



# CATHOLICISM

## An Examination of the Teachings of the Catholic Church

Lecture notes by [Charlie Campbell](#)  
 Director of The Always Be Ready Apologetics Ministry  
 Twitter: [@CharlieABReady](#)

Right at the outset, I want to say that this is not a mean-spirited attack on Catholic people. I love Catholics. I have Catholic friends. This is an examination or comparison of what the Catholic Church teaches side by side with what the Bible teaches. I pray that it would be helpful to evangelicals who desire to share the truth in love with their Catholic friends and eye opening to Catholics who may have not seriously considered these issues previously.

In this concise examination of the Roman Catholic Church, we want to consider:

- I. The Origin of the Catholic Church
- II. Areas of Agreement between Evangelicals and Catholics
- III. Areas of Disagreement
- IV. Sharing the Truth in Love with Catholics
- V. Book recommendations for further reading

### I. THE ORIGIN OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

The Book of Acts records for us the birth of the New Testament Church, and some of the history of the first 30 years of Christianity. In spite of great persecution, by the end of the first century A.D., Christian churches had been established in numerous cities throughout the Roman Empire.

In the first century, the churches followed the pattern of government laid down in the New Testament. The churches were independent, autonomous, local churches that met in homes and were led by a plurality of elders, also called bishops. There was no Pope, Cardinals or priests in the Catholic sense. All believers were considered priests (1 Peter 2:5). The churches were generally simple gatherings of disciples who met to give attention to the apostles teaching, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer (Acts 2:42). Well, over the course of the next couple hundred years, that changed.

Primarily because of its location in the capital of the Roman Empire, the church in Rome slowly began gaining some prominence. When the Roman Emperor Constantine legalized the Christian faith, and ended the persecution of Christians with the Edict of Milan in 313, the church in Rome gained even further prominence. As the church in Rome allied itself with the Roman government, it continued to grow in its size, authority, and influence.

As early as the third century the leaders of the church in Rome were claiming for themselves a supremacy over other churches throughout the Empire when it came to matters of doctrine. By the sixth century, the church in Rome was exercising jurisdiction over the churches.

In 590 AD, Gregory the First, the bishop of Rome, expanded the authority of the Church to

include military and civil power. Though Gregory did not claim to be a theologian, some of his beliefs became essentials in Catholic theology. He believed in purgatory and taught that masses celebrated in behalf of the dead could relieve their pains there. After Gregory, these ideas would become widely accepted. A Christianity that looked to Rome for leadership was definitely beginning to take shape.

### **And thus, the Roman Catholic Church was born.**

Most Bible scholars outside of the Catholic Church reject the Catholic tradition that says the church at Rome was established by the apostle Peter. The case for Peter being the first bishop of the church in Rome is very weak.

The apostle Paul, in his letter to the church at Rome, greets more than two dozen people by name at the end of his letter (Romans 16), *but not Peter*. That would be a strange omission if Peter was living in Rome, and especially if he was the overseer of the church there.

Eusebius (c. 260–c. 340) who is called the “Father of Church History,” never mentions Peter as the Bishop of Rome. He *does* tell us that Peter came to Rome “about the end of his days” and was crucified there. So Peter apparently made it to Rome and even died in Rome, but there’s no compelling evidence he was the bishop of the church in Rome.

But even if it could be shown that Peter was the first bishop there, that does not mean that he had ultimate ruling authority over the entire church, that he or his successors were infallible, or that Peter would support the unbiblical teachings that poured out of the church in Rome in the centuries that followed.

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*For additional help on this topic (Peter and the Origin of Catholicism)...*

#### **ARTICLE:**

["Is Peter the Rock on Which the Church is Built?"](#) by Matt Slick

#### **AUDIO:**

["The Papacy: Matthew 16 – Peter and the Rock"](#) by William Webster

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Now, Rome’s claim to supremacy and legal jurisdiction was vigorously resisted by other church leaders and could never be enforced in the eastern portion of the Empire. Dissension remained in the Church between those in the West, based in Rome, and those in the East, based in Constantinople.

This finally led to a major split in the church in 1054, when the Eastern churches broke away from the church in Rome. The church in the East went on to be known as the [Eastern Orthodox Church](#) (also known as the Greek Orthodox Church). The Eastern Orthodox church maintains to this day that Rome strayed into heresy with the development of the papacy (the office of the pope) and its claims to absolute primacy (supremacy) over other churches.

Another major split came in the sixteenth century. In Wittenberg, Germany, on October 31, 1517, a Catholic monk by the name of Martin Luther (1483–1546) nailed his *Ninety-Five Theses* to the door of the local Catholic Church, protesting numerous teachings of the Catholic Church. Martin Luther’s disagreements with the Catholic Church sparked a fire of protest against the Catholic Church that spread throughout Europe. That movement of course became known as "The Reformation."

*(If you would like to learn more about this fascinating and pivotal time in church history, you might rent a copy of LUTHER (2003) PG-13. If you use Netflix, it is available there. If you use iTunes, you can rent it for a couple of dollars and watch it right on your computer.)*

Far more than protesting trivial, debatable matters, the protest against the Catholic Church revolved around the power of the Pope, the abuse involved in the sale of indulgences, the teaching that souls are in Purgatory, and the gospel message itself.

The Greek word for the word “gospel” is *evangelion* and, as you know, means “good news.” So Martin Luther dubbed his breakaway movement the “evangelical church.” And the division that took place nearly 500 years ago between Catholics and Evangelicals exists to this day. (Evangelicals would include: Lutherans, Methodists, Presbyterians, Baptists, just about all Christians outside of the Catholic Church.)

Today, nearly one out of every six people alive today would call themselves a follower of the Roman Catholic Church. Out of the six billion people alive today, there are approximately one billion Catholics worldwide. The word “Catholic” comes from the Greek word “katholikos” meaning: universal. The Catholic Church began referring to itself as the Catholic Church because for so long it believed that it was the one and only true church universally. For centuries it was taught that there was no salvation outside of the Roman Catholic Church.

Pope Innocent III said in A.D. 1208: “With our hearts we believe and with our lips we confess but one Church, not that of the heretics, but the Holy Roman Catholic and Apostolic Church, outside which we believe that no one is saved.”

Pope Pius IX said in A.D. 1854: “It must be held by faith that outside the Apostolic Roman Church, no one can be saved; that this is the only ark of salvation; that he who shall not have entered therein will perish in the flood.”

In 1965 at an event known as “Vatican II” a change took place. Pope Paul VI delivered a message that elevated protestant evangelical believers from being lost to being “separated brethren.” Unfortunately, it was also suggested that even non-Christians, in faiths such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam, might also be saved (see [“Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions”](#)).

## II. SOME AGREEMENTS BETWEEN CATHOLICS AND EVANGELICALS

There are many doctrines that Evangelical, Bible believing Christians, and Catholics agree upon. For instance, both Evangelicals (Protestants) and Catholics believe...

1. That the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is the sovereign creator and sustainer of the universe
2. That there is one God who exists eternally in three distinct, but co-equal persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
3. That Jesus was born of a virgin, lived a sinless life, rose bodily from the grave, ascended into Heaven, and is returning in glory to judge mankind
4. That there is a future resurrection of the bodies of both the righteous and the wicked
5. That the Old and New Testaments are the inspired and infallible Word of God
6. We agree on the sanctity of life and many of the moral issues of our day.

And there are others. We rejoice that we have so much in common with our Catholic friends (and these are good starting points for conversation). But in addition to our agreements, there are some...

### III. SOME DISAGREEMENTS BETWEEN CATHOLICS AND EVANGELICALS

#### DISAGREEMENT NO. 1 / The Gospel

According to the Roman Catholic Church, salvation is not by grace alone through faith in Christ alone. According to the Catholic Church, being justified (declared righteous) before God is a *process* that begins at the moment of baptism and then *progresses* and is maintained by a person's *participation* the Catholic Church's "Seven Sacraments."

The Seven Sacraments of the Catholic Church are:

A. Baptism

B. Penance

(Penance must involve: A. Contrition over sin. B. Confession to a priest. C. Following the instructions of the priest, typically involving praying ten "Our Fathers" or ten "Hail Mary's")

C. Participation in the Eucharist, also known as Mass.

(Mass involves the re-sacrificing or re-presenting of the sacrifice of Jesus to the Father, in order to appease God's wrath and cover people's sins)

D. Confirmation

(This occurs when a bishop lays his hand on the head of the Catholic. Confirmation is believed to impart the Holy Spirit to the recipient)

E. Matrimony (Marriage)

F. Holy Orders (Ordination to the office of a bishop, priest or deacon)

G. Anointing of the sick (Commending a person to the Lord so that He can relieve him and save him. Usually done near death)

The Catholic Church teaches that as a person participates in these sacraments, grace for salvation is dispensed piece by piece from birth to death. The official Catechism of the Catholic Church, right on the Vatican's website, plainly states: "The Church affirms that for believers the sacraments of the New Covenant are necessary for salvation." (p. 319)

In response to this, Evangelicals Christians believe that to make participation in any of these things a requirement for salvation is to pervert the Biblical gospel. Why?

The Bible, over and over, teaches that salvation is by grace alone, through faith in Christ alone, and not the result of our efforts, baptism, confession to a priest, or any other work of man (Ephesians 2:8-9). Listen carefully to the following verses which, interestingly enough, were *all* originally written to the believers in the city of Rome.

Romans 3:28 says, "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified [how?] by *faith* apart from the deeds of the law."

Romans 4:3 says, "For what does the Scripture say? 'Abraham *believed* God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.'"

Romans 4:5 says, "But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his *faith* is accounted for righteousness"

Romans 5:1 says, "Therefore, having been justified by *faith*, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ"

In addition to these verses written to the church in Rome, we have other Scriptures. For example...

Jesus Himself said there was only one condition for salvation and that was belief. In John 3:16 He said, "Whoever *believes* in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

John the Baptist taught that there was only one condition for eternal life. In John 3:36 he said, "He who *believes* in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."

The apostle John taught that there was only one condition for eternal life. In 1 John 5:13 he said, "These things I have written to you who *believe* in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life..."

These verses and many others, clearly and I think forcefully, refute the Catholic notion that salvation is obtained piece by piece through our ongoing participation in their Seven Sacraments.

But, at the Council of Trent in 1546 the Catholic Church stated something that stands to this day. Listen carefully to this: "If anyone says that the sinner is justified by *faith* alone, meaning that nothing else is required to cooperate in order to obtain the grace of justification, let him be anathema [defined by Catholics as being excommunicated]." This is the official teaching of the Catholic Church to this very day.

Well, this teaching obviously contradicts the Scriptures. Is this a serious issue, that the Catholic Church has tampered with the gospel? Let's allow God's Word to speak on the matter.

Galatians 1:8-9 says, "But even though we, or an angel from Heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which 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 that which you received, let him be [what?] accursed."

The Greek word there for accursed is *anathema*. The word refers to that which is doomed to eternal destruction. That is a heavy warning. It is heartbreaking to think about how many people in the Catholic Church today believe they are going to Heaven because of their good works, their attendance at mass, their baptism, or their confirmation but who have never really placed their trust in Jesus Christ.

**A look into the teachings of the Catholic Church.**



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**W**here, when, and how did the Roman Catholic Church come to be? What do Catholics and Protestants agree upon? What do they disagree upon? Why do they disagree? Do Catholic teachings line up with the Bible? Why are there different books (the Apocrypha) in the Catholic Bible? Are those books inspired and trustworthy? This hour-long presentation by Charlie Campbell, recorded before a live congregation at Calvary Chapel South Bay in southern California, will give you answers to these questions and others. This visual presentation includes more than 100 of Charlie's PowerPoint images.




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A second area that Evangelicals and the Catholic Church disagree has to do with...

### **DISAGREEMENT NO. 2 / Purgatory**

The Catholic Church teaches that the souls of believers who have died will suffer for a time of purging that will prepare them to enter Heaven. The purpose of Purgatory, says the Catholic Church, is to cleanse an individual of imperfections, sins and faults. Catholics differ in their

opinions as to the nature of the suffering in Purgatory. Most believe that suffering will include the physical pain of burning in fire.

Regarding Purgatory, the official teaching of the Catholic Church says: "If anyone says that after the reception of the grace of justification the guilt is so remitted and the debt of eternal punishment so blotted out to every repentant sinner, that no debt of temporal punishment remains to be discharged, either in this world or in Purgatory, before the gates of Heaven can be opened, let him be anathema." [Council of Trent]

In other words, "If you think a person can just go straight to Heaven after having their sins forgiven, without having to suffer in Purgatory first, let him be anathema!" Well, that's exactly what we say.

Evangelicals believe that the doctrine of Purgatory is a man made invention that denies the sufficiency of what Christ did on the cross for our sins. The Bible teaches that upon death, Christians are immediately ushered into the presence of God in Heaven. Where? Turn with me to Luke 23:43.

If ever there was a person who deserved to go to "Purgatory"—if there was such a thing—it would have been the thief on the cross next to Jesus. He was a brand new believer. He had no time to do any good works, be baptized or be "confirmed" before his death. But where did he go when he died? Jesus said to him: "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43). Not Purgatory. Paradise.

For the person who has put their faith in Christ, he too will immediately go into the presence of God in "Paradise" (Rev. 2:7). The apostle Paul knew this and that is why he was able to say "We are of good courage, I say, and prefer to be absent from the body and to be *at home with the Lord* (2 Cor. 5:8)." That is what happens to believers today when they die. They go "home" to be "with the Lord."

To say that a Christian must suffer in the future for the same sins that Jesus died for is an insult to Christ's sacrifice. Purgatory is an unbiblical doctrine and a second area that Evangelicals disagree with the Catholic Church.

A third area that Evangelicals and the Catholic Church disagree has to do with...

### **DISAGREEMENT NO. 3 / Praying for the dead and to the saints**

First, let's consider praying for the dead. The Catholic Church teaches that Christians who are alive on Earth can and should come to the assistance of the souls in Purgatory by intercessory prayers as well as by giving to the poor and other pious works.

Evangelicals reject this teaching of the Catholic Church on the basis that there is no Scriptural support whatsoever for this doctrine. (See Norman L. Geisler and Ralph E. MacKenzie, *Roman Catholics and Evangelicals: Agreements and Disagreements*, p. 348ff.) There is not a single example in the Bible of a person praying for a person who has died.

Second, let's consider praying to Mary and the saints. The Catholic Catechism says:

"The witnesses who have preceded us into the kingdom, especially those whom the Church recognizes as saints, share in the living tradition of prayer by the example of their lives... They contemplate God, praise him and constantly care for those whom they have left on earth. Their intercession is their most exalted service to God's plan. We can and should ask them [the saints] to intercede for us and for the whole world." (p. 645, #2683, p. 249, #956) [This is right off the Vatican's website [here](#).]

And so the Catholic Church encourages its followers to pray prayers like this one to Mary (that can be found on many Catholic websites)...

“O Mother of Perpetual Help, thou art the dispenser of all the gifts which God grants to us miserable sinners; and for this end He has made thee so powerful, so rich, and so bountiful, in order that thou mayest help us in our misery. Thou art the advocate of the most wretched and abandoned sinners who have recourse to thee: come to my aid, for I recommend myself to thee. In thy hands I place my eternal salvation, and to thee I entrust my soul. Count me among thy most devoted servants; take me under thy protection, and it is enough for me. For, if thou protect me, I fear nothing; not from my sins, because thou wilt obtain for me the pardon of them; nor from the devils, because thou art more powerful than all hell together; nor even from Jesus, my judge, because by one prayer from thee He will be appeased. But one thing I fear: that in the hour of temptation I may through negligence fail to call on thee and thus perish miserably. Obtain for me, therefore, the pardon of my sins, love for Jesus, final perseverance, and the grace ever to have recourse to thee, O Mother of Perpetual Help.” (This [prayer](#) is available on numerous Catholic websites, including this one <http://www.dailycatholic.org/perpetua.htm>)

Catholics are encouraged by the Catholic Church to pray prayers like this, not to God, but to Mary! This is absolutely contradicted by the Bible.

The Bible says in Philippians 4:6: “Let your requests be made known to [who?] God.” Jesus taught us to pray to “Our Father who art in Heaven” (Matthew 6:9). The apostle Paul writes, “For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 2:5). There are prayers recorded in the Bible from Genesis all the way to the Book of Revelation, and *none* of them are addressed to a saint, an angel or anyone other than God.

Numerous passages in the Old Testament condemn all attempts to communicate with the dead. Those verses include Deuteronomy 18:10-12; Leviticus 20:6, 27; 1 Samuel 28:5-18; Isaiah 8:19-20.

Is it a serious thing that the Catholic Church would mislead multitudes of people away from the *living* God and into prayer to people (who have died)? Absolutely! In Old Testament times, if a Jew violated these commands prohibiting communication with the dead, they were to be put to death. Am I suggesting that we put people to death who do this? No. We are living in a different dispensation. Those laws were to govern the Israelites at a particular time in history. But it does show you how much God detests the practice.

A fourth area that Evangelicals and the Catholic Church disagree has to do with...

## **DISAGREEMENT NO. 4 / MARY**

The Catholic Church teaches that Mary was immaculately conceived (that is to say, “preserved free from all stain of original sin”-Pope Pius IX, 1854), lived a sinless life, remained a virgin after the birth of Christ, was carried bodily up into Heaven and plays a part in our salvation as a co-redeemer with Christ.

Evangelical Christians reject all of these teachings. We believe Mary was a great example for believers in her faith and in her obedience. But there are numerous Scriptures that contradict the traditions the Catholic Church has attached to her.

For example, regarding the Catholic teaching on Mary’s supposed sinlessness, the Bible clearly contradicts this in Scriptures like Luke 1:46 where Mary herself states: “My spirit rejoices in God my *savior*.” Mary’s reference here to God as her “Savior” implies that she too was a sinner. You don’t need a “Savior” if you are not a sinner. Her statement here is in perfect harmony with Romans 3:10, where it states: “There is none righteous, no not one.” There is also Mark 10:18 where Jesus said: “No one is good except God alone. There is also the passage in Luke 2:22-24, where Mary goes to Jerusalem “to offer a sacrifice...a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons” for her sinful condition (fulfilling the requirement put forth in Leviticus 12). A sacrifice would not have been necessary if she had been sinless.



These are just some of the verses that the Catholic Church has overlooked or brushed aside as it has developed its unbiblical view of Mary.

A fifth area that Evangelicals and the Catholic Church disagree has to do with...

## **DISAGREEMENT NO. 5 / The Bible**

Evangelicals believe that the Bible is made up of 66 divinely inspired documents that God decided should make up the canon of Scripture.

In 1546 at an event known as the Council of Trent, the Catholic Church added eleven Jewish writings to the Bible known as the "Apocrypha."

### **What is the Apocrypha?**

The Apocrypha is a collection of fourteen Jewish writings that were written down between 200 B.C. and A.D. 100. Eleven of those fourteen books were accepted by the Catholic Church as God-inspired Scriptures and were placed in the Catholic Bible. If you open a Catholic Bible today you will see books in there with titles like Tobit, Judith, 1 & 2 Maccabees, and Baruch.

Not only has the Catholic Church added these books to the Bible, they state:

"If anyone, however, should not accept the said books as sacred and canonical [ i.e. part of the Bible], entire with all their parts...and if both knowingly and deliberately he should condemn the aforesaid tradition let him be anathema." (Cited in *Roman Catholics and Evangelicals: Agreements and Differences*, by Geisler and MacKenzie, p. 157.)

Well, that's precisely what we say. There are numerous reasons why the early church and believers down through the centuries have rejected the apocryphal books as authoritative or divinely inspired.

#### *1. Neither Jesus nor the New Testament writers ever quoted from the Apocrypha as Scripture.*

Though Jesus and the apostles cite the Old Testament nearly 300 times in the pages of the New Testament, they never quote any of the apocryphal books accepted by the Roman Catholic Church.

There are in Jude verses 9, 14-15 some allusions to some extrabiblical writings, such as the Book of Enoch (v.14-15) and the Bodily Assumption of Moses. But this doesn't lend any support to the Catholic position because even they reject those books as non-canonical. And none of these are cited as Scripture nor as divinely authoritative. The New Testament simply refers to a truth contained in those books which otherwise may (and do) have many errors. These writings are rejected by Roman Catholics as well as Protestants. Remember that even the apostle Paul quotes pagan poets in Acts 17:28. That didn't mean they were divinely inspired.

#### *2. The Apocrypha contains numerous historical, geographical and chronological errors.*

There are many examples of this.

One error is found in the Book of Judith where it speaks of Nebuchadnezzar reigning in Nineveh. But it is a historical fact that this was never the case. Nebuchadnezzar was the king of Babylon.

For instance, the Apocrypha claims that Tobit was alive when the Assyrians conquered Israel in 722 B.C. and also when Jeroboam revolted against Judah in 931 B.C., which would make him at least 209 years old; yet according to the account, he died when he was 158 years.

Click [here](#) for additional information on errors in the Apocrypha.

#### *3. The Jews themselves never accepted the Apocrypha as inspired.*

The Jewish people themselves and the leading Jewish teachers of that era recognized that this collection of Jewish writings did not belong in the Hebrew Bible. The first century Jewish historian, Flavius Josephus, tells us in his writings that the Hebrew Bible was composed of the same books that make up our Old Testament today. Philo, an Alexandrian Jewish teacher, who lived from 20 B.C. to A.D. 40 quoted the Old Testament numerous times from virtually every Old Testament book. And he never once quotes from the Apocrypha.

*4. The Apocrypha contains no predictive prophecy to help substantiate its claims.*

The Bible over and over substantiates its claim to divine inspiration with hundreds of fulfilled prophecies. In fact, 27% percent of the Bible contains predictive prophecy, and half of them have already been fulfilled (see [Every Prophecy of the Bible](#) by John Walvoord).

Unlike the books of the Bible, the Apocrypha contains none.

*5. The Apocrypha never claims to be the inspired Word of God.*

Unlike the Old Testament books that over and over say things, like “thus says the Lord” or “the word of the LORD came unto him” the Apocrypha never says anything like this.

Since that is the case, it seems unwise to call the authors of the Apocrypha “prophets” or “spokespersons of God,” when that is something that they themselves did not claim to be.

*6. The Apocrypha was rejected by many of the leading early church fathers.*

The early church recognized a distinction between the Old Testament and the apocryphal books. Many of them, men such as Athanasius, Cyril of Jerusalem, Origen, spoke out against them.

*7. Jerome rejected the Apocrypha and left them out of His Latin translation of the Bible (the Vulgate).*

Jerome (who lived from 340-420 A.D.) was the man, who translated, for the first time, the Bible from Greek into Latin. Jerome is considered to be the greatest biblical and Hebrew scholars of the early medieval period. Jerome’s translation (known as the *Vulgate*) became the Bible translation for centuries to follow. It even became the official translation of the Roman Catholic Church.

So if Jerome left them out of his translation, how did the Apocryphal books end up in the Vulgate, the Catholic Bible? The Church inserted them into the Vulgate after he died.

*8. The Apocrypha contains numerous non-biblical and heretical doctrines.*

–The Apocrypha teaches the erroneous unbiblical doctrine of the pre-existence of the soul, suggesting that the kind of body one now has is determined by the character of his soul in a previous life (Wisdom of Solomon 8:19-20).

–The Apocrypha teaches prayer for the dead (2 Maccabees 12:41-46)

–The doctrine of Purgatory (that even the righteous must suffer after death for a time before they will be accepted into Heaven).

–The Apocrypha teaches that salvation is available through good works (through the giving of alms) in Tobit 12:9.

Tobit 3:9 says, “It is better to give alms than to lay up gold: alms doth deliver from death, and it shall purge away all sin”

Tobit 4:11 says, “For alms deliver from all sin and from death, and will not suffer the soul to go into

darkness."

These are doctrines that are not supported in the Bible, and are clearly even contradicted by authentic Scripture.

*9. The Apocrypha was not formally declared to be authoritative and inspired by the Catholic Church until 1546.*

1500 plus years after they were written!! Why did they do this so late? They did it to counter the teachings of Martin Luther and the other reformers. These men were exposing the fact that the Catholic Church was basing certain teachings on the Apocrypha, and not the sixty-six books of the Bible. So, the Catholic Church, officially declared that the Apocrypha was part of the Bible, inspired by God, and to be accepted with the rest of the Bible!

So for these reasons Evangelicals reject the Apocrypha.

A sixth area of disagreement between Evangelicals and Catholics (and this will be the last one that we look at today is...

## **DISAGREEMENT NO. 6 / The Authority of Church Tradition**

The Roman Catholic Church teaches that authority for faith and practice rests on two foundations:

A. The Bible (which includes their 11 added apocryphal books that they added to the Bible, the Apocrypha)

B. The Church (or Sacred church tradition).

Authoritative Church tradition includes the decrees of various councils (meetings of Church leaders) as well as certain sayings of the Popes.

The Catholic Church teaches that when the Pope speaks *ex cathedra* (which literally means "from the chair") he is absolutely infallible.

Throughout the history of the Church, the various Popes have said numerous things in this manner. Those things stand irreversibly to this day, as truths that are equal in authority to the written Word of God.

So, when you read something on the Vatican's official website, or in a Catholic book on theology, you'll read something that says something like "Such and such is true" and instead of it giving you a Scripture reference for justification for a particular belief, it will just say something like: "Pope Pius XII" because to the Catholic Church that is equal to Biblical revelation.

Evangelicals believe that authority for faith and practice rests solely upon one foundation, the sixty-six books of Scripture.

This is something that the men who led the reformation (i.e. Martin Luther and John Calvin, and Ulrich Zwingli) called *sola scriptura*, Latin for "Scripture alone."

We believe that Scripture alone is the final court of appeal on all doctrinal and moral matters. Evangelicals believe that any tradition or teaching that contradicts the Scripture it is to be rejected, no matter how sacred or old it is!!!

Colossians, chapter two says...

"Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition [the what? ] of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power (Colossians 2:8-10)."

Any “tradition” (v.8) that conflicts with the absolute Word of God, as contained in the Scripture, is to be rejected (Acts 17:11, Isa. 8:20)

Turn over to Matthew 15 with me. Listen to Jesus rebuke the Pharisees here for voiding the Word of God with their traditions...

Matthew 15:1-9

15:1 Then the scribes and Pharisees who were from Jerusalem came to Jesus, saying, 2 "Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread." 3 He answered and said to them, "Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition? 4 For God commanded, saying, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.' 5 But you say, 'Whoever says to his father or mother, "Whatever profit you might have received from me is a gift to God"-- 6 then he need not honor his father or mother.' Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition. 7 Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: 8'These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honor Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me. 9 And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'"

This is a why Evangelicals reject many of the Catholic traditions. They often contradict the commandments of God, and of course God does not contradict Himself.

Another reason Evangelicals reject most of the traditions of the Catholic Church as authoritative is because if tradition is needed to supplement God's Word (as the Catholic Church teaches) then that means the Bible is insufficient as a guide for living. But that is exactly the opposite of what the Bible says about itself.

The Bible tells us that written “Scripture” is sufficient. Turn with me to...

2 Timothy 3:14-17 Paul, writing to Timothy said...

14 But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, 15 and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, [notice: nothing else] which are able to make you wise for salvation [Scripture is sufficient to lead a person to salvation] through faith which is in Christ Jesus. 16 All Scripture [notice again, Paul doesn't mention tradition] is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be [what?] complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."

The Word of God, “the Holy Scriptures” (v.15) are able to make a man “complete” (v.17). The Greek word there for “complete” (in v. 17) can also be translated: adequate, capable, fully furnished, proficient in the sense of being able to meet all demands (*The Bible Knowledge Commentary*).

Jesus said, "The *Scripture* cannot be broken (John 10:35)." He never said, "Tradition cannot be broken."

Jesus said, "For assuredly, I say to you, till Heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled (Matthew 5:18)."

Again referring to the authority of written Scripture, not oral tradition. Jesus used Scripture as the final court of appeal in every matter under dispute.

To the Sadducees He said, "You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God (Matthew 22:29)."

To the devil, Jesus consistently responded "It is written..." three times in Matthew 4:4, 7, 10.

To the Pharisees, Jesus said, “For laying aside the commandment of God [the written Word], you hold the tradition of men — the washing of pitchers and cups, and many other such things you do. He said to them, “All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition (Mark 7:8-9).”

It was the man made traditions that people elevated above the written commandments of God that Jesus consistently had to condemn!

So, Evangelicals follow Jesus’ lead and believe that Scripture alone is the supreme and final authority. The Word of God itself tells us that it will equip us for every good work (2 Tim. 3:17).

But what about those verses that uphold “tradition” as being valuable? Paul does tell the Thessalonians to: “hold the traditions” in 2 Thessalonians 2:15.

2 Thessalonians 2:15 Paul writes to the believers in Thessalonica...

“Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word [i.e. word of mouth] or our epistle.”

Paul seems to say here that believers should hold on to “tradition”!

But, notice the critically important word there in v.15: “our”

Paul’s not referring to traditions in general, but things that he, along with Silas, and Timothy [see 1:1] had taught them previously.

And notice, Paul said...

“...hold the traditions which you were [notice that it’s in the past tense] taught [that is, when Paul was with the Thessalonian believers], whether by word or our epistle.” (2:15)

Paul was writing to people here in this epistle that he had previously and personally “taught” (v.15, 1 Thess. 2:1-2, 13) as an apostle of God.

The apostles, for a time, communicated their teachings orally until those teachings could be permanently recorded in written form.

Those are the traditions that Paul had in mind, not the traditions that the Roman Catholic Church would develop hundreds and even a thousand plus years later!

Did you realize that many of the traditions of the Catholic Church have no ties to the apostles or to Jesus? Many of them were developed long after the apostles. Listen to when the following Roman Catholic Church doctrines came into being:

- The perpetual virginity of Mary: 553
- Purgatory: 593
- Prayer to Mary, the saints and angels: 600
- The practice of kissing the Pope’s foot: 709
- The canonization of the dead saints: 995
- Celibacy of the priesthood: 1079
- Praying the Rosary: 1090
- Transubstantiation and confessing sins to a priest: 1215
- Belief in the seven sacraments: Late 13th century
- The Sinlessness of Mary: 1547 at Council of Trent
- The Infallibility of the Pope: 1870
- Mary being the co-redeemer with Christ: 1891 / Pope Leo XIII
- Mary being caught up to Heaven in bodily form: 1950 / Pope Pius XII
- Mary proclaimed Mother of the Church: 1965

And I could go on! Monks. Nuns. Convents. Cardinals. Lent. Ash Wednesday. The Catholicism that is practiced today does not resemble the Christianity of the New Testament or the first century church.

(The dates above are largely taken from [\*The Moody Handbook of Theology\*](#), p.404, 531-32; [\*Roman Catholics & Evangelicals\*](#) by Norman Geisler and Ralph MacKenzie).

Another verse the Catholic Church points to in support of its view of tradition is 2 Thessalonians 3:6, where Paul writes: "But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us."

Again, notice the words "from us" here in this verse. Not from the church to come and the leaders that will come on the scene hundreds of years from now. The traditions or teachings that came directly from the apostles are the ones that are binding. Also, notice that Paul speaks again in the past tense (v.6): "according to the tradition which he *received* from us."

Those are the traditions that are authoritative—and we believe that were even written down—not the Catholic traditions introduced centuries later! Paul said to hold to the tradition which "you were taught" (in 2 Thess. 2:15) and that which you "received from us" (in 2 Thess. 3:6). Those would exclude the traditions of the Catholic Church.

So those are some of the areas that Evangelicals disagree with the Catholic Church: The Gospel, Purgatory, Praying for the dead and to the dead, Mary, the Bible, and the authority of Church tradition.

#### **IV. SHARING THE TRUTH IN LOVE WITH CATHOLICS**

##### ***1. Remember to be speak kindly, with humility and gentleness.***

Our goal as ambassadors of Christ is never to shoot down people of other persuasions. No. We need to be merciful to our Catholic friends. Many of them are Catholics because they were raised in the religion. Many of them have never even heard some of the verses we've talked about. So, God desires that we be loving, gentle, kind and patient with them. Notice what 2 Timothy 2:24-25 says:

"And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth."

##### ***2. Ask them about their beliefs.***

Don't just assume that every Catholic believes the same thing. Some may not believe in Purgatory or praying to the saints. So you need to be sensitive to that.

##### ***3. Identify some of the beliefs you have in common.***

As I mentioned earlier, Evangelicals and Catholics have a lot of agreements. I encourage you to bring some of those up. A person is much more inclined to talk about *disagreements* after a friendly chat about areas of agreement.

##### ***4. Ask them about their salvation.***

I like to ask the Catholics this question: "If you were to die today and stand before God and He was to ask you 'Why should I allow you into Heaven?' What would you say?" Most Catholics say, "Because I am a good person" or "Because I am a Catholic."

Well, as you know, that is the wrong answer. They are trusting in themselves or their church

membership. Jesus said there was none who was good except God alone. There is none righteous no not one (Rom. 3:10). Point that out to them and...

### **5. Share the gospel.**

And keep it simple; no big words! Share verses from the Bible if you have a Bible on you. Seeing the Word of God with their own eyes will often be much more effective than just talking to them.

### **6. Invite them to church.**

How many Catholics have been led into the light after experiencing a church service where there is genuine, heart-felt worship taking place and where the Bible was taught in an expository way!

### **7. Encourage them to read the Bible.**

Many Catholics never read the Bible. And that is why they continue to believe much of what the Catholic Church teaches. Jesus said you shall know the truth and the truth will set you free. If a Catholic will only start reading their Bible, God will show them wonderful things!

I talked to a man at our church a while back and asked him how he became a believer. He said that he was raised a Catholic. He began to read the Bible on his own and he realized that the Bible was all about Jesus with very little mention of Mary. There was no mention of Purgatory, etc. The Word of God opened his eyes and he placed his faith in Jesus Christ.

God's Word is powerful and has opened the eyes of many Catholics. Let's encourage them to read it. Amen?

## **V. BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS**

If you have Catholic friends or family that you would like to dialog with, but could use some extra help, there are some wonderful books that examine the teachings of the Catholic Church and compare them side by side with the Scriptures.

1. [\*\*Roman Catholics & Evangelicals: Agreements and Differences\*\*](#) by Norman L. Geisler and Ralph E. MacKenzie
2. [\*\*Reasoning from the Scriptures with Catholics\*\*](#) by Ron Rhodes
3. [\*\*The Roman Catholic Controversy: Catholics & Protestants—Do the Differences Still Matter?\*\*](#) by James R. White

They are all very well written and provide lots of well researched answers to tough questions and issues that may come up in your conversation. If you'd like to find the official Catholic teaching on a variety of different doctrines, you can do some research right on the Vatican's website by [clicking here](#).

### **About Charlie Campbell:**

Charlie Campbell is the Director of The Always Be Ready Apologetics Ministry, the author of [\*\*One Minute Answers to Skeptics' Top Forty Questions\*\*](#), and a popular guest speaker at churches around the United States on issues related to the defense of the Christian faith. His teachings and resources have been endorsed by Dr. Norman Geisler, Charles Colson,

Chuck Smith, Nancy Leigh DeMoss, Jeremy Camp, and Brian Brodersen. He resides in southern California with his wife and five children.



### **Scheduling Charlie to Teach:**

Charlie would love to come and teach at your church, conference, school or retreat. Please [click here](#) for further details.

### **Additional Resources by Charlie Campbell**

[DVDS. BOOKS. CDS. MP3S.](#)

### **Supporting Charlie Financially**

Charlie Campbell is a full time missionary traveling the world seeking to spread the gospel and help believers stand strong in the truth. If you'd like to help support him financially, [click here](#). Thank you!