

Getting Clean Before God “The Path to Holiness” – Part I

The Five Basic Types of Prayers: Praise and Worship, Confession, Petition, Intercession and Meditation

Today we are going to learn about the second in the list of the five basic types of prayer. We are going to learn what the Bible says about *confession*.

Confession is the time in your prayer when you ask God to search your heart and cleanse you from any sin that would hinder your power to pray. Confession is how we grow and allow God to conform us to the image of Christ (Romans 8:29; 12:1-2). According to Romans 8:29, confession is how we grow to be more like Christ.

After the prayer of confession come the prayers of petition and intercession. It is very important that we get fully right with God before we start asking Him for things. James 5:16 reminds us of a crucial truth. *“The effective fervent prayer of the righteous avails much.”*

It is impossible to pray powerful, Spirit-led prayers if there is unconfessed sin between you and God. The psalmist said, *“Search me O God and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me and lead me in the way everlasting”* (Read Psalms 139:23-24). When it comes to confessing our sins, God calls for a thorough process and not a brief, casual ritual of prepackaged words.

The psalmist asked God to search him, to know his heart, to try him, and to know his thoughts. Have you ever been so bold as to ask God to search you, to know your heart, to try you and to know your thoughts?

It is very dangerous for believers to “assume” they are on praying ground. According to Jeremiah 17:9, it is ever so easy to ignore and minimize our own sins. In Jeremiah 17:9 the Bible says, *“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?”*

Many people have little prayer power because they fail to practice meaningful confession on a daily basis. Many Christians make the mistake of rushing through their confession time so they can get down to the business of telling God what they want Him to do for them.

If you want the true cleansing and filling of the Holy Spirit, you need to pray more than a shallow confession. A petty, superficial confession will not bring about true cleansing and the filling of the Holy Spirit that is needed to do the will of God.

The Great Shantung Revival

One of the most exciting and encouraging examples of thorough confession is the great revival that took place in the Shantung province of China in the early 1900's. A group of Southern Baptist missionaries were expending enormous efforts to love and minister to the Chinese people but there was very little response.

The story of what God did during what is called the [Shantung Revival](http://www.sermonindex.net), is told by one of the original missionaries, C.T. Culpepper at www.sermonindex.net.

Though the missionaries were faithfully praying, witnessing, preaching and doing works of service, the Chinese people showed almost no interest in the Good News of Jesus Christ

After consulting one another about the lackluster response of the Chinese people, the missionaries resolved to double their efforts—yet there was very little response and it seemed like the hearts of the Chinese people were made out of stone.

After many months, the missionaries became disheartened and began to ask God what was wrong. In spite of all their hard work and determination in ministry why was there so little spiritual power?

When God answered them the missionaries were surprised. God impressed upon them that “there was hidden and unconfessed sin in their lives and (as a result of this) they were not truly filled with the Holy Spirit.”

You may be wondering, “How could such dedicated, hard working missionaries—followers of Christ who left the creature comforts of home to serve in a foreign land—not be filled with the Holy Spirit?”

The missionaries came together and worked out a plan to go separately into places of private prayer and ask God to show them anything that might be quenching His Spirit. Each missionary took a copy of the Bible, a pad of paper and a pen to list their sins. They were to fully confess and forsake each sin.

There was a woman named Bertha Smith who sincerely thought she was close to God. Bertha expected to discover little she needed to confess. She later stated that when she allowed God to search her life, she saw many things that she had previously assumed were small and unimportant. But God led her to realize that she had lost the mighty fullness of the Holy Spirit because of “small” attitudes. You see, these “little” things were huge in the eyes of God who is holy.

Each missionary who got alone with God with pen, paper and a contrite heart had the same experience as Bertha Smith and after a significant time of spiritual searching, they came together and confessed several things to one another.

God began to work in their lives and in their midst. Some of the missionaries got up out of their seats at a church service and confessed that they were worthless, vile sinners who needed God’s grace and forgiveness.

After the service a few of the Chinese pastors who worked with the missionaries went up to the front of the church and began to embrace the missionaries. The Chinese pastors told the missionaries that their people felt for a long time that the American missionaries came over to their land thinking that they were better. But now, after the confessions, the Chinese felt as if they were all equal before God.

After this service something miraculous began to happen:

- 1.) God poured out His Spirit on the missionaries! They immediately sensed a joy and power they had never known.
- 2.) Their praying and preaching took on awesome new power.
- 3.) God sent a flood of the Holy Spirit upon the entire region. Suddenly, the Chinese people who were so unresponsive, now flooded into the Kingdom of God. Their cold hearts melted before the mighty conviction of God’s Spirit. Chinese people knocked on the doors of the missionaries in the wee hours of the morning because they couldn’t wait for the service begin in order to get saved.

What was the turning point in the ministry of the missionaries? The pivotal point has always been the same whenever a spiritual awakening begins in any area on the planet: When God's people are genuinely cleansed by deep confession of sins, *then* and only then does God fill them with mountain-moving power.

God's top priority in the life of every believer and in your life as well is to make you holy and sanctified in spirit, soul and body. Your daily time of confession is God's primary way of conforming you to the image of His Son, Jesus Christ (Roman 8:29).

Confession and repentance *the Bible way* are God's primary methods for transforming you, (Romans 12:1-2; 2 Timothy 3:16) If your confession is brief, inconsistent and shallow, then so will be your power as a Christian.

It had come to the missionary's attention that they had hidden, unconfessed sin in their lives and this sin was blocking the powerful and dynamic filling of the Holy Spirit. After each of the missionaries spent significant time in prayer, confessing and forsaking each sin, God poured out His Spirit upon them and an awesome spiritual awakening filled the entire region.

God's people were genuinely cleansed by way of deep confession and *then* God filled them with mountain-moving power. You've got to first clean out the cup before you pour something into it to drink. This is the way that God has sent every great revival and spiritual awakening in history.

I can say without reservation that the only way to obtain genuine spiritual fullness and power in your life is through the confession of sins. If these totally dedicated missionaries were not truly filled with God's Spirit and needed thorough confession, how much more do we?

What is confession?

The word "confess" comes from the Greek word that means, "to say the same thing." The word translated "confess" is the Greek word, *homologeō*.

logēō from which we get logos, means "to speak." The other part, *homo*, means "the same." So to confess our sin, *homologeō*, is simply to say the same thing about our sin that God is saying. When confessing, the Christian says the same thing that God says about their behavior.

In China there was a woman with a sack of dirty clothes to be washed. This woman had taken her sack of dirty clothes to the riverside with the purpose of washing them. But she was ashamed to open it for fear someone would see how dirty her clothes were; so she just threw the whole bag into the water, plunged it up and down several times, and then took it back home.

A lot of people are like that woman. They have many sins that need to be cleansed, but they are not willing to bring them out and confess them one by one. They just say, "Lord, forgive me" and cover up all their sins, their thefts, and their lies, and their jealousies, and their hatred. But your sins must be brought out and confessed, and only then can they be cleansed.

As a tool to help us in examine our lives there are five basic categories we can work through when examining our lives and confessing our sins. We are going to look at three of these categories today and save the other two categories for the next time.

First Category: Sins of Thoughts and Attitudes

Sin begins in the realm of our thoughts and attitudes. Jesus said, “*For out of the heart proceeds evil thoughts...*” (Matthew 15:19). In 2 Corinthians 10:5, we are commanded to “*take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.*”

Ask God to reveal any pattern of attitude or thought that is sinful. Immediately confess and forsake these sins of the heart.

Ask yourself—

- Are there any unclean or lustful thoughts that are connected with earthly pursuits?
- Are there any thoughts of anger or bitterness?
- Are there any unloving thoughts?
- Are there any thoughts of fear or doubt?
- Are there any attitudes of pride (“I’m the best”)?
- Are there any attitudes of prejudice? (I’m better?)
- Are there any attitudes of lukewarmness toward God? (“God is not that important to me”)?

If you answered “yes” to any of these questions, immediately confess them and ask God to help you forsake them.

Second Category: Sins of Speech

God’s Word is clear about the enormous importance of our speech. Matthew 12:36 states, “*But I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment.*” James 3:10 says, “*Out of the same mouth proceeds blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be.*”

Be specific in confessing your sins of speech. Be aware of the fact that God will lead you to seek forgiveness from people you have hurt with your words.

Let’s look at a list of some of the sins of speech. Go through this list; let God show you the areas that need work. Record what God says to you. If God gives you others sins of speech, write them down.

- Course or profane words _____
- Gossip _____
- Slander _____
- Unkind or unloving words to or about another _____
- Overly critical speech _____
- Exaggerations or untruths _____
- Speaking when you should be quiet _____
- Others _____

Go through this list several times and pray that God shows you how to eliminate sins of speech from your life.

Third Category: Sins of Relationship

Perhaps the most common place we grieve the Holy Spirit's power in our life is found our relationships.

Sins of relationship generally fall in five major areas:

1.) People you have hurt or offended.

Jesus was emphatic about the importance of getting right with those you have offended. In Matthew 5:23-24 he said, *“Don't approach God until you first get right with those you have offended!”*

Many Christians don't have any power because they have ignored this foundational command.

The other day on the way home from work I was on my way to the church and a driver just about cut me off as I was headed north on Rolling Road toward Security Blvd. Without thinking I honked my horn at the car and “lasered” him with my high beams. All of a sudden three things went through my mind:

First, I thought, *“What if he throws his brakes and jumps out of his car with a gun?”*

My second thought was, *“What if he sees me turn into the church parking lot; what kind of testimony for Christ is that?”*

My third thought was, *“He's probably just as scared of me as I am scared of him!”*

When you and I sin against someone and an offense is taken, we change the way we relate to God and the person we offended. On a vertical plane, we change the way we relate to God and on a horizontal plane, we change the way we relate to our fellowman.

When we sin against God, we grieve Him and quench His power in our life. When we sin against people we build up a way between ourselves and the person we've offended. Many times we steer clear of that person and often times they make up their minds to have nothing to do with us.

Ask God to search your heart as it pertains to people you have hurt and offended. When God reveals people to you, resolve to go to them and ask their forgiveness. In Matthew 5:23 Jesus says to do this.

Don't just say, *“I'm sorry;”* that could mean several things—you are sorry they got hurt, you are sorry you got caught; you feel sorry because you did something wrong. Jesus wants us to go to people we've hurt not to tell them how we feel but to get forgiven for the sin we've committed against them.

The Five A's of Confession¹

We must confess our wrongs in a way that demonstrates that we are taking full responsibility for our contribution to a conflict.

- ***Admit*** what you did wrong.
- ***Apologize*** for how your choice affected the other person.
- ***Accept*** the consequences.

¹ Taken from www.peacemaker.net

- *Ask* for forgiveness.
- *Alter* your choice in the future.

Don't be tricked by the devil to think that you have failed if they refuse to forgive you. Your responsibility is to do your part in a humble and loving manner. How they respond is their responsibility.

Please understand that so-called "little rifts" between Christians can easily quench God's Spirit for the whole church! When Achan took the things that were to be devoted to God, all of Israel suffered for it.

Can you think of someone you may have hurt or offended? What did you do about the situation?

2.) *Bitter or Holding Grudges*

The first sin of relationship had to do with addressing a person who could possibly be holding a grudge against you for something you did to him. The second sin of relationship has to do with *you holding a grudge* against someone else.

In Matthew 6:14-15, Jesus made a statement of enormous importance. "*For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*" Jesus says we must forgive people "*from the heart.*"

Remember that forgiveness is a choice, not a feeling. Are you bitter or holding grudges against people who have offended you?

Ask God to search your heart and reveal any patterns of bitterness or unforgiveness against friends, family members, or even against God.

As God searches your heart, make a list of (friends, family members, church members, and God) that you may have bitterness toward or hold a grudge against. Confess your sin of bitterness or your sin of holding a grudge. Ask God to give you the power to decide to forgive.

Forgiveness is a choice, not a feeling. You must, by the power of God, choose to forgive the person who offended you.

Four Promises of Forgiveness²

We learn to forgive one another in a way that models the forgiveness we have received from God through the Gospel of Jesus Christ:

1. I promise I will think good thoughts about you and do good for you.
2. I promise I will not bring up this situation and use it against you.
3. I promise I will not talk to others about what you did.
4. I promise I will be friends with you again.

These promises may be summarized in a poem that is so easy a four-year old can memorize it:

- Good thought
- Hurt you not

² Taken from www.peacemakers.net

- Gossip never
- Friends forever

3.) *Improper Relationships*

Another Sin of Relationship that can quench the power of God in your life is having an *improper relationship*. An improper relationship could be anything from adultery and fornication to simply being inappropriately close to someone.

Don't try to rationalize or defend a relationship you know is improper.

"It's just a working relationship"

"We are in luv.."

"She shows me the respect I ain't getting at home."

"He listens to me and understands me."

"We going to get married but are just waiting until his divorce comes through."

Improper relationships involve many things besides physical immorality. I've heard people rationalize their sin, *"There's nothing wrong with a little flirtation every now and then. I was told you can look just as you don't touch."*

Christians also rationalize their improper relationships...

"He/she needs me"

"We minister together"

"We are Christians; the Lord is protecting us and blessing us"

Are you involved in any improper relationships? Ask God to show you any relationships that are improper or out of balance. Ask God what steps He wants you to take to resolve this relationship.

So far we've looked at the Sins of Relationship that relate to (1) People you have hurt or offended, (2) Harboring bitterness or holding grudges and (3) Having improper relationships.

4.) *Neglecting regular fellowship and meaningful service through your Church*

According to Hebrews 10:25, it is a major sin to neglect regular fellowship and worship with the body of Christ. The writer says, *"Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more, as you see the day approaching."*

God lets us know the importance of *body life* in 1 Corinthians chapters 12-14. In these chapters we are told that believers are given spiritual gifts that are to be used to build up each other.

The truth in these chapters also let us know that all believers are to stay in genuine fellowship and close relationship with a local congregation. Today it seems many want to sit and be served by others but few want to get up and serve others.

Today, more and more people are *church shopping*. They want to know what they can get out of church. Churches are one more consumer commodity. Worship services are not a place for us to serve God and neighbor but a place where people expect to purchase the best: inspiring worship, good music,

moving sermons, quality child care. As if people are purchasing God ignoring the fact that He has already purchased us.

In seeking a church, our primary prayer should not be “*What can this church do for me?*” but “*What can I do for this church?*” Some Christians are not filled with the Holy Spirit because they are neglecting regular fellowship and meaningful service in the local church.

Do you think the Holy Spirit is going to waste His power on someone that refuses to serve God in the church? It is a major sin not to be involved in consistent giving and service through a local body of believers.

Another common form of this sin is the tendency to drift from church to church trying to find the “perfect church.”

~ The Perfect Church

I think that I shall never see
A Church that’s all it ought to be:
A Church whose members never stray
Beyond the Strait and Narrow Way:

A Church that has no empty pews,
Whose Pastor never has the blues,
A Church whose Deacons always deak,
And none is proud, and all are meek:

Where gossips never peddle lies,
Or make complaints or criticize;
Where all are always sweet and kind,
And all to other’s faults are blind.

Such perfect Churches there may be,
But none of them are known to me.
But still, we’ll work, and pray and plan,
To make our own the best we can.

—*Selected*

Have you neglected regular fellowship and meaningful service through your church? Ask God to search your life and reveal ways you are neglecting fellowship and service in the local body of Christ.

A Final Word About Confession

As I said before when we looked at the basic prayer type of Praise and Worship, don’t be overwhelmed or discouraged with this teaching. I am not saying that you must meticulously go through all of these sins categories every time you pray, but you should at least be aware of key categories and Scriptures.

You may simply want to ask God if there is sin in each category and then quietly reflect for a few moments. Some days you may be led to focus only on one or two categories.

Above all, seek to be spontaneous and sensitive to God’s Spirit. Remember, this is a personal relationship with God, not a formula!

I do warn you of one potential danger. Be careful to avoid confession that does not lead to immediate repentance. When you become aware of a sin, be sure to take action to remove it. True confession must involve repentance, or it is not genuine! Sin must be confessed and forsaken:

Proverbs 28:13 says, *“He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, But he who confesses and forsakes them will find compassion.”*

Each day after your time of thorough confession, ask God to fill you with the Holy Spirit and empower you for Spirit-anointed prayer.

KEY POINTS SUMMARY – The Biblical Path to a Powerful Prayer Life

We must never forget that God will not hear us if there is unconfessed sin in our life (Psalm 66:18).

Psalm 66:18 says, *“If I regard wickedness in my heart, The Lord will not hear...”* In our series on the New Testament book of 1 John we learned that sin squelches the confidence we have in God when it comes to Him answering our prayers. (1 John 3:21-22)

MARK THIS WELL! This is serious stuff—The depth and power of your prayer life will never be greater than the depth of your daily confession and cleansing.

The daily time of confession is God’s primary way of conforming you to the image of Christ. Scripture-based confession and repentance are God’s primary method for transforming you. (Romans 12:1-2; 2 Timothy 3:16).

The sad truth is, most believers have gotten so accustomed to living without God’s fullness, and we have actually forgotten what it is like to be biblically filled with the Holy Spirit. It is because we fail to make serious time to allow God to truly cleanse us and fill us on a daily basis!

No one can stay truly cleansed and full of God’s Spirit without consistent time in thorough confession.