



THEN the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, *Peace be unto you.* 20 And when he had so said, he shewed unto them his hands and his side. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord. 21 Then said Jesus to them again, *Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you.* 22 And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, *Receive ye the Holy Ghost: 23 Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.* (John 20:19-23)

The Absolution from the 1928 Book of Common Prayer:

ALMIGHTY God, our heavenly Father, who of his great mercy hath promised forgiveness of sins to all those who with hearty repentance and true faith turn unto him; Have mercy upon you; pardon and deliver you from all your sins; confirm and strengthen you in all goodness; and bring you to everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Does another man have authority to forgive yours sins whether bishop, priest, magistrate or king? Every sin is a violation of the Law of God, and only the King can render judgment concerning that violation. There is only on Priest entitled to forgive sin, and that is the High Priest, our Lord Jesus Christ, and Bishop of our souls. Even so, some modern reformed (with small 'r') churches are embracing the false notion that the priest can forgive sins. This was never practiced until the thirteenth century by any church, but was then adopted doctrine of the Roman Church. It was repudiated by Augustine in the early history of the Church; but with the advent of Romanizing men such as Archbishop

Laud and the Oxford Movement men, there has been a return to this false practice even in many so-called Anglican churches.

In the Reformation Church of England, the priest is authorized to pronounce forgiveness of sin only insofar as the Lord has provided the benefit (as indicated in the above Absolution from the Book of Common Prayer). That benefit would be based upon *“heartly repentance and true faith”* in Christ as Redeemer and Savior. This pronouncement is based solely upon the Lord’s Will to forgive. *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”* (1 John i. 9). It is always God’s will to forgive sins of the repentant soul convicted of his sins and placing himself before the Throne of Grace.

There is no longer a high priest who offers the prayers of the people before the Mercy Seat in the Holy of Holies. That curtain of separation was torn from top to bottom at the moment of our Lord’s death on the cross. *And the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was rent in the midst. And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, **Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit:** and having said thus, he gave up the ghost.* (Luke 23:45-46) From that moment, the old high priest office of national Israel was voided, and our Lord Jesus Christ became our High Priest and Advocate with the Father. *Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.* (Heb 4:14-16) This text could not be more clearly stated. It is supported throughout a number of other textual witnesses including, *For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.* (1 Tim 2:5-6)

As my old friend and Bible teacher, Matthew Henry has said: *“Christ directed the apostles to declare the only method by which sin would be forgiven. This power did not exist at all in the apostles as a power to give judgment, but only as a power to declare the character of those whom God would accept or reject in the day of judgment. They have clearly laid down the marks whereby a child of God may be discerned and be distinguished from a false professor; and according to what they have declared shall every case be decided in the day of judgment.”* Of course he said that many decades before my birth.

I will cite another passage of Scripture that sheds further light, if further light is needed, concerning forgiveness of sin:

AND it came to pass on a certain day, as he was teaching, that there were Pharisees and doctors of the law sitting by, which were come out of every town of Galilee, and Judaea, and Jerusalem: and the power of the Lord was present to heal them. 18 And, behold, men brought in a bed a man which was taken with a palsy: and they sought means to bring him in, and to lay him before him. 19 And when they could not find by what way they might bring him in because of the multitude, they went upon the housetop, and let him down through the tiling with his couch into the midst before Jesus. 20 And when he saw their faith, he said unto him, **Man, thy sins are forgiven thee.** 21 And the scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, Who is this which speaketh blasphemies? Who can forgive sins, but God alone? 22 But when Jesus perceived their thoughts, he answering said unto them, **What reason ye in your hearts?** 23 **Whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Rise up and walk?** 24 **But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power upon earth to forgive sins,** (he said unto the sick of the palsy,) **I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy couch, and go into thine house.** 25 And immediately he rose up before them, and took up that whereon he lay, and departed to his own house, glorifying God. 26 And they were all

amazed, and they glorified God, and were filled with fear, saying, We have seen strange things to day. (Luke 5:17-26)

Notice it was Christ who forgave the palsied man, first of his sins, and then healed him. He did this with deliberate intent to demonstrate His divine Sonship in the Father to these miscreant Pharisees and doctors. But they at first accused Him of blasphemy for they correctly said that only God could forgive sin – and they were right! Their greater error was in their failure to realize that the Lord Jesus Christ was indeed God. That is the great error of those who assume for themselves the Redeemer's power to forgive sin. We need not confess our sin to any man, but to God alone!

The reaction of the observers to the works of Christ speak for themselves in this passage: *What reason ye in your hearts? Whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Rise up and walk? **But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power upon earth to forgive sins,** (he said unto the sick of the palsy,) *I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy couch, and go into thine house. And immediately he rose up before them, and took up that whereon he lay, and departed to his own house, glorifying God. And they were all amazed, and they glorified God, and were filled with fear, saying, We have seen strange things to day.**

Let us not trust in the arm of flesh, but in the Lord: *With him is an arm of flesh; but with us is the LORD our God to help us, and to fight our battles. And the people rested themselves upon the words of Hezekiah king of Judah (2 Chron 32:8)*