

# WHO CAN FORGIVE SINS

by Max Younce

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*A theological examination of Christ's authority to forgive sins, demonstrating through His miracles that He possesses divine power and the unique prerogative of pardoning transgressions.*

10 Chapters

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## Who Can Forgive Sins? A Minister, Priest, Or Jesus Christ?

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### I. WHO CAN FORGIVE SINS?

A MINISTER, PRIEST, OR JESUS CHRIST? This question has surfaced numerous times down through the years. Two of the most prominent adherents to this position are the Evangelical Lutheran Churches of America ( ELCA) and the Roman Catholic Church. There are a few others, but these are the most influential in this practice.

One must remember--when you have placed your confidence in any priest or minister as mediator between yourself and God, you have acknowledged them as being equal with Christ. You have then placed yourself in a position to be susceptible to any other false teaching that is presented. For any minister or priest to declare that you must go through him to obtain forgiveness of sins is ludicrous, apostate, and diametrically opposed to the Word of God. Let us examine the claims of both from their own writings, "Absolution and Penance."

Lutheran: The following is taken and quoted from the writings of the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America and published by the Concordia Publishing House in Saint Louis, Missouri.

1. The preacher says:

"Do you promise that with the aid of the Holy Ghost you will henceforth amend your sinful life? Then declare by saying: I do promise."

2. The preacher says:

"Finally, do you believe that THROUGH ME, a called servant of God, you will RECEIVE THE FORGIVENESS OF ALL YOUR SINS? Then declare so by saying: I do believe. As you believe, even so may it be unto you."

2. The preacher says:

"Upon this your confession, I, BY VIRTUE OF MY OFFICE, AS A CALLED AND OR-DAINED SERVANT OF THE LORD, announce the grace of God unto all of you, and in the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ I FORGIVE YOU ALL YOUR SINS in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, Amen." The question many have asked is, "Does the Lutheran preacher forgive his wife's sin also? Does he forgive his children's sins, and does he forgive HIS OWN?"

Roman Catholic:

Similar ideas appear in almost all Catholic literature describing Penance. The following quotes are from the Father Connell's Confraternity Edition, New Baltimore Catechism. (Lesson 29, Penance)

1. Penance is also a sacrament instituted by Our Divine Savior in which sins committed after Baptism are forgiven through the absolution of the Priest. (Par. 379, Pg. 221)."

2. "The Priest has the power to forgive sins from Jesus Christ, who said to His apostles and to their successors in the Priesthood: 'Receive the Holy Spirit; whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; whose sins you shall retain, they are retained. (Par. 380, Pg. 221). " (John 20:22-23)

3. "No man, by his own power and authority, could possibly forgive sins. Only God can do that because sin is an offense against Him. BUT the Priest, as God's representative, can forgive sins because God has given him the power to do so. (Par. 380, (c), Pg.221" (Matthew 18:15-18).

4. "Our Savior could indeed have decreed that men should receive the Pardon of their sins by going directly to God with contrition. BUT a sacrament, administered by men in the name of God, IS A MORE ASSURING AND A MORE EFFECTIVE MEANS. (Pg. 223)."

5. "The power to forgive sins by pronouncing these words of absolution is given to the priest at his ordination. In order to exercise this power the priest must have jurisdiction, or be authorized to ACT AS A SPIRITUAL JUDGE OVER THE PERSONS HE ABSOLVES. (Par. 381, (a)."

e. THE PRIEST FORGIVES SINS WITH THE WORDS: "I absolve thee from thy sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, Amen. (Par. 381, Pg.221)."

One might notice under "4." that the Catholic Church acknowledges that no man has the power to forgive sins, but God only; they then transfer that power to their priests. The following Scriptures are used to support their position:

1. Matthew 9:5-8.

"For whether is easier, to say, thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and walk? (v.5). But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith he to the sick of the palsy,) Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house. (v.6). And he arose and departed to his house. (v.7). But when the multitudes saw it, they marvelled, and glorified God, WHICH HAD GIVEN SUCH POWER UNTO MEN." (v.8).

2. Matthew 18:15-18.

"Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. (v. 15). But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. (v.16.) And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. (v.17).

Verily I say unto you, WHATSOEVER YE SHALL BIND ON EARTH SHALL BE BOUND IN HEAVEN AND WHATSOEVER YE SHALL LOOSE ON EARTH SHALL BE LOOSED IN HEAVEN." (v.18).

3. John 20:21-23.

"Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. (v.21). And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the

Holy Ghost: (v.22). Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained." (v.23).

4. Matthew 16:19.

"And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

## Purpose Of Miracles In The New Testament

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### II. PURPOSE OF MIRACLES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT:

Christ performed hundreds of miracles, beginning with His first miracle of turning the water into wine in John 2:1-11. Not all miracles were recorded. John tells us in John 20:30,

"And many other signs (Gr. semeion, miracles) truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book." The purpose of the miracles which are recorded, is given in John 20:31,

"But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus (His humanity) is the Christ (Deity, i.e., God in human flesh), the Son of God (by the Virgin Birth); and that believing ye might have life through his name." Our Savior, Himself, stated the purpose of miracles in John 4:48, "Then said Jesus unto him, Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe." In John 1:11 it is recorded that, "He came unto his own (Israel), and his own received him not." The Scriptures declared to Israel that Christ was their Messiah: By the witness of Andrew in John 1:41,

"He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messiah, which is, being interpreted, the Christ." The Angels declared Christ was their Savior in Luke 2:11, "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord." The angel of the Lord revealed Christ as their Sin-bearer in Matthew 1:21, "And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins." The wise men revealed Christ as their King in Matthew 2:2,

"Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him."

But, the witness of Scripture was not enough for Israel and the religious leaders wanted nothing to do with Him. In Hebrews 2:3-4 the Word of God declares,

"How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him." (v.3).

"God also bearing them (Israel) witness, both with SIGNS AND WONDERS, and with DIVERS MIRACLES, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will?" (v.4). In Matthew 9:1-8 Christ had healed a man sick of palsy (a paralytic) as proof that He had the power to forgive sins also. Anyone can say, I will forgive your sins, but the miracle of healing was "proof positive" that He was truly the Son of God! In Matthew 10:8, this power of healing and other miracles would also be given to the Twelve Apostles, and to The Seventy in Luke 10:1-42. As we are going to see from Scriptures, no human being was ever given the power to forgive sins. The message of the Twelve Apostles was that Christ was to bear our sin on the cross; and, by the power given to them to perform miracles, their message was substantiated as authentic. In Matthew 10:1-42 they were to go ONLY to the nation of Israel. In Matthew 10:6-7, "...go, rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. (v.6). And as ye go, preach, saying, THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS AT HAND." (v.7). The

power given them is recorded in verse 8,

"Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils (demons): freely ye have received, freely give." (v.8).

Nowhere in Matthew, Chapter 10, do you find they were given power to forgive anyone's sins. Their message and commission was to preach that, "...the kingdom of heaven is at hand." The reason the Kingdom was "at hand"—the King was here! When any Jew believed this message their sins were forgiven. Matthew earlier stated in 1:21 that, "...He (Christ) shall save his people from their sins." (Note John 1:29). The Seventy in Luke 10:1-42 were given the same power to perform miracles (See Luke 10:9; Luke 10:17; Luke 10:19-20). Notice carefully, as you read Luke 10:1-42, NOWHERE do you find the Seventy being given the power to forgive sins. Their message to their own nation was that Jesus Christ was their Savior and Messiah. "Dr. Luke" stated earlier in Luke 2:11, "For unto you is born this day in the city of David A SAVIOUR, WHICH IS CHRIST THE LORD."

Christ's Crucifixion and Resurrection was God's payment for our sins. Paul declared this in writing to the Ephesians, "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace." (1:7).

Every minister that loves the Lord Jesus Christ will not draw attention to himself, let alone claim the power to forgive sin. He will declare as Paul did to the Corinthians in 2:2 and 1:31, "For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified." (1 Corinthians 2:2).

". . .He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord (not in himself.)" (1 Corinthians 1:31). To the Seventy who preached Christ and him crucified, the Lord said concerning their hearers in Luke 10:16,

"He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me; and he that de-spiseth me despiseth him that sent me."

Keep in mind, it was the message they preached that would be accepted or rejected. The message would save or condemn, and that God's Word is truth.

"Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth." (John 17:17).

Ezekiel stated that God's word would be done; i.e., whatever God says He will back it up from Heaven, ". . .but the word which I have spoken shall be done saith the Lord GOD." (12:28).

## The "Keys" And "Binding And Loosing"

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III. THE "KEYS" AND "BINDING AND LOOSING" The same guarantee of God backing up His Word from Heaven, is in Christ's words to Peter in Matthew 16:19,

"And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

Vine's An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words has this to say in reference to the Word "bind":

"The Lord's Words to the Apostle Peter in Matthew 16:19 as to binding, and to all the disciples in 18:18 signify, in the former case, that the apostle, by his ministry of the Word of life, would keep unbelievers outside the kingdom of God; and admit those who believed." The "keys" spoken of in Matthew 16:19 were first used by Peter on the Day of Pentecost, as recorded in Acts, Chapter 2. Nowhere did Peter or the Eleven ever even HINT that they could or would forgive anyone's sins! The whole chapter is a testimony concerning Christ, the Resurrection and His forgiveness. Here are Peter's Words in Acts 2:21... "And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

They were saved because of the Word of God that Peter preached. They were then baptized as a public testimony of their faith. Notice Peter's Words in Acts 2:41,

"Then they that gladly received his Word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls."

Peter used the "keys" (symbolic of God's Word) again in Acts 10:1-48. God sent Peter to the Gentile named Cornelius, to show the Jews that the Gentiles could be saved also. Read Chapter 10 and nowhere do you find Peter EVER claiming the power to forgive anyone's sins. Peter directed the lost to Christ, and Him alone! Here are Peter's words in Acts 10:43,

"To him ( Christ) give all the prophets witness, that through his (Christ's) name whosoever BELIEVETH IN HIM (Christ) SHALL RECEIVE REMMISSION OF SINS."

Unlike Peter, some clergy, through pride, love to claim this power for themselves and love to mediate between God and man. In doing so they outright deny and resist God' s Word. 1 Timothy blatantly declares in 1 Timothy 2:5, "For there is one God, and ONE MEDIATOR BETWEEN GOD AND MEN, the man CHRIST JESUS." When God's servants preach His Word on earth, it will divide—those who believe it are saved and—those who do not are lost! God's Word is so powerful it will divide as a sharp, two-edged sword.

"For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." (Hebrews 4:12).

Isaiah 55:11 declares that His Word will not return unto Him void and empty.

"So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." (Isaiah 55:11).

Those in Matthew 16:10 that are bound on earth are those who have believed the WORD and are saved. They have the promises of the Omniscient and Omnipotent God, that in Heaven, He will make good the promises that He gave on earth. The same goes for those who reject God's Word (John 3:36). Even though many do not believe in Christ, the Word of God, or Hell; it will not alter God's faithfulness to his WORD when he pronounces their final sentence in Matthew 25:41, "...Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels."

Then they will realize that—not in all the New Testament, nor in Peter's two epistles—was there the vestige, either claimed or exercised, of Peter forgiving anyone's sin! Who will you believe? Man or God? Romans 3:4 makes it perfectly clear concerning God's Word, "God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar..."

## Comparison Of Joh\_20:23 To Other Scripture

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### IV. COMPARISON OF JOHN 20:23 TO OTHER SCRIPTURE

John 20:23 is the verse relied upon as the strongest to support this position of the Lutherans and Roman Catholics. This they claim is their right and power given to them by God to forgive your sins. To obtain the correct teaching of John 20:23, as any Bible student knows, you must compare all other Scriptures that pertain to the same subject or verse in question. When all Scriptures pertaining to the same subject AGREE, then you have the correct teaching of that subject or verse.

If they do not agree; then you have a wrong interpretation or application of the verse or subject in question. This would then lead to a false teaching per-petrated upon the unsuspecting congregation.

Since all Scripture is given by the "inspiration of God" (2 Timothy 3:16), there can be no error or contradiction in God's Word. This is why Peter declared in 2 Peter 1:20 that, "Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any PRIVATE INTERPRE-TATION." The Word "prophecy" is the Greek "propheteia" and defined by Vine's An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words:

"Signifies the speaking forth of the mind and counsel of God. Though much of the Old Testament prophecy was purely predictive, it is the declaration of that which cannot be known by natural means. It is the FORTH-TELLING OF THE WILL OF GOD, WHETHER WITH REFERENCE TO THE PAST, THE PRESENT, OR THE FUTURE." This does not mean that one cannot understand the Scriptures for themselves. It does warn against anyone building a doctrine on one, isolated, verse without comparing all other verses on the same subject. This is why the Holy Spirit inspired Paul in his second epistle to Timothy, to emphasize the value of studying the Word of God for yourself.

"Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, RIGHTLY DIVIDING the Word of truth." (2 Timothy 2:15).

"Rightly dividing" comes from the Greek Word "orthotom" and means "teaching Scripture accurately". Our study thus far has shown that only God, who is Christ in human flesh, can forgive sins. Now let us compare John 20:23 with some other Scriptures concerning forgiveness of sins, and a preacher or priest trying to place himself as mediator and intercessor between God and man.

## Christ Is The Only Mediator

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A. Christ Is The Only Mediator A mediator is one who goes between God and man. There have been, and still are, myriads of men, either claiming they are the Christ; or that they possess special powers above others in order to be man's representative to God.

Maybe you are one who actually believes your minister or priest can forgive your sins; thereby instilling in you the confidence that you are now ready for eternity. Let us examine the BIBLE and see if you have been misled; or if their claims are substantiated. Here is God's Word on the subject:

1. 1 Timothy 2:5.

"For there is one God, and ONE MEDIATOR between God and men, the man CHRIST JESUS."

2. Romans 8:34.

"Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, WHO ALSO MAKETH INTERCESSION FOR US."

3. John 14:6.

"Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: NO MAN COMETH UNTO THE FATHER, BUT BY ME."

4. Hebrews 7:25.

"Wherefore he (Christ) is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him (Christ), seeing He (Christ) ever liveth to MAKE INTERCESSION FOR THEM."

5. 1 John 2:1.

"My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an ADVOCATE with the Father, JESUS CHRIST the righteous:"

6. Isaiah 53:12 ". . .and he (Christ) bare the sin of many, and made INTERCESSION FOR THE TRANS-GRESSORS."

One would have to outright deny the Word of God and call Jesus Christ a liar by not acknowledging that Christ, and He alone, is the only one who can forgive our sins!

Isaiah 53:5-6 describes the lost condition of man and what our wonderful Savior did for us. No wonder He is a jealous God!

"But he (Christ) was wounded for our trans-gressions, he (Christ) was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him (Christ); and with his stripes we are healed." (v.5).

“All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him (Christ) THE INI-QUITY OF US ALL.” (v.6). The only One who can forgive sins is the One who paid for our sins; and that is Jesus Christ. The only true and absolute peace a person can possess concerning eternal life comes from Jesus Christ and His payment for sin. Paul makes this perfectly clear in Romans 5:1, “Therefore being justified by faith, we HAVE PEACE with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Scriptures are vouchsafed in plenty for those who have a sincere desire to know the truth. Tradition has propagated upon humanity the most dastardly evil employed by some of the clergy to convince the unsuspecting that they have the power of Jesus Christ to forgive your sins. The following Scriptures will unmask the veil of error and illuminate the truth of God's Word:

## Only Christ Has the Power To Forgive Our Sins

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### B. Only Christ Has the Power To Forgive Our Sins

1. Mark 2:10 "But that ye may know that the Son of Man (Christ) hath power on earth to forgive sins,..."

2. Luke 5:20 "And when he (Christ) saw their faith, he (Christ) said unto him, Man, thy sins are forgiven thee."

3. Matthew 9:6 "But that ye may know that the Son of man (Christ) hath power on earth to forgive sins,..."

4. Ephesians 4:32.

"And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."

5. Colossians 2:13.

"And you, being dead in your sins and the un-circumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him ( Christ) , having forgiven you ALL TRESPASSES."

6. 1 Corinthians 15:3.

"For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures;"

7. 1 Peter 3:18.

"For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he (Christ) might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit."

8. John 1:29.

"The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. " (I don't see anything in this verse that indicates the priest or minister is the one who takes away sin.).

9. Romans 11:27.

"For this is my covenant unto them, when I (Christ) shall take away their sins."

10. Acts 13:38. Be it known unto you, therefore, men and bre-thren, that through this man (Christ) is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins:" This is what every Lutheran minister and Catholic priest should be preaching. "Through Jesus Christ, and Him alone, is the forgiveness of sin." Our question is, and should be yours also, why are they not directing their parishioners to Christ, instead of themselves?

I, personally, have asked hundreds of people belonging to these two organizations to question their minister or priest, asking them why they cannot just go directly to Jesus Christ for forgiveness? Most often their answer is, "I wouldn't dare do something like that." My reply is, "Why not, are you scared to? You have a right to question your pastor or priest on ANYTHING they teach."

Sad to say, the clergy of these organizations have almost promoted themselves to the level of a god in the eyes of their people—a practice so entrenched that it would be a "sin" to question their authority! We find the prophet, Jeremiah, experienced the same problem, so nothing has changed in over 2500 years!

"The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; AND MY PEOPLE LOVE TO HAVE IT SO: and what will ye do in the end thereof?" (Jeremiah 5:31).

11. Acts 13:39.

"And by him (Christ) ALL THAT BELIEVE are justified (declared righteous) from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses." (Please note: By believing in Jesus Christ we are justified.) 12. Ephesians 1:7.

"In whom we have redemption through his (Christ's) blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace;"

Remember, nowhere in the New Testament can you find one case where any of the Apostle's ever forgave anyone's sin. They always pointed their listeners to Jesus Christ. If not one of the Apostles ever made that claim, then those today claiming that power have placed themselves above the Apostles, and equal with Jesus Christ, Himself.

13. Luke 7:47-48; Luke 7:50 a. Luke, Chapter Seven, gives us the account of an extraordinary event that happened while our Lord was having dinner at a Pharisee's house. The woman that was there, Scripture says, "which was a sinner," began to weep and wash the Savior's feet with tears, and anoint them with oil from a box of ointment, and then to wipe them with her hair. Not only did Jesus shock the Pharisees by allowing her to touch him; but, He forgave her sin!

"Wherefore I (Christ) say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven..." (v.47). b. In Luke 7:48, Christ assures this woman her sins have been forgiven:

"And He (Christ) said unto her, THY SINS ARE FORGIVEN." c. In verse 50 the Lord gives the reason the woman's sins were forgiven. It is on the same basis that our sins are forgiven—our FAITH IN HIM—and not in a minister or priest. No priest or minister ever died for your sins, but Christ did.

"And he (Christ) said to the woman, Thy FAITH hath saved thee; go in peace." The Lord Jesus Christ forgave sins while he was on the earth, and is still the only One who can forgive sins today. Every preacher and priest is a sinner themselves, and needs forgiveness. Notice God's indictment on mankind in Romans 3:23, "For ALL HAVE SINNED, and come short of the glory of God;" My Bible says "ALL have sinned"; and I cannot find where it says, "ALL, but preachers and priests." "Coming short of the glory of God" literally means falling short of being as righteous as God, Himself. Therefore, Romans 3:24-25 tell us how and why we have remission of sins.

"Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: (v.24). Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his (Christ's) blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God." (v.25). Where do you find anything in these verses about a minister or priest being able to remit your sins? Ask your minister or priest if they are trusting Jesus Christ as the payment for their sin. The clergy go to Heaven the same way the congregation does; that is through Christ and Him alone. If their answer is "Yes," then ask them why you cannot go directly to Christ the same as they? The only one who can forgive sin is the One who is sinless. 2 Corinthians declares that Christ was without sin.

"For he hath made him (Christ) to be sin (i.e. the payment for sin) for us , WHO KNEW NO SIN; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." (2 Corinthians 5:21). Would any minister or priest dare to claim they are sinless. Remember, only the One who is without sin can forgive those who are sinners, and that is Christ Jesus. By making the claim they can forgive sins, they are actually placing themselves on equality with Christ and claiming to be sinless themselves.

I, personally, have talked to many and all deny they are sinless; but become a little offended that one should question their self-appointed authority. Even though they deny this, their solicitation for sinners to come to them for forgiveness is an indictment against themselves by their own WORD AND PRACTICE.

14. 1 John 1:8-10.

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

"If we confess our sins, he (Christ) is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (v.9).

"If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his (Christ's) Word is not in us." (v.10). The first chapter of 1 John is written to Christians who sin AFTER they are saved. John is addressing: The Christian's service, not his salvation.

His fellowship with Christ, and not his Son ship.

His power for Christ as a witness--not his position with Christ in Heaven.

Let us closely analyze what the preceding verses actually say. Who are we to confess our sins to?

Answer: Jesus Christ. Who is faithful to forgive our sins?

Answer: Jesus Christ. Who is able to cleanse us from all un-righteousness?

Answer: Jesus Christ. Should any Lutheran minister or priest even hint that they, themselves, are without sin, God says they are SELF-DECEIVED (1 John 1:8). and make God a liar (1 John 1:10).

I have been a pastor for 40 years and it is beyond my comprehension to even think I could forgive someone's sins. What a blessing it has been and still is to direct people to our wonderful Savior, who will forgive any and all sins. John 6:37 declares, "...and him that cometh to me (Christ) I will in no wise cast out."

There are multitudes of Scriptures in addition to what we have already quoted. Isaiah 43:25; Isaiah 44:22; Isaiah 53:5-6; Micah 7:18; Exodus 34:7; Daniel 9:17-19; and Psalms 130:1-4, could have been quoted, as well as many others.

## Faithful Ministry Of The Gospel Accomplishes Remittance Of Sin

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### V. FAITHFUL MINISTRY OF THE GOSPEL ACCOMPLISHES REMITTANCE OF SIN.

What follows is an examination of the verse most commonly used by Lutheran ministers and Catholic priests to justify their "power" in claiming they can forgive your sins. By this, they place themselves as the mediator between you and God.

"Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained." (John 20:23). As we compare other verses with John 20:23, we can easily see the only way a Christian, clergy, or layman, can remit sins is by presenting the WORD OF GOD. The Word will judge those who reject it, as Christ stated in John 12:48,

"He that rejecteth me ( Christ), and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the WORD that I have spoken, the same (i.e., the Word) shall judge him in the last day."

Psalms 138:2 relates to us the importance of the Word of God:

"I will...praise thy name for thy loving kindness and for thy truth: for THOU HAST MAGNIFIED THY WORD ABOVE ALL THY NAME." The reason the WORD is magnified above His name is that we, today, would not know the surety of God or His Name, if it weren't for the WORD OF GOD. When a Christian witnesses to a lost person with the WORD of God, as recorded in John 3:16; John 3:36, that person then has a choice to make. If they accept Christ, they have everlasting life. Should they reject Christ until death, they will then experience the wrath of God in Hell, just as the Word of God has stated in John 3:36,

"He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life ; but the wrath of God abideth on him." When one believes God's WORD, their sins are then remitted, not by the preacher or priest, but by the WORD OF GOD which promises them eternal life. Should they reject God's WORD, they will retain their sin. Only by presenting God's Word as a faithful witness for Christ, do we have a part in another person's sal-vation. This is what Christ meant in John 20:23 when he told His disciples that, "Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them, and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained." The Greek Word for "remit" is "aphiemi" and literally means "to send away." Vine's An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words explains the use of this verb as such,

"Scripture makes clear that the Lord's Words could not have been intended to bestow the exercise of absolution which the Scripture declares is the prerogative of God alone. There is no instance in the New Testament of this act on the part of the Apostles. The Words are to be understood in a "declarative" sense; the statement has regard to the effects of their ministry of the gospel, with its two-fold effects of remission or retention."

## Some Closing Thoughts For Consideration

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### VI. SOME CLOSING THOUGHTS FOR CONSIDERATION.

A. Search the New Testament through and you will not find where any of the Apostles ever claimed the power or authority to forgive anyone's sins. The Apostles always directed the Lost to Christ, and Him alone, as the One who paid for sin and offers forgiveness to all in return for their faith.

B. Fact: The minister or priest who asks you to trust him as God's representative to forgive your sin has placed himself as mediator between you and God. God's Word in 1 Timothy 2:5 states, in no uncertain Words, "For there is one God, and ONE MEDIATOR between God and men, the man Christ Jesus;"

If you are one who is trusting the Lutheran preacher or Catholic priest to forgive your sins, instead of Jesus Christ, you will spend eternity separated from God. Christ encountered these same types of religious leaders in His day and levied a stern rebuke against them. Consider Matthew 23:13,

"But unto you, scribes and Pharisees, Hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in." An analysis of this verse will show the strength of Christ's Words against these RELIGIOUS LEADERS:

#### 1. The Scribes.

In New Testament times the Scribes were the students, interpreters, and teachers of the Old Testament Scriptures, and were held in high esteem by the people.

They were also called lawyers in Matthew 22:35. They were avowed opponents of Christ, and were publicly denounced by Him for making the Word of God of none effect through their tradition. (Mark 7:7-9)

#### 2. Pharisees.

The name means "separated" and they were called "separatists" because they had separated themselves from the ambitious political party in their nation. They were the exponents and guardians of the written and oral law; and, in belief, were the "conservatives" in distinction from the Sadducees. Their religious orthodoxy was spiritually dead and barren. These were the religious leaders—just as you have today!

#### 3. Christ called the Scribes and Pharisees "Hypocrites..."

"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!..." (Matthew 23:27 a).

...because they were aware that what they were teaching the people was not true. Christ knew this and that is why He labeled them correctly. Your minister may appear to be very humble and sincere on the surface, but when he tells you that he can forgive your sins, his true character is

then exposed. Christ has this to say in Matthew 23:27 b,

"...for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, BUT are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness."

#### 4. Modern Scribes and Pharisees.

If you believe the false teaching of today's modern" scribes and Pharisees," you will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

"...for ye shut up the Kingdom of Heaven against men:..." (Matthew 23:13 b).

These false teachers are not saved and will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but Hell awaits their entry.

"...for ye neither go in yourselves,..." (Matthew 23:13 c).

C. Who do these ministers and priests confess their sins to? Do they forgive themselves? Have you ever heard one of these clergymen telling their congregation who they confess their sin to? If you support these churches with your money, you surely have a right to know how the Lutheran ministers or Catholic priests get their sins forgiven. Why not ask them?

D. Have they presented themselves to you as being without sin? I should hope not, but if that is the case with some, then; according to 1 John 1:8, God would indict them with "First Degree LYING!"

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

E. In Luke 23:43, it was Jesus Christ who forgave the thief on the cross next to Him. He didn't call for the religious leaders or the priest, did He? Only Christ could assure this thief that his sins were forgiven and give Him the absolute assurance that...

"...TO DAY SHALT THOU BE WITH ME IN PARADISE."

Who are you going to trust for your salvation, the Lutheran minister, the Catholic priest, or JESUS CHRIST?

F. For the ministers and priests who assume the power to forgive your sins by claiming Matthew 9:8, why do they not claim and practice the power God gave the Apostles in Matthew 10:8?

"Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, RAISE THE DEAD, cast out devils ( demons): freely ye have received , freely give." As Christ stated in Matthew 9:5, "For whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise and walk?"

If these Lutheran ministers and Catholic priests can legitimately forgive your sins, let us see proof of their claims such as:

a. healing the sick,

b. cleansing the lepers, c. RAISING THE DEAD!

Notice the paradox. The Apostles had, and exercised, the powers given them by Christ in Matthew 10:8; but, NEVER claimed to possess the power to forgive anyone's sin. The Lutheran and

Catholic clergy claim the power to forgive your sins; yet, are unable to exercise the power to heal the sick, raise the dead!

If they possess the power the Apostles had, let us take them to the nearest hospital and let us witness the healing of every person in that hospital! If they fail, you have exposed a false teacher who pretends to be humble and pious, a lover of God, with an outward appearance of righteousness. This would all be so convincing unless we compare their claims with the Word of God.

Again, may I submit, IT IS MUCH EASIER TO SAY TO SOMEONE, "I forgive your sins" than to say "Arise and walk." Put them to the test and you will find their claims and teaching to be fraudulent.

Whether in the secular or ecclesiastical arena, men have always craved to have power over others. Christ indicted the religious leaders for their pride. Here are Christ's Words in Matthew 23:5-6; Matthew 23:28,

"But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments, (v.5). And love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues" (vs. 6).

"Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity." (v.28).

## Conclusion

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### VII. CONCLUSION:

There is only one Person who can forgive your sin. There is only one Person who paid for your sin. There is only one Person who is your Mediator, and there is only one Person who can give you eternal life. That Person is the LORD JESUS CHRIST. Whether you go to Heaven or Hell depends on who you want to believe, the Lutheran preacher, the Catholic priest, or THE LORD JESUS CHRIST.

"Jesus saith unto him (or you), I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." (John 14:6).

"These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the son of God." (1 John 5:13).

Personally, if I were visiting a church where the preacher got up and stated he would forgive my sins, I would get up and walk out immediately. I would not subject myself or my family to that type of brain washing; but would find myself a good, Bible-teaching church where Jesus was exalted—not the preacher! Our prayer is that you will accept the Lord Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, and have the peace and assurance that you have a home in Heaven when this life is through.

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (John 3:16).

And...

"For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus;" (1 Timothy 2:5).

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