

August 6, 2017 – Corporate Practices – Confession  
Psalm 32:1-6a, 11; James 5:16

No, Bill Nelson is not the guest speaker today. I picked up the wrong bulletin cover from the folder when I printed this Sunday's worship bulletin. I confess: I make mistakes.

I confess: I'm not a technology person. Oh, you already know that from last Sunday! I now know where the master volume knob is located on the sound system.

I confess: I like Pepsi better than Coca Cola, specifically Diet Pepsi better than Diet Coke.

Today we're talking about the spiritual discipline, the spiritual practice of confession. Are these the kinds of confession we are to practice? Not really, this is more sharing personal information, not confession.

What comes to mind when you hear the word "confession?"

The Catholic practice of individuals confessing their sins to their parish priest?

An internet search of "confession" generated multiple graphics confessing one's love for another.

These are a starting place, but only a starting place.

We've been talking about spiritual disciplines, spiritual practices that draw us closer to God. My soul thirsts for God...(Psalm 42:2)

As we draw closer to God, there are those practices we do as an individual alone or as an individual toward others—fasting, solitude, silence, submission, service, simplicity—and those practices we do with a group of people. Usually we think of worship, guidance and celebration as something we do in a group. Prayer and study can be done as an individual or as a group. Where does this put confession?

Confession is acknowledging our sins, our shortcomings, our less-than-Christ-like attitudes and behaviors. We are called to confess our sins to God and to confess our sins to one another. We begin by confessing our sins to God:

1

To God – just God and me, God and my sins. This confession is an individual spiritual practice

We read in 1 John 1:8-9 "If we claim to be without sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us"

In Psalm 32:3-5, David wrote "when I failed to acknowledge my sin, I wasted away, my bones wasted away...For day and night your hand was heavy on me...Then I acknowledged my sin to you. I said, 'I will confess my transgression to the Lord.' And you forgave the guilt of my sin."

Confession must be a part of our worship.

In worship we are acknowledging God's greatness; we are giving thanks for who God is. We are in relationship with God. Sin comes between us and God –

In our worship, we are strengthening our relationship with God

Like David, that means acknowledging we have disobeyed—and accepting responsibility for our disobedience

How do we go about confessing to God? I'm borrowing from Richard Foster's book *Celebration of Discipline* for this.

- ◆ Examine our conscience in identifying concrete sins  
This requires study and prayer, so we have a more Complete understanding of what sin is  
It requires seeking guidance from God's Spirit.
- ◆ We express sorrow or regret for offending "the heart of the Father"

--How do we grieve God with our sin?

--We are commanded to love God and love others

John 13:34 A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.

John 15:12 My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you

Jesus tells us what God expects from us. God grieves when we disobey.

2

- ◆ We determine not to repeat that behavior, action, attitude (yearn for holy living)

As we practiced for the upcoming Sunday, our choir director (sitting in this congregation now) used to tell us, as we made the same mistakes repeatedly:

When you're driving down a road and hit a pothole, that is an accident.

When you're driving down that same road again and hit that same pothole again, that's stupidity (my word, not hers). ("Stupidity" is a word I'm not supposed to use two sets of my grandkids.)

Her point: making the same mistake twice means I haven't learned from my accidents, my mistakes

We must identify and acknowledge our sins, feel regret for grieving God and then make the intentional choice to not commit the same sin again.

When we fail to accept responsibility for our disobedience

We read again what David wrote in Psalm 32:3-4

"For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your (God's) hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer."

Have you ever told a lie, and then had to tell a second lie to cover up the first lie, and then maybe a third lie....How much energy all this lying takes! Remembering what you said, how you said it; finding new ways to avoid the truth. That's what also happens with unconfessed sin: it weighs us down.

Confession offers relief –

With David, we express gratitude God forgives our sins when we confess them. Psalm 32:5 "Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,' and you forgave the guilt of my sin.

God wiped the slate clean for David. God gives us a new, blank sheet with which to start over.

3

Confession offers relief – As we read in Proverbs 28:13 "The one who conceals his/her transgressions—sins—will not prosper, but the one who confesses and renounces them (sins) will find mercy."

Confession is an individual spiritual practice—something we do with just God. But confession also is a Corporate practice—why?

Baptists do not have the confessional or the practice of confession to a priest. This is not a usual practice for us.

We may even shudder at the thought of confessing to one another, or even to the pastor

And yet, confessing to one another does have scriptural basis

1) We are to confess to one another

- a. James 5:16 "Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working"

Some scholars suggest James is writing about physical illness and sin. YET, in John 9 when the disciples ask why the man was blind—was it because of his sin or his parents' sin?, Jesus answered, "Neither." The man was blind so the glory of God could be demonstrated.

When Bible scholars agree with me or not, I'm suggesting James could be addressing our spiritual illness—our sin.

- b. Matthew 5:23-25 "Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering"

Our relationships with one another are important to God. God seeks for us to live together in unity, to be reconciled to one another and then be reconciled with God.

4

- c. Lord's Prayer - Forgive us our sins, our debts, our trespasses as we forgive those who sin against us, our debtors, those who trespass against us
  - But our relationship is strengthened when that person confesses his/her wrong against us.

2) Biblical teaching about reconciliation found in Matthew 18:15-20

Reconciliation is offering the "other" the opportunity to confess

- go to offender, talk about the offense
- if offender doesn't respond (confess), take two or three witnesses
- if offender still doesn't respond (confess), go to the church

Confessing to one another is Biblical

We confess to the person we have wronged

We also can meet regularly with a trusted friend, to whom we can confess our lapses.

When we confess to one another

Our confession frees us from having to look and act perfect

Confession brings relief

When we hear the confession(s) of our trusted friend, sometimes we realize, "that applies to me also." We gain insight into our own shortcomings.

We confess to God, we confess to the person we have wronged and to a trusted friend. And we confess as the body of God's people.

3) As God's people, sometimes we get it wrong

As a church family

- a. What do we do intentionally that is sinful? (sin of commission)
  - Arrogance - "Only this church has the right answers." "Only this church understands the Bible correctly."

Years ago, we had a neighbor who let us know only those belonging to her church/denomination would be saved. She said this, knowing my husband at the time was the pastor of another local church.

--Establishing barriers to keep the "wrong people" from attending this church

James 2:2-4 warns us against preferring some people over others. Do we welcome the one who comes with fine clothes and gold ring, while rejecting another who comes in filthy clothes? James asks, "Have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?"

We need to confess our sin of arrogance and our sin of rejecting some of God's children.

- b. What do we fail to do that we should be doing (sin of omission)

-- Matthew 25 lists a number of actions we are to take to help others and warns those who fail to do so: feed the hungry, visit those in prison, clothe the naked, care for the widow, the orphan, the needy

We need to confess of sin of overlooking those around us who need help

As God's people, sometimes we get it wrong

--Churches torn apart by gossip—intentional/malicious as well as the unintentional sharing of confidential disclosures.

--As Churches torn apart by conflict

God is not a God of strife, but of unity

As Christians, as God's people, as God's church, sometimes we get it wrong

-- By proclaiming bad theology - It is my opinion that the prosperity gospel is bad theology. As I read the New Testament, I don't read of Jesus' followers becoming rich

and having all they wanted. In fact, I read of their suffering and persecution. We need to study and pray to be careful not to succumb to bad theology.

Confession is acknowledging our disobedience to God;  
acknowledging our actions that hurt others  
We confess directly to God and we confess to one another  
The person we have harmed/hurt  
To a trusted friend who can hear us, extend God's love to us  
We confess as a body of believers, because sometimes we get it wrong.

Isn't it wonderful that as we talk about confession this day, we also are celebrating communion together. This day we have God's assurance that when we confess our sins, He is faithful to forgive us. Jesus' sacrifice was for each of us. Out of God's great love for us, Jesus made possible our restoration as God's children.

As we move into a time of communion let us sing together "He Is Lord."

He is Lord, He is Lord  
He has risen from the grave and he is Lord  
Every knee shall bow; every tongue confess  
That Jesus Christ is Lord

And let us enter into a time of confession, as we read these words together:

Almighty Father; we enter your presence confessing the things we try to conceal from you and the things we try to conceal from others. We confess the heartbreak, worry, and sorrow we have caused, that make it difficult for others to forgive us, the times we have made it easy for others to do wrong, the harm we have done that makes it hard for us to forgive ourselves. Lord have mercy and forgive us through Christ. Amen.

Paul E. Engle,

*Baker's Worship Handbook,*

Hear these words of assurance,

**Leader:** God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.  
If we claim to have fellowship with him,  
yet walk in the darkness,  
we lie and do not live by the truth.  
But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light,  
we have fellowship with one another,  
and the blood of Jesus, his Son,  
purifies us from sin.  
(John 1:5b-7)

Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!