

Same Words, Different Meanings: How Roman Catholicism Understands the Christian Faith

It is often pointed out that Evangelical Protestants and Roman Catholics have a lot in common. On the one hand, there is an apparent “common orthodoxy” based on the ancient Trinitarian and Christological creeds, which use the same basic words of the gospel: God, Jesus Christ, Bible, sin, faith, salvation, and so on. On the other hand, there is a profound difference in how the doctrines of Christ, the Church, and salvation (i.e. the core of the gospel) play out in practice. In dealing with Roman Catholicism, especially in times of mounting ecumenical pressure, Evangelical Protestants should attempt to go beyond superficial commonalities based on shared vocabulary. They should instead be aware of the internal theological framework of Roman Catholicism and try to understand it in the light of Scripture.

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- I. A Shared “Common Orthodoxy” based on Common Words?
 - A. “Evangelicals can embrace at least two-thirds” of RC *Catechism* (Noll-Nystrom)
 - B. ... but “When Christ is mentioned the Church is really at stake”
 - C. Beyond Phonetics (sounds) into Semantics (Meanings): Let the Bible define our Words
- II. A Biblical Analysis of Key Roman Catholic Words
 - A. Revelation
 - B. Sin
 - C. Salvation (Regeneration, Justification, etc.)

D. Mary

E. Church

III. What is at Stake with the Roman Catholic Gospel?

A. A Confused Gospel: The Bible is not the final authority

B. A Misleading Gospel: Salvation is not by faith alone

C. A Blurred Gospel: With Rome there are Deeper Disagreements Despite Some Agreements

Suggested Readings:

- Mark Noll and Carolyn Nystrom, *Is the Reformation Over? An Evangelical Assessment of Roman Catholicism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005)

- G. Allison, *Roman Catholic Theology and Practice. An Evangelical Assessment* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014)

- www.vaticanfiles.org