

## No Excuses

**Matthew 16:13-19** Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" <sup>14</sup> And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." <sup>15</sup> He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" <sup>16</sup> Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." <sup>17</sup> And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. <sup>18</sup> And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. <sup>19</sup> I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

*In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

1 Making excuses for sin is not confession. "What I did was wrong, but it's not completely my fault." Not confession. "Yes, I sinned, but others have much worse sin." Not confession. "Sure, it's sin, but it's not really a big deal." Not confession. "Sure, maybe my sin is a problem, but I'll deal with it later." Not confession. "I know it's wrong, so I'll ask for forgiveness later." Not confession.

2 This is confession: making no excuses for your sin. As the Psalmist says, "I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity." (Ps 32:5) And "the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, you will not despise." (Ps 51:17) If you claim to be without sin, you deceive yourself and the truth is not within you. If you claim that your sin is anyone's fault other than your own, you deceive yourself. If you suppose the sins of others eclipse your own, the truth is not within you. If you contend your sin is no big deal, you deceive yourself. If your confession of sins includes the word "but," if you say you have not sinned, you make God out to be a liar, and His word is not within you. Confession makes no excuses. Contrition doesn't try to justify sin.

3 Repent of false, self-righteous confession. All sin means death. There is no such thing as little sin any more than there is little death. The wages of all sin is death, Paul says (Ro 6:23). There is no way out of sin. Grieve over your sin. This is good. This is what Paul calls "Godly grief," that is, sorrow over your sin is a gift from God. Despair over your inability to save yourself is a good thing. This grief leads not to despair but to confession. What sins should you

confess? Before God, you should plead guilty of all sins, even those of which you are not aware, as you do in the Lord's Prayer; and before the pastor you should confess those sins which you know and feel in your hearts. Which sins are these? Consider your place in life according to the Ten Commandments. Are you a father, mother, son, daughter, husband, wife, or worker? Have you been disobedient, unfaithful, or lazy? 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? Confess your sins.

4 The Lord made no excuses for your sin. He didn't write it off as "no big deal," when He knew that inasmuch as your sin left you separated from Him, it was a big deal. He didn't scrap creation and start anew with some fresh, sinless humans. He made no excuse for your sin. Death was what sin earned, and He faced up to that consequence of your sin by sending His Sinless Son to die in your place. That Jesus came, took human flesh, inseparably joined God and man together in His person, and was crucified for your sinfulness is proof of how seriously the Lord took your sin.

5 The Lord does not excuse your sin. But for the sake of Jesus who paid for your sin, he forgives your sin. He delights to bestow this life-giving gift upon you. Forgiveness is the medicine of healing, the elixir that restores life to your dead body. And the Lord loves to forgive your sins. As He works repentance within you so that you confess your sins, God is faithful and just and forgives your sins and cleanses you from all unrighteousness. In fact, the Lord so much wanted to guarantee that forgiveness would be given out that He created an office to carry on the ministry of Christ to forgive sins. The Lord has created the Office of the Holy Ministry, or the Office of the Keys, as the means through which He forgives your sins.

6 What is the Office of the Keys? It is that special authority which Christ has given to His church on earth to forgive the sins of repentant sinners, but to withhold forgiveness from the unrepentant as long as they do not repent. The Lord Jesus breathed on His disciples and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive

them, they are not forgiven.” When the called ministers of Christ deal with you by His divine command, in particular when they exclude openly unrepentant sinners from the Christian congregation and absolve those who repent of their sins and want to do better, this is just as valid and certain, even in heaven, as if Christ our dear Lord dealt with us Himself.

7 God guarantees that His gifts get given out. So do not despise the Lord’s gifts. Private confession and absolution is a treasure the Lord has entrusted to His church for your benefit. So that you might hear the clear word of Christ’s forgiveness, God has created the Office of the Keys. So that you might not sit in your bedroom by yourself and try to talk yourself into feeling forgiven, God has appointed an external means, outside yourself, to deliver forgiveness. Don’t foolishly suppose that confession is a Roman Catholic thing. It’s not. It’s 1/6<sup>th</sup> of the Small Catechism. It’s a service within the hymnal. The Lutheran reformers rejected the Roman abuses of Confession just like they rejected the Roman abuses of the Lord’s Supper. They no more stopped the practice of private confession than they stopped the practice of the Lord’s Supper.

8 This gift from the Lord is for you. God who created all things by speaking them into existence, who creates faith through hearing, continues to work through words. There is no word more precious to you than the Lord’s pronouncement of forgiveness. God is faithful and just to forgive your sins. In Luther’s words: “we teach what a splendid, precious, and comforting thing Confession is. Furthermore, we strongly urge people not to despise a blessing that in view of our great need is so priceless. Now, if you are a Christian, then you do not need either my pressuring or the pope’s orders, but you will undoubtedly compel yourself to come to Confession and will beg me for a share in it.”

*In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

*Soli Deo Gloria*  
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