

My Walk with God

May 29, 2016

This morning we are setting aside time for each of us to reflect on our personal walk with God. Each time that our church observes communion, we put an announcement in the bulletin a week beforehand. It reminds each of us to take some time to reflect on our walk with the Lord and our relationships with other Christians. It's based on the instructions given in

1 Corinthians 11:27-29, "So then, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. Everyone ought to **examine themselves** before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup. For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ **eat and drink judgment on themselves.**"

Notice that this verse says to examine your **SELF**, not the people around you. The English Standard Version of the Bible translates it more clearly by saying "Let a person examine himself (herself)," showing us that it's written in the 3rd person singular. So, this morning, let's all draw a circle around ourselves. It's just between you and God right now.

This verse tells us to **EXAMINE** yourself. This is a close, personal, self-critique. This is not about beating ourselves up. It's about opening ourselves up to hear from God. Let His Spirit bring conviction to any part of your walk with Him. **Ephesians 1:29** mentions that, when we don't do this, we risk eating and drinking judgment on ourselves. So, this examination is a serious thing.

It can help us when we consider the physical posture of our prayer. This morning, consider praying with your palms facing up. Literally put the backs of your hands on your knees with your palms facing upwards. Pray, "Lord, have your way in me," with a humble and surrendered attitude.

Psalms 139:23-24, "**Search me**, God, and know my heart; **test me** and know my anxious thoughts. **See if** there is any offensive way in me, and **lead me** in the way everlasting." Opening ourselves up to God can be a little intimidating, after all **Proverbs 17:3** says, "The crucible for silver and the furnace for gold, but **the LORD tests the heart.**" Being melted down in order to be purified is a pretty intense process, but it is well worth the final product.

Don't let the intensity of this process deter you. Rather, consider that last week we learned from **Ephesians 1:4** that, "... [God] chose us in [Christ] before the creation of the world **to be holy and blameless** in his sight." God has had our best interests in mind since before the creation of the world. And, God wants His people to be holy and blameless.

And, consider this, **Romans 2:4** teaches us that, "...**God's kindness is intended to lead [us] to repentance.**" God is not the kind of father who flies off the handle or treats us poorly when we come to Him and confess our mistakes. Rather, as we learned in **Ephesians 1:7-8**, "In [Christ] we have redemption through his blood, the **forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace** that he lavished on us..."

Therefore, it's safe to confess our sin to God. We can be honest before Him. And, we can be confident that He will receive us and forgive us.

Hebrews. 4:15-16 puts it this way, "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. **Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence**, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."

One other thing for us to keep in mind is that it doesn't help us to deny or hide our sins. We are taking time this morning to intentionally examine ourselves. **Sin is not a small thing.** It's not a minor inconvenience. Sin is the primary problem in the world and in our personal lives.

Right after Romans 2:4 reminds us of God's kindness, **Romans 2:5-6** goes on to warn us about God's wrath, "But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, **you are storing up wrath against yourself** for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. God 'will repay each person according to what they have done.'"

We may think we are being sneaky or somehow fooling God with hidden sin in our life. But, there is no sin that is hidden from God.

Psalm 32:3-5, "**When I kept silent, my bones wasted away** through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy on me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. **Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity.** I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD.'" And you forgave the guilt of my sin."

- Why go on carrying the guilt and weight of unconfessed sin?
- Why leave that awkward tension between yourself and the Lord?
- Why risk storing up wrath against yourself?

1 John 1:8 to 2:1 says, "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. **If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.** If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us. My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One."

Let's set aside some time right now for each of us to listen to God. I will open us in a prayer of confession and then I'll leave us some time to pray individually in the quietness of our own hearts. We'll close our time of silent prayer with a Scripture Reading.

Corporate Prayer of Confession

"Dear Heavenly Father, we confess our sins before you this morning. We know that You are a Holy and Righteous God and that Your desire for us is that we be Your holy and faithful people. God of Truth, we have wandered from your ways like lost sheep. We have followed the desires of our own selfish hearts and we have offended your good and holy commandments. We have done things which we should not have done. We have left things undone that You have called us to do.

Lord God, have mercy on us, spare us from the heavy burdens and the drifting away that our sins have caused. Rescue us as we confess our faults. Restore us to a right relationship with You as we humble ourselves with repentant hearts. Heal us from our sin-sickness according to your great promises given in our Lord Jesus Christ. And for Your Name's sake, grant us lives that from this point forward are godly, righteous, and committed fully to You. We pray this to the glory of your holy Name."¹

And now, let's take some time for individual silent prayer.

Scripture Reading of Confession Psalm 51:1-17

"Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight; so you are right in your verdict and justified when you judge. Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb; you taught me

¹ Based loosely on the Book of Common Prayer pp. 41-42 @ <http://www.episcopalchurch.org/>

wisdom in that secret place. Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice. Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity. Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. Then I will teach transgressors your ways, so that sinners will turn back to you. Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God, you who are God my Savior, and my tongue will sing of your righteousness. Open my lips, Lord, and my mouth will declare your praise. You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise.”

Acts 3:19 gives us this wonderful promise, “Repent, then, and turn to God, **so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord.**”

Repentance leads to refreshing. It revitalizes our union with God. The distance between us and God is removed. The barriers to prayer and victorious living are removed.

God has high goals and plans for His Church. **Ephesians 2:8-10** says, “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us **to do.**” Those last two words in Ephesians 2:10 “to do” are actually from a verb whose main idea is “to walk around.” So, **Paul gives us a picture of people who make up a Grace-Community, who are God’s handiwork, and who walk around doing good works.**

John Stott says it this way, “**We are exhibits of God’s skill and trophies of his grace.**”² And so, although we could credit the beauty of a painted portrait to the beauty of the person in the painting. In the case of our Christian faith we do better to credit the skill of the artist. The church is God’s handiwork. Any beauty or strength or virtue people may see in followers of Jesus is a reflection of God’s good work in us.

Proverbs 28:13 comforts us with these words, “He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy.” **Isn’t it amazing that we worship a merciful God!?** There are many false religions in the world today who serve gods who are nothing like the one true God, Jehovah. There is no one like our God! He is jealous for us. He is stern regarding sin and that which takes us away from Him. But He is so merciful and kind.

Consider this amazing Psalm. It illustrates the amazing contrast between the reality of our sin and the celebration of God’s forgiveness. **Psalm 103:1-22**, “Praise the LORD, my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the LORD, my soul, and forget not all his benefits — who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.

The LORD works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed. He made known his ways to Moses, his deeds to the people of Israel: The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.

As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust. The life

² John R. W. Stott, *God’s New Society: The Message of Ephesians*, p. 82

of mortals is like grass, they flourish like a flower of the field; the wind blows over it and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more.

But from everlasting to everlasting the LORD's love is with those who fear him, and his righteousness with their children's children — with those who keep his covenant and remember to obey his precepts. The LORD has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all.

Praise the LORD, you his angels, you mighty ones who do his bidding, who obey his word.

Praise the LORD, all his heavenly hosts, you his servants who do his will. Praise the LORD, all his works everywhere in his dominion.

Praise the LORD, my soul.”

And so, Brothers and Sisters who have been forgiven in Christ, let us celebrate His forgiveness today. And, in the days to come, may we find great joy in following Christ. May we continue walking faithfully in His Truth.³

This sermon was preached at the Evangelical Free Church of Bemidji
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³ Inspired by 3 John 3-4