Question: Is it right to go to a religious leader—such as a priest—kneel before him, and confess your sins? After all, Jesus said:

> If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.” (John 20:23, NKJV)

Answer: What Did Jesus Actually Teach?

Let’s look carefully at what Jesus taught about authority regarding sin. In Matthew 16:15-19, we read:

> He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’
>
> Simon Peter answered and said, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’
>
> Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.

> And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.
>
> And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. (NKJV)

Here Jesus gave Peter “the keys of the kingdom of heaven”—that is, authority to open the way for people to enter the kingdom. This same authority (symbolized by the keys) was also given to the other apostles (see Matthew 18:18). But these keys did not mean they could pronounce forgiveness at their own will. Rather, the keys represent the gospel message—the revelation of how people can be saved and forgiven through Jesus Christ.

How Did the Apostles Use This Authority?

When Peter exercised this authority on the Day of Pentecost, notice what he said:

> Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 2:38, NKJV)

Peter didn’t simply declare, “Your sins are forgiven.” He called people to repentance and baptism as the conditions for forgiveness. The true key to forgiveness is the gospel itself:

> Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel ... by which also you are saved.” (1 Corinthians 15:1-2, NKJV)

What About Confessing to a Religious Leader?

The Bible does teach the value of confessing sins—but not to obtain forgiveness through the priest’s or leader’s power. Scripture says:

> Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed.” (James 5:16, NKJV)

Confession can bring healing, accountability, and restoration within the body of Christ, but the forgiveness of sins comes from God alone, through faith in Jesus and obedience to His Word:

> If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9, NKJV)

The Error of Misusing the Authority

Unfortunately, many today—whether popes, priests, or other religious leaders—claim the right to pronounce forgiveness without requiring genuine repentance or scriptural baptism. This is a misapplication of Scriptures like John 20:23 and Matthew 16:19. Jesus never intended for His ministers to replace God’s role in forgiving sins. Instead, they are to point people to the cross, where forgiveness was purchased:

> In Him we have redemption through His blood, the

> forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.” (Ephesians 1:7, NKJV)

True ministers preach the way of salvation, just as the apostles did. When leaders simply declare people forgiven without them repenting, they rob the gospel of its true power and lead people into false security.

Conclusion

If a religious leader tells you that your sins are forgiven, but you have not truly repented or been baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, do not be deceived. Only God can forgive sins through the finished work of Jesus Christ. The apostolic way is clear:

> Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.” (Acts 3:19, NKJV)

May God give you discernment to follow His Word.

Be blessed.

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