

# WHY WE MUST CONFESS OUR SINS

Confession is a commandment of God. Thus, the person who has sinned is obligated to go to confession in order to receive forgiveness of his sins and achieve salvation. This is evident from the Holy Scriptures, the writings of the holy fathers of the Church, and countless examples from the life of the faithful.

## SCRIPTURAL VERSES REFERREING TO CONFESSION IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

In the name of God, Moses commands: *“Every man or woman who shall commit any sin...or if that soul has in any way neglected the commandment and transgressed, that person **shall confess the sin which he has committed**”* (Num. 5:6-7). And again: *“if a soul sins...**then he shall declare his sin...he shall even restore it in full; and he shall add to it a fifth part besides;...And he shall bring to the Lord for his trespass, a ram**”* (Lev. 5:6).

In Solomon’s Proverbs it is written: *“He that covers his own ungodliness shall not prosper; but **he that blames himself shall be loved**”* (Pr. 28:13).

And elsewhere: *“a well known man **reveals his own sins** in public assemblies”* (Pr. 26:26).

God, through the Prophet Isaiah, instructs: *“Do thou first **confess thy transgressions** that thou mayest be justified, because I am He that blots out thy transgressions”* (Isa. 43:25).

The wise Sirach similarly advises: *“**Before judgment examine thyself**, and in the day of visitation thou shalt find mercy”* (Sirach 18:20).

The prophet David states: *“Mine iniquity I have acknowledged, and **my sin I have not hid**”* (Ps. 31:5).

Job also admits: *“I was not reluctant before a great multitude **so as not to confess boldly before them**”* (Job 31:33-34).

## SCRIPTURAL VERSES RECOMMENDING CONFESSION IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Since confession had always followed repentance, everyone who came to the Preacher of repentance, the Prophet and Forerunner John the Baptist, would confess their sins prior to baptism. Behold the words of the Evangelist: *“Then there went out to him Jerusalem and all Judaea and all the region round about the Jordan. And they were baptized by him in the Jordan, **confessing their sins**”* (Mt. 3:6).

This commandment obtained further validity in the New Testament because Christ specifically gave His Apostles the authority to forgive sins: *“Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and **whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven**”* (Mt. 18:18).

After His resurrection, Christ appeared to His Apostles and re-affirmed: *“**As the Father has sent Me, I also send you**. And having said this He breathed on them and said to them: ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. **If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained**’”* (Jn. 20:21-23).

This authority given to the Apostles, and by extension to the Church, is likewise witnessed in the book of Acts. While narrating the Ephesians' entrance into Christianity, the Apostle Luke notes that they would come confessing their deeds—even in front of others! Behold the words of the Apostle: *“And many who believed came, **and confessed, and showed their deeds**”* (Acts 19:18).

The Apostle James, the brother of our Lord, also recommends confession: *“**Confess your faults** one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed.”* (Jas. 5:16).

John the Evangelist similarly advises: *“**If we confess our sins**, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”* (1 Jn. 1:9).

### THE HOLY FATHERS OF THE CHURCH ATTEST TO CONFESSION

Confession, as an ancient ritual of the Church, is mentioned by Christian authors who lived in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries A.D., such as Irenaeus, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Cyprian.

St. John Chrysostom says: “Even if you forget your sins, God never forgets. He will set everything before your eyes [in the next life] if you do not proceed to obliterate them now through repentance and confession.”

St. Basil advises: “Have we sinned? Let us confess with our mouth...and then, after the confession, you are worthy of chanting to God with a ten-stringed psaltery.”

St. John Climacos asserts: “Wounds displayed in public will not grow worse, but will be healed.”

St. Gregory the Theologian teaches: “Surround yourself with ashes, tears, sighs. Achieve restoration through confession and a more virtuous conduct.”

St. Kosmas Aitolos instructs: “He who does not confess resembles an unbaptized person, and it is impossible for him to be saved...First we must go to confession and then proceed to Holy Communion.”

The great teacher of the Orthodox Church, St. Nikodemos the Hagiorite, concludes: “God not only provided that we be spiritually reborn through Holy Baptism, but also provided that we regain our spiritual health when we become spiritually ill with a cathartic bath and a wondrous treatment, which is nothing other than the mystery of holy confession.”

The person who does not confess his sins will never find peace because he will never draw near to God. Rather, such a person will find himself perpetually under the weight of guilt and distanced from God. The Church alone received the authority to reconcile man with God. This is why the person who has sinned is obliged to run to the Church, to sincerely declare the sins he has committed without shame and reservation, but with self-reproach, contrition, and true repentance, to an Orthodox priest who has been empowered by the Church to forgive sins.

*For a comprehensive study, please refer to the book Repentance & Confession by St. Nektarios*