

Roman Catholicism and the Bible

By [Rebecca S. May](#)

- *Is Catholic doctrine consistent with the Bible?*
- *Is the Catholic teaching of sacraments consistent with the Bible?*
- *Is the Catholic view of Mary consistent with the Bible?*

Four Historical Influences

Augustine (354-430 A.D.) was one of Catholicism's greatest contributors of theological thought during the Catholic domination in the western world of Christianity for the first 1500 years after Christ. After Eastern Christianity separated itself from the Catholic church to form Eastern Orthodoxy, around 1000 A.D., **Thomas Aquinas** contributed greatly to the faith by combining the philosophy of Aristotle with Catholic tradition. The 1500s mark another significant event for Catholicism when one of their own, **Martin Luther**, began to question traditional Catholic doctrine.

The **Reformation** that took place during Luther's departure from the church was the most significant division of Catholic history. That these reformers had a case is not denied by Roman Catholic historians or scholars; they do, however, maintain that while priests and bishops, and even popes, may err, the one true church cannot err, and Luther was wrong in rebelling ("Handbook of Denominations in the United States," page 268).

There are some aspects of the Roman Catholic religion that are consistent with the Bible and evangelical Christianity, most significantly that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, He came to earth in the form of man, lived a sinless life, was crucified, buried, and rose from the dead. Roman Catholicism teaches that Christ's death on the cross was necessary for salvation. However, they do not believe that Christ's death was sufficient for salvation.

Peter and the Authority of the Pope

The Catholic church dates its beginning to the moment when Christ selected the Apostle Peter as guardian of the keys of heaven and earth and chief of the apostles (Matthew 16:16-19). Therefore, Peter is considered to be the first pope. A closer look at the text reveals some problems with this. It seems unlikely that Christ would name Peter as the pope (the father of the church) considering the fact that four verses later He calls him Satan (16:23). Furthermore, Jesus said not to call anyone on earth "father" (23:9). Also, if it was so clear that Peter was named first among the apostles, why only four chapters later are James and John asking Jesus if they could be first (20:21)? It is true that Peter had a unique role in starting the church. He also had the authority of an apostle, the same authority was given the other apostles by Christ. However, it cannot be substantiated by Scripture that the authority continued beyond the 12 apostles or that it can be applied to a church-appointed leader. It is Christ whom God the Father appointed as head over all things to the church (Ephesians 1:22). And Jesus Christ is the only foundation of the church (1 Corinthians 3:11) and the cornerstone of the church (Ephesians 2:20).

Purgatory and the Authority of the Apocrypha

Another debatable view within Catholicism is the existence of purgatory—the belief that there is a place of purification for Christians who die without having achieved forgiveness for all earthly sins. The idea of purgatory cannot be found in the Bible. The idea originated from a collection of writings called the Apocrypha, written toward the end of the Old Testament and between the Old and New Testaments (2 Maccabees 12:39-42). However, the Catholic church did not include the Apocrypha until 1546. Evangelical Christians do not consider these books authoritative since they were not written by a prophet of God, were not quoted by Christ, and were not sanctioned by the apostles.

Catholic Doctrine and the Authority of the Sacraments

According to the official Catechism of the Catholic church (CCC), there are seven sacraments required by God and to be performed only by the Catholic church. [An ordinance is an opportunity for the believer to worship God. Protestants generally practice the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper.]

Baptism—Baptism is necessary for salvation for those to whom the Gospel has been proclaimed and who have had the possibility of asking for this sacrament (CCC 1257). By baptism all sins are forgiven, original sin and all personal sin, as well as all punishment for sin (CCC 1263). However, according to Ephesians 2:8-9, salvation comes by grace, through faith NOT by works—such as baptism.

Eucharist—Catholics believe that in taking the bread and the cup transubstantiation occurs, which is, a change of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the body of Christ our Lord and of the whole substance of the wine into the substance of His blood (CCC 1376). However, this is My body could mean, “this represents My body.” It is illogical to assume that the bread and the cup actually literally become the physical body and blood of Christ since He Himself performed the eucharist with His disciples prior to His body being broken and His blood being spilled (Matthew 26:28).

Penance—In this sacrament of confession, Catholics believe that bishops and priests, by virtue of the sacrament of Holy Orders, have the power to forgive all sins (CCC 1461). However, Christ proved that He Himself is the answer to the question, Who can forgive sins but God alone? (Mark 2:7).

Confirmation—Confirmation completes baptismal grace by increasing the gifts and strengths of the Holy Spirit in the recipient (CCC 1303). However, Paul said concerning all believers, you are not lacking any gift (1 Corinthians 1:6-7).

Marriage—Catholics believe the sacrament of matrimony gives spouses the grace to love each other with the love which Christ has loved His church (CCC 1661). However, there is no biblical basis to claim we are given special grace to love our spouse because of being married in the Catholic church.

Holy Orders—Catholics believe this sacrament confers sacred power for service (CCC 1592). However, the ministry of forgiveness and reconciliation was not limited to any special class known as “priests” or “clergy” (2 Corinthians 3—5) (“Roman Catholics and Evangelicals,” Geisler, p. 289). The Bible says all believers are priests (1 Peter 2:7-9 and Revelation 1:6).

Extreme Unction (Last Rites)—This assistance from the Lord by the power of his Spirit is meant to lead the sick person to healing of the soul but also of the body, if such is God’s will. Furthermore, if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven (CCC 1520). However, the Bible says that forgiveness is between us and God and does not require the intercession of a priest. *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness* (1 John 1:9).

Mary and the Validity of the Immaculate Conception

The doctrine of the Immaculate Conception is the belief of Catholicism that Mary was totally preserved from the stain of original sin and she remained pure from all personal sin throughout her life (CCC 508). However, according to the Bible, Mary is a sinner—for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23; see also Romans 3:9-20).

Catholicism teaches that Mary remained a virgin throughout her life (CCC 508). However, according to the Bible, Mary was the mother of other children besides Jesus (Luke 8:19; see also Psalm 69:8; Matthew 12:46; 28:10; Mark 3:31; and John 7:3).

Catholics view Mary as co-mediator of God’s grace and as a collaborator with the salvation of Jesus her Son (CCC 510, 973). However, according to the Bible, *there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus ...* (1 Timothy 2:5; see also Hebrews 12:24).

According to Pope Paul VI, The Church’s devotion to the Blessed Virgin is intrinsic to Christian worship (CCC 971). However, according to the Bible, anyone who is not God should not receive prayer, adoration, or worship (Revelation 19:10; 22:8-9; and Daniel 3:16-18).

Questions and Answers

Q: *Is Catholic doctrine consistent with the Bible?*

A: Parts of the Catholic doctrine are consistent and parts are inconsistent. For example, Catholics believe Christ’s death on the cross is necessary for salvation but not sufficient for it.

Q: *Is the Catholic teaching of sacraments consistent with the Bible?*

A: No. The ministry of forgiveness and reconciliation is not limited to any special class known as “priests” or “clergy.” The Bible says all believers are priests (1 Peter 2:7-9 and Revelation 1:6).

Q: *Is the Catholic view of Mary consistent with the Bible?*

A: No. The Bible teaches that Mary was a sinner, had other children besides Jesus, is not a co-mediator, and should not be worshiped.