

I. Introduction.

II. Confess your sins to one another. v. 16a

- A. Roman Catholics claim this text (and others) as a basis for their practice of confession in their sacrament of penance. John 20:23**
 - 1. Roman Catholics are expected to confess their sins to a priest at least once a year.
 - 2. The priest gives appropriate penance (typically prayers to be recited) to make amends (satisfaction) for sin and then pronounces absolution (forgiveness)
 - 3. The priest is to keep what he hears in the confessional absolutely confidential.
- B. There is no biblical basis for the Roman Catholic sacrament of confession/penance.**
 - 1. James speaks of all believers confessing their sins to one another, not to a priest.
 - 2. Jesus Christ is the only Mediator between God and man. 1 Tim. 2:5 Mt. 23:9
 - 3. The only acceptable satisfaction to absolve us from guilt of sin is the perfect and complete sacrifice of Jesus. 1 Tim. 2:6 Heb. 9:14,28 10:10,14 Ro. 3:20
 - 4. There is no biblical basis to offer anyone absolute confidentiality. Mt. 18:15ff
- C. We are all to confess our sins to God. Mt. 6:12 1 John 1:8-2:2 Ps. 32:1ff 51:1ff**
 - 1. There is a confession of sin at conversion. Mt. 3:7 Lu. 15:7 18:13-14 Acts 19:18ff
 - 2. There is ongoing confession of sin to God for believers. Mt. 6:12 1 Jo. 1:8-2:2 Ps. 32:1ff 51:1ff
 - 3. Confession must be joined with repentance towards God. Ps. 51:3-4
 - 4. Is confession good for the soul? 2 Co. 7:10-11
 - 5. Do you have sin which you need to confess to the Lord right now? Pr. 28:13 Ps. 32:3-6a Is. 55:6-7 Jer. 3:13-14
- D. When is it appropriate for us to confess our sins to each other?**
 - 1. New believers publicly confess their sinfulness at baptism. Mt. 3:6
 - 2. When you have sinned against a brother or sister, you should privately seek his or her forgiveness as quickly as possible. Mt. 5:23-24 Gen. 50:17 Luke 15:21
 - 3. When your sin has affected the entire body, then confession before the entire church is appropriate. Ps. 51:1ff 32:1ff Josh. 7:19 1 Co. 5:6 12:7,15ff
 - 4. We continue to confess our sinfulness as part of worship and body life. Mt. 6:12
 - 5. You may seek the prayers of the church for you to overcome sin.
 - 6. You may seek the benefits mutual accountability of the church body.
- E. When might mutual confession of sin become inappropriate or dangerous?**
 - 1. If you have sinned in your heart with wicked thoughts, confess your sin to God, but if your sin hasn't affected anyone else, you don't need to tell them. Ps. 90:8
 - 2. Don't share details of your sin which might be unedifying or even tempting to others. Eph. 4:29 5:3-4 1 Co. 14:26
 - 3. Don't share things which violate a legitimate confidence and/or make others look bad. Gen. 9:22 Pr. 11:13 20:19 16:22
- F. Other things to consider about mutual confession.**
 - 1. Mutual confession of sin may should take place in the most appropriate (and most helpful) setting – individual, small groups, public.
 - 2. How might others be benefitted by your confession?
 - 3. Why do so many resist mutual confession of sin?
 - 4. What should you do when others confess their sin to you? Luke 15:22-24

III. Pray for one another. v. 16b-17

- A. Mutual prayer is an important part of being a member Christ's body. Eph. 6:18
 - 1. This is not merely the duty of our leaders, but each of us is to pray. Gal. 6:2
 - 2. We pray publicly and privately. Acts 2:42 1 Tim. 2:8
 - 3. How should you pray for your brother or sister who confesses sin?
- B. Your prayer is powerful. v. 16b Mt. 6:10 7:7-8 21:21-22 John 14:13 15:7,16 16:23
- C. What are the conditions of effectual prayer? v. 16b
 - 1. The one praying must be righteous. 1 Tim. 2:8 Pr. 15:8,29
 - a. We have perfect standing with God because of the righteousness of Christ which has been imputed to us through faith. Phil. 3:9 1 Co. 1:30-31 Da. 9:18
 - b. Our practical righteousness is also important – sin hinders prayer. 4:2-3 1:5-8 Is. 59:2 1:15 Ps. 66:18 34:15,17,19 1 Pet. 3:7,12 1 Jo. 3:21-22
 - 2. The prayer must be fervent (heartfelt). Mt. 6:5-7 Col. 4:12 Acts 2:42 Ro. 8:26
 - 3. Jesus, the Righteous One, earnestly prays for you. Heb. 7:25 Isa. 53:12
- D. Elijah is an illustration of powerful prayer. v. 17-18 Luke 4:25
 - 1. Learn effectual prayer from Elijah. 1 Kings 18:36-46
 - a. Elijah prayed to the one true God. 1 Kings 18:36a
 - b. Elijah is a righteous man who wholeheartedly serves God. 1 Kings 18:36b
 - c. Elijah prays in submission to God's will. 1 Ki. 18:36c,1 Mt. 6:10 1 Jo. 5:14
 - d. Elijah prays for God to be glorified, especially in the conversion of the lost. 1 Kings 18:36-39
 - e. Elijah prayed earnestly. 1 Kings. 18:42 Js. 5:17
 - f. Elijah prayed persistently. 1 Kings 18:43 Luke 11:5-10 18:1-8 Ps. 40:1
 - g. Elijah prayed expectantly. 1 Kings 18:44
 - 2. God answered Elijah's prayers for drought and for rain. 1 Ki. 17:1 18:44ff
 - 3. Does this mean that we can pray for drought or rain (or mountains to be moved) and expect the same results? Mt. 21:21-22
 - 4. Elijah prayed according to the will of God. Dt. 11:13-17 28:12,23-24 1 Ki. 18:1,36
 - 5. Why did Elijah have to pray, given that God had already said it would rain?
 - 6. Elijah had a nature like ours. 1 Kings 19:1-4,9-10 Acts 14:15

IV. Concluding applications.

Discussion questions

- 1. How would you answer someone who said that James 5:16 requires us to confess our sins to a priest who will tell us what penance we can do so that we can receive absolution?
- 2. Why should a believer confess his sins to God? How often do you do this?
- 3. Under what circumstances is it appropriate for us to confess our sins to one another?
When might mutual confession of sin be inappropriate or dangerous?
- 4. What kinds of confessions might be most appropriate in different settings (public, private)?
- 5. What are the benefits of mutual confession?
- 6. Are you involved in community with your fellow believers to the extent that you appropriately confess your sins to one another?
- 7. How should you pray for your brother or sister who confesses sin?
- 8. What good does it do to pray?
- 9. What are the conditions of effective prayer?
- 10. List several ways in which Elijah is an example of how we should pray.
- 11. How does this passage point to Christ?