

Confirmation 2020-21 Session 25 - Confession and Forgiveness

Background Information

Some of the earliest glimpses of worship in the Old Testament contain elements of confession and forgiveness. When asked by his disciples how they ought to pray, Jesus gave a response that included confession and forgiveness between us and God, and between us and others. A clean heart is an essential part of coming before God in worship.

We often think of confession as a private practice, but one of the functions of the church is for us to confess together. Confession as a part of a larger community of faith helps us recognize that our sins have real-life consequences; our responsibility in confession is part acknowledgment and, where possible, part restoration. It also helps us avoid feeling like we are the worst of sinners. Instead, we are reminded that we're all in this together.

Is it necessary to confess if God already knows where we have fallen short? A better question might be whether it is necessary *for us* to confess? How do we live faithfully without acknowledging where we have gone against God's intentions for our lives? And hearing the assurance of forgiveness can be a powerful reminder of God's mercy. It assures us that sin does not have the final word.

That doesn't mean we need to present an all-inclusive laundry list of our sins to be forgiven. We believe that confession is a healthy part of our faithful response to God, but forgiveness comes through the grace of God, not because we remember to confess every little sin and get everything just right. When Luther was a friar (a type of monk) in the Augustinian monastery, he did what he'd been taught. He went to confession regularly and confessed every sin he could remember he had committed. Sometimes he would leave confession and remember something he'd forgotten to list, and he would run back to confess that

thing. The demand to confess everything began to tear him apart. No matter how hard he tried to be better, he always saw more he needed to change. At one point Johann Staupitz, the head of his order of monks, told him to go away and not come back until he'd committed a real sin. What Luther eventually learned was that the real sin that lay under it all had to do with his own will. He didn't want God to be God. He wanted to be in charge of himself.

That meant he had to start living his life as someone Christ had saved. It became a process of letting go of himself and of getting used to being forgiven. What's more, Luther began to go to confession with real joy and hope when his conscience began to trouble him, and he began to look for and even demand the forgiveness Jesus had promised. That what is at the heart of confession and forgiveness – not just what God does for us, but what this process tells us about who we are in God.

What you need to know

Confession and forgiveness have been a part of our faith story since the very beginning. And it was probably just as challenging and uncomfortable then as it is now. However, something doesn't have to be comfortable for it to be good for us. Like getting a shot, or going for a run, there are certain things we do in our lives not because we enjoy them implicitly, but because we know the effects are life-giving and beneficial.

We all sin. Our sins might be big or small, but none of us lives outside of this reality. Acknowledging our sins allows us to truly accept the forgiveness that is offered by God and others. Without this acknowledgment, grace is nothing but a word we use in church.

Hearing God's forgiveness conveyed to us is an important reminder of God's grace. Who delivers the message is irrelevant – anyone can offer forgiveness. What's important is the knowledge that God's love is greater than even our worst failings.

Confession can be made individually or corporately (in a group such as a worshiping congregation). Individuals can confess to one another or directly to God. Confession in a group setting reminds us that our sins have a ripple effect of damage in the world. Additionally, sometimes it helps to hear another live person declare us forgiven, rather than hearing it privately in our heart. That is when your pastor is most valuable. He or she can listen to your confession and remind you of the promises of God in Christ.

Luther's Small Catechism – Confession and Forgiveness

How people are to be taught to confess

What is confession?

Confession consists of two parts. One is that we confess our sins. The other is that we receive the absolution, that is, forgiveness, from the pastor as from God himself and by no means doubt but firmly believe that our sins are thereby forgiven before God in heaven.

Which sins are a person to confess?

Before God, one is to acknowledge the guilt for all sins, even those of which we are not aware, as we do in the Lord's Prayer. However, before the pastor, we are to confess only those sins of which we are aware and which trouble us.

Which sins are these?

Here reflect on your walk of life in light of the Ten Commandments: whether you are father, mother, son, daughter, master, mistress, servant; whether you have been disobedient, unfaithful, lazy, whether you have harmed anyone by word or deed; whether you have stolen, neglected, wasted, or injured anything.

Essay Questions

Write 150 words per each assignment below:

Answer two of the following (1-4):

- 1) Maybe you think you've never done anything that requires God's forgiveness. But God who created you and all of creation is aware of your every thought. How would you explain some of your thoughts if God asked you to?
- 2) In confession, we reveal our sins and place them before God, whose forgiveness crushes and eradicates them completely. Luther said that accepting this forgiveness is the second part of confession. Write down a reason it can sometimes be hard to accept that God really does forgive us.
- 3) Fresh on the heels of confession and forgiveness, we jump for joy because we are no longer weighed down by sin. We have received, as Luther wrote, a "happy heart and conscience." Write down what you would say to God if you were face-to-face after confessing your sins and receiving God's forgiveness.

Answer one of the following:

- 4) How would you respond to the following, "If God already knows and forgives my sins, why do I need to confess them? Can't I just forget them?"
- 5) In the liturgy of confession and forgiveness, we confess "things we have done and left undone." What does it mean to confess things "undone?"

Answer one of the following:

In the church, we confess two ways that we sin-"by what we have done (the sin of commission) and "by what we have left undone" (the sin of omission). List three examples of sins that involve doing something we shouldn't and three examples of sins that involve doing something we should and why you classified them as such.