

2 0 1 3 N O V E M B E R

# the PASTORAL *point*

PROCLAIMING TRUTH IN A WORLD OF UNCERTAINTY

It still seems that if God gives grace to one person, in the interest of fairness he “ought” to give grace equally to another. It is precisely this “oughtness” that is foreign to the biblical concept of grace. Among the mass of fallen humanity, all guilty of sin before God and exposed to his justice, no one has any claim or entitlement to God’s mercy. If God chooses to grant mercy to some of that group, this does not require that he give it to all RC Sproul

## Is Roman Catholicism Biblical

In today's spirit of ecumenism, many evangelicals have called for the Protestant Church to lay aside its differences with Rome and pursue unity with the Catholic Church. Is that possible? Is Roman Catholicism simply another facet of the body of Christ that should be brought into union with its Protestant counterpart? Is Roman Catholicism simply another Christian denomination?

While there are many errors in the teaching of the Catholic Church *(continue on back --->*

I love the church. It is the body of Christ. It nurtures my soul and aids in my sanctification. But the church cannot redeem me. Christ and Christ alone can save me. The sacraments are precious to me. They edify and strengthen me, but they cannot justify me.



“Since then your sere Majesty and your Lordships seek a simple answer, I will give it in this manner, neither horned nor toothed. Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason (for I do not trust either in the pope or in councils alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. May God help me. Amen.”

*(Reply to the Diet of Worms, April 18, 1521)”*  
— Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, 33: Career of the Reformer III*

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(for example its belief in the transubstantiation of the communion wafer and its view of Mary), two rise to the forefront and call for special attention: its denial of the doctrine of sola Scriptura and its denial of the biblical teaching on justification. To put it simply, because the Roman Catholic Church has refused to submit itself to the authority of God's Word and to embrace the gospel of justification taught in Scripture, it has set itself apart from the true body of Christ. It is a false and deceptive form of Christianity.

## **The Doctrine of Sola Scriptura**

In the words of reformer Martin Luther, the doctrine of sola Scriptura means that "what is asserted without the Scriptures or proven revelation may be held as an opinion, but need not be believed." Roman Catholicism flatly rejects this principle, adding a host of traditions and Church teachings and declaring them binding on all true believers--with the threat of eternal damnation to those who hold contradictory opinions.

In Roman Catholicism, "the Word of God" encompasses not only the Bible, but also the Apocrypha, the Magisterium (the Church's authority to teach and interpret divine truth), the Pope's ex cathedra pronouncements, and an indefinite body of church tradition, some formalized in canon law and some not yet committed to writing. Whereas evangelical Protestants believe the Bible is the ultimate test of all truth, Roman Catholics believe the Church determines what is true and what is not. In effect, this makes the Church a higher authority than Scripture.

Creeds and doctrinal statements are certainly important. However, creeds, decisions of church councils, all doctrine, and even the church itself must be judged by Scripture--not vice versa. Scripture is to be accurately interpreted in its context by comparing it to Scripture--certainly not according to anyone's personal whims. Scripture itself is thus the sole binding rule of faith and practice for all Christians. Protestant creeds and doctrinal statements simply express the churches' collective understanding of the proper interpretation of Scripture. In no sense could the creeds and pronouncements of the churches ever constitute an authority equal to or higher than Scripture. Scripture always takes priority over the church in the rank of authority.

Roman Catholics, on the other hand, believe the infallible touchstone of truth is the Church itself. The Church not only infallibly determines the proper interpretation of Scripture, but also supplements Scripture with additional traditions and teaching. That combination of Church tradition plus the Church's interpretation of Scripture is what constitutes the binding rule of faith and practice for Catholics. The fact is, the Church sets itself above Holy Scripture in rank of authority. *John MacArthur*

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