

Time of Confession

In the Worship Service

Confession is a part of worship. It is saying to God, “Your righteous standard is true and good.” It recognizes the holiness of God. We’re saying that whether I have lived out God’s standard or not, the standard is still right. “Let God be true and every man a liar.”

We should keep our sins confessed up to date, of course. There’s a handy saying: “Confess ‘em as ya does ‘em and don’t bunch ‘em.” However, a time of confession might serve as a safety net for some who are behind in their confession. A backup system, if you will.

For others, such a time might provide an opportunity to grow in their understanding of God’s holiness and His expectations of us.

For those more hardened, it points out to them that God does indeed have a standard.

And for those more tender – some *very tender* – there is the opportunity for assurance.

This could be a guided prayer in which the pastor suggests some broad areas in which confession might need to be made – concerning thoughts, attitudes, words, deeds, relationships, giving our religious devotion to something or someone other than the one true God. Sins of omission, as well as commission, should be included.

In some churches, someone prays a prayer of confession, as the congregation silently joins in the prayer.

After the confession time, churches have through the centuries followed with a Bible promise on forgiveness. Some denominations call this the *pronouncement of forgiveness*, but the church cannot pronounce someone forgiven – “There is one who forgives sin, God.” However, the Bible contains numerous promises of forgiveness for those who repent and confess.

Leading a Prayer of Confession:

When one leads in public prayer, the believer isn't speaking merely as an individual, but on behalf of the entire group. So, a prayer of confession should be worded in such a way as to speak for all.

There are prayers of confession in the Bible, including Nehemiah 9, Psalm 51, and Daniel 9. These provide helpful guidance. Notice the things for which these biblical writers prayed when they confessed sin.

Prayers of Confession: Outlines		
Nehemiah 9	Psalm 51	Daniel 9
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Praise vs. 5-6 2. Recounting God's faithfulness. vs. 7-15 3. Remembering our unfaithfulness. Vs. 16-31 4. God's been in the right; we've deserved the consequences of our sins. vs. 32-35 5. Admitting our present distress and rightful shame. vs. 36-37 6. Committing to repentance. vs. 38 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Request for forgiveness. vs. 1-3 2. God's right and I'm wrong. vs. 4-6 3. Requests for restoration. vs. 8-11 4. Committing to repentance. vs. 12-17 5. Request for a fresh beginning of blessing and in worship. vs. 18-19 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Praise vs. 4 2. God is good, but we have defied God. vs. 5-10 3. God kept warning us about the consequences, but we continued to rebel. vs. 11-14 4. Please have compassion and forgive us. vs. 15-18 5. Please forgive us and restore us for the sake of Your own reputation. vs. 19

You will notice how the biblical writers started with praise. There is a concern for God's reputation; they want to clear his name. It wasn't God who did anything wrong, but us. There is an admission that sin's consequences, though embarrassing and painful, have been deserved. The confessions made are more than admitting we did it, but they also include repentance and a renewed commitment to worship, service, and witness. God is asked to do what only he can do – cleanse and restore.

Some denominations with more formal worship styles use written prayers of confession. The idea of a written prayer will strike many as less than heart-felt. I would suggest, however, that a deacon who prays, "Please forgive us of our many, many sins" (This is a prayer we Baptists have all heard, word for word, and is a prayer our members learn by hearing others pray it in public.) – is doing *exactly the same thing*. How does the fact that it isn't written make it more heart-felt? A prayer is more heart-felt because it is felt more in the heart. It is not less so because someone took the time to think about what they should say.

Let's look at one of these prayers and see if we can learn anything:

Almighty and most merciful Father, we confess unto Thee that we have often and grievously sinned in thy sight. We have offended against Thee, not only by numerous outward acts of transgression, but by the secret thoughts, affections and desires of our corrupt hearts, all which are indeed naked and open in Thy sight, but which we cannot fully understand or confess unto Thee. It is with sincere sorrow and heartfelt repentance that we acknowledge these our manifold transgressions. We fervently desire the blessedness of those whose sins are forgiven and whose transgressions are covered, and long for those consolations which are promised unto them that mourn. It is our solemn purpose to amend our sinful lives, and to live more godly, righteously and soberly than we have hitherto done. We beseech Thee, O Lord, to enable us, through the assistance of Thy Holy Spirit, to carry this resolution into effect...

*Lord God, our Father in heaven, have mercy upon us; Lord God, Redeemer of the world, have mercy upon us; Lord God, Holy Spirit, have mercy upon us and give us Thy peace. Amen.*¹

While we admit the language is a little more flowery than we use and there are words which aren't much used anymore, we can still learn from these Christians. They took the time to think about what should be said in such a prayer. Here are some thoughts I gleaned:

- Sin is a *serious* matter. “We have grievously sinned”
- Sin is against God, and it offends God. “We have offended against Thee.”
- Sin involves more than our outward actions. Sin may also include our private thought-life, forbidden affections, or desires.
- Sin comes from a “corrupt heart” which is so devious it tricks us into doing the wrong things – just as Jeremiah 17:9 and Mark 7:21-22 teach.
- We cannot hide our sin from God. They are “naked and open in Thy sight” – a quote from Hebrews 4:13.
- We are such sinners we have sin in areas where we didn't realize we had areas – “We acknowledge our manifold transgressions.”
- Sin is confessed with “sincere sorrow and heartfelt repentance.”

¹ United Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the South, [The Book of Worship](#) (Charleston, SC: Committee of United Synod on Common Book of Worship, 1907), 235–236.

So, we can gain some insight on confessing sin in a worship service from those who are more formal in their worship styles. Now, how do we translate this to our worship style and the culture in our churches?

One Southern Baptist Church bases their time of confession on a short Scripture reading each week. This is an example:

Prayer of Confession: 2 Peter 3:8-18

Highlight: verse 14- “Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace.”

Say: “Let me ask you how well are you doing in waiting for the return of Christ? Have you allowed yourself to be stained or blemished by this world? Have you allowed hostility or anger, lust or greed to come in? What might you need to go to Jesus with this morning and confess and repent of?”

“I’m going to give you a minute to do just that, where you are, just between you and the Lord. If you aren’t sure of something to confess, then ask God to show you what you might repent of. Then, I’m going to close us in our prayer of corporate confession.”²

Another approach would be a time of guided prayer. It would go along these lines:

We come now to our time of confession. With our heads bowed, take a moment, between you and the Lord, and consider where you are spiritually. Is there some sin you would like to confess to God? Have you violated a command of Scripture? Have you developed a bitter attitude? Has your thought-life been pure? Is there someone in your life with whom you have become estranged? Perhaps you have left something undone you were supposed to do? Take this moment to realign yourself with God.

[Assurance of Pardon] The Bible promises, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us of all unrighteousness.”

² Pleasant View Baptist Church, Carrollton, Georgia. Order of service for December 10, 2023.

In the link below, we provide a list of verses in which God promises forgiveness to those who confess and repent.

Verse List: [Assurance of Forgiveness](#)

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