

## **His Mercy and His Men - III**

### ***What sins should we confess? - Continued***

*These things I write to you, my little children, the holy Apostle John writes to us, in order that you may not sin. And if anyone does sin, we have One who speaks an our behalf before the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous One. And He Himself is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only, but for those of the whole world.*

The Son of God is our heavenly High Priest; He stands before the Father, pleading what He Himself has done for us, how He has had Himself baptised into us and suffered for us and made Himself to be the one sacrifice sufficient to make up for our sin, and is Himself our righteousness and our salvation, and really is all that already.

In Him we have full and complete forgiveness for all our sins and shortcomings. Therefore is it that *before the Pastor we should confess only those sins which we know and feel in our hearts*, those that burden us, for which we need specific assurance of His mercy, that even for those He is the atoning sacrifice by His sufferings and death, and a sufficient one at that.

We need not inform Him about each and all of our specific sins and shortcomings, as if He did not know already. He does not demand it of us. On the other hand, the sins of which we know and feel in our heart, those we should and must give over to Him. For He will not have us *lie*, neither to Him nor to ourselves, and insist that the evil and ungodliness is not there, in our hearts and minds, and in our lives, of which not only He knows, but also we ourselves, nor would He have us cling to them and keep them in our hearts and minds, and live them out in our lives.

*God is light and in Him is no darkness at all*, as the Apostle also writes it, and if we say that we are in Communion with Him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not do the Truth. And the Letter to the Hebrews spells it out, that *if we continue sinning deliberately after having received the knowledge of the Truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but rather a fearful expectation of judgement, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.*

Particularly this holds true for the sin of refusing to forgive others for the wrong they have done to us - or the wrong we *think* they have done to us because we do not know the whole truth, because we have not bothered to find out, or to think things through, before we made our final judgement.

Now, this is different from still feeling hurt from what has happened to us, let us by all means be absolutely clear about that; but nevertheless: *If you do not forgive others their trespasses, says our Lord Jesus, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses!*

This, though, is not so much because there is a limit to how much sin God will forgive, or how bad sin; in fact, it is not about that at all. Our salvation is not about exactly what evil God is willing to put up with, rather, it is that the price and penalty has been paid in full for all evil of ours; that *Jesus Christ the righteous One is the atoning sacrifice for our sins.*

It is rather that allowing ourselves to become accustomed to the wrongs we harbour in our hearts, and the wrongdoings we insist on continuing with in our lives, it makes us to no longer consider our wrongs and wrongdoings *real sin*. And ultimately, it might cause faith itself to die in us. *If we say we have no sin, writes the holy Apostle John, we deceive ourselves, and the Truth is not in us.* This would apply, also, to the situation where we will not acknowledge that the sin of which we are only too aware actually *is sin, real sin*, which makes us stand guilty before God, and of which we actually need to repent, and for which we actually need to seek His mercy.

*God is light and in Him is no darkness at all; and if we say that we are in Communion with Him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not do the Truth.* To claim to be Christian and believe in God, and also claim your right to disregard and defy His Word and will, that is not the faith He will work in us; it is not faith unto salvation!

*But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, the Apostle then on to write, we have Communion with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.* So to walk in the light is not to live without sin; rather, it is to live the life of His Church, in which all sin is *forgiven*, in the Word and worship of His salvation.

Furthermore, He also wants us to amend our ways. *My little children, as He has had His Apostle write it after having written about the forgiveness of sins, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin.* It is not His will that His children should sin and do evil.

Therefore is it that He calls us and commands us to think about what we have done, and what we do, and what we harbour in our hearts and minds. *Whenever you stand praying, says our Lord Jesus, if you have anything against anyone, forgive - so that also your Father who is in Heaven may forgive you your trespasses.*

*And: If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, then come and offer your gift.*

Therefore is it, also, that our Catechism presents and provides us with guidance to search our hearts and minds: *Have you been hot-tempered, rude, or quarrelsome? Have you hurt someone by your words or deeds? Have you stolen, been negligent, wasted anything or done any harm?*

So much wrong we do unaware that it is sin. So much wrong we do not take seriously as sin. And so easily we convince ourselves that we are *right* in our wrongdoing. So often we need to be *confronted* with our sin to see it as sin, so as to be led to repentance, and to amend our ways. As we heard about it tonight, how our Lord Jesus confronted the officer who chastised Him for how He spoke to the high priest: *If what I said is wrong, bear witness about the wrong; but if what I said is right, why do you strike me?* And as we heard it, that the rooster crowing a second time after Peter had denied His Master, and Peter remembered how our Lord Jesus had said it to him in advance: *Before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times!* And he went outside and broke down and wept bitterly.

We hear also about those who bore false witness against our Lord Jesus and said: *We heard him say: "I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands"*. Most likely they were not aware that they were false witnesses; our Lord Jesus had said something somewhat similar, that others would break down His body, which is the true Temple, and He would raise it again. Only, they did not understand the difference; as false witnesses so often will not be aware that they make themselves to be that, false witnesses, because they do not understand, and do not care to. Like those who said: *What further testimony do we need? We have heard it ourselves from his own lips.* They had heard what they wanted to hear; and they did not care to enquire any further into what our Lord Jesus meant with what He said.

There is nothing hidden, though that shall not be revealed. As we heard it that our Lord Jesus said it: *You will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.* He shall come to judge the living and the dead. And *we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ, as the holy Apostle Paul writes it, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done*

Our Lord Jesus, though, does not intend for us sinners to receive the reward due for our what we have done. He has taken the punishment and penalty for our sins upon Himself to bear it for us, and its due reward of death and damnation. His wish is for us to receive remission of sins from Him by living in His love, under His Word of salvation, hearing His Word in faith and surrendering to His love.

Therefore is it, for our salvation, that He will have us confronted with specific wrongs and wrongdoings on our part, in order that we might turn away from them, and turn to Him instead, before it is too late, the sins that are eating away at our faith, and those that are harmful to the faith of others.

Therefore He calls us to search our hearts, to think about what kind of feelings we harbour toward others, the things we say about them and do to them, and to look at our lives, what we do or have done to others: to see if we are in any way shutting His love out of our hearts; to see if there are things we need to do undo the damage we have been doing to others, perhaps to the congregation, lies we have told because we misunderstood something that somebody said or did, or did not know the whole story, because we believed what other liars told us, and did not care to find out what the truth was.

Therefore is it also, that He has given you your Pastor, and set him to confront you with your sin, in private conversation, if need be, as well as in public preaching.

*Before the Pastor we should confess those sins which we know and feel in our hearts;* because hearing the word of forgiveness spoken to you, with the authority Christ has given to your Pastor, that the sins he forgives on earth are forgiven in Heaven, it is the most precious assurance that those specific sins and shortcomings which cause you concern for your salvation, they also are dealt with and done away with in His suffering and death.

And we should confess also to those sins with which we are confronted, and of which we are convinced, by the Word of God, that they are sinful; that is: rather than harden our hearts against His love should we submit to the judgement of God against our sin, so as to be rescued from our arrogance and ungodliness and restored to His love, and the faith, and true life with Him.

And by the word of forgiveness in response to specific sins, those sins lose their power over us, drowned as they are in the blood of Christ, and in the waters of our Baptism.

O Christ our God, Lamb of God, who have borne, and take away, the sin of the world, have mercy upon us. Amen.