

## WHEN A CHRISTIAN SINS

The New Testament plainly teaches that we sometimes sin as Christians. To children of God, John wrote: “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.... If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us” (1 John 1:8, 10). As much as a child of God might desire to live in absolutely perfect harmony with Divine Law, these verses remind us that we will fail to do so due to weaknesses of the flesh, resulting in sin (1 John 3:4).

Some sins are private in nature (Mat. 5:28), and some are public sins (1 Cor. 5:1). It logically (and practically) follows that there are, between these extremes, “semi-private” sins, known by only one or a few others.

The Bible teaches us to confess our sins: “If we confess our sins, he [God] is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins...” (1 John 1:9). To “confess” a sin is to acknowledge or admit to the one(s) sinned against and/or to the one(s) who has/have witnessed our sin, that we have sinned. Further, there is at least some implication of repentance in a confession of sin, assuming the confession is genuine. An impenitent person does not confess sins.

What about public confession of sins? Such is likely the setting of James 5:16: “Confess therefore your sins one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed.” It seems obvious to me that the healing here is the forgiveness of sins, the “healing” of the soul.

What sins should be publicly confessed? The obvious answer is those that are publicly committed or known. A sin of thought needs to be confessed only to God, for He alone knows it, besides oneself. A sin in the privacy of one’s home, known only to his family, should be confessed to and corrected with only those few. However, when

one has shamed the whole church by neglect, immorality, dishonesty, drunkenness, false doctrine, or otherwise, he/she should publicly confess such sins. Of course, “gutter-language,” sensitive details, should (and can) be avoided in announcing such confessions.

Many of the Lord’s finest people respond to the invitation from time to time, asking for prayers from the church for a particular need, weakness, or trial. Is this good or bad? I personally desire for the whole church to pray for me, and I am greatly encouraged to hear my name called in the prayers of our assemblies. I certainly do not begrudge anyone else this source of strength. While requests for such prayers may be made at other times (e.g., through public announcements), I can see nothing wrong with making such requests known when the invitation is extended.

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