

BE032908

THE D WORD

1 Community To Confession

Well, we start the second phase of our D word series today. I want to review where we've been – because some of you are new to Community and others are new to this series.

The ground we covered in phase 1 was this:

- The Goal of the Christian life is to be Transformed.
- And our transformation goal is as follows:
  - o to look more like Jesus Christ

Now this is absolutely critical that we get our goal in mind first, before we talk about SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE. Some of you will be tempted even by some Christians in church culture to enter the Christian life with the wrong transformation GOAL in mind.

Remember 2 weeks ago, I introduced you to this hypothetical Christian, stuffy and unchanging BROTHER PETE? Brother Pete's first problem is that his approach to the Christian life is faulty. He has a BOUNDARY Centered Approach. But if he were really to take on Jesus as his Master, he would develop a HEART centered approach.

What's the difference? Let me spell this out. First difference is obvious:

- the Boundary centered idea approaches the Christian life and the only question they care about is, what's the boundary? What's the can and can't do's?
  - o The Heart centered idea understands that there are some boundaries that we shouldn't cross as Christians. The moral law gives us those boundaries. But Jesus taught us to ask a more fundamental question: what's the heart doing? Because out of the overflow of the heart, we act and move. God doesn't just want to put band aids on your behavior! He wants to change you into a new person from the inside out. (anxiety/control; infidelity/unfaithfulness illus.)
- The boundary approach looks at salvation only in terms of going to heaven. What's the formula? How do I avoid hell? Fire insurance.
  - o The heart approach looks at salvation in terms of LIFE. Jesus said salvation was the Kingdom... which means salvation comes when the rule of God comes to my life. God's rule brings God's grace, his power, his hope, his acceptance, his LIFE. Yes, that Life carries on beyond the grave... but it begins NOW.
- The boundary approach teaches Pete to ask, what's the minimum? What's the least I have to do to make God happy? What's the check list I have to perform?
  - o The heart approach asks, What's the Maximum of God I can know and experience? It's asking for more, not less. It doesn't ask for the benefits of God without cost. The heart approach hears Jesus say, "unless you give up everything you cannot be my disciple" and it counts the cost.

- The Boundary approach to the Christian life teaches Pete to have superficial differences with the world... but it's tolerant of internal similarities with the world. For example, Pete knows never be seen with a beer in his hand, but inside his heart, he's frankly not addressing roots of lack of self control, lust, pride, rebelliousness.
  - o The Heart approach to the Christian life is tolerant of some external similarities with the world... but it encourages internal dissimilarities with the world. For example, Jesus himself ate and met with notorious sinners, prostitutes and tax collectors – that looked worldly on the surface. But inside he was the sinless Son of God reaching out with the Father's love. Just like that the heart approach says, "avoid sin, not the appearance of sin."

So friend, some of you are beginning the Christian life. Do you have clarity on what Kingdom Life is?

- Are you about living as Jesus lived, or just focused on wanting to go to Heaven?
- Are you about looking more like Jesus? Is your life in submission to him?
- Is your goal boundaries and formulas or is your goal well ordered heart affections?
- Is your goal sin management or TRANSFORMATION?

### **TRAINING VS TRYING**

We learned the difference between TRYING and TRAINING. Trying leads to boundary sin management stuff. Training leads to actual transformation.

To look more like Jesus we have to do more than TRY. Trying to be like Jesus is like TRYING to play the piano. You step up there and merely TRY you will fail. Same with the Christian life. You just TRY to be like Jesus and expect that somehow the ability to respond like Him, love like Him, forgive like Him, obey like Him, give like Him... will just come over you? It won't. And we wind up being a hack at being like Jesus, as much as some people are hacks at singing or playing certain sports.

The pathway to power was not in TRYING but in TRAINING. And all spiritual disciplines were is TRAINING to be more like Jesus. The D WORD we found was the key. And it wasn't what we thot.

- Spiritual Disciplines are not undoable.
- Spiritual Disciplines are not a monkish or aesthetic.
- Spiritual Disciplines are habits or practices that enable you to access power from God to be transformed.

What's it going to take to become more like Christ?

It's going to take Holy Spirit POWER that we access by new disciplines and habits.

So with the rest of our time, I want to talk about two spiritual disciplines that are related to each other. Throughout this series we're going to talk about a basic habit and a

second one which is critical deeper expression of the first. Today is COMMUNITY and CONFESSION.

### **COMMUNITY**

Community is the habit of being around other Christians. Now, why does this habit transform me? Let me give you a few biblical reasons:

1. **POWER:** Jesus promises that his presence would be wherever we gather in his name. Matt 18:20 says, “for wherever two or three have come together in my name, I am there, right among them!” Now if we want power to change, this is significant because Jesus the son of God has all power and authority and he promises to be with us when we get together. (\*illus)
2. **ENCOURAGEMENT:** The Bible says: Hebrews 10:25 “let us not give up the HABIT of meeting together, as some are doing. Instead, let us encourage each other.” Everyone knows how much we get buoyed up by an encouraging word. Prov. 12:25 an anxious heart weighs a man down, but a kind word cheers him up. I can’t tell you how many times I’ve been flagging in my walk with Christ, unsure, despondent, doubting. And 2 hours with my small group lifts me, fills my zeal tank.
3. **LEARNING:** Col 3:16 “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom.” I have so much to learn from other Christians. God gives one an insight, they share it with me. But I cut myself off from correction, learning and knowledge when I don’t commit to meet with other Christians.

So I challenge you friends, to consider how strong this habit is in your life. Is there community? Yes, you have friends or family. But do you specifically prioritize Christian friendship? Christian counsel? I can share a laugh with anyone, but there’s special power I access to change into the image of Christ when I make time to meet with others.

How are you going to get what you need to grow in one hour or worship a week? This should be a priority don’t get me wrong, but you need more. You need people in your life who have refrigerator rights. People whose home is like your home – you’re that comfortable and accepted and real. You can’t have that with 150 people but you can have it with 5 or 15.

So that’s community. But let’s take that basic idea and talk about an even deeper habit:

### **CONFESSION.**

This is where Brother Pete trips up. See, there isn’t a single idea that is more directly antithetical to his “clean the outside of the cup” Christianity, than this. It runs totally counter to the Boundary Approach to Christianity he’s learned.

“Confession? Are you kidding? I thought I was supposed to appear as an

overachiever in the faith... you know, have my act together. **Confession?**"

But Brother Pete must understand this sooner or later: Jesus despised the "outside of the cup" approach. He railed against it with considerable horsepower. He'd rather take authentic brokenness than inauthentic holiness ANY DAY. That's why he began his list of the blessed life like this:

- Blessed are the POOR IN SPIRIT
- Blessed are those who MOURN
- Blessed are the MEEK.

News flash, friends: you're a sinner. That's why you came to Christ. If you came to Christ to feel just a little bit superior, you've come to the wrong place. Go to Islam or Mormonism or some other system that touts works as a pathway to heaven. Christianity begins with **poverty of spirit**.

So if that's how we came to Christ... confession should be as natural to us as swimming is to a guppy. ...as losing is to a Seattle Sonic. And regular confession is to your Christian maturity, your growing Christ-like character, what lifting weights is to your muscles.

- James says: "Confess your sins to one another that you may be healed."
- Paul says, "Stop lying to each other" Col 3:9
- John says, "if anyone says he is without sin he deceives himself and the truth is not in him, but if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us and cleanse us from every wrong" I John 1:8,9

People tell me that one of the hallmarks of the DNA of our church is the permission to be authentic and real. No one has to put on airs at AC3. That's really cool. But this part of our church will go away without the regular practice of:  
CONFESSON.

In our church, when someone is interviewed to be an elder, at the top of the list of personal questions we pose is this:

- "How do you determine spiritual weaknesses or blind spots in your life?"
- "What is your besetting sin?"

Notice we don't ask,

- Do you HAVE a blind spot?
- Do you HAVE a spiritual weakness?
- Do you HAVE a besetting sin?

We **know** they do. It's the mark of maturity not whether they have spiritual junk or not, it's a mark of maturity how they **deal with it**. Do you stuff it, hide it, are you even aware of it? Are you known? Are you an island? Are you open? If I don't see that person engage in the regular habit of self examination such that they are free to be transparent before God and people, they can't lead others.

Confession is also a lifestyle for a disciple – not just what you do when you come to faith in Christ. How is this done? The first is

### **PRIVATE, INDIVIDUAL CONFESSION.**

Part of my prayer habit is to journal. So about 5 days a week, on a blank computer screen, I type the word, “CONFESSION”. Then I spend some time examining my life in the last day to pour over areas God is pointing out where I fell short of his holiness.

- You don't have to journal to confess. Some of you may be fearful of having a written record of your sins! But, truthfully, facing that fear is part of the exercise for me.
- See I believe that it's not appropriate for everyone to know my junk... but if someone should find out my junk... and I'm panicked about that? It shows there's a part of me that's not bathed in grace as it should be.
  - C.S. Lewis once said, *“Maybe the redeemed are simply those who gladly bear their shame forever, rejoicing in the occasion which it furnished to God's compassion and glad that it should be common knowledge to the universe. Perhaps the lost are those who dare not go to such a public place.”* What does it say about my security before God and my experience of his grace that I would be devastated and wrecked if you found out the worst about me?

So you see, I've just discovered how easy it is to fall into what someone once called, “the tyranny of the unexamined life”. Without regular confession, a disciple can begin to think he's further down the road than he really is. Sins can get glossed over, our innate tendency to justify our behaviors kick in and we think we're doing fine.

But if I regularly confess the same sin in my journal day after day, I no longer live in the world of illusion. Just coming clean is a way of accessing God's power to change because it keeps you pressed in, desperate, and it ups your resolve to obey.

I'll level with you: I hate confession! I'm embarrassed to see my sins in black and white and it's a time consuming habit. But the discipline is reaping results in my life in dealing with sin early. The trail of carnage from my sinful behaviors gets shorter.

### **CORPORATE CONFESSION**

But, confession is not just for conversion and it is not just a private discipline. Confession is a corporate discipline as well. Frankly we seldom if ever emphasize the power and grace that can be accessed by confessing to each other.

Richard Foster says,

“Corporate confession is so difficult a discipline for us partly because we view the believing community as a fellowship of saints before we see it as a fellowship of sinners. We come to feel that everyone else has advanced so far into holiness that we are isolated and alone in our sin. We could not bear to reveal our failures and shortcomings to others. Therefore, we hide ourselves from one another and live in veiled lives and hypocrisy”.

Friends, we don't have to go to a priest in a collar to get to God. We are all priests. But if it's true that we are a nation of priests for ourselves, it is also true that we are a nation of priests for each other too? Listen again to James 5:16:

Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other that you may be healed...

Why? We, can bring God's grace to one another!! Bonhoeffer wrote:

“A man who confesses his sins in the presence of a (trusted) brother knows that he is no longer alone with himself; he experiences the presence of God in the reality of the other person. As long as I am by myself in the confession of my sins, everything remains in the dark, but in the presence of a brother, the sin has to be brought into the light.”

The power of corporate confession came home to me many years ago. At that time, I didn't want to realize that I was an emotional basket case, I was a youth pastor and work wasn't going well, my self esteem was shot and my marriage was under huge strain, my wife had just had our first son. On the outside everything seemed fine, but on the inside, I was withdrawing from my wife and my family and my church.

And suddenly I realized that I was vulnerable for an affair. I hated what was going on inside, but what should I do? I had confessed the sins many times to God, but the attitudes and desires remained in the dark and powerful.

During this time, I was meeting with another pastor friend for “accountability”. But the truth is, we NEVER discussed stuff this intimate. But this is not a stranger, OK. This is a guy I had known for 10 years, who was my best friend in the world, a guy I would trust with my life. But I couldn't trust him with my secret, my anger and resentment and my temptation to lust?

- How could I tell him?
  - o He would be shocked.
  - o He'll recoil.
  - o He'll think I'm a terrible person.

Finally, I just did it. I confessed. And guess what? Instead of judgment, a pained look of sympathy came over his face and he said, “I know exactly how you feel!” In fact, he was in danger with a person in his church. And my trust risk gave him permission to confess that to me. And let me tell you, there in that restaurant, we cried together and he prayed for me, and I experienced the forgiveness of God as I have never felt it before except the day of my conversion to Christ.

And all the ugliness of my sin came – kicking and screaming – into the light and you know what? It lost its power. It became repulsive to me, there in the light. I was healed through confession.

Men, it takes more courage to get real with some other trusted men in the Body of Christ, than it does to storm a beach. We would rather strap on a gun and

fight to the death, than bare our souls.

I'm here to tell you that ultimately, all you've got to lose is the ILLUSION that you have your spiritual act together. Lies about yourself is something you can afford to lose! As long as the sin remains inside me, it remains in the dark, powerful and strong. But when I practice the discipline of confession, the sin comes into the light and I'm set free. Transformed!

- I get free from old sins and habits that keep me in the past.
- I preemptively strike against future sins.
- I'm free from besting behaviors that have ruined my life.

## **CONCLUSION**

Sin that remains within, is like a chain. Confession breaks the chain. Confession ends pretense but confession is embracing the truth about ourselves. It's agreeing with God about the truth in us. Walking in the light means walking in that truth, the truth is, we are sinners **together**. So in Community, in acts of mutual confession we release the power that heals and transforms.