

If We Confess

Sharon and I were traveling last month and we attended services in a small church on Maui. There is a lot I would like to share about the state of the Church in the Hawaiian Islands, but time today does not permit.

What I will share is prompted by what the Church there was studying. They have been studying fellowship and the text they have been using is 1 John.

Most of us recognize one verse from 1 John 1:6-10

We hear and remember verse 9 this way:

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

When we hear and remember the verse standing alone we tend to remember that it is about the faithfulness and righteousness of Jesus and his forgiveness.

But that is not the way this passage is written.

This passage uses repetition—a technique that in rhetoric is called anaphora, which simply means to repeat a word or phrase at the beginning of a verse, or sentence.

If you watch the news coverage of the presidential candidates you may see them doing a variation of this technique called an epiphora which is also called an Epistrophe. This technique places the repeated phrase at the end.

When Abraham Lincoln intoned the words “of the People, by the People, for the People.” He was using this in its simplest form.

Politicians like to use an Epistrophe because if the crowd starts to repeat it with them which amplifies the effect.

When Winston Churchill used anaphora—repeating the beginning phrase when he said:

“we shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills. We shall never surrender.”

Lest you think that the politicians invented this, they borrowed it from the rhetoric of preachers and the words of Scripture.

The Apostle Paul used epistrophe when he said in **1 Corinthians 13:11**

¹¹When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things.

King Solomon used anaphora—repeating two words 30 times in 15 couplets that I expect everyone here recognizes. **Ecclesiastes 3:1 - 8**

- ¹There is an appointed time for everything.
And there is a time for every event under heaven—
- ² A time to give birth and a time to die;
A time to plant and a time to uproot what is planted.
- ³ A time to kill and a time to heal;
A time to tear down and a time to build up.
- ⁴ A time to weep and a time to laugh;
A time to mourn and a time to dance.
- ⁵ A time to throw stones and a time to gather stones;
A time to embrace and a time to shun embracing.
- ⁶ A time to search and a time to give up as lost;
A time to keep and a time to throw away.
- ⁷ A time to tear apart and a time to sew together;
A time to be silent and a time to speak.
- ⁸ A time to love and a time to hate;
A time for war and a time for peace.

We remember Paul and Solomon—but do you recognize this famous anaphora? It repeats the first two words in each of 9 couplets.

Matthew 5:3 - 12

- ³"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- ⁴"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.
- ⁵"Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth.
- ⁶"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.
- ⁷"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.
- ⁸"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.
- ⁹"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

¹⁰"Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹"Blessed are you when *people* insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. ¹²"Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Why did each of these speakers use an anaphora - a figure of speech at the beginning - of several lines?

They did so for two reasons.

First - they want you to remember what they were saying.

Good speakers help their audience to be good listeners.

Good speakers capture attention by the way they say things.

Good speakers say things in a way that is extra-ordinary.

Good speakers say repeat until listeners start to repeat with them.

Good speakers use couplets - contrasting ideas tied together by rhetoric

Good speakers use meter - phrases that have a predictable length,

Good speakers let you know when to start listening for the next thought

Good speakers use a change in meter to let you know when they are done

Good speakers deliver their message in such a way and cause you to remember what they said because of both what they said and how they said it.

Second - they used the anaphora - the figure of speech at the beginning - to tie the complete thought together.

Quoting or recalling single verses by themselves is a terrible habit that many Christians have.

The anaphora reminds us that there is one point being made.

Paul wanted us to remember that as Christians we need to grow up.

Solomon wanted us to know that there is a time and a place for everything.

Jesus wanted his listeners to know and remember that following him would result in persecution and that we should rejoice when following him resulted in persecution.

So..you have known about anaphora for a long time, you just didn't know what it was called.

Perhaps you have not been on the lookout for

Armed with this new understanding, let's read 1 John 1:6-10 again.

I f we say that we have fellowship with Him and *yet* walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; but

I f we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.

I f we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us.

I f we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

I f we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.

Five times John begins with the word I F.

When you read the passage the word I F should look sound and feel like just keeps getting bigger.

This passage is one thought.

The faithfulness and righteousness of Jesus is important, but is not the one thought.

The one thought is our conditional relationship to sin !

I looked it up– the word translated I F here is in the original Greek text. It is not something that an English translator added. It is the Greek word “ean” G1437 if you are into Strong’s references.

I looked up what it means– it means “if”–a conditional preposition.

If you understand English, you already understand what if means.

If someone tells you “if you give me \$3 then I will give you a hamburger.”

It means you have to give the \$3 or you don’t get the hamburger.

So listen again to 1 John 1:6-10:

If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth;

--- walking in darkness is practicing sin. Don’t accept people who claim to be in fellowship with Christ and his church, but who make a habit of doing things he told us not to do. People who practice darkness should expect to be denied fellowship.

If we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.

--- If you want be a follower of Jesus– you have to follow. Fellowship is the result of Fellowship. If you follow Jesus, you will enjoy the fellowship of other followers and share in the cleansing of you sins

If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us.

--- Who do we think we are kidding?

When someone is invited to speak, it is usually because they are perceived to have an understanding of what they will speak about.

Public speakers–preachers and teachers in churches–are expected to be people of understanding.

I try to be a person of understanding. I study things and try to understand them. I am not claiming to be great at it, but I try.

One of the plagues of people of understanding, is that people of understanding tend to rely on their own understanding.

The most obvious example of how this is a problem is the machinery operator who thinks he understands his machinery so well that he can leave guards off or bypass safety devices. You hear about these people on the news—when they are killed or injured.

So if I try to be a person of understanding—which is strength—I am susceptible to the sin of trusting in my own understanding.

If you know me, you know this is true.

If I look back on my life, what do I regret most

If I could do it all over again, what would I change

If I fail, what sin has the best chance of catching me

If I think no one else notices, I am deceiving only myself and not you.

If you think you can hide your sin by just not acknowledging it and hoping no one else notices—I have bad news. You are only deceiving yourself.

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

--- I looked this word “confess” up too. G3670 homologeo , it literally “to speak the same”

Vine's Dictionary of New Testament Words says specifically of 1 John 1:9 that this word means:

“to confess by way of admitting oneself guilty of what one is accused of, the result of inward conviction.”

In Greek the word may mean to declare or profess, but Vine is saying here that it means ADMIT and CONFESS,

A thesaurus says this about these SYNONYMS:

ADMIT means to agree because of persuasion

ACKNOWLEDGE means to admit something you would rather not
CONFESS has come to mean a formal Acknowledgement.

John is telling us that the forgiveness that Jesus is faithful and righteous to
cleanse us with is only available if we acknowledge the sin.

Because we have been conditioned to regard Confession as a formal
acknowledgement of guilt, we have become a people who tend not to confess
anything until we have done something so bad and is so known to everyone else that
we need to come and make a formal confession at the end of a sermon.

This is a bad situation. If we are not acknowledging sin, we are denying it and
pretending it does not exist.

We have developed customs in the church in America that confession is public
confession; that we come down front after the sermon and make some kind of
statement that will be shared with the whole congregation.

Some teach that only some sins must be confessed and the confession for those
sins must be a confession like this. They base their opinion on James 3.

I don't see that written in either James 3 or here in 1 John.

I do see in Matt 5:23-24 and 18:15 that Jesus taught that sins that affect others
should include being reconciled with the person who was affected by the sin.

If you need to make a public confession, you probably know it.

If you are unsure, the Elders are here to guide you.

If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.

--- Not even the faithful promise and righteous blood of Jesus can forgive and
cleanse us of a sin if we don't admit that we have sinned.

Jesus promised the whole world that he would forgive and cleanse us of our sin.
If we fail to acknowledge sin he can't do what he promised—we are making him a
liar.

His word is not in us!

If you are not admitting sin then you are denying it.

If you read commentaries, they will tell you that John was writing to teach against Gnosticism, a sect that taught that they could not be guilty of sin.

He may have been.

What we know for sure is that he taught this: 1 John 1:6 - 10

If we say that we have fellowship with Him and *yet* walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; but

If we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.

If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us.

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.

He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

But we only receive forgiveness of sins if we confess our sin.

To not confess is to deny.

The consequences of Sin don't go away if we simply ignore them long enough.

This message is to everyone who is here, including me. The only ones excluded are those who are not going to be forgiven.

Have you admitted sin? When was the last time?

Have you admitted sin to yourself?

Have you admitted sin to God?

Have you admitted sin to someone you sinned against?

Have you admitted sin to the church or anyone in the church?

Jesus cannot forgive you of what you have not acknowledged.

I don't expect each and every person here today to get up and come down front after the sermon.

Perhaps you should

Perhaps you need to confess to someone you have sinned against.

Perhaps you need to confess privately to God.

Perhaps you need to confess to one or more of the Elders– if you are not sure what to do they are here to guide you.

Perhaps you need to confess to a prayer partner.

The important thing is that you need to acknowledge your sin.

I hope and pray that every person here will respond in some way.

If you have not made the first step to becoming a Christian, you need to come and make confession not only of your own sin, but of your faith in Jesus Christ the faithful one who forgives sin. You need to repent and put on your Lord in the watery grave of Baptism.

If we can help you in any way today, the Elder stand ready to receive you.

The Bride and the Spirit say come, won't you come.

Small group talking points

What forms do you feel confession should take?

What situations require public confessions?

What sins would confession to at least one other person help you overcome?

What can the Church do to help Christians get back in the practice of confession?

What sins are you prone to?

What sins would you like to confess to this group and let them ask forgiveness for?