

PUBLIC CONFESSION - IS IT SCRIPTURAL?

The extent or the limitations of public confession have not been left in the realm of uncertainty or doubt in God's word. The Bible has unequivocally established the principal and the rules for public confession. Amongst brethren there should be no disagreement upon a question which is not complex nor obscure. But many times there is disagreement and it is due to lack of study and neglect, of the subject as well as incompetent and unsound teaching and reasoning. The danger inherent in not obeying God's instructions upon public confession could do irreparable harm to the souls of all Christians. To not confess publically and obtain public forgiveness could mean that the church or possibly a good portion of it could be in outright rebellion, ignorantly or otherwise, against the commands of God. So it behooves all of us to study and to ascertain God's will of this important matter that we might obey and please Him in the application of His commands rather than attempting to carry out our own will without too much study of subject.

It would be profitable at this time before going into the teachings upon public confession to digress for a few paragraphs to write somethings about instruction and our attitude towards it. We must have instructors, this is a part of God's word. That we can depend, rely and trust them, goes without question. To search the scriptures to see if the things said are so is also a part of our duty. To teach that the instructor does not know the word, that he could never know all of it is to plant the seed of doubt in the breast of those who must be taught. No man knows ALL the Bible. However, teachers can teach that which they do know. A competent and conscientious teacher would try to the best of his ability to confirm what he teaches at all times and he need not be in much doubt as there are many ways to be sure. God says "Prove all things". And if we cannot prove it we musn't teach it. Teachers make mistakes but usually it is in the application rather than in the substance.

A good way to study the scriptures is to keep in mind that each passage of scripture, whether precept or example must be interpreted in the light of WHATEVER AND ALL else that God has said on the theme and ALL must agree. Those who are babes will of course need to trust his or her teacher because it would be impossible for those unlearned in the scriptures to properly equate a subject without help. When one is instructed it is good to have it proven but one must be assured that the one being taught takes the proof. When it's proven, ACCEPT IT. Don't argue with the word of God. We must have a thorough knowledge of the scriptures to be a good instructor and the unlearned must be cautious in jumping to conclusions before all scriptures necessary to prove a subject are taught. An example which violates any precept is not an approved example. For instance we put all necessary scriptures together on a given subject and they will not contradict but will agree with each other. Then we can know whether the instructor or ourselves are right or wrong.

God said He would confound the wise and the Bible is so written that the wisest man on earth could not know it unless he was a Christian. Christians are taught by the Holy Spirit and as the world does not have the Holy Spirit they cannot comprehend the word of God. God says in 1st Cor. 1:27 "For God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty. And the base things of the world and things which are despised, God hath chosen, yea, and things which are not to bring to nought things that are". This gives us one of the reasons that the wisdom of men cannot penetrate the profound wisdom of God's word.

Again we read 1st Cor. 1:10 to 16 and I quote only verses 12 & 13, "Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the HOLY SPIRIT teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual." This verse fits with Rom. 8:7 "Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither can be."

These verses give us an idea of why the carnal or worldly mind cannot understand the word of God. The Christian is greatly blessed by being privileged in knowing and understanding what the will of God is. This of course means that we also have a greater responsibility because of this and we must therefore learn to study and to rightly divide the word of God so that we can become teachers that we might do our part in converting the world to Christ. As we receive instruction and as we study to grow thereby we will be able to penetrate some of the great and profound lessons which are in the Bible. This is right and good and profitable. In Pro. 1:3-5 we read, "To receive the instruction of wisdom, justice and judgement and equity. To give subtilty to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion. A WISE man will hear and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels."

From the above we learn the wise amongst us receive instruction from their counselors and teachers. Our attitude in receiving instruction and towards the instructor is very important. We must heed and acquire knowledge from those who instruct us. To do otherwise is not to learn and we will disobey our Lord also. In Pro 1:7 we read "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; but fools despise wisdom and instruction." Pro 5:12-15 teaches us to heed instruction and to learn thereby, this is the attitude of the wise in the church. Not to do so could be fatal to our hope of heaven. Jer 17:23 gives us a picture of God's people who were not wise, "But they obeyed not, neither inclined their ear, but made their neck stiff that they might not hear nor receive instruction."

I bring these verses of scripture from the word of God because we sometimes have the wrong attitude towards receiving instruction. It is not wrong to know the Bible, to acquire wisdom in God's word, to be able to counsel and instruct and teach those who are not learned in the Bible. But sometimes it would seem that the attitude of some is that if you have knowledge (something which we are commanded to add, and without it we can never have heaven) it is a display of pride of the instructor or that he can't know everything therefore we don't trust anything taught. This is the wrong attitude and those with this attitude will never understand and be able to teach the meat of God's word.

2Tim 4:1-4 verse 3 reads "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers having itching ears; and they shall ~~be turned~~ turn away their ears from the truth and shall be turned into fables." So to refuse instruction is liable to lead to the attitude such as the above verse describes. Today the church is going thru a mammoth apostasy and the authority of the Bible is being ignored as more and more of the members and leaders of the church follow the tradition and dictates of men rather than God. So it is especially important

today to get a sound foundation so that we will not be "carried about with every wind of doctrine" but that we will study the scriptures, be settled on them, make a stand on what we know to be the truth and then contend and fight for it if necessary. If we couldn't know the truth, and agree on the truth, then it would have been foolish for God to have commanded for us "to know the truth" and to "stand on it". Read Eph 4:13-16 & Eph 6:10-18. These verses prove that we can know the truth and we can all come into unity on it.

"Hereby we do know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments." So instructors can have knowledge and they can, if they live Godly lives and study to be approved of God, be trusted to teach the truth "Prove all things" so it is good to demand proof of all that is taught in case one is in doubt.

I believe that one of the most significant reasons for the apostasy of the church today is because the confessing of sins one to another has been neglected and public confession before the church when a member has sinned publically, has been discouraged if not in many instances almost completely discontinued. The result, of course, is a group of God's people, who because of their sins which have not been forgiven have grieved the Holy Spirit, resisted the Holy Spirit and God's blessings have been withheld until such time as His word and His commands are obeyed.

Under these forlorn spiritual conditions prayers are not heard, the church retrogresses, the members because of their spiritual condition, lack zeal and when this is lacking most of the time the study of the word of God is discontinued, and eventually when false teaching is brought in, ignorance of the word of God, makes the members of the church easy prey for those who are leading the church into apostasy. This sad spiritual condition stems from the lack of God's people cleansing themselves of public sins by public confession of those sins. We know the ultimate result of disobedience is to fall away.

But to return to our lesson. We have learned the method by which we are able to rightly interpret the word of God. We learn also that the Bible is not written like any other book, it is different from any which has ever been written. Isa 28:10-12 explains this complex uncomformable method which confounds the wise by saying "For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little and there a little. To whom He said, This is the rest where with ye may cause the weary to rest; and this is the refreshing; yet they would not hear." Read also the 9th verse. We must and can come into an accord upon the word of God. It maybe complex but it is not obscure, it may confound the wise but the Christian has the key which opens the understanding and give us the necessary knowledge of truth. We should deem this a great privilege and the greatest of blessings.

Most of the time it takes more than one scripture to make a lesson or ascertain the truth upon a subject. Sometimes it takes a fund of knowledge and many scriptures and hours of study to learn what we must know about the word of God upon a subject such as public confession. But we would have to twist and wrest the word of God to fail to get the teaching and establish the principle of public confession.

There are three ways to determine the exegesis of a scripture or scriptures. First, we have the direct command, such as in Acts 2:38 "Repent and be Baptized everyone of you", and 1st Cor 5:10 "I wrote you in my epistle

not to keep company with fornicators". Again in Rom 16:17, "Now I entreat ^{be ye} you brethren mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine ^{ye} have learned; and AVOID THEM." These verses of scriptures are all direct commands and rarely will we have any trouble understanding them, however, we have lots of trouble in the church in obeying them.

Second, the way to determine the exegesis of a scripture is by "example". One of the better known verses in this respect is Acts 20:7 "And upon the 1st day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow." We do not have a direct command to eat unleavened bread, we have the example and also the same is true in ~~xx~~ respect to drinking the fruit of the vine. Lke 22:26-29. Also 1st Cor 10:16 and 1st Cor 11:23-34.

Third, we have "necessary inference" and this is the method which causes trouble for some members. When we come to a scripture which demands a verse which is not a direct command nor an example but rather "necessary inference" it usually takes more than a casual knowledge of the Bible to convince or convict those whom we are teaching by this method. But by deductive and sometimes inductive reasoning we are able to argue the point and to ascertain the correct exegesis of the subject under consideration. For instance there is a command to sing, but none that says to sing upon the 1st day of the week. Therefore we have to use a necessary inference to prove that we sing upon the 1st day of the week. We do this by proving that the Bible commands Christians "to sing" Col 3:16 reads "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and ~~hymns~~ and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." We are all gathered together on the 1st day of the week, it is the only assembly which God has commanded, so if we are to sing one to another and teach and admonish one another by this method then the necessary inference must be on the 1st day of the week when all are together would be the proper time.

Eph 5:19 bears this same conclusion out also by necessary inference. "Speaking to yourselves (or to one another) in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord. In Matt 26:19-20 teaches us of the institution of the Lord's Supper and we find that after they had eaten of the bread and drunk from the cup verse 30 reads "And when they had sung an hymn they went out unto the mount of olives." The necessary inference is that after partaking of the Supper with wherein He tells them He will not drink with them again "until in the Kingdom" (the kingdom is the church) that they sang a hymn. We know that we partake of the Lord's Supper only on the 1st day of the week so the necessary inference is that it would be right and proper to sing upon the day we take the Lord's Supper. This could also be used as an example but it fits better into the category of "necessary inference."

There are many other examples of all three methods. One of them to be considered is baptism which is taught throughout the New Testament. Many times when people are baptized, for instance in Acts 16:27-33 we are told of a group of people who were baptized but not one word about "remission of sins." This is also true of the passages of scripture from Acts 8:26-39 where a man was baptized but nothing said about remission of sins. However, the necessary inference is that because Acts 2:38 & Acts 22:16 tells us the reason for baptism is to remit sins or to wash away sins, that these people were also

taught the gospel and were baptized for the same reason all others have been baptized down thru the ages.

These are some of the simpler examples of the three methods by which we come to the truth of the word of God. There are many more and when we come to more difficult subjects the method does not change but one must have a greater knowledge of the Bible to substantiate our stand upon other subjects. Therefore in the study of "public confession" we must also be willing to accept either the direct command, the example or the necessary inference. Any one of these or all of them will give us the true exegesis of any subject which we may want to ascertain the truth about. However, when any of these methods are used and they agree with each other then we must of necessity, if we hope to progress in our learning, accept them.

Isaiah said, "come let us reason together." In all study and acquiring of knowledge, reasoning and logic must be used. To eliminate this from our Bible study would be fatal to our gaining knowledge. Some will not reason and therefore cannot learn. This is what Jesus meant when He said in Jhn 8:43 "Why do you not understand my speech? even because ye cannot hear my word." Peter said "As newborn babes desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby." Without a determination and will to learn the word of God we will never gain knowledge. It keeps us studying and then studying some more to learn the will of God that we might know better how to please Him. This is another very vital reason for the unconverted and lackadaisical attitude of many members of the church and is that which causes the church to lack zeal and die.

We have two methods of reasoning. One is called "deduction" and the other "induction". Both are necessary in studying and in acquiring a sound and working knowledge of the word of God. Deductive reasoning is the method whereby we gather facts by reasoning or logic. Induction is reasoning from the accepted facts. Sometimes this would be similar to necessary inference. No one can understand the Bible without reasoning, and it is something we learn to do. As has been pointed out there is not always a direct command or an example and inductive reasoning leads to truth just as surely as direct command and example. Only this way can truth prevail. This is why we must receive instruction until such time as we are capable of using the weapons which God has given us so that we might better understand His word.

One of the reasons there is so much disagreement among church members over scriptures is greatly due to the fact that reasoning hasn't been used when approaching a subject for understanding. For instance to use Matt 18:15 as a rule for public confession would be a misuse of these verses. We can see this but nevertheless it is a greatly misused passage of scripture. Again to use Acts 8:9-24 to instruct upon public confession would be to use scriptures or a lesson which was not intended to teach upon that particular phase of sin at all. When misused there will be an argument and misunderstanding, but when deductive and/or inductive reasoning is used and the fallacy of such an interpretation shown (and one which can be proven false) then we can come into an accord. We must acquire knowledge, a little here and a little there, precept upon precept, and we don't find it all in one place. We sometime must diligently search for it.

Because there seems to be some misunderstanding upon the application of Acts 8:9-24 and it has been used to prove that we do not need to make public confession after publically sinning but "repent therefore of this thy wickedness and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee" We thought it should be brought out in this lesson and rightly explained as taught. In the first place if this is a public sin, then it must of necessity be publically confessed before forgiveness can be given. But because it does not teach us that Simon asked for forgiveness publically does not mean that (if it was a public sin) he did not. As said before each passage of scripture whether precept or example, must be interpreted in the light of ALL else that God has said on the subject, and ALL must agree. When Philip baptized the eunuch in Acts 8:38 it does not say he was baptized "for the remission of sins" but by gathering ALL scriptures on baptism we KNOW that if he was baptized scripturally then Philip must of necessity have taught and baptized him for the remission of sins.

Therefore the same rule of logic must be applied upon the scriptures in Acts 8:9-24. First we do not know that Simon ever repented of his wickedness and got forgiveness. Peter was not trying to teach Simon on public confession so these scriptures would not be a part of deductive or inductive reasoning upon that particular subject. If Simon did repent he owed an apology only to the TWO apostles because he could only have sinned by asking them for the power to be able to lay hands on others and give them gifts because there were only two apostles at Samaria. By applying Matt 5:23 & 24 to this incident we find that he would have had to ask forgiveness from Peter and John before getting forgiveness from God. However, if one should assume that the sin was committed before the multitude Simon would of necessity have had to ask forgiveness of all those who witnessed his wicked deed. By the simple method of deductive reasoning we can come to this conclusion and know that we are scripturally right; that if the sin was done only to Peter and John and did not involve the multitude then Simon must ask their forgiveness to get forgiveness from them and God, and if it included more than these two, then however more there were involved the same procedure would have to be taken to carry out Matt 5:23 & 24 and Matt 18:15.

These verses cannot be used to disprove or to prove public confession anymore than Matt 18:15 can be applied to prove how every brother should be treated when he has sinned. We must get all scriptures together and ascertain the truth from an examination and reasoning of all not just a few. I'm amazed and disheartened to see brethren misusing these verses and discouraging public confession by wrong application of them. Long ago God said in Hosea 4:6 "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge; because thou has rejected knowledge I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me; seeing thou hast forgotten the law of God, I will also forget thy children". The principle of confession whether public or involving one, two or three or more, or private is that one must repent and ask forgiveness before forgiveness can be given. Like 17:3 & 4, Matt 5:23 & 24 sets the principle for public confession, and by simple deduction we reason that if it is necessary to make oneself right with one brother who has offended or vice-versa, then if it is two brethren, or three or 10 I must confess to those who have been offended or have offended; and of course this deduction leads us to the natural and

scriptural conclusion that if I sin against the congregation I must publically confess my sin or sins before them after repenting of them and ask forgiveness. 1st Cor 11:24-34 teaches us to examine ourselves before partaking of the Lord's Supper and if we are not clean we drink damnation to ourselves.

Today the church is weak, sickly and asleep, (1st Cor 11:30) and has gone off into apostasy mainly because they refused to publically confess their sins and have not been taught properly on the verse "confess your faults ONE TO ANOTHER." Therefore the prayers of many have not been heard, many drink to damnation, and as said before they become easy prey for the wicked and false teachers amongst us.

In Lke 17:3 & 4 we read "Take heed to yourselves, if thy brother trespass against thee; rebuke him; and IF HE REPENT, forgive him." How would we know he had repented if he did not SAY SO. By the same reasoning if we publically sin how can the church forgive unless we confess our sins and let them know we have repented of them. But let us read the 4th verse, "And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day and seven times in a day TURN AGAIN TO THEE SAYING, I repent; thou shalt forgive him." The necessary inference is that if I must tell my sin or sins to my brother and ask forgiveness then we must, if public sin has been committed, confess our sins to all the congregation. To say "I have sinned" is not enough as I will prove later on. The sin must be confessed when repented of, we must SAY it. Some in the congregation might know of more than one public sin that a member has committed and if one publically repents and does not confess the sins the brethren would not know whether he had asked forgiveness for only one or all. Therefore this proves that the sin itself must be confessed.

1st Cor 5:1-8 is as clear as it can be as to the public nature of the sin of the fornicator. If it wasn't before Paul's letter was read to the congregation it surely was AFTER it was made public when the CHURCH WAS GATHERED TOGETHER. We might digress just to say that we find also a lesson about discipline in the church, IT WAS NOT ADMINISTERED BY JUST A FEW OR BY JUST THE ELDERS, but the WHOLE congregation was involved and this is the scriptural method which God has ordained for public discipline but one which is rarely used. Therefore the church sins, and those responsible for deciding to use a method of public discipline which cannot be found in the Bible, will be held responsible. The church is weakened by the arrogant and often defiant attitude of those responsible for the lack of scriptural discipline amongst the members of the church.

But to get back to the sin of the fornicator we find he did not sin against one brother more than another, but he sinned against all. Therefore he would owe a confession of his sin and repentance of it before all of the congregation before he could be forgiven. While there is no record of this public confession we can deduct and the necessary inference is that as the sin was public so must the repentance and confession of it be public. We use the principle from Matt 5:23 & 24 & Lke 17:3 & 4 to prove this point inasmuch as we have no record of the confession of the fornicator. However, in 2nd Cor 2:1-10 Paul admonishes some of the Corinthian brethren of their lack of forgiveness towards their once erring brother and asks them to forgive and comfort him. Paul would not have admonished them to commit a sin by forgiving

a brother before he had repented and publically confessed his sin, and he would have had to publically confessed because the congregation knew of it. Paul would have violated the principle in Lke 17:3 & 4 as well as Matt 5:23 & 24 if he had asked them to continue fellowship with an unrepentant sinner. We know the congregation took part in the disciplining of the fornicator, by the same process of reasoning from that fact we know that if they were ~~made~~ ~~aware~~ ~~by~~ ~~the~~ ALL to forgive him they could not do so until all were made ~~wa~~ aware by the fornicator's public confession that he had repented. So by the method of necessary inference we come into the truth of public discipline and public confession and forgiveness.

Again we read from Gal 2:11-14 and gather the same lesson from the process of necessary inference. In these verses Paul publically rebuked Peter for a public sin which involved many in the church and had influenced others to commit the same sin. I might say here that I do not find the slightest hint or any inference that Paul took Peter aside and talked or pleaded with him about this very public sin. But because it was publically known, as was the fornicator's discussed in the paragraphs preceding this one, the matter was taken in hand immediately and exposed the guilty as well as exposed the sin. There was nothing to hide, the harm was done and the congregation aware of the matter and the quicker the matter disposed of the better for the congregation. He didn't use a shush-shush policy so common amongst the Brethren today. He didn't think it wrong to expose Peter and he didn't try to keep from hurting his feelings nor did he think it would harm the church if the public rebuking was administered to a brother as prominent as Peter. This is our thinking on matters of this kind today in many instances and is as wrong as trying to keep brethren from publically confessing their public sins "because it might hurt the church." It strengthens the church and makes weak members fear, which is good and healthy for all. When a public matter is exposed it keeps gossip down as well as speculation and false stories from being told.

In the passages of scripture above we have no record of Peter publically standing before the congregation and repenting and confessing his wrong and asking for forgiveness. However, if Peter believed and obeyed the principle in Lke 17:3 & 4 and Matt 5:23 & 24 he must have done what we know the fornicator must have done, he publically confessed his sin before all the congregation. If he didn't how could they know he repented and if he didn't they could not forgive him, Lke 17:3&4. The necessary inference is drawn from the principle established by other scriptures which I have used again and again to prove the point, public confession of sin done, must be confessed before the congregation, "when they are gathered together." I might say here that the only gathering together of all the church ordained by God, is the 1st day of the week. The necessary inference is that when Paul commanded the Corinthian brethren to take care of the public sin of the fornicator "when they were gathered together" or assembled together, it must of necessity mean the 1st day. What better time for the whole congregation to be together than the first day of the week. What better time to admonish them, to preach to them, to rebuke them for their carelessness in allowing the fornicator to continue in his wickedness, than when all the church was assembled together.

A principle is a fundamental truth or doctrine; settled rule or law. God's

principles are immutable, never changed. "My word is settled in heaven." For instance we do not follow the 10 commandments but the principles are still used. The principle that man shall not shed the blood of man is established in Gen. 9:6. "Whoso sheddeth man's blood by man shall his blood be shed." "Vengeance is mine, sayeth the Lord." We are commanded to "love our enemies, not kill them." Rev. 13:10 confirms the principle in Gen. 9:6, "He that killeth with the sword must be killed with the sword. Christ teaches us "to love our enemies" not to kill them. "Vengeance is mine sayeth the Lord."

The principle of marriage and divorce is established in the Old Testament. The principle that unless one repented and rectified his sins there was no forgiveness is taught in Ezekiel 14:1 to 11. Verse 6 reads, "Repent and turn yourselves from your idols: and turn away your faces from all your abominations." Matt. 3:8 reads "Bring therefore fruits worthy of repentance." Also the principle of repenting and publically confessing sins is established in the Old Testament, therefore it is binding on us today. I will give these on another page. Some excuse themselves from carrying out the will of the Lord by saying it is not good for the church to expose the sins of the members before the church. But God has established the principle and we dare not break it lest we ourselves sin and lose our souls. If it is a public sin then we must of necessity publically expose (confess the sin) to get forgiveness from God. How many of His children today are covered with sin because they have never carried out the will of God in this respect. Whether by ignorance, weakness, or lack of courage or unscriptural teaching upon the matter, or whatever the excuse we will not be saved on the judgement day if our sins are not rectified and confessed when we are guilty of public sin.

One might well ask what is the difference between public sins and private sins and how can I differentiate between the two? The lesson on "Discipline in the church" established the difference between the two very clearly and one will not have too much trouble, if we study the word of God to differentiate between the two. God makes all things manifest. As we learn the commandments, we learn to walk in them.

This takes time, but of one thing I'm sure that if we study and try to live by God's word and we are in error or need more light to walk thereby, God will reveal it to us thru His word. (Phil. 3:15)

For instance we have all been taught it is a sin to miss the assembling of ourselves upon the first day of the week. We are cognizant of the fact this is a public sin, for if it is a sin it is not against one but against all. When a member of the church is not present upon the Lord's day everyone should be concerned, whether the one is ill or needs help or whether it is thru weakness or ignorance or carelessness, and should immediately take steps to ascertain the reason for the absence. So all should be aware of the absence of one of the saints and if it is found that they stayed away without scriptural reason then of course the one guilty of the offense would have to repent and confess before All before forgiveness could be given.

If we can understand this we can by the same reasoning understand that to stay away, because of carelessness or indifference, from any of the Bible classes, we would be guilty of an offense against all because all would be aware of our negligence. If we repented of it we must of necessity confess it before all so that they can know that we have repented and WHAT we have repented of so that they might forgive us and in turn God will forgive us. The principle for this is Luke 17:3 and Matt. 5:23 & 24. We are doubly guilty when we do not attend the services of the church because we set a bad example before others and like Peter in Gal. 2:11 to 14 others may be influenced by our example to commit the same trespass. So the principle is established if we sin against one we must go to our brother and rectify our sin, by repenting and asking for forgiveness. If the sin is with two, or ten, the same principle is in effect and of course the deduction from the fact or principle is that when all in the church are offended, or sinned against or are cognizant of our sin then we must use the principle and confess our sin or sins before ALL.

I might say here before going into James 5:16 which is a greatly misunderstood and abused verse of scripture, although it's implication and meaning is clear, that God allows us as children of His to determine the sins we want to publically confess and no brother or sister has a right to question the motive or to dictate their ideas or opinions relative to our confession. ~~We do not have dominion over one another's consciences.~~

Sometimes we find brethren, those who are ignorant of the necessity of public confession, or reasons of their own prefer not to have the congregation confess their sins audibly, who will quibble over the word "faults" and insist that "faults" and "sins" are different and do not in this verse convey the same meaning. But to set this matter straight so that we will know for certain that "faults" and "sins" mean one and the same thing, and are interchangeable, we go to verses 15 to 18 and find that "trespass" (sins) and "fault" are both used in these verses and mean the same thing. This proves conclusively that both "trespass" and "fault" mean one and the same thing and breaking of the law of Christ which is sin. So James 5:16 properly understood means we are to confess our sins one to another.

With these thoughts in mind we come to the natural and necessary conclusion that it is scriptural to confess our sins one to another. To confess our sins means we TELL WHAT OUR SIN IS. It could not mean anything else. This would do away with the heresy that to confess the nature of our sin was unscriptural or that it was unnecessary or "does more harm than good." It is not for us to decide upon this matter but the word of God determines what we must obey. All sins are not of a private nature and as the Bible warns us against "secret sins" it would be healthy spiritually and sound scripturally to confess our sins to others. This is scriptural whether we confess our private sins to one another or our public sins.

James 5:16 doesn't teach how many we should confess to or how few but the command is "CONFESS YOUR SINS ONE TO ANOTHER." To obey it we must do as it says.

If a sin is of a private nature but we feel the necessity to confess it to one of the saints we can determine how many. But if it is of a public nature we MUST CONFESS it to all. The principle, as I have written before, is found in Luke 17:3 and Matt 5:23 & 24 as well as James 5:16. Now let those who teach against and/or discourage public confession of sin study these verses and pray God that they might find the truth and then teach and preach it so that not only they but those who hear them might be saved on the judgement day. The much misused Acts 8:22 will be used properly when one comes into the knowledge of God's word.

Recently I heard a preacher at the end of a sermon exhorting the sinner to come forward and obey the gospel and then he said "To those who have wandered away," we say "repent therefore of this thy wickedness and pray God if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee." Now if a child of God has wandered away from the fold and has done wickedness which he has done, for whatever he has done (committed or omitted in wandering away from God and the church) he cannot be forgiven by praying God and asking for forgiveness. He must of necessity openly repent and confess his misdeed if he is to get forgiveness. It is not a private sin to wander away from the church and set a bad example and shame be brought upon the church by negligence; and members possibly weakened by the example. So therefore to quote Acts 8:22 is misleading, unscriptural and may cause those who misuse it to lose their souls and as the wandering one is taught wrong and considers himself brought back to God by praying to God privately, he is left in his sins and in an unforgiven state. This is a terrible sin and is a blight upon the church and a sin to those who ~~commit~~ misuse the scripture in this way.

Furthermore if we study this verse in Acts 8:22 we find something that is overlooked by those who misuse it and possibly by those who carelessly read it. We notice that Peter admonishes the sinner to repent but he tells him to pray FOR THE THOUGHT OF his heart to be forgiven. My thoughts are private therefore I can pray and be forgiven them. Therefore Peter taught Simon scripturally in respect to the thoughts of his heart, he could be forgiven, if he repented. But if he did repent, and the scriptures are silent upon this, he would have had to confess to those whom he had sinned against in trying to buy power which had been invested in the apostles only. There were only two apostles at Samaria but he tried to buy the power from both of them. Using Luke 17:3 and Matt 5:23 & 24 as the principle we know that if Simon got forgiveness he had to go to both Peter and John, repenting and openly confessing his sin and asking forgiveness before God would forgive him.

Therefore to use Acts 8:22 as an invitation for the erring member of the church who is guilty of more than wicked thoughts (private sin) is to misuse the scripture and is misleading and wrong. If a member of the church has sinned publically, by doing those things which have hurt the church and publically shamed it, or if it is sin which all the church is aware of, the sinner must PUBLICALLY CONFESS AND NOT be told to "pray in that the THOUGHT of his heart might be forgiven." We cannot get forgiveness of our public sins by praying for forgiveness for "the thoughts of our heart." I do hope all that read this exegesis of this passage will take note and teach those who err in the misapplication of this verse. The congregation cannot know of sinners repentance unless he publically acknowledges it and the church cannot forgive unless it know what the sin is. Simon could not obtain forgiveness unless he

repented and confessed his sin to Peter and John, as they were the ones whom he sinned against. The wicked thoughts of his heart he could repent and ask God for forgiveness for privately BUT after he had gotten forgiveness from Peter and John. (Matt 5:23 & 24)

It is easy to understand the above and one would have to deliberately misunderstand or deliberately refuse to believe the word of God to contradict such plain teaching. However, great harm is being done by many preachers who either deliberately or ignorantly use this verse as a means to restore a member who has wandered away from the fold or has committed other sins publically. No wonder the church has lost it's zeal, the members so wordly and so lukewarm.

There is no doubt in my mind that the great apostasy of the church in this time is largely due to the sinful state of much of the members who have been discouraged, misled, mistaught upon public confession and because of this are in a sinful state and unsaved. We do not get rid of our public sins without public confession, therefore many are dying, are weak, and many sleep because of this and the church is easily led into false practices and led away by false teachers because of their "sickly" condition spiritually.

We have an erroneous opinion about the so called "conservative" part of the brotherhood in that it is supposed that because they are against the sponsoring church position, and the unscriptural Herald of Truth practices, as well as the church support of orphan homes, that in all else they are sound and scripturally right in their practice. But while all these practices are wrong and should be and are taught against it is well that we turn the beam upon some of the teaching and practices which are so prevalent amongst the "conservative" brethren. While many of the churches have gone off into irrevocable apotasy it is high time that we considered and reflected and "looked to ourselves" and to our teaching on many matters so that we do not follow after them into apostasy. Some of the things practiced and preached amongst the brethren (not those who have been apotasized away) are just as dangerous to the spiritual welfare and soundness of the church as some of the things which are done by those who have gone away into complete apotasy.

Christ said "Watch and pray." We need to pray more and watch diligently that while as we teach and fight against the practices of the fallen away brethren that we don't forget to watch and fight against some of the teaching and practices amongst us, such as the "professional clergy", the unwillingness to expose and withdraw from those amongst us who practice and teach contrary to holy writ. When we observe brethren upholding factionists, who refuse to heed Rom 16:17 & 18, what do we do about it? Do we condone them by avoiding them or do we keep in touch with them, refuse to warn others against them, and causing souls to be lost? Do we preach a "soft" approach against those who split churches and teach contrary to the Bible? To condone the wicked is just as fatal to our hope of heaven as is sponsoring orphan homes and Herald of Truth. To refuse to teach the word of God relative to how the church is governed, whether or not a Christian can engage in carnal warfare, whether or not he can practice segregation, whether or not he can get forgiveness of public sins by praying to God rather than by publically repenting and confessing the sin, and on and on, will eventually lead us away from the

truth of God's word and cause many souls to be lost. There are many other subjects which need to be clarified and taught and practiced which are essential to our spiritual welfare and our position which we have assumed as the "conservative" as well as the upholder of the truth of God's word. The subject of "marriage and divorce" should not be lightly thrown around as has been done but we should come into an agreement on it. Too many members have too many ideas and opinions about this subject but it is too important to be cast lightly aside or to let men like Bro Moyer take such an unscriptural position upon it without exposing him to the brotherhood as an unsound and unscriptural preacher.

In conclusion we will go to the Old Testament for the principle established in the O Testament for public confession of sins by God's people when in error. The guilty were exposed as a warning to Israel as well as to make those who might be tempted to follow the erring ones and to fear the consequences of such behaviour. Neither are we to have a false sentimentality or soft approach to the divine command for discipline for His people. In Duet 13:6 we find an Israelite who has tried to lead God's people away from God's commands and the punishment to be administered by the Israelites, "And neither shall thine eye pity him, neither shalt thou spare, neither shalt thou conceal him; and thou shalt stone him with stones that he die. "AND ALL ISRAEL SHALL HEAR AND FEAR AND SHALL DO NO MORE ANY SUCH WICKEDNESS AS THIS AMONG YOU." Read from the sixth verse to the eleventh as I've quoted only one.

Herein is the same principle for exposure and punishment of the wicked in the church as well as our attitude toward the wicked, and the reason for public exposure and punishment so that the congregation might see, hear & fear. In Acts 5:1-11 we find the same quick punishment and exposure and for the same reason. When the wicked or rebellious are allowed to run the church or allowed to do their wickedness without fear of punishment they not only wreck their own lives spiritually but they take the weak with them. In Duet. 19:13-21 we are again told that we are not to pity them. Pity the congregation, pity those who are influenced and thereby lost by the wicked ways and the false teaching done by those who have fallen away from God but who are still actively doing their evil deeds; and expose and punish those who are guilty of sin. By these verses we are made to realize why it is necessary to know what the sin is and by the same reasoning under the law of Christ we must know what the sin is to properly administer discipline and if the guilty repent we must know of WHAT he is repenting before we can justly forgive him for the sin he has committed. (Lke 17:3&4)

Principles never change and as we have pointed out before in this lesson we return to the Old Testament for instruction in this respect. In Lev 5:5 we read "And it shall be when he shall be guilty in one of these things, that he shall confess that he hath sinned in that THING." The principle is that we are to confess ~~kkk~~ our public sin and to tell the nature of it. How can we forgive a brother if we don't know what the sin is. Prov 28:13 reads, "He that covereth his sin shall not prosper; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy." We are not to attempt to hide our sins; secret sins are dangerous to our spiritual health. Read all of chapters 5 & 6 of Lev. We will find that it was ordained by God that at times the guilty one went to the priest and confessed to him only, his sin. This was necessary because the priest would have to know the nature of the sin before he could tell the sinner what type of sin offering was necessary. This is additional proof of

the principle before forgiveness can be given we must confess and rectify our sins if they are public. In the lesson above we are taught that it is necessary to know the sin.

In Nu 4:6 & 7 we read, "Speak unto the children of Israel, when a man or woman shall commit any sin that men commit to do a trespass against the Lord, and that person be guilty, then shall they confess "Their SIN WHICH THEY HAVE DONE." Again I reiterate that in confessing public sins we must if we are to obtain forgiveness, follow the principle and acknowledge the sin committed. Also read Lev 26:22.

Returning again to the New Testament, as we conclude this lesson, we repeat again that the lesson in 1st Cor 5:1-13 was a public sin and in 2nd Cor 2:6-9 we find the congregation had forgiven the fornicator (most of them at least). This being true then the fornicator must have acknowledged and repented of his sin, otherwise the congregation would not have known that he had repented and according to Lke 17:3 & 4 we cannot forgive our brother unless he repents. This same principle is carried out in Matt 5:23 & 24 wherein our worship is not acceptable to God unless we have rectified our sin towards our brother and the necessary inference is of course that if we sin against more than one or the whole congregation then we must acknowledge and publically repent before we can be forgiven.

Again in 2nd Cor 7:8-12 we find that the congregation repented of the sins which they were guilty of and we know from reading Corinthians that some of them at least were of a public nature and therefore they must have publically shown their repentance by acknowledging them as Paul commended them for their Godly sorrow and the clearing of themselves. Public sins and public confession go hand in hand.

It would be profitable to read Ezra the 10th chapter (all of it). We find here ALL the congregation of Israel gathered together and publically confessed their sins and rectified them. If there was more of this done today amongst God's people there would not be so much strife, jealousy and hatred as well as a lack of love amongst us.

So many in the church have been taught wrong on this subject of public confession that the church is filled with the indifferent, the lukewarm, the sickly and those who are asleep spiritually, because the guilt of their public sins has not been forgiven because they have not publically acknowledged them. Many have fallen away and many others, as said before, have become easy prey to false teaching and gone off into apostasy.

The "conservative" element of the church is not entirely free of false teaching, not only upon this subject of 'public confession' but other subjects as well, some of which have been mentioned in this lesson. This lesson has been written to correct wrong teaching upon it so that all might know the truth and know that the Bible teaches public confession for public sins and an acknowledgement of sins committed. There will be other lessons to counteract other teaching which does not conform to the truth. Sometimes wrong teaching is because of ignorance and it is not always deliberately taught falsely, but whether one way or the other we want to arm ourselves with the truth so no one can lead us from the law of Christ. We must study to do this, "Prove all things" God's word states, and all things can be proven." By gathering ALL the scriptures together upon a given subject we can prove (if we'll believe them) what is truth and what is error. If they don't fit then we have error. God's word teaches only one way not two or more and we must come into an accord, all of us.