

**Incarnate Word Tract Series #8**  
**Private Confession and Absolution**

- 1. What is private confession and absolution?** It is a Christian confessing his sins to God privately in the presence of a pastor, and then God forgiving this believer in the words the pastor speaks.
- 2. Does the Lutheran Church favor the practice of private confession and absolution?** Yes, Lutheranism believes in and urges this practice. In fact, the Lutheran Church says in its doctrinal writings: “It would be wicked to remove private absolution from the church” (Apology, XII, 100).
- 3. Is absolution one of the sacraments?** Yes. According to a definition in the Lutheran **Book of Concord** it ranks with Baptism and the Lord’s Supper (Apology, XIII, 4). “Absolution may properly be called a sacrament of penitence” (Apology, XII, 41).
- 4. Where does the Bible record Christ’s institution of this sacrament?** On the evening of the day of his resurrection Jesus gave authority to forgive sins to his apostles, and thus to those who continue their ministry (Jn. 20:23; also Mt. 16:10; 18:18).
- 5. Is it important for a person to make a confession before receiving absolution?** Yes. The pastor is to forgive only sins of repentant sinners. This act of confession assures the pastor that the sinner is penitent. God’s promise of forgiveness always assumes that repentance and confession have taken place. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (I Jn. 1:8f.).
- 6. How often does a person have to go to confession?** There is no law about this. It is up to the individual Christian. All the church says is that it should be “many times in a year” (Apology, XI, 3).
- 7. Does a person have to enumerate all his sins?** No. In fact, a complete enumeration of sins is impossible. “Who can discern his errors? Clear thou me from hidden faults” (Ps. 19:12).
- 8. Which sins should we confess?** “Only those sins of which we have knowledge and which trouble us” (Small Catechism, V. 18).
- 9. How should I prepare for confession?** Examine your conscience in the light of the Ten Commandments (Small Catechism, V. 20).
- 10. Can I trust the pastor to keep my sins secret?** Yes. You should be able to trust him completely. In confession and absolution he is God’s representative, bound to utter secrecy.

**11. What are the benefits of absolution?** In this sacrament, as in the others, you receive full, free forgiveness of all sin. And you find strength to fight sin harder in your life.

**12. What is special about private absolution?** In this form of absolution God speaks his forgiveness to you in a most pointed and powerful way. It is here, in a way all its own, that God deals lovingly with you as a sinner.

### **Brief Form for Confession**

**Penitent:** Pastor, please hear my confession and speak forgiveness to me in God's name.

**Pastor:** Proceed.

**Penitent:** I, a poor sinner, confess before God the guilt of all my sins. Especially, I confess before you, Pastor, that . . .

*(Here confess those sins of which you have knowledge and which trouble you.)*

For all this I am sorry and I pray for grace. I want to do better.

**Pastor:** God be merciful to you and strengthen your faith. Amen.

Do you believe that my forgiveness here is God's forgiveness.

**Penitent:** Yes, Pastor.

**Pastor:** Be it done for you as you believe. By the command of our Lord Jesus Christ I forgive you your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Go in peace.

**(Adopted from the Small Catechism, V.)**