

# THE DEVOTIONAL ASPECT OF CONFESSION

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MY address on Confession is to be devotional.

May I ask you to consider—

I. Its need. (1) Surely this is indicated by the existence of its counterfeit, Auricular Confession. Just as base coin presumes the existence of a genuine currency, so the false and unscriptural Confession, Confessor, and Confessional point to the real and true. Satan knows the needs of sinful human nature and the relief to be obtained by simple, unaffected, hearty confession to God, and accordingly he intervenes and strives to intercept the sinner on his way to the Throne of Grace with the Sacerdotal Confessor and his Confessional. But while we expose the false let us be careful to bring forward the true, let us be careful to recognize the need, and emphasize God's merciful provision for it. (2) The need of true confession lies in its being the essential preliminary step to obtaining the forgiveness of our sins. "If we confess," says the Apostle, "He is faithful and just to forgive." "I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord," writes David, "and," he immediately adds (as though the relief were instantaneous), "Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin" (Ps. xxxii.-5). This was taught the children of Israel on the great Day of Atonement by Aaron laying "both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confessing over him all their iniquities." In our own Church this need is recognized by the opening sentences of the order for Morning and Evening Prayer followed by the Exhortation to Confession and the form of General Confession itself. There is also, of course, the form in the Communion Service, and the instruction to the minister in the Order for the Visitation of the Sick. Let us ask ourselves, have we individually recognized our own personal need of Confession? Have we known what it is to have (1) gone as sinners without a character to the great High Priest sitting on His grand confessional, the Throne of Grace, and to have heard His Voice penetrating into the very deepest recesses of heart and conscience with the gracious assurance "thy sins be forgiven thee"? And if we know that, are we (2) daily having recourse to Him for the cleansing of our daily walk through a sinful and sin-staining world?

II. Consider what encouragements we have to do so. (1) St. John, in the first chapter of his first Epistle, mentions two. First (a) God's faithfulness. He has promised. Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. And He is "God, that cannot lie." "Hath He said, and shall He not do it? Or hath He spoken, and shall He not make it good?" "His every word of grace is strong as that which built the skies. The Voice that rolls the stars along speaks all the promises." (b) God's justness or His justice. Forgiveness is not simply an act of mercy on God's part towards the confessing penitent, but also of justice, because "He hath already laid on Him [the Man Christ Jesus] the iniquity of us all." The remission of the debt is certain on the plea of the debtor that it has already been paid. God delights to pardon, as it gives Him a fresh opportunity of attesting the efficacy of His Son's atoning work and His satisfaction therewith. In approaching God in confession of sins we are doubly certain of the issue on God's word and deed. He hath not only promised, but also performed. "I have blotted out as a thick cloud thy transgressions, and as a cloud thy sins; return unto Me, for I have redeemed thee."

III. In the third place look at the benefits of Confession.

(1) The Apostle again mentions two in 1 John i.-9: (a) First forgiveness, and that not after any

human pattern, but one altogether Divine. How does God forgive sin? Not as we forgive offences against each other; that would be a very unsatisfactory and incomplete method of forgiveness. In Ps. xxxii.-2 David writes, "Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity"; but in Rom. iv.-6, 7 St. Paul thus quotes that verse, "Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works." Here we get both sides of the shield. First of all non-imputation of iniquity, and then imputation of righteousness without works. And this is in accordance with the same Apostle's statement in 2 Cor. v.-21, "He was made sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." The iniquity is gone, laid upon our Divine Surety and by Him for ever borne away; while His righteousness, His human righteousness that He wrought by His spotless life down here, is reckoned as ours, and hence we are "complete in Him." "Accepted, perfected, complete, For God's inheritance made meet, How true, how glorious, and how sweet!" It follows that God's forgiveness never can be partial, nor anything but full, free, permanent, and complete—once and for ever. (b) There remains, however, for the believer, the daily benefit of cleansing. "He that is washed [bathed] needeth not, save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit." Just as the bather coming out of the sea has not to wash his body entirely, but only his feet from the defilement of sand on which they have walked, so the once-pardoned believer needs no second conversion, but simply to put his feet daily into the hands of his great High Priest that his walk may be purified from the sins of the day. This daily need and daily provision are beautifully typified in the Old Testament by the ashes of the red heifer "kept for the congregation of the children of Israel for a water of separation; it is a purification of sin." Now mark the inspired commentary on the type (Heb. ix.-13): "If the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: how much more shall the blood of Christ . . . purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" The merits of Christ's blood avail infinitely and permanently to cleanse from daily guilt and keep communion with God unbroken,

IV. And what is confession? (1) Its elements may be said to be two-fold—simply telling God what we are, and what Christ is. (a) First telling God what we are. Not trying to make out any case for ourselves, but accepting the revelations of His Word as to our entire alienation from Him and our utter depravity in His sight. It is not so much the enumeration of sins (though in the case of the pardoned believer specific confession is undoubtedly right) as the confession of sinfulness. The publican's prayer is the model—"God be merciful to me the sinner." It is standing before God in all our vileness, conscious that He knows our hearts—deceitful and desperately wicked as they are—even better than we do, and (and here is the superiority of the true confession over the false) in the application that His remedy will meet the necessary imperfectness of our confession through our ignorance of how oft we offend. (b) But true Scriptural confession implies not only telling God what we are, but what Christ is. In the words of the late Prebendary Vaughan, of Brighton, it is "to confess sin and confess Christ. It is no confession to confess sin, if you do not also confess Christ. And do it thus: My sin is very great; but Christ is greater. My sin is very deep; but His love is richer. My debt is very large; but His blood is infinite. My mountain is vast; but the ocean of His grace is vaster." In other words, such a confession as that is to carry out the Old Testament type and confess our sins over the head of our Victim, the Lamb Divine. And the moment a man does that he awakes to the reality that he is a pardoned man. Now, to quote Mr Vaughan again, "there is nothing between that soul and God nothing to prevent the free flowings of God's Spirit; and that Spirit comes giving 'oil of joy for mourning, and the garments of praise for the spirit of heaviness.' The chains, the oppressive feelings, the fears, the leaden conscience, the dark horizon, the loaded memory, the frowning future, they are all gone. He has no fear. He reasons: 'If when we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. Now he is dear to Christ and Christ is dear to him. What in the whole world can trouble him? Christ loves him. He will keep him all the way. He will soon go home. Already his robe is washed. Already he has the white stone. Already his name is 'written in the Lamb's book of life'; and so he goes up the hill, and says, 'Blessed is the man whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity'." All that stands between any soul and this blessedness is confession. Try it, dear hearer, if you

have not already done so, and enter into David's experience. And in closing let me say how earnestly should we who know the blessedness of the reality strive to set it before the many in our Church who are victims to the false and the untrue. I cannot emphasize the necessity for doing this better than by quoting words uttered many years ago in Carlisle Cathedral by the late Bishop Samuel Waldegrave. In the course of his remarks he said: "I know full well what the victims of this system say, for have I not heard it from their lips myself? That none but he who has tasted that joy can tell how great the peace of him who has made true confession and received full absolution. But oh, my brethren, what a peace! A peace which soothes, which delights, which intoxicates, as it is in life from time to time renewed. A peace which stills the chamber of sickness, and which smooths the very pillow of death. But beyond it cannot go. The spell of the enchantress is broken as the river of death is crossed. And then what a discovery! That that which man had professed to loose upon earth has not been loosed in heaven! That that sin which man professed to remit has been by God still retained; and that therefore, notwithstanding the absolution of a human priesthood, their miserable dupe, standing before the great High Priest, is pronounced by Him helplessly, hopelessly unclean! And mark the consequence. Without the camp of the saints, without the New Jerusalem, in lamentation and mourning and woe, for ever must his habitation be." The good Bishop closed with a prayer we may well re-echo for ourselves, for the Church of which we are members—"From such strong delusion, from such fearful doom, good Lord deliver us."