

The Bible and Catholic Salvation, #2
The Bible & Roman Catholicism
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Welcome. This day of all days, I feel especially privileged to be a preacher of the word of God because it was 500 years ago this very day that Martin Luther launched the Protestant Reformation which recovered the Gospel of Jesus Christ from the clutches of the Church of Rome. And we've been preparing for this night for quite a long time, studying a series that we've called "The Bible & Roman Catholicism," and we have a number of albums of the messages to date that are available on the table out there. If you're watching over the live stream, if you'd email us through the website, we'd be happy to send you one of these free of charge. Those of you that are with us, we invite you to take one of those because we want you to have this material.

The Lord saw fit about six years ago to begin our church in an area with heavy Roman Catholic influence and history and we were mindful of that when we started the church, and I have to tell you, this series has gone a little longer than I expected it to. It's required more attention than I thought at the start. I kind of pictured this as five message series and I think this is number seven and there are still a couple more to go. There are a lot of reasons for that, we don't need to rehearse them all, but I first started a series on Catholicism back in 2013, almost four years ago, and for various reasons we weren't able to finish it back then and every time that I saw that folder on my computer, I had a sense of regret thinking, "I've got to get back to this. I've got to finish that. That's important. I haven't done that yet." And so this has kind of been an opportunity to discharge that sense of responsibility but also, not that anyone has complained about the length of the series, but also just so you know, I feel a great responsibility to deal with this not exhaustively but thoroughly and to cover everything that needs to be covered. And I told a friend who wrote an article this week on his blog about Catholicism, covering many of the same points that we've covered in this series, I told him that once you start to refute the errors of Roman Catholicism, it's like eating potato chips, you just keep going and there is more and there's more and there's more and there's more and you just keep eating the potato chips and it's like there's no end to it, and that's the situation that we're facing here.

So thank you for being here. This is a wonderful turnout for a Tuesday. I'm very grateful that you're here and I want you to know that we go through these things in depth for many reasons. At one level you could say there are 1.27 billion reasons why we're doing this series because that's the number of people that are in bondage to Roman Catholicism. We're doing this for 500 reasons, to honor the anniversary of the Reformation and those

men who stood so courageously. And you know, beloved, I know you understand this but it's healthy for us to repeat it to ourselves, is to realize that everything that we do stands on the shoulders of men who have gone before us, men who courageously broke ground when their lives and livelihood were threatened, their families were threatened. There was so much upheaval during that period of time and yet these men loved the Gospel and they loved Christ more than they loved themselves and their own livelihoods and their own lives and here we are enjoying the benefit of it 500 years later after Martin Luther posted his 95 theses. So there are just a lot of reasons for us to handle this with the care that it deserves, to respect God, to respect Christ, to respect the written word, to respect the souls of those whose destinies are at stake depending on the fidelity of the true church to the Gospel. So that's why we're giving so much attention to this.

Since we started this series at the end of September about five weeks ago, we've seen many falsehoods to which the Church of Rome clings, which they proclaim, which they assert as we've dealt with the pope and Catholic tradition, as we've dealt with the Mass and dealt with Mary, and for all of that, and as I've said multiple times, all of those things individually and collectively are enough to make the whole superstructure, the whole infrastructure of Rome collapse and to fall into dust and it will be a wonderful day when St. Peter's Basilica collapses into a dust of ruins when Christ returns, if not before then, and that symbol of demonic teaching is crushed once and for all. But for all of those things and issues that we've looked at that are decisive in showing people the error of Rome and that you cannot go, you cannot follow Rome to heaven, for all of that, the climactic issue in this matter is greater still than any of those issues, as important as those are. R. C. Sproul in his book, "Are We Together?" said this, he said, "The core issue of the Reformation was the question of how a sinner finds salvation in Christ." That's the core issue. The core issue is how can a sinner be forgiven? Has God provided a way of salvation and forgiveness to miserable sinners like you and me and if so, what is that way and how is it found?

Well, Sunday, this past Sunday, we set forth the biblical teaching on salvation and we discussed the doctrine of justification by faith and we said that we are justified by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, based on the Scriptures alone, to the glory of God alone. Alone. Alone. Alone. Alone. Alone. The five solas as they are known. And there was a lot of response to that, comparatively speaking, for which I am grateful. And I don't have the opportunity really tonight to review any of that so I just kind of have to assume it here. The question that I would start with tonight as we move into our material is this: what do Catholics think about that? What do Catholics think about the doctrine of justification by faith alone as we just sang?

Well, they made it pretty clear back at the Council of Trent in 1546 in their sixth session, Canon XII, they said this, they said and I quote, "If anyone says that justifying faith is nothing else but confidence in the divine mercy, which remits sins for Christ's sake, or that this confidence alone is that whereby we are justified, let him be anathema." The Church of Rome has pronounced a curse on those who teach the doctrine of justification by faith alone. Catholicism condemns that doctrine. There is no mutual ground here. We are not fellow brothers and sisters in Christ with the Church of Rome. These two things

are mutually exclusive. So as I was preparing these notes and realizing what I had taught on Sunday, I thought, "Well, oh well. Rome condemns me and others like me. It condemns you and others like you that hold to that precious truth." So be it. So be it.

Now, what we want to do tonight, having set forth the biblical view of salvation, what we want to do is kind of take a look and examine the Catholic view of salvation so that you can have some kind of understanding of this and to see why it is so separate. And nothing would thrill me more than for some of these messages to fall into the hands of Catholics who perhaps would listen with an open mind, would want to know what Scripture says. You know, the truth of the matter is that many of them don't even understand the teaching of their own church. It's such a sad perversion of a responsibility of a church to lead its people, to teach them, to give them understanding. It's bad enough that Rome teaches what it does but the fact that people are in such darkness there that they don't really even understand what their own church teaches is just a further condemnation of Rome.

Now, let me start here and say this. To be accurate, it's important for us to realize that Catholics do speak about grace, about faith, they speak about Christ and his death on the cross, and if you simply stopped there you might think that there was room for common ground, but you have to go further. You have to understand the fullness of their system and this is what is so crucial: they deny that faith alone is sufficient to receive salvation. It is not enough to tell a sinner, as the Apostle Paul did, "Believe in the Lord Jesus and you shall be saved." They cannot say that with a straight face. They cannot say that with integrity because they attach all kinds of conditions to what faith is supposed to be.

Now, tonight I'm not going to give a full presentation of their doctrine of salvation. It's enough to prove the conclusion that matters, that Roman Catholicism does not teach biblical salvation because it does not teach justification by faith alone. So to set the stage for tonight, let's start with a key distinction. The biblical view as we saw on Sunday is that God imputes righteousness to the sinner by faith and apart from works. He gives them a gift that the sinner does not deserve. He credits to his account the righteousness of Christ, the shed blood of Christ, and in justification, pardons all of our sins and counts to our credit, gives us the benefit of the full righteousness of Jesus Christ so that in an instant, in that declaration, God has declared a legal verdict that says we are found righteous in the sight of his law. That's a remarkable gift purchased by the work and the shed blood of Jesus Christ. God credits us with the righteousness of Christ even though we do not deserve that, and that, beloved, satisfies his law, and to have God's law satisfied, we could say another way, it means that the curse that God pronounces on disobedience has been removed from you and the law is no longer a threat to you. It no longer condemns you. You can no longer be sent to hell. God will not send you to hell under any circumstances when you are justified because he has declared you righteous at the highest court of all, his own court of justice, and says, "You satisfy what I require because I have imputed to you the righteousness of Christ." That means that every accusation of your accusing conscience has been silenced. It means every judgment, every threat of judgment from the word of God, no longer holds any fear for you because all of those demands of the law have been fully answered by Christ on your behalf.

Now, by contrast, the Catholic view may sound similar at first, at first, but it is miles away from that. No, no, not miles, it's infinitely apart from that. It is not like that at all and I'm going to explain all of this in more detail. Catholics teach that at the initial act of justification, God doesn't impute righteousness to your account, rather he infuses righteousness to your soul and he removes original sin and a principle of grace is implanted in your soul. But here's the thing, beloved: that justification is not final; that justification is conditional. It does not guarantee your salvation at all. Now for us who are used to biblical teaching, who are used to the finality of salvation, that sounds very strange to our ears, but what Catholics teach is that it is the sinner's responsibility to develop that justification by the Church sacraments and by his own good works. God, in a sense, gives you a good head start but then it's up to you to get to the finish line, is basically what it goes by. Oh, and God is willing to give you grace along the way but you have to earn that grace. You have to do things to earn that grace before he will give it to you and if you don't do the right things, if you don't follow the right rules, that grace will be withdrawn. God forbid that you should commit a serious mortal sin because if you do, God will condemn you and send you to hell. Does that sound anything like biblical salvation? Of course not. Do you know why it doesn't sound like biblical salvation? Because it's not biblical salvation.

Now, let me illustrate this for you and as we've done throughout this series, continue to quote the words of Catholicism itself. I don't want you to have to take my word for it. The Roman Catholic Catechism is built on the prior work of the Council of Trent, and at the Council of Trent in 1546, here is what the Catholic Church said and affirmed as their doctrine for all time. I quote, "Life eternal is to be proposed to those working well unto the end and hoping in God, both as a grace mercifully promised to the sons of God through Jesus Christ and," there's the killer, "and as a reward which is according to the promise of himself," and listen to this, "to be faithfully rendered to their good works and merits." Let me say that again, "to be faithfully rendered to their good works and merits." In other words, yes, you need to have faith in order to be saved but faith alone is not enough. Eternal life is given to those who have the good works and merits in order for God to render that to them. That is not justification by faith alone. That is justification that is rooted in the sinner's own righteousness as Catholicism defines it. And it is so important for us to understand that these are two mutually exclusive approaches, and if the Bible says that salvation is by faith alone and Rome says it's by faith plus works, then you have two things that are in diametric opposition.

Here's one way to look at it. I can't remember who helped me with this in all the reading that I've done with this. But we, the Bible and Rome would agree that there is a sense in which God has to declare the sinner righteous in order for the sinner to enter into heaven. Okay? According to Scripture, God makes that declaration at the front end of salvation. God declares you righteous when you put your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and you trust in Christ alone. God says, "That satisfies my law. That's what I'm looking for." And then you live a life of gratitude and a changed life in response to that work of God in your heart. With Catholics, justification in that sense of God declaring you righteous doesn't come until after you're dead and you don't know whether he's going to declare you righteous or not. You have to go through their prescription and you work through life

trying to measure up and only after you die and you stand before God do you find out whether he will declare you righteous or not and let you into heaven.

Now, you can see why it's so difficult, if not impossible, for a Catholic to die in peace because they don't know, according to the teaching of their Church, what that declaration is going to be and they have to take a blindfolded leap into the dark at death in order to find out what's going to happen to their soul. It's a terrible bondage and tyranny of massive consequences to put upon someone, but that's the reason, it's because they won't know until the end. We believe that you're justified and then God takes you through a process of sanctification. Catholics say you go through a process of good works and then you'll see at the end whether God justifies you or not, whether your good works have measured up. That's basically the problem.

Well, let's dig in a little bit more here. What are these good works and merits of which Trent spoke some 470 years ago or so? Well, they are good works and merits found in a system of sacraments and what I want to do is give you three points again here tonight. First of all, we want to talk about the general role of Catholic sacraments. The general role of Catholic sacraments. And just stay with me here. We'll get some momentum going and this will start to come together here as we go along.

What is a sacrament? We don't use that word here at Truth Community Church. Well, a sacrament is a religious rite, r-i-t-e. It's a religious activity through which, according to Catholics, grace is conveyed to the participant. You participate in the sacrament, you go through it, and by going through that sacrament, God communicates grace to your soul. If you do the sacrament, God gives you grace and so you are going along in your Christian life, you go to the Mass or you do some other things and God will give grace to you in the midst of that.

Now the Catholic Church has seven sacraments and quoting from paragraph 1113 of their Catechism, their modern Catechism, the Catholic Church has seven sacraments and paragraph 1113 says this, "The whole liturgical life of the Church revolves around the Eucharistic sacrifice and the sacraments. There are seven sacraments in the Church: Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Penance, Anointing of the Sick, Holy Orders, and Matrimony." So they have seven sacraments by which they believe that God communicates grace when you go through them. We're not going to take time to review them all. Here's the key thing that you need to know. I realize it might be easy for your eyes to kind of glaze over with all of this stuff. Here's the key thing for you to know about Catholics and their sacraments, paragraph 1129, "The Church affirms that for believers the sacraments of the New Covenant are," and I quote, "necessary for salvation." According to the Catholic Church, you must have these sacraments, you must do these sacraments if you are to be saved. If you avoid the sacraments, you will be lost. And so they have set up this system of multiplied rituals for you to go through that you must do in order to be saved. This is directly contrary to everything we've seen about justification by faith alone. By faith alone does not leave room for sacraments that are necessary for salvation.

Now, again we're just talking about the general role of sacraments. By virtue of participating in the sacraments, you receive grace from God. I quote from paragraph 1116, "Sacraments are powers that comes forth from the Body of Christ, which is ever-living and life-giving. They are actions of the Holy Spirit at work in his Body, the Church." So the Catholic Mass is one of their sacraments. They believe that when they go to that Mass and they take the wafer and eat it, that God is literally communicating grace to their souls to strengthen them, to sustain them, to strengthen them against temptation, and improving their status before him, bumping it up a couple of notches. And that's why a lot of Catholics, some Catholics anyway, will go to Mass on a daily basis; they so much want grace that they'll go to Mass every single day.

Now as part of this, as part of this whole system, you need a priest in Catholicism, and only the priest is authorized to perform the sacrament. So there is only a small select group that is authorized to perform the sacraments or they don't work. You know, if you and I tried to do a sacrament, it wouldn't have any effect because we are not authorized by the Church to do them. You need authority from the Catholic Church in order to be able to conduct the sacraments. So paragraph 1120 of the Catechism says this, "The ordained priesthood guarantees that it really is Christ who acts in the sacraments through the Holy Spirit for the Church. The ordained minister is the sacramental bond that ties the liturgical action to what the apostles said and did and, through them, to the words and actions of Christ, the source and foundation of the sacraments." Again, I ask you to stay with me here.

So what they say is that Christ established these seven sacraments, gave them to the apostles, and because the Catholic Church is the – and I'm just telling you their side, this is contrary to fact – because the Catholic Church is in apostolic succession to the apostles, therefore to Christ, when their authorized priest does the sacraments which Christ instituted, then you can know that you are receiving actual grace from God; that Christ himself is communicating this grace to you in the sacraments in the religious rituals that you are going through. That's their system.

Now, step back for a moment because that's the end of point 1 here. Step back for a moment and realize that what the Catholic Church is claiming, and you can see why they say that no one can be saved outside of the Catholic Church really and truly because the Catholic Church owns the sacraments, and because it's in the sacraments that God gives grace, then you have to come to the Catholic Church. They have set themselves up so that they are the exclusive distributor of the grace of God, and as the exclusive distributor, you have to go through their authorized representatives, the priests, in order to get the grace that you need for your eternal salvation. Well, you can see why this places people in slavery. You can see why for such a long period of time the priests had such sway over the souls of people, because your eternal salvation depended upon the priest cooperating with you. You had to pay homage to him, you had to cooperate with him because he held the keys to your soul. The Catholic Church held the keys to your soul. Well, they still say that.

So that's in general. It's a whole different way of thinking about it. We talk about faith alone and we call people to believe the word of God, and that believing in God and trusting him is the key to his blessing, receiving his blessing. They say, no, it's the sacraments. So you have a completely different approach to spiritual life.

Now, let's move quickly on to point 2 here and talk about the specific role of baptism. The specific role of baptism. We can set this up by asking this question, renewing the question that we framed Sunday and tonight with. The question is: how can a sinner be reconciled to God? You approach the Catholic Catechism with that question: how can a sinner be reconciled to God? Catholicism points to the sacrament of baptism as the entry point.

Listen to a couple of short quotes. Paragraph 977, "Baptism is the first and chief sacrament of forgiveness of sins because it unites us with Christ." Paragraph 1213, "Through Baptism we are freed from sin and reborn as sons of God; we become members of Christ, are incorporated into the Church and made sharers in her mission." You hear that, right? Baptism communicates the forgiveness of your sins. Baptism causes you to be reborn as a son of God. Baptism makes you a member of Christ. Beloved, I ask you: is that justification by faith? That has nothing to do with justification by faith alone. They own baptism, they own their version of baptism anyway, and they say you've got to come to us for baptism. Only baptism can remove your sin. Paragraph 405 says, "Baptism, by imparting the life of Christ's grace, erases original sin and turns a man back towards God."

So for them, the gateway, the entryway, what opens the door into spiritual life is their version of baptism which gives you some perspective on why they baptize babies. What about infants, you might say? Well, baptism saves them too. Saves not in the sense that we understand salvation but saves them in the sense that the Catholic Church defines it. So paragraph 403, "the Church baptizes for the remission of sins even tiny infants who have not committed personal sin." Paragraph 1250, "The Church and the parents would deny a child the priceless grace of becoming a child of God were they not to confer Baptism shortly after birth." And they multiply this kind of language throughout the Catechism.

Now, according to Catholicism, a special kind of grace is bestowed at baptism. Let me say that again: a special kind of grace is bestowed at baptism. Paragraph 1999 of the Catechism says and I quote, "The grace of Christ is the gratuitous gift that God makes to us of his own life, infused," there is that word that I used at the start, "infused by the Holy Spirit into our soul to heal it of sin and to sanctify it. It is the sanctifying or deifying grace received in Baptism. It is in us the source of the work of sanctification." So God infuses grace into your soul at baptism according to the Catholic Church, and that is the start of the Christian life. It removes original sin from you, in other words it erases the effect of Adam's sin on your soul, and it gives you a start from ground zero, you might say, and now you are in a position to go forward.

Now, that all might sound great if you didn't know the Bible at all and say, "Okay, there is a way forward here." That all might sound great but when they talk about removing sin and all of that, you have to understand that there is a massive catch. Baptism is a small worm slathered around a really big hook. Baptism only confers upon you conditional grace. It is a grace that can be lost. You can sin your way out of that grace. You can lose it through what they call mortal sin. Catholics have two categories of sin: the serious sin is called mortal sin; less serious sin, as they call it, called venial sins. We're not going to spend much time at all discussing the distinction. Mortal sins, the more serious one; venial sin is the less serious one.

Now listen to this, beloved. Now we are getting down to the brass tacks, that what the Catholic Church gives you in baptism they take away later on. They give you this hope that grace has been given to you but if you mess it up, they're going to take it right back and bring you and twist you further into bondage into their system. Once you bite the hook of Catholic baptism, they just reel you in tighter and tighter as seen in what I'm about to quote from paragraph 1861. "Mortal sin results in the loss of charity and the privation of sanctifying grace." In other words, the grace that you got in baptism, you lose it. "If it is not redeemed by repentance and God's forgiveness, it causes," listen to this, "exclusion from Christ's kingdom and the eternal death of hell, for our freedom has the power to make choices for ever, with no turning back." In other words, a man could have a state of grace from baptism but still go to eternal hell according to Catholic doctrine. Paragraph 1874, "To choose deliberately - that is, both knowing it and willing it - something gravely contrary to the divine law and to the ultimate end of man is to commit a mortal sin. This destroys in us the charity without which eternal beatitude is impossible." Eternal blessing, in other words. "Unrepented, it brings eternal death."

It's unthinkable to me, it's unthinkable to me to teach this to sinners. It's unthinkable. I've been preaching the Gospel for about 25 years now, I've been a Christian a little bit longer than that, and I love the privilege of telling sinners just like you that Jesus Christ will forgive all of your sins if you come to him in faith. No conditions. No qualifications. Believe his promise and he will save you and he will save you forever and he will never hold your sins against you ever again. That's what I'm used to. That's what I believe. That's what Scripture teaches. And it is a privilege to be able, not only for me to declare it from a pulpit, but for you to declare it to your family and friends as well. We all share in the wonder and the glory of being able to say that it is by grace that you are saved and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, and to glorify God according to the wonder of his grace and love and tell sinners they can be forgiven today right now. That's wonderful. I cannot for the life of me imagine being a Catholic teacher and teaching drivel like this. I can't imagine with any love for any soul anywhere in the space of your heart, to say, "Be baptized but, you know, if you screw up, you're still going to go to hell. We can help you with that but it's going to cost you. You're going to pay," as we're going to see later in this message. It is just such a twisted and distorted system of slavery and you should see immediately how different Catholic salvation is so that, speaking within the context of this room, so that every one of you would never be tempted ever to take the first step toward considering Catholicism as some who have abandoned the faith and

gone out and shown that they were never truly saved to begin with in embracing this kind of teaching.

In true salvation, God imputes Christ's righteousness to you. He pardons all of your sins, past, present and future. The work is finished. Beloved, your salvation is perfect. It could never be lost. In Catholic salvation, air quotes for those of you listening on subsequent media, God only starts the work at baptism. If you sin big, you lose big. For us, think about it this way, beloved, for us to know biblical salvation, to know Christ, to be in him, we realize that all of the threats of God's law have been removed and that we will never suffer the consequences and penalties that our sins deserve because we realize that Jesus Christ paid for them in full for us at the cross and that's why we have peace. We have an objective peace with God, an objective sense that the war has been settled. There is an eternal reconciliation that has taken place and God is no longer angry with us. Instead, we are in the blessed position of enjoying his grace and favor forever and ever. For Catholics it's not like that. For Catholics, there is always a condition hanging over them. And even though they might think that they are good today, tomorrow there is no guarantee that they would sin and fall out of grace, and if they die in that situation, the Catholic Church says you're going straight to hell. It is sick and it is perverse when you understand the nature of biblical salvation.

Now, let's think about it this way. Let's say you're a Catholic, you are baptized but you've committed a mortal sin. There is no real clear definition of what constitutes a mortal sin versus a venial sin, and by the way, a little side bar here: that's a completely false distinction anyway, mortal versus venial sins, serious versus nonserious sins. Beloved, mark it: every sin is a serious offense against God. James said that if you break one of the commandments, you've broken them all. Jesus said if you are angry or if you are lustful, you've murdered and committed adultery. There is no such thing as a small sin in the sight of a holy God. They dumbed down the whole concept of sin and still condemn you over it.

Well anyway, you sin big after baptism, Catholics offer you a means of restoration when that happens and it brings us to our third point this evening: the specific role of penance. Of penance, p-e-n-a-n-c-e. Now, penance is one of the seven Roman Catholic sacraments. Here's what they say about it and, beloved, let's approach it this way. Let me back up. I like to try to keep our knowledge of salvation clear in our minds as we go through these things. All of you, those of you that are Christians here, you know the sense of sadness and sorrow and guilt that comes upon you when you sin as a Christian, right? You know something about that. You feel the weight of it, "Oh, I've sinned against God. Why did I say what I said?" And you feel the inner angst that David described in Psalm 51, "Against thee, thee only I have sinned and done what is evil in your sight." Well, you know as a Christian, you know from reading Scripture, that we go to God in confession. We go directly to God, not through a priest. We go to God and we confess our sins to him, "Lord, I said this. Lord, I did this. Lord, I thought this. It was wrong. It was sin in your sight and I ask you to forgive me." What's our position there? What Scripture do we lean on in that time? 1 John 1:9, "If anyone confesses his sins, God is faithful and righteous to forgive him his sins and to cleanse him from all unrighteousness." There is a thorough

washing, a thorough cleansing. The blood of Jesus, his Son, 1 John 1:7, "cleanses us from all sin." As we confess those sins that occur in our lives as we are walking through in our Christian life, we have the assurance that our loving heavenly Father is gracious and always forgives us and restores us back to that sense of joy and fellowship that belongs to us as his children. That's our experience of confession and there is a sense in which it draws us even closer because we appreciate the fresh pouring out of grace on our souls once more as we remember God's faithful promise to forgive us when we confess our sins to him as a Christian.

Well, keep that in mind. Keep that blessed grace in mind in your own Christian life as we look at this abominable sacrament of penance according to the Roman Catholic Church. Paragraph 1446 says this, "Christ instituted the sacrament of Penance for all sinful members of his Church: above all for those who, since Baptism, have fallen into grave sin, and have thus lost their baptismal grace and wounded ecclesial communion. It is to them that the sacrament of Penance offers a new possibility to convert and to recover the grace of justification. The Fathers of the Church present this sacrament as the second plank of salvation after the shipwreck which is the loss of grace." Don't miss that in that definition from their own source, they say that you have to recover the grace of justification. In other words, the justification that you received in baptism is lost. It has been taken away from you. You have forfeited it. So whereas one day you were in grace, you were justified, now the next day you are not justified.

Think, beloved, about what that means. Think about that in terms of what we discussed with the doctrine of justification by faith on Sunday whereby we said that God pardons all of your sins and imputes to you the perfect righteousness of Christ. For the biblical Christian, in true salvation, your salvation is rooted on something perfect and unalterable because it is rooted on Christ, not on your behavior. That is crucial to understand and that's why your best days spiritually don't improve your justification, and that's why your worst days and your sins do not diminish your justification because it is not rooted in what you do. Justification is not rooted in your behavior, beloved, it is rooted in the perfect righteousness of Christ. That is its ground, its basis, its foundation. That is what we stand on and it never changes. You can see, therefore, that anyone that is teaching a justification that can be lost is not teaching biblical salvation. They are teaching something that in some way or another is rooted in human merit, in human righteousness, because when that righteousness goes away, the justification goes away. That's why, as much as they object to it, it is proper and fitting to say that Rome teaches a method of salvation by works, because if your works aren't adequate, you do not get saved. That's the basis on which we say that.

Now, going back to their idea of recovering the grace of justification, James McCarthy said this, he's a Protestant writer critiquing Catholicism when he says this. He says to Catholics, I quote, "Mortal sin is a death blow. It kills the soul as surely as a fatal disease kills the body. When a Catholic who has received sanctifying grace through baptism commits a mortal sin, he loses that grace." Do you hear it? He loses that grace. "Though by baptism he had been justified, because of mortal sin, he forfeits the grace of justification, or it might be said, is de-justified. He becomes a child of wrath and destined

for hell. And just as a dead body has no capacity to restore life to itself, the Catholic Church teaches that a soul struck dead by mortal sin cannot revive itself. The sinner must turn to the Church and to the sacrament of penance."

What is penance? What is the sacrament of which they speak? Well, it is a sacrament in which the sinner expresses contrition, makes verbal confession to a priest, and he also has to make satisfaction; that is, the priest assigns something for him to do in order to make amends for his sins. So what happens in penance is this: the Catholic discloses his sins verbally to a priest. Can you imagine a young girl having sinned going to a priest on the other side and disclosing the depths of the blackness of her heart to him? You can see how perverse this is, but that's a whole other issue. The Catholic discloses his sins verbally to a priest and the priest judges whether the sinner is sorry enough and decides whether to forgive him. If he absolves him, another word for forgiving him, if he absolves the sinner, then he also imposes acts of penance for the Catholic to do. Paragraph 1424 of their Catechism, "the disclosure or confession of sins to a priest is an essential element of this sacrament. It is called the sacrament of forgiveness, since by the priest's sacramental absolution God grants the penitent pardon and peace." In other words, beloved, if you want pardon and peace, if you have sinned as a Catholic, you have to go to a priest, tell him what you've done, maybe he forgives you, maybe he doesn't, maybe he absolves you, he says, "I absolve you of your sin." That's bad enough. There is nothing in the Bible about confessing sins to a priest so you know that's weird and unbiblical, but then further the priest gives you things that you have to do if you want to seal the deal on your pardon. This is nothing other than putting the sinner in the position of making himself his own savior by what he does. He has to perfect his own pardon by going out and doing something, saying a few prayers or doing other deeds that are assigned to him. You have to go out and you have to finish the deal on your own.

So through the priest, God grants pardon but that's not all. There is more to it, as I've already been saying. Here's what they say, paragraph 1459. By the way, we're going to get to some Scripture before the night is over. Paragraph 1459 of the Catholic Catechism, I quote, "Absolution takes away sin, but it does not remedy all the disorders sin has caused. Raised up from sin, the sinner must still recover his full spiritual health by doing something more to make amends for the sin: he must make satisfaction for or expiate his sins." Paragraph 1460, what does he have to do? "The penance can consist of prayer, an offering, works of mercy, service of neighbor, voluntary self-denial, sacrifices, and above all the patient acceptance of the cross we must bear. Such penances help configure us to Christ, who alone expiated our sins once for all." This is just doubletalk there at the end. They say Christ paid for our sins once for all, they don't believe that, they don't mean that because they have just been saying at length what you have to do in order to get forgiveness. They talk out of both sides of their mouth. It's intrinsically self-contradictory.

The point for you tonight is to realize that when you have sinned seriously as a Christian under the Catholic doctrine, you've got to go out and you've got to get to work in order to get back to it. That's why you see in some of the more heavily dominated Catholic countries, you'll see news stories of people flagellating themselves with whips or being

crucified on it. They are suffering as a penance to help pay for their sins, thinking wrongly that the more that they suffer, the more they can pay, and the more likely it is that they can get a final pardon. They have no concept because the Catholic Church has not told them that there is no need to go out and whip yourself, there is no need to go out and suffer to pay for your sin because as we sing so often in communion, Jesus paid it all. His sufferings were a perfect atonement for sin. His offering was sufficient. It was everything that God required and you can't add to it without canceling your involvement in it. If you're trusting in your own suffering to forgive your sins, then you're not trusting in Christ, you're not looking to him by faith alone.

So these aren't, beloved, these aren't simply little differences of opinion, you say, "Well, I think sin is forgiven this way and you think sin is forgiven this way. I think it's by faith alone, you say you've got to do some works in order to do it. You know, I'm sure it's just kind of all sorts out in the end." No, there is only one way of salvation. There is only one name given to us by which we must be saved and if you don't go the God-appointed route, you are still in your sins. You are still lost. There is only one way that God has given.

With that in mind, turn to Romans 10 just to help reinforce that point. Romans 10 here. There is more to say about penance. I am so glad I am not a Catholic. The truth of the matter, building on something similar that Martin Luther is known to have said: if Roman Catholicism were true, I would hate God intensely. If Roman Catholicism were true, it's not but if it were, contrary to fact statement, if Roman Catholicism were true, I would rather go to hell than to spend eternity with the god who devised such a manipulative dirty system as what Roman Catholicism is. I wouldn't want anything to do with the god of Roman Catholicism. That's how bad this is. And as Luther just shortly before the reality of justification by faith alone dawned upon him, he had the same sense. He hated God intensely because he was viewing God through a works based lens. He said, "I can't keep this and the harder I try, the worse it gets! And there is just so much frustration and guilt and there is no relief to it!" That's what Catholicism does to those who take it seriously and try to follow it, who understand what's going on. It's bondage of the worst sort and it lays on the sinner the responsibility of doing that which is necessary to save his own soul. The whole point of needing salvation is, "I can't save myself. I can't do this. I need help from outside myself." That's why, beloved, the Gospel is so great and so glorious, the Gospel is the announcement that Jesus Christ says, "I have done it. Believe in me and I'll cover it all for you as a gracious gift not to be bought with a price but received by simple faith." That is music to the sinner's ears. That is the sweetest sound a guilty soul could ever hear. "There is a way for my burden of guilt to be removed and I don't have to pay for it? Someone else will save me?" That's sweet. That's precious. That brings joy and satisfaction to the human heart. To tell a guilty sinner, "You've got more to do," is to just throw boulders into a backpack that was already causing him to stagger and collapse. That's why we say it's demonic. It's demonic because it leads the sinner away from the only true salvation, it leads him away from faith in Christ and leads him and brings him to trust in himself and his own works.

Romans 10:1, Paul speaking about the Jews, echoing what modern day Christians would say about Catholics.

1 Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation. 2 For I testify about them that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge.

Here's the thing that Catholics are trying to do,

3 For not knowing about God's righteousness and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God.

They make up their own rules and they pursue their own rules and they try to establish righteousness according to rules that they made up based on things that they do themselves, and that currency, that money, doesn't pay in the economy of God. The only thing that God receives is faith in Christ. Everything else is Monopoly money. Nothing else can pay. Faith alone, in Christ alone, or you're on your own. The first thing is not to try to get your salvation, the first thing to say is, "What does God say? What does God say? How can a man be saved?" He has made that known in Scripture. If you try to avoid, if you neglect Scripture and establish your own, you're working out a false salvation that can only damn you in the end and the consequences of this are eternal.

Well, Loraine Boettner sees through it all in his book on Roman Catholicism. He says this, "In all Roman Catholic Catechisms and theological books which deal with this subject, it is taught that God grants forgiveness only to those who on their part try to atone for their sins through worthy fruits of repentance. This false teaching that forgiveness is only partial and that it is given only for a price, is the real basis of the Roman Catholic doctrine of salvation and must always be kept in mind in any effective controversy with Roman Catholics."

Let's summarize here and then I want to give you some Scriptures to refresh your heart before we close. What is the Catholic system of salvation? Well, initial forgiveness comes through baptism. But that state can be lost through mortal sin. But you can get it back through penance. But you have to work for it. But even then you may still spend a long time in purgatory before you ever get to see the pearly gates. Catholicism, Roman Catholic salvation is like Lucy and Charlie Brown, Charlie Brown trying to kick the field goal. They put the ball down and you go up and you try to kick it and they go, "Whoops! That's not it. Try again. Try here. Whoops! Try again. Whoops! Try again. Whoops! Try again." It's a shell game. It's a con. It's like trying to get your salvation from the con artist who has three cups and one ball in it and moves it all around so that you can't really follow because of the sleight-of-hand that's going on. They say, "Which cup do you think it's under? The baptism one? No, sorry. Penance? No, sorry. Purgatory? No, sorry." They never let you see it.

No wonder 500 years ago almost to the hour, not quite, Martin Luther nailed 95 theses to the door at Wittenberg and said, "Let's dialogue about this." And no wonder after 1,000

years of that kind of dark slavery in the midst of other social things that were going on, desperate hearts in the midst of a very difficult world situation, a lot of death in preceding decades, no wonder desperate hearts leaped at the thought that there might be another way of salvation than the slavery and bondage that had been given to them through the Roman Church.

Beloved, here's the bottom line: a man, a woman, a child, could ignore God's word and follow Catholicism if they wanted, I suppose, or you could hear God's word, ignore Catholicism, and listen to the sweetness and the simplicity of what Scripture says. Scripture promises full salvation as a gracious gift through simple faith in Jesus Christ.

Listen to these Scriptures as we close. Romans 5:1,

1 ... having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

Romans 8:1,

1 ... there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Romans 8:30,

30 ... these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.

Everyone justified is glorified. No one drops out. You don't lose justification. Why? Because it is premised on a perfect Savior who has paid it all. So the ones who are truly justified could never be lost because it is based on Christ.

Galatians 2:21,

21 I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly.

Ephesians 2:8-9,

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

The testimony of the Apostle Paul in Philippians 3:8 and 9,

8 ... I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, 9 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.

One more, Titus 3:5.

5 He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit,

Everyone who is truly justified by faith will go to heaven. A Catholic would never tell you that. Their whole doctrine denies that. They set up penance so that you can restore that which had been lost. I hate it. I hate it with all my heart. It's been a privilege to teach against it, especially on this day, the exact 500th anniversary. Do you realize if we had a Wednesday night service we wouldn't be able to do that? Tuesdays, man. Tuesday is when you should have your midweek service. You liked that, didn't you, Janet?

One last thing. The whole idea of sacraments, doing things so that you can get God's grace into your life as a Christian, so-called, how is it that you and I as believers in Christ find God's grace in our times of weakness, times of temptation, times of confession, times of trial, times of sorrow? How do we find God's grace, beloved? Do we have to go through a lot of rituals? How do you find God's grace in the Christian life? Simply ask. You just ask directly to God. Have you sinned? Matthew 6:12-13, "forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." God is eager to answer that prayer from his children. Facing a hard time ahead, you're feeling the weight of temptation? "God, do not lead us into temptation but deliver us from evil," Matthew 6:12 and 13. Later on in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says, "Ask and it will be given to you. Seek and you will find. Knock and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened."

Is there anything more precious to you as a Christian than the fact that you don't have to go through a lot of rituals? That you don't have to go out and do works of penance in order to somehow earn God's grace and maybe satisfy with what you did or maybe you don't? Forget all of that. The blessed position that we enjoy as Christians is God says, "Just come to me and ask. I'll give it to you. You need grace? I've got all the grace you need. It's sufficient for you." That's our Father, the one who loves us, the one who sent Christ to save us, the one who planned salvation from the start, the one who knows your needs before you ask, the one who is pleased with his Son and because you're in his Son, you share the same status before God as Jesus Christ himself did. You say, "Well, you know, it's been a dry time for me." Could it be, James 4:2, you don't have simply because you haven't asked? God hears. God doesn't set any conditions on it. He says, "Ask me for the grace you need." It's his delight to provide it.

So in true Christianity, beloved, God doesn't convey grace to his children through threats, through priests, through works, or through self-inflicted punishments. Beloved, if you take nothing else away from this tonight than this: God is a good God who delights to give good gifts to his children. There is probably a little bit of Catholicism in all of us

thinking we've got to work, we've got to earn this, but the more you go into Scripture, the more that you understand true salvation, true biblical theology, the more you realize that it's not rooted in you. God doesn't respond to you based on your merit. That's wonderful because it means he responds to you according to his love and his grace and you go and you ask him in faith, you ask him in trust, and he is delighted to pour the blessing upon you. You don't need to prove anything to him because Jesus already paid it all.

Thank you for your patience. We'll try to bring all of this to a conclusion next week. For now, let's bow together in prayer and thank our God for who he is.

Father, we have spoken strongly, strongly to say that we would hate you if the true God were the god of Roman Catholicism. We can speak that way because the god of Roman Catholicism is not you. It's not the true God. It's some false substitute. It's an idol in the minds of men but it's not the true god so we can hate that false god, Lord, and come to you and simply thank you for who you are.

We thank you, Father, for the love which designed the eternal plan of salvation, that designed our good before we were even born. We thank you for the wonder of a Savior who made the complete atonement for sin 2,000 years before our mothers held us in her human arms. Father, we thank you for the indwelling Holy Spirit who keeps us, who is the seal, the promise that there is even more to our salvation yet to come. Having put the Spirit within us, O God, you won't take him away. The Spirit will be with us and deliver us safely into your heavenly kingdom and there, Father, we will know inexpressible joy full of glory that will just abound in ways that go far beyond eye can see or tongue can describe in this life. That's what you've done for us. That's what salvation is and, God, that is not anything that we could ever work for. There is no way that climbing up stairs on our knees someplace in Europe could ever earn any kind of gift like that.

O God, please have mercy on those that we love that we know that are in the bonds of Catholicism. Be pleased to use us as instruments of the Gospel. Open their hearts to the same Gospel that you opened our hearts to that they might also believe in Christ and be saved.

But as we close, Father, we just thank you for the glory of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It's why we are eager to preach it to Jew and Gentile alike, for in the Gospel alone the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith. In the Gospel alone is your glory and your righteousness truly seen. It's a glory and a righteousness that belongs to you alone that you give to us as a gift received by faith. Father, we are on the receiving end of amazing, astonishing, abounding grace that is far more precious than any false system of religion could offer an alternative to. So with that, Father, we close with grateful, thankful, abounding hearts. Not that we are better than anyone else, not that we are better than any Catholic, but you have shown us grace, Father, that we would desire them to know as well. Protect us as we go. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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