

This is My Confession...

1 John 1:1-2:2 (NIV84)

¹ That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. ² The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. ³ We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. ⁴ We write this to make our joy complete. ⁵ This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. ⁶ If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. ⁷ 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 all sin. ⁸ If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives. ¹¹ My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. ¹² He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

The Planning Committee meets again today after church. Our main topic to discuss is plans for remodeling – ideas for the inside, outside, who's going to do it, how are we going to do it, when are we going to do it, etc., etc. Not trying to do committee work with my sermon, but what would you think of putting in the plans a confessional booth? Does anyone want that?

Why do we, myself included, have such a stigma against the confessional booth - a little room with two chairs, separated by a screen where a person can confess their sins to a pastor or a priest? Maybe it's because it's too Catholic. And that's fair. It really is more associated with the Catholic faith. In that way it would feel a little anti-Lutheran to have it here for ourselves.

That feeling grows when you consider how the confessional booth is used. Supposedly, the confessional booth was first built in the 16th century in Milan. Soon afterwards, the Roman Catholic Church made it common fixture within their churches. Generally, you would go in, confess the sins you knew you had committed, then have a priest tell you what you needed to do to make up for those sins such as so many times praying the Lord's Prayer or so many times that you would pray to Mary, the mother of Jesus. If you did the prayers, the priest told you that you were absolved, forgiven, of your sin. You had to work off whatever you confessed.

Practically speaking, if you knew that the more you confessed the more you would have to do to make up for it, why not make a few omissions? Give a cliff notes version. Confess the ones that really trouble you, but not all of them. Hide a few. That way you can feel better, the priest has absolved you, you are good with God, and you didn't have to spend all day praying. This is without a doubt an abuse of God's grace, a false idea that we can somehow pray enough to make up for our sins.

Others of us may look at this idea of having a confessional booth, and the gut reaction is simply, "No. You don't need to hear my sins. I don't have to tell you my sins, pastor. I am fine with who I am." Looking a little deeper, there is that voice that also says, "And I don't want the pastor to think less of me. These things are too shameful. I don't want them to be known by anyone else. The best solution is to hide my sins."

That's the original solution to sin, isn't it? What did Adam and Eve do when God asked them what they had done in the Garden? Adam, did you eat fruit from the tree that I told you not to eat from? She did it! Eve, what did you do? The devil made me do it! The best solution for them seemed to be to hide it, and we've been doing it ever since – from pastors to church members to unbelievers. And I will admit that I have the same thoughts. There are sins in my life that quite frankly I don't ever want to confess to anyone.

We don't avoid confessional booths merely because they make us think of Catholicism. We avoid even the concept of having them because we are much more content to try to hide our sins rather than to expose them, confess them, put them out there for people to see and to know. I don't want people to think less of me. I don't want people to judge me. Let's brush it under the rug.

Just so that we are all on the same page, I am not going to be advocating a confessional booth in the Planning Committee meeting today. What I am going to advocate is the same thing that the Apostle John was advocating for his people: confession of sins. This is nothing new. It's not an invention of the 16th century. The authors of the Psalms, great people like King David, often confessed their

sins to God and God preserved it for us to read. In Old Testament worship life, priests would offer sacrifices every morning and every evening every day confessing their sins and the sins of the people over the sacrifices while they did them.

John knew that our default option in confronting sin was to hide it, and he warns us of the dangers of doing so: "If we claim to have fellowship with [God] yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth." (verse 6) God is light; he exposes our sins. That's what his law does. It points to what we should and should not do. As we measure ourselves against, the light shines on and reveals our sins. Instead of acknowledging what God clearly shows us, we walk away from his Word because we don't want to be exposed. By avoiding what he shows us but say that we follow him, we are lying and do not live by his truth; we walk in darkness. If we do not let God expose our sin, we cannot have any part, any fellowship with God. We are by ourselves in darkness when we try to hide our sins.

"If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us." (verse 8) More than lying in general by not letting our sins be exposed, if we say that we have no sins to confess, then we are also lying to ourselves. By doing so, we continue in that darkness, trying to cover are sins up, avoiding the light of God's Word. Again, we do not live according to God's Word and we cannot claim any part of his forgiveness or have any fellowship with him. We instead think that the secretiveness of darkness will cover us and we won't have to feel guilty and judged.

"If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives." (verse 10) If we claim that we have not sinned, that we are not really guilty, that my past is perfect, that I am not troubled by anything I have done because I have never done anything wrong, then we are not just lying to ourselves, but we are also calling God a liar. He said that we are all sinful from birth, sinful from the time we were conceived. But if we claim that we have never sinned, refuse to have our sins exposed, we are claiming to be god-like as we lay claim to perfection. By not confessing our sins and covering them up, we make God out to be a liar and we completely ignore his Word. We do not belong to him. We do not belong with him. We have no fellowship with him or other believers. We are hopelessly lost in the darkness of our unconfessed sin.

What's the solution? "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 all sin." (verse 7) Walking in the light means that we are completely exposed. Just as it was in the Garden of Eden, there's no point in trying to hide our sins. God knows exactly what we have done. He wants us to come clean and admit our damning failures, that we fell to sin and are now dead in it. God's light, his Word, exposes us, exposes our hearts. He can already see it. It's time to own up to it. It's time to come clean.

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." (verse 9) When we admit sin, come to terms with that fact that I have wronged God and that I am not able to make up for it, then we are told the true solution to our exposed sins. The blood of Jesus, God's Son, purifies us. He cleansed, purged every single sin from us. All the impurity that we brought into our lives, Christ's blood covers. He takes care of each and every stain, wrinkle, and blemish. Nothing is left uncovered. We are 100% cleansed and pure before God because Jesus' shed his blood for you and me.

What's more is, even though our desire is to live holy lives walking with God in his light, Jesus speaks in our defense when we sin. He shows God the Father the nail marks, his pierced side. He reminds God of what he has done to cleanse us from all sins, his perfect life, his blood, his atoning sacrifice paid for our sin. "If anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One." (chapter 2 verse 1)

Hiding our sin will only make it worse and lead us to the darkness of unbelief, of damnation. The only solution to our sin is to come clean, to confess our sins before our God. We can't fix what we have done wrong, but Christ has. As we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

We may not be comfortable with the idea of installing a confessional booth here in church, but we don't need one in order to confess our sins. Confession and absolution - admitting our sins and receiving forgiveness from God - is for our everyday life. When your kid does something wrong, you inherently teach them to say that they are sorry. When they say that they are sorry, what do you say in response? "It's okay"? Well, it's actually not. In that moment, you can make use of the confession and absolution that John is promoting here in his letter. Don't say, "It's okay you sinned, okay that you did something wrong" because it's not. Instead, say, "You are forgiven. God forgives you. I forgive you. It's not okay, but Jesus died for you and rose from the dead. He forgave you your sins. You are forgiven. He has purified you from all sin. That's why I can forgive you. God makes it okay."

"[Jesus] is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world." (chapter 2 verse 2) That's what Jesus gave us in rising from the dead. I know that you really are forgiven because the risen Jesus said so. He died so that we could have this, that we could tell each other to stop hiding from our sins. Expose them. Bring them to light. Let Jesus' shoulders carry them. Put them on him on the cross. He did the heavy lifting. He did it all. He suffered and died for your sins. God's justice has been satisfied. Jesus' blood purifies us from all our sins.

We can confess our sins and forgive them one on one with family and with friends. We can confess them to our pastor, confess them here in church in our worship and receive from the pastor or a friend forgiveness of those sins just as valid as Jesus himself telling us that we are forgiven. Because Jesus' blood purifies us from all sins, he has brought us into fellowship with God, with him. We walk in the light as we allow our sins to be exposed and then be forgiven by the one who speaks in our defense of our forgiveness: Jesus Christ, our Righteousness. This is my confession: I am a sinner, and the Risen Christ purifies me from all my sin. I am forgiven. Amen.

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