

## Worship 101: The Confession and Absolution

In this installment of Worship 101 we look at what is known as the Confession and Absolution which follows the Invocation. When we gather on Sunday mornings for worship why do we confess our sins? What does the word absolution mean?

The word confess means “to say the same thing.” So what we are doing when we confess our sins is saying the same thing that God says in His word about our sins: that they offend Him and deserve to be punished. Before we confess however we let God speak to us from His word as a reminder of the fact that He does forgive us our sins. This promise is taken from 1 John 1:8-9 which says: “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins, God, who is faithful and just, will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” Based on this promise we come before God confessing our sins believing that He will indeed forgive us.

In the confession we admit that we are “by nature sinful and unclean.” This refers to the original or inherited sin that has been passed down to us from Adam and Eve and from our own parents. That we are, by nature, sinful means that we are born with this tendency toward that which is evil; we are, by nature, selfish and curved in on ourselves. So often we would rather do what we want in our lives rather than what God would want for us (Psalm 51:5).

We go on in the confession and admit that we are also guilty of those vices that flow from our sinful hearts: we sin against God in our thoughts, words and deeds, by what we have done and what we have left undone. Notice here sin isn’t just what you do but what you should be doing that you don’t do. This is called the “sin of omission” (James 4:17).

The confession continues with a reminder as to what God requires of us: not just try your best to do the commandments but be perfect in your commandment keeping. “We have not loved You with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbor as ourselves” (Luke 10:27). In our confession we have to admit that we have fallen short of what God expects of us which is perfection. We therefore justly deserve God’s present and eternal punishment. Present punishment has to do with the heartaches and difficulties that we experience in this present life because of our sins. Eternal punishment refers to eternal punishment in hell.

There is however, hope for us. Our faith rests on what God has done to spare us from what our sins deserve. “For the sake of Your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. Forgive us, renew us, and lead us, so that we may delight in Your will and walk in Your ways to the glory of Your holy name. Amen.” “For the sake of Jesus” means everything He did to save us from the torments of hell. It speaks of His death on the cross in our place to pay for our sins and His resurrection. It refers also to His obeying all of the commandments for us so that we get credit for His sinless life. It’s important to see here that the confession of sins and forgiveness through Christ is not a license to sin. No, we ask God to help us live a life that is pleasing to Him; a life in which we “delight in His will and walk in His ways.”

All of this is our confession. We agree with God that we are sinful. We also agree with Him that there is forgiveness through His Son, Christ Jesus.

What follows is the “absolution” which is another word for forgiveness. The absolution is based on Jesus promise to His disciples that He spoke on that first Easter. He told them: “If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven: (John 20:23). Notice Jesus gives Christians the authority to forgive in His name. Therefore, when the pastor says “I forgive you all your sins” it is actually Christ Who is forgiving you. Christ forgives through the mouth of the pastor.

It’s important to realize that the absolution (forgiveness announced by the pastor) is ultimately for the sake of your conscience. You come to confession as a Christian yet you come with a guilty conscience for all the times throughout the week you have done the wrong thing. Hearing that you are forgiven should fill you heart with joy for Christ Himself has forgiven you through the words spoken by the pastor? To hear that you are forgiven because of Christ is what we call the Gospel: the Good News of forgiveness through Christ.

What is our response to this Good News? Amen which means “yes this is true.” Amen means “yes, I believe this with all my heart. I know that for Jesus sake I’m forgiven and on my way to heaven!”

In Christ,  
Pastor Bloom