

Notes on Confession

- “The confession of evil works is the first beginning of good works.” -Augustine of Hippo
- God’s heart and desire is seen is longing to forgive
- It wasn’t God’s anger that brought Jesus to the cross, but it was his love.
- “Jesus knew that by his vicarious suffering he could actually absorb all the evil of humanity and so heal it, forgive it, redeem it.”
- Talking about Jesus on the cross, “In a deep and mysterious way he was preparing to take on the collective sin of the human race. Since Jesus lives in the eternal now, this work was not just for those around him, but he took in all the violence, all the fear, all the sin of the past, all the present, and all the future. This was his highest and most holy work, the work that makes confession and the forgiveness of sins possible.”
- We know the reality of the fullness of Jesus’ embodiment of sin so that we could know true forgiveness. Not just because the Bible tells us so, but because many of us have experienced the Divine Mystery of God’s loving forgiveness that is found in forgiveness.
- Confession is the practice that brings us to deeper relationship with God.
- Confession happens by the very grace of God that helps reveal to us the depth of our need for Him and for us to move into a deeper relationship with God...”work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.” (Phil 2:12)
- Confession is a decision it is extremely personal and must also be a practice of the faith community...”there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 2:5)...”confess your sins one to another, and pray for one another...” (James 5:16)
- “Confession is a difficult Discipline for us because we all too often view the believing community as a fellowship of saints before we see it as a fellowship of sinners...We imagine that we are the only ones who have not stepped onto the high road of heaven. Therefore, we hide ourselves from one another and live in veiled lies and hypocrisy.”
- “We know that we are not alone in our sin. The fear and pride that cling to us like barnacles cling to others also. We are sinners together. In acts of mutual confession we release the power that heals. Our humanity is no longer denied, but transformed.”
- Confession leads to freedom!
- We have the ability to receive confession and forgive for one another (“If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.” John 20:23)
- “Our brother...has been given to us to help us. He hears the confession of our sins in Christ’s stead and he forgives our sins in Christ’s name. He keeps the secret of our confession as God keeps it. When I go to my brother to confess, I am going to God.” - Dietrich Bonhoeffer
- Power of public confession does not negate the work that God does inwardly, nor does it replace the confession to God, but there are moments that hearing of our forgiveness from another brings it to a deeper place of healing.
- 1 Peter 2:9 “You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood.”

- “A man who confesses his sins in the presence of a brother knows that he is no longer alone with himself; he experiences the presence of God in the reality of the other person.” -Dietrich Bonhoeffer
- Public confession allows for the sins of darkness to be drug into the light and in the light they lose their power!
- St. Alphonsus Ligouri writes, “For a good confession three things are necessary: an examination of conscience , sorrow, and a determination to avoid sin.”
 - Examination of conscience: “we are inviting God to move upon the heart and show us areas that need his forgiving and healing touch.”
 - Sorrow: as it relates to confession is not primarily an emotion, though emotion may be involved. It is an abhorrence at having committed the sin, a deep regret at having offended the heart of the Father.
 - Determination to avoid sin: asking God to give us a yearning for holy living, a hatred for unholy living (not to be projected onto the lives of others)
- “A generalized confession may save us humiliation and shame, but it will not ignite inner healing.” The people who came to Jesus to confess, came with their specific needs of forgiveness.
- John Wesley, “Give me one hundred preachers who fear nothing but sin and desire nothing but God...such alone will shake the gates of hell and set up the kingdom of heaven on earth.”
- It is the will to be delivered from sin that we seek from God as we prepare to make confession.
- Confession begins in sorrow, but it ends in joy.
- “There is celebration in the forgiveness of sins because it results in a genuinely changed life.”
- “It is correct theologically to say that every Christian believer can receive the confession of another, but not every Christian believer will have sufficient empathy and understanding. Though it is unfortunate, it is a fact of life that some people seem unable to keep a confidence. Others are disqualified because they would be horrified at the revealing of certain sins. Still others, not understanding the nature and value of confession, would shrug it off with a “that’s not so bad.”...
- Moving to the correct characteristics of someone to confess to: “The key qualifications are spiritual maturity, wisdom, compassion, good common sense, the ability to keep a confidence, and a wholesome sense of humor. Many pastors- though by no means all- can serve in this way. Often ordinary folk who hold no office or title whatever are among the best at receiving a confession.”

To the hearers of confessions

- We begin by learning to live under the cross.
- Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “Anybody who lives beneath the Cross and who has discerned in the Cross of Jesus the utter wickedness of all men and of his own heart will find there is no sin that can ever be alien to him. Anybody who has once been horrified by the

dreadfulness of his own sin that nailed Jesus to the Cross will no longer be horrified by even the rankest sins of a brother.”

- “Once we see the awfulness of sin we know that, regardless of what others have done, we ourselves are the chief of sinners.” (this does not negate our having been truly forgiven! It brings us to a place of humility, not superiority)
- “When we live in the spirit, we do not need to tell others that we will keep privileged information privileged.”
- “As we prepare for this sacred ministry it is wise that we regularly pray for an increase of the light of Christ within us so that, as we are with others, we will radiate his life and light into them. We want to learn how to live so that our very presence will speak of the love and forgiving grace of God. Also, we should pray for an increase of the gift of discernment. This is especially important when we minister to them following the confession. We need to be able to perceive the real healing needed in the deep, inner spirit.”
- When hearing someone’s confession, be silent. Listen. Silence does not diminish the moment, but our words might.
- “It is often helpful by prayer to set the cross between yourself and the penitent. This protects them from receiving merely human emotion from you and protects you from receiving any harmful influences from them. Everything is filtered through the light of the cross. Your human compassion is heightened and enlivened by divine love.”
- Confession can not be complete without the one hearing the confession, praying over the confessor.
- This prayer is for inner healing from the destruction of sin and should likely be accompanied by the laying on of hands. (Hebrews 6:2)
- “One makes a very deep rapport in this kind of prayer. One feels the feeling of the person for whom one prays; so much so that often tears come from some deep center of compassion within the soul. Yet, if one weeps, it is not in grief but in joy, knowing that these tears are not one’s own but are the tears of the compassionate heart of Christ brooding over the lost one, and the joy of Christ that at last has been given a channel through which He can reach this person whom He loves.” -Agnes Sanford

“Honesty leads to confession, and confession leads to change.”

Wesley’s 21...