

MOSJ Meeting
Apologetics Study Lesson
March 9, 2010

Chapter One: What Catholics
Really Believe

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Agenda:

1. How are we viewed by non Catholics ?
2. Briefly review some common misconceptions.
3. In depth look at what we believe about justification. Is it faith, works, or something else?

Common Misconceptions

1. The Pope can change doctrine.

Response – No way! No Pope has ever claimed this authority. Popes are protected by the Holy Spirit as a guardian of doctrine.

Popes can and have adjusted customs of the Church, but not doctrine.

Common Misconceptions

2. The Pope is infallible.

Response – Catholics believe this is true in a very specific context, which is in matters of doctrine on our faith and morals. As Vatican II stated...Papal infallibility does not apply to customs, sports, literature, nor most things of everyday life.

3. Vatican II proclaimed the Church to be a democracy.

Response – False. The church is patterned as a monarchy, the same structure a heaven. The church does allow parish councils to assist our ordained leaders in the administration of everyday business. The Papal position is akin to that of a Prime Minister. Bishops serve as his assistants.

Common Misconceptions

4. Vatican II made reading books and theological literature written prior to it useless.

Response – False. First of all , our Bible is an ancient writing so this thought process is illogical. The writings of Augustine and Thomas Aquinas are still very much worth reading.

5. Excommunicated Catholics are sent to hell.

Response – False. The Catholic Church maintains an excommunicated member is still a Christian, but excluded from the communion of the faithful. God has the power to condemn someone to hell, and even then it would be the choice of that person.

Common Misconceptions

6. Catholics who leave the Church will go to hell.

Response – Not clear. Leaving the Church certainly isn't beneficial. Keating lists 3 things which identify the full Catholic:

a) Valid reception to Baptism

b) Profession of the Catholic faith

c) Participation in the communion of the Church

Purposely leaving the Church and failing to repent mean certain disaster.

8. We should not build fancy or expensive churches.

In the Old Testament, God instructed the Jews to build a magnificent temple in which they could worship Him, therefore it seems illogical to think God would not look with favor on us when we follow that instruction today.

Common Misconceptions

7. The Church teaches that going to Mass and confession will guarantee us entry to heaven.

Response – The Catholic Church teaches belief is insufficient for salvation, and that we must live our faith for it to be a saving faith.

What do protestant teach ? (Review protestant tracts)
Protestantism has its beginning with Martin Luther. Luther's belief was that we are saved by faith alone, and pointed to the Book Romans to back his theology.
However, there is evidence that Luther changed a key word in Romans when translating the Bible into German, a change which made the scripture fit his own theology.

Romans 3: 20 “for we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.”

Luther translated the verse as “ for we maintain that a man is justified by faith alone, not works of the Law.” Luther also choose to eliminate 7 Old Testament books as well as James and Revelations from the New Testament.

This was the genesis of the protestant claim of Sola Fide – Latin for “faith alone” as the way to salvation.

Observations:

How do we think non Catholics would react to a Pope changing accepted scripture? Or eliminating books from the Bible?

Protestants also claim Sola Scriptura (The Latin phrase for Scripture alone) as a basis for determining the validity of any teaching. However, the Bible contains a plethora of verses that seem to say our interpretation is in fact more Biblical. It was the Roman Catholic Church which preserved scripture and ultimately put the Bible together as a book.

James 2:24 "You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone."

James 2: 26 " so also faith without works is dead."

Assuming Luther was correct in his translation, and assuming that we are to depend on Scripture alone to know the way to salvation, then it seems there is a contradiction in the Bible, which means God contradicted Himself.

Not Likely!

So what is going on here? The answer is that Paul and James are both correct.

There is no question in my mind we are saved by our faith...justified by our belief that the spilled blood of Our Savior Jesus Christ purchased our salvation. The righteousness of Jesus was credited to us as adopted children of God and brothers of Christ.

But now that we are truly saved by our faith...what comes next.

It is the Catholic belief that a changed life comes next. A life dedicated to serving God and following the example of Jesus that He gave us while He walked among us.

Jesus Himself taught His Apostles that He came to serve, not to be served. If we believe in Him and love Him, how can we do less than serve as He served. Or at the least give that mission our best effort.

John 8: 10-11

Jesus stood and said to her "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you? She replied, " No one sir." Then Jesus said "Neither do I condemn you. Go, and from on do not sin any more." Jesus didn't say " Have faith in Me and continue to sin, since faith is all you need."

Having experience many encounters with protestants co-workers and friends who have tried to straighten me out over the years, it is my impression that they truly misunderstand the Bible, which they adamantly insist Catholics do not follow.

My response to them is that I know I am justified by my faith, but my faith compels me to a life of service, which is what Jesus asks of us as His followers. I do not tithe, or make donations to charitable causes because I am trying to store up credits for a ticket to heaven. I do it because Jesus instructed me to give the first fruits of my blessings back to God. Jesus instructed His followers to love and care for others less fortunate than us. He also taught us that all that I have are gifts from God, with which I have been entrusted to oversee while I am here.

Other Thoughts

As I read Paul, he uses the phrase "works of the Law." The word law is capitalized. Perhaps this an indication that he was referring to the Law of Moses, the Ten Commandments of the Old Testament.

In James, the tone and context of his writing clearly refers to the Law of Christ and a new covenant with His followers.

The difference to me is that while we know we are not capable of keeping the Commandments perfectly, we also know that even though we may fail to keep the law of Christ, His grace His shed blood cover our sins and render all who believe in Him to be righteous, and therefore saved.

Final Point

First Peter 5: 1-4

“So I exhort the Presbyters among you , as a fellow presbyter and witness to the sufferings of Christ and one who has a share of the glory to be revealed. Tend to the flock of God in your midst, overseeing not by constraint but willingly, as God would have it, not for shameful profit but eagerly. Do not lord over those assigned to you, but be examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd is revealed, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.”

Perhaps Peter is saying that those who do God’s work (service) here on earth will have additional rewards in heaven. He certainly is not saying service without faith will get us there. I once heard a protestant minister say he had entered the ministry because of this passage because he wanted additional rewards in heaven. What does that sound like to you?

“Jesus has no body on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which His compassion looks out on the world, the feet with which He is to go about doing good, and the hands with which He is to bless us now.”

Theresa of Avila – a quote from Sunday’s bulletin of 03-07-10