

Justification by Faith Alone, Chapter 2

The Roman Catholic View of Justification

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There are many reasons why all Bible-believing Christians should have a solid grasp of the Roman Catholic doctrine of justification. First, the Romish theory of justification is a complete denial of the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is a damnable heresy. Anyone who adheres to such a gross perversion of the gospel cannot be saved. Second, it is a subtle doctrine of Satan. The papal perversion of justification is one of the cleverest perversions of Scripture that the mind of man has ever conceived. This papal doctrine is not the typical amateur heresy one finds in many cults today. It was formed over a period of one thousand years. It is a combination of errors found in the Patristic fathers, and the speculations of the Aristotelian-influenced medieval scholastic theologians. The doctrine was fully developed at the Council of Trent (1543-1563) in reaction to the great Reformation doctrine of justification by faith alone. At Trent Rome slammed the door shut upon the gospel of Christ; it has remained shut ever since. The Second Vatican Council (1965) and the recent Roman Catholic Catechism (1994) both clearly affirm Trent (all Roman Catholics are *supposed* to affirm the teachings of Trent as infallible truth). Since Trent, the Romish church is truly a synagogue of Satan. Her pope, cardinals, bishops and priests are all antichrists, enemies of the gospel. Third, there has been a move by many Protestants for closer ties with Rome. This move reflects an ignorance of the basic theological differences between Christianity and Romanism, and a shift within Protestantism away from objective justification toward spiritual existentialism. Fourth, Romanism has adopted an aggressive apologetic toward Protestants. There are some intellectual ex-Protestants who are defending Rome on the radio, internet, and books. These papal apologists frequently take advantage of Evangelicals who have a poor understanding of the Romanist view. In order to avoid the accusation that this author is misrepresenting the Roman Catholic view of justification, quotes from Rome's own doctrinal statements will be provided for each assertion.

To many Christians, Roman Catholicism sounds very evangelical. The Council of Trent declared: "If any one saith, that man may be justified before God by his own works, whether done through the teaching of human nature, or that of the law, without the grace of God through Jesus Christ: let him be anathema."¹ The Roman Catholic Catechism also appears very

¹ *Trent*, sixth session, canon 1, in Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), 2:110. A number of the statements of justification found in the Council of Trent's decrees are ambiguous. Furthermore, the first decrees *appear* more Evangelical than the latter decrees. The vagueness and almost contradictory nature of these decrees arises from the fact that many of the representatives present had conflicting views of justification. Furthermore, Romish theologians had the impossible task of trying to harmonize the teachings of the church fathers whenever they considered a doctrine. One thing is clear. Those who were present at Trent knew their job was to answer and condemn the Protestant doctrine of justification. This they did with no ambiguity.

evangelical at times: “Justification *detaches man from sin* which contradicts the love of God, and purifies his heart of sin. Justification follows upon God’s merciful initiative of offering forgiveness. It reconciles man with God. It frees from the enslavement to sin, and it heals.”² A good Roman Catholic would say that Christians are saved solely by God’s grace. “Our justification comes from the grace of God. Grace is *favor the free and undeserved help* that God gives us to respond to his call to become children of God, adoptive sons, partakers of the divine nature and of eternal life.”³ The statement regarding salvation from the document *Evangelicals and Catholics Together* also appears evangelical: “We affirm together that we are justified by grace through faith because of Christ.... All who accept Christ as Lord and Savior are brothers and sisters in Christ.”⁴

Although Roman Catholic doctrine sounds very evangelical at times, a close look at their teachings regarding salvation reveals a clear but clever denial of the biblical doctrine of justification. Gerstner writes, “Romanists many times fool Protestants by their claim to teach ‘by grace alone’ (*sola gratia*). And they sometimes fool themselves when they are more evangelical than a Romanist can honestly be. Romanists are saved by *their works* which come *from* grace, according to their teaching. It is *not the grace but the works which come from it* that save them!”⁵ Virtually anyone can say “I am saved by grace” or “I am saved solely by Christ.” One must look at the fine print to understand what lies behind these statements. An orthodox Protestant and a good Roman Catholic mean two completely different things when they confess Christ.

Basic Statement of the Difference

² *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Ligouri, MO: Ligouri Pub., 1994), §1990, p. 483.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium*, 1994, p. 16. Any Protestant attempt to have a union or close-working relationship with Romanism can only be achieved by deceit on one or both sides. One must concede crucial doctrines and/or use ambiguous statements, for both systems are irreconcilable. One should learn from history the dangers of such attempts. At the Diet of Ratisbon (1541), an attempt at doctrinal reconciliation between Protestants and Romanists was attempted but failed miserably. Buchanan’s analyses should be headed by all Protestants: “At Ratisbon, the difference between the Popish and Protestant doctrines of Justification seemed to resolve itself into one point, and even on that point both parties held some views in common. It might seem, then, that there was no radical or irreconcilable difference between the two; and yet, when they came to explain their respective views, it was found that they were contending for two opposite methods of Justification,—the one by the personal obedience of the believer, the other by the vicarious obedience of Christ.... This fact shows the utter folly of every attempt to reconcile two systems, which are radically opposed, by means of a compromise between them; and the great danger of engaging in private conferences with a view to that end. In the open field of controversy, truth, so far from being endangered, is ventilated, cleared, and defined; in the secret conclaves of divines, and the cabinets of princes, it is often smothered, or silenced. It has far less to fear from discussion, than from diplomacy. There can be no honest compromise between the Popish and the Protestant doctrine of Justification,—the one is at direct variance with the other, not in respect of verbal expression merely, but in respect of their fundamental principles...” (*The Doctrine of Justification*, pp. 136-137).

⁵ John Gerstner, “The Nature of Justifying Faith,” in Don Kistler, *Justification by Faith Alone* (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 1995), p. 109.

Before going into detail, a brief statement of the difference between Romanism and the biblical view of justification is in order. The Bible teaches that justification is a legal declaration of God in heaven regarding the sinner who believes on earth. Justification is objective. The Romanist confounds the doctrine of justification with sanctification. “The Tridentine theory makes inward holiness in conjunction with the merits of Christ the ground of justification. It founds human salvation upon *two* corner-stones.... The unintentional confounding of the distinction between justification and sanctification, which appears occasionally in the Patristic writers, becomes a deliberate and unemphatic identification, in the scheme of the Papal church.”⁶

The Bible teaches that God accepts men solely on the merits of Jesus Christ (Rom. 3:21-4:8; Phil. 3:8-9). Men are declared righteous because their guilt is *imputed* to Christ on the cross, and Christ’s perfect righteousness is imputed to the believer’s account. Romanism teaches that grace is *infused* into man and that people are justified only after becoming righteous. Justification is subjective; it is the internal renovation and renewing of man. Men are justified because of what the Holy Spirit does *in them*. “Justification means that man himself is made just—made pleasing to God in his own person.... A devout Catholic may say: ‘Righteousness by faith means that I cannot save myself, but by faith I can receive God’s transforming grace. His grace can change my heart, and by His grace in my heart I can be acceptable in His sight....’ The focal point of Catholic theology is God’s work of grace *within* human experience.”⁷

The Scriptures teach that justification is an instantaneous act of God. It is whole, never repeated, eternal and perfect, not piecemeal or gradual (Jn. 5:25; Lk. 18:13, 14; 23:43; Rom. 4:5; 5:1; 8:3-8). Romanism teaches that justification is a gradual process which may not even be completed in this life. It usually is completed by the tortures of purgatory.⁸ The Bible teaches that sinners are saved solely because of what God has done in Jesus Christ. Papal doctrine affirms that justification is a cooperative effort between God and man. Man must cooperate with inward grace until he achieves justification. The Roman Catholic believes that good works contribute to his salvation. However, he would argue that since these good works flow from inward grace, that ultimately he is saved by grace and not by works.

Romanism is the cleverest attempt of man to take a religion of human merit, works-righteousness and personal achievement and dress it with the terminology of grace. Romanism teaches “the most subtle form of the doctrine of justification by works that has yet appeared, or that can appear. For the doctrines of Trent do not teach, in their canonical statements, that man is justified and accepted at the bar of justice by his law. This is, indeed, the doctrine that prevails in

⁶ William G. T. Shedd, *History of Christian Doctrine* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1886), 2:321. “*Justification* is a judicial act of God, in which He declares, on the basis of the righteousness of Jesus Christ, that all the claims of the law are satisfied with respect to the sinner.... *Sanctification* may be defined as that gracious and continuous operation of the Holy Spirit, by which He delivers the justified sinner from the pollution of sin, renews his whole nature in the image of God, and enables him to perform good works” (L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965], pp. 513, 532).

⁷ Robert D. Brinsmead, *Present Truth* (special issue on justification by faith), pp. 8-9.

⁸ “If any one saith, that, after the grace of Justification has been received, to every penitent sinner the guilt is remitted, and the debt of eternal punishment is blotted out in such wise that there remains not any debt of temporal punishment to be discharged either in this world, or in the next in Purgatory, before the entrance to the kingdom of heaven can be opened [to him]: let him be anathema” (*Council of Trent*, Sixth Session, Canon XXX).

the common practice of the papal church, but it is not the form in which it appears in the Tridentine canons. According to these, man is justified by an *inward* and spiritual act which is denominated the act of faith; by a truly divine and holy habit or principle infused by the gracious working of the Holy Spirit. The ground of the sinner's justification is thus a divine and gracious one. God works in the sinful soul to will and to do, and by making it inherently just justifies it. And all this is accomplished through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ; so that, in justification *there is a combination of the objective work of Christ with the subjective character of the believer.*"⁹ Protestants who are not aware of these subtleties are often tongue-tied in debates with knowledgeable Roman Catholics, because Romanists insist they do not believe in salvation by works-righteousness. They simply assert that God is the author of infused grace and inherent righteousness. The Romish system is easily exposed as a doctrine of demons when one considers that their theory of an inward infused grace in the heart as a second pillar of justification clearly means that they regard the death of Christ as insufficient for pardon. For them "Christ alone" is not enough. Jesus, according to their statements of faith, did not perfectly satisfy God's justice by His life and death. Romanism is in reality a cleverly disguised form of humanism.

"The Protestant trusts Christ to save him and the Roman Catholic trusts Christ to help him save himself."¹⁰ The Roman Catholic looks at what Christ accomplished as something that enables a person to begin a long journey that possibly leads to salvation. The Protestant looks to Christ and His merits as salvation itself. Good works prove that justification has already occurred. They do not contribute one iota toward salvation.¹¹

The Romanist Theory Examined

The key to understanding Romanism's heretical view of justification is their false understanding of Christ's atonement and their rejection of the doctrine of imputation. The papal church teaches that Christ's satisfaction for sin only applies to sins committed before baptism and to eternal punishments for sins committed after baptism. The satisfaction rendered for the sins committed before baptism is the first plank of justification, but even in this first plank regeneration is confused with justification. Trent, the sixth session, chapter III says: "in that new

⁹ William G. T. Shedd, *History of Christian Doctrine*, 2:322-323, emphasis added.

¹⁰ Gerstner, p. 112.

¹¹ Biblically speaking, after a man is justified before God, he begins a lifelong process of sanctification where he grows in holiness and obedience to God's law. Justification is the basis, the starting point, for sanctification (Rom. 6). Justification removes the guilt of sin and restores the sinner to God's household as a child of God. Sanctification removes sinful habits and makes the sinner more and more like Christ. Justification takes place outside of the sinner in the tribunal of God. Justification takes place once and for all. Sanctification is a continuous process which is never complete in this life (Berkhof, pp. 513-514). Protestants do not believe that sanctification contributes to salvation but they do not teach that Christians can sin as they please and claim to be saved. Justification is by faith alone, but *not* by the faith that is alone. Biblical Protestants agree with the apostle James "that faith without works is dead" (Jas. 2:20). A person who has true saving faith, who really is justified, will lead a godly life, a life of good works. Justification necessarily leads to sanctification. But sanctification is not justification and does not contribute to salvation.

birth, there is bestowed upon them, through the merit of his passion, the grace whereby they are made just.”¹² Chapter IV says: “Justification of the impious is...a translation.... And this translation, since the promulgation of the Gospel, can not be effected, without the laver of regeneration.”¹³ Chapter VII continues: “the instrumental cause [of justification] is the sacrament of baptism, which is the sacrament of faith, without which no man was ever justified.”¹⁴ Romanism teaches baptismal regeneration. For baptized infants, baptism removes original sin. Adult converts (according to Rome) have original sin removed as well as all actual sins committed before baptism. This is an ancient heresy that led (quite logically) to the practice of putting off baptism until one was old and about to die.

Baptismal regeneration which bestows justification was reaffirmed in the 1994 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. “Justification is conferred in Baptism, the sacrament of faith. It conforms us to the righteousness of God, who makes us inwardly just by the power of his mercy.... The grace of Christ...is the *sanctifying* or *deifying* grace received in baptism.”¹⁵ Even in this initial act of justification the pardoning of sins is not viewed in judicial terms, “which implied a charge of guilt and a sentence of condemnation for what was past, but in the sense of being ‘deleted’ in the heart of the baptized person,—deleted by an infused principle of grace which ‘renewed him in the spirit of his mind.’”¹⁶

The Romanist confounding of justification with sanctification starts with this defective view of baptismal regeneration. Baptism is not “the laver of regeneration” but is the visible sign that regeneration has taken place.¹⁷ Regeneration does not bestow justification but enables the sinner to believe. Faith, not baptism, is the instrument of justification. Although regeneration logically precedes or coincides with justification, regeneration is a work of the Holy Spirit *in man* which purifies the heart (Jn. 3:5, 6; Ezek. 36:25-26; Col. 2:11). The second aspect of the change which the Holy Spirit effects upon a man’s heart is one of renovation. The scriptural terms used to describe man’s spiritual birth are “born again” (Jn. 3:3), “regeneration” (Tit. 3:5),

¹² The English translation of the *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent* is taken from Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom* (Grand Rapids: Baker, [1931] 1983), 2:90-91.

¹³ *Ibid*, 2:91. This statement is contrary to Scripture. The Romanist understands the phrase “laver of regeneration” to refer to baptism (see below). The thief on the cross was never baptized, yet he believed in Christ and went directly to heaven after death (Lk. 23:43). Furthermore, Abraham was justified before he was circumcised (Rom. 4:9-12).

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 2:95.

¹⁵ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Ligouri, MO: Ligouri Pub., 1994), §1999 [p. 484]. The Bible teaches that (except in the case of covenant children) baptism is to follow regeneration and justification and not precede it. In fact, it is positively sinful to baptize adults who do not profess to be saved by Christ. Thus, the Roman Catholic doctrine of submitting to baptism in order to receive regeneration and justification is wicked; it is ritualistic superstition. Berkhof writes, “In the case of adults baptism must be preceded by a profession of faith, Mark 16:16; Acts 2:41; 8:37...; 16:31-33. Therefore the Church insists on such a profession before baptizing adults. And when such a profession is made, this is accepted by the Church at its face value, unless she has good objective reasons for doubting its veracity” (Systematic Theology, p. 631).

¹⁶ James Buchanan, *The Doctrine of Justification*, pp. 103-104.

¹⁷ The *Westminster Confession of Faith* teaches: “Baptism is a sacrament of the New Testament, ordained by Jesus Christ, not only for the solemn admission of the party baptized into the visible church, but also to be unto him a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, of his ingrafting into Christ, or regeneration, of remission of sins, and of his giving up unto God, through Jesus Christ, to walk in newness of life: which sacrament is, by Christ’s own appointment, to be continued in his church until the end of the world” (XXX:I).

and “made alive” or “quickenened” (Eph. 2:5). The person regenerated by God is called a “new creation” (Gal. 6:15, 2 Cor. 5:17) and a “new man” (Eph. 4:24). Regeneration deals with a man’s heart. It is what enables a person to believe in Christ (1 Cor. 2:12; 2 Cor. 4:6; Ac. 16:13-14). Justification occurs only when a person believes. Justification is judicial; it is *not* the purification of the heart. The Bible teaches that regeneration is the beginning of the process of sanctification. The Romanist teaches that regeneration is the first ground and also the beginning of the second ground of justification. Hodge explains the Romanist teaching as follows: “As life expels death; as light banishes darkness, so the entrance of this new divine life into the soul expels sin (i.e., sinful habits), and brings forth the fruits of righteousness. Works done after regeneration have real merit, ‘*meritum condigni,*’ and are the ground of the second justification; the first justification consisting in making the soul inherently just by the infusion of righteousness. According to this view, we are not justified by works done before regeneration, but we are justified for gracious works, i.e., for works which spring from the principle of divine life infused into the heart. The whole ground of our acceptance with God is thus made to be what we are and what we do.”¹⁸

The second ground of the Romish doctrine of justification flows not only from their confounding of the purificatory aspect of regeneration with pardon, but also their idea that Christ *only* rendered satisfaction for eternal punishments but *not* for temporal punishments. Trent says: “If any one saith, that satisfaction for sins, as to their temporal punishment, is nowise made to God, through the merits of Jesus Christ, by the punishments inflicted by him, and patiently borne, or by those enjoined by the priest, nor even by those voluntary undertaken, as by fastings, prayers, alms-deeds, or by other works also of piety; and that, therefore, the best penance is merely a new life: let him be anathema.”¹⁹ Furthermore: “If any one saith that God always remits the whole punishment together with the guilt, and that the satisfaction of penitents is no other than the faith whereby they apprehend that Christ has satisfied for them: let him be anathema.”²⁰ The Romanist theologians at Trent in their concept regarding the temporal punishments due for sin were following in the footsteps of the medieval scholastic theologians who made a distinction between the guilt of sin and the guilt of punishment. Romanists teach that Christ did not render a satisfaction or pay the price for the guilt of punishment. Out of this legal obligation of punishment flows the entire system of penance and purgatory. Protestants maintain that God chastises His children to aid them in their sanctification. Roman Catholicism teaches that God actually metes out penal sufferings on His people, that Christians are required “as a satisfaction to God’s avenging justice” to pay for their sins.

Roman Catholicism teaches that Christ’s death did *part* of what was needed, but that man through prayer, fasting, attending masses, rosary prayers, vows of chastity and poverty, and other “good” works completes the job. Boettner writes, “Penance, as the catechisms say, involves confession of one’s sins to a priest and the doing of good works as the only way by which sins

¹⁸ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 3:136.

¹⁹ Philip Schaff, *Creeeds of Christendom*, 2:168 (session 14, canon 13).

²⁰ *Ibid*, 2:168 (canon 12).

committed after baptism can be forgiven.... Romanism...teaches that salvation depends ultimately upon ourselves, upon what we do, that one can 'earn' salvation by obedience to the laws of the church...."²¹ In any debate with a Romanist regarding justification, one must always remember that the confounding of justification with sanctification and the Romanist idea of the necessity of human merit stands upon the foundation of their deficient view of Christ's sacrifice. A biblical view of Christ's atoning death would instantly render unnecessary the whole anti-Christian popish system (e.g., the mass, works of penance, purgatory, etc.).

Can the Romanist view that Christ rendered only a partial satisfaction for sin be proven from the Bible? No. The Bible clearly teaches that the satisfaction for sin that Christ offered in His death was perfect and totally sufficient. Jesus removed every bit of a believer's guilt for sin. This includes all judicial punishments both eternal and temporal. God requires no more propitiatory offerings (e.g., the mass)²² or satisfactions of any kind for sin (e.g. penance and purgatory). Christ satisfied *all* the claims of the law for believers. The idea that Christ removed the guilt of sin but not its punishment is absurd. If Christ totally removed all the guilt of sin, then He also has removed the punishment for sin both temporal and eternal. "There is now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1). "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us" (Gal. 3:13). "For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified" (Heb. 10:14). Christ's expiation of sin for His people was either full and complete or it was not. The Bible teaches that Christ's perfect obedience is the ground of our justification (Rom. 5:18-19); that by His death He removed all guilt and every penalty (Rom. 5:21; 8:1, 32-34; Heb. 10:14; Ps. 103:12; Isa. 44:22, etc.); that He actually achieved reconciliation with God (Rom. 5:10; 2 Cor. 5:18); that He completely propitiated God's wrath against the elect (Rom. 3:25; Heb. 2:17); that He paid the ransom price in full (Gal. 3:13; Rom. 7:4, 6; Heb. 9:12; Rev. 5:9; Isa. 53:6; 1 Pet 2:24). "As a creditor does not liberate a surety from prison unless a full payment has been made, so neither could Christ be set free unless he had satisfied to the full. Therefore, since he rose again so gloriously and was raised by the Father himself, there is no room left for doubt concerning the perfection of satisfaction and the full payment of the price of redemption...."²³ Once this perfect satisfaction is established, "the Roman dogmas of the sacrifice of the Mass, of human merit and satisfaction in this life and of the purgatorial punishments to be endured hereafter are at once overthrown. For such things cannot be allowed without either accusing his satisfaction of insufficiency or God of injustice (exacting a double price and a double punishment of the same sin)."²⁴

The Protestant recognizes that believers often suffer the consequences of sin. The Christian man who backslides, gets drunk and slams his car into a tree—who as a result spends

²¹ Loraine Boettner, *Roman Catholicism* (Phillipsburg: NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1962), p. 255.

²² Romanism's view of the mass is clearly a denial of the sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice: "If anyone says that in the mass a true and real sacrifice is not offered to God...let him be anathema" (*Council of Trent*, 22nd sess., canon 1). "If anyone says that...Christ...did not ordain that...other priests should offer His own body and blood, let him be anathema" (canon 2). "If anyone says that the sacrifice of the mass is not a propitiatory [sacrifice]...let him be anathema" (canon 3). Cf. the *New York Catechism* and the *Creed of Pope Pius IV*.

²³ Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1994), 2:440.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 2:441.

the rest of his life in a wheelchair—suffers the consequences of sin. But his sufferings in no way expiate the guilt of punishment. Furthermore, a man who commits murder and then becomes a Christian in jail must still be executed for his crime, even though Christ has removed the guilt of that sin. His execution is not a temporal punishment inflicted by God to expiate sin, but is the proper restitution rendered to his victim by the civil magistrate. Christians who sin are obligated to make restitution when necessary, but acts of restitution do not contribute to one’s salvation or remit temporal punishments. God often chastises His people, but these chastisements are never spoken of in Scripture as rendering satisfaction for sin. God chastises those He loves not as a vengeful judge, but as a loving Father who is concerned with His children’s sanctification. He is giving medicine, not judicial punishment.²⁵

The Romanist doctrine of justification flows not only from their heretical view of the atonement, but also from their rejection of the biblical concept of imputation. The Romanist doctrine of salvation is a combination of errors found in the church fathers and medieval scholastic theology. Schaff writes, “The fathers lay chief stress on sanctification and good works, and show the already existing terms of the Roman Catholic doctrine of the meritoriousness and even the supererogatory meritoriousness of Christian virtue.”²⁶ Furthermore, in the Western church the Latin translation of the Greek word for justify held a different meaning than the biblical terminology. “The etymology of *iustificare*, drawn from Roman culture, means to *make* just, from the root *facare*.”²⁷ The medieval scholastic theologians who were strongly influenced by Aristotle regarded the idea of imputation as irrational. Thus, Roman Catholicism at Trent completely rejected the Protestant doctrine of an imputed righteousness. Trent, the sixth session, canon 11, says, “If any one saith, that men are justified, either by the sole imputation of the justice of Christ, or by the sole remission of sins, to the exclusion of the grace and *the charity which is poured forth in their hearts by the Holy Ghost*, and is inherent in them; or even that the grace, whereby we are justified, is only the favor of God: let him be anathema.”²⁸ Imputation and the forensic nature of justification are also rejected in canon 9: “If anyone saith, that by faith alone the impious is justified, in such wise as to mean, that nothing else is required to cooperate in order to the obtaining the grace of Justification, and that it is not in any way necessary, that he be prepared and disposed by the movement of his own will: let him be anathema.”²⁹

Romanism regards the doctrine of justification by the imputed righteousness of Christ to be a legal fiction “because it declares sinners to be righteous contrary to fact.”³⁰ Protestants, however, have never held to position that believers are simultaneously both righteous and sinful

²⁵ Romanists argue that since Christ gives Christians the power of satisfying for themselves that this is not salvation by works. But since their doctrine is founded upon a view which states that Christ did not render a perfect and satisfactory sacrifice, no other construction can be placed upon the Romish system than that of a syncretism: God does His part and man must do his part for salvation to occur. “[I]t is one thing to make satisfaction, another to give power to make satisfaction” (Turretin, 2:441).

²⁶ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, [1910] 1989), 2:589.

²⁷ R. C. Sproul, “The Forensic Nature of Justification,” in Don Kistler, *Justification by Faith Alone* (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 1995), p. 26.

²⁸ Philip Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, 2:112.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, p. 524.

in themselves. But they do teach that God the Father reckons or regards the believing sinner as righteous because of *Christ's* righteousness. They are not subjectively righteous, but are clothed with the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ. Christ's righteousness, which is objective to the sinner, is imputed to them by faith. This doctrine is so clearly taught in the New Testament that only a rank heretic would deny it. The apostle Paul says, "Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. But to him who does not work but believes on *Him who justifies the ungodly*, his faith is accounted for righteousness, just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom *God imputes righteousness apart from works*" (Rom. 4:4-6; cf. 4:7-25; 5:12-21). Charles Hodge writes, "*To whom God imputeth righteousness without works*, that is, whom God regards and treats as righteous, although he is not in himself righteous. The meaning of this clause cannot be mistaken. 'To impute sin,' is to lay sin to the charge of any one, and to treat him accordingly, as is universally admitted; so 'to impute righteousness,' is to set righteousness to one's account, and to treat him accordingly. This righteousness does not, of course, belong antecedently [i.e., going before in time] to those to whom it is imputed, for they are ungodly, and destitute of works. Here then is an imputation to men of what does not belong to them, and to which they have in themselves no claim. To impute righteousness is the apostle's definition of the term to *justify*. It is not making men inherently righteous, or morally pure, but it is regarding and treating them as just. This is done, not on the ground of personal character or works, but on the ground of the righteousness of Christ. As this is dealing with men, not according to merit, but in a gracious manner, the passage cited from Ps. xxxii. 1, 2, is precisely in point: 'Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.' That is, blessed is the man who, although a sinner, is regarded and treated as righteous."³¹ To reject the imputed righteousness of Christ in favor of an infused righteousness inherent in man, as Romanism does, is an explicit rejection of the gospel.

Given Romanism's defective view of the atonement and their rejection of justification by the imputation of Christ's righteousness, they developed a system of salvation by works that flows from grace. Roman Catholic theologians knew that the Bible condemned the notion of salvation by keeping the law; however, they believed that these passages did not apply to them because God was the author of such works. They attributed a person's meritorious good works to the grace of God. The *Roman Catholic Catechism* says: "The merit of man before God in the Christian life arises from the fact that *God has freely chosen to associate man with the work of his grace*. The fatherly action of God is first on his own initiative, and then follows man's free acting through his collaboration, so that the merit of good works is to be attributed in the first place to the grace of God, then to the faithful. Man's merit, moreover, itself is due to God, for his good actions proceed in Christ, from the predispositions and assistance given by the Holy Spirit....³² The merits of our good works are gifts of the divine goodness....³³ Since the initiative belongs to God in the order of grace, *no one can merit the initial grace* of forgiveness and

³¹ Charles Hodge, *Romans* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, [1835] 1989), p. 115.

³² *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §2008 (p. 486).

³³ *Ibid*, §2009 (p. 487).

justification, at the beginning of conversion. Moved by the Holy Spirit and by charity, *we can then merit* for ourselves and for others the graces needed for our sanctification, for the increase of grace and charity, and for the attainment of eternal life....³⁴ Merit is to be ascribed in the first place to the grace of God, and secondly to man's collaboration. Man's merit is due to God."³⁵ The Romanist's system is subtle and deadly. He constantly speaks of salvation by grace, and yet continuously denies it. Grace for the Romanist means that God starts the process and gives aid along the way, but if man does not do his part, he will not merit eternal life. Salvation is called a "collaboration" between God and man. Collaboration means "to labor together; work or act jointly."³⁶

The Romanist believes that Christ's death was insufficient; that imputation is a legal fiction and that man can merit eternal life by cooperating with God's grace. Thus, the fundamental principle of the Romish system is a righteousness inherent in man. Sanctification is confounded with justification. Trent, sixth session, chapter seven says, "This disposition, or preparation, is followed by Justification itself, which is not remission of sins merely, but also the sanctification and renewal of the inward man, through the voluntary reception of the grace, and of the gifts, whereby man of unjust [sic] becomes just."³⁷ Since Romanists do not believe that justification is a legal declaration but a process inherent in man, they speak of the increase of justification. Trent says, "They, through the observance of the commandments of God and of the church, faith cooperating with good works, increase in that justice which they have received through the grace of Christ, and are still further justified."³⁸ Since justification is ultimately dependent upon man, Romanists teach that justification can be lost and then regained through the sacrament of Penance. Trent says, "As regards those who, by sin, have fallen from the received grace of Justification, they may be again justified, when, God exciting them, through the sacrament of Penance...."³⁹ The Romanist believes that good works and the sacraments of the church are necessary to increase and preserve justification. "The medieval church thought of grace as being infused to change and transform the sinful nature of man. By this transforming change within him, the believer was said to be made just in God's sight. Then, as he received more and more grace, the believer was said to become less and less sinful and at the same time more and more just in the sight of God. Good works were done in the believer by the indwelling of Christ and, because of this, were thought to be entirely pleasing and acceptable to God. Rome held out to men the possibility of becoming pure and sinless saints (ontological perfection), and those who attained this perfection reached sainthood and were qualified to enter heaven at the

³⁴ Ibid, §2010 (p. 487).

³⁵ Ibid, §2025 (p. 490).

³⁶ *Webster's Secondary School Dictionary* (Springfield, MA: G. C. Merriam, 1913), p. 136.

³⁷ Philip Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, 2:94. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says: "Justification includes the remission of sins, sanctification, and the renewal of the inner man" (§2019). "The editors of the Roman Catholic Douay Version make these footnote comments on Romans 3 and 4: 'The justification of which St. Paul here speaks is the infusion of sanctifying grace which alone renders a person supernaturally pleasing in the sight of God. But justification, that is, an infusion of sanctifying grace, cannot be merited by us; it is an entirely gratuitous gift of God.'" (quoted in "Justification by Faith," *Present Truth*, p. 8).

³⁸ Schaff, op. cit., 2:99 (session 6, chap. 10).

³⁹ Ibid, 2:104 (session 6, chap. 14).

hour of death. Those who did not become perfect and absolutely sinless in the flesh, would need to go to purgatory after death and thus be made completely just and qualified to enter heaven.”⁴⁰

The Roman Catholic system of salvation is a devilish combination of biblical terminology and human invention. In their councils and catechisms there is much talk about the grace of God and the merits of Christ. Also, there are a few fairly evangelical-sounding statements, but the bottom line is that man must save himself: partly with Christ’s merits, partly with the merits of the saints, partly from the Mass, partly from his own merits, and partly from penance and purgatory. Buchanan says the papal church “did not recognize One only Mediator, and One only sacrifice for sin: it taught the merits and mediation of the saints,—the repetition of the one sacrifice on the Cross by the sacrifice on the Altar,—and addition satisfactions for sin in the austerities of penance, and the pains of purgatory. It made the pardon of sin dependent on the confession of the penitent and the absolution of the priest,—thereby placing the church in the room of Christ, and interposing the priest between the sinner and God: and when absolution was granted on condition of penance, or some other work of mere external obedience, it led men to look to something which they could themselves do or suffer, instead of relying by faith simply and solely on Christ and His finished work.”⁴¹ The beauty and perfection of Christ’s completed work are replaced by the filthy, stinking rags of human merit. Roman Catholicism offers a deadly mixture of faith and works in the matter of justification but labels this mixture “pure grace.” One can label a bottle of deadly poison anything he wants to, but the contents remain the same. To offer up a system of salvation by works and excuse the whole thing by saying it all flows from grace is contradictory and deceptive. Paul says that as soon as works of any kind enter the picture, grace is no more grace. “Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt” (Rom. 4:4). “You who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace” (Gal. 5:4).

A Summary of Scriptural Proofs against the Roman Catholic Doctrine of Justification

The Roman Catholic doctrine of justification contradicts the Scriptures in several areas. First, the biblical terms used to speak of justification, *dikaioo*, always means *to declare righteous* and never means *to make righteous* (see Lk. 7:29; 10:29; 16:15; Mt. 11:19; Rom. 3:4). Justification is a judicial, forensic term and is often contrasted in Scripture with judicial condemnation (see. Dt. 25:1; Pr. 17:15; Isa. 5:23; Job 34:17). Second, when speaking of justification the Bible speaks of the *imputation* of righteousness and not the *infusion* of righteousness (see Rom. 4:12, 22-24). Third, the Bible describes justification as something achieved in an instant of time. It is never described as a long process (see Jn. 5:24; Lk. 18:14; 23:43; Rom. 5:1). Fourth, the Scriptures repeatedly declare that all that a person needs to be saved is to believe in Jesus Christ. “Everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses” (Ac. 13:39; cf. Ac. 16:31; Jn. 3:15-16;

⁴⁰ Robert D. Brinsmead, “Justification by Faith and the Charismatic Movement,” in *Present Truth*, 1972) p. 19.

⁴¹ James Buchanan, *The Doctrine of Justification*, p. 125.

5:24; 11:25-26; Rom. 10:9; 1 Th. 4:14). Fifth, the apostle Paul says that God “justifies the ungodly” (Rom. 4:5). This proves that God does *not* justify people because they are personally righteous but because of the imputation of Christ’s perfect righteousness. Sixth, God’s word makes a clear distinction between justification and sanctification. “But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor. 6:11). Justification deals with the guilt of sin and the merits needed for eternal life, while sanctification deals with the pollution of sin. Sanctification proves that a person has already been justified but does not contribute one iota to a person’s salvation. Seventh, the Bible teaches that the good works of believers are tainted with sin and are non-meritorious (Is. 64:6; Lk. 17:10; Gal. 5:17; Rom. 7:15 ff.; Phil. 3:8-9). This side of heaven not one believer is without sin (1 Jn. 1:8). Eighth, the Scriptures say that *faith alone* is the instrument which appropriates Jesus Christ and His saving work (Rom. 3:22, 25-31; 4:5-25; 5:1, 18; 9:30-32; Gal. 2:16; 3:11-13, 24; 5:1-4). After one is justified, the sacraments and other means of grace are used in order to help the believer grow spiritually (i.e., for sanctification not for justification). Ninth, God’s word teaches that Jesus Christ actually accomplished a perfect redemption for His people, the elect (Mt. 1:21; Jn. 10:11-29; Ac. 20:28; Eph. 5:25-27). Romanism erroneously teaches that Christ merely made salvation a *possibility* if people cooperate with grace. But, as noted, such a view must presuppose that either Christ’s death was insufficient to save or that God is unjust by punishing the same sins twice. Both options are thoroughly unscriptural.

The Roman Catholic doctrine of justification is diametrically opposed to the biblical method of justifying sinners. It contradicts the experience of Abraham and the teachings of Jesus Christ and all the apostles. Therefore, the Protestant reformers opposed the papal doctrine with every fiber of their being. Also, the Reformed churches rightfully opposed the Romish heresy in all their confessions. Now that modern Evangelicalism has degenerated so far in so many critical areas (e.g., soteriology, worship, eschatology, etc.). Protestants need to be even more diligent in defending justification against all attacks from antichrist and his lieutenants.

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