

The Bible says man is saved by believing God's truth (*Eph 1:13-14*). God can never deceive anyone (*Titus 1:1-2*). But man remains condemned if he continues in deception. False religious systems hold people in bondage to deception by perverting God's truth and grace. Any religion that teaches its followers that salvation is obtained through human effort and merit is nullifying the grace of God. Grace is the only means by which God saves sinners! The Bible says, "If by grace, it is no longer because of works: otherwise grace would no longer be grace" (*Rom 11:6*).\*

Some people blindly put faith in religious leaders, assuming that their leaders would never seduce anyone with a false plan of salvation. Yet the Apostle Paul warned that "from your own group, men will come forward perverting the truth to draw the disciples away after them" (*Acts 20:30*). Other people simply choose not to respond or conform their lives to truth. Instead they turn away to listen to teachers who say what they want to hear (*2 Tim 4:2-4*). Then there are people who have a zeal for God, but not according to truth (*Rom 10:1-4*). Those who have been indoctrinated with false teaching have difficulty believing the truth. They fail because they refuse to let go of unbiblical beliefs.

It was disobedience to God, a lack of faith in his purpose, plan, and word, that separated Adam and Eve from him. Instead, they chose to put their faith in the deceiver, which brought spiritual and physical death to us all. God uses the very instrument that separated us from him—faith—to restore us back to him. Salvation in Christ is received by turning to him in faith: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not from you; it is the gift of God; it is not from works, so no one may boast" (*Eph 2:8-9*).

The Word of God is clear... **(1)** We are either children of the devil (*John 8:43-45*) or children of God (*John 1:12*). **(2)** We live as slaves to sin or as slaves to righteousness (*Rom 6:16-18*). **(3)** We will either spend eternity under the wrath of God or in his loving presence. "Whoever believes in [Jesus] will not be condemned, but whoever does not believe has already been condemned, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God" (*John 3:18*).

God has revealed that trusting in anything other than Christ and his word is evidence of deception. Those who choose to follow the traditions, opinions, and philosophies of men will be condemned. Jesus said, "Whosoever rejects me and does not accept my words has something to judge him: the word that I spoke, it will condemn him on the last day" (*John 12:48*), but "to those who did accept him, he gave power to become children of God to those who believe in his name" (*John 1:12*). Are you basing your life and eternal destiny on the eternal truths of God's Word, or the Catholic traditions added to God's truth? How will you respond to God's truth? Compare the following essential teachings of the Bible to the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church:

THE WORD OF GOD	THE WORD OF THE POPE
<b>Salvation is only through the Lord Jesus Christ</b> ( <i>Acts 4:12; 1 Tim 2:5</i> )	<b>Salvation is through the Catholic Church and its sacraments</b> (846, 1129)
<b>We are saved by faith and not by works</b> ( <i>Rom 11:6; Eph 2:8-9</i> )	<b>We are saved by faith plus works</b> (1815, 1821, 2010, 2027)
<b>All who keep the law (commandments) for salvation are under a curse</b> ( <i>Gal 3:10</i> )	<b>Obedience to the commandments is necessary for salvation</b> (2068)
<b>Salvation occurs when we repent and believe the gospel</b> ( <i>Acts 16:31; 20:21; Eph 1:13</i> )	<b>Salvation is a process from baptism through purgatory</b> (161, 162, 1254, 1255)
<b>Only Jesus purifies sin</b> ( <i>Heb 1:3; Col 1:22</i> )	<b>Purgatory purifies sin</b> (1030, 1031)
<b>We can know that we have eternal life</b> ( <i>John 10:27-30; 1 John 5:13</i> )	<b>We sin if we presume to be saved without merit</b> (2090, 2092)
<b>Christ's sacrifice is finished</b> ( <i>John 19:30; Heb 10:14</i> )	<b>Christ's sacrifice continues in daily Mass</b> (611, 1405)

As you can see, these teachings directly oppose each other. One is truth that will set you free. One is deception that will hold you in bondage. Which teachings will you choose? Choose carefully. In this life you can be wrong about a lot of things and still survive. But when this life is over, if you were wrong about God's only provision for your sins, you will perish in the lake of fire for all eternity. □

## 2. IS "ROMAN CATHOLIC CHRISTIAN" AN OXYMORON?

Should the combination of the words "Roman Catholic Christian" be considered an oxymoron? Webster's Dictionary defines an oxymoron as "a combination of contradictory words." So if we define "Christian" as one who believes the gospel, and a "Roman Catholic" as one who believes the official teachings and traditions of Roman Catholicism, we must conclude that a "Roman Catholic Christian" is indeed an oxymoron. It is absolutely impossible to believe two opposing views at the same time. Biblical Christianity and Roman Catholicism stand in opposition to one another as seen by the following striking contrast.

**Christians** believe *Scripture has authority over the church*. "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (*2 Tim 3:16—remaining Bible quotes are from the King James Version*).

**Catholics** are taught that *the church has authority over Scripture*. "The manner of interpreting Scripture is ultimately subject to the judgment of the Church which exercises the divinely conferred commission and ministry of watching over and interpreting the Word of God" (119).

**Christians** are *born again by the Word of God and the Spirit of God*. "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever" (*1 Peter 1:23*). "The wind bloweth where it [pleaseth], and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit" (*John 3:8*).

**Catholics** are *born again by water*. "The water of baptism truly signifies our birth into the divine life" (694). "The faithful are born anew by baptism" (1212).

**Christians** are *eternally justified once through faith in Jesus Christ*. "But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness...God imputeth righteousness without works...Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin" (*Rom 4:5-8*). "Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified" (*Rom 8:30*). "By one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified" (*Heb 10:14*).

**Catholics** must be *justified repeatedly by works and sacraments* because "mortal" sin brings condemnation. "Those who die in a state of mortal sin descend into hell" (1035). "The sacrament of penance offers a new possibility to convert and to recover the grace of justification" (1446).

**Christians** are *saved by God's unmerited grace*. "By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast" (*Eph 2:8-9*). "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us" (*Titus 3:5*).

**Catholics** are *saved by meriting the graces needed for salvation*. "We can merit for ourselves and for others the graces needed for...the attainment of eternal life" (2010).

**Christians** are *saved unto good works*. "We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (*Eph 2:10*).

**Catholics** are *saved by good works*. "A treasury of prayers and good works makes it possible for Catholics to attain their own salvation and at the same time cooperate in saving their brothers" (1477).

**Christians** believe *salvation is in Jesus Christ*. "He hath made us accepted in the Beloved. In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins" (*Eph 1:6-7*). "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature" (*2 Cor 5:17*).

**Catholics** believe *salvation is in the Roman Catholic Church*. "The Council teaches that the Church, a pilgrim now on earth, is necessary for salvation. Anyone refusing to enter it or remain in it cannot be saved" (846).

**Christians** are *purified only by the blood of Jesus*. "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (*1 John 1:7*).

"Their sins and iniquities will I remember no more" (*Heb 10:17*).

**Catholics** are *purified by the fires of purgatory*. "After death they undergo purification [in purgatory], so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven" (1030).

**Christians** believe *the Lord's Supper is a memorial* of Christ's finished work. "This do in remembrance of me" (*1 Cor 11:24*).

**Catholics** believe *the Lord's Supper is a sacrifice* of Christ that continues the work of redemption. "The sacrifice of Christ and the sacrifice of the Eucharist are one single sacrifice...the same Christ who offered himself once in a bloody manner on the altar of the cross is contained and offered in an unbloody manner...for the sins of the living and the dead" (1367, 1414).

**Christians** receive *Jesus permanently, spiritually in the heart*. "As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name" (*John 1:12*). "God...hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts" (*2 Cor 1:22*).

**Catholics** receive *Jesus frequently, physically in the stomach*. "The body and blood, together with the soul and divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ...is truly, really, and substantially contained in the Eucharist" (1374-78).

**Christians** are *priests and saints*. "Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light" (*1 Peter 2:9*). "Paul...to the saints which are at Ephesus" (*Eph 1:1*).

**Catholics** *need a priest and are not saints* unless canonized by the pope. "In the forgiveness of sins, both priests and sacraments are instruments which our Lord...wills to use to efface our sins and give us the grace of justification" (987).

**Christians** are *condemned by the Roman Catholic Church*. The Council of Trent and Vatican II pronounced over 100 anathemas that are still in effect today.

**Catholics** are *condemned by God's Word*. "He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day" (*John 12:48*). "There be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed" (*Gal 1:7-8*).

Christians who have believed the Word of God have the assurance of eternal life. Catholics who have rejected the Word of God in favor of the teachings and traditions of men, have only a false hope of being saved from the wrath of God. While there may be born-again Christians who worship in the Catholic Church, by definition they are no longer Roman Catholics. Eventually the Spirit of Truth will lead them out when they begin discerning truth from error, and worship from idolatry.

\* Bible quotes are from the New American Bible for Catholics.

Our desire is to set forth the truth in love as it is in Jesus, with the sincere prayer that God may grant Roman Catholics repentance, even as the apostle taught: “In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will” (2 Tim 2:25-26). □

### 3. SHOULD I LEAVE MY CHURCH?

“I am a Roman Catholic, but recently in a home Bible study I received Christ as my Lord and Saviour, and I know now that I am a new creature in Christ, a born-again child of God; I know that I have eternal life. Soon, I hope to follow the Lord in believer’s baptism. Should I leave the Catholic Church, or should I stay in it? Is it necessary or important for me to join an Evangelical church?”

All Catholics who by God’s grace trust in Christ sooner or later face this problem. As a former Roman Catholic priest myself, I believe that a true Christian will eventually leave the Catholic Church.

**First**—A Catholic who receives Christ as Lord and Savior will leave his church for these three reasons:

(1) As a believer, he has Christ as Lord, which means he does what the Lord says. If his church happens to have doctrines and laws against God’s Word, the believer cannot abide by them, he must obey the word of his Lord and Master. As we’ve clearly seen, the Catholic Church has various major doctrines and laws which are unbiblical; yet these are binding on a Catholic’s conscience, under pain of sin, and if dogmas, even of excommunication.

(2) God’s Word teaches that believers have one or more spiritual gifts (Eph 4:7-13; 1 Cor 12:1-31), the purpose of which is to equip us for building up the body of Christ. They are for service. The context in these passages demands, from the very nature of such gifts, that the Apostle Paul is dealing with the visible manifestation of Christ’s body—the local church. Now, in which church is the believer supposed to serve and exercise his gifts? If I work in and for a church that mixes error with truth, I am directly responsible for the spreading of error. A true believer who remains in the Catholic Church directly contributes to the growth and building up of that church, and to the spreading of that for which it stands.

(3) The Catholic who becomes a true believer can find local churches which accept the Lordship of Christ and the authority of his word. Such churches surely fall short of perfection in the lives of believers, as also Roman Catholics do (in a much greater way), but they will not justify open disobedience to God’s Word on the basis of the authority of the church. These Evangelical churches abide by God’s Word in principle, and seek to do so in practice, too, by the enabling power of the Holy Spirit.

**Second**—A Catholic who has trusted Christ will leave his church because he is no longer a Roman Catholic.

(1) If you have faith in Christ alone and accept his word as your final authority, you are not a Roman Catholic, but a Protestant (even if you don’t like the word Protestant). Salvation by faith and the sole authority of Scripture is the very foundation of Protestantism, over against salvation by works and sacraments, and the authority of Catholic tradition.

(2) Many Catholics wrongly think that they can reject official teachings and dogmas of their church and yet be Catholics. Their church declares them *ipso facto* excommunicated (that is, automatically cut off from the Catholic Church and the Body of Christ). This makes them heretics in the eyes of their church. For instance, if you don’t believe in your heart that the pope is infallible, that Mary was sinless from conception, that the Mass is a true sacrifice, that there is a purgatory, or if you reject any of the seven sacraments as taught by the church, etc., ***you’re no longer a Roman Catholic in the eyes of your church.*** The text of official definitions of the pope always ends with the expression: “And if any one dare to believe the contrary, let him be anathema (damned and excommunicated).”

If you are a Catholic and have truly submitted your life to Christ as Lord and Savior, there’s no other option—you must leave the Catholic Church. You need a local Christian fellowship for your growth in grace, for your growth in the knowledge of Christ and his word, and for the exercise of your spiritual gifts.

If you are a Catholic and have not yet trusted Christ alone to save you, listen carefully to what Jesus said—“This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men” (Mark 7:6-8).

Roman Catholicism’s teaching on salvation contradicts the Bible, elevating the traditions of men above the Word of God. To adhere to those teachings is to worship God in vain. No one is saved by trying to merit God’s favor. No one is saved who adds anything to faith in Christ for justification and acceptance with God. No one is saved who depends on what they do to be saved—whether it be baptism, receiving sacraments, tithing, self-righteousness, church attendance, giving to the poor, indulgences, or any other religious duty.

God justifies sinners “freely by his grace”—the unmerited and undeserved gift of God (Rom 3:24). “By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast” (Eph 2:8-9). This gift is received only by trusting in Christ, as we forsake all of our own efforts to save ourselves, and cease to trust in anything that we can do to make ourselves right with God (see Luke 18:9-14).

Turn from your sin and every other confidence, and rest in the finished work of Jesus Christ which provides a perfect salvation for all who put their trust in him. □

## WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?

The gospel of Christ is good news of pardon to the guilty, addressing all as equally guilty before God. It reveals an atonement sufficient for all; and every sinner is commanded to receive it as a faithful saying, that “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” (1 Tim 1:15). The gospel is addressed to those who are “far from righteousness” (Isa 46:12); who are poor, and blind, and naked; who have no money to purchase salvation, no merit to recommend them to the favor of God (Isa 55:1; Luke 7:42).

Christ came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance (Matt 9:13). If we are not sinners, we have nothing to do with the gospel; and if we are sinners, let us not reject the counsel of God against ourselves, by vainly supposing that anything about us gives us a peculiar claim to his favor, or by imagining that our sins are too great to be forgiven. The thief upon the cross was saved by faith in Jesus, and none shall enter heaven in any other way. Our only plea is this—“God be merciful to me a sinner.”

Although the Scriptures are so clear on this subject, it is a stumbling-block and foolishness to the great body of those who hear the gospel. It offends their pride to be put upon a level with the outcasts of society; surely, they think, some difference will be made; but they err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor understanding the malignity of sin or the grace of God.

They view salvation as a kind of bargain which God proposes to make with his creatures, that on certain conditions he will accept them; while in fact it is the message of reconciliation, equally addressed to all mankind, declaring that a full atonement for sin has been made upon the cross, and inviting every sinner of Adam’s race instantly to approach God through Christ.

When Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, it was a remedy equally adapted for all who had been bitten (Num 21:8; John 3:14-15). By looking to the serpent the patient was healed; and in reference to this emblem, Christ, indiscriminately addressing all mankind, says, “Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is none else” (Isa 45:21-22).

While the gospel is preached freely to all, it is “the power of God unto salvation” only to those who believe (Rom 1:16). But it is vain to talk of being justified by Christ’s righteousness, unless our hearts are “purified by faith” (Acts 15:9). We may profess faith in Jesus while we are slaves to sin; we may deceive ourselves, and affirm that we are trusting in Christ while we are living after the flesh; but every branch in the vine that beareth not fruit shall be cast into the fire (Matt 3:10; John 15:2).

If we believe Christ’s gospel, it will effectually work in our hearts (1 Thess 2:13), and teach us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world (Titus 2:11-12); and if what we believe does not produce this effect, it is not the true grace of God in which we stand. We are deceived. “They that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts” (Gal 5:24). □

## Roman Catholics are Asking...

### 1. AM I BEING DECEIVED?

Which is worse—to be insulted, embarrassed or deceived? If I were to insult you, you’d feel the sting immediately. If I were to embarrass you, you’d be the first to know. But if I were to deceive you...you might never know it! As painful as being insulted or embarrassed can be, at least you’re aware of what’s taking place. But deception can be deadly because you don’t realize you are being betrayed, misled, seduced or ensnared. It’s much more than a clever slight of hand. Deceived people are not even aware they are being misled unless they are confronted with the truth. Tragically, many go to their graves deceived about their relationship with God.

What is your source for truth? Is it trustworthy; and will it protect you from the schemes and lies of the master deceiver, Satan? Jeremiah gave wise counsel for choosing who to trust. He said if you put your trust in man you will be cursed like a withered bush in a barren desert; but if your ultimate trust is in God, you will flourish like a tree planted by the water (Jer 17:5-8). In searching for truth, most people put their trust in man—religious leaders—instead of God.

Catholics, for example, believe that the pope and the Roman Catholic Church teach exactly what Jesus and the Bible teach. But how do we know if the popes’ teachings or the dogmas of the Roman Catholic Church are true? We must search the Scriptures (see Acts 17:11). This is the standard for judging the teachings of all religious leaders. Disregarding the objective truth of God’s Word in favor of the subjective teachings of men can be a tragic mistake.

#### THE DANGER OF DECEPTION

Would it surprise you to learn that many religious teachings go against the Bible? That should concern you, since your eternal destiny may depend on such teachings? Here is how Catholic doctrine misleads people about God’s salvation:

- All graces needed to attain eternal life can be merited (2027).\*
- Catholics are reborn as sons of God and freed from sin by water baptism (1213).
- Purgatory is a cleansing fire that achieves the holiness necessary for heaven (1030-31).
- In Mass Jesus is offered daily as a sacrificial victim (1367).
- Venial sins are not deserving of hell (1863).
- Performing acts of penance can expiate our sins (1459, 1477).