

The Good Confession

"Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life into which you were called, and you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. 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, that you keep the commandment without stain or reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Timothy 6: 12-14)

Paul reminds Timothy of the start of his Christian experience. We know that he had a Greek father but that his Jewish mother had instructed him in the scriptures from childhood. We also know that his mother Eunice and grandmother Lois were believers before he was, that Timothy himself was described as a 'disciple' and that he was highly regarded by the rest of the believers in the area where he lived. (**Acts 16: 1-2, 2 Timothy 1:5, 3:15j**)

His discipleship had not been an automatic result of the instruction he had received, nor of the sincere faith of his mother and grandmother. No doubt those were beneficial, but the young Timothy had been personally called to eternal life and had 'made the good confession' with many people there to witness it.

The word translated 'confession' comes from the Greek word *homologeō*, meaning literally 'to say the same thing'. In the New Testament, it is most often translated as 'confess' but is also used to mean acknowledge, admit, assure, declare, profess and promise. A well-used word, but completely without some of the negative feelings that we attach to 'confess' and 'admit'. There is no shame in this word. It is a strong statement of agreement, not just a silent and unspoken assent. When Timothy 'made the good confession', he was standing up clearly and declaring his discipleship. There could be no going back.

This sort of confession is very common in the New Testament and seems to be an important part of the basis of fellowship in the Church.

In charging Timothy with his responsibility to fight the good fight of faith and take hold of the eternal life into which he has been called, Paul stands with him in the presence of the Father (the author of that life) and of Jesus the Messiah, who also made 'the good confession' before Pilate.

What did Jesus have to 'confess' before Pilate? In all four accounts, Pilate asks one central question: "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus' answer is the same in all accounts, "You say", which was the common form of agreement. In John's account, he gives Pilate a fuller answer, but the

'confession' is still the same, Jesus 'admits' that yes, he is the King, but not just of the Jews! He agrees, affirms and acknowledges what Pilate has said - the good confession!

Earlier in the same letter to Timothy, Paul quotes some words which seem to have been commonly used at the time. Perhaps they were a song, or just an early statement of basic truth about the Lord Jesus (**1 Timothy 3:16**). They were facts that all the believers could agree together and 'confess' together.

Other passages seem to underline the fact that 'confession', this 'saying the same thing', was central to the fellowship of the early Church. In **Hebrews 3:1**, Jesus is described as "*the Apostle and High Priest of our confession*". The Jewish believers are told to "*hold fast to the confession*" in **Hebrews 4:14** and **10:23**. This is not an encouragement to just hold to a form of words. This confession was a strong statement of identification with the Lord Jesus Christ, particularly significant for Jewish believers to declare openly before their fellow-Jews that Jesus is the Messiah.

Another phrase which seems to run alongside confession is to 'call on the name of the Lord'. It describes the early believers in **Acts 9:14&21**, **1 Corinthians 1:2** and **2 Timothy 2:22** and, when he comes to meet Saul in Damascus, Ananias tells him to be baptised, 'calling on his name' (**Acts 22:16**).

In **Hebrews 13:15-16**, it says that the fruit of lips that confess to his name is "a sacrifice of praise to God", along with actions to match.

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How does this relate to us? There are at least two distinct sides to it, for each of us individually:

Firstly, we need to take seriously what the Lord Jesus says. In **Matthew 10:32&33**, he says, "*Therefore everyone who will confess me before men, I will also confess him before my Father who is in the heavens. But whoever will deny me before men, I will also deny him before my Father who is in the heavens.*"

Jesus also says that he will confess in front of the angels of God those who confess him in front of other people. (See **Luke 12:8**)

We need to look at these words alongside another well-known passage, **Matthew 7:21-23**. Here Jesus makes it clear that it is not just the words that are important, but real 'heart-obedience' to the will of the Father. Not even great 'words from the Lord' or miracles are any proof of really knowing the Lord. He says he will declare (literally, 'confess') to many, "*I never knew you*".

The positive side of these words is amazing. If we are prepared to confess Jesus in front of other people, he says that he will confess us in front of his Father and all his angels.

When the books are opened and all that you have done in your life is made public before God, his angels and the whole of creation, you will know that you do not deserve anything but condemnation. But then another book is opened, 'the Lamb's book of life'. Your name is written in it and the Lord Jesus steps forward to claim you. "This one is mine, Father". Amazing! (See **Revelation 20:11-15 and 3:5**)

Don't let us get confused about what it means to confess someone. Those of us who have had teenage children will probably remember times when we met our son or daughter in a group of their other friends and we will have seen their embarrassment to even acknowledge that they are our offspring. They certainly didn't want any show of affection with their friends looking, even if it was perfectly normal at home. In Jesus' terms, they were not prepared to 'confess' us in front of their friends.

When they were younger, there was probably little inhibition. They might have run out of school and given us a big hug. After the teenage years, they became less embarrassed by their parents and perhaps even quite enjoyed introducing their friends to us. They were ready to 'confess' us again!

If we are ready to say, "Jesus is mine" in front of other people, then he will be ready to say, "He (or she) is mine" in front of his Father. We are not asked to prove our knowledge of right doctrine nor how many things we have done in his name. Just "He is mine". In fact, we may find it harder to say that we belong to Jesus than to say that we go to church or believe all the right things!

Secondly, confessing Jesus has a profound effect on our lives, here and now. **Romans 10:8-13** (especially **v.10**) shows us that there are two aspects to a real response to 'the word of faith which we are preaching', with quite distinct effects.

With the heart a person believes and comes into righteousness, a right standing with God, says Paul. He has already said that this righteousness is a gift by the grace of God through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, to be received by faith, not earned by effort (**Romans 3:21-28**).

But that is not all. Paul then says that a person confesses with his mouth and comes into salvation. "*Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved*". What has already happened in the heart-transaction with God is now confirmed in the world in which we live, in our daily life. By

confessing Jesus in the world, we are declaring that we have been transferred out of Satan's world system and into the kingdom of God's own Beloved Son (**Colossians 1:13**).

This is the effect that Timothy's 'good confession in the presence of many witnesses' will have had on his life. He will have declared openly and publicly that 'Jesus is my King', underlining the fact that he was now aligned with the Lord Jesus and confirming that his old life was well and truly behind him.

Though Paul does not say so, this may well have been the day that Timothy was baptised. It would certainly fit the facts! Baptism was (and is) more than just a ritual to be observed. It is a clear statement (a 'confession', if you like) by the believer that he or she has died to their old life and now shares in the resurrection life of Jesus, a vivid enactment of **2 Corinthians 5:17**. It is a 'confession' of being "*dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus*" (**Romans 6:1-11**).

Peter even says that baptism saves us! (See **1 Peter 3:29**) This has been mis-applied by people who have chosen to think that just going through the actions of baptism will ensure salvation. It is just as empty as it might be to just repeat the words 'Jesus is my King' without it being true. Neither 'confessing' Jesus by our words nor by baptism actually does anything unless the words and actions reflect what is already true in our lives. It is not true 'confession' unless words, actions and the true situation are all 'saying the same thing'.

On the other hand, if the reality is there, if we really have been born again by the Holy Spirit, then speaking out and confessing "Jesus is my King" is a very powerful action, confirming our salvation out of the world system and into the kingdom of God. It has an effect on us as well as on the people to whom we make the 'confession'. Being 'buried' and 'raised up' in baptism takes it a stage further, not just words but clear enactment of new life in Jesus, for all to see.

Both these ways of confessing the Lord Jesus Christ demand a price from us, the price of clear alignment with him. Yes, there are other things that he wants us to 'confess', such as confessing that Jesus is the Son of God (**1 John 4:15**) and that Jesus Christ came in a real physical body (**1 John 4:2&3**) but, most important of all, he wants us to confess him. Not just what we believe, not all that we do or our attendance at meetings and services - just him!

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December 2000