

Catholicism and Christianity

As we begin this morning, let me ask you a series of questions. I don't want you to answer these out loud, but just to yourself. Can a person be saved apart from believing the gospel of Jesus Christ? Is a person a "brother in Christ" who does not believe the gospel? What should our position be on a person who preaches a false gospel? Is Roman Catholicism simply another Christian denomination? Please listen carefully to this doctrinal statement of the Catholic church:

"If any one saith, that man is truly absolved from his sins and justified, because that he assuredly believed himself absolved and justified; or, that no one is truly justified but he who believes himself justified; and that, by this faith alone, absolution and justification are effected; let him be anathema."

This is a quote from the Council of Trent Canon 14. According to this, every Christian in the world stands under the official, never changed curse of the Roman Church, and we need to be aware of that fact. According to the Catholic Church, those who believe in justification by faith alone are anathema.

Canon 9 of the Council of Trent states categorically:

"If any one saith that by faith alone the impious is justified; in such wise as to mean, that nothing else is required to cooperate in order to the obtaining [of] the grace of Justification, and that it is not in any way necessary, that he be prepared and disposed by the movement of his own will; let him be anathema."

In November of 1544, in the northern Italian community of Trent, the Roman Catholic Church convened its 19th ecumenical council. The Council of Trent officially lasted from December of 1545 through December of 1563. During that time the Church intensified its ongoing affront on Protestantism by codifying Catholic dogma in unprecedented fashion, in matters ranging from the strategic place of the sacraments to the doctrines of transubstantiation, purgatory, indulgences, the veneration of the Virgin Mary and the saints, and the efficacy of relics. Tradition was declared coequal to Scripture as a basis for authority.

Now you might be thinking, "But the Council of Trent met a long time ago, hasn't Rome since modified its position?" No, it has not! The Vatican II documents as well as the new Catechism of the Catholic Church reinvoked the theological position of the Council of Trent, condemning the gospel of justification by an imputed righteousness.

This is what Pope John Paul II believed and taught. This is Catholic theology. Catholic theology anthematizes the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Pope John Paul II, and I am quoting from him, in 1997 said this, "Having created man male and female, the Lord also wants to place the new Eve beside the new Adam in redemption." The new Adam, of course, is Christ, and the new Eve is Mary. He goes on, "Mary, the new Eve, thus becomes the perfect icon for the church, we can, therefore, turn to the Blessed Virgin, trustfully imploring her aid in the awareness of the singular role entrusted to her by God, the role of co-operator in redemption." Did you know that Mary was a "co-operator in redemption?" That is blasphemous!

Pope John Paul II credited Mary with saving his life in 1981 during an assassination attempt. Mary didn't save his life. Mary wasn't around. Mary is in heaven with all the rest of the saints who are there, worshiping God and having nothing to do with what we are doing.

Listen to what men who claim to be Christians have said about Pope John Paul II:

President Bush said, "The Catholic Church has lost its shepherd. The world has lost a champion of human freedom, and a good and faithful servant of God has been called home." Was Pope John Paul II "a good and faithful servant of God" or was he an apostate teacher who was damning men to the Lake of fire with his false teaching?

Former President **Jimmy Carter** said, "Rosalynn and I are saddened by the passing of His Holiness, Pope John Paul II. A man shaped by his own experience under Nazi occupation during World War II, he dedicated his life and vocation as instruments of peace throughout the world. His was a constant voice for justice, nonviolence, and reconciliation for both individuals and nations. As a spiritual leader, he emphasized the common humanity of people of all faiths. His advocacy for the poor and oppressed will prevail as a source of hope and inspiration for others to follow. We will remember him with love and gratitude for his faithfulness to peace and human rights." Does a spiritual leader teach a doctrine of salvation by works?

Now if that isn't bad enough, listen to what some Evangelical leaders had to say about Pope John Paul II: **Pat Robertson** said, "I am deeply grieved as a great man passes from this world to his much deserved eternal reward. John Paul II has been the most beloved religious leader of our age far surpassing in popular admiration the leader of any faith." So, according to Robertson, you don't have to believe the gospel to go to heaven.

Prison Fellowship Founder and President, **Chuck Colson**, in a statement released after the news of the Pope's death on April 2, said, "I had the honor of meeting his Holiness, and I have actively been a part of a collaborative fellowship called 'Evangelicals and Catholics Together.'" Colson calls the Pope, "his Holiness" - this is blasphemy! "His un-holiness" would be a more appropriate title. Only Christians are holy. And no Christian is more or less holy than another, we are all made holy instantaneously; we are all holy totally and completely. We are holy because we are in Christ, the Holy One.

This fellowship, "Evangelicals and Catholics Together," that Colson talks about states this in their written document, "That all active Roman Catholics are brothers and sisters in Christ and therefore should not be evangelized." As we proceed in our study today, hopefully, you will understand how ridiculous that statement is.

Colson said, "The Pope's willingness to reach out to Christians outside of the Roman Catholic faith was critical to promoting unity across the Christian family. His vision, his determination, and his loving spirit will be missed by Christians around the world."

This is what the Apostle Paul had to say about Pope John Paul II:

Galatians 1:6-9 (NASB) I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; ⁷ which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you, and want to distort the gospel of Christ. ⁸ 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. ⁹ 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.

Paul was "amazed" by the Galatians, and we should be amazed at the way the Christian world views the Pope. The evangelical world is often more polite than it ought to be. Face-saving politeness is not advocated anywhere in Scripture. Paul's sense of shock regarding the activities of the Galatians, whom he loved very much, should arrest our attention.

Paul says that these Galatians were deserting God for a "*different gospel*." The word "different" is the Greek word *heteros*, which means: "another of a different kind." He goes on to say:

Galatians 1:7 (NASB) which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you, and want to distort the gospel of Christ.

The word "another" here is the Greek word *allos*, which means: "another of the same kind." Thus, It is as if Paul writes, "They brought you a completely different gospel. They claim it is just an alternative gospel of the same kind, but it isn't at all. It is all together different."

The Catholic Church in the 16th century placed its unambiguous anathema on the Protestant doctrine of "Justification by faith alone" and has never, in any magisterial sense removed that anathema. The Roman Catholic Church condemns justification by faith alone. Now please understand this, if justification by faith alone is the gospel, then the Roman Catholic Church has condemned the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Somebody is under the anathema of God! And we can be as nice, and as pleasant, and as gentle, and as loving, and as charitable, and tolerant as we can possibly be, but it's not going to change that, folks. Somebody is preaching a different gospel! And when Rome condemned the Protestant declaration of "Justification by faith alone," I believe, Rome placed the anathema of God upon themselves.

"The most destructive dangers to the church have never been atheism, pagan religions, or cults that openly deny Scripture, but rather, supposedly Christian movements that accept so much biblical truth that their unscriptural doctrines seem relatively insignificant and harmless. But a single drop of poison in a large container can make all the water lethal. And a single false idea that in any way undercuts God's grace poisons the whole system of belief." (MacArthur, John. Galatians, pg. 14)

Paul goes on in Galatians 1 to say that they want to "*distort the gospel of Christ*." The doctrine that they are accepting is a "distortion" of the gospel of Christ. That word "distort" is very interesting. It means: "to reverse the very character or reverse the very essence of." That's what the Catholics have done to the gospel. That's what it means to distort the gospel. It is to change the very essence, the very core, of the gospel. Thus, Paul is saying that the "good news" is being changed into its opposite: "bad news."

The gospel is the good news that "Christ died for our sins." Believing the gospel is trusting in the substitutionary death and payment of Christ for our sins. In order to be saved, a person must realize that they are a sinner without hope. Second, they must recognize that they can do nothing at all to avoid the wages of their sin. Third, they must understand that Christ paid all the penalty for their sin through His atoning sacrifice, enduring what they should endure. Fourth, the sinner must trust Jesus and Jesus alone as his Substitute for his sins.

The word "accursed" originally meant: "something dedicated" (Liddell-Scott, Greek English Lexicon), but as it was used day by day it began to be used only of that which was dedicated to evil. And then, it came to be used to indicate the end of things that were dedicated to evil - that is, destruction.

Paul does not say this of those who were deserting the gospel. Rather, he says it of the **teachers**, the leaders who were preaching this false message. Paul is right in line with a point of view that runs throughout the Scriptures. Jesus said that anyone who leads little ones astray would be better off tying a millstone around his neck and casting himself into the sea. Teachers incur a stricter judgment. No matter who these teachers may be, whatever their names, their degrees, or their background, teachers who deny the freedom, the grace and peace that come from the sacrifice of Christ on our behalf, deserve devotion to destruction.

If we do not have the gospel correct, then we are not giving the right message to the world. And the wrong message kills. Like the message a Pharmacist gives to his clients coming in to fill a prescription, if he gives the wrong message as to how to take that medicine, or the wrong prescription, it doesn't make any difference how sincere he or his clients are, it will have devastating effects. Unfortunately, the Catholics are doing just that today. They are teaching another gospel. Catholic theology is another gospel, it is salvation by works.

For the rest of our time together this morning let's look at some of the teachings of Catholicism and compare them to the teachings of the Bible. The following references are cited from the new *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, imprimatur from eminent Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger and the "Holy See," copyright 1994. Ratzinger is Prefect of the "Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith."

The Doctrine of Sola Scriptura

"Sola Scriptura" - is the idea that the Scriptures are the only authority for sinful man in seeking salvation. Sola Scriptura is foundational to Christianity and was given to us by God Himself. It is God made, not man made. In the words of reformer Martin Luther, the doctrine of sola Scriptura means: "what is asserted without the Scriptures or proven revelation may be held as an opinion, but need not be believed." Roman Catholicism flatly rejects this principle, adding a host of traditions and Church teachings and declaring them binding on all true believers -with the threat of eternal damnation to those who hold contradictory opinions.

In Roman Catholicism, "the Word of God" encompasses not only the Bible, but also the Apocrypha, the Magisterium (the Church's authority to teach and interpret divine truth), the Pope's ex cathedra pronouncements, and an indefinite body of church tradition; some formalized in canon law and some not yet committed to writing. Whereas evangelical Protestants believe the Bible is the ultimate test of all truth, Roman Catholics believe the Church determines what is true and what is not. In effect, this makes the Church a higher authority than Scripture.

Catholicism teaches the dogma of the infallibility of the Roman pontiff. This was not declared by the church until the year 1870. Yet through the church's motto of *Semper idem* ("Always the same"), it is claimed that the church has always held this, going back to the first Pope, the Apostle Peter! (Catechism 80-82, 85).

The pope, as the vicar (substitute for) of Christ, is considered infallible only when he speaks "ex cathedra" (from the chair). But this tradition, along with other traditions of the church, is considered to be as authoritative as the Scriptures.

"As a result, the Church, to whom the transmission and interpretation of Revelation is entrusted, does not derive her certainty about all revealed truths from the holy Scriptures alone. Both Scripture **and Tradition** must be accepted and honored with **equal** sentiments of devotion and reverence." Catechism 82 (emphasis added)

Thus, for the Roman Catholic, submission to the formal teaching of the church's tradition is as important as submission to the Scriptures.

The sixteenth century Reformation was responsible for restoring to the Church the principle of sola Scriptura, a principle that had been operative within the Church from the very beginning of the post apostolic age.

Initially the apostles taught orally, but with the close of the apostolic age, all special revelation that God wanted preserved for man was codified in the written Scriptures. Sola Scriptura is the teaching, founded on the Scriptures themselves, that there is only one special revelation from God that man possesses today, the written Scriptures or the Bible.

Consequently, the Scriptures are materially sufficient and are by their very nature (as being inspired by God) the ultimate authority for the Church. This means that there is no portion of that revelation which has been preserved in the form of oral tradition independent of Scripture. We do not possess any oral teaching of an Apostle today. Only Scripture, therefore, records for us the apostolic teaching and the final revelation of God.

The Council of Trent in the 16th century declared that the revelation of God was not contained solely in the Scriptures. It declared that it was contained partly in the written Scriptures and partly in oral tradition, and, therefore, the Scriptures were not materially sufficient.

The view promoted by the Council of Trent contradicted the belief and practice of the Early Church. The Early Church held to the principle of sola Scriptura. It believed that all doctrine must be proven from Scripture, and if such proof could not be produced, the doctrine was to be rejected.

The Roman Catholic faith has shown a willingness to raise the pope above Jesus Christ and the Bible by giving him the right to nullify Scripture through papal decrees. The conscience of the biblical Protestant (like that of Martin Luther) is bound by the Bible alone. "The Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the Word of God, the only infallible rule for faith and life." It cannot be both ways. The traditions of the churches are often of value. But these traditions must always be subordinate to, and constantly corrected by, the Scriptures, which alone are the Word of God.

Justification by Grace through Faith Alone

Ephesians 2:8-9 (NASB) For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; 9 not as a result of works, that no one should boast.

According to Roman Catholicism, justification is a process in which God's grace is poured forth into the sinner's heart, making that person progressively more righteous. During this process, it is the sinner's responsibility to preserve and increase that grace by various good works. The means by which justification is initially obtained is not faith, but the sacrament of baptism. Furthermore, justification is forfeited whenever the believer commits a mortal sin, such as hatred or adultery. In the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church, then, works are necessary both to begin and to continue the process of justification. Rediscovery of the biblical doctrine of justification by faith alone, more than any other truth, ignited the Protestant Reformation. On what grounds is a sinner accepted in the presence of a holy God? Acceptance is based on the "righteousness of God in Jesus Christ." It is a righteousness wholly outside the sinner, accomplished by Christ, and imputed to him through the one God-given means - faith in the Savior, acceptance of His gift of eternal life.

Romans 3:19-24 (NASB) Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, that every mouth may be closed, and all the world may become accountable to God; ²⁰ because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin. ²¹ But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, ²² even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus;

I was reading some of the things which Catholics tell a person they must "do" in order to receive the grace of justification. Consider these things, they must: Love and worship God, pray, fast, love one's neighbor, practice self-renunciation, obey the commandments of God, bear witness to the Catholic faith, follow supernatural inspiration in deeds, and confess the major doctrines of the Church. And if they do all of these things, they may become worthy of Justification. But the Bible says that God Justifies the ungodly, and that we are justified apart from works.

Galatians 3:6 (NASB) Even so Abraham BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.

Paul says, "Abraham BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS." The Greek word translated "reckoned" here is *logizomai*. Paul uses it 19 times in Romans. It is a courtroom word used 11 times in Romans 4. It means: "a judge looks at the evidence, and in light of the evidence, regards something as true." It was a book keeping term used of writing down in the ledger the finances available. He would record as a fact in the ledger what he had counted in cash in the register. Reckoned means: "to regard or consider something as true." Abraham's faith was placed on his account before God as righteousness. It was not his works, but his faith that God accepted.

Justification means the sinner is declared righteous, not actually made righteous. This goes hand in hand with the fact that justification is instantaneous. There is no process to be performed - justification is purely a forensic reality, a declaration God makes about the sinner. Justification takes place in the court of God, not in the soul of the sinner. It is an objective fact, not a subjective phenomenon, and it changes the sinner's status, not his nature. Justification is an immediate decree, a divine "not guilty" verdict on behalf of the believing sinner in which God declares him to be righteous in His sight.

Catholicism says: Man is justified by baptism plus faith, plus additional works (see Catholic Catechism Ref. Nos. 1265-1271, 1987-1995). The Holy Spirit's transforming work in the sinner becomes the grounds, along with faith, for justification. Most good Catholics are, therefore, very concerned with "being good enough," "meriting," and "earning" their salvation.

The Catholic Catechism says of baptism, for example: "**Baptism** not only **purifies from all sins**, but also **makes the neophyte 'a new creature,'** an adopted son of God, who has become a 'partaker of the divine nature,' member of Christ and co-heir with him, and a temple of the Holy Spirit" (Catechism 1265, emphasis added). "... Justified by faith in Baptism, [they] are incorporated into Christ; they therefore have a right to be called Christians" (Catechism 1271).

The Second Vatican Council's Decree on Ecumenism states: "For it is through Christ's Catholic Church **ALONE**, which is the universal help toward salvation, that the fullness of the means of salvation can be obtained" (emphasis added).

Believer, would you agree with this statement: "We are justified by grace, through faith, because of Christ?" So would all Roman Catholics. They accept and believe these words, but if we add the word "alone" to this sentence, so that it reads this way: We are justified by grace *alone*, through faith *alone*, because of Christ *alone*. The Roman Catholic's are going to back away from it, they will not accept it.

Why is the word "alone" so important? The issue in the 16th century was, not whether God demands righteousness in order for Him to declare somebody just, but the issue is: Where do we get that righteousness? Catholics talk about Jesus, and they talk about God, and they talk about faith, and they talk about grace, but there is always something to be added to them. The Protestant view was this: that the only righteousness that has the merit necessary to meet the requirements of the holiness of God is that righteousness that was achieved and performed by Jesus Christ - and by Jesus Christ "alone!"

***Romans 5:18-19 (NASB) So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men.
¹⁹ For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous.***

Catholics would say , "You can't be saved without the help of Christ, or without grace, or without faith. But, added to that faith, added to that grace, added to that Christ - must be the contribution of your efforts, without which God will not declare you just." Thus the word "alone" is very significant, it draws a line in the sand and says that the Gospel of Jesus Christ says, "The only way that a person can be saved is by the righteousness of Christ imputed to us by faith alone."

Mary, Jesus' Mother

Protestants have historically held Mary in high regard as a godly and highly favored woman of God, a sinner saved by the grace of her divine Son.

Catholic dogma, on the other hand, has exalted her in an irresponsible and idolatrous way. She is declared to have been free from all original sin (the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, first declared in 1854; (Catechism 491-492), free from any actual sin during her life (Catechism 411), and perpetually a virgin even after the birth of Jesus (Catechism 499-500).

"Mary... was redeemed from the moment of her conception... preserved immune from all stain of original sin." (Catechism 491). "Mary remained free of every personal sin her whole life long." (Catechism 493).

Pope Benedict XV, in 1918: "Mary suffered with Christ and nearly died with Him when He died, thus she may rightly be said to have **redeemed** the human race with Christ."

Pope Pius XI, in 1923: "The virgin of sorrows **shared** the work of redemption with Jesus Christ."

Pope Leo XIII, in 1891: "No one can approach Christ except through His mother."

The Catechism, in the *Sunday Missal* (Catholic Catechism) says, "My salvation depends on Mary's mediation and union with Christ, because of her exalted position as Mediatrix of all grace."

Vatican II said, "Mary's intercession continues to win for us the gift of eternal salvation."

The Sacrifice of the Mass

A Catholic mass is by definition the sacrifice of Christ (Catechism 1322, 1338). The Baltimore Catechism (Confraternity Edition of 1949) says, "Christ gives us His own body and blood in the holy Eucharist first, to be offered as a sacrifice commemorating and renewing for all time the sacrifice of the cross" (Catechism 356).

While the Catholic catechisms quote the passages that speak of Christ dying once, they also teach that the priest miraculously transforms the bread and wine into Christ's real body, and that Jesus is then sacrificed anew. "The blood is real blood (it looks like wine and tastes like wine at Mass, but it is truly the Blood of Christ," says Daniel P. McGivern, "The Church's Greatest Eucharistic Miracle," *Fatima Family Messenger*(Jan.-Feb.-March 1995), p. 14.

Although there is some variation among Protestants on the meaning of the Lord's supper, without exception, biblical Protestants teach that the sacrament is not a renewal or a revisitation of the bodily sacrifice of Christ. Rather, it is a remembrance and a memorial use of symbols blessed by God to the benefit of the humbled believer.

This contrast is far more than a controversy of words. It goes to the very heart of the difference between Catholicism and Protestant Christianity. Protestant faith denies that the church has the power to perform the mass's "miracle of transubstantiation," and it further denies that the Lord's Supper's purpose is to see accomplished the death of Christ all over again.

Purgatory

The Roman Catholic Church does not teach its people to have confidence in the full forgiveness of their sins through the death of Christ alone. Nor are they taught that the righteousness of God accomplished by Jesus Christ is their permanent possession. The result is that the faithful Catholic is taught never to come to full assurance of salvation during their earthly life, for they are still capable of committing "mortal sin." A Catholic's redemption is always dependent on their maintaining a faithfulness to the Church's doctrine and practice.

Thus, Catholics are taught that when they die, if they have not committed mortal sins (and with the exception of the special class of believers they call "saints"), all go to the place the church calls "purgatory." The Catechism states, "All who die in God's grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation; but after death **they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven...**"

"The Church formulated her doctrine of faith on Purgatory especially at the Councils of Florence and Trent" (Catechism 1030-1031). This concept of purgatory led to the unbiblical Catholic doctrine of prayers for the dead (Catechism 1032). Catholic believers are taught: "It is a holy and a wholesome thought to pray for the dead that they may be loosed from their sins" (Catechism 958).

The Priestly System

The Old Testament clearly established a priesthood (the Levites) to serve Israel. This earthly priesthood was a symbol of the Messiah's eternal priesthood. The book of Hebrews explains its purpose and fulfillment. Historic Protestantism, because of its study of the Scriptures, proclaimed the "universal priesthood of all believers." The special office of priest was fulfilled in our Savior and thus came to an end in Him.

Although Catholicism acknowledges this universal priesthood, it sustains a "weak and beggarly element" of the old covenant and assigns to its priests remarkable power as pastors of the church. This system is essential to the power of the Catholic Church and cannot be justified by the Bible.

In today's spirit of ecumenism, many evangelicals have called for the Protestant Church to lay aside its differences with Rome and pursue unity with the Catholic Church. Is that possible? Is Roman Catholicism simply another facet of the body of Christ that should be brought into union with its Protestant counterpart? I say, "No." The Roman Catholic Church is apostate - it is not a true Christian community. In this day and age of tolerance and pluralism and relativism that may not sound very loving, but in fact, it is very loving. It is not loving to cover the truth for unity sake.

Believers, we must realize how important it is to be a protector as well as a proclaimer of the message of the gospel of salvation by faith alone. We live in a culture where people say it's loving and it's tolerant to just allow people to define the gospel however they want. But I believe that is the most unloving thing you could ever do. To allow someone to believe something that we know is not true, knowing in the end they will be damned by God, is as unloving as we could possibly be.

The most loving thing we can do is, with gentleness and kindness, proclaim the gospel of grace. It is totally a work of God and His grace, with no human merit added. Those people who have believed a different gospel need to be told the truth - not reaffirmed that what they believe is right if it is, in fact, in error.

There are undoubtedly born-again believers in the Roman Catholic Church. But the Catholic theological and ecclesiastical system generally leads people to trust in the church, or in themselves, for salvation. It places the church's dogmas on par with the Bible, proclaiming false views of God, of man, of sin, and of salvation.

I personally believe that those people who trust Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior in the Biblical sense, who live in the Roman Catholic Church, have a moral and spiritual duty to leave that church immediately! They are living in sin by continuing to be a visible member of an institution that anathematizes the Gospel of Jesus Christ!

We can't compromise on this truth. We can agree to disagree on a lot of the nonessentials, but when it comes to the heart of the gospel, we have to insist that there is only one way, and Christ is that way, and to ignore that is a false love. It is a personal apostatizing on our own part from what Christ called us to be.

This message preached by [David B. Curtis](#) on April 10, 2005. [Tape #316a](#).

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