

The Lord's Message: Deny Self, Take Up Your Cross and Follow Jesus - Confession

Date: February 23, 2023

Where: Tilghman UMC

Scripture Reference: 1 John 1:5-10

Title for today's Lord's Message is Deny Self, Take Up Your Cross, and Follow Jesus. I began this sermon series on Ash Wednesday by explaining that we need to be doing a soul check. The soul is the essence of who we are and is the only part of us that will be in eternity. The body goes in the ground, but the soul goes to the Lord. If it is the only part of us to go to be with the Lord, then we should be doing a soul check daily. Amen. For this season of Lent, we are going to be adding tools into our spiritual tool belt for us to do an accurate soul check. The first spiritual tool is Confession.

Let us pray.

The passage of scripture that Michael just read in 1 John is the writer imploring Christians to live a healthy spiritual life in relationship with God and others. The passage which begins in **1 John 1:5**, describes God as light. This description takes us back to **John 1: 4-5**. The nature of God is one of purity, being perfect, holy and righteous. "God is good. All the time. All the time. God is good."

The opposite of light is darkness. In **1 John 1:6**, the writer is telling us that if there is anything in our lives that is in disobedience with God and His will, sin, then our relationship with God suffers. Our relationship with others suffers as well. Pure, perfect, holy and righteous God cannot be around sin. In **Romans 3:23**, this verse acknowledges that we are all sinners. So, how can we be around God? The answer is found in **1 John 1:7**. By the blood of Jesus.

Now the problem comes, when we do not believe the Bible that we are all sinners and we try to cover up our sins. The results are found in verse 8. We deceive our own selves. You cannot hide sin. You cannot run away from sin. It sticks to us like glue. Sin becomes a barrier in our relationship with God and with others.

How do we deal with sin? Look what it says in verse 9. We confess it. If we do not confess it this is how the Psalmist describe the effects of sin on us in **Psalm 32:3**.

Not only do we have to confess our sins, but we also need to make restitution for the harm that we have caused. Anybody recall the story of Zacchaeus in Luke 19? Zacchaeus climbed up a sycamore tree because he wanted to see Jesus. Jesus stopped and looked up in the tree and He told Zacchaeus to come down because Jesus must stay at Zacchaeus' house. Zacchaeus was overjoyed. Let me pick up in **Luke 19: 7-10**. The great preacher Dr. F. E. Marsh tells that on one occasion he was preaching on the importance of confession of sin and wherever possible of restitution for wrong done to others. At the close a young man, a member of the church, came up to him with a troubled countenance. "Pastor," he explained, "you have put me in a sad fix. I have wronged another and I am ashamed to confess it or to try to put it right. You see, I am a boat builder and the man I work for is an infidel. I have talked to him often about his need of Christ and urged him to come and hear you preach, but he scoffs and ridicules it all. Now, I have been guilty of something that, if I should acknowledge it to him, will ruin my testimony forever." He then went on to say that sometime ago he started to build a boat for himself in his own yard. In this work copper nails are used because they do not rust in the water. These nails are quite expensive and the young man had been carrying home quantities of them to use on the job. He knew it was stealing, but he tried to salve his conscience by telling himself that the master had so many he would never miss them and besides he was not being paid all that he thought he deserved. But this sermon had brought him to face the fact that he was just a common thief, for whose dishonest actions there was no excuse. "But," said he, "I cannot go to my boss and tell him what I have done or offer to pay for those I have used and return the rest. If I do, he will think I am just a hypocrite. And yet those copper nails are digging into my conscience and I know I shall never have peace until I put this matter right." For weeks the struggle went on. Then one night he came to Dr. Marsh and exclaimed, "Pastor, I've settled for the copper nails and my conscience is relieved at last." "What happened when you confessed to your employer what you had done?" asked the pastor. "Oh," he answered, "he looked queerly at me, then exclaimed, 'George, I always did think you were just a hypocrite, but now I begin to feel there's something in this Christianity after all. Any religion that would make a dishonest workman come back and confess that he had been stealing copper nails and offer to settle for them, must be worth having.'" Dr. Marsh asked if he might use the story, and was granted permission. Sometime afterwards, he told it in another city. The next day a lady came up and said, "Doctor, I have had 'copper nails' on my conscience too." "Why, surely, you are not a boat builder!" "No, but I am a book-lover and I have stolen a number of books from a friend of mine who gets far more than I could ever afford. I decided last night I must get rid of the 'copper nails,' so I took them all back to her today and confessed my sin. I can't tell you how relieved I am. She forgave me, and God has forgiven me. I am so thankful the 'copper nails' are not digging into my conscience anymore." If we have harmed anyone by our sin, then we need to make restitution, even if the person is not aware of our sin. Reformation and restitution do not save. But where one is truly repentant and has come to God in sincere confession, he will want, to the best of his ability, to put things right with others.

With confession, there also needs to be accountability. In **James 5:16**, it says that we need to confess our sins to each other. John Wesley did this during Society meetings. He would ask each person this question, "How is your soul?" Their response would be a confession of their sins. Now, it is important to confess our sins to someone that is trustworthy and not a gossip. Four preachers met for a friendly gathering. During the conversation one preacher said, "Our people come to us and pour out their hearts, confess certain sins and needs. Let's do the same. Confession is good for the soul." In due time all agreed. One confessed he liked to go to movies and would sneak off when away from his church. The second confessed to liking to smoke cigars and the third one confessed to liking to play cards. When it came to the fourth one, he wouldn't confess. The others pressed him saying, "Come now, we confessed ours. What is your secret or vice?" Finally, he answered, "It is gossiping and I can hardly wait to get out of here."

We should not confess our sins to everyone, but to a person or a group of trusted friends. With these friends, we need to be brutally honest, in order that their prayers can be informed and their counsel specific. Temptation is not a sin. It becomes a sin when we give into the temptation. It is best to reach out to your friends before the temptation becomes too strong. Once we sin, we need to be honest and confess the sin. Sin has this evil element which leads us to cover up our sin by lying. In **Ephesians 4:15**, our friend or friends should be honest with us, but speak the truth in love and not accusing.

Now, some of you maybe be doubting whether confession to another is helpful in your relationship with God and others. This is the format that many addictions counseling groups, such as AA, use. It is also the format that other counseling groups, such as grief counseling or patients dealing with cancer or other life-threatening diseases, use. It is also the format that many Christian disciplining groups use. I have seen it very successful in Pastoral Support groups.

Confession is one of the spiritual tools that God has given us to keep us connected to Him. So, that we can deny self, take up our cross, and follow Jesus. Amen.

