

REFORMED CHURCH BELLVILLE: SUNDAY 10 FEBRUARY 2008: MORNING SERVICE

Sing before: Psalm 138:1

Let us commence this meeting with God by declaring openly to one another and to God:

Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth. Beloved grace and peace be to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, through the mighty working of God the Holy Spirit.

Amen

Psalm of praise: Psalm 89:3

Confession of faith: Apostolic

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, our Lord who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried. He descended into Hell, the third day He rose again from the dead, He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, from there He shall come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, a holy catholic* Church, the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting.

Amen.

After the reading of the Law we confess our guilt and pray for forgiveness and a new life before God with Psalm 31:13

Law

Psalm: 31:13

Prayer:

- ***Doxology***
- ***Worship***
- ***Confession of sins***
- ***Forgiveness***
- ***Gratitude***
- ***Prayer for the need of the congregation for the church, the authorities and the sinful world and appeal to God's promises.***
- ***General prayer***
- ***Enlightenment from the Holy Spirit for the sake of the ministry of the Word.***

Amen

Psalm: 19:5

Scripture: Isaiah 59

Text: Isaiah 59:2

"But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear."

The power of our sins shows in our unrighteousness. We can put it differently: should I stand before a spiritual mirror and look at myself the misery that I see in myself would be the sins I do.

Our sinning is not without consequences.

- It is a crime we commit against God and for that God will punish us.
- Our sinning (call it unrighteousness!) sends us into a spiritual exile.
- It alienates us from the Lord and often it also alienates us from the people who are closest to us.

In both cases the effect is the same – it becomes a wall of partition – thus speaks the Lord.

- A partition is a wall built in a room to divide it into two.
- That is exactly what the unrighteous things we do cause.
- They separate us from the Lord.
- They separate us from the Lord's love.
- They separate us from our fellow man's love.

We find many examples of this in the Bible:

- Adam and Eve sin – and they were driven out of Paradise by God and punished.
- Cain's sin resulted in alienation from God and his fellow man.
- Consider the exile the Lord brought onto the Israelites.
- And remember Judas!

These events were serious – and there are more examples in the Bible and in our own lives. We must therefore test this matter to our own person. What do we believe about our personal miseries?

We are quick to notice and point out the imperfections in other people. Are we as vigilant and relentless towards ourselves?

The fact that the Lord Jesus tells us to remove the plank from our own eye before we start to complain about the speck in the eye of our neighbour, underlines two issues:

- The one is that the Lord does not approve of double standards.
- The other is that in our knowledge of the common misery and sin we exclude ourselves.

What makes this more serious is that it means:

- That we have this failure because we refuse to allow God the Holy Spirit to work in us.
- That we lack the ability to listen to Him sufficiently.
- That is the cause for our failure.

Sooner or later we are confronted by the question: Do I know my personal sins and misery?

It is in our nature to want to know about the sins and miseries of other people.

- The novels we read and the stories we watch on television abound with horrible deeds and scandals and we love it!
- The sensational stories in our newspapers are about murder and the mistakes of the mighty and wealthy in our society. The people must be informed! That is what we believe and so we participate.

But is this the truth that the Lord seeks in us?

- Is this the truth with which we want to pave our way to heaven?
- That cannot be for those matters are filthy
- We cannot make filth part of our life and boast that it is for the best?!

God the Holy Spirit wants to know from each one of us whether we are as keen on discovering our own sins and scandals as we are on discovering what we read in the papers about other people!

- What would we answer? Perhaps – *“Lord I do not want to hear about my own shortcomings!”*
- I refuse to reveal my own shame – that does not concern others!

The truth is that our own lives are exactly like those of the people we condemn.

- That is why the Holy Spirit teaches us through the Word of God that our sins corrupt our body and our soul in the same way as with the people we condemn.
- He teaches us that if we do not overcome sin and flee from it we shall meet God’s punishment.

Hence, we must take note of what we confess. We confess in the Heidelberg Catechism that we know our sins and misery from the Law of God. Clearly, it is true the Law of God shows us where we sin. But what is not written here?

- It is not written that the Law is our only source of knowledge about our sins. In a particular manner the Lord also uses our conscience to reveal our sins to us. (Romans 2:14-15)
“Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the Law, do by nature things required by the Law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the Law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.”
- We know that the cross of the Lord Jesus also reveals our sins. (Romans 3:25)
“God presented Him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in His blood. He did this to demonstrate His justice, because in His forbearance He had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished.”
(Colossians 2:14) *“Having cancelled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross.”*

We also know our sins from the laws of the land, listen to what the Lord says: (1 Timothy 1:9) *“We also know that law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious; for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers;”*

Obviously, these different sources of revelation will teach us nothing more than what the Ten Commandments tell us. The main source of knowledge about our sin is and shall always be the Law of God.

What does the Lord want with all this? His premise is that everybody wants the best for himself/herself.

- The Lord teaches us that we can obtain the best only if we stay as far away as possible from the wrong things.
- We know what is wrong, for the Lord teaches us this with His Law and through our conscience and all the sources the Bible speaks of.

But, we are not lost. Once we reach the stage of honesty that we recognise our miserable situation, then we understand what the Lord did for us when, through the Lord Jesus, He reconciled us with Him and redeemed us.

He knows that we shall then know how deep the sorrow for us was in the heart of the Lord Jesus. When we reach that stage, then our own remorse about the dark spots in our lives brings us to repentance and faith.

That brings us to our personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

- We confess that He is the Saviour because our insight (that is sharpened by God the Holy Spirit) shows us that with our hostile attitude we travel the road to perdition.
- The path of repentance makes us relinquish evil because God the Holy Spirit makes us break away from evil and take a fresh route – the path of sincerity and a righteous life before God and with our neighbour.
- The cross re-creates us: we are no longer seekers of sensation who only wish to read and hear about scandal, no, we become servants of God and of our neighbour.
- We obey the first commandment given by God: we guard! We guard and protect the glory of God and that of our neighbour.
- We no longer destroy (and do not enjoy the destruction of others). We build and protect.

The knowledge of our own misery should make us so humble before the Lord and our neighbour that we sincerely confess the following passage from the Word of God: (1 John 3:15) *“Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him.”*

We have the permanence of the eternal life in us, for the Lord Jesus gave it to us. We know how miserable a life of sin is when He is not part of our life – we know that miserable life, for the Lord reveals to us in His Law all that goes awry in such life.

We are new and strive for an untainted life under the guidance of God the Holy Spirit, for we belong to the Lord Jesus Christ.

What does our confession teach us about this? Let us read the Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day 2:

3. From where do you know your sins and misery?

From the Law of God.

4. What does the Law of God require of us?

Christ teaches us in sum, in Matthew 22: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. This is the first and great commandment; and the second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

5. Can you keep all this perfectly?

No; for I am by nature prone to hate God and my neighbour.”

Amen

Closing prayer

Closing Psalm: 34:6

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Amen

Dr MJ Du Plessis
Reformed Church Bellville
10 February 2008
NIV