

“If We Confess Our Sins”

Every so often, it is beneficial for us to look deeper into the text of the Bible. Although it is not necessary for one to be a student of the languages of the Bible in order to understand it, a cursory examination can instill within us a vividness and appreciation for the Holy Spirit-inspired words. John wrote, “*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*” (1 John 1:9). The significant verbs in the verse are “confess” or *homologomen*, which is (listed in order of tense-voice-mood), a present-active-subjunctive; “forgive” or *aphei*, which is (listed in order of tense-mood), an aorist-subjunctive; and “cleanse” or *katharise*, which is (listed in order of tense-mood), also an aorist-subjunctive. The present tense of *homologomen* indicates a continuous or ongoing activity. The aorist tense of *aphei* and *katharise* indicates a completed or accomplished action.

Concerning *homologomen*, the subjunctive mood makes perfect sense. The subjunctive mood represents the mood of uncertainty, indefiniteness or doubt. Generally, in New Testament literature, the subjunctive mood is one of probability. The one who confesses their sins has a certain amount of doubt or indefiniteness as to whether they will obey or not. However, the use of the subjunctive mood with *aphei* (forgive) and *katharise* (cleanse) is somewhat puzzling. A casual reading of the verse teaches that God will forgive if someone confesses their sins, but why would a mood of uncertainty be used concerning the actions of God? The subjunctive mood is closely related to the future tense, which helps to point up the fact that often the uncertainty only arises because the action has not yet occurred. Rienecker says, “The subjunctive clause expresses the way in which God expresses His faithfulness and justice and it is equivalent to an infinitive of result” (p. 786).

The word “confess,” according to Vine, means literally to “speak the same thing, to assent, accord, agree with” (p. 226). In 1 John 1:9, he says “confess” means, “to confess by way of admitting oneself guilty of what one is accused of, the result of inward conviction” (p. 226). Rienecker adds the definitions, “to concede, to admit” (p. 786). A.T. Robertson states, “Confession of sin to God and to one another (James 5:16) is urged throughout the New Testament from John the Baptist (Mark 1:5) on” (p. 208).

Young’s Concordance indicates that *homologomen* occurs 18 times in the New Testament and has a variety of meanings. In most instances, *homologomen* represents a confession as to agreement of facts; i.e., Matthew 10:32; Romans 10:10. In Matthew 14:7, *homologomen* is used in the sense

of promising and in Acts 24:14, Hebrews 11:13 and 1 John 1:20, *homologomen* is used in the sense of declaring.

Thayer indicates that *homologomen* comes from the same word family as *homologia*, which means "profession, confession," and *homologoumenos*, which means, "by consent of all, confessedly, without controversy" (p. 446). The word is also a part of the word family with the *homo* prefix, which means "one" or "same," and *lego*, which means "to speak."

As one considers the meaning of *homologomen*, pictures of childhood are certain to be brought to the mind. A child who breaks a window with a baseball must confess or admit their guilt. A parent's prerogative is then to punish or forgive the child. Also, a parent always has a way of finding out who broke the window if no one confesses. A Christian must confess that they have sin in order for God to forgive them. In a sense, a sinner must "speak the same thing" as God regarding sin. They do this by confessing their sins. If a Christian does not confess their sins, God knows and will punish them according to their works.

The spiritual significance of this verse is certainly comforting to a child of God. As long as a Christian confesses when they sin, God will be faithful and true to complete the action of forgiving and cleansing. We also know from Acts 8:22-23 that repentance is required for the forgiveness of sins. No one will ever be completely free from sin. John calls people liars who they think they have no sin. A conscientious, God-fearing Christian who confesses and repents of their sins does not have to worry about losing their soul because of a transgression.

Works Cited:

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