

Is Catholicism a true or false religion?

by Matt Slick, *Christian Apologetics & Research Ministry*

What does it mean to ask if Catholicism is true or false? It is a religion, but is it true? Does it lead to salvation and does it represent Christianity properly? Or does it have so many rules and regulations that it no longer fits within Christianity?

Unfortunately, the Roman Catholic Church is not a true Christian church because it denies one of the essential doctrines of the Christian faith, namely, salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Of course, Roman Catholics will not agree with my assessment. They believe they accurately represent Scripture and Christ's intention for the Church. So, in order to quickly address the issue, we need to look at Scripture since it is the guidebook on Christianity. I will get right to the point.

Roman Catholic teaching on salvation

•"In every circumstance, each one of us should hope, with the grace of God, to persevere 'to the end' and to obtain the joy of heaven, as God's eternal reward for the good works accomplished with the grace of Christ," (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1821).

•"...the Second Vatican Council confirms: 'The bishops, successors of the apostles, receive from the Lord...the mission of teaching all peoples, and of preaching the Gospel to every creature, so that all men may attain salvation through faith, Baptism and the observance of the Commandments,'" (CCC, par 2068).

•"The authority of the Magisterium extends also to the specific precepts of the natural law [i.e., 10 Commandments, CCC 2070], because their observance, demanded by the Creator, is necessary for salvation," (CCC 2036).

As you can see from the previous quotes, Roman Catholicism says that heaven is a reward for good works (CCC 1821) and that salvation is obtained through observing the commandments (CCC 2068; 2070, 2036). This is a clear rejection of the teaching of salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. So, is this what the Bible teaches? Let's take a look.

•"Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the law," (Rom. 3:28).

•"For does the scripture say? Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness," (Rom. 4:3).

•"But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness," (Rom. 4:5).

•"For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, to perform them," (Gal. 3:10).

•"For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all," (James 2:10).

As you can see from Scripture, we are made right before God without the law. This means that our salvation is based on faith alone as Romans 4:5 clearly tells us: "But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness." In contradiction to this, the Roman Catholic Church says that Christians are obligated to keep some form of law, only it's not the 10 Commandments, in order to obtain salvation (CCC 1821, 2068, 2070, 2036).

However, Roman Catholics often say that it's not the strict adherence to the law that is necessary, but a keeping of the law of love spoken of by Jesus when he said to love God and love your neighbor. Let's take a look at this.

Okay, Jesus said that the greatest commandment was to love God (Matt. 22:37-38 quoted from Deut. 6:5). The second greatest is to love your neighbor (Matt. 22:39 quoted from Lev. 19:18). Jesus said that the Law and Prophets were fulfilled in these two commandments. Therefore, to keep the Law of Love, they are still teaching being saved by keeping the Law -- even if they say it is faith, working in love, that keeps the Law.

But again, Romans 3:28 says we are justified by faith apart from the works of the law. This means that we are justified by faith apart from loving God and loving our neighbor. It's not loving God and loving our neighbor that makes us saved. It's loving God and loving our neighbor that is a result of us being saved.

Finally, there's one more verse we need to look at.

No Justification by Law, only condemnation

"You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace," (Galatians 5:4).

Notice how Paul the apostle talks about being "severed from Christ" and falling from grace. He equates this problem with the issue of seeking to be justified by law. Justification is a legal declaration of righteousness before God, and this is what we obtain in salvation. We obtain it by faith, not by faith and works. Paul is warning the Galatians that they who are seeking to be made right before God by what they do, "by law," are severed from Christ, fallen from grace.

Because of the Roman Catholic church's teaching on salvation by works, which is rejected by Scripture with a warning, Roman Catholicism must be considered a false religion since it clearly contradicts Scripture.