

Is the Catholic Gospel Really “Gospel”? (Part 2)

“Blessed is the man whose SIN the Lord will NEVER COUNT AGAINST HIM.” – Romans 4:8

In my last newsletter article (9/25/07), I explained why I didn't believe the Catholic gospel was actually “gospel”, because the biblical word “gospel” means “good news”. I personally do not believe Catholicism teaches “good news” when it says no one can ever really know for certain they are saved, even after putting your faith and trust in Jesus Christ. I do not believe it is “good news” that Catholicism claims that only through a continuation in the Sacraments and in Virtues (i.e. “good works”) can a believer expect to merit an opportunity for salvation. I also stated last week that I did not think that it was “good news” to have to trust a Catholic priest to hear my confession, determine whether or not I was truly repentant, and then set a proper “penance” (such as prayers, fasting, and/or giving alms to the poor) in order for my sins to be forgiven. As I tried to make clear last week, not only are these elements of the Catholic gospel NOT “good news”, they are also NOT “biblical”. Each of these conditions towards “meriting” salvation is derived and finds its roots in Catholic traditions and evolved rituals.

This week, I want to discuss another Catholic doctrine that is far from being “good news”. When Pope Benedict XVI claimed back in July of this year that the Catholic Church had the only “true” pathway to heaven, he was including in that “pathway” a major obstacle called PURGATORY.

In short, according to Catholicism, purgatory is a “place” where SOULS OF DEAD BELIEVERS ARE CLEANSED of their sins that they committed while alive on earth, but never had them “absolved” properly through the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation. Catholics refer to what is experienced in purgatory as “satispassion”, which means “being cleansed (purified)” before entering into God's presence (you can read more about the technical aspect of this doctrine in Rev. John A. Hardon's book, “The Catholic Catechism”, pages 273-280).

Purgatory did not become an official teaching of the church until the latter part of the 13th century (approx. 1274 A.D.) when it formally declared by the Second Council of Lyons:

“If those who are truly repentant die in charity before they have done SUFFICIENT PENANCE for their sins of omission and commission, their souls are cleansed AFTER DEATH in purgatorial or cleaning PUNISHMENTS.”

Rev. John A. Hardon explained the Catholic “justification” for believing in purgatory by writing:

“The REASON of faith is that nothing defiled can enter heaven, and therefore ANYONE LESS THAN PERFECT must be FIRST PURIFIED before he can be admitted into God's presence...thus, Catholic Tradition holds that there must exist ‘purgatory’, in which the souls of the JUST who die with STAINS OF SINS are cleansed by EXPIATION before they are admitted to HEAVEN.” (The Catholic Catechism, pages 273-274)

For anyone who still stubbornly believes that there are no differences between the Catholic “gospel” and the Protestant “gospel”, you need to investigate the DETAILS behind why

Catholicism believes there NEEDS to be a purgatory! From the statements above, the Catholic “gospel” is not very “good news”, if they say it is necessary for “JUST” (i.e. “justified”) believers in Jesus Christ to still be PUNISHED, after they die, for the sins they committed AFTER becoming Christians. This includes ALL Christians who are “less than perfect” when they die. Catholicism teaches they must first be PURIFIED... through SUFFERING...before they can enter into heaven. So I ask you: IS THIS “THE GOSPEL”? Is this “THE GOOD NEWS”?

I hope it is obvious to you that the very doctrine of “Purgatory” proves, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that the Catholic understanding of what takes place when a person accepts Christ as their personal Lord and Savior...is NOT THE SAME as what the Bible teaches! If you take the time to go back to my previous articles (8/06/07 & 8/13/07), you will see that I spent considerable time to give you the biblical definitions of the words “justification” and “imputed”. I provided this information so that you could see that the Bible says we are “justified” (i.e. forgiven and brought into the right standing before God) by FAITH in accordance with God's GRACE (Rom 3:24 & Rom 3:26-28). The Bible also says that, through our FAITH, God “imputes” (i.e. credits to us) His very own RIGHTEOUSNESS! (Rom 3:21, Rom 4:3-8). In fact, Paul summarized the doctrine of justification in chapter four of the book of Romans when he wrote: “...God will CREDIT RIGHTEOUSNESS—for us who BELIEVE in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead.” (Rom 4:24b).

Because we have been “credited” with God's very own “righteousness”, the bible says that true Christian believers NOW are “holy and blameless in His sight” (Eph 1:4), at “peace with God” (Rom 5:1), and under “no condemnation” (Rom 8:1). The Christian believer is truly “blessed” by the biblical “gospel”, because he has the assurance that ALL of his sins HAVE ALREADY BEEN forgiven (Eph 1:7) and covered (Rom 4:7); therefore, the

believer's sins will NEVER BE COUNTED AGAINST him (Rom 4:8).

Catholicism teaches that "reason" must be used to believe in "purgatory". They "incorrectly" reason that a "righteous" and "holy" God could not possibly come in personal contact with an "unrighteous" person...even if they person is a true believer in Jesus Christ. Therefore, Catholic Doctrine "incorrectly" teaches that there must be a need for sins of a believer to be "purified" AFTER they die.

This is a good example of why God does not want us to base our beliefs on faulty human reasoning and religious wisdom (1Cor 1:18-25). Jesus teaches us to live only by God's Word (Matt 4:4). And it is God's Word that says Christian believers are totally PURIFIED of all their sins BEFORE they die...not by the suffering in purgatory...but because of the suffering of Christ on Calvary. The Bible says we were REDEEMED (once and for all) through the "...*precious BLOOD of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.*" (1Peter 1:18-19)

While it is true that a "holy" and "righteous" God demands that we be "righteous" in order to enter into His presence, it is equally true that the Bible teaches He proclaims us "righteous" and "purifies" us from all sin...when we, by FAITH, trust in Jesus Christ's death, burial, and resurrection for our salvation. I can't speak for you, but for me (a less than perfect believer), that is a "gospel" that is truly GOOD NEWS! –**Pastor Louis**