

Sermon for Sunday, January 30, 1977, by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Senior Pastor
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"HOW TO GET RID OF YOUR SINS"

I John 1:1-10

Text: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive our sins
and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." --St. John 1:9

The Bible gives us two ways to deal with our sins. The first way of dealing with sin is found in our text for this morning, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins..." So the first way to deal with sin is to be honest with God. The second way the Bible gives us of dealing with our sins is found in St. James 5:16 where we read, "confess your sins to one another..." And that means dealing with sin by being honest with one another.

However, being honest with God and being honest with one another is not as easy as it sounds. Dr. Eduard Thurneysen in his book A Theology of Pastoral Care, writes, "Inhibitions in man work against the confession of sin. Man does not like to admit his guilt. His pride, his self-righteousness, rear up against it. Bent on mastering sin on his own, he objects to submitting it to God and his grace." (P. 289) He might well have added that we object to exposing ourselves and what is in our hearts to one another, too.

The first question I want to deal with this morning is this: Why must we confess our sins to God? And the answer is simple. We must confess our sins to God because repentance begins with confession. And without repentance there can be no forgiveness of sins. Do you remember the story told in chapter two of Acts that tells of the day of pentecost? As Peter preached about Jesus the Bible tells us that the people were cut to their hearts and cried out, "Brethren, what shall we do?" And Peter responded, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins." So the answer was to repent and turn to Jesus for forgiveness. But repentance comes when we are cut to the heart, when our sins weigh heavily upon us, and we confess those sins to God.

It would be nice, of course, if we didn't have to confess our sins to God. It would be nice if, instead, we could go back and undo our deeds and relive our lives. Yet, can we ever do that? Remember how the poet put it? He wrote, "the moving finger writes and having writ moves on; nor all your piety nor wit can lure it back to cancel half a line, nor all your tears wash out a word of it." No, we can never go back, never undo our deeds. Do you remember how Shakespeare makes the wicked murderer MacBeth cry out in his guilt for a deed he can never undo? MacBeth pleads with his doctor, "Canst thou not minister to a mind diseased, pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow, raze out the written troubles of the brain, and with some sweet oblivious antidote cleanse the stuffed bosom of that perilous stuff which weights upon the heart?" And isn't that our need this morning? The need to cleanse our stuffed bosoms of that sin which weighs so heavily upon the heart?

Yes, it would be nice if we didn't have to confess our sins to God--if we didn't have to admit our failures. But isn't that what the cross of Jesus is all about? Doesn't the cross say that what we cannot do about our sin, God does for us in Jesus if we will repent and turn to him? And doesn't repentance begin in confession, in having our hearts cut to the quick? I know it works that way for me. I find myself helpless to master my sin, to undo my deeds, and in that cross God somehow masters them for me and undoes them by forgiveness. And while it hurts my pride dreadfully, in my helplessness I have to accept God's love and forgiveness.

Would you like to be at perfect peace with God this morning? Would you like all those dark blots that stain your heart to be wiped clean? Would you like to start over with God this morning and have a fresh, new beginning? You can, you know. You can if you confess your sins. As the text for this morning puts it, the Bible tells us, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

So, the first way to deal with sin is to confess it to God. The second way to deal with sin according to the Bible is to confess our sins to one another. And why is this so? For the simple reason that a man cannot relate himself to God unless he also relates himself to his brother. Do you remember how St. John put it? He wrote, "If anyone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God...and this commandment we have from him, that he who loves God should love his brother also."

I do a great deal of counseling, particularly with families who are having difficulty. Do you know what is wrong in almost every case? It is a couple's failure to be honest with one another. Suppose, for example, a wife does something that hurts the feelings of her husband. But he doesn't tell her. Instead, he stores that hurt in his heart and grieves over it. As time goes on, he puts more and more hurts in his heart until one day his heart is full of hate and bitterness against his wife and he walks out on her. Now, his sin was not in being hurt--in many cases he may have had a right to be hurt. No, his sin was in not being honest with her and letting his hurt turn into resentment and hate. The Bible says, "do not let the sun go down upon your wrath."

Or again suppose a man's ego is being threatened. It may be because he is in his mid-forties and he is realizing that he will not achieve the goals he once had for his life; now he is beginning to realize that he never will accomplish all the dreams he had and he is feeling like a failure. He needs an ego-boost, he needs reassuring that he is a person of worth. Or it may be because his job is making demands of him that he is having difficulty fulfilling and he is feeling insecure. Or it may be that his wife unconsciously is always running him down by pointing out his faults; or unwittingly his wife is making the children the center of attention and he feels rejected and left out. There may be many reasons that his ego is threatened. So, because his self-image needs bolstering, he may have an affair with another woman--not because of sex, but because of a desperate inner need for someone to reassure him that he is important, that he is someone of significance. It was no sin to have an ego need, but when he let that need dominate his life, that need led him into sin. Had he dared to be honest with his wife in the first place about his need, she could have reached out to him to help him, to minister to him, to reassure him.

How honest are you with the people you love the most about the kinds of needs you have? Suppose a man comes home and is very upset. Maybe the boss reprimanded him for something--maybe he lost a big account--or maybe he had a disagreement with an associate. When he gets home he is upset and angry. As soon as he gets home he finds something to criticize about his wife--and soon they are in a dreadful argument that leads to unkind statements, hurt feelings, and unhappy tears. It may not have been wrong for him to have those angers from work, but it was certainly wrong for him to use his wife as an excuse to ventilate that anger. If he had dared to be honest with her about the things in his heart, she would have responded to that.

Yes, the Bible tells us to do two things with sins--confess them to God and to one another; it tells us to be honest with God and to be honest with each other. And that isn't easy to do. Sometimes we try to evade our sin. Do you remember the story of Cain and Abel? Cain was jealous and resentful because God found Abel's sacrifice more acceptable. He let his feelings do terrible things to him and he killed his

brother. When God asked him where Abel was, Cain tried to evade his sin and he cried out in irritation to God, "I know not. Am I my brother's keeper?"

There are many ways to kill a person. We can deny him human rights and dignity and kill his self-respect. We can murder his character by malicious gossip and unfounded rumor. We can kill the human heart by treating someone as an object rather than as a person. We can kill the human heart by treating someone as an object rather than as a person. We can destroy a personality by rejection, by ignoring or disregarding another. God said to Cain, "your brother's blood cries to me from the ground." And surely the blood of many of our family, our neighbors, our friends, of people we come in contact with is crying out against us because we evade our sins.

Another way we deal with sin is to hide it. When God sent the Hebrews into the promised land under Joshua's leadership, the first city to fall was Jericho. God had instructed them that everything in the city was to be destroyed. Yet, in spite, of God's clear command, one of the men couldn't resist. When Achan saw the silver and gold, the Bible says he coveted it. So he took some loot and hid it in his tent. A lot of us are hiding sins in our hearts this morning. They lie there, unforgiven simply because they are unconfessed and thereby unrepented. We think no one will know, that we will never be found out. Because of Achan's hidden sin, he and his entire family were destroyed. That is what hidden sin does. It may destroy not only you, but all of those close to you.

Another thing we do with sin is to run from it. Jonah did that. God gave him a job to do and because he didn't want to do it, he rebelled against God. The Bible says that Jonah rose up to flee from the presence of God. But Jonah's sin went right with him, clinging like a leech to his back. I know many people who are running this morning. They try to lose themselves in being busy and in doing things. They try to stay so busy they don't have time to think. But we can't run away from who and what we are--you can't run away from a guilty conscience or a dirty memory--it will cling to your back like a leech. Sometimes a person thinks that a new mate, a new job, a new city will fix things up, only to discover we haven't run away from ourselves or from who and what we are. No, running away from sin doesn't work very well.

Another thing we try to do with sin is to deny it. Do you remember the story in the early chapters of Acts about Ananias and Sapphira? They belonged to that early Christian community of believers. Everyone who had anything was using it to help take care of his fellow Christians who were in need. This couple sold some land. But they didn't bring it all to the church. They decided to give part of it and keep part of it, but pretend they had given it all. It was no sin to keep part of it back. No, their sin was in pretending to give it all. As St. Peter said to them that day, "While it remained was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own power? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men only, but also to God." Are you guilty of that? When you deny your sin you are refusing to see yourself as you really are. To deny sin is to ignore and cover up the reality and the truth about ourselves. God can't deal with us as long as we deny our sins. Our loved ones and friends can't help us, can't reach out to us or minister to our needs as long as we deny them.

Yes, we do a lot of wrong things with sin--we try to evade sin, to hide sin, to run from sin, to deny sin. Yet, to do those things is to let sin destroy us, to destroy our relationships to loved ones, to even hurt and ruin the lives of others. The Bible gives us only two ways to deal with sin--to confess it to God and to one another; to dare to be honest with God and to be honest with each other.

Is there sin in your life this morning? That sin can do terrible things to you, to your life. If you really want to do something about that sin, the place to start is to confess it to God. You see, if you will turn the eyes of your heart upon the cross of Jesus you will know that God has provided a way to forgive your sins. He has already done all he can do about your sins. Our text says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Yes, God has provided a way to forgive your sins; he has done all he can do. The next step is yours.