



BIBLICAL TRAINING CENTER

June 3, 2018

Differences between Roman Catholics and Protestants

Cannot Cover All

There's too much to cover in one class. Below is a summary. We can only go over a few in detail during today's class.

List of Differences

Note: Unless otherwise indicated, the list below comes from the official dogmas of the Roman Catholic Church. There seems to be a growing trend, however, that local parishes are allowed more freedom on these points than in the past.

- The Roman Catholic Church believes they are the **one true visible church**.
- **Papal infallibility**
 - The "infallibility of the Pope" was pronounced dogma in 1870 at Vatican I.
 - Considers pope infallible when speaking *ex cathedra* (lit. "from the chair") on matters of faith and practice.
- **Apostolic succession**
 - Peter was appointed by Christ to be the visible head (pope) of the church.
 - The present bishop of Rome (Pope Francis) is Peter's successor.
- **Teaching magisterium**
 - This is the official interpreter of faith and practice (rejection of perspicuity of scripture).
- **Infused righteousness**
 - Protestants believe in imputed righteousness (a person is declared righteous by faith).
 - Catholics believe grace is "infused" by keeping the sacraments over time.
- **Priestly class**
 - Sacraments can only be administered through priests (qualified people) only (**sacerdotalism**).

- **7 sacraments necessary for salvation**
 - Baptism
 - **Baptism is required for salvation** (baptismal regeneration).
 - Confirmation
 - Strengthens the union of person and God.
 - The Eucharist
 - **Transubstantiation:** the bread/wine become Christ's body/blood.
 - Christ is sacrificed repeatedly; can even worship elements.
 - **Penance** (Confession)
 - Idea of confession to a priest for the remission of sin existed in the second century but did not become a widespread practice in the early medieval period.
 - **Extreme Unction** (Anointing of the Sick)
 - Anointing with oil.
 - For healing, restoring health, forgiveness (if not able to do penance), preparation for death.
 - Holy Orders
 - The ordination of priests, bishops and deacons.
 - Matrimony
 - Confers grace on couple for marriage.
- **Mary**
 - **Immaculate conception of Mary:** Mary was born without sin.
 - **Mary's sinlessness:** Mary continued to be without sin.
 - **Bodily assumption of Mary** into heaven.
 - Mary's role as **co-redemptrix** (not yet dogma).
- **Veneration** of Mary, saints and icons.
- **Prayers to Mary and saints.**
- **Purgatory**
 - **Treasury of merit**
 - The excess merit from the saints is stored in the bank of heaven.
 - Others who need it can draw from this.
 - Can obtain this merit through purchase of **indulgence**.
 - **Praying for the dead** so they can obtain this merit.
- **Sainthood**
 - There's a process for recognizing saints (canonization). Protestants believe all true believers to be saints.
- **Apocrypha**
 - Acceptance of additional 11 Old Testament books/texts.

Comparing Key Differences

Is there One True Church?

Roman Catholic Church dogma:

Only one true visible church

- The Roman Catholic Church believes they are the **only true visible manifestation** of the body of Christ on earth.
- Jesus made **Peter** the head of the church (**the pope**).
- This headship has been passed down through **apostolic succession** (through the popes).
- **Apostolic tradition** has also been passed down.
- The pope and **magisterium** have the infallible interpretation of Scripture.
- The church also claims to be the only institution through which **sacraments** can be distributed.
- Salvation must be obtained through the sacraments.
- Therefore, there is **no salvation outside** the Catholic church.

Protestants:

Many valid visible churches

- Protestants agree there is **one true invisible church**.
- But there are many valid visible churches too.

Was Peter the First Pope?

Roman Catholic Church dogma:

Peter was the first Pope

- Jesus appointed Peter as **first pope** to be the visible head of the church (Mt. 16:18; Jn. 21:15-17).
- This is also called the “**primacy of Peter**.”
- Vatican I: “the Apostolic See and the **Roman Pontiff hold primacy over the whole world**, and that the Pontiff of Rome himself is the **successor of the blessed Peter, the chief of the apostles**, and is the true vicar of Christ and **head of the whole Church and faith**, and teacher of all Christians; and that to him was handed down in blessed Peter, by our Lord Jesus Christ, **full power to feed, rule, and guide the universal Church**, just as is also contained in the records of the ecumenical Councils and in the sacred canons.”

Catholic position based on key passages between Jesus and Peter

- Matthew 16 – Jesus says, “on **this rock [Peter]** he would build his church” (Mt. 16:15-18)
- John 21 – They see significant that Jesus told Peter 3 times to **feed/tend his sheep** (Jn. 21:15-17)

Protestants:

Nowhere in Bible do we see Jesus giving primacy to Peter

- There are better ways to understand these passages (see below).

Protestant view of Matthew 16:15-18

“Jesus said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Simon Peter replied, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ And Jesus answered him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not **revealed this** to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are **Peter [“Rock”]**, and **on this rock** I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.’”

Option #1: “upon this rock” means Peter’s confession

- Peter had just said **made a statement** that, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” (v. 16)
- Jesus would be saying it’s **upon this statement** that his church would be built.
- “this rock” is **feminine** while “Peter” (“rock”) is masculine.
- Some Church Fathers like **Augustine** and **John Chrysostom** held this view (was not consensus).

Option #2: “upon this rock” means Christ

- Jesus could have been **pointing at himself** while he said that.
- Fits well with Eph. 2:20 where **Christ is the cornerstone** of the church.

Option #3: “upon this rock” means Peter

- Some Protestant agree with Catholics that Jesus is referring to Peter.
- But Jesus would merely be saying that Peter would have an **important role** in bringing the gospel to the Jews, Samaritans and Gentiles (Acts 2, 8, 10).
- But it’s **quite a stretch** to say Jesus was giving Peter infallible authority from this passage.

Protestant view of John 21:15–17

“When they had finished breakfast, **Jesus said to Simon Peter**, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?’ He said to him, ‘Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.’ He said to him, ‘**Feed my lambs.**’ He said to him a second time, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love me?’ He said to him, ‘Yes, Lord; you know that I

love you.’ He said to him, ‘**Tend my sheep.**’ He said to him the third time, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love me?’ Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, ‘Do you love me?’ and he said to him, ‘Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.’ Jesus said to him, ‘**Feed my sheep.**’”

- This passage is about Peter’s weakness and need of restoration after **denying Christ three times.**
- There’s **no indication** Jesus is giving Peter **primacy or infallible authority.**
- Peter would later need to be **rebuked by Paul** (Gal. 2:11-14).

Top 10 Protestant arguments Peter was not first pope

1. Bible says no apostle was **superior** to another (Gal. 2:6,9).
2. Peter was only **one church pillar** mentioned with James and John (Gal. 2:9)
3. Paul put **himself at same level** as Peter, James and John (Galatians 2:9).
4. James, not Peter led the **Jerusalem council** (Acts 15).
5. Peter seems to **vanish entirely** after this council (Acts 15).
6. Peter called himself a “**fellow elder**” and “**an (not the) apostle**” (1 Pet. 1:1; 5:1-2).
7. Paul’s ministry was **greater in scope** (to Gentiles) than Peter’s (to the Jews) (Gal. 2:8).
8. Acts pays **more attention to Paul’s ministry** than Peter’s.
9. It was Paul, not Peter who went on **three missionary journeys** and founded many churches.
10. Paul even **rebuked Peter** because Peter was wrong (Gal. 2:11-14).

Protestant arguments for no early line of ruling popes

- Each NT church was **autonomous** and **elected their own officers** (Acts 6:1-7).
- Each church was to **judge and settle their own disputes** (1 Cor. 5:13; 6:5).
- Each **bore their own responsibility** to Christ as head (Rev. 1-3).
- In Jesus’ exhortation to the churches, there’s no mention of a **single ruling bishop** but the Holy Spirit was the all-sufficient guide (Rev. 1-3).
- In the centuries after the NT, we see **bishops over regions** but not one over all.

Saved by Faith + Works?

Roman Catholic Church dogma:

Good works required for salvation

- Roman Catholic Church says **works are necessary for salvation:** “by his good works the justified man really acquires a claim to supernatural reward from God.” (Trent in Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, p. 264)

Protestants:

Bible says we're saved by faith alone

- Romans 1:16-17 — “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation **for everyone who believes**, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed **from faith to faith**; as it is written, ‘The just shall live **by faith**.’”
- Titus 3:5-7 — “**he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness**, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”
- Romans 5:1 — “Therefore, **having been justified by faith**, we have **peace with God** through our Lord Jesus Christ”

Bible says we cannot work for a gift (and salvation is a gift)

- Ephesians 2:8-9—“For **by grace you have been saved through faith**. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, **not a result of works**, so that no one may boast.”
- Romans 4:4-5 — “Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. And to **the one who does not work but believes** in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness.”

Bible says it's illogical to mix grace/works

- Romans 11:6— “But if it is by grace, it is **no longer on the basis of works**; otherwise grace would no longer be grace.”

Galatians speaks against mixing grace/works

- The **entire book of Galatians** speaks against the Judaizers who **taught works were required** in addition to faith.
- Galatians 3:24—“So then, the **law was our guardian** until Christ came, in order that we might be **justified by faith**.”

Must we Receive Sacraments?

Roman Catholic Church dogma:

Sacraments are required for grace

- Salvation is by grace and the **sacraments give grace**.
- All but two **must be administered by priests** of the Roman Catholic Church (1 & 7 are exceptions)

- “If anyone shall say that the sacraments of the New Law are not necessary for salvation... let him be anathema.” (Denzinger, *Sources of Catholic Dogma*, no. 847, p. 262.)

There are seven sacraments

1. **Baptism**

Salvation not possible without this.

2. **Confirmation**

Strengthens union of person with God.

3. **The Eucharist**

Bread/wine become Christ (transubstantiation).

Christ is sacrificed again; can worship it.

4. **Penance (Confession)**

Contrition is required for forgiveness.

5. **Extreme Unction**

Anointing with oil for healing, restoring health, for forgiveness (if not able to do penance), preparing for death (Last rites).

6. **Holy Orders**

For ordaining priests, bishops or deacons.

7. **Matrimony**

For uniting a man and woman in marriage.

Protestants:

There are two ordinances

- Only ones are **Baptism** and **Communion**

Baptist / Independent / Congregationalist View

- **Not cause of grace** but are **symbols** of grace.

Does the Bread Turn into Christ?

Roman Catholic Church dogma:

Transubstantiation

- The **bread/wine are transformed** into the **physical body** of Christ.
- Christ is actually **sacrificed again**; can even **worship the elements**.

Protestants:

Hard to believe a miracle happens

- Really doesn't seem to be **anything happening** to the bread/wine during mass.

- Supposed to believe it's a miracle but there's **no empirical evidence**.
- Seems to **weaken the case** for what miracles really are.

Transubstantiation lacks unanimous consent

- There is **not "unanimous consent"** of the Fathers" regarding what communion was.
- Transubstantiation was **declared dogma very late** (1551, Trent).

Can only be one body of Christ

- If transubstantiation were true, there would be a **physical body** of Christ at every mass.
- At the time Jesus said "this is my body" there would be **two incarnations** of Christ.

Christ only needed to be sacrificed once

- Hebrews 10:12-14 – "But when Christ had offered for all time a **single sacrifice for sins**, he sat down... For **by a single offering** he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified..."

Protestant view of John 6

Jesus was using a figure of speech

- It's true Jesus said "I am the bread of life... unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you." (John 6:35, 53).
- But Jesus also said, "I am **the vine**," (John 15:5) "I am **the resurrection**," (John 11:25) "I am **the door**," (John 10:7,9) "I am **the light** of the world" (John 8:12).
- **Jesus tells us he's speaking metaphorically:**
John 6 — "(53) So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you **eat the flesh** of the Son of Man and **drink his blood**, you have no life in you... (61) But Jesus, knowing in himself that **his disciples were grumbling** about this, said to them, "Do you take offense at this? (63) It is the Spirit who gives life; **the flesh is no help at all**. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life."

Zwingli's view: Remembrance

- Scripture seems to say that the **purpose of communion** is so we **frequently remember** that Jesus paid for our sin upon the cross:
Luke 22 – "(19) **This [bread] is my body**... do this in remembrance of me" (cf. 1 Cor. 11:24, 26)

Is Ongoing Confession Required?

Roman Catholic Church dogma:

Penance is required for salvation

- Penance is **ongoing confession** to a priest for **forgiveness of sins**.
- Must **merit the forgiveness** by showing **contrition**.

Protestants:

We're completely forgiven at justification

- A person is **instantly acquitted** of all sin when they trust in Christ's salvation.
- **Righteousness is transferred** (imputed) to believers by this initial faith alone (Rom. 5:1; Acts 13:38).
- Ongoing confession can be helpful when it impedes a person's walk or for making amends, but it does not merit more forgiveness.

Penance based on faulty translation of Bible

- The Latin Vulgate translated "repent" as "do penance."
- This error was discovered 15th century by the humanists.
- For example, Acts 2:38 – When asked how to be saved, "Peter said to them: '**Do penance**: and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of your sins.'"

No mention of confession to priests

- We're supposed to confess to other Christians, not priests:
James 5:16 – "**Confess** your sins **to one another** and pray for one another..."

The “Five Solas” of the Reformation

The Five *Solas* of the Reformation also summarize important differences.

1. *Sola Scriptura* – The Bible alone

- The Bible alone has supreme authority
- This is a rejection of the authority of the pope, tradition, etc.

2. *Sola Fide* – Faith alone

- Salvation is based on the finished work of Christ alone.
- Carries idea of forensic or imputed righteousness.

3. *Sola Gratia* – Grace alone

- A rejection of the idea that people also need works to be saved.

4. *Sola Christus* – Christ alone

- Christ is the only mediator between God and man.
- This is a rejection of the sacerdotalism (priestly class between people and God).

5. *Sola Deo Gloria* – The Glory of God alone

- A rejection of the special veneration given to saints, the pope, etc.

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