

*The Question
and Comfort of
Confession*

By Geoffrey Bingham

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THE QUESTION OF COMFORT OF CONFESSION

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The Question and Comfort of Confession

1. INTRODUCTION: WHY CONSIDER CONFESSION?

Sometimes it is a relief to get things ‘off our chests’. Things we have done lie like a burden. Memory often makes us ashamed. We are glad to confess. Others do not see it this way. They feel that confession is a weakness. They find it childish and humiliating. Some have a theology that confession is ‘crawling to God and man’. They have their reasons, no doubt, for thinking this way.

Others see grace as so magnificent that man never needs to confess anything. ‘God has forgiven all,’ they say. ‘Why then recycle your sins?’ Of course there is truth in this statement. God has forgiven our sins. Even so we are often stuffed up with them in practice, and we want to have the comfort of confession. It will not be denied us.

However there are those who ‘crawl to God’. Having confessed - almost as a ritual - they are, nevertheless, not free. Confession has done them no good. No matter how much they seem to repent or confess they are little, if any better off. There must be something wrong in their understanding or practice (or both) of confession.

The fact is that there is more to confession than simply acknowledging our sins. Some seek to give respect to confession by making it part of penance. Others are more easy. It is as though confession clears the current accounts they have with God. It is almost an accounting transaction! Obviously these are defective views of confession. There must be more to it than that.

As we shall see, in the Scriptures, confession of sins constitutes a very small part of the whole gamut of confession. Confession is primarily the joyful and worshipful acknowledgment of the nature and person of God, His laws, His works, His qualities of love and compassion, as also His holiness, righteousness and truth. It seems that were man never to have sinned he would nevertheless have been a person of confession. In fact the very nature of sin clouds over the great reasons for confession. It is simply through grace that man is enabled and permitted to confess his sins.

We can see then that the matter of confession is not only stimulating, but it is very much a live issue for humankind. Because sin has covered this issue we need to make our way patiently through Scripture to recover this almost lost truth. We use the word 'patiently' because what follows in our study may seem even painstaking. Yet it will yield its rewards. The reader ought to look up the Scriptures we have indicated, and read them deeply and thoughtfully. Gradually, he will find, this truth of confession will come alive to him, and he to it.

He will then see what-is the comfort, security and riches of true confession.

2. THE MEANING OF CONFESSION

For most of us the word 'confession' relates either to the confession of sin to God and man, or to a confession of faith, such as confessing that Jesus is Lord. Both of these ideas cover a lot of the ground which belongs to this word, but its coverage is wider. We generally tackle the word by examining the New Testament words, namely the two verbs *homologeō* and *exomologeō*, both of which mean to promise, confess, and praise. *Homologeō* also has the idea of declaring. The noun *homologia* simply means confession but with the meanings contained in the verbs.

The Greek version of the O.T. (the Septuagint or LXX) uses the N.T. verbs we have examined. *Homologeō* is used to translate the Hebrew words 'to praise' (Job 40: 14), 'to make a vow' (Jer 44: 25), 'to swear' (Ezek 16: 8), 'to make a freewill offering' (Ezek 46: 12, Amos 4: 5), 'to praise and honour' (Ezra 10: 11). *Exomologeō* is used more prolifically and dynamically. It is linked with the ideas of praising, thanksgiving, confessing with praising, and covers the many attributes and acts of God. A glance at a concordance will show that primarily in the O .T . confession was acknowledgment of the greatness and goodness of God, as well as His majesty amongst the nations.

3. CONFESSION IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

We may now examine in more detail the use in the O .T . of the equivalent of the Greek verbs and nouns.

(i) **Confession as Praise.** Example: 'Because Thy steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise Thee' (Psalm 63:3). In the Psalms there are at least 40 such occurrences. In Isaiah, 6 uses. Leah uses the term when she bears *Judah*, which is a pun on the Hebrew word for confession, *yadah* (Gen 29: 35). The words *psallo* (psalm, eg. Psalm 7:17, I will give to the Lord the thanks due to His righteousness, and I will give praise to the name of the Lord, the Most High') and *aineō* (eg. Psalm 106:47, 'Save us, O Lord our God, and gather us from among the nations, that we may give thanks to Thy holy name and glory in Thy praise') are also used.

(ii) **Confession as Thanksgiving.** The same word is used (Heb. *yadah*) and is always for Who God is and what He has done. Example: 'O give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; for His steadfast love endures for ever!' (I Chron 16:34). There are 22 examples of this use in the Psalms and 14 elsewhere. A similar use is contained in the word *todah*, and this is always associated with worship, both ritual and

spontaneous, eg. (a) *Ritual*. Leviticus 7:12, 'If he offers it for a thanksgiving, then he shall offer with the thank offering unleavened cakes mixed with oil, unleavened wafers spread with oil, and cakes of fine flour well mixed with oil.' (b) *Spontaneous*. Psalm 69: 30, 'I will praise the name of God with a song; I will magnify Him with thanksgiving.' We only see the significance of such confession of the nature of God when we look into the things for which He is praised, and the effects wrought by these things upon the confessors.

(iii) **Confession as Vowing or Swearing.** (Heb. *nadar*, *neder*.) Jacob makes such a vow to God in Genesis 28:20f, 'Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then the Lord shall be my God, and this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God's house; and of all that Thou givest me I will give the tenth to Thee.'" One makes such vows to men, but mostly and primarily to God. *Neder* is used some 30 times and *nadar* some 56 times. Again we need to study these uses closely to grasp their importance.

(iv) **Confession as Acknowledgment of Sin.** This kind of confession is first the confession of God and His nature. It is thus seen that the sin is wrong because of the holiness and truth of God. Thus in Joshua 7:19 we read, 'Then Joshua said to Achan, "My son, give glory to the Lord God of Israel, and render praise to Him; and tell me now what you have done; do not hide it from me.'" We see that it is in accordance with the nature of God that we confess. This is made clear in I Kings 8:33ff. In verse 33 we read, 'When Thy people Israel are defeated before the enemy because they have sinned against Thee, if they turned again to Thee, and acknowledge Thy name, and pray and make supplication to Thee in this house, then hear Thou in heaven, and forgive the sin of Thy people Israel, and bring them again to the

land which Thou gavest to their fathers.' In II Chronicles 6:22-23 the same principle is expounded. In Psalm 107 we see in verses 11 and 17 the sinfulness of the people. In verses 15 and 21 the ones forgiven and aided are exhorted to praise God. This is part of their confession. The following are some clear cases of confession:-

- (a) *Jacob*. Genesis 32: 9-12.
- (b) *David*. Psalms 32 and 51.
- (c) *Nehemiah*. Nehemiah 1:4-11, 9:6-17.
- (d) *Daniel*. Daniel 9: 3-17.
- (e) *Isaiah*. Isaiah 6: 5.

Each of these is a pattern for confession. Other situations which speak of the same principle are Exodus 32 (cf. Deut 9: 18-21, 25-29, 10: 10) where Moses acknowledges the sin of his people, but believes God will deliver them.

The form of confession is set out in Leviticus 5: 5f, verse 5 saying, 'When a man is guilty of any of these, he shall confess the sin he has committed'. Note that this is *personal confession*. Leviticus 16: 21 is *corporate confession*, '...and Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins; and he shall put them upon the head of the goat, and send him away into the wilderness by the hand of a man who is in readiness.' The whole community is involved. Leviticus 26 speaks of Israel under covenant conditions. God says that if they sin, then He will judge and punish them, but if they confess their iniquity then He will remember His covenant (vs 40-45). Thus we may call this *covenant confession*.

Another form of confession is set out which we may call *restitution confession*. In Numbers 5:5-10 the Lord lays down that when a man who sins against the Lord in defrauding another, he shall make restitution, adding a fifth in the process. The person must confess his sin. Even if the man he has def-

rauded had died or moved away he must make the restitution, this time to the priest who shall then possess the restituted elements. We could look upon this partly as punishment, especially if we were not aware that restitution brings immense relief to the person who has sinned. Indeed in all the above forms of confession the one confessing obtains peace and blessing. for confession is not a stint to be endured, but a practice which is most helpful. Indeed it is healthful.

(v) **Confession as Acknowledgment of Weakness and Need.** There are many times when the servants of God cry out in their need. A pattern is seen in Psalm 40: 1-2, 'I waited patiently for the Lord; He inclined to me and heard my cry. He drew me up from the desolate pit, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure.' So many Psalms (eg. 18) are examples of confession of tribulation beyond personal coping, and dire circumstances from which one cannot escape without God's help. Hezekiah's prayer is one of these. Hannah's prayer (in I Samuel ch. 1) is another. It is this kind of confession which moves God to help the confessors.

NON-CONFESSION IN THE O.T.

Proverbs 28:13 has it, 'He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy.' Job 31:33-34 is not a complete statement, but it suggests great suffering from being afraid to make public confession of sin. It is in Psalm 32, however, that we find the terrible suffering which comes from failing to confess. In verses 1 and 2 David speaks of the blessedness of forgiveness and justification from sin. In verses 3-4 he describes the terrible condition which comes when sin is not confessed: 'When I declared not my sin, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long: For day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer.' In verse 5 he describes the enormous relief and release

which come when sin is acknowledged, for 'acknowledged' means 'confessed'. Doubtless sin's deceit (cf. Heb 3: 13) covers over the inner iniquity, but it does not lessen the inner workings of guilt which are most dynamic (cf. Isa 57:20-21).

Psalm 51 and Psalm 32 are really twin psalms. They both show the beautiful relief and renewal which comes through confession.

GENUINE REPENTANCE REQUIRED

David says that a broken spirit and-a contrite heart are required by God. Where there has been no sin a simple and contrite heart is all that is required (Isa 57: 15), but where sin has taken place God requires the heart to be broken. It then becomes the heart of the New Testament beatitudes (Matt 5: 3-12). *Remorse* must never be mistaken for *repentance*. The former is merely being furious that one is found out. One is in fact caught with one's sin. Repentance is a total change of mind towards God and sin. There is the sorrow of remorse and the genuine sorrow of repentance. II Corinthians 7:10 states this principle, 'For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation and brings no regret, but worldly grief produces death.' Psalm 38:18 gives the simple recipe for confession, 'I confess my iniquity, I am sorry for my sin.'

We see then that most of what we need to know can be discovered in the O.T. Confession is for the most part glad acknowledgment of God Himself. Confession of sin is comparatively speaking a minor matter, but is comprehensible in the light of the greatness of the Lord we confess.

4. CONFESSION IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The doctrine of penance has deeply coloured the idea of confession. In penance there are three elements,

'confession, contrition, and satisfaction'. Grace tells us that satisfaction has been made by Christ in his Cross. God requires none. Contrition, when genuine sorrow, is in order, but when demanded it may be seen as an element of satisfaction. Confession is primarily acknowledgment of one's sin rather than an exercise of work, making demands on the emotions. Sincerity is all that is required in confession. Confession must primarily be faith that God forgives the confessor.

When we come to the N .T . we do not find the principle of penance, which, as a matter of history, has grown up during the Christian centuries. In fact we find confession very much as in the O.T., the difference is that generally speaking Christ is the object of confession. For the most part the verbs *homologeō* and *exomologeō* mean simply 'to assent to', 'to agree on a common basis', 'to admit'. However not all confession is necessarily linked with the words for confession. We can see confession in the N.T. as follows:-

(i) **Confession as Praise.** Romans 15: 9, Matthew 11: 25, Luke 10:21 and Hebrews 13:5 all have similar meanings to confession in the Old Testament (Rom 15: 9 = Psalm 18: 49). Confession as praise is a moving matter from the lips of Christ. We note that he bases what God does perfectly upon the fact or substance of his confession. We can say then, 'Confession is doxology.'

(ii) **Confession of Jesus.** I Timothy 6:13 says, 'In the presence of God who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession...'. Jesus is really confessing the Father in what he is and does. He insisted on what he was in Matthew 26:62 before the high priest, as later before Pilate. We can thus call the confession of Jesus, 'confession by Jesus'.

In Revelation 1:5 Jesus is the faithful witness (cf. 19: 11), i.e. he is the true confessor.

At the same time the N.T. speaks of men making

a confession of Christ. John the Baptist confessed Christ (John 1: 20, 29-34, 3: 25-30). Simon Peter also confessed him as the Messiah (Matt 16:13-20), even though later he denied him (Matt 26:69ff.). However at Pentecost he again confessed him (Acts 2). Martha confessed him at the grave of Lazarus (John 11: 27), and Mary after the resurrection (John 20: 16, 18), and Thomas also made his confession (John 20: 28). We note through the Gospels that men deny a true confession through fear of the Jews, through desiring the praise of men, or seeking mammon before God.

From Pentecost onwards confession of Christ was essential for salvation. The classical statement is Romans 10: 9-10. To confess with the mouth is to believe in the heart. Thus we find many confessions in the N .T . where the simple baptismal confession (see Acts 8:37 in the A.V.) has been developed. I Timothy 3:16 is one confession, 'He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.' So also I Corinthians 8:6, 'Yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.' We may also see Philippians 2:6-11 and I Corinthians 15:3-7 as fragments of confession.

I John 4:2-3 (cf. 4:15, II John 7) says, 'Every spirit which confesses that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God.' The spirits who do not confess this are not of God. Philippians 2:11 makes it clear that everyone will ultimately confess Christ as Lord. Meanwhile it is the Holy Spirit who moves us to confess, 'Jesus is Lord!' (I Cor 12:3). Of course the Holy Spirit in revealing Christ enables us to confess him.

The interesting thing about I Corinthians 8:6 is that it states the N .T. position on the confession of Jesus as Lord. In the O .T . the confession was, Hear, O Israel, the Lord thy God is one Lord...'. In the N.T. it is, virtually, 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord is

Jesus the Messiah.' Note, however, the unity of the Father and the Son in the Gospels and Epistles, eg. John 10:30, Matthew 11:25, Colossians 1:13, Ephesians 5: 5. The confession of the Son is really the confession of the Father as in Philippians 2: 11, cf. I Corinthians 15: 24, 28.

In the Book of the Revelation John is persecuted for his confession (Rev 1:2, 9, cf. 12:11, 17, etc.). In fact the Book of the Revelation is the struggle between those who confess the Beast, i.e. have his mark, and those who confess Christ and the Father, for they have the mark of both on their beings, i.e. the seal of God.

Note also that the Spirit enables us to confess because he is the Spirit of the Father (Matt 10: 20).

(iii) Confession Which is the Opposition to Denial. In I John 2:19-23 and 4: 1-3, John speaks of those who do not affirm that Jesus is the Son of God, and that Jesus has come in the flesh. One only has the Father when one has the Son, and so this denial of confession is a negative confession which ensures that the confessor is apart from the true God-and His Son. Matthew 10:32-33 draws the contrast between positive confession and denial-confession, 'So every one who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven; but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.' The same 'statement is made in slightly different wording in Luke 12:8. It is also helpful to remember, at this point, that the ultimate confession is eschatological. Whilst all mankind will—voluntarily or perforce - confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of the Father, yet what is the true state of the heart now will be made clear, i.e. will be unveiled in the eschaton.

John the Baptist is an excellent example of one who affirms positively and refuses to have denial-confession. This clear fact is seen in John 1:7, 15, 19, 20 and should be pondered.

(iv) Confession Which is Proclamation. Confession

of Christ's Lordship within the church is the sign and seal of the believing community being in salvation. I Timothy 3:16 is not merely an internal affirmation to the church. The confessing church is laying claim to this 'greatness of religion' being based on the objective facts as they have seen them, and witness to them. Hence the great commission of Christ to his disciples is for them to witness to him (Acts 1:8) and witness is active confessing. In this sense the whole church is in the business of proclaiming the Gospel. I Corinthians 11:26 says, 'For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes', and in a very real sense the Lord's Supper is a confession. I Corinthians 14:24-25 also gives us another example of proclamation when it says, 'But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, the secrets of his heart are disclosed; and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you.'

In the Book of the Revelation, as we have seen above, the people of the Beast have that mark which is both their confession of their identity and denial-confession of the truth. Likewise believers who have been sealed with the Holy Spirit (Ephes 1: 13-14), have the mark of God upon them which is 'the seal of God upon their foreheads' (Rev 7:2, 9:4, cf. Ezek 9: 4). This doubtless the same as in Revelation 14:1 and 22:4 where it is the name of God and the Lamb. In any case their confession is 'the word of their testimony' so often spoken of in the Revelation. Their confession of course always endangers them (Rev 12: 10-17). Denial-confession is the way of escaping the persecution by evil, but it is counter-productive in that Christ will deny those who deny him, in that day when confession will come under judgement.

(v) Confession of Sins. It is surprising how little this subject figures in the New Testament. Repentance rather than confession is the dynamic event. Repentance which means 'change of mind, attitude,

understanding' and which consequently issues in a change of life through the forgiveness of sins most certainly involves acknowledgment of one's sins, and in this sense repentance is never without confession. Really speaking one repents of being sinful as much as having committed specific sins. One really confesses one is a sinner.

We have seen that in the O.T. confession of sins is personal and sacrifices are provided for forgiveness and the relief from guilt. Confession is also a matter of the entire community, so that a person such as Moses, or Nehemiah or Daniel will utter community confession. We also saw that Psalm 32 enshrines the principle of concealment of sin, and the relief (and release) which comes from confession, i.e. acknowledgment of the sins and their culpability.

CONFESSION RELATING TO SALVATION

We first meet confession in Matthew 3: 6, 'And they were baptised by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.' There is no commentary whatever on this practice. Obviously the sincere listeners had been moved by John's preaching, and so confessed their sins. As in the O.T. this must have brought great relief to them. However this relief is not based on the sacrifices as provided but upon the notion of the imminent Kingdom. John had said it was a baptism of repentance for (Gk. *eis*, 'unto', or 'with a view to') the remission of sins. Whilst he did not mention the new covenant, this must have been in his mind as the prophetic utterance of his father at his naming had spoken in terms of the New Covenant of Jeremiah 31: 31-34, and it was to this that Jesus referred in the Last Supper (Matt 26: 28). We may assume that John's full teaching moved them to overt confession.

A somewhat similar note is struck in Acts 19:18, 'Many also of those who were now believers came, confessing and divulging their practices.' It seems that even believers had continued their links with the

occult, but the revelation that Paul was stronger than the demons moved them to confession. It should also be noted that this confession had a rich result (v. 20), 'So the word of the Lord grew and prevailed mightily.'

In Luke 5:8 we see Peter confessing. His confession is, 'Lord, depart from me, for I am a sinful man.' In seeing the person of Christ through the miracle of the draught of fishes, he realised his own state. Likewise in Luke 19:8 Zacchaeus makes a confession, 'And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor, and if I have defrauded any one of anything, I restore it fourfold ."' He too has been moved by the gentle and loving character of Christ. He also grasps the principle of restitution (or, reparation). Indeed he goes beyond the demands we saw in Leviticus 6. Repentance must have come quietly, and confession was the result.

In Jesus' parables we have examples of confession. Most famous is that of the lost son of Luke 15. 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and am no more worthy to be called your son.' This is as complete a confession as could be possible. Paralleling it is the confession of the tax-gatherer in Luke 18: 13, 'But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, "God, be merciful to me a sinner!'" It is simple but comprehensive. We should note the effects of such confession in both these cases.

Although Thomas's confession is a positive statement concerning the being of Christ, 'My Lord: and my God!' (John 20: 28), it is also a confession of his unbelief, i.e. his sinfulness in not believing.

CONFESSION RELATING TO THE BELIEVER

We really only have two clear references relating to the practice of confession for the Christian. These are I John 1:9 and James 5:16.

JAMES 5: 16. Mutual or church confession may have been a practice in the early church. It is difficult to know because we have only one reference to it. This reference is really in the context of a healing ministry carried out by the elders, and seems to be speaking to it. We do know that Jewish practice of that time was that a healing guild visit the sick person, sweep his room, exhort him to confession of sins, pointing out that sickness for the most part comes from sins.

The confession is not simply of the sick man, however, and seems to relate to the occasion of healing. It appears best to relate it to the fellowship of the elders, although the principle does not have to be limited to them. Having confessed their faults to one another they would now be wholly united. Scholars make something of the difference in the words sins (Gk. *hamartia*) and *faults* (Gk. *paraptomata*), seeing the latter as slips or lapses, as in Galatians 6:1 where the latter word is used. This may well be the case. In Ephesians 5:3 Paul seems to forbid the naming of certain sins, though whether in confession or not we cannot be sure. It would seem then that *paraptomata* are the things which could divide the fellowship, as in Matthew 5:23-24, 'So if you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.' We may conclude then that this kind of confession cleared the air, drew the fellowship together and made for 'effectual prayer'. There seems little ground for claiming that this was a constant regular practice.

I JOHN 1:9. This verse must be seen in the context of the passage of verses 5 to 10. The background must also be understood. There are some, it appears, who said they had no sin. Probably they were the gnostics who believed their bodies could commit sin, but not their inner spirits, ie. their essential selves who scorned the grossness of the

body, believing it was a clog upon the true person, the encased spirit. Anything of material natures was to be despised. It could be fiercely restricted or scornfully indulged, but it made no difference to the inner (true) person who would be released upon death. Not one ounce of true Christian truth can be found in such a view. If John were talking solely to these folk, then *his principle would not at all apply to Christians*. He would be saying to Gnostic Christians, 'If you, even though you have held these views, confess your sins, i.e. acknowledge that you are responsible for them - not denying them as sins - then He will forgive you in accordance with His nature, word and promises.' This seems to be the true thrust of the passage.

In verse 7 John has said, 'But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.' He is saying that the blood of Christ, i.e. the death, *is constantly working of itself*. That parallels the thought in 2: 1-2, namely that when we sin Christ is (not 'was', although that is true) the propitiation for our sins. This accords with Paul's Romans 8:1 and 5:1, ie. we are justified and there is no condemnation. Since the blood of Christ goes on cleansing we do not have to *invoke* its work. The only thing we can do is to seek to *prevent* it. In the case of the gnostics, they would prevent it by saying they had no such need, seeing they did not sin. In the case of Christians who held to truth, they could only prevent such cleansing (so to speak) by refusing to admit given sins had been committed or mattered. Such Christians would need to *admit* the fact of their sins, and thus the cleansing would be effective. This, surely, is the thrust of the passage.

If it is not then we must ask the question, 'How can those who walk in the light have need for cleansing? Have they - walking in the light - committed sins?' The answer must be, 'Yes.' In other words walking in the light is not the total guarantee that we

will not sin (though surely we will sin less), but the guarantee that cleansing will take place. That is, the *one walking in the light will surely admit to his sins.*'

The reason we seek to expound this passage in this way is because of the practice of people constantly mulling over their sins, seeking to discover things which are hidden, and perpetually approaching God as though He *were* some celestial accountant. Their primary idea is that God's forgiveness does not primarily relate to our *attitude* but rather to our meticulous detailing of our sins. John would have doubtless been dismayed as also surprised to have his words *interpreted* thus.

Probably the reason for this attitude lies in the mistaken idea that confession is virtually penance. Penance as we have seen is related to contrition and the giving of satisfaction. Whilst many would not realise it they are unconsciously making their very confession a form of satisfaction. The pain and unease connected with it is an unwitting pay-off for their failures. Also some persons feel that if they do not have emotional sorrow and even distress with their confession then it is ineffective confession.

The real message of 'the passage is, 'Don't be foolish. Don't lock your sins into yourself. Admit them. Agree with God. See them as sins and get them off your chest, but see that your confession does not move God to forgive. His nature has been to forgive where there is confession, but you know that He has already made provision for this in the death of His Son (I John 4: 10).'

It may be daring to put it in a slightly different way. 'We do not confess in order to be forgiven, but we confess because we are already forgiven .' That is Romans 8:1 and 5:1 assure us that the guilt is permanently removed. On the basis of this we can boldly approach God, knowing that His forgiveness is total.. For us the relief is that we have consciously received the forgiveness of the things which we had admitted. It is in the light of this that the N.T. speaks of

receiving the forgiveness of sins as a total gift (Ephes 1:7, Col 1'.13-14), and so can say of Christ, 'He has loosed us from our sins' (Rev 1:4). It does not say 'looses' as though it were a continual action, but 'loosed', as though it has happened once for all. Coupled with this fact of the *gift* of forgiveness (Acts 5: 31-32) is Romans 11: 29, 'For the gifts and call of God are irrevocable.' Thus, we repeat, confession is primarily an attitude of admission which is unchanging and continuous from which on the one hand we confess the Lordship of Christ, and on the other the fact of our sins, knowing that 'He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. '

THOSE TO WHOM CONFESSION IS MADE

Primarily all confession is to God. We confess to Him His nature, His attributes, and His works. In one sense this confession is a form of doxology. Often, however, it is a confession before men, as we acclaim the Lord. This is so especially in the confession of Jesus as Lord. With this confession goes the confession that God is the Father.

Confession of ourselves is primarily to God. We confess our needs, our weakness, our dependence, and also our sins. If this confession is public, then it is before men. David saw correctly that all sin is primarily against God (Psalm 51:4), but then sins against one another must be admitted, and, if possible, cleared. Such clearing involves restitution or reparation where possible. If prayer is against the church then it must be brought to the church. When our failures are beyond our handling we must be helped as in Galatians 6:1ff. Whilst the apostolic declaration is of the forgiveness of sins (John 20: 23, Luke 24:44ff, Acts 2:38), it is a ministerial and not a magisterial declaration. We must forgive one another, especially on the admission of sin (Matt 18:21ff), but the mutual sharing of 'slips' and 'lapses' is to the fellowship

In no case are sins confessed to a presbyter who can then forgive them.

5. CONCLUSION ON CONFESSION

We commenced our study under the title, 'The Comfort of Confession'. This is correct. We are immensely uneasy with unconfessed and undeclared sin. Containing it within ourselves brings distress, and dangerous suffering (Psalm 32:3-4). Confession liberates us from the inner repressed and perverse dynamic of guilt.

However our study of confession shows that it is primarily the acknowledgment of God as He is, and consequently of the creation as it really is, and the work of God as seen by revelation. Thus the major portion of confession is concerned with God, and with His Son. Such confession is both liberating and stimulating. The minor portion of confession deals with the confession of sin. It is because we see the nature of God in our confession that we know - beyond all doubt - that God forgives and that we come not in terror to the Judge, but in joyful acceptance by the Father and Redeemer. Hence our confession is not craven, not meticulous, and not even without joy. It is not that we are not contrite, or that we are conscripted into confession. Confession must reveal the pain of our sins to us, but it also in the same moment calls confidently upon the grace of God.

Confession is not only 'good for the soul'. It is a great comfort, telling us that we walk daily with the God of all grace, of all comfort, and of all peace.