

Why I Left the Catholic Church

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Praise our Lord, Jesus Christ, with all your heart and all your might!

Every year, millions of dollars are spent on questionnaires and information sources to find out about people - to answer the question "Why?" This is my response to why I left the Catholic Church. Please don't view this as a judgment of the church but as a conviction on my part. Whatever good you find in this book, give the glory to God.

I read the four books of the Gospel because it was all that I would trust. At that time I wasn't too certain about the rest of the Bible. I thought that maybe some of it was hearsay or fable or just exaggerated. I believed the Gospel was pretty accurate, especially since the four books confirmed one another.

As I read, I learned things that I never heard before. I'll admit, I didn't go to church every Sunday but I went often and I did have twelve years of Catholic school. When I read, I found out that three times Jesus was almost killed. I was pretty surprised about that. I didn't think Jesus was in much danger until the end. But even in his hometown, the whole town had moved him to the edge of the cliff to push Him off! I didn't know Jesus fed 4,000 and 5,000 people or that Peter walked on water. More importantly, I didn't know that Jesus was in existence before the world was created. Jesus confirms this in John 8:56-58. His existence and His death was written in Genesis, the first book of the Old Testament (God's plan was and is in action!). In just the Gospel alone, there was so much that I didn't know. I then started getting curious about the years of Catechism that I took and just what I did or didn't learn. I figured that I just misunderstood and needed to clarify what the church's stance was on some issues. This is where things really got crazy. As I asked family and friends, I got so many different answers. I realized that most Catholics are not in unity in knowledge and belief.

For example, some believed in Limbo, some don't. Some believed in Purgatory, some don't. Some believed in the church as taught from the Baltimore Catechism, some accepted the Second Vatican II Catechism. If you work up a list of questions, as I did, you will find an interesting variety of beliefs. Questions like "If a woman takes birth control, should she be allowed to take communion? What if she does? How does this view differ from the stance of the Catholic Church? If your view is in disagreement with the church, have you sinned? Why or Why Not? If you are disagreeing with the church, can you still call yourself Catholic?"

At this point I was participating as much as I could in Mass. I felt the church was sound but needed to focus on education to build the Catholic Church into one body with the same mindset knowing that there will always be some disagreement. The real search for me began when I was asked to explain some of the new Catechism. That should be easy. I'm Catholic. I've read the Gospel. I've listened in Mass. Since the footnotes in the Catechism refer to bible verses, I began to look up the related verse. Unfortunately, I became frustrated because I didn't come into the same conclusion as the church did.

Then the big question hit me, "At what point are you no longer a Catholic?" If there was a test and you disagreed with half of what the Catholic Church believes, would you still be Catholic? How about disagreeing with one-third? How about ten percent? Should it be weighted where some are major questions and some are minor questions? If you show up for Mass and receive communion on a regular or occasional basis, does that allow you to maintain your Catholic status? Let's put it another way. Is this like being a citizen of a country? If you are born into it, for better or worse, are you a citizen?

One day I was taking a break watching EWTN, the Catholic television station. Two teenagers were asking a priest questions about the Catholic faith. As they asked, I found myself disagreeing with the answers that the priest was giving. Before reading the Bible, I would have had no basis to disagree with a priest. Yet I was very confident on what I had learned because John 16:13 states that the Holy Spirit will guide you into all truth and John 14:26 says that He will teach you. Disagreements are natural, but I was disagreeing with Catholic authority – my church. If ever you have gotten that deep gut wrenching feeling when someone was turning over your world, this is what I was feeling. I continued listening (and squirming). At the end of the show, the priest gave the viewer an ultimatum, "If you don't believe it, you are not Catholic."

That hurt. I was strongly grieved because I didn't believe it. My faith in the Catholic Church for the first time had really been shaken. Ironically, until now, I felt that there was little difference in the teachings of the Church and the Bible. But I calmly thought about what I should do. I decided that I would have to dig a little deeper to either change what I so strongly learned from the Bible or support the theology that the Church was teaching.

Although it was very painful, I'm grateful that I have had a chance to make this choice. From generation to generation we do what we are told to do without really understanding why. Ironically, it should never be that way. In relation to eternity our life is like one second of time. Living a hundred years is a blink of an eye compared to our eternal lives. "What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes." ^{Jam 4:14} When it vanishes, there'll no one on earth who had been responsible for my eternal life. I came to the realization that on the day of judgment, I will be responsible for myself. In other words, the choices that I make here on earth will decide my eternal fate. No one else could decide my fate.

I was struck with the oddness of the situation. We each decide on our diet, on life careers, and on thousands of decisions that we research for ourselves. We get second opinions plus read and ask friends on any major medical operation. There are whole arrays of things we treat this way yet we don't really research and question our religion. It is absolutely the most important decision that we can make. It is deciding on eternal life or death.

If I'm Jewish or Muslim, I don't believe that Christians will go to heaven. It is the same for most religions. The belief that their way is the only way and any other way will not lead to eternal life. So there I was. Beginning to search the search that millions have done before me yet many more millions had never done.

I didn't try to search other beliefs outside of Christianity, but I wanted to know the difference between Christianity and some of the major religions. Of course I knew that the Jewish faith

doesn't believe in Jesus. Muslims believe in Jesus but not as God. The Mormons have a completely different view of the Bible than the Christian interpretation. It was interesting to see how these religions interpret the status of Jesus Christ.

Some religions see Him as a Prophet. Some religions don't recognize Him at all. The Bible says that Jesus Christ is, without question, the only way to eternal life. He fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies about the coming Messiah – including many that were not understood. He easily responded to and challenged the experts that spent their entire life studying religious law. He taught in ways that are opposite from our human nature – a greater life through humbleness and service rather than pride, power and wealth. He made strong claims that no other religion can make. As a result, I was confident to keep my focus was on Christian denominations.

I also had to consider the costs if I left the Catholic Church. To join any other denomination would not be looked upon favorably amongst the majority of my family and friends. I knew that I would be separated from them and there would be stress from disagreements. If you leave the Catholic Church, you are viewed as confused or obviously someone who didn't know much about their faith. The attitude that I had as a Catholic was simple – why would you want to be one of those other religions?

As a Catholic, I looked down on the other Christian faiths. I was taught that Catholicism had been the only real Christian church from the beginning - those "other Christian churches" just wanted their own way because of Martin Luther. This made it difficult for me to consider another denomination. Would going to another church mean I was not going to the only "authorized Christian" church? Did it mean that I would be against Catholics or should it matter since they are all Christian churches?

As a Catholic, I was baptized as a baby. I received my Communion Certificate and had gotten my Confirmation. I was an altar-boy. I attended 12 years of Catholic school and sang three years in the choir. I lit many candles and almost every week went to Church and received Communion on Sunday. I donated to the Church often. During the Lenten season, I would sacrifice something such as fasting on Fridays. In the past few years I've attended some of the exclusive fund raising functions as I donated larger sums to help the needy and to help education cost for priests. I felt involved and a part of the Church. So what more could another Christian Church offer?

Like so many Catholics, I felt that I was a great Christian. I didn't like it when someone said that I was a sinner. Actually, I would get angry when someone would call me a sinner. Why should I be called a sinner? I didn't go around stealing or killing. I didn't try to harm my fellow man. I tried to apply "The Golden Rule" (do unto others as you would have them do unto you).

I knew everyone made mistakes. I felt, "Who are you to call me a sinner?" I'm a good Christian. When I went to church, I felt a great sense of Holiness. How could there be much more for a lay person? How could I find a greater relationship than what I had? How could any church give me more fulfillment? Was Satan trying to confuse me? Maybe there wasn't anything wrong with my Catholic faith except that I needed to be corrected to understand the teachings of the Catholic Church. I sincerely wanted to find the answers.

As a Catholic, I understood that religion had its place. If you discussed Jesus, it became a conversation killer. It was okay as long you said His name in cursing or as an exclamation. When someone would talk about the Holy Spirit or that they were "born again", it was time to run quickly! Those topics had their place in church, just after mass, or around the Sunday dinner table. It was understood that you didn't discuss this at school, work, or at a social environment. I had wondered if this would be a requirement of some of the other Christian faiths. If so, what else would they expect?

Before searching different churches and comparing beliefs, I needed more research – much more research. I knew that I wanted to have a greater relationship with God whatever denomination I would follow. I started with reading and studying the Bible – day and night as the Old Testament tells us to do so. Looking up the Bible verses was almost comical for me. I hadn't heard of some of the books much less know where they were located in the Bible but I caught on.

Reading the Bible was very difficult at first but the Catholic Living Translation helped and I felt confident reading this translation because it had an endorsement by the Pope in the introduction. This is a noteworthy step because many older Catholics won't read the Bible. When they were young, they were taught that they could misinterpret it and become confused about what they were reading. I considered that I was experiencing this possibility. There had to be a reason for the difference in interpretation. I knew that the popes, archbishops, bishops, and priests throughout all of the decades were very intelligent men that studied the Bible. The answer would be there in the Bible.

As I read the Bible, I found it was slow at first but I became more and more interested. Then I became thirsty to learn. I never thought that reading the Bible would be fun! With constant tribulations going on in my life I found it not only to be a comfort and interesting but also a pleasure. There would be times a verse would confuse me but as the Bible says God reveals Himself gradually. As any relationship grows, you learn more and more about the person and so it is with God. All of life around us is His classroom and the Bible is His instruction.

Sometimes I would read for an hour before bedtime and other times I would wake up at five in the morning to read until I got ready for work. I found that if I didn't read for several days, I would start to become interested in other things but if I kept reading almost every night, I would stay focused. After the second or third time of reading the same book, I would see the verse in a different light and understand it with more meaning of the verse.

Eventually, I invested in several translations of the Bible and would compare differences. I used Bible software and Bible dictionary software to help look up references. I bought other references and checked out books at the library including early Christian church history. I learned that the Catholic Bible and all of the other Bibles are the same with the exception of a group of additional Old Testament books that are included in the Catholic Bible called the Apocrypha. They were composed of 15 books written from 400-100 BC and the Catholic Bible contains 12 of them and were added to Catholic Cannon in 1546. All of the New Testament books are the same in all Bibles. There are many different translations of the Bible.

After the Reformation, the Catholic Church created a translation to allow any laity unfamiliar with Latin, to read the Bible. This Bible called the 'Duo' was translated from their current Latin version. It was deeply erred and was replaced within a few years by an accurate translation. This translation used original language as the source of information. Specifically, the Old Testament is written in Hebrew and the New Testament is written in Greek. These books in the original language are still available to us today. The different versions of the Bible are written for different purposes.

The Living Bible and the New Living Bible are paraphrased for ease of readability. These Bibles are not designed to give an exact word by word translation. The King James Version is a Bible translated in Old English, the English language common at the time of the translation. The New King James Version, New American Standard, New Revised Standard, New Century Version, New International Version, and others all are written to use the words of the original language to fit our language today with specific word accuracy.

I started to compare Second Vatican II Catechism with what I had learned from reading the Bible. Yet, I knew that I was not or would ever be on the level of the Catholic Theologians. These men throughout the decades have spent a great amount of time analyzing, debating, and writing the issues that now comprise the Catechism. But, I have often seen simple things turn into complicated matters. So it became important that I understood the Catechism to see that it simply matched with the Bible.

As I read the Catechism, I looked up the Biblical verses that the Catechism was referencing. Sometimes it matched and I agreed with it. Unfortunately, other times it was a poor match. It would reference a single verse to prove the point yet it would not reference several verses that were contrary to the point. Sometimes I disagreed on how the interpretation was made.

For example, I don't understand why the Catechism chose to split the 10th Commandment into the 9th and 10th Commandments. Then it took the 1st and 2nd Commandment and combined them into one eliminating the Commandment "Though shall not make idols." The Catechism didn't adopt the same 10 Commandments as the Jewish nation had it for centuries. I read the references and how it was explained. Then I read and studied the side-by-side comparison but when I actually looked up the verses, I didn't come to the same conclusion as the Catechism because of the sections in the Bible that were left out in the comparison.

I looked up more sections. I didn't agree that Mary could join herself with the sacrifice of Jesus while He was dying on the cross because the Bible doesn't indicate that she did. I didn't agree with the explanation of Purgatory. I searched more and disagreed more. This was very uncomfortable for me. I had to stop reading and studying the Catechism because I was worried that I would find more that I disagreed with – I simply didn't want to become more upset. I needed time to recover from my anguish. I needed time to understand why was there such a difference. I have never been a radical but how could I agree with the Catechism when it appeared to be in contrast to the Bible?

Even though I was aggravated about this situation, I felt that the Catholic Catechism and Catholic Church via the Mass were two totally different entities. I agreed much more with the

Mass than I did with the Catechism. This posed an odd situation. Who is the Catholic Church? Would there be so many Catholics if they read the Catechism? How can I give all my heart to what seemed to be two different churches? This led to explore other churches to see how their church and theology worked together.

Searching out other denominations wasn't an easy job either. It can be uncomfortable to go to other churches and not know what to expect or what is expected of you. Yet, it is fun to be an observer and to watch other Christian's worship in such a variety of ways. I tried to be very objective and apply Biblical standards to the church service. I also knew that I would not find "The Perfect Church." I hoped that I would find a church where I could learn and grow in accordance to the Bible, whether it would be Catholic or non-Catholic.

As I visited other churches, my life was plagued by joy and disappointment. I've heard and read about cults. I've read about the warning that Jesus gave us regarding many false prophets. As I searched, I became discouraged and often believed that I should never change churches. I started to believe that all Christian Churches have their problems and I should just stay with the Catholic Church. This is why there is a need for Biblical foundation. "The whole Bible was given to us by inspiration from God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives; it straightens us out and helps us do what is right". ^{2 TIM 3:16 TLB}

I found a Christian Faith that has a vast amount of wealth. I found a Christian Faith that nails a church member to the cross at Easter. I found a Christian Faith that crawl on their knees while praying.

All of these findings are of the Catholic Church. If you are not Catholic, you probably won't understand and may find this to be very extreme. Most people may not understand why Orthodox Jews dress as they do or some Muslims going to church five times a day and sit on the floor. So, a standard must be applied when discerning all faiths otherwise how can we decide what is a cult. Of course the standard is the Bible.

Should the Bible itself be questioned? Is it fair to ask whether the Bible is a lie? I have heard some people say that it is just an old book or others say it is a bunch of stories or others that say there is some truth to it but throughout the years it became distorted. These are important viewpoints that should be addressed. Since there are many books written on the validity of the Bible with exceptional scientific and historical evidence, I just want to touch on this subject. This is where a Bible study can be of great help.

A Bible study will show you the relationship of historical events that occurred during the time the books were written. It will also show you the incredible accuracy of the copying of the books. As you study the words and the writing style of the different books that make up the Bible, you will understand the Bible. Yet, no one can convince you that this is God's Word. When you have taken into account all of the proof and have read the Bible, you alone must decide.

In deciding consider the accuracy of the writings of Aristotle. The earliest copy made was produced about 1,100 years after the original was written and there are only 5 copies in

existence. Copies of Plato were produced 1,200 years after the original with only 7 copies in existence. Copies of Caesar were produced 1,000 years after the original was written with 10 copies in existence. Copies of the New Testament were produced 40-50 years after the original with more than 13,000 copies in existence. The originals were written from about the year 40 to 90 (90AD) with the earliest copies made about 130AD.

As you read it, you realize that it is not a deception that any man or group of men could have created. As you study, you realize that this isn't just a collection of the all time best writers. You realize that there is something that is beyond the ability of man. It has something that crosses all political, social and educational boundaries. It has depth.

We have all heard a song or read a poem that touches something deep inside of us. Like most people, I have had some that were very special to me. But when compared to the Bible, I was amazed that they were nothing in comparison. As you read the Bible and understand it, the depth is so great that you know this is God's written Word.

"For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow" Heb 4:12 NIV

This depth is beyond imagination. It is a depth that allows anyone seeking a greater relationship with God to receive a greater depth of understanding. No one in the history of man has completely exhausted this depth and God has designed it so that anyone can seek a greater depth throughout your entire life.

The Bible is sound but what about religion? There are many religions that have stemmed from the same Bible. How do we apply the test of time to religion? Simply stated, time length is not an accurate qualifier that a religion is correct. Even within each denomination, time can distort the origins and truthfulness of the Christian faith. In the New Testament we can read verses written to correct major wrong teaching that were trying to work their way into the church. This within sixty years of the death of Christ!

Although not a Christian example, the United States offers an example of how we change. In just a little over 200 years the U.S. still has roots in the Constitution but interpretation of the Constitution has changed. The rights of states, federal taxation, and involvement by the federal government are applied differently today than it was applied in the early years of the founding of the country. The Constitution hasn't changed but how it is interpreted has changed significantly. So, we should verify that any church doctrine compares accurately with Biblical references, cross-referencing related verses, to get the most accurate interpretation. This needs to be an on-going process because churches throughout the years adjust their doctrine.

In this age we have the ability to view an array of churches without having the restriction of distance by using the television and radio. Throughout the years, I never trusted anyone on TV that wasn't Catholic and thought that some of the preachers were a fraud. The tragedies that occurred in Jonestown and Waco are some of the false prophets that Jesus warned us about. But, there are many programs on the radio and television that are a true blessing.

Listening and watching these programs helped me in learning and growing. Christian radio plays songs that helped me to remember God's promises and truth. The different preachers on both TV and radio forced me to research what they have said. By using Biblical comparison it was easy to find who was standing on solid Biblical truth. (I strongly recommend listening to Charles Stanley, Chuck Swindol, John MacArthur, Billy Graham, and Kay Arthur.) So my array of influence was not only from local pastors but national ones as well.

I didn't always agree with them but I agreed with most of what they were saying. This is what I was lacking in the Catholic Church. When I defended the views of the Catholic Church, I would point out that the differences between Catholics and Protestants were just "splitting hairs" on Biblical interpretation. I said this without having a strong Biblical knowledge but I knew the hearts of Catholics. I knew that these people had a desire for God. They took their time to go to church on Sundays, had their children baptized, and would do many such things to please God. Between this and the steadiness of the Catholic Church, how could I be wrong? So I would point out that splitting hairs didn't really matter as long as we all believed in Jesus Christ.

For example, most Protestants believe that you can be married to be a church leader or pastor whereas the Catholic Church believes you must not be married. It is because of interpretation of the Biblical reference. Although this is an important issue to both groups, neither group is accusing the other that they will not go to heaven because of their belief on this issue.

Meanwhile I went to Mass but I found that I wasn't being fulfilled. Even though I agreed with the Mass, something was missing. I wanted more. There was a need deep inside of me that the Mass was not satisfying – a greater closeness to God. As I went to Mass, I always felt a sense of reverence and holiness to God. I felt that this was a holy place. A place that I can come and pray and God could hear me. As a Catholic, I knew that I was not worthy and that a close relationship to God was always out of my reach. He seemed too righteous and too strong on discipline. Maybe if I was good, he would hear me and answer my prayer.

The Bible teaches that God is Holy. We could perish if our eyes ever saw His presence. But, it also teaches us that we become His adopted children when we accept Jesus Christ. The word "ABBA", meaning father, is how we are to refer to God. Jesus taught us in the Lord's prayer to say "Our Father, who art in Heaven..."

The family teaches us about God. As a child, you learn about a father through His love and discipline. As a parent, you learn the need to discipline. It's painful on the parent but it is best for the child. A parent disciplines for the love of the child so that he may grow knowing right from wrong. Discipline that is always reinforced with love creates a strong family relationship. "... do not lose heart when He (God) rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those He loves, and He punishes everyone He accepts as a son. Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons." ^{Heb 12:5-8 NIV}

Other family principles that Jesus taught us can also be understood easier from a parent's viewpoint. Jesus tells us that God knows our needs and not to worry about food, clothing and shelter. Any parent knows that a child does not have to tell him these needs and the child

willingly trusts the parent to fill these needs. Jesus talks of this faith when He tells us to be like a child to get into heaven.

A parent wants to give his child presents. As a parent, should we give our children everything he wants? Of course not! Yet we are frustrated when God doesn't give us everything we want or what we think we need. Our Father is watching out for us. He knows our needs. I just didn't know how much He loves us because I always thought that He was constantly keeping score on my good verses my bad.

My personal life was also experiencing trials. It would have been much easier to stay with the Catholic Church because of all the battles I was fighting. My business was struggling and I was tired of trying to keep up with the pace so I had started another company with several people. It became a far greater problem than my previous business and proved to be an extreme financial drain on my personal finances. The hours became longer and longer. My health was being taxed and I was unable to spend much time with my family. Fortunately, there are Christian men and women to give a word of encouragement and guidance.

A man of faith took time out of his busy schedule, for no earthly gain to himself, to have a one-on-one Bible study to teach me about God's promises. He was a Christian businessman whose business struggled for years and years as he waited and prayed for God's blessing. This is where He had learned the test of faith. He showed me verse after verse, throughout the Bible, where God makes promises and it takes faith to believe in God's promises. There are many Biblical illustrations that show the blessings from having faith as well as the result of a failing faith. The Bible tells us that our faith will be tested. Mine has and I don't doubt that it will be tested again.

He showed me verses that had helped him to rely on God one day at a time. His business consul was only suggestions and he said that I should pray for God to lead me. I believe that his point was to lean on God and not depend on man. We need people. Jesus used people to build churches but God must be our first order of dependence, not man. Once we learn this, we can set our priorities on God. This businessman knew this as well as his wife. They used their trials to teach others for the glory of God through Jesus Christ.

She taught a woman's Bible study class that my wife had been attending for years. This was a great support for me. My wife became more steadfast in God's Word. She would be supportive and help build me whenever possible. Without question, most marriages would have ended during these stressful trials but our marriage not only survived but also grew because of learning to lean on God's Word. I'm grateful for these Christians teaching me through radio, television and in person, giving up time to teach, and praying for me.

So here is my situation. I disagreed with the Catechism, I wanted a greater relationship with God, I needed Bible based instruction to guide my life during my trials and to show me that God does love me and has a plan for me. I needed spiritual support for my wife and children to continue as a family. In short, I needed support from the body of Christ during my trials.

I realize that the Catholic Church has many ministries to help people but I didn't feel that they had anything for me. I believed most of their support was prayer groups, which are important,

but I needed a greater foundation. Additionally, I felt a coolness towards the people around me in Church because I was taught that we go to Mass to have a relationship with God not these people. It was nice when we greeted each other when instructed by the priest at the prescribed time in the Mass but the relationship stopped there. Sometimes there was a social event after Mass but I never felt comfortable going. Unlike some of the churches, socializing or talking in Church before the Mass was unacceptable because it is a time of prayer and silence until the Mass started.

I can see that too many fellow Catholics are facing trials, facing guilt, and facing Satan's challenge with only a 20-minute sermon each week. This isn't enough for anyone – including me! The sermon needs to be more filling – more inspiring. As a Catholic, I rarely found a sermon inspiring. Instead I used the time to daydream rather than listen. I often wondered why some of the priests, who were gifted in writing, did not write sermons for all of the Catholic Churches once or twice a month.

In contrast, many of the small churches that I have visited had sermons that would have a lasting effect. There was an intensity that I didn't find in the Catholic Church. I'm not talking about something like yelling or screaming. It was an intensity similar to a child telling a story about going to the fair. There was an excitement in their voice.

Some of these churches would have very limited resources but help and friendship is easily available. This may be because some of them are small and can be more personalized but to their credit they let people know what is available and are constantly positively encouraging people to join it. Also there was a different attitude toward one another. There wasn't an issue of status that I have often felt in Catholics gathering. It was more like an "I am no better than you" attitude. This was truly refreshing to me because I felt their genuine warmth.

Most importantly all of these churches offered a small group or even a one-on-one Bible study. This gives you the foundation to read the assurances in the Bible when you are being tormented by problems in the middle of the night or during the day – a battle of unseen proportions. "For we are not fighting against people made of flesh and blood, but against persons without bodies-- the evil rulers of the unseen world, those mighty satanic beings and great evil princes of darkness who rule this world; and against huge numbers of wicked spirits in the spirit world. So use every piece of God's armor to resist the enemy whenever he attacks,..." Eph 6:12-13 TLB

Paul tells us that the Bible is part of the armor of God. It is "the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God." Eph 6:17 NIV Every Christian needs this all-important piece of armor. Jesus tells us, "... I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth." Rev 2:16 NIV referring to the Bible. Since the worldly views and deceit constantly try to slip in, knowledge of the Bible is necessary. Unfortunately, the Church has very few Bible studies and rarely encourages people to join a Bible Study. But we are told "Have Faith" in the Catholic Church. Faith is important. It is also a part of the armor of God.

What is faith? Faith means trust. These small words are extremely important in the outcome of your eternal life. Every Sunday the congregation expressed their faith by reciting the Profession of Faith. It's recited because that's what we're told to do. Too many Catholics are reciting this

prayer without commitment. The Israelites," who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it. Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works." ^{Rom 9:31 NIV} It takes faith to believe this Procession of Faith and recite it every week with commitment. I was just as guilty. I would recite it without commitment. The Bible teaches many lessons in faith. You need faith to trust in God and His son, Jesus Christ but the Bible also demonstrates the lack of faith.

For example, the Israelites were delivered from Egypt through amazing miracles that they witnessed. On their way to the Promised Land they conquered many armies along the way because of God's strength. To learn to depend on God they were fed with manna every day, except on Saturday, which was the Sabbath. Yet, when they arrived just outside of the Promised Land, they became scared, lost faith, complained and wanted to kill Moses and the other leaders. Their lack of faith resulted in their wandering for 40 years because God told Moses that he would not let one of the ones who didn't believe, see the Promised Land. The ones that believed, like Joshua and Caleb, did see the Promised Land.

This example is a faith builder! This and hundreds of other examples teach us how to keep faith in God regardless of the circumstances. Often, it doesn't make sense from our viewpoint but keeping faith in God is always blessed and we are usually blessed in a way contrary than we would expect. Shouldn't Catholics get a chance to learn these lessons of faith? I'm not trying to be disrespectful but I grew because of the faith lessons that I had read about in the Bible without the encouragement of my Church. I knew that I would keep growing in a relationship with the Lord, knowing that God's Spirit would help me, because God promised. I would love to see this for all of my fellow Catholics – not just certain Christian churches.

I had searched for over a year to find a church. There is no perfect church but there are a lot of good churches trying to apply the lessons of our Lord Jesus Christ in both their teaching and their actions. I listened diligently and analytically to what the pastor was saying. What did he stand for? Where was he leading the congregation? To answer these questions I needed the Bible as my point of reference – not the beliefs of any church.

As a Catholic, I learned about God being all-powerful and holy. I never knew that I could approach Him or I that He cared for me personally. It was like a major corporation where the president cared for all of his employees but only the ones that he personally knew were the ones he took special interest in like a priest or other similar holy people – definitely not me. Conversely, the Bible teaches that God does care for all of us but He will only accept us through Jesus Christ. He is the only way to heaven. "And what is it that God has said? That He has given us eternal life and that this life is in His Son (Jesus). So whoever has God's Son has (eternal) life; whoever does not have His Son, does not have (eternal) life."^{1 John 5:11-12 TLB}

It wasn't until I was an adult that I started to pray more to Jesus. I took Communion and understood that Jesus suffered but I did not understand the relationship that God intended for us. I would kneel before the crucifixion in prayer and feel a sense of humbleness because of the pain that Jesus took on the cross but I didn't realize that something was lacking. I only knew that I was not worthy and I was sinful in His sight. How could I ask Him for anything when He

suffered so much? I didn't know that the Bible teaches that we can have a very friendly, personal relationship with Jesus and God but we must trust in Jesus first – we must be "saved" by Him.

For example, you are drowning in a swimming pool. The side is right next to you but it's just beyond your reach. You realize that you can't live without help. There is a lifeguard standing there who is the only one who can help you but he is waiting for you to ask for help. You call out to the lifeguard, "Help! I'm drowning!" He reaches in and pulls you out of the water so that you may live.

Now, applying real life, you are drowning because of sin. Heaven is right there but just beyond your reach - any single sin throughout your entire life will keep you from it. You realize that you can't have eternal life without help. You call out to Jesus to save you. He does. You are very grateful because you will now have eternal life – you can now go to heaven. It's that easy.

Look at the basics that this example gives. God provided a way for you to live - Jesus. He is the life-giver. Because of your sin you cannot go to heaven. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"^{Rom 3:23} If your pride, stubbornness, or confidence in your self-ability prevents you from relying on Jesus, then you don't qualify to go to heaven.

This is because you are a sinner (just like everybody else in the world) and you must call out to be saved or you will drown. Heaven is just beyond your reach (in this lifetime – if you die without salvation, it is impossible to reach and vastly far away). If you realize that you can't make it, it cost you nothing because Jesus already paid the price for you with His death. God made it so simple. If you let Jesus save you from drowning, then He will be your personal Savior – He saved you personally.

There are so many things that prevent people from asking Jesus to be their Savior. Some are floating around with a life jacket bought with their wealth, power, status, intelligence, or pride. They are content. They have been fooled because when they die, it will become a heavy weight that drowns them. They will never get to the side of the pool without Jesus. Some will work harder and harder believing that they can do it by being a good swimmer – we all have the ultimate handicap – sin. God won't allow sin in heaven. It must be washed clean. Jesus washes it but you must accept Him as your Savior. Some call out to other people or try to figure out other ways - Jesus told us that He is the only way. If you embrace your wisdom (which God calls foolishness) to go another way, you will drown. You'll find out that you were wrong after you have died. You won't get a second chance. Hell is an extremely awful place to find out that you were wrong.

You may not agree but remember that I didn't make the rules. It's all in the Bible. No one could ever blame God. He has given everyone a lifetime of chances. If you deny His Son, He won't change His mind because He is the constant. He won't say, "I will forgive everyone because my grace is sufficient," or "I love all people so no one will have to pay the price of hell." Truth never changes. "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever."^{Heb 13:8 NIV} He is, without question, truth. Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."^{John 8:21-32 NIV} The ones that do accept Jesus will be in heaven. The ones that don't won't. Those are the rules that God made.

You might be thinking about the exceptions. Like "What happened to the Jews who lived before Jesus?" or "What about the people who have never heard about Jesus?" or some other exception. The Bible can show you all of these answers but remember these exceptions do not apply to you. If you have read this book, then you know how to get to heaven.

This is not an attitude of "I'm better than you." The attitude is, "It is only by God's grace through Jesus Christ that I've been saved so I can't boast because I didn't earn it but I so much want you to share in it too."

I missed that in Catechism. I don't mean the example but the message. I learned about being good and learned that if my good outweighed my bad, I would go to heaven – that's not what the Bible teaches. It teaches us that it is impossible to be good enough to get to heaven. Jesus is the key. The moment He died on the cross was the moment salvation was available but not yet received. We have to go the next step and trust in Him and then we receive salvation.

The message is simple but with good intentions it became difficult. I'm sure that the Church was trying to cover all of the other important points about being a Christian but the most important basics of the message got muddled. For example, when a law is proposed, it is written in a way that prevents legal misinterpretation. Unfortunately, only the lawyers can understand it. The general public cannot.

I believe it is a case where simplicity became complicated – a momentum that was started and could not be stopped. But God did not make salvation difficult because He loves everyone – not just a select few. This grace (gift) that God gives is available to everyone so that no personal ability, no works, no donations, no promises, etc. is needed to receive it with one exception – faith in Jesus. We need to constantly emphasize the true simplicity of salvation. Other works are only important after salvation is realized.

Jesus wants to help so He pleads with God on my behalf. He is the greatest of all loving brothers in existence! Once I understood this, my uncertainty left me and I started to "experience God's peace, which is far more wonderful than the human mind can understand. His peace will keep your thoughts and your hearts quiet and at rest as you trust in Christ Jesus."^{Phil 4:7 TLB} God draws people to Jesus (see John 6:44). He'll keep trying - some will accept but most won't.

If you have this relationship, then you have experienced the tears of joy that come to you while praying, listening to Christian music, in Church, or just about anywhere. Jesus' touch can be felt deep inside of you. I can't write the words to describe it but I have seen men and women from all walks of life, cry in joy. If you haven't accepted Jesus, you can do it now. He knocks at the door all you have to do is let Him in. ^(see Rev 3:20) He will cleanse all of your sins and declare you not guilty before God so that you may live in heaven. Just say, "Jesus, Son of God, you are my Savior. Remove my many sins and lead me in your way." Then don't let this joy slip from you. Read the Bible and get together with other Christians to build your relationship with your Lord so that, as Jesus said, you won't let "the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the Word, making it unfruitful."^{Mark 4:19}

The last Mass that I attended was with my parents in a packed church. Because I was there to glorify God through Jesus Christ, I sang (while most people didn't), I recited (while some people didn't), and listened. I did not see the love, joy, or peace (fruits of the Spirit) with God that Christians are promised in the Church. I understand that it is not always possible to see this outwardly but there was the usual lackluster participation (at best). I'm not trying to be hard on anyone. I'm just being honest. Jesus said "I know your works; you are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were either cold or hot. So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I am about to spit you out of my mouth." ^{Rev 3:15-16 NRSV} By the end of the Mass I really didn't feel like participating because so few other people were. It becomes contagious. I knew that I no longer belonged there. I knew I wanted to find more from my church. I knew that I was no longer Catholic and it was time try to settle on a church home.

This does not mean that I believe that all Catholics are not saved but too many have missed the message of salvation – I did. I have talked with friends, family, and even some acquaintances who have also left the Catholic Church. Many believe or did believe that their salvation was founded on their good outweighing their bad. How devastating! I believe the hardest trial a Christian can experience is knowing that people you know will not be in heaven. This is not judgement by me. It is applying Biblical Truths to one's religious response. Their salvation is their responsibility.

I found several churches that taught from the Bible with 45-minute sermons. As a lesson was being applied, I could look up the verses so that I could discern for myself. By this method you also validate what that church believes and compare it to what the Holy Spirit has taught you. I did not agree with everything just as in the Catholic Church but I found that I disagreed with very little. This was very important. Their teaching coincided with the Bible. Ironically, I was looking forward to going to church on Sunday whereas I use to go because I was suppose to.

Some of the churches that I was visiting have been established for less than 25 years. Some of them didn't have a building or had recently acquired a building. I use to believe that any these new churches, along with some of the television evangelists, were nothing but money chasers. I had doubt about any church that had not been established. I still have doubts about certain churches, such as the ones that ask for money constantly - especially since Jesus told us not to worry about these things and this applies to churches as well. So I took some time to look at how the Catholic Church was established. I found this to be very fascinating. After all, what is the church that Jesus established? Where did the Mass come from? How did the apostles continue the work of Jesus? I decided to touch briefly on some history.

In the book of Acts it is clear that the apostles spent their time teaching, as Jesus did, and that they would often preach at the Jewish temples. In subsequent books we see churches established, problems arise, false doctrines try to creep in, and the need for financial support. Satan was right there trying to stop the spread of Christianity wherever possible. It is clear that Paul had started the majority of the churches. He helped lead the church in Rome as we can read from his letter that we now call the book of Romans. Paul was determined not to let false doctrine become part of the church - even among the apostles. He corrected Peter, as he knew Jesus would, that circumcision is not required for a Christian. (Peter was starting to associate with only Christians

who were circumcised. The Christian Jews argued that circumcision was required since Jesus was fulfilling the Law of Moses). ^{see Gal 2:11-21}

I really didn't find how the Mass was established. I know that there is a combination of the Old Testament ritual and the teaching of the New Testament. The layout of the altar with the inner and outer court, the ceremonial washing of the hands, and the burning of incense are some examples of the Old Testament influences in the Mass.

Most all of the churches were independent Christian churches that circulated copies of the letters from Paul and the other disciples, which was formed into the New Testament. The New Testament tells us that communion was often associated with a meal. At about 341 AD the church at Rome started to write to the other churches telling them that Rome is the head of the church, this was the beginning of the Authority of the Holy See. Some churches agreed. Some did not. I was surprised to learn this since I thought all churches were a break off from the Catholic Church rather than never being a part of the Catholic Church.

As I understood how the pieces fit together, I wanted to fit my Christian life as close to the Bible as possible. It no longer mattered to me if the church that I attended was two years old or two thousand years old. I was free to make my decision as to where to go and I knew that I had to find a church that was as close to the teachings of Jesus and the apostles.

The church that I found has praise and worship of God through song. Everyone sings. The sermons are 30-45 minutes long that teaches us applications to face today's trials. It has Bible studies and very warm, casual social events. The members consist of people of all ages and denominations. They get to know each other and get to know God through Jesus Christ. This is one of thousands of new churches that have come to existence within the past few decades. Its foundation can't be shaken because the Bible is its cornerstone. It's a small church that offers a lot.

Like so many new and revitalized churches, this church is filled with people who want to be in church, who seek Jesus, and try to be a good example of Christianity. Jesus told us of the vine and the branch and the type of fruit it would bear. I am grateful to my Lord to allow me to have found a church where my Christian faith is alive. I know it will help guide me to produce good fruit and grow in my love for God and Jesus Christ.



Chapter II



As I mentioned, I wanted to point out specifically where I disagreed with Catholic Church. Likewise, there are many issues that I agree with such as the Catechism's view on horoscopes, idolatry, superstition, etc. to name a few (the Catechism has over 700 pages – it would take some time to name every item I Biblically agreed with).

After I left the Catholic Church, a friend said to me that we are in agreement but approaching our faith from two different ways. Unfortunately, it's some of the major differences that we're not in agreement and I know the Church stands behind every item that I disagree with an explanation for each one of them. I stand on Bible foundation and on the following promise that God has made with us:

"But you have received the Holy Spirit, and he lives within you, in your hearts, so that you don't need anyone to teach you what is right. For he teaches you all things, and he is the Truth, and no liar..." 1 John 2:27 TLB

A Catholic friend asked, "Why didn't you ask a priest to teach you about the questions that you had?" I believe a priest would not have deviated from the Catechism. So, I had two reference points – the Bible compared to the Catechism. Sometimes they agreed and sometimes they did not.

No one should decide these issues for you but yourself. It is your eternal life. Pray that the Holy Spirit guides you. Research the verses in your Bible. Discuss these items amongst friends and family then discern for yourself. It would be difficult for you to research this and not grow in the Lord – whatever church you attend.

One final note. It is very easy to misquote from the Bible. For example, someone could incorrectly say, "In Mark 8:33 Jesus reveals to us that the apostle Peter is Satan!" As we well know, the apostle Peter is not Satan. But when taken out of context, the statement can be incorrectly made. Unfortunately, if you don't read the Bible, you can't rebuke this foolishness. As a result, I challenge you to look up all the Biblical references that I used. You will find all of them are used in their correct context. And remember that I have written this list out of love. If you disagree with me, that's okay – you have seen two sides and have decided for yourself.



Anyone who knows me can easily point out that I have often failed as a Christian. I have sinned and unfortunately, will again. I constantly fail myself, my Christian faith, and my Lord. I am not above sin and know that God hates sin and therefore I cannot fully please God (except through Jesus). Look at the prophet Elijah.

He proved to Israel, who was worshipping false gods at that time, that God was the only true God. He had prayed and the water soaked altar was completely consumed by a lightning bolt from God. He had thousands of false prophets killed. He outran a chariot.

He prayed for and received rain after three years of drought. After all of that, he failed God by fearing for his life. His faith failed.

Look at John the Baptist. "The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, 'Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!'"^{John 1:29 NIV} Later, when he was in prison, he sent a messenger to ask "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?"^{Mat 11:3 NIV} His faith failed.

Jesus warned the apostle Peter that he would deny knowing Jesus. Yet, he denied Jesus three times within the first twelve hours of Jesus' arrest. His faith failed.

These great godly men failed in their faith and they are far greater with God than I could ever imagine. Their failure was allowed by God to show them that they are not worthy in their own ability and to prevent them from pride. Therefore they must rely on God. The only man whose faith hasn't failed is Jesus Christ. He is the only man without sin. But for the rest of us we have to deal with our sin.

Of course we know that Jesus died for our sins but Catholics carry more guilt than other Christians. Feeling guilty is a heavy burden to carry. So many people are carrying guilt for something that may have happened a long time ago or believe that their sin is too great to be forgiven. It is evident from the people that you talk to or listen to on television. Even some of the elderly will not take communion because of a sin in their past. I know the Church has confession but it is linked to penance. These are usually in a form of a number of prayers to be said to cleanse away your sin. The priest hears the confession and gives a number of prayers to be said for penance based on the confession (for example, three Hail Mary's and two Our Fathers if you have lied).

When we were kids, we would compare our penance and would know who had been really bad by how long they had to say their prayers. After a while, I found an inconsistency to justice. There were times that I had been really good and received much more penance than when I was bad. This leads Catholics to an important question. Is it possible that the congregation doesn't believe that going to confession will forgive their sin or maybe that the penance for that sin wasn't enough?

I'm not saying confession is bad. It is very good. So why are these burdens being carried? There is an absolute way to release the burden of sin. "For if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." ¹ John 1:9 NIV

Simply put, confess your sin and God will wipe it clean. This is one of God's greatest promises to Christians. He is absolutely faithful (even though we don't deserve it). Therefore, you can't say that God won't forgive a sin. Whatever the sin, He will remove it and "purify us from all unrighteousness."

Satan will keep reminding us of the sin but if we have the faith to believe in God's promise, we can say "I am purified from that sin and you are unable to hold that against me. It is forever forgiven." It isn't fair but Jesus paid the debt for our sins. He is the only reason why God will allow us to be forgiven and purified. As Jesus told us, He is the only way to salvation and eternal life.



Who gets to have an eternal life in heaven? Is it all who belong to the Catholic Church? Is it all who believe in God? Is it good people? Let's see what the Catechism says:

In paragraph #839 the Jewish people will have eternal salvation because they have received the covenants, law, worship, promises, etc. "according to the flesh, is the Christ."¹

In paragraph #841 the Muslims are eternally saved. "The plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator, in the first place amongst whom are the Muslims; these profess to hold the faith of Abraham..."¹

Paragraph #847 allows for anyone who 1) doesn't know the Gospel, 2) "seek God with a sincere heart," 3) "moved by grace," and 4) "try in their actions to do His will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience," "may achieve eternal salvation."¹

To summarize according to the Catechism, anyone who is Jewish, Muslim, or has faith in the Creator or seeks God with a sincere heart and uses their conscience to do His will, may achieve salvation. But paragraph 846 states that the Catholic Church is necessary for salvation. So, who belongs to the Catholic Church? Everybody listed above!¹

In paragraph 836 the Catechism states that, "All men are called to this catholic unity of the People of God... 1) the Catholic faithful, 2) others who believe in Christ, and 3) finally all mankind called by God's grace to salvation." This leaves us with the conclusion that just about everyone will go to heaven.¹

The Bible does tell us that anyone may be saved but the qualification is to believe that Jesus, who is God, will save you from your sin. Even though the Muslims have the "faith of Abraham" they know of Jesus and recognize him as a Prophet. This is denying Christ as God. Even Abraham would not have eternal life if he denied Christ. Since he lived before Christ God declared him righteous because of his faith.

Let's look at the following quotes made by Jesus:

"I am the way and the truth and the life.

No one comes to the Father except through Me." ^{John 14:6 NIV}

"Whoever acknowledges Me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns Me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven." ^{Mat 10:32-33 NIV}

"Whoever believes in Him (Jesus talking of Himself) is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the Name of God's one and only Son." ^{John 3:18 NIV}

"Heaven can be entered only through the narrow gate! The highway to hell is broad, and its gate is wide enough for all the multitudes who choose its easy way. But the Gateway to Life is small, and the road is narrow, and only a few ever find it." ^{Mat 7:13-14 TLB}

The Gospel according to Jesus Christ tells us that heaven is available to anyone but only through Him. As a result, a minority, not a majority, of people will be saved. Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, and anyone else could be saved but won't be unless they declare Jesus as their Savior - then they're Christians. Some may find this unsettling but this is God's design and Jesus is specific about the requirements for eternal salvation.



The first time a Mass instituted the sacrifice of Jesus was around 500 AD. It was decided that the priest has the ability re-enact the sacrifice of Jesus and can transform the bread and wine into the actual flesh and blood of Jesus Christ. When giving the host (bread now body), the priest says "Body of Christ" and the recipient says "Amen." This was instituted to make sure that the recipient acknowledges that they agree this is the actual body of Christ. When taken, as the Catechism states, the recipient receives the forgiveness of sins and grace.

In the other Christian churches the view is quite different in that there is no sacrifice, forgiveness of sins are not linked to taking Communion and that grace is given by God only - not decided nor dispensed by man. They believe that "we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." ^{Heb 10:10 NIV} and that Jesus "had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins,..." ^{Heb 10:12 NIV}

As Jesus quoted, "I desire mercy, not sacrifice." ^{Mat 9:13 NIV} They believe that we don't need to sacrifice Jesus anymore because He has already fulfilled all of the sacrifice required. They no longer follow the Old Testament rituals but the New Covenant (agreement) with Jesus. Also, there are no New Testament references of any sacrificing (like sacrificing an animal) by Christians. The apostles taught at the temple but didn't sacrifice.

Instead, these churches share in Communion as bread and wine to remember Jesus. They often stress the needed attitude that the Apostle Paul tells us consider. "So if anyone eats this bread and drinks from this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, he is guilty of sin against the body and the blood of the Lord. That is why a man should examine himself carefully before eating the bread and drinking from the cup. For if he eats the bread and drinks from the cup unworthily, not thinking about the body of Christ and what it means, he is eating and drinking God's judgment upon himself; for he is trifling with the death of Christ. That is why many of you are weak and sick, and some have even died." ^{1 Cor 11:27-30 NIV}

Because of these two views on Communion (actual Body of Christ verses the bread as representation of Christ), the Catholic Church does not allow anyone other than Catholics to participate in Communion. Yet, the other Christian Churches allows any Christian to participate in Communion. It would be a great step toward Christian unity if the Catholic Church did share Communion because this is the one time that Christians should lay aside their differences.



Images of the Virgin Mary are appearing throughout the world. Hundreds of thousands of Catholics are gathering at these apparitions for prayer. I know the Biblical references that the Catholic Church uses to defend the status of Mary such as Genesis 3:15, John 19:26, Revelation 12:1. I have also learned the Biblical arguments against the cause of Mary as well. There are millions of people that stand on both sides of the issue. Also, I have read commentaries that stretch the interpretation of the Bible. If applied in the same manner to the whole Bible, we would be completely lost. Each word, each sentence, and each verse would have so many meanings that it would be impossible to stand on anything the Bible says. The translations of the Bible are accurate and we should not try to substitute a particular word to fit our need. God did not give us His Word to confuse us but to guide and teach us.

So how do we view the status of Mary? The Catechism considers her a co-redeemer (she works with Jesus to redeem – people go through her to Jesus but only Jesus has the ability to redeem). The Catechism also refers to her as an Advocate and a Mediator. The Bible says, "For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" ^{1 Tim 2:5} and "if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense - Jesus Christ," ^{1 John 2:1} (written by the Apostle John who Mary lived with after Jesus died - see John 19:27).

The Church does emphasize that Mary cannot take the role of Jesus even though the terminology used is very misleading – the titles of Redeemer, Mediator, and Advocate had been used exclusively for Jesus. Although these titles have been given to Mary through her own apparitions, the church has adopted them. The Church defends that these titles of Mary and the Marian Movement (believers of Mary) work with the salvation of Jesus Christ. Additionally, the Catechism points out that she is "a mother to us in the order of grace."¹ The debate continues because the status of Mary has steadily increased throughout the years. Some of the influence has resulted in the following belief:

The Bible tells us about the first miracle that Jesus performed at a wedding. We are told that His mother asked Him to help out when the wine ran out. "'Dear woman, why do you involve me?'

Jesus replied. 'My time has not yet come.' His mother said to the servants, 'Do whatever he tells you.'¹ John 2:5 NIV Then Jesus told the servants to fill the vases with water and He performed His first miracle. Because of this, the theory has developed that whatever Mary asks, Jesus will do.

Catholics are starting to say, "If you can't talk to Jesus, talk to His mother" or "Mary is our mother and will be a mother to you. Pray to her and she will answer your prayer." She is given credit for answered prayers even though we know all blessings come from God. When Pope John Paul II came to visit in our city, I spent the day with thousands of people to see him. I really enjoyed seeing so many people, Catholics and non-Catholics, gather in unity to see the pope. The pope has a motto that states "Totus tuus" meaning "Totally yours" or "All yours".

Years later, I was hurt and shocked when I found out his motto was not referring to Jesus Christ but Mary and that he attributed his life being saved by Mary rather than Jesus when he was shot in 1981. One year later, he visited the Fatima shrine to thank Mary for saving him. This is probably the first pope whose motto doesn't exalt Jesus.

It's difficult for the Catholic Church to say that Mary is not being elevated when there exists strong evidence that her position and influence is growing. After I studied the Bible, then I started studying the Catechism, the apparitions of Mary, and deeds that Catholics do for Mary. It was only then that I realized the extent to which Catholics glorify and worship Mary.

For example, a priest stated that Mary is letting people into heaven through the "back door" because she knows that Jesus will do whatever she asks of Him. In most churches there are more candles lit at the statue of Mary than Jesus. There are more prayers said to Mary than to Jesus (for every rosary, 53 of the 59 prayers are recited to Mary). The Catechism states that saying the rosary, "an 'epitome of the whole Gospel,'" expresses our devotion to the Mary.² Catholics are taught to kneel before Mary at the sites of apparitions and statues. Although it may sound petty, according to the Bible, kneeling signifies worship. But even more so, we should look at the apparitions of Mary that are the driving force that increases her position.

In the apparitions of Mary (places or people that Mary has appeared to) she often states that her purpose is to guide souls to Jesus. For example, in 1916 she instructed the three children to say the rosary and insert at the mysteries, "O my Jesus, forgive us our sins. Save us from the fires of hell." In 1990 at Medjugorje she said, "Open your hearts to Jesus! I am calling you to prayer and to complete surrender to God!" In fact the Medjugorje site of apparitions had many statements that glorified Jesus. This certainly gets approval of the Christian community as any priest or pastor sows the same seed. But there is the other side to the apparitions. The following are extracts from the thousands of pages that Mary has said through various people throughout the last 150 years.

Throughout history the apparitions of Mary were very quiet until 1830 when Mary appeared and showed an image of a medal to be made. It included the words "O Mary conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee." Twenty-four years later, Pope Pius IX proclaimed that Mary "was preserved immune from all stain of original sin." This was the first time anyone other than Jesus was declared sinless.²

In 1846 she predicted, "Rome will lose the faith and become the seat of the Antichrist."² She also said, "The priests, ministers of my Son, the priests, by their wicked lives, by their irreverence and their impiety in the celebration of the holy mysteries, by their love of money, their love of honors and pleasures, the priests have become cesspools of impurity. Yes, the priests are asking for vengeance, and vengeance is hanging over their heads. Woe to the priests and to those dedicated to God who by their unfaithfulness and their wicked lives are crucifying my Son again!" "There are no more generous souls, there is no one left worthy of offering a stainless sacrifice to the Eternal God for the sake of the world."²

1916 – "Offer unceasingly to the Most High prayers and sacrifices! Offer up everything within your power as a sacrifice to the Lord in an act of reparation for the sins by which He is offended." "Take and drink the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, horribly outraged by ungrateful men. Make reparation for their crimes and console your God."²

1917 - "Sacrifice yourselves for sinners and say often, especially when you make some sacrifice, 'O my Jesus it is for love of You, for the conversion of sinners and in reparation for the offenses committed against the Immaculate Heart of Mary.'²

1917 - "... they must build a chapel here in my honor, that I am the Lady of the Rosary; that they continue to say the rosary every day."²

1941 – "God wishes to establish the world devotion to My Immaculate Heart."³

1973 – "With my Son I have intervened so many times to appease the wrath of the Father. I have prevented the coming of calamities by offering Him the sufferings of the Son on the Cross... Prayer, penance and courageous sacrifices can soften the Father's anger."⁴

1974 – "I, the Mother of the Church, am personally intervening and initiating my work of salvation."²

1979 – "I have come from Heaven to reveal to you my plan in this struggle which involves everyone, marshaled together at the orders of two opposing leaders: the Woman clothed with the sun and the Red Dragon." "During these years, I myself am intervening, as the Woman clothed with the sun, in order to bring to fulfillment the Triumph of my Immaculate Heart which I have already begun through you, my beloved sons."²

1980 – "The Holy Spirit draws me, like a magnet, into the depths of the life of the love between the Father and the Son, and I become interiorly transformed and so assimilated to Him as to be His spouse..." "I will bring you full understanding of the Sacred Scriptures. ...The battle to which I am calling you is clearly described, and my great victory is foretold."²

1982 – "In many ways I have manifested myself, but my signs have been given no credence, my interventions, even the most extraordinary have been contested."²

1986 – "This is the moment for all to take refuge in me, because I am the Ark of the New Covenant." We are told to take refuge in the ark, which is the Immaculate Heart.²

1987 – Pope John Paul II wrote in his encyclical *Redemptoris Mater* that Marian apparitions signify Mary's final victory over Satan.

1989 – "...the time has come when I also, your heavenly leader, am signing, with my heavenly seal, all those who have consecrated themselves to my Immaculate Heart and formed part of my army. I am imprinting my seal on your foreheads with the most holy sign of the Cross of my Son Jesus."²

1990 – "You will see the greatest marvels everywhere, because the time of my maternal co-redemption has arrived." "I am the Mother of the Second Advent. I am preparing you for His new coming."²

1991 – "In the Name of Mary, Marxist communism, ... has been defeated in these countries. Not because of political movements or persons, but through my personal intervention, has your liberation finally come about."²

1991 – "My Pope, John Paul II..." "When this pope will have completed the task which Jesus has entrusted to him and I will come down from heaven and receive his sacrifice, all of you will be cloaked in dense darkness of apostasy..."² (according to the Catechism, apostasy means the rejection of the Christian faith.)

1992 – "By accepting the Protestant doctrine, people will hold that the Mass is not a sacrifice but only a sacred meal, that is to say, a remembrance of that which Jesus did at His Last Supper. And thus, the celebration of the Holy Mass will be suppressed. In this abolition of the daily sacrifice consists the horrible sacrilege accomplished by the Antichrist, which will last about three-and-a-half years, namely, 1,290 days."²

1973 & confirmed through later apparitions – "... if men do not repent and better themselves, the Father will inflict a terrible punishment on all of humanity. It will be a punishment greater than (the Great Flood). Fire will fall from the sky and will wipe out a great part of humanity, the good as well as the bad, sparing neither priests nor faithful. The survivors will find themselves so desolate that they will envy the dead. The only weapons which will remain for you will be the rosary and the Sign left by my Son." "one will see cardinals opposing cardinals, bishops against other bishops. The priests who venerate me will be scorned and opposed by their confreres..." "Pray very much the prayers of the rosary. I alone am able still to save you from calamities which approach. Those who place their confidence in me will be saved."⁵

Additionally, there are Marion apparitions that tell about the time of tribulation, many signs that we will all be able to see in the sky and on earth, that the Protestant Churches will not be able to withstand the temptations of Satan, and that she will hear your prayers and intervene on your behalf. Along with all of these apparitions, there have been many miracles and many foretold. I don't question the validity of the miracles because Jesus told us that there would be miracles to come.

This paints a varied picture of Mary's position. On one side, if you believe that she is what she claims to be, then she says you will be protected through the time of tribulation. Yet, the Bible

does not account for such a substantial role for her. On the other side, she has glorified herself by talking about her plan, her intervention, telling people to pray to her, and to depend upon her for guidance from deceptive and unworthy priest, and for protection and guidance to salvation.

She has taken many titles and abilities that were exclusively used by Jesus. She has strongly influenced the Catholic Church and confuses its congregation as to which priest, bishops, cardinals, or pope will be of the faith or demons. The Bible *does account* for this role to be fulfilled, including many miracles, but only as a false prophet that Jesus warned about. As a Catholic, I was required to believe that she is what she says she is or leave the Church. As the priest said, "If you don't believe it, you're not Catholic."

It is possible, through the Catholic Church, that Mary can be elevated. If the pope, who has ultimate authority on the interpretation of the Bible for the Catholic Church, decides that Mary can have this role, then Catholics must believe it. It all depends on one man – the pope.

Very few Catholics realize that Mary has claimed so much authority and few realize the impact that she has had on the Catechism and the Church. When I was young, I had visited and prayed at a site where the image of Mary formed on a window (similar to the occurrence on the window at the church in Florida). As a Catholic, I defended her thinking that I knew a lot about her. It is only after all of this research that I realize how little I knew and how wrong I was to defend her.

What would happen if we left Mary alone? What would the result be? We would pray directly to God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. Who saves? Jesus. "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." ^{Acts 4:12 NIV}
Who do we ask for things? God. "Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name." ^{John 15:16} Who do we ask for spiritual guidance? The Holy Spirit "will guide you into all truth." ^{John 16:13 NIV} The Trinity is completely suffice! The Trinity does it all!

What is prayer? Talking to God. Jesus told us it is not repeating words over and over again. He was very specific about it. "Don't recite the same prayer over and over as the heathen do, who think prayers are answered only by repeating them again and again." ^{Mat 6:7 TLB} So, what about asking other people to pray for you? Great! The New Testament gives us examples of people praying for others. When you ask others to pray for you, it shows a humbleness, a weakness, and a need on your part. It helps the people praying for you to grow more intimately with God. When the prayer is answered, all of the glory goes to God. No glory is given to the prayer group. All of the light is shown on God. The Bible says that the Holy Spirit glorifies Jesus and that Jesus glorifies God.

So how do we view signs? Jesus was annoyed with the people who kept looking for signs and said, "This is a wicked generation. It asks for a miraculous sign," ^{Luke 11:29 NIV} More importantly Jesus said, "For false christs and false prophets will appear and perform signs and miracles to deceive the elect - if that were possible." ^{Mark 13:22 NIV} The Bible tells us to always be prepared for we don't know the hour or the day. So, it doesn't matter because we are told to always be ready and waiting for Jesus to return.

Jesus entrusted the care of someone He loved dearly, Mary, to someone He dearly loved - John. John was leaning back against Jesus at the Last Supper as a loving brother would. John never mentions his own name in any of the books that he wrote and he was the only apostle mentioned at the foot of the cross with the women. John had a loving and serving personality. The type of person anyone would want his or her loving parents to be cared for. John wrote four more books after his book in the Gospel. Yet he never mentioned Mary, who was in his care. Additionally, Mary is only mentioned twice in the New Testament after the death of Jesus.

Mary is blessed. Her prayer of thanks is sincere and beautiful. Jesus told us, "But even more blessed (than Mary) are all who hear the Word of God and put it into practice." ^{Luke 11:28 TLB} If you exclude the apparitions and the influence they have had on the writings of the Catholic Church, you will find very little to support Mary in the substantial role she tells us that she has claimed. If you stand on the writings of Bible, it's impossible to support this substantial role.

What if I'm wrong? There is no reference in the Bible that I will be condemned because I stand on the promises and words of Jesus Christ and not Mary. Not once in the Bible does it condemn me for this. But asking for salvation through Mary can be strongly argued throughout the Bible. She is not God, the Father, God the Son or God the Holy Spirit.

Mary says that she is unable to protect me if I don't trust in her. Yet, I know I have salvation because the Bible is very specific on how to attain salvation. The most that could happen to me is to suffer for the sake of Christ. Jesus told us that this is a blessing and we would be rewarded for it! "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you..." ^{Mat 5:11 NIV} The apostle Paul writes "In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted..." ^{2 Tim 3:12 NIV}

Often Jesus points out that He is the only way. We know that Jesus didn't mislead us. We know that God has not changed His mind. God's truth is eternal and absolute. If not, then there is no basis for salvation for anyone. Trust the Bible. Paul writes in 2 Timothy 3:1-17 about the end times and states that the Bible is the truth to stand on. Trust Jesus. As Jesus said, "I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can them out of my hand." ^{John 10:28 NIV}

If you've made it through this section, read on – every issue from here on is easy.



I would love to see the Catholic Church have a renewed commitment in teaching its' congregation on God's name. I have heard throughout my life from many Catholics who proceed the word "Dammit" with "God" or use the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ, as an expression of anger or annoyance. This is contrary to God's Commandment – "You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name." ^{Exo 20:7 NIV} The Catechism stresses the various misuse of the Lord's name but many Catholics seem unaware or indifferent to it. If a little time were taken in Mass to remind the congregation of this, it would probably be very effective. Continuing education is important.

After I studied the Catechism, I was amazed how little Catholics, including me, knew about it. But with all of the changes to the Catechism, ongoing education seems to have lacked. As a

result, Catholics are not well informed as to what they are suppose to know. Even some of the Catholic Catechism teachers taught the children that some of the stories of Old Testament were just myths used for illustration and were not actually true. This has a devastating effect.

When talking to an adult friend, I pointed out that Jesus confirms the story of Jonah in the book of Matthew 12:39. The response from my friend was that Jesus was simply using this story because the people were familiar with it and that it really doesn't mean that it actually happened. We can't stand on God's promises or trust God if we don't believe His Word. We believe the miracles of Jesus but if we can't believe the miracles of the Old Testament, then we are questioning God's ability and insulting Him.



In the first two chapters of Genesis God creates the world. God created Adam and Eve on the sixth day. In the book of Exodus, God gave Moses instructions on Mount Sinai. One of them was:

"Six days you shall labor, but on the seventh day you shall rest; even during the plowing season and harvest you must rest." Exo 34:21 NIV

The word "day" is written exactly the same in both references as well as many other places. In Hebrew the word is YOWM. This is the exact word written in Old Testament Scriptures. This word day cannot be misinterpreted for a greater time period such as hundreds or thousands of years. Therefore it is absolutely impossible for the Theory of Evolution to be correct. You would have to deny the truth and correctness of the Bible to believe that man has evolved from an ape throughout thousands of years.

Although most scientists don't believe in the Bible's explanation of the existence of man, more and more of them are rejecting the Theory of Evolution. Most of the Christian community was upset when Pope John Paul II endorsed this theory. The Bible does not account for even the slightest validation of the Theory of Evolution. I hope that the Catholic Church reverses its' stance on this false theory.



Have you ever wondered about the Pharisees? We often look at them as the enemy because Jesus is so hard on them. What happened to them? We know that they didn't just get together one day and change everything. Look at what Jesus said to them:

"But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you lock people out of the kingdom of heaven. For you do not go in yourselves, and when others are going in, you stop them. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cross sea and land to make a single convert, and you make the new convert twice as much a child of hell as yourselves."

Mat 23:13-15 NRSV

These were the leaders of God's chosen people. But Satan had twisted their thoughts and interpretations throughout time. This was one of the greatest warnings to all churches. Satan's job is to get churches to negotiate or to accept teachings that are different than what the Bible is saying.

Jesus told us, "Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: 'These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.' You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men." ^{Mark 7:6-8 NIV} We are so blessed to be given this warning. Satan will do his job to destroy churches from within as well as from outside forces. If the church was founded on Biblical Christianity, then the church must not accept everything subsequent leaders wrote into church law, but depend solely on the Bible as pointed out in the above verse.

In the year 1545, the Council of Trent enacted that tradition is equivalent to the Bible (this includes the Catechism). Furthermore, in 1870, the pope was given complete authority over the interpretation of scripture. This is a lot of power for one man. But isn't this exactly what the Pharisees would have said? They believed that their High Council spoke for God.

One of these Pharisees talked with Jesus and spoke at his trial to help Jesus, and later requested to have Jesus taken down from the cross to be buried before the Sabbath. He searched for truth in Jesus and I am certain found salvation. Remember, the apostle Paul also was a Pharisee who was the leader of the mob that killed the first Christian martyr, Stephen. Paul was shown that the traditions were incorrect and went on to start the majority of the early Christian Churches. This influenced me towards a younger church rather than an older established church.

As a Catholic, I was upset when the Catholic Church would use wording in such a confusing way. I don't believe that it was ill-intended but it creates a sense that God is only reachable through the hierarchy of the Church. Even the latest Catechism is written in a wording that requires attorney-like skills to understand. Why make salvation so difficult when Jesus made it so easy?

Paul warned us, "See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ." ^{Col 2:8 NIV}



In the Old Testament, when an Israelite wanted forgiveness, he would give a specific animal to the Levite Priest. The priest performed forgiveness of sins through a sacrifice of this animal where blood was shed. Christ was sacrificed. His blood was shed.

In the Old Testament once a year on the Day of Atonement, a High Priest was allowed in the area called Holy of the Holies. This area was separated by a veil (a curtain) from the inner court. This was considered the only place where man could be in the presence of God. When Christ died on the cross, the veil was split in two. God showed the Israelites that anyone could now

approach God through Jesus Christ. The point is that the old covenant (promise of God) was fulfilled. A new covenant was established – salvation through the belief in Jesus Christ.

I'm not saying that this is what the Catholic Church taught but as a Catholic, I felt that I could only approach God through a priest. Of course, this is not what I have learned from the Bible. We don't need to call a priest day and night. We can call upon the Holy Spirit to support us. We can ask Jesus to mediate for us to our Father. We can talk directly to God and present our requests.

Whatever the request is, it might not be fulfilled or the tribulation may not be taken away but "the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds."
Phil 4:7 NIV



It would be a great justice to the Catholic congregation if the Church would take a very active and strong stand against drunkenness. Even if drinking doesn't lead to alcoholism, there is too often grief upon the family and society. Too many families have suffered life-long anguish because of a drunken moment. There are so many Biblical references that tell us to steer away from this.

For example, "Don't drink too much wine, for many evils lie along that path; be filled instead with the Holy Spirit and controlled by Him." EPH 5:18 TLB As a Catholic, I would say, "If we weren't suppose to drink, why did Jesus perform his first miracle turning water into wine?" That's still true. Drinking is okay. Drunkenness is not. Unfortunately, the more you drink, the less you feel that there is a problem with it.

Too many Catholic weddings result in being drunk and it is laughed about and encouraged, rather than disapproved. Ironically, most Catholics don't know that they are required to go to confession before receiving Communion again if they have become drunk. It's so unfortunate to know that priests, as well as the Catholic congregation, have fallen prey to alcoholism while the Church could be very aggressive and very successful to stop this grave problem.



God made eternal salvation very simple and very available. One of the criminals that was being crucified along with Jesus proved how simple salvation is. He wasn't given the gift of prophecy, the ability to speak in tongues, or had time for good works. He was not even baptized. He confessed his sin and believed that Jesus could save him (knowing that Jesus was God). Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise." Luke 23:43 NRSB

Notice how God gave us this wonderful example of how easy it is. Too often religion requires us to do many things before we can become a Christian. God made it simple. Man makes it difficult. This criminal went to heaven on that day. There was no Purgatory, only Paradise.

The spiritual gifts are wonderful to have and Baptism is important but you must receive salvation first - accept Jesus as your Savior. All other works and gifts are important for your growth in Christ as well as your reward in heaven.

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast." ^{Eph 2:8-9 NIV}

The Bible gives us a clear understanding to the order of eternal salvation:

First, it is by God's Grace that we are saved.

Second, your faith in Jesus.

Third, works glorify God, perfect you and determine your reward.

All three of these components are important. There are many verses to research on the subject. Here are just a few:

"Yes, all have sinned; all fall short of God's glorious ideal; yet now God declares us 'not guilty' (God's grace) of offending Him if we trust in Jesus Christ, who in His kindness freely takes away our sins." ^{Rom 3:23-24 TLB}

"So God's blessings are given to us by faith, as a free gift (God's grace); we are certain to get them whether or not we follow Jewish customs if we have faith like Abraham's, for Abraham is the father of us all when it comes to these matters of faith. That is what the Scriptures mean when they say that God made Abraham the father of many nations. God will accept all people in every nation who trust God as Abraham did." ^{Rom 4:16-17 TLB}

"So you see, it isn't enough just to have faith. You must also do good to prove that you have it. Faith that doesn't show itself by good works is no faith at all--it is dead and useless." ^{Jam 2:17 TLB}

"And if (salvation is) by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace." ^{Rom 11:6 NIV}

Heaven will be absolutely wonderful for everyone. Because of our works, different people will receive a different reward. As Jesus told us to "store up for yourselves treasures in heaven..." ^{Mat 6:20 NIV}



It is my hope that the Catholic Church teaches the congregation on the detriments of pride. Pride was a stumbling block to the Israelites and the Bible teaches us that pride comes before a fall (referring to a Satan with his pride and arrogance was made to fall ^{see 1 Tim 3:6-7}).

God can use anyone or anything to speak for His glory. So we have no reason to be filled with pride. The Bible teaches us with the illustration of Balaam's talking donkey where God used a donkey to speak to Balaam and saved his life. If God can use a donkey for his purpose, He certainly doesn't need a man full of pride.

Pride made me stumble in my growth with Jesus. Because of my pride in the Catholic Church and in my family, I was unwilling to question my religion or my faith. My pride allowed me to defend the Church regardless of what it believed. But God broke my pride and His Spirit taught me to grow in His Word and to depend on Him not man.



As a Catholic I would say, "How can God be so cruel? How can He allow so much?" There is still so much that I don't understand but know that we have no right to question God's justice (if we were to receive justice, we would all have eternal death – living forever in hell). This is pointed out in the book of Job – a book that gives you a fuller understanding of God.

God showed us that Job had no right to demand or question anything. God answers Job's complaints from chapters 38-42 in the book of Job. Job realizes that he doesn't have the right to complain to God at all and that he is not worthy to answer anything. This is a man who just lost all of his children, all of his wealth, and has been made very ill for the Glory of God.

It's not that God didn't love Job. God had a specific purpose for Job just as He does for everyone. God does have feelings and does care for us just like Job. Attributes of His personality are shown throughout the Bible. We can read of God's joy, anger, and anguish - He is even comical in some situations.

He knows everything that is going on. As Jesus told us, "Not one sparrow (What do they cost? Two for a penny?) can fall to the ground without your Father knowing it. And the very hairs of your head are all numbered." Mat 10:29-30 TLB

But what did God ever do for us? Everything. He is 100% pure but will not embrace a sinful man. So He took part of Himself, Jesus, and allowed His death. As Jesus told us, "The greatest love is shown when a person lays down his life for his friends." John 15:13 TLB The pure sinless blood that Jesus shed cleansed and removed our sin. Jesus made us pure so that we can embrace God and be with Him in heaven. All of this is because God loves us.

If you want to insult God and receive eternal death, deny what God did for us through Jesus Christ. If you want eternal life, without exception - no matter what you have done, declare Jesus Christ as the only person that can save you from eternal death and accept this free gift of salvation. "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Jesus Christ." Rom 8:1 NIV In other words, you will not be condemned to eternal death but will have eternal life.



As a Catholic, I was never certain of going to heaven. If anyone said that they knew that they were going to heaven, I was angry at their certainty. What arrogance I thought. How can anyone know for sure that they are going to heaven?

The answer is in the Bible. As you read the book of John, Jesus used so many examples to tell us of eternal life through Him. Jesus is our Savior and is God. He knows who is given to Him. He

knows that we will sin but He died to cleanse us for all sins – including sins that we haven't committed yet. If we are true Christians, we try not to sin and try to be obedient but we will sin. The nature of man is to fail but God's grace is beyond our nature.

Jesus said, "Let not your heart be troubled. You are trusting God, now trust in Me. There are many homes up there where my Father lives, and I am going to prepare them for your coming. When everything is ready, then I will come and get you, so that you can always be with me where I am. If this weren't so, I would tell you plainly." ^{John 14:1-3 TLB}

If we can't believe the last line in the above verse, then we don't trust Jesus. I know that Jesus isn't a liar so believe, without question, in His truth.

Although it may sound presumptuous, I know that I will go to heaven. This is probably God's greatest promise to us and God never breaks His promise. "... He has given us eternal life and that this life is in His Son (Jesus). So whoever has God's Son has (eternal) life; whoever does not have His Son, does not have (eternal) life." ^{1 John 5:11-12} This verse leaves us no room for doubt. Take your time and study it.



What about Purgatory? Fortunately, I've never been to a Catholic funeral where a priest has told the surviving members that the deceased is now in a state of torment. Rather, heaven is discussed. So where did Purgatory come from?

Purgatory is never mentioned in the Bible. The doctrine was created by the Church based on the New Testament references in 1 Corinthians 3:15 and 1 Peter 1:7.

Gold is tested and purified through fire. Fire is used to extract the impurities from pure gold. Peter writes that trials are sent by God to see if your faith is genuine. Pure faith like pure gold is derived from this process - for gold it's fire, for us it's trials. "These trials are only to test your faith, to see whether or not it is strong and pure. It is being tested as fire tests gold and purifies it - and your faith is far more precious to God than mere gold; so if your faith remains strong after being tried in the test tube of fiery trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day of His return." ^{1 Pet 1:7 TLB}

The reference in 1 Corinthians 3:15 uses the example of fire to reveal heavenly reward. If "wood, hay, and straw" are items used to build the foundation, they quickly burn and leave ash when fire is applied - there's no reward left. Jesus told us, "Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven." ^{Mat 6:1 NIV}

Instead Paul is instructing us to build on a foundation using items that can withstand fire like gold, silver, and precious stones. These items may melt but will not disintegrate. These works are ones that are pleasing to God and will return in a heavenly reward. "If the work is burned up, the builder will suffer loss; the builder will be saved, but only as through fire." ^{1 Cor 3:15 NSRV} This tells

us that we have salvation if Jesus is our Savior (see verse 11). Yet our heavenly rewards will suffer a loss if we've built on items like wood, hay, and straw.

Because of the last three words, "as through fire," the doctrine of Purgatory was created. Because of these three words, the Church has decided that every sin (even the small ones) must be paid for by suffering through a tormenting fire to purify the soul. The Catechism allows for prayers by the living to shorten the time length that the deceased spends in purgatory torment and allows indulgences (financial payment for others to pray for the dead).

Not only did Paul write, "as through fire," he also wrote, "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." ^{Rom 6:23 TLB} John writes, "...the blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from all sin." ^{1 John 1:7 NIV} Since we're purified from sin by the blood of Jesus Christ, how can we have sin to pay for. If we have sin to pay for, then the wages of sin is death - not purgatory. As a human being, we naturally believe that we must pay for something, but that is the real mystery of grace. It is a free gift from God through Jesus Christ.

Thankfully, I can say, "When I die, I will go straight to heaven." I will be with Jesus as soon as I die ('absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.' ^{2 Cor 5:8 KJV}). When I die, pray for the living, not for me because I will be in heaven as Jesus has promised me. Why pray for someone who is in heaven and full of joy? This is where I'll be.



Who changed the Catholic Church? This is one of the greatest mysteries to me. Doctrines like purgatory, the conversion of the Eucharist from bread to flesh, the elevation of Mary, indulgences, praying the rosary, etc. were not part of the original Catholic Church. Even after Five Hundred years after the Church was formed, most of these doctrines weren't practiced.

When I was a child, it was a sin to receive Communion if we hadn't fasted for the proper amount of time. Now that no longer applies. A sin no longer is a sin? This is just one of many reversals that Catholics have experienced throughout the ages.



In conclusion, I know that there are so many Catholics that have a true heart and want to know God. Some are trying to do good works for God but are feeling frustrated. Some are seeking God but the Church is not fulfilling them or even worse they have quit trying. Some have fallen into a routine of just going to Church every Sunday believing that this will fulfill their obligation. Some have quit practicing altogether.

As you have read from this book, I didn't write this from a standpoint of *self-righteousness*, anger or with ill- intentions. It was written from a *Biblically-righteous* viewpoint and written out of love for my fellow Catholics with genuine concern about their future and the future of the Catholic Church.

If we look at the apparitions, whether they're from heaven or hell, it puts Catholics in a difficult situation. Since Mary has stated in her apparitions that the Catholic Church will split and the official Catholic Church will be the home of the future Anti-Christ, Catholics will have to choose sides as the Church divides on the authority of Mary. They have to either follow the Marion Movement or follow the official Catholic Church.

I hope this book will be helpful to Catholics to decide their eternal life on a Biblical basis. Catholic and non-Catholic alike are failing to use Biblical guidelines. There's a great need to apply daily life's situations with a simple test - "What does the Bible say?"

Finally, I hope that if pride has become a stumbling block, that it be removed. I pray that Catholics and non-Catholics read the Bible on a daily basis for God's guidance and assurance, and to fill them with the depth's of the Holy Spirit.

"... not seeking my own profit,

but the profit of many,

that they may be saved." ^{1 Cor 10:33}



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Abbreviations

TLB	-	The Living Bible
NRSV	-	New Revised Standard Version
NCV	-	New Century Version
NIV	-	New International Version
KJV	-	King James Version

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