

1 John 4 – Part M

1 John 4:15

1 Jn 4:15 **Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.**

In this passage we want to concentrate on the understanding of one word – “**confesses**”. As has been the case all along, John makes another very dogmatic statement when he says that the person who “**confesses**” Christ abides in God and God abides in them. As John has repeatedly done, he is providing more evidence for the believer’s assurance and more discernment for identifying those who are truly saved and those who are not. Everything that he says, however, hinges on the word “**confesses**”. Once again, this is one of those places where hermeneutically we cannot interpret a word by what it means to us, but we must find out what it means in the context and to those to whom the passage was written.

The word “**confesses**” or a form of it is used 26 times in the New Testament in the NKJV. It is the Greek word “*homologeo*” which means to speak the same thing that someone else says, thus to agree with the other individual as to a particular proposition.¹ In this passage it is in the aorist tense, the subjunctive mood, and the active voice. Most of the translations either use the word “**confesses**” or “**acknowledges**”. The aorist tense is the same as the English past tense. It is something that happened in the past at a definite point in time. The subjunctive mood is the mood that may be stated as an objective possibility. The active voice is simply where the subject is doing the acting. However, this particular aorist tense is what is known as a “constative aorist”. The “constative aorist” classification means that the confession is a life time confession and represents the sustained attitude of the heart. By its very nature, Dr. Wuest says that this particular use of the word “**confesses**” implies that the individual has surrendered their life to Christ and will be obedient to Him.² So, what he is clearly doing is linking the person’s words and confession to their life. This is something that the individual does one time, but when they do it, it is very real and very genuine to them. It has great meaning and substance relative to their life and how they live from that point forward. In our terms we would say that the person was genuinely saved. I do not get up every morning and tell my wife that I am taking her to be my one and only wife until death do us part. I did that once for all at our wedding and it was real and my life has reflected that my confession that I would be faithful to her was genuine. Same for her. I have never, not one time, ever thought about divorcing or leaving my wife. This word “**confesses**” carries that same kind of implication.

Just the simple fact that this word is in a fairly unusual tense - a constative aorist - means that this idea of just saying a prayer or walking an aisle has little to no value whatsoever. Jesus never told someone to just say a prayer or to come down to the front and take the pastor’s hand – not one time. Neither did Paul, or John, or Peter for that matter. Anyone can do either of those or both of those plus more, but never truly surrender their life to Christ. In fact, I am afraid that what I have just described may be very much more normal than abnormal. One of the plagues of the modern day church is that it has created a cultural gospel that cannot save. I have said it often and will continue to say it, but when someone is truly saved, everything about their life changes. There will be bumps in the road along the way, but still the major characteristic of their life will be an unswerving love for and an unflinching commitment to Jesus Christ. That is exactly what the constative aorist tense is identifying. The kind of life that loves Jesus

on Sunday, but fails to identify with and surrender to Him on Monday is a frightening delusion that has no saving merit whatsoever – none.

Now, of the four times that the word is used in [1 John](#), it is used three times in [1 John 4](#) (v2, 3, 15). V2-3 are talking about false teachers. The first time that John used it was in [1 John 1:9](#).

^{1Jn 1:9} If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

In this context it is clear that the confession is relative to a person's sins – "**confess our sins**". In other words, they agree with God about the particular sins in their life, and their confession is their acknowledgment of those sins. In the context of [1 John 1](#), "**confesses**" represents more than just a verbal confession, but includes a very heart felt confession relative to the sin that has been committed against God. Acknowledging that we have sinned and done something wrong is not the issue. We could consider that a verbal confession. The issue is the person's attitude toward the sin that they have committed. If sinning against God is almost a no-never mind, then the individual's confession does not have any substance or meaning to it. If it does not have any significance or importance to the individual, then why would anyone even suspect that it had any meaning to God? It is just a verbal confession that agrees with God by simple default, but it lacks the heart felt substance that John is addressing. Anyone can say the right thing. People do this all the time. They are so general in their confession that they really do not even know what they are confessing. They would say something like this – "*Lord, please forgive me of all of the sins that I committed today. I know I should live more for you.*" Listen. A confession like that has no value to it. It is actually a way of the person ignoring the fact that they have sinned God. In essence, the generality of their confession means that they are not confessing their sin. When sin is genuinely confessed, it has to be identified and be specific, and it must have some nature of repentance associated with it. What good does confession of sin do someone if they have no intention of giving up that sin? It has no value. What good would it do to ask someone that you have borrowed a large sum of money from to forgive you, but you never had any intention of repaying what you owe? Do we think that the person that we owe would see any value in our confession if we never repaid our debt? I certainly doubt it.

As the word "**confess**" relates to sin, it is referring to the individual's acknowledgment of their specific sins and their agreement with God about what they have done in their life that is unacceptable to Him. Their sin is exactly what God has declared it to be. So, whenever genuine confession is present, it is much more than just repeating correct words about that sin. It is much more than just repeating and rehearsing what God has already claimed sin to be. Rather, genuine confession comes from a deep conviction and persuasion in the individual's heart that what they have done in their life has dishonored Christ, and it greatly troubles them. True confession is the believer's way of expressing to God that they see their sins as God sees their sins and that what they have done was against God's holy character.³ True confession always resolves to allow God to begin to change those areas of our lives that we know are displeasing to Him. Confessing our sins to God can never be a mere ritual of words.

So, the word "**confess**" in [1 John 1:9](#) represents genuine repentance on the individual's part and signifies that the individual truly wants to live by faith and in obedience to the Word of God. In other words, this confession is not simply lip service or just saying the right thing. It is an actual and personal confession

of sin where the individual clearly recognizes that they have gone outside of God's boundaries and are responsible for their actions before God. It is the sincerity of the confession that God uses to cleanse the believer from their unrighteousness and it is the basis for the restoration of meaningful fellowship with God.

One of the most prominent uses of the word “**confess**” occurs in [Romans 10:9](#).

Ro 10:9 that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.

This verse has been so abused by evangelicals over the years that it is difficult to appreciate how severe has been the misuse. In some denominations, they have made this verse to mean just a simple verbal agreement. In other words, all someone has to do is to “say” that Christ is Lord and to “say” that they believe in their heart in the resurrection, and they will be saved. In other words, if they just “say”, just verbally speak, just state the right things with words, then the individual will be saved. It is the idea of getting someone to say the “sinner’s prayer”, or to get them to “just repeat after me”. This approach simply eliminates the heartfelt conviction that is integral to salvation. What it does is merely focus on an accurate verbal confession of biblical truth as proof of salvation. This very erroneous approach clearly removes the deep and abiding salvific element that is clearly a part of the meaning of the word “**confess**”. Confession is not just a mental agreement with some historical facts about Christ, but a heartfelt belief in the person of Christ and that He is deserving of one’s personal devotion, allegiance, and obedience. Once again, just saying the right things to someone has never been the issue. Certainly salvation does include a genuine confession of the truth, but ultimately it is an issue of the heart.

Many commentators read into these verses, and rightfully so, that Paul is referring to someone’s willingness to publicly acknowledge that Jesus Christ is their Lord and that they clearly believe in His resurrection. The idea is that when someone truly believes the truth about Christ that they will publicly confess their faith in Christ to others as evidence of what they truly believe. It was a practice of Judaism that if anyone openly confessed Jesus Christ as the Messiah that they were put out of the synagogue. So, at the time that this was written it was a very serious matter to openly confess Christ. The individual would be de-synagogued and their businesses boycotted by the unbelieving Jews. They would not be allowed to buy goods from their Jewish counterparts. It was a very costly experience for a Jew to openly confess Christ. It certainly is something that happens today in Muslim countries when a Muslim comes to Christ. They not only publicly confess their faith in Christ, but they are also baptized. Those events cost them everything. They are cast out of their communities, their families disown them, and they become a viable target for persecution and martyrdom. So in those environments, the idea of confessing Christ has great meaning and purpose. Unfortunately, in America it does not have the same significance. Just raise your hand, sign a card, get baptized, and join the Christian club. In many countries, baptism is subtly taught as being the true evidence of salvation - which it is not.

One of the elements of confession that often is not even addressed is that true confession includes the fact that the individual is confessing that they are willing to be obedient to the known will of God for their life. A continuing denial to be obedient to Christ is in reality an actual denial of Christ.⁴ This really is a very serious issue when understood with other New Testament passages. For instance, [Matthew 10:32-33](#) says,

Mt 10:32 **“Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. ³³ But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven.**

It is generally understood that the opposite of “**confesses**” is the word “**denies**”. The word “**denies**” is the Greek word “*arneomai*” and means to disavow, to reject, and to refuse.⁵ [1 John 2:23](#) says,

1Jn 2:23 **Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either; he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also.**

In the New Testament, the primary meaning of the word is that of denying a person.⁶ The general evidence of someone who initially had a meaningless confession is that they revert back into a condition of unfaithfulness to Christ. The opposite of denying Christ is simply holding fast to Christ. When someone is truly and genuinely saved, their desire is follow Christ and to be obedient to Him no matter what the cost may be to them personally. We live in a culture that creates so many distractions, options, and personal preferences that those become people’s priority over faithfulness to Christ. One day we will all have to stand before Christ and give an account of why we felt like it was okay to place everything else before Christ, His Word, and His church. Unfortunately, the modern church has created a kind of spiritual lukewarm atmosphere by succumbing to cultural preferences that people want over Christ. Many churches, both large and small, only meet on Sunday morning because people have so many other priorities in their life that no one would come if they did have other services.

As a pastor, I study just as hard and just as long for the Sunday evening and Wednesday evening messages as I do for Sunday morning, but I generally teach to about half the people during those times. It is sad what all of that actually says to our children and our grandchildren who are spiritually at great risk. The church is headed for some very, very difficult times ahead and my personal concern and unrest is that what the hard times will reveal is that people who are not fully committed to Christ and His church will not have the will to live for Christ when everything else around them is falling apart. Why? It is because they have casually fooled themselves into thinking that they are spiritually strong when in reality they are not. Be assured that the spiritual testing that will separate the sheep from the goats is coming, and maybe much sooner than we might desire.

Many professing Christians have absolutely no idea whatsoever of what it truly means to be a devoted follower of Christ. Other priorities have overtaken their lives. I make no apology for what I am saying, and I know that I am not making friends, but I stand before you as one entrusted by God to build up His church, and not to just accept its cultural mediocrity and lethargy – and I will remain true to that calling. In the Old Testament God provided a continual stream of prophets to call His people back to Himself. We live in a very lukewarm church age that is actually rejected by Christ in [Revelation 3](#).

The word “**acknowledges**” in [1 John 2:23](#) is the same Greek word “**confesses**” that we are studying – “*homologeō*”. The ESV NIV, ASV, and RSV all translate it as “**confesses**”. In that verse it is in the present tense which means that the individual is always confessing Christ with their life – all the time. They are not ashamed and not afraid to do so and are constantly living their life in light of Christ. They are always putting Christ ahead of all of the distractions. In the context of [Matthew 10:32](#) it is clearly denying that Jesus is the Christ or the Savior of the world. We could read into this passage that if someone is not willing to openly and unapologetically live for Christ and confess Him to others with

their life that they are actually denying Christ. Many people acknowledge Christ verbally, but deny Him with their life. In this verse Jesus demands and mandates the individual's confession of who Christ truly is – not just in their words, but also in their life. If a person is not willing to live for Christ every day, they should have no expectation that they are a genuine part of His kingdom and that one day they will enter into that kingdom. If they are left behind after the rapture, they will surely believe the lie that will be perpetrated by the Antichrist.

When someone truly confesses Christ, in essence they are making a very solemn statement of faith in Christ and about Christ. Genuine confession always grows out of genuine faith. As mentioned earlier, it is important to discern that many people confess Christ in a verbal way, but they are not saved. [Titus 1:16](#) speaks of some of these individuals when it says,

Tit 1:16 They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work.

The word there for “**profess**” is the same Greek word “*homologeō*”, or “**confess**”. Churches are filled with people who outwardly confess Christ, but have denied and continue to deny Him by their life. For some reason someone has convinced them that if they just say the right things that everything will be right. Nothing could be any further from the truth than that – nothing! Certainly it is not for us to stand as their judge in these matters, but it would be undiscerning on our part to simply assume that someone's confession without a corresponding evidence of living a biblical life is genuine salvation. If I can say it this way, to confess Christ means that the individual takes sides with Christ. They confess him as both Lord and Savior of their life. They confess that the historical events surrounding His life are true and that His life and His words demand a commitment to Him and an integration of His truth into their life.⁷ Genuine biblical confession of Christ implies acceptance of His person, a deliberate and intentional commitment to Him, and obedience to His Word.

The actual confession that John mentions in [1 John 4:15](#) is that “**Jesus is the Son of God**”. When the individual sincerely makes this confession, what they are saying is that they truly believe that Jesus Christ is exactly who He claimed to be – the Second Person of the Trinity, the Savior of the world, God come in the flesh, the only name given among men whereby a person can be saved, the Door through which men must enter the kingdom of God, and the soon coming King of Kings before whom all men will stand and give an account. It is a deep confession of heart which sincerely understands that Jesus Christ is all of these things and that the individual is willing to fully commit their life, their heart, their mind, and their will to Him. Please – do not let anyone ever convince you that merely saying the right things can equate to biblical salvation. It cannot and does not.

ENDNOTES

¹ Wuest, 168.

² Wuest, 168.

³ Campbell, 69.

⁴ Verbrugge, 410-411.

⁵ Strong, 987.

⁶ Kittel, 79.

⁷ Kittel, 689.

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