

Scripture References to Confession

Jesus Christ Granted the Apostles His Authority to Forgive Sins



John 20:21 - before He grants them the authority to forgive sins, Jesus says to the apostles, "as the Father sent me, so I send you." As Christ was sent by the Father to forgive sins, so Christ sends the apostles and their successors forgive sins.

John 20:22 - the Lord "breathes" on the apostles, and then gives them the power to forgive and retain sins. The only other moment in Scripture where God breathes on man is in Gen. 2:7, when the Lord "breathes" divine life into man. When this happens, a significant transformation takes place.

John 20:23 - Jesus says, "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven. If you retain the sins of any, they are retained." In order for the apostles to exercise this gift of forgiving sins, the penitents must orally confess their sins to them because the apostles are not mind readers. The text makes this very clear.

Matt. 9:8 - this verse shows that God has given the authority to forgive sins to "men." Hence, those Protestants who acknowledge that the apostles had the authority to forgive sins (which this verse demonstrates) must prove that this gift ended with the apostles. Otherwise, the apostles' successors still possess this gift. Where in Scripture is the gift of authority to forgive sins taken away from the apostles or their successors?

Matt. 9:6; Mark 2:10 - Christ forgave sins as a man (not God) to convince us that the "Son of man" has authority to forgive sins on earth.

Luke 5:24 - Luke also points out that Jesus' authority to forgive sins is as a man, not God. The Gospel writers record this to convince us that God has given this authority to men. This authority has been transferred from Christ to the apostles and their successors.

Matt. 18:18 - the apostles are given authority to bind and loose. The authority to bind and loose includes administering and removing the temporal penalties due to sin. The Jews understood this since the birth of the Church.

John 20:22-23; Matt. 18:18 - the power to remit/retain sin is also the power to remit/retain punishment due to sin. If Christ's ministers can forgive the eternal penalty of sin, they can certainly remit the temporal penalty of sin (which is called an "indulgence").

2 Cor. 2:10 - Paul forgives in the presence of Christ (some translations refer to the presences of Christ as "in persona Christi"). Some say that this may also be a reference to sins.

2 Cor. 5:18 - the ministry of reconciliation was given to the ambassadors of the Church. This ministry of reconciliation refers to the sacrament of reconciliation, also called the sacrament of confession or penance.

James 5:15-16 - in verse 15 we see that sins are forgiven by the priests in the sacrament of the sick. This is another example of man's authority to forgive sins on earth. Then in verse 16, James says "Therefore, confess our sins to one another," in reference to the men referred to in verse 15, the priests of the Church.

1 Tim. 2:5 - Christ is the only mediator, but He was free to decide how His mediation would be applied to us. The Lord chose to use priests of God to carry out His work of forgiveness.

Lev. 5:4-6; 19:21-22 - even under the Old Covenant, God used priests to forgive and atone for the sins of others.

The Necessity and Practice of Orally Confessing Sins

James 5:16 - James clearly teaches us that we must "confess our sins to one another," not just privately to God. James 5:16 must be read in the context of James 5:14-15, which is referring to the healing power (both physical and spiritual) of the priests of the Church. Hence, when James says "therefore" in verse 16, he must be referring to the men he was writing about in verses 14 and 15 – these men are the ordained priests of the Church, to whom we must confess our sins.

Acts 19:18 - many came to orally confess sins and divulge their sinful practices. Oral confession was the practice of the early Church just as it is today.

Matt. 3:6; Mark 1:5 - again, this shows people confessing their sins before others as an historical practice (here to John the Baptist).

1 Tim. 6:12 - this verse also refers to the historical practice of confessing both faith and sins in the presence of many witnesses.

1 John 1:9 - if we confess are sins, God is faithful to us and forgives us and cleanse us. But we must confess our sins to one another.

Num. 5:7 - this shows the historical practice of publicly confessing sins, and making public restitution.

2 Sam. 12:14 - even though the sin is forgiven, there is punishment due for the forgiven sin. David is forgiven but his child was still taken (the consequence of his sin).

Neh. 9:2-3 - the Israelites stood before the assembly and confessed sins publicly and interceded for each other.

Sir. 4:26 - God tells us not to be ashamed to confess our sins, and not to try to stop the current of a river. Anyone who has experienced the sacrament of reconciliation understands the import of this verse.

Baruch 1:14 - again, this shows that the people made confession in the house of the Lord, before the assembly.

1 John 5:16-17; Luke 12:47-48 - there is a distinction between mortal and venial sins. This has been the teaching of the Catholic Church for 2,000 years, but, today, most Protestants no

longer agree that there is such a distinction. Mortal sins lead to death and must be absolved in the sacrament of reconciliation. Venial sins do not have to be confessed to a priest, but the pious Catholic practice is to do so in order to advance in our journey to holiness.

Matt. 5:19 - Jesus teaches that breaking the least of commandments is venial sin (the person is still saved but is least in the kingdom), versus mortal sin (the person is not saved).

