

Last month we discussed the role **accountability** in **Spiritual Community**. To bring us up to speed, here's what we've discussed so far regarding **Spiritual Community**.

- **Discipleship always takes place in the context of relationship**—relationship with God and relationships with others.
- Our relationship with Christ (being **in Christ**) is first and foremost. Outside of Christ, **Spiritual Community** cannot happen.
- **Transformation** is the natural and expected result of **Spiritual Community**. If we are not changed by it we are not experiencing genuine **Spiritual Community**.
- **Belonging** means we fit in. We are where we belong. We are made for community. It also means we belong to others and others belong to us. We are both “owned by” and “owners of” one another, which means we have responsibility.
- **Accountability** is motivated by love, not fear, and goes hand-in-hand with belonging. It helps us measure our progress in growing into Christ-likeness.

Closely related to **accountability** is **CONFESSION**. In this article, I am going to deal with **confession** and **repentance**. The two go together, and frankly, we should add **repentance** to the list of essentials for **Spiritual Community** in the first article, **repentance** is an act of reconciliation, and **confession** is an act of **repentance**. This is largely a practice which has been swept under the rug in the western church because it is misunderstood and runs counter to our individualistic culture, like **accountability**.

Repentance is an act of reintegration into the life of God and the Body of Christ, the church. When we sin against one another and/or God, the relationship is broken. **Repentance** is an act of returning to the relationship. The community of Christ, ought, then, to **forgive** and accept the person back into **Spiritual Community** just as God does. (**Forgiveness** should also be added to the list of essentials for **Spiritual Community**.)

Repentance, however, is not a mere expression of remorse over the wrong done, nor is **Confession** a mere acknowledgement that what was done was wrong. **Repentance** is the beginning of new life. It is the first step we are told to take by Peter in Acts 2:38, and it continues to be the first step we take back towards God, and others when we sin against them. It is a reorienting of ourselves to the relationship. **Confession**, as an act of **repentance**, is an act of submission (another idea foreign to western culture) in the face of, or face-to-face with the other person or persons in the relationship.

If the purpose of such acts is the reintegration into relationship, then the confessor, the one hearing the **confession**, is not there to dispense absolution, but to participate in the reintegration of the one **confessing**. In other words, when someone comes and **confesses** to you, you are a part of the restoration process—the very presence of God (Christ in you) to the person, offering a real and tangible expression of a spiritual reality. Indeed, they are **forgiven** by God, but they are also **forgiven** by you, because you and the other person are alive in Christ, in God.

Confession, then, is much more than getting something off your chest to assuage guilt. It is the recognition of a breaking of the relationship AND an expression of desire to enter back into that relationships.

Hopefully, this brief discussion has helped you understand better what **confession** and **repentance**. My prayer is that you will make it a point to practice this regularly... in your relationship with God, in your marriage, with your children, with your small group and with all other people. It is how **Spiritual Community** is both gained and regained as we fall forward and fall in love more-and-more with God and others.