Christianity

And

Roman Catholicism
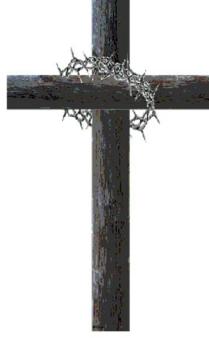
In the 14th century AD, a Christian movement began opposing the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. With the reintroduction of the Bible into European society, many followers of Christ began to see a difference between the traditions of the Roman Church and the Gospel of the New Testament. Christian leaders such as Luther, Zwingli, Wycliffe, and Calvin began the Protestant Reformation. Since that time, some Protestant denominations have stayed faithful to Biblical Christianity while others have become more flawed than the very Roman Church from which they separated. The Apostles foretold that apostasy would always plague the visible church.

I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things…   (Acts 20:29-30)

For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds.
(2 Corinthians 11:13-15)

Yet Jesus said, "I will build My church and the gates of Hell will not prevail against it (Matthew 16:18)." How could any church of Jesus Christ deteriorate into an apostate organization? The wrong assumptions are that (1) the Church of Rome, or any one denomination, is the one true church of Jesus Christ; and (2) Christ meant for the church to be under one successor to Peter and headquartered in one location.

Early New Testament Christianity did not view the church as having a head office under one man-made title (Roman, Methodist, Lutheran, Presbyterian, etc.) The church of Jesus Christ is a spiritual organization, and down through the ages, Christians have utilized the shell of various labels and organizations. Because of man's propensity toward error, once a denomination becomes powerful, wolves in sheep's clothing enter; and it is again time for true believers to reorganize into Biblical congregations. Through this process believers are tested as to their faithfulness to Christ and His teachings.

Keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them.
(Romans 16:17)

If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting; for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds.   (2 John 10-11)

By the 5th century AD, the church at Rome, being located in the capital city of the Roman Empire, began to claim supremacy over all other churches. The Roman Church asserted that their pastor (the Pope) was the direct successor to the Apostle Peter. In the spirit of Roman politics, the Romans supposed there should be an emperor for the church even as there was an emperor for the state. The rest of Christendom adamantly disagreed with Rome. From then until now, major Christian groups such as the Coptic Church in Egypt, the Armenian Church, and the Greek Orthodox Church consider Rome's claims an outrageous violation of Christ's teachings. Jesus Christ is the Head of the church, and the church has no earthly headquarters.

He (Jesus) is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything.   (Colossians 1:18)

All true Christians are "catholic" in the sense that all Christians are part of the universal church. All Christians are not "Roman Catholic". Protestant Christians would agree with the Church of Rome until the 4th century AD. It was in the Middle Ages that the Church of Rome began to add to and change the Gospel of Christ. Christians must choose between following the teachings of the medieval Roman church or the Apostolic teachings recorded in the New Testament.

The Main Controversy

The issue that separates Roman Catholicism from Evangelical Protestantism is the source of authority.

* **Protestantism: The Bible is the sole source of Christian doctrine.**

* **Roman Catholicism: The Bible and the decrees of the popes and cardinals are the sources of Christian doctrine.**

The Roman Catholic basis for authority allowed for the introduction of all sorts of practices and doctrines that were unknown to early Christianity. For example, the New Testament makes no mention of purgatory or celibacy of the clergy. In fact, the Bible actually refutes such teachings: Pastors are to be the husband of one wife (1 Timothy 3:2); false teachers forbid marriage (1 Timothy 4:3); after death, the Christian goes to heaven (2 Corinthians 5:1).

Nevertheless, the Roman Church claims that its doctrinal additions were hinted at in the New Testament, but it took the Spirit's guidance of the popes and cardinals to bring these new doctrines to light. Given the influence of false teachers, how can one be sure that this was the Spirit's guidance and not the superimposing of traditions on the Bible? Rome's answer is that the Roman Church is Christ's church, and Christ's church cannot err. The same authority

that was given to the Bible was given to the Roman Church.

Christians believe the Spirit of God leads the church into all truth (John 16:13). But the test of doctrine is consistency. The Spirit of God would not change the Gospel, nor would God contradict Himself. The early church allowed into the Bible only those books that were consistent with the Gospel message taught in the previous Biblical books. As Jude 3 teaches, the Gospel was given once in the apostolic age, and that Gospel needs to be defended.

Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was <u>once</u> for all handed down to the saints.   (Jude 3)

When the Apostolic letters in the New Testament are no longer the sole judge of truth, the door is open to all sorts of new teachings. Over the centuries the Roman Church added many new doctrines that contradict New Testament teachings. With a belief that Rome's decrees were God's revelation, the Roman Church gradually departed from the New Testament faith.

Catholic Doctrine	Biblical Refutation
Purgatory	(2 Cor. 5:8; Jn. 14:1-3)
Lent	(Col. 2:20-23)
The Mass	(1 Cor. 11:22; Heb. 7:27)
Celibacy	(1 Tim. 3:2, 4:3)
The Confessional	(Heb. 4:15-16)
The Sacramental System	(Gal. 2:16; Rom. 11:6)
The Pope	(Mt. 23:9; Col. 1:18)
Canonization	(Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:2)
Sinlessness of Mary	(Rom. 3:10; Lk. 1:47)
Mary a co-mediatrix	(1 Tim. 2:5)
The Rosary	(Mt. 6:7)
Priests	(I Pet. 2:9; I Tim. 3)
Prayers to the saints	(Eph. 2:18; Acts 14:15)
Worship through statues	(Ex. 20:4)

The Gospel According to Romanism

In the Roman Catholic system of salvation, infant baptism takes away the sin imputed through Adam (original sin). The Catholic is now in the state of grace. Every sin committed thereafter must be removed through the sacramental system.

- Sin can be expiated by good works, prayers, the rosary, or penance.
- Since the saints in heaven have extra credits of righteousness, the Catholics on earth may pray to the saints and receive these credits.
- Each Mass credits righteousness to one's account.
- At death, if the accumulated credits of righteousness do not outweigh one's sin, the Catholic goes to purgatory to suffer the penalty for the remaining sins.
- Catholics on earth can do good deeds to lessen the time for those in purgatory.

Roman Catholicism teaches that salvation is by the Grace of Christ; that is, Christ alone is the source of "merit". However, the Christian must work to "merit the merit of Christ." Such a system cleverly makes grace void. In effect, Christ is not the Savior; one becomes his own Savior.

I do not make void the grace of God, for if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly. (Galatians 2:21)

The Gospel According to the New Testament

The Bible teaches that man is spiritually dead and is by nature at enmity with God. "There is none righteous, not even one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God (Romans 3:10-11)." Since man is tainted with sin, man is not able to do any works pleasing to God. "All our righteous deeds are like filthy rags" in God's sight (Isaiah 64:6)." No amount of good works can wash away our sin. "By the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in God's sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin (Romans 3:20)."

Therefore, God decreed that He would provide righteousness solely through faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Jesus paid the substitutionary price for our sin on the cross. All who believe in Jesus are imputed the righteousness of Christ. Salvation is a gift received by faith.

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9)

To illustrate, it takes 100% righteousness to go to heaven. If a person has only 60%, the solution is not asking Christ for the missing 40%. He must abandon his 60% and accept 100% from Christ. This is what it means to trust Christ alone.

And may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith. (Philippians 3:9)

A typical complaint to "salvation by faith" is that if all one has to do is believe, then people will live like the devil. Those who say this do not understand the Biblical teaching of regeneration. With true faith comes a supernatural change in the soul – the new birth. True believers desire to live for God.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is unique. Every other religion teaches that man can achieve heaven by self-righteous effort. Only Christianity teaches that since man is completely unworthy, God must provide salvation as a free gift through faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Leaving Roman Catholicism

Through very basic Bible study, it can be shown that the Roman Catholic system is foreign to New Testament Christianity. But even after being shown irrefutable Biblical texts, many Catholics are unmoved. Why do people stay in the Roman system? Catholics can generally be divided into three groups:

(1) Those who don't care about the doctrine because they find in Romanism a religion of convenience

In every religion there are people who attend worship out of culture, not conviction. If they are born in Saudi, they become Muslims; if they are born in Delhi, they become Hindus; and if they are born in Catholic communities, they become Catholics. For this group, church is a place for baptism, weddings and funerals. Showing up occasionally for a Mass is an insurance policy just in case there is a Heaven and Hell. As was the case with many in Jesus' day, such people have no passion for God and no sincere remorse over sin. When confronted with the doctrinal errors of Romanism, this group simply doesn't care. They are content to believe all roads lead to heaven.

(2) Those who truly believe in a works-based salvation

The works salvation of Romanism is attractive to those who are depending on their self-righteousness as their ticket to Heaven. The controversy in Jesus' day was between those who trusted the Messiah for salvation and those who "trusted in themselves that they were righteous (Luke 18:9)." The apostle Paul described unsaved religious people who "go about to establish their own righteousness" and, consequently, "do not subject themselves to the righteousness of God (Romans 10:3)."

There are Roman Catholics who have attended mass and prayed the rosary for years. Their security is in sacramental observances, and they are not about to surrender their reliance on those credits of righteousness. This group even considers salvation by faith in Christ alone to be unfair. If asked why God should let them into Heaven, rather than saying, "I am trusting Jesus Christ and His blood shed for my sins," they will say, "I have been a good Catholic." This group truly believes in the Roman doctrine that Heaven is gained by earning merits.

Such individuals trust tradition above Scripture, the Roman System above the Gospel, and the Roman Church above Christ's Church. The object of their trust is misplaced, and the Bible describes misplaced trust as the great error of the lost.

3) Sincere, untaught believers who mistake loyalty to the Church of Rome for loyalty to Jesus Christ.

There are sincere followers of Christ within Catholicism who are uneducated in both the Bible and the Roman theological system. As one Catholic woman testified, "I don't know anything about the pope or the church's teaching, but I am simply trusting Jesus Christ as my Savior." Like many Catholics, this woman professes saving faith, but she is unaware that she is in a religious system that obscures the very faith she believes. This group is often shocked when they learn what Catholicism truly teaches compared to the New Testament, but they remain in Catholicism out of fear.

This group wonders, "Who is the individual Christian to question these scholarly Roman priests and centuries of church tradition?" Such uncertainty is a lack of confidence in one's ability to discern the doctrines of the Bible. To have some reservations is godly humility, but there comes a point at which one must put confidence in the Bible and the guidance of the Holy Spirit over the words of men. As it took courage for first-century Christians to follow Christ in opposition to the popular traditions of Judaism and paganism, so it takes great courage to follow Christ today.

The choice is loyalty to Christ or loyalty to the personalities and teachings of men.

He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it. (Matthew 10:37-39)

B.E.Winship