

Confession and Communion: A Fellowship of Accountability

Discussion Question:

1. Who would you be more afraid to tell you messed up, your parents or your friends?
- 2.

Unconfessed Sin is a Barrier to True Christian Community

- Sin grows in the darkness of unconfession. Simply put, sin isolates us.
 - *Sin demands to have a man by himself. It withdraws him from the community. The more isolated a person is, the more destructive will the power of sin over him, and the more deeply he becomes involved in it, the more disastrous is his isolation. Sin wants to remain unknown. It shuns the light. In the darkness of the unexpressed it poisons the whole being of a person. (p.112)*
 - *He who is alone with his sin is utterly alone. It may be that Christians, notwithstanding corporate worship, common prayer, and all their fellowship in service, may still be left to their loneliness. The final break-through to fellowship does not occur, because, through they have fellowship with one another as believers and as devout people, they do not have fellowship as the undevout, as sinners. (p.110)*
- Religion often helps sin's preference
 - *The pious fellowship permits no one to be a sinner. So everybody must conceal his sin from himself and from the fellowship. We dare not be sinners. Many Christians are unthinkably horrified when a real sinner is suddenly discovered among the righteous. So we remain alone with our sin, living in lies and hypocrisy. The fact is that we are sinners! (p. 110)*

Christian community members can approach one another to confess and be restored by God's power.

- True Christian community is filled with sinners.
 - *But it is the grace of the Gospel, which is so hard for the pious to understand, that it confronts us with the truth and says: You are a sinner, a great, desperate sinner; now come, as the sinner you are, to God who loves you. He wants you as you are; He does not want anything from you, a sacrifice, a work; He wants you alone...He wants to be gracious to you. (p.110-111)*
- Because Jesus wants us as we are, we can be the same way with our Christian brothers and sisters.
 - *You do not have to go on lying to yourself and your brothers, as if you were without sin, you can dare to be a sinner. Thank God for that; He loves the sinner but hates sin. Before him alone in the whole world I dare to be the sinner that I am; here the truth of Jesus Christ and his mercy rules. (p. 111)*

- Because of Christ we can be open with fellow Christians, but not only that, we can confess to each other.
 - *Christ became our Brother in order to help us. Through him our brother has become Christ for us in the power and authority of the commission Christ has give to him. Our brother stands before us as the sign of the truth and the grace of God. He 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. (p. 111-112)*
- When we confess to our brothers and sisters, the light of the Gospel shines onto our sin.
 - *In confession the light of the Gospel breaks into the darkness and seclusion of the heart. The sin must be brought into the light. The unexpressed must be openly spoken and acknowledged. All that is secret and hidden is made manifest. It is a hard struggle until the sin is openly admitted. (p. 112)*
- Because sin has lost its grip on us, true community can be restored.
 - *Since the confession of sin is made in the presence of a Christian brother, the last stronghold of self-justification is abandoned. The sinner surrenders; he gives up all his evil. He gives his heart to God, and he finds the forgiveness of all his sin in the fellowship of Jesus Christ and his brother. The expressed, acknowledged sin has lost all its power. It has been revealed and judged as sin. It can no longer tear the fellowship asunder. Now the fellowship bears the sin of the brother. He is no longer alone with his evil for he has cat off his sin in confession and handed it over to God. It has been taken away from him. (p.112-113)*
 - *The sin concealed separated him from the fellowship, made all his apparent fellowship a sham; the sin confessed has helped him to find true fellowship with the brethren in Jesus Christ. (p.113)*

Confession helps the Christian community overcome sin.

- The root of all sin is pride.
 - *The root of all sin is pride, superbia. I want to be my own law, I have a right to my self, my hatred and my desires, my life and my death. The mind and flesh of man are set on fire by pride; for it is precisely in his wickedness that man wants to be as God. (p.113-114)*
- Confession helps us overcome that pride.
 - *Confession in the presence of a brother is the profoundest kind of humiliation. It hurts, it cuts a man down, it is a dreadful blow to pride. To stand there before a brother as a sinner is an ignominy that is almost unbearable. In the confession of concrete sins the old man dies a painful, shameful death before the eyes of a brother. Because this humiliation is so hard we continually scheme to evade confessing to a brother. Our eyes are so blinded that they no longer see the promise and the glory in such abasement.*

(p.114)

- The Cross is the only thing that brings us to confession.
 - *It is nothing else but our fellowship with Jesus Christ that leads us to the ignominious dying that comes in confession, in order that we may in truth share in his Cross. The Cross of Jesus destroys all pride. We cannot find the Cross Jesus if we shrink from going to the place where it is to be found, namely, the public death of the sinner. And we refuse to bear the Cross when we are ashamed to take upon ourselves the shameful death of the sinner in confession. (p.114)*
 - *In confession we break through to the true fellowship of the Cross of Jesus Christ, in confession we affirm and accept our cross. In the deep mental and physical pain of humiliation before a brother - which means, before God- we experience the Cross of Jesus as our rescue and salvation. The old man dies, but it is God who has conquered him. Now we share in the resurrection of Christ and eternal life. (p.114)*

Confession to one another gives us the opportunity to be sure of our forgiveness from God

- Many Christians fear confessing sin to people more than God
 - *Why is it that it is often easier for us to confess our sins to God than to a brother? God is holy and sinless, He is a just judge of evil and the enemy of all disobedience. But a brother is sinful as we are. He knows from his own experience the dark night of secret sin. Why should we not find it easier to go to a brother than to the holy God? But if we do, we must ask ourselves whether we have not often been deceiving ourselves with our confession of sin to God, whether we have not rather been confessing our sins to ourselves and also granting ourselves absolution. (p.115-116)*
 - *And is not the reason perhaps for our countless relapses and the feebleness of our Christian obedience to be found precisely in the fact that we are living on self-forgiveness and not a real forgiveness? Self-forgiveness can never lead to a breach with sin; this can be accomplished only by the judging and pardoning Word of God itself. (p.115-116)*
- Confession to a fellow Christian makes our confession real
 - *Our brother breaks the circle of self-deception. 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. (p.116)*
 - *As long as I am by myself in the confession of my sins everything remains in the dark, but in the presence of a brother the sin has to be brought into light. But since the sin must come to light some time, it is better that it happens today between me and my brother, rather than on the last day in the piercing light of the final judgment. It is a mercy that*

we can confess our sins to a brother. Such grace spares us the terrors of the last judgment. (p.116)

- *Our brother has been given me that even here and now I may be made certain through him of the reality of God in His judgment and His grace. As the open confession of my sins to a brother insures me against self-deception, so, too, the assurance of forgiveness becomes fully certain to me only when it is spoken by a brother in the name of God. Mutual brotherly confession is given to us by God in order that we may be sure of divine forgiveness. (p.116-117)*

Getting Practical

- Choose who you share with wisely.
 - *Moreover, what we have said applies solely to confession between two Christians. A confession of sin in the presence of all the members of the congregation is not required to restore one to fellowship with the whole congregation. I meet the whole congregation in the one brother to whom I confess my sins and who forgive my sins. In the fellowship I find with this one brother I have already found fellowship with the whole congregation. In this matter no one acts in his own name nor by his own authority, but by the commission of Jesus Christ. (p.113)*
- When Confessing to one another, be specific.
 - *Self-examination on the basis of all Ten Commandments will therefore be the right preparation for confession. Otherwise it might happen that one could still be a hypocrite even in confessing to a brother and thus miss the good of the confession. In confession we, too, receive the forgiveness of the particular sins which are here brought to light, and by this very token the forgiveness of all our sins, known and unknown. (p. 117)*
- Confession with a fellow Christian is a help, not a requirement
 - *Does all this mean that confession to a brother is a divine law? No, confession is not a law, it is an offer of divine help for the sinner. It is possible that a person may by God's grace break through to certainty, new life, the Cross, and fellowship without benefit of confession to a brother. It is possible that a person may never know what it is to doubt his own forgiveness and despair of his own confession of sin, that he may be given everything in his own private confession to God. (p.117-118)*