**TRUE CONFESSIONS**

***Bonhoeffer’s Soul-Searching Question***

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a fascinating man, and a very complex man. He was born into an affluent family and was one of eight children. His father was a well-respected neurologist and professor of psychiatry at the University of Berlin in Germany. His mother was the daughter of a well-known preacher who served Kaiser Wilhelm II for many years. Dietrich was an accomplished pianist and brilliant student who could have become most anything he wanted, but chose instead to become a pastor in the Lutheran church. In 1933, at the age of 27, when Adolph Hitler had come to power as Chancellor of Germany, Bonhoeffer wrote what later became a Christian classic when he published *The Cost Of Discipleship*. It became his guide through the very dangerous years when the Nazi party was running the country. With great courage he chose to speak out against Hitler’s genocide of the Jews, working feverishly to save as many as he could.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was arrested by the Gestapo in 1943 and remained in prison for two years. On April 9, 1945, just three weeks before Hitler committed suicide, and just one month before Germany surrendered, ending the war in Europe, the Germans put him on trial for conspiring to assassinate Hitler. He was taken into a courtyard and hung, thus becoming a martyr for his convictions.

I have enjoyed reading his written works which were saved for posterity. In particular he wrote a book at the age of 35 that he titled *Life Together*. He has a chapter in the book on confession of sin. In that chapter he wrote a fascinating thought that I wish to share with you regarding Biblical confession. I hope it causes you to do some serious reflection on your own life of confessing your sins before both God and man. Listen to this:

“Why is it that it is often easier for us to confess our sins to God than to a brother? God is holy and sinless, He is a just judge of evil and the enemy of all disobedience. But a brother is sinful as we are. He knows from his own experience the dark night of secret sin. Why should we not find it easier to go to a brother than to a Holy God?

But if we do find it easier, we must ask ourselves whether we have not often been deceiving ourselves with our confession of sin to God, whether we have not rather been confessing our sins to ourselves and also granting ourselves absolution (forgiveness). And is not the reason perhaps for our countless relapses and the feebleness of our Christian obedience to be found precisely in the fact that we are living on self-forgiveness and not a real forgiveness?”

That is an interesting question, don’t you think? Can you answer this? “Why should we not find it easier to go to a brother than to a holy God?” And yet we think little about asking God to forgive our sins, and seldom fulfill the Biblical injunction to “*Confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another that you may be healed*” (James 5:16).

It could be that we have either not thought enough about confession before a holy God, or about confession before a fellow sinner like ourselves. Perhaps we need to think far more about both.

A holy God before whom I must bare my soul and lay out the specifics of my crimes, should leave me weak and humbled, vowing never to commit such sins ever again. Because I don’t think on that as I should, I so easily return to the scene of the crime and do it all over again. If I had truly repented before my confession to God I would not so easily fall to “*the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life*” (I John 2:16-17). For true confession, like true repentance, is a gut-wrenching act before a holy God. Paul tells us just how gut-wrenching it is when he describes it this way:

*For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death. For observe this very thing, that you sorrowed in a godly manner: What diligence it produced in you, what clearing of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what vehement desire, what zeal, what vindication! In all things you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter.* (2 Cor. 7:10-11).

Diligence. Clearing. Indignation. Fear. Vehement desire. Zeal. Vindication. Those are the words of true repentance and confession. They are powerful words that imply adrenalin-pumping action. They are meant to be life-changing, which is why Paul tells us it “*leads to salvation, not to be regretted*.” That’s just another way of saying, “I’m so glad I did that, for it changed my life for good, and for God.”

That leads me back to Bonhoeffer’s question concerning why it’s easier to confess sin before God than my fellow sinful brother. I firmly believe the reason as to why that is true is that I am too full of pride. To prove my point let me ask you bluntly: When was the last time you confessed your sins to a brother or sister in Christ? A day ago? A week ago? A month ago? A year ago? Ten years ago? Never? It pains me to answer that question. My guilt is keenly felt.

Let me repeat James 5:16, reminding us of this God-given command: “*Confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another that you may be healed*.” The more I practice this, the less I will sin. The less I sin, the closer I come to being formed into the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29; I Cor. 15:49; 2 Cor. 3:18). For when I confess my sins to my brother it is so humbling as to motivate me never to do it again.

True confession, preceded by true repentance, is good for the soul. Dietrich Bonhoeffer reminds us that failure to do this leads us to “*live on self-forgiveness and not real forgiveness*.”

Dear God, help me to confess my sins before You, and before my brethren, so that I might stand truly forgiven today, and on Your judgment day. – Rick