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DR. MARTIN LUTHER'S TREATISE OF CONFESSION,
WHETHER THE POPE HAVE POWER
TO ENJOIN SAME.

(Concluded.)

113. XXI. And why should we feel ashamed to unbosom ourselves to a mere man, when at our death—a short time hence—we shall be obliged to stand shamefaced before God and all angels and devils?—all of which we could easily avoid

by suffering a little embarrassment before one man. I am not sure that a man may have a real, living faith if he refuses to suffer so much as to embarrass himself before another. Each Christian must bear his cross, if he is to be saved and his faith to be tried, and this shame is a very small part of the holy cross. No suffering here is a bearing of the cross, except the shame and disgrace that we (as Christ) be numbered with the transgressors.

114. For I reject the laws of the pope concerning confession on account of those that are unwilling to bear this cross, and are not susceptible to the inducements. With these he ought to cease from urging, and not drive them into additional sins. They are all thieves, crucified on the left hand of Christ, and suffer in vain; nay, they only add to their sins, even as that thief did [Luke 23, 39]. We are to invite, not to drive; to call, not to force; to strengthen, not to threaten; to console, not to terrify with confession and all other sufferings. We are to teach and make men free, free, willing, and eager to confess; if we cannot do this, we must not undertake to command and force. For just as to torture, suffering, and death we can only invite, call, strengthen, and console. If anyone is unwilling or unable to do this, let him cease from threatening, driving, and terrifying. We are far too prone to threaten and compel.

115. XXII. The second reason and inducement that ought to make us willing to confess our sins is the noble and precious promise of God contained in the following four passages: Matt. 16, 19: "Whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." Matt. 18, 18: "Whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." John 20, 23: "Whosoever sins ye remit, they shall be remitted unto them." Matt. 18, 19. 20: "If two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." If a man is not moved by such words full

of love and comfort, he must, indeed, have a frigid faith and be a poor sort of a Christian.

116. For although each one may confess his sins to God privately, and may secretly make his peace with God, still he has no one to render a verdict upon him in which he may acquiesce and gain peace of conscience. He cannot help but worry as to whether he has met all requirements or not. But it is a fine and sure course to lay hold of God in His own words and promises, so that we may gain a firm foothold and a proud reliance on the truth of God, and thus urge freely and boldly upon God Himself His own truth and say: Now, dear God, I have in Thy sight complained of my sin to my neighbor and revealed it unto him and have joined with him in Thy name and desired grace. Thou hast out of abundant grace promised: Whatsoever is bound shall be bound, and whatsoever is loosed shall be loosed, and shall be done of the Father what we agree to ask. Therefore I cling to Thy promise, and do not doubt Thy truthful promise, that, as my neighbor has loosed me in Thy name, so shall I be loosed, and that unto me shall be done as we have asked.

117. XXIII. Behold, he that confesses only to God in secret cannot have such a defiant assurance, for these promises are given unto two or three, or as many as there may be. But God is faithful, and whatever He promises we are sure He will perform [Ps. 33, 4], as St. Paul says unto Timothy [2 Ep. 2, 13]: "If we believe not, yet He abideth faithful: He cannot deny Himself." Therefore, this faithfulness of God in regard to His promises is an abundant, precious, rich, and firm assurance, which will let no man sink and remain in doubt.

118. Such a man will maintain himself against all the powers of heaven and hell and earth, and God Himself will yield unto him and concede Himself overcome, as it is taught figuratively Gen. 32, where Jacob wrestled with the Angel and fought all night, till morning. Scripture says that Jacob prevailed against God, and that the Angel was not able to

deny him anything. For this same reason the Angel changed his name and called him Israel, meaning: a prince of God or one prevailing against God, and gave His reason in these words: "Thy name shall be called Israel," a conqueror of God; for if thou hast prevailed against God, how much more wilt thou prevail against men.

119. Thus we all must be Israelites, and acquire power over God. This can be accomplished in only one way: God's judgment and our conscience are bitter enemies; God's judgment is righteous, our conscience, sinful and deserving of punishment. When these two meet, a deathly struggle and the anguish of hell begins; there is hard wrestling and heavy fighting. If our conscience is to prevail there and become an Israel, it must lay hold of God where He may be conquered and captured. This can be done by laying hold of Him in His promises, to which our conscience must cling so firmly and so long till judgment is compelled to desist and promised grace alone remains. Then our conscience is made glad, and God becomes what man desires. For He cannot lie, and is thus conquered by His own truth as He has graciously promised in advance.

120. XXIV. For this reason the words immediately following tell us that the Angel blessed Jacob, and Jacob said [Gen. 32, 30]: "I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved." What does he mean? This, that his soul has been in dire distress and anguish and has felt God's judgment as being incensed at him. But what did he do? He had in times before received a gracious promise of God that He would be his God and that He would bless in his seed all the families of the earth [Gen. 28, 13, 14]. To the truth of this he clings so firmly, would not think of God in any other way, and would have suffered himself to be torn into a hundred thousand pieces rather than surrender his belief that God, having given him this gracious promise, would fulfill it and prove faithful. And thus he gained the victory, and is called a man who has prevailed against God, that is, Israel. Of this Hosea says,

12, 4. 5: "By his strength he had power with God. Yea, he had power over the Angel, and prevailed; he wept, and made supplication unto Him," etc.

121. Thus he became Israel, a man having power over God, while before he was Jacob (one who treads all sin under foot), that is, he has become a free man, who has power over God and sin, hell and heaven. Thus we also must conquer God with God, and urge Him upon Himself, a battle in which our strength is nothing else than His divine promise and truth, which He cannot deny and will not. Thus, if a man lay hold of Him there, he has Him and will hold Him. This is confessed by the bride in the Song of Solomon, 3, 1—4, when she had sought Him a long time and had not found Him. When she had passed but a little from the watchmen, she found Him and said, "I hold Him, and will not let Him go." If, now, a man makes light of this wealth of divine truth, although he may so easily obtain it in confession, he surely shows that he does not esteem God's grace highly. As far as he is concerned, this bounteous market-place has been opened in vain, and it is to be feared that his faith is not genuine and will not endure to the end.

122. XXV. But is it not true that, if any man knew that such a promise as that given to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob existed, no matter where on earth, we would have no peace and would risk our life and our worldly goods to obtain it? Well, now God has filled all the world with such promises in the Gospel. For what He has promised unto them, He says unto us and unto all the world in the passages cited above, Matt. 18, 18 sqq. We have it at our neighbors, before the door of our house, and yet refuse to receive it. The holy patriarchs esteemed it so highly and clung to it so firmly, and we regard it so lightly that we refuse to take upon ourselves a little mortification before one man to obtain it. Verily, it is a shameful lack of faith and an ungrateful contempt of the kind promises of divine grace and comfort.

123. It is by reason of this ingratitude that God has

plagued us with the pope and his accursed laws, and has imposed this penalty, that we are compelled to run after his lying bulls and deceitful indulgences and to purchase this iniquity of his at great cost. It serves us right: we do not recognize the bounteous and true promise of God; we have not received it gladly and willingly, without cost and labor, and now we must buy mere lies of the devil through the pope at high cost and great labor, instead of the truth. St. Paul, 2 Thess. 2, 11. 10, has foretold this: "God shall send them strong delusion, because they believed not the truth, and received not the love of truth, that they might be saved."

124. XXVI. But where there is genuine contrition, there is not much need of urging and admonishing. And particularly in the anguish of death a sinner's eyes are opened, and he becomes eager and glad that such an opportunity is offered him to confess his sins and to hear such a comforting promise. In such a frame of mind he would give his life many times rather than do without this advantage.

125. Why, then, do we not bear ourselves thus at all times, and while we are in good health, since we must always look forward to that hour without any certainty? On the other hand, as was said above, to those that are not in that attitude of mind confession is of no advantage. For as yet their contrition and faith is not sufficient, and it is better for them to postpone their confession, in order that they may not dishonor God's promise and grace offered in confession, and defile it by their lack of preparation. Meanwhile they should not allow the pope's apish law to raise any doubts in their hearts, even though they were excommunicated on account of it. It is better to live under the ban of the pope, the juggler, which is of no validity, than to sin against the serious and true grace of God and His promise. And to sum it up, whosoever is a serious Christian let him thank God that he may have this confession, and let him use it with joy and gladness whenever and as often as he desires, without regard to the pope's tomfoolery and law.

126. Thus there is here no need of doing anything further than to make men willing and eager for it without command and compulsion by means of the foregoing reasoning; the profit and fruit will follow. Again, those that are not willing and are not moved by such reasons can far less be brought to it by law and compulsion; or, if they are compelled to confess and do it not from their own free will, they are driven into it merely for their own greater hurt and harm. Therefore, it is necessary in such cases not to coerce such men and to consign this unhallowed law of the pope to the privy, where it belongs, although it is not worthy of the place, because it drives so enormously many thousands of souls to their destruction in this sacrament, and makes this high boon of divine promise a laughing-stock, without any reason or ground, from sheer personal malice and frivolity.

127. XXVII. It is far better to advise such people to confess to God in secret. Without doubt, they will not in this fashion commune with God three or four times and confess to Him. At some time or other they will consider who He is to whom they are speaking and confessing and promising reform, and they will say to themselves: Pray, how often dost thou confess, how often dost thou speak to God; when wilt thou seriously mend thy ways? Thus they might, through this secret confession to God, be overcome with fear, and thereafter become free and willing to confess to man also, and thus gain God's promises. Otherwise they might perhaps never have come to this way of thinking from their feeling of reluctance and fear to confess unto man, which causes them such distress of mind that they think of nothing else than how to have it over with most quickly. Thus they remain one year as the other. They think to confess is all that is needed. They never really think of God; they are servants of custom and human laws. Away with such men from confession, and let them be instructed that they habituate themselves to confess to their God, angel, or patron saint in secret, and let them confine themselves to this until they become more willing and better.

128. XXVIII. But let us continue and comfort those of weak faith, whom the holy apostle, Rom. 15, 1; 14, 1, commands us not to despise, but to receive, and let us further show them how free this confession is. The pope, in his misleading laws, has strained the thing to such a narrow compass that he bids us confess all sins and only to the priest. This you must not do, unless you do it gladly; and here bear in mind your three liberties.

129. The first liberty is, that you do not resolve to confess all sins, but only those that bite and oppress your conscience, while all the others you may include by acknowledging the sinfulness of your entire life, in order that the confession may be short. I mean thus: Behold, my lord, this have I done and also this, and many things more which I need not relate; but these are the greatest sins. I ask of you good comfort and counsel, for all my life is evil. By what authority would pope or man force us to recount all sins separately, since God does not require it?

130. The second liberty is this: They have made a great deal of twaddle concerning the division of confession. I, for my part, think that no one will gratuitously divide his confession if he comes at all willingly. But if she should forget something, he is under no obligation to go to the same confessor; he may either not confess it at all, or confess it to whom he will; for concerning this there is no law one way or the other. But as to those that confess unwillingly, merely from fear of the pope's law, what difference does it make whether they divide their confession or not, a confession which it would have been better to drop entirely? For it is of no avail and is lost labor, moreover harmful to the soul. It is a confession which God does not hear; it is made merely to the pope. Therefore, as the confessor is, such is the confessant, such also the absolution, except that the Word of God is therein prostituted and abused. Hence let them divide or not, it makes no difference.

131. XXIX. The third liberty: If you should prefer not to confess to a priest or monk, then go to a man, either a layman or a clergyman, in whom you have confidence, and act precisely as if you desired to get good advice and comfort for your soul. Wait and see what God will say to you through him. And as he tells you in the name of the Lord, so follow him and regard it as an absolution. Cling to it and seek no other absolution! Of course, priests ought to be such people of whom every one expects good comfort and counsel in such matters, but their lust of power tickles them so very much that no one trusts them and confesses to them only from a fear of the pope's law. Such mistrust do they create with their tyranny in that they wish to be masters, not servants, among Christians. Truly, one ought to strip them of their domination and remind them of their duties as servants, and let them see that they are not noblemen, but servants, as Christ has assigned them their duty.

132. And now, to prove that I do not say this out of my own head, let us hear Christ Himself, when He says in the words cited above, Matt. 18, 15: "If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone. If he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother." Listen here to the highest Pope and Judge. He says: a brother is gained if he takes advice and acknowledges his sins secretly between himself and his neighbor alone. If he is gained, everything has been made straight, and the sin disappears secretly between these two alone; what more need has he of confession? Christ Himself absolves him here with nothing more than this that he listen to his brother, and that the two compose the matter between them. We have here neither priest nor pope, and yet the brother is gained and sin is forgiven.

133. XXX. How much more will it be the case if I myself anticipate the thing and rebuke myself before my neighbor and desire of him counsel and comfort. Do you think, if I have here Christ's word and absolution, that the fear lest the pope might not absolve me should cause me any worry, seeing

that he has not an iota of Scripture for his secret confession, while I have here such a strong declaration of Christ on my side? On the contrary, we must conclude that secret confession, punishment, and reformation is taken away from the priests and is given to every one in the congregation. For Christ says here not to Peter, nor any individual, but generally, to every one, "Go and tell thy brother his fault!" Hence every Christian is a confessor of secret confession, which the pope, the great robber, has snatched, just as he has snatched the keys, the episcopate, and everything else.

134. My friend, if Christ judges and says that the brother has been gained, though it has been done secretly, do not hesitate to accept it. He will not lie to you. If he is gained, sin is done away with and grace has come; what more do you desire? Additional aid is found in the following verse [v. 20]: "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." Is He in the midst of them for any other purpose than to accept and ratify what they do? Why, it is Christ Himself that does it all! Pray, why do we argue further, since we have here His clear word that everything is right and proper whatsoever thus is done in His name between brother and brother? Whence comes that foreign obligation that the pope claims in this matter? And why does he claim the right to have a hand in this secret "midst"? Yea, he is not satisfied with what Christ is satisfied with, but rides rough-shod over Christ and compels men to reveal this secret thing to him and his. Thus he destroys secret Christian confession, and inaugurates a popish and human secret confession without any cause or reason.

135. XXXI. Just as strong and even stronger are these words of Christ [v. 19]: "If two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven." I ween, here He seizes the pope by the jaw and tears his cobweb laws to pieces. He says quite generally, "If two of you," not the pope and a layman, a priest and a citizen, a monk and a peasant; but

two, whosoever they be, if only they be among you, that is, if they be Christians and on earth, so that no one may make bold to loose the dead in purgatory or hell, as the pope does. And, "Anything that they shall ask," etc. Here He speaks without reserve, making no exception, doubtlessly including also the sins that are discussed between brother and brother, in short, all things. And now hear His judgment and final word, "It shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven." Behold, what more do you desire, what stronger assurance? Christ is there; the Father hears, if even as few as two gather in Christ's name and pray for what they desire and need. Therefore, in view of His clear words, let us freely and gladly make bold to confess to each other, advise, help, and pray for whatever weighs upon our hearts in secret, whether it be sin or pain, and let us by no means doubt this easy and clear promise of God, and on the strength of it let us go freely and gladly to communion and die with far greater assurance than the pope's secret confession can give us, for the latter has no foundation, while here we have a strong foundation.

136. I even go further and warn men not to confess secretly to a priest, because of the priest's office, but to confess to him as to a common brother and Christian. And this in order that, since the pope's confession has no foundation, we may not build on sand, but that we may confess on the strength of these words of Christ when we do confess, whether it be to a layman or to a priest. On this let us boldly lean and comfort ourselves that, when two gather together in His name, that Christ is there, that what they do is acceptable to Him, that what they pray is done of the Father without any doubt. Assuredly we cannot gather together in Christ's name in a better manner than for the purpose of doing away with sin and to seek His grace, help, and comfort. This is most acceptable in His sight, then surely His name and honor is sought; our name and honor come to naught.

137. From all this we learn how far the pope's tyranny, as planned by the devil, has led us away from all our comfort

and salvation. And yet, as a reward, he has stolen the money and wealth and honor of all the world, as if he had done a fine thing, so that, if we had not deserved it of God, it were proper to grind him together with his devil's throne to powder. He is the real and foremost Archantichrist, whom, please God, our Lord Jesus Christ will very shortly cast into the abyss of hell by His coming. Amen.

138. Therefore let us acknowledge our guilt and bewail our ingratitude. We have not accepted gratis God's Word and grace, and hence He has given us the pope as a punishment, who sells us his lies and errors for the price of our goods, body, and life, till he has devoured our soul, body, and goods, and still devours them this very day. Let us, then, with one accord pray against this devilish stench and abomination at Rome which poisons all the world, so that God may again exalt His Word and destroy this sinful and pernicious man's law. To that end may Christ, our Lord, blessed forever, help us! Amen.

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