

Counterfeit Grace

The Catholic Church does not teach that we are saved by works alone; the Church insists that we cannot be justified by works done by our own ability. The Council of Trent makes that clear:

If anyone says that man can be justified before God by his own works, whether done by his own natural powers or through the teaching of the Law, without divine grace through Jesus Christ, let him be anathema. (Trent, Session 6, Canon 1).

Furthermore, Catholicism teaches that we can only be justified by God's grace. Again and again, the same council speaks of the 'grace of justification'.

Well then, is the Catholic doctrine identical to the biblical teaching on grace? The terminology may be the same, but is the meaning different?

Biblical Grace

When the Bible says that we are justified by grace, it means that God accounts the believer as righteous for Christ's sake. This legal right-standing before God is granted as a free gift to people who do not deserve it. Justification is by 'grace' because it is a favour that cannot be merited by works. The Bible sets grace in contrast to works so that we will never mix them up.

- Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt (Romans 4:4).
- And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace (Romans 11:6).
- For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast (Ephesians 2:8,9).
- Who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began (2 Timothy 1:9).
- Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us ... having been justified by His grace (Titus 3:5-7).

When the Bible speaks of grace in relation to salvation, it excludes any admixture of good works. Add one tiny drop of merit to grace, and you don't have the genuine, saving, divine grace any longer. If it is grace, it is not of works!

Catholic Grace

Catholic theology gives a different *definition* of grace so that it could add the merit of human works, and yet claim that salvation is by grace.

The Catechism defines grace as a "favour, the free and undeserved help that God gives us to respond to his call to become children of God, adoptive sons, partakers of the divine nature and of eternal life" (paragraph 1996).

The Catechism rightly states that grace is a free and undeserved favour. But when the Catechism says that grace is the "help" that God gives us, it cleverly opens the way for the addition of our cooperation, our works and our merits. To this end, the third part of the Catechism explains the way to reach beatitude through our right conduct with the help of God's law and grace (see paragraph 16).

Initial justification at baptism is absolutely undeserved, but then Catholics are called to be further justified by their good works performed by divine grace, that is, by the help of God. At the end, they will be considered to have satisfied the law of God on the basis of those works.

Take a second look at canon 1 quoted above: it is not contrasting works with grace, but 'natural' works with works done with God's help. It denies justification by works done by our natural powers, but it affirms the opposite, namely *justification by human works done by God's grace*.

That is called salvation by grace; that is in fact salvation by human works!

Salvation by Grace

When the Bible says we're saved by grace, it means we're really saved by God's favour apart from the merit of our works. When Catholicism says we're saved by grace, it means we're saved by the merit of our works that God helps us perform.

God's remedy for our spiritual malady is pure grace. Catholicism poisons the gospel by the addition of human works and merit. But Catholicism kept the same label 'Salvation by Grace' on the new 'gospel'. Do not be deceived by a counterfeit 'grace'!