

Sacrament of Reconciliation



On Sunday evening, the day of His resurrection, Jesus appeared to the Apostles and gave them the authority and the power to forgive sins:

Jesus said to them, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you.” And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven: if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

John 20:21-23

While Jesus gave the apostles the power to forgive sins He didn't give them the form in which confession was to be carried out. That was to be decided by His Church.

According to the Catholic Encyclopedia, in the early centuries of the Church confession was done publicly and privately. Penance was public. For committing a serious sin a person could be given the penance of remaining outside the Church during Mass for several years.

Over the centuries penance for sins gradually changed as well as public confession. By the seventh century private confession to a priest was the norm.

Protestant Objection: Only God can forgive sins. Men have no authority.

Catholic Answer: We agree that only God can forgive sins but He has chosen to use men as His instruments for absolving sins. We see that clearly in John 20:21-23 where Jesus gave the apostles the power to forgive or not to forgive sin.

Protestant Objection: That verse means that if a person believes the gospel his sins are forgiven and if he rejects the gospel his sins are not forgiven.

Catholic Answer: That verse isn't speaking about the gospel. In John 20:21 Jesus says, “As the Father has sent me, even so I send you.” Jesus was sent by the Father to forgive sin and now Jesus is sending His ministers to forgive sin.

Protestant Objection: If that is the case, that power was only given to the apostles.

Catholic Answer: Scripture clearly tells us that God gave men the authority to forgive sin.

Matthew 9:6-8: Jesus said, “For which is easier, to say, your sins are forgiven, “or to say, “Rise and walk”? But that you may know that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins” he then said to the paralytic, “Rise, take up your bed and go home.” And he rose and went home. When the crowds saw it, they were afraid, and they glorified God who had given such authority to **men.**”

Paul who was not one of the original twelve apostles also forgave sins.

“Anyone who you forgave, I also forgive. What I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, has been for your sake in the presence of Christ.” 2 Corinthians 2:10

Notice that Paul doesn’t take credit for forgiving sins. He says, “If I have forgiven anything.” Paul recognizes that only God forgives but God is using Paul as His minister to announce forgiveness. In the Greek translation the phrase “presence of Christ” is **προσωπω χριστου** “prosopon Christos.” The Greek word “prospon” is where we get the word “person.” In Latin it is translated “persona Christi”

Paul is literally saying that if he forgave anyone it was not he that forgave sin but he in the “person of Christ” that forgave sin.

Paul is clearly using Catholic theology which teaches that when a priest administers the sacraments he is doing so in the “person of Christ,” that is, representing Christ.



In 2 Corinthians 5:17-20 Paul says that he and Timothy are ambassadors for Christ. An ambassador acts on the authority of the king who sends him and can speak in the king’s name and with his authority. He says that through Christ, God has given Paul and Timothy, who were ordained Bishops and presbyters of the Church, the “ministry of reconciliation.”

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God.”

Catechism 1461:

Since Christ entrusted to his apostles the ministry of reconciliation, bishops who are their successors, and priests, the bishops' collaborators, continue to exercise this ministry. Indeed bishops and priests, by virtue of the sacrament of Holy Orders, have the power to forgive all sins "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

Protestant Objection: All sins are equal. There is no such thing as mortal and venial sins.

Catholic Answer: The book of James shows us the progression of how sin can grow from venial to mortal.

James 1:14-15 "Each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin and sin when it is full grown brings forth death."

All sins are not equal as scripture clearly shows us in 1 John 5:16-17 which says, "If any one sees his brother committing what is not a mortal sin, he will ask and God will give him life for those whose sin is not mortal. **There is sin which is mortal**; I do not say that one is to pray for that. All wrongdoing is sin but there is sin which is not mortal."

As John says all wrongdoing is sin but not all sin is "deadly" or mortal. Jesus also tells us that there are different degrees of sin. In John 19:11 Jesus says to Pontius Pilate, "Therefore he who delivered me to you has the greater sin."

Protestant Objection. My Pastor said that 1 John 5:16-17 is referring to physical death. God will actually take the life of a believer who is unrepentant. Even though he died unrepentant he will still go to heaven but God will take his life as a punishment for his sin. Please go to this commentary to see that this is true.

Go [HERE](#)

Catholic Answer: God does not kill unrepentant sinners so that they can go to heaven. This verse is talking about spiritual death from committing a mortal sin that destroys sanctifying grace. This is why Christ established the Ministry of Reconciliation so that we can be restored to grace. God wants all men to repent, that is, turn toward God:

2 Peter 3:8-9 "The Lord is not slow about his promise as some count slowness but is forbearing toward you, not wishing that any should perish but that all should reach repentance."

Sanctifying Grace

We receive *Sanctifying Grace* in the Sacrament of Reconciliation just as we do at our Baptism. It is the presence of Sanctifying Grace in the soul which we refer to when we say we are in a "State of Grace". We must have Sanctifying Grace to be saved, that is we must be in a State of Grace when we die to go to Heaven.

Mortal sin eradicates Sanctifying Grace from the soul. Since we cannot be baptized again, Christ gave us the Sacrament of Reconciliation to restore Sanctifying Grace to the soul.

Catechism 1861 Mortal sin is a radical possibility of human freedom, as is love itself. It results in the loss of charity and the privation of sanctifying grace, that is, of the state of grace. If it is not redeemed by repentance and God's forgiveness, it causes exclusion from Christ's kingdom and the eternal death of hell, for our freedom has the power to make choices for ever, with no turning back. However, although we can judge that an act is in itself a grave offense, we must entrust judgment of persons to the justice and mercy of God.

Additional Resources

Book- *Go in Peace* by Father Mitch Pacwa

History- Go [HERE](#) to New Advent Catholic Encyclopedia

Church Fathers on confession go [HERE](#)

Next topic:

The Sacrament of Confirmation and the Sacrament of the sick.