

Matthew 10:32 through Matthew 10:33 (KJV)

³²Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. ³³But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.

CONFESSION

Confession, an admission, declaration, or acknowledgment, is a significant element in the worship of God in both Old and New Testaments.

The majority of the occurrences of the term can be divided into two primary responses to God: the confession of sin and the confession of faith.

Confession of Sin

Numerous Old Testament passages stress the importance of the confession of sin within the experience of worship.

Leviticus speaks of ritual acts involving such admission of sin: the sin (or guilt offering

(5:5-6:7)

⁵And it shall be, when he shall be guilty in one of these things, that he shall confess that he hath sinned in that thing: ⁶And he shall bring his trespass offering unto the LORD for his sin which he hath sinned, a female from the flock, a lamb or a kid of the goats, for a sin offering; and the priest shall make an atonement for him concerning his sin.

and the scapegoat that represents the removal of sin

(16:20-22). ²⁰And when he hath made an end of reconciling the holy place, and the tabernacle of the congregation, and the altar, he shall bring the live goat: ²¹And Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat, and shall send him away by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness: ²²And the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities unto a land not inhabited: and he shall let go the goat in the wilderness.

Furthermore, confession can be the act of an individual in behalf of the people as a whole

(Neh. 1:6; ⁶Let thine ear now be attentive, and thine eyes open, that thou mayest hear the prayer of thy servant, which I pray before thee now, day and night, for the children of Israel thy servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel, which we have sinned against thee: both I and my father's house have sinned. ⁷We have dealt very corruptly against

thee, and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the judgments, which thou commandedst thy servant Moses.

Dan. 9:20)²⁰ And whiles I *was* speaking, and praying, and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before the LORD my God for the holy mountain of my God; ²¹Yea, whiles I *was* speaking in prayer, even the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, touched me about the time of the evening oblation. ²²And he informed *me*, and talked with me, and said, O Daniel, I am now come forth to give thee skill and understanding. ²³At the beginning of thy supplications the commandment came forth, and I am come to show *thee*; for thou *art* greatly beloved: therefore understand the matter, and consider the vision.

or the collective response of the worshiping congregation

(*Ezra 10:1*)¹ Now when Ezra had prayed, and when he had confessed, weeping and casting himself down before the house of God, there assembled unto him out of Israel a very great congregation of men and women and children: for the people wept very sore.

; *Neh. 9:2-3*)² And the seed of Israel separated themselves from all strangers, and stood and confessed their sins, and the iniquities of their fathers. ³And they stood up in their place, and read in the book of the law of the LORD their God *one* fourth part of the day; and *another* fourth part they confessed, and worshipped the LORD their God.

. Frequently, it is presented as the individual acknowledgment of sin by the penitent sinner

(*Ps. 32:5*;⁵ I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin.

Prov. 28:13;¹³ He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh *them* shall have mercy.

see also Pss. 40 and 51 which are individual confessions although the word “confession” is not used).

Likewise, in the New Testament confession of sin is an aspect of both individual and corporate worship.

At the Jordan, John’s followers were baptized, confessing their sins

(*Matt. 3:6*;^{v4} And the same John had his raiment of camel’s hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey. ⁵Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan, ⁶And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins

Mark 1:6). ⁴John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. ⁵And there went out unto

him all the land of Judaea, and they of Jerusalem, and were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins.

Similar confessions were made by Paul's converts in Ephesus

(Acts 19:18).¹⁸ And many that believed came, and confessed, and showed their deeds. ¹⁹ Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all *men*: and they counted the price of them, and found *it* fifty thousand *pieces* of silver. ²⁰ So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed.

Christians are reminded that God faithfully forgives the sins of those who confess them

(1 John 1:9).⁸ If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

James admonished his readers not only to pray for one another but also to confess their sins to one another

(5:16),¹⁵ And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him. ¹⁶ Confess *your* faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

probably within the context of congregational worship.

By the end of the first century, routine worship included confession as the prelude to the observance of the Lord's Supper as seen in Didache 14:1. See Apostolic Fathers.

Confession of Faith

Closely related to the confession of sin in the Old Testament is the confession of faith, that is, the acknowledgment of and commitment to God.

*In 1 Kings 8:33, 35*³³ When thy people Israel be smitten down before the enemy, because they have sinned against thee, and shall turn again to thee, and confess thy name, and pray, and make supplication unto thee in this house: ³⁴ Then hear thou in heaven, and forgive the sin of thy people Israel, and bring them again unto the land which thou gavest unto their fathers. ³⁵ When heaven is shut up, and there is no rain, because they have sinned against thee; if they pray toward this place, and confess thy name, and turn from their sin, when thou afflictest them:

*(as well as 2 Chron. 6:24, 26)*²⁴ And if thy people Israel be put to the worse before the enemy, because they have sinned against thee; and shall return and confess thy name, and pray and make supplication before thee in this house; ²⁵ Then hear thou from the heavens, and forgive the sin of thy people Israel, and bring them again unto the land which thou gavest to them and to their fathers. ²⁶ When the heaven is shut up, and there is no rain, because they have sinned against thee; *yet* if they pray toward this place, and confess thy name, and turn from their sin, when thou dost afflict them;

acknowledgment of the name of God results in forgiveness of sins.

Such acknowledgment came to be standardized in the confessional formula known as the Shema

(Deut. 6:4-5). ⁴Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: ⁵And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. ⁶And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: ⁷And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. ⁸And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. ⁹And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates.

Such declaration of commitment to God, or particularly to Christ, is also found in the New Testament.

One's public acknowledgment of Jesus is the basis for Jesus' own acknowledgment of that believer to God

(Matt. 10:32; ³²Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. ³³But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.

Luke 12:8; ⁸Also I say unto you, Whosoever shall confess me before men, him shall the Son of man also confess before the angels of God: ⁹But he that denieth me before men shall be denied before the angels of God.

compare Rev. 3:5). ⁵He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels. ⁶He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

Furthermore, as Paul described the process by which one is saved, he explicitly drew a parallel between what one believes in the heart and what one confesses with the lips

(Rom. 10:9-10). ⁹That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. ¹⁰For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. ¹¹For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.

Belief and confession are two sides of the same coin! Probably the earliest confession of faith was the simple acknowledgment of the lordship of Christ

(*Rom. 10:9*); ⁹That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.

1 Cor. 12:3; ³Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed: and *that* no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost.

Phil. 2:11), ¹¹And *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

but the rise of heresy seems to have caused the addition of specific data about Christ to the confession—for example, that He is Son of God

(*1 John 4:3, 15*) ³And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that *spirit* of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.

¹⁴And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son *to be* the Saviour of the world. ¹⁵Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God. ¹⁶And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.

or that He has come in the flesh

(*1 John 4:2*). ²Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God:

A firmly set outline of Christian beliefs then appears to be what is meant by confession in later New Testament writings

(*Heb. 5:14*). ¹⁴But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, *even* those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

See Faith; Scapegoat; Sin; Repentance.

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