

PRAYER UNWRAPPED - confession

Welcome to our second session unwrapping prayer. We are looking at the word ACTS - a c t s - a word formed from the first letters of the four components of prayer - adoration, confession, thanksgiving, supplication. Last month we talked about adoration. Today it is the turn of confession.

What does confession mean? It means saying sorry about something and also feeling sorry inside. How do we feel before we confess something? We feel bad because we feel guilty. And how do we feel after we have confessed it? Much better! As if a weight has been lifted from our shoulders.

Sing with me. This is a Victorian hymn, written towards the end of the 19th century. It says it all.

Dear Lord and father of mankind, forgive our foolish ways. Re-clothe us in our rightful mind, in purer lives thy service find, in deeper reverence praise, in deeper reverence praise.

So why should we say sorry to God? I will explain.

God made us totally good, but there is bad in the world because of the fallen angel Lucifer, sometimes called Satan, sometimes called the devil. He was a beautiful angel. But he became proud and God threw him out of heaven.

The first people were Adam and Eve and they did something bad. They are famous for doing it. You know. Eating the apple etc. Now, the problem is that God is perfect and does not want to have anyone who is bad near him. So he sent Jesus to put things right. Jesus is sometimes called "the second Adam". Whereas Adam got it wrong, Jesus got it right. If we follow Jesus, who is perfect, then we, who are not perfect, can be close to God. But to do that, we have to confess to God what we have done wrong, say sorry, and try to change. Then we can be with God forever. We can be with him now and after we die.

What sort of things should we confess to God? In the Confession that we sometimes say in church, it says that we confess our sins in thought, word and deed. Bad thoughts, bad things we say and bad things we do. We can't help bad thoughts popping into our heads. We can stop them staying there though, and if we keep control of our tongues we can stop the bad thoughts turning into words. We can definitely stop them turning into deeds, or actions.

So will God forgive us? Yes he will but he expects us to forgive each other too. What right do we have to expect God to forgive us if we don't forgive others? As it says in the Lord's Prayer, "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us". Also, one of the Beatitudes, which Jesus preached in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew, chapter 5 says "Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy". Same idea.

One place in the Bible where there is a lot of confession is in the psalms written by David. Psalm 51 is wonderful. David wrote it after he had committed adultery with Bathsheba. If you feel bad about something, try saying psalm 51 to God. It will make you feel better. Here is one bit of it.

"Create in me a pure heart, oh God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me."

A pure heart would be quite something. Just think what the world would be like if we all had pure hearts! No crime, for a start! “Steadfast” means constant and faithful.

“Create a constant and faithful spirit within me.”

One of the most well –known examples of someone who confessed his sin, in this case not to God but to his earthly father, was the prodigal son. As most of us know, like all parables this is a metaphor. Jesus uses ideas and situations we can easily understand to teach us truths about God and heaven. The son has gone off and wasted his inheritance, money given to him by his father. And he comes home and confesses to his father,

“Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.”

The thing to note about the father’s reaction is his total joy, killing the fatted or fattened calf, etc. You could read this parable in Luke, chapter 15. And what does it teach us? God is ecstatic when we open our hearts and confess to him. So we need not be afraid.

So how should we go about confessing our sins? Well, it is always a good idea to spend some time in silence, so that we can remember the things that we might have done wrong. If we listen to God he will remind us of them. And it is a good idea to do this fairly regularly because things build up pretty fast and sin makes a block between us and God.

Pray with me.

Dear God

Please help me to think of something that I should confess to you.

After a moment of silence, tell God something that comes to mind.

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I am sorry for that.

Please help me not to think bad thoughts. As soon as I think them, please help me to throw them into the fire and replace them with loving, kind, useful thoughts.

Please help me not to say bad things. May the words that come out of my mouth be kind.

Above all, please help me not do things that hurt you or other people or myself.

Amen