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**On Salvation and Justification**

Roman Catholic theology does not embrace the interpretation of salvation and justification as that presented by Scripture and the Protestant Reformers.

The Roman Church does teach that we are justified by grace through faith on account of Christ. What is missing, however, is the word ***alone***.

By omitting this word the Roman Church redefines grace, faith and justification in a way that undermines and invalidates the teaching of Scripture.

This will become clear as we examine the specific definitions given these terms by the official Magisterium of the Church of Rome.

**The Roman View of the Work of Christ**

Rome says that Christ made an atonement for sin, meriting the grace by which a person is justified but that the work of Christ is not the exclusive cause of an individual’s justification and salvation. Ludwig Ott makes this statement:

Christ’s redemptive activity finds its apogee in the death of sacrifice on the cross. On this account it is by **excellence** but not **exclusively** the efficient cause of our redemption….No one can be just to whom the merits of Christ’s passion have not been **communicated**. It is a fundamental doctrine of St. Paul that salvation can be acquired only by the grace merited by Christ *(Ludwig Ott, Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma (Rockford: Tan, 1974), pp. 185, 190).*

According to the Church of Rome, Christ did not accomplish a full, finished and completed salvation in his work of atonement. His death on the cross did not deal with the full penalty of man’s sin. It merited grace for man which is then channeled to the individual through the Roman Catholic Church and its sacraments.

This grace then enables man to do works of righteousness in order to merit justification and eternal life. Robert Sungenis expresses the Roman Catholic perspective in these words:

What did Christ’s suffering and death actually accomplish that allowed the Father to provide the human race with salvation? Did Christ take within himself the sin and guilt of mankind and suffer the specific punishment for that sin and guilt, as Protestants contend? **The answer is no**… Christ did not take upon himself the entire punishment required of man for sin. Rather, Scripture teaches only that Christ became a ‘propitiation,’ a ‘sin offering,’ or a ‘sacrifice’ for sins…Essentially, this means that Christ, because he was guiltless, sin-free and in favor with God, could offer himself up as a means of persuading God to relent of his angry wrath against the sins of mankind.

*(Robert Sungenis, Not By Faith Alone (Santa Barbara: Queenship, 1997), pp. 107-108).*

What Sungenis is saying is that Christ’s death merely appeased God’s anger against man. He persuades God to relent of his anger and to offer a means of forgiveness to man. And that means is through man’s own works cooperating with the grace of God.

**The Sacraments**

In Roman Catholic teaching there is no salvation apart from participation in the sacraments mediated through its priesthood. The Roman Church teaches that she is the mediator between Christ and the individual. Saving grace is mediated through these sacraments. John Hardon, says this:

**Why did Christ establish the Church?**Christ established the Church as the universal sacrament of salvation.

**How is the Church the universal sacrament of salvation?** The Church is the universal sacrament of salvation as the divinely instituted means of conferring grace on all the members of the human family.

**What does the Catholic Church believe about the forgiveness of sins?**  
She believes it is God’s will that no one is forgiven except through the merits of Jesus Christ and that these merits are uniquely channeled through the Church He founded. Consequently, even as the Church is the universal sacrament of salvation, she is also the universal sacrament of reconciliation.

**How does the Church communicate the merits of Christ’s mercy to sinners?** The Church communicates the merits of Christ’s mercy to sinners through the Mass and the sacraments and all the prayers and good works of the faithful.

**Are the sacraments necessary for salvation?** According to the way God has willed that we be saved the sacraments are necessary for salvation

*(John Hardon, The Question and Answer Catholic Catechism (Garden City: Image, 1981), Questions # 401, 402, 461, 462, 1119).*

These words clearly express the official position of the Church of Rome. There is no salvation apart from participation in the sacraments of the Roman Catholic Church. There is no other means of obtaining saving grace. Hardon’s words echo the teaching of the Council of Trent:

If any one saith that the sacraments of the New Law are not necessary unto salvation…and that without them, or without the desire thereof, men obtain from God, through faith alone, the grace of justification…let him be anathema *(The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent – Philip Schaff, The Creeds of Christendom (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1919), Canon IV, p. 119).*

According to Rome, there are three main sacraments necessary for justification and ultimate salvation. These sacraments supposedly communicate grace to an individual and help to maintain him in a state of sanctifying grace. **They are baptism, penance, and the Eucharist / mass.**

**Through baptism**, an individual is brought into a state of regeneration and sanctifying grace. The guilt and punishment for original sin and for all sins committed up to the point of baptism are forgiven in the sacrament of baptism. However, sins committed after baptism must be dealt with through the sacraments of penance and the mass.

This is especially true for mortal sin which is said to kill the spiritual life in the soul and cause the loss of sanctifying grace and, therefore, of justification. In order to regain the state of grace the individual must participate in the sacraments.

As Ott stated, the atonement of Christ is not the exclusive cause of man’s redemption. Man must supplement the work of Christ for sins committed after baptism by partially atoning and expiating his own sin through penance.

If any one saith that he who has fallen after baptism…is able to recover the justice which he has lost…by faith alone without the sacrament of Penance…let him be anathema *(The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent. Philip Schaff, The Creeds of Christendom (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1910), Decree on Justification, Chapter XIV. Canon XXIX.*

**Penance is**…necessary because we must expiate and make reparation for the punishment which is due our sins…We make satisfaction for our sins by every good act we perform in the state of grace but especially by prayer, penance and the practice of charity *(John Hardon, The Question and Answer Catholic Catechism (Garden City: Image, 1981), Question #1320).*

**In addition to Penance the Church teaches the necessity for the mass as an expiation for sins committed after baptism.** The mass is the re–sacrifice of Jesus Christ as a propitiation for sin. It is declared by ***Trent*** to be a propitiatory sacrifice and necessary for salvation:

In this divine sacrifice…that same Christ is contained and immolated in an unbloody manner who once offered himself in a bloody manner on the altar of the cross…This sacrifice is truly propitiatory…If any one saith, that the sacrifice of the mass is only a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving; or that it is a bare commemoration of the sacrifice consummated on the cross, but not a propitiatory sacrifice…and that it ought not to be offered for the living and dead for sins, pains, satisfactions and other necessities: let him be anathema (*The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent. Philip Schaff, The Creeds of Christendom (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1910), Doctrine on the Sacrifice of the Mass, Chp. II, p. 180, Canon III).*

To suggest that a sacrament is necessary to continue to offer Christ’s body and blood to make sacrifice for sin is completely opposite to the teaching of Scripture, and undermines the sufficiency of Christ’s work.

This teaching of the mass as a perpetuation of the sacrifice of Christ which is propitaitory for sin was a point of universal opposition by the Reformers.

They vigorously objected to this teaching on Scriptural grounds that it made void the cross of Christ. These comments from Scottish Reformer John Knox are representative:

**John Knox**: How can you deny the opinion of your Mass to be false and vain? You say it is a sacrifice for sin, but Jesus Christ and Paul say, The only death of Christ was sufficient for sin, and after it resteth none other sacrifice…I know you will say, it is none other sacrifice, but the self same, save that it is iterated (repeated) and renewed. But the words of Paul bind you more straitly than that so you may escape: for in his whole disputation, contendeth he not only that there is no other sacrifice for sin, but also that the self same sacrifice, once offered, is sufficient, and never may be offered again. For otherwise of no greater price, value, nor extenuation, should the death of Christ be, than the death of those beasts which were offered under the Law: which are proved to be of none effect, nor strength, because it behooves them often times to be repeated. The Apostle, by comparing Jesus Christ to the Levitical priests, and his sacrifice unto theirs, maketh the matter plain that Christ might be offered but once *(John Knox, A Vindication of the Doctrine That the Mass Is Idolatry. The Works of John Knox (Edinburgh: James Thin, 1895), Volume III, p. 56. Language revised by William Webster).*

**From a Roman Catholic perspective**, the concept of saving faith is far removed from the biblical teaching of commitment to and simple trust in Christ alone for salvation.

The Roman Catholic Church has distorted the gospel of grace. It has fallen into the same Galatian error of legalism addressed by Paul in his letter to the Galatian Churches.

Temple worship and the ceremonial law included circumcision, an altar, daily sacrifices, a laver of water, priests, a high priest, special priestly and high priestly vestments and robes, candles, incense and shewbread.

In the routine religious life of the average Jew there were feast days, prayers, fasts, adherence to the tradition of the elders and certain dietary restrictions. All of these things were included in the Judaizers’ teaching on salvation.

**So it was Jesus plus the Jewish system.**

**How does this relate to Roman Catholicism?**

The doctrines of salvation embraced by Rome are, in principle, identical to the Judaizers. The Roman Church teaches that salvation is achieved by believing that Jesus is the Son of God who died for sin, by being baptized, by being a part of the Roman Catholic Church, by striving to keep the Ten Commandments and partaking of the sacramental system (which involves ongoing sacrifices, altars, priests, a high priest, along with the exercises of prayers, fasts, almsgiving, penance’s and until recently adherence to certain dietary regulations). The following lists demonstrate the parallels between Roman Catholicism and the Judaizers:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Judaizers** | **Roman Catholicism** |
|  |  |
| Belief in Jesus as Messiah and Son of God | Belief in Jesus as Messiah and Son of God |
| Circumcision | Baptism |
| Become a Jew | Become a Roman Catholic |
| Sacrificial System | Sacrificial System |
| Priests | Priests |
| High Priests | High Priests |
| Altars | Altars |
| Feast Days | Feast Days |
| Laver of Water | Font of Holy Water |
| Dietary Regulations | Dietary Regulations (Until recently) |
| Candles | Candles |
| Incense | Incense |
| Shew Bread | The Eucharist Wafer |
| Keep the Ten Commandments | Keep the Ten Commandments |
| Tradition of the Elders | Tradition of the Church Fathers |

**The parallels are obvious.**The Roman Catholic teaching on salvation is essentially the same as that preached by the Judaizers. **Paul warned the Galatian believers that if they embraced this false gospel they would actually desert Christ** (Gal. 1:6). Those evangelicals who would promote spiritual cohabitation with the Church of Rome need to heed to the warning of Paul. He saw no basis for unity with the Judaizers even though they professed faith in Christ. Likewise, there is no basis for unity with the Church of Rome today.

**How To Witness To A Roman Catholic**

**Understand who they are.**

By and large Roman Catholics do not know…

* The scriptures
* What the RCC teaches

By and large Roman Catholics were raised in the tradition they are in, therefore…

* They are blinded by their indoctrination
* They are bound ancestrally and socially
* They are enslaved ecclesiastically

**Understand what they need to hear**

They are taught, as demonstrated in this lesson from their own documents, that Christ died for their sins, was buried and rose again the third day according to the scriptures. The error injected into this Bible truth by the RCC ecclesiastical body is that the Lord Jesus Christ did not pay enough.

Therefore what they need to hear clearly and concisely is that the Lord Jesus Christ paid for all sin, for all men, for all time – once for all.

They need to hear the details of grace verses works. They need to understand that there is nothing they can do to merit, purchase or earn eternal life, it is a free gift.

We need to have patience in dealing with them. Remember that it is the word of God that will do the work in them. We cannot convince, convict or convert them that is the job of the Holy Spirit of God. It is our job to … **Eph 6:19 … that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel**