

## **CHRIST FELLOWSHIP'S VIEW ROMAN CATHOLICISM PART I - DIFFERENCES**

Christ Fellowship (CF) warmly welcomes those from a Roman Catholic Church (RCC) background. You will never be asked to renounce Roman Catholicism or to repudiate your spiritual heritage. We do ask that you keep an open mind about what you learn from the Bible at Christ Fellowship. The Holy Spirit will guide you into all truth, just as Jesus promised (John 16:13).

We are all in a process of spiritual growth and progressive understanding. Therefore, we give lots of room to differ, to question, and to debate matters of spiritual truth. The beliefs jointly held by our leaders may be found in the publication *What We Believe*.

In the broadest terms, at Christ Fellowship a Roman Catholic can expect to hear a different view of the Bible, spiritual authority, justification (how one obtains God's mercy) and the sacraments. Let's take them in turn.

### **1. THE BIBLE**

The RCC and CF agree on the inspiration and divine authority of all 66 books in the Protestant Bible, and that set of books is called the Protestant canon. However, the RCC canon contains an additional eleven pieces of literature (whole books or parts) called the Apocrypha, which the Protestants do not accept as the inspired Word of God. The Apocrypha was added to the canon in 1546 by the Council of Trent. The good news is that no vital doctrine of the Christian faith requires the disputed pieces for support.

It may be important for some to note that the RCC New Testament and the Protestant New Testament contain the same books.

### **2. SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY**

CF believes that the Bible contains God's authoritative revelation of truth and is our final authority for what we believe.

The RCC believes that the Bible and apostolic tradition not contained in the Bible are the final authority for faith and practice. This apostolic tradition might be, for example, the mandatory meaning assigned by the RCC to certain

verses in the Bible. Since the RCC considers itself to be the only valid possessor of apostolic tradition, this concept means that the RCC considers itself the final authority for faith and practice.

Christ Fellowship believes that the Bible alone is the final authority for faith and practice. By saying "the Bible alone" is the final authority, CF is saying that the Bible is the only final authority, without regard for any interpretation mandated by any church body.

The net effect of this difference between the RCC and CF is that the viewpoint held by CF provides the believer with a lot more freedom of belief under God, but it also places more responsibility on the believer to interpret the Bible correctly.

### **3. JUSTIFICATION**

Justification means being declared righteous by God. To put it another way, talking about justification is talking about how to receive salvation.

CF and the RCC agree that justification comes only by God's grace through faith in Jesus. However, CF believes that this justification comes by faith alone, while the RCC believes that meritorious works must be added to achieve complete justification. The RCC includes in justification such meritorious works as baptism, penance, and participation in RCC sacraments (see below) along with the more common idea of good deeds.

This difference in beliefs is a major one, and CF stands in the Reformation tradition here. The Bible teaches that salvation comes through faith alone, apart from works. Note the following verses:

*However, to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness (Romans 4:5).*

*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast (Ephesians 2:8-9).*

### **4. THE SACRAMENTS**

The RCC holds the view that the partially justified believer needs regular infusions of grace through certain activities administered by the RCC, namely, the seven sacraments.

In short, CF does not believe that regular increments of grace must be provided through the sacraments to believers in Jesus for the following reasons:

- A. As stated above under Justification, CF believes that salvation comes through faith in Christ alone, apart from any works whatever. The Bible does not teach progressive justification by even one additional act of grace beyond salvation. For example, the writer of Hebrews said of Jesus:

*Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself (Hebrews 7:27; see also Hebrews 10:10-14).*

- B. There is only one mediator between God and the believer in Jesus. The Apostle Paul said:

*For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all people. This has now been witnessed to at the proper time (1 Timothy 2:5-6).*

So, no believer needs any church body to mediate increments of grace.

- C. The moment a person believes in Jesus, all the benefits of salvation become his or her inheritance. Most of these benefits are received immediately, but some wait for the time when one joins Jesus in heaven. Consider the words of the author of Hebrews:

*For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy (Hebrews 10:14).*

Paul also stated:

*Therefore, there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1).*

John said the same thing:

*Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God (John 1:12).*

CF believes and practices both believer's baptism and communion as ordinances that symbolize important spiritual truths. But they are not a means of perfecting one's salvation or receiving further grace from God beyond that already provided by Jesus. A further explanation of these two ordinances as practiced at Christ Fellowship can be found in the following separate View papers: [Christ Fellowship's View: Baptism](#) and [Christ Fellowship's View: Communion](#).

*Christ Fellowship's views on this subject are guided by the authoritative Word of God.  
Not all biblical references in the Word of God relating to each principle are listed.  
Biblical references quoted are from the New International Version (NIV) 2011 unless otherwise noted.*