

Wings

*“Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles.”
Isaiah 40:31*



November 11, 2012

Worthless Confessions

Confessing our sins to God is an essential step toward forgiveness. But without two other elements, confession becomes a meaningless formality that falls on deaf ears.

“Then Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron in haste, and said, ‘I have sinned against the Lord your God and against you’” (Ex. 10:16).

“Then Saul said to Samuel, ‘I have sinned, for I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord and your words’” (1 Sam. 15:24).

The circumstances leading up to these confessions of wrongdoing by Pharaoh and King Saul were very different, but their words of contrition do have one thing in common: both were totally bogus. Pharaoh was only interested in escaping the effects of a terrible plague, and Saul was embarrassed by Samuel’s public rebuke. Once they got past the immediate crisis, both men soon reverted to their real characters and sank deeper into rebellion against God.

The willingness to confess one’s errors is essential to maintaining a right relationship with God (Psa. 32:5; Psa. 51:3; 1 Jn. 1:9; Jas. 5:16). But since a confession is nothing more than words, it’s all too easy to fake it. “I have sinned” can be an honest expression of a heart that is genuinely convicted of sin

and wants to do better—think of David’s reaction to Nathan’s rebuke (2 Sam. 12:13), or the prodigal son’s decision to turn his life around (Lk. 15:18)—or it can be a cheap PR gimmick designed to win sympathy and divert attention away from deeper character flaws—as in the case of Pharaoh and Saul.

Clearly, confession of wrong is only one element in a more complex process of restoration. There are two additional ingredients that must be present for a confession to be meaningful.

First, a true confession is the product of a heart that has humbled itself before God. David’s confession of his crimes, for example, grew out of a “broken and contrite spirit” that felt keenly the pain of having disappointed God (Psa. 51:3, 17). Elsewhere, God promised to forgive the Israelites on the condition that they “*confess* their iniquity . . . [and] their uncircumcised hearts are *humbled*, and they accept their guilt” (Lev. 26:40-41). The purpose of a confession is not to inform God of my shortcomings; He is already perfectly aware of them. Rather, the purpose is to force

me to come to terms with my failures. I cannot make improvements in my life if I do not acknowledge in my own heart the need for improvement—no excuses, no blame-shifting, no pleading of extenuating circumstances, but an honest admission of the mistakes I’ve made. They are my mistakes, so I must own them. That takes a lot of humility.

Solomon identifies the second missing ingredient in his proverb, “He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses *and forsakes them* will have mercy” (Prov. 28:13). Confession of sin must be accompanied by a determination to cease the sin. The prodigal son’s confession meant nothing until he left the pig pen and returned to his father. Without this commitment to renounce the behavior that got us in trouble to begin with, we are merely playing games with God.

“An honest confession is good for the soul,” the saying goes, but in the absence of genuine humility and repentance, a confession of wrong is just wasted breath. If we’re going to *say* it, we had better *mean* it.

– David King