



Confession and Restoration

“Howbeit thou art just in all that is brought upon us; for thou hast done right, but we have done wickedly” (Neh 9:33)

Too many Christians today tend to look at Confession as the easy way out after they have sinned against the Lord. They think that a ‘Sorry’ is all it takes to be forgiven and restored to His favor. But nothing is further from the truth.

In times of great revivals, when people were acutely aware of their sins and sincerely sought the Lord for forgiveness and restoration, one cannot help but note that their confessions were anything but superficial. The spiritual revival that came upon the remnant in Jerusalem under Nehemiah is a very good example.

During their corporate confession in Nehemiah 9, we notice at least two important characteristics about their confession.

CONFESSION AND GODLY SORROWS GO HAND IN HAND

First of all, godly sorrow always comes before genuine confession of the heart.

Earlier on in chapter 8, we read how the Spirit of God moved among the people so that the congregation was convicted of their sins through the preaching of God’s Word. Unlike their self-righteous forefathers, the remnant were deeply saddened within their hearts, not because of the consequences that they had to face, but because they realized they had failed and disappointed the Lord time and again. This godly sorrow for their sins was the chief motivation that led to their confession before God. They admitted they had indeed sinned against Him.

Now, this natural link between godly sorrow and the confession of sin is observed, not only in this passage, but also in every instance in the Bible where genuine repentance did occur.

GENUINE CONFESSION IS DETAILED AND ACTIVE

The second important thing to note from this passage is the fact that true confession is anything but superficial. The confession of Nehemiah and the people was not a general confession like what many people are apt to pray today, *“Lord, please forgive me of all my sins today, amen.”*

It was a very detail confession, which can be generally divided into three sections.

i) Acknowledging the Goodness and Mercy of God towards Us

The first section (vv.6-15) has to do with acknowledging the goodness and mercy of God towards them, from the time He chose their forefather Abraham out of the Ur of the Chaldees up to the time when He provided for their daily needs in the wilderness. It was a very detail account indeed.

Now, to some of us, this may be pretty unnecessary to include in a confession, but it actually served a very important purpose for them, namely by allowing them to understand the depth of their own wickedness. In other words, by putting what God has done for them side-by-side with what they had done against Him, it allowed them to appreciate the depth of their ungratefulness and sinfulness before Him.

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Today, we need to take heed to their example. It is exactly because many Christians today do not spend enough time during their confessions to first ponder over the mercy and goodness of God towards them that they often fail to have a deep and proper sense of their wickedness before God. As a result, it leads to a superficial confession, in which the heart is not adequately pained by the sorrow that ought to have been there.

This was not the kind of confession that the people in Nehemiah's time were interested in. They wanted God to impress their hearts about the severity of their sins, that they might truly understand the utter wickedness of their sins. Hence, they first recounted God's goodness upon them.

li) Acknowledging Our Sins against God

Having done so, the Levites moved on in the second section of their confession to recount the sins of the people against God. It begins from v.16 about their many sins against God during the wilderness journey all the way to v.31 when Jerusalem was finally destroyed by the Babylonians.

Why bother to list down all the details?

Frankly speaking, it would have been easier for them to avoid all these details and just summarized their sins with just a few words. But instead, they took pains to list down in detail all that they had done against the Lord because they were serious with their confession. They did not want to hide their sins under a few general statements. They wanted to list them out one by one so that these evil deeds could be confessed before the Lord and dealt with. It also ensured that

they understood what they themselves meant when they admitted before God that they had sinned against Him.

lii) Acknowledging the Need for Practical Reformation

Finally, we note from vv.32 – 38 that after acknowledging God's goodness upon them and how they had been ungrateful towards Him, the people determined to officially abandon their evil deeds and return to the ways of God. And they did so by entering into a solemn covenant with God. We read in verse 38, "**And because of all this we make a sure covenant, and write it; and our princes, Levites, and priests, seal unto it.**"

To have an idea of the issues that they covenanted before the Lord, just read from v.29 onwards. You will notice that every issue that needed to be rectified was dealt with in practical ways, and it involved sacrifices. In other words, the Jews' reformation was not merely a reformation in word, but a reformation in deed! It was not merely a reformation of convenience, but a reformation of sacrifice and obedience.

CONCLUSION

Today, if we desire the Lord to accept our confessions, and restored His divine favor upon us, then we must learn from Nehemiah and the people in his days and follow their examples. Only then can we expect the faithful God to hear us from heaven, and "...to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 Jn 1:9). Amen

Bro Calvin Loh

If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.

(2 Chronicles 7:14)