TO CONFESS OR NOT TO CONFESS:
A BIBLICAL DEFENSE OF THE SACRAMENT OF CONFESSION

I. THE BIBLICAL PLAUSIBILITY OF THE SACRAMENT OF CONFESSION

A. Argument: From God 's Use of Human beings as Instruments to Administer Blessings that He Alone is the Source of

1. **Truth (Matt. 28:19-20)**
2. **Supernatural Life (Matt. 28:19-20; Rom. 6:3-4)**
3. **Physical Healing (Acts 3:6)**

B. Argument: From God's Paradigm for Receiving the Forgiveness of Sins in the Old Testament

1. **Leviticus 5:5-6 (cf. Num. 15:27-28)**

II. JESUS'S TRANSFERAL OF AUTHORITY TO FORGIVE SINS

A. John 20:21-23

1. **The "Preach the Forgiveness of Sins" Objection (cf. Luke 24:44-52)**

   a. **answer: The Event that Luke Describes is not the Same Event as John 20:23 (cf. Acts 1:1-10)**

      i. **the drop of time cues and rapid-fire narrating ("And then he said"—v. v.44; cf. vv.45, 50, 51, 52, 53)**
      ii. **connecting the dots: Jesus' instruction to preach forgiveness included with instructions to preach in his name (v.47), begin in Jerusalem (v.47), and wait for the power from on high (v.49), all of which are recorded by Luke in Acts 1:8 as taking place right before the Ascension**

   b. **answer: To Preach Forgiveness is Not the Same Meaning as "To Forgive Sins"**
      i. **no immediate contextual support**
      ii. **the action is not to preach but forgive and retain – two different meanings**
      iii. **the apostles are the ones performing the action of forgiving and retaining, not Jesus**

   c. **answer: Apostles' Mission is Same as Jesus' Mission (John 20:21)**

B. Matthew 18:18

1. **"Bind and Loose" Similar Language to "Forgive and Retain"**
2. **Greek *Lyo* can be used for Forgiving Sins (Rev. 1:5)**

III. THE EARLY CHURCH'S EXERCISE OF THE POWER TO FORGIVE SINS

A. The "Apostles Didn't Administer" Objection
1. **Answer: Reasonable Inference (Unreasonable to Think the Apostles Never Carried Out Christ's Command)**

B. The "Paradigm Shifted After Apostolic Age" Objection
1. **Answer: No Evidence that the Paradigm Shifted**

2. Answer: The Presbyters Administered the Sacrament (James 5:14-16)
- **a. Catholic Implications**
- **b. The "Public Confessing of Sins" Objection (v.16)**
  - **i. the use of the word "therefore" to connect to previous statements**
  - **ii. Public confession doesn't negate sacrament of confession (cf. CCC 1447)**

3. Answer: The Paradigm Did Continue in Early Church Fathers
- **a. St. Hippolytus, *Apostolic Tradition* (215 A.D.)**
- **b. Origen, *Homilies on Leviticus* 2:4 (248 A.D.)**
- **c. St. Cyprian of Carthage, *The Lapsed* 15:1-3 (251 A.D.)**

IV. GENERAL OBJECTIONS : FROM BOTH PROTESTANTS AND CATHOLICS

A. The "Confess Only to God" Objection from 1 John 1:9

1. Answer: The Instruction Doesn't Specify Direct Confession to God. Fits Perfectly with Catholic View of Confession

2. Answer: "Confess" (Gk. *Homologeo*) has a *public* connotation in Scripture
- **a. John's writings (1 John 1:20; John 12:42; 1 John 4:3; 2 John 1:7)**
- **b. wider context of scripture (Acts 7:17; Matt. 7:23; Matt. 10:32; Matt. 14:7; Acts 23:8; Heb. 11:13)**

3. Answer: The confessing of sins in Scripture is a Public Affair
- **a. the Old Testament (Lev. 5:5-6; Nub. 15:27-18)**
- **b. the New Testament (Acts 19:18; James 5:16)**

4. Answer: Private Confession of Sins to God is Very Slim Compared to Public Confession of Sins
- **a. direct command for private confession (Ezra 10:11)**
- **b. description of private confessions to God (Psalm 32:5; Dan. 9:2)**
- **c. Jesus's instruction to pray the Our Father in private, which includes a request to forgive us of our sins**
- **d. passages that deal with confessing sins but are ambiguous (Lev. 26:40; Prov. 28:13; 1 John 1:9)**

B. The "Only God Can Forgive Sins" Objection from Isa. 43:25

1. Answer: God Uses His Ordained Ministers to Forgive Sins through Baptism
2. Answer: God uses Human Beings as Ministers of Other Blessings that He is the Source of

C. The "I Ain't Killed Anybody" Objection

1. Answer: Confession of Venial Sins is Spiritually Beneficial for Growing in Holiness

CCC 1458: "Without being strictly necessary, confession of everyday faults (venial sins) is nevertheless strongly recommended by the Church. Indeed the regular confession of our venial sins helps us
1. form our conscience,
2. fight against evil tendencies,
3. let ourselves be healed by Christ and
4. progress in the life of the Spirit.
5. By receiving more frequently through this sacrament the gift of the Father's mercy, we are spurred to be merciful as he is merciful."