

INTRODUCTION

“Two Important Questions”

In Acts 16:30 a jailer in Philippi asked the Apostle Paul the simple question, “*What must I do to be saved?*” Paul answered, “*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved.*”

The answer to that question is the most important of all. No matter how sincere one may be, if the wrong answer is given, the result will be eternal damnation instead of eternal salvation.

If the Philippian jailer had asked his question of a Roman Catholic, would he receive the same answer as he would from an Evangelical Protestant? Would either answer as Paul did?

Second Timothy was the Apostle Paul’s last letter to be included in the Bible. It may well have been his last letter ever, since it is believed that he was executed the next day. In that book, he told his prized pupil, Timothy, “*Be diligent to show yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth*” (2 Tim. 2:15). A few sentences later, Paul reminded Timothy that “*All scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, instruction in righteousness that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work*” (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

While many things that have been said about the Lord, and His Church have had a tendency to change over the centuries, the Bible has remained virtually unchanged.

What shall we diligently study? To what are we to look as inerrant and inspired? On what authority do we base our Christian faith?

Evangelical Protestants would say the Bible is the sole authority for all matters of faith and practice. Roman Catholics would say the Bible as well, but they would add the traditions and teachings of the Roman Catholic Church, as equally authoritative additions to the Bible. Does this difference matter?

The booklet you are reading is a response to a document entitled Pillar of Fire, Pillar of Truth, published by Catholic Answers, Inc. Studying through the Catholic Answers document challenges one to think about many interesting issues — issues about which Roman

Catholics and Protestants disagree.

There are many differences between Roman Catholic and Protestant beliefs. The most obvious (issues of practice and methodology) are not the most important, however. This paper seeks to deal honestly and charitably with the lesser issues, but begs the reader to focus on the two questions of *primary* importance.

1. On what authority do we base our Christian faith?
2. What must I do to be saved?

If the answer to the first question is incorrect, one may be devoted, but to the wrong instructions. The disastrous result is obvious.

If the answer to the second question is incorrect, the result would most certainly be eternal damnation.

That is how serious these issues are.

The following pages contain the complete, unedited text of the Catholic Answers, Inc. document, entitled, “Pillar of Fire, Pillar of Truth,” printed in this type face.

My personal commentary will immediately follow the text in this conspicuously different type face.

PILLAR OF FIRE, PILLAR OF TRUTH

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The first section is an introduction. There is no need to comment on it.

You cannot avoid challenges to your Catholic faith. They come from door-to-door missionaries who ask, “Are you saved?” from peer pressure that urges you to conform to the morals of the world, from a secular culture that whispers there is no God.

Sometimes Catholics who are challenged begin to doubt their faith. If they find themselves unable to answer basic questions about what they believe and why they believe it, they begin to wonder whether the Catholic Church really was founded by Jesus. Sometimes their doubts lead them straight out of the Church.

This doesn’t need to happen. Challenges to your faith should not produce doubts. They should be looked upon as mere difficulties in understanding, and difficulties can be overcome through study and prayer. It has been said that ten thousand difficulties do not make one doubt — a good point to keep in mind. To *doubt* means to be unsure whether a belief is true; to *have a difficulty* means to know the belief is true but to be unsure just what it means or why it is true. This unsureness [sic] can be overcome.

When mathematicians have difficulties doing their calculations, they don’t allow their difficulties to turn into doubts about the established truths of mathematics. Instead, they study harder and learn more about mathematics so they can understand how its parts fit together. So it is with the Catholic faith. This booklet presents you with basic Catholic truths. You will find in the Catholic faith answers to life’s most troubling questions: Why am I here? Who made me? What must I believe? How must I act? All these can be answered to your satisfaction, if only you will open yourself to God’s grace, turn to the Church he established, and follow his plan for you.

AN UNBROKEN HISTORY

The second section argues that the Roman Catholic Church is the true Church because it is, or claims to be the oldest, and can trace its roots back the furthest.

Jesus said his Church would be “the light of the world.” He noted that “a city set on a mountain cannot be hidden” (Matthew 5:14). This means his Church is a visible organization. It must have characteristics that clearly identify it and that distinguish it from other churches.

Among all the Christian churches, only the Catholic Church has existed since the time of Jesus. Every other Christian church is an offshoot of the Catholic Church. The Eastern Orthodox churches broke away from unity with the pope in 1054. The Protestant churches were established during the Reformation, which began in 1517. (Most of today's Protestant churches are actually offshoots of the original Protestant offshoots.)

While it is true that the Roman Catholic Church was the only visible church to have existed during certain portions of church history, that does not make all other Christian churches unbiblical. If the same incorrect reasoning was applied to the original church in Jerusalem, all churches (including the Roman Catholic Church) would be deemed as offshoots. The church in Jerusalem is the only church to have existed since the beginning. Offshoots are not necessarily aberrant.

Protestants maintain that the Roman Catholic Church deviated from the truth held by the primitive church that existed in the first three centuries. The Protestant Reformation was a return to the historic positions of the primitive church. That being true, the longevity of the Roman Catholic Church does not guarantee purity or accuracy.

Only the Catholic Church has existed in the tenth century, in the 5th century, and in the first century, faithfully teaching the doctrines given by Christ to the apostles, omitting nothing. The line of popes can be traced back, in unbroken succession, to Peter himself. This is unequalled by any institution in history. Even the oldest government is new compared to the papacy, and the churches to which door-to-door missionaries belong are young compared to the Catholic Church. Many of these churches began as recently as the nineteenth or twentieth centuries. None of them can claim to be the Church Jesus established.

The succession of popes, that allegedly can be traced back to Peter proves a rich history for the Church — the universal Church of Jesus Christ, not exclusively for the Roman Catholic Church.

The first bishop of the Church according to Acts 15 seems to be James, rather than Peter. This isn't an issue that makes a great deal of difference to Protestants, but it seems to make a difference to Roman Catholics.

It is inaccurate to assume that all groups that go door-to-door are the same. Since they are not all the same, dismissing them all is an error. It is true that some groups that go door-to-door are not Christian. Some are. The practice of going door-to-door is not wrong. A pastor of the Roman

Catholic Church in my hometown has done door-to-door canvassing.

The Catholic Church existed for nearly 2,000 years, despite constant opposition from the world. This is testimony to the Church's divine origin. It must be more than a merely human organization, especially considering that its human members — even some of its leaders — have been unwise, corrupt, or prone to heresy.

The Church has existed for nearly 2,000 years. This is true of the Universal Church of Jesus Christ, just the Roman Catholic Church.

Any merely human organization with such members would have collapsed early on. The fact that the Catholic Church is today the most vigorous church in the world (and the largest, with about a billion members) is testimony not to the cleverness of the Church's leaders, but to the protection of the Holy Spirit.

It is faulty logic to assume that something is true just because it has been around a long time and has many proponents [members]. Astrology predates Christianity and has many adherents. Is it therefore right? The same is true of Buddhism. On the flip side, when Jesus' disciples were few and the Church was still in its earliest stages of formation, did its newness or lack of numbers make it untrue? Jesus said "Narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life and there are few who find it." (Matthew 7:17)

FOUR MARKS OF THE TRUE CHURCH

These four marks were first outlined by Augustine in his work entitled, "The City of God," written in the 4th century.

If we wish to locate the Church founded by Jesus, we need to locate the one that has the four chief marks or qualities of his Church. The Church we seek must be one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. Let's look at these terms.

The Church is One

Jesus established only one Church, not a collection of competing churches (Lutheran, Baptist, Anglican, and so on). The Bible says the Church is the bride of Christ (Ephesians 5:23-32). Jesus can have but one spouse, and his spouse is the Catholic Church.

Jesus did establish only one Church, but His Church is made up of many members. 1 Corinthians 12:20-25 warns one member of the body against dismissing another member of the body because it is different or serves a different

purpose. Jesus does have one Church, one Bride, made up of people from all nations, languages, and traditions. What makes a person a member of Christ is salvation, not membership in a particular denomination, any more than salvation is based on having any particular gifts.

His Church also teaches just one set of doctrines, and those doctrines must be identical to the doctrines taught by the apostles. This is unity of belief.

*Absolutely correct! Christians must stand firm on the Apostle's doctrines on the issues of salvation, not disputing and dividing over "doubtful things" as defined in Romans 14:1-4. We are to hold one another accountable for the major doctrines of the faith, but we are not to go to war over lesser things. Lesser things may be **important**, but they are not **essential**. The unity of belief the Church must maintain is unity in the essentials. As one writer put it, "In the essentials, purity. In the non-essentials, liberty. In all things charity."*

Although some individual Catholics dissent from officially-taught doctrines, the authentic teaching authority of the Church — the pope and the bishops united with him — has never changed any doctrine. Over the centuries, as doctrines are examined more fully, the Church comes to understand them more deeply, but never understands them to mean the opposite of what they once meant.

This is what Protestants would say about the Reformation. It was not a new doctrine, merely a rediscovery and a deeper understanding of the key elements of the faith, namely justification by grace through faith alone in Christ alone, and the Bible as the sole authority for all matters of faith and practice.

The Church is Holy

By his grace Jesus makes the Church holy, just as he is holy. This doesn't mean each member is always holy. Jesus said there would be both good and bad members in the Church (John 6:70), and not all members would go to Heaven (Matthew 25:31-46). But the Church itself is holy because it is the source of holiness and is the guardian of the special means of grace Jesus established, the sacraments.

No members of the true Church, made up of all born again believers in Jesus Christ, will be excluded from Heaven (2 Corinthians 5:8). It is true that there are those who will profess to be Christian, but who are really not (Matthew 7:21-23; 1 John 2:19).

The Church is not the source of holiness. God is. The Church is a means through which God's holiness is seen.

The reason the Church is holy is because God has declared her holy. She dispenses the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper because God has made her holy. She is not holy because she dispenses the sacraments.

The Church is Catholic

Jesus' Church is called catholic ("universal" in Greek) because it is his gift to all people. He told his apostles to go throughout the world and make disciples of "all nations" (Matthew 28:19-20). For 2,000 years the Catholic Church has carried out this mission, preaching the good news that Christ died for all men and that he wants all of us to be members of his universal family (Galatians 3:28). Today the Catholic Church is found in every country of the world and is still sending out missionaries to "make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19).

The true Church is indeed "catholic," meaning universal. However, the Roman Catholic Church is not the extent of the Universal Church.

The Church Jesus established was known by its most common title, "the Catholic Church," at least as early as the year 107, when Ignatius of Antioch used that title to describe the one Church Jesus founded. The title apparently was old in Ignatius' time, which means it may go back to the time of the apostles.

*The Church has been designated as "catholic" from the beginning. However, the **Roman** Catholic Church came into being in the 4th century. Before this time the Church was primitive and simple. At this time and thereafter, the Roman Catholic Church, the highly organized and structured church that it is today, came into being. All Christians can trace their heritage of faith back to the primitive catholic, or Universal Church of the first three and one-half centuries.*

The Church is Apostolic

The Church Jesus founded is apostolic because he appointed the apostles to be the first leaders of the Church, and their successors were to be its future leaders. The apostles were the first bishops, and since the first century, there has been an unbroken line of Catholic bishops faithfully handing on what the apostles taught the first Christians in Scripture and oral Tradition (Acts 1:15-26, 2 Timothy 2:2).

Acts 2:42 says the Church continued steadfastly in the Apostle's doctrine. That doctrine is preserved for us in the New Testament. While church tradition helps us understand the progress of the Church, it is not equal with the Bible.

One important proof of this is the fact that the Church has made mistakes and has changed its mind on certain issues. The Bible on the other hand, has no errors and has not changed.

These beliefs include the bodily Resurrection of Jesus, the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, the sacrificial nature of the Mass, the forgiveness of sins through a priest, baptismal regeneration, the existence of purgatory, Mary's special role, and much else — even the doctrine of apostolic succession itself. Early Christian writings prove the first Christians were thoroughly Catholic in belief and practice and looked to the successors of the apostles as their leader. What these first Christians believed is still believed by the Catholic Church. No other church can make this claim.

Several Roman Catholic doctrines are stated here:

Sacrificial Mass: *Nowhere in the New Testament is the Mass mentioned. Nowhere in the New Testament is there any mention of sacrifices (other than the sacrifice of praise) after the once for all, all-sufficient sacrifice of Christ (Hebrews 7:27; 9:7-28; 10:10).*

Forgiveness through priests: *Nowhere in the New Testament is forgiveness of sins given through human priests (Mark 2:7; Luke 5:21). The Roman Catholic Church maintains that in John 20:22-23 Jesus gave the power to forgive sins exclusively to the Apostles and their successors.*

Since the only mention of a Christian priesthood in the New Testament includes all believers, the Protestant understanding of this is that Jesus was saying all believers have the authority to proclaim a person's sins forgiven based on that person's faith in the risen Christ and the gospel.

Baptismal regeneration: *Paul taught that salvation was not based on any human effort or act (Romans 4:1-8). It is not based on any ritual (Romans 4:9-12). It is not based on keeping the law (Romans 4:13-15). Salvation is based on faith **alone**. (Romans 4:16; Ephesians 2:8-9) Baptism is an important act of obedience that all disciples are commanded to do, but it has no saving power in itself, any more than circumcision did for the Jews in the Old Testament.*

Purgatory: *The New Testament does not speak about any place called purgatory, or any time of purgation. Purgatory is described in "Christ Among Us," (second revised edition, c.1975, a Roman Catholic publication, pages 418-419) as follows:*

"Purgatory is the painful state or experience of encountering God after death . . . In this state of purgation we must make up for our sins by growing in love. While Christ has made up for our sins, we yet have

the need of doing something about them ourselves, as when we offend anyone we love. We experience this painful purgation because we have not loved enough on earth. This is only reasonable. Most people realize that they have not made up for all their sins, that they still are clinging to some faults, and therefore could not expect to be perfectly happy immediately after death with the all-perfect God. ("But nothing unclean shall enter . . ." Revelation 21:27). But on the other hand, they know that they are not evil enough to be damned forever. It is only logical, then to believe in this state of purgation."

If Christ has "made up for our sins," then we do not have to. If we still have to, then Christ's sacrifice was not sufficient. No one is holy enough to enter the presence of God, but Christ's sacrifice has made us acceptable (Ephesians 1:6). It takes only one sin to be less than perfect and thus worthy of damnation (Romans 3:23). Since all have sinned, and fallen short of the glory of God, all are damned, no matter how good or loving they are (Romans 6:23). The only means by which anyone can enter Heaven is the all-sufficient sacrifice of Christ. If that sacrifice is not sufficient, no one will be saved.

The doctrine of purgatory is said to be based on logic. If that logic is based on the unbiblical belief that the sacrificial death of Christ was not sufficient to "make up for our sins" without our help, then the logic may be valid, but the doctrine is not sound.

The doctrine of purgatory is not only unbiblical, it opposes the gospel of salvation by grace through faith alone (Ephesians 2:8-9).

*It is true that the Universal Church, made up of all born-again believers in Jesus Christ, has remained faithful to the doctrines of the faith as taught by the Apostles. The exclusive claim that the Roman Catholic Church is the **only** church that believes the doctrines that were taught by the apostles is unfounded.*

Pillar of Fire, Pillar of Truth

Man's ingenuity cannot account for this. The Church has remained one, holy, catholic, and apostolic — not through man's effort, but because God preserves the Church he established (Matthew 16:18, 28:20). He guided the Israelites on their escape from Egypt by giving them a pillar of fire to light their way across the dark wilderness (Exodus 13:21). Today he guides us through his Catholic Church.

The Bible, sacred Tradition, and the writings of the earliest Christians testify that the Church teaches with Jesus' authority. In this age of countless

competing religions, each clamoring for attention, one voice rises above the din: the Catholic Church, which the Bible calls “the pillar and foundation of truth” (1 Timothy 3:15).

Concerning the citation of 1 Timothy 3:15: The Israelites followed the pillar of fire and smoke in the wilderness. These were only symbols that human eyes could see. The guidance was from the Lord Himself. Just as it would have been idolatry for the Israelites to venerate the pillar of fire and smoke, so it is for Christians to venerate the Church. The Church is subject to the Lord. But it is God’s Word that is given a place equal to or above God’s name (Psalm 138:2).

*Again the question of Bible vs. tradition. Tradition and the historic teachings of the true Church (not speaking specifically of the Roman Catholic Church) are helpful in correctly understanding the Bible. However, tradition must always be subject to the Bible, not the other way around. The one voice that is above all others is the voice of God. 2 Timothy 2:16-17 says “**scripture is inspired and profitable . . .**” The Bible gives no such position of authority to tradition. Tradition, like the “**grass that withers and the flower that fades,**” changes. There have been countless changes in the traditions of both the Universal Church and the Roman Catholic Church over the centuries. Yet, the “Word of God stands forever” (Isaiah 40:8).*

Jesus assured the apostles and their successors, the popes and the bishops, “He who listened to you listens to me, and he who rejects you rejects me” (Luke 10:16). Jesus promised to guide his Church into all truth (John 16:12-13). He keeps his promises. We can have complete confidence that his Church teaches the truth and nothing but the truth.

The words in Luke 10:16 are directed to the apostles. It says nothing of their “successors.” The apostle’s words concerning the person and work of Jesus Christ are found in the New Testament. Rejection of these words is a rejection of the Lord. Jesus’ promise in John 16 is not given to the church as an institution, but rather to His disciples. He will guide His disciples into all truth, whatever Christian church they belong to.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE CHURCH

The fourth section outlines Roman Catholic hierarchy.

Jesus chose the apostles to be the leaders of the Church. He gave them authority to teach and to govern, not as dictators but as loving pastors and fathers. That is why Catholics call priests “father.” We follow Paul’s

example: “I became your father in Jesus Christ though the gospel” (1 Corinthians 4:15).

Paul was a spiritual father to the Corinthians because he led them to the faith. He refers to himself as a father to others as well. But he does not tell anyone to call him “father.” Nowhere in the Bible does anyone refer to another as “father.” Jesus specifically taught that we are not to call anyone father except God (Matthew 23:9). This is a case where Roman Catholic Tradition contradicts the clear teaching of Christ found in scripture.

The apostles, fulfilling Jesus’ will, ordained bishops, priests, and deacons and handed on their apostolic ministry to them — the fullest degree of ordination to the bishops, lesser degrees to the priests and deacons.

The New Testament does not mention any Christian priesthood other than (1) the unique High Priesthood of Christ and (2) the priesthood of all believers (1 Peter 2:5). The Apostles were not priests, nor did they ordain any priests. The primitive church had no priests. The priesthood in the Roman Catholic Church came about when the Imperial Roman Catholic Church began late in the fourth century and beyond.

The Pope and Bishops

Jesus gave Peter special authority among the apostles (John 21:15-17) and signified this by changing his name from Simon to Peter, which means “rock” (John 1:42). He said Peter was to be the rock on which he would build his Church (Matthew 16:18).

The rock upon which the Church is built is the confession of faith that Peter uttered concerning Christ. He was not even the first to do so. John the Baptist in John 1:34; Nathanael in John 1:49; Peter’s brother Andrew in John 1:41-42 all did so before Peter.

In Aramaic, the language Jesus spoke, Simon’s new name was Kappa (which means a massive rock). Later this name was translated into Greek as Petro’s (John 1:42) and into English as Peter. Christ gave Peter alone the “keys of the kingdom” (Matthew 16:19) and promised that Peter’s decisions would be binding in heaven. He also gave similar power to other apostles (Matthew 18:18), but only Peter was given the keys, which symbolized his authority to rule the Church on earth in Jesus’ absence.

Peter was not given the keys to the kingdom. The Church, made up of all born-again believers, was given the keys. There is no need for any ruler over the Church in Christ’s “absence” since He is not absent. He is here ruling His Church at all times (Matthew 28:20, John 14:16-19).

Christ, the Good Shepherd, called Peter to be the chief shepherd of his Church (John 21:15-17). He gave Peter the task of strengthening the other apostles in their faith, ensuring that they taught only what was true (Luke 22:31-32). Peter led the Church in proclaiming the gospel and making decisions (Acts 2:1-41, 15:7-12).

We do not want take anything away from Peter's importance, but neither should we add to it.

Peter was not exempt from error. He had to be corrected by Paul (Galatians 2:11-14). All Christians are responsible to keep each other in line with the truth. Right after his declaration concerning Christ in Matthew 16:23, Jesus rebuked Peter saying he was speaking as an instrument of Satan. That Jesus would say this to Peter reminds us not place anyone but Christ Himself on a pedestal.

Peter did preach the sermon at Pentecost, and a great one it was. But in Acts 15, Peter was a witness testifying about the inclusion of Gentiles in the Church, (Acts 15:7-11) as were Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15:12). James was the one who made the final pronouncement (Acts 15:13-21).

This is not written out of disrespect to Peter. We do not want to take anything away from Peter's importance, but neither should we add to it when it is not founded in the biblical record.

Early Christian writings tell us that Peter's successors, the bishops of Rome (who from the earliest times have been called by the affectionate title of "pope" which means "papa"), continued to exercise Peter's ministry in the Church. The pope is the successor to Peter as bishop of Rome. The world's other bishops are successors to the apostles in general.

*The Bishop of Rome was not recognized as supreme ruler of the Church until the Council of Constantinople in 381. It was not until **after** this time that the succession from Peter was established. "The council of Chalcedon in 451 stated their acceptance of the view of the current pope Leo: 'Peter has spoken through Leo.'" ("Christ Among Us," second revised edition, c.1975, a Roman Catholic publication, page 142)*

The full quotation is as follows: "What Leo believes we all believe; anathema on anyone who believes anything else. Peter has spoken by the mouth of Leo." (Encyclopedia Americana, volume 21, "Papacy," p. 252)

The doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church relative to the authority of the pope, was not officially promulgated by the Council of the Vatican until 1870.

The Roman Catholic papacy was not established by the apostles, but came into being in the 5th century when the primitive church became the Imperial Roman Catholic Church and has developed over time.

The teaching authority of the pope and the bishops is called the magisterium (from the Latin for “teacher”). The magisterium, guided and protected from error by the Holy Spirit, gives us certainty in matters of doctrine. The magisterium is infallible when it teaches officially because Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit to guide the apostles and their successors into “all truth” (John 16:13).

No human, from Peter to modern popes, is exempt from error. All are prone to it (Romans 3:23). Again, Paul had to publicly correct Peter in Galatians 2. Jesus rebuked Peter for speaking as an instrument of Satan in Matthew 16:23. The promise to guide disciples into all truth (not just apostles and their alleged successors) is not a guarantee of freedom from any error.

HOW GOD SPEAKS TO US

The fifth section argues that scripture and tradition are equally inspired and infallible.

God speaks to his Church through the Bible and through sacred Tradition. To make sure we understand him, he guides the magisterium so it always interprets the Bible and Tradition accurately. Like the three legs on a stool, the Bible, Tradition, and the magisterium are all necessary for the stability of the Church and to guarantee sound doctrine.

The three-legged stool has no biblical basis for belief. There is no magisterium. Traditions are subject to the Bible, not the other way around. This leaves the Bible as the sole authority in all matters of faith and practice.

Again let it be said, tradition does have an important role, but if tradition deviates from scripture, tradition is to be discarded, not scripture re-interpreted.

Sacred Tradition

Sacred Tradition should not be confused with mere traditions of men, which are more commonly called customs or disciplines. Jesus sometimes condemned customs or disciplines, but only if they were contrary to God’s commands. He never condemned sacred Tradition, and he didn’t even condemn all man-made tradition.

True. Refer to previous comment.

Sacred Tradition and the Bible are not different or competing revelations. They are two ways the Church hands on the gospel. Apostolic teachings such as the Trinity, infant baptism, the inerrancy of the Bible, purgatory, and Mary's perpetual virginity have been most clearly taught through Tradition, although they are also implicitly present in (and not contrary to) the Bible. The Bible itself tells us to hold fast to Tradition whether it comes to us in written or oral form (2 Thessalonians 2:15, 1 Corinthians 11:2).

Of the examples listed, two are contrary to the teachings of the Bible:

Purgatory. This is a place where one can finish being purified, making one righteous enough to enter the presence of God. This is contrary to the teachings of the Bible. The Bible says that we are made righteous by the obedience of Christ (Romans 5:19). That has already happened. There is no need for further work in purgatory. 2 Corinthians 5:8 says that for the believer, to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. This gives no indication about a intermediate time or place. Hebrews 9:27 says death, and then judgment. Again, there is no allowance for an intermediate time or place. This doctrine challenges the sufficiency of Christ to present His Bride spotless (Ephesians 5:25-27).

The perpetual virginity of Mary. Mary is to be highly respected as the mother of our Lord Jesus Christ. Care must be taken not to take anything away from her position of honor. However, Jesus was known as the son of Mary and Joseph and the brother of several siblings. (Mark 6:3; Acts 1:14) Therefore, Mary was not a virgin for the rest of her life (Matthew 1:25).¹

While some Roman Catholics may see this as a blasphemous statement, it takes nothing away from the goodness and purity of Mary or the essential doctrine of the virgin birth of Jesus.

These are but two examples of extra-biblical doctrines held by the Roman Catholic Church. The doctrine of the perpetual virginity of Mary diverts people's attention away from Jesus toward Mary. The doctrine of purgatory teaches that

¹ *Biblical Protestants do not belittle Mary's role as the human mother of the Man Jesus Christ. We recognize her as the most blessed woman ever to have lived. However, since the last passing mention of Mary in the New Testament is in Acts 1:14, and since she is never mentioned again in the New Testament, we have to ask, if she held a position as elevated as the one given her by the Roman Catholic church wouldn't there be some biblical instruction about it? Mary must not be venerated in any way.*

something after death may be necessary for one to enter Heaven. This says the blood of Christ is not sufficient. This is blasphemy.

While 2 Thessalonians 2:15 and 1 Corinthians 11:2 do bid us to hold fast to the traditions — these speak of the traditions as taught directly by the apostles. Contrariwise, we are warned by Paul in Galatians 1:6-9 that if anyone, including an angel, teaches anything other than the gospel as taught by the apostles, he is to be accursed. The doctrine of purgatory is one small part of a doctrinal scheme that undermines the sufficiency of Christ and makes salvation a matter of works.

Any traditions that are not found in the Bible are suspect, especially when they challenge what the Bible clearly teaches.

Sacred Tradition should not be confused with customs and disciplines, such as the rosary, priestly celibacy, and not eating meat on Fridays in Lent. These are good and helpful things, but they are not doctrines. Sacred Tradition preserves doctrines first taught orally by Jesus to the apostles and later passed down to us through the apostles' successors, the bishops.

Scripture

Scripture, by which we mean the Old and New Testaments, was inspired by God (2 Timothy 3:16). The Holy Spirit guided the biblical authors to write what he wanted them to write. Since God is the principal author of the Bible, and since God is truth and cannot teach anything untrue, the Bible is free from all error in everything it asserts to be true. The Church is the custodian of the Bible and must faithfully and accurately proclaim its message, a task which God has empowered it to do.

While this paragraph is essentially true, depending on how one reads it, the last statement subtly places the Bible in subjection to the Roman Catholic Church. The Church is to be in subjection to the Bible, not the Bible to any church.

Keep in mind that the Church came before the New Testament, not the New Testament before the Church. Divinely inspired members of the Church wrote the books of the New Testament, just as inspired writers had written the Old Testament, and the Church is guided by the Holy Spirit to guard and interpret the entire Bible, both Old and New Testaments. Such an official interpreter is absolutely necessary. (We all know what the Constitution says, but we still need a Supreme Court to interpret what it *means*.)

It is true that the Church came before the New Testament was written, but the Church (including the Roman Catholic Church) has changed over the centuries. The Bible has not.

The example of the US Supreme Court is ironically accurate. In our day, the Constitution is being reinterpreted by the courts. This is what the Roman Catholic Church has done with the Bible over the centuries.

Some Christians claim, “The Bible is all I need,” but this notion is not taught in the Bible itself. In fact, the Bible teaches the contrary (2 Peter 1:20-21, 3:15-16). The “Bible alone” theory was not believed by anyone in the early Church. It is new, having arisen only since the Protestant Reformation. The theory is a “tradition of men” that nullifies the Word of God, distorts the true role of the Bible, and undermines the authority of the Church Jesus established (Mark 7:1-8).

*The verses in 2 Peter about the Bible do not say that the Bible is incomplete without extra-biblical interpretation. When Peter wrote, “**No prophecy of scripture is of private interpretation,**” he meant, as a careful reading of the text demonstrates, no one wrote the Bible based on his own whims, but was moved by the Holy Spirit. It is also true that scripture must not be lifted out of, and interpreted apart from, the context of the whole Bible. The Bible is the best help in interpreting the Bible.*

The warning in 2 Peter 3:15-16 that the Bible can easily be misinterpreted is a sobering one. But it doesn’t intimate that we need anything in addition to the Bible to correctly interpret the Bible. It simply warns us to get it right.

*The closing statement in this paragraph is sensational. It is also illogical. How can an emphasis on the Bible, which is the oldest, simplest, and least corruptible truth, distort the whole faith? Citing Jesus’ words of Mark 7: 1-8 is a tactical error if one is seeking to make the point that the Bible is not enough. Jesus was not finding fault with those who **stuck with the Law**. He was talking to the religious leaders who had **added to the Law**. He was saying the error is in **adding to the law, not holding fast to the law**. Those who place the teachings of any church on a par with the Bible are guilty of the very error Jesus was condemning so strongly. Better not to refer to Mark 7:1-8 than to invert its meaning.*

Although popular with many “Bible Christian” churches, the “Bible alone” theory simply does not work. Historical experience disproves it. Each year, we see further splintering among “Bible believing” religions. Today there are thousands of competing denominations, each insisting its interpretation of the Bible is the correct one. The resulting divisions have caused untold confusion among millions of sincere but misled Christians.

It is true that there are thousands of churches, many of whom claim to have “the truth.” Some are indeed wrong. But many who differ on lesser issues do hold the truth regarding the essentials of the Christian faith. The Body of Christ is big enough to allow for differences of opinion on lesser issues. Refer again to Romans 14:1-20. Paul is saying that we should not make mountains out of theological molehills. Eating meat or not is immaterial. Most of the differences between Christian churches are along these lines.

In Mark 9:40 Jesus warned against condemning those who do things differently than we do, as long as they are orthodox on the essentials. Various local churches in the NT were different and had different challenges, yet they were all one Church in Christ.

Just open up the Yellow Pages of your telephone book and see how many different denominations are listed, each claiming to go by the “Bible alone,” but no two of them agree on exactly what the Bible *means*. One thing we know for sure: The Holy Spirit cannot be the author of this confusion. God cannot lead people to contradictory beliefs because his truth is *one*. The conclusion? The “Bible alone” theory must be false.

The fact that there are many different denominations within the Universal Church does not mean they are all wrong. If a church is correct about the essentials of the gospel, there is room for differences on the lesser issues. If we are going to denounce a church as “wrong” because there are different views on lesser issues, we would have to discard the Roman Catholic Church as well. After all, there are thousands of differing opinions and beliefs within the Roman Church itself.

It is poor logic and a bit arrogant to reach the “conclusion” that the Roman Catholic church is the only church that is right, simply because there are so many different Protestant churches.

HOW GOD DISTRIBUTES HIS GIFTS

In this sixth section the seven sacraments of the Roman Catholic Church are discussed. Two of them are sacramental. Some of them are biblical, but not sacramental. Others are neither sacramental nor biblical.

Jesus promised he would not leave us orphans (John 14:18) but would send the Holy Spirit to guide and protect us. He gave the sacraments to heal, feed, and strengthen us. The seven sacraments — baptism, the Eucharist, penance (also called reconciliation or confession), confirmation, holy orders,

matrimony, and the anointing of the sick — are not just symbols. They are signs which actually convey God’s grace and love.

The only reason the Roman Church can justify the seven sacraments is that it bases doctrine on extra-biblical tradition.

Do the sacraments actually convey God’s grace? The Roman Catholic Church says, “yes”. The Apostle Paul says, “salvation is by grace alone, received through faith alone (Ephesians 2:8-9). Performing sacraments as a means of receiving grace or completing one’s salvation is a system of works. We acknowledge that the Roman Catholic Church does not teach salvation solely by works, but by insisting that salvation is by faith in Christ plus human works, it says Christ is insufficient without our efforts.

The sacraments were foreshadowed in the Old Testament by things that did not actually convey grace but merely symbolized it (circumcision, for example, prefigured baptism, and the Passover meal prefigured the Eucharist). When Christ came, he did not do away with symbols of God’s grace. He supernaturalized [sic] them, energizing them with grace. He made them more than symbols.

Where are the Old Testament foreshadows of the other five Roman Catholic sacraments? Since they do not exist in the Old Testament, nor are they taught as sacraments in the New Testament, they are not sacramental.

God constantly uses material things to show his love and power. After all, matter is not evil. When he created the physical universe, everything God created was “very good” (Genesis 1:31). He takes such delight in matter that he even dignified it through his own Incarnation (John 1:14).

During his earthly ministry Jesus healed, fed, and strengthened people through humble elements such as mud, water, bread, oil, and wine. He could have performed his miracles directly, but he preferred to use material things to bestow his grace.

In his first public miracle Jesus turned water into wine, at the request of his mother, Mary (John 2:1-11). He healed a blind man by rubbing mud on his eyes (John 9:1-7). He multiplied a few loaves and fish into a meal for thousands (John 6:5-13). He changed bread and wine into his own body and blood (Matthew 26:26-28). Through the sacrament he continues to heal, feed, and strengthen us.

Baptism

Baptism is the gateway into the Church. Because of original sin, we are born without grace in our souls, so there is no way for us to have fellowship with God. Jesus became man to bring us into union with his Father. He

said no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is first born of “water and Spirit” (John 3:5) — this refers to baptism.

Through baptism we are born again, but this time on a spiritual level instead of a physical level. We are washed in the bath of rebirth (Titus 3:5). We are baptized into Christ’s death and therefore share in his Resurrection (Romans 6:3-7). Baptism cleanses us of sin and brings the Holy Spirit and his grace into our souls (Acts 2:38, 22:16; 1 Peter 3:21).

Baptism is a New Testament sacrament. However, it does not save. No ritual can confer salvation or regeneration (Romans 4:9-12). Baptism is a means by which we testify we are saved by faith in Christ.

Baptismal regeneration makes a ritual necessary for salvation. This is clearly denounced by Paul in Romans 4:9-12.

Does John 3:5 teach that no one can enter the kingdom of God except through water baptism? Let’s consider the fact that the Roman Catholic Church makes exceptions to this alleged “rule” that baptism is necessary for entrance into the kingdom of God. According to Rome,

“There are other ways of being united to God besides baptism. . . Any adult who believes in God and basically desires to do his will, and who has sorrow for his sins out of love for God, has God’s grace-presence by this sincere desire. His sins would be forgiven. This is called ‘baptism of desire.’ . . . Men can come to God in this way through other, non-Christian religions.” (“Christ Among Us,” second revised edition, ©1975, (a Roman Catholic publication), pages 199-200)

Here the Roman Catholic Church gives provision for a person to enter the kingdom of God without being baptized. Provision for salvation is made for those who are not even Christian. If Jesus taught that baptism is essential for salvation, the Roman Catholic Church has made provision to disobey the teaching of Christ.

The question of whether Jesus was referring to baptism in John 3:5 is not easily answered. There are differing opinions among Protestants as well. How do we resolve the questions on passages that are less clear? By looking to those that are more clear. If Jesus was referring to baptism in John 3:5, then Paul contradicted the Lord’s teaching as well when he taught that no ritual could confer salvation (Romans 4:9-12; Ephesians 2:8-9).

The washing in Titus 3:5 is spiritual. It says nothing about water baptism.

Romans 6 is not referring to water baptism, but baptism into the body of Christ which happens when one is regenerated. One is not regenerated because of a ritual any more than a Jewish person was made righteous by circumcision.

Acts 2:38 records Peter telling those who have already heard and believed the message of the gospel to be baptized. Belief in the heart comes before the requirement of the sacrament.

In Acts 22 Paul is recounting his conversion experience. He believed, in verse 8, calling Jesus Lord. He had already begun to give evidence of his conversion by obeying Christ's command in v. 10 and following. THEN, he was directed to be baptized.

In 1 Peter 3:21, Peter is arguing that baptism does not literally wash our sins away.

I do not wish to make light of baptism. It is an important command of Christ that all believers are to obey. However, if it causes regeneration, a ritual is able to do what the New Testament says only the Spirit of God can do (John 1:12-13).

The Eucharist

Once we become members of Christ's family, he does not let us go hungry, but feeds us with his own body and blood through the Eucharist. In the Old Testament, as they prepared for their journey in the wilderness, God commanded his people to sacrifice a lamb and sprinkle its blood on their doorposts, so the Angel of Death would pass by their homes. Then they ate the lamb to seal their covenant with God.

This lamb prefigured Jesus. He is the real "Lamb of God," who takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29). Through Jesus we enter into a New Covenant with God, who protects us from eternal death. God's Old Testament people ate the Passover lamb. Now we must eat the Lamb that is the Eucharist. Jesus said, "Unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood you have no life within you" (John 6:53). At the Last Supper he took bread and wine and said, "Take and eat. This is my body... This is my blood which will be shed for you" (Mark 14:22-24). In this way Jesus instituted the sacrament of the Eucharist, the sacrificial meal Catholics consume at each Mass.

*The Eucharist, or the Lord's Supper is a sacramental and memorial supper, but it is not **sacrificial**. We celebrate it in obedience to Christ's command in remembrance of Christ and His sacrifice that has already been offered and received by God as atonement for the sins of God's people.*

The following is a quotation from the Eucharistic Prayer I (The Roman Canon, published by the Liturgical Press, 1971):

“Through Him [Christ] we ask you to accept and bless these gifts we offer you in sacrifice . . . Almighty God, we pray that your angel may take this sacrifice to your altar in heaven.” (emphasis added.)

*Since Christ’s sacrifice was offered “**once for all [never to be repeated] by Christ**” (Hebrews 9:26-28), why is there a sacrifice offered by Roman Catholics in every mass? Since Christ’s sacrifice has already been accepted by God, why do Roman Catholics ask God to accept their sacrifice in every mass? Was Jesus’ sacrifice not sufficient?*

The Catholic Church teaches that the sacrifice of Christ on the cross occurred “once for all”; it cannot be repeated (Hebrews 9:26-28). Christ does not “die again” during Mass, but the very same sacrifice that occurred on Calvary is made present on the altar. That’s why the Mass is not “another” sacrifice, but a participation in the same, once-for-all sacrifice of Christ on the cross.

Although the Roman Catholic Church acknowledges the finality of Christ’s sacrifice, and God’s acceptance of it, the questions posed in the previous comments are yet unanswered.

Paul reminds us that the bread and the wine really become, by a miracle of God’s grace, the body and blood of Jesus: “Anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself” (1 Corinthians 11:27-29). After the consecration of the bread and wine, no bread or wine remains on the altar. Only Jesus himself, under the appearance of bread and wine, remains.

*The issue of Christ’s literal physical presence in the elements is not agreed upon, but it doesn’t have to be. As stated earlier in the section entitled, “How God Distributes His Gifts”, Jesus “**supernaturalized**” the sacraments. It is not necessary therefore to insist on the literal physical presence of Christ in the Supper. In addition, how can a literal physical body be omnipresent everywhere a Mass is being celebrated all over the world at the same time?*

Penance

The Eucharist gives us spiritual strength for the long journey toward the heavenly promised land. But sometimes on that journey we stumble and fall into sin. God is always ready to lift us up and restore us to fellowship with him. He does this through the sacrament of penance.

Jesus gave his apostles power and authority to reconcile us to the Father. They received Jesus’ own power to forgive sins when he breathed on them

and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained” (John 20:22-23).

Paul notes that “all this is from God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ and given us the ministry of reconciliation... So, we are ambassadors for Christ, as if God were appealing through us” (2 Corinthians 5:18-20). Through confession to a priest, God’s minister, we have our sins forgiven, and we receive grace to help us resist future temptations.

Penance. The word “repent,” or “repentance” was translated “penance” in the Latin Vulgate translation of the Bible. This change was subtle. The next change came about as “penance” came to be understood as “doing penance.” This change is more serious since “repentance” means confession and turning from sin, while “doing penance” involves performing certain acts (as prescribed by the Roman Catholic Church) to earn forgiveness. There is nothing a person can do to make himself righteous. No amount of penance will atone for a man’s sin. Adding anything to the all-sufficient blood of Christ is blasphemy. (Galatians 2:16)

Only Christ can reconcile anyone to the Father. That reconciliation is based on the Blood of Christ, applied by faith, and validated by a changed life of obedience. Reconciliation does not take place because we do any acts of righteousness. The authority to forgive sins given by Jesus in John 20:20-23 is to all who proclaim the gospel of forgiveness through faith in Christ. All believers have the authority to proclaim a person forgiven or not forgiven based on that person’s acceptance of the gospel.

We are ministers of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18-20) as we proclaim the gospel and call people to Christ.

Confirmation

God strengthens our souls in another way, through the sacrament of confirmation. Even though Jesus’ disciples received grace before his Resurrection, on Pentecost the Holy Spirit came to strengthen them with new graces for the difficult work ahead.

They went out and preached the gospel fearlessly and carried out the mission Christ had given them. Later, they laid hands on others to strengthen them as well (Acts 8:14-17, 9:17). Through confirmation you too are strengthened to meet the spiritual challenges in your life.

Confirmation. The need for constant growth in the faith is affirmed. A rite or sacrament of confirmation is nowhere to be found in scripture. There is nothing inherently wrong with the concept of coming into an adult faith, but the ritual of confirmation is not Biblical.

Matrimony

Most people are called to the married life. Through the sacrament of matrimony God gives special graces to help married couples with life's difficulties, especially to help them raise their children as loving followers of Christ.

Marriage involves three parties: the bride, the groom, and God. When two Christians receive the sacrament of matrimony, God is with them, witnessing and blessing their marriage covenant. A sacramental marriage is permanent; only death can break it. This holy union is a living symbol of the relationship between Christ and the Church (Ephesians 5:21-33).

Matrimony. Here again, marriage is biblical, but it is not a means of receiving grace. The comments here about marriage are essentially correct, except that scripture does not present marriage as a grace-imparting sacrament.

Holy Orders

Others are called to share specially in Christ's priesthood. In the Old Covenant, even though Israel was a kingdom of priests (Exodus 19:6), the Lord called certain men to a special priestly ministry (Exodus 19:22). In the New Covenant, even though Christians are a kingdom of priests (1 Peter 2:9), Jesus calls certain men to a special priestly ministry (Romans 15:15-16).

This sacrament is called holy orders. Through it priests are ordained and empowered to serve the Church (2 Timothy 1:6-7) as pastors, teachers, and spiritual fathers who heal, feed, and strengthen God's people—especially through preaching and the administration of the sacraments.

Holy Orders. There are gifts of leadership within the body, but these persons have received no more saving grace than the laity. We affirm the fact that there are people (elders and deacons) specially gifted to minister to and build up the Body of Christ. There is, however, no mention in scripture of elders or deacons, or any other gifted leaders in the church being a part of a special order of priests. The only special priesthood mentioned in the New Testament is the unique High Priesthood of Jesus Christ (Hebrews 4).

While Paul had the special gift of Apostle, Romans 15:15-16 says nothing about a priesthood of any sort.

Anointing of the Sick

Priests care for us when we are physically ill. They do this through the sacrament known as the anointing of the sick. The Bible instructs us, "Is anyone among you suffering?" he should pray.... "Is any one among you sick?" He should summon the presbyters [priests] of the Church, and they

should pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord, and the prayer of faith will save the sick person, and the Lord will raise him up. If he has committed any sins, he will be forgiven” (James 5:14-15). Anointing of the sick not only helps us endure illness, but it cleanses our souls and helps us prepare to meet God.

Anointing the sick. The New Testament does call upon the elders of the church to pray for the sick. (James 5:14-15) No disagreement here. It should be noted, however, that this anointing does not make a person ready for Heaven if he hasn't received Christ.

It is important to know that the seven sacraments were not defined and made the official means of grace until the Fourth Lateran Council, presided over by Pope Innocent III. This did not take place until 1215. If these are the necessary means through which salvation is to be obtained, and by which the Christian life is to be lived, we can only wonder why it wasn't until this late date that they were officially defined.

TALKING WITH GOD AND HIS SAINTS

The seventh section deals with the Roman Catholic doctrine of praying to deceased saints and asking them to assist us and pray for us. This is never mentioned in the New Testament and is based solely upon Roman Catholic tradition.

One of the most important activities for a Catholic is prayer. Without it there can be no true spiritual life. Through personal prayer and the communal prayer of the Church, especially the Mass, we worship and praise God, we express sorrow for our sins, and we intercede on behalf of others (1 Timothy 2:14). Through prayer we grow in our relationship with Christ and with other members of God's family.

This family includes all members of the Church, whether on earth, in heaven, or in purgatory. Since Jesus has only one body, and since death has no power to separate us from Christ (Romans 8:38), Christians who are in heaven or who, before entering heaven, are being purified in purgatory by God's love (1 Corinthians 3:12-15) are still part of the Body of Christ.

Nowhere in the New Testament are people instructed to pray to the dead or to ask the dead for prayer. There are no examples of this either. Rather the Old Testament forbids it under penalty of death (Deut. 18:11-12).

In addition the Bible warns us not to "believe every spirit" (1 John 4:1). Any and every so-called message must agree completely with the Bible or else it must be deemed as false.

Many of the messages received from so-called are absolutely contrary to the teaching of scripture.²

Roman Catholics are taught that Jesus was speaking of the Lord's Supper and of eating and drinking His literal flesh and blood in John 6. John 6:63 makes it clear that Jesus was speaking "spiritually" and that the "flesh profits nothing."

This paragraph speaks of the extra-biblical idea of purgatory. Purgatory has been addressed in two previous sections.

1 Corinthians 3:12-15 speaks about our works being either purified or burned up in the fire of God's judgment. It says nothing about making people fit for Heaven since our fitness for Heaven is not based on our works, but on the righteousness and work of Christ alone.

Jesus said the second greatest commandment is to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:39). Those in heaven love us more intensely than they ever could have loved us while on earth. They pray for us constantly (Revelation 5:8), and their prayers are powerful (James 5:16).

Revelation 5:8 does not say that people in Heaven are praying for people on earth. It says they are worshipping the Lord in the presence of the prayers of the saints.

James 5:16 is not referring to the prayers offered by those already in Heaven, but by people living on earth.

Our prayers to the saints in heaven, asking for their prayers for us, and their intercession with the Father do not undermine Christ's role as sole mediator (1 Timothy 2:5). In asking saints in heaven to pray for us we follow Paul's instructions: "I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone," for "this is good and pleasing to God our Savior" (1 Timothy 2:1-4).

Jesus is the only mediator between God and men (1 Timothy 2:5). Praying to departed saints, asking them to pray for us is an acknowledgment that they too, are mediators for us. Since Jesus is the only mediator between God and men, there is no need to pray to departed saints asking to pray for us. To do so is to deny that Jesus is the only mediator.

Praying to departed saints, asking them to pray for us is, according to the Pillars document, likened to asking any living Christian to pray for us. It is not the same however

² The fifteen promises supposedly from Mary to those who pray the rosary are all unbiblical and false—especially number five which promises eternal life to those who pray the rosary. John 3:16 tells of a different way to receive eternal life: believing in Jesus.

since we do not **pray** to living Christians asking them to pray for us.

If the prayers to departed saints are heard and understood by those saints, they would have to be omnipresent and omniscient (everywhere-present and all knowing). Else, how could they hear and act on the prayers of thousands of living people from all over the world at the same time?

All members of the Body of Christ are called to help one another through prayer. Mary's prayers are especially effective on our behalf because of her relationship with her Son (John 2:1-11). God gave Mary a special role. He saved her from all sin (Luke 1:47), made her uniquely blessed among all women (Luke 1:42), and made her a model for all Christians (Luke 1:48). At the end of her life he took her, body and soul, into heaven — an image of our own resurrection at the end of the world (Revelation 12:1-2).

We never want to take anything away from Mary's place of honor, but in the passage cited, Jesus gently rebuked Mary for telling him what to do, after which she merely told the people to do what Jesus said (John 2:5). We are not directed in scripture to pray to Mary or any other departed saint. Each of us must come to Christ on our own, not based on the lives or prayers of departed saints.

The doctrine of the Assumption of Mary is explained in "Christ Among Us," (second revised edition, c.1975, a Roman Catholic publication, pages 368-369.) It is there stated that the doctrine was not established until the 6th and 7th century, and not officially sanctioned by the Roman Catholic Church until 1950. While this doctrine is not of particular importance in the discussion of Roman Catholic and Protestant differences, it further exemplifies the Protestant charge that the Roman Catholic Church bases doctrine on extra-biblical tradition.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF LIFE?

This section is the most important of all. In this section the Roman Catholic plan of salvation is presented.

Old catechisms asked, "Why did God make you?" The answer: "God made me to know him, to love him, and to serve him in this world and to be happy with him forever in the next." Here, in just 26 words, is the whole reason for our existence. Jesus answered the question even more briefly: "I came so that [you] might have life and have it more abundantly" (John 10:10).

God's plan for you is simple. Your loving Father wants to give you all good things — especially eternal life. Jesus died on the cross to save us all

from sin and the eternal separation from God that sin causes. When he saves us, he makes us part of his Body, which is the Church (1 Corinthians 12:27-30). We thus become united with him and with Christians everywhere (on earth, in heaven, in purgatory).

What You Must Do to Be Saved

Best of all, the promise of eternal life is a gift, freely offered to us by God — it is not something we need to “earn.” Jesus is the mediator who bridged the gap of sin that separates us from God (1 Timothy 2:5); he bridged it by dying for us. He has chosen to make us partners in the plan of salvation (1 Corinthians 3:9).

*The first two sentences are correct. The third sentence is not correct. We are **partakers** of the gospel, and we are **partners** in the **proclamation** of the gospel, but we are not **partners** in our own salvation as though we are to add to, or complete, what Christ has done. If it were so, salvation is not by grace through faith, but of works (Ephesians 2:8-9).*

The Catholic Church teaches what the apostles taught and what the Bible teaches: We are saved by grace alone, but not by faith alone (which is what “Bible Christians” teach; see James 2:24). When we first come to God and are justified (that is, enter a right relationship with God), nothing preceding justification, whether faith or good works, earns grace. But then God plants his love in our hearts, and we must live out our faith by doing acts of love (Galatians 6:2).

Even though only God’s grace enables us to love others, these acts of love please him, and he promises to reward them with eternal life (Romans 2:6-7, Galatians 6:6-10). Thus good works are meritorious. When we first come to God in faith, we have nothing in our hands to offer him. Then he gives us grace to obey his commandments in love, and he rewards us with salvation when we offer these acts of love back to him (Matthew 25:34-40).

The term “Bible Christians” presumably is meant to refer to Protestants. I would hope that all Christians are “Bible Christians.” There is no other kind.

*Protestants do not teach that works are unimportant in the life of a Christian. Those who are saved, are saved by faith alone, but the faith that saves is not alone. Christians are commanded to live righteous lives filled with works of righteousness as a **result** of and in gratitude for salvation, not, as a means of **earning** salvation. Works prove the genuineness of saving faith. Ephesians 2:8-10 says:*

- 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God,
- 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast.

Saving faith has nothing whatsoever to do with works—but verse 10 continues:

10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

*We are not saved **by** works of righteousness, but we are saved **for** works of righteousness.*

Jesus said it is not enough to have faith in him; we also must obey his commandments. “Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ but do not do the things I command?” (Luke 6:46, Matthew 7:21-23, 19:16-21) We cannot “earn” our salvation through good works (Ephesians 2:8-9, Romans 9:16), but our faith in Christ puts us in a special grace-filled relationship with God so that our obedience and love, combined with our faith, will be rewarded with eternal life.

*This paragraph has a glaring contradiction in it. It says: “We cannot **earn** our salvation,” which is correct.*

*Then it says by faith we receive a “special grace filled relationship with God so that **our obedience and love, combined with our faith, will be rewarded with eternal life**” (emphasis mine). If we cannot earn our salvation how is it that we can be rewarded with eternal life based—even in part—by our obedience and love?*

*The glaring problem is that the document says “we do not **earn** salvation,” but then says we receive eternal life as a **reward** for our obedience and love. You cannot have it both ways. Either salvation **is** by grace alone, not based on what we do to earn or warrant it, or it is **not** by grace alone and it is based—even in part—on what we do to earn or warrant it.*

*If we must do anything to earn or be worthy of reward, it is not grace. No matter how small our part is, if we must add our obedience and love to God’s grace in order to be saved, salvation is not by God’s grace alone. It would not be a gift, it would be a payment. (Please read Romans 4:4.) It may be **overpayment** because it is more than our works truly deserve, but if we receive salvation based in any way on our efforts, love or obedience, salvation is not grace but works.*

Again let it be said, works of righteousness are not unimportant. They are important. Without them, there is no validation that we have saving faith (1 John 2:3-5).

Paul said, “God is the one who, for his good purpose, works in you both to desire and to work” (Philippians 2:13). John explained that “the way we may be sure that we know him is to keep his commandments. Whoever

says, 'I know him,' but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1 John 2:3-4, 3:19-24, 5:3-4).

Agreed, but the works of righteousness are a response to the grace of God, not a means of achieving it, or else salvation is not by grace.

Since no gift can be forced on the recipient — gifts always can be rejected — even after we become justified, we can throw away the gift of salvation. We throw it away through grave (mortal) sin (1 John 5:16-17). Paul tells us, "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). Read his letters and see how often Paul warned Christians against sin! He would not have felt compelled to do so if their sins could not exclude them from heaven.

The notion that sin can separate Christians from the love of God is soundly denounced by Jesus in John 10:28-29 and by Paul in Romans 8:28-39. God begins the work of grace and He finishes it. Those who seem to be Christian, but who then forsake the faith, never were Christians (1 John 2:19). This is very different than saying Christians can forfeit their salvation based on sin.

If sin can forfeit salvation, which sins can do so? Who determines which sins do so? Who is to say which sins are great enough to be beyond the sacrifice of Christ and God's forgiveness? Who dares to say Christ's sacrifice is not sufficient for some sins? Who dares to say God's forgiveness is limited by the magnitude of one's sins?

The reason for the warnings against sin can be found in the Roman Catholic Act of Contrition. The most compelling reason not to sin, and then to repent when we have sinned, is that our sin offends God — the Righteous One who has loved us so greatly. If sin can ultimately separate us from God's grace, none shall be saved.

There is no distinction between mortal sin and venial sins in the New Testament.

Paul reminded the Christians in Rome that God "will repay everyone according to his works: eternal life for those who seek glory, honor, and immortality through perseverance in good works, but wrath and fury to those who selfishly disobey the truth and obey wickedness" (Romans 2:7-8).

Who will be rewarded for his righteousness? Paul answers that question in Romans 3:10-12 (quoting Psalm 14 and 53). There is NO ONE! Those who are unrighteous will be judged based on their unrighteous deeds. Those who are saved will be saved based on the righteousness of Christ, since none of us has any righteousness of our own, whatsoever. Any righteousness a man may think he has that can commend him

to God serves only to alienate him further because it dares assume that sinful men could attain to the standards of God's righteousness (Galatians 5:1-7).

Sins are nothing but evil works. We can avoid sins by habitually performing good works. Every saint has known that the best way to keep free from sins is to embrace regular prayer, the sacraments (the Eucharist first of all), and charitable acts.

The righteous works of believers do not save. They merely demonstrate that a person has been born again and given a new set of affections (Titus 3:3-8).

Are You Guaranteed Heaven?

Some people promote an especially attractive idea: All true Christians, regardless of how they live, have an absolute assurance of salvation, once they accept Jesus into their hearts as “their personal Lord and Savior.” The problem is that this belief is contrary to the Bible and constant Christian teaching. Keep in mind what Paul told the Christians of his day: “If we have died with him [in baptism; see Romans 6:3-4] we shall also live with him; if we persevere we shall also reign with him” (2 Timothy 2:11-12). If we do not persevere, we shall not reign with him. In other words, Christians can forfeit heaven.

Anyone who says “believe in Jesus and then it is okay to live in sin wrong. A believer's lifestyle either validates or invalidates his claim to have believed in a saving manner.

If we gain Heaven by what we do, this paragraph is true. If, however, we do not gain Heaven by what we do, we cannot lose Heaven by what we do either. This is not to say that works are unimportant. They validate saving faith. But they neither earn, nor preserve salvation.

Who then is responsible to keep the saints saved? Since it is God who saves, it is God who preserves. He has promised to complete the work of salvation that He has begun (Romans 8:28-39). God has “sealed [us] with the Holy Spirit of promise who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession” (Ephesians 1:13-14).

Perseverance to the end is important. And apart from the grace of God, no one would persevere. So those who are saved persevere. Those who do not persevere never were saved (1 John 2:19).

The Bible makes it clear that Christians have a moral assurance of salvation (God will be true to his word and will grant salvation to those who have faith in Christ and are obedient to him [1 John 4:19-24]), but the Bible

does not teach that Christians have a guarantee of heaven. There can be no absolute assurance of salvation.

It is a weak Savior and system of faith that is unable to give assurance of salvation and makes no promises. The Christian gospel does both. (1 John 5:11-13; Ephesians 1:13-14; Romans 8:28-39)

Writing to Christians, Paul said, “See, then, the kindness and severity of God: severity toward those who fell, but God’s kindness to you, provided you remain in his kindness, otherwise you too will be cut off” (Romans 11:22-23; see also 1 Corinthians 15:1-2, Hebrews 10:26-29, 2 Peter 2:20-21).

Note that Paul includes an important condition: “provided you remain in his kindness.” He is saying that Christians can lose their salvation by throwing it away. He warns, “Whoever thinks he is standing secure should take care not to fall” (1 Corinthians 10:11-12).

It is true that God is severe with those who fall. But John makes it absolutely clear that those who departed never were a part of Christ or His Church (1 John 2:19).

If anyone asks you if you have been “Saved,” you should say, “I am redeemed by the blood of Christ, I trust in him alone for my salvation, and, as the Bible teaches, I am ‘working out my salvation in fear and trembling’ (Philippians 2:12), knowing that it is God’s gift of grace that is working in me.”

This too is a good answer, as long as one understands he is only “working out” the salvation that “God has graciously worked in” rather than adding to what Christ has done by

THE WAVE OF THE FUTURE

All the alternatives to Catholicism are showing themselves to be failures: the worn-out secularism that is everywhere around us and that no one any longer finds satisfying, the odd cults and movements that offer temporary community but no long-lasting home, even the other, incomplete brands of Christianity. As our tired world becomes ever more desperate, people are turning to the one alternative they never really had considered: the Catholic Church. They are coming upon truth in the last place they expected to find it.

The only way to the Father is Christ Jesus (John 14:6). All other ways, including any church, religion, or rituals are false.

Never Popular, Always Attractive

How can this be? Why are so many people seriously looking at the Catholic Church for the first time? Something is pulling them toward it. That something is truth.

This we know: They are not considering the claims of the Church out of a desire to win public favor. Catholicism, at least nowadays, is never popular. You cannot win a popularity contest by being a faithful Catholic. Our fallen world rewards the clever, not the good. If a Catholic is praised, it is for the worldly skills he demonstrates, not for his Christian virtues.

This is true of all Christians.

Although people try to avoid the hard doctrinal and moral truths the Catholic Church offers them (because hard truths demand that lives be changed), they nevertheless are attracted to the Church. When they listen to the pope and the bishops in union with him, they hear words with the ring of truth — even if they find that truth hard to live by.

When they contemplate the history of the Catholic Church and the lives of its saints, they realize there must be something special, maybe something supernatural, about an institution that can produce holy people such as Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and Mother Teresa.

When they step off a busy street and into the aisles of an apparently empty Catholic church, they sense not a complete emptiness, but a presence. They sense that Someone resides inside, waiting to comfort them.

They realize that the persistent opposition that confronts the Catholic Church — whether from non-believers or “Bible Christians” or even from people who insist on calling themselves Catholics — is a sign of the Church’s divine origin (John 15:18-21).

Persistent opposition may be an indicator that one is right. Or it may be an indicator that one is dead wrong. And when the opposition is from the Bible, it is a definite indicator that one is wrong.

And they come to suspect that the Catholic Church, of all things, is the wave of the future.

Incomplete Christianity Is Not Enough

Over the last few decades many Catholics have left the Church, many dropping out of religion entirely, many joining other churches. But the traffic has not been only in one direction. The traffic toward Rome has increased rapidly. Today we are seeing thousands of converts. People of no religion, lapsed or inactive Catholics, and members of other Christian churches are “coming home to Rome.”

They are attracted to the Church for a variety of reasons, but the chief reason they convert is the chief reason you should remain a Catholic: The solid truth of the Catholic faith.

Our separated brethren hold much Christian truth, but we might compare their religion to a stained glass window in which some of the original panes were lost and have been replaced by opaque glass: Something that was present at the beginning is now gone, and something that does not really fit has been inserted to fill up the empty space. The unity of the original window has been marred.

When, centuries ago, they split away from the Catholic Church, the theological ancestors of these Christians eliminated some authentic beliefs and added new ones of their own making. The forms of Christianity they established are really incomplete Christianity. Only the Catholic Church was founded by Jesus, and only it has been able to preserve all Christian truth without error — and great numbers of people are coming to see this.

While the Protestant Reformation did away with mountains of extra-biblical religion the Roman Catholic Church had invented and added over many centuries, the Reformation added nothing new. It merely called believers to return to the simplicity of the Bible. To claim that the Roman Catholic Church is the only source of truth is the zenith of arrogance— not to mention that the Roman Catholic Church has reversed herself so many times on so many issues that there is no way she can be inerrant.

YOUR TASKS AS A CATHOLIC

This last section speaks to Roman Catholics about remaining true to their church, but not about matters that Roman Catholics and Protestants would disagree on.

Your tasks as a Catholic, no matter what your age, are three:

Know your Catholic faith. You cannot live your faith if you do not know it, and you cannot share with others what you do not first make your own. Learning your Catholic faith takes some effort, but it is effort well spent because the study is, quite literally, infinitely rewarding.

Live your Catholic faith. Your Catholic faith is a public thing. It is not meant to be left behind when you leave your home. But be forewarned: Being a public Catholic involves risk, and it involves loss. You will find some doors closed to you. You will lose some friends. You will be considered an outsider. But, as a consolation, remember our Lord’s words to the persecuted: “Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven” (Matthew 5:12).

Spread your Catholic faith. Jesus Christ wants us to bring the whole world into captivity to the truth, and the truth is Jesus himself, who is “the way, and the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). Spreading the faith is a task not only for bishops, priests, and religious — it is a task for all Catholics.

Just before his Ascension, our Lord told his apostles, “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19-20).

If we want to observe all that Jesus commanded, if we want to believe all he taught, we must follow him through his Church. This is our great challenge — and our great privilege.

Last modified July 30, 1995 by Karl Keating

MY CONCLUSION

There are many issues about which Roman Catholics and Evangelical Protestants disagree. Some of them are of a lesser significance. While I have commented on some of these lesser differences, these are not of paramount concern. There are two questions, however, that are of ultimate importance.

1. *“On what authority do I base my Christian faith?”*
2. *“What must I do to be saved?”*

Roman Catholics and Protestants answer these two questions differently. Roman Catholics answer the question, “By what authority?” by saying: “The Bible, Roman Catholic tradition and the magisterium.” Evangelical Protestants answer: “The Bible is the sole authority for all matters of faith and practice.” (Isaiah 8:20,

Since Roman Catholics and Evangelical Protestants are directed by different sources of authority that are not in agreement, it is little wonder that their beliefs and doctrines do not agree.

The second question, “What must I do to be saved?” will also be answered differently because Roman Catholics and Protestants rely on differing sources for the answer.

The Roman Catholic Church answers the question, “What must I do to be saved?” like this:

All are born sinful. You must be regenerated through Baptism, which imparts grace to enable you to do works of righteousness (including and especially the sacraments, and further purifying of sin in purgatory) for which you will be rewarded with salvation. Those who fail are lost.

The Evangelical Protestant answers the question, "What must I do to be saved?" like this:

All are born sinful (Romans 3:23). Salvation is a work of God's grace alone (Ephesians 2:1-9), whereby He regenerates a person (Titus 3:1-7). This salvation is received by faith alone in Christ alone (Ephesians 2:8-9). Those who are regenerated, are to live out their faith with righteous living, not as a means of attaining or preserving salvation, but as a validation of its genuineness (Ephesians 2:20, Titus 3:8, James 2:17-18). Those God regenerates are justified, sanctified, and will be glorified (Romans 8:29-30). God guarantees it (Philippians 1:6). Those who ultimately depart from the faith do not forfeit salvation; they never were saved (1 John 2:19). This is known as salvation by grace alone through faith alone (understanding that genuine faith is followed by a changed life).

The difference between Evangelical Protestant and Roman Catholic views on salvation is monumental. Is salvation by grace through faith alone in Christ alone, or is it by faith plus works? It doesn't matter what you add to Christ, adding anything is a statement that Jesus Christ is not enough.

The Roman Catholic Church's stand on the Protestant doctrine of Justification by grace through faith alone was established at the Council of Trent (1545-1563). Rome pronounced several anathemas (pronouncements of damnation) on Protestant doctrines, including an anathema on all who embrace the doctrine of salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. That anathema has never been rescinded.

If the New Testament does teach salvation by grace through faith alone, that anathema was not merely on those who embrace the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith alone, it is an anathema on the gospel as presented in the New Testament.

*If the traditions of the Roman Catholic Church have altered the simple gospel of salvation by grace alone through faith alone, the gospel has been changed. Paul warned in Galatians 1:6-9, that anyone preaches "**any other gospel**" than the one he preached, "**let him be anathema.**" What Gospel did Paul preach?*

Consider Ephesians 2:3-5, 8-10:

³ All of us also lived among them [the disobedient] at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.

All are by nature lost and under condemnation.

⁴ But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy,

But God is merciful and loving.

⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions — it is by grace you have been saved.

While we were yet sinners Christ made us alive — by grace.

⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God

⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.

Salvation is not based on any human effort, whether it solely man's effort or is assisted by God. The only One in Heaven who will be able to take credit for anyone's salvation will be Christ.

¹⁰ For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

*Works of righteousness are important, as a **result** of salvation, not as a **means** of attaining or preserving it.*

There are many differences between Roman Catholicism and Evangelical Protestantism. They vary in importance. The two that are of supreme importance concern (1) the authority of the Bible, and (2) the means of eternal salvation.

*If the Bible **is** the sole authority for all matters of faith and practice, we have a solid, unchanging foundation. If the Bible is **not** the sole authority for all matters of faith and practice, then our faith is subject to change and uncertainty.*

*If eternal salvation is by grace **alone** through faith **alone** in Christ **alone**, salvation is as sure as God Himself. If eternal salvation is by a so-called grace that merely enables us to perform works of righteousness for which we will be rewarded with eternal life, then eternal salvation is not by grace but by human effort — it is not of God, but of man.*

Each of us must decide. Is salvation of God, or is it of man?