

Exploring Catholicism and the Scriptures

*An Exploration of the Bible and the Teachings
of the Catholic Church*

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Introduction:

When going on a trip or journey we should be asking at least three very pertinent questions...

1. Are you listening to the right people?
2. Are you getting the right directions?
3. Are you going to end up in the right destination?

There are various answers that could be given to those questions, but that begs another question... “In light of what the Bible teaches versus what the Catholic Church teaches, which is true?” When it comes to our eternal soul we want to be absolutely sure we are listening to the right people (God, apostles, prophets, teachers, etc.), that we are getting the right directions (Scriptures, the plan of salvation, practices, etc.), and that we will end up in the right destination (heaven, hell, end-times, etc.). This is our chance to see how the Catholic Church answers those questions as opposed to how biblical Christianity answers those questions.

We will begin our exploration of the Catholic Church starting with the second question, “Are you getting the right directions?” Then we’ll explore whether those directions are coming from the right people and then explore whether one who listens to the Catholic Church will end up in the right destination?

Before we answer those questions let’s do a brief perusal of the history of the Catholic Church.

A Brief History of the Catholic Church

Vatican City is an ecclesiastical state. It is the seat of the Roman Catholic Church. Within the walls of this city in Italy is a miniature nation that was built during the fourth century and rebuilt during the sixteenth century. The city has its own banking system and coinage, its own stores, pharmacy, telephone system, radio station, and post office, as well as an army of over 100 Swiss Guards. The most imposing building within the walls of the city is St. Peter’s Basilica, which is said to cover the shrine of St. Peter the apostle. The city also includes the Sistine

Chapel, the Pauline Chapel, the pope's palace, five museums of antiquities, libraries, the archives of the Roman Catholic Church, and two art galleries. The city publishes its own newspaper, L'Osservatore Romano. Various utilities and supplies—water, food, gas, electricity, and the like—are imported from outside the city. The pope exercises sovereign control over Vatican City. He has absolute executive, legislative, and judicial powers within its walls. He also appoints the members of the Vatican's governmental organs. From this city the pope also rules over the Roman Catholic Church, said by Roman Catholics to be the one true church on earth. It was allegedly established by Christ through Peter as the first visible head of the church. The governance of the church is said to continue generation after generation via Peter's successors, the popes. Throughout history, under the leadership of various popes, many of the distinctive Roman Catholic doctrines emerged far after the first century. Here are a few notable dates:

- A.D. 593—belief in purgatory
- A.D. 600—prayer to Mary and the saints
- A.D. 709—the practice of kissing the pope's foot
- A.D. 995—the canonization of dead saints
- A.D. 1079—celibacy of the priesthood
- A.D. 1090—praying the rosary
- A.D. 1215—transubstantiation and confessing sins to a priest
- A.D. 1439—belief in the seven sacraments.

Salvation and the Roman Catholic Church

Previous to Vatican Council II, those who held beliefs akin to those of modern Evangelical Protestants—such as salvation through grace alone by faith alone—were considered “anathema,” in the words of the Council of Trent. And indeed, throughout its history a major emphasis of Roman Catholicism has been that union with the Roman Catholic Church is essential to salvation. Cyprian (circa A.D. 200–258) said: *“No one can have God as Father who does not have the Church as Mother.”* In the twelfth century the Fourth Lateran Council affirmed: *“There is only one universal Church of the faithful, outside which none will be saved.”* This was reaffirmed by Pope Boniface VIII's Bull, Unam Sanctam, in 1302.⁵ Then in 1854, Pope

Pius IX declared: *“It is to be held as a matter of faith that no one can be saved outside the Apostolic Roman Church. It is the only ark of salvation and anyone who does not enter it must sink in the flood.”* This one “true” church is said to be the dispenser of the seven sacraments, which are necessary for salvation. We can immediately understand, then, why many Roman Catholics have historically said that to be faithful to God one must necessarily be faithful to God’s one “true” church—the Roman Catholic Church.

Since Vatican Council II, however, all who are named “Christian” (including non-Catholics) are viewed as part of God’s family. Non-Catholics are now considered to be “separated brethren.” Vatican II concluded that *“the church knows that she is joined in many ways to the baptized who are honored by the name of Christian, but who do not however profess the Catholic faith in its entirety or have not preserved unity which unites them to Christ.”* These “separated brethren,” however, are not in the most advantageous position—for, as noted previously, Roman Catholicism represents the one true church on earth. After all, Rome’s bishops are allegedly the successors of Christ’s 12 apostles. And the Catholic pope has allegedly inherited the throne from Peter (see **Matthew 16:18**). Clearly, then, there can be no other true church than that of Rome. It is only in the Roman Catholic Church that *“the fullness of the means of salvation can be obtained.”*

It is highly revealing that even though the Second Vatican Council has displayed a more open attitude toward non-Catholics, it has repeatedly reaffirmed past councils—including the Council of Trent, which pronounced anathemas against those who believe as Protestants do today in regard to the doctrines of justification and salvation. In fact, the recent Catechism of the Catholic Church (1994) cites the Council of Trent 100 times. And what should be of concern to modern Protestants is the fact that these anathemas uttered by Trent have never been recanted by the Roman Catholic Church.

The lack of assurance in Roman Catholic theology is more than evident in this statement from the Council of Trent: *If one considers his own weakness and his defective disposition, he may*

well be fearful and anxious as to the state of grace, as nobody knows with the certainty of faith, which permits of no error, that he has achieved the grace of God.

So, lets begin our exploration of the eternal matters of salvation by asking and answering a series of questions that will determine where one's eternity is spent.

Question: “Are You Getting the Right Directions?”

When it comes to where we will spend eternity we want to make sure we are getting the right directions so that we end up in the right destination. It is here that we will explore whether the Catholic Church’s doctrine regarding salvation and atonement are consistent with what the Scriptures teach.

Explore...

Is Salvation Instantaneous, Once-for-All, and By Grace Alone?

According to Catholics, salvation does involve grace and faith, but it is not by grace alone through faith alone, as the Reformers taught. Grace alone is not sufficient, without human works, to yield final and full justification. While Catholics acknowledge the necessity of grace, they do not acknowledge the exclusivity of grace. (Ron Rhodes, *The 10 Most Important Things You Can Say to a Catholic*, p. 65)

One of the more disturbing aspects of Roman Catholic theology is the teaching that the grace of justification can be gained and lost and gained and lost, on and on. It is a conditional justification. Catholics believe that committing a mortal sin virtually erases sanctifying and justifying grace from the soul. For a person who commits such a sin, the only remedy is to become “re-justified” through the sacrament of penance. (Ibid., p. 66)

Let’s begin by exploring how one gains and keeps salvation according to the Catholic Church and then we’ll look at whether that is consistent with what Scripture teaches.

In Roman Catholic theology there are seven sacraments: baptism, penance, the Eucharist (mass), confirmation, matrimony, holy orders, and the anointing of the sick. The word sacrament communicates the idea of conveying grace. Sacraments in Roman Catholic theology are not just viewed as metaphors pointing to the reality of grace, but rather these sacraments are actually said to be containers of grace, and this grace gets infused into the believer when participating in the sacraments. The Council of Trent said, “A sacrament is something presented

to the senses, which has the power, by divine institution, not only of signifying, but also of efficiently conveying grace.” (Rhodes, Ron. Reasoning from the Scriptures with Catholics (p. 171 Harvest House Publishers.)

We will simply explore the first four sacraments of the Catholic Church (baptism, penance, the Eucharist (Mass), and confirmation), as those are seen as the most important in terms of acquiring and keeping salvation in Catholicism.

Is Baptism Necessary for Salvation?

When a person is finally baptized, according to Roman Catholics, original sin is removed from his or her soul, and in its place sanctifying grace is infused. It is at this point that the person experiences “initial justification.” No one can merit or earn this grace, and hence this initial aspect of justification is said to be by grace. When the soul is infused with this sanctifying grace of God, inherent righteousness becomes one of the soul’s characteristics. (Rhodes, Ron. Reasoning from the Scriptures with Catholics, p. 123. Harvest House Publishers.)

The Council of Trent emphatically stated that *“if anyone shall say that baptism is optional, that is, not necessary for salvation: let him be anathema.”* (Henry Denzinger, *Sources of Catholic Dogma*, p. 264)

Is this what the Scriptures teach in regards to baptism? The answer is an emphatic “no” as we will explore here by looking at New Covenant Church’s teaching on baptism according to the Scriptures themselves. Just the four following points will give us clarity on what baptism does and does not do in one’s life...

Jesus commanded that His disciples go into the world and make disciples; baptizing and teaching those who believe the gospel (**Matthew 28:19-20**). Much confusion has entered Christendom regarding water baptism for believers... such as the mode of baptism and exactly what it is that baptism does and does not do.

The Bible Teaches Water Baptism *By Immersion*:

- A. The Greek word *baptizo*, which is where we get the English word *baptize* means to “dip, dye, or immerse.”
- B. To baptize means to *immerse* something in water or dye.
- C. Look up the following scriptures and what they say about water? (in the river; coming out of the water; lots of water; down into the water)

Mark 1:5

5 And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

John 3:23

23 John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because water was plentiful there, and people were coming and being baptized

Acts 8:36-38

36 And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, “See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?” 38 And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him.

The Bible Teaches That Water Baptism *Is Symbolic*:

A. Romans 6:3-4

3 Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

This passage is describing what happens to us when we choose to rely on Jesus as our Savior. The Holy Spirit of God unites us with Jesus in Jesus’ death, burial and resurrection. This act of uniting us with Jesus is called Spirit Baptism. Every follower of Jesus is Spirit Baptized at the

moment they put their faith in Jesus to save them. **Water baptism by immersion illustrates the meaning of Spirit Baptism.**

When we go under the water it symbolizes our dying with Jesus and leaving our old self behind; when we come up out of the water it symbolizes that we have risen with Jesus into new life! That's what baptism into the life of Jesus means. When we are lowered into the water, it is like the burial of Jesus; when we are raised up out of the water, it is like the resurrection of Jesus. Water baptism also symbolizes being cleansed of our sins. Again, this is symbolic of what has already happened, it doesn't actually cleanse you from sin.

The Bible Teaches Water Baptism Is For *Believers*:

The New Testament pattern is that of *salvation* always precedes baptism. Look up the following scriptures and write down **who** is being baptized:

A. **Acts 2:41**

41 So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

B. **Acts 8:12-13**

12 But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. 13 Even Simon himself believed, and after being baptized he continued with Philip. And seeing signs and great miracles performed, he was amazed.

C. **Acts 10:47-48**

47 "Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" 48 And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to remain for some days.

The Bible Teaches That Water Baptism Is *Not Necessary For Salvation*:

As indicated above, water baptism is *symbolic* of a believer's union in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus and of cleansing from sins. Water baptism is for those who have already placed their faith in Jesus for salvation. Water baptism is *not* necessary for salvation.

We are justified (made right with God) by Christ alone.

Galatians 2:15-16

15 We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; 16 yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.

Luke 23:39-43

39 One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!" 40 But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? 41 And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong." 42 And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." 43 And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

The Lord gave us water baptism to strengthen and encourage our faith and to be a witness to those who have not yet been saved showing the world that Jesus died for our sin, that our sin was buried with Him, that He rose from the grave, and that we too have been raised to a new life in Christ.

Is the Sacrament of Confirmation Biblical and is it Necessary for Salvation?

In Roman Catholic theology, confirmation is said to complete the sacrament of baptism. Indeed, *"if baptism is the sacrament of re-birth to a new and supernatural life, confirmation is the sacrament of maturity and coming of age."* (Karl Rahner, *Teaching of the Catholic Church*, p. 273) Confirmation is not strictly necessary for salvation, *"but it is eminently important in contributing to Christian perfection and there is a grave obligation to receive it in due time."* (John A. Hardon, *Pocket Catholic Dictionary*, p. 87) The bishop administers confirmation by laying his hands on the head of the parishioner, by which act the person is said to receive the Holy Spirit, strengthening him to live up to his profession of faith. The Essential Catholic Handbook tells us:

Along with baptism and the Eucharist, confirmation is a sacrament of initiation—in this case, initiation into the life of adult Christian witness. The deepened presence of the Spirit, who comes to us in this sacrament, is meant to sustain us in a lifetime of witness to Christ and service to others.

Ask...

- Is there a single verse in all of Scripture that even remotely hints towards the need for confirmation to be a child of God and completely forgiven of sin?
- Please read **John 1:12**. If receiving Jesus by believing in His name is what it takes to become a child of God why do we need the sacrament of confirmation?
- Please read **Romans 10:9-10**. If it is by believing that Jesus is Lord and that God raised Him from the dead for salvation why do we need the sacrament of confirmation? Can you see that the sacrament of confirmation is unbiblical and offensive to Christ and His work on the cross?

Does the Sacrament of Penance Absolve One's Sins?

In order to understand the sacrament of penance and the Roman Catholic belief that this sacrament can absolve one's sins we must first explore the Roman Catholic teaching on sin, specifically on what they call "venial" and "mortal" sins.

The following teaching from Ron Rhodes book Reasoning from the Scriptures with Catholics are incredibly helpful in exploring the Roman Catholic view of sin...

Venial sins, in Roman Catholic theology, are lesser sins that can be pardoned. Indeed, the word venial comes from the Latin term venia, which means "pardon" or "easily forgiven." Such sins do involve a violation of God's holy law, but they do not have any bearing as to whether a person goes to heaven or not. Venial sins can weaken someone's spiritual vitality—thus making him or her more vulnerable to falling into deeper sin—but venial sins cannot keep a person out of heaven. Someone might have to suffer some temporal punishment for these sins, but they are

not serious enough to put a person outside the family of God. Unlike mortal sins, venial sins do not kill the soul. They just make you spiritually sick, so to speak.

In Dogmatic Theology for the Laity we read: *We commit a venial sin (one which can be forgiven outside confession) whenever we transgress a commandment of God either in a matter which is not so serious, or without full knowledge, or without full consent of the will...for example, deliberate distraction at prayer, petty thievery, idleness, white lies, lack of love and generosity in small things, etc.*

What this means is that a person can commit a venial sin not only by engaging in a lesser form of sin, but also if that individual engages in a more serious sin but is not sufficiently aware of the evil involved or does not fully consent to the sin. God forgives the sinner for such venial sins if he or she confesses them to God in prayer and sincerely repents.

Unlike venial sins, mortal sins are deadly or mortal in the sense that they virtually deplete the soul of God's sanctifying grace. We read in Dogmatic Theology for the Laity: *"We commit mortal sin when we transgress a commandment of God in a serious matter, with full knowledge, and free consent of the will. Serious matter is, for example, unbelief, hatred of our neighbor, adultery, serious theft, murder, etc."*

For a person who commits such a sin, there is only one way to escape the damnable destiny of hell and find redemption, and that is found in confession of sin in the sacrament of penance. By confession of such sins to a priest, a person can do penance as instructed by the priest and can be absolved of his sins. At that point, grace is restored to the soul and the person essentially becomes "re-justified."

The Catechism of the Catholic Church puts it this way: *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.”

According to Roman Catholic theology, there are three primary aspects of penance: there must be contrition, confession to a priest, and then satisfaction. Contrition of heart consists of sorrow for the sins one has committed and the intention not to commit such sins in the future. In confession the sinner confesses to the priest all the sins he remembers in their entirety. Satisfaction for sins is then made according to the judgment of the priest, which is mainly achieved by the confessing sinner’s prayers, fasting, and good deeds such as giving money to the church or serving a neighbor.

The Biblical Teaching On Sin

The Bible makes no such distinction between mortal sins and venial sins. It is true that some sins are worse than others (**Proverbs 6:16-19**). But never does Scripture say that only certain kinds of sin lead to spiritual death. All sin leads to spiritual death, not just one category of sin (**Romans 6:23**).

There are two points I want to make in this regard. First, the biblical reality is that every single sin a person commits is a mortal sin in the sense that it brings about spiritual death and separates us from God. Even the smallest sin makes us legally guilty before God and is worthy of eternal punishment. As the apostle Paul put it in **Romans 6:23**, *“The wages of sin is death.”*

Second, and most important, even the most serious sins (so-called “mortal sins”) are fully forgiven for the person who comes to Christ for salvation. Someone does not have to go to a priest a thousand times throughout life to obtain absolution, but rather the person who has trusted in Christ is simply in a state of forgiveness. Christ has done it all.

An example would be the believers in the city of Corinth. Consider the apostle Paul's words from **1 Corinthians 6:9-11**:

Do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God.

These Corinthians had been guilty of committing all kinds of "mortal sins" for years and years, and yet their slate had been wiped clean as a result of their faith in the Savior, who attained eternal redemption for them at the cross. They were "washed," "sanctified," and "justified" in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. (Rhodes, Ron. Reasoning from the Scriptures with Catholics, pp. 217-218)

Ask...

- Weren't these Corinthians guilty of numerous mortal sins?
- Yet, how does the Scripture present their standing as a result of their faith in Christ?
(*Washed, sanctified, justified*)

So, are there any Scriptures that would warrant the sacrament of penance and the need to confess to a priest, repeat dictated prayers, or the paying of alms? The Catholic Church teaches that the answer is "yes". In his book Reasoning from the Scriptures with Catholics scholar Ron Rhodes draws our attention to the following often used passages and shows us both the Catholic interpretation of these verses as well as the biblical interpretation and response...

John 20:23—Biblical Support for Confession to a Priest?

The Roman Catholic Teaching: In **John 20:23** we read the words of Jesus, "*If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained.*" Roman Catholics often teach that in this verse Jesus was giving priests the power to forgive Christians who had succumbed to sin: "*This power to forgive sins Christ delegated to His*

Apostles (John 20:23), thereby, according to the solemn teaching of the Council of Trent, instituting the Sacrament of Penance, in which this same power to forgive sins continues to be exercised by the priests of the Church.” (Encyclopedia Dictionary of the Bible, Harmony Media Inc.)

Response: Only God can judicially forgive sins committed against Him (**Mark 2:7**). All **John 20:23** is saying is that when people respond positively to the gospel and accept it, we have the right to declare to them, “Your sins are forgiven,” based on the promise of Jesus. Likewise, when people respond negatively to the gospel and reject it, we have the right to declare to them, “Your sins are not forgiven,” based on the promise of Jesus. We are simply declaring or announcing heaven’s verdict regarding what will happen if people respond one way or the other in regard to Christ. Further, the context of the verse indicates that this declarative power is not limited to some select group (like priests), but every Christian has this right. After all, every single believer is a priest before God (**1 Peter 2:5,9**). Of course, if it is true that we are all priests unto God, then this has implications regarding whether it is necessary for believers to go to a priest for confession. After all, priests confess directly to God (see **Hebrews 4:16**). If we are priests, as Scripture indicates, then we confess directly to God, not to another priest. The scriptural reality is that there is not a single verse in the New Testament (including **John 20:23**) that instructs us to confess our sins to some priest. Nor do we see a single example in the Book of Acts or any other biblical book of anyone making confession to a priest (or disciple). Confession is to be made to God alone (**Psalms 32:5; Nehemiah 1:4-11; Daniel 9:3-19; Ezra 9:5-15**).

Ask...

- Can you show me a single example in all of Scripture of someone going to a priest to confess their sins?
- Since the Bible indicates that all of us are priests (**1 Peter 2:5,9**), and since all priests confess directly to God (**Hebrews 4:16**), what does this tell you about the privilege of every single believer? (*We can confess directly to God instead of having to go through another priest.*)

Matthew 16:24—Biblical Support for the Need for Penitential Works?

The Roman Catholic Teaching

In **Matthew 16:24** we read, *“Then Jesus said to His disciples, ‘If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.’”* Some Roman Catholics say that Jesus’ instruction here refers to the necessity of doing penitential works.

The Biblical Teaching

This verse refers not to doing penitential works (which Roman Catholics typically say are necessary for salvation), but rather refers to the life of commitment of one who has already become saved. Christ is calling on those who have already trusted in Him for salvation to totally commit themselves to living for Him on a daily basis.

These words of Jesus would certainly have made sense to His first-century hearers, since the cross as a tool of execution was quite common. When a man had been condemned to die, and the time of execution had arrived, the man would be required by the Roman executioners to carry his own cross to the place of execution. This is much as it was with Jesus when the time of His execution came: *“Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha)”* (**John 19:17**).

As we “take up” our “cross” and follow Jesus, we are willingly submitting ourselves to suffering and even dying for His sake. Jesus is quite obviously calling for a total commitment. The idea is this: “If you really want to follow Me, do not do so in word only, but put your life on the line and follow Me on the path of the cross—a path that will involve sacrifice, suffering, and possibly even death.”

It is important to keep in mind that there is a distinction between becoming saved and following Christ as a disciple. Scripture is clear that we become saved by placing faith in Jesus Christ. Close to 200 times in the New Testament, salvation is said to be by faith alone. Here are a few representative verses: — In **John 5:24** Jesus said, *“I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed*

*over from death to life.” — In **John 11:25** Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies.” — In **John 12:46** Jesus said, “I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness.”*

Clearly, salvation is by faith in Christ! A life of discipleship, however, goes beyond the initial conversion experience and calls for a life of sacrifice and commitment. The disciple is to “deny” himself. He must turn his back on selfish interests. He is no longer to live his life with self on the throne of his heart, but Christ must reign supreme.

As Bible scholar William Lane put it,

Jesus stipulated that those who wish to follow him must be prepared to shift the center of gravity in their lives from a concern for self to reckless abandon to the will of God. The central thought in self-denial is a disowning of any claim that may be urged by the self, a sustained willingness to say “No” to oneself in order to be able to say “Yes” to God. This involves a radical denunciation of all self-idolatry and of every attempt to establish one’s own life in accordance with the dictates of the self.

2 Corinthians 2:10—Biblical Support for Performing Absolution?

The Roman Catholic Teaching

In **2 Corinthians 2:10** we read the apostle Paul’s words: *“But whom you forgive anything, I forgive also; for indeed what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, I did it for your sakes in the presence of Christ.”* Roman Catholic theologians often say that in this verse we find the apostle Paul exercising the power of absolution given to him by Christ. Christ likewise “promised to His Church and transmitted to His Church the power to forgive sins without limitation.”

The Biblical Teaching

This verse has nothing to do with exercising the power of absolution. In context the verse deals with an incident of church discipline in the church at Corinth. The person of whom Paul was speaking had committed a serious offense and, as a result, severe church discipline was

imposed upon him. Paul now urged the Corinthian believers to lovingly restore this person to fellowship in view of the remorse the person had shown. The person had repented, and hence forgiveness was in order. After all, the purpose of church discipline is to restore a person to fellowship, not to permanently injure him.

It was in this context that the apostle Paul said, *“But whom you forgive anything, I forgive also; for indeed what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, I did it for your sakes in the presence of Christ.”* Paul then indicated that it was important for the offender to be restored so that the incident would not become an occasion for Satan to drive a wedge between the church and Paul (verse 11).

Many Bible scholars believe that in this verse Paul was personally forgiving an offense directed at him, and then urged the Corinthian believers to forgive the person and restore him to fellowship. Bible Scholar Colin Kruse notes that Paul had *“found himself the object of a hurtful attack (2:5; 7:12) made by a certain individual,”* and this situation caused disruption not just for Paul but for the church as well.

Expositor Murray H. Harris agrees, adding:

The man referred to in these verses is almost certainly not the man guilty of incest (1 Corinthians 5). Rather, after Paul’s painful visit some powerful insult had been directed against him or one of his representatives by a visitor to Corinth or by a Corinthian, who perhaps headed the opposition against Paul at Corinth.

This individual ended up repenting of his attack against Paul after being disciplined by the church. Bible scholar David Clines notes: *“The leader of the opposition to Paul has been punished by the church, and has repented of his rebellion. Paul therefore forgives him, and asks the church also to forgive him.”*

If this view is correct, as the evidence seems to indicate, then in verse 10 Paul is simply saying that he has already forgiven the man in question, if, in fact, there was anything to forgive in the

first place. Paul was taking the initiative in the matter of forgiveness, making sure the Corinthians followed suit. Seen in this light, the verse cannot be used to support the Roman Catholic view of a priest absolving people from their sins. Paul himself was expressing personal forgiveness.

Luke 13:3—Biblical Support for Penance?

The Roman Catholic Teaching

A Roman Catholic translation of **Luke 13:3** reads, *“The Lord also said: ‘Except you do penance, you shall all likewise perish.’”* Roman Catholics say this verse supports the sacrament of penance.

The Biblical Teaching

The Roman Catholic translation of this verse is incorrect. A better translation is the New American Standard Version: *“I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”* The Greek word in question, *metanoe*, means “to change one’s mind,” “to repent.”

Indeed, Friberg’s Greek Lexicon tells us the word is used *“predominately of a religious and ethical change in the way one thinks about acts—[meaning] repent, change one’s mind, be converted.”* The Louw-Nida Greek Lexicon says the word means, *“to change one’s way of life as the result of a complete change of thought and attitude with regard to sin and righteousness—‘to repent, to change one’s way, repentance.’”*

Clearly, then, the phrase in question in **Luke 13:3** should be translated, *“Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish”* (New American Standard Version), not *“Except you do penance, you shall all likewise perish”* (Roman Catholic translation). Obviously, there is a big difference between the sacrament of penance and a call to repentance.

As for what is going on in the context of **Luke 13:1-3**, in verse 1 we find record of some Galileans who had been slain by Pilate’s soldiers while offering sacrifices at the temple so that their blood and that of the sacrifices were mixed. Christ’s subsequent point in verses 2 and 3 is

that this horrible thing did not happen to them because they were worse sinners than all other Galileans, but that all people needed to repent. Death is a common denominator for the whole human race. Only repentance can bring life as people prepare to enter into God's holy kingdom. "Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish." Penance is nowhere in view here.

Acts 2:38—Biblical Support for Penance?

The Roman Catholic Teaching

A Roman Catholic translation of **Acts 2:38** reads, "*Do penance and be baptized every one of you.*" Roman Catholics say this supports the sacrament of penance. We are told that Peter recommended "*penance to sinners about to receive baptism.*"

The Biblical Teaching

The Roman Catholic translation is a mistranslation. A better translation is the New American Standard Version: "*Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*" The same Greek word used for repent in **Luke 13:3**, *metanoë*, is used in this verse. It means, "*to change one's mind,*" "*to repent.*" There is a big difference between the sacrament of penance and a call to repentance. What is it the people in Acts 2 were called to "change their minds" about? In context, Peter was speaking to the Jews ("men of Judea" [verse 14], "men of Israel" [verse 22]) who had rejected Jesus Christ as being the Messiah. It is logical that Peter would call on them to repent (or change their mind) regarding their rejection of Jesus as the Messiah. In other verses, repentance has to do with sin in general, but in the present context it would seem that the Jews are being called to repent regarding the one primary sin of rejecting Jesus.

Transition:

After exploring and concluding that it is by grace alone that we are saved and that by grace alone we have ALL of our sins paid for by Christ, it is clear that the sacrament of penance is unnecessary as well as unbiblical. This now leads to another very important sacrament in Catholic theology, the sacrament of Mass.