

Roman Catholic Doctrine on Salvation – Parts 1 of 2

Based on “The Gospel According to Rome” by James G. McCarthy

An excerpt from the forward: “*Catholic apologists usually complain – and often rightly so – that Protestant treatments of Church teachings tend to be caustic, unfair or inaccurate. This book carefully avoids such pitfalls. It is a comprehensive guide to Roman Catholic beliefs, based on Catholic sources, well documented, objective, and wholly without rancor. Catholic teachings are carefully examined in the light of scripture, which speaks for itself.*” - John MacArthur

An excerpt from: “What former Roman Catholic priests and nuns are saying about The Gospel According to Rome”. “*The Gospel According to Rome is tenderly written, scripturally sound, scrupulously fair, and historically accurate. This is a book for all those who genuinely love Roman Catholics.*” - Bartholomew F. Brewer, former Discalced Carmelite Priest.

Sources used by McCarthy:

- The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1994
- The decrees of 21 universal councils, especially: The Council of Trent (1545-1563), The First Vatican Council (1869-1870), The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965)
- Papal documents, e.g. the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* he makes 256 references to pontifical documents.
- *The Code of Canon Law* - revised in 1983 and contains 1,752 laws.
- *The Liturgy of the Church* - refers to public worship and practice.
- *The Roman Catechism* - also called the *Catechism of the Council of Trent* - published in 1566.
- Summa Theologica – Written by Thomas Aquinas between 1265 and 1274. (Note this was about 270 years before the Council of Trent and is not a “Roman Catholic” book as we understand the term post Trent).
- Other books declared free of doctrinal or moral error by official representatives of the Catholic Church and sealed as *Nihil Obstat*. (Info from these books not cited here).

We will not have time to read the scriptures cited. However, when you talk with a Roman Catholic, it is essential that you prepare by not only reading the statements in this document, but by also reading every scripture reference cited, so the biblical truth associated with each point is firmly established in your mind.

Roman Catholic Infant Justification

- Catholicism teaches that every newborn child must be baptized in order to “remedy a deadly spiritual disease” the original sin of Adam [403,1250]. Catholics believe that every newborn child comes into this world with original sin on his or her soul and is therefore alienated from God. In Catholicism, an infant receives the benefits of Christ’s death through the sacrament of baptism. “Holy baptism is...the door which gives access to the other sacraments. Through baptism we are freed from sin and reborn as sons of God.” [1213]. Babies are therefore “born again” when baptized.
- By being baptized the child is:
 - Rescued from the power of Satan
 - Freed from original sin
 - Made innocent and stainless before God
 - Born again
 - Given the gift of divine life
 - Made a partaker of eternal life
 - Made a temple of the Holy Spirit
 - Made a member of Christ’s body
 - Welcomed into the church
 - Committed to being raised in the Roman Catholic faith.
- During an infant baptism, the priest prays a prayer of exorcism saying: “We pray for this child: set him/her free from original sin...”
- Catholicism further teaches that God gave Adam and Eve, a supernatural gift: participation in divine life. Catholicism calls this gift “*Sanctifying Grace*”. They further teach that having lost *Sanctifying Grace* through Original Sin, it can only be restored by baptism. Baptism is therefore said to “*infuse sanctifying grace into the soul*”. This they call Justification. It goes like this: Christ made satisfaction to God the Father on our behalf and this *merit* is applied to both adults and infants through the sacrament of baptism when duly administered. Baptism is therefore called the “*instrumental cause*” of *justification*. Baptism is therefore the vehicle through which the state of an infant’s soul is transformed from that of being spiritually dead to that of being spiritually alive.
- What happens to infants that happen to die before being baptized? Aquinas reasoned that of all sins, *Original Sin* is the least serious because it is the least voluntary. However, Catholic theology decrees that without baptism, no one can see God. Catholic theologians have therefore proposed something between heaven and hell that they call Limbo for these babies. It is a place of “natural happiness” but something short of heaven because God is not there. Limbo is neither an official dogma of the Church nor a denied belief. Although most modern Catholics no longer speak of limbo, it is still described in the new 1994 Catechism [1261, 1283]. **[Read 1261]**. Baptism of infants is so important that doctors sometimes baptize babies in the womb with a syringe if they believe they might die during childbirth. In such emergencies, a parent could also baptize an infant.

- You will see later that adults converting to Catholicism who were never baptized must also be baptized to be justified.
- **Biblical response.** The New Testament is clear that those who give a believable profession of faith in Christ should be baptized as Jesus commanded in Matthew 28:19. Baptism symbolizes regeneration and the spiritual re-birth that comes when one is born again in Christ. In addition, baptizing believers is an act of obedience and obedience brings the blessing of God's favor and as such may be considered a means of grace, but this is not what Catholics call "saving grace". According to the Bible, justification is a divine act: "God is the one who justifies." (Romans 8:33). Biblical justification is an act of God, in which He declares an unworthy sinner to be righteous in his sight (Romans 4:3). Biblical justification is more than the acquittal or forgiveness of sins. It also includes a positive reckoning in which God credits to the sinners account "the righteousness of God." (Romans 3:22). From that point onward God views the individual as "in Christ" (Ephesians 1:3 – 14). The bible says that God justifies "the one who has faith in Jesus" (Romans 3:26). The gospel is preached, the elect know in their heart it is true and decide to repent and trust Christ for their salvation. These believers God instantly justifies, declaring them righteous in His sight. But what about infants? We would agree that infants are born with original sin, but scripture does not explicitly tell us exactly how God deals with the death of the unborn or infants. Many protestant churches also baptize infants (e.g. Lutheran, Episcopalian, Methodist, Presbyterian, etc.) but this is based on the "*covenant*" argument that sees infants born to believers as part of the *covenant community*. Baptism of infants is considered an outward sign of entrance into that covenant community. It is like the New Testament counterpart to circumcision of the Old Testament, but it does not cause regeneration and it is not necessary for salvation as Roman Catholic doctrine teaches.
- **Summary.** Infant baptism misleads Catholics young and old as to their true spiritual condition and need for salvation by producing a false hope. Early in life Catholics are taught that baptism has removed original sin and infused them with sanctifying grace. In this way many Catholics grow up convinced they already have a right relationship with God and are on the road that leads to heaven. Their baptismal certificate is of course worthless in the eyes of God, and they have put their faith in a sacrament and the minister of that sacrament, rather than in Christ.

Roman Catholic Adult Justification

- Unlike newborn infants who are to be baptized without delay, adults seeking justification in the Catholic Church must undergo extensive preparation. [1232]. This is called R.C.I.A, or "Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults". Four major steps are involved:
 1. Cooperation with first actual grace,
 2. Faith
 3. Good works
 4. The sacrament of baptism.

- **Step 1, First Actual Grace.** According to the Catholic Church, it is God who takes the initiative in justification of adults and it depends entirely on God's gratuitous initiative [Read 1998]. When God reaches out to a person, he bestows "*first actual grace*". This is like a "helping hand" that enables an individual to seek God and prepare or dispose his soul for baptism and justification. The church calls it "*actual grace*" as in act-tual because good acts are its goal. Once a sinner receives "*first actual grace*", he must decide whether-or-not he will yield to its influence throughout his lifetime. [1993]. Unlike our view of unconditional election and irresistible grace, this call may not be effectual because the Catholic can persist in rejecting this grace to the point that he will die in a state of sin and suffer the eternal consequences. On the other hand, if a sinner agrees to cooperate with "*first actual grace*" he will begin to perform *salutary acts* (good works).
- **Step 2, Faith.** After proper instruction, an adult must "...*believe to be true what has been divinely revealed and promised, and in particular that the wicked are justified by God by his grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus*". [26] This faith is called *theological or confessional faith* [1814]. It is the firm acceptance of the major doctrines taught by the church and summarized in the Nicene and Apostle's creeds. This is the first response to first actual grace. The second response is good works.
- **Step 3, Good works.** Next the adult candidate must prepare their souls by performing good works [1247-1248]. This is accomplished through his or her own will, through faith and through various acts of virtue. "*Acknowledging that they are sinners...they are thereby turned against sin by a feeling of hatred and detestation, namely by the repentance which must occur before baptism. Finally, when they are proposing to receive baptism, they are "moved to begin a new life and to keep God's commandments"*. [28] After this comes baptism.
- **Step 4, Baptism.** According to the church, the amount of sanctifying grace (the grace that justifies) which baptism infuses into the soul, varies from one person to the next depending on both God's generosity and the persons pre-baptismal preparation. How to actually prepare was not formally addressed until the Second Vatican Council in 1963. At that council, the church restored an ancient tradition known as the catechumenate. The modern catechumenate is also called R.C.I.A. and has 3 parts used to prepare an adult for baptism.
 1. Evangelization
 2. Instruction
 3. Purification and Enlightenment

Evangelization. A sponsor is assigned to each candidate to help them prepare and evaluate their progress. They move out of this phase when they can show evidence in their lives of an understanding of Catholic fundamentals, they practice spiritual living, they are repentant, they pray and they fellowship in the Catholic community.

Instruction. The church formally promotes qualified candidates into this phase with an oath where the candidate is asked if he or she is prepared to begin his or her journey under the guidance of Christ. The candidate responds with a memorized positive response and then the

priest invites them into the church building, where the ritual continues with prayers, renunciation of false worship, the giving of a new name, and presentation of a cross. Through supernatural means, the candidate is transformed. It may take several years for complete conversion and for faith to become strong. When finally ready the candidate is presented to the bishop for what is called "*election*". In this ceremony the Church makes its *election* of the candidate and the sponsors must testify as to the candidate's worthiness. Next the bishop says: "I now declare you to be a member of the *elect*, to be initiated into the sacred mysteries at the next Easter Vigil."

Purification and Enlightenment. The period of purification usually takes place during Lent (the 40 days prior to Easter). Three so called "*scrutinies*" are celebrated on the middle three Sundays of Lent during liturgies where the *elect* candidates are present. These are solemn celebrations involving prayer, petitions, laying on of hands, etc. Then the *elect* candidate is to spend Holy Saturday (the day before Easter) in prayer, refectio and fasting. Finally, on Easter Sunday, the priest leads the candidate in one of the creeds and the Lord's prayer as a demonstration of his or her faith. Then the priest finally baptizes him or her.

- **Biblical Response.** Roman Catholicism teaches people to approach God through their own righteousness and good works. This stands in direct contradiction to the Bible which teaches that God justifies by unmerited grace and not by human works. (Romans 3:24, Eph 2:8-9).
- But we should understand this contradiction at a deeper level. Although the Catholic Church teaches works are required for justification, they maintain that justification is a free gift. They give two reasons.
 - Reason one: Good works performed in preparation for justification are done under the influence of "*actual grace*". [1989, 1998]. The works themselves are therefore works of grace [2001].
 - The second reason, according to the Church, is that justification cannot be earned. [1308, 1992, 1996, 1999, 2003, 2010, 2027]. From the Council of Trent. We read: "We are said to receive justification as a free gift, because nothing that precedes justification, either faith nor works, would merit the grace of justification..." [42].
 - Or stated in the words of the new catechism: "Since the initiative belongs to God, in the order of grace, no one can merit the initial grace of forgiveness and justification, at the beginning of conversion." [2010]. This means that though a person must have both faith and works to be justified neither faith nor works directly earn the blessing of justification. Consequently, Roman Catholic theologians argue, Catholic justification is a gift of God.
 - Now here comes the apparent contradiction. Though Catholic theology is clear that a person cannot earn justification, those seeking justification must work hard and long - "several years if necessary". The R.C.I.A. requires candidates to demonstrate the conversion by acts of:

- Loving and worshiping God
 - Praying
 - Fasting
 - Loving one's neighbor
 - Practicing self-renunciation
 - Obeying the commandments
 - Bearing witness to the Catholic faith
 - Following supernatural inspiration and deeds
 - Confessing the major doctrines of the church.
- We might look at all this and think it makes a degree of sense, because if they were born again these things could be fruit of the Spirit. We might start to think their theology is partly correct, but this is happening before justification. Then comes this from the Council of Trent: "If anyone says that the faith which justifies is nothing else but trust in the divine mercy, which pardons sins because of Christ; or that it is that trust alone by which we are justified: let him be anathema." [45]
 - "If anyone says that the sinner is justified by faith alone, meaning thereby that no other cooperation is required for them to obtain the grace of justification, and that in no sense is it necessary for him to make preparation and be disposed by a movement of his own will: let him be anathema." [46].
 - The Roman Church was aware that Paul repeatedly listed faith as the only required response for justification, e.g. Romans 3:26, 3:28, 4:3, 5:1. So they tried to explain it at the Council of Trent as follows: "When the apostle says that a person is justified by faith and as a gift, those words are to be understood in the sense which the perennial consent of the Catholic Church has maintained and expressed, namely, that we are said to be justified by faith because faith is the first stage of human salvation and the foundation and root of all justification, without which it is impossible to please God and come into the fellowship of his children." [47].
 - There is nothing in Paul's writings or anywhere else in the New Testament, which teaches that faith is merely a "first stage" leading to justification. When the church calls faith the "first stage" of salvation and good works the second stage, it ignores the fact that Scripture emphatically states that good works have no part in justification. An example is Romans 4:5: "But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness." Or Ephesians 2:8-9: "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is a gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast."
 - According to the Bible, the only requirement for justification is faith, but the Roman Church strongly disagrees and points to the letter of James as its proof: James 2:24, "you see that a man is justified by works, and not by faith alone." James is of course referencing Abraham and "living faith" as opposed to "dead faith" which is evidenced by

good works. The Roman Church has taken this verse completely out of context and twisted its meaning to fit their doctrinal view.

- In summary, regarding the justification of adults, Roman Church doctrine holds that sinners seeking God must first undergo a moral transformation through the process called R.C.I.A. where they must learn "...to practice love of neighbor, even at the cost of self-renunciation" [48] and give "evidence of their conversion by example of their lives." [49] To be counted among the elect, they must demonstrate that they are "fit to take part" [50] and "worthy to be admitted" [51] and that they have "begun to walk in God's presence". [52] Only then according to the church, is the seeker properly prepared for justification. This contradicts Scripture which repeatedly states we are saved completely by grace, through faith in Christ.

Roman Catholic Increasing and Preserving Justification

- **Sanctifying Grace.** Once baptized, the Catholic is said to be in a state of "*sanctifying grace*". Though *sanctifying grace* is a constant influence, it is not a permanent one. Just as Adam lost divine life in his soul through the first sin, a baptized Catholic can forfeit *sanctifying grace* through serious, conscious, and deliberate sin. Should this happen, the *sacrament of penance* can restore *sanctifying grace*. (Also called *saving grace*).
- **Actual Grace.** Unlike *sanctifying grace*, which is a constant influence, Catholics believe in something called "*actual grace*", which is a temporary strengthening. It is the promise of a helping hand from God in times of need. It is a momentary aid for a specific action or "act" and must be continually replenished.
- **The Sacraments.** Grace, as just described, is accomplished through the sacraments of which there are 7. These are the primary means by which God bestows both sanctifying grace and actual grace upon the faithful.
 - Baptism
 - Penance
 - The Eucharist
 - Confirmation
 - Matrimony
 - Holy Orders
 - Anointing the sick
 - These sacraments are said to "*contain grace*" [57] They are the means or channels of God's grace. They are referred to as the "*instrumental cause*" [58] of grace [1804]. Baptism provides initial *saving grace* and *penance* restores it after it is lost. A Catholic must be in a state of *saving grace* to receive the sacraments. In other words, his or her soul must be in a state of *sanctifying or saving grace*. Preparation prior to receiving the sacraments also requires a believing heart, reflection and prayer. The quantity of grace

that is received is proportional to how well the Catholic is prepared and the generosity of God.

- The church teaches that these *sacraments* are necessary for salvation [1129] [60]. Baptism, or at least the desire for it, is necessary for initial justification [1257-1261, 1277] [61]. As stated earlier, *penance* is necessary for restoration to a life of grace should the Catholic forfeit grace through serious sin. Confirmation, anointing of the sick, and especially the eucharist, provide the grace needed to avoid sin and do good.
- The 7 sacraments are also object lessons that portray the religious beliefs of the church through what is called “sacred drama”. As such, they are standardized, and any unauthorized innovation is forbidden in order to preserve and teach the Roman Catholic faith.
- **Merit.** Although *sanctifying and actual grace* influence a person's will to do good, they do not override it. [978] Therefore, if these graces are to accomplish their intended purpose, the individual must also do his part. [2002] Catholics therefore must “*cooperate*” with heavenly grace less they receive it in vain.” [62]
 - The cooperative work of the individual under the influence of grace results in the performance of good works. These works include obedience to the Commandments of God and the church, acts of charity, self-denial, and the practice of virtue. According to the church the performance of good works earns a reward from God. The earned right to such rewards is called *merit*. [2006]
 - *Merited* reward can take various forms. A Catholic in a state of grace can *merit* an increase in sanctifying grace. Good works can also *merit* other blessings. [2007]
 - The amount of *merit* earned is proportional to: [64]
 - The kind of work performed
 - The quantity of work performed
 - The difficulty of work performed
 - The duration of work performed
 - The amount of sanctifying grace already in the soul
 - The intensity or fervor with which the work is performed
- **Sanctification.** This is cyclical process. Grace inspires the mind and strengthens the will which encourages a person to continue participating in the sacraments and performing good works. This generates more grace and the cycle repeats. In this way the Catholic grows in grace and holiness. The Catholic Church calls this process “*sanctification*”.
 - *Sanctification* has two goals. The first is to preserve the grace of justification received at baptism [1392] because this grace can be lost through serious deliberate sin.

Maintaining *sanctifying grace* in the soul until death is essential in order to attain eternal life. [1023, 1052]

- The second goal of *sanctification* is to *increase or perfect* the grace of justification in one's soul. [1392] Through baptism the Catholic received an initial installment of *sanctifying or justifying grace*, but after baptism this grace can be increased. In this way, the Catholic is said to be "*further justified*". [65]
- The second Vatican Council listed nine of the most important means by which Catholics are *sanctified and further justified*: [66]
 - Loving God
 - Loving one's neighbor
 - Obeying God's commandments
 - Receiving the sacraments, especially holy communion
 - Participating in the liturgy
 - Praying
 - Practicing self-denial
 - Serving others
 - Practicing virtue
- Summary: *Sanctification*, which begins at baptism [1254] is a lifetime activity as the Catholic receives the sacraments and performs good works in cooperation with grace. The process is completed only after death when the person finally enters the presence of God in heaven. Then and only then can a Catholic say that he or she is saved. Until then, the Catholic is not saved, but is being saved through the process of *sanctification*.
- **Biblical Response.** Contrary to the Roman Catholic understanding of sanctification, the Bible teaches that the standing of a justified sinner before God is perfect. Neither justification nor the grace of God toward the justified can be increased by sacraments or good works. The Bible teaches us that grace is undeserved favor, not a merited reward. Justification is completed in Christ. The Bible describes grace as the favorable attitude of God toward an individual. It is a mindset on the part of God, a decision to bless (Ephesians 2:4-7). Grace is, by definition, free and unmerited (Romans 11:6). It is the undeserved, unearned favor of God.
- The Roman Catholic Church has obscured the meaning of grace and altered its very essence. Grace becomes the medium of exchange in the church's merit system: do work, earn grace. The more grace you have, the harder you work. The harder you work, the more grace you earn. The church denounces anyone who thinks otherwise: "If anyone says...the justified person, by good deeds done by him through the grace of God, and the merits of Jesus Christ (of whom he is a living member), does not truly merit an increase of grace... Let him be anathema" [71]

- Biblical justification is perfect and complete. It is a divine act: "God is the one who justifies" (Romans 8:33). God forgives the sinner and reckons to his account the righteousness of Christ (Romans 3:21, 22; 4:3-8). In Roman Catholicism, good works are not only the result of justification, but the cause of its increase. The church is emphatic on this point: "if anyone says that justice once received is neither preserved nor increased in the sight of God by good works, but that the works themselves are no more than the effects and signs of justification obtained, and not also a cause of its increase: let him be anathema" [75]
- For the Roman Catholic, eternal salvation involves a lifetime of doing, working, and striving. Behind all this activity is a theology that considers justification an incomplete and fragile condition of the soul. Consequently, there are always more sacraments to be received and more work to be performed. Biblical salvation, on the other hand, is characterized by rest. Christ has already finished the work of salvation on the cross and justification is a free and perfect gift of God. The Christian, confident that his/her eternal salvation is secure, (1 John 5:11-13), rests in Christ. "For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His" (Hebrews 4:10). Sadly, Roman Catholicism knows nothing of resting in Christ.

Roman Catholic De-justification

- **Mortal Sin.** The Catholic Church teaches there are two categories of sin. [1854] The first is *mortal sin*, [1855, 1874] which is defined as follows: "'We commit *mortal sin* when we transgress a commandment of God in a serious matter, with full knowledge and free consent of the will. A serious matter is, for example, unbelief, hatred of our neighbor, adultery, serious theft, murder, etc.'" [*Dogmatic Theology for the Laity*, p78] Just as Original Sin killed the life of God in Adam, mortal sin ends the life of God in baptized Catholics. *Mortal sin* kills the soul and if un-repented, brings eternal punishment. [1033, 1861, 1874]
- **Venial Sin.** "We commit a *venial sin* (one which can be forgiven outside of confession to a priest), whenever we transgress a commandment of God, either in a matter which is not so serious, or without full knowledge, or without full consent of the will...for example, deliberate distraction at prayer, petty thievery, idleness, white lies, lack of love and generosity in small things, etc." [*Dogmatic Theology for the Laity*, p79].
 - God will forgive the sinner of these so called minor *venial sins* if he or she confesses them to God in prayer with sincere repentance. *Venial sins*, weaken a person's spiritual vitality and make the individual more susceptible to greater sin, but unlike *mortal sins*, they do not kill the life of the soul or incur eternal punishment. [1855]
 - Using an analogy to sickness, Roman Catholic theologians compare *venial sin* to an ailment. Most ailments are minor and the body's immune system fights them off and eventually restores health. In the same way, a *venial sin* is like a minor sickness of the

soul. It hinders spirituality and lowers resistance to temptation, but the vitality of the soul survives. [1863]

- *Mortal sin* on the other hand, deals a deathblow. It kills the soul as surely as a fatal disease kills the body. When Catholics who have received *sanctifying grace* through baptism commit a *mortal sin*, they lose that grace. Though by baptism they had been justified, because of *mortal sin* they now forfeit the grace of justification and are *de-justified*. [81] They become a child of wrath and are destined for hell. [1033, 1861, 1874] Just as a dead body has no capacity to restore life to itself, the church teaches that a soul struck dead by mortal sin cannot revive itself. The sinner must turn to the church and to the *sacrament of penance*. [1446, 1856] [82]
- **The Sacrament of Penance.** The *sacrament of penance* re-establishes a right relationship between God and the wayward Catholic. It is also called the *sacrament of reconciliation*. [1424] It has several parallels with the *sacrament of baptism*. As baptism supplies sanctifying grace to the soul that is dead because of Adam's sin, the *sacrament of penance* restores sanctifying grace to the soul that is dead because of *mortal sin*. [987, 1446] Baptism justifies, while penance re-justifies. Penance requires several pre-steps:
 - **Confession of the sin** [1455-1458, 1493] - The sinner must search "all the folds and corners of his conscience" [84] and confess every *mortal sin* that he finds. He is also encouraged to confess *venial sins*, but that is not required. [1493]
 - **Contrition of the sinner** [1430-1433, 1450-1454, 1490-1492] – The sinner must demonstrate sorrow for his or her sins and a determination to avoid sinning in the future. Usually expressed as a prayer called an *Act of Contrition*.
 - **Judgement by the priest** [1441-1445, 1461-1467, 1485] - Catholicism teaches that only God can forgive sins but He has willed to do so through the Roman Church. It is therefore the responsibility of the priest to judge the sinner. The priest may first ask several questions to establish the circumstances of the sin and to measure the person's guilt. He then determines if the sinner is truly sorry and determined not to repeat the sin. Based on this information the priest decides whether-or-not to pardon the sinner.
 - **Absolution by the Priest** [1441-1445, 1449, 1461-1467, 1495] - If the priest forgives the sinner, and he usually does, he administers absolution. He uses the words: "I absolve you from your sins..." Absolution frees the guilty person of *mortal sin* and from eternal punishment. The church claims that there is no offense, however serious, that it cannot forgive. This absolution is considered a judicial act by the priest. [87]
 - **Penance by the Sinner** [1434-1439, 1459-1460, 1494] – Finally, the sinner must make a satisfaction to God for the sin. "Raised up from sin, the sinner must still recover his full spiritual health by doing something more to make amends for the sin: he must make satisfaction for or expiate his sins. This satisfaction is called penance." [1459] To assist the person in completing this, the priest imposes an act of penance. It is selected to be

in keeping with the nature of the sin and the ability of the penitents. It may take the form of a fast, a charitable gift to the poor, self-denial, service to one's neighbor, or the performance of some devotional exercise. Church law requires Catholics to confess serious sins at least once per year. Anyone who is aware of having committed a mortal sin must not receive communion without having first received sacramental absolution.

- **Biblical Response.** When King David repented of his adultery, he confessed his sin directly to God. No priest. No ritual. No sacrament. Just a broken man owning up to his sin before his Maker.
- New Testament Christians also go directly to God with their sins. They go not to an earthy priest/judge, but to their Father with Jesus at their side: "If anyone sins, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." (1 John 2:1,2). They go with confidence that God will hear them: "Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." (Hebrews 4:16). They go with the promise of God that he will forgive them: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9).
- The Bible teaches that the spiritual consequence of every sin is the death penalty. Jesus taught that every sin warrants eternal punishment in hell. He taught that the sin of anger brings the same punishment as a sin of murder, (Matthew 5:21,22), and the sin of lust the same penalty as the sin of adultery, (Matthew 5:27-30).
- The Bible teaches us that all sins are mortal, but the Roman Church teaches that no sin is necessarily mortal. Though the Bible never mentions venial sin, the Catholic Church teaches that every sin could potentially be venial. (Note: the Bible never mentions venial sin). But the truth is that God allows the full weight of sin to fall upon the sinner that he might cry out, "What must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30). It is the convicted sinner who realizes that he needs a Savior. This is a person who, upon learning the gospel, clings to the cross like a drowning man to a life preserver. It is the person who knows that he deserves hell 1000 times over but that Jesus' blood has made full satisfaction for every sin, past, present and future. Roman theology, on the other hand, consistently undermines the seriousness of sin and its consequences, most notably by teaching that most sins are not punishable by death. This is a lie that is as old as the world itself. Soon after God warned Adam and Eve that if they disobeyed him, they would surely die (Genesis 2:17), Satan told Eve "You surely shall not die!" (Genesis 3:4). This same lie has deceived countless Roman Catholics! As a result, most go through life unaware of the magnitude of their guilt before God. They underestimate their spiritual problem and readily embrace an inadequate and faulty solution.

Roman Catholic Final Destiny

- **Final Perseverance and the Particular Judgement.** Think of Roman Catholic salvation as a journey down a long road with an uncertain end. The starting point is baptism, the middle

[XXXX] or [XXX] (3 or 4-digit numbers) Catechism of the Catholic Church, First Image Books, April 1994

[YY] (2-digit numbers) Council of Trent, 1545-1563, public domain by page number

section is made up of a lifetime of receiving the sacraments and doing good works. The finish line his death, which is the moment of truth for the Catholic. [1682-1683] The human body decays but the soul goes to meet God. [997] There the individual learns whether-or-not he or she has attained to eternal life. This is a private and personal event called the *particular judgment*. It is when God decides a person's final destiny. [1005, 1013, 1022, 1051]

- In order to pass the *particular judgment* and ultimately reach heaven, a Catholic must die in a *state of grace*. [1010, 1052] This means, at the moment of death, his or her soul must be in possession of *sanctifying grace*. In such a case, the Catholic is said to have achieved *final perseverance*, he or she has preserved grace in their soul until the end. [161, 1026, 2016]
- If the person is devoid of *sanctifying grace* at the moment of death, God will banish the individual to eternal punishment. [1022, 1033-1037, 1056-1057]
- “The souls of those who depart this life in actual *mortal sin*, or in *original sin* alone, go down straightaway to hell to be punished, but with unequal pains. [*Council of Florence p 101*]
- The Church teaches that no one knows until the *particular judgment*. What their fate will be. [1036, 2005] [102] One might commit a mortal sin at the last moment and die in that condition and be eternally lost. Therefore, no living Catholic can say that he or she is saved in an eternal sense. Rather, they can say they are being saved as they cooperate with grace. To be eternally saved, a Catholic must persevere to the end. [161-162, 1026]
- **Purgatory.** If at the *particular judgment* God finds a person in the state of grace, the individual's ultimate salvation is in fact ensured. But before the person can enter heaven, they may need to make atonement for any temporal punishment not paid for while on earth. Catholics must still make satisfaction for their sins.
 - Some of those who passed the *particular judgment* go straight to heaven. Baptized infants, who died before reaching the age of accountability, are considered free of guilt and temporal punishment. They are pure enough to immediately enter heaven and enjoy the *beatific vision* which is an intuitive contemplation of God. Another group that go straight to heaven are those who have worked hard or suffered sufficiently on earth. This would apply to some of the heroes of the Catholic faith that the church has canonized as saints.
 - The average Catholic may not, however, be immediately ready for heaven as explained here: “People who have committed many sins, even if they are only venial sins, but who have never done enough penance by themselves and never tried to gain any indulgences, have a heavy load of punishment to atone for. God, however, is not only merciful, but also supremely just. If this punishment is not atoned for on earth, then He demands that satisfaction be made after death, “*down to the last farthing*” (Matthew

5:26). For "*nothing unclean can enter into heaven*" (Apocalypse 21:27). Experience, too, can teach us that most men, at the time of their death, are not good enough for heaven and still not bad enough for eternal damnation. Reason alone, without the aid of revelation, leads us to expect that there must be some means of purifying the punishment due to sin after death. This concept is what we express in the word *purgatory*. Scripture and tradition both clearly teach that *purgatory* does exist". [Dogmatic Theology for the Laity p 104]

- Roman Catholic theologians are not in agreement as to the nature of suffering in *purgatory*. Some teach that the pain of *purgatory* is chiefly a sense of loss and being separated from God. Others, following Thomas Aquinas, teach that souls in *purgatory* suffer intense and excruciating physical pain from fire. How long a person must suffer in *purgatory* is not clear.
- Catholics still alive can help a deceased loved one in *purgatory* by saying prayers, giving alms, and performing good works. [958, 1032, 1457] The Catholic offers up these meritorious acts for the poor soul in *purgatory*. The most effective means of helping the dead is the sacrifice of the Mass. [1055, 1689] Parishioners can ask a priest to say mass for the benefit of a person believed to be in *purgatory*. Normally a small gift of money accompanies the request.
- **Indulgences.** [1471-1479, 1498] Another way in which the living can help the dead is by acquiring special credits called *indulgences* that cancel out temporal punishment. The church has the power to dispense *indulgences* from a vast reservoir of merit called the *treasury of the church*. [1476-1477] Catholics can earn an indulgence from the church by doing specific acts of piety, such as praying the Rosary. [1478] A plenary *indulgence*, the cancellation of all current temporal punishment, can be obtained by performing special acts with a perfect disposition. [1471] This must be accompanied by reception of the sacraments of confession, holy communion, and prayer for the Pope's intentions – this is his personal prayer requests. Once a Catholic has acquired an indulgence, he is free to decide how to use it. He can apply it to his own temporal punishment, or by prayer he can apply it to the account of a deceased loved one in *purgatory*. [1479]
- **Merit and General Judgement** [678-679, 682, 2006-2011, 2025-2027]
 - Whenever a person who is in a state of grace does a good work, he earns a reward. [2010-2011, 2016] The right to a reward is called *merit*. *Merit* accumulates during a person's life, but if the Catholic commits a *mortal sin*, all *merit* is forfeited. If he or she repents and receives the sacrament of *penance*, all lost *merit* is restored. [108] *Merited* reward takes three forms in Roman Catholicism:
 - **Increase of Grace** – [2010, 2017] When a Catholic does a good work, he or she immediately receives the reward of an *increase of grace*. This grace further justifies the Catholic. He or she becomes holier and more pleasing to God.

- **Eternal Life – [1022,1036,1051,1821,2010,2027]** Upon death, each person must face God, in the *particular judgment*. If God determines that the individual has died in the state of grace, the person obtains "the joy of heaven, as God's eternal reward for the good works accomplished with the grace of Christ." [1821]
- **Increase of Glory in Heaven – [1038-1041, 1053]** The church teaches that *merited reward* also results in an increase of the degree of glory that an individual enjoys in heaven. God does not decide this reward until the end of the world. At that time, Christ will return to earth, the dead will rise with the immortal bodies, and God will release all who are still suffering in *purgatory*. [988-1004, 1038] Then there will be a second evaluation of each person's life. This is the *universal or general judgment*. [1038-1041, 1059] Catholics maintain that Jesus described this judgment in Matthew 25:31-32. [678, 681-682,1038-1039,1059] [112] The *general judgment* is the public proclamation of the results of the *particular judgment* and the determination of a person's *total* reward. [1039] It occurs at the end of the world so that the complete effect of each person's life upon all of society and history can be calculated and duly rewarded. If the person died in a state of grace, Christ will reward the individual in proportion to his or her good works. [682] This will decide the degree of his or her *glory* in heaven. Similarly, if the person died without grace in his or her soul, Christ will decide the degree of their *punishment* in hell. [679]
- **Biblical Response.** When asked how they hope to get to heaven, few Catholics express their faith in terms of justification, sanctifying grace, temporal punishment, or final perseverance. Although the average Catholic has little formal knowledge of Catholic theology, the religious beliefs of most Catholics correspond fairly well to the Catholic Church's teachings. But as we have seen, those teachings do not correspond with Scripture which teaches eternal life is a free gift, not a merited reward.
- We have seen that the Roman Catholic Church teaches that there are three forms of merited reward: increases of grace, eternal life, and increased glory in heaven. The third one, increased glory in heaven, is not a uniquely Catholic doctrine and many non-Catholics also understand the Bible to teach that believers are stewards who will be rewarded for their service (2 Corinthians 5:10; Romans 14:10-12). But increases in grace and eternal life through merited reward stands in direct contradiction to Scripture. Though the Bible teaches that God will reward faithful stewards in heaven, it never says that he will reward them with heaven. Eternal life is not a reward, but the unmerited gift of God.
- Jesus, speaking of His sheep, said, "I give eternal life to them." (John 10:28). He promised, "I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost" (Revelation 21:6, See also John 4:14; 6:40; 6:47; 17:2; Romans 5:17; 6:23).
- Though there is no biblical basis for purgatory, there is a strong philosophical need for it in Roman Catholic theology. According to the Church, every sin credits temporal

punishment to the sinners account. Acts of penance, suffering and indulgences debit this account. Since sinners will likely not make a full satisfaction for all the sin in their lives, purgatory in the afterlife is necessary to balance the ledger. Sadly, the church uses purgatory to motivate Catholics to live righteously. If there were no purgatory, their reasoning goes, people would go on sinning without fear.

- Biblical salvation, of course, has no need of a place such as purgatory. Biblical salvation relies solely upon Christ. His blood can cleanse the vilest sinner. (Hebrews 9:14). There is no temporal punishment remaining for which the believer must atone, Jesus paid it all: "He himself is the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 2:2).
- Finally, the Roman Catholic plan of salvation contradicts biblical truth in 24 major areas. (See handout). Those who follow their false gospel will not escape the consequences that Paul warned the Galatians of: "But even though we or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed! (Galatians 1:8-9)

- Comparison Table Handout
- Discussion