

## His Mercy and His Means

### V. What is Confession?

Pilate sat on his judgement seat and declared, we heard, with regards to our Lord Jesus, that *I find no guilt in him!*

Now, we believe, and we have to believe it, for it is the law of the land, that when the one lawfully seated on the judgement seat declares someone innocent, then he really *is* innocent, in the eyes of the law, and must be *considered* innocent, and treated as such, whether he has actually been *proven* to be innocent or only *not* been proven not to be. Well, this is not only the law of the land, but also the Law of God; the Eighth Commandment teaches us that, as it is expounded upon in various passages of Holy Scripture.

In reality, though, Pilate's judgement and declaration did not make our Lord Jesus to be innocent, really, rather, He made Himself to be that, by who He is, and always was, the Son of God, God Himself from eternity, and the Holy One of God, in whom there is nor ever was any evil or impurity at all.

Pilate's judgement and declaration that he found no guilt in our Lord Jesus was not the *ultimate* judgement; it was not that, either, in the sense, that, as we also heard it, he would once more sit down on the judgement seat and then, instead, declare *himself* to be innocent. And sitting on his judgement seat he would set his own judgement aside, and truth and justice and right, and have our Lord Jesus, in whom he found no guilt, given over to death, on his authority; and although he declared himself innocent, he has been declared guilty ever since, whenever the Church of Christ confesses her Master to have *suffered under Pontius Pilate*.

So much for judging yourself and declaring yourself innocent; so much, also, for the judgement and justice of men. *With me it is a very small thing*, writes the holy Apostle Paul, *that I should be judged by you or by any human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. For I know of nothing against myself, but I am not justified by that; He who judges me is the Lord!*

Ultimately, God is the only rightful Judge of all, and of all things; well, our Lord Jesus is, really, who is God, and appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead. Human judgement of guilt and innocence always has an element of incompleteness to it, and uncertainty; still, in this world it *must* stand, that someone found innocent in a court of law must be considered to be that, whether he has been *proven* to be that, or only *not* been proven not to be.

This established human ordinance must stand, and we must honour it; Christians most certainly must. As the holy Apostle Paul also writes it: *Let every person be subject to the governing authorities, not only on account of the wrath but also for conscience's sake. For there is no authority except from God, and those that are appointed by God.* Or as we heard it earlier that our Lord Jesus said it to Pilate: *You would have no authority over me whatsoever, had it not been given to you from above.*

Again, though, no human judgement is ever the *ultimate* judgement. Ultimately, God is the only rightful Judge of all, and of all things; only His judgement is without incompleteness or uncertainty, absolutely certain to be absolutely good and right, as only God is good in any absolute sense.

Pilate really did not make our Lord Jesus to be without guilt by his judgement and declaration, any more than he made himself to be that. Nor was *he*, ultimately, the one to condemn our Lord Jesus, and give Him over to be crucified. Our Lord Jesus Himself did that, also; as we heard it earlier, again, that He told Pilate: *You would have no authority over me whatsoever, had it not been given to you from above. Therefore, He who delivered me over to you has the greater sin.* And our Lord Jesus was Himself the one who had the greater sin. He gave Himself over to be crucified; not without guilt, though, although there was no guilt in Him, for He had had Himself clothed in the sin of the world, having had Himself born into sinful Mankind, and baptised with sinners, to be made one with the sin of sinners. Whereas Pilate would present the heavenly Judge to the people for their judgement, the heavenly Judge would present Himself to the judgement of the holiness of God, clothed in the sin of all Mankind, on behalf of all Mankind: *Behold, this is Man!* And judged He would be, cursed and condemned on behalf of all Mankind, and all Mankind would be judged in Him, the sin of all sinners cursed and condemned into eternal death and damnation.

Even this the judgement of God was not the *ultimately* judgement, though. Ultimately, the Father would find the Son innocent, even clothed and covered in the sin of the world; so far did His innocence outweigh the guilt of sinners, His goodness our evil. And so, with His sufferings, the price and penalty has been paid for the sin of all sinners, in full, and in abundance, and He has been raised from death and received again into the heavenly glory from which He had come, and shall come, to judge the living and the dead. And *His* judgement is ultimate, without incompleteness or uncertainty.

He alone is the rightful, and righteous, Judge of all, and of all things.

We, when we judge, excuse and explain away our own evildoings, and those of those we like. It was somebody else's fault that you did what you did, was it not, or somehow you had no choice. And that your grandson fornicates with his girlfriend, and has moved in with her to make it easier to do that more often, or that your niece does not go to Church, or that your brother goes to a church that teaches falsehood, or that your sister is a notorious gossip and liar, neither of this means that either of these is not a good and faithful Christian, and Lutheran. We might even defend our evildoings, or theirs, as good and right, and condemn the faithful Church of Christ for upholding His Word and will!

The crowd let a murderer loose and gave our Lord Jesus over to death. And when you encourage others to continue in ungodliness, you let evil loose and give them over to death, and yourself, and our Lord Jesus, also, for when you shut your heart to His Word, you make Him dead to you, and yourself to Him.

And the murderer may be let loose in another way, also, when you set yourself up as the ultimate judge, and give our Lord Jesus over to death. As you close your heart to the Word of God, you open it for the evil one to convince you that there is no salvation for you with God, and make our Lord Jesus dead to you also as *Saviour*.

You need to hear somebody else's judgement; for somebody else is your rightful and real Judge. Therefore is it that He has set His Church in the world, and given to her servants, and His, the authority to pronounce His judgement, not only to the world as a whole, but also to each and every one of His Christians individually, and to you, on His behalf, and with His own authority, so that what they say is what goes, for real As He said it, as He did that: *If you forgive the sins of anyone, they are forgiven; if you withhold forgiveness from anyone, it is withheld; and: Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in Heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in Heaven; and: He who hears you hears me;* because it is *His* judgement you need to hear, for certainty, and for your salvation, not your own, nor that of your grandmother, or your aunt, or your sister, or anybody else whose judgement might mean little more than that she likes you and does not want you to get upset, let alone angry at her. Her judgement will benefit you no more than that of Pilate, who set all justice and truth aside to secure his own interests, or your own judgement, which will always either excuse you or accuse you, or both, but has no authority to confirm your good standing with God or convey any *real* comfort, let alone actually save you.

*His judgement you need to hear, with regards to your guilt, who has Himself borne all judgement for you, He who had Himself baptised into your guilt to bear it for you and take it away from you, so that, as He has had His holy Apostle Paul write it, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. It is His judgement you need to hear, from the man He has set to speak for Him, on His behalf, as to whether or not you still are in Him, so that there is no condemnation for you.*

Therefore is it, again, that our Lord Jesus has given the gift of *confession* to His Christians, to allow you to see through your uncertainty and insecurity about your eternal fate and future, and enable you to rejoice undisturbedly in the assurance of your salvation.

*If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, He has had His holy Apostle John write, and the Truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just so as to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

So to *confess our sin* is the opposite of claiming that we have none, that our sin is not sin, that we are right in doing what is contrary to the Word and will of God. If that is how you relate to Christ Jesus, you are *not* in Him, and there is condemnation aplenty for you; whereas to *confess our sins* means to acknowledge our Lord Jesus as Judge and submit to His judgement of sin and salvation. This is what confession is, really, and repentance, rather than remorse and regret; of those Judas had plenty, as we heard it, but he did not seek salvation in our Lord Jesus, and therefore is it that he is called *the son of perdition*, and therefore is it that the one who was lost remained and remains lost.

Therefore is it, also, that in its teaching about confession, our Catechism is not really not all that concerned with how deeply depressed you are for your sins; in fact, it is not concerned at all with how you *feel*, not at all: *Confession has two parts. First, that we confess our sins, and second, that we receive absolution from the Pastor as from God Himself, not doubting, but firmly believing that by it our sins are forgiven before God in Heaven.*

To make confession is nothing more than to acknowledge the heavenly Judge who has borne all judgement for you, and to submit to His judgement, of sin and righteousness.

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