

## Testing the Teachings of Roman Catholicism

Scripture is the inspired Word of God and the ultimate authority for what we believe (John 17:17; 2 Timothy 3:16–17; 2 Peter 1:16–21). However, though I was raised in the Roman Catholic Church, I never opened a Bible until I was nineteen when I joined a home Bible study focused on the Gospel of John. There, the Holy Spirit opened the eyes of my heart, revealing that while I was religious, I was lost and lacked a personal relationship with Christ. I was trusting in myself instead of the finished work of Christ. Following my conversion, I saw the contrast between my religious upbringing and the straightforward teaching of the Bible. Because our beliefs have eternal consequences, I sincerely desire to help others understand some of the key differences between official Roman Catholic doctrine and the truth of Scripture.

The chart below compares the official statements found in the most recent Catechism of the Catholic Church (revised 1994) with biblical doctrine. The bracketed numbers in the left column are references to paragraph numbers in the official Catechism. You can compare these statements to the Scripture references in the right column to discern what God's Word teaches in these major areas of doctrine. To begin with, you can see that Roman Catholicism and biblical Christianity look to a different source of authority for what each believe.

ROMAN CATHOLICISM	BIBLICAL CHRISTIANITY
<b>Authority:</b> The Church: Her official interpretation of Scripture + Tradition [80,81,82].	<b>Authority:</b> The Bible: Its interpretation of itself + nothing (2 Tim 3:16-17; Jn 17:17; Mark 7:1-13)
The Pope is Peter's successor [882,936]; bishops succeed the apostles [861-862,938]; together, they rule the universal Church [883,894-896].	Apostles have no successors (Acts 1:21-22); Christ was head of the apostles and is now the Head of the church (Col 1:18; Eph 1:22-23).
God entrusted revelation to bishops [81]; The RC Church alone is the infallible interpreter of Scripture [890-891] and she alone has the authority to teach doctrine [85-87].	God gave His revelation to all believers (Jude 3); Scripture interprets Scripture (Acts 17:11); the Holy Spirit is the only authoritative Teacher (Jn 14:26).
The Pope is the Vicar of Christ and is infallible (incapable of error) in all he teaches [891].	Only God is infallible (Num 23:19; as His divine revelation, God's Word is our objective standard of Truth (2 Pet 1:19-21; Titus 1:2). Man is sinful (Rom 3:23)
The Magisterium (the official teaching body of the RC Church that possesses self-claimed authority) alone can interpret Scripture [85,100,939]; she has the right to add "truth" not clearly found in the Bible [66,88,2035,2051]	The priesthood of the believer gives each the right to interpret, and the Holy Spirit gives each the ability (1 Cor 2:12-16); no man has the authority to add to the Bible (1 Cor 4:6; Rev 22:18-19)

The Roman Catholic Church has been called a Christian religion because historically it has held to the deity of Christ, His virgin birth, bodily resurrection and return to earth. However, the following heresies reveal it does not hold to these essential doctrines in the truest sense.

ROMAN CATHOLICISM	BIBLICAL CHRISTIANITY
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<b>Mary &amp; Jesus:</b> Jesus is the Son of God, but because of her role in the virgin birth of Christ, Mary is a sinless deity and co-Redeemer with Jesus in the work of salvation.	<b>Jesus &amp; Mary:</b> Jesus Christ is very God; the sinless Son of God; second person of the triune Godhead; Creator and only Savior of sinners. Mary was a sinner chosen to be a servant of God.
Mary is the sinless co-Redeemer of humanity. "Without a single sin to restrain her, she gave herself entirely to the person and work of her son; she did so in order to serve the mystery of redemption with Him...being obedient she became the cause of salvation for herself and for the whole human race" [494] She "is...Advocate...and Mediatrix" [969].	Mary was a sinner in need of a Savior like you and me (Luke 1:46-47); Christ is the only sinless Redeemer whose complete sacrifice made salvation possible (1 Pet 1:17-19) and is the only Mediator between God and man (1 Tim 2:5, 1 Jn 2:1; Acts 4:12).
the "perpetual virginity of Mary", i.e. she was a virgin before, during, and after the birth of Christ [499,500,510,511].	Joseph kept Mary a virgin until the birth of Christ (Matt 1:25); she had more children afterward (Matt 13:55-56).
Mary is the Mother of God [963,971,2677]; the Mother of the Church [963,975].	Mary is the mother of Jesus Christ, who is both man and God (Jn 2:1); she is a member of the church (Acts 1:14).
Mary did not die, rather she was bodily assumed into heaven [966,974]. The official doctrine of the Assumption of Mary was declared dogma by Pope Pius XII in 1950.	As a sinner, Mary died like anyone else (Rom 3:23; Gen 3:19).
Mary was miraculously preserved from the stain of original sin at the time of her conception [490-493]. The Immaculate Conception of Mary was declared official church dogma by Pius IX in 1854.	Mary herself said she was a sinner (Luke 1:46-47); and as a descendant of Adam, she was born with original sin (Rom 5:12).
Mary has been exalted as "Queen of Heaven and Earth" [966] and worthy of praise and devotion [971,2675].	God alone is to be praised (Ps 148:13); and heaven will forever ring with, "Worthy are Thou, our Lord and God, to receive glory...(Rev 4:11).
Jesus returns daily to the altar to be sacrificed at the Mass via the doctrine of Transubstantiation declared by Pope Innocent III in 1215 AD [1374-1377].	Christ's work on the cross is complete. He will bodily return in glory (Acts 1:11).

ROMAN CATHOLICISM	BIBLICAL CHRISTIANITY
<b>The Work of Christ:</b> The saving work of Christ began at the cross but continues daily through the Mass. The crucifix symbolizes the absence of hope in a risen, ascended, and living Savior.	<b>The Work of Christ:</b> The saving work of Christ on the cross was complete when He declared "It is finished," and God tore the veil of the temple in two. The empty cross is a symbol of His resurrection and complete work.
"The sacrifice of Christ and the sacrifice of the Eucharist are one single sacrifice" [1367]; "Every time this mystery is celebrated the work of our	The sacrifice of Christ is complete (Jn 19:30); was offered once for all (Heb 10:14); there is no need for any additional payments for sin (Heb 7:27-28). To

redemption is carried on" [1405]; The sacrifice is "offered...for the sins of the living and the dead" [1414].	add to the cross is blasphemy.
Sins are atoned for in the fires of purgatory; we "must strive to accept this temporal punishment of sin as a grace" [1030,31;1472-75]. "All who die in God's grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified...undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven [1030].	The precious blood of Christ is full payment for the sins of mankind (1 Pet 1:18-19; Rom 3:25). In Christ, believers are presented to God as holy and blameless and beyond reproach (Col 1:22). Purgatory was created by the RC Church to increase revenue and maintain its cultic hold upon its people.
The Mass is central to RC theology. The Last Supper was a real sacrifice [610-611, 621, 1339]; the bread & wine become the literal body & blood of Christ [1373-1377]; therefore, the body & blood of Christ literally exist in every piece of bread & wine in every RC church in the world [1374,1377]	The Last Supper was the sharing of a Passover meal with His disciples, not a sacrifice (1 Pet 2:24; bread and cup are symbols (1 Cor 11:23-25); Christ is bodily present at the right hand of the Father in heaven (Hebrews 10:12-13).
The Mass is a re-crucifixion of Christ [1367, 1371, 1414]; each Mass appeases God's wrath against sin [1371, 1407].	Christ offered Himself once for all (Heb 9:24-28); His death appeased God's wrath (Heb 10:12-18); He is our propitiation (1 Jn 2:2).
ROMAN CATHOLICISM	BIBLICAL CHRISTIANITY
<b>Salvation:</b> Salvation is by good works, which merit the infusion of grace through the Church.	<b>Salvation:</b> Salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.
"We can merit for ourselves and for others all the graces needed to attain eternal life" [2027].	Unregenerate man is dead in his trespasses and sin; completely unable to remedy his lost condition. Salvation is by grace through faith (Eph 2:8-9). Good works negate grace to gain salvation, but are evidence of genuine conversion (Eph. 2:10).
Man can earn heaven by receiving seven sacraments: [1129], meritorious masses [1405], RC Church membership [846], purgatory [1030], and indulgences [1498].	Eternal life is the free gift of God to all who repent of their sin and relinquish all trust in self and self-achievement, thus placing their complete faith in the sacrifice of Christ on Calvary (Titus 3:5-6; Rom 6:23)
Justification begins at infant baptism [1262-1274]; comes through faith and good works [1247-1249]; is the process of removal of original sin and replacement of <i>infused</i> righteousness [1987-1995] via the Church (sacraments, penance, etc).	Justification is by faith alone (Rom 3:28); the act whereby God declares a sinner righteous because of <i>imputed</i> righteousness (2 Cor 5:21; Rom 5:17); i.e. the righteousness of Christ. Works result from salvation, not the means (Eph 2:10).
"Baptism is the sacrament of regeneration...without which no one can enter the kingdom of God" [1213, 1215].	Baptism is a fruit of genuine salvation. It is the outward demonstration of an inner change (Acts 2:41).
Faith is belief in God and a hearty acceptance of all that the RC Church teaches [181-182].	Saving faith is an emptying of all self; total reliance and trust in Christ as Lord and Savior (Rom 10:8-17).
Assurance of salvation is impossible in this life; no one can be sure of heaven [1036, 2005].	God has given His Word that believers may <i>know</i> that they have eternal life (1 Jn 5:13).

Be aware of the apostolic warning against believing a different gospel than the one taught by the Lord Jesus Christ and His original apostles: *I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you, and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed* (Galatians 1:6-8).

### GLOSSARY OF CATHOLIC TERMS

**Apocrypha:** Fifteen writings recorded during the 400 “silent years” between the Old and New Testaments. The RC Church declared twelve inspired. and added them to the Catholic Canon in 1546.

**Apparition:** A vision of a disembodied person associated with an urgent message, e.g. the Virgin Mary.

**Eucharist:** The consecrated bread-like wafer and wine claimed to contain the body, blood, soul and divinity of Jesus Christ. It is to be worshipped, consumed, and sacrificed.

**Indulgence:** A means of receiving forgiveness from the temporal punishment of sins. Good works gain salvation and forgiveness and grace can apply to the sins of the living and the dead. During the Dark Ages, indulgences were sold for money.

**Magisterium:** The official teaching body of the RC Church possessing absolute, self-claimed authority.

**Mass:** The continuation of the sacrifice of Christ, which carries on the *unfinished* work of redemption, appeases the wrath of God, and atones for the sins of the living and the dead.

**Mortal sin:** A serious sin committed with full knowledge and consent. Those who die in this state go immediately to hell.

**Penance:** The confession of sins to a priest for forgiveness and reconciliation to God. A certain number of prayers are usually given as an assignment and requirement for forgiveness.

**Purgatory:** A place where those who die in God’s grace are punished and purified by fire for sins that have already been forgiven.

**Rosary:** A necklace of beads developed in the 11th century by Peter the Hermit as an expression of devotion to Mary. The beads comprise 53 repetitious prayers to Mary, 6 to the Father, and 6 to the Trinity.

**Sacraments:** Seven signs of efficacious grace which are necessary for salvation and by which grace and righteousness are infused.

**Transubstantiation:** The belief that the body, blood, soul, and divinity of Christ is truly, really, and substantially contained in the Eucharist.

**Venial sins:** Sins that merit only temporal punishment and do not deprive the sinner of grace, friendship with God or eternal happiness.

\*I’ve borrowed many of these definitions from a tract by Mike Gendron. For more information about the official teachings of the Roman Catholic Church, see [proclaimingthegospel.org](http://proclaimingthegospel.org).

