



Confession is Good for the Soul

By RICK LIGGIN

You've probably heard the old expression, "Confession is good for the soul." And of course, if you've ever been in a situation where you did something wrong and made it right, you know that this old expression is true. "Coming clean" about some crime or sin we have committed—confessing it openly—feels good. It opens the door to being forgiven, and enables us to get a fresh start.

But what I want you to know is that this old saying—"confession is good for the soul"—this is not just some silly "pop-psychology" or "feel-good-psycho-babble." This wise old adage really expresses the truth! It's a simple way of saying what God first said in His Word.

Forgiveness Through Confession

Consider, for example, King David, a man who had committed both adultery and murder, but who ultimately found God's mercy when he finally confessed his sins and admitted his fault (Psa. 32:1-5).

David begins this Psalm by saying, "How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered! How blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit" (32:1-2). In these first verses, David describes the joy of salvation and of being forgiven...but it wasn't always that way.

He says, "When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; my vitality was drained away as with the fevered heat of summer" (32:3-4). Initially, David had tried to hide and cover up his sin; but deep down, he knew he was being deceitful...and he felt awful! He felt guilty and all sick in-

side. He felt as if God's heavy hand was pressing him down and burdening him with his guilt.

So what would he do? What could he do to escape the guilt and feel again the freedom from sin? Here's what David did: he said, "I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I did not hide; I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord'; and You did forgive the guilt of my sin" (32:5). As soon as David took responsibility for his own sin and confessed it to God: that's when he found relief!

That same thing is true for every one of us! If we will but confess our sins to God and turn away from them, we will know the joy of salvation and the relief that comes from forgiveness—but not until we truly "come clean" about it altogether.

Denial And Excuses Won't Work

The book of Proverbs teaches: "He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will find compassion" (Prov. 28:13). This text confirms the fact that mercy and forgiveness come only by confession...and forsaking our sins.

Please understand: you will never prosper—you will never find relief from your guilt or the forgiveness of those whom you have wronged (including God)—as long as you try to cover it up and hide your sin.

And that's exactly what so many of us do! Instead of "coming clean" about our sin, we want to deny it—deny that we did anything wrong; or we want to excuse it—find some way of pointing out that even though we did the wrong thing, somehow: "It wasn't my fault!"

Which brings me to one of the biggest obstacles that keeps many from finding forgiveness: too many in this permissive soci-

ety of ours have adopted a "victim" mentality. For some, it doesn't matter how wrong they are or how badly they've behaved or how foolish they've been, they stubbornly declare: "It's not my fault! I wouldn't have had to do that bad thing, if this bad thing hadn't happened to me...or if that bad person hadn't done what he did." And if you listen to such a person for very long, you'll soon see that what he's trying to convince you of is this: that really, "I'm the victim here. Woe is me!"

Friend, until you're willing to take full responsibility for all your own actions and admit it when you've done wrong, you will not find compassion from those you've wronged, and you certainly will not find forgiveness from God! In the end, it doesn't matter what bad things may or may not have happened to you, you are fully responsible for your own choices and your own actions. Unfortunate past events or the misconduct of others will never excuse my wrong choices or my sinful deeds. And if I want mercy and relief, I'm going to have to take responsibility, confess my crimes, and forsake my wicked ways.

It's Time To "Come Clean"

How about you? Are you running from your sins or trying to cover up your great transgression? Do you see yourself as a victim to whom life has simply not been fair? Stop it! Stop wallowing in self-pity, and face your responsibility! You committed the sin; so you need to fix it! Acknowledge your faults and confess your sins—and maybe then you will find compassion and forgiveness and a real fresh start. But understand, it's not going to happen until you finally "come clean"!

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THINK

ON THESE THINGS

Philippians 4:8

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The Gospel's Dependency On Men

By **ANDY DIESTELKAMP**

What do you know about God? The Apostle Paul argues that people are without excuse for failing to reason that God exists and that He is supernatural and eternal (Rom. 1:20). These basic conclusions arrived at by mature and sound minds observing the course of nature leave little room for idolatry and none for atheism. Yet, while the existence and design of the natural world demands a preexistent Designer, nature is virtually silent about the specific purpose and will of God for humanity.

What do you know about God? Nature exists, but it does not specify what is right and wrong. It does not identify sin. It does not prescribe a remedy for evil. Without specific revelation from the mind of God, we would know nothing about such matters of the spirit (1 Cor. 2:9-14). Yet, how do we come to know the mind of God?

Some people imagine that each person can have his own spiritual connection to the mind of God. Indeed, it is popular to emphasize the personal relationship that each person can have with God. This concept is then extrapolated to reason that connecting

You Can't Judge An Apple By It's Peeling



By **AL DIESTELKAMP**

Many times I have picked up a beautiful red apple, hoping that when I bite into it it will be crisp and sweet, only to find out it's sour or mushy. I've come to the conclusion that you can't judge an apple by its peeling.

Christians should understand that, in like manner, one cannot judge a congregation by its sign out front. You might be able to determine that a church is *not* the Lord's church if their sign betrays that fact with a description that is unscriptural, but having a scriptural designation doesn't mean what's inside is necessarily good.

Too many brethren, when trying to locate a place to worship, are simply content to find a congregation which claims to be a church of Christ, without investigating as to whether it's living up to its billing.



with the mind of God is dependent on no one else. "Faith is personal. It is just between you and God." That sounds so warm, mystical, and comfortable; but is it true?

Ah, truth; "What is truth?" Pilate derisively asked Jesus before condemning Him (Jn. 18:38). Jesus had claimed to bear witness to the truth and declared that, "Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice," (vs. 37). He claimed, "I am the way, the truth, and the life," (14:6). Of all people, professing Christians ought to believe in objective truth. Instead, much of "Christendom" is mired in a self-loving, better-felt-than-told subjectivism that idolizes personal experience and on its altar sacrifices any truth that does not validate the feelings of the worshiper.

The truth is that God determined to communicate His will to mankind, not by means of personal encounters with Him, but through the message preached by humans. God made the communication of this message dependent upon the efforts of men (1 Cor. 1:21).

Atheists and other unbelievers guffaw at such foolishness and ask, "If there is a God, why wouldn't He just personally appear and communicate to each one of us?" Yet these are the same sophomoric ones who choose to assume the natural world spontaneously arose from nothing, rather than bow their knees to the Creator. Since men in their "wisdom" explained God away (or recreated Him in their own image), it pleased God to save mankind using a method that seems foolish to those who are wise in their own eyes.

God's method of communicating His grace and will to mankind (and thereby saving men upon their compliance with that message) was through the preaching of the gospel by men. While it is popular to quote, "Whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved," (Joel 2:32; Ac. 2:21; Rom. 10:13), Paul asks some practical questions that many people are not answering correctly.

"How then shall they call on Him in whom

they have not believed?" (Rom. 10:14). They can't! This informs us that "calling on the name of the Lord" is neither some mindless incantation nor is it an "it can't hurt" shot in the dark. It is an act of faith which goes well beyond saying, "Lord, Lord" and doing things in His name (Matt. 7:21-23).

Paul continues his reasoning: "How shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard?" They can't. The saving faith of Scripture is not blind or mindless but is based on sound information. Without that information there can be no real faith.

Paul then asks, "How shall they hear without a preacher?" The answer is the same; they can't! In other words, while "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God," (Rom. 10:17), the word of God comes to men by the message preached. Thus saving faith is a product of hearing the message preached. Do not misunderstand Paul. He is not providing job security for preachers. He is affirming that God's design for the spread of the gospel is by the message shared and taught by humans.

We tend to think that the necessity of the message preached is obsolete because we now have Bibles. However, let us never forget that our Bibles *are* the message preached. The written word exists because the message preached was written down (2 Pet. 1:12-15). Indeed, the Bible is the Word of God; but by God's design it was produced and propagated by men who were sent forth with a mission.

Paul took his call to preach seriously and declared that he was not ashamed of the gospel because it was God's power to save those who believe (Rom. 1:16). Jesus' own instructions to His apostles before ascending to heaven makes it clear that the salvation of souls was dependent upon men going into all the world and preaching the gospel (Matt. 28:19,20; Mk. 16:15,16; Lk. 24:47).

Reading through the book of Acts shows how the gospel was spread and souls were saved. There are no examples of anyone being saved without human agency. Faith and salvation are not subjective, personal experiences but products of the objective preaching of Jesus by men. This is by God's design.

God inspired men to reveal His gospel, His mystery, His will. Through those men God has instructed parents to train their children in His ways. If they fail, precious souls will be lost. Through the apostles and prophets God instructed others to "preach the word," "teach others also," edify, reprove, rebuke, exhort, and discipline one another. If we do not do this, souls will be lost.

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The 'Seeker-Friendly' Fad

By AL DIESTELKAMP

The emergence of the "seeker-friendly" church, popularized by Rick Warren's book, *The Purpose-Driven Church*, has become quite a fad in religious circles. "Seeker-friendly" is a term which sounds good on the surface, but what is usually meant is anything but good. Keep in mind that the word "friendly" in this context is not referring to being cordial. Here it is being used as a suffix in a similar way as it is in the term "user-friendly" when claiming ease of use of some product. Thus, a "seeker-friendly" church is one that adapts to those seeking a church.

It's not unusual to be asked, "Is your congregation seeker-friendly?" Who would want to say, "No" to that question? Certainly, every congregation of the Lord's people ought to be very friendly toward anyone seeking the truth, but unfortunately that's not what is meant when the question is asked.

Churches which bill themselves as "seeker-friendly" are usually groups which have adopted a market-driven approach to church growth. Following the lead of megachurch founder, Bill Hybels, these churches survey the population to see what kind of church they want, and then form (or reform) a church to fit the desires of the people.

Of course, this is not a new concept, but one that was employed by Aaron back in the foothills of Mt. Sinai, resulting in Israelites dancing and playing in "The Church of the Golden Calf" (see Ex. 32). Later, King Jeroboam, claiming "It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem" (1 Ki. 12:28), established a "seeker-friendly" religion boasting two convenient worship centers. Both of these attempts were numerically successful, but led Israel into sin.

It should be no surprise that a good portion of the sectarian world, having long ago abandoned any claim to following the New Testament as a pattern, has embraced this concept. Unfortunately, it is also not surprising that even some of our brethren, after gradually eroding away their loyalty to scriptural authority, have been caught up in the numbers game and have embraced some of the "seeker-friendly" tactics. One of the claims made by "seeker-friendly" advocates is that they stress the need for spiritual renewal without the negativity. I suppose that means that they preach the principle, but stop short of making the application.

Even from a few brethren who still claim to believe we need New Testament authority for all that we do, we hear the suggestion that maybe we ought to tone down our emphasis on authority. I've heard it suggested that visitors are turned off by preaching against instrumental music in worship,

immodest apparel, divorce, etc. Evidently it's ok to preach against sin, in general, but it's a turn-off when you speak against specific sins.

Brethren sometimes justify following popular trends by claiming it's like eating watermelon. You learn to swallow the good part and spit out the seeds. It is true that something isn't necessarily wrong simply because it is practiced by those in error, but it is also true that a watermelon is sometimes rotten throughout.

Then there are some brethren who wouldn't, even for a moment, compromise the truth on doctrinal issues, but have seemingly bought into another aspect of the "seeker-friendly" concept by advocating that we have to keep up with the sectarians with our places of worship. They try to convince us that unless we do, people won't seek us out. It's true that many worldly people have come to expect churches to impress them with state-of-the-art facilities and every comfort and convenience imaginable. While there may be nothing wrong with building comfortable and convenient places to meet, if we adopt a "build it and they will come" approach, we are being fooled because it is the pure gospel that must attract people to Christ (Rom. 1:16).

Marketing polls indicate that people won't attend churches lacking ample off-street parking, or if their attendance approaches the capacity of their building. I assume these are the same people who will park on a side street blocks away from a theater they are attending, and will even wait for a table at a crowded restaurant. I think you'll find that



people will do what they *want* to do, and if they *want* to seek the truth they will not be turned off by crowded conditions.

I'm not suggesting that we purposely make it difficult for people to worship by building meetingplaces and parking lots which are too small, but some congregations have been convinced that, in order to keep growing, they must add on or rebuild prematurely. A few congregations, after heeding such advice, have found out the hard way that people who visit because of the comfort and convenience, "stumble" at the "foolishness" of an unaltered gospel message (1 Cor. 1:18-25).

Jesus said He came to "seek and to save that which is lost" (Lk. 19:10). He also said, "If you abide in My word, you are my disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (Jn. 8:31-32). It's the truth that is "friendly" to one who is seeking the Lord, so we do truth-seekers no favor by trying to draw them in by any other means.

Men's Overnight Bible Study

The third annual *Men's Overnight Bible Study* will be held Friday night through Saturday afternoon September 15-16, 2006 at a campground near Manteno, Illinois. It is hoped this event will encourage and edify men in their particular roles in the Kingdom—helping them be better Christians. Men can get away from the pressures of their lives and come together to focus on male issues which generally are not often, or as candidly addressed, in congregational Bible studies. It allows Christians from some distance to make or rekindle friendships, and to strengthen every man in Christ Jesus. Following are the topics and speakers:

"Identifying the Problem: Compartmentalized Faith" ~ Andy Diestelkamp

"Solving the Problem: Living By Faith" ~ Jeff Nettles

"Faith Comes By Hearing" ~ Jon Quinn

"I've Got A Life, Too" ~ Steve Bonk

"Setting the Course of Life By Faith" ~ Frank Nettles

"Working By Faith" ~ Joe Novak

Question and Answer Forum, moderated by Al Diestelkamp.

This event is organized by Christians in the northern and central Illinois area, and is not the work of any particular congregation. It is the result of the efforts put forth by its organizers and those willing to lead the various Bible studies. For more information and online registration go to www.freewebs.com/mensbiblestudy, or e-mail Tim Zydek at timzz61@core.com



UNCHANGING PRINCIPLES

By **LESLIE DIESTELKAMP**

Morality pertains to that which is right and wrong, and for the Christian this is determined by God's attitude, and not by the changing customs of men and women. But there seems to be a tendency for us to accept something as right after it has been practiced so much that it is accepted by society, regardless of what God says about it.

I can remember when almost everyone opposed smoking by women (though many, inconsistently, upheld it for men), the wearing of scanty clothing, mixed bathing, etc. But today few oppose any of these on the basis of morality.

If one will take the time to study the morals of the children of Israel, from the days of Jacob until the time of Christ, he will find that God never did smile upon immorality. In fact, when Israel became immoral God withheld his blessings. When Israel repented and became moral people God blessed them abundantly. Furthermore, almost always when Israel became immoral they became idolatrous and conversely when they became idolaters they always became immoral.

In this day of grace and truth that came by Jesus Christ (Jn. 1:17), the generic, basic foundation principles of morality are the same as they were in the days of Adam or in the days of Israel.

There are four areas of immorality that not only seem to prevail in the world, but also seem to be prevailing among many of God's own people today. Each of these are soul-destroying. Each will render one's influence null and void for righteousness, and

I believe they will cause God to withhold His blessings from His church, regardless of other areas of fidelity, such as purity of worship, organization, work, etc.

1. Profanity and vulgarity (including the use of euphemisms) have always been offensive to God, but are heard too often from the lips of God's people today (Tit. 2:8; Matt. 12:36-37; Eph. 4:29; Col. 3:8).

2. Drinking intoxicants, whether bar-room drinking, social drinking or private drinking, defiles men and women, degrades the youth, leads to irresponsibility in other moral matters and brings shame, disgrace and even death (Prov. 20:1; 23:29-35; Gal. 5:21).

3. Nudity (and near nudity) have always been shameful in God's sight (Rev. 3:18; 16:15). Every biblical reference to nakedness indicates shamefulness. The modern mini-skirt is a disgrace to any Christian who wears it. It cannot be considered as that adornment that exemplifies holiness of heart, nor can it be considered adornment that produces purity of mind in others (Phil. 4:8). Such scanty attire is, in and of itself, lascivious and it produces licentiousness and lust in others (Gal. 5:19).

4. Divorce and remarriage are so strongly condemned in the Bible that it would seem we hardly need to mention them. Yet these evils are not only practiced by some children of God, but they are overlooked and excused by most Christians today. However, when marriage is degraded, when home is debased and when the family circle is inconsequential, the basic foundation of society is thus removed and the anger of God is kindled (Mal. 2:14-16). Most of all, when this is true among God's children, the church is disgraced and the Lord must withhold His

blessings (see Matt. 19:9; Rev. 2:14-16, 20-23).

Let us remember that true morality does not adapt to the styles and customs of the world. And let us not forget that it is the duty of Christians to demonstrate high moral standards regardless of what the world does. The destiny of our souls depends upon it, and the welfare of the church is at stake.

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We greatly appreciate the help we receive from our readers. Fortunately, the past issue did not cost as much as I had projected. I thought the annual bulk mail permit (\$160) was due before this issue. However, it will be due about the time to mail the next issue, so this issue will cost about \$737 which would leave a surplus of \$118.80 toward the next issue.

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