

Is the Catholic Gospel Really "Gospel"? (Part 1)

"...If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord', and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, YOU WILL BE SAVED.." – Romans 10:9

In my last newsletter article (9/11/07), I explained to you that the initial differences between the Catholic "gospel" and the Protestant "gospel" begin at the very sources used to proclaim and teach these "gospels". For the Protestants, Scripture alone (i.e. God's inspired and infallible Word) is considered the only reliable source from which to preach and teach the gospel. However, as I previously proved to you, Catholics do not believe that the Bible is the sole source from which to derive truth. They hold the "traditions of the church" and the "teachings of past popes and ecumenical councils" as equally divine sources of truth along with the Holy Scriptures. Because the Catholic gospel and the Protestant gospel have different starting points, it should not be unexpected that they end up at significantly different ending points when it comes to explaining how a "sinful" person can become "saved" and enter "eternal life" in heaven with Jesus Christ.

Because he was aware of these very different "gospels", Pope Benedict XVI came out this past summer with an official claim that only the Catholic Church is the "real" church and only Catholicism has the "true" gospel. As I said before, this is a serious claim that I could not ignore...because the "gospel" I teach here at Northbridge is not at all like the gospel taught by the Catholic Church. Therefore, logic clearly tells us that WE BOTH CAN'T BE RIGHT! The apostle Paul made it clear that there was only ONE (1) gospel (Gal 1:6-8) and there are serious consequences for those who preach a "perverted" gospel (Gal 1:9).

The reason I do not accept the "gospel" of Catholicism is simply because I do not believe it is "gospel", at all! What I mean by this is that the word "gospel" means "GOOD NEWS". When I am explaining to someone how their sins can be forgiven and their souls saved by their "faith" in the finished work of Jesus Christ, who atoned for all the sins of mankind, so that He could reconcile us to God...I AM TELLING THEM GOOD NEWS (i.e. "gospel"). It is "good news" to know that Christ has saved us by God's grace (Eph 2:8-9) apart from any of our "good works" (Titus 3:5; Rom 3:19-27). It is "good news" when I tell someone that the Bible claims all you have to do to be saved is to BELIEVE (Rom 4:23-25; Rom 10:9-10). It is also "good news" when the Bible assures us we can never lose our salvation (John 10:28-29) because we are "sealed" by the Holy Spirit to "guarantee" our salvation and redemption (Eph 1:13-14; Eph 4:30).

In my honest opinion, the Catholic gospel is NOT "good news" (i.e. gospel). I say this because, according to Catholicism, accepting Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior does NOT guarantee salvation. According to Alan Schreck, professor of theology at Franciscan University of Steubenville, *"The Catholic Church has ALWAYS taught that no one can know with absolute certainty in this life whether he or she will be saved...this teaching is based on recognition that any of us, at any point in life, can turn away from God and LOSE THE HOPE OF HEAVEN."* (Catholics & Christians; page 36).

This explains why you will find it very difficult to find a Catholic person who "knows" they are saved. Their "gospel" teaches that they can never be sure. However, Protestants rest in the assurance of their salvation based on God's promises, such as *"I write these things to you who BELIEVE in the name of the Son of God so that you may KNOW THAT YOU HAVE ETERNAL LIFE."* (1John 5:13). Our loving heavenly Father did not want us walking around scared that we have not "done enough" to keep our salvation. He wanted us to be confident that He is "KEEPING US" saved until He comes for us (Rom 8:1; 1Jn 2:1-2).

Catholics are taught that there are two types of sins that a "believer" can commit AFTER becoming a Christian. Venial (i.e. excusable) sins are less serious sins and do not lead to damnation. But Mortal sins, according to Catholicism, destroy the life of Christ in a believer and deprives them of sanctifying grace, and will lead to eternal death in hell, unless that person participates in the Sacrament of Penance (Compendium: Catechism of the Catholic Church; page 114 & 115).

I also do not think it is "good news" to believe salvation depends on a person continuing through a process of SACRAMENTS and GROWTH OF VIRTUES in order to obtain salvation as well as retain it. According to "The Catholic Catechism", by Rev. John A. Hardon, *"The indispensable means for the perseverance and development (of*

salvation) is grace, which Christ has promised to furnish us BY THE SACRAMENTAL SYSTEM, through PRAYER, and through the PRACTICE of VIRTUE." (page 181). This means, according to Catholicism, a person must "practice" righteousness and "live" righteously in an attempt to try to achieve "true" righteousness. However, the Bible says that God's "righteousness" is "credited" (i.e. imputed) to all who simply "believe" in Jesus Christ by FAITH (Rom 3:22, Rom 4:4-8).

Another reason I do not believe the Catholic gospel is "good news" is because of the process they claim must be followed in order to have your sins forgiven AFTER you have become a believer. Catholicism teaches that the "original sin" of Adam is forgiven at BAPTISM and, thus, a believer must be baptized to be saved. "*Baptism is NECESSARY for salvation for all those to whom the Gospel has been proclaimed and who have had the possibility of asking for this sacrament.*" (Compendium: Catechism of the Catholic Church; page 79) When a believer sins AFTER being baptized, his sins can only be forgiven through the Sacrament of Penance (or Reconciliation) that must be performed by an ordained minister of the Catholic Church. Using the "traditional" understanding of Matthew 16:18 and John 20:22-23, Catholicism teaches that "*Christ has entrusted the ministry of Reconciliation to his apostles, to the bishops who are their successors and to the priests who are the collaborators of the bishops, all of whom become thereby the INSTRUMENTS to exercise God's power of forgiving sins...The absolution of GRAVE SINS is reserved to the Apostolic See...*" (Compendium; page 89)

I don't know about you, but for me, it is not "good news" to have to depend on any man to "absolve" and "forgive" my sins (Rom 3:10-13; Rom 3:23). The biblical "gospel" informs me that I don't need an "earthly priest", because I have a "heavenly priest" who is sinless and always lives to intercede on my behalf! (Heb 8:1-2; Heb 9:24-28). That is why I confess my sins "only" to Jesus Christ and rejoice in the "good news" that my sins will be forgiven (1John 1:9)!!!

We have seen that it is not "good news" for a Catholic believer to never really "know" if they are saved or not. Next week we will see if a believer's death is "good news" according to the Catholic "gospel". -**Pastor Louis**