

How Christians should be taught to confess

Luther's original catechism did not contain the questions and answers on Confession and Absolution. Instead, it seems it was taught in practice. Luther offers a sample of how a confession before a pastor might go. Even for those who do not regularly "go to confession," it stands as a fine example of "examining oneself according to one's station in life and the Ten Commandments." How could this example help you prepare to come to the General Confession, or to seek the special comfort of Private Confession?

You should speak to the confessor thus: Reverend and dear sir, I beseech you to hear my confession, and to pronounce forgiveness to me for God's sake.

Proceed.

I, a poor sinner, confess myself before God guilty of all sins; especially I confess before you that I am a man-servant, a maidservant, etc. But, alas, I serve my master unfaithfully; for in this and in that I have not done what they commanded me; I have provoked them, and caused them to curse, have been negligent (in many things) and permitted damage to be done; have also been immodest in words and deeds, have quarreled with my equals, have grumbled and sworn at my mistress, etc. For all this I am sorry, and pray for grace; I want to do better.

A master or mistress may say thus:

In particular I confess before you that I have not faithfully trained my children, domestics, and wife (family) for God's glory. I have cursed, set a bad example by rude words and deeds, have done my neighbor harm and spoken evil of him, have overcharged and given false ware and short measure.

And whatever else he has done against God's command and his station, etc.

But if any one does not find himself burdened with such or greater sins, he should not trouble himself or search for or invent other sins, and thereby make confession a torture, but mention one or two that he knows. Thus: In particular I confess that I once cursed; again, I once used improper words, I have once neglected this or that, etc. Let this suffice.

But if you know of none at all (which, however is scarcely possible), then mention none in particular, but receive the forgiveness upon your general confession which you make before God to the confessor.

Then shall the confessor say: God be merciful to thee and strengthen thy faith! Amen.

Furthermore: Dost thou believe that my forgiveness is God's forgiveness?

Answer. Yes, dear sir.

Then let him say: As thou believest, so be it done unto thee. And by the command of our Lord Jesus Christ I forgive thee thy sins, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen. Depart in peace.

But those who have great burdens upon their consciences, or are distressed and tempted, the confessor will know how to comfort and to encourage to faith with more passages of Scripture.

This is to be merely a general form of confession for the unlearned.