

BIBLE DENIES PRIESTS FORGIVE SINS

CHURCH DECREES ON THE SACRAMENT

The Roman Catholic Church is notorious for its claim that its priests can forgive sins as if they were God. The repenting person confesses to the priest and rather than the priest asking God to forgive the sins the priest forgives in God's name - that is to say as if it was God sitting there instead of the priest. Though God alone can forgive sins he can hand the responsibility to forgive to priests. That is a bigger wonder than the resurrection for forgiving is a personal matter and nobody can be given the responsibility to forgive for you. It is as bad as saying God does not love you but gave the priest the prerogative and responsibility to love you for him.

Early tradition seems to support the notion of priests forgiving sins. Top saint and theologian St Athanasius (who died in 373): "As the man whom the priest baptises is enlightened by the grace of the Holy Ghost, so does he who in penance confesses his sins, receive through the priest forgiveness in virtue of the grace of Christ" (Frag. contra Novat. in P.G., XXXVI, 1315). The Church reacted against the Novatianists who denied priests could forgive sin except in baptism - their point was that if you sin after baptism there is no forgiveness.

To clarify, Catholics have to confess their sins to the priest. We read in *The Faith of Our Fathers* page 398 that this is a power. Priests have the power to forgive sins. They forgive sins in the same way I have to raise up my power to forgive wrongs done to me. It is not a case of God just agreeing to forgive sins when the priest forgives.

The priest forgives as God.

The Roman Catholic Church claims to be infallible and in the decrees in which it exercised this alleged charism it said that the sacrament of penance was authorised and empowered by God.

The quotes come from *Salvation, The Bible and Roman Catholicism*.

Chapter One of the Fourteenth Session of the Council of Trent declared that since we do not remain faithful after baptism we need another sacrament, the sacrament of penance. It said, "The Lord...principally instituted the sacrament of penance when, being raised from the dead, he breathed on his disciples, saying: Receive ye the Holy Ghost: whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them, and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained. By which action so signal, and words so clear, the consent of all the Fathers has ever understood that the power of forgiving and retaining sins was communicated to the apostles and their lawful successors for the reconciling of the faithful who had fallen after baptism" (page 148).

Chapter Five says, "From the institution of the sacrament of Penance, as already explained, the universal Church has always understood that the entire confession of sins was also instituted by the Lord, and is of divine right necessary for all who have fallen after baptism; because that our Lord Jesus Christ, when about to ascend from earth to Heaven, left priests his own vicars, as presidents and judges, unto whom all the mortal crimes, into which the faithful of Christ may have fallen, should be carried, in order that, in accordance with the power of the keys, they may pronounce the sentence of forgiveness or retention of sins. For it is manifest that the priests could not have exercised this judgment without knowledge of the case" (page 149).

So the power of the keys comes from the Bible where Jesus tells Peter he will give him the keys of the kingdom of Heaven which power to open up Heaven by forgiving sins which Peter or the Pope gives to the bishops and priests. But Jesus said the Jewish leaders had these keys and they didn't absolve sins so the keys do not refer to the power to pardon that the Pope has and gives to the Church. He told them they shut the kingdom of Heaven against their followers (Matthew 23:13) so he has the image of Heaven having a door or gate in his mind and a door or gate can only be shut properly with a key. Jesus told his hearers to enter through the narrow gate of Heaven and not to look for somebody with a key (Matthew 7:13). Most of these people would stay Jews so he was telling them they had to try and enter and not look for the man with the key. The keys then are just what Protestants take them to mean, the power to open Heaven by preaching the gospel of divine mercy. The key of the Catholic Church is literally a key to Heaven while the key Jesus means is just a metaphor. Absolution is not the key.

The Council of Trent decreed, "Whosoever shall affirm that the priest's sacramental absolution is not a judicial act but only a ministry to declare that the sins of the party confessing are forgiven let him be anathema". The priest is a judge and has the power to pass sentence and to decide if the person should be granted pardon. Obviously, the priest then is to be respected and obeyed by the laity and treated like Christ himself. The man that has the right to judge you and hear your sins

should be obeyed like he was a king.

The magistrate can forgive your crime against the law because he has judicial authority and can make judicial acts. The magistrate in this way is on a par with the law. He treats the law as if it was his personal creation so that anybody breaking the law is offending him and needs his mercy. He decides that other people who have been hurt by this person should forgive them too for he has taken the offence away. Trent then put priests on a par with God in the same way. It implies that the priest should have supreme authority over lives. This kind of authoritarianism was reprehensible to the prophets and in his better moods Jesus himself said that the one that wants to be Lord must be the slave of all.

The priest can forgive sins even if he is bad himself, “Even priests, who are in mortal sin, exercise, through the virtue of the Holy Ghost which was bestowed in ordination, the office of forgiving sins, as the ministers of Christ; and that their sentiment is erroneous who contend that this power exists not in bad priests” (page 150).

Canon 6 said that those who denied that priests could forgive sins in the sacrament of penance were accursed. Canon 7 said, “If anyone saith, that, in the sacrament of Penance, it is not necessary, of divine right, for the remission of sins, to confess all and singular mortal sins which after due and diligent previous meditation are remembered, even those [mortal sins] which are secret, and those that are apposed to the two last commandments of the Decalogue, as also the circumstances which change the species of a sin; Let him be anathema” (page 152).

Canon 12 condemns anybody who says that “God always remits the whole punishment together with the guilt” (page 152) because they want you to believe that you can be punished after being pardoned by God for the pardoned sins.

IS PRIESTLY ABSOLUTION BIBLICAL?

Roman priests claim to possess the power to make God forgive our sin in the sense that God won't pardon certain penitents' mortal sins until the priest says, “I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” to which the grateful reply is simply, “Amen” (Council of Trent, Session 14, Chapters 1, 3, Canon 6, 7 and 9). He says, “I absolve you”. He does it by his own authority. Catholics tell their sins to the priest and say they are sorry and then the priest forgives their sins after giving them something to do as a penance in order to make up for their debt of temporal punishment.

Today, this sacrament is called the sacrament of reconciliation, but the older term, the sacrament of penance, is still occasionally used.

The Church says that Jesus gave priests this power to forgive sins for the gospels say so. But the texts may not mean what Rome would dearly love them to mean.

Here are the lesser ones with their refutations following them:

Matthew 18:18 where we read that whatever the apostles bind on earth shall be bound in Heaven and what they unbind on earth shall be unbound in Heaven. Since this passage refers to whatever not whoever it is taken as confirmation that Jesus conferred on his entourage the ability to take sins away.

But there is no reason to suppose that he meant sin. The promise was made in the context of talking about Church discipline. Catholicism should stop taking verses out of context. Jesus promised his disciples the ability to accept only those he approved into his Church and to put the unwanted out of it. This could only be done if they were infallibly inspired by him from Heaven. The apostles needed this gift to keep unity among themselves and the Church and unity is more important than doctrine in the sense that true doctrine is lost to some degree if there is too much schism and it is brought into disrepute. (Rome knows this doctrine but cannot confess it is true for it would mean that she is infallible when she excommunicates and even she admits she is not infallible then.)

Yet the promise may be one of another kind of infallibility, protection from error in order to teach the word of God and to have it written down. The Catholic Church has no right using this text here to justify absolving when she also uses it to persuade folks that she cannot err in her ecumenical councils and when her pope speaks ex cathedra or from the chair of Peter.

The Church assumes that when Jesus gave the Church the power to bind and loose so that what it bound or loosed would be bound or loosed in Heaven he meant it could forgive sin. This is nonsense. The power was given in the present tense before the time after the resurrection when Rome says he gave the power to forgive sins to the apostles. The authority refers only to the power to accept people or excommunicate them. Rome says Jesus forgave sins. Also Jesus didn't literally forgive sins as if he were God for he only told the man that his sins were forgiven. He said that he had the authority to forgive sins but he doesn't say he had the authority to forgive sins in the person of God.

2 Corinthians 5:18-20 says that the apostles had the ministry of reconciling people with God. Do marriage guidance counsellors who have a ministry of reconciliation forgive the estranged husband and wife?

The final Catholic proof is the alleged mention of Paul absolving the sins of an incestuous man in his letters (1 Corinthians 5; 2 Corinthians 2). Paul judging, excommunicating and pardoning this man is hardly the same as giving him the sacrament of penance! Paul never met this man and when he was able to judge him he must have been able to read his mind by the power of the spirit. Catholic absolution demands that the penitent be present for absolution. In 2 Corinthians 2, Paul wrote that he forgives in the person of Christ whoever the Corinthians forgive. He means forgive in the matter of Church discipline because if he meant absolution how could he absolve” persons absolved by the Corinthians? Notice too how, “If you Corinthians forgive the sins of any I forgive them” which matches what Jesus said in John “Whoever you forgive I forgive. And Paul is definitely not telling the Corinthians that they can forgive for him as if they were him so how could Jesus be doing that either? The Catholic Church says that distant absolutions are futile for the person has to be near the absolver. A Presbyterian minister could say the same as Paul concerning a reconciled rebel who has broken Church law and he does not absolve.

John 20:23 has Jesus giving the Holy Spirit to the disciples and telling them that if they forgive the sins of any they are forgiven and if they do not forgive they are not forgiven. It does not say that it means they can forgive sins as if they were the ones the sins were against. It makes sense to say that Jesus meant nothing more than if the disciples forgive then God will forgive AS WELL. There are two forgivings not one. The apostles make their decision to forgive and God makes his to forgive along with them. The text does not say that Jesus gave them the power to forgive sins against God. It is against commonsense to imagine that John can forgive you for Eddie when it was Eddie you hurt. The Bible assumes we have the power to think.

When Jesus told the apostles after his resurrection that if they forgave the sins of any they were forgiven he may have had the non-literal interpretation in mind (John 20:23). Just as John can't forgive Marty for hitting Sean for he is not Sean so priests could not possibly literally forgive as if they were the offended God. Jesus knew that though the paganism of Roman Catholicism has forgotten that. Moreover, the Bible occasionally speaks of declaring an act like it was performing it (Jeremiah 1:10; Isaiah 6:10). The John text could have been using this peculiar method of expression. It may just mean that to successfully declare a person pardoned by God is to forgive.

The Bible seems to teach that God saves you in this life and makes you holy. Jesus never said he meant forgive as in give sinners salvation. In Protestantism, you need forgiveness from God even if you are saved but it is not about giving you salvation for you already have it. Roman Catholicism has priests giving salvation when they absolve and that is going beyond the text. The role of the priest is blasphemous.

There is no justification for the Catholic interpretation of the passages. Rome says that baptism forgives sins, that we can all pardon sins for God by baptising. If it does then Jesus could have just been giving it that power in some of the texts or reminding the apostles of that power. Assuming another sacrament is going too far.

It is asserted by a few that since the texts could mean absolution they must mean it. They argue that it is the simplest interpretation and that when a text has more than one meaning the simplest and safest must be taken. It is not safe to start absolving people in case it is nonsense just because a text merely seems to command it and looks can be deceiving.

BIBLE SAYS WE CAN GO STRAIGHT TO GOD

The Psalms and the Old Testament have people praying straight to God for forgiveness and getting it.

When the Gospel is supposed to be good news it is clear that God could not and would not have changed this structure to make it harder leaving one having to look for a validly ordained priest and remember sins and fight the shame of confessing to that priest.

Jesus told his apostles that they must pray the Our Father which pleads, “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” The prayers at the start, “Hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come”, are by implication prayers for pardon too for they ask that God be fittingly praised and his reign of righteousness will come. How could you want the name revered and the kingdom to come now as Jesus wanted us to when you mean “forgive me God but not now and wait until I get to confession”?

Rome says the Lord's Prayer will get venial sins forgiven if you sincerely mean it. The Lord's Prayer would be meaningless to a person who had no venial sins never mind mortal sins but Jesus wants all to use the prayer. It speaks of no restrictions. The Lord's Prayer refutes the idea that some forgiveness is the priest's domain.

The Catholic forgiveness system contradicts the urgency of the New Testament message of conversion and even more so in the past when there were no cars and when there was much persecution of Christians. If a person needed absolution in times of persecution it was very hard to get and caused much terror. St Paul said we could not get married for we had to prepare for the second coming. There was no time for the Catholic system which only slows things. When the Bible never denies that we must go straight it is enough to prove that it wants us to go straight.

Conclusion

Priests forgiving sins is just another Roman Catholic doctrine that emerged from its control freak antics despite being in contradiction to the Bible. Jesus did not specify that the power to remove sins - if it was a power he was talking about - belonged just to ordained individuals in the Church. Luther said anybody can absolve but advised against it for it would lead to disorder. Again that was an error for people forgiving sins does not need regulation. Jesus however was not giving any power to forgive sins - he was saying he had decided to forgive those who his listeners forgive. He was doing the absolving not them.

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