

Absolution: History of its Application in the Church

November 25, 2012



Synopsis: The practice of absolving sinners has its roots in Christ's commands to his church to retain and to remit sins (Mt. 16:16; 18:18; Jn. 20:21f). Problems with this absolution given to penitent sinners are as manifold as the problems that exist in the church. Why? Because absolution is an aspect of sanctification, a practice that applies Christ's perfect righteousness to believers who are not yet perfectly righteous. It is given to believing sinners without too much of a user's guide in Scripture. Although the command is given to remit and retain sins, the process by which this is done is left by our Lord to the church to practice as best she can. That being the case the use of absolution by the church reflects the health of the church, since absolution is given for the health of the church. A healthy church uses the absolution in a way that is most appropriate to that means of grace. As a hammer isn't very good at driving screws into wood, so absolution has a particular use that will "hit or miss the nail on the head." This session of Sunday's adult class will examine and defend the practice of confession and absolution through the history of the Church, and especially the Lutheran Church, and will trace that history to modern practice and that of our congregation. Resource: Early DL.

Goals:

- To consider the Lutheran Reformation of the penance system; *vis a vis* Roman and the fanatics.
- To defend the Biblical practice of absolution against those (Methodists) critical of the practice.
- To consider Keyl's (1847) report of the history of Lutheranism w.r.t. penance.
- To learn the earliest LCMS stance on private/corporate absolution from her first Constitution.
- To learn why private absolution was the standard in Lutheranism, as a matter of Christian freedom.
- To learn the proper application of the doctrine of Christian freedom to this practice; our practice.
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Confession/Absolution: The "Unplugged Sacrament" Smalcald Part III; Article IV

Roman Penance

1. Contrition (attrition)
2. Oral Confession (numerating sins)
3. Absolution (conditional)
4. Works of contrition (or buy an Indulgence)

[*ex opera operatum/conversion is the issue*]

Lutheran Penance

1. Confession
2. Absolution from pastor as from God himself.

[*for the converted/faithful, ie, only believers*]

Protestant Penance

1. Struggle before conversion.
2. Feel the peace of the Spirit.
3. No more repentance or confession to a priest; "I have the Spirit."

[*overreaction to RC; does away with on going need for absolution*]

Augsburg Confession Article 25

Confession has not been abolished by the preachers on our side. The custom has been retained among us of not administering the sacrament to those who have not previously been examined and absolved. At the same time the people are carefully instructed the consolation of the Word of absolution so that they may esteem absolution as a great precious thing. It is not the voice or word of the man who speaks it, but it is the Word of God, who forgives sins, for it is spoken in God's stead and by God's command. We teach with great diligence about this command and power of keys and **how comforting and necessary it is for terrified consciences.**

Next week: Objection from the American Methodists to this practice in 1847.