

The Gospel and Confession of Sin

1 John 1:5-2:2

I. The _____ to Confession. (1 John 1:9)

II. The _____ for Confession. (1 John 1:5-2:2)

III. The _____ of Confession. (1 John 1:1-4, 6, 8, 10)

To whom should we make a confession? According to Jesus' promise every Christian believer can hear the confession of another [John 20:23]. But will the other understand us? Might not another believer be so far beyond us in the Christian life that she or he would only turn away from us without understanding our personal sins? Whoever lives beneath the cross of Jesus, and as discerned in the cross of Jesus the utter ungodliness of all people and of their own hearts, will find there is no sin that can ever be unfamiliar. Whoever has once been appalled by the horror of their own sin, which nailed Jesus to the cross, will no longer be appalled by even the most serious sin of another Christian; rather they know the human heart from the cross of Jesus. Such persons know how totally lost is the human heart in sin and weakness, how it goes astray in the ways of sin – and know too that this same heart is accepted in grace and mercy. Only another Christian who is under the cross can hear my confession.

It is not experience with life but experience of the cross that makes one suited to hear confession. The most experienced judge of character knows infinitely less of the human heart than the simplest Christian who lives beneath the cross of Jesus. The greatest psychological insight, ability, and experience cannot comprehend this one thing: what sin is. Psychological wisdom knows what need and weakness and failure are, but it does not know the ugliness of the human being. And so it also does not know that human beings are ruined only by their sin and are healed only by forgiveness. The Christian alone knows this. In the presence of a psychologist I can only be sick; in the presence of another Christian I can be a sinner. The psychologist must first search my heart, and yet can never probe its innermost recesses. Another Christian recognizes just this: here comes a sinner like myself, a godless person who wants to confess and longs for God's forgiveness. The psychologist views me as if there were no God. Another believer views me as I am before the judging and merciful God in the cross of Jesus Christ. When we are so pitiful and incapable of hearing the confession of one another, it is not due to a lack of psychological knowledge, but a lack of love for the crucified Jesus Christ.

- Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, Works 5:1

Who should we confess our sins to, aside from God Himself?