rest of the story and you'll see that he didn't mean it. He thought his confession would soften God up and get him out of trouble, but he didn't change! Read on and you'll see when he went ahead and betrayed the people of God, disobeyed the Lord, and caused a multitude of Israelites to die as a result of

his treachery. Words are cheap if they're not backed up by action and Balaam's confession was just words. Like all of his sermons, great and powerful as they may have been, his confession was just telling God what he thought God wanted to hear but it was a hypocritical confession.

And then there is the HALF-HEARTED confession. This was the kind of confession King Saul made when he got backed into the corner in 1 Samuel 15. God had an important and clear mission for Saul and that was to go wipe the Amalekites off of the face of the earth. He was to eradicate them from the top all the way down. God was crystal clear about what Saul was to do when Samuel delivered the message and sent Saul into battle. The problem was Saul was arrogant, prideful, and stubborn. He thought he knew better than God. So, when he and his men got over there and things were going like they were supposed to, he got the bright idea to spare the king alive and bring him back as a prisoner of war and to save out the best of the Amalekite's oxen and sheep under the guise of offering them to God as sacrifices. Well, he sinned in all of that because that's not what God said to do. When Samuel found out about it, he went to confront Saul and when Saul first saw Samuel, he sticks out his chest and says, "I have done the commandment of the Lord!" But he hadn't and Samuel knew that he hadn't. And about the time, the oxen started their lowing and some sheep off in the distance started bleating and they told on Saul. He didn't have much choice now. He's in trouble and he knows it. So, much like Balaam, he backs up and tries another approach with Samuel. He says in verse 24: "I have sinned..."

Well, again, you would think, "Great! He's seen the light. He's coming around and he's going to get right with God. But read on. He said, "I have sinned...because I feared the people and obeyed their voice." He's not repentant. He's not accepting responsibility. He's making excuses and pointing fingers. Listen, when a confession of sin is laced with alibis and excuses and rationalizations and justifications, it's not a true confession. There's no repentance there. Had Saul truly confessed his sin and repented, he would have remorsefully said, "You're right. I sinned, no if's and's or but's, and I'm going right now to finish the job God sent me to do." But that's not what he did. Read the story and you'll see that Samuel had to finish the job for him. He eventually lost his crown and ultimately his life because of all of that.

And then, let's consider the HEMMED-UP confession. This was what we hear from another man in the Old Testament named Achan. He also said "I have sinned" but it didn't amount to much. When the Israelites surrounded and toppled the walls of Jericho in Joshua 6, God told them not to take the spoils of the city. Those belonged to Him, and the people weren't to take them for themselves. Achan didn't listen to Joshua though and he snuck into the ruins and stole the fine apparel and the silver and gold and snuck back and buried them beneath his tent. He thought he had gotten away with a great crime, and no one was any the wiser, but He forgot about the all-seeing eye of God. His secret sin led to a very public and humiliating defeat for his people when they tried to take the little city of Ai. God told Joshua they failed because of sin in their midst and so Joshua launched an investigation and on a divine hunch, zeroed in on Achan. He brought Achan out and put him on trial. With nowhere to run and no excuse to offer, Achan said in Joshua 7:20, "indeed I have sinned..." Apparently, though, like many people, he wasn't as sorry for his sin as much as he was for getting caught. That's how so many people are. There are no tears of remorse until their sins are exposed or until they are backed into a corner and the axe of judgment is about to fall. His pseudo-confession was no substitute for genuine repentance for God told Joshua to kill him, his family, his livestock, and to burn it all into a heap of ash. How many will cry out to God in the Day of Judgment because judgment has finally come but not because they are truly remorseful for disobeying God.

You see, none of these are true confessions. I told you in the beginning that the word confess means to 'say the same thing'. That has to do with more than just words, though. It means we not only say what God says about our sin; it means in our mind and our heart we agree with Him and see our sin like He sees it. Friend, when we see our sin through the eyes of God, we'll find ourselves humbled, broken, and repentant. That's what true confession is. That's why true confession has no excuses, alibis, or self-justification. True confession is looking at our sin through the eyes of a holy and offended God. That's what leads to repentance. "Godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation" said Paul in 2 Corinthians 7:10. That's the kind of confession that the prodigal son made when he was finally ruined, broken, humiliated, and alienated by his sin and yearning for fellowship with his loving father. He said "I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to my father, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against thee. Make me as one of your hired servants...'" And he arose and went!" No excuses. No negotiating. No saying "If you hadn't been so strict, I wouldn't have left." He was not only sorry for breaking his father's heart and wasting his father's living, but he was also ready to do whatever he had to do to be right with his father. And that's the kind of realization and attitude we must have about our own sin if God is to forgive us. "He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy." (Proverbs 28:13) Are you ready to come to grips with the sin in your life? And without reservation, without condition, without excuse, without holding back anything from God, give in and give it up and humbly submit to the will of your Heavenly Father.

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