
Confession

DAVE BAST

The act of personal confession isn't really a huge part of most people's lives. In some Christian groups, confession of sin is still important, almost an obligation; but there are other groups...there are churches, for example, that refuse to talk about sin. They say it is too negative. Well, today's *Groundwork* examines what the Bible says about confessing sin. Stay tuned.

BOB HEERSPINK

From ReFrame Media and Words of Hope, this is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Bob Heerspink.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast. Bob, I don't know if you remember back to last February...

BOB HEERSPINK

Oh, you will have to jog my memory.

DAVE BAST

All right; the date was February 19, 2010; the occasion was a news conference. A somber man in a dark suit stepped up to the podium in a room filled with television cameras and reporters. All of the major networks in the United States carried the press conference live.

BOB HEERSPINK

So, this is the President.

DAVE BAST

No, it wasn't the President. It wasn't some world leader; it was Tiger Woods.

BOB HEERSPINK

Oh, sure.

DAVE BAST

Well, unless you have been living on another planet, you know the Tiger Woods saga. Tiger Woods, the great professional golfer – the greatest professional golfer – not just any ordinary athlete; nor was this any ordinary occasion. It was his *mea culpa* – that was what one newspaper called the press conference. It is an interesting choice of words, Bob; as you know, *mea culpa* is Latin for my fault.

BOB HEERSPINK

Right.

DAVE BAST

That is the old phrase that was used in the Middle Ages for confessing one's sin; and in a sense, that is what Tiger Woods was doing. He didn't really use the vocabulary of sin, but he did talk about his mistakes – his problems – yes, even his fault.

BOB HEERSPINK

You know, the question was, why was he doing it at all? And that was a great debate afterwards.

DAVE BAST

Yes, right.

BOB HEERSPINK

You know, was this just because he wanted to reinvigorate his brand, as some people said?

DAVE BAST

Yes, Tiger Woods, Inc. You know, certainly you can understand why a person in that situation would apologize and confess to his own family, to his wife in particular; but why the public thing? Why confess to us, you know, just because he is a celebrity? What do we have to do with it?

BOB HEERSPINK

People were stopping on the streets and watching TV monitors that were in storefront windows. Why did the whole world have to stop what they were doing to watch what Tiger Woods had to say?

DAVE BAST

Well, and you know, you think about other examples: The politicians who have come on television to confess to their infidelities or their affairs or whatever. In a sense, it is about business for people like that. They are trying to regain something of their career. They are trying to get some restoration in the public mind – some acceptance.

BOB HEERSPINK

And yet, it seems that even in a secular world there is this push, this drive that confession is necessary. There is almost something deep within us that says we have to get things out in the open. It was like the whole world actually was waiting for this very moment in Tiger's career.

DAVE BAST

Yes; it is a fascinating thing, isn't it? I mean, how we are made spiritually, and how when...all of us have sinned. I mean, let the one without sin cast the first stone, as Jesus said; but this idea that confession is good for the soul; you know, the old proverb: Confession is good for the soul. Something in our makeup must make that true.

BOB HEERSPINK

So, if you go to scripture, why? What is the purpose of confession?

DAVE BAST

You say go to scripture and I think of 1 John 1:8 and 9, which says this: ⁸If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. ⁹If we confess our sins, he (meaning God) is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

BOB HEERSPINK

So, if that passage is saying anything, it is saying confession is important, because if you don't confess, if you don't think you need to confess, you are really deceiving yourself.

DAVE BAST

Yes; I think about these groups or churches that say let's not name sin or let's not use the word. It is too much of a downer. People understand this; they realize; they are feeling bad enough as it is. I think of an analogy with somebody who comes in to see their doctor; they have not been feeling well and they go

through this battery of tests; and then the doctor says: Well, I am not going to tell you what the tests reveal. I don't want to use the word *cancer*, even though you've got it, because it would just make you feel worse.

BOB HEERSPINK

Make you feel bad.

DAVE BAST

Yes, right; no, you have got to name the thing if you want to get rid of it.

BOB HEERSPINK

You have to face it.

DAVE BAST

If you want to treat it, yes.

BOB HEERSPINK

And you have got to face your sin before God, to confess sin to God. Now, that is a gutsy move; to stand before God and say: I have really messed up. But if we want to be forgiven people, that is the posture we have to take to God.

DAVE BAST

It is the first step in an honest self appraisal: I am a sinner.

BOB HEERSPINK

Yes.

DAVE BAST

This wonderful text from the book of Romans:

^{5:8}God demonstrates his love for us in that while we were sinners Christ died for us.

If we are not willing to put ourselves in that category of sinner, then the love of God and the death of Christ have no relationship to us.

BOB HEERSPINK

You have to be someone who understands your sin if you are going to understand grace.

DAVE BAST

But I want to probe a little bit about this idea of confessing sins in order to be forgiven. That doesn't really mean that we have to name every last sin or that there is a one-to-one correspondence, right, between if you confess this sin then you will be forgiven; if you don't confess that sin, you won't be forgiven.

BOB HEERSPINK

And I have had parishioners who have gotten hung up on that; that if they haven't confessed all of their sins – individual sins – before God, on Judgment Day they are going to be held accountable for sins not confessed; but that is simply missing the breath of grace...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

BOB HEERSPINK

And how grace covers the sin of our entire life.

DAVE BAST

It is not a kind of cosmic arithmetic where you have column one and column two...

Bob Heerspink: Right.

DAVE BAST

And they all have to equal out somehow.

BOB HEERSPINK

It is not a cosmic accounting practice.

DAVE BAST

There is this wonderful phrase from Psalm 19 in the old King James: Cleanse Thou me from hidden faults. I like that idea. If we confess honestly to God, and we do name the sins we are aware of, we can trust that his grace will cover the things we don't even know; or maybe the things we failed to do that we should have done. I mean, who can finally know all that they are and all that they have done?

BOB HEERSPINK

Right; that whole idea of cleansing, though; that comes out in this text, too.

DAVE BAST

Right.

BOB HEERSPINK

We are not only forgiven, but we are cleansed from unrighteousness. Somehow, our confession of sin links with a deeper cleansing.

DAVE BAST

Yes; and I think, too, the idea of cleansing as getting rid of it – actually eliminating sin from our lives. I think that is where we need to move next in this idea of confession; and there is something further, as you know, that the New Testament says about confessing our sins, not just to God, but maybe to each other as well.

BOB HEERSPINK

Well, and perhaps the cleansing – deep cleansing – and that confession to others, those two things are linked.

DAVE BAST

Yes.

BOB HEERSPINK

That is what we really have to investigate next.

DAVE BAST

Yes; think of it this way: We are all addicted to sin. We are sin addicts, and we need to get clean. What we need is not just to be forgiven for our sins, but to get rid of them; to begin to overcome them, to eliminate them from our lives. That is what God is really interested in doing; not leaving us as we are, but conforming us to the image of Jesus Christ. That is the idea we want to pursue further; but here is the question: How do we actually begin to get rid of the sin in our lives; and does that have something to do with confession?

BOB HEERSPINK

We will return to that in just a moment; but since *Groundwork* is all about digging into the scripture and applying it to our lives, we want to tell you about some additional resources we offer to guide you on your spiritual journey. We recommend two daily devotionals: *Today* and *Words of Hope*. Each one of them contains a Bible reading and a daily meditation. They are short and they are concise, but they dig beneath the surface of scripture; so they are ideal for everyone with a busy life. Both of these devotionals are designed with you in mind. Whether you would like to receive each one in a booklet form or have it delivered to your e-mail each day or listen to it on your commute to work, you will always find the spiritual nourishment you

are looking for. You can find out more information about *Today* and *Words of Hope* devotionals on the resource page of our website at groundworkonline.com.

Segment 2

BOB HEERSPINK

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we dig into the scripture as the foundation for our lives. I am Bob Heerspink.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast. Okay, we are talking about confession – confession of sin, confession of sin to God, and as John tells us in his first letter – 1 John 1 – that is how, really, we experience God’s forgiveness. There is a relationship between being honest about ourselves, between confessing our sin and experiencing not only God’s forgiveness, but his cleansing as well. So, here is the key question. It is one thing to have our sins forgiven; it is another to start to get rid of them – to overcome them – to overcome our sin addiction – and to study that a little bit further, we want to go to another scripture from James Chapter 5.

BOB HEERSPINK

Let me just read those verses from James 5 beginning at 13: Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise. ¹⁴Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. ¹⁵And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. ¹⁶Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. ¹⁷Elijah was a man with a nature like ours and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. ¹⁸Then he prayed again and heaven gave rain and the earth bore its fruit.

DAVE BAST

All right; so James repeats the connection that we saw in John between prayer and forgiveness. We confess our sins and we experience God’s forgiveness.

BOB HEERSPINK

But there is more here. There is a connection of sin with sickness, so how does that work?

DAVE BAST

Yes; does that mean sickness is the direct result of sin?

BOB HEERSPINK

Well, we know that is not true because Jesus himself says you cannot draw a direct line between the crises that afflict people’s lives and judgment of God against sin.

DAVE BAST

Yes: Who sinned, this man or his parents that the man was born blind? John 9. Jesus says: No, neither one. It doesn’t work that way.

BOB HEERSPINK

But there does seem to be in this passage a body/soul connection that maybe we in our scientific, 21st Century world haven’t acknowledged sufficiently.

DAVE BAST

Well, even in our scientific, 21st Century world we are beginning to acknowledge that, aren’t we? I mean, there are all kinds of studies that show the relationship between physical health and call it spiritual health – your emotional state – your sense of guilt.

BOB HEERSPINK

The psalmist, David, talks in his psalm of confession about what happened when he suppressed his sin – when he refused to confess his guilt – it ate him alive.

DAVE BAST

Okay, so there is a connection, but here is what I zero in on in this text from James 5; it is verse 16: Therefore, confess your... Therefore, in other words, if you want to be forgiven... Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another that you may be healed. Now, yes.

BOB HEERSPINK

Confess your sins to each other. Now, that is something makes a lot of us squirm.

DAVE BAST

Reciprocal confession: Confession to a brother or sister in Christ.

BOB HEERSPINK

We would rather go into our prayer closet and tell God about our sins, but...

DAVE BAST

Yes, right.

BOB HEERSPINK

Not our neighbors.

DAVE BAST

Let's just keep it between me and the big guy upstairs, right?

BOB HEERSPINK

That is right.

DAVE BAST

It strikes me, too, we are very good at praying for one another, especially as Evangelicals, you know; we are always saying pray for me, and I will pray for you.

BOB HEERSPINK

Right; what are your prayer requests?

DAVE BAST

So, why do we keep the one part of this verse and not the other? Why do we do all the praying for one another, but we don't do any of the confessing?

BOB HEERSPINK

Well, I wonder whether it is a response to some Christian traditions, which have really formalized it – ritualized it.

DAVE BAST

Yes, right, right.

BOB HEERSPINK

You know, a yearly visit to make confessions – to receive penance.

DAVE BAST

Yes.

BOB HEERSPINK

Most of us in the Protestant tradition have really reacted strongly against that, and because we don't want to go the road of a ritualized confession, we have almost taken this verse and thrown it away.

DAVE BAST

Yes, right; we have reacted too far the other way...

BOB HEERSPINK

Right.

DAVE BAST

Because it can turn into a ritual, or it is a one-way street. You just tell your sins into the ear of the priest and then he tells you what to do to kind of get rid of the... So, we have eliminated altogether this idea that there could be benefits in confessing sins to another person.

BOB HEERSPINK

Well, certainly there is a need to confess sins to people whom we have wronged. You know, when we have sinned against others, not just sinned against God...all sin is against God; but when we have sinned against other people, part of what it really means to be reconciled is to go to that person and to say to that person: I have sinned against you.

DAVE BAST

Yes; well, again, the teaching of Jesus: If you are standing at the altar, he says in the Sermon on the Mount...

BOB HEERSPINK

Right.

DAVE BAST

And you know that your brother has something against you, or you have something against your brother, he says in another place, then first go and be reconciled; and that takes an apology, which is one form of confession.

BOB HEERSPINK

It is the words of the prodigal son: Father, I have sinned against you and against heaven. Recognizing that confession needs to go both vertically to God, but it has to go horizontally out to other people.

DAVE BAST

Yes; and I think another thing confessing to another can do, it can put flesh on the promises of God. You know what I mean?

BOB HEERSPINK

Right.

DAVE BAST

It is one thing to pray silently and then to maybe read in the Bible that your sins are forgiven, but if you can confess to another person, now not someone you have offended, but you are just being honest with someone else, maybe they can repeat those promises and look you in the eye, and there is a real sense of the incarnation of forgiveness.

BOB HEERSPINK

Well, I have found a lot of people in my ministry will come to the cross and they will confess their sins and they will lay their guilt before the cross, and then before they leave they pick it all up and take off with it.

DAVE BAST

Huh...yes.

BOB HEERSPINK

And they really don't get to the point of believing – trusting – their forgiveness; and when another person says to them: In the name of Jesus, you are forgiven, claim the promises; that can have a powerful effect in terms of appropriating the forgiveness of grace that comes through Jesus.

DAVE BAST

Yes, but now, let's talk about how hard this is to do, because if I tell you...if I confess my sins to you really honestly, and let you have a peek inside my sin-darkened heart and mind and head, you are not going to like what you see; you are not going to like me!

BOB HEERSPINK

You are not going to like me either.

DAVE BAST

So, how do you do it? Why? Why would you do it?

BOB HEERSPINK

It certainly demands that we trust each other. There has to be a relationship of trust as two people come together and really bare their hearts and souls to their neighbor.

DAVE BAST

Well, that is a start; but let's explore a little bit further the real practical way of putting this into practice. What does it mean and why would we do this when it is such a risky behavior?

Okay, so let's address that in just a moment, Bob; but first, we want to talk to you about how you could join us in this conversation via our website.

BOB HEERSPINK

Listeners like you make *Groundwork* what it is. Our website, groundworkonline.com, is another way that we work to join you as you dig deeper into the scriptures. There, we continue to reflect on today's discussion about our world and the Bible, as well as many other conversations that listeners have begun about scripture and how it interacts with their lives.

We would also like you to help us think about upcoming programs. One of the topics we are going to talk about is the problem of evil. Is it possible to reconcile a good God with all the trouble that we see in the world? Share your thoughts on that topic. Finding us is easy; just visit our website, groundworkonline.com.

Segment 3

DAVE BAST

So, to quote from James again: ^{5:16}Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another so that you may be healed. Why confess to another person when that is a risky, vulnerable thing to do? Because it is the pathway to healing.

BOB HEERSPINK

You know, Dave, we had a very interesting posting on one of our ministry websites a while back, and it was someone talking about the need to confess; why should we confess our sins; and this is what she wrote: We are only as sick as our secrets. If we hold onto things that create shame and guilt for us, then we become sick.

Maybe it is a small thing for one person, but for some such as myself, it becomes the reason to pull further and further away from God and indulge in addiction.

DAVE BAST

Yes; sin is a kind of addiction, and various addictions are sinful – have elements of sin about them. Think about sexual addictions or addiction to porn, or maybe even addiction to gambling, something like that.

BOB HEERSPINK

Well, you know, very often we have made addiction into something that is physiological, but really, it is a spiritual condition.

DAVE BAST

Yes, well, and it may be both – maybe a little of both...

BOB HEERSPINK

Right.

DAVE BAST

But it makes me think of that text in John 3, where Jesus says that people love the darkness because their deeds were evil. There is something about hiding our deeds in darkness that lets them kind of just fester and keep going; and when we bring light to them, or bring them to the light by acknowledging them, by confessing them to one other person even, just one trusted person, the light will kill the evil deeds of darkness.

BOB HEERSPINK

A lot of people will find that if they come and, by the power of God's strength – and it is going to take God's strength to really go to another person and say: Let me tell you what I am really like. I've got this problem that I am struggling with – this addiction – this sin. Let me lay it out in front of you. It is going to take God's Spirit to do that, but that is going to be one of the key steps in actually breaking free to a new level of discipleship.

DAVE BAST

Yes; but practically, how do you do that? How do you find that person? I don't think...you just don't blab to somebody that you bring in off the street. If you have a pastor who is wise and trustworthy, the person you confess to has to be absolutely dependable. I mean, that is one of the good things about the Catholic practice of confession. Priests are sworn to secrecy. There is a kind of a sacred bond in the confessional that they will never reveal what is told to them; so you need to be sure of that other person.

BOB HEERSPINK

Well, trust is key. You have to have a relationship of trust. You have to have a relationship in which the other person will respect appropriate confidentiality. It really has to be someone who can handle the weight of what you are going to say because this is heavy stuff.

DAVE BAST

Yes; okay, that raises another question in my mind. What about confessing to someone who doesn't know what you have done when they have been hurt by it? For instance, let's say you are a spouse, you have committed adultery, and you have repented of that, you have confessed it to God, you have even confessed it to a trusted pastor or Christian friend. Should you then go to your spouse – your wife or your husband – and confess it to them?

BOB HEERSPINK

I am not sure if we can give an ultimate answer in every situation. That is something that I would say you really have to work that through with a pastor, with a spiritual mentor...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

BOB HEERSPINK

To decide what would be the best way to go in those kinds of situations.

DAVE BAST

Yes, because sometimes we want to confess just because we want to share the burden. It is very painful to carry our secrets around, and we think we can shift some of that to another person. It can almost be selfish to confess to somebody. So, yes, it is a tricky thing. There is no real hard and fast rule. It is risky, as we have said; so then the question becomes why do it at all?

BOB HEERSPINK

Well, it is going to be freeing, and I would say if someone said: you know, I have confessed it to Jesus, I don't have to confess this sin in my life to anyone else; I would really say: Is that just a dodge? Are you really sidestepping your responsibility to confront with another person what you are really like?

DAVE BAST

You know, Jesus once came up to a crippled man lying beside the pool of Bethesda and he said to him: Do you want to be healed? What a question to ask a crippled person, but it is profound, isn't it? Do you really want to be healed?

BOB HEERSPINK

Do you really want to be set free from your sin? Thanks for joining our *Groundwork* conversation, and don't forget it is listeners like you asking questions and participating that keeps our topics relevant to your life. So, tell us what you think about what you are hearing and suggest topics or passages that you would like to hear on future *Groundwork* programs. Visit us at groundworkonline.com and join the conversation.

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