

A friend alongside.

Many years ago we met a friend who was to influence us greatly. It was one of those unexpected meetings that looking back we know the Lord brought about. We like the phrase “a friend alongside” and that is what she was to us. Although always loving she was direct regarding our faults. This was helpful because we can all be blind. We see the faults of others accurately but we are not so good at seeing our own!

She also encouraged confession. This for some Christians is viewed with mistrust. We can go straight to the Lord Jesus and tell him all about our faults and failings and receive his forgiveness. But there can also be something very beneficial in humbling ourselves and confessing to a person. It helps us to begin to examine our lives in the light of God. This begins to break our self-righteousness, the besetting sin of the religious.

Gone was the generalised confession of being a sinner. This was soon followed by the question of where exactly had we sinned. She once said that sin is like a piece of string. We found this to be true. Pride is confessed but in the confessing, other instances are seen. As God shines his light we begin to look in dismay at all the places where we have been blind in the past.

We often fall again and again in the same place. There is a trait in our personality that needs correcting. If we are efficient we may be impatient with others. Impatience is there in the quick, unkind comment or gesture, speeding through the day, a refusal to accept that some tasks have to be left unfinished at the close of the day. Then there is impatience with ourselves -we want to have “instant” everything including perfection.

How much harm is done by touchiness in the life of a church? All it reveals is that we think too highly of ourselves. One that we often find difficult to name and confess is jealousy. There is freedom when it is out in the light with an understanding Christian friend who has experience of walking alongside others. If you do not have such a friend, then pray that the Lord will lead you to one.

We did not go out looking for such a friend to help us. The Lord saw our need. If sin had not been acknowledged and confessed we doubt very much whether we would still exist as a community. It is the same for a church.