What's Wrong With Admitting You Did Something Wrong?
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This question keeps circling around in my mind: *Why is it so hard for people today to admit when they're wrong?* We see it everywhere. In the smallest everyday things — when a spouse snaps but won't say, *"I'm sorry I spoke to you that way."* When a coworker messes up an invoice but blames the computer. When a student knows they didn't study but insists the test was unfair. We see it in politics, education, even religion. We hear the word *accountability*, but we practice blame.

We have developed a culture that excels at blame-shifting and self-victimization. Instead of owning mistakes, we explain them away, downplay the damage, or flip the script so we look like the wounded party. It's a cycle that makes confession feel impossible and keeps real healing forever out of reach. It also prevents moral growth and spiritual depth.

When we can't say, *"I was wrong,"* everything else falls apart. Relationships break down. Communities fracture. Whole societies become spiritually sick.

A Nation That Can't Confess
I've been thinking a lot about this moral crisis at a national level too. Many people call this country a Christian nation. But I struggle with that label when we can't do the most basic thing Christian faith demands: tell the truth about our sin.

If this were truly a nation shaped by the gospel, we would know how to name our wrongs — big and small — and do the slow, hard work of repair. But for the past four years especially, we have seen a movement to silence the truth about our collective sins. We've watched as some of our white sisters and brothers have railed against anything called "woke," dismantled diversity and equity programs, and banned honest conversations about racism and injustice in schools and workplaces.

Why? Because facing the truth requires admitting we did something wrong. That our ancestors did something wrong. That our communities, our churches, our institutions may have done — and may still be doing — things that require confession, repentance, and

repair. It is far easier to ban the books, muzzle the teachers, and shame the truth-tellers than it is to say, *"We were wrong. Let's do better."*

This is not just about politics or history. It's a window into a deeper spiritual and moral sickness infecting this nation.

The Spiritual Cost of Blame and Denial
Scripture names a better way. The apostle James writes, *"Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, so that you may be healed"* (James 5:16). Confession is not a punishment; it's the pathway to healing. It breaks the grip of pride and shame. It opens up the possibility of forgiveness.

When Paul taught the Ephesians how to live as new people in Christ, he laid out a way of life that calls out our blame-shifting and moral evasion. He said:

- *Don't live like those who have not encountered the transforming power of the gospel* (Eph. 4:17–22).
- *Put off falsehood and speak truthfully with your neighbor* (v. 25). ***In other words, stop lying about what was said or done.***
- *Don't let your anger fester and become a grudge the devil can use* (v. 26–27).
- *Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you* (v. 32).

This is basic Christian practice: tell the truth. Own your part. Confess your wrongs. Forgive as you have been forgiven. But our culture — and too often our churches — have normalized the opposite.

It's not that Christians don't know the words. Every Sunday, we say *"forgive me of my sins"* in our prayers. But Christian practices are meant to do more than soothe our conscience — they are supposed to train us to live in ways that reflect the radical teachings of Jesus and the kingdom of God. It's one thing to flippantly ask for forgiveness in the safety of a church service; it's another thing entirely to confess to a person you've hurt, a colleague you've betrayed, or a community wounded by a policy you supported. Confession only transforms when it moves beyond ritual words to real relationships, work, and public life.

When we're confronted, we point fingers. When we're exposed, we posture as victims. This is how unforgiveness becomes a feature of our public life, not just a private failing. In my recent essay, *Forgiveness and the Witness of God's People in an Age of Collapse*, I wrote that unforgiveness has become the moral atmosphere of American life — a backdrop for our outrage, insults, and violence. But unforgiveness doesn't start with refusing to extend grace. It starts with refusing to confess the truth about what we've done.

What's Wrong With It?
So what's really wrong with admitting you did something wrong? It costs you something — your pride, your illusion of control, your right to justify yourself. Confession feels like

weakness in a culture that worships strength. But the gospel teaches us the opposite: confession is freedom. When we tell the truth, we step into the light. We name what's broken so it can be mended.

When we won't confess, we're stuck. Blame-shifting hardens our hearts. Self-victimization blinds us to the ways we've harmed others. Silence about sin guarantees that cycles of harm will repeat. And when churches model the same evasion, we lose our moral credibility — and our power to offer the world a real alternative.

A Better Witness

If the church is to be salt and light in this fractured world, it must show a better way. It must be a place where we practice what we preach: *"Forgive us our sins…"* means we first admit them. It means telling the truth about our history. It means speaking honestly about our failures. It means refusing to weaponize victimhood to avoid responsibility.

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But confession doesn't grow in isolation — it must be nurtured. In a society where we attack, antagonize, and cancel each other at every turn, it takes deep moral courage to say *"I was wrong."* I think about the prodigal son in Luke 15. He knew his father would hear him out — not with a list of demands but with compassion and grace. That undergirding trust gave him the courage to own his mistakes and return home on new terms. In the same way, the church is called to be that kind of community: a people who practice confession together, and who create relationships, institutions, and public spaces where others can do the same. As Paul says in Galatians 6:1, *"If someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently."* Confession requires a soil of grace — a climate where truth-telling is not punished but received with love, restoration, and hope.

What's wrong with admitting you did something wrong? Nothing — except that it's hard. But it is the first step toward becoming the kind of people, churches, and communities that can live free.

If we can't say *"I was wrong,"* we'll never learn how to say *"I forgive you."* And without both, we have no hope of healing.

Here are three **Questions for Reflection** that invite people to *practice the muscle* of admitting wrongs — not in specific situations yet, but in forming the habit:

1. **When was the last time you said, "I was wrong" — out loud — to someone else?** What did it cost you? What did it set free?
2. **Where can you practice confession as a habit, not just a crisis response?** Who are safe people who can help you grow in truth-telling?

3. **How might your church, workplace, or community change if "I was wrong" became normal, not rare?** What would that kind of honesty do for trust, grace, and growth?

About the Author

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Author's Note

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