



## Year of St. Paul Archdiocese of Toronto

# Examination of Conscience with St. Paul

### A Guide to the Sacrament of Reconciliation with the Catechism of the Catholic Church & Reflections from St. Paul

When thinking of St. Paul, one readily thinks of his dramatic conversion on the road to Damascus. His being struck blind by heavenly light and Christ's confronting words: "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" invites each individual to his/her own conversion.

The theme of Reconciliation is one that is most familiar to St. Paul. He writes,

It is all God's work; he reconciled us to himself through Christ and he gave us the ministry of reconciliation. I mean, God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not holding anyone's faults against them, but entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors for Christ; it is as though God were urging you through us, and in the name of Christ we appeal to you to be reconciled to God. (2 Cor 5: 18-20)

Provided is an Examination of Conscience with insights from St. Paul. The sections are divided into acts that the Catechism of the Catholic Church identifies as major elements that make-up a true confession.

### The Acts of the Penitent

**1) Examination of Conscience** – The celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation ought to be prepared for by an Examination of Conscience made in the light of the Word of God. (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1454)

St. Paul on Examination of Conscience, Ephesians 5: 7-14

Once you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is a shame even to speak of the things that they do in secret; but when anything is exposed by the light it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore, it is said, "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light."

**2) Contrition** - Contrition is "sorrow of the soul and detestation for the sin committed, together with the resolution not to sin again." When it arises from a love by which God is loved above all else, contrition is called "perfect" (CCC, 1451,1452)



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St. Paul on recognition of contrition, Romans 7: 14-25a

For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin. For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate. But if I do the very thing I do not want to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that the Law is good. So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good.

For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members.

Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of his death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

**3) Confession of Sin** - The confession (or disclosure) of sins, even from a simply human point of view, frees us and facilitates our reconciliation with others. Through such an admission man looks squarely at the sins he is guilty of, takes responsibility for them, and thereby opens himself again to God and to the communion of the Church in order to make a new future possible. (CCC 1455)

St. Paul on confession of sin, Galatians 5: 13-21

For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love be servants of one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." But if you bite and devour one another take heed that you are not consumed by one another. But I say, walk by the Spirit, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you would. But if you are led by the Spirit you are not under the law.

Now the works of the flesh are plain: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissension, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

**4) Satisfaction/ Purpose of Amendment** - Many sins wrong our neighbor. One must do what is possible in order to repair the harm (e.g., return stolen goods, restore the reputation of someone slandered, pay compensation for injuries)...Absolution takes away sin but does not



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remedy all the disorders it has caused. Raised up from sin, the sinner must still recover his full spiritual health by doing something more to make amends for the sin: he must “make satisfaction for sin” or “expiate his sins”. (CCC 1459)

St. Paul on Satisfaction, Colossians 3:12-17

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

**5) Penance in atonement for sin** - The penance the confessor imposes must take into account the penitent's personal situation and must seek his spiritual good. It must correspond as far as possible with the gravity and nature of the sins committed. It can consist of prayer, an offering, works of mercy, service of neighbor, voluntary self-denial, sacrifices, and above all the patient acceptance of the cross we must bear. Such penances help configure us to Christ, who alone expiated our sins once and for all. They allow us to become co-heirs with the risen Christ, "provided we suffer with him." (Rom 8:17) (CCC sec. 1460)

St. Paul on enduring all things willingly, 2 Corinthians 11:23-30

Are they servants of Christ? I speak in utter folly - I am too, and more than they are: I have done more work, I have been in prison more, I have been flogged more severely, many times exposed to death. Five times I have been given the thirty-nine lashes by the Jews; three times I have been beaten with sticks; once I was stoned; three times I have been shipwrecked, and once I have been in the open sea for a night and a day; continually travelling, I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from brigands, in danger from my own people and in danger from the gentiles, in danger in the towns and in danger in the open country, in danger at sea and in danger from people masquerading as brothers.

I have worked with unsparing energy, for many nights without sleep; I have been hungry and thirsty, and often altogether without food or drink; I have been cold and lacked clothing. And, besides all the external things, there is, day in day out, the pressure on me of my anxiety for all the Churches. If anyone weakens, I am weakened as well; and when anyone is made to fall, I burn in agony myself. If I have to boast, I will boast of all the ways in which I am weak.



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Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you. (Phil 4:8-9)