



# Confession—The Ultimate Test of Truthfulness

There are not many reliable avenues to gain insight into the “real you” . . . but your words, like a mirror, reflect what is in your heart. Jesus stated that reality in Luke chapter 6.

**Luke 6:45**, The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.

A confession, one aspect of verbal communication, is especially adept at revealing the orientation of one’s heart toward truthfulness or falsehood. One’s inclination toward truthfulness or falsehood will, in turn, indicate one’s tendency to be self-oriented or Christ-oriented.

*For a more complete study on this issue see [Words—The Thermometer of Your Heart](#)*

## THE MEANING OF CONFESSION

A confession is typically defined as an admittance of wrongdoing. It has that meaning, but its use has a wider scope than that singular application. A confession may also highlight God’s goodness, confirm one’s allegiance to a cause or person, or simply state provable facts. Some examples of the subject variability of “confession” in the Bible are displayed in the following verses:

**1 John 1:9**, If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (*Confession deals with an acknowledgment of personal sins.*)

**John 1:20**, He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, “I am not the Christ.” (*John the Baptist acknowledged the fact that he was not the Messiah.*)

**1 John 4:15**, Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. (*Believers acknowledge the truth that Jesus is God’s Son.*)

**2 John 1:7**, For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist. (*Deceivers do not acknowledge the truth that God’s Son came to earth as a human.*)

**Romans 10:9-10**, because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. (*Salvation is realized by accurate belief in Jesus that is subsequently acknowledged verbally.*)

**Hebrews 4:14**, Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. (*Believers are urged to remain faithful to their acknowledged commitment to Christ.*)

A confession is actually an *acknowledgment* of something, *either good or bad*, that is recognized or experienced by the person confessing. An authentic confession is truthful, echoing God’s viewpoint about a specific matter. Even though no human could have unquestioned godly insight all the time, an accurate confession is always marked by maximum clarity and verifiable truthfulness.

## CONFESSION, SIN, AND TRUTH

As the previous verses demonstrate, a confession (an acknowledgment or recognition of something) is applicable to different subjects. The primary aspect of a confession, however, is its *truthfulness*.

A person who acknowledges personal sinfulness in an incomplete manner will often omit facts that incriminate others or possibly increase personal consequences. When omissions occur, the confession is *false*. Additionally, if a person purposefully distorts or tries to hide facts related to sinful activity by minimizing, rationalizing, or blame shifting, then the result is increasing sinfulness.

Deceitful distortion of a confession is not unexpected, but spiritual delusion related to an untruthful confession is often overlooked. Those who do not confess “the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth” might be purposefully deceitful, but they could also be so spiritually deluded that complete truthfulness is actually impossible for them to

articulate. Never forget that when a person's behavior is consistently self-centered, that person will not tell the truth (bring everything to light) . . . in fact, telling the truth for a self-centered person is naturally impossible.

See [Telling the Truth is Naturally Impossible](#)

Whether truth is hidden out of deceit or delusion, such self-orientation hinders a confession of sin from realizing Christ-honoring results. A confession of wrongdoing can either bring glory to God by being truthful or can dishonor the Lord by "not bringing everything to light" which is, by definition, a lie. If you wonder why any statement is a lie when facts of a matter are deliberately or inadvertently omitted, then a review of truth's definition would be helpful.

**Truth means:** *firm, sure, reliable, verifiable, steadfast, certain, faithful, established, trustworthy, indisputable, unchangeable, without pretense or deception, devoid of any hint of falsehood, without corruption, unconcealed, and complete with all the facts. A concise definition of truth is "bringing everything to light."*

*Truth, as opposed to "spin" (falsehood), puts everything in the spotlight. While "spin" uses selective data to exalt one person or viewpoint over another, truth simply places all facts in the open. A person or a viewpoint is not the issue . . . being honest and telling the truth is the issue.*

For a more complete review of truth, click on [Truth is Personal, Not Merely a Concept](#)

A truthful confession of sin is characterized by:

- Accuracy of facts that are mentioned, and
- Inclusion of all facts related to the sin that is confessed.

### **INCOMPLETE (FALSE) CONFESSION**

There are consequences that occur when a confession does not "bring everything to light." Any overlooked or purposefully hidden wrongdoings associated with a particular sin will contribute to incomplete repentance, partial restitution, bogus restoration, and a delay of on-going recovery by those impacted by specific sins.

The following situations help to illustrate the reality of supportive sins that contribute to greater sinfulness but are often omitted from an initial confession.

- If a person stole a bike, should he eventually confess it? If a person lied about his whereabouts, should he confess his actual whereabouts? If an under aged person took a friend's driver's license to buy liquor, should he confess when confronted about that action? If a person robbed the local liquor store, should he confess that crime when apprehended?
- What if the same person did all of the above as part of the plan to rob the liquor store? He stole a bike to ride to the liquor store, lied about where he was going in an effort to conceal where he was headed, stole a driver's license to try and prove age legitimacy for a counter purchase, and eventually robbed the liquor store. Would an accurate confession mention only the more consequential sin of robbing the store, or should a truthfully complete confession reveal the supportive sins that were related to the robbery? Obviously, to be entirely truthful, a confession would mention all sins associated with the eventual robbery in order to "bring everything to light."
- If a person confessed of fornication and even identified his sinning partner but did *not* relate that this behavior also involved pornography, phone sex, secret meeting places, notes passed at church fellowships, daily phone calls to the sinning partner, and regular lying about personal whereabouts, would these omissions allow the confession to be considered truthful? Obviously, it would not be truthful because partial (concealed, selective, distorted) truth is, by definition, a lie since everything is "not brought to light."

### **OMISSION OF SUPPORTIVE SINS**

A person who has committed sin with obvious consequences may confess that particular failure but fail to mention other supportive sins that have contributed to such waywardness.

In the previous example of supportive sins related to confessed fornication, any one of the supportive sins is a very significant wrongdoing and should be acknowledged (confessed). When a supposed "greater sin" (such as fornication) occurs, the supposedly "less consequential" sins are often omitted from a confession. A failure to mention "supportive" sins may be due to a lack of awareness of how sin increases in its severity from "sin to sin." On the other hand, a person's failure to mention "supportive" sins is often due to pride and a crippling awareness that the ugliness and power of other sins create even more difficulty for all concerned.

Not surprisingly, sins such as prayerlessness (Colossians 4:2, Ephesians 6:18), avoidance of studying and applying God's Word to life (2 Timothy 2:15), forsaking the fellowship of other believers (Hebrews 10:24-25), pursuing worldly pursuits and attractions (1 John 2:15-16), and living for self instead of Christ (Matthew 16:24-25) will, typically, not be mentioned as sinful practices in an initial confession by a professing believer.

**Colossians 4:2**, Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.

**Ephesians 6:18**, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints.

**2 Timothy 2:15**, Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.

**Hebrews 10:24-25**, And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

**1 John 2:15-16**, Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions—is not from the Father but is from the world.

**Matthew 16:24-25**, Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”

A failure to live by any of the above truths is common to all subsequent sins by a believer. Faithful believers should encourage those overtaken in sin (Galatians 6:1-2) to bring the above “basic, ground level” failures to light to help confessing believers realize the depth of personal sinfulness and the fullness of God's merciful forgiveness (1 John 1:9).

See [\*Grace, Mercy, and Peace\*](#)

**Galatians 6:1-2**, ...if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

**1 John 1:9**, If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Additionally, when a believer gives a truthful confession (bringing everything to light), then an effective plan of repentance can be formulated that relates to every facet of confessed sin. A confession provides the stated framework for a plan of repentance. When a plan for repentance is as complete and accurate as possible, there is a much greater possibility for biblical restoration to occur with the Lord and others.

If you fulfill your ministry to help another confess completely and truthfully, you may also need to help believers who are sinned against to realize their biblical responsibility to forgive. You may need to review biblical forgiveness with fellow believers who indicate they are ready to forgive.

See [\*Common Misconceptions about Forgiveness\*](#)

Believers who are initially willing to forgive may think they are ready to do so because they have an idea of the sin(s) that might be confessed in their presence. What they do not know is the scope of the supportive sins that should also be confessed.

## **ENCOURAGING OTHERS TO CONFESS TRUTHFULLY**

As a believer, you are to confess personal sin(s) truthfully and encourage others to do likewise. In other words, all aspects of any sin should be confessed, including all of the supportive sins associated with it.

It is rare for a person overcome by sin to have the spiritual insight to realize initially all the corresponding supportive sins. By God's grace, coupled with a believer's desire for continued growth in Christ, the supportive sins will eventually be seen for what they are . . . sinful “crutches” and enablers for on-going sinfulness. When a repentant believer confesses personal sinfulness in a wholehearted manner, the specifics of the confession are often far-reaching.

For example, a person may sin by calling a friend or family member an unwholesome name in violation of Ephesians 4:29. The subsequent confession of sin (and asking for forgiveness) could take less than a minute if the confession focused solely on the name-calling incident. On the other hand, the confession would take a few minutes longer if the person doing the name-calling was sensitive to the spiritual fact that “words indicate the condition of the heart.”

See [\*Forgiveness: The Impossible Possibility\*](#) . . . especially pages 7-8 in the section “How to Ask for Forgiveness”

## EXAMPLE OF CONFESSION WITH USE OF SCRIPTURE

To prepare for a more thorough confession with regard to the sin of unwholesome words (name-calling), a believer would expectantly spend time in prayer, Bible study, and biblical self-evaluation. This preparation would be done in anticipation of asking another person to set aside a few minutes to review the “unwholesome words” situation.

The person confessing might write out the following to say at the meeting, “I acknowledge my failure in calling you a name. I am a follower of Christ who wants to live according to God’s Word, but I failed by using unwholesome words, which violates Ephesians 4:29 (*possibly state that verse*). That verse also tells me to use gracious words instead. In addition to not being gracious and failing you in my word usage, I also have failed to demonstrate biblical love, the definition of which is found in 1 Corinthians 13 (*possibly state 1 Cor. 13:4-8a*). According to the Bible’s definition of love, I also failed you by being unkind, impatient, arrogant, and self-centered. I ask your forgiveness for these shortcomings as well. I also did not exercise gentleness or self-control, two characteristics mentioned in Galatians 5:22-23 that are to accompany my life in Christ (*possibly state this passage*). Finally, my use of hurtful words also demonstrated that I continue to struggle with pride, a sin mentioned in 1 John 2:16 (*possibly state that verse*). For all these sins against you, I ask your forgiveness. Will you forgive me?”

To demonstrate a desire to change sinful behavior, a person asking for forgiveness could also list specific steps in an initial plan of repentance that would help those sinned against to recognize the confessor’s commitment to change.

As you read through the above example of confession and asking for forgiveness, you might think, “Who would really take the time do this?” In all probability, only believers who are focused on growing in Christ, living biblically, and sharing the reality of their faith will use a personal failure to demonstrate to others the difference Jesus has made in their lives. *Ouch!* Sad to say, believers often fail to confess in a thoroughly truthful manner due to pride, a lack of sensitivity to sin, spiritual delusion, minimal awareness of sin’s power to cripple life and relationships, and—above all else—a failure to habitually confess sins to God.

See [A Prayer Pattern to Help Structure Your Life](#)

## RESULTS OF NOT FULLY CONFESSING

A partial confession of sin that does not disclose all sins related to a more consequential sin is a matter of the heart. Does someone purposefully overlook sins to avoid confessing them, or does a person desire to confess any and every wrongdoing but can’t remember all of them? Since only God knows the heart (1 Samuel 16:7b, Psalm 139:23, Jeremiah 17:9-10, Romans 8:27), there are different outcomes that result from an incomplete confession of sin.

**1 Samuel 16:17b**, . . . For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.

**Psalms 139:23**, Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts!

**Jeremiah 17:9-10**, The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately sick; who can understand it? I the LORD search the heart and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds.

**Romans 8:27**, And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

## OUTCOME OF INCOMPLETE CONFESSION TO GOD

**1 John 1:9**, If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

A believer may truly want to be forgiven by the Lord for a particular sin and will readily confess that sin but not mention supportive sins. This oversight is not done to “hide things” from God—which cannot be done—but, instead, is just not remembered by the one confessing. God, in seeing the heart, realizes the person is confessing all that can be remembered at that time, so He forgives the stated sin but also *cleanses* the confessor of *all unrighteousness* (which includes sins not mentioned due to forgetfulness). God grants divine forgiveness because He is able to see the heart and accepts a wholehearted confession from a repentant person who can’t remember every wrongdoing at that time. Seeing the heart, God also knows that when the repentant remembers or is made aware of forgotten sins, confession will follow. God, by His grace, does not withhold forgiveness due to the poor memory of a confessor but, instead, cleanses unrighteousness completely because of a sincere confession.

Even though forgiven completely by the Lord, a penitent person who does not “bring everything to light” cannot have everything in place with regard to a plan of repentance. Sinful behavior, which may not be remembered, still needs to be “put off” and appropriate Christ-honoring behavior needs to be “put on.” (*See Ephesians 4:17-32 and*

*Colossians 3:1-17* for examples of “putting on” and “putting off.”) God, in His timing, will reveal non-remembered sin(s) to a person desiring to grow in Christ so that biblical steps can be taken with regard to “putting off” and “putting on” for the glory of God.

Is there ever a time when God will *not* forgive in response to a verbal confession? Yes, there is; but God has access to the heart of a person and we humans do not. God will not—in fact, cannot—forgive sin when a person cherishes (regards, holds closely) sin(s). God knows the lack of sincerity of an unrepentant person and is on record as not responding to a phony confession of cherished sin (Psalm 66:18, Proverbs 28:9, Isaiah 59:1-2, James 4:3).

**Psalm 66:18**, If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.

**Proverbs 28:9**, If one turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination.

**Isaiah 59:1-2**, Behold, the LORD’S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or his ear dull, that it cannot hear; but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear.

**James 4:3**, You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.

## **OUTCOME OF INCOMPLETE CONFESSION TO FELLOW HUMANS**

No one accurately knows the spiritual condition of anyone’s heart, including one’s own. Thus, a person who is asked to grant forgiveness cannot accurately know the motivation of the person confessing sin and asking for forgiveness. Believers, however, should grant forgiveness to those confessing personal sin(s) unless facts confessed are known to be false. In that case, those hearing a confession can encourage truthfulness. If confessed sin(s) are truthful, even though initially incomplete, forgiveness is to be granted (Matthew 6:14-15).

**Matthew 6:14-15**, “For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”

For a believer, the willingness to forgive is the critical issue. Forgiveness can be granted on the basis of a confessing person’s words, but the facts stated in a confession should be open for verification. If facts are proven to be false after forgiveness is granted, a believer can return to the person confessing and reveal the known mistruths or incomplete information. At that point, the person who originally confessed can revisit the now proven false confession and, hopefully, restate it truthfully with the expectation of being forgiven once again (Luke 17:3-4).

**Luke 17:3-4**, “Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him, and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, ‘I repent,’ you must forgive him.”

It is important to remember that no one has a guarantee of being granted forgiveness by those sinned against. An acknowledgment of sin (confession), however, opens a potential doorway for relationships that are in need of repair to be restored.

See [\*Forgiveness: The Possible Impossibility\*](#)

## **WHY CONFESS?**

The primary motivation to confess sins and ask for forgiveness is not to gain emotional relief but, instead, is an outgrowth of love ... love for the Lord and love for others (Matthew 22:37-39).

**Matthew 22:37-39**, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

The first benefit of confessing personal sin(s) is to receive forgiveness from the Lord. Confessing personal sin(s) to those sinned against provides for the possibility of being forgiven by them.

A believer’s confession of sin(s) to those sinned against also demonstrates the difference Jesus has made in one’s life and opens the possibility of Christ-honoring relationships to prosper for the glory of God.

Those that confess shortcomings by stating “the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth” are few and far between. This scarcity of truthful confessions allows an authentic confession to be a shining beacon of Christ’s love in a dark world that needs the light of His truth.