

How Christians should be taught to confess

What is the Office of the Keys? It is that peculiar church power which Christ has given to His church on earth, to forgive the sins of penitent sinners, but to retain the sins of the impenitent as long as they do not repent.

Where is this written? Thus writes the Holy Evangelist John, chapter twentieth: "The Lord Jesus breathed on his disciples and saith unto them, 'Receive ye the Holy Ghost; whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained.'" (John 20:22-23)

What do you believe according to these words? I believe that, when the called ministers of Christ deal with us by His divine command, especially when they exclude manifest and impenitent sinners from the Christian congregation, and again when they absolve those who repent and are willing to amend, this is as valid and certain, in heaven also, as if Christ, our dear Lord, dealt with us Himself.

1. When does Jesus say what He says in John 20:22-23? What has He just done, and what does this have to do with these words? What power is here, and what opportunities do we have to benefit from it?
2. What are the two "keys" (Matthew 16:19) and what does each do? How and when is each to be used? Who is to use them, in Christ's stead? Why? (Luke 10:16) How? (Luke 24:45-47; 1 Corinthians 4:1-2)
3. When the binding key has to be used, what is the purpose and goal? (1 Corinthians 5:1-13 and 2 Corinthians 2:5-11)

From Luther's Large Catechism (!!!)

²³ If this were explained in detail and if the need that ought to move and lead us to make confession were pointed out, then one would need little urging or coercion. For everyone's own conscience would so drive and disturb him that he would be glad to do what a poor and miserable beggar does when he hears that a rich gift of money or clothing is being handed out at a certain place. So as not to miss it, he would run there as fast as he can and would need no bailiff to beat and drive him on...

²⁷ He who feels his misery and need will no doubt develop such a longing for it that he will run toward it with joy. But those who pay no attention to it and do not come of their own accord, we let them go their way. Let them be sure of this, however, that we do not regard them as Christians.

²⁸ So we teach what a splendid, precious, and comforting thing Confession is. Furthermore, we strongly urge people not to despise a blessing that in view of our great need is so priceless. Now, if you are a Christian, then you do not need either my pressuring or the pope's orders, but you will undoubtedly compel yourself to come to Confession and will beg me for a share in it.