

CONFESSION:

WHERE IS IT IN THE BIBLE & THE COMPLETE GUIDE TO CONFESSION

(by: Scott Smith)

One of the greatest treasures of the Church, her ability to heal people of their sins, is constantly under attack. This world obviously craves the miraculous release offered in this Sacrament - look no further than the sudden proliferation of psychologists and psychiatrists over the last fifty years and the corresponding increase in prescriptions for psychotropic medications. Mankind replaces with drugs what God offers for free! Instead of accepting God's release from our addictions, we discover all new ones.

Nonreligious people seem to have long ago dismissed the idea of sin, so what would they be confessing? Confession - even contrition - has become incomprehensible to them. That is, apart from the historically aberrant need for psychotropic medications described above.

More often than not, the Sacrament of Confession is attacked by Protestants and such on Biblical grounds. This is somewhat strange given the strong foundation for the Sacrament - all Sacraments for that matter - in Scripture. While it is true that the Sacraments were not fully formed during Jesus' ministry, their elements, foreshadowing, and trajectory are nevertheless obvious from the text.

Also, if you are just looking for what to do in the confessional, check out this article. This article is a step-by-step guide to Confession with an Act of Contrition and two Examinations of Conscience.

SCRIPTURAL BASIS FOR CONFESSION - Where is Confession in the Bible?

Below, I'll list the common Biblical arguments against Confession and show you how they can be easily dismissed with Scripture.

But first, here's one of the strongest Biblical foundations for the Sacrament of Confession, John 20:21-23: (21) Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you." (22) And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. (23) If you forgive the sins of any, they

are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." Here we see that Jesus is giving his disciples the power to forgive (and retain) sins to his ministers, the disciples.

Protestants will argue that the tense of the verb in "they are forgiven" indicates that Jesus' ministers are not doing the forgiving, but merely pronouncing the fact that God has already forgiven the sins. This argument acts as a diversion: focus on God's role; ignore the minister's role. It is true that God does the forgiving. It is not true that the role of the priest or minister is irrelevant - this would mean Jesus is just wasting his words. Are Jesus' instructions just meaningless? And what about the "retaining" of sins part? Jesus' ministers are given the keys to unlock and lock.

This is not the only time Jesus speaks about forgiving/retaining and binding/loosing. This power to bind and loose is also specifically reserved to the Church, through the office of the papacy, at Matthew 16:18-19: (18) And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it. (19) I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

There are plenty more Biblical foundations for Confession, too! These are provided below as responses to common Protestant objections. Also, these are all just the references from the New Testament. There are a lot more passages about Confession in the Old Testament, cf. Lev 19:20-22, as well as the writings of the Apostolic Fathers, cf. Didache 4:14, 14:1 - we're just getting started! For more on the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation, also check out the Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraphs 1422-1498.

Now, here's a list of common Protestant objections:

OBJECTION # 1: ONLY GOD CAN FORGIVE SIN

Here's the objection as stated in "The Cripplegate," an evangelical blog site:

The Pharisees hated the fact that Jesus forgave sin (Matt 9:3). They knew that it was something only the creator of the universe was allowed to do. When Jesus healed the paralytic [sic] man the Pharisees were ready to lynch him for saying that he forgave him of his sin. It's incredible that the Pope could think that he has the power to absolve someone of sin, give them some work to do and send them on their way absolved of sin. The only one with the power to forgive sin is God himself (1 John 1:9), and

thankfully he does not leave it up to us to be the judges of whether someone deserves forgiveness or not.

So is this truly what the Bible says? Is God the only One with the power to forgive sins, and no one can forgive sin in God's name? Cripple gate cites 1 John 1:9, above, to support this claim, so what does 1 John 1:9 say? Here's the passage from the RSV-CE Bible.

(8) If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

(9) If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (10) If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

This verse actually encourages us to "confess our sins." Nowhere does this verse refute that Jesus' priests have been empowered to forgive sins in Jesus' name.

OBJECTION 1 A: DO I HAVE TO CONFESS MY SINS TO A PRIEST?

A priest is just a man - what power does he have to forgive sin?

First off, it's true. It's not the priest who forgives sins. The priest forgives sins in Christ's name, in persona Christi. As it is written at John 20:21-23, Jesus empowered the disciples to forgive sins in His name. Jesus hands over his authority to the new priesthood of the Twelve which he ordained at the Last Supper, cf. John 13.

Jesus gave his Apostles power to heal the sick, cleanse lepers, raise the dead, and cast out devils (Matthew 10:7-8). In the same way, He also gave them power to absolve sins. That is, they healed people who were spiritually sick, spiritually lepers, and spiritually dead.

Listen to what Jesus says after healing the paralytic in Matthew 9:

(6) 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."

(7) And he rose and went home.

(8) When the crowds saw it, they were afraid, and they glorified God, who had given such authority to men.

Does it say God gave "such authority to A MAN"? Is it Jesus alone who exercises this authority? No. The crowds glorified God because He had given such authority to MEN, namely the Twelve

OBJECTION #2. THE BIBLE SAYS THAT IF I BELIEVE THAT JESUS IS LORD, I'LL BE SAVED.

Doesn't the need for Confession mean Christ's work was lacking in some way?

The passage referred to here is Acts 16:31, which reads, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved." Sounds pretty simple, right? It does, if you just take that one verse out of context. Check out the verse in context. Acts 16 describes how Paul and Silas were released from prison by God's power and by the jailer: (29) ... trembling with fear [the jailer] fell down before Paul and Silas, (30) and brought them out and said, "Men, what must I do to be saved?" (31) And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." (32) And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all that were in his house. (33) And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their wounds, and he was baptized at once, with all his family. (34) Then he brought them up into his house, and set food before them; and he rejoiced with all his household that he had believed in God.

The Bible has quite a lot to say about salvation and forgiveness of sin. Even in this passage, the jailer does a lot more than just believe in the Lord Jesus. Not only is the jailer's whole family baptized, the jailer (a) washes their wounds, (b) brings them to his house, (c) gives them food ... (d) visits the imprisoned. Sound familiar? These are 4/7 of the Corporal Works of Mercy described at Matthew 25:34-40:

And, the jailer as well as his whole family is **BAPTIZED**. Not only is this a basis for Infant Baptism if there were any infants in the jailer's household, it shows the necessity for the jailer's sins to be forgiven in order to receive salvation. Why? Because all sins are forgiven in Baptism, both personal sin and Original Sin.

"Just believe" and it will set you on the right path, one which includes Baptism,

forgiveness of sins, and doing the works of Jesus. But Saints Paul and Silas didn't say "believe and you are saved," they said "believe and you will be saved."

OBJECTION # 3: WHY DO I HAVE TO GO TO A PRIEST FOR CONFESSION INSTEAD OF GOING STRAIGHT TO GOD?

After all, the Bible says that "there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5). St. Paul says the following in his second letter to the Corinthians: (18) All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; (19) that is, God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. (20) So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. (21) For our sake he made him to be sin [d] who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (5:18-21)

That's a pretty strong voice defending the Sacrament of Reconciliation, no less than Saint Paul, himself! The apostles and their successors, i.e. bishops and priests, are merely ambassadors for Christ, on a mission from Jesus to forgive sins in Jesus' name. "All this is from God" - therefore, it is God's own choice to send sinners into the world to forgive sins in His Name. There may be other ways to accomplish this, but God chose this way. Maybe He's on to something? Maybe He who designed human nature has some special insight into how to heal it?

OBJECTION # 4: CONFESSION IS NOTHING MORE THAN A PERMISSION SLIP TO KEEP SINNING.

Since people keep sinning even after going to Confession, doesn't that mean it doesn't work? There is a bit of a false premise to this objection. The grace of Confession helps us avoid future sin - it's not a guarantee against future sin. Of course, whose teaching is truly the "permission slip to keep sinning"? There are many Protestant denominations that believe that no amount of sins can interfere with our salvation. Here are some of Martin Luther's own statements on this: No sin can separate us from Him, even if we were to kill or commit adultery thousands of times each day, Letter No. 99, 1521).

A person that is baptized cannot, thou he would, lose his salvation by any sins however grievous, unless he refuses to believe. For no sins can damn him but unbelief alone (On

the Babylonian Captivity of the Church, "Concerning the Sacrament of Baptism," 1520). Not even committing murder can put us on the path of damnation?? You can see where Protestant teaching drastically differs from Catholic teaching. When Protestants say "once saved, always saved," they really mean it! Wouldn't this teaching be the true "permission slip to keep sinning"? Can this teaching be true? Of course not. The Apostle John says: "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8). And the Lord himself taught us to pray: "Forgive us our trespasses," cf. Luke 11:4, Matthew 6:12.

EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE BASED ON THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

[This Guide to Confession was prepared by Father John Trigilio]

Examine your conscience and review your sins according to the Ten Commandments, as provided below:

I. "I am the Lord, thy God, thou shalt not have strange gods before Me."

Have I sinned against Religion by seriously believing in New Age, Scientology, Astrology, Horoscopes, Fortune-telling, Superstition or engaging in the Occult? Did I endanger my Catholic Faith or cause scandal by associating with anti-Catholic groups & associations (e.g., the Freemasons)? Have fame, fortune, money, career, pleasure, etc. replaced God as my highest priority? Have I neglected my daily prayers?

II. "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain."

Have I committed blasphemy by using the name of God and Jesus Christ to swear rather than to praise? Have I committed sacrilege by showing disrespect to holy objects (crucifix, rosary) or contempt for religious persons (bishop, priests, deacons, women religious) or for sacred places (in Church). Have I committed sacrilege by going to Holy Communion in the state of mortal sin without first going to confession e.g., after missing Mass on Sunday or a Holy day? Did I violate the one hour fast before Communion? Did I break the laws of fast and abstinence during Lent? Did I neglect my Easter duty to receive Holy Communion at least once? Have I neglected to support the Church and the poor by sharing my time, talent and treasure?

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III. Remember to keep holy the Sabbath day.

Did I miss Mass on any Sunday or Holyday of Obligation? (Bad weather and being sick do not count) Have I shown disrespect by leaving Mass early, not paying attention or not joining in the prayers? Did I do unnecessary work on Sunday which could have been done the day before? Have I been stingy in my support for the Church? Do I give of my time & talent?

IV. Honor thy Father and Mother.

Parents: Have I set a bad example for my children by casually missing Mass, neglecting prayer, or ignore my responsibility to provide for them Education? Do I show little or no interest in my children's faith and practice of it? Have I showed disrespect for those in authority, government or church? Have I not expressed my moral values to them? Children: Have I been disobedient and/or disrespectful to my parents or guardians? Did I neglect to help them with household chores? Have I caused them unnecessary worry and anxiety by my attitude, behavior, moods, etc.?

V. Thou shalt not kill.

Did I consent, recommend, advise, approve, support or have an abortion? Did I realize that there is an excommunication for anyone who procures an abortion? Did I actively or passively cooperate with an act of euthanasia whereby ordinary means were stopped or means taken to directly end the life of an elderly or sick person? Have I committed an act of violence or abuse (physical, sexual, emotional or verbal)? Have I endangered the lives of others by reckless driving or by driving under the influence of drugs or alcohol? Do I show contempt for my body by neglecting to take care of my own health? Have I been mean or unjust to anyone? Have I held a grudge or sought revenge against someone who wronged me? Do I point out others' faults and mistakes while ignoring my own? Do I complain more than I compliment? Am I ungrateful for what other people do for me? Do I tear people down rather than encourage them? Am I prejudiced against people because of their colour, language or ethnic-religious background?

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as provided below:

VI. Thou shalt not commit adultery.

IX. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife.

Did I have any sex before or outside of marriage? Do I view pornographic material (magazines, videos, internet, hot-lines)? Did I commit the sins of masturbation and/or artificial contraception? Have I avoided the occasions of sin (persons or places) which would tempt me to be unfaithful to my spouse or to my own chastity? Do I encourage and entertain impure thoughts and desires? Do I tell or listen to dirty jokes? Have I committed fornication or adultery?

VII. Thou shalt not steal.

X. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's goods.

Have I stolen any object, committed any shoplifting or cheated anyone of their money? Did I knowingly deceive someone in business or commit fraud? Have I shown disrespect or even contempt for other people's property? Have I done any acts of vandalism? Am I greedy or envious of another's goods? Do I let financial and material concerns or the desire for comfort override my duty to God, to Church, to my family or my own spiritual well-being?

VIII. Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor. Have I told a lie in order to deceive someone? Have I told the truth with the purpose and intention of ruining someone's reputation (sin of detraction)? Have I told a lie or spread rumors which may ruin someone's reputation (sin of calumny or slander)? Did I commit perjury by false swearing an oath on the Bible? Am I a busybody or do I love to spread gossip and secrets about others? Do I love to hear bad news about others?

EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE BASED ON THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS

Here's a helpful mnemonic device for the Seven Deadly Sins: **PLAGGES** (like "Plagues") - Pride, Lust, Anger, Greed, Gluttony, Envy, Sloth

1. PRIDE

According to St. Thomas Aquinas, Pride is the mother of all sin (ST II-II q162).

Have I refused to admit my own weaknesses? Have I dwelt on the failings of others?
Have I judged others, in my thoughts or words?

Have I ranked myself better than others? Have I borne hatred or disdain for another?
Have I refused to learn from others? Have I been irritable with others? Have I been
critical of others? Have I been slow to listen to others and quick to speak over them?
Have I been stubborn? Refused to admit I was wrong? Have I refused to accept that
another person had a better idea? Have I been arro-gant? Have I held others in
contempt? Have I reacted negatively when questioned?

Pusillanimity, also called Timidity or Cowardice – the opposite of pride (Note:
Pusillanimity is the opposite vice from Pride. Humility is the opposite virtue from
Pride): Have I neglected to use the talents that God has given me? Have I shied away
from my duties or doing or saying what is right because of fear of how others will
respond? Have I failed to give witness to my faith in Christ in public?

Vanity

Vanity, which is an expression of pride, is excessive concern about what others think of
me, not just what they think of my appearance (ST II-II q132).

Have I been overly concerned about what others think of me? Have I allowed this to
motivate my actions? Have I failed to follow God's will because of a fear of what others
might think of me? Have I lied or exaggerated to make myself look good? Have I
wasted undue time and money on clothes and appearance? Have I been content with
my lowly position, or have I resented the role that Christ asks of me? Do I constantly
take selfies or spend time primping and correcting my hair, clothing or other aspects of
my appearance?

EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE BASED ON THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS

2. LUST

Lust disordered desire for sexual pleasure, isolated from its procreative and unitive
purpose
(ST II-II q.153; CCC 2351).

Have I maintained custody of my eyes or have I allowed them to wander?: "Whoever
looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his
heart" (Mt 5:28) Have I viewed other people as mere sexual objects rather than as

persons to be loved and served? Have I viewed pornography or related sexual or sexualized material on internet? or TV? or Social Media? Have I engaged in romantic fiction leading to sexual fantasy? Have I entertained impure thoughts? Have I engaged in masturbation, alone, or with another?

3. ANGER

Anger/Wrath is undue desire for vengeance, i.e. undue in cause or in amount (ST II-II q158).

Have I harbored resentment, grudges, and hatred in my thoughts? Have I nurtured imaginary angry conversations? Have I been slow to forgive? Have I lost my temper? Impatience, as an associated vice to Anger: How have I carried my cross without complaint or self-pity? Have I been impatient with people, family, events, sufferings, sicknesses?

4. GREED

Covetousness/Avarice is the excessive love of possessing things (ST II-II q118).

Have I been overly concerned about my own comfort and wellbeing? Have I been resentful of my lack of money or resources? Have I been generous in giving? Have I given with a cheerful heart? Have I avoided sacrificial giving? Do I only give what is easy to give? Have I cheated, stolen, or failed to pay my bills on time? Have I used people for my own ends and advantage? Have I wasted money on things I don't absolutely need?

5. GLUTTONY

Gluttony is the inordinate or excessive desire for, focus on, attachment to, or use of food or other material goods (ST II-II q148).

Have I consumed more than I need to – more than my body needs to maintain a healthy weight? Have I consumed food or drink that is damaging to my body to satisfy my tastes or appetites? Have I spent time engaging with food (or other material things) or fantasizing about food (or other material things) that should be spent elsewhere? Have I spent excessive money on food? Have I consumed alcohol excessively? Have I driven after drinking? Have I eaten greedily with little consideration for those at table with me? Have I failed to give money to help the hungry? Have I failed to practice fasting and self-denial, especially on Fridays? Have I failed to abstain from meat on Fridays?

Have I always fasted an hour before receiving Holy Communion at Mass? Do I spend excessive energy and expense seeking to ensure my food or environment is perfectly to my desires (temperature, texture, atmosphere)? Do I spent excessive energy and expense seeking comfort?

6. ENVY

Envy/Jealousy is sadness at the happiness of another (ST II-II q36).

Have I envied or been jealous of the abilities, talents, ideas, good-looks, intelligence, clothes, possessions, money, friends, family, of others? Gossip: Have I judged others in my thoughts? Have I damaged the reputation of another person by my words, attitude, or looks, reactions, responses? Have I repeated accusations that might not be true? Have I exaggerated? Have I failed to defend the reputation of others? Have I failed to keep secrets? Do I despise others of different race, class or culture? Lies: Have I lied, exaggerated, or distorted the truth?

7. SLOTH

Sloth/Apathy is laziness, especially in the things of God (ST II-II q35).

Sloth is a sorrow in the face of spiritual good. It makes you lethargic and want to do nothing, and/or it drives you to neglect spiritual goods. Have I sought God above all else, or have I put other priorities ahead of him, e.g. friendships, ambition, comfort and ease? Have I got so caught up in the things of this world that I've forgotten God? Have I risked losing my faith/piety by bad company, bad reading, cowardice, or pride? Have I trusted God, especially in times of difficulty? Have I attended Mass each and every Sunday? Have I neglected to say my daily prayers? Have I entertained distractions in prayer, or failed to give God due concentration in prayer or in the Mass?