

Fulton County Gospel News

Good News About Christ And His Church For All Of The World

“... Christ is the head of the church: and He is the Savior of the body.” - Ephesians 5:23

Established 1953

March-April 2013

Vol. 47 / No. 2

PUBLIC CONFESSION OF SINS

by Lee Moses

At the close of a sermon, a Gospel preacher will typically offer the invitation, following the pattern of first-century evangelists (Acts 2:38-40; 3:17-26; 10:47-48). And along with offering alien sinners the opportunity to be baptized for the remission of their sins, the preacher will typically offer the opportunity for erring brothers and sisters to confess sins before the church. Some ponder, “Which sins do I need to confess publicly?” Others may ask, “What do I need to say when I confess publicly? How specific do I need to be?” Still others wonder, “Is public confession necessary at all? Can I not just confess my sins privately to God?” To answer these questions, consider a few Biblical principles.

A child of God is responsible to confess every known sin to God. God stands ready to extend mercy and forgive His children, but forgiveness is conditional: “*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*” (1 John 1:9, emphasis LM). To fail to meet the condition is to fail to receive the desired result. “*He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy*” (Proverbs 28:13). Thus to prosper and receive mercy, one must confess his sins; or the opposite—ruin and condemnation—will be his lot. As the late brother Guy N. Woods observed, “The scriptures clearly teach that every *known* sin, of what ever nature, must be confessed to God. *Any sin, every sin, unrepented of [or unconfessed, LM], establishes a barrier between God and the individual rendering fellowship impossible.*”¹

Children of God are commanded to confess sins to other Christians.

“*Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much*” (James 5:16). According to this verse, there are occasions when brethren are to confess their sins before other brethren, and one’s being healed (forgiven) depends upon it. When in Ephesus the apostle Paul clearly demonstrated the folly of magical arts, “[*M*]any that believed [*Christians, LM*] came, and **confessed, and shewed their deeds.** Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver” (Acts 19:18-19, emph. LM). These repentant souls made known to others what they had been practicing, and that they would be practicing such things no longer.

Not every sin must be publicly confessed. Christ commanded a specific course of action when one brother or sister has committed a personal offense against another (Matthew 18:15-17). As the first step of this course, He commanded, “[*G*]o and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother” (Matthew 18:15). Why does Christ instruct this conversion to take place privately, between “*thee and him alone*”? It is partially because a one-on-one conversation tends to conduce to more openness, kindness, and receptivity in the conversation. But Christ’s instruction also implies that it is **unnecessary** for anyone outside of the

two involved to know that sin has taken place. The offending brother’s willingness to “hear” the one offended means his “gain”—his full restoration, without confession being made before the entire congregation.

Thus we find the principle, “A sin should be confessed as widely as it is known.” If a sin that is only known by two brethren can be kept between two brethren and forgiven, does it not follow that a sin that is only known by one child of God and God Himself can be kept between the two and forgiven? Would it be necessary—or appropriate or helpful—for a brother to confess, “I’ve been struggling with feelings of lust toward sister so-and-so”? Such a confession would bring shame to the sister and could cause strife in her marriage, although she may never have done anything to incite the confessor’s amorous impulses.

Elders and other Christians need to know the spiritual state of their brethren. Christians are to **pray** for their erring brethren, that they may be healed. But how are they to pray when they have no knowledge of a brother’s **need** to be healed? “*If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it. All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death*” (1 John 5:16-17). Whether a sin is “unto death” or not depends on whether or not it been confessed and repented of. And, once again, how one prays for his brother depends on his understanding of his brother’s spiritual situation.

FULTON COUNTY GOSPEL NEWS

USPS Publication #211780

... is a Periodical publication issued monthly by the Church of Christ at Third and Bethel (P.O. Box 251), Mammoth Spring, AR 72554-0251. **POSTMASTER: Please mail all changes of address to the above address.**

FCGN is mailed free of charge to any who care to receive it. We will be happy to add any names to the regular mailing list. If you send in a name we must have a complete address, including number and street name, or R.R. or HCR number, plus box number, or a P.O. Box number and the **NINE DIGIT ZIP CODE**. This paper is supported by voluntary contributions for which we are grateful. Financial information will be furnished upon request. **Mail all address corrections or manuscripts to:**

FULTON COUNTY GOSPEL NEWS

P.O. Box 251

Mammoth Spring, AR 72554

Lee MosesEDITOR
Phone(870) 625-3217
E-Mailcocfcgn@centurytel.net
Websitewww.fultoncountygospelnews.org
Brian DixonWebmaster
E-Mailsales@halopages.net

continued from page one

Christians are commanded to “mark” and “avoid” those who bring false doctrines (Romans 16:17). Christians are commanded, “*Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us*” (2 Thessalonians 3:6). But if an erring brother or sister has **repented**, faithful Christians are no longer to avoid or remain withdrawn from that person. And the only way Christians can know that a brother or sister has repented is if he or she confesses it publicly.

Confession requires a certain amount of specificity. Sometimes an erring child of God will come forward to make confession, and say something to the effect of, “If I have sinned, I would like forgiveness.” There may well be times when we need to ask ourselves or others if we have sinned. But to ask such as a question, or to express one’s sin as a mere **possibility**, does not constitute confession. Even to say, “I have sinned” does not really constitute confession if people have no

idea what that person did. “*All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God*” (Romans 3:23, *emph. LM*). When James instructed, “*Confess your faults [‘your sins,’ American Standard Version] one to another,*” he did not say, “Confess that you **have** sinned one to another.” He said to confess the sins themselves. When the repentant Ephesians came forward to confess, they “*shewed their deeds*”; that is, they fully disclosed what they had been practicing. Should we do differently? “Of course, ‘gutter-language,’ sensitive details, should (and can) be avoided in announcing such confessions.”² Yet proper confession does require a certain amount of specificity.

¹ *Questions and Answers*, Vol. 1 (Henderson, TN: Freed-Hardeman, 1976), p. 211. As one would expect, brother Woods does an outstanding job answering this question on pp. 211-213 of this volume.

² Dub McClish, “When a Christian Sins.”

TRIPS TO HELL ON THE WEEKENDS

by Gary W. Summers

Keeping up with thousands of “stars” is not really relevant to daily living; so, admittedly, this writer had no idea who Javier Bardem is, but there was a question about him in the January 23rd [2011] “Personality” section of *Parade*. After the writer’s question concerning him was answered, it was pointed out (why is anyone’s guess) that he has a peculiar take on the afterlife. His words (recorded below) were intended as a joke, but some of us are not laughing:

“I don’t know if I’ll get to heaven. I’m a bad boy,” jokes the actor, 41. “Heaven must be nice, but is it too boring? Maybe you can get an apartment there and then go to hell on the weekends” (2).

At the risk of sounding like a spoilsport, hell is not the proper subject for religious humor. Many jokes that show some of the foibles of Christians or that demonstrate a lack of understanding are appropriate, but some topics should be off-limits. Mr. Bardem is not the only

one to minimize the nature of hell; many others seem to think that it is the place where all of one’s friends are—the place one would rather be. Of course, such an idea is absurd, and the Scriptures debunked that notion nearly 2,000 years ago.

Jesus characterized hell as the place where the fire shall never be quenched (Mark 9:43). Even the Hadean realm, the place where all await the Day of Judgment, contains one location where the righteous rest and another location where the lost suffer torment. The rich man went there but sought relief from the flame (Luke 16:23-24). He was not having a good time with all his friends, nor did he want his five brothers to come there for a wonderful family reunion (Luke 16:27-31).

Apparently, the idea that hell will be an exciting place where the good times will continue to roll is merely a matter of wishful thinking. Certainly, it is not couched in reality.

Those in Abraham’s bosom did not want to cross the great gulf between the two locations for weekend visits, and such was disallowed anyway (Luke 16:25-26). The same restriction will apply later, but even if it did not, who in their right mind would want to leave heaven for “the lake of fire and brimstone” (Rev. 20: 10)? The smell and the heat would be sufficient to deter anyone from desiring to have a brief vacation there.

Current Philosophy

Thinking that hell will be a giant recreational facility with only a slight downside is popular with many who cannot bring themselves to be devoted to good now but think being bad once in a while is normal and healthy. While “Santa checks for those who are naughty or nice,” these folks think it is fine to be both. If one is a good actor and makes people laugh, surely it is all right to party with a bevy of women and use cocaine. The blend of naughty and nice is fiction—not reality.

God does not view sin as something to trifle with. He did not view David’s sin with Bathsheba just as something

kings do. Even though David was a man after God's own heart, He did not conclude, "He's been pretty nice all of his life; I'll overlook this naughty little dalliance." God sent Nathan the prophet to rebuke David and impose strict punishments upon him. Bad boys are not redeemed unless they are willing to give up their badness (repent).

Many believe that God will save them no matter what. Some have even been so bold as to say, "I'm not giving up an unlawful mate (or some other sin); God will just have to save me the way I am." Hah! The rich man might have tried that one. It does not work. We have the responsibility to become conformed to the life of Jesus, Who came down to do the Father's will. Can anyone seriously think He would have been qualified to remove our sins if He had indulged in "naughtiness"?

Will Heaven Be Boring?

Too many people have subscribed to the image of those in heaven floating around on clouds and playing harps. That image does injustice to the true atmosphere of heaven. What will be going on there?

First of all, God will be there. Yes, the One Who created us and gave us this world to live in shall also provide for us the next world, of which this one is only a pale comparison. It is called the city foursquare and is described as having streets of gold. The foundations are compared to precious gems; the splendor will be greater than what we have ever imagined. Anyone who has enjoyed the earth—its lakes and rivers, its mountains and valleys, its waterfalls and placid pools, the forests and the meadows—will enjoy the next world even more. It will be akin to the original Garden of Eden on earth—only better.

Second, heaven will be wonderful because of who will not be there—Satan. Who has ever enjoyed being deceived, lied to, or betrayed? Satan is the father of lies (John 8:44), and all those who have followed in his footsteps will be absent from heaven. They have their part in "the lake which burns with fire and brimstone" (Rev.

21:8). How many have suffered misery at the hands of adulterers and murderers? Is it necessary to provide a list of homes that have been ruined by the former? Can we even fathom how many family members have grieved over the loss of a father, mother, daughter, son, brother, or sister because of the latter? "But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie..." (Rev. 21:27). All of these who foisted such evil upon others were inspired by the devil, who rejoices in seeing others suffer. He is the friend of no one.

Third, heaven will be glorious because no one will need to endure pain there. Perhaps many young people do not think this one is important yet, but anyone who has lived very many years knows what kind of pain the body can be afflicted with. Job certainly knew it. Some have endured back pains, arthritis, blindness, deafness, diabetes, and many other ailments for years and are looking forward to a pain-free eternity. It is doubtful they would want to revisit "old times" by a weekend trip to the other realm.

Fourth, there will be no more crying or tears. In this world there is much about which to weep. When Jacob thought his favorite son Joseph had died, he mourned for him many days. In fact, he refused to be comforted and said, "For I shall go down into the grave to my son in mourning" (Gen. 37:34-35). And it was all for naught, since Joseph was actually alive! Not one of his sons, despite his continual lamentation, saw fit to tell him the truth—that Joseph had not died. They could not bring themselves to admit that they had sold him into slavery. Jeremiah wept over the sins of the people because he knew the punishment that God was about to bring upon them. Numerous have been the causes of people's sadness, but it will not be so there.

Fifth, heaven will be thoroughly enjoyable because there will be no more death. Some of the saddest moments in life are those occasions when a loved one departs from this earth. Even if we are confident that we

shall be reunited later, the temporary separation remains painful. But those occasions will not exist there. Whoever is rewarded with eternal life shall remain there, and we may rejoice in their company continually.

Sixth, heaven is the genuine place of fellowship and socialization. Those in hell will be experiencing too much pain to fraternize, and none of God's grace will be present. Imagine a place where the goodness of God is absent! How horrifying! But in heaven, the church members we know now and have known in the past will be present. Also in evidence will be those of all ages—those who have fought physical and polemic battles, those who did great deeds through the power of God—people of great faith like Abraham, Moses, Peter, and Paul—just to name a few. The social interaction will be marvelous.

Seventh, heaven will be more than a dwelling place of clouds. Consider the physical world God created. What imagination did He show in the colorful varieties of birds, fish and flowers He created! The heavens, including the various stars and constellations, declare His majesty and power. If there is one thing that God does not lack, it is *imagination*. It will not be a world of dreariness but of wonder, as some of the descriptions indicate. Just because our own imaginations lack depth is no reason to impose dullness upon the Deity. To miss heaven for a few paltry pleasures of the flesh is the poorest exchange one could ever make. That God even offers it to us is phenomenal; to spurn it is unthinkable. We must do everything within our power to be obedient and have that eternal home.

Eighth, Jesus will be there—the One Who redeemed us from all iniquity. Each week we are reminded that our sins put Him on the cross, but from the Day of Judgment onward we shall see the glorious Savior Who *arose* from the dead, making salvation possible for all. We will be able thenceforth to honor and praise Him forever. No one has ever accomplished more for humankind than Jesus. And though He knows that, we will have abundant opportunities to

continued from page three

thank Him, to praise Him, and to express our continual love.

Ninth, we will be able to worship God face to face. We are somewhat removed from Him while on earth, although His presence fills the universe, but then the glory of God illuminates the celestial city, and the Lamb is its light (Rev. 21:23). Many have questioned Him because of His distance, but no one can entertain any doubts while living in His presence. The evil one will be in the lake of fire and not around to try to convince us that God does not love us or that He is withholding blessings from us. The peace and harmony that

humankind has yearned for will have been achieved—permanently.

Tenth, we will serve Him in whatever capacity He sees fit. Although heaven is a place of rest (compared to earth), it is not a place of inactivity. Even Adam was given a job in the Garden of Eden. Whatever we require (such as labor or energy), God will provide it. He will see to our every need and longing. We shall be satisfied! The state of perfection that we could not achieve on earth will be realized in heaven.

And no one will ask for a weekend pass.

Winter Park, FL

JANUARY AND FEBRUARY CONTRIBUTIONS

CHURCHES

Viola church of Christ (Viola, AR)	50.00
East Side church of Christ on the Hill (Lexington, OK)	60.00
Lowell church of Christ (Springdale, AR)	50.00
Jeff church of Christ (Thayer, MO)	50.00
Pritchett church of Christ (Big Sandy, TX)	100.00
Clarkridge church of Christ (Clarkridge, AR)	150.00
Moody church of Christ (Moody, MO)	150.00
Agnos church of Christ (Agnos, AR)	100.00
Pilot church of Christ (Mammoth Spring, AR)	700.00
Crossroads church of Christ (Gepp, AR)	100.00
Gospel Hill church of Christ (Pottersville, MO)	100.00
Elizabeth church of Christ (Elizabeth, AR)	100.00
Bakersfield church of Christ (Bakersfield, MO)	150.00
Moko church of Christ (Sturkie, AR)	50.00
Sturkie church of Christ (Sturkie, AR)	100.00
Poughkeepsie church of Christ (Poughkeepsie, AR)	100.00
Bellefonte church of Christ (Harrison, AR)	100.00

Anonymous (In memory of Thelma Ragsdale)	700.00
Anonymous	400.00
Doris Waggoner (Kimmell, IN)	75.00
Don Smith (Caldwell, OH)	6.33
Lucille Laws (Spencer, OK)	100.00
Lucille Laws (Spencer, OK) (In memory of Beatrice Nicholson)	30.00
T. Ray & Sandee (Corsicana, TX)	50.00
Charles E. Smith (Pottstown, PA)	25.00
Victor Lebsack (Mt. Pleasant, TX)	50.00
Val Jamison (Nashville, AR)	100.00
Bonita Reynolds (West Plains, MO)	15.00
Jerry & Linda Watts (Jonesboro, AR)	20.00
Tamadge & Bonita Graham (Heber Springs, AR)	40.00
Leah Watkins (Bono, AR)	100.00
Milton Smith (Pineville, WV)	25.00
Leila Bonnett (Osceola, IA)	50.00
Joel Patterson (Bentonville, AR)	100.00
Ermyl Pearle (Beedeville, AR)	50.00
Vera Harris (Charles City, VA)	40.00
Billy & Jean Tabor (Malden, MO)	20.00
H. Root (Bristow, OK)	30.00
Dr. A.T. Pate (Nashville, TN)	20.00
Sue McDaniel (Eddy, TX)	10.00
Junior Kimmel (Unionville, MO)	100.00
Ernest Armstrong (Pecos, TX)	500.00
Gary & Ann Wilson (Hot Springs, AR)	20.00
Laurel & Jim Parsley (Columbus, NE)	25.00

INDIVIDUALS

Wilene & Luceile (Franklin, AR)	10.00
Greg & Rebecca McFann (Malaga, WA)	50.00

GOD'S AUTHORIZED WORSHIP

- COLOSSIANS 3:17

1. **LORD'S SUPPER** - The New Testament and early church history record that Christians met on the first day of every week (Sunday) to worship God and remember Christ (Acts 20:7; I Corinthians 11:23-34; 16: 1-2).
2. **PRAYERS** - (Acts 2:42; Philippians 4:6-7; I Thessalonians 5:17-18).
3. **SINGING** - God's word authorizes only vocal music and specifically singing (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16; Hebrews 2:12). The New Testament shows no use of mechanical instruments of music in worship to God by the church Christ established. Church history notes no such use for nearly 700 years after the New Testament was completed. It is an innovation of men, not of God.
4. **GIVING** - Free-willed, cheerful, generous, and every week (Acts 20:35; I Corinthians 16:1-2; 2 Corinthians 8 & 9).
5. **PREACHING OF THE WORD** - The gospel of Christ, not men's doctrines nor entertainment, saves and strengthens us (Acts 2:42; 20:7; Romans 10:17; I Corinthians 1:18-23).

CHURCH OF CHRIST
 P.O. BOX 251
 MAMMOTH SPRING, AR 72554
 ADDRESS
 SERVICE
 REQUESTED

Periodical Postage
 Paid At
 Mammoth Spring, AR
 72554-0998
 Publication #211780