



THEREFORE is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants.²⁴ And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents.²⁵ But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made.²⁶ The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.²⁷ Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt.²⁸ But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellowservants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest.²⁹ And his fellowservant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.³⁰ And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt.³¹ So when his fellowservants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done.³² Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me:³³ Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee?³⁴ And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him.³⁵ So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses. (Matthew 18:23-35)

A GENERAL CONFSSION

¶ To be said by the whole Congregation, after the Minister, all kneeling.

ALmighty and most merciful Father; We have erred, and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep. We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts. We have offended against thy holy laws. We have left undone those things which we ought to have done; And we have done those things which we ought not to have done; And there is no health in us. But thou, O Lord, have mercy upon us, miserable offenders. Spare thou those, O God, who confess their faults. Restore thou those who are penitent; According to thy promises declared unto mankind In Christ Jesus our Lord. And grant, O most merciful Father, for his sake; That we may hereafter live a godly, righteous, and sober life, To the glory of thy holy Name. Amen.

In keeping with the spirit of communal worship, the General Confession is a prayer that can be uttered by every believer with meaning and faith. It is not a prayer manufactured by man, but of the Holy Scriptures and its truth.

ALMIGHTY and most merciful Father. This is the Being to whom we address our every prayer if we expect an answer. *We have erred, and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep.* Who among us has not! Just as those merciless Jewish leaders who brought the woman caught in the very act of adultery dropped their stones and departed at the strong counsel of our Lord: *He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.* And again he stooped down, and wrote on the ground. And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. John 8:7-9 (KJV) That woman must have, from that moment, loved the Lord with all her heart – and we all were that woman! Yes, we have all erred and strayed from the ways of the Lord, but grace aplenty is available to those who appeal to His grace and mercy for forgiveness. We have all sinned and come short of the glory of God, and we must be conscientious in repenting of those sins. When those close to us repent, we must forgive just as God forgives our sins repented of. *Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him.* (Luke 17:3)

We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts. We have offended against thy holy laws. Our so-called ‘free wills’ belong to Satan and the world, but those who have taken upon themselves that Mind which was in Christ have the perfect law of liberty in their hearts. Their wills coincide with His will so that they are made free. Still we fall and falter. Who among us has not committed sin in the last month, week, day, or even hour – unless we have been sound asleep?

We have left undone those things which we ought to have done; And we have done those things which we ought not to have done; Herein lies the crux and focus of my devotion to the Church today. Read again the introductory text from Matthew 25.

. . . . *he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats.* I sadly suggest to you, friends, that perhaps as much as 90% of those on the church roles will be accounted among the goat-side of that equation. Why? What sins have they committed? I aver that the greater sins of the goat-side church members is not the sins they have committed, but those acts of love and mercy that they have omitted. The Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus is a fine example of this. The Rich Man was not, in the eyes of the world, a great sinner for he neither robbed nor murdered; but he failed to comfort the less fortunate who lay right outside his gate. Those are the ones our Lord addresses in this passage. The sins mentioned in our General Confession are two only – sins of COMMISSION, and sins of OMISSION. The righteous will be moved by Christ-like compassion to offer love and mercy to the downtrodden, the sick, the widow, orphan, and prisoner. The unrighteous, who are Christians in name only, will omit to help such ones even if their lives appear above reproach insofar as open sin is concerned. All sin falls into one of the other of these two categories.

What does Christ say to those who omit to do those things that are evidence of a Christ-like believer? *Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I*

say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.

The Samaritan on the Road from Jericho was one despised by the Jews, yet it was only the Samaritan, and not the Jewish religious, who stopped to help the Jew who was robbed and broken at the point of death. We need no purple robes or silken garments to reflect the love of God. We may even be poor and famished of hunger ourselves, but offer our last mite to help another in need. That defines the saint of God. Love and mercy compels ACTION! Our Lord did not merely feel sorry for those who were lame, blind, lepers, or deaf – He ALWAYS had compassion on them which results from a love that overrules every other emotion.

Why is the church sick, and many sleep? *And there is no health in us.* No health at all in those who are separated by lack of love or zeal for God. In fact, they are *dead in trespasses and sin* according to Ephesians 2. A dead man cannot help others, and he certainly can do no good works for himself. True life is ruled by love and the very Author of Love.

What remedy for those who are dead in spirit? In spite of our faltering failures, there is an answer of hope: *But thou, O Lord, have mercy upon us, miserable offenders. Spare thou those, O God, who confess their faults. Restore thou those who are penitent; According to thy promises declared unto mankind In Christ Jesus our Lord. And grant, O most merciful Father, for his sake; That we may hereafter live a godly, righteous, and sober life, To the glory of thy holy Name. Amen.* We can never be accepted by God until we confess our sins and realize that we can never be good enough by our own meritorious acts to earn salvation. It is all an act of grace. The Holy Ghost imbues us with the faith needful for salvation – even that is no work of our own doing. So, if we are feeling righteous, we are lost already. We must know that we are accepted by God, not by our own righteousness, but by the imputed righteousness of Christ. If we are Christians, we shall reflect the values and personality of our dear Savior – to love, to act for others, to proclaim His unmerited mercy, and to not fail to commit acts of love and mercy toward others. The greater sins of the church today are those sins of omission referenced in our General Confession and by our Lord in the text from Matthew 25!