

Scripture Reading:

I John 1:1 “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life— 2 the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us-- 3 that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. 4 And these things we write to you that your joy may be full. 5 This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. 6 If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice 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 Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. 8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.”

"Confessing Our Sins"

This morning will be the second of five sermons here at the end of ordinary time this year, on how and why we worship the way that we do here at Church of the King. We are moving through the five major elements of what we call Covenant Renewal Worship which have been part of traditional Christian worship for almost two thousand years.

- **A Call to Worship our Triune God**
- **A Confession of our sins**
- **A time of Consecration of the Saints**
- **A Communion meal with our Savior**
- **A Commission to disciple the nations**

As I said last week there are two very good reasons for such a review:

- **First it is good for us to remember why we do what we do here on Sunday mornings**
- **And second, we have a tremendous responsibility to pass on our love of the Lord's Day and a right understanding of proper worship to the covenant children that God has blessed us with, both as their parents and the rest of us as their sponsors!**

The reaction to last week's message has been encouraging for your pastor not only because of some kind comments that were made, but reports of on-going discussions and the reactions from the children.

- **My hope and prayer is that this continues to take place throughout the entire series.**

We have considered the importance of how God calls us into His presence and this week we will look at the confession of our sins & forgiveness: Although we find such confession and forgiveness in the orders of worship from all corners of Christendom for the first 1800 years of church history it has been largely lost in the Baptist, Evangelical, Charismatic and even reformed Churches here in America today.

- **This should remind us of how important it is to have a right understanding of worship & why we must make sure to pass along these truths to our children!**

We are not striving to just return to traditional worship but rather to understand why we see such uniformity down through the centuries:

- **We are striving to understand how the Bible can inform us about the right worship of our God.**

Before we look at the particulars about confessing our sins I want us to take a moment to look at one of the study sheets I provided last week and this week: [There is a chart called “Understanding our Order of Worship from a covenantal framework in Scripture and can be found under “our worship” at www.COTKS.org]

Now please understand this is not the only pattern that we see in the Scriptures, but I think it is a dominant pattern and one that is often seen in the worship of the Saints and how God saves His people from their sins. I want to quickly review this pattern and how we see it in our worship and I will leave the other comparisons for your own study and discussions.

As you do so, it should become clear that even where churches do not practice covenant renewal worship they order their understanding of salvation in the same way and you should also see how richly the Old Testament informs us about right worship in the New Covenant.

The general pattern is given in the left-hand column:

- First God takes hold of something or someone to establish a covenant.
- Next God changes or reorders them.
- God speaks to them & instructs them.
- God confirms His covenant with signs and oaths [often with food!]
- God looks to the future, revealing the purpose of His Covenant. If you move over to the column on Covenant Renewal Worship you will see that God takes hold of us in the call to worship.

-- In our time of confession we see God reorder us by removing our sins as far as the east is from the west and clothing us in the white robes of righteousness in His Son Jesus.

-- During the time of consecration that we will study next week, God instructs us from His word and accepts our prayers and gifts.

-- Next those who have been given the sign of Baptism are gathered around the great covenant meal where we are nourished by God Himself.

-- And finally God looks to the future by sending us forth to serve in His Kingdom!

You can see how this clearly parallels what Jesus has done in coming to save His people from their sins and also how the Old Testament patterns showed the way: Old Testament worship looked forward to what Jesus would do and new covenant worship remembers and celebrates what Jesus has done!

Many American churches have lost their way in terms of the order of worship: BUT, those who are Biblical and orthodox are none the less preaching a salvation that follows this same Biblical pattern!

Perhaps this is a good place to answer a couple of objections that we will often hear from these evangelical quarters these days:

- First they are often put-off by our being liturgical, having a more formal order of worship in the first place.

Part of this is a proper concern that we do not return to the dead orthodoxy of the Roman Catholic or Eastern Orthodox churches and those more traditional American churches who have gone liberal...

The other concern is that they don't want the worship service to be stale or to become common place: They want freedom for the Spirit to move and to have real life in their services.

As to the first we clearly reject the errors of Rome & the liberals: BUT just because they don't believe the Gospel anymore or pervert proper worship practices as the Catholic have with the Mass, that is no reason to throw the baby out with the bath water!

- **IF what we have shown to be the Biblical pattern is in fact Biblical and has been followed for centuries, then we have an obligation to stand up for Biblical truth by defending it AND practicing it!**

As to the second objection, why does it have to be stale or wrong to be properly prepared for worship?

- **Is it going to be better to worship in unbiblical ways?**

If someone argues that my taking the time to prepare an order of worship somehow curtails the ability of the Spirit to move during our worship, would they not be arguing that the Spirit is not working the other six days of the week when I am doing those preparations? And we need to remember that those who insist that they do not want to be shackled by some sort of liturgy are just using a different liturgy: All that liturgy means is how we arrange our services...

- **You can arrange for them to be very orderly or disorderly**
- **You arrange for them to be structured or free-flowing**
- **You can arrange them so the attendees are participating or have them come as spectators.**
- **You can use or choose not to use all of the elements of worship we are studying together**

These are all decisions that are made before the worship service begins!

- **We want to always be searching the Scriptures and seeking the Lord's direction for how we should approach Him in worship.**

I think we can all agree that it would NOT be a good idea to just send the young folks off into the kitchen with just the raw materials but no recipes or instructions and hope that a good meal would result from their efforts...

- **A good cook knows the recipe, just as we should look to the Bible and the Spirit for right worship!**

When we do, there is a natural flow to what happens during the worship service and the flow is reflecting the covenant patterns that we see in all of the Bible. So first God calls us into His presence and we respond with a song of adoration and a salutation that affirms that we are coming before the one true, Triune God of Creation.

- **At this point we have a problem and need God's gracious help.**
- **We have the same problem that we often see other Saints having as they are brought into God's presence in the Bible:**

Isaiah is taken before the very throne of God and he cries out,

"Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, The Lord of hosts."

**This is not the cry of a wicked person thrust before our Holy God;
this is God's faithful prophet!**

It is the same with the Prophet Ezekiel who when brought before God proclaims, "I fell on my face."

And this is also what we see in the New Testament when the Apostle John comes before the risen Jesus on the Lord's Day: "And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead."

- Now these verses should be very familiar because we often use them to introduce our time of confession and forgiveness in the worship service.
- Even as redeemed sinners we are humbled when we come into the presence of God and need to be reminded how and why we are forgiven and able to stand before our Holy God.

We are reminded of this need with a reading from the Scriptures and then sing a hymn of confession together remembering our need and that Jesus is our gracious Savior! After our hymn we take time for individual and corporate confession of sin: Here is where we practice the great truths that we read this morning from the first letter of John: John begins his letter with the great truth that through Jesus we have been called into the very presence of God:

I John 1:1 “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life— 2 the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us-- 3 that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.”

Now as we pointed out last week, this truth applies to each of us at all times during our lives...

- BUT assembling as the Saints together is when we experience this as the Body of Christ...
- We have been called into the presence of our Holy God, and then John points out our problem:

6 “If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.”

- So who was able to come here this morning declaring they did not walk in darkness this week?

Now if we use the standard of righteousness from the world’s or even what some churches use, we might be able to get by: We may have avoided the REALLY big sins like murder or adultery!

But did we keep the commandments on either side of the “big” ones?

- Honor your parents and do not covet?

Consider the list of sins that Paul presents at the end of Romans, you know, the one that we always use to beat up on those really bad sinners like homosexuals in the world...

“being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness... *[oops how did that slip in here]*, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, *[envy & murder right next to each other!]* strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, 30 backbiters, *[guess all that gossip might be serious]* haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, *[sorry kids you don’t get a pass]* 31 undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; 32 who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.”

Now I want you to notice two important points that Paul makes there at the end of this long list which show why we must be very serious about the confession of sins:

- He does NOT say SOME of these things are deserving of death... ALL of them deserve death because ALL sin is serious!
- Paul argues that if we do not avoid and condemn such things, then we approve of them!
- Honest confession demonstrates our disapproval of these sins!

Now Paul will go on to drive home these points until he declares in Chapter three that ALL are under the guilt of sin and then presents the glorious Good News that we can be declared righteous because of what Jesus has done.

- This is the very point that John now makes in verse seven of our text this morning:

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 Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.”

- There is only one way for us to walk in the light, only one way for us to properly approach our Holy God and that is through the blood of Jesus!
- John then clearly states why we need, even as forgiven sinners, a time of proper confession...

8 “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.”

- During our time of confession, silently or corporately, we are NOT telling God anything that He does not already know!

Driving this home a 3rd time John says in verse 9, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.”

- Some have argued that we don’t need to do this in the service each week because Jesus has already forgiven our sins!

This is true, but only part of the great truth about our justification...

- By faith we know our sins were forgiven when Jesus declared ‘it is finished’ from the Cross, was raised in power from the dead and ascended to God’s right hand!
- However, we experience the forgiveness of sins each time we obey John’s call to confess our sins
- And, we will know the final forgiveness of our sins when Jesus reads our name from the Lamb’s Book of Life at the final judgment in our resurrected bodies!

Taking the time to confess your sins during the day or in your morning prayers does not obscure the great doctrine of justification: It confirms it!

- It is no different when we gather together for worship and also have the opportunity to confess our corporate sins together before God.

So we take a moment to confess our individual sins and then we pray a corporate prayer of confession together: This is a prayer and we pray it together! *[young children too!]*

In our time of individual confessing we must simply be honest...

- No making excuses for our actions, like I was tired or sick
- No blame shifting, which we learned well from our first parent: “The woman YOU gave me...”
- No comparison confessions, thinking what I did was not so bad compared to what someone else has done.
- Be serious, remembering, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

And again we come face to face with a simple question as we did last week asking if we really believe that God is calling us into His presence?

➤ **Here we confront the often troubling question of whether God has really forgiven my sins...**

-- **Some of us have very grievous sins in our past and always wonder if God could really forget all that...**

-- **Some of us have struggles with particular sins that seem to come back week after week wondering if God can once again forgive us.**

-- **Some of us may have suddenly fallen into some grave sin unexpectedly and thus question whether we were ever saved at all**

➤ **This is why that simple question and the answer that follows in the order of worship are SO important...**

After we have honestly confessed our sins we hear an officer in Christ's Church proclaim Good News with a Scripture and the absolution!

➤ **The Bible teaches that we are forgiven in Jesus and the Scriptures and the minister now proclaim this truth!**

➤ **And we believe in faith!**

Please note that in giving the absolution, 'Your sins are forgiven,' Theron or Mike or Dale or I as ordained Elders are simply declaring the truth of God's Word!

➤ **We are forgiven because God says we are forgiven and that is a great comfort to His people!**

I want to close with just two more observations about why it is so important that we have this time of confession and forgiveness in the service... Just as our salutation in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit confirms our Trinitarian worship each week, this time of confession and forgiveness preaches the Gospel, the Good News that Jesus came to save His people from their sins each and every week! It is Good News that comforts the Sheep and it is Good News that confronts unrepentant sinners!

➤ **We certainly want to be friendly, open and inviting to unbelievers who need Jesus, hoping and encouraging them to attend worship.**

But worship should not make them feel comfortable as many in the seeker friendly movements strive for today... The Apostle Paul in addressing the reaction of unbelievers who see right worship says, "he is convinced by all, he is convicted by all. 25 And thus the secrets of his heart are revealed; and so, falling down on his face, he will worship God and report that God is truly among you."

Yes, being confronted by their sin will make them uncomfortable and Paul reminds us that for those with hardened hearts the aroma of the Gospel is the stench of death...

➤ **But our desire should be that those who the Lord is calling would be moved by seeing the people of God honestly confessing their sins & receiving forgiveness!**

And finally I would argue that since this time of confession and forgiveness is an important part of right worship it will show up somewhere in the services of churches who faithfully preach the Gospel and believe the Bible!

➤ **In some churches a Gospel call to repent and believe is preached week after week as the major point of the sermon: We will consider why this can be a problem next week.**

- Many charismatic churches will end the service with an altar call to come and confess their sins and receive Jesus... Calls that often stretch out to almost everyone in the congregation!

And sadly, the proper time of confession is often moved to the Lord's Table where there is a felt need to make sure we are all worthy to come...

- Something that should have been dealt with closer to the beginning of the service.

A part of the service that is necessary if we are responding to God's call to enter into His holy presence...

- As Pastor Wilson often says, we must not enter the house of God with dirty boots.

Confessing our sins and receiving absolution also relates to one of the most sobering parables that Jesus told about a great marriage feast the master called in Matthew 22. It showed how the nation of Israel had rejected the Messiah and refused to come to the great feast. The call [yes, you can think call to worship] then goes out to the highways and byways for all to come and the master's servants work until the great hall is full. Jesus then tells us that "when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment. 12 So he said to him, 'Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless.

13 Then the king said to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' 14 For many are called, but few are chosen."

Does that sound harsh?

NOT when you consider that the wedding garment represents the white robes of righteous that we must be clothed with to stand in the Holy presence of God! If someone thinks lightly of the proper confession of sins, or outright refuses to confess their sins, they can continue on in the worship service, they can hear a good sermon, bow their heads in prayer and even drop a gift in the basket and approach the Lord's Table... But ultimately God as the master of the feast will come and ask, 'friend how did you come in here without a wedding garment?' ...and they will be speechless.

We on the other hand as those who have been called into God's presence and having rightly confessed out sins, hear gladly the Good News,

- "Almighty God in His mercy has given His Son to die for your sins and to be raised for your justification; & for His sake forgives you all your sins."

Then and only then are we ready and willing "by the mercies of God," to "present our bodies as living sacrifices, holy, acceptable to God, which is our reasonable service."

- We are ready to be consecrated by God, to ascend into the very presence of God to be instructed by His Word and to present our gifts and prayers which we shall learn more about next week!

But for now remember what John said, "these things we write to you that your joy may be full."

Communion Meditation: Psalm 51:10-16:

"15 O Lord, open my lips, And my mouth shall show forth Your praise. 16 For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it; You do not delight in burnt offering. 17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, A broken and a contrite heart-- These, O God, You will not despise. 18 Do good in Your good pleasure to Zion; Build the walls of Jerusalem. 19 Then You shall be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, With burnt offering and whole burnt offering; Then they shall offer bulls on Your altar."