

The Good Confession

Loyalty of the believer to Christ

What one must see at the outset is that the confession required of the person who would become a disciple of Christ is not a confession of sin. That one is a sinner is a given. And to confess one's sins, while commendable, does not make the confessor a Christian. The proper confession is the Good Confession. The Good Confession is as Jesus Himself described in the gospel of Matthew,

Matt. 10:32 “Everyone therefore who shall confess Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. 33 “But whoever shall deny Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven.

- Notice that the subject of the confession is not personal sin.
- The objects of confession are Christ and the believer.
- The idea involved in confession is not mere acknowledgement, or recognition; it is loyalty.
- The opposite of confession is denial.

Vine, in his *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, says of the word “confession” in this context, (Matt. 10:32 and Luke 12:8) “confession” ... has a special meaning, namely, to confess in a person's name—the nature of the confession being determined by the context—the suggestion is that of **making a public confession**. Thus the statement, “every one ... who shall confess Me before men; him will I also confess before My Father ...,” conveys the thought of confessing **allegiance** to Christ as one's Master and Lord, and, on the other hand, of acknowledgment, on His part, of the faithful one as being His worshipper and servant—His loyal follower.

In this connection there is an interesting comparison between Romans Chapter 14:11 and Isaiah 45:23.

In the New American Standard Bible Romans 14:11 says,
For it is written,
“As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me,
And every tongue shall give praise to God.”

But the American Standard Bible, King James Version,
New King James Version, and New International Version
read “...**will confess** to God.”

But in the book of Isaiah the prophecy referred to in
Romans says,

Isa. 45:23 “I HAVE SWORN BY MYSELF,
THE WORD HAS GONE FORTH FROM MY MOUTH IN
RIGHTEOUSNESS
AND WILL NOT TURN BACK,
THAT TO ME EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, EVERY TONGUE
WILL SWEAR *ALLEGIANCE*.”

Here Isaiah used the Hebrew word *shaw-bah*, meaning
"swear, to take an oath, to cause to take an oath, to adjure."

On the day of his crucifixion Christ stood trial before the
Great Sanhedrin. The High Priest Caiaphas applied to Him
the Oath of the Testimony.

It says in the Mishnah that if one shall say, "I adjure you
by the Almighty, by Sabaoth, by the Gracious and Merciful,
by the Long-Suffering, by the Compassionate, or by any of
the divine titles, behold they are bound to answer."

Caiaphas, in effect, placed Jesus under oath. Matthew
wrote,

Matt. 26:63 But Jesus kept silent. And the high
priest said to Him, “I adjure You by the living
God, that You tell us whether You are the
Christ, the Son of God.”

Jesus answered, “You have said it yourself...” Luke gives
His answer as, “Yes, I am.” Luke 22:70.

Jesus did not deny Himself.

Loyalty and confession

Loyalty is an important idea to bear in mind when you
think about your confession of Christ. As Vine says, the

confession of Christ is a statement of **allegiance. It is akin to an oath of loyalty.** An example of this type of servant, and loyal follower, is that of Ittai the Gittite.

In the book of 2 Samuel in the 15th chapter we read of Ittai the Gittite, the native of Gath. He was a Philistine in the army of King David. When Absalom revolted and threatened to strike his father and all those loyal to him with the edge of the sword, David fled Jerusalem with his loyal company. The scripture says that David paused at the last house to watch his servants pass before him.

2 Sam. 15:19 Then the king said to Ittai the Gittite, “Why will you also go with us? Return and remain with the king, for you are a foreigner and also an exile; *return* to your own place. 20 “You came *only* yesterday, and shall I today make you wander with us, while I go where I will? Return and take back your brothers; mercy and truth be with you.” 21 But Ittai answered the king and said, “As the Lord lives, and as my lord the king lives, surely wherever my lord the king may be, whether for death or for life, there also your servant will be.” 22 Therefore David said to Ittai, “Go and pass over.” So Ittai the Gittite passed over with all his men and all the little ones who *were* with him.

When next we see Ittai the Gittite it is at Mahana'im when David's army is again numbered and organized. Ittai is in command of a third part of the army. 2 Sam. 18:2, 5, 12. The loyalty of Ittai the Gittite to David produced loyalty in David to Ittai. Ittai confessed David and did not deny him even in difficult times. The last time we see Ittai the Gittite David has promoted him to much greater responsibility.

I am the King's man

The television network A&E ran a series of films a few years ago about Horatio Hornblower. In one of the films entitled, *The Duchess and the Devil*, there is a scene in which the First Mate, Mr. Bracegirdle, of the British frigate

Indefatigable, is in the galley speaking to a junior officer, Mr. Hunter. There is some question about Mr. Hunter's loyalty to Horatio Hornblower.

Bracegirdle says to the junior officer, "He's a lucky dog that Hornblower, eh? To be tuck into the capons? Roast beef. Plain duff? Bet you envy him, Mr. Hunter?"

Mr. Hunter, who is seated, chewing on a biscuit, says, "No, Sir. Beef and biscuit does me fine."

The First Mate then leans over and says, "You, uh, sail with Mr. Hornblower tomorrow, you know?"

"Yes, Sir."

"It goes without saying that he can depend on your whole-hearted support?"

Mr. Hunter stands at attention, stares forward and says, "I am the king's man, Sir. I follow my captain's orders."

- "I am the king's man, Sir." In this answer is the essence of confession.
- The essence is loyalty, not merely recognition.
- For sure, Mr. Hunter referred to the King of England.
- The Christian refers to the King of Kings in his confession.

The demons acknowledged Jesus

The New Testament has numerous references telling how demons recognized Jesus, called Him by name, yet still voiced their opposition to him. There is no sense in which they are accounted loyal to Him, nor He to them.

Matthew 8:29 The demons said to Him, "What do we have to do with You, Son of God? Have You come here to torment us before the time?"

- They recognized Him. They were not loyal to Him.
- Theirs was not the Good Confession.

Peter's Denial

The opposite of "confession" is "denial." Peter made, perhaps, the most noble confession of the Lord that is

recorded in the gospels. He said to the Lord before them all, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Matt. 16:15.

But when Jesus was on trial before His enemies, Peter was put to the test. In this instance he also denied the Lord,

Matt. 26:69 Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard, and a certain servant-girl came to him and said, “You too were with Jesus the Galilean.” **70 But he denied it before them all**, saying, **“I do not know what you are talking about.”** **71** And when he had gone out to the gateway, another *servant-girl* saw him and *said to those who were there, “This man was with Jesus of Nazareth.” **72** And again **he denied it with an oath, “I do not know the man.”** **73** And a little later the bystanders came up and said to Peter, “Surely you too are *one* of them; for the way you talk gives you away.” **74** Then he began to curse and swear, **“I do not know the man!”** And immediately a cock crowed.¹

- Peter’s example at this point was denial, the opposite of confession.
- There are a lot of ways to say, “I don’t know Him.”

Paul wrote to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2 verse 11,

2:11 It is a trustworthy statement: For if we died with Him, we shall also live with Him; 12 If we endure, we shall also reign with Him; If we deny Him, He also will deny us; 13 If we are faithless, He remains faithful; for He cannot deny Himself.

To Peter’s credit he repented, and afterward showed unwavering loyalty to Christ.

The Admonition to Timothy

Timothy was a Greek Christian who became a student, and close follower of the Apostle Paul. In his first letter to Timothy, Paul admonished the younger man to take a

¹ Emphasis mine, author.

greater and firmer hold on his service to Christ. The admonition is taken in full recognition of the implications of the "good confession,"

1 Timothy 6:12 Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called, and you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. 13 I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who testified the good confession before Pontius Pilate...

What was the "good confession" that Timothy made? The Apostle says that it was the same confession Jesus testified before the Roman Governor, Pontius Pilate. John wrote in his gospel,

John 18:33 Pilate therefore entered again into the Praetorium, and summoned Jesus, and said to Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?" 18:34 Jesus answered, "Are you saying this on your own initiative, or did others tell you about me?" 35 Pilate answered, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests delivered You up to me; what have You done?"

What He had done was lay the groundwork for a kingdom. He had already begun to call his disciples out from among the Jews. Shortly, they would begin to come from among the Gentiles. The issue they would face would be loyalty to Christ as they lived in a world dominated by their adversaries.

John 18:36 Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting, that I might not be delivered up to the Jews; but as it is My kingdom is not of this realm." 37 Pilate therefore said to Him, "So You are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say correctly that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice."

Do you hear His voice?

The chief priests who were present as accusers when Jesus was brought before Pilate evidently had no difficulty whatever understanding the reply Jesus made. They did not accept His declaration of kingship. But the testimony cannot be denied. It shouts down to us through almost two thousand years. The chief priests asked Pilate,

John 19:21 "Do not write, the King of the Jews, but **that he said**, 'I am king of the Jews...'"

And let us not forget what Pilate wrote on the *titulus*, the sign, they attached to His cross, "Jesus the Nazarene, the King of the Jews." John 19:19.

Jesus did not equivocate. [I.e., He did not use ambiguous words to conceal the truth or to protect Himself.] Neither does the testimony of the New Testament. The choice of confession is not as present day opponents of Christianity would have you to believe. They say, "If it's right for you, then it's right." Or, "If you believe He is the Messiah, then He is the Messiah." They say the words in such a way as to make the actual facts seem unimportant, or the benefits obtained, completely subjective. They will tell you that the facts and benefits are of value only insofar as your personal feelings or interests are concerned.

Jesus did not grant such a preposterous choice to Pilate, nor to anyone else with whom He spoke. The Jewish authorities at that time understood the words of Jesus to mean that He claimed to be the "King of the Jews" with all its Messianic implications.

The Lord has tough words for people who deny Him. Read what He said in Revelation chapter 3,

Revelation 3:1 "And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: He who has the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars, says this: 'I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. 2 'Wake up, and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die; for I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God. 3 'Remember therefore what you have received and heard;

and keep it, and repent. If therefore you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come upon you. 4 'But you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments; and they will walk with Me in white; for they are worthy. 5 'He who overcomes shall thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father, and before His angels. 6 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'

Do you hear what He says?

The cult of Caesar.

In the First Century people paid divine honor to Caesar. They gave Caesar titles that should only be applied to the Eternal God, Jehovah. They worshipped Caesar. The Romans went so far as to make the cult of the Caesar a part of the law of the constitution. Simply put—the worship and adoration of Caesar had the force of law.

In the year 48 B.C. the town council of Ephesus, with other cities of the region, made an official inscription in which they spoke of Julius Caesar as "the god made manifest, offspring of Ares and Aphrodite, and common savior of human life."² Such inscriptions are not rare. Archaeologists are able to cite so many examples from papyrus documents, potsherd and stone monuments that as Deissmann says, "If we try to get them all the net breaks."³

Besides the uses of the words "god" and "divine" to apply to the Caesars, the followers of Caesar also applied to him the term "lord," in the Greek, *kyrios*.⁴ This usage was parallel to the way Christians refer to Christ.

The evidence shows that shortly after Nero assumed the throne he was referred to as "the lord." Deissman says that

² A. Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*, p. 344.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 346.

⁴ Bauer, Walter, Gingrich, F. Wilbur, and Danker, Frederick W., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press). κύριος.

"the statistics are quite striking; everywhere, down to the remotest village, the officials called Nero lord. In the Acts, Festus the Procurator speaks of Nero simply as "the lord." Acts 25:26.

The Conflict of Confessions

The question Polycarp's inquisitors put to him was, "What harm is there in saying 'Caesar is Lord', and offering incense, and saving yourself?"

This question that the Romans asked of Polycarp takes on serious meaning when we consider the instruction of Paul in Romans the Tenth Chapter, where he says,

Romans 10:9 ... that if you confess with your mouth Jesus *as* Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved; 10 for with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.

Paul gave his admonition in direct opposition to Roman Law. His instructions were: confess loyalty to Christ, not to Caesar. Worship Christ not Caesar.

- A lot of people who read that letter made the proper confession and paid for it with their lives.
- So it is today in many ways. There are different ways to pay.
- There might be something for you to pay for your confession.
- Are you willing?

The issue in confession is among the oldest in the experience of man. Who is Lord? Who is Master? Who is god? Frequently the issue is accompanied by persecution. It finds its expression in the words of loyalty and belief. Who is your god? Is it God? Are you willing to speak it publicly, and then stand by your words? Are you willing to pay the price of your confession?

Loyalty to Whom?

The world resents greatly to be told that there is only one God, and only one Lord to serve. People who are ignorant of God's unique place believe that all gods should be honored, or at least, tolerated.

Loyalty of Christ to the believer.

In a verse of Matthew 10, Christ says,

“Every one therefore who shall confess Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven.” (10:32)

He reciprocates that loyalty. Indeed, never could you have a better friend. He told his disciples when giving them the Great Commission,

Matt. 28:19 “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, **I am with you always**, even to the end of the age.”

Jackie Robinson was the first African American to play major league baseball. Robinson played Second Base for the Brooklyn Dodgers. He entered the league in 1947 when the country was still segregated by race. He encountered hostility and mistreatment. Even when playing at his home field in Brooklyn he encountered the hostility of the fans. Once he committed an error. The fans, who did not approve of him anyway, jeered and protested. Robinson could only stand at Second Base and hang his head. “Pee Wee” Reese who played Shortstop came over and stood beside him. Then Reese put his arm around Robinson’s shoulder. Standing together, they faced the crowd down. Robinson said later that the gesture saved his career.

- Why wouldn’t the Lord do the same for you?

In Hebrews the writer said in the 13th chapter,

Heb. 13:5 Let your character be free from the love of money, being content with what you

have; for He Himself has said, "I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you," 6 so that we confidently say,

"The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid.

What shall man do to me?"

Be loyal to Him because He is loyal to you.

Summary.

Jesus made a public confession of Himself before Pontius Pilate. From the evidence it is clear that not only Pontius Pilate understood his statement, but the accusing Jews who were present understood the words also.

Persons who would become Christians are expected to make the same kind of confession, that is, The Good Confession. The Good Confession is a confession of a Person, namely, that Jesus Christ is Lord, the Son of God, the Messiah. It is a public statement that both implies, and requires, loyalty to Christ. Anyone who truly believes in Christ as Lord does not shrink back from the confession.

As it happened at Carthage on July 17, 180 A.D., a Christian by the name of Speratus of the city of Scili in Numidia stood before the judgment seat of the Proconsul P. Vigellius Saturninus. The Proconsul commanded Speratus, "Swear by the genius [that is, by his spirit] of our lord the Emperor!" Speratus answered, "I know no imperium of this world,...I know my Lord, the King of kings, and Emperor of all nations."⁵

With that confession Speratus identified himself with the servants of Christ. His voice speaks to us today.

Hear Speratus.

Conclusion

Be loyal to Christ and He will be loyal to you.

Make the Good Confession that Christ is your Lord, that He is God's Son come in the flesh, the Messiah of promise who suffered for you on Calvary's cross, but rose from the

⁵ Deissmann, *op. cit.*, p. 356.

dead and sits now at God's right hand, exalted King of Kings, Lord of Lords.

Then you can say with the rest of us, "I am the King's man sir; I obey my Captain's orders."

Or as Ittai the Gittite said, "As the Lord lives, and as my lord the king lives, surely wherever my lord the king may be whether for death or for life, there also your servant will be."

And the Lord will say to you, "Go and pass over. Your name is in the Book of Life."