

How Christians should be taught to confess

What sins should we confess? Before God we should plead guilty of all sins, even of those which we do not know, as we do in the Lord's Prayer. But before the confessor we should confess those sins alone which we know and feel in our hearts.

Which are these? Here consider your station according to the Ten Commandments, whether you are a father, mother, son, daughter, master, mistress, a man-servant or maid-servant; whether you have been disobedient, unfaithful, slothful; whether you have grieved any one by words or deeds; whether you have stolen, neglected, or wasted aught, or done other injury.

From Luther's Large Catechism (!!!)

⁸ In the first place, I have said that besides the Confession here being considered there are two other kinds, which may even more properly be called the Christians' common confession. They are (a) the confession and plea for forgiveness made to God alone and (b) the confession that is made to the neighbor alone. These two kinds of confession are included in the Lord's Prayer, in which we pray, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us" (Matthew 6:12), and so on.

⁹ In fact, the entire Lord's Prayer is nothing else than such a confession. For what are our petitions other than a confession that we neither have nor do what we ought, as well as a plea for grace and a cheerful conscience? Confession of this sort should and must continue without letup as long as we live. For the Christian way essentially consists in acknowledging ourselves to be sinners and in praying for grace.

¹⁰ Similarly, the other of the two confessions, the one that every Christian makes to his neighbor, is also included in the Lord's Prayer. For here we mutually confess our guilt and our desire for forgiveness (Matthew 5:23-24). Now, all of us are guilty of sinning against one another; therefore, we may and should publicly confess this before everyone without shrinking in one another's presence... ¹¹ Besides such universal guilt, there is also the particular guilt of the person who has provoked another to rightful anger and needs to ask his pardon.

¹² So we have in the Lord's Prayer a double absolution: there we are forgiven our offenses against God and those against our neighbor, and there we forgive our neighbor and become reconciled to him.

¹³ Besides this public, daily, and necessary confession, there is also the confidential confession that is only made before a single brother. If something particular weighs upon us or troubles us, something with which we keep torturing ourselves and can find no rest, and we do not find our faith to be strong enough to cope with it, then this private form of confession gives us the opportunity of laying the matter before some brother. We may receive counsel, comfort, and strength when and however often we wish.

¹⁴ That we should do this is not included in any divine command, as are the other two kinds of confession. Rather, it is offered to everyone who may need it, as an opportunity to be used by him as his need requires. The origin and establishment of private Confession lies in the fact that Christ Himself placed His Absolution into the hands of His Christian people with the command that they should absolve one another of their sins (Ephesians 4:32). So any heart that feels its sinfulness and desires consolation has here a sure refuge when he hears God's Word and makes the discovery that God through a human being looses and absolves him from his sins.