

A Summary of the Roman Catholic Church

In the preceding sections we have dealt with several key RCC dogmas in detail. There are several distinctive RCC practices which we have bypassed, since they are not central to an understanding of the church. For those who wish to study the Rosary, the Scapular, the Stations of the Cross, or other RCC distinctives, good resources are available. None of these add significantly to what we have discovered: that key RCC dogmas serve to obscure our view of the cross. Once this view is obscured, we can be diverted from the fact that the cross is the all-sufficient hope of the sinner. Nothing he can do will add to or take away from its efficacy. It is grace and grace alone that allows us to have hope.

At this time, we will briefly review the high points of our study. The RCC claims that it is the “church” envisioned in the NT, because Peter was the “chief apostle”, and that he founded the church a Rome. He then passed his apostolic authority down to his successors in an unbroken chain of succession. This “apostolic succession”, while historically phony, is claimed to stem from Matt 16:18.

1. What does Matt 16:18 say about the supremacy of Peter?

Jesus refers to Peter as “*petros*”, or a small stone and the truth on which the church is founded as “*petra*” or a large immovable boulder. This contrast is done to illustrate the difference between a fallible human and the solid rock who is Christ. This symbolism for Christ is seen numerous places in the OT, and Christ applies it to himself several times. This is set up in John 1:42 where Jesus names Simon “*Cephas*,” which is to be “interpreted” as “*petros*.”

2. In Matt 16:19, Jesus says that he will give the “keys of the kingdom” to someone. The RCC declares that this is Peter, and this shows that Peter will be able to command on earth with the direct sanction of heaven. Compare this to Matt 18:18 and Is 22:22. What is the true meaning of this passage?

Once again, Jesus draws on OT symbolism. The “keys” are to “the House of David”, or the kingdom. This is a symbol of vicarious authority, which is revokable. It is not an irrevokable grant of personal authority, but rather a statement of the office of the person. He is responsible to act in accord with the king’s will. In fact, the proper translation of Matt 16:19 states that whatever is bound on earth is bound, not because the person on earth bound it, but because it had already been bound in heaven! That is, the person exercising the authority must be in tune with heaven. Finally, as we look in Matt 18:18, we find that this authority is granted not just to Peter, but to the entire body of disciples. No pre-eminence exists.

3. What does Peter say about the composition of the true church in 1 Peter 2:3-8?

In this passage, Peter, allegedly the founder of the RCC, declares that Jesus’ use of the symbolism of the Rock in Matt 16:18 is as we suspected. Jesus is the foundation of the church, not Peter. And every believer is a part of the church, not just members of the RCC.

At this time, we move to the RCC economy of grace. In the RCC, a sinner must confess his sins to a priest, who then absolves him of the sin. The grace of God, applied by the priest, pays off the eternal penalty, but not the temporal penalty. Following this, he must perform various penances to “pay off” the temporal penalty for his sins.

4. To whom should we go for grace for forgiveness of sin? (Heb 4:15-16) Is there any possibility that the penitent sinner will be rejected? (1 John 1:9) How long will the sins be kept “on the books” to require a temporal penalty to be paid? (Heb 8:12) What does the RCC view say about God?

We are to go directly to Jesus for grace (Heb 4:15-16). No priest is required. God will forgive those who truly ask (1 John 1:9). And when sins are forgiven, they are forgotten (Heb 8:12). This is an act of pure unmerited favor. It is a gift (Rom 6:23). The sinner plays no part except to come to God in faith. The

RCC view tells us of a God who is impotent to eliminate sin. We, on the other hand, are sufficiently powerful to pay off the sin debt. This puts man above God and makes God out to be impotent to deal with sin.

Placing man above God is the fundamental error of all salvation by works. Salvation is purely by grace through faith. Works serve only as evidence of faith (James 2:17), and have no saving merit of themselves (Rom 3:20, Gal 2:16).

The next topic was the Mass. In it, the priest calls on Jesus to “transubstantiate” the wafer (host) into His own body and blood. The penitent then eats the wafer re-presenting the sacrifice of the cross. This is alleged to be in accordance with Jesus’ explicit statement in John 6:53-54.

5. In the context of John 6:34-58, what is the proper understanding of Jesus’ statement? In 1 Cor 11:23-29, how does Paul present the ceremony?

Jesus was fond of speaking in parabolic form. The entire passage in John 6 is a way of trying to get the Jews to understand that his words were life for them. He used the story of the manna falling from heaven as a parallel to tell them that He had come from heaven with the good news. The Jews were so fixated on literalism that even when he was done, they still did not understand. Jesus even had to tell his disciples (verse 63) the literal truth, that it was the Spirit that gave life. Paul understood this important fact. When he presented the Lord’s Supper, he called it a remembrance: an act which brings something to mind. It was never intended as a literal recreation of the cross.

6. How many times was the sacrifice of the cross to be done? (Heb 9:25-26) What value is a sacrifice which must be repeated? (Heb 10:11-12)

The cross was a “once for all time” sacrifice. It was never to be repeated. Sacrifices which are repeated can never truly take away sin. Only the cross can do that.

7. The RCC insists that the host is truly the body and blood of Christ, and therefore to be worshipped. What is the worshipping of anything or anyone other than Christ himself? (Ex 20:4-6)

There is no way to get around the fact that the Mass is a form of idolatry. This is the ultimate sin which will separate the saints from the wicked (Rev 13). It must be condemned. We must point our Catholic brethren to the cross, not a tarnished substitute.

The doctrines of Purgatory and Limbo are outgrowths of the RCC fixation on salvation by works. Purgatory stands as a place of purging. The penitent who dies with allegedly incomplete penances goes to this place to have the penance done by fire. God’s goodness is somehow demonstrated by the extreme pain caused by this punishment.

8. Based on our discussion above, how should the Christian regard Purgatory?

Purgatory is a figment of the RCC imagination. Since our sins are forgotten the moment they are forgiven, there is no penalty remaining. Similarly, since the dead are unaware, there is no possibility of them participating in anything after death (covered below). Given these facts, Purgatory cannot exist. We should celebrate our complete victory over sin through Jesus instead.

Limbo is stated to have two parts: first, the *limbus patrum*, where the righteous who have finished their purgatorial cleansing waited for the cross, and the *limbus infantum* where children who have died before the age of accountability are housed. In this latter case, the RCC admits that there is no Biblical guidance, and it is an issue of pure speculation. The *limbus patrum* is a construct derived from the idea that the soul lives after death and that Christ’s sacrifice could not be counted until it actually occurred.

9. Based on our discussion above, how should the Christian regard Limbo?