

Stealing the Keys to Heaven

Dan Dougherty

* Is the Roman Catholic Church the "True Church" founded upon St. Peter by Jesus Christ, of which "***...the gates of hell shall never prevail?***"

* Is the "Mother Church" the institution which safeguards the faith for all Christians, "...outside of which there is no salvation?"

* Is the Church of Rome proclaiming the "Good News" of salvation or has the message been lost among man-made traditions and formalistic rituals?

* Find out the steadfast answers in this highly controversial, no-holds-barred book!

"Stealing the Keys to Heaven"

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Dedication

In memory of those who refused to compromise their Baptist faith and principles and as a result, lost their lives. To the praise and glory of the Lord, it was through these brave souls, the mantle of revelation regarding salvation was preserved. Without their faithfulness, we would not have had the unhindered opportunity to know and accept the true Gospel of Jesus Christ!

Foreword

After my true conversion to Jesus Christ I did something I neither desired nor was encouraged to do as a Roman Catholic -- read the Bible from cover-to-cover. I discovered passages which clearly contradicted the official doctrines and established traditions I had been taught by the Roman Catholic Church. After 28 years of being a fundamentalist Christian, I felt compelled by God that now was the time to write this highly controversial book.

The first of many critical questions which will surface are: "What credentials does this man possess, warranting

his ability to write about such weighty and complex spiritual matters?" "Has he earned any degrees of higher learning?" "How many years has he spent in the ministry as a pastor or missionary?" "Has he published any other recognized works?" My answer to these and any other similar questions is this: I do not possess credentials which can be put on a piece of paper, placed on a wall or kept in a box. But the original apostles chosen by Jesus Christ were for the most part, considered common, average citizens by the societal standards of their day. In the biblical book "Acts of the Apostles," we get a glimpse of St. Peter and St. John being looked down upon by the Jewish religious leaders, while both of them attempted to preach the Gospel. Those religious men of authority not only questioned this "new" doctrine being heralded by Peter and John, they considered both of them to be **"unlearned and ignorant men"** (Acts 4:5-13).

So, I am in very good company. Heavenly wisdom is not derived from mere intelligence or captured by attending religious institutions of higher learning. It is a gift from God given only to those who are humble in spirit, highly receptive to His will and gently guided by His Spirit. Jesus confirmed this when He stated: **"I thank thee O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes"** (Matthew 11:25). St. Paul, an exception to this ideal, was a man of higher learning.

Yet, he understood and wrote of this concept: ***"But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty"*** (I Corinthians 1:27).

The purposes of this book are two-fold: It is a warning toward those who claim to represent Jesus Christ, yet hide the "Keys to Heaven" from those earnestly seeking to enter therein. May God allow these "Pharisees" to see the error of their ways and come to true repentance. More importantly, may the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob use this book to convince and save to the uttermost, those who are unwarily lost in the wilderness of spiritual deception. My prayer is that their eyes are opened to the plain and bold simplicity of the true Gospel of Jesus Christ!

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Chapter 1

I Once Was Catholic

Born in Evanston, Illinois and baptized at St. Nicholas' Catholic Church, I was raised in pretty much the stereotypical middle class American Catholic family. The Catholic family who were not "Bible-thumpers," but the type who attended Mass on a regular basis and believed in the "Golden Rule."

While I was still a toddler, we moved downstate to a home in the country. Since we were living in the "boonies," I attended a secular school, so like good Catholics my parents enrolled me in Saturday Catechism classes. In

addition, I attended Mass on Sunday, eventually completing my First Communion and Confirmation. During my eight years of religious instruction, I was taught about the nature of God, what He expects of us, what the Commandments were, how to keep them and so forth. I felt fairly secure in my relationship with the Lord, living my life the same as every other average Roman Catholic. I was not devout or holy by any means, but did my best to follow the Commandments, attend Mass regularly and pray to God for guidance and support. I truly believed I knew and loved God until my life took a slow, but dramatically different path.

Joining the Air Force right out of high school, just shy of my 18th birthday, I ended up at a base in Abilene, Texas -- a haven for those "Bible-thumping" Baptists, who seem to have a church on every other block! Up to this point in my life, having new-found freedom from mom and dad's rule, I had only attended Mass a couple of times.

As the months went by, I became best friends with a fellow airman and he was a member of one of those "Bible-thumping" Baptist churches. He would talk to me about Christ and "being saved," inviting me to attend his church. I would politely fend off his witnessing and invitations by raising the shield of: "That's nice, but I'm Catholic." I thought about this recent transformation in my friend's life, finding it a bit odd because he was a very nominal Christian, if even one at all, when he first arrived

at the air base. While I was a bit curious, I was also leery at why he had become such a "Jesus Freak." Then my roommate, who had been an avid searcher of the Bible started in on me, talking about the word of God from time to time. In hindsight, I now know that the Lord sent them my way, planting seeds that were about to be watered by a book which came to my attention.

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I do not remember who gave me the book, which was written by a well-known and respected Christian author. The topics centered on biblical prophecy, which he explained using several books from the Bible, such as "Ezekiel", "Daniel" and "The Revelation of St. John." He brought future events to light, which will be the last days of mankind's rule over the earth, culminating in the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, when He will return to establish His Kingdom.

For the first time in my life, the Bible became the living book God intended it to be, and it was applicable to my insignificant daily life. As I read it, I wondered why the Catholic Church avoided these portions of Holy Scripture? I strained my memory banks, trying to recall a teaching by a nun or a sermon by a priest warning us that mankind in his lost and sinful state, was highly displeasing to God.

And His patience would eventually expire, unleashing frightful and disturbing events in a magnitude unknown by this present world.

In the final chapter of this book, the author explained the "Good News": God's plan of salvation and redemption. For the *first time* in my life, I immediately understood I was lost and out of favor with God. I knew I was doomed because I had been relying upon my own merits to get me into Heaven. I *knew* with absolute certainty, that despite being baptized, completing First Communion and Confirmation, attending Mass, going to Confession and "believing" in Jesus Christ, I was going to die lost and separated from God for all eternity! I would have been banished to a place named "Hell," where Jesus said there is "pain, weeping and darkness." With an oppressing realization of this, I put that book aside and confessed my sins of disobedience and unbelief, calling upon Jesus Christ to save me. From that point until this very day, I felt a peace from and a regard for God that has never left me. I saw myself and the world around me from a completely different and fresh perspective.

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I attended Mass at the base chapel the following Sunday, observing the service and listening to the sermon with a new-found intensity, desiring to know more about

God. To say the least, the entire service was lacking in excitement and conviction. In no way did it satisfy my spiritual hunger to be closer to the Lord, who had just drawn me to Him and given me eternal life. So, I ventured off on my own, bought a pocket-size New Testament and read it for the *very first time*. Every chance I had, I gleaned those precious passages, soaking up "God's Letter to Mankind." I quickly learned about His personality and thoughts, what His expectations were of us and what our responsibilities were toward Him.

I told my best friend about my conversion and he invited me to attend his church again, assuring me I would be glad I went. This time I accepted and it turned out they were hosting a "Revival Meeting," with a guest minister preaching throughout the week. That elderly man spoke about the joy and beauty of Heaven one night, then the agony and isolation of Hell the next. At the conclusion of each service, an "invitation" was given for all in attendance to come forward for several reasons: Accept Christ's offer of salvation, get one's Christian life back on track, pray for a specific need or request membership in the church. On the final day of the revival, I went forward to publicly acknowledge my conversion and requested to be accepted as a member. That very Sunday, I was baptized at Trinity Baptist Church, never to return to the Catholic faith I had been taught to trust for salvation.

Less than a year later, I was transferred to Thule Air Base, Greenland, where I had ample time to read the entire Bible from cover-to-cover. I also joined an interdenominational Bible study group, noticing the Catholics had their own separate class. In addition, I read several books by Christian authors which covered multiple topics on Christian doctrine. I began to realize through my "spiritual quests," that many of the doctrines and traditions of the Roman Catholic Church either were not contained within the Bible, or they clearly contradicted the word of God.

After my one year stint in Greenland, I returned stateside to a different base in Texas. I joined another independent, fundamental Baptist church. Two years later, I was sent back to Thule, Greenland! While most people would have been depressed over this prospect, I was elated because I knew it was God's perfect will for my life.

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With my growing discoveries and concerns over blatant differences between official Catholic dogma and the commonly accepted doctrine of Baptists and other fundamentalist Christians, I could not refrain from visiting

the Catholic chaplain at his office. As I presented these doctrinal issues, he would refer to Church writings, traditions and an isolated verse or two from the Bible. I only responded with multiple passages from the Old and New Testaments of the Bible. On my third visit, and what would be our last encounter, this chaplain became so flustered and agitated, he got up from his chair and after pacing back and forth, he told me not to come to him any more with my questions. I agreed, realizing we were *never* going to see eye-to-eye on any major tenets of Christian faith. We never spoke directly to each other again for the remainder of our tours of duty.

The more I prayerfully studied the Bible, read Christian literature, participated in Bible studies and attended fundamental Baptist churches, the more apparent it became to me, that the Roman Catholic Church was playing a deceitful game with the souls of men. While the Catholic Church correctly upholds some of the major doctrines of the Christian faith, She perverts the most essential doctrine of all -- salvation. Salvation is the central and chief doctrine of Christianity. Without a correct perspective of salvation, all other biblical doctrines are futile and useless. Salvation is the reason Jesus Christ, the Son of God came to live the perfect and sinless life we could not. Salvation is the reason our Savior had His innocent blood shed to the point of His death, so our sins could be covered. Salvation is the key to re-establishing

our broken relationship with God. Salvation is the key to inheriting eternal life, so we can live in a place called "Heaven." Without salvation having been made possible, absolutely nothing in this life or the life to come will have counted or mattered! With no hope of salvation, It would have been better to never have been born!! Salvation is the single most important and pressing issue you and I will ever face in this present life. You must settle this issue before you step out into eternity. My hope and prayer is that this book will help you sort out and clarify what you must personally do to inherit eternal life.

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Chapter 2

The Early Church(es)

Church history according to whom? As my critics will point out, each Christian denomination tends to present their "slanted" view of Church history. Each attempts to paint their viewpoint in a more authoritative and positive light than the next. To squelch that criticism, I avoided both the Catholic bookstores, as well as the Evangelical. I went straight to the local library and checked out multiple books (listed in the Bibliography) on the topic, having read only

one of them before. I have put forth every effort possible to present Church history fairly and objectively. The books I used in my research were written by scholars and historians, many of whom were neither of any specific denomination nor even professing Christians. They simply presented historical facts without prejudice. This only adds to my credibility of detailing an objective overview of true Church history.

As we begin with the "early" or "primitive" churches, we need to address the definition of the word "church." In our westernized mindset, when we see or hear "church," we visualize a specific building of worship or an organization, such as the Catholic Church. The word "church" used 115 times in the New Testament was translated from the original Greek text word "ekklesia." In classical Greek, this word translated into English simply means "assembly summoned by a crier." So, the correct intent and definition of the word "church" is: "assembly called forth or summoned." As you read the Bible, exchanging the word "church" with "assembly called forth," you quickly grasp the true intent of what our Lord meant, not the meaning you have been led to believe by those misrepresenting the definition for their own gain. Substituting the word "assembly" for "church" gives us the perspective of a fluid group of believers, instead of a specific location, building or city.

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The concept of a set aside building of worship was not a widespread practice until the 4th century. The first assemblies of Christians met in private homes in Jerusalem, while it was still under Roman rule. Church organization and worship services of these early assemblies were relatively simple and forthright, as portrayed in the biblical book "Acts of the Apostles." Services consisted of reading passages from available, but scarce copies of scripture and a teacher expounding on those verses. Psalms were sung and prayers were made for both believers and those outside the fold. Opportunity was made for anyone who felt they had something to add, to speak. The service concluded with the "Lord's Supper" being observed in the fashion of a meal, much in the same way Jesus celebrated solemnly with His apostles just prior to His death.

Membership into the local assembly was afforded to those who had repented of their sinful life, received the Holy Spirit, made a public affirmation that Jesus was the only Lord and underwent full immersion baptism.

The primary focus of the first church (assembly called forth) in Jerusalem was the furtherance of the Gospel (Good News), through public preaching and the

establishment of more churches in other parts of the world: ***"And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven..."*** ***"And at that time there was great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles."*** ***"Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word."*** (Acts 2:5, 8:1, 8:4). Multiple converts out of every nation had major roles in preaching the Gospel and establishing churches, contrary to the popular belief it was only the original apostles who accomplished these tasks. The founding of these churches progressed from Jerusalem to Antioch, then Ephesus and Rome, and on to Africa and Arabia. It is a little-known fact that by 225 A.D., approximately twenty churches existed in Persia, which is modern-day Iraq and Iran.

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As for the Catholic claim that St. Peter established the Christian Church at Rome, there is no concrete historical evidence that proves this to be accurate or true. Pure church history actually reveals that neither Peter nor Paul set foot in Rome until multiple Christian communities were

already in existence. By 49 A.D., fifteen years before Peter was executed for his faith, 50,000 Jewish converts were present and a dozen churches existed throughout Italy, including the towns of Naples and Puteoli. Emperor Tiberius Claudius regarded those Christians to be such nuisances, with their doctrine of "One God," he expelled a majority of them from Rome. Those evicted included Priscilla and Aquila, who are mentioned by St. Paul in his letters.

Roman Catholic historical records give us the impression Peter and Paul had free reign in confirming the affairs of the churches in Rome. Unaltered historical facts show the majority of Christian leaders who ended up in Rome, did not go there by their own free will. They were taken to this city to be tried for treason against the Roman Emperor, then executed! St. Paul, who had written his letter to the Roman Christians prior to traveling to Rome was an example of this. He ended up there because he had been accused by the Pharisees and High Priest of "sedition and profaning the temple" (Acts 24:5-6). As it was his right as a Roman citizen, Paul appealed his case, so it could be heard and decided by Caesar. He was transported to Rome under guard as a prisoner. Once he arrived, he was kept under house arrest until his case could be heard. In the biblical book "Acts of the Apostles," we are informed that Christians came to where Paul resided and he was: ***"preaching the kingdom of God,***

and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him" (Acts 28:30-31). Paul remained a captive until his execution two years later.

A noteworthy item one notices of early church history is there is no mention in either the New Testament or historical records, the following:

- * The presence of icons or statues of Jesus, Mary or the saints.

- * The use of incense, candles or beads during services.

- * The custom of praying to departed believers.

- * The confessing of sins in private to a priest.

- * The offering of a "bloodless sacrifice" in the form of Christ's body and blood by a priest.

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I could not find even an inkling of the practices we normally associate with Roman Catholic rituals, being utilized by the "early" or "primitive" churches!

The first glimpse or hint of the Church of Rome being considered superior to all other Christian churches in the Roman Empire, surfaced in 180 A.D. Church father,

Ireneus of Lyons, wrote: "As a matter of necessity, all other churches should give precedence to the Church at Rome." In his opinion, the Roman Church was the lead authority for all Christians, because She had a "line of Apostolic succession" and She had preserved their original traditions. In 225 A.D., St. Hippolytus reinforced this theory and set the framework for Catholic liturgy still in use in their services to this very day.

A couple of decades later, a group of dissident Christians called "Novationists" surfaced, who had been named after their leader, Bishop Novatus. They had many disagreements with the Church of Rome, such as refusing to allow anyone who succumbed to Emperor Decius' decree to sacrifice to pagan idols, back into the fellowship the Church. They also disagreed with Rome over infant baptism, re-baptizing their converts via full immersion after the example of Jesus, John the Baptist and the original apostles. During this time of dissension, Bishop Gregory of Pontus approved the merging of pagan feasts with the festivals of Christian martyrs. By this time, the practice of praying at the tombs and graves of those martyrs was well entrenched into society, despite clear scriptural (Old Testament) prohibitions against praying to or communicating with the dead. These "Christians" rationalized that since those martyrs died in service to God, it was permissible to show devotion to them. They also believed the deceased martyrs could ward off evil

and transmit the powers of God directly to them. This appears to be the beginning of pagan practices being adopted, validated and "Christianized" to satisfy converts who wanted to claim the name of Christ, while retaining their former pagan rituals and traditions. Their conversion to Christ was superficial, in which they gave lip service to Him, but never fully surrendered their hearts and lives to God.

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St. Paul and the other New Testament writers warned the Christians of the 1st century that false teachers and prophets were already cropping up. If this was a problem while the original apostles were still alive, how much worse do you suppose this dilemma would become as they died off? That is why God, in His infinite wisdom, inspired them to put their doctrines in writing. This way, we are able to recognize false teachings as soon as they appear on the horizon. We are thereby enabled to steer clear of them and warn others not to be misled.

As we will see in the next few chapters, false doctrines will eventually infiltrate and become steadfastly rooted in Christianity, which is to remain so until the end of this world age and the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. While this sounds disheartening, there were true Christians in

Rome. They were looked down upon by the general Roman citizenry and considered to be haters of the human race. They were despised for teaching and preaching there was only one God, and salvation could only be obtained through His Son, Jesus Christ. Pagan Romans derided them for abstaining from public amusements, refusing to celebrate pagan festivals and the wearing of modest apparel. The true believers of the early churches were regarded by the general populace as being strange and peculiar, just as they are in this present age.

Persecutions of Christians occurred at the outset of their appearance in Rome and Italy. This started with Emperor Nero Claudius in 54 A.D. and continued for nearly three hundred (300) years under successive caesars. Persecution was at its severest level in the year 249, when Emperor Decius issued an edict that all citizens were to offer sacrifices to the Roman gods, for which they received a "Certificate of Compliance." This left Christians with the following choices:

1. Comply with the order
2. Bribe an official to obtain the certificate
3. Leave the country
4. Have one's property confiscated and be sold into slavery
5. Suffer the ultimate penalty -- DEATH!

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The death penalty law was eventually modified and applied to anyone who attended Christian church services.

In the year 311, Emperor Galerius admitted the campaign to eliminate the Empire of all Christians, had failed. This three hundred year period had been a time of unfathomable misery for those who claimed the name of Jesus Christ, but peace was on the horizon for all Christians...

Chapter 3

Hail Constantine, Protector of the Church

The next noteworthy milestone in Christian history occurred in the early 300's, when wars were fought over who would control the destiny of the Roman Empire. The decision was finally made when Emperor Constantine defeated Licinius at Adrianpole. Constantine attributed his victories to the Christian God, having observed a vision

several years earlier of a fiery cross in the sky, with the inscription "Under this sign, you will conquer." After this vision, he claimed conversion to Christianity, but continued to practice the old pagan Roman rituals in his private life. He gave standing orders that he was not to be baptized until he was on his death bed. He believed the sacrament would cleanse him of his sins and afford him entry into Heaven.

In the year 325, he officiated the Council of Nicaea, the first ecumenical meeting of the churches within the Roman Empire. He advised the attending bishops he would be a patron of the "Church of Christ," giving endowments of land to the Church of Rome. He also awarded influential positions within government -- senator, governor and judge, to Catholic clergy. The framework for the marriage of the State with the Church had been successively laid.

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Many Catholic leaders, such as Bishop Eusebius of Caesarea, believed this marriage signaled God's plan for the redemption of mankind was in full force. He went so far as to say Constantine had fulfilled the prophecy in

Isaiah: ***"...swords shall be beaten into plowshares..."***

That prophecy, as anyone with minimal training in the interpretation of scripture well knows, has yet to be completed, because it refers to the Lord Jesus Christ and His eventual reign upon this earth.

After Constantine's death, the power and influence of the Roman Catholic Church increased, assisted by the support of successive emperors. Theodosius reinforced pro-Catholic laws in 395 A.D. He enacted legislation stating only those who converted to Christianity could be lawful members of government. Valentinian II ordered the destruction of all pagan temples and shrines in the year 345, for the western portion of the Roman Empire. He also issued an edict that all were to obey the Bishop of Rome. Three years later, Theodosius II started enforcing pro-Catholic laws for the eastern part of the Empire. He also ruled the death penalty could be brought against anyone who denied the doctrine of the Trinity, or those who re-baptized Christian converts.

The Church of Rome garnered 1,000 years of peace, with only minimal resistance from dissident Christian groups, such as the Alexandrians and Donatists. Despite their opposition and protests towards the Roman Church, their objections fell upon the deaf ears of both emperors and the masses.

Capitalizing upon government approval and support of Her actions, the Roman Catholic Church gained control

over both peoples and kings, in spiritual as well as temporal matters. Under cleric direction, Christian converts took over existing pagan temples and hallowed sites, turning them into places of prayer to dead Christian martyrs. Stories surfaced of miracles attributed to relics previously worn or carried by those saints. Charms blessed in the name of Jesus were widespread and highly cherished. Superficial converts were adopting Christianity with the expectation that the Christian God would do the same as, or even better than their old gods at meeting their needs. Catholic priests, either through ignorance of the scriptures, or just plain apathy, did little to correct the superstitious thoughts and practices of their flocks. Compromise with the surrounding pagan elements was allowed to go unchallenged. This was the orthodoxy of the Catholic Church then and it remains that way until this very day.

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By the 400's, Catholicism had strayed far from the principles and doctrines of the original apostles. The plan of salvation and redemption was hidden behind, then buried under worthless rituals and man-made traditions, which were not supported by Holy Scripture. As the centuries progressed, the simple plan of salvation became

so twisted and perverted, it was no longer recognizable and easily understood by the very people Jesus came to save!

Chapter 4

Dark Ages, Darker Hours

The next significant period in Christian history (476-1450 A.D.) was given the label "The Dark Ages." From the secular viewpoint, it was a time of widespread illiteracy and lack of cultural stimulation. Due to inept and corrupt government, oppression and abuse of the people was rampant. Poverty, starvation and disease was common, with no apparent end in sight.

From the Christian perspective, the Dark Ages represented the illiteracy of the common man, coupled with unyielding control of the word of God, which squelched the spreading of the Gospel. The scriptures were only available in Latin or Greek, which was neither spoken nor read by the majority of those living in the Roman Empire. The Catholic Church preferred to keep it

that way, claiming they had a commission from the Lord to keep the printed word of God from being mishandled by the ignorant masses. Only a privileged few had access to entire copies of the Old and New Testaments.

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During this 1,000 year period, the Roman Catholic Church still retained the blessing of the governmental rulers, such as Emperor Justinian. He was extremely aggressive in promoting Christianity, outlawing pagan cult rituals and Jewish religious practices. Justinian would eventually issue an edict that all citizens must receive instruction in the Catholic faith and be baptized. Failure to do so would result in the confiscation of personal property. Later, the laws were strengthened, so that anyone caught practicing pagan rituals would be subject to the death penalty. Catholic clergy, emboldened by Justinian's rulings, goaded Christian mobs into destroying both pagan temples and Jewish synagogues. They were also directed to destroy personal property and homes belonging to

these "heretics." While Justinian was carrying out the "work of God," the general population was subjected to outrageous taxes, massive food shortages and death by disease, such as bubonic plague. The people turned to the Church for help and the archbishops, exempt from paying taxes, would act as mediators and protectors of the poor. They accomplished little for them, while simultaneously increasing their wealth and power.

By the time the 5th Ecumenical Council convened in the year 553, pagan practices and rituals had pretty much ceased. The Christianization of rulers such as Justinian and his anti-pagan legislation was considered a major triumph of the Church over the State. On the surface, it appeared the Church was well on its way of bringing forth the Kingdom of God on Earth. However, the outlawing and punishment of practices contrary to Christianity brought forth superficial conversions. Thousands upon thousands succumbed to threats and badgering and accepted Christ with their lips, but not their hearts.

To make Christianity more palatable to the masses and administrate speedy conversions, the Catholic Church hierarchy slowly introduced and "Christianized" the old pagan mystery religions' beliefs and practices. The desire for a "Queen of Heaven" was transferred to "Mary, the Mother of God." Since the old religions had multiple gods instead of one, that desire was accommodated by praying

to "the Saints." The ancient pagan cults had statues and icons to give them a feeling of tangible deities.

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The Catholic Church disallowed such practices for several centuries, but the people brought them into use, while the priests turned a blind eye to it. Pope Leo III stepped in and issued an edict in the year 725, forbidding the use of any statues or icons. His successor, Constantine V called a council in 753 A.D. and also condemned their use. When images and objects were destroyed per papal orders, riots by furious Catholics broke out. In the year 787, the use of icons was approved by the Second Council of Nicaea. They did an about-face and ruled Christians should "kiss and honor sacred images and statues of Jesus, Mary, angels and the Saints," The council boldly declared any who opposed this Church tradition should be "cursed and driven from the Church."

These edicts were in clear violation of our Lord's commandments to His people, the Israelites, after their release from Egyptian captivity. The first and foremost of the Ten Commandments was: ***"Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image , or any likeness of any thing that is***

in the heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God..." (Exodus 20:3-5). Pope Leo III and Constantine V knew the scriptures. Both claimed direction and guidance from the Holy Spirit when they ruled statues, icons and the like should not be used in worship. The 2nd Council of Nicaea also claimed this same guidance from God, when they declared icons, images and statues were to be venerated. So someone is sadly mistaken, because both cannot be right. And they cannot blame God, because He is never confused and does not contradict Himself!

Instead of correcting the wayward masses frothing at the mouth for icons, Roman Catholic leaders clearly disregarded and transgressed Holy Scripture. To date, they flatly refuse to acknowledge these violations of God's laws and these grievous offenses toward Him. Instead of being concerned for the souls of men, they are solely focused upon protecting and furthering their own kingdom by any and all means at their disposal!

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Despite the Roman Catholic Church's best efforts to control the dispensing of God's word, church groups existed and flourished outside of their grasp. The history

of these communities is sketchy. We know of one such group, the "Paulicians," who operated in southern Armenia around 650 A.D. They were given this name by their enemies because of their leader, Constantine Silvanus, who preached in public from the Gospels and St. Paul's letters. While doing so, he was stoned to death by an angry crowd. Paulicians differed with Catholicism over baptism, believing in full immersion only. They did not venerate Mary or the Saints, and had a disdain for the use of icons, candles and incense in church services.

Several other dissident church communities existed throughout France, such as the "Waldensians," named after Peter Waldo, who was excommunicated and forbidden to preach by Pope Lucius III. Waldo, after studiously reading the New Testament, gave away all his wealth earned as a successful merchant to the poor. He started preaching the Gospel in the street, winning converts left and right. He was not bashful in proclaiming the Church of Rome was corrupt and the pope was not the true head of Christ's Church.

Another cruelly persecuted Christian group, the Albigenses or Cathari, lived in France, northern Spain and Italy. They also believed the Roman Catholic Church was evil and their formalistic rituals, unscriptural and useless.

In the year 1075, the Catholic Church reinforced Her claim to be the "True Church of Christ." Pope Gregory VII

issued his "Dictatus Papae," spelling out twenty-seven rules of the Church. Among them were:

1. The Roman Church was established by God alone.
2. The Roman pontiff is called Universal.
9. All princes shall bow and kiss the foot of the pope.
18. The decrees of the pope can be annulled by no one
22. The Roman Catholic Church has never erred and never will err, according to Holy Scripture.
26. No one can be a Christian if he does not agree with the Catholic Church.

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Further tightening of Roman Catholic control was heightened in the 1200's, as the ideals of the Church were foisted upon every aspect of daily culture. At the 4th Lateran Council in 1225, Pope Innocent III issued more rules, some of which were:

Canon I - There is only one universal Church, outside of

which there is no salvation.

Canon III - Those who arrogate themselves to preach the

Gospel without the authority of the Apostolic See,

or local Catholic bishop, shall be excommunicated

and subjected to other penalties.

Secret

assemblies which differed from the common way

of "the faithful," were forbidden.

At the Council of Toulouse in 1229, the laity were barred from owning copies of the New Testament, and only permitted to possess select passages from the "Book of Psalms." This was in direct contradiction to our Lord Jesus' invitation: **"Search the scriptures: for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me"** (John 5:39). So once again, the mighty Roman Catholic Church, which "never errs," disobeyed the very Lord they claimed to honor and represent!

During this same century, voices of dissent arose from within the Catholic Church. Priests and bishops wrote letters to Popes Innocent IV and Gregory X, protesting the local parish priests' ignorance of the scriptures. Their chief concerns were that the laity were being taught false

doctrines and to trust in relics for faith and salvation. Also cited in these letters, were instances of priests accepting bribes and misappropriating burial fees. Pope Innocent III had been aware of these issues and addressed them at the 4th Lateran Council. He agreed that the corruption of the laity came from following the examples of the clergy. But, instead of reining in and correcting those abuses, the Catholic hierarchy elected to focus its energy and resources on "heretical" Christian communities, such as the Waldensians and Albigenses. The next unfolding of events were to become the darkest hours to date for the Roman Catholic Church.

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Chapter 5

The Coming of the Inquisitors

Christian communities like the Waldensians, who refused to recognize the Roman Catholic Church as the only one established by Jesus Christ, rapidly grew in numbers. The Catholic hierarchy considered them heretics and a threat to the very Kingdom of God, because they

refused to acknowledge the pope as the "Vicar of Christ," and sharply disagreed with the Roman Church over the doctrine of salvation.

To combat and stem this tide of uncontrolled heresy, heresy being defined as any theological doctrine which opposed or contradicted Catholic dogma, Pope Lucius III established the first Inquisitional Tribunal in 1184 A.D. The primary operation was conducted in France by priests from the Dominican and Franciscan orders. With the approval of the secular government, alleged heretics were rounded up, held in deplorable conditions, given no defense attorney and no right to appeal after a sentence was pronounced. As soon as these "reprobates" were arrested, they were brought to a selected city, where the tribunals were being held. They were advised of their "crimes" against the Church and questioned at length about their beliefs. Usually, they were not believed, no matter what answer they afforded. Some bravely stood up to their captors, citing scriptural passages as the basis for their beliefs.

(21)

To ensure a pure confession of the accused, or to assist the heretic in seeing the error of his/her ways, the priests would order them to be tortured. This would be conducted until the wayward believer either confessed their sin(s) or they recanted to the satisfaction of the tribunal.

The methods of torture were as wicked and depraved as the deceitful heart could devise. "Torture by water" consisted of the subject being strapped down on a large table and his/her nose blocked, only allowing them to breathe through their mouth. A funnel was jammed into the mouth just short of causing choking, then water was slowly forced, in amounts ranging from 5-10 liters. Naturally, a few "accidental" drownings occurred. Another common method was "Trial by Fire," whereby the hands and feet were manacled with iron cuffs and chains. Grease would be applied to the bare feet, which were then held close to an open flame pit. Other body parts could be burned when the accused refused to repent or recant. This was at the sole discretion of the inquisitor and carried out until he was satisfied with the recantation or confession.

Another popular method of torture carried out by these men "doing God's service" was the "Strappado." The

subject would be stripped to his/her undergarments, ankles shackled and hands tied behind their backs. A second rope or chain would then be attached to the wrists. The accused was hoisted up about six feet in the air, then dropped. The subject would be asked if he/she would repent or recant, and if they refused, they would be hoisted higher and dropped again. This procedure would be repeated over and over again, if necessary, causing excruciating dislocations of the wrists, elbows and shoulders.

There were various other sinister methods of extracting confessions, more insidious and gruesome than these, but I think the picture has been illustrated well enough for all to understand the extent of misery endured by those who dared disagree with the Roman Catholic Church.

When news of these methods of inquisition reached the popes, they did not lift a finger to end it. Instead, they issued edicts clarifying and fine-tuning what was proper, and what was unacceptable in the use of torture. Pope John XXII warned the inquisitors that the use of torture must be done with "mature and careful deliberation." Pope Alexander IV gave the inquisitors the right to absolve each other of their "irregularities." That way, one priest could carry out affliction, while the other absolved his brother in Christ!

(22)

The popes and cardinals did nothing to stop the Inquisitions, which continued into Spain in 1478, and on to Italy in 1542. Shortly after the Spanish Inquisition was initiated, Pope John XXII suspended the one in France. The inquisitors there had become so intoxicated with their unchecked power, a Catholic cleric, Henric Chamayou, tried eighteen deceased men and women for heresy in the towns of Narbonne and Grassone, France. After his tribunal found all subjects guilty of crimes against the Catholic Church and God, their buried bodies were dug up, paraded through the streets, then burned and the ashes thrown into a nearby river.

The preferred death penalty method of the inquisitors for unrepentant heretics was burning at the stake. This ghastly end could be avoided by the condemned subject, if they did the following:

1. Swore allegiance to the pope and Catholic Church.
2. Stated their belief that Christ's body and blood was present
in the consecrated bread and wine.
3. Promised never to associate with other heretics.
4. Promised to notify Catholic authorities of any heretics

personally known to them.

Those who refused these conditions were tied to a wooden post, where wood was piled around their body, up to the chin. Just before the wood was set ablaze, the condemned subject might be "mercifully" strangled, depending on the decision of the presiding inquisitor.

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The three tribunals lasted a total of 600 years, ending on June 6th, 1869. The Vatican manuscript "Codice Urbinate" claims a total of 15,000 subjects were executed by all three inquisitional tribunals, combined. Since the Inquisitions are a sore topic with the Roman Catholic Church, they will do all in their power to keep the accurate number of murders as low as possible. Credible historians place the number of subjects killed during the Spanish Inquisition alone, at 32,000. This piece of evidence alone, proves the Catholic Church has been fudging the numbers! If we take a logical and analytical look at the true number of murders over a 600 year span, one can easily conclude there had to be HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS killed!

At times, hundreds of alleged heretics were killed in a single day, such as occurred on February 13, 1278, when

200 Albigenses from France, who openly detested the formalistic rituals of the Roman Church, were executed in of all places, the Roman Amphitheater! During the year 1506, 2,000 Jews were exterminated in Portugal under Catholic King, John II. That was just one year in one small country. If you are absolutely honest with yourself, you must conclude that the Catholic Church lied about the high volume of murders they committed. So what stops them from lying about anything they see fit -- whether it be church history, doctrine, finances or sexual abuse by priests?

The Roman Catholic Church hierarchy bristles at the mention of the word "inquisition," wishing this dark blot on their history would be forgotten, buried and never mentioned again. They love to rationalize and justify the Inquisitions with the almost flippant attitude of: "Collectively, we have made a few errors in judgement over the years, and the Inquisitions are an example of this. But we are justified and forgiven by Christ's merits and God's grace." This type of response is as ludicrous as a man claiming to be a born-again Christian and elects to become a serial rapist and murderer. When he is captured and brought to justice, he proclaims to the media: "I'm not worried. I'm a child of God and He will justify and overlook my sins." The bottom line is this: This man never had God and God never had him. Regardless of these futile attempts to rationalize sin, we all must confront these

officially sanctioned murders committed by the Catholic Church. And we must determine whether these acts were carried out by men directed by the Holy Spirit or by those under the power of the "Wicked One," Satan.

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The Inquisitional Tribunals certainly were not sanctioned by our Lord Jesus Christ, despite multiple popes declaring the Catholic Church "has never erred and can never err." Our Savior warned us that His believers would be persecuted and murdered by those who believed they were **"...doing God's service"** (John 16:2). It takes minimal effort to notice that the suffering endured by those that defied the Roman Catholic Church during the Dark Ages, mirrored those persecuted in the early Church under pagan Rome.

No Catholic priest can take the Bible and show where it directs Christians to kidnap, torture and kill those who believe differently regarding the plan of salvation. Jesus corrected His apostles when they told a man casting out demons in His name, to stop doing so. That believer's sin in their eyes, was that he was not of their fold. Jesus advised them: **"...let the man be...for he that is not against us is on our part"** (Mark 9:38-40). How is it the

great Catholic theologians and scholars missed this passage for over 600 years?

True, bona fide Christians never resort to violent acts in an effort to convert a lost soul. They know they were in that same boat of spiritual blindness at one time. Respecting the gift of free will and choice, a Christian prays for a lost person, trusting in the Spirit of God to bring about conversion. The Inquisitions in and of themselves, are a red flag that should cause one to question whether the Roman Catholic Church has been faithfully handling and truthfully dispensing the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

(25)

Chapter 6

The Rise of the Instigators

Despite the threat of imprisonment, separation from loved ones, loss of property, lack of food and water, followed by torture and certain death, numerous opponents arose simultaneously to challenge the biblically unsubstantiated doctrines of the Roman Church. Prior to the printing of the Guttenberg Bible in 1453, few copies of Holy Scripture were available, so all Catholic doctrine was accepted by the masses without reservation. Most of the challenges to questionable doctrine came from those elite few who had access to the Bible -- professors of theology from the universities, some of whom were Catholic clerics.

The Roman Catholic Church was at the crossroads of having to decide which direction to take in regard to this growing "instigation." They could either review all Church dogma and cease teaching doctrine which could not be verified or backed up by Holy Scripture - or - cite "Apostolic Authority," Church tradition and the writings of the Church fathers as credibility for doctrine not expressly spelled out in the Bible and stay on their original course. They chose the latter, either ignoring the rising voices of dissent, or silencing them by whatever means deemed prudent and necessary to combat those "heretical views."

John Wycliffe, a professor of divinity at Oxford University in England, was one of the first of these instigators. He challenged Catholic doctrine two ways: Written works and street preaching. He expressed

concern over the people relying upon their parish priests for spiritual guidance in the faith of Christ, without the benefit of being able to read the scriptures on their own. He publicly proclaimed that the world was blinded by the outward ceremonies and manmade traditions of the Roman Church. He wrote several books on Christian doctrine, bringing to light the many fables and myths conjured up over the previous 1,000 years, by the Catholic hierarchy.

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He was summoned to appear before Catholic bishops in the year 1377, and given an opportunity to explain his divisive views. The bishops were unable to thwart Wycliffe's beliefs and unsuccessful in getting him to admit his "sins of disobedience." So, Catholic doctors of divinity, religious lawyers and the like were summoned to London to pore over and examine Wycliffe's written works. They pronounced all of them "heretical, seditious and not in concert with the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church." Pope Gregory XI issued an edict that same year, calling Wycliffe's works "erroneous, false and depraved." A public citation was issued, directing John to appear before the

pope within three months. He was able to dodge the authorities until his death in 1401 A.D.

John Wycliffe left such an impact on the mighty Church of Rome, the Council of Constance declared him a "notorious heretic" in 1415. As was customary, his buried bones were dug up, burned to ashes and discarded into a river. All because he pointed out doctrines that were not in the Holy Scriptures ordained by God.

John (Jan) Huss, a minister in Prague, Bohemia was active in his criticism of Roman Catholicism around the time of Wycliffe. Huss was adept at painting a vivid contrast between Christ's humility, riding upon a donkey and the pope on a stallion, with adoring crowds kissing his feet. He spoke out against the openly notorious immorality of Catholic priests. He put some of his beliefs in writing, which included:

1. Neither the pope nor the cardinals were the true successors of St. Peter.
2. Christ, and only He, was the Head of the Church.
3. Issuance of any order that all Christians must obey the pope was wrong, because many had been immoral and heretics.

(27)

Huss openly challenged Catholic authorities to show where he erred in the interpretation of Holy Scripture. The only response he received advised him to recant from his "misguided wickedness." In the very same year Wycliffe's bones were dug up and burned, John Huss was burned alive at the stake. His remaining intact body parts were beaten with sticks and his ashes were thrown into the Rhine River.

In the 1490's, Catholic scholar and philosopher, Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam wrote several articles targeting Roman Catholic superstitions and corruption. He criticized priests and monks for serving God via outward actions and teaching their flocks this was acceptable with God. He stated: "True religion is from within the heart. It is not about what we do, but who we are." He poked fun at those who would revere a bone allegedly belonging to St. Paul, yet ignored the glow of his spirit contained in one of his written epistles. He further scoffed at relics, such as the slippers worn by St. Thomas Haskett, because they reportedly performed more miracles after his death, than when he occupied them!

Erasmus referred to the Catholic hierarchy as "New Pharisees," because they did not make the doctrine of salvation simple enough to be easily and universally

understood. He eventually translated the entire Bible from the original tongues into Latin. He uncovered numerous errors in St. Jerome's Latin Vulgate version, which had been in use by the Catholic Church for the previous 1,000 years! Not only did the Roman Catholic hierarchy ignore those blatant mistakes, they kept using the unreliable Vulgate. Of course, all of the written works by Erasmus were later banned by Pope Paul IV.

While Erasmus was shaking up the Catholic clergy, another professor from Oxford University, William Tyndale, stepped up to the plate. He came to the attention of the Catholic leadership in the late 1400's, when he stated vocally and in writing, the Roman Church got away with teaching false doctrine, because the scriptures were not made readily available to the masses.

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Tyndale soon shook up the world as never before in history, by one great act of faith -- translating the entire Bible into the English language. With the printing press now available, affordable copies of Holy Scripture could be produced and thereby purchased by the common man. Even though Inquisitional Tribunals were in full swing, dissidents surfaced in practically every country in Europe, and beyond. New Christian denominations were formed

by these rebels of the faith, who had broken away from the authority of the Roman Catholic Church. They were eventually given the name "Protestant."

For his audacity in making the Bible available to the average citizen in his native tongue, Tyndale was imprisoned for one and a half years. He was eventually sentenced to death for his insolence against the pope and the Catholic Church. In the year 1536, he was strangled, then burned at the stake for his "crimes" against the "True Church of Christ."

At the time Tyndale was actively challenging the Catholic Church in England, Martin Luther, who had been a Catholic priest and monk, became a professor of theology at Wittenberg, Germany. Prior to this appointment, he had struggled for many years as a Catholic cleric, trying to feel justified with God through good works, prayer, confession, penance and a life dedicated to serving the Lord. Deep down, he knew that despite his life of sacrifice, he was never going to be worthy enough to stand before God. He anguished day and night, trying to figure out how he could be forgiven and justified by God, once and for all. He brought his concern to another priest during his many confessions. His confessor assured him he was making salvation too difficult and to stop dwelling on it. Yet, Luther's worry and dread would not leave him.

In 1513, Luther began a series of lectures on the "Book of Psalms" and St. Paul's "Letter to the Romans." During one of these lectures, it finally struck him as to what true salvation was, and how one received it from Almighty God. He concluded that only through the sinless, perfect life and subsequent death, in which Jesus' innocent blood was shed, the all-terrible and just God could make peace with mankind.

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For this wonderful grace to be valid, each individual had to come to terms with his/her unworthiness, cease all reliance upon themselves, including good works and freely accept this gift of unmerited favor from God. Luther *finally* had the simple doctrine of salvation, made complicated and mysterious by the Catholic Church, revealed to him by the Holy Spirit of God. It was summed up in one verse: **"...the just shall live by faith"** (Habakkuk 2:4). Nothing more, nothing less!

Many of Luther's beliefs collided head-on with established Catholic dogma. Some of his teachings which ran opposite of what he had been taught as a priest were:

1. Any person guided by the Holy Spirit could correctly interpret the Bible, without direction from a cleric.
2. The papacy was a man-made invention and not ordained by Christ.
3. All believers in Christ were saints and empowered to administer sacraments, instead of a hierarchial priesthood.
4. A Christian lives freely and gladly for God, not seeking rewards or favors through good works.

Luther translated the Bible into German and distributed inexpensive tracts , which challenged the many false doctrines of the Roman Church. He saw no hope of reforming his old Church, so he broke away and established the Christian denomination later known as the "Lutherans."

In 1521, Martin Luther was summoned to appear before an Imperial Tribunal, so he could give an account of his heretical and seditious actions. Under the protection of armed guards sent with him by the King of Germany, Luther appeared before the "Diet of Worms," giving his famous speech, a summarization being: Unless he was convinced by both scripture and his own reasoning, his

conscience was captive to the word of God. He further stated that he rejected both popes and Church councils, because both had erred and contradicted each other on a consistent basis. Of course, the Catholic authorities were outraged at his accusations, but since he was under the protection of the German king, they were unable to imprison him. He went into hiding and died of natural causes, escaping certain death at the stake.

(30)

The Catholic Church was in a flux over these instigators, many of whom were former priests and monks. They were stealing members away, causing public embarrassment and derailing plans to establish "Christ's Kingdom" here on Earth. In an effort to regain Her authority and influence, the Council of Trent was held in the year 1545 and lasted eight long years. The council decided the Church would stick to its guns. They voted to uphold doctrines, such as Transubstantiation, Purgatory and salvation through grace, coupled with good works and merits. Church tradition was declared equal in weight to Holy Scripture. Despite errors brought to light regarding the Latin Vulgate translation of the Bible, no corrections

were deemed necessary. It was declared to be the only authentic version and not to be called into question.

Many other church communities existed during the Protestant battle against the Church of Rome, which were neither Protestant nor Catholic. Mennonites, named after their founder, Menno Simons, another "renegade priest" from Catholicism, were the forerunners of the Anabaptists. Separatists, Independents and Puritans broke from the Church of England, the other "organized religion" of the day. These independent church groups were despised and persecuted by both Catholics and Protestants, who considered them fringe believers, out-of-step with the rest of the Christian world.

Anabaptists, Mennonites, Puritans, Separatists and Independents shared many similar beliefs:

1. Men were free to walk with God according to their light, and truth emerges in the battle for minds.
2. Infant baptism had no scriptural authority or basis.
3. Services with altars, adoration of the "Host" and the use of icons or statues was considered pagan idolatry.
4. Both Catholics and Protestants had strayed from the original

intentions and doctrines of the early churches.

5. Each "assembly called forth" would decide by majority vote, who would lead each individual church. No other church was allowed to dictate the affairs of another. This practice was put in place to prevent the abuse and errors of organized Christianity.

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To further release the corrupt grip of organized Christianity, The Puritans petitioned King James I of England for a new version of the Bible. Fifty-four linguistic scholars were selected and placed into six separate groups. Each independently translated the scriptures from the original tongues into English. Four years later, the most accurate version of the Bible was complete, mirroring the intent and power of the original texts. It came to be known as the "King James or Authorized Version."

In America, the input and influence of groups, such as the Puritans and Baptists assisted in the formulation of the framework for our Judeo-Christian laws and ethics.

Christian societies, such as the Baptists, sent missionaries across the globe with an intensity and fervency unmatched by the Catholic Church, both then and now. It is plain and clear -- once the Bible became readily accessible in the language of the common man, the Roman Catholic Church steadily lost its tyrannical control and has been unable to regain it ever since.

Chapter 7

Upon Which Rock?

I selected six major doctrines of Roman Catholicism that were, and still are, great sources of contention and disagreement between Catholics and fundamentalist Christians. Although there are many more than this, I limited them to these six to keep this book concise and moving along.

(32)

Disagreements over doctrine between Christians are common and will be so until the end of time. At the very first church in Jerusalem, Paul had "sharp contention" with another apostle, Barnabas, over whether fellow disciple, John Mark should accompany them on their next mission. The disagreement was not able to be resolved, so Paul and Barnabas separated, each taking their chosen associate to a part of Asia Minor they felt was the Lord's will for them (Acts 15:35-40).

Christians have always been divided on matters of faith, such as whether one should partake of alcoholic beverages, serve in the military or support the death penalty. No Christian or single denomination has all of the correct answers to every facet of the Christian faith. We all have blind spots in our beliefs and none of us has uncovered all of the secrets hidden within the word of God. Minor errors in the interpretation of scripture is not the end of the world, unless they are so grossly out-of-sync with God's purpose and intention, one is led completely astray and into blatant sin.

Accurate interpretation of scripture requires three major elements:

1. Guidance from the Spirit of God.
2. Avoidance of isolating specific verses or passages , without comparing them with the remainder of the Bible.
3. Caution in taking a passage literally and at face value, when the intention was meant to be figurative or symbolic.

Jesus rarely taught or preached without using parables or allegories, which required illumination from God for the correct understanding of His message. Any honest theologian will agree -- the vast majority of the Bible is figurative in nature, with multiple meanings hidden within each passage. God did not intend for every line of His word to be interpreted literally. The literal interpretation of scripture, when it was meant to be figurative, coupled with the isolation of a select passage leads to false doctrine, as we shall see in this chapter.

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The first doctrine(s) we will explore are "Apostolic Authority and Successorship," which has been a source of serious dispute between Catholics and non-Catholics for centuries. These doctrines, which are essentially one, give the Roman Catholic Church its authority over all the other Christian churches or "ecclesial communities." Catholics claim that as the successor to St. Peter, they are the only true Church, because the Lord Jesus Christ founded His Church upon Peter. Catholic history teaches that after Peter left the church in Antioch, he went to Rome and established what would eventually evolve into the Roman Catholic (Universal) Church. Primary support for this claim of supremacy over all the other churches comes from the "Gospel According to St. Matthew 16:17-19:"

A "And Jesus answered and said unto him (Peter), Blessed art thou Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say unto thee, thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

On the surface, without any serious thought or study, it appears Jesus just made Peter the head of all the other apostles, putting him in charge of all future Church affairs. According to Catholic tradition and documentation, Peter ended up in Rome, becoming the head or pope of its church. In 64 A.D., he was executed for his Christian faith per the order of Emperor Nero.

However, countless church historians, both secular and Christian, find the only factual historical evidence regarding these Catholic claims, relates only to Peter's presence in Rome and his execution. None of these historians can attest conclusively as to Peter being a bishop or pope. Objective Church history does not indicate Peter was the lone bishop establishing or confirming the Church of Rome.

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Since these claims are the foundation upon which the Roman Catholic Church built Her authority, She cannot afford for that structural base to be found lacking and faulty. If the doctrines of Apostolic Authority and Successorship are proven false, built upon mere fables and myths, how can She be trusted with the work of God, declaring His truths to all the world?

Again, as I just stated earlier, isolating a specific verse or cluster of verses without comparison to the Bible in its entirety, opens the gate to doctrinal perversion and abuse. For a correct perspective of what our Lord stated to Peter in Matthew 16, we need to back up a few verses:

"When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, whom do men say that I the Son of man am? And they said, Some say thou art John the Baptist: some Elias: and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:13-16). It was at this point that Jesus made His pronouncement: "Upon this rock I will build my church..."

In the Christian realm, there are two generally accepted explanations of who or what this "rock" was. The first: Peter was the "rock," which seems plausible until you continue on in Matthew 16: ***"From that time forth began Jesus to show his disciples , how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee Lord: this shall not be unto thee. But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me Satan : thou art an***

offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men" (Matthew 16:21-23). These are very harsh words toward the man Jesus had just proclaimed to be the leader of His Church. If we go back to verse 18 of Matthew 16 and focus on the Greek (original) text, we will get the correct meaning of our Lord's words. "Petros," which means "stone" was translated into "Peter." When Jesus said the word "rock," it was the Greek word "petra." So Jesus literally stated: **"Thou art Petros (a stone) and upon this petra (rock) I will build my church."**

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Jesus **never** said "Upon you, Peter, I will build my church!" Not one time in the entire Bible is any being, whether an angel, prophet or saint, ever called a "rock." The term "rock" in scripture **always** refers to Almighty God and no other! Examples of this are: **"The Lord is my rock, and my fortress..."** (Psalms 18:2). **"Because I will publish the name of the Lord, ascribe ye greatness to our God. He is the Rock, his work is perfect..."** (Deuteronomy 32:3-4). If you are correctly interpreting these verses in Matthew 16, taking and comparing them with the rest of the word of God, you can easily see that

Jesus was referring to Peter's admission of faith, that He was **"the Christ, the Son of the living God."** That is the "rock" Christ said He would build His Church upon, for He alone is the "Rock" for all the ages!

For the sake of argument, let us suppose the Catholic Church was correct in its claim that Peter was the first pope designated by Jesus, followed by Linus and so forth, with an unbroken line of succession leading up to the current vicar, Pope Benedict XVI. How is that Peter had a wife (Matthew 8:14), but all subsequent popes were forbidden to do so? In the biblical book, "Acts of the Apostles," a centurion by the name of Cornelius met Peter **"...and fell down at his feet, and worshipped him. But Peter took him up, saying, Stand up, I myself also am a man"** (Acts 10:25-26). What a contrast to the popes of yesteryear and today, who freely accept the adoration and worship of men, which rightly belongs only to the Lord God! Roman Catholic popes adopted the title "Holy Father," which is the same name Jesus attributed to God the Father during His prayer in chapter 17 of "The Gospel According to St. John." Millions of Christians feel assuming such a title as a mortal man, lacks a servant heart and reeks of arrogant pride.

Again, in the "Acts of the Apostles," we get a glimpse of Peter, who preached the Gospel of Jesus Christ straight and true, not mincing words or using elegant, carefully constructed speeches. Peter preached: **"...whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved"** (Acts 2:21). And, **"Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven whereby we must saved"** (Acts 4:12). I have yet to see one pope preach this message as plainly and boldly as Peter. The "Vicar of Christ" travels to non-Christian countries year after year, yet fails to warn them Jesus Christ is the Way, the Truth and the Life, and no man comes to God the Father unless it is through Him! The pope **never** declares as forthrightly as Peter and all of the other apostles, that Jesus Christ is the *only* Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, and He is the *only* sacrifice for their transgressions. Instead, these lost souls are given cautiously worded messages of hope, peace and reconciliation, which in the end offer no lasting peace, no true hope and no acceptable reconciliation; for it will only be found in Christ Jesus, the Living Word of God!

Every single apostle the Roman Catholic Church claims to represent through the offices of pope, cardinal, bishop and priest warned the world of God's impending wrath, which is His glaring, unwavering, fiery judgement! Not one time, have I heard a Catholic cleric heralding this message, let alone preaching it on a consistent basis. Did

not St. Paul, who warned us over and over again of the Lord's wrath, tell us: **"...it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe...?"** (I Corinthians 1:21). The Gospel is an offensive topic, but only to those who refuse to admit their sin and acknowledge Jesus Christ as the only path to Heaven. It is a Christian's duty to convey this message, not worrying about who may be offended or insulted, because the majority will reject the "Good News." That is why the Pharisees conspired to silence our lord by killing Him. He was greatly offensive toward them. Where are those soldiers of Christ, fulfilling their calling to preach the Gospel to every creature? Are there any left who are concerned enough for lost souls, they do not fear ridicule, persecution or hurting someone's little feelings?

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The Roman Catholic Church claims it is preeminent over and superior to all other Christian churches, because Peter and Paul established and confirmed it. If that were true, Peter and Paul established and confirmed the churches in Jerusalem and Antioch first, making them senior to the one in Rome. So, why are they not the "True Church?" The answer is simple: It was through the

writings of the Church fathers, such as Irenaeus of Lyons and St. Hippolytus, combined with the political power and financial backing of pagan Roman Emperors, which vaulted the Catholic Church into the position of the head of all the other Christian churches.

We come to the point of having to decide whether the Roman Catholic Church is, or is not, the one founded upon St. Peter by our Lord Jesus Christ, "outside of which, there is no salvation." If this is not true, She has fabricated Her authority via fables, false history and fake documents. If placement of the writings of the Church fathers on the same level as Holy Scripture and stating Church tradition carries the same weight as the word of God turns out to be wrong, She is a ***counterfeit Christian church!*** And, if She has perverted church history and Her authority, what stops Her from teaching falsehoods regarding the most critical doctrine of all -- salvation? Once absolute authority has been established, it allows for unchecked erroneous Christian doctrine to be introduced, such as the Office of the Pope.

For those who insist on adoring these alleged 'Vicars (Substitutes) of Christ," let's delve into some examples of their personal lives:

* **Pope Boniface III** 1294-1303 A.D.) -- routinely had sexual

relations with both boys and women; held the opinion that these acts were "no more a sin than rubbing one's hands together."

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* **Pope John XII** (953-963 A.D.) -- turned St. Peter's Basilica into a brothel and its reputation was such, women steered clear of the building, for fear of rape. He died in bed at the age of 77, with a married woman beside him.

* **Pope Benedict VIII** (1017-1017 A.D.) -- forced each nominated bishop to pay him a pound of gold as tribute.

* **Pope John XIX** (1024-1032 A.D.) -- bribed his way into office; went from a mere layman to pontiff in one day.

* **Pope Benedict IX** (1032-1048 A.D.) -- also obtained his office via bribes paid by his father, Count Alberic III. This was possible during this period in history, because popes were elected by the aristocracy and the Emperor. Benedict was deposed in the year 1045 by Sylvester III, then restored to power after a bloody battle in the streets of Rome. He eventually left office upon the payment of a large bribe.

* **Pope Alexander VI** (1492-1503 A.D.) -- having nine illegitimate children, he flaunted his mistresses openly. He poisoned rival cardinals he considered to be a threat, then confiscated their property.

* **Pope Julius II** (1503-1513 A.D.) -- fathered three daughters while a cardinal. He personally led troops into battle to crush

anyone who dared defy his authority.

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* **Pope Leo X** (1513-1521 A.D.) -- made a priest at age 7, then a cardinal at age 13. Upon discovering a plot to remove him from office, he had the ring leader executed, the other conspirators imprisoned, then added thirty-seven "loyal" cardinals in one day. At the time of his death, over 2,000 offices and titles were for sale at the Vatican.

* **Pope Paul IV** (1555-1559 A.D.) -- a former Inquisitor General. He rounded up and imprisoned Catholics who pushed for reform of the Church. He banned all books portraying Catholicism in a negative light, creating the "Index of Prohibited Books." In the year 1557, he ordered all Jews in

Rome to sell their property to Catholics, then forced them to live in ghettos. The Jews were required to wear yellow headgear in public and surrender all of their copies of the Talmud, which were later burned.

* **Pope Pius IV** (1559-1565 A.D.) -- successor to Paul IV. Had fathered three illegitimate children, prior to his papal appointment.

* **Pope Sixtus V** (1585-1590 A.D.) -- another former Inquisitor General. He had priests and nuns executed as criminals for violating their vows of chastity. Their bodies were then placed on stakes along the "Ponte Sant Angelo" (a bridge over the Tiber River). He was also responsible for the placement of the Obelisk (pagan phallic symbol) from Emperor Nero's Circus, in front of St. Peter's Basilica, where it remains to this

very day!

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* **Pope Lucius III** (1181-1185 A.D.) -- established the French Inquisition.

* **Pope Sixtus IV** 1471-1484 A.D. -- established the Spanish Inquisition.

* **Pope Boniface VI** (896-896 A.D.) -- was so immoral, he was defrocked twice, once as a priest and again when he was a deacon. Despite this, he was still allowed to assume the Office of Pope. Died 16 days later.

How can any rational human being honestly believe for one minute, that these men were the "rocks" which Jesus established and built His Church upon? These examples of papal degradation are enough evidence to prove Jesus Christ did not, and would never build His "Assembly called forth" upon mortal men. Even those of us who are God's elect, falter and stumble in our walk with the Lord, harboring selfish motives, despite our very best efforts to

live a life pleasing to God. *Anyone* who mistakenly believes Peter was the "rock" our Lord was referring to in Matthew 16, needs to forget what he or she learned in Catechism or Seminary, throw away their collection of books on theology, seek the face of God and re-discover His word! Only then, will you have a crystal-clear understanding of God's doctrines of faith.

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For those of you still stubbornly clinging to Roman Catholic doctrine, which sates She is the only true Church, I have a question for you to consider: "Were the Reformation and Protestant movements the work of men under the influence of Satan, or those under the guidance and direction of God?" If they were the work of Satan, trying to disrupt and derail the "True Church," all Christian denominations outside the authority of the Catholic Church are false imitators of Christ's "Assembly called forth." However, if the attempts by both Catholic clerics and Protestants to reform the Roman Catholic Church were by the providence of God, the reverse would be true. The Catholic Church would not be the authentic Church of Christ, and there is NO HOPE of salvation within its confines!

Currently, the Catholic Church holds the official position that anyone who believes in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, is saved. But, since they do not have access to God's "ordained sacraments," they are unable to experience the "fullness of God's grace." For centuries, the Roman Church held the position that no one could experience salvation outside of Her confines. But, as the Bible became more readily available to the everyday citizen, She was forced to soften that lofty, brazen stance.

Those who persist in holding fast onto their belief the Roman Catholic Church is the one and only sanctioned by Jesus Christ, often raise the question: "Why then, did God allow the Catholic Church to flourish, gaining power over the entire Roman Empire?" "Why did He give them the ability to influence kings, queens and the affairs of the known world?"

The answer is this: God gives us, as free-will beings, what we choose, even when it is against His perfect will. After He brought the children of Israel out of their captivity in Egypt, they were not satisfied with the manna (sweet bread) God had provided for their sustenance. While in the desert, they clamored for meat, so God gave them quails to satisfy their desires (Exodus 16).

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When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the tablets containing the Ten Commandments, he found the people dancing naked around a golden calf. He questioned the priest, Aaron, asking **"What did this people unto thee, that thou hast brought so great a sin upon them?"** Aaron responded: **"...thou knowest the people, that they are set on mischief. For they said unto me, Make us gods, which shall go before us..."** (Exodus 32:21-23). This is but one example in the scriptures which shows us God allows events to occur, but in no way does He condone or approve them. He let the people, both the priest and his flock, have their way even when it was highly offensive toward Him.

Another example: Once the people of Israel were settled in their promised lands, they were soon dissatisfied with the Lord's plan of government, desiring to be ruled by a mortal, tangible king. The elders presented their petition to the prophet Samuel, who relayed it to God. **"And the Lord said unto Samuel, Harken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them. Now therefore hearken unto their voice: howbeit yet protest solemnly unto them, and show them the manner of the king that shall reign over them"** (I Samuel 8:7,9).

Samuel returned to the people and warned them life would not be better under the rule of a king, predicting they would regret their decision. Nevertheless, the people refused to heed Samuel, replying "**...Nay; but we will have a king over us...**" (I Samuel 8:19).

In this same vein, God allowed the Roman Catholic Church to thrive. The people desired a religion which offered a half-hearted commitment to the Lord, instead of a full and complete surrender of their hearts and lives to His will. The people wished for a religion where all that is necessary to attain Heaven, is to be baptized, attend Mass, go to Confession and receive the other ordained sacraments of the Church.

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The people desired a religion where they could leave the living of a holy life to their priest, and he would be the mediator between them and God, absolving them of their sins. The people clamored for a religion whereby they could keep their icons, statues and relics from the pagan mystery cults of old. In essence, they assisted in the creation of the Roman Catholic Church, aided by apathetic priests who knew, but ignored the scriptures and failed to warn their flocks of their grievous errors!

During the 1500's, Catholic priests from Mexico to South America expressed concerns over mass conversions to Catholicism, because there was minimal indoctrination in the true faith of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. The new converts kept resorting to the priests of their old religions for advice and the performance of religious rituals. They still visited the pagan idols and statues to pray. Parish priests were aware of this, but hid it from their superiors so operations ran smoothly and numbers grew. The numbers of converts were used to measure their success at spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ. But 100 years after the alleged conversion of Peru, Catholic authorities were arresting pagan priests and destroying their idols. As had been done in the Roman Empire, the people were eventually pacified in their urge for the old ways of worship. Their former gods of old were given the names of Catholic saints. The heathen places of prayer were converted into shrines dedicated to Christian martyrs. The hearts of the people still belonged to the old religion, while they professed the name of Jesus Christ. This was the Catholic Church then, this is still the Catholic Church today. Not one thing has truly changed in its central core of doctrines, beliefs and practices!

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Chapter 8

Baptism = Salvation?

Official Roman Catholic Catechism states: "The Sacrament of Baptism removes the stain of original sin and is necessary for salvation." One example of a passage from the Bible used to support this doctrine is: ***"And he (Jesus) said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned"*** (Mark 16:15-16).

At face value, these two verses appear to support the theory baptism has saving effects upon the soul. However, as I stated in the previous chapter, you must assess the Bible in its totality, in order to accurately and properly understand scriptural doctrine. The word "baptize" means "to plunge" or "to immerse." The examples of baptism illustrated throughout the New Testament are of people

who acknowledged and repented of their sinful lives, confessed Jesus Christ as the Lord, went to a nearby river or lake, and were baptized in the exact same manner as Jesus Christ, Himself.

Infant baptism is ***never*** mentioned one single time in the Bible. It was not practiced by the early or primitive churches. Infant baptism was instituted by the Catholic Church a few centuries down the road, with the justification it paralleled the Old Testament rite of circumcision. Circumcision designated that an Israeli child belonged to the faith of Abraham. Since those infants were circumcised at eight days of age, the Roman Catholic hierarchy reasoned that baptism should be completed as soon as possible after birth.

There were critics of this practice, such as Church father, Tertullian, who believed children should not be baptized until they knew Christ, then requested it to be done. It was St. Augustine, another Church father, who believed a person who dies immediately after being baptized, goes to Heaven. For whatever reason, the Catholic Church decided to follow Augustine's theory, completely dismissing Tertullian, as well as scriptural examples and authority.

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Opponents of infant baptism believed the Catholic sacrament closely resembled the initiation rites of the pagans, where special water had cleansing power over sins. Those who defended the New Testament examples of baptism, strongly believed full immersion was an outward sign and public identification that one belonged to Christ. They also believed it to be a public admission that a person had repented of his/her past sinful life, was dead to those trespasses and would henceforth live a life pleasing to God. In addition, they held the belief baptism was merely a requirement for church membership. In the biblical book "Acts of the Apostles," we are clearly shown that baptism has no special powers of conversion, no power to cleanse one from their sins and no saving effects upon the soul. A man named Simon, who had been a sorcerer, was baptized and claimed faith in Jesus Christ. Not long after, he observed miracles being performed by the apostles and he attempted to bribe Peter, so he could obtain their powers. Peter flatly told Simon his **"heart was not right in the sight of God."** Peter further advised him, he was: **"in the bond of iniquity"** (Acts 8:9-23). I do not believe we really need any more proof that (water) baptism does not convert, save or cleanse a sinner. But, I will continue on with more scriptural evidence to prove this point.

Question: If Jesus Christ is **"the same yesterday, and today, and forever"**(Hebrews 13:8), how did those born before Christ's sacrificial death get into Heaven? How were they forgiven their sins, since baptism did not exist in their time? The Catholic Church points out the act of circumcision is the equivalent to baptism. So, does this mean all women under the Old Covenant were barred from Heaven, since they did not undergo the rite of circumcision? There has to be a consistent "key," that both the people living before the Savior died, as well as those who lived afterward, which can justify ALL OF US. And that "key" to salvation was spelled out in the very first book of the Bible -- Genesis. God promised Abraham He would bless the world through his descendants: **"And he (Abraham) believed in the Lord; and he (the Lord) counted it to him for righteousness"** (Genesis 15:6). It was Abraham's FAITH which justified him in the eyes of God, not the act of circumcision!

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King David committed adultery and murder, and certainly did not live the life of a holy man. Yet, he was told by the prophet Samuel: **"...the Lord hath put away thy sin"** (II Samuel 12:13).

The link between the saints of the Old Testament (Covenant) and those of the New Covenant is: FAITH. Faith in the blood sacrifice of an innocent one. It is the **only** sacrament, ritual or practice that God will accept to cover our otherwise indelible sins. It is **blood** that erases sin, not water!

Question: If baptism were necessary for salvation, how did the criminal being crucified along side Jesus get into Heaven? Answer: He asked Christ for His forgiveness and it was granted *immediately* by our Lord, without ceremony, ritual or any form of pomp and circumstance. What is truly absurd, is that when a Catholic cleric is confronted with these scriptural facts, they will agree -- God can communicate His grace without the use of any sacraments. Yet, any book on Catholic Catechism will state the sacraments "are necessary for the salvation of mankind," and "without their use, salvation cannot be obtained." So, which is the correct doctrine, "O Great Church of Confusion?"

The Catholic Church is on target when She teaches circumcision is the Old Testament equivalent of New

Testament baptism. However, these rites are only external symbols which show one belongs to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. St. Paul pulled this together for us : ***"For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart..."*** (Romans 2: 28-29). Paul again brings this concept home: ***"For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love"*** (Galatians 5:6). Paul is warning unconverted Jews not to trust in the rite of circumcision to justify themselves with God. He is clearly telling them this act "avails nothing." In other words, it is of no use or advantage. The same holds true for baptism -- IT AVAILS NOTHING! To rely upon this ritual for justification with God is pure folly and not supported by the word of God.

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Chapter 9

Eating the Flesh of God

"This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever: and the bread which I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." "...Verily, verily I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you." (John 6:50-51, 53).

These are some of the passages the Catholic Church utilizes as a foundation for the doctrine "Celebration of the Eucharist." Eucharist was borrowed from the Greek word "eucharista," which means "thanksgiving." Catholics refer to this celebration as an "unbloody sacrifice," which is offered upon the altars of thousands of Roman Catholic Churches every single day. Their belief is that by the working and intervention of God, bread and wine are miraculously transformed into the actual body and blood of Jesus Christ, which the faithful then consume.

In the year 1215, the 4th Lateran Council labeled this doctrine "Transubstantiation," declaring Christ's soul, divinity and actual presence dwells within the consecrated bread and wine.

Official Catholic doctrine also teaches that the Celebration of the Eucharist or Mass has the same

purposes as our Lord's actual death on the Cross of Calvary -- glorification of God, reparation for sins of both the living and the dead, thanksgiving and appealing to God for mercy. Roman Catholic dogma proclaims: "The sacrifice of the Mass is numerically the same as the historical sacrifice of the Cross."

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Looking at the totality of the Bible and analyzing what Jesus stated about the "bread of life," we know there is no command anywhere in scripture directing us to re-sacrifice our lord, or reenact His death upon the Cross. Our Lord specified His death for the sins of the world was complete in its entirety when He stated **"It is finished"** (John 19:30), and died immediately thereafter. To reinforce this concept, we can look to the biblical book "Epistle to the Hebrews:" ***"For Christ is not entered into the places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us: Nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with the blood of others; for then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself."***

"So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many..." (Hebrews 9:24-26,28). ***"And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; But this man (Jesus), after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God..."*** (Hebrews 10:11-12). The Bible is plain and clear: Christ's sacrifice was a ONE-TIME EVENT!

Non-Catholic Christians believe the "Lord's Supper" was meant to be a memorial service, whereby we remember and honor His great sacrifice, but no mystical powers or properties are attached to this rite. St. Augustine, whom the Catholic hierarchy relied heavily upon when formulating much of its doctrine, also held the opinion the Lord's Supper was a "symbolic memorial of Christ's sacrifice at Calvary." Catholic leaders conveniently chose to hide this fact from its followers. Once it was made known to the public, they rebutted with: "St. Augustine's theory does not exclude the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist." Here, we have the perfect example of how the Catholic Church operates when confronted with a contradictory teaching, straight from one of Her beloved Church fathers. Rationalize and thereby justify, despite the obvious truth!

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If we go directly to the Gospel accounts of the Lord's Supper, we can see for ourselves what actually transpired. Jesus was celebrating the feast of the Jewish Passover, dining at a home with His disciples. One version of this account: ***"And as they did eat, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and brake it, and gave it to them, and said, Take eat: This is my body. And he took the cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them: and they all drank of it. And he said unto them, This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many. Verily I say unto you, I will drink no more of the fruit of the vine, until that day that I drink it new in the kingdom of God. And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives"*** (Mark 14:22-26).

Another version of the Lord's Supper: ***"And when the hour was come, he sat down, and the twelve apostles with him. And he said unto them, With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer: For I say unto you, I will not any more eat thereof, until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, Take this, and divide it among yourselves: For I say unto you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of***

God shall come. And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, this is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me" Luke 22:14-19).

The final version of the Lord's Supper: **"And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take eat, this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; for this my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom" (Matthew 26:26-29).**

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We see simple, forthright acts like eating a meal, during which, bread was broken into pieces and consumed. This was followed by the drinking of the fruit of the vine. OBSERVATION: Jesus is *still* alive with His body intact, so how is it He was dwelling literally in the bread and grape juice, prior to His ultimate sacrifice? How could this mystical transformation spoken of by the Catholic

Church have taken place before His death? Yet, Jesus did say to His apostles -- "This is my body and blood." It is apparent He was in fact, speaking symbolically after all!

The early churches celebrated the Lord's Supper in the same fashion as portrayed in the Gospel accounts. It was by no means, the central theme (as in Catholicism) of the service. Church history reveals no mention of altars (as in Catholicism) in Christian churches, until pagan temples like the Greek Parthenon were "converted" for Christian use in the middle of the 6th century.

It is also observed by those who study the Bible in its totality, only St. Luke mentions Jesus telling His disciples at the Last Supper: ***"This do in remembrance of me."*** Matthew and Mark do not repeat these words, and John completely excludes the *entire event* from his Gospel account. If this ritual was a crucial and necessary part of salvation (as Catholics believe), would not all four Gospels have reinforced this concept?

When Protestants and other "dissident" Christian groups proclaimed their determined belief the Lord's Supper was merely a memorial of Christ's sacrifice at Calvary, they were ferociously persecuted via confiscation of property, imprisonment, torture and execution. They still boldly pronounced that the adoration of the "Host" was idolatry and highly offensive to God. The idea of repeating Christ's sacrifice over and over again was considered by them to be pagan sacrilege! Perhaps they were thinking of

Isaiah 44:15?: ***"...yea ,he kindleth it, and baketh bread; yea he maketh a god, and worshipping it; he maketh it a graven image, and falleth down thereto."***

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Once again, we are presented with an example of the Roman Catholic Church taking the symbolic and allegorical words of the Lord and twisting them into an incorrect, literal meaning, so it suits their purpose. This doctrine of "eating the flesh of God," appealed to the pagan mindset during the early stages of the Church. The heathens of old had an ingrained belief system, whereby they felt they must appease an angry God through the daily offering of some form of sacrifice. They further believed that these offerings must come from the works of their own hands. In order to win easy conversions of those idolaters, the Catholic Church fashioned the sacrament of the Eucharist, by merging the pagan rites of old with a ritual from the New Covenant. This false doctrine, which tells the world we must sacrifice our Lord Jesus Christ over and over again, is not supported by Holy Scripture. The doctrine of "Transubstantiation" is PURE FICTION!

Chapter 10

Mary, Queen of Heaven

All Christians are in agreement that Mary was selected by God to bring forth His Son via a virgin birth, accomplished by the power of the Holy Spirit. All believers would also agree she was humble, faithful and obedient to her calling.

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After Jesus was crucified, Mary was involved in the affairs of the first church at Jerusalem: ***"These all continued in one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brethern"*** (Acts 1:14). From this point on, scripture falls silent on Mary's life and eventual death. As the years, decades and centuries passed, doctrines and beliefs regarding Mary that were foreign to the early Church

surfaced and were cultivated by the Roman Catholic Church. These doctrines were given the stamp of approval by both popes and councils, even though they had no scriptural foundation. Mary was slowly made into a major tenet of faith for Catholics beginning in 431 A.D., when the Council of Ephesus gave her the title "Mother of God." Two hundred years later, feasts honoring her were widespread throughout the Roman Empire. Converts from the pagan mystery religions, familiar with female divinities found it an easy transition to accept Mary as their new "Queen of Heaven."

The desire for and worship of a female divinity had been ingrained in societies for over 3,000 years. It was one of the sins Israel succumbed to after they were established in their homeland. They had strayed from the principles given to them by the Lord God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob:

"And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and served Baalim: And they forsook the Lord God of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods, of the gods of the people that were round about them, and bowed themselves unto them, and provoked the Lord to anger. And they forsook the Lord, and served Baal, and Ashtaroath. And the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel..." (Judges 2:11-14).

Baal was the Canaanite version of the "sun god," leader of all the other deities. Ashtaroth was the "goddess of the earth and fertility." The sin of the Israelites was that they abandoned the true God, in search of a "just-in-case god." They snubbed their Lord and decided to petition the heathen gods to meet their physical and spiritual needs. They further insulted Him by making statues and images of those false deities, and praying to them. Their hopes were that these "just-in-case gods" would move quicker to satisfy their impatient, selfish wants.

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These acts were in clear defiance of the Lord's Ten Commandments, which they were well aware of:

"Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord am a jealous God..." (Exodus 20:4-5).

One does not have to be a certified Bible expert to see that a majority of the false religions, which trace their roots back to ancient Babylon under the pagan king, Nimrod, can be readily identified by any of the following practices:

* Acknowledging or praying to any other male divinity or deity.

* Acknowledging or praying to *any* female divinity or deity.

* Praying to or before an image, icon or statue.

* Emphasizing or worshipping the creations of God, such as
nature, rather than acknowledging the Lord God as the only
sustainer of the earth.

Over and over again, the Old Testament warns of God's anger toward those who insist on ignoring Him and seeking out a lower deity or relic of these so-called gods. Those who promote these practices stand in direct violation of the very word of God! Those who choose to follow these false teachers, no matter how devout, sincere or holy they appear to be, are not pleasing God!

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Despite these biblical warnings, the Council of Nicaea in 787, issued edicts declaring "the faithful should give reverence and devotion to Mary and "the Saints." This

included their icons, images and statues. It took another 300 years before prayers made directly to Mary were prevalent. This practice was approved by the Catholic Church, paving the way for Mary to take a more centralized role in worship.

Pope Pius IX issued his Bull "Ineffabilis" in 1854 A.D. It stated "Mary, at the moment of conception, was preserved free from all stain of original sin via God's grace and privilege." He went on to say that at the end of her earthly life, God took her up, body and soul, directly into Heaven, sparing her a mortal death.

In 1950, Pope Pius XII via an Apostolic Constitution, proclaimed Mary was immaculately conceived, lived a perfect and sinless life as a perpetual virgin and upon the completion of her earthly life, she was "assumed, body and soul into Heaven."

These edicts were issued despite admissions by Catholic authorities that these "Marian doctrines" were not explicitly revealed in Holy Scripture. These bold declarations regarding Mary were made by both popes and councils, despite writings from Church fathers, who opposed such doctrines.

As for the doctrine of "Immaculate Conception," which states Mary was born without the stain of original sin, St. Bernard of Clairvaux, St. Alexander of Hales, St. Bonaventure and St. Thomas Aquinas rejected it as sound Church doctrine. Tertullian, Eunomius, Jovianian,

Hledivius and Bonosus of Sardica considered the "perpetual virginity" of Mary to be a Christian fable, unsupported by scripture.

Yet, the Catholic Church hierarchy insisted these doctrines, while not expressly spelled out in Holy Scripture, were brought forth by the guidance and direction of the Holy Spirit. So, we once again come to the crossroads, as we do with all alleged, factual Church doctrine: Are these Marian doctrines true and the work of men guided by the Spirit of God, or are these teachings false and the tasks of men deceived by the spirit of the Antichrist? To help settle this argument, I will take each one of these Catholic doctrines about Mary and view them under the light of Holy Scripture, the only true guide we have from the first apostles.

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Immaculate Conception: This purely Catholic doctrine relates that Mary was not born with the sin nature we all inherited from Adam and Eve (original sin). No one has, and no one ever will prove this theory using the Bible. Just as no one can show Mary lived a perfect, sinless life, from the pages of Holy Scripture. The Roman Catholic Church gets away with perpetuating these myths, because the average, everyday person neglects the Bible.

They blindly accept everything thrown at them by this Church, without the slightest objection or reservation. St. Paul told us: ***"Wherefore, as by one man (Adam) sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned..."*** (Romans 5:12). This verse alone, proves Mary was born with a sin nature and did not live the sinless life heralded by the Catholic Church.

Scripture reveals another little-known fact concealed by the Catholic hierarchy: Initially, Mary did not fully realize she had given birth to the Savior of the world. ***"And when they saw him, they were amazed: and his mother said unto him, Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? Behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing. And he said unto them, How is it ye sought me? Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business? And they understood not the saying which he spake unto them"*** (Luke 2:48-50). Jesus was twelve years old at this point and Mary was still uncertain as to the full identity of this child she had bore and raised. At some point in time later in her life, Mary had to come to the conclusion that this Jesus was the "Anointed One," the "Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." Just as we all must do, she had to acknowledge her lost state and separation from God due to her inherited sin nature, then believe upon Jesus Christ as the Lord and her Savior.

Perpetual Virginity: Mary is always referred to by Catholics as either the "Virgin Mary" or "Blessed Virgin," which is absolutely true up to the birth of our Lord. After that, the Bible indicates she did not remain a virgin for the remainder of her life: ***Then Joseph being raised up from his sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife: And knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name Jesus***" (Matthew 1:24-25).

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Closely scrutinizing these verses, we notice a very important word - "till" - which indicates Joseph would have relations with Mary in the future. After all, is it not both biblical and Catholic doctrine, a marriage is not valid until it is consummated by sexual union, whereby "two become one flesh?" The Roman Catholic Church completely disregards this and insists Mary was so full of God's grace, she had no fleshly desires and completely abstained from sex. This is unrealistic and wishful thinking by a long shot. We *all* war against sexual desire every day we are upon this earth, dwelling in this fleshly tabernacle.

Joseph and Mary had sexual relations and bore other children besides Jesus, which is proven in this passage:

"And when he (Jesus) was come down into his own country, he taught them in their synagogue, insomuch that they were astonished, and said, Whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works? Is not his the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? And his brethern, James and Joses, and Simon, and Judas? And his sisters, are they not all with us? Whence then hath this man all these things?"

(Matthew 13:54-56). Additionally, in St. Paul's "Epistle to the Galatians," he refers to James as ***"the Lord's brother"*** (Galatians 1:19). When these verses are brought up to challenge the proclamation Mary remained a perpetual virgin, the Catholic response is: "Brothers and sisters in Jewish family life could have meant cousins." This is the great defense offered in contradiction to the word of God? No monk, priest, pope or Bible scholar has ever been able to prove via Holy Scripture Mary remained a perpetual virgin, because it cannot be done!

Bodily Assumption: According to Catholic doctrine, after Mary lived a life free of committing sin, she was taken up into Heaven by God, bypassing natural death. Not a single thread of evidence exists in Holy Scripture, which supports this theory. Therefore, no further discussion or explanation is warranted regarding this topic.

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Mediatrix of Grace: Heaping fable upon fable, the Catholic Church decided Mary is in Heaven "cooperating in the application of grace for the redemption of mankind." The Church of Rome further explains : "Through Mary's intercession, we are brought the gifts of salvation." The Catholic authorities theorized that since Mary was the "Mother of God," Jesus would be subject to her wishes and obey her direction. Based upon this theory, Catholics were instructed to pray to Mary, asking her to help us appease God's wrath. If this is true, why does the Bible tell us we are **"fellowheirs and partakers in Christ"** (Ephesians 3:6), and because of this we can **"...come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy..."** (Hebrews 4:16)?" The Bible tells us over and over again, Jesus Christ is the only mediator and intercessor between God and mankind! We have the awesome privilege of being able to approach God directly, without assistance from any man, saint or angel. Nowhere in the Bible do we have instructions to pray to any being other than God Himself. There is not one line of Holy Scripture which directs us to pray to Mary, kneel before her likeness or image, celebrate feasts in her honor or parade through the streets in procession. God does **not**

approve of any form of worship toward any other person, including angels, as shown in his biblical passage:

"And I John saw these things, and heard them. And when I had heard and seen, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which showed me these things. Then sayeth he unto me, See thou do it not: for I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethern the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book: worship God" (Revelations 22:8-9).

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God, in His foreknowledge, knew mankind was going to elevate Mary to this level of admiration and worship. So, He left us another hint this was not to be done: ***"And it came to pass, as he (Jesus) spake these things, a certain woman of the company lifted up her voice, and said unto him, Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked. But he said, Yea rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it"***(Luke 11:27-28). This woman was attempting to elevate Mary's status even before she had died, and Jesus had to knock her notions down to the

ground. To combat the temptation of making Mary into an icon, Jesus also reminded us: ***"For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister and mother"*** (Matthew 12:50).

The official Roman Catholic Church position on the worship of Mary is: "We honor and revere her, but reserve worship and adoration for God." This is how they attempt to rationalize and justify actions which are clearly in opposition to the word of God -- suggesting there are different levels of worship? The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines "worship" as:

1. Respect, reverence paid to a divine being.
2. Reverence offered a divine being or supernatural power.
3. Extravagant respect or admiration for, or devotion to an object of esteem.

Reverence toward Mary is WORSHIP! Veneration of Mary is WORSHIP! Devotion to Mary is WORSHIP! Praying to Mary is WORSHIP! Worship is worship, no matter how hard one tries to dress it up to be something other than that.

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Despite the crystal clear clarity of the word of God, these false Marian doctrines are perpetuated year after year by so-called men of God, and the masses love to have it so. The unconverted, lost mind has a natural inclination and desire for a "goddess of heaven." And the Catholic Church capitalized upon the peoples' desire for goddess and cultivated Mary into that "Queen of Heaven." They used her man-made divinity to draw in converts, comparing her to their pagan goddesses from the old mystery religions. This made the transition from heathen to Christian so much smoother and easier. It was easy for the Church and even easier for the superficial convert, Everyone was pleased and content.

These doctrines of a "Queen of Heaven" cause confusion and detract from the true Gospel of Jesus Christ and His plan for redemption for the world. The early Church had no Marian doctrines. The Church fathers rejected these practices. Holy Scripture gives no validity to *any* major Catholic teaching regarding Mary.

Mary fulfilled her special calling and certainly is in Heaven, because of her FAITH, not her deeds. If she were here, she would tell those who insist upon venerating and

praying to her: ***"See thou do it not, for I am thy fellowservant...worship God."***

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Chapter 11

Purgatory: Between Heaven & Hell

Purgatory, which is derived from the latin word "purgare," means "to make clean" or "to purify," and is an alleged place between Heaven and Hell. According to Roman Catholic doctrine, Purgatory was designed for those who die with unforgiven venial (minor) sins. Through suffering and torment in this place, a person who was neither good enough for Heaven ,nor bad enough for Hell,

could be purified of his/her lesser sins and be made worthy to enter Heaven.

This doctrine, foreign to the early Church did not come into full force until the "Dark Ages," when the Catholic Church had unchallenged power, coupled with scarce copies of scripture available for reference. In the previous centuries, the general populace had expressed concern over a merciful, loving God casting nominal, professing Christians into Hell for all eternity. To allay these worries, the doctrine for Purgatory was created, offering a second chance to those who did not live a strict Christian life.

Even though Jesus never mentioned Purgatory, the Catholic Church slowly developed the doctrine by relying upon the teachings of the Church fathers, such as Tertullian, who was the first to mention praying for the dead. These doctrines were not finalized and approved until the Councils of Florence and Trent in the 15th and 16th centuries. They claimed scripture speaks of a "cleansing fire" and this "purifying trial by fire" allows one to achieve the holiness he or she did not attain in their earthly life. One passage of the Bible used to support this theory is:

"Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is" (I Corinthians 3:13). Notice, St. Paul did not

say we personally, our own bodies, would be tried with fire, He clearly said our works shall be tried by fire!

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Once this doctrine of Purgatory was firmly in place and readily accepted by the masses, the Catholic Church added an ingenious money-making scheme to strengthen Her finances -- the doctrine of "Indulgences." Capitalizing upon the peoples' lack of knowledge regarding the scriptures, the Church advised those still on this earth, they could lessen a departed loved one's time of suffering in Purgatory, or even secure their release and subsequent entry into Heaven. Since the Roman Catholic Church claimed they were given the **"keys to Heaven"** by Jesus Christ, all popes, cardinals, and bishops had the authority to order the immediate release of a soul from Purgatory. Of course, for this to occur, money had to be donated by the concerned relative on the behalf of the poor soul trapped in this place of agony. After the money was deposited into the Church treasury, a certificate was drawn up and issued to the contributor, giving them a false sense of comfort.

These man-made doctrines, having no scriptural basis, were concocted by those who did not want to face up to

this fact: We are all under the sentence of God's wrath and eternal death. Our Lord warned us **"...he that believeth not, is condemned already"** (John 3:18). If you do not believe the doctrine of salvation as spelled out in the Bible, you have already determined your fate for all eternity. The very second your soul separates from your body, your destiny has been sealed for all time! There is not one verse in the word of God indicating we get a "do-over!"

The doctrine of Purgatory does not line up with sound biblical ideology for the following reasons:

1. We are responsible for all our sins, whether in thought, word or deed, even if they were committed unknowingly. King David prayed to God, asking **"Who can understand his errors?"** Then, he asked God to **"...cleanse thou me from secret faults"** (Psalms 19:12). David *knew* it was impossible to recognize and confess every single sin. Yet, the Catholic Church tells Her followers they must confess every sin, and if they fail to do so, they will be subject to the torment of Purgatory. Who then, could possibly escape this punishment! Answer: NO ONE! The Catholic Church needs to come clean about venial (minor) and mortal (major) sins.

The Bible warns us: ***"For whosoever shall keep the whole law and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all"*** (James 2;10). This means if you commit any sin, even a venial one, such as lying or stealing, you have broken all the commandments. In the eyes of Almighty God, you are also guilty of the mortal ones, such as murder!

2. Purgatory removes the need for the grace of God, replacing it with our own merits of suffering. Like the pagan mindset of old, this theory assumes God will eventually have pity on our sacrifice of torment and release us from our debt of sin. If this were true, there was no valid reason for Jesus Christ, the Son of God to take on our form, live a blameless life in our place, then die an unjust and gruesome death.

3. Purgatory negates and erases the ultimate accomplishment of Christ's death. It says His sacrificial slaughter and the grace of God applying His innocent blood to our debt of sin, is not sufficient enough to cover our trespasses.

The doctrine of Purgatory is another mythological fairy tale dreamed up by unsavory men. They lead their flocks into a false hope of a second chance at redemption not spoken of in the Bible!

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Chapter 12

Salvation: By Whose Merits?

When I ask the average, everyday Catholic what they believe they must do to inherit eternal life, so they can spend eternity in Heaven, I get the following general responses:

* "I really don't know, I'm not too sure."

* "It's all a great mystery and we'll find out after we die and are judged by God. The majority of us will be okay, because He is a loving and merciful God."

* "Being baptized, attending Mass and going to Confession regularly, living a fairly moral life, doing our best to keep the commandments and of course, believing Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world."

This last reply is the one I would have given twenty-seven years ago. After my true conversion, I realized a child of God is able to answer questions about salvation with relative ease and comfort. He or she is able to point another toward the correct path to Heaven with solid, steadfast answers. How is it a 12-year-old child, who attends a Baptist church can answer a question about the requirements of salvation without batting an eye, but the average Catholic when asked the same questions, becomes uncomfortable and flustered?

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The doctrine of salvation is the core and central theme of Christianity. It supersedes all other doctrines, and all other doctrines point us toward it. Salvation allows a holy and righteous God an opportunity to forgive and justify us, without compromising His standards of perfection and

justice. Without this wonderful provision of redemption, NO ONE would ever be allowed to spend eternity with Him in Heaven!

Simply put, salvation is God reaching out to us, pulling us out of our sinful condition and rescuing us from our lost state. It allows for the restoration of our broken relationship with God and reinstates our privilege of future citizenship in Heaven, which had been forfeited by our never ending disobedience.

How one obtains salvation is the question of all the ages of mankind. We all either consciously or subconsciously yearn to know the answer to this at some point in our lives. There are only three possible ways to inherit eternal life:

1. Good works, suffering and sacrifice through a pure and holy life.
2. A combination of faith in Jesus Christ, coupled with good works, sacrifice and a holy life.
3. Faith and belief solely in unmerited salvation, a gift purchased by the shed blood of Jesus Christ and the only sacrifice accepted by the Lord God.

Belief #1 presumes if we live a holy life of sacrifice, denying ourselves the pleasures of this life, God will have both pity and admiration for us .He will overlook any sins we committed and welcome us into Heaven without reservation. Jesus did warn us in His "Sermon on the Mount," ***"For I say unto you, except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter the kingdom of heaven"*** (Matthew 5:20). The Pharisees lived a strict, religious life of sacrifice and holiness. They dedicated their entire lives to serving God. And Jesus told us we must be even holier than them! This should cause an alarmed reaction of wondering: How then, does *anyone* have even a remote chance of getting into Heaven? This is the response Jesus was trying to evoke from you, so you have just learned one of the ***"keys to Heaven!"***

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And that key is this: No amount of good works, sacrifice, praying or doing your utmost to live a holy life is adequate enough to erase your constantly accruing debt of sin. Our Lord made this very clear to us: ***"But we are***

all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags..." (Isaiah 64:6). All of our very best efforts are so tainted with sin, they cannot be accepted by God as sacrifices for those transgressions. It is our natural, unconverted mind which seeks out ways to appease God's wrath and justice, attempting to erase sins via good works and holy lives. Anyone who believes this is the correct path to Heaven, IS WRONG!

For the most part, Roman Catholic Church doctrine agrees, good works in and of themselves are not sufficient to attain salvation. Catholicism also teaches that while faith and grace play a part in securing salvation, works are a major portion of the equation. Their official stance is, one must "cooperate in their salvation" by living a life which avoids sin, completes charitable works and so forth. In Catholic tradition, works play a majority role in determining if one gets into Heaven, while faith is of lesser importance. One passage from the Bible used by them to justify their faith + works doctrine is:

"Thou believest there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the scripture was

fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the friend of God. Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only" (James 2:19-24).

The great error of the Catholic Church is they believe if you are performing good works and living a holy life to the best of your ability, you automatically have faith. Unfortunately, they are getting the cart before the horse. Faith comes FIRST and as a result, good works follow suit as a natural byproduct of this saving faith in Jesus Christ. It is out of our gratitude toward God who saved us, that we desire to live a life pleasing to Him. That is what St. Paul referred to when he advised us: **'For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's'** (I Corinthians 6:20). I am in full agreement -- anyone who claims conversion to the Christian faith and is still living the same sinful life as before, had better seriously reflect upon whether he or she is truly "born again."

The Catholic Church utilizes isolated passages, such as those from James to justify their theory one must do good deeds to get into Heaven. They fail to compare this passage with what the rest of the Bible teaches about salvation. By doing so, they are promoting the most DAMNABLE and WICKED LIE of all time! And that horrendous lie is this: One must justify himself before God by the filthy, sin-stained works of his own hands. This LIE was the first false teaching of the very first church. Men came in behind Peter and Paul, telling the Christians at Jerusalem they had to be circumcised and keep the laws of Moses in order to be truly saved. Both Peter and Paul publicly denounced this attempt to deceive the believers in Christ. They reminded all in attendance: Their **"hearts were purified by faith"** and **"we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved..."** (Acts 15:9).

True Christianity teaches: **"For by grace are ye saved through faith: and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast"** (Ephesians 2:8-9). This is the doctrine of salvation, summed in two verses! Salvation is a GIFT (something voluntarily transferred without compensation), and a true gift is given freely out of love. NO ONE will enter Heaven on his or her merits. NO ONE will stand before God justified by his or her own good deeds, personal sacrifices

or holy life. FAITH, AND FAITH ALONE is the **"Key to Heaven,"** which justifies the sinner before God! Once works are attached to this gift of God's unfathomable love, it no longer remains a valid gift.

Abraham, the father of the Israelites, was justified by his faith alone: **"And he (Abraham) believed in the Lord; and he (the Lord) counted it to him for righteousness"** (Genesis 15:6). Abraham was saved because he believed and looked *forward* to the day when "Shiloh" (the Peaceful One who is to be sent) would come and be the ultimate sacrifice for his debt of sin.

King David, guilty of committing adultery, then murder to cover it up, certainly was not living the life of a holy man. Yet, he was told by God through a prophet: **"The Lord hath put away thy sin"** (II Samuel 12:13). David was forgiven and justified because he had faith that one day, the Lord would send the "Lamb of God" to die for his sins.

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Jesus spoke of a man justified by his faith only: **"Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, I thank thee, that**

I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other..." (Luke 18:10-14). This tax collector was immediately vindicated by using three "Keys" that access the portals of Heaven:

1. Realization he was not worthy to be saved.
2. Admission and acknowledgement of this to both himself and God.
3. Asking the Lord for mercy and forgiveness.

All it took for him to be saved was a simple act of faith. Nowhere in this parable does our Lord mention good works or sacrifices of any kind were also necessary, for this man's redemption to be whole and complete.

Another example in the Holy Scriptures which shows us faith alone justifies the sinner, is when Jesus is being crucified along with two criminals:

"And when one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him saying, If thou be the Christ,

save thyself and us. But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost thou not fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this man hath done nothing amiss. And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:39-43).

This man obviously led such a wicked life, he was being put to death for his crimes against humanity. He had been living contrary to all of the Lord's commandments, with no care for the ways of God. Caring only for himself, he rarely did anything unselfishly for another. He lived the majority of his life thwarting both the laws of men and God. Even by nominal Christian standards, this criminal was a candidate for Hell. So how did this rebel against God erase the penalty for his life of sin?

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1. He recognized his lost condition and broken relationship with God.
2. He acknowledged and admitted this to himself and God.

3. He was sorry for and repented of his rebellion against God.

4. He believed Jesus Christ was the blameless and perfect sacrifice for his sins.

5. After realizing and acknowledging all of this, he called upon the Lord to forgive and save him, not from his earthly, mortal death, but the spiritual one (eternity in Hell), which was just around the corner. And by FAITH ALONE, his salvation was secured instantaneously and for all time!

Those who insist no one can be saved without both, faith and good works, are guilty of duplicating the sins of the Pharisees! This Jewish religious sect, whom the people looked to for spiritual guidance, was in power when Jesus walked this earth. Our Lord constantly rebuked their authority and doctrines. Even though the Pharisees were held in high esteem by the people, the Lord was highly upset over their misinterpretations of Holy Scripture regarding what one must do to be truly justified in the eyes of God. These distortions of scripture about God's plan for redeeming mankind, was the great sin of these religious leaders.

The Roman Catholic Church has been repeating this same heinous sin for centuries! and they continue to do so, teaching MILLIONS upon MILLIONS to trust in their own merits and not solely upon Christ's for their eternal salvation! To end this never ending argument, I refer to St. Paul, who summed it up quite nicely: ***"Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law"*** (Romans 3:2). ***AMEN!***

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Chapter 13

Like the Pharisees...

When the Protestant and Reformation movements were calling for an end to the Church of Rome's blatant corruption and man-made doctrines, those leaders of

revolt often referred to Catholic clerics as "Pharisees." Prior to my research of Church history and Catholic doctrine, I had already noticed many similarities between the ruling Jewish sect active during the ministry of Jesus and the workings of Roman Catholic clergy. This comparison is by no means, an original thought on my part.

Just who were the Pharisees, what were their beliefs and practices and why did Jesus have such a disdain for them? Pharisee comes from the Hebrew word "parash," which means "separate." This group came into existence about three hundred years prior to Christ's appearance. They were the guardians of Judaism, fiercely protecting their religion from the influence of the surrounding pagan cultures. Alexandra, the wife of Alexander the Great, had a special affinity for them. She pushed for and obtained legislation which allowed the Jews to re-establish their religious rituals and traditions previously banned by their former captors, the Babylonians and Persians.

The favors afforded by Alexandra gave the Pharisees great respect among the Hebrews, and allowed them to win the hearts of the general populace. Even under the thumb of Roman rule three hundred years later, they managed to maintain fairly significant religious and political authority. With the admiration of the Hebrew people, achievement of religious authority and the political backing of the pagan governments, the Pharisees became

a proud lot. They adopted special attire, distinguishing themselves from the common citizenry, and they thrived on the loving adoration given them by the general public. This pride, combined with their authority gave way to the interpretation of Holy Scripture as they deemed fit. This then led to the implementation of traditions and rituals not found in the scriptures. These man-made doctrines were adjusted and adapted with the winds of political or societal change. They gradually carried the same weight as, or even superseded the laws and commandments handed down by God. They became so absurd in their inventions of special laws and traditions, it was ruled that to eat an egg which had been laid by a hen on the Sabbath, was a sin!

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By the standards of society both then and now, the Pharisees were men to be admired for dedicating their lives to the matters of God. Some of their noteworthy traits were:

* Refusing to swear allegiance to the pagan rulers of both the Greek and Roman empires, answering only to God.

* Standing up and speaking out against tyranny and oppression.

* Persecution for their faith to the point of death, for refusing to compromise their beliefs.

* Honoring the prophets of the past by building tombs for their bodies and elaborately decorating their graves.

* Committing to memory, the laws of Moses as well as their own traditional doctrines.

* Strictly following God's commandments, a code of ethics and performing religious rituals, in an effort to merit the Lord's favor and forgiveness.

On the surface, the Pharisees appeared to be the type of people God would readily welcome into His kingdom. So, what were the points of contention Jesus had with these alleged holy men?

* They had the mere facade of righteousness, through outward actions and deeds. Jesus warned them, God looks upon the

heart, not works, for justification. **"Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity"** (Matthew 23:28).

* They placed their own carnally-inspired doctrines and traditions on par with Holy Scripture and the laws of God.

Jesus asked them: **"Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your own tradition?"** (Matthew 15:9).

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* They shut up the kingdom of Heaven and took away the keys of knowledge of how to attain eternal life from the people. **"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees,**

hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in" (Matthew 23:13). ***"Woe unto you, lawyers! For ye have taken away the key of knowledge: ye entered not in yourselves, and them that were entering in ye hindered"*** (Luke 11:52).

Even though the Jewish people thought well of their spiritual leaders, regarding them to be guardians of their faith, Jesus boldly declared otherwise, considering them to be traitors toward their positions of trust. How easily we are fooled and swayed by those who have dedicated their lives to the service of God. We falsely assume, not only would these "holy" men and women not lie or deceive us about spiritual matters, we presume the "red carpet" to Heaven has been rolled out for them. Our Lord gave us a very solemn warning for those who trust in their own merits to achieve salvation, then teach others to do so: ***"Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say***

to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? And in thy name have cast out devils? And in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me..."(Matthew 7:21-23).

The Pharisees believed they were selected by God to carry out His will. But in actuality, they were doing the *opposite* of all He required. Jesus warned them they were bound for Hell, because they rejected Him as the only chosen sacrifice for their sins, relying instead upon their own merits for salvation. The sin that would lead them to "greater damnation," was taking others down this same mistaken path!

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There are far too many similarities to ignore regarding the ways of the Pharisees and the operations of the Roman Catholic clergy. The most prominent of these, is the false doctrine which teaches faith alone is not sufficient to secure justification and salvation from God. Despite the convincing truths I have presented in this book, many will stubbornly refuse to accept them. They will persist upon blind obedience to Roman Catholic doctrines and traditions. For those of you who do so, I

assure you, you will sorely disappointed for all eternity, with no chance of ever being able to reverse that decision! For the sake of your eternal destiny, you need to strongly consider I may be right, for I was once in your position. I KNOW I was not saved, despite assurances from the Catholic Church saying otherwise. Please search your heart and seek the face of God, asking Him for guidance as you prayerfully ponder this last chapter. I hope and pray you finally understand God's amazing grace through His gift of salvation, Jesus Christ. May you realize to trust Him, and Him alone , not any sacrament or religious system for your redemption!

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Chapter 14

God's Remarkable Plan

Through the centuries, the Roman Catholic Church in the same fashion as the Pharisees, has managed to corrupt the simplicity of God's plan for the redemption of mankind. One would have to be a diligent religious detective of sorts, studiously poring over Catholic teachings for months and perhaps years, to unearth God's simple plan of salvation. The Catholic system buried it long ago, losing it under man-made doctrines, unscriptural traditions, repetitious and hollow rituals and outright superstitions.

Those who came to Jesus during His ministry on earth were for the most part, simple, average, everyday people like you and me. Rarely were those who sought out the Lord, citizens of societal stature, religious scholars or holy men who had dedicated their lives to the service of God. From these examples, we can reasonably conclude the plan of salvation was meant to be relatively simple and easily understood. The Gospel (Good News) was somewhat of a mystery to those of the Old Testament: **"...of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you..."** (I Peter 1;10). But we now have the awesome honor and privilege of being able to fully understand "God's greatest Gift," because He revealed it to us through His chosen apostles and Holy Scripture.

From the outset, the Gospel was spread via word-of-mouth by Christian converts preaching and witnessing everywhere they went and lived. They did not have the benefit of the writings of the New Testament, as we do now.

They relied upon acknowledging what the apostles taught them and the testimony of their personal conversions. This was and still is, the mantle of revelation regarding the "keys to Heaven," which has been passed down from one Christian to another for the past 2,000 years!

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As I mentioned earlier in this book, these "keys" were explained to me by a Christian author, who had them revealed to him earlier in his life by another Christian. These "keys" vary somewhat in name and principle among Christians to some very minor degree. But, these principles or "keys" are so closely similar in nature when they are used to explain the plan of salvation, it is silly to split hairs over who has a more perfect way to teach the Gospel message. The crucial matter at hand is whether the "Good News" is being properly presented to the lost. It is my *personal* observation that God alone is the author and designer of the plan of salvation. He keeps it pure and

intact through a combination of Holy Scripture and those whom he has drawn to Him by His Spirit, who can testify firsthand of His saving grace.

I have broken down the plan of salvation into four "keys," so anyone can readily understand God's gift of mercy and forgiveness, as revealed in the Bible. After reading these next few pages, no one will be able to say to God, "I was never told what you required of me, Lord."

Key #1: Realization and Admission of Guilt. Each one of us must personally come to the full and complete comprehension we are condemned as sinners, right where we stand, here and now. Because of our naturally disobedient nature, we refuse to face up to the fact we possess a sinister heart which is: ***"...deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked..."*** (Jeremiah 17:9). It is our inherent nature to sin and thereby offend God each and every day of our lives. We do this by the hurtful words we speak, the wicked thoughts we have, the evil deeds we do and the good works we fail to complete. This constant pattern of wrongdoing has severed our relationship with the God who created us, causing the forfeiture of our right to citizenship in Heaven.

We also fail to grasp the purity, holiness and perfect justice of God, which will not tolerate one single sin in His presence. With this tarnished view of ourselves and the world around us, we bring God down to our level of

judgement. We understand and can acknowledge that a person who has been convicted of heinous crimes, such as murder or rape, deserves the anger and wrath of God. We even believe this sort of person, if they refuse to show remorse for these types of acts, is worthy of being banished to Hell when they die. But when it comes to our own sinful life, we rationalize that we are not so bad, since we do not willfully and consistently try to offend God by our actions. After all, we try to live by the "Golden Rule," attend church, give to charity, volunteer for worthy causes, raise our children to be productive citizens and so forth. We do these things with the hope God will overlook our faults. We pray within ourselves, somehow these deeds will erase our debt of sin and placate His glaring judgement.

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However, because we sin the Bible points out: **"...the wages of sin is death..."** (Romans 6:23). The penalty for our willful disobedience toward God and His laws, is DEATH. Death in both the physical and spiritual sense. This spiritual death is also called the **"second death"** -- banishment from the presence of God, forever in Hell.

"How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God, I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds: I will be like the most high High. Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit" *Isaiah 14:12-15).

God ejected His prize angel, Lucifer, out of Heaven, along with one-third of the other angels who followed his lead in a failed attempt to take over the kingdom of Heaven. For this one act of rebellion, they have been condemned to an eventual eternity in the "Lake of Fire" (Revelations 20:10). There is no hope of redemption for them and no chance of an appeal to a higher authority. Their judgement has been sealed forever! So, how is it we think we can escape this very same condemnation, when we sin thousands upon thousands of times during our brief lifetimes? In our fallen state, we relish focusing upon the love and mercy of God, keeping His wrath and hatred of sin in the background. But, to have a proper and balanced perspective of God's nature, we need to initially focus on His terrible wrath, then discuss His love, mercy and forgiveness.

Moses, David and the majority of the Old Testament writers warned of the fury and wrath of the Lord. Jesus preached numerous times about the anger of God and Hell. John the Baptist asked some of those coming to him seeking salvation: **"...who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come...?"** (Luke 3:7). All throughout his letters, St. Paul warns of mankind being under God's impending wrath: **"...knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men..."** (II Corinthians 5:11).

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St. Peter, the alleged first pope of the Roman Catholic Church stated: **"For the time is come that judgement must begin at the house of God: and if it begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall he ungodly and the sinner appear?"** (I Peter 4:17-18).

Despite these numerous warnings about the wrath of God and a place named Hell, the Roman Catholic Church willfully neglects in both their sermons and catechism, to warn Her flock of them. From the pope, all the way down to the local parish priest, they have failed miserably in heir duty to sound the alarm that **"...all have sinned and**

come short of the glory of God" and ***"the wages of sin is death"*** (Romans 3:23 & 6:23).

Sunday after Sunday, the Catholic hierarchy fails to teach proper doctrine to its followers regarding the Ten Commandments. They hide the *true* intention and purpose of these familiar laws, which is: ***"For whosoever shall keep the whole law, yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all"*** (James 2;10). The very first time you knowingly lied or took something that did not belong to you, you became as guilty before God as someone who committed adultery or murder! At that point, you became the enemy of God for all time, just as Lucifer did, when he chose to rebel against the Lord.

The Catholic Church continues to mislead those under Her charge, telling them: "Do this, do that and God will love and accept you," when the Bible *distinctly* tells us: ***"Therefore by the deeds of the law (as in the Ten Commandments) there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin"*** (Romans 3;20). God *knew* we could not keep His laws without fail and he never intended us to do so! He gave us His laws and commandments to make us aware of and define sin.

Yet, the Catholic Church defiantly insists on promoting: "You better do your best not to sin if you want to get into Heaven." This LIE is the first false doctrine the Pharisees attempted to force on the newly converted Christians in

Jerusalem! The law condemns, it does not save! Yet, Catholics insist upon rejecting this plain truth and persist in the futile attempt to gain the mercy and forgiveness of God via personal sacrifices and good works!

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In summary, the first key to Heaven is realizing and admitting to yourself and to God, that you are wicked because of your chronic, willful disobedience i.e. sin. At the same time, this key to salvation requires the realization and admission to both yourself and God, you can do NOTHING to quench His anger and save yourself by your own hand. You must realize you are powerless to erase your debt of sin, no matter how hard you strive to live a holy life. You have to come to the end of yourself and realize you are doomed, with no hope of appeasing the unlimited wrath of the Lord, who "***...is a consuming fire***" (Hebrews 12:29).

Key #2: Acceptable Sacrifice. The next key (step) is determining what God will accept as the sacrifice for your sins. You need to find the atoning sacrifice which covers your sins, so God no longer holds you accountable for them. Of course, that one and only sacrifice is:

"...Christ Jesus: whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation (atoning sacrifice) through faith in his blood...that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus..." (Romans 3;24-26).

"But God commendeth (proved) his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him" (Romans 5:8-9).

"And you being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances (laws & commandments) that was against us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross..." Colossians 2:13-14).

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Jesus Christ, the Son of God came to live as one of us and did so without sinning -- a feat no one has ever accomplished. When He was murdered on the Cross at Calvary and His innocent blood spilled, He became **"The Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world"** (John 1:29). Jesus was the perfect fulfillment of the Old

Testament ritual, whereby a lamb without blemish was sacrificed by a Levite priest for the sins of the people. Due to His selfless actions, Jesus Christ was given the legal right to take our debt of sin, nail it to the Cross and mark it "PAID IN FULL!" God, in His majestic wisdom, created a way to wipe our slate clean, allowing each one of us to be free of our bondage to sin. God located a person who could legally commute our sentence of spiritual death. When we believe Jesus Christ successfully accomplished His mission and is the ONLY way to Heaven, we have found the second key to salvation and an eternity in Heaven!

Key #3: Repentance. Repentance is not only feeling sorry for and being ashamed of living contrary to God's laws; it also entails a willingness to completely turn away from and no longer live that life of disobedience. ***"The Lord is...not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance"*** (II Peter 3:9). Without his sincere sorrow for having lived in defiance of all that God stands for, He will not look in your direction to reach out and save you. Once you are willing to turn your back on your life of rebellion against God, turn to and trust Him to save and justify you, you will become His for all eternity! Just as no amount of good works can save you, no amount of bad deeds can un-save you or cause you to

lose your salvation. ***"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast"*** (Ephesians 2;8-9).

The song "Amazing Grace" was written by a former slave ship captain, John Newton. In the year 1734, at the age of 39, he had read a book while traveling on this ship, titled "Imitation of Christ" by Thomas A. Kempis. Shortly after completing this book, a violent storm arose on the ocean, so fierce, he and all aboard were certain they were going to perish. Knowing he had led a sinful life, Mr. Newton prayed to the Lord for mercy . Right then and there, he experienced the saving peace and grace of God! John Newton gave up his life in the slave trade, became a minister of the Gospel and preached the "Good News" until his death at age 82.

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Ask yourself these questions: "Can I sing the words to "Amazing Grace" and fully relate to them?" "Can I point to a specific time in my life when I came to the Lord seeking his forgiveness and experienced a transformation, similar to that of John Newton?" I know that powerful grace, having experienced it firsthand. You too, can have this

same saving grace and peace, simply for the asking, which leads to the fourth and final "key" to salvation and Heaven:

Key #4: Call Upon the Lord: After you realize and admit your wickedness, realize you are condemned and separated from God, realize the shed blood of Jesus Christ is the only acceptable sacrifice for your sins, and have a heartfelt desire to turn away from your life of rebellion, all that is left to do is: Ask the Lord to save you. The Bible tells us: ***"For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation"*** (Romans 10:13, 9-10). The tax collector in the "Gospel According to St. Luke" admitted and confessed to God he was a sinner, and with a repentant heart he asked God to ***"Be merciful to me, a sinner."*** Jesus proclaimed he went back to his home from the temple, "justified." You too, can do the same and be justified in the eyes of God.

The criminal on a cross beside Jesus, lived an ungodly and selfish life, void of being decent or moral. This man, who flaunted his wickedness in the face of God had a

change of heart, and believed Jesus Christ was the holy and blameless Lamb of God, who was dying for his sins. He trusted in the Lord and called upon Him for mercy and salvation. Jesus assured him: **"Today shalt thou be with me in paradise."**

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Please understand and take this to heart: No matter how you have lived your life up to this point, no matter how many sins you have committed, no matter how despicable they were, you can be forgiven instantaneously, RIGHT HERE AND NOW! Admit to God you are lost and separated from Him, because of the stain of sin upon your soul. Believe that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, lived the perfect and sinless life you could not and died for you, spilling His innocent blood to save you. Repent of your disobedient lifestyle. Call upon the Lord and ask Him to save you, trusting only in His grace to do so.

The Lord Jesus assures us: **"...and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out. And I will give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish..."** (John 6:37 & 10:28). You have His word to rely upon for your assurance of salvation. You do not have to depend upon another mortal man or look to *any* religious system for

your redemption. That is what is so astounding about God's simple, yet remarkable plan of salvation for all of mankind! it is what Jesus taught His disciples and what they in turn, preached throughout the Roman Empire and beyond. It is what their converts taught to their successors, and has been preserved and passed down from believer to believer for the past 2,000 years!

Those who teach any other way leads to salvation were called **"thieves and robbers"** by the Lord. These teachers of false doctrine are guilty of **"Stealing the Keys to Heaven!"** They will be in for a rude awakening when the Lord will tell them: **"I never knew you. Depart from me!"** The Lord is especially harsh with false prophets, because they steer those seeking God's gift of salvation away from Heaven and into Hell. Jesus said it would have been better for those who teach a false gospel to never have been born, for they will receive **"greater damnation!"**

I sincerely pray the veil of spiritual darkness hanging over your soul is lifted and God opens your spiritual eyes, so you can see that all I have written is true. Call upon the Lord right here and now for this gift of salvation. See for yourself that this is **"the way, the truth and the life,"** Jesus spoke of. See you in Heaven!

Final Notes: For those of you who took this leap of faith, determine to live a life pleasing to the One who just ransomed you. Read His word, the Bible, daily. Pray to Him constantly. There are no hard and set rules on when or how to pray. Talk to Him just as you would another person you love and highly respect. join a Bible-centered church, where you can grow in your knowledge of our Lord and receive the support and encouragement of other Christians. Thank you & may God richly bless you!

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