

“The Good Confession”

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If any of you here this morning would like an interesting research project, I would suggest that you go home this afternoon and try to figure out how many words there are in the English language. I looked into it just a little bit this past week, and the question gets very complicated very quickly. Right at the beginning, for example, we need to decide what actually counts as a word. In the introductory material to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the editors brought up the question of “dog,” one of the most basic words in the English language. There are many forms of the word “dog.” It’s a noun, it can be plural, it can also be a verb, and then we have the various tenses of the verb. And then we have words like “dog-tired” – would that be a new word or do we just count it as two different words being joined together. And then, what about “hot dog”? Technically, that seems to be two words counted separately elsewhere, and yet a person can also “hotdog,” referring to showing off, so there we have what seems to be a new word again!

On top of these questions from what is one of the simplest words in the English language, we then have all kinds of questions concerning medical and legal terms. Many of our words are basically Latin. We use French words in cooking, Italian words in music, German words in academic writing, various Asian words in martial arts. Is “karate” an English word or not? What about fettuccini? And then, what about slang? What about abbreviations? What about English words that are no longer used? And how do we handle new words? The minute we come up with a list, somebody thinks up a new word. How do we deal with that? Those questions keep on coming, and so, as you can see, it is extremely difficult (if not impossible) to come up with an exhaustive list of English words. And yet if we count all possible words, *most experts suggest that there are close to a million words in the English language.*

By the way, the average American actually understands only between 50,000 – 250,000 of those words, and we regularly use only about 10% of the words that we know. In other words, I might understand just about every word that I hear or read, but I might not use all of those words in my own vocabulary. There are a lot of words I know that I will never use. As far as quantity is concerned, we may speak close to a billion words in a lifetime (roughly 26,000 every day). However we decide to look at it, most of us know and use a lot of words.

In the Bible, King Solomon writes about the importance of our words as he says (in Proverbs 18:21) that, ***“Death and life are in the power of the tongue.”*** Yes, our words are incredibly important. But for just a moment, I would invite you to think with me this morning about the most important words that any of us

could ever speak. And I know, in a gathering of this many people, we could talk about this all day long. But please think with me: What are the most important words that we could ever speak? This morning, I would like for us to focus on some words that are to be spoken as a part of God's plan of salvation.

Sometimes we refer to it as the **"Good Confession."** And I would suggest that these are the ten most important words in the English language, **"I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."** These words are the basis of our faith, these words bind us together with others who have also made the same confession, and these words summarize God's plan of salvation – His Son came to this earth to save us from our sins. The Good Confession means everything to us. If Jesus is not the Son of God, then we are still lost in our sins. But if He is the Son of God, then we are obligated to do what He tells us to do.

As we study the Good Confession, we do need to define a few terms. In English, the word **"confession"** comes from Latin and literally means "to speak with." It translates a Greek word that refers to "speaking the same thing." One scholar has said that the word means, "...to assent, accord, agree with..., admit, to declare openly by way of speaking out freely." We discussed this several months ago with regard to confessing sin. In the Bible, God tells us that we have sinned. And so, if we **"confess"** our sins, we are saying to God, "Yes, we are guilty of this, this, and this." We are agreeing with God. We are speaking with God. We are speaking the same thing as God on the issue of sin.

But this morning, we are not talking about confessing sin; instead, we are talking about the **"Good Confession,"** the statement we make right before baptism, that we believe Jesus really is the Christ, the Son of God. When we refer to Him as **"Jesus,"** we are literally referring to Him as our **"Savior."** When we use the word **"Christ,"** we are referring to the idea that Jesus is the Messiah, the Anointed One – like an ancient King would be anointed with oil. He is the Christ announced long beforehand by the Old Testament prophets. And then, as we refer to Him as being the **"Son of God,"** we are affirming that He is more than just a man, that He is, in fact, deity. So, it is a powerful statement.

Normally, I like to keep our Sunday morning worship studies focused in on one passage, studying that one passage in context, asking ourselves why it's there, and bringing out several lessons. This morning, though, I'd like to do something different and study the Good Confession from more of a topical point of view. We will start with an overview of several confessions that were made during New Testament times. We will go on to notice that this statement (or at least agreement to it) is necessary for salvation. We will note that we have to be faithful to this confession for as long as we live. And then we will close this lesson with a reminder about a confession that all people will make once this life is over.

I. But first, let us please consider some HISTORY here.

We may not always have the entire confession word-for-word, but starting in the gospel accounts, we have a long line of people expressing their faith in Jesus as the Son of God. We might get a workout going from verse to verse this morning, but the first passages come in John 1 (p. 1654). In John 1:29, John the Baptist announces the Lord's arrival by saying, **"Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"** And then (down in verse 41), Andrew found his brother Peter and said, **"We have found the Messiah"** (which translated means Christ). And again (down in verse 49), we have the testimony of Nathanael who speaks to the Lord and says, **"Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel."** A few chapters later in John, we come to John 6:68-69. Jesus had said some things that made people just get up and leave – they got mad at what He was saying, and the Lord said to the twelve, **"You do not want to go away also, do you?"** And Peter answered and

said, ***“Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life. We have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God.”***

After the death of Lazarus in John 11 (p. 1678), Martha was upset, and the Lord asked her whether she believed that He was the resurrection and the life, and Martha responds (in John 11:27) by saying, ***“Yes, Lord; I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God, even He who comes into the world.”***

We come to another string of verses in the book of Mark, starting in Mark 1 (p. 1558). The passage records something that happened right near the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, right after He had called James and John to be apostles. Please notice Mark 1:21-28, and please notice who makes the confession...

They went into Capernaum; and immediately on the Sabbath He entered the synagogue and began to teach. They were amazed at His teaching; for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. Just then there was a man in their synagogue with an unclean spirit; and he cried out, saying, “What business do we have with each other, Jesus of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us? I know who You are – the Holy One of God!” And Jesus rebuked him, saying, “Be quiet, and come out of him!” Throwing him into convulsions, the unclean spirit cried out with a loud voice and came out of him. They were all amazed, so that they debated among themselves, saying, “What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him.” Immediately the news about Him spread everywhere into all the surrounding district of Galilee.

Did you notice who (or what) made the confession? The unclean spirit, the demon, was one of the first to recognize that Jesus was the ***“Holy One of God.”*** We see something similar a few chapters later, in Mark 3:11 (p. 1562). The reference comes concerning all kinds of unclean spirits – more of a general statement – something that was said over and over again, ***“Whenever the unclean spirits saw Him, they would fall down before Him and shout, ‘You are the Son of God!’”*** We have another specific example in Mark 5 (p. 1565) with the demon-possessed man on the other side of the Sea of Galilee. This was the man who could not be bound with chains, living in the cemetery, running around naked and gashing himself with stones. He sees Jesus coming at a distance, and the man runs up and bows down before the Lord and shouts out (in verse 7), ***“What business do we have with each other, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I implore You by God, do not torment me!”*** So again, the unclean spirits were some of the first to recognize Jesus as being the Son of God. It reminds us of what James would go on to say later in the discussion on faith and works in James 2:19 (p. 1889), ***“You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder (or tremble).”*** In other words, believing in God (and even confessing God) is very important, but it is certainly not all that God requires. Even the demons believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

But back in the book of Mark, we move on to Mark 9 (p. 1574), and we find a confession spoken by God the Father. At the transfiguration, as Jesus appeared with Moses and Elijah, a voice came out of the cloud and said (in verse 7), ***“This is My beloved Son, listen to Him!”*** We have something similar at the Lord’s baptism as the voice from heaven said (in Matthew 3:17), ***“This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased.”*** So, we have God the Father “confessing” that Jesus is His ***“beloved Son.”***

We can also turn back to the book of Matthew to an example that I had forgotten about until yesterday – Matthew 14:33 (p. 1527). After the Lord calmed the storm on the Sea of Galilee, the Bible says, ***“And those who were in the boat worshiped Him, saying, ‘You are certainly God’s Son!’”*** And then we flip over a few

pages for one of the most famous examples – in Matthew 16 (p. 1530). And we find in Matthew 16 one of the first religious opinion polls. Please notice Matthew 16:13-18,

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He was asking His disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” And they said, “Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.” He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” And Jesus said to him, “Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.

Peter, then, confessed Jesus as being the **“Son of the Living God,”** and Jesus then said that the church would be built on that confession. Just a note here: Some have argued that the church would be built on Peter. In Rome, right next to the Vatican, you can go to St. Peter’s Basilica, every word Jesus ever spoke to Peter is inscribed in six-foot tall golden letters all the way around the top of the inside, you can stand in line to kiss the toes on a statue of Peter – it’s all about Peter! But that goes back to a misunderstanding of verse 18. The name Peter goes back to the word for rock or a small stone. But when Jesus uses the word **“rock”** (in verse 18), He uses a different word, a word referring to a large rock, a slab of bedrock. So, the Lord is really saying to Peter: You are a rock (a little rock, a pebble, a stone), and upon this bedrock (this giant slab) I will build my church. The church, then, was not built on Peter, but the church was built on Peter’s confession that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God.

In time sequence, the next major confession was made by the Lord Himself. In Mark 14 (p. 1588), the Jewish leaders were trying to come up with charges to put the Lord to death. Please notice what happens in Mark 14:60-64 (in the wee hours of the morning),

The high priest stood up and came forward and questioned Jesus, saying, “Do You not answer? What is it that these men are testifying against You?” But He kept silent and did not answer. Again the high priest was questioning Him, and saying to Him, “Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?” And Jesus said, “I am; and you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.” Tearing his clothes, the high priest said, “What further need do we have of witnesses? You have heard the blasphemy; how does it seem to you?” And they all condemned Him to be deserving of death.

Notice, then: The Lord made the Good Confession by giving a positive answer to the question, **“Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?”** And as if to remove all doubt, the religious leaders considered the Lord’s answer to be blasphemy. We see something very similar with Pilate, the Roman governor, in Mark 15:2 (p. 1589), **“Pilate questioned Him, ‘Are You the King of the Jews?’ And He answered him, ‘It is as you say.’”**

Immediately after the Lord’s death, then, we have the testimony of a Roman centurion in Mark 15:39 (p. 1591), **“When the centurion, who was standing right in front of Him, saw the way He breathed His last, he said, ‘Truly this man was the Son of God!’”**

We have another good example in the book of Acts, in Acts 8:37 (p. 1715). Various translations handle this verse differently. In the NASB, the translators put the verse in brackets with a little footnote, “Early manuscripts do not contain this verse.” As we have discussed before, we have nearly 6,000 New Testament manuscripts, and for the most part, all of those manuscripts are practically identical. However, there are a few

differences here and there. When we add those variations together, they would make up no more than half a page, which is amazing for a document nearly 2,000 years old! But verse 37 is in that category. We could discuss this for hours, but for the purpose of our study this morning: Even if we go with the worst-case scenario, even if this verse was not in the first edition written by Luke, it certainly reflects the practice of the early church, and it certainly fits in with the context. Philip is explaining the gospel to the Ethiopian officer as they are riding along in the chariot. Philip is ***“preaching Jesus”*** (verse 35), and in response to hearing about Jesus, the Bible says (starting in verse 36), ***“As they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch said, ‘Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?’ And Philip said, ‘If you believe with all your heart, you may.’ And he answered and said, ‘I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.’ And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him.”***

Before we leave this brief summary, I should also point out that some people in New Testament times actually believed in Jesus as God’s Son, but they were too afraid to admit it. Please turn with me to John 9 (p. 1674). The religious leaders were interrogating the parents of the blind man who had been healed by Jesus. Finally, at some point in the interrogation, the parents basically said: We don’t know how our son was healed – ask him! And in John 9:22, John explains that, ***“His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone confessed Him to be the Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue.”*** So, it appears to me that there was no denying the miracle, but the mom and dad were too afraid to admit what they really thought had happened. We can flip over a few pages (to John 12:42-43), and we have a sad commentary on many of the religious leaders themselves – John 12:42-43, ***“Nevertheless many even of the rulers believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they were not confessing Him, for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the approval of men rather than the approval of God.”*** Let’s not miss that: Because of their fear, they accepted the approval of men rather than the approval of God. They turned down God’s approval, they pushed it away – because they were afraid. Let us not be afraid as they were.

So we see, then, based on a quick summary, that the Good Confession is repeated over and over throughout the New Testament.

- II. **As we start to focus our thoughts on what the Good Confession really means for us, I’d like for us to at least briefly notice that admitting this publicly is actually A REQUIREMENT FOR OUR SALVATION.**

We need to look at two passages, starting with Matthew 10:32-33 (p. 1517). Jesus was telling His disciples that they were not to be afraid, ***“Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul,”*** He said (in verse 28), and in that context, He goes on to say (in verses 32-33), ***“Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven.”*** And so we have a reciprocal agreement, a deal (we might say). If we admit to knowing the Lord here, He will admit to knowing us on the Day of Judgment! Most of us have probably had the experience of having had someone vouch for us. Back before we were married, Keola and I bought a house up in Janesville. The problem was, we were still students down in Tennessee. And to buy that house, we had to send a check of a \$1,000 for earnest money. Well, it had to be in the form of a cashier’s check, so we scraped together every last penny and went to the little bank on Main Street down in Henderson, Tennessee. We had a few recent paychecks and some cash, and we walked up to the counter even though we didn’t have an account there, and these people had no idea who we were. Right at that moment, a woman walked up behind us, she happened to be the president of the bank, she also happened to be the woman my

wife babysat for, and she said to the cashier, “You do whatever these kids ask you to do.” You might say that she confessed us to her employee. In the same way, if we admit to knowing the Lord in this life, then He will admit to knowing us in the next.

The second main passage along these lines is found in Romans 10 (p. 1772). The apostle Paul is talking about the importance of faith, and as he appeals to the Law of Moses, notice what he says in Romans 10:8-11,

But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart”—that is, the word of faith which we are preaching, that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. For the Scripture says, “Whoever believes in Him will not be disappointed.”

The Bible teaches, then, that we must confess Jesus as Lord in order to be saved. Someone has compared it to burning a bridge behind us. As we learn about God, we come to the point of belief, we turn away from sin, and at some point we realize and we openly declare that Jesus really is the Son of God. Once we have that understanding, we do not turn back, but we press on and we are then buried with Christ in baptism. In Mark 16:16, we are told that we must believe and be baptized. The confession is proof of our belief. When I baptize someone, I always ask. We do not baptize people who don’t believe that Jesus is the Son of God. The Good Confession, then, is a very important part of God’s plan.

III. **There is a third basic idea we need to consider here, and that is: AFTER WE HAVE MADE THE GOOD CONFESSION, WE NEED TO HANG ON TO IT – WE NEED TO STAY FAITHFUL TO IT.**

And the main passage here is 1 Timothy 6:12-14 (p. 1859) – Paul’s words to the young preacher, Timothy,

Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called, and you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who testified the good confession before Pontius Pilate, that you keep the commandment without stain or reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And so we find that Timothy (based on his good confession) was to “**keep the commandment without stain or reproach.**” In other words, this was not a one-time thing, but Timothy had to hang on to it. Perhaps you have heard about a Roman official by the name of Pliny the Younger. We have some of Pliny’s writings, some of the reports that he sent to the emperor in the early 100’s AD. In one of his reports to the emperor, Pliny said, “...the method I have observed towards those who have denounced to me as Christians is this: I interrogated them whether they were Christians; if they confessed it I repeated the question twice again, adding the threat of capital punishment; if they still persevered, I ordered them to be executed. For whatever the nature of their [belief] might be, I could at least feel [no] doubt that [the] inflexible obstinacy deserved chastisement.”

Several years later, we read about the death of a man named Polycarp. Polycarp was apparently an elder in Smyrna (one of the churches in Revelation), and around the year 156 AD, the Roman authorities brought Polycarp in for questioning on charges that he was a Christian. They gave him the option of renouncing his confession and allowing him to live, but after several threats, as he was tied to the stake over a pile of wood waiting to be burned alive, Polycarp referred to the Lord and this is what he said, “Eighty-six years I have served him, and he never did me any wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?” And at that point,

the Romans put him to death. Polycarp held on to his confession. As Paul had said earlier in Philippians 3:8, ***“...I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ.”***

Today in our nation, if a CEO expresses a Biblical thought publicly, his company might face a boycott. Government officials and mayors might threaten to block him from opening any new stores in their cities. We have seen that over the past seven days, have we not? But when Paul wrote to the young preacher Timothy, the threat was death. Let us pray that we will have the courage to hold on to our confession. As the writer of Hebrews put it, ***“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful”*** (Hebrews 10:23).

This morning, then, we have done an overview of confessions in the New Testament, we have noted that the good confession is necessary for salvation, and we have also noted that once we make the good confession, we need to hold on to it. We cannot turn away from it.

IV. **As we close, I would point out one final aspect of the Good Confession, and that is: THERE IS A TIME COMING WHEN ALL PEOPLE WILL MAKE IT. THERE IS A TIME COMING WHEN ALL PEOPLE WILL BE FORCED TO ADMIT THAT JESUS REALLY IS THE SON OF GOD.**

I am referring, of course, to an awesome passage in Philippians 2 (p. 1837). Paul is talking about the fact that Jesus came to this earth to die on the cross, and he says (starting in verse 9), ***“For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”*** In Romans 14, Paul seems to indicate that this will happen on the Judgment Day, but there is a day coming when all people will bow down and confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. Even the most devout atheists will appear before God’s throne, and they will confess. On that day there will be no choice. But for now, we have the privilege of making the confession willingly.

Conclusion:

This morning, the Day of Judgment is one week closer than it was last Sunday morning. If you have not yet obeyed the gospel, we would invite you (once again) to consider it. We are not asking that you put your faith and trust in any human religious leader – you don’t need to trust me, you don’t need to trust the pope, or Martin Luther, or John Calvin, or any other human being. We are looking, however, for people who can say with all their heart, ***“I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.”*** If you can make that statement, we invite you to join us in doing the best we can to constantly turn away from sin. We then invite you to make an appeal to God for a clean conscience. The Bible explains that we make that appeal through baptism as we allow ourselves to be briefly dipped under the water. If you are ready to make that decision, if you are ready to make the Good Confession, you can let us know as we sing this next song. Let’s stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: foullakeschurch@gmail.com