

Why we still need confession

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Most of us do not take criticism well. We get defensive, make excuses, or blame others. Nor do we engage in much self reflection or acknowledgement of our personal failings.

A lot of churches have deleted the prayer of confession from their Sunday morning orders of worship because of complaints that “those prayers are too depressing,” or “those things don’t apply to me.” Ponder: if a prayer of confession is too much to stomach, what right does a prophet from 2,500 years ago have to make us feel guilty, to throw stones at our worship practices, to cast aspersions on our expressions of piety?

That’s exactly what Isaiah is doing, and his ancient vantage point reveals that human nature is the same today as it was then. We ask, “What’s in it for us?” rather than seeing worship as a time to bow before God. We repeat words like “Forgive us, as we forgive others,” but in reality we are quick to demand paybacks, slow to let go of grudges, and more concerned with our own comfort than with the welfare of those around us.

Can this passage be used to cause the blinders to fall from our eyes so that we can honestly gauge our self-centeredness—our myopia—and see beyond ourselves to the obedience that God wants? Going through the motions doesn’t feed souls or satisfy God, neither for the ancient Hebrews nor for us.

Many people in our churches are on the extremes—not in their political viewpoints or even their theological positions but in their self appraisals. Some strut their perceived righteousness; others don hair shirts. God wants neither. God directs us to

look beyond ourselves and to show the kind of love and mercy God shows us. Then our light shall break forth like the dawn, and our healing shall spring up quickly.