

THE DISCIPLINE OF CONFESSION

by Beatrice Ofwona



Confession is good for peace of mind but especially because it brings us back to focus on our Lord. As Christians we are encouraged in the book of James to confess our sins one to another especially those that we sometimes think we cannot share with anyone. This should be a way of life because it is liberating to get off, from one's chest, sin that we privately engage in and let the brethren help us in praying about it.

Easton's bible dictionary describes confession as the open profession of faith. It is also an acknowledgement of sin to God or to a neighbor. This is a discipline that entails that we continually admit and take responsibility for our flaws and faults before God and other people. Catholics confess to a priest, Protestants confess to God only, while Pentecostals believes that there is really no sin to confess about because it was all finished at the cross. We do know however that man is a carnal being and liable to all manner of failings. He therefore needs to continually confess his sins in order for him to be released to the full worship of God. Confession leads to maturity, integrity, purity and vitality of the worshipper.

A Christian who expects maturity in his walk with Christ must possess the habits of such a worshipper. One is the need to feed on the Bible which is our spiritual food that helps us to grow; this entails the discipline of diligently studying the Bible. Two is to ensure that we are spiritually hygienic and this is where the issue of confession comes in because it has a cleansing effect on us and permits us to continue uninterrupted in our worship. Three is to be in the company of a caring family of worshippers; this is what is meant by fellowship. Four is to regularly exercise our faith and this comes in the form of service in church. There are many ministries which one can be involved in according to the gifts that one has, whether it is in the choir, hospital and home visitations or in evangelizing. Five, we should be involved in protection of our communities in every way possible. This could be through advocating for the rights of the voiceless, through feeding the hungry amongst us or through ensuring that people are not exploited or stigmatized around us. Lastly is to learn to be good stewards of what we possess or of what we have been asked to look after; these include our children, our property, our jobs or

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Written by admin
Saturday, 16 July 2011 22:34 -

those who look up to us. Despite all the above things that lead to spiritual growth and maturity, 66% of people claim to be too busy to do them, while 25% have no motivation or interest to try; this is according to George Barna's survey.

Confessing our faith means telling the truth about God whereas confessing about our sins is really confessing about ourselves. We all project ourselves as being better than we really are; we even try to smell better by using perfumes to camouflage even that bit about ourselves. For as long as we can project the right image, nothing else matters; we wear all sorts of masks so that our real self is not known yet the worst we can ever be is to be ourselves. Confession brings an end to pretense because the opposite of hypocrisy is integrity.

Confession means the pursuance of purity and facilitates good spiritual hygiene. Our physical bodies dispose of waste through various processes like sweating. We too go through life saying, doing and thinking what we are not supposed to. We therefore need to get rid of this waste material by confessing. We need to have others rebuke us and show us where we have gone wrong. Mathew 5:8 says that those who are pure in heart will see God. Only God knows our sins; Psalms 32:2 blesses the man whose sin is not counted against him. Purity is not only about abstaining from defiling thoughts but rather about admitting them.

Failure to confess leads to several things, inclusive of which is the loss of strength, loss of joy and inability find relief. One also becomes thwarted and frustrated with life to the extent that success eludes him.

Hindrances to confession may be brought about by our unhealthy view of it, whereby we may think that the term 'sinners' does not apply to us because we view believers as a community of 'saints'. Also, our cultural beliefs may be the kind that views admission of faults as a weakness. We may also have an unhealthy environment around us whereby people fail to keep confidences; there is lack of empathy and understanding; people become horrified at our revelations or we ourselves shrug off what we have done as too small to be confessed about.

There exist what are called the seven 'A's of confession and these are that we may 'address' all that are involved in the dispute or issue; that we may 'avoid' confessing conditionally with ifs, buts or maybes; that we may 'admit' specifically what we did wrong; that we may 'acknowledge' the hurts that we have caused others; that we may 'alter' our behavior thereafter and that we may 'accept' the consequences of our actions.

Stop carrying burdens that are too heavy for you. Confessions lead to forgiveness. Be the initiator of forgiveness, after all, did Christ not ask us to do the same in Mathew 5:23?

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