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A Discussion With a Roman Catholic

...And Marrying Outside of The Faith (2Cor.6:14)

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Editor's note:

The following discussion/debate is one of several the editor has had with people of differing faiths wanting to marry. This particular discussion/debate here highlights the differing tenets of each faith and also the lack of understanding of what is Biblical and what is Roman Catholic, as well as what the scriptures forbid on this.

In this case one partner claimed to be a Bible believing Christian and the other a Roman Catholic. For privacy reasons, some parts are excerpts only and the names of the participants have been changed. The partners are in *italics* and the editor in **bold** and or brackets.

The editor has chosen to publish this debate out of dozens, as it was the most difficult and deceptive in the replies as well as highlighting the double speak and clever use of Roman Catholic language.

Round 1

Editor (TA):

Hi Linda, have you sorted the 'Catholic' differences out with John yet? Did you give him my book to read? What did he think? The two gospels are of course irreconcilable as is the Jesus of both. I praise the Lord I was born again out of it all and by His grace alone through faith alone...I pray you are walking close with the Lord's Word...Every blessing in Jesus...

Linda:

Things with John are going really well Mr. Arnold. He has such an incredibly strong and real faith. We know we will get married... I am actually reading your book ['To Catholics Whom I love'] at the moment so I haven't given it to John. I will keep you in the loop how we are going. Last night we were talking about the power of the cross and John brought up how Catholics love their crucifixes, but he prefers just a plain cross without Jesus on it, because Jesus is RISEN and the cross should be empty. Mr. Arnold, John loves truth. He really does...he is such a true follower of Jesus...John is the most Godly young man I've ever met. He has been living a life of chastity, purity and faith, and we pray together and read the Bible together all the time. He is such an encouragement to me, Mr Arnold.

Either Catholicism is the true religion of works and sacraments; or it is a system of salvation contrary to scripture.

Note also the very common emotional reaction and 'offense' taken and the debate is then shut down when questions are not answered, regardless of how direct this might seem.

Many reading this debate will possibly consider the person (John) as a true Christian. But salvation is not possible with a different Jesus and a different gospel which adds to the Gospel of Christ once crucified.

Round 6

John:

Dear Terry, this email is to say that I will be not discussing any of these matters with you any further. I understand now that our reasons for and approach to this discussion are very different. Continuing will only lead to more damage than good. Please respect my wishes by not contacting me regarding these matters again or replying to this email. I wish you nothing but the best. Yours in Christ, John.

Editor:

John, I am surprised that you find ‘aggression’ and ‘judgment’ when all I have done is address your beliefs, *not you*. I am challenging your beliefs, not you as a person. You are being over sensitive in this. You said you welcomed *challenge and discussion*. That is all I have done?...

Final Assessment

After the above there was no more correspondence. The pair did marry.

What is to be noted here is the re-wording of Catholic doctrine to be couched in language of love and acceptance and ‘what unites us’, rather than the differences in scripture. However, it is the differences that determine eternity? Either one is saved by faith without works and an imputation of righteousness as a result; or one is saved by faith plus works and ‘necessary’ sacraments to continually infuse grace into the soul. Either one is saved by the blood of Christ ‘once and for all’ or that sacrifice has be replayed, continued in some form? Either there is a ‘Purgatory’ to purge sins finally, or our sins are forgiven when we believe in Jesus....Catholicism teaches a justification that is ongoing and by the use of sacraments. Biblical faith teaches Justification by a crediting of righteousness when we believe. All these differences are no small thing. There is ‘*another jesus*’ (2Cor.11;14); there is ‘*another gospel*’ (2Cor.11:4; Gal.1:6).

Round 2

Editor:

...I am concerned and confused about your friend John. I fail to see how a Born Again spirit filled Catholic can continue to go to Mass and sacrifice Jesus again as well as accept the idols and Mary, the social gospel, etc, that is so obviously there? I do urge you to finish reading my book and test it with what John knows...It is the only way you will see what is really in his heart on these matters? This subject must be broached and open before you marry! I would also urge you to do marriage counselling beforehand...It usually pin points any potential problems to be cautious of later or potential weak spots to work on. It also takes the people through the scriptures on marriage (Eph.5) and sets a foundation that will stand the strongest of attacks, as the best of marriages will come under attack.

Perhaps it is that John does not actually know what Catholicism teaches?...That is the only way I could see that a person is truly Born Again could remain a Roman Catholic. The Spirit will lead and guide into truth and when that conviction comes then they will separate every time. To compromise is often a sign of a lack of true salvation. I have only ever met one Catholic who I believed possibly was saved and when he heard the truth about what Catholicism teaches, he left it. Every other Catholic I have dealt with (hundreds) was not Born Again and usually went on to prove that by falling away back into the world or denouncing Bible truths. So, you can see why I am concerned for you and John. I cannot judge John until I actually understand what he believes...I would...just hear him out as to how he feels about the Lord and Catholicism. But it is very easy to have ‘another jesus’ as the scriptures teach (2Cor.11:4). Catholicism is ‘another jesus’. Either I am wrong, or Catholicism is a false religion - the two are universes apart in doctrine and the Gospel. (Catholicism also openly teaches you must keep the sacraments to be saved).

The danger here is to look at the ‘*morality*’ and ‘*pure behaviour*’ side of it. Many Catholics can be moral people and

good living and as such 'holy'. '*Chastity, purity and faith*' are found also in Buddhists and many of them leave us for dead in these works. But that is useless and '*filthy rags*' of '*unrighteousnesses*' (Is.64:6) unless it is in a regenerated person. This is one of the greatest deceptions of 'religion'. These things simply do not save. It's the truth of the Word that saves. We are begotten *from above* by the Word (1Pet.1:23). The 'faith' of Roman Catholics can be '*real*' and '*strong*' but is it the wrong 'faith'?

If John loves an 'empty cross' then why is he partaking in a sacrifice that crucifies our Lord Jesus again every 'Mass'? It's a simple question that demands an answer before marriage? If he 'loves truth' as you say, he will have no trouble answering the hard questions about Catholicism and the Bible?...If he is a true believer of Jesus then there will have works 'meet for repentance' and works that match the faith...those works will not be partaking and being 'unequally yoked' with a 'different communion' and thus there will be 'separation'. There can be no 'agreement' between Biblical born again faith and Catholicism (read 2Cor.6:14-17). I can tell you from experience, when one is saved and the other is a Catholic it can be very difficult later on...

As a Catholic I was also relatively 'moral' in most things, and believed I had a real 'faith' and I 'believed in Jesus'. I told Christians who gave me tracts I agreed with everything in their shallow tracts. But they were not asking me the right questions. I was not born again! I would like to hear John's testimony as to how he was Born Again because this is necessary for heaven (Jn.3). What does he believe about the term 'Born Again'? Catholicism believes one is Born Again by baptism (usually as an infant)...

Anyway, enough preaching. ...I am concerned. If I am wrong in this, then please show me? Every blessing and I urge you to bring the truth out with John in the open as soon as possible. Make sure you have the same minds. What church would he go to when he marries you?...

on that? I don't mean any aggression in my tone...but YES I certainly use righteous 'judgement' (Jn.7:24) when it comes to Roman Catholicism...it is a religion that is not based on scripture]

'He abhors the person you are! Even your righteous deeds are as 'filthy rags' to Him'. - Who are you to make such judgements and say such things Terry? I think you hold your opinion too highly.

[John, This is not MY opinion of you! This is *God's view of ALL fallen humanity!* I was quoting scripture (Is.64:6), not MY opinion? The Bible says you were '*conceived in sin*'.... You were born into the fallen Adamic Race and if you do not become 'born again' by God's Grace then you will suffer eternal damnation. It's NOT a matter of my 'opinion' - this is Biblical FACT?]

I believe you have missed the point of the Gospel of love for the sake of doctrine.

[There is no true Gospel without doctrine]

God looks at the heart not our academics. [Doctrines are not '*academics*']

Terry, from where I'm from even challenge must be delivered with love.

[John, in telling you the TRUTH about Roman Catholicism, I AM showing you LOVE. Not a sentimental mushy love, but a hard and fast and immovable feast of love. I am trying to 'pull you from the fire'. Is that not enough love for you?]

I'm sure you will judge my response as 'defensive' and you will justify your approach on the basis of 'seeking truth'.

[John, I am JUDGING Roman Catholicism. I want to be sure Linda obeys God and marries a Christian believer!]

You may decide I'm offended because my 'false doctrine' has been challenged. Please know I'm ok with and even welcome challenge and discussion. I'm not ok with rudeness.

[I see no rudeness in what I wrote, just challenges in scripture?]

I may take some time to respond properly.

[I look forward to seeing the answers to the original e-mail and the last e-mail. I urge you to do this after you have read the book and checked it with Scripture]

- Please tell me precisely - how did you become 'born again' in the Roman Catholic church?

- If you say He died for your sins then why are you believing in a Purgatory to purge these sins?

- Are the sacraments 'necessary' for salvation or not?

- Does James 2 contradict Ephesians 2:8,9 and Romans 4:3-5, etc.? Is salvation by faith alone or faith and works together? Which is it; it cannot be both.

- What of Baptism? Can one be saved in Roman Catholicism without this?

- Where in the Bible does the sacraments 'nourish faith'?

- Where is 'Purgatory' in the Bible? Was not Christ's sacrifice enough? Does Christ's shed blood cleanse us from all sin...or just SOME? Is He the last and perfect sacrifice, or must we add to that?

- Do you believe Mary is a 'co-mediator' and 'co-redemptrix' with Christ?

- Which doctrines are 'misunderstood'?

- I believe in 'faith alone' and not at all of works to be saved. So, does this mean I am 'anathematised'? Does this mean I am preaching 'another gospel' as you say and this is 'outside of truth' as you say?

John, I pray you will seek truth in all this. I also again beg you to read my book in full with an open mind and Bible open. Love to you both, from Terry.

Round 5

John:

Terry, I feel very offended by a number of your statements and your general tone of aggression and judgement...In particular - 'I vouch that these answers you have given are not all your own' - these answers were completely my own and I worked hard to give them...The only place I sought advise was on the anathemas and I told you that.

[Editor: Michael, You said you 'trusted these guys' that you had sought doctrinal advice from ...my remarks were predicated

I hope I am not too unbending in this e-mail, but I cannot compromise on God's Word and the experiences I have had with dozens of these situations. But I still love you, Linda, nothing will change that. Every blessing to you both...

Round 3

John:

Dear Terry...This is John...Firstly, I would like to thank you for your love and support for Linda. She thinks very highly of you and speaks of you fondly. In particular, during the times that she didn't have a lot of support in her walk with God and was struggling a little in her faith, she says it was you that reminded her of His love. You obviously love and care for her very much...

Terry, Linda and I often chat about our faith...our upbringing in the faith, the ups and downs, how we came to be where we are at currently, and what we feel God is doing in our daily walks...Coming from different denominations...we have...explore the meaning of different beliefs and expressions we very rarely, if ever, disagree. We find that all that unites us, that flows from relationship with Jesus, far outweighs anything that is different. And for any difference we are grateful.

Linda has passed on your concerns regarding the Catholic faith which we have chatted about in detail. I understand this comes from a love and concern for her and her relationship with me and I am more than happy to chat with you about this. Perhaps if you could express your concerns and questions and I could give you my understanding on the different matters...

Editor:

John, there are some of us that are concerned. If you are a Roman Catholic then that belief system, compared to a 'born again' or Bible based Christian, is very different concerning salvation issues. The 'gospel' presented by Rome is diametrically opposed to Biblical Christianity ('Protestant' churches were called this name for good reasons). The Roman Catholic gospel teaches that you are saved by the sacraments and a system of both faith and works. The Bible teaches we are saved by God's

Grace alone and through faith alone and not of works, or of ourselves. *'For by grace are you saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast'* (Eph.2:8,9); *'For what says the Scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. Now to him that works is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that works not, but believes on him that justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness'* (Rom.4:3-5)... These are just some scriptures which clearly show salvation is by faith alone and not of any works. There are more I can give (eg.Tit.3:5).

However, the Roman Catholic gospel clearly teaches that it is by faith and works [which includes the sacraments] that are 'essential for salvation' as they say.

Which Gospel do you believe? Do you believe you are saved by Grace through faith and nothing else; or do you believe the sacraments and /or works are necessary for salvation? Rome's *'Basic Catechism of Christian Doctrine'* calls the sacraments *'the chief means of our salvation'*...It can only be one or the other. *'And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work'* (Rom.11:6).

The Bible teaches a righteousness imputed (credited) to man upon faith alone (Rom.4:3-5). Catholicism teaches that righteousness is not imputed but *infused* through sacraments and works (this is clearly stated in their catechism, councils and in canon law).

Which do you believe? Do you accept the 'anathemas' (curses) that Roman Catholicism has pronounced upon any who believe that justification comes when righteousness is imputed by faith alone?...and also the anathemas concerning the sacraments?:

'If anyone says that men are justified...by the imputation of the righteousness of Christ alone...let him be anathema [cursed].' (Trent Sess.6 canon 11)

'If anyone says that the guilt is remitted to every penitent sinner after the grace of justification has been received, and that the debt of eternal punishment is so blotted out that there remains no debt

many non-Catholics miss'. John, she is MORE than 'honoured'...she is bowed down to, prayed to, crowned and given the position of co-redemptrix with Christ? She is also a 'co-mediator'. Do you believe Mary is a 'co-mediator' and 'co-redemptrix' with Christ?

- You say: *'As for what 'saved me'... I'm not sure I can put this in an e-mail! I believe this process is not complete...but as I journey with Christ he continues to change me into the person He created me to be.'* John, this is NOT Biblical salvation. He abhors the person you were in the flesh! Even your righteous deeds are as *'filthy rags'* to Him. You can only be made acceptable to Him by His IMPUTED righteousness...*this at the heart is the difference between Roman Catholicism and true Christianity!*

- You say: *'Often the Catholic Church is misrepresented and beliefs are misunderstood'*. John, let me be clear here - I taught RC doctrine in schools for years in primary and high school both while I was a Catholic school teacher and even afterwards, until I was saved! For decades I have read and re-read and studied Catholic doctrine and refuted it. John, which doctrines are *'misunderstood'*?

- You say: *'...anything proclaimed by Church doctrine should be understood in the historical context in which it was written. The 'anathemas' were written at the time of the reformation. ...secondly, the word 'anathema', apparently refers to St Paul's proclamation in Galatians 1:9 - 'If anyone preach to you a gospel besides that which you have received, let him be anathema'. The anathema is therefore a statement to say that anyone preaching another gospel (in this case, the argument for faith alone bringing salvation) is outside of the 'truth'..*

John, these 'anathemas' were ratified again in councils and in Vatican II. They still stand! I believe in *'faith alone'* and not at all of works. So, does this mean I am 'anathematised? Does this mean I am preaching *'another gospel'* as you say and that this is *'outside of truth'* as you say? Your answer would have to be 'yes' by what you have stated. Will you correct me by scripture?

John, these are the questions again. I would ask for plain answers to these:

- You say *'As we eat his body and drink his blood we come into communion with him in a physical...'* So, it is in fact a 'sacrifice' then?

- You say *'and [in a] spiritual way...but to say that we 'crucify Jesus in every Mass' is a distortion of RC teaching. The Mass makes present the once and for all sacrifice that took place on Calvary'*. No, it 'repeats' it if you teach that in each Mass Christ is 'physically' manifested in the wafer? How can you make something that was done *'ONCE'* to be something you continue or repeat? Do you not see this is anti scripture? (Hebrews is clear - *'once for all'...**'once'* etc.)? I notice you did not answer this part of my e-mail?

- Re Mary devotion: You say: *'I'm not surprised by this because there are parts of the RC world that do, in my opinion, hold Mary too highly. Often in some Asian cultures (and sometimes amongst older Australian Catholics) Mary is prayed to for healing or direction or whatever'*. John, the last three popes alone have dubbed her the *'Queen of Heaven'* and proclaim her to be a *'co-redemptrix'* with Christ!

- You say *'...I do find this very strange and wrong. It is not RC teaching'*. Oh, yes it is! Check out the writings of Ratzinger and Bergoglio? Check your official Catechism...

- You say: *'We pray together to God for healing. Catholics believe that this gathering can go beyond the grave. We can therefore ask for the intercession of the saints or Mary. We ask them to pray for us for whatever the need is'*. John, this may be logical but NOT scriptural. Christ instructed us to pray to the Father alone? We are not to pray to the dead? (Isaiah 8:19-20; see also Dt.18:10,11; Lev.20:6). Saul attempted to contact the dead (1Sam.28:11) against the Word of God, (Lk.16:26). It is only through Him that we have access...to the Father (Eph.2:18). He is our 'advocate' with the Father (1Jn.2:1) and *'my soul wait you only upon God'* (Ps.62:5). The Bible says *'Whom have I in Heaven but you?'* (Ps.73:25). The only one in the Bible who mediates and intercedes for us is Jesus.

- You say: *'But because of her special relationship to Jesus she is honoured.... an important distinction that some Catholics and*

of temporal punishment to be discharged either in this world or in the next in Purgatory...let him be anathema [cursed]' (Trent Sess.6, Canon 30).

'If anyone says that by the said sacraments...grace is not conferred through the work worked but that faith alone...is sufficient for obtaining the grace, let him be anathema [cursed]' (Trent Sess.7, Canon 8).

'If anyone says that the sacraments...are not necessary for salvation but...men obtain from God through faith alone the grace of Justification...let him be anathema [Cursed]'. (Canon 4, Session7)

'If anyone says that the sinner is justified by faith alone...let him be anathema [cursed]' (Canon 9, Session 6).

'If anyone shall say that justifying faith...remits sins for Christ's sake...let him be anathema [cursed]'. (6th Session, Canon 12).

All these 'curses' were re-affirmed in the Vatican II Council of the 20th Century.

Catholicism teaches that *'sins must be expiated. This may be done on this earth through the sorrows, miseries and trials... Otherwise expiation must be made in the next life through fire and torments or purifying punishments...in Purgatory the souls... are cleansed after death with punishments designed to purge away their debt'* (Vatican II ID; 1:2).

This flatly contradicts the following Scriptures: Jn.19:30; Heb.10:18; 1Jn.1:7; Lk.16:19-31.

The Roman Catholic sacrament of Baptism teaches *'by which means men and women are freed from their sins, are re-born as children of God'* (Canon 849). The Basic Catechism teaches that baptism *'is necessary for salvation...cleanses us from original sin, make us Christians...'*.

John, which salvation plan and which 'gospel' do you believe? How did you become a Christian? What is it that actually saved you?

I look forward to your answers and to your clarifying of these things. (There are other questions such as: Do you believe the Mass is 'a continuing sacrifice' of Jesus? Do you believe Mary is 'co-redeemer', 'co-mediatrix', can be prayed to, etc?).

I look forward to hearing from you on these vital matters....

Round 4

John:

Thanks for putting your questions clearly in your e-mail. I will do my best to express my understanding on each of your concerns. Before I do I think it's important to say that I do so for...first and foremost for Linda. I know you have been important in Linda's faith journey and she is very grateful for the ways you have encouraged her over the years. So I'm happy to chat about these things to honour your friendship with her. Secondly, I do so in love from one Christian to another (as I believe we both are) so that we may understand one another better. I don't think it would be right for me, as I'm sure you'll agree, to answer your questions in order to prove myself or gain your acceptance.

Firstly, the question of what must be done in order to attain salvation. Terry, I can't say this is something that I have thought about in great detail. I am aware of the differing opinions of different churches but I cannot say it's something that has ever worried me. I have always thought and felt that judgement is up to God alone and he will be the One to decide if I go to Heaven or not. I suppose my personal philosophy is that my purpose on earth is to love God and love those in my life. If I do these two things I hope and pray God will one day welcome me home. I believe that it is through the grace of the death and resurrection of Jesus that I am redeemed. It is by his sacrifice on the Cross that I am forgiven and brought into communion with the Trinity. My faith is in Jesus who died for my sins and rose for my justification.

Now my understanding on RC teaching - Catholics do believe that salvation comes through Jesus' sacrifice on the Cross. The works that we do are a response of love that comes from our faith in Jesus and love for him. Catholics believe that faith is ongoing. As we come to relationship with Christ, in daily prayer, we grow deeper and deeper in faith. As we do so, in this ongoing way, he transforms the heart through the power of the Holy Spirit. We grow to love Him, ourselves and others more as we journey in faith in Jesus. As we become more like Him, the way in which we live our lives changes. The fruit of this transformation is the works in our lives, be it loving

deeds'. Where in the Bible does the sacraments 'nourish faith'? Where do such 'good deeds' become a part of salvation?

- You say 'I do trust these guys'. John, you should not 'trust' these guys! Luther did not, nor many great leaders. I did not, and was Born Again. Why can't you trust the Bible enough to check out the difference between Paul's 'Gospel' and that presented by Rome? Therein lies the difference between salvation and damnation? What do you think the Reformation was all about? Why were millions burnt at the stake if all this means nothing at all?

- You say: 'I will do some more reading and look into it though'. John, this you MUST do...for the good of your eternal soul to be sure? I did it. I beg you to read my book in full and check anything out with the Bible...

- You say: 'We may rejoice in these sufferings on earth as we share, in a small way, in Jesus suffering on the cross'. Where do the scriptures suggest that we must share in the Calvary sufferings of Christ?

- You say: 'Purgatory completes the purification that is begun on earth so that there is no residue or stain of sin left when a person enters into heaven'. So, Christ's death and resurrection are not sufficient for salvation in and of themselves? - they are insufficient for our salvation? They must be added to by US? Where is Purgatory in the Roman Catholic Bible? Was not Christ's sacrifice enough? (Please read Heb.ch.9,10 - 'once for all'; 'once forever', 'once', etc). Does Christ's shed blood cleanse us from all sin...or just SOME? Is He the last and perfect sacrifice or must we add to that?

- You say: 'We do believe that the Mass is a representation of the events on Calvary 2000 years ago'. No, Rome teaches that Christ is ACTUALLY PRESENT in the wafer. And it is the 'same sacrifice as at calvary' and that it is a 'continuing' sacrifice.

- You say: 'We do believe that through the power of the Holy Spirit the gifts of bread and wine are changed into the body and blood of Jesus'. Catholicism teaches literally 'changed'.

My question to you is: Does this passage contradict Ephesians 2:8,9 and Romans 4:3-5, etc. (which you neglected to comment on)? Does James contradict Paul? Is salvation by faith alone or faith and works together? Can you be clear on this?

- You say: *'The works by themselves have no power but a genuine faith in Jesus always creates a natural flow of works'*. Then if so, why the 'necessary' sacraments for salvation in Roman Catholicism?

- You say: *'In this sense it is not the works that save us but the ongoing transformation of the heart that is only by Jesus' grace by the power of the Holy Spirit'*.

John, this is really contradictory. How can it not be of works and grace through 'faith alone' when the sacraments are 'necessary for salvation' and sins are not purged here but in Purgatory? Salvation, Biblically, is NOT an 'ongoing transformation' that saves us - it is a one-off IMPUTATION of Christ's righteousness through Faith (Rom.4:3-9).

- You say: *'We believe that the actions or objects used in the sacraments have no power in and of themselves, this would be silly, but they are very powerful only because they are a channel through which the love of God is ministered'*. John, this is NOT what Catholicism teaches about the sacraments. Read your Catholic Catechism. In Catholicism the sacraments *infuse* righteousness into the soul on an *ongoing* basis. This flatly contradicts Romans 4 and *imputation*. Romans 4 teaches that a man is made righteous upon belief without works and that righteousness is '*credited*' (imputed) to him and that *his sins are not imputed to him*: *'For what says the Scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted [imputed] unto him for righteousness. Now to him that works is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that WORKS NOT, but believes on him that justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted [credited, imputed] for righteousness...Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin'* (Rom.4:3-8)

John, also - what of Baptism? Can one be saved in Roman Catholicism without this?

- You say: *'The sacraments are only related to works by virtue of the fact that they nourish faith that naturally flows to good*

our families, reaching out to those in need, evangelisation etc. In this way, the fruit and proof of faith is our works. As James says, 'Show me your faith without deeds and I will show you my faith by what I do' (see James 2: 14-26)... I believe this passage captures the heart of the Catholic understanding on faith and works.

If you were to ask a Catholic if they believe a person would go to heaven if they were to confess, even sincerely confess, their faith in Jesus as Lord and saviour at one point in their life, and then go on to choose a life of sin and hurting others, the answer would be no. The RC belief, fully understood is that genuine faith is ongoing and this faith brings works. The works by themselves have no power but a genuine faith in Jesus always creates a natural flow of works. In this sense it is not the works that save us but the ongoing transformation of the heart that is only by Jesus' grace by the power of the Holy Spirit.

So now my understanding on the sacraments - I have always been taught, even as a young boy, that the sacraments are a physical sign of an invisible reality. These are a very important way in which we encounter God (not to diminish or discount the importance of the bible, daily personal prayer and receiving the love of God through others). The sacraments engage and utilise our five senses, our bodily reality, so that our hearts may encounter God. We believe that the actions or objects used in the sacraments have no power in and of themselves, this would be silly, but they are very powerful only because they are a channel through which the love of God is ministered.

Catholics believe that through the guidance of the Holy Spirit God has established the RC Church and the sacraments, with the Eucharist at its core. For this reason we do regard the sacraments as the 'primary means of salvation' insofar as they are most 'direct line' to God, or put another way, 'contain the fullness of truth'. Again, it is not personal observance of the sacraments themselves that brings about salvation, not the personal effort or regular attendance, but it is the action of God through them that is of importance.

On this note, I have heard that sometimes a common misunderstanding is that Catholics believe that the sacraments are,

or are a part of, the works. As I understand it, this is not so. The sacraments exist so that we can encounter God and deepen in faith. In this way the sacraments are more closely related to faith than works. Observance of the sacraments is therefore important because it deepens faith in an ongoing way. The sacraments are only related to works by virtue of the fact that they nourish faith that naturally flows to good deeds.

Next... 'anathemas'. I can't say Terry that this was something I had ever heard of. Of course I would not personally believe in a 'curse' of any kind. I have never heard of a Catholic that would either... (fortunately I don't know anyone at all that would want to place a 'curse'!). I briefly spoke to a couple of people, more educated in these things than myself (a friend and soon-to-be Dr of Theology and a former Protestant and apologist for the Catholic faith) who had the following to say. Firstly - anything proclaimed by Church doctrine should be understood in the historical context in which it was written. The 'anathemas' were written at the time of the Reformation. As I'm sure you know, at this time very 'forceful' and 'aggressive' statements of faith were made on both sides of the argument. This was one. And secondly, the word 'anathema', apparently refers to St Paul's proclamation in Galatians 1:9 - 'If anyone preach to you a gospel besides that which you have received, let him be anathema'. The anathema is therefore a statement to say that anyone preaching another gospel (in this case, the argument for faith alone bringing salvation) is outside of the 'truth' and therefore their salvation is jeopardised. The anathema is accompanied with prayers that the person will repent and be brought again into 'truth'. Like I said, this is not something I know a lot about but I do trust these guys. I will do some more reading and look into it though.

Purgatory - Expiation of sins through sorrows and trials or in Purgatory - At the heart of RC understanding and theology is the understanding that all things, since the fall, must pass through the cross to reach the new life of the resurrection. As we choose and follow Christ we encounter this suffering in various ways - persecution for His name sake, personal hardships, sickness, loneliness etc, etc.. As St Paul says we share in Christ's sufferings

John, this is contradictory! It still says the sacraments are necessary for salvation! But my Gospel says nothing but grace through faith alone is necessary! Which is it? The difference is HUGE!

- You say: '*Catholics believe that faith is ongoing. As we come to relationship with Christ, in daily prayer, we grow deeper and deeper in faith. As we do so, in this ongoing way, he transforms the heart through the power of the Holy Spirit*'.

This gradualism is antithetical to Biblical truth. This is infused human wrought righteousness by which no one will be saved. You have confused biblical Justification at the new birth with sanctification ongoing by the Holy Spirit. It is belief in Christ and His finished sacrifice that initially saves, not the ongoing Holy Spirit.

- You say '*We grow to love Him, ourselves and others more as we journey in faith in Jesus. As we become more like Him, the way in which we live our lives changes*'. Yet initial Salvation has NOTHING to do with the way we 'live'. It's about what we believe.

- You say '*The fruit of this transformation is the works*'...But by this 'works' NO MAN is saved.

- You say '*In this way, the fruit and proof of faith is our works*'. Yes, but Rome teaches that our works are 'efficacious' or saving? To rely on those is to be damned finally.

- You say: '*As James says, "Show me your faith without deeds and I will show you my faith by what I do" (see James 2: 14-26)...I believe this passage captures the heart of the Catholic understanding on faith and works*'. John, you have not put the whole context here: '*What does it profit, my brethren, though a man SAY he has faith, and have not works? can [that] faith save him? ...faith, if it has not works, is dead, being alone. Yes, a man may SAY, you have faith, and I have works: show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works*'

The passage compares two kinds of faith - one true and one false; one that a man 'says' he has and one that is proved by works; one has works and one that has no works. The one that has no works is false. But that 'works' has NO part in salvation as is shown in numerous other scriptures and in this passage.

Simply put you cannot be saved by 'another gospel'. Either the Protestant gospel is correct and the Catholic one false; or the Catholic one correct and the Protestant one false. They are diametrically opposed. One is 'Grace through faith alone' which you say Paul anathematizes (curses)! But the Biblical Gospel is faith alone, not of works...Again - *'For by grace are you saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast'* (Eph.2:8,9); *'For what says the Scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. Now to him that works is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that works not, but believes on him that justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness'* (Rom.4:3-5).

You have admitted that you believe it is not 'faith alone' as the true gospel. Yet that contradicts the scriptures clearly? Saying sacraments is not 'works' is avoiding this issue - the Catholic sacraments are '*necessary for salvation*' as taught by your church and the recent Popes and stated many times in their teachings. Rome teaches that the sacraments, baptism etc. are salvific. Pope Ratzinger spoke and taught publicly to this recently. Here is a recent quote: *'The Church affirms that for believers the sacraments of the New Covenant are necessary for salvation. 'Sacramental grace' is the grace of the Holy Spirit, given by Christ and proper to each sacrament'*. This was taught in the Council of Trent (Canon 4, Sess.7) and ratified in the recent Vatican II. (Added to this the 'anathemas' also state the same and also all are ratified. None of the 'anathemas' have been taken back).

- Then you do say: *'For this reason we do regard the sacraments as the 'primary means of salvation' insofar as they are most 'direct line' to God, or put another way, 'contain the fullness of truth'. Again, it is not personal observance of the sacraments themselves that brings about salvation, nor the personal effort or regular attendance, but it is the action of God through them that is of importance'*.

so that we may also share in his resurrection. We may rejoice in these sufferings on earth as we share, in a small way, in Jesus suffering on the cross. We rejoice because we know that as we unite with Him, He will bring about His new life in us in this life and ultimately in eternal life. I believe that a full understanding of expiation of sins can only been seen with this backdrop. We believe that will all encounter the cross of suffering and trial in our lives so that we may reach the resurrection in eternal life. Purgatory is the belief that Heaven is for those who have been completely purified and are able to see God face to face. Purgatory completes the purification that is begun on earth, so that there is no residue or stain of sin left when a person enters into heaven. Again, this is not something I have ever had a particularly strong opinion about...just giving my understanding of the RC teaching...but I do believe it makes sense.

The Mass as a continuing sacrifice - As you would know the Mass is sometimes called the 'sacrifice of the Mass' because we celebrate Jesus passion and resurrection with the gifts of bread and wine. This is sometimes misunderstood - some believe that we believe that we crucify Jesus in every Mass. This of course is as crazy as it sounds and this is not what Catholics believe. We do believe that the Mass is a representation of the events on Calvary 2,000 years ago. We also take Jesus words literally when he said 'he who eats my body and drinks my blood will be born to eternal life'. We do believe that through the power of the Holy Spirit the gifts of bread and wine are changed into the body and blood of Jesus. As we eat his body and drink his blood we come into communion with him in a physical and spiritual way. But...to say that we 'crucify Jesus in every Mass' is a distortion of RC teaching. The Mass makes present the once and for all sacrifice that took place on Calvary.

Re: Mary - I have had a few chats with people from other denominations over the years about the Mary thing. It is often clear that what these people think we believe, we do not believe. I'm not surprised by this because there are parts of the RC world that do, in my opinion, hold Mary too highly. Often in some Asian cultures (and sometimes amongst older Australian Catholics). Mary is prayed to for healing or direction or whatever. I do find this very strange and wrong. It is not RC teaching.

I once had a deacon explain it to me this way - When someone is sick in a church, as I'm sure you do, people gather to pray. We pray together to God for healing. Catholics believe that this gathering can go beyond the grave. We can therefore ask for the intercession of the saints or Mary. We ask them to pray for us for whatever the need is. We believe their prayers are powerful because they are especially close to God. We believe that Mary was the closest to God of all as she held Him in her womb. So...we ask for her intercession and prayers. Mary should never be worshipped because she is not God. But because of her special relationship to Jesus she is honoured...an important distinction that some Catholics and many non-Catholics miss.

As for what 'saved me'... I'm not sure I can put this in an e-mail! In a nutshell...my faith was nominal but regular until emptiness lead me to prayer - He changed my heart. I also believe that 'I am being saved'...I believe this process is not complete but as I journey with Christ he continues to change me into the person He created me to be.

Finally, I'd like to say that many Catholics do live a very 'traditional' or 'nominal' faith without a genuine transformation of heart or personal relationship with Christ. As a result the Catholic Church is sometimes seen dead or out-of-date or dormant in faith. Often the Catholic Church is misrepresented and beliefs are misunderstood. Some may be led to wonder what kind of 'jesus' Catholics worship. However, this is not my experience. The Church that I know is alive and vibrant. I personally know many many young people with a beautiful and genuine faith in Jesus. These are people that know and study their Catholic faith - often far better than I know mine. They are seeking God's direction for their lives, they pray daily, read their Bible, go to Mass, are overcoming temptation and are living incredible lives for God and doing incredible things for those in need through Him. Over my years in ministry I've witnessed the 'new evangelisation' across many Christian Churches including the Catholic Church.

Editor's reply:

John, you do not have to 'prove' anything to me...I have no doubt you are one nice person. But the issue is a Catholic marrying a 'Protestant' is biblically 'unequally yoked' (2Cor.6:14) and also it is *against Catholic teaching*. Hence the tension.

If you were to marry, where will you marry? - in a 'Protestant' church or in the Catholic church? As a Catholic you must marry in the Catholic church?

I vouch that these answers you have given are not all your own. They are standard replies that 'apologists' give that I have heard before, but they confuse and avoid the issues as being black and white issues. I too once gave the same answers in my reply to those who challenged my 'Catholic faith' with scripture. But I was not Born Again then when I gave the same replies. I ask you not to seek answers from those who you 'trust' as you say, but rather your understanding *from the Bible itself*.

Please tell me precisely - how did you become 'born again' in the Catholic church?

Here are some comments to your writings...and with more questions...

- You say *'I suppose my personal philosophy is that my purpose on earth is to love God and love those in my life. If I do these two things I hope and pray God will one day welcome me home'*.

John, there is NO salvation in these activities! This 'philosophy' is not the true Gospel. The Catholic church teaches (and you agree in your writings) that you will have Purgatory to purge sins...unless you somehow are sinless at the time of death?

- You say *'My faith is in Jesus who died for my sins and rose for my justification'*. But how can you say this and yet not be certain of the outcome (see your statement above)? If you say He died for your sins then why are you believing in a 'purgatory' to purge these sins?

The question I originally asked you was *'Which Gospel do you believe? Do you believe you are saved by Grace through faith and nothing else; or do you believe the sacraments and /or works are necessary for salvation?'* You have not clearly answered that question?