

Catholics speak of heaven as our "hope". Evangelicals speak of knowing (being "assured") that one is saved. Although Scripture uses both terminologies, Catholics are actually using the more common biblical language, for faith, hope, and charity are the three virtues of 1 Cor 13:13. Our hope is in Christ, and His promise of heaven. Hope that is seen (assurance) is not hope at all; it actually nullifies faith (See Rom 8:25-35).

Catholics pray for the "grace of perseverance" in their faith, of which it is written, he that "shall persevere to the end, shall be saved" (Mt 10:22, 24:13).

### **Have you been saved?**

Evangelicals will sometimes ask a Catholic: "Have you been saved?" A Catholic's answer would be threefold:

1. I have been saved. It is an objective fact that Jesus Christ has died and been raised to save me from my sin. Salvation has already begun to take effect in the life of everyone who has accepted Jesus Christ and has been baptized (2 Cor 5:17).
2. Secondly, I am being saved; I am still running the race and, we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord are being changed into His likeness from one degree of glory to another (2 Cor 3:18).
3. I hope to be saved. "I hope that I may arrive at the resurrection from the dead .... I am racing to grasp the prize, if possible, since I have been grasped by Jesus Christ" (Phil 3:11-13).

### **Catholic and Protestant views of justification**

The Reformers saw justification, then, as a mere legal act by which God declares the sinner to be meriting heaven even though he remains, in fact, unjust and sinful. It is not a real eradication of sin, but a covering of non-

imputation. One's sins are covered, as it were, by a blanket, the "dungheap" of sin remaining underneath. It is not an inner renewal and a real sanctification, only an external application of God's justice.

The Catholic Church understands justification as a true eradication of sin and a true sanctification and renewal. The soul becomes objectively pleasing to God and so merits heaven. Scripture conceives of the forgiveness of sin as a real and complete renewal of man. The words used are "blot out" (Ps 50:3), "clears away" (Ps 102:12), "takes away" (Jn 1:29). The few times the Bible mentions "covering" sins, it refers not to the forgiveness of sins by God, but to the forgiveness of one man's sins by another. Since only God really forgives, the best we can do is overlook, or "cover" them. Fundamentalism's notion that God "covers" our sins but does not actually remove them is an unfortunate misreading of the Bible that found its origin in Martin Luther.

"Are you saved?" asks the fundamentalist. "I am redeemed", answers the Catholic, "and like the apostle Paul, I am working out my salvation in fear and trembling" (Phil 2:12) – with a firm hope but not with a false assurance – and I do all this as the Church has taught, unchanged, from the time of Christ".

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## **Justification by Grace: Not by Faith Alone**

The Catholic Church has always affirmed that salvation is a free gift that God freely offers to mankind. God "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim 2:4). God is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe." (1 Tim 3:10). Human beings cannot save themselves. Nor does mankind deserve eternal life, any more than we "deserved" to be created in the first place. Nothing that a person has ever done or ever could do on his own can merit or earn eternal life; God must offer it or confer it.

### **We can only be saved by Jesus Christ**

The Catholic Church does not teach and has never taught that a person can be saved by anyone else other than Jesus Christ. No one is saved by Buddha, Mohamed or the leaders or gods of any other religions. Nor do Catholics believe that anyone is saved by the Pope, the Virgin Mary, the saints or any other member of the Church. Jesus alone is the Savior of man: "... There is salvation in no one else for there is no name under heaven given among men by which we can be saved" (Acts 4:12).

## **Both works and faith play a part in salvation**

Many Evangelicals will say they believe Christians are saved by faith, and that Catholics believe they are saved by works. Both statements are fundamentally inaccurate. Both Protestant and Catholic Christians accept the official starting tenet of soteriology that we are all saved by grace. This is not a point of disagreement between Protestants and Catholics. This is one of our glorious agreements!

The Catechism of the Catholic Church puts it this way: "Since the initiative belongs to God in the order of grace, no one can merit the initial grace of forgiveness and justification" (CCC 2010).

Evangelicals and others however define justification as an act of God whereby He declares the Christian righteous. It happens at one moment in time and is made possible by the Christian's faith alone (sola fide: justification by faith alone - Latin).

## **Justification continues throughout our lives**

Catholic Christians believe that justification starts at a moment in time but continues throughout a person's life. Justification, for Catholics, is made possible by faith working in love (Gal 5:6). It is an error to think that Catholics do not have a place for faith in justification.

The unscriptural belief of justification by faith alone only arose with Martin Luther in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. In order to substantiate this man-made claim, Luther deliberately added the word "alone" to his German translation of Rom 3:28. In reality, the only time "alone" appears with the word "faith" in the original Greek text is in James 2:24 where it says we are not saved by faith alone.

## **Justification is incomplete without sanctification**

Some Evangelicals have likened Catholic justification to Evangelical justification and sanctification rolled up into one. A Catholic would respond that justification is not complete without complete sanctification: "Justification entails the sanctification of (man's) whole being" (CCC 1995).

Scripture clearly teaches that "graced" works are involved in the "by" of justification. James 2:26 is the most obvious passage: ".... You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone."

Is it any wonder that some of the Reformers attempted to put James into an "appendix" to the Bible rather than in its historically accepted place?

## **The teaching of Jesus on justification**

Most important: this is also the gospel of Jesus. His ideal was that of a life of (graced) good works flowing from a vibrant inner faith. See Mt 7:24-27, the two sons (Mt 21:28-32), the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37), the talents (Mt 25:14-30), the sheep and the goats (Mt 25:31-46) and other texts to teach a unity of faith and works for salvation. How much more explicit could Jesus have been in the following: "Not everyone who says to Me 'Lord, Lord', will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who 'does the will of My Father in heaven'" (Mt 7:21).

It is important to keep in mind that Paul uses the word "works" in a very different way from either James or the Catholic Church.

Paul is usually referring to Jewish obligatory "works of the law", as opposed to "graced works". Look at Rom 3:28: "For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law" (the Torah). Paul uses the word as a verb rather than a noun,

probably due to his continued struggles with the "party" of the circumcision. In Phil 2:12 he exhorts his converts to "work out your salvation with fear and trembling". Why work, why fear, why trembling, if faith is all that is necessary?

In Eph 2:8-10 "For it is by grace that you have been saved .... Not by works" Paul is not pitting faith against works. He is pitting works of the law (the Torah) against grace (through faith in Jesus Christ WORKING IN LOVE – Gal 5:6).

An Evangelical apologist once said that all the cults started by tampering with the words of Scripture to make it say what they want.

Catholics unashamedly start with the gospel and base their soteriology on Jesus' teachings. The rest of the New Testament is looked at as an expansion on Jesus (which it is) and must be understood in the light of His teachings. Evangelicals start their study of soteriology with the Pauline epistles. All the rest of the Bible is a "footnote" to Paul, including the teaching of Jesus. A check of evangelical literature will bear this out.

This approach to Scripture bears an uncanny resemblance to the heresy of Marcion, the 2<sup>nd</sup> century Gnostic, who relegated all of the Old Testament and most of the New Testament to second place under the Pauline epistles. He taught Old Testament was lived under an entirely different economy to the New (that will sound familiar to most Evangelicals, particularly "dispensation- alists"). Because Marcion led the first major split in the Church of Jesus Christ, Polycarp, a disciple of St. John, referred to him as "the first-born of Satan". There are some Evangelicals who teach that "people of Jesus' time lived under the law; we live under grace, therefore very few of Jesus' sayings apply to us" (sic).