

Confession of Faith

“A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.” John 13:34

“Spirits” - 1970’s and 1980’s

It seems there is a fear or reluctance to freely visit about this time in God’s Kingdom. Due to the parallels to our current situation, this time period should be spoken about. Comments made toward those who bring up this time period need to be addressed:

1. “Are you bitter about the 1980’s?” This has been brought up almost immediately in some cases, which stifles freedom to speak about it. We should be perfectly free to discuss all matters in God’s Kingdom. The Bible is filled with examples of sinners. We study them to learn from the lessons of the past.
2. “Are you wanting to hold the leaders from that time accountable?” Absolutely not! We assume those who participated in those times had their matters taken care of, and if they died believing have reached their heavenly home.
3. “The 80’s have nothing to do with what is happening today!” The parallels between the 80’s and what is happening now make it critical that we speak about the events of that time period.
4. The caretaking meetings of the 1970’s and 80’s have been described by some as “overshooting”. This serves to minimize the damage caused by accusation and pursuit of individuals.

During that time period, there were many public confessions for different “spirits”. Some are listed below:

1. Leniency
2. Freedom of the flesh
3. Self-righteousness
4. Dry
5. Kososian spirit

The Kososian spirit was the final spirit. It was introduced as a very serious matter, the result of *sensing that something indefinable* is off with a person. It seemed that people who *questioned* the correctness of the spirit doctrine were found in that spirit. It appeared the claim of being in that spirit was used to *intimidate* those who questioned what was taking place.

Some examples and effects of the time of the “spirits”:

1. Caretaking meetings were initiated by congregation boards, who led discussions and directed the meetings, rather than being initiated by the congregation.
2. It was common for congregation members to carefully watch one or two individuals (leaders) to see if they raised their hands to forgive. This was the clue that it was okay for the congregation to forgive. Believers were timid to freely preach the gospel.

3. Confessions were carefully evaluated to see if there was enough remorse or penitence or if the confession was “genuine”. Forgiveness was *withheld* if the confession was deemed insufficient.
4. Individuals were **actively bound**, including *high school children*.
5. Some people suffered mental or nervous breakdowns, with some resorting to professional counseling to deal with the trauma of the time.
6. Several ministers were removed from their positions due to “spirits”. Those ministers were put back in use in God’s kingdom after these times passed.

Lessons from the spirit times of the 80’s

1. The Bible is the ultimate authority. If we are believing and have the Holy Spirit, our beliefs and congregational spiritual decisions will conform with God’s word.
2. The spiritual mother did not err, but congregation members were intimidated by those pursuing their own aims.
3. We do not follow man. Leaders can err and lead others astray.
4. Pertaining to individuals being affected by law-minded pursuit, in the SRK yearbook 2017 “The Righteous Shall Live by Faith”, on page 68 Ilari Kinnunen writes: “For sure, the consequences can be such, that (the matters) can become part of life (for the wronged) even though the sins were forgiven. Irreversible things may have occurred, and does not change the factual existence of these matters. After being forgiven, a believer desires to carry responsibility for his deeds.”
5. When ministers are removed from speaking, the reasons should be articulated based on doctrine and/or Scripture.
6. The law-minded actions taken during this time period were not the work of the Holy Spirit. Satan was for a time able to effectively break the mutual love within Zion.
7. We need to remember the commandment of Jesus that we love one another. Christian love raises in us the desire to help others in times of difficulty in grace and truth.

TODAY

Withholding of Forgiveness

Many Bible portions give clear instruction on how we are to behave in this matter. A believer can freely preach the gospel to anyone who asks without exception or condition of any kind. “For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” Matthew 6:14-15

“Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him.” Luke 17:3-4

Some have suggested that in certain situations the gospel message can be, and even must be, withheld to avoid spiritual fornication. This understanding is not according to scripture.

The law-minded understanding of the 1980's shows the folly of leaving the door open, even slightly, to the thinking that it is correct to withhold the gospel in some cases. The danger of beginning to examine hearts of those asking is great. Who among us can see inside the heart of another person to divine the "correctness" of their penitence? Living Christianity has long understood that the examination of the hearts of those asking for the gospel is incorrect. How is it possible to withhold forgiveness without examination? By what means and criteria is forgiveness withheld? Jesus himself warned us not to take matters into our own hands. "Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again." Matthew 7:1-2 Further, Jesus told the adulteress "Neither do I condemn thee; go, and sin no more." John 8:11

We are ambassadors of the Word of Reconciliation, not its masters. We are not in God's stead. "I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy." Exodus 33:19. The scriptures relate that some have planted, others watered, but God gives the increase. If someone makes repentance only of the lips and yet the heart is far from God, certainly the fruits of such will show. We are but the mouthpiece, God is the giver of increase. We can trust that God will work within the heart of the one who requests forgiveness, revealing the true thoughts and intents of the heart.

Grace and Continual Forgiveness

Ari Pelkonen, a Finnish minister, wrote in Writings on Foundations of Faith and Doctrine SRK 2018, page 108: "Grace is grace merited by Christ. It is God's favor that is continuously present. A child of God can believe his sins forgiven every moment. It does not pertain only to those situations when one hears the proclamation of the absolution. Grace also teaches us to live in partaking of the gospel and keeping a good conscience."

Forgiveness is also spoken of in scripture. "I write onto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake." 1 John 2:12.

We believe that continual forgiveness and grace are the same thing, not different from one another, as some suggest. A child of God can believe that their sins are forgiven at every moment, not only after asking for a blessing. The grace of God toward a believer is not punctual or just momentary. God's grace or forgiveness is only accessed by faith. Nothing else. If it were true that some action on our part is needed to lay claim to the immeasurable grace of God, it would no more be a free grace gift but of works. "Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness." Romans 4:4-5

Some have suggested that believing of grace and that our sins are forgiven at every moment leads to, or could lead to, permissiveness of sin. This is only possible if grace and truth are separated. Such an understanding leads one to think "because grace abounds, I can live in sin." The Apostle Paul says, "God forbid." Grace teaches. "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we

should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world.” Titus 2:11-12 If man rejects the truth of Christ and His doctrine, grace is also then rejected.

Others have erroneously concluded that if our sins are forgiven every moment by faith, that would mean that having once believed it would be impossible to fall from faith (once a believer always a believer). Scripture includes many examples of people who began the endeavor as believers, but became shipwrecked in faith. We battle against the threefold enemy with the aid of the Holy Spirit. “For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so ye cannot do the things that ye would.” Galatians 5:17 This battle between the Spirit of God that dwells within us by faith and the powers of satan, the world and our own flesh is the endeavor of faith.

The gift of faith is in earthen vessels. We carry the old portion that does not believe. We experience this burden of unbelief within us. Some have said that believing of grace continually would mean that we would never need the assurance of the gospel again. This statement would be true if we traveled the narrow way with only one portion. However, flesh having fallen from the perfect image of God in the garden of Eden, we will continue to reap inherited corruption till our death. Living souls require spiritual manna or they die. The Gospel lifts us, comforts us and carries us to the destination.

An oft-cited comment that needs further explanation is that “yesterday’s, today’s, and even tomorrow’s sins are forgiven.” Christ suffered and died for the sins of not only those who believe, but also the whole world from Adam to judgment day. But it all hinges upon believing. What use is it to us if we have believed yesterday? Former faith saves no man if we have turned aside after satan. Of tomorrow we need not worry since we’ve no promise of its coming. What matters is today, at this moment, that we are believing that our sins are forgiven for Christ’s sake before God. In other words, Christ’s atonement work is of no benefit without faith. As the old saying goes “it gets left to believing.” Personal faith of the heart saves.

Justification: “Therefore we conclude that man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.” Romans 3:28.

Perhaps the very core of recent disagreements is over this question. How is man justified before God? The Scriptures, especially Apostle Paul, in addition to Luther and the other reformers have written much on this subject. Justification was after all, the primary disagreement to which they could never compromise. Nor can we as believers of today.

1. For we are righteous by faith alone, by grace alone, by the merit work of Christ. The completeness of the merit work of our Lord and Savior is sufficient for those who simply believe. What then is to be believed? Many of Jesus’ words answer this question. “I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?” John 11:25-26.

This question of Jesus is yet asked today. Many say that they believe, and perhaps most of the world would so answer, however they only believe in, but don't live in Christ Jesus, hence He does not dwell in them.

It has been and remains a difficult matter for people to believe that man is justified or made acceptable to God only by faith in the merit works of Christ. Our corrupt flesh always wants to add something of ourselves to God's salvation plan that was promised already to the first human pair. There is not a partnership of sorts between us and the Heavenly Father, in that, if we do our part, God will then perform His. After the original fall from grace, man became completely corrupt and incapable of any good thing. The Bible relates all have fallen short of the glory of God. The story of Adam and Eve illustrates this immediate corruption. They manufactured garments of fig leaves to hide the shame of their nakedness. This man-made righteousness was unacceptable to God. Only the sacrificial animal-skin garments which God prepared were an acceptable covering for sin.

Nothing has changed. Only the righteousness that God has prepared in his Son is acceptable. Adding something more than just believing upon Jesus is to return to the bondage of the law. Paul writes to the Galatians, "Are ye so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?" Galatians 3:3

The desire to add some of man's work to Christ's righteousness appears to have misled some in our day also. Instead of circumcision as in the early church, the issue is private confession. A common phrase is to "put sin away". While the phrase itself is harmless, what exactly does it mean? Who is putting and where is away? If putting sin away is to be understood as, we by faith and believing have put our sins on Christ Jesus and away is the bottom of hell, where Jesus took them on our behalf, we say amen. However, if it means that we do the "putting away" of sin via confession to rid them from our conscience, then we have improved upon the righteousness of Christ and private confession has become a work to merit forgiveness /righteousness and is a misuse of this gift.

Confession is a support to our faith, not a requirement or a meritorious work. In a sermon on Luke 24:36-47, Luther wrote:

"we teach that we should use confession in order to hear the comfort of the Gospel, and thus to awaken and strengthen faith in the forgiveness of sins (which is the true, chief part of repentance). Thus, "to confess" does not mean...to make a long list, counting up the sins, but to desire absolution, which is in itself confession enough, that is, that we acknowledge our guilt and confess that we are sinners. Nothing more should be demanded or imposed on us about counting up by name all or some, many or few sins. You yourself could then point out something which especially burdens your conscience, for which you need advice or special comfort, as is often necessary for young, inexperienced people and also for others.

We praise and retain confession not for its own sake, but because of absolution. This is the golden treasure: that you hear proclaimed to you (individually) the words of Christ commanded to be preached in His name to you and all the world, so that even if you do not hear it in confession, yet you otherwise daily hear the Gospel, which is precisely the word of absolution. Preaching the forgiveness of sins means nothing other than acquitting or absolving from sins.”

Some may surmise that, can I not believe mostly of grace and just a little bit of law or something I would need to do? Scriptures affirm the answer to this question: “A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.” Galatians 5:9 In other words, justification is an all or nothing proposition - all by grace or no justification. Man is justified by faith alone, which is the righteousness of faith. If man adds anything to merit justification, be it private confession, observing of rules or traditions of men, etc., the law has entered our justification. If we allow the law to enter into the equation of how we are justified, we become debtors to the whole law, and have fallen from grace.

Some may then say, do we not need private confession? Or, what of righteousness of life? Being justified by faith, we have peace with God. This means our sins are forgiven. Christ is the mediator that has come between us as sinful people and God. By faith we gain His forgiveness and favor. Despite these promises of God, we are slow to believe that all of our sins are covered. As is often the case, satan tries to say otherwise. We can turn to another believer for comfort and assurance that God’s promises are sure and unchanged - we yet have permission to believe. This gift helps us along the way, and we are free to use it as much as we have need. But we are just as righteous before, as we are after. Private confession is separate from justification; it is not a vehicle by which sin is forgiven or God’s grace accessed. That is done by faith.

Righteousness of life follows after righteousness of faith - it is the fruit of faith. These fruits are as if on autopilot, they come by themselves. These good works are incited, as Luther says, by the Holy Spirit. We don’t live righteous, sober and godly lives, and then having done this good work, now we are eligible for the righteousness of faith. The world is full of this type of works righteousness.

This then is the mystery of faith, that we are righteous, holy, without sin, heaven acceptable, yet of ourselves unrighteous, full of sin and corruption.

Robe of righteousness

The Robe of Righteousness is the righteousness of Christ, perfect, without blemish, gifted to us by faith when we believe. It is not stained by our sins and failures, but covers them. By faith, being owners of this garment of salvation, we are righteous before God, freed from sin. “I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and a bride adorneth herself with her jewels.” Isaiah 61:10

Some have said we stain this robe of righteousness, others suggest that we also wear another robe that we stain and clean. A believer either wears the righteousness of Christ as a grace gift through faith, or a person wears the filthy garments of unbelief “But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags...” Isaiah 64:6 “Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and stood before the angel. And he answered and spake unto those that stood before him, saying, Take away the filthy garments from him. And unto him he said, Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment.” Zachariah 3:3-5

With respect to washing, Jesus provided the example when he washed the feet of his disciples. In response to Peter’s request that Jesus wash not only his feet, but also his hands and his head, Jesus told Peter “He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all.” John 13:10 (the reference “but not all” referring to Judas the betrayer) Further, Jesus instructed the disciples “..ye also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.” John 13:14-15

The dust (sin) of this journey attaches to our feet, and we as believers wash one another’s feet by preaching the Gospel. As Jesus indicated, only the feet need to be washed. The garment of faith, the righteousness of Jesus, covers our unrighteousness and causes us to appear righteous before God. This is yet another example of the dual nature of man, by faith righteous before God, yet possessing the corrupt temporal part.

The Word of God as the highest authority

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” John 1:1 “For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.” 1 John 5:7.

While most concur with this concept of the Word of God being the highest authority in doctrine and life, a worrisome trend has been heard in recent years suggesting that the spirit in the congregation is equal to and seemingly exceeds the Word of God. If the voice of the spirit in the congregation begins to teach contrary to the Word of God, some other spirit is at work. “Believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.” 1 John 4:1

The body of Christ which is the Church, the communion of saints here on this earth, is subject to the head, being Christ. Paul writes to the Ephesians, “Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also that which is to come: And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church. Which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all.” Ephesians 1:21-23 The Word of God alone judges all teachers and preachers and is the judge of all doctrine.

Luther wrote of this matter in this way: “the Holy Spirit establishes a wide difference among teachers and gives the right rule by which the spirits are to be tested. He wants to say that there are two kinds of teachers. There are some who speak on their own

authority; that is, they evolve their message from their own reasoning or religious zeal and judgment. The Holy Spirit is not to be that kind of preacher; for He will not speak on His own authority. In this way Christ sets bounds for the message of the Holy Spirit Himself. He is not to preach anything new or anything else than Christ and His Word.” (Sermons on the Gospel of St. John).

Watchmen on the walls

Some have suggested that ministers and board members are the watchmen on the walls of Zion. Isaiah writes, “I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace day nor night...”. Isaiah 62:6 Paul writes to the Corinthians “Watch ye, stand fast in the faith...”. 1 Corinthians 16:13 From Paul’s writing, we understand that all believers are to watch. As believers, we have a duty to be on guard against the wiles of satan, and to assist our brothers and sisters in faith on this way.

Ezekiel specifically warns the watchmen that if they do not do their duty, they will be held to account for not warning those who fall (Ezekiel 3:17-21).

Trust your boards and the LLC board

It has been said that we should put our trust in and take our direction from both the local boards and the LLC board. What if the elders had taken that advice at the time of the most recent heresy? If the American Zion had put their trust in the Mission board, the North American Zion would have gone in heresy. It has been said that “This time it’s different”. Nothing has changed. Satan today remains the deceiver he has always been. What is needed is that each of us remember that are individually responsible for our faith. We do not put our trust in any man, men or persons when it comes to our soul salvation. Our trust must be placed in God and His Word.

At the time of the heresy in 1973, the Mission Board (equivalent of the present-day LLC Board) and some congregations/boards voted to not permit Finnish ministers to speak in the congregations. Most of these individuals departed living faith. There was confusion and uncertainty within the American Zion due to an apparent unwillingness of the Mission Board to address concerns of time. As it turned out, this unwillingness was because the members of the Mission Board had themselves fallen.

Disinviting Ministers

Darwin Lake and Phil Alajoki have both been disinvited from serving at some congregations. There is no clear articulation of the reasons why. Statements have been made along the lines of “the Holy Spirit revealed this” or “they cause confusion”.

Scriptures speak about the body here on earth: “But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. And if they were all one member, where were the body? But now are they many members, yet but one body. And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you.”

1 Corinthians 12:18-21 Luther speaks to the need to point out doctrinal concerns with ministers when caretaking.

Christ himself instructed us that the proper manner of taking care of matters is to follow what is described as the Church Law of Christ. The Church Law of Christ instructs us that when a brother offends us, we are to go and take care of the matter privately. If the matter is not resolved, we are to take additional witnesses so every word may be established. Further, if there is no resolution, the matter is to be taken to the congregation. In this case, ministers and boards have pointed to unspecified “concerns” over other ministers as a reason to “disinvite” them from speaking before the congregation.

In the February 5, 1973 letter to the SRK, the Mission Board wrote: “...speaker brothers from Finland will not be called here for mission work. Also those preachers who are now here or are planning to come here and the one here at the present time, along with those called by others will not be used in the mission field.” Further, “This action will remain in effect until mutual thinking, love and spiritual unity are hopefully the same as in the past.” This sounds oddly like the present-day circumstances.

At the time of the heresy and during the 80’s, the Holy Spirit was not guiding many events and decisions of leaders and boards. John writes “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.” 1 John 4:1 The Holy Spirit will not conflict with God’s word. If the spirit conflicts with God’s word, it is not the Holy Spirit.

In inquiring about events surrounding Phil Alajoki and Darwin Lake, questions of the following type have been asked of various board members involved in the “disinviting” decisions:

1. Do they personally know the ministers in question
2. Have they personally spoken with either of the ministers regarding any concern
3. Had they had a concern of their own with the minister(s) prior to this time period
4. Did they rely on “trusted” brothers to reach a decision

It was dismaying to learn that private concerns were not expressed and private caretaking was not practiced, and further that “trusted” brothers were relied upon to reach such a decision, with the decision based on the indefinable “confusion”. Additionally, to have boards and ministers making such a decision on behalf of a congregation appears to place those individuals above the congregation.

Summary

It is important to be guided in faith and life by God’s Word. Unity is created and maintained by an understanding of faith which is founded upon God’s Word and enlightened by the Holy Spirit. Grace teaches us to do that which is right because it is right, not because it provides “merit” to us. We want to think and speak well of our brother and sister in faith, and to

willingly assist them in the endeavor of faith. When there matters of concern, we use the Church Law of Christ in love to restore the fallen one.

“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.” Ephesians 2:8

As Paul wrote: “where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.” Romans 5:20 Wrong teachings and wrong watchings can be put away in the grace blood of Jesus. There is some question whether ministers who continue in wrong doctrine should be retained in their position, since that causes confusion within Zion.

God’s Peace

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