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## **TO WHAT DEGREE SHOULD WE CONFESS FAULTS?**

**"Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another that ye may be healed." – James 5:16.**

THIS text represents a general principle of humility and willingness to make acknowledgment when we commit a fault, particularly to the one against whom the fault or wrong has been committed, with due apology and reparation so far as possible. It is quite proper for us to freely concede that we are not perfect, and no one should attempt to pose as perfect, but rather to acknowledge what the Scriptures declare that "there is none righteous, no, not one"; that we are merely righteous in our intentions and efforts and are trusting for full covering in the sight of God through the merit of our Lord Jesus Christ.

There might be times when the confession of a fault should be made publicly to the advantage of others and if we feel sure that the telling of our own shortcoming would be of advantage to others, we should not hesitate [R4598 : page 131] to tell of the matter in a proper way with a view to assisting others; but our thought is that in general we do well, not only to hide our imperfections, but that it should be our daily endeavor to put our faults away completely.

In this passage, however, the Apostle has a deeper thought; he is discussing here the case of one who has committed a sin that has alienated him from God, causing a cloud to come between them. It has been a repetition of sins, or something to this effect. He is spiritually sick, whether physically sick or not. The prescription for him is that he call for the Elders of the Church that they may pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. "The prayer of faith shall save the sick" (the spiritually sick, we think), "and though he has committed

trespasses or sins they shall be forgiven him." The brother is not in a condition to advocate his own cause with the Lord, and the Lord therefore arranged it so that we should feel a sympathy with our brother and go to his relief and make intercession for him. Not that our intercessions would avail of themselves; it must be the intercession of our Advocate that would avail for the wrongs and imperfections before justice; but our Advocate may at times thus withhold himself for the good of one in error and for the sake of drawing out the sympathy of the brethren who have knowledge of the case, that they may seek to assist, remembering themselves lest they also should be tempted, lest they also should fall from their steadfastness, and that therefore the spirit of sympathy and mutual helpfulness may be encouraged in the Church.

There is nothing that would be in the way of an Elder Brother in the Church praying for one of the fellow-members of the Body of Christ or against the members of the Church praying for each other in general without special request. This would be entirely proper. If one should see a brother taking a wrong course, he should not only pray for him, but should seek to restore such a one in the spirit of humility by calling attention to the course he has taken, as wisely as he may be able; but of course the matter could not go so far under such circumstances as under the circumstances above recited – that the sick one should call for the Elders to pray for him, realizing his own need.

Not merely should the Elders pray for those whom they see going astray, but the Lord has put a special responsibility upon every member of the Church, every member of the Body, to look out for all other members to the extent of ability and opportunity, yet there could not be the same degree either of responsibility or of propriety in a younger brother in the Church attempting to correct and rebuke and exhort, etc., an Elder Brother. The Apostle says to Timothy, "Rebuke not an Elder, but entreat him as a father"; thus we see what a younger brother in the Lord's family

might do, if he saw what he thought to be a deflection from the proper course. But he should feel a hesitancy about approaching the matter and feel also that he would be laboring under a disadvantage and would not be as likely to accomplish good results as if he were one of more experience. Therefore it would be wise for him to pray for the person in secret for a while, rather than be too free about giving advice. But if he finally thought it necessary, it would perhaps be wiser for him to speak to some of the Elders of the Church and ask them for their opinion; or if they thought it would be wise that the brother be spoken to by them.

We are not supposing that he is imagining evil – "evil speaking" – about the person, but that he has some absolute knowledge about some wrong qualities of disposition, wrong course of life, something he knows to be wrong, something that is outwardly seen, something that is not merely imagined. We realize that many of the things that comprise evil speaking, etc., are purely imaginary, such as, "I thought he was going to do so," and "I thought she was doing so," or "I thought she might have been intending to do" thus and so. These things are classed with **[R4598 : page 132]** evil speaking. In these cases the brother should make the subject a matter of prayer to see that he is not busy-bodying in other people's affairs; that he is not setting up his judgment in a matter that is of no great importance; that it is something really serious and disastrous to the brother and dangerous to his interests as a New Creature in Christ Jesus.

The general course, however, should be to go to the person alone, as our Lord instructed in Matthew 18:15; the going to an Elder would be only in the case of some very serious matter in which the person felt that his own power to set the matter right was entirely insufficient. It is our belief that those instances would be very few. If the matter is a trespass against himself, it would be his duty to go to the person alone; if it is something against the Church or that is outwardly immoral or wrong or a

violation of some recognized principle of righteousness, it would seem to be on a little different plane and would call for someone who would be more in authority, since it is not the rights of the individual that are trespassed upon, but the interests of the Church or the Truth or the Lord's cause. In such cases the Elders would no doubt be the better able to judge and would know better how to approach the matter.

