

## Confession

In God's Kingdom we say and believe that confession is a grace gift yet the enemy of souls attempts to deprive us of this grace gift by sowing seeds of confusion and misunderstandings. We often hear questions related to confession and to the care of our conscience, for example: What are name sins? Do I need confession in order preserve faith and a good conscience or is the general proclamation of the gospel sufficient? What about caring for offenses we have caused with a brother or sister?

The topic of our discussion this evening is Confession. We are going to focus on the confession of sins in the Kingdom of God. In the beginning of this introduction, I would like to first define some basic terms. Two terms sometimes used interchangeably are 'repentance' and 'confession.' For the sake of this introduction, the use of these terms is as follows:

Repentance – When one comes into the Kingdom of God.

Confession – True confession of sins with absolution that happens inside the Kingdom of God

To help follow the presentation, we need to define what confession and absolution mean. Keep these in mind as we examine confession this evening.

*CONFESSION* – To acknowledge or to admit. It is the opposite of denial, and it negates denial.

*ABSOLUTION* -When we confess our sins, the gospel assures our sins are forgiven.

We will talk about 'General Confession' and 'Individual Confession.' Individual Confession includes Silent Confession, Private Confession, Confession of Love, and Public Confession.

### General Confession

'General Confession' is when we collectively confess in the communion liturgy. The Communion liturgy contains the following: *first*, an exhortation to confess sins; *second*, the actual confession of sins; and the *third*, the absolution, by the gospel, which the minister proclaims to the congregation (communion guests). By this confession, we acknowledge and confess ourselves to be part of the redeemed, sinful humankind for which Christ gave himself, and are part of the Body of Christ. Through faith, we are partakers of the eternal salvation. We are simultaneously sinful and righteous. (Sacred Acts)

### Individual Confession

#### Silent Confession

This is Confession that springs from faith. Silent confession takes place daily when we acknowledge sin in our hearts during prayer, and when we are open before God. We acknowledge ourselves guilty of all manner of sins, even of those which we do not perceive, as we do in the Lord's Prayer. "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." We are all sinners by nature. "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." (1 John 1:7) We want to confess all before God even those faults we do not understand and see. "Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults." (Psalm 19:12) We want to be open before God and acknowledge our sinfulness and not deny our sins. "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy." (Proverbs 28:13)

Why do we not believe our sins forgiven through prayer as some do in the world? God does not directly reply to us in our prayer, but God answers our prayer with His forgiveness in His congregation with the preaching of the precious Gospel. In hearing the general gospel preached, as we have heard so many times during these services, we can believe our sins forgiven. This gospel sounds repeatedly in God's Kingdom to the sinner. God has given us the Gospel, which is the good tidings of our Lord and Savior Jesus and the salvation He has prepared for us. The Lord Jesus has suffered and died for our sins and has taken all the sins of the world so we do not need to be burdened by sin. As Jesus says: **"Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest."** (Matt 11:28) His blood is what cleanses us from all sin. (1 John 1:7). Jesus has taken that burden of sin and we do not need to carry sin. When we hear this gospel, we receive power. The general preaching of gospel often gives us power to care for particular sins that trouble our heart or to care for offenses we may have caused between brothers or sisters. Hardening to sin in the world is very dangerous and has its effect on us. The attitudes of the world can easily attach to believers. Sin becomes a matter of opinion instead of what God's word teaches us is right and wrong. Sin is diminished and sin has become permissible in society. Because of this, believers are easily drawn and attracted to sin. Many years ago in society, certain behaviors were sin. Today the same behaviors are "no big deal" and have become acceptable in society and sometimes even encouraged. Sin becomes familiar, acceptable and justified by the world. It creeps into the life of a believer and we no longer acknowledge sin as sin before God.

### **Private Confession**

According to Luther in the Small Catechism, confession consists of two parts: the one is that we confess our sins; the other, that we receive absolution from the confessor as of God Himself, in no wise doubting, but firmly believing that our sins are thus forgiven before God in heaven. Absolution is the most important part of confession. Absolution is the freeing from sins so we can believe freely and we can make new promises.

When we fall into sin and we have not offended another person, we also have private confession in addition to collective and silent confession. In James it is written: "Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, they ye may be healed." (James 5:16) We live in God's grace Kingdom. Often we have such little faith that God has given the grace gift of Private Confession. In Private Confession, we can confess a sin or sins that trouble our conscience to a confessor father or mother. He or she then proclaims God's forgiveness by the gospel for those particular sins that we have confessed. Confession helps us stay in faith but does not give us faith. Confession is given as an aid to the believer to care for his or her conscience. It is comforting that we can go and speak of our sins and our temptations to another believer. We can then be reassured by the gospel.

Luther writes: "Privately confessing sin to a confessor father is a refuge. Peoples whose consciences the devil holds captive in his snares and has fascinated and worn out so thoroughly that they do not know how to release and extricate themselves but only feel and see that they are bound to perish. For there is no greater misery in this life than the pains and anguish of a heart that lacks advice and consolation. Therefore such people should be given an open door to confession so that they may seek and find consolation from the ministers of the church. Or if the matter is so repulsive that one is ashamed to confess before a minister, let him confide in some other Christian and pious person, whoever he may be, whose faith is apparent." (What Luther Says)

Often in God's kingdom, we talk about the term "name sins." What are name sins? These are sins we can put away in private confession. The Holy Spirit that dwells in the heart admonishes us to put away all matters which prevent us from believing freely. It seems to me that Luther speaks of what we refer to as name sins when while writing about Private Confession in the Catechism, he answers the question: What sins should we confess? Luther writes: "Before the confessor, we should confess those sins alone of which we have knowledge and which we feel in our hearts and which trouble our conscience." These sins

then we can put away in Private Confession. “Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us.” (Heb 12:1).

While it is true that the general gospel promises the forgiveness of all sins, the common experience of God’s children is that their faith is so weak that they have needed private confession and its absolution. Some may claim that their faith is so strong that they are able to free their conscience from the burden and accusation of sin under the general proclamation of the gospel and that they thus have no need for private confession. When discussing the obstacles to confession, our brother Juhani Uljas has described his own experiences in this way: “What if I do not speak about transgressions to anyone, but try to believe the matter that particularly bothers my conscience forgiven through the general preaching of the gospel? In my experience, I can say that one cannot reach peace or freedom this way. No matter how much I have tried to believe that particular matter gone, it has kept on bothering me. It has been like a rock in a shoe and made the travel troublesome. Then when I have spoken of these matters which have troubled me to my confessor father, I have experienced a surprise. First of all, my confessor father has understood me and nothing has indicated he would not carry me as a believer. As he has on behalf of God, proclaimed all sins forgiven in Jesus’ name and blood. I have experienced a relief. The sins that have troubled me have no longer come to mind to accuse me. The rock has been removed and the journey has felt easy. The only thing I have regretted is that I have carried burdens on my conscience in vain.”

Here we want to remember that in order for a conscience to operate properly it must be enlightened and guided by the word of God. We also want to remember the dangers of ignoring the rebuke of our conscience and the resulting hardening. Bloomquist writes “If man continually ignores the prompting of his conscience and allows it to become a reservoir for sin, his conscience will harden. It will cease to function properly. His understanding of right and wrong soon becomes clouded, then finally it is lost. His sense of shame and sorrow begin to disappear. Paul tells Timothy that this disdain or neglect for the care of conscience causes spiritual shipwreck, in other words, spiritual death. It is for this reason Paul urges Timothy to keep “faith and a good conscience.” (Keep Faith and a Good Conscience, Bloomquist 1998 Phoenix) This is so our conscience would remain tender and continue to speak to us and teach us so we could remain believing.

The enemy of souls wants to spoil this grace gift of confession. There is a danger of making confession our salvation. Confession is a grace gift given by God intended to help us in the endeavor of faith. It should not enslave us as believers. We cannot make our confession more important than absolution. The word of absolution, which is part of confession, releases us from burdens weighing our conscience. Confession as an operation does not cleanse our conscience, but by faith we are absolved of our sins. God does not cleanse our hearts by confession but by faith. “...purifying their hearts by faith.” (Acts 15:9) Luther says, “As I exhort to confess it means that I exhort to live as a Christian.” Absolution is the medicine that lifts the burdens, sadness, sorrow and remorse of sin. It makes our journey in faith easier. “Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved.”(Jeremiah 17:14). The gospel heals our wounded conscience, and frees us from the bonds of sin.

A person can have the wrong motives for confessing sins. Rather than sorrow over sin, perhaps he is trying to please the person that rebuked him or wants to “get him off his back.” This is confession of the lips, pseudo, or fake confession. It is confession without penitence. “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise” (Psalms 51:17)

When we talk about private confession, we also talk about to whom we can confess our sins. To whom can we turn to in private confession? “But ye are come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God the heavenly Jerusalem and to an innumerable company of angels.” God has given us angels along the way in his Kingdom as escorts to help us on our journey. It is a Kingdom of forgiveness. It is good that we can find a true friend in the Kingdom of God to open our heart to. We can speak of the way and the journey. We can hear the forgiveness of sins preached. It is a kingdom of grace and mercy. When someone comes to take care of matters with a confessor father or mother, we want to have the mind of

Christ. “Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful.” (Luke 5:36 Matt. 10:10) Juhani Uljas also writes: “I have also been a confessor father. Those believers that have told me of matters and to whom I have consoled with the word of absolution have been close and dear to me. I have not regarded them as poor travelers. I have learned to know them as Christians to whom the matters of faith are important and who endeavor to preserve faith and good conscience. I also acknowledge as a confessor father I have an obligation to keep all matters confidential.”

As a side note, our general experience is that sin makes us feel bad, and confession and absolution makes us feel relieved. In the case of depression, we might experience similar bad feelings, which will not go away by taking care of our conscience. It is vital to distinguish between the bad feelings caused by depression and the bad feelings caused by sin. Someone may in vain try to take care of depression through confession, finally become desperate, and conclude that they do not have faith any more or believing does not help them anymore.

### **Confession of love**

Confession of love is confessing and asking forgiveness when we offend a brother or sister, regardless how we feel about it. God’s Word requires us to care for offenses against a brother or sister. This preserves and strengthens mutual love and makes our journey with our brothers and sisters easier. When we know that we have offended a brother or sister in faith, the love has been broken between two individuals. We are obligated to put matters away with the brother or sister. We want to approach the person to correct the offenses we have caused. The carnal mind battles against this. When the gospel is preached, the love between brother and sister is restored and there is peace in their hearts.

Sometimes we do not know that we have offended another brother and that is why God has given us the Church Law of Christ. Jesus instructs the offended person to approach the one that as offended. “Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.” Most times, this is enough to take care of matters, but sometimes the person does not understand and we use the other parts of the Church Law of Christ. “But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he neglects to hear them, tell it unto the church:” and so on. (Matt 18:15-17) When the gospel has been preached in these cases, we receive *their* forgiveness and *God’s* forgiveness. At times, we receive God’s forgiveness but the person has not been able to forgive. Later the person has asked for forgiveness for their inability to forgive. It is sometimes difficult to forgive. But remember Jesus’ words “if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses.”(Mark 11:26) We may also want to put a limitation on how often we will forgive a brother. Peter asked Jesus: “Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? ‘Til seven times?” before. Jesus answers: “I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but Until seventytimes seven.” (Matt 18:22-23) We have reason to pray to our Heavenly Father that we would have a forgiving, and merciful heart.

### **Public confession**

At times, a sin may be of such a nature that it should be confessed before the congregation. The believers then preach forgiveness of absolution with the gospel openly. People sometimes wrongly think that public confession is better and more complete. This is not so. We only need to confess our sins as far as they have offended.

### **Conclusion**

Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.” (Psalm 32:1) Our salvation is in believing the absolution of the forgiveness of our sins. All sins are washed away with the bloody gospel

message. They are forgiven and we are heaven acceptable before God.

We can thank Jesus that He has taken my sins away and all the sins of the world. We can praise God that he has given us his only Son and that we can be a child of God. "Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing: thou has put off my sackcloth, and girded me with gladness; To the end that my glory may praise thee, and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give thanks unto thee for ever." (Psalm 30:11-12)

By the gospel, we receive the comforting assurance that these sins are forgiven. "Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee." Matt; 9: 2. Our sins are drowned in the sea of grace. We can put them behind us. Sometimes our natural mind has a better memory than God does. Satan wants us to remember our faults and sins, but God forgives and does not remember them. We also do not want to remember our sins and wish to be a free child of God without sin. We are as holy as any angel in heaven when we can believe the Gospel message that all sins are forgiven in the name and the blood of Jesus. Then there is peace in our hearts and we are no longer troubled by the burden of sin. This is the mystery of the Gospel. "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us." (Psalm 103: 12)

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