

SERMON TITLE: Words of Confession (pt1)

DATE: June 6, 2021

SCRIPTURE: Psalm 32

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Not a day goes by that we aren't shaped by words—words spoken to us, words on the news, words on social media, our own words. We're shaped by words because there is a mysterious and yet certain power in them. The Bible says that there is life and death in the power of the tongue. Words are used to build up and give life. Or, sometimes, they're used to tear down and take life. So, how can we be sure that we are speaking life to others? How can we avoid words that cut and tear down? How can we know we are honoring God with what comes out of our mouths? Answer: God himself is not silent. He is the God who speaks. In Scripture and ultimately in Jesus, we have God's holy communication to us. His word should be the primary thing that shapes our words so that others might find life in him.

Last week, I gave you an assignment—what we called “The Tongue Assignment.” Remember? For one week try to follow these “five spiritual laws” of the tongue: Don't gossip; Don't complain about anything; Don't blame-shift or make excuses; Don't defend yourself; Don't boast about anything in yourself. Instead, speak well of others; give thanks in all things; own your mistakes and confess your sins; acknowledge critiques with grace; and boast in your weakness rather than your strengths. How did you do with that? I made it till 5:00 on Sunday afternoon before I broke 3 of the five all at once. Of course, I did take a nap all afternoon. (BTW, if you weren't here for the assignment, try it this next week and see how it goes for you.) The point is not so much that by doing the assignment we will get better at taming the tongue. No, the idea is that by watching our words, we're able to see what's going on in our hearts. And also remember we said that God doesn't love you more or less based on how well you do with the “Tongue Assignment.” It's simply a way we can begin to see if we are living out of a Gospel-shaped heart or a Me-shaped heart. By taking our words more seriously, we take what's going on in our hearts more seriously.

So, here's my question for those of you who tried the assignment. When you failed—when you gossiped, when you complained, when you blame-shifted or made excuses, when you blew it—what did you do with that? Did you take the next step and confess it as sin? That's the question. So today, we're going to look at Psalm 32, and we're going to look at the importance of confession—“words of confession.” But first, we need to clear up some confession confusion. If you were raised in a Catholic background, you know the routine of regularly going to the priest to confess your sins. The priest would hear your confession, give you “penance”—x-number of “Our Fathers,” and/or x-number of “Hail Mary's,” and then absolve you of your sins. It was a way to relieve you of the guilt of your sins. But the next week you went back into everyday life and you committed the same sins and the next week you went back and did the routine all over again. I grew up Baptist, and even though Protestants don't confess their sins to a priest, the ritual of confession was pretty much the same. You dump your “sin-bucket” before God, ask him to forgive you of your sins, you feel better about yourself, but you go back into everyday life and you commit the same sins, and then you go through the routine all over again. So, whether you came from a Catholic background or a Protestant background—or whatever your religious background might be—the ritual is—you blow it; you feel guilty for your sins; you confess your sins; you promise to try harder; you feel better about yourself, but then, you go out and commit the same sins again, then you confess the same sins again, promise to try harder again—it's a never-ending cycle. That's not confession. That's not repentance. That's not the Gospel. That's religion. Really, that kind of “confession” is all about me—I don't feel good about me; I feel guilty; I feel bad for what I've done—so, how do I get rid of that guilt? How do I get rid of those bad feelings about me? I confess my sins so I'll feel better. Many of us think that confession is about guilt relief. We think about confession as clearing our conscience. But when you open the Scripture, that's not what you find at all. What exactly is confession? How does confession result in genuine life-change instead of it being a way to temporarily relieve your guilt before going back and committing the same sins over and over again?

Someone has said, “Genuine confession leads to genuine change.” And they are right. Confession is not about getting rid of your guilt in order to feel better about yourself. No. Confession is acknowledging your sin to God and experiencing in the present the grace and forgiveness of God you received in the past when you trusted Christ as your Savior. And that's what we're going to unpack today.

Here's our outline. We're going to look at (1) Sin; (2) The Consequences of Concealing Your Sin; (3) Confession; (4) The Blessings of Confessing Your Sins

SIN (v1)—David uses two words in v1 that help us define sin. First, the word “transgression,” which means “rebellious self-assertion.” (1) Sin is rebellious self-assertion. That comes out of our heart and mouth as “Nobody can tell me how to live my life!” Second, the word “sin,” which means to go off the path. (2) Sin is going off the path—going off the path God lays before us in his Word and going our own way.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF CONCEALING YOUR SINS (vv3-4) —David tells us that when he kept his sin secret, it was killing him inside. You see, when you lie and cheat, when you are unfaithful to your husband or wife, when you find emotional, sexual fulfillment outside the covenant of marriage—whether with porn or another person—even though you might not get caught publicly—if you know God and you’ve walked with God in the past—you will get caught in your heart. And David says that God’s hand will be heavy on you. If you don’t respond to God’s hand trying to nudge you back on to the path, if you don’t respond to the “Nathans” in your life that God sends your way, if you tell yourself lies to justify the lies you are living in, ultimately, you will end up becoming a person you never thought you would be. Hear me. Harboring secret sin, - lying, deceit, anger, bitterness, unforgiveness in your heart - will rewire your heart and mind so you end up becoming a very different person. My friend Steve Farrar wrote a book entitled “Finishing Strong,” and he writes this: “Sin will take you farther than you want to go; it will keep you longer than you want to stay; it will cost you more than you want to pay.” Even worse, it will turn you into a person you never thought you’d be. The cost of concealing your sin is greater than the cost of confessing your sin. That’s what David is telling us in vv3-4.

CONFESSION (v5) — (1) Confession is agreeing with what God says about your sin; (2) Confession is the first step toward repentance; (3) Confession is “uncovering your sin” (v5 and v1). Look at how Paul uses Psalm 32 in Romans 4.

THE BLESSINGS OF CONFESSING YOUR SIN (vv1-2 again) - Confession leads to experiencing God’s blessing. Here’s our memory verse for this message—Prov 28:13—Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses them and forsakes them will obtain mercy. Read through v6, 7, 8, 10, 11 and look at all the blessings that God bestows on those who confess their sins to God and who know that the Lord holds no sin against them. Hmmm. That actually brings up one final bit of confusion that needs clearing up. The question is— If the Lord does not hold our sins against us, then why do Christians need to confess their sins? If all our sins past, present, and future were nailed to the cross, what’s the point of confessing? Do we confess our sins in order to be forgiven of our sins when they’ve already been forgiven?

READ 1 John 1:9 — Why do I need to confess my sins if they’ve already been forgiven? The answer is in one little word—the word “just”—“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and *just* to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” Not “faithful and merciful,” although God IS merciful. Not “faithful and loving,” although God IS most definitely loving. No, here we see that God is “faithful and just” to forgive us—Okay? ...???... If you’re a Christian and you confess your sin, the reason God will forgive you is because he’s just. It would be unjust for him not to forgive you. Why? Because Jesus paid for your sin on the cross. He paid the penalty of your sin. He paid the debt of your sin. He was uncovered so you could be covered. He paid your debt, which means, if you believe in Jesus Christ, God *has* to forgive you. It would be unjust for him not to forgive you because that would mean he would get two payments on the debt, and that would be wrong; it would be unjust. The book of 1 John is about walking in fellowship with God (v6). For a believer, sin breaks fellowship with God. It does not break the relationship with God. So, why do we confess sins that have already been forgiven? Remember what I said way back at the beginning? Confession is acknowledging your sin to God and experiencing in the present the grace and forgiveness you received in the past when you trusted Christ as your Savior. For faithful followers of Jesus, confession and repentance are meant to be a lifestyle. (cf 1 John 2:1). Your sins past, present, and future *have been* covered on the cross. And, you *have been* covered in the righteousness of Jesus Christ the Righteous. *And that means*, you need not fear confessing your sins to God, because by confessing your sins, you will experience *in the present* the blessing of God’s limitless grace and forgiveness you received *in the past* when you first trusted Christ as your Savior. And that is the great, Good News of the Gospel of grace.

Discussion Starters —

1. So, how did you do with the “Tongue Assignment” from last week? Even if you didn’t hear it or try it, why is controlling our tongues so difficult?
2. What do our words teach us about our hearts?
3. When it comes to sin, guilt, and confession, what was your church background, if any? How would you describe what you were taught about confessing your sins to God? What was the purpose of confessing your sins to God?
4. What do you think about the statement—“Confession is not about getting rid of your guilt in order to feel better about yourself?”
5. How does genuine confession lead to genuine life-change?
6. What are the two ways that David talks about “sin” in v1? How are they alike, and how are they different?
7. How is it possible that the cost of concealing your sin is worse than the cost of confessing your sin?

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8. What is genuine confession? (hint: We talked about three things)
9. What are some of the blessings of confessing your sins found in vv6-11?
10. This is the “biggy”—“If, because of the cross, God does not hold our sins against us, then why should Christians confess their sins? (Answer this question by looking at 1 John 1:9 and 2:1)