

SERMON TITLE: Words of Confession (pt2)

DATE: June 13, 2021

SCRIPTURE: Selected Scriptures

PASTOR: Charlie Boyd

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.

We are continuing in our summer sermon series entitled "The Word(s) We Use" and we're continuing where we left off last week as we looked at "Words of Confession." It really was a powerful worship service and if you missed it, I encourage you to go back and watch/listen online. Our "big idea" is that "genuine confession leads to genuine change." Of course, genuine confession means we have to take sin seriously. One reason we don't take confession seriously is b/c we don't take sin seriously. But what if I told you there was a process that, no matter how much you blew up your life, there is a way to come out the other side restored, whole, and free? Interested? Genuine confession begins a process that leads to restoration—restored fellowship with God and with anyone we may have hurt by our sin. Here's the process: repentance, restitution, reconciliation.

Repentance (Psalm 51)—Confession and repentance are almost synonyms. Both involved agreeing with God that what I've done is sin—both involve changing my mind from blaming someone else to owning that I am to blame. I change my mind from thinking that some circumstances "caused" me to do what I did to taking personal responsibility for what I've done. People and circumstances do not "cause" us to sin. They may "shape" our sinful responses, but they don't cause us to sin. We sin because we choose to sin. READ Psalm 51—If we focus on the "big picture" of this psalm, we immediately see the honesty and humility of David in the words of his confession here. David knows that God is "merciful"—he knows God is the "God of his salvation"—he knows that God will restore all who have a "broken and contrite heart"—he knows, because of the covenant promise God made him, he will not "cast him away" or remove "his spirit" from him like he did former King Saul—he knows that it's possible to commit grievous sins but be restored to fellowship with God so that lips that had been dishonest and deceitful can once again declare the praise of God. I wonder, do you know these things? We have the assurance of God's grace and mercy and forgiveness in a way that David knew. We know that because of the Cross of Jesus, our sins have already been forgiven and we never have to be afraid to confess our sins to God. "But," you ask, "What if I still feel guilty after I've confessed? Does that mean I didn't really confess? Did I not do it the right way?" Most of the time, the problem is not in the confession, the problem is faith. The problem is you putting too much emphasis on "you" and not enough emphasis on what Jesus has done for you. It's right to feel godly sorrow for sin. It's right to feel remorse for how you have dishonored God and hurt others by your sin. It's right to be "broken" over what you've done. But if you know—if you really believe—that God forgives sin—if you know that God *has* forgiven your sin and that he continues to forgive your sin because of the Cross—there's no room for lingering guilt. God is not requiring you to beat yourself up for messing up—because—Jesus took the beating for you. Continuing to feel guilty for a sin that you've confessed and for which you've repented is like saying, "Jesus' death for my sin was not enough." The problem is not with confession; the problem is with faith—faith to believe that Jesus has taken away your sin and your guilt and there's nothing left for you to pay.

Restitution (Numbers 5:5-7; Luke 19: 8-9) —Restitution means doing whatever needs to be done to make things right with anyone you've sinned against. In our FG Re-Gen program restitution is called "making amends." READ Numbers 5:5-7. The first thing to notice in this passage is that "sin" is "breaking faith with the Lord"—meaning—When I sin when I am no longer trusting in what God says is right and I trust that my way is more right than God's way, *even though* God says it's wrong. Sin is breaking faith with God. The second thing to notice here is the command to make right what you did wrong by making restitution. OT Law required a person to pay back all he stole or swindled and add 20% on top. So, we see that it's not enough to just make things right with God because you can't be completely right with God until you are willing to make things right with the people you have wronged. We see this same idea played out in the NT in the story of the "wee little man" Zacchaeus. READ Luke 19:8-9. Zacchaeus goes way beyond the letter of the Law and he

says he will pay back to the people he cheated 4X what the Law required. Jesus doesn't say, "Okay, okay Zacchaeus, now don't get carried away here." No, he commends him (v9) for his desire to make amends in an extremely generous way.

There's one other thing I need to bring in here and it's not quite the same thing as making monetary restitution, but it carries the same kind of weight of a Zacchaeus-type confession. The fact is, sometimes, genuine change only comes when you open your heart and your life and you confess your sins to real-life, flesh-and-blood people. Not just to those you've hurt, but also to people who can walk the path toward restoration with you. There are habits and addictions that have never been broken by simple willpower as people have struggled with them on their own. Sometimes, confessing your sins to God won't be enough to bring lasting change. Sometimes, you need to confess your struggles and sins to someone you trust—to someone who will ask to hold you accountable and ask you hard questions—but you have to be committed to being honest with them. No one can hold someone accountable who does not want to be accountable. So, let's look at one other passage.

James 5:16—James underscores the importance of being transparent and open with our "besetting" sins so we can be healed from the devastating effects and guilt of those sins. James tells us that by bringing other people into your desire to change, you will change.

Reconciliation — Reconciliation is pursuing a restored relationship with the person(s) you have hurt. Forgiveness is not trust. The person(s) you've hurt can forgive you, but they still may not be able to trust you. Forgiveness is a gift, but trust is earned; trust is rebuilt. And, it takes time to rebuild trust. It takes being open and honest and showing yourself to be an open book—showing yourself to be trustworthy again. In this case, restitution will not be a Zacchaeus-paying-back-4X-kind of restitution. But it may mean that you're willing for the process of reconciliation to take 4X longer than you think is necessary.

To be sure, the process of reconciliation is not easy; it takes time, it's costly, and there are consequences. But as we saw last week, the consequences of concealing your sin are always greater than the consequences of confessing your sin. So, what do you need to confess and who do you need to tell? What do you need to do to make amends and make things right? What does reconciliation look like? Confession is a part of a process that brings about real change—repentance, restitution, and making amends—pursuing reconciliation and rebuilding trust even though it may not always be possible. Why would you want to forfeit the freedom that comes from confessing the things that keep you in the dark, under a load of guilt, when you can confess to God and others and become the guilt-free person Jesus died to make you to be?

Discussion Starters —

1. How are you doing with your tongue? Let's keep this idea in front of the group. What is your tongue revealing about your heart? Be open and honest about this.
2. How seriously do you take this whole idea of confession? How is confession a part of your daily life? If it's not a part of your Christian lifestyle, why is that?
3. Talk about this idea that "people and circumstances don't 'cause' us to sin." Agree or disagree? How do our responses to people and circumstances 'shape' our sinful responses?
4. Take time to read all of Psalm 51. What are some of your "big picture" "ahas" and "take-aways" from this great Psalm of confession and repentance?
5. Why do we never have to be afraid of confessing our sins to God? How does the Cross deal with any kind of fear of confession?
6. What is going on when we continue to feel guilty after we have confessed and repented of a particular sin?
7. Read Number 5:5-7 and then talk about the Zacchaeus story from Luke 19:8-9. What is the point of making restitution when we have sinned against someone?
8. Read James 5:16—Why is it that sometimes, genuine change only comes when you open your heart and your life and you confess your sins to real-life, flesh-and-blood people?
9. Reconciliation is pursuing a restored relationship with the person(s) you have hurt. Why is forgiveness not the same as rebuilding trust?
10. How does what we learned from Zacchaeus about making restitution apply to rebuilding trust in a broken relationship?

What's your Next Step?—If you want to know more about our Re-Gen ministry, email Trenton Stokes, the pastor that oversees Re-Gen. Trenton's email is tstokes@fellowshipgreenville.org. If you want to know more about Tin Man ministries you can contact them at tinmanministries.org. Also, Trenton, Todd DeVaney, and Jon Schrader will be out at the Next Steps table in the Commons if you want to talk more about Re-Gen or any of the things we've mentioned in the last two messages.