



**WIN Program: Witnessing in Neighborhoods  
Advanced Class on Catholicism**

**Week Nine**

**Penance**

**The First Fundamental Bible Church  
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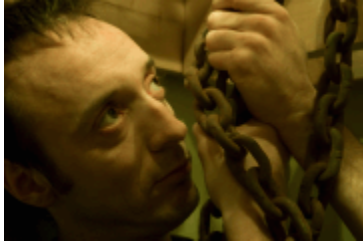
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# Penance



[by Matt Slick](#)

Penance is, according to the Roman Catholic Church, the sacrament of reconciliation that "reestablishes a right relationship between God and a wayward Catholic."<sup>1</sup> It is something the person does. Penance is "always, by its very nature, a liturgical action, and therefore an ecclesiastical and public action," (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, par. 1482) and consists of a greeting from the priest, the reading of the Bible, "an exhortation to repentance," confession to a priest, the "acceptance of penance," absolution from the priest, and a "prayer of thanksgiving," (CCC, 1480). Roman Catholicism teaches that penance "is necessary for salvation for those who have fallen after Baptism, just as Baptism is necessary for salvation for those who have not yet been reborn," (CCC, 980). The penitent person must willingly submit to its requirements of having a contrite heart, perform verbal confession, and be completely humble (CCC, 1450). It is part of the process that restores the person to God's grace (CCC, 1468, 1496). It includes works of reparation (CCC, 1491). It cleanses a person preparing for Confirmation so he can receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (CCC, 1310). It reconciles a person to the Roman Catholic church (CCC, 1469). Penance can be performed for the dead (CCC, 1032). And, with faith it is part of the process of conversion to Christ (CCC, 1470).

According to *The New Saint Joseph Baltimore Catechism*, Vol. 1, 1969, p. 141, "Penance is a sacrament by which sins committed after baptism are forgiven." It goes on to state in question 171 that in order to receive the sacrament of penance worthily the Roman Catholic must, first, examine his conscience; second, be sorry for his sins; third, make up his mind not to sin again; fourth, confess his sins to the priest; and fifth, be willing to do the penance the priest gives them to do. Thus, we see that this so-called sacrament is a works based means of gaining forgiveness of sins from God. This is in contradiction to scripture. A right relationship with God is achieved through faith in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and not by our works, or combination of our works and God's grace, because our works are nothing more than filthy rags ([Isaiah 64:6](#)).

- "being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus;" ([Rom. 3:24](#)).
- "For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness." ([Rom. 4:3](#)).
- "But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness," ([Rom. 4:5](#)).
- "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ," ([Rom. 5:1](#)).
- "Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him." ([Rom. 5:9](#)).

- "But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace." ([Rom. 11:6](#)).
- "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God;" ([Eph. 2:8](#)).

As you can see, the Bible teaches us that we are made right with God by faith apart from works. Notice how the Bible contrasts faith and works when it comes to being made right with God. The Bible rejects works of any kind as a means of being made right with God. You'd think that this would be clear to the Roman Catholic Church. But, it isn't. *The New Saint Joseph Baltimore Catechism*, Vol. 2, 1969, p. 199 says,

"The priest gives us a penance after confession that we may make some atonement to God for our sins, receive help to avoid them in the future, and make some satisfaction for the temporal punishment due to them."

What is amazing in this quote is that it is not Christ's sacrifice on the cross that is the focus of atonement for our sins but the works of the individual via penance. This is in blatant contradiction to scripture which says that we are cleansed of our sins by the blood of Christ--not by our works.

- "how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" ([Heb. 9:14](#)).
- "but if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin." ([1 John 1:7](#)).

The Scriptures teach us that Christ's blood cleanses us of ALL sin--not some, not part, but all. This includes our sins of the past, present, and future; and it is not necessary to have our sins forgiven via our own effort.

- "I do not nullify the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly." ([Gal. 2:21](#)).
- "Is the Law then contrary to the promises of God? May it never be! For if a law had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law.<sup>22</sup> But the Scripture has shut up all men under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe." ([Gal. 3:21-22](#)).
- "But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace." ([Rom. 11:6](#)).

The Roman Catholic Teaching is wrong because it is contrary to scripture because it uses penance - works that a person does--as a means to become right with God.

## **Atonement for sins**

Remember the *New Saint Joseph Baltimore Catechism*, Vol. 2, 1969, p. 199, says that penance (some work you do) makes atonement for sins. Let's look at what atonement means.

According to *Harpers Bible Dictionary*, atonement is "the means by which the guilt-punishment chain produced by violation of Gods will is broken, as well as the resulting state of reconciliation (at-onement) with God."<sup>2</sup> And, ". . . the earlier meaning of the English word "atonement" was "the reconciliation of two estranged parties."<sup>3</sup>

In the Old Testament priests made atonements for the sins of the people: ". . . So the priest shall make atonement for them, and they shall be forgiven." ([Lev. 4:20](#)); ". . . Thus the priest shall make atonement for him in regard to his sin, and he shall be forgiven." [Lev. 4:26](#)); "and the priest shall make atonement for him before the Lord; and he shall be forgiven for any one of the things which he may have done to incur guilt." ([Lev. 6:7](#)).

So, atonement brings forgiveness of sins according to the Old Testament by a priest making sacrifices. But the Old Testament system is not in effect today in this regard because Christ has come and offered a single and eternal sacrifice ([Heb. 10:10-11](#)). The OT priests were not able to cleanse us via their animal sacrifices ([Heb. 10:4](#)). Their sacrifices were a representation of the one true sacrifice of Christ ([Heb. 8:3-5](#)). Since we now have that one and true sacrifice, we don't need to do anything to make atonement for our sins since atonement was made by Jesus on the cross.

## Can we atone for others?

There is a sense in which others could make atonement for people. "And it came about on the next day that Moses said to the people, You yourselves have committed a great sin; and now I am going up to the Lord, perhaps I can make atonement for your sin." ([Exodus 32:30](#)). We see this explained in the New Testament as well: "For it was fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens; <sup>27</sup> who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins, and then for the sins of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself." ([Heb. 7:26-28](#)).

But when we come to the New Testament, we see that the atoning work for sin is centered around the sacrifice of Jesus. Whereas the Old Testament typified the coming atonement, the New Testament realizes it in the person of Christ. The Old Testament made allowances for one person (i.e., a priest) to make atonement for others, so that their sins might be removed ([Lev. 4:20](#), [26](#); [6:7](#); etc.); the New Testament teaches that it is Christ alone who makes the atonement by which our sins are removed:

- "And He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed." ([1 Pet. 2:24](#)).
- "When He had made purification of sins . . ." ([Heb. 1:3](#)).
- "Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people." ([Heb. 2:17](#)).
- "By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all, <sup>11</sup> And every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the

same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; <sup>12</sup> but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God." ([Heb. 10:10-12](#)).

## **Conclusion**

We can see that the Roman Catholic system of penance is an unbiblical, works-based system that keeps the Roman Catholic in submission to the sacramental legislation of the mother Church. Instead of the Roman Catholic Church pointing to Christ alone for the forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with God, it teaches that a person must perform works to make himself right with God. Furthermore, we have seen that the Scriptures clearly teach that our position and righteousness with God is not based upon anything that we do. On the contrary, to the exclusion of our works the Scriptures clearly teach that we are justified before God by faith. In other words, it is by faith alone in Christ alone in his work alone that makes us right with God. There is no way that anyone is able to remove his sin through any of his sin-stained efforts.

The Roman Catholic Church, because it adds works to the finished work of Christ in order to be made right with God, thus preaches a false gospel.

"But even though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we have preached to you, let him be accursed. <sup>9</sup> As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed!" ([Gal. 1:8-9](#)).