

Back in my football playing days it was a pretty hard and fast rule: the second guy always gets caught.

A linebacker catches you off guard and decks you after the whistle blows. You jump up, full testosterone and anger and shove him back... you draw the penalty.

An offensive lineman hits you a little below the belt when you throw your hands up to block a pass. You grab his facemask and twist in response... the little yellow flag flies, that lineman walks back to the huddle with a smirk on his face because you got caught while he got away with it.

You could try what a lot of guys did – whine and complain and excuse it to the refs and your upset coaches. “Yeah but he...”... but that was as effective as when I hear one of my upset children yell at the other, “I’m gonna tell mom!” because tattling doesn’t fly with coaches, refs, or the mother of my children.

Tattling, no matter where it happens, it is almost universally looked down upon.

Now, to be clear: I am not suggesting that it is inherently wrong to tell proper people of authority when someone has hurt you. God has given us a government and HR departments as a way to protect us from the many ways that we can be hurt in a world full of sinful people. My point is not to stand up here and tote the old mafia line that snitches get stitches.

I’m talking about a very specific kind of tattling, one that is very common on a football field, in a home full of kids, and, if I’m being honest, in my own heart, where you do something wrong and instead of accepting responsibility you try to blame someone else, or get someone else in trouble for what you did wrong.

My hope is that today we would learn the fine, and I believe lost art of confession. To borrow a phrase from Jesus, my hope is that we would learn the art of removing the plank from our eyes – an act that is necessary for the people of God, an act that Jesus says we must do before we even *begin* to think about tattling about the speck of sawdust we may see in someone else’s eye.

From the kid on the football field, to the toddler in his mother’s kitchen, and Adam and Eve in the garden, we humans show time and time again a deep seated desire to make excuses, to pass the blame for what I have done wrong – which is the opposite of confession.

My hope is that we would realize that kind of tattling, those attempts to excuse or deflect attention from my own failures don’t fly on the football field. They don’t fly in the Hoff house. And, most importantly, they don’t fly with my God.

That’s a fact we heard in Genesis 3 just a minute ago.

In the verses right before what Pastor Adams read, Adam and Eve, God’s perfect creation in his perfect garden, Eden, had fallen into sin. The devil, that wily serpent, had convinced Eve that God was withholding something good from her by restricting her from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Adam watched as his wife took the forbidden fruit and he didn’t stop her... not only did he not stop her, he too fell for the lie and took a bite of his own.

Moses tells us that the eyes of both of them were opened... for the first, but far from last time, God’s creation felt shame – shame that flowed from the knowledge that they had just done exactly what God told them not to do; shame that led them to hide from each other and hide from God...

Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

The conversation that happens next shows as much maturity as the “yeah, but coach” football player, as much pettiness as a 5 year old tattle tale. It is the first example in history of a sin-induced human tendency to make excuses and pass the blame...

The LORD God called to the man, “Where are you?”

He answered, “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.”

And he said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?”

And here it is, the moment of truth... God didn’t ask these questions because he didn’t know... our God knows everything. This was Adam’s chance to confess, his chance to own up to the fact that he had doubted his God’s goodness and eaten the forbidden fruit, but instead of simple confession, the tattling begins...

The man said, “The woman you put here with me – she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.”

A far cry from Adam’s **bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh** poem of love and gratitude a chapter earlier when Adam first met Eve, Adam not only attempts to throw Eve under the bus, Adam blames God - **“The woman you put here with me.”**

Then the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this you have done?”

Eve, not to be outdone, passes the buck, **“The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”**

Adam and Eve knew they couldn’t deny the fact that they had eaten, but neither did they want to face the consequences alone.

But... tattling, blame shifting, doesn’t fly on football fields, in the Hoff kitchen, or in Eden’s garden.

Tattling didn’t stop sin and shame from bringing a curse and death. Would things have been different if Adam and Eve had taken the chance to simply confess their sins, to own up to what they had done wrong? We will never know. But one thing is clear: passing the blame, tattling didn’t fix the problem... but that didn’t stop them from trying, and it doesn’t stop us from trying...

This past week I was thinking about it and it was mind boggling to me how many times I’ve had people come to me, as a pastor, and tell me that they had or were about to do something wrong. But it wasn’t said in a confessing kind of way (I’m sorry Pastor, forgive me), it was said in an excuse making, tattling kind of way (Pastor, if you knew all the facts you would understand why it is ok for me to do this thing I know is wrong).

I can't tell you how many times, as a Pastor, I've heard something along the lines of, "Pastor, I know I should say it, but..." and then they go ahead and say the very thing they just said they knew they shouldn't say! Because in their heads they had already begun the excuse making, the blame casting.

Pastor I know I shouldn't talk about this person behind their back, but they really have it coming... Pastor I know I'm supposed to take their words and actions in the kindest possible way, to leave justice to God and allow someone to hurt me if that's what they are out to do, but Pastor there is a history here, I've got a good reason for holding a grudge. Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me.

Really, it is amazing how often I've had people say stuff like that to me... and those are just the people who are brave enough or just didn't think it through enough to say what they are thinking. I'm betting that every single one of you, whether you've said something like that to me or not, are very efficient at excusing a whole list of things you know are just as wrong as a big juicy bite from the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

As I thought about how often I've seen sinners attempt to excuse their sin and pass the responsibility for their words and actions off on someone else, it was mind boggling until I started thinking about my own heart, my own history with temptation and sin and my own response to them.

The rotten apple doesn't fall all that far from the tree. The gut reaction that Adam and Eve had when they were caught in sin has been replayed throughout the annals of history and my own life. It's not just little kids, football players, naked people in God's garden who try and pass the buck, to excuse the sin we know we've committed or sometimes sins we are about to commit.

But tattling doesn't fly. Just like with Adam and Eve, the excuses, no matter how justifying we try and make them sound in our heads does not stop sin and shame from bringing curses and death.

There is this universally looked down upon thing – not owning up to your own failures – and yet we try, day in and day out, to excuse the taking and eating of forbidden fruit.

But this isn't just some tsk-tsk sermon meant to make you feel terrible about yourselves. Yes, I want you to daily, strive with me, to put to death the natural inclination of your heart to excuse sin and pass blame, but this isn't a threat that something terrible is going to happen to you if you don't, I do it because I don't want you to miss out on something amazing.

Adam and Eve were ashamed and afraid, and rightfully so. But did you catch God's response? Yes, in the verses right after this section God will lay down what the fall into sin would mean for Adam and Eve. He shows them how their sin, regardless of how hard they tried to pass the blame, would bring all sorts of hardships into their lives, but before he does that he tells them what he is going to do about said sin and hardships.

It is what theologians call the *protevangelium* – the first gospel. Immediately after the first sin, and Adam and Eve's petty excuses for sin, before a word of the consequences Adam and Eve would suffer, God shares the first bit of Gospel – good news. In his curse of Satan, God promises to send someone who would crush that wily serpents head – to do what Adam and Eve couldn't and didn't, to defeat the devil and fix the sin and hardship the devil brought.

In your business of excusing your sin and passing the blame I don't want you to miss out on this amazing fact. God looked at Adam, and Eve, he saw the sin and the shame, the tattling and the blaming and his first response is to say, "I can fix this." I don't want you to be so busy trying to excuse your sins that you miss out on the God who looks at you, full of sin and shame and tattling and says, "I can fix this."

Because here we are thousands of years after Adam and Eve, East of Eden through the beautiful words of the Bible we know that God *did* fix this – that he sent an offspring of Eve to crush the devil's head - which means you and I, we can drop the self-justifying, finger-pointing, excuse making charade... we can stop the excuses. They never worked in the first place, and all they do now is distract us from seeing the beauty of Jesus.

Your sins are forgiven.

So I would submit to you a better response to sin. When you know you are being tempted to do something wrong, or you have already done something wrong, don't tattle, don't pass the blame, don't excuse... confess.

The word *confess* comes from a Latin word that means *to admit, acknowledge, agree*. In short it is owning up. It is to admit to God that you have sinned, to acknowledge that what you did was wrong, and to agree that God is right and so was David when they wrote, **"Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me."**

I would submit that confession is a better response to sin because do you know what God says to sinners who confess? It's the same thing he said to Adam and Eve – no matter how excuse, tattle-laden their confession was, God's first response was, "I can fix this."

And the same is true for you – no matter what the sin, no matter how big and bad and shameful forbidden fruit was, God's response to you in Jesus is, "I can fix this. Your sins are forgiven."

So, dear Christian friends, let's confess so that our God can refresh us with the streams of his love.

Confession is something we do together at the beginning of almost every worship service. It is something most of you probably do on a regular basis between you and God, in prayer. It is also something that God encourages we do on an individual basis. And this is especially where I think we Christians could use some improvement in our lives of confession. How many of you have someone that you regularly confess your sins to - not just a public, general confession like we do every weekend, but specific owning up to the sins you have

committed? How many of you have someone like that? What we do here every weekend is good. The confessing that happens between you and God is good. But I would submit it is not enough.

Our God encourages us to confess our sins to each other. He wants us to set aside the excuse making and know the freedom that comes with confession, because our God wants us to know the unburdening that can be found in the absolution (another Latin word that means forgiveness). God wants us to know that relief of owning up to our sins and then leaving them nailed to the cross of Jesus.

And so this is the first seed I want to plant in your head about God's gift of individual, private confession. It is something you will hear me talk about more, I promise you that – the God given encouragement to own up to your sins so you can be assured of forgiveness. Private confession doesn't have to happen in with Pastor Adams or I, but it should be someone who will hear your sins and point you to Jesus – a fellow Christian.

But while it doesn't have to be Pastor Adams or I, by being a member of this congregation you have asked Pastor Adams and I to take responsibility of your soul before God, and private confession and absolution is a beautiful way for us to carry out that very important task. So, consider this word one on private confession: Pastor Adams and I are trained and willing to listen and love, and our doors are open – even if it is just more questions you have about private confession.

Above all, my prayer is that God would continue to teach you the joy of confession. Whether it is in your own head as we speak the general confession here at St. Paul's, in your prayers as you lay in bed at night, in my office, or on the phone with a Christian friend, I pray that you would know the freedom and forgiveness that is yours because we have a God who looks at you and says, "I can fix this. Your sins are forgiven."

Amen.