

Roman Catholicism

In today's politically correct climate, few are standing firm against the onslaught of doctrinal error. As shocking as this may seem to some, it shouldn't be surprising. As we come closer to our Lord's return, the "professing" church will increasingly become as 2 Tim. 1-5 describes. The modern day church needs to be reminded that as history unfolds there will be more and more religion and less and less Christianity. Verse 5 gives us an incredible insight into the latter-day church. Paul warns that there will be "a form of godliness but denying it's power." Simply put religion will increase and capture the hearts of many unsuspecting victims. This Scriptural warning is not simply for a particular brand of denomination, but includes the entire "professing" church. Although reformation is needed across all evangelicalism (including many Protestant denominations), this brochure focuses on the doctrinal deviations of the Roman Catholic Church.

The questions that must be asked, "Is Roman Catholicism the true church as they claim to be?" Can they be considered another denomination? Do their core doctrines agree with Scripture? While there are numerous subjects that need to be carefully considered, two rise to the level of special attention: it's rejection of sola scriptura (Scripture alone) and the doctrine of justification. Because the Roman Catholic church has refused to submit itself to the authority of God's word, it has separated itself from historic, orthodox Christian fundamentals of the faith.

The great reformer Martin Luther commented on the importance of Scripture when he said "what is asserted without the Scriptures are proven revelation may be held as opinion. But need not be believed." Roman Catholicism flatly denies that Scripture is totally sufficient for life and godliness (2 Pet 1:3). They add many (Traditions) and Church teachings that are outside the authority and inspiration of God's Word. In fact they go as far as to say that those who deny their teachings are in danger of eternal damnation.

They believe that "the Word of God" includes 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. These are opposed to what Scripture itself says. Biblical evangelicals believe that Scripture is the ultimate voice of God, whereas Roman Catholics believe that they themselves have the authority to determine what is true and what is not. The implication is, that they (Roman Catholic Church) are a higher authority than the completed Cannon (Bible). As Peter Kreeft has said, "If we believe only what the Scripture teaches, we will not believe sola scriptura, for Scripture does not teach sola scriptura.

Creeds and doctrinal statements are important, but they carry absolutely no inspired authority from God. They are no more than a collective understanding of the proper interpretation of Scripture. Everything must be judged in light of Scripture, not the other way around. Scripture is to be accurately interpreted in its context by comparing it to Scripture. In other words, it interprets itself, certainly not on the infallible decisions of man. Scripture is itself the sole binding rule of faith and practice for all Christians. Paul explains in 2 Tim. 3:16-17 that only Scripture is "inspired." The Greek word for "inspired" [theopneustos], means God breathed. The Greek form of the word indicates that the Bible is the results of God's breath. Because Scripture is breathed out by God – it originates from Him – it

is true, inerrant, and complete. The apostle Peter claimed Scripture's superiority to any human eye-witness accounts, including his own witness of Christ's transfiguration (2 Pet. 1:16-21). The Old Testament Psalms are full of claims that the Word of God is eternal (Ps. 119:89, 16, 152). God's word will never pass away (Lk. 16:17; Isa. 40:8; 55:11; 59:21; Matt. 5:18; 24:35). Jesus Himself accepted the Bible's inspiration when He claimed that "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God (Matt. 4:4). He used historical events in the Old Testament to prove His total confidence in the fidelity of Scripture: He verified the events of the flood (Matt. 24:38-39; Lk. 17:26-27), The destruction of Sodom (Matt. 10:15; Lk. 17:28-29), Jonah and the fish (Matt. 12:40). Peter claims the Bible alone is sufficient for all life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:1-4). Even though sola scriptura is not "explicitly" taught, it is surly "implicitly" declared from Genesis to Revelation. The Lord Jesus used Scripture as His final court of appeal. He affirmed "Scripture cannot be broken" (Jn. 10:35). To Satan, Jesus consistently responded, "It is written." Jesus affirmed the Bible's divine inspiration (Matt. 22:43), final authority (Matt. 4:4, 7, 10), infallibility (Jn. 10:35), historicity (Matt. 12:40, 24:37), scientific accuracy (Matt. 19:2-5), and factual inerrancy (Jn. 17:17; Matt. 22:29).

Roman Catholics believe that Christ bestowed authority to the Catholic Church through apostolic succession. Therefore, not only does the Church infallibly determine the proper interpretation of Scripture, but also supplements Scripture with additional traditions and teachings. Both of these together constitute the rule of faith and practice for Catholics. Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for placing tradition of men over Scripture (Mk. 7:8). Jesus warned that tradition can lead people astray (Matt. 15:6). Paul also warned against unwarranted emphasis on tradition (Col. 2:8). Paul warned the Corinthians "not to exceed what is written" (1 Cor. 4:6).

The Bible itself reveals it was God's will for His revelation to be written down and preserved for coming generations. "Moses wrote down all the word of the Lord (Ex. 24:4). Joshua too "wrote these words in the book of the law of God" (Joshua 24:26). Samuel "told the people the ordinances of the kingdom and wrote them in the book and placed it before the Lord" (1 Sam. 10:25). The Lord instructed Isaiah, "Take for yourself a large tablet and write on it in ordinary letters (Is. 8:1). The apostle John commanded by the Lord "write, therefore, what you have seen" (Rev. 1:10).

The second error involves the crucial doctrine of justification. The Roman Catholic interpretation of justification differs radically from orthodox Christianity. They believe it is a process in which God's grace is gradually poured into the sinners heart. Over time and to some degree of obedience, one becomes progressively acceptable. During this life-long process, it is the sinner's responsibility to preserve and increase that grace by human effort through various good works. The Roman Catholic position believes that the sinner is initially justified not by faith, but at the moment of baptism. Upon baptism, the individual begins his journey towards salvation. For the Roman Catholic, justification is not a permanent condition, but begins upon baptism and continues if the individual live a good life. For Roman Catholics, eternal life can be forfeited whenever one commits a mortal sin, such as hatred or adultery. Even though they don't categorize such efforts as works, nonetheless, works are necessary both to begin salvation (by baptism) and to continue and preserve eternal life through various prescriptions called sacraments.

These are grave and dangerous errors. The Catholic Church's position on justification may be

summed up in five biblical arguments that flatly deny their beliefs.

1. Scripture presents justification as instantaneous, not a process. It is imputed instantaneously upon belief, not imparted through human effort. Contrasting the proud Pharisee with the broken, repentant tax-gatherer who beat his chest and prayed humbly for divine mercy, Jesus said that the tax-gatherer “went down to his house justified” (Luke 18:14). His justification was immediate and complete. He was “declared perfectly innocent” before he performed any good works. It was given by God based solely on his repentant faith. Jesus also said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life” (John 5:24). Eternal life is an eternal reality and a present possession of all who believe. It is important to realize that Scripture declares that eternal life cannot be lost. How can eternal life be temporary? Paul says that the one who believes immediately passes from spiritual death to eternal life, because that person is instantaneously justified (Rom. 5:1, 9; 8:1).

2. 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 or judicial reality, a declaration God makes on behalf of the sinner. Justification is a declaration made outside the believer 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. This completely contradicts the Roman Catholic definition which implies a gradual change of the sinner’s nature. Justification is an immediate decree, a divine declaration of “not guilty. He becomes righteous in the sight of God.

3. Since justification is a declaration outside of man, it is irrevocable. Since man can’t work for it, he can’t lose it either. The incredible change of status is reserved in heaven, apart from man’s performance. At the moment of salvation, the believer is given all the credits of Jesus Christ. God the Father sees the believer as perfectly pardoned from all condemnation on the merits of Christ’s atonement. God the Father was completely satisfied with His Son’s sacrifice; therefore, the believer is completely satisfactory in the eyes of the Father.

4. The Bible teaches that justification means righteousness is imputed, not infused. Righteousness is “reckoned” or credited to the account of those who believe (Rom. 4:3-25). They stand justified (declared perfectly innocent) before God not because of their own righteousness. Romans 2:10 says “There is none righteous, not even one.” Perfect righteousness is reckoned to them who believe or have faith (Phil. 3:3). Where does that perfect righteousness come from? It is God’s own righteousness (Rom. 10:3), and it is the believer’s in the person of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 1:30). It’s an amazing reality that Christ’s own perfect righteousness is credited to the believer’s personal account (Rom. 5:15, 19, just as the full guilt of the believer’s sin was imputed to Christ.

5. Scripture clearly teaches that justification is declared by God on the basis of faith alone, apart from works.

According to Paul, it is by “grace you have been saved through faith; and that is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works” (Eph. 2:8-9); see also Acts 16:31 and Rom. 4:3-6). Paul also says “If it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer

grace” (Rom. 11:6). There is one thing that Scripture is crystal clear about, that “a man is justified by faith apart from works of the law” (Rom. 3:28; see Gal. 2:16; Rom. 9:31-32; 10:3).

In contrast to orthodox Christianity, Roman Catholicism places an unscriptural emphasis on human works or effort. Catholic doctrine denies that God “justifies the ungodly” (Rom. 4:5) without first making them godly. Good works therefore become the ground and cause of justification. As thousands of former Catholics will testify, Roman Catholic doctrine and liturgy obscure the essential truth that the believer is saved by grace alone, through faith alone apart from works. To put it simply, Catholics believe they are saved by doing good, confessing sin, and observing sacraments or ceremonies.

Adding good works to faith as the ground of justification is precisely what Paul condemned as “a different gospel” (2 Cor. 11:4; Gal 1:6). It nullifies the grace of God, for if meritorious righteousness can be earned through the sacraments, “then Christ died needlessly” (Gal. 2:21). Any system that mingles works with grace, then, is “a different gospel” (Gal. 1:6). The Roman Catholic view of justification sets it apart from historic, orthodox Christianity. It is simply antithetical to the simple gospel of grace.