

Dear Massimo,

Thank you for writing us at Christian Questions Radio. You wanted to know where we are told in the Bible to confess our sins to God and not to a priest.

The concept of confession of sin to a priest is nowhere taught in either the Old or New Testaments. In fact, the New Testament teaches that all true believers are priests. 1 Peter 2:9-10 describes believers as a "holy priesthood" and a "royal priesthood," "a people belonging to God." In the Old Covenant, the Jewish nation could only approach God through its priests who offered sacrifices to God for the forgiveness of sins of the entire nation of Israel. This practice is no longer necessary because of Jesus' one time all-encompassing sacrifice, which fulfilled the Law, thus granting Christians direct access to God for forgiveness of individual sins through Jesus Christ. "Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." (Hebrews 4:16)

The New Testament teaches that the organization of Christ's church would have elders, deacons (1 Timothy 3), overseers (Titus 1:6-9), and pastors (Ephesians 4:11). There is never any mention of priests. Believers are told to confess their sins to God (1 John 1:9) and God is faithful and just to forgive sins as they are confessed to him. Although James 5:16 speaks of confessing trespasses to one another, this confession is in no way linked with God's forgiveness of the trespass.

The Roman Catholic Church bases its practice of confession to a priest primarily on John 20:23, "If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven." Because Jesus gave the apostles the authority to forgive sins, Catholics claim that that authority was passed on to their successors, i.e., the bishops and priests of the Roman Catholic Church. There are several problems with this interpretation. First, John 20:23 nowhere mentions confession of sin. Second, the scripture nowhere promises, or even hints, that the authority to forgive sins would be passed on to the successors of the apostles. Jesus' promise was specifically directed to the apostles. Lastly, the New Testament nowhere states that the apostles would even have successors to their apostolic authority.

Therefore, should we confess our sins directly to God or do we need to confess them to a priest? We are to confess our sins to God. He has the power to forgive us. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9) A priest does not have the power or authority to forgive sins. No man living on earth in this day and age has that authority. This fact does not negate the need we have as individuals to confess our sins openly to other believers. That practice is encouraged in James 5:16, "Therefore, confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed."

The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.” Although God hears the prayers of the righteous, a righteous individual has no power to eradicate the sin of another. However, and most importantly, we Christians are admonished to always forgive others for transgressions against us. “For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.” (Matthew 6:14-15)

We hope we have answered your question. Be sure to sign up for CQ Rewind at www.christianquestions.net. The service is free without obligation and will provide you with scriptural perspective on many questions and topics.

Sincerely,

Christian Questions Radio