

Heavenly Father, give us hearts to believe and to know ourselves as we are. Then we may truthfully confess our sins, trusting in Your forgiveness and mercy. Amen. (*The Lutheran Study Bible, CPH, p. 2173*)

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, [God] is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us. My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

In Christ Jesus, of whom we in all humility boast, dear fellow redeemed:

When Christians express their certainty of salvation, it can be understood by the unbelieving world to be proud boastful expressions. Often it will be heard like the *“prayer”* of the Pharisee in the temple: “God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.” Of course we know that is not what we as Christians would pray, but that is how our confidence in Christ is heard by those who do not know Christ.

For example when Paul writes: “For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain.” and again: “The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into His heavenly Kingdom.” these expressions of certainty are heard as boastful claims. However, being certain of salvation is not a product of pride, but from a humble heart. Let us then consider how it is that **We Are Humbled in Both Our Confessions of Sin and God’s Mercy.**

I

The tax collector is a prime example of this truth. His words are spoken with humility accompanied by lowly gestures: he “standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’” He confessed himself to be a sinner undeserving of God’s love, but dared to call upon the mercy of God, which our Lord has promised to all sinners.

John writes in our text: “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” So on one hand, if we are not willing to confess ourselves to be sinners, we, in pride, imagine that we have something to offer God. Not too many sinners would go that

far however, that is, to say they have **NO** sin. Even the Pharisee in the temple would probably have admitted to being a sinner or at least someone who has made mistakes. But the way he viewed things, he considered himself much less of a sinner than others. However, neither approach comes from a humble spirit, but from a proud arrogant heart.

So confessing to being a sinner without any righteousness that counts for anything before God is a truly humble approach. “If we confess our sins, [God] is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” But do not misunderstand, we do not somehow earn God’s forgiveness if we properly confess our sins in all humility. The cause of God’s forgiveness has nothing to do with you and me, not even our humility. The cause of God’s loving acts of our salvation is found alone in His love for the person and work of His Son in our behalf.

II

Confessing our faith in our merciful Lord, knowing there is nothing good in us that moves Him to be merciful to us is also a humble confession. You see, God, the eternal, holy and just God, is for us, not against us. Yes, we have sinned and deserved to be cut off from Him for all eternity. But He is still for us. You have that familiar passage memorized: “God so loved the world that He gave His only son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.” So instead of giving us what we deserve as sinners, God gave us His Son.

This is how John states it in our text: “we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.” You and I have nothing we can say to justify ourselves in regard to our sins against God’s holy law. We on our own stand condemned before the divine throne of justice. But we have an Advocate, who does speak in our defense. However He does not make the case that we are innocent of the charges against us, but rather He speaks up that He has appeased the eternal wrath of God by becoming the sinner for us and being punished with our deserved everlasting punishment.

As strange as it sounds, unbelievers can be offended in their sinful pride to hear that Jesus is their Savior too. You can tell them the good news: “[Jesus] is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.” They likely will question the need for any saving through appeasement. They consider that they are good enough and God needs to take them the

way they are. In other words, *who does God think He is anyway that "good" people need saving?* What we consider to be good news, they find to be offensively hurtful news that God does not accept them for who they are.

So, far from being a pride issue with Christians who confess themselves to be sinners in need of a Savior and to confess Jesus as the only Savior who has done all to save them, it is a clear position of humility to confess both our sins and our faith in Christ as Savior.

III

Now in these words regarding our confession of sin and Christ as Savior, John points out: "My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin." We know not only that we have sinned, but will still sin today, tomorrow and for however long our Lord allows us to live in this broken world. By God's gracious working in us we humbly repent of our sin and confess Jesus to be our Savior. By that same grace, we now have the desire to please God who has saved us.

When the Pharisee and Tax Collector left the temple, do you think they were committed to not sin again? The Tax Collector who, as Jesus said, went down to his house justified before God through His faith in the mercy of God shown him in God's Son, certainly did go wanting to amend his sinful life. But it would not likely be so with the Pharisee. Rather he would probably go from the Temple seeking to accrue more self-righteousness by adding to his fasting and tithing. This is not a humble process, it is one of pride and arrogance.

Remember Paul, the former Pharisee, asking the question in Romans: "who has given a gift to [God] that he might be repaid?" It is a rhetorical question with the negative answer implied. But the self-righteous life of the Pharisee was one in which he would think he was gifting God with his special extra good works as though he could earn rewards from the righteous God and thus pay back his eternal debt. *"Thanks be to me, O God."* – God forbid such blasphemy should ever proceed from our lips or be expressed through our attitudes!

So do not be deceived by your old sinful flesh thinking you have no sin really to confess. Do not be deceived by the unbelieving world, which seeks to convince you that you are "good enough" to be found acceptable to God, if there is a God. Do not be deceived by the great Deceiver who wants to convince you like our first parents – *"you will surely not die."*

Humbly, yet boldly, confess to your sins and your trust in your Savior, Jesus Christ. In Him, God has had mercy on you. Now go home justified, for Jesus' sake. Amen.