

The Roman Catholic Economy of Grace

With this session we leave those doctrines of the RCC which appear to have a close connection with the Bible and move into areas defined by tradition. As a result, we will be examining RCC dogmas by looking at their defining “infallible” statements within official RCC documents. After reviewing these, we will examine the teachings of God’s word to determine the truth. This is the first place where *sola scriptura* comes directly into play.

Two RCC claims need to be revisited here. The first is that “the Church of Christ, watchful guardian that she is, and defender of the dogmas deposited with her, never changes anything, never diminishes anything, never adds anything to them; but with diligence she treats the ancient documents faithfully and wisely...” (*Ineffabilis Deus*, Pope Pius IX, Dec 8, 1854, emphasis added).

The second claim is that the RCC never strays from any understanding of any doctrine originally given to the early church fathers. “In consequence, it is not permissible for anyone to interpret holy scripture in a sense contrary to this, or indeed against the unanimous consent of the fathers.” “Indeed, their apostolic teaching was embraced by all the venerable fathers and revered and followed by all the holy orthodox doctors...” (*Vatican I*, April 24, 1870) As we will see in our studies, these “infallible” statements of the RCC are blatant lies.

When we reviewed the doctrine of apostolic succession, we found that on the doctrines of *theotokos* and Peter and the rock (Matt 16:18), unanimous consent simply did not exist, and therefore, any appeal to it is false. Yet, this remains the refuge of the RCC, proving that a lie told often enough and loudly enough will eventually be accepted as truth. Without further ado, let us consider the forgiveness of sin.

1. Who has sinned? (Rom 3:23; 5:12)

2. What is the penalty for our sin? (Rom 6:23)

3. How is our penalty removed? (Heb 9:22-28, Col 2:13-14)

“Q. How does the Sacrament of Penance remit sin, and restore the soul to the friendship of God?

A. The Sacrament of Penance remits sin and restores the friendship of God to the soul by the absolution of the priest.” (Baltimore Catechism)

4. Is God ever not our friend? (Rom 5:8; 8:38-39, 2 Peter 3:9, Psalm 106:40-46, Jer 46:28, Rev 3:19)

“The priest holds the place of the Saviour Himself, when, by saying, 'Ego te absolvo' [I thee absolve], he absolves from sin... To pardon a single sin requires all the omnipotence of God... But what only God can do by His omnipotence, the priest can also do by saying 'Ego te absolvo a peccatis tuis.'... Alphonsus de Liguori, "Dignity and Duties of the Priest", 1927 (bearing the Nihil Obstat and Imprimatur of the Catholic Church)

"Bishops and priests being, as they are, God's interpreters and ambassadors, empowered in His name to teach mankind the divine law and the rules of conduct, and holding, as they do, His place on earth, it is evident that no nobler function than theirs can be imagined. Justly, therefore, are they called not only Angels, but even gods, because of the fact that they exercise in our midst the power and prerogatives of the immortal God.

In all ages, priests have been held in the highest honor; yet the priests of the New Testament far exceed all others. For the power of consecrating and offering the body and blood of our Lord and of forgiving sins, which has been conferred on them, not only has nothing equal or like it on earth, but even surpasses human reason and understanding." (Catechism of the Council of Trent)

“**Absolution**” means the words the priest says at the time he “forgives” sins. To absolve means to

set loose or free. In other words, a priest declares that one's sins are forgiven, and that person is free from the sin.

5. Who can forgive sin? (Ex 34:6-7, Is 43:25, Acts 4:12, 1 John 1:9) Is anyone else able to forgive sin? (John 20:22-23, 2 Cor 5:18-20)

6. What is the proper judgment against someone improperly professing the right to forgive sin? (Matt 9:2-3, John 10:33) What is this called? (See Hebrews 10:28-31)

The RCC defines sin as being of two different types: venial and mortal.

"Mortal sin is defined by St. Augustine (*Contra Faustum*, XXII, xxvii) as "Dictum vel factum vel concupitum contra legem æternam", i.e. something said, done or desired contrary to the eternal law, or a thought, word, or deed contrary to the eternal law." . . . These are enumerated by St. Thomas (I-II:84:4) as vainglory (pride), avarice, gluttony, lust, sloth, envy, anger. (Catholic Encyclopedia) Every violation of the Commandments of God or of the Church is a sin: *mortal sin*, if three conditions are present - serious matter, sufficient reflection, and full consent of the will. (Dictionary of the Liturgy)

"Venial sin is essentially different from mortal sin. It does not avert us from our true last end, it does not destroy charity, the principle of union with God, nor deprive the soul of sanctifying grace, and it is intrinsically reparable. It is called venial precisely because, considered in its own proper nature, it is pardonable; in itself meriting, not eternal, but temporal punishment. It is distinguished from mortal sin on the part of the disorder. By mortal sin man is entirely averted from God, his true last end, and, at least implicitly, he places his last end in some created thing. By venial sin he is not averted from God, neither does he place his last end in creatures. He remains united with God by charity, but does not tend towards Him as he ought. The true nature of sin as it is contrary to the eternal law, repugnant namely to the primary end of the law, is found only in mortal sin. Venial sin is only in an imperfect way contrary to the law, since it is not contrary to the primary end of the law, nor does it avert man from the end intended by the law. (St. Thomas, I-II, Q. lxxxviii, a. 1; and Cajetan, I-II, Q. lxxxviii, a. 1, for the sense of the *præter legem* and *contra legem* of St. Thomas)." (Catholic Encyclopedia)

7. What is sin? (1 John 3:4) Is any part of the law more important than any other? (John 19:11, Matt 11:20-24 cf Is 23, Matt 12:31, Luke 12:48, James 2:10, 1 John 5:16-17)

"The distinction between mortal and venial sin is set forth in Scripture. From St. John (I John, v, 16-17) it is clear there are some sins "unto death" and some sins not "unto death", i.e. mortal and venial. The classic text for the distinction of mortal and venial sin is that of St. Paul (I Cor., iii, 8-15), where he explains in detail the distinction between mortal and venial sin. "For other foundation no man can lay, but that which is laid; which is Christ Jesus. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble: every man's work shall be manifest; for the day of the Lord shall declare it; because it shall be revealed in fire; and the fire shall try every man's work, of what sort it is. If any man's work abide, which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work burn, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire." By wood, hay, and stubble are signified venial sins (St. Thomas, I-II:89:2) which, built on the foundation of a living faith in Christ, do not destroy charity, and from their very nature do not merit eternal but temporal punishment. "Just as", says St. Thomas, [wood, hay, and stubble] "are gathered together in a house and do not pertain to the substance of the edifice, so also venial sins are multiplied in man, the spiritual edifice remaining, and for these he suffers either the fire of temporal tribulations in this life, or of purgatory after this life and nevertheless obtains eternal salvation." (ibid.) (Catholic Encyclopedia)

8. The RCC insists that “wood, hay, and stubble” (1 Cor 3:12) are venial sins, and thus show the distinction between mortal and venial sins. Based on the entire passage (vv 10-15), how should we understand “wood, hay, and stubble”? (Note the beginning of verse 12.) (See also 1 Cor 4:5)

9. How does Paul describe the consequences of sin? (Rom 6:23, cf Rom 5:12;21, 6:16) Is there any sin in Paul's theology which merits lesser punishment than some other sin? Does Paul recognize a difference between mortal and venial sins? Does James? (James 2:10)

In the auricular confession, the penitent confesses his sins to a human priest. This priest says that the sin is forgiven (absolution) and assigns a penance.

“Q. Does not the Sacrament of Penance remit all punishment due to sin?

A. The Sacrament of Penance remits the eternal punishment due to sin, but it does not always remit the temporal punishment which God requires as satisfaction for our sins.” (Baltimore Catechism)

“Finally, in regard to satisfaction . . . the holy council declares that it is absolutely false and contrary to the word of God, that the guilt is never remitted without the entire punishment being remitted also . . . And it is in keeping with divine clemency that sins be not thus pardoned us without any satisfaction . . .” (Council of Trent, Fourteenth Session)

“An indulgence is a remission before God of the temporal punishment for sin the guilt of which is already forgiven, which a properly disposed member of the Christian faithful obtains under certain and definite conditions with the help of the Church which, as the minister of redemption, dispenses and applies authoritatively the treasury of the satisfaction of Christ and the saints.” (Canon Law 992)

In essence, in the RCC, a penitent sinner is removed from God's grace. He confesses to the priest, is “absolved”, but still has to pay off the temporal penalty of that sin. This payment is made by performing certain acts of penance, which result in earning an “indulgence”, which may be likened to marking a debt “paid”. Only when this is completed does he return to a state of grace. If he commits another sin before the completion of the penance, he cannot be returned to grace until the process is repeated and completed for that sin.

This has a necessary consequence of dealing with the sinner who dies without performing every act of penance and gaining the indulgences required for complete purification. Such a person cannot enter heaven by RCC theology, but must first have his punishments completed. (We will not deal with the state of the dead here.) RCC theology therefore creates a place of purging (cleansing from the penalty for venial sins) call Purgatory.

“Purgatory (Lat., “*purgare*”, to make clean, to purify) in accordance with Catholic teaching is a place or condition of temporal punishment for those who, departing this life in God's grace, are, not entirely free from venial faults, or have not fully paid the satisfaction due to their transgressions. . . the souls therein are helped by the suffrages of the faithful, but principally by the acceptable Sacrifice of the Altar . . . We pray, we offer sacrifice for souls therein detained that “God in mercy may forgive every fault and receive them into the bosom of Abraham”. . . Gregory the Great speaks of those who after this life “will expiate their faults by purgatorial flames,” and he adds “that the pain be more intolerable than any one can suffer in this life”. . . It is the common teaching of Catholic theologians that indulgences may be applied to the souls detained in purgatory; and that indulgences are available for them “by way of suffrage”. . . “the pope does not absolve the soul in purgatory from the punishment due his sin, but offers to God from the treasure of the Church whatever may be necessary for the canceling of this punishment”. . . It is the traditional faith of Catholics that the souls in purgatory are not separated from the Church, and

that the love which is the bond of union between the Church's members should embrace those who have departed this life in God's grace. Hence, since our prayers and our sacrifices can help those who are still waiting in purgatory, the saints have not hesitated to warn us that we have a real duty toward those who are still in purgatorial expiation." (Catholic Encyclopedia)

10. What is grace? (Rom 5:17-19) Who is the source of grace? Is there any part to be played by human works?

11. Propitiation is payment. What does the NT say about the need to pay for our sins? (Rom 3:25, Heb 2:17, 1 John 2:2; 4:10, Col 2:13-14)

12. Remission is "forgiveness or pardon, of sins (letting them go as if they had never been committed), remission of the penalty." What is the result of the application of Jesus' blood to our sins? (Heb 9:22-28 [see KJV], Deut 15:1-2)

Canon law 992 refers to the "treasury of the satisfaction of Christ and the saints." This is also known as the "treasury of merit". The RCC refers to it as the goods deeds saved up to the credit of Jesus, Mary, and the Saints which "merit" "indulgences" and can be applied to the temporal penalties owed by penitent sinners.

"Since the initiative belongs to God in the order of grace, no one can merit the initial grace of forgiveness and justification, at the beginning of conversion. Moved by the Holy Spirit and by charity, we can then merit for ourselves and for others the graces needed for our sanctification, for the increase of grace and charity, and for the attainment of eternal life." (RCC Catechism #2010)

"It is a universally accepted dogma that man, in union with the grace of the Holy Spirit must merit heaven by his good works." (Dogmatic Theology for the Laity, by Matthias Premm)

13. What does the Bible say about the "treasury of good works"? (Is 64:6, Job 14:4, Rom 7:18)

14. Is it possible for any person to do anything good which will add up for eternal benefit? (John 15:5, Rom 3:20, Gal 2:16) What are works of the law?

15. The RCC economy of grace recognizes the necessity of grace, but not its sufficiency. What does Paul say about this? (2 Cor 12:9, 2 Cor 3:5-6, Rom 4:4-5, Rom 11:5-6*, Eph 2:8-9)

16. What is the gospel according to Paul? (Titus 3:3-7)

17. How is this good news provided to us? (Heb 9:22, Matt 26:28, Rom 3:25-26, Col 2:13-14)

18. What must we do in order to be able to accept the gospel? (Rom 10:9)

19. What must we do once we have accepted the gospel? (Rom 1:17, Hab 2:4, James 2:17-24)

20. Do we do anything of ourselves? (2 Pet 1:2-11, John 15:5, Gal 5:22-23)

Challenge: Define the Gospel. Describe whether the RCC teaches the same gospel as the apostles, and if not, outline the differences.