

Elephant – Catholicism

4/26/23

Various Text

Sunday AM

4-weeks ago, we began a series comparing the beliefs of Christianity to the beliefs of the other religions of the world. The goal of this series is nothing more than awareness/clarity – as we all need to know what we believe and why – and how to distinguish/discuss our beliefs with the beliefs of others. And with 4,200 cults/religions in our world, this is no easy task.

Remind – we began the series by talking about the infamous/misleading *Elephant Analogy* that speaks of (6) blind men all touching a different part of the same elephant but describing what they're experiencing in vastly different ways – attempting to teach that so long as you believe in something – you'll be good with God.

(1) Problem is the vast majority of the 4200 different religions *believe their way is the only way.*

(2) Mankind, because of sin, can't get along when they agree on a topic, much less when they can't agree.

(3) The Law of NC says *something can't be both true and untrue at the same time within the same context.* So, since every religion/cult has differing beliefs within the same context – it's not possible they're all right. It proves the opposite – *while we can all be wrong, we can't all be right!*

Meaning – if *Scientology* is right then *Hinduism*, and every other way, is wrong? If *Muhammed* was God's true messenger, then *L. Ron Hubbard* has missed the mark. But if *Jesus* is God's only way, truth, and life as He claimed, then *there are no other avenues to God.*

To frame our study – *For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.* 2 Timothy 4:3-4

Peter spoke to our need to clarify – *But set apart Christ as Lord of your hearts, always being ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope within you, with meekness and fear.* 3:16

Paul/Peter's point – we need to know what we believe (and why) and what others believe (and why) so that we're able to share/defend our faith with others.

Today, we're going to take a peek at a belief system within Christianity whose teachings have created great confusion within the Christian faith – **Catholicism.**

**Before I get started you need to know a few things:**

- I was raised in Catholic/Episcopal and I have many family/friends whom I love who are Catholic.
- Many, many Catholics have a true faith in Christ
- Not all Cath. know/agree with RCC beliefs/practices

Like with many people, many RCC Christians have been converted to Christ thru the Gospel IN SPITE of what the RCC teaches, and not BECAUSE of it.

Like within most religions, there are many subgroups in RCC. In general, most Catholics fall into 1 of 5 different categories with some crossover:

- **Ultra-Traditionalists** hold to all of the Catholic traditions and believe Mass should be in Latin.
- **Traditionalists** adhere to the traditional creeds, follow the Pope, and Mass can be in any language.
- **Liberals** question the infallibility of Scripture, the Pope, and the church – reject the morality of the CC
- **Charismatic** have a reformed/evangelical view of the CC beliefs/traditions and hope to reform the CC
- **Cultural** is more social than religious with little understanding of the beliefs/practices of the CC.

## I The ORIGIN of Catholicism

The NT book of Acts records the birth of the Church on Pentecost and some of the history of the 1<sup>st</sup> 30 yrs of Christianity. We learn that in the wake of great persecution, the church was established in many cities thru-out the Roman Empire. These churches followed a similar pattern as laid down in **Acts 2:42**. Believers gathered in secret where they gave attention to the apostle’s teaching, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer. This pattern continued thru-out the Roman Empire until the *Edict of Milan* in 313 AD.

The **Edict of Milan** (signed by Constantine and Licinius provided *religious toleration* in the Empire), As a result, Christianity soon became the accepted religion in the Empire. Of course, because of its location in Rome and its ties to the government, the Church in Rome began to use its influence to seek to control the church thru-out the Empire. As a result, by the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, Church leaders in Rome were claiming absolute supremacy over all other churches. By the 6<sup>th</sup> century, the church in Rome was so forcefully exercising its perceived jurisdiction that the churches outside of Rome began resenting the papacy. This dissension remained until the *Great Schism* in 1054 – when the *Eastern Orthodox Church* broke away from the church in Rome. To this day, the EO Church maintains that Rome (and the popes) strayed into heresy with the development of the papacy and claimed absolute supremacy over all churches.

Another major split came in the 16<sup>th</sup> century in Wittenberg, Germany, on Oct. 31, 1517, when a Catholic monk named Martin Luther nailed his **95 Theses** to the door of the local church, protesting the heretical teachings/practices of the RCC. Luther’s disagreements sparked what is known as the *Reformation*. Luther was so grieved by the abuses of the RCC on things like the power of the papacy, the sale of indulgences, the teaching of Purgatory, and the miss-teaching of the Gospel away from *grace alone*.

## II The BELIEFS of Catholicism

### A Beliefs on which We AGREE

Before we look at the differences b/w evangelical Christianity and the RCC, let me point out some of our commonalities. Historically, Evangelical Christianity and the RCC would to some degree, agree on:

The validity of Scripture, the Trinity, the Virgin Birth, the atonement and bodily resurrection of Jesus, and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming. We also agree on issues of morality, marriage, and the sanctity of human life.

### B Beliefs on which We DISAGREE

**BIBLE AUTHORITY** – while we agree the Bible is God’s revelation to man, RCC Catechism teaches that in addition to the Canon, there are (5) other sources of divine authority because the Bible is not sufficient alone:

- Deuterocanonical (Apocrypha) written b/w OT/NT
- The *Official* RCC interpretation of the Bible
- The *Official* RCC Orthodox Tradition (history)
- Divine infallibility is given to the Pope when he speaks *ex-cathedra* (*from the chair*) on faith/morality
- When speaking in conjunction with the Pope and orthodox Catholic tradition, bishops are infallible

*The Facts on RCC*, Ankerberg, p. 11-12

*Scripture/tradition must be accepted/honored with equal sentiments of devotion/reverence. RCC #81-82*

But it's more than other sources of authority – it's also the interpretation of that authority that goes to the Pope, bishops, priests, and the church to interpret.

*The task of interpreting the Word of God authentically has been entrusted solely to the Magisterium of the Church, that is, to the Pope and to the bishops in communion with him. RCC #100*

*To preserve the Church in the purity of the faith handed on by the apostles, Christ who is the Truth willed to confer on her (the church) a share in His own infallibility. RCC #889*

*The pastoral duty of the Magisterium is aimed at seeing to it that the People of God abide in the truth that liberates. To fulfill this service, Christ endowed the Church's shepherds with the charism of infallibility in matters of faith/morals. RCC #890*

*The Roman Pontiff... enjoys this infallibility in virtue of his office, when, as supreme pastor/teacher of all the faithful – who confirms his brethren in the faith – he proclaims by a definitive act a doctrine pertaining to faith or morals... This infallibility extends as far as the deposit of divine Revelation itself. RCC #891*

That means RCC leaders have no ability to be wrong or in error in things that pertain to faith/morals.

Evangelicals believe the Canon alone is authoritative – **Sola Scriptura** – *scripture alone* and that all of us are capable of rightly studying/understanding it.

*All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, reproof, correction, training in righteousness... 2 Timothy 3:16*

*Study to show yourself approved of God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed – who handles God's Word with accuracy. 2 Timothy 2:15*

**SALVATION** – While Jesus is a key to salvation, the RCC says salvation is a provisional, lifelong process secured only thru good works keeping the sacraments. Meaning, salvation is not by faith alone, but by faith, church-approved *good* works, and the church itself.

*The Church affirms that for believers the sacraments of the New Covenant are necessary for salvation. 1129*

*There are (7) sacraments in the Church: Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Penance, Anointing of the Sick, Holy Orders, and Matrimony. RCC #1113*

*The Sacraments are the means appointed by God for the attainment of eternal salvation. (3) of them (baptism, penance, holy orders) are in the ordinary way of salvation so necessary that without their use salvation cannot be attained. RCC theologian, Dr. Ludwig Ott, Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma. 340*

**Meaning** – for the RCC, true salvation is obtained thru the process of the sacraments and not thru **grace alone**.

This idea was affirmed at the **Council of Trent** (1546) which stands to this day as an official tenet of the RCC.

*If anyone says the sinner is justified by **faith alone**, meaning that nothing else is required to cooperate to obtain the grace of justification, let him be anathema.*

Even more, to be a Christian requires you to join the RCC by way of confirmation (profession)/Eucharist.

*The Church's faith precedes, engenders, supports, and nourishes our faith. The Church is the mother of all believers. 'No one can have God as Father who does not have the Church as Mother. RCC #181*

*For it is thru Christ's Catholic Church alone, which is the universal help toward salvation, the fullness of the means of salvation can be obtained. Vatican II Council*

Niece *baptized* in the RCC – the priest claimed she was indebted to him for imputing her salvation.

Biblical Christianity teaches that salvation is a grace act of God gifted to all people based solely on the work of Christ on the cross – it is the free gift of God – *It is by grace you have been saved, thru faith, and this is not from yourselves, it is the free gift of God – not by works, so no one can boast. Ephesians 2:8-9*

Salvation is a gift of God that is to be received by faith alone apart from human effort/church membership. It's received by trusting in Jesus as God's sole means of forgiveness – meaning it's **Jesus plus nothing.**

**PAPAL AUTHORITY** – The RCC alleges St. Peter's Basilica in Vatican City was built over Peter's tomb. They say Peter took residence in Rome in A.D. 42 until his martyrdom in A.D. 67. They hold Peter was the 1<sup>st</sup> Pope and that whoever succeeds him rules as the ***Vicar of Christ***. As such, the Pope is infallible when he speaks ***ex-cathedra*** (from the chair) on matters of faith/morality. *Ankerberg, 72*

**Basis** – Matthew 16:17-19 – *Jesus said, "Blessed are you, Simon bar Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh/blood, but by my Father in heaven. I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock, I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loosed on earth will be loosed in heaven."*

Many of my Catholic friends have been taught that this text teaches that Jesus built the church on Peter – who was the 1<sup>st</sup> pope. They say the name Peter means 'rock' so Jesus was pointing at Peter saying ON you Peter, I'm going to build My church.

But that is NOT the correct interpretation of this passage, nor was it what Jesus is saying.

The name **Peter** comes from the masculine form of the Greek word *petros* – meaning – a *small stone* or *tiny pebble*. If you're from Arkansas, it means *little rock!*

When Jesus said – *upon this rock, I'll build my church* – He used the **feminine** form which refers to a *huge slab* of rock. What Jesus said was... Peter, you're a tiny pebble, but on ME (on this huge slab), I'll build My church. Jesus wasn't declaring Peter the 1<sup>st</sup> Pope, but Himself as the ***founder/foundation*** of His church.

There are many reasons this is important to distinguish but none greater than the misuse of this authority thru-out history to make up many of the RCC practices and beliefs that are not Scriptural but came as a misuse of power and authority to manipulate/control people.

It'd be like a S.C. Justice ignoring the Constitution and legislating from the bench to create new laws with no accountability or standard for truth – infallible forever.

Do you realize how many of the traditions of the RCC have no ties to Jesus, the Bible, or the apostles?

- Purgatory – 593 – Pope Gregory
- Prayer to Mary and the Saints and Angels – 600
- The Canonization of the Dead Saints – 995
- Praying the Rosary – 1090
- Transubstantiation/Confession to a Priest – 1215

- The Sinlessness of Mary – 1547 Council of Trent
- Mary is the Co-redeemer with Christ – 1891 Leo 8<sup>th</sup>

Scripture says humans are fallible and only Christ is head of the Church as the One who atoned for sin – and God has given the H.S. as our ultimate authority.

**BTW** – almost all Bible scholars outside of the RCC reject the Catholic tradition Peter was the 1<sup>st</sup> Pope. In fact, in Paul's letter to the Romans, he greets 33 people by name in *Romans 16*, **but not Peter** – this is a strange omission if Peter was in Rome serving as the Pope.

**Eusebius** – *Father of Church History*, mentions Peter was martyred in Rome, but nothing of him being Pope.

Of course, there are a number of other differences b/w the RCC and what we'd call Biblical teachings.

**CONFESSION** – RCC believes in venial/mortal sins Thru confession and penance, one is pardoned.

**Venial sins** are lesser sins that weaken one's spiritual life, but won't keep you from heaven. While **Mortal sins** are deadly sins depleting the soul of God's sanctifying grace requiring the sacrament of penance.

By confessing to a priest and doing acts of penance and contrition – a person can be absolved (cleared) of sin. After confessing, the priest will invite the confessor to go thru a set of verbalized acts/prayers known as acts of penance and prayers of contrition (Hail Marys/Our Fathers) – once done the person is released from their guilt by the priest's declaration.

The Bible makes no distinction b/w mortal/venial sins but says when we sin, we're to go to Jesus for mercy.

*If we confess our sins, He's faithful/just to forgive our sins and cleanse us from unrighteousness. 1 Jn 1:9*

**PURGATORY** – In 593 AD, Pope Gregory the 1<sup>st</sup>, spoke *ex-cathedra* to introduce purgatory and that Masses celebrated on behalf of the dead could rescue.

*All who die in God's grace/friendship, but still, imperfectly purified, are assured of eternal salvation; but after death they undergo purification, to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven. #291*

Purgatory is to cleanse of imperfections, venial sins, and faults, and to remit or do away with the temporal punishment due to mortal sins that have been forgiven in the Sacrament of Penance. *Pocket Catholic Dict.*

The Bible teaches that because of Jesus' work on the cross when a person dies they immediately go to heaven/hell – with no 2<sup>nd</sup> chances – *It is appointed unto man to die once and after death comes judgment. Hebrews 9:27*

**VENERATION OF MARY** – Pope Pius IX, 1854 taught that Mary was immaculately conceived (preserved free from the stain of original sin), lived a sinless life, remained a virgin after Jesus' birth, was carried bodily into Heaven, and now serves as co-mediator/co-redeemer with Christ.

Evangelicals believe Mary was a great example for believers in her faith/obedience but that she was a sinner just like us who needed God's grace as we do.

**BAPTISM** – the RCC teaches that baptism releases a person from original sin, guilt, and all punishment until the person can confirm their salvation. *Facts on Roman Catholicism, Ankerberg*

The Bible teaches that baptism is a symbolic expression of salvation after a person accepts Christ as Savior to publicly testify to what Christ has done in their lives thru His death, burial, and resurrection – an outward demonstration of an inward commitment.

**COMMUNION** – the RCC believes during Mass, when the priest offers a prayer of consecration, miraculously the bread/wine turns into the actual body/blood of Christ... In the partaking of the elements salvation is re-affirmed. Ron Rhodes, p. 77

The term used to describe this is *transubstantiation* – from the Latin term meaning – *change of substance*.

Evangelicals hold the bread/cup are symbols of the body/blood of Christ given for the forgiveness of sin.

As you can see, although RCC is considered to be within the Christian faith – there are a number of big concerns that speak contrary to the Bible. So, know what you believe and why so you can talk clearly with others.