

IS CATHOLIC PENANCE NECESSARY FOR SALVATION? CAN ONLY PRIESTS AND THE CATHOLIC CHURCH FORGIVE SINS?

*The Sacrament of Conversion, Penance, Confession, Forgiveness, and Reconciliation
(CCC 1423-24)*

A Biblical Study of The Catechism of the Catholic Church:

Bible Answers to the Most Frequently Asked Questions about Catholic Beliefs and Practices

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Passages of *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* to Consider:

- “The sacrament of Penance is necessary for salvation for this who have fallen after Baptism” (CCC 980)
- **“the Church possesses the power to forgive the sins of the baptized and exercises it through bishops and priests normally in the sacrament of Penance” (CCC 986)**
- “In the forgiveness of sins, both priests and sacraments are instruments through which our Lord Jesus Christ, the only author and liberal giver of salvation, wills to use in order to efface our sins and give us the grace of justification” (CCC 987)
- “reconciliation with the Church is inseparable from reconciliation with God” (CCC 1445)
- “those who, since Baptism, have fallen into grave sin and have thus lost their baptismal grace...the sacrament of Penance offers a new possibility to convert and recover the grace of justification.” (CCC 1446)
- “When it arises from a love by which God is loved above all else, contrition is called ‘perfect’ (contrition of charity). Such contrition remits venial sins; it also obtains forgiveness of mortal sins if it includes the firm resolution to have recourse to sacramental confession as soon as possible.” (CCC 1452)
- “imperfect contrition cannot obtain the forgiveness of grave sins” (CCC 1453)
- “Confession to a priest is an essential part of the sacrament of Penance” (CCC 1456)
- “the faithful is bound by an obligation faithfully to confess serious sins at least once a year” (CCC 1457)
- “without being strictly necessary, confession of everyday faults (venial sins) is nevertheless strongly recommended by the Church” (CCC 1458)
- “whoever confesses his sins...is already working with God” (CCC 1458)
- “Absolution takes away sin” (CCC 1459)
- “the sinner must still recover his full spiritual health by doing something more to make amends for the sin: he must ‘make satisfaction for’ or ‘expiate’ his sins. This satisfaction is also called ‘penance’” (CCC 1459)
- “the penance the confessor imposes...must correspond as far as possible with the gravity and nature of the sins committed. It can consist of prayer, an offering, works of mercy, service of neighbor, voluntary self-denial, sacrifices...such penances help configure us to Christ...they allow us to become co-heirs with the risen Christ” (CCC 1460)
- “Indeed bishops and priests, by virtue of the sacrament of the Holy Orders, have the power to forgive all sins” (CCC 1461)
- “Certain particularly grave sins incur excommunication” (CCC 1463)
- “In danger of death any priest...can absolve from every sin and excommunication” (CCC 1463)

- “the whole power of the sacrament of Penance consists in restoring us to God’s grace” (CCC 1468)
- “In converting to Christ through penance and faith, the sinner passes from death to life and ‘does not come into judgment.’ (CCC 1470)
- “those who approach the *sacrament of Penance* obtain pardon from God’s mercy” (CCC 1422)
- **“It is called the *sacrament of conversion* because it makes sacramentally present Jesus’ call to conversion, the first step in returning to the Father from whom one has strayed by sin.” (CCC 1423)**
- **“It is called the *sacrament of Penance*, since it consecrates the Christian sinner’s personal and ecclesial steps of conversion, penance, and satisfaction.” (CCC 1423)**
- **“It is called the *sacrament of confession*, since the disclosure of confession of sins to a priest is an essential element of this sacrament.” (CCC 1424)**
- **“It is called the *sacrament of forgiveness*, since by the priest’s sacramental absolution God grants the penitent ‘pardon and peace.’” (CCC 1424)**
- **“It is called the *sacrament of Reconciliation*, because it imparts to the sinner the love of God who reconciles” (CCC 1424)**
- “This is the struggle of conversion directed towards holiness and eternal life to which the Lord never ceases to call us.” (CCC 1426)
- “This endeavor of conversion is not just a human work. It is the movement of a ‘contrite heart,’ drawn and moved by grace to respond to the merciful love of God who loved us first.” (CCC 1428)
- “One who desires **to obtain reconciliation with God** and with the Church, **must confess to a priest** all the unconfessed grave sins he remembers after having carefully examined his conscience.” (CCC 1493)
- “The confessor proposes the performance of certain acts of ‘satisfaction’ or ‘penance’ to be performed by the penitent in order to repair the harm caused by sin and to re-establish habits befitting a disciple of Christ.” (CCC 1494)
- **“Only priests** who have received the faculty of absolving from the authority of the Church **can forgive sins** in the name of Christ.” (1495)
- “The spiritual effects of the sacrament of Penance are: - reconciliation with God by which the penitent recovers grace; - reconciliation with the Church; - remission of the eternal punishment incurred by mortal sins; - remission, at least in part, of temporal punishments from sin; - peace and serenity of conscience, and spiritual consolation; - an increase of spiritual strength for the Christian battle.” (CCC 1496)

Scriptures to Consider:

- **Romans 8:39** “nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (ESV)
- **1 John 1:9** “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (ESV)
- James 5:16 “Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.” (ESV)
- Luke 7:48–50 “And he said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.” [49] Then those who were at table with him began to say among themselves, “Who is this, who even forgives sins?” [50] And he said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”” (ESV)
- Romans 5:8–11 “[10] For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. [11] More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.” (ESV)
- Romans 8:33–34 “Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. [34] Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.” (ESV)

- **Romans 8:1–2** “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. [2] For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.” (ESV)
- Romans 10:1–4 "Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved. [2] For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. [3] For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. [4] For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes." (ESV)
- Romans 10:9–10 “because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. [10] For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.” (ESV)

Questions to Consider:

- **Who has the power to forgive according to the Bible?**
- What is the purpose of confessing our sins in the Bible? Who do we go to for forgiveness? (1 John 1:9) Who do we go to for accountability, prayer, and healing? (James 5:16)
- Why do you suppose the process of confession to priest began? What are the advantages? What would be the dangers? What does the Bible say?
- After becoming a follower of Jesus, does sin separate us from the love of God?
- When did Jesus die for us? Why did He die for us? **What does Romans 8:1-2 mean?**
- How should we feel when we realize the undeserved forgiveness Jesus has shown us?
- What is the danger Paul mentions in Romans 10:1-4 about establishing their own righteousness?
- How is someone saved? How can someone know for certain they’ll go to Heaven when they die?

WHAT ABOUT ABORTION & SUICIDE?

- “Formal **cooperation in an abortion constitutes a grave offense.** The Church attaches the canonical penalty of excommunication to this crime against human life.” (CCC 2272)
- In Pope Francis’ Apostolic Letter *Misericordia et misera* (November 20, 2016) he writes: “I henceforth grant to all priests, in virtue of their ministry, the faculty to absolve those who have committed the sin of procured abortion. The provision I had made in this regard, limited to the duration of the Extraordinary Holy Year” (http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_letters/documents/papa-francesco-lettera-ap_20161120_misericordia-et-misera.html)
- If the Pope has the power to forgive the sin of abortion, why does he limit it to one year for priest?
- Why does abortion typically result in excommunication? Why is the power of forgiveness restricted to Bishops on some issues like abortion?
- Why does the Catholic Church not excommunicate politicians who endorse abortion?
- **“We should not despair of the eternal salvation of persons who have taken their own lives.** By ways known to him alone, God can provide the opportunity for salutary repentance. The Church prays for this who have taken their own lives.” (CCC 2283)
 - If murder is a “grave sin” and “grave sin deprives us of communion with God and therefore makes us incapable of eternal life” (CCC 1472), then how can suicide (self-murder) result in “eternal salvation” (CCC 2283)?
 - What is “salutary repentance”? Doesn’t biblical repentance always involve our mind and soul? Can repentance happen after physical death? Where is that concept in the Bible?
 - How is that distinct (and not contradictory) from the requirements of repentance and confession through a priest?
 - Is this “exception” simply trying to tickle our “itching ears” about a tough and touchy subject?
 - 2 Timothy 4:3 “For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions” (ESV)

- Where does the Bible talk about praying for the dead?
- SEE: “What Does the Bible Say about Abortion?” www.trustworthyword.com/what-does-the-bible-say-about-abortion
- SEE: “What Does the Bible Say about Suicide?” www.trustworthyword.com/suicide