

Confession

Catholic Apologetics

Only God Can Forgive Sins

Many will use these verses against the idea of confession to a priest. God forgiving sins, they will claim, precludes the possibility of there being a priest who forgives sins.

Isaiah 43:25

It is I, I, who wipe out,
for my own sake, your offenses;
your sins I remember no more.

Psalms 103:2-3

Bless the LORD, my soul;
and do not forget all his gifts,
Who pardons all your sins,
and heals all your ills...

1 Timothy 2:5

For there is one
God.
There is also **one**
mediator
between God and
the human race,
Christ Jesus,
himself human

Hebrews 3:1, 7:22-27

Therefore, holy “brothers,” sharing in a heavenly calling, reflect on Jesus, the apostle and **high priest of our confession**...
...to that same degree has Jesus [also] become the guarantee of an [even] better covenant. Those priests were many because they were prevented by death from remaining in office, but he, because he remains forever, has a priesthood that does not pass away. Therefore, **he is always able to save those who approach God through him**, since he lives forever to make intercession for them. It was fitting that we should have such a high priest: holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners, higher than the heavens. He has no need, as did the high priests, to offer sacrifice day after day, first for his own sins and then for those of the people; he did that once for all when he offered himself.

Old Testament Confession

Leviticus 19:20-22

If a man has sexual relations with a female slave who has been acquired by another man but has not yet been redeemed or given her freedom, an investigation shall be made. They shall not be put to death, because she has not been freed. The man shall bring to the entrance of the tent of meeting as his reparation to the LORD a ram as a reparation offering. With the ram of the reparation offering **the priest shall make atonement** before the LORD for the wrong the man has committed, so that he will be forgiven for the wrong he has committed.

Apparently, a priest being used as God's instrument of forgiveness did not somehow take away from the fact that it was God who did the forgiving. God was the first cause of the forgiveness; the priest was the secondary, or instrumental cause. Thus, God being the forgiver of sins in **Isaiah 43:25** and **Psalms 103:3** in no way eliminates the possibility of there being a ministerial priesthood established by God to communicate his forgiveness.



New Testament

But Jesus is the only priest in the New Testament

John 20:20-23

The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. [Jesus] said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." And when he had said this, **he breathed on them** and said to them, "Receive the holy Spirit. Whose **sins you forgive are forgiven** them, and whose **sins you retain are retained.**"

Implies  Confession

This means a priest has to hear the sins in order to know whether to forgive them or hold them bound!

The only other time that God breathed on anyone was when He breathed life into the first human being (Genesis 2:7).

This signifies awesome life-giving power to the disciples!

Protestants think we are confessing to the Priest instead of directly to God

Catholics confess directly as well **through His ministers** as we see here in Scripture

New Testament

Anointing of the Sick

James 5:13-16

Is anyone among you suffering? He should pray. Is anyone in good spirits? He should sing praise. Is anyone among you sick? He should summon the **presbyters** of the church, and they should pray over him and anoint [him] with oil in the name of the Lord, and the prayer of faith will save the sick person, and the Lord will raise him up. **If he has committed any sins, he will be forgiven.** Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The fervent prayer of a righteous person is very powerful.

Specifies a Priest Must be Called
Priest had Power Ordinary Christian did not
Had Power to Forgive Sins



We Share in the Ministry of Christ in Forgive Sins in His Name

2 Corinthians 5:17-20

So whoever is in Christ is a new creation: the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come. And all this is from God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ and **given us the ministry of reconciliation**, namely, God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting their trespasses against them and **entrusting to us the message of reconciliation**

More Than One Priest?

Major obstacle for Protestants is Priesthood

Remember Hebrews Chapter 7 ... now we have one priest—*Jesus Christ*.

So how could we have all these Priests for Confession?

1 Peter 2:4-9 gives us some insight:

Come to him, a living stone, rejected by human beings but chosen and precious in the sight of God, and, like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it says in scripture: “Behold, I am laying a stone in Zion, a cornerstone, chosen and precious and whoever believes in it shall not be put to shame.” Therefore, its value is for you who have faith, but for those without faith: “The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,” and “A stone that will make people stumble, and a rock that will make them fall.” They stumble by disobeying the word, as is their destiny. But you are “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of his own, so that you may announce the praises” of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

Echoes Exodus 19:6, where the Lord calls his chosen people, Israel, You will be to me a kingdom of priests, a holy nation. Old Testament – Aaron (High Priest), Aaron’s Sons (Priest), Israelites (Universal Priests) New Testament – Jesus, ??? (Refer back to James 5 for example), Us

We are all members of the priesthood – remember our baptismal call?

We do not take away from the unique priesthood of Christ – as members of the body of Christ, we establish it on earth.

As members of the Body of Christ, we too are mediators of God’s love and grace through the one true mediator, Jesus!

Apostolic Authority

Matthew 16:19

I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”

John 17:18- Sent Out

CCC 553

The "power of the keys" designates authority to govern the house of God, which is the Church. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, confirmed this mandate after his Resurrection: "Feed my sheep." The power to "bind and loose" connotes the authority to absolve sins, to pronounce doctrinal judgments, and to make disciplinary decisions in the Church. Jesus entrusted this authority to the Church through the ministry of the apostles and in particular through the ministry of Peter, the only one to whom he specifically entrusted the keys of the kingdom.

28:18-20 – Power to Baptize

Matthew 18:18

Amen, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

Luke 22:29-30 - Confer a Kingdom

CCC 1445

The words *bind and loose* mean: whomever you exclude from your communion, will be excluded from communion with God; whomever you receive anew into your communion, God will welcome back into his. *Reconciliation with the Church is inseparable from reconciliation with God.*

Looking Back

"Confess your sins in church, and do not go up to your prayer with an evil conscience. This is the way of life. . . . On the Lord's Day gather together, break bread, and give thanks, after confessing your transgressions so that your sacrifice may be pure" (*Didache* 4:14, 14:1 [A.D. 70])

"You shall judge righteously. You shall not make a schism, but you shall pacify those that contend by bringing them together. You shall confess your sins. You shall not go to prayer with an evil conscience. This is the way of light" (*Letter of Barnabas* 19 [A.D. 74])

"[Regarding confession, some] flee from this work as being an exposure of themselves, or they put it off from day to day. I presume they are more mindful of modesty than of salvation, like those who contract a disease in the more shameful parts of the body and shun making themselves known to the physicians; and thus they perish along with their own bashfulness" (Tertullian, *Repentance* 10:1 [A.D. 203]).

"[A final method of forgiveness], albeit hard and laborious [is] the remission of sins through penance, when the sinner . . . does not shrink from declaring his sin to a priest of the Lord and from seeking medicine, after the manner of him who say, 'I said, "To the Lord I will accuse myself of my iniquity"' (Origen, *Homilies on Leviticus* 2:4 [A.D. 248]).

"The apostle [Paul] likewise bears witness and says: ' . . . Whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord' [1 Cor. 11:27]. But [the impenitent] spurn and despise all these warnings; before their sins are expiated, before they have made a confession of their crime, before their conscience has been purged in the ceremony and at the hand of the priest . . . they do violence to [the Lord's] body and blood, and with their hands and mouth they sin against the Lord more than when they denied him" (Cyprian of Carthage, *The Lapsed* 15:1–3 [A.D. 251]).



Envy

Questions for Discussion

Pride

What happens when we “bottle up” our sins and refuse to acknowledge guilt?
Why is it easier sometimes to confess to a friend instead of a Priest?
Is there any sin too great to be forgiven in the confessional? Hint – CCC 982
When was the last time you went to confession? How often should you go?

Sloth

Anger

Gluttony

Greed

Lust

Because I kept silent, my bones wasted away; I groaned all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength withered as in dry summer heat. Then I declared my sin to you; my guilt I did not hide. I said, “I confess my transgression to the LORD,” and you took away the guilt of my sin.