

RETURNING TO GOD AND THE CHURCH

FINDING OUR WAY BACK TO GOD and the church is a difficult road. Sin separates us from God and in serious cases may bring church discipline. We may find ourselves confused or bitter about our experience, and distant from the brotherhood. We may feel hurt, betrayed, or misunderstood by the people around us. Amid all these feelings, we long for a restored relationship. We wish we could return and again be part of the fellowship. But we wonder: *Do people really care about me? Will they forgive me and accept me again? Is it possible for me to return to God and the church?*

Our God is a loving God. He forgives sinners who come to Christ and confess their

sins. The church also forgives and restores the penitent sinner. Regardless of the seriousness of our sin, there is healing and restoration. There is a way back to God and the church. The journey may seem long and lonely. It is often difficult and frustrating, but it is well worth the effort!

CONSIDER THE TRUTH

The truth is that we deserve God's wrath and judgment for our sins. We are not worthy of any love and forgiveness from God or our fellow men. God could rightly have destroyed us in our sin and condemned us to eternal punishment. Instead, He extended mercy to us and has given us opportunity to return to Him. Praise God for His love and mercy!

We also need to recognize that *we* stepped out on God. *We* chose to sin, and *we* stand accountable for our choices. We may have

faced strong temptation or influence to do wrong. Our home may have contributed to our failure, or some church brethren may have been unconcerned about us. But *we* made the decision to commit sin. So *we* will need to take the necessary steps to return to God and His church.

THE JOURNEY BACK TO GOD

CONFESSING OUR SIN.

We must first acknowledge the seriousness of sinning against God. This results in repentance and brokenness before Him. If our sin is still hidden, we are under the smiting hand of God's conviction. If we have confessed it privately to God but still have found no rest, we may wonder, *Must I confess this*

before the whole church to find forgiveness and release?

The answer to that question may depend on the nature of the sin and the counsel of the ministry. Since immoral behavior with another person brings reproach upon God and the church, confessing it to God and the brotherhood releases the offender from guilt and frees him from hoping no one discovers his wrongdoing.

We will need to confess *all* of our sin voluntarily, openly, and with contrition. We need to confess it to the ministry, and seek their counsel on what else must be done to clear the matter. We know we must take this step, but we tremble and feel like running and hiding.

Perhaps we decided previously that we will clear ourselves, but now we shrink back and put it off again. The battle rages in our heart and we wonder, *Will I ever have the courage*

to confess this? But what will they think if they know everything I did? We should ask God to help us abandon self and give us the grace we need. It will take the lowest level of humility to do this. But the sooner we step forward and expose our sin, the sooner we can find relief and forgiveness. The Bible says, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

Some people choose to hide their transgression until it is discovered. Lying to cover a sin only makes matters worse. Voluntary confession always brings the greatest blessings. Others can more readily accept our confession as genuine when we acknowledge our sin of our own free will. The journey to restoration is usually shorter when we accept full responsibility for our actions.

When we confess our sin, it is important to focus on what *we* have done. It will be easy to