

## **“And you forgave the guilt of my sin.” Psalm 32:5**

In Fyodor Dostoyevsky’s famous novel, *Crime and Punishment*, Rodion Raskolnikov savagely murdered two people. For months afterward, Raskolnikov’s conscience so relentlessly tortured him that he finally had to confess aloud, “It was I who killed the old woman and her sister.”

Many people realise their own guilt as Raskolnikov realized his. Their conscience haunts them, and they, too, feel crushed by the first part of repentance: contrition.

### **CAN GOD EVER FORGIVE ME?**

Perhaps you also understand the burden of inescapable guilt. In church, when the pastor speaks God’s powerful Word of forgiveness to everyone, you may think, “Surely He does not include me! How can God ever forgive what I have done?” Your shame makes you want to keep your sins hidden. But you also understand how David felt when he said, “When I kept silent, my bones wasted away . . . my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer” (Psalm 32:3-4; see also Proverbs 28:13).

What a welcomed relief it would be if someone could look directly at you and announce to you - fully knowing your sins - that you are completely forgiven in Jesus’ name! (Luke 17:3; John 20:23).

### **THE NEGLECTED GIFT OF REPENTANCE**

Sadly, when people contemplate confessing their own sins, they reject the idea as “too formal” or “too Roman Catholic.” It is true that some have abused this act of repentance by making it into a law rather than a gift, or by insisting that you remember and confess every sin you ever committed (Psalm 19:12). Martin Luther called this abuse an “intolerable burden” and “a hellish torture.”

But wrongful use of this divine gift by some ought not prevent you from using it rightly. Luther also said that confession “should not be neglected; on the contrary, it should be highly esteemed and valued.” Again: “I will let no man take private confession away from me, and I would not give it up for all the treasures in the world; for I know what comfort and strength it has given me. No man knows so well what it can do for him as he who must struggle and fight much with the devil. The devil would have slain me long ago if confession had not sustained me. For there are many doubts and false matters which a man cannot settle by himself. . . . So he takes a brother aside and tells him his trouble. What harm does it do him to humble himself a little before his neighbour and put himself to shame? When you receive a word of comfort from him, accept and believe that word as if you heard it from God Himself.”

### **FORGIVENESS SPOKEN INDIVIDUALLY AND DIRECTLY TO YOU**

Luther valued confession highly for one reason alone: the powerful Word of forgiveness. David also understood this as he prayed in Psalm 32, “I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the LORD;’ and You forgave the guilt of my sin” (Psalm 32:5; see also Isaiah 1:18; Acts 3:19; I John 1:8-9).

The mere act of confessing your sins relieves part of the burden they impose. But the REAL joy of heaven comes when the person to whom you confessed says to you, “I forgive you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen” (Matthew 16:19; 2 Samuel 12:13). You no longer need to doubt whether God forgives you: His forgiveness was spoken individually to you, in direct response to the sin you confessed! Then you will understand with renewed confidence that “there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1).

### **FORGIVENESS FOR YOUR GUILTY CONSCIENCE**

We do not intend to encourage the use of a confessional booth such as the one you see here, or for that matter, any other human device. Such things have nothing to do with the fundamental point of private confession: forgiveness announced individually and directly to you. It does not matter if you meet in an office, the church sanctuary, or in any other place. God’s Word of forgiveness is what matters!

Finally, do not think of private confession as an obligation or a burden. Think of it as a gift! Feel free to seek out the great relief of God's forgiveness, spoken individually and directly to you. Go to your pastor or to someone else you trust (Proverbs 11:13) and confess your sins aloud to that person. Ask to hear God's life-giving Word of forgiveness spoken directly to you, and cling to the words you hear: "Your sins are forgiven in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen" (Matthew 28: 19; Mark 2:5). Then rejoice with David by praising God and saying, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, and whose sin is covered! How blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit!" (Psalm 32:1-2)