

What Divides Catholics and Protestants (Part 3)? The Sufficiency of Jesus: The Role of Mary and the Saints

I. The Five *Solas* of the Reformation Summarize the Main Issues

- A. *Scripture alone* is the ultimate authority – not Scripture plus tradition.
- B. *Christ alone*. His work is ultimate and sufficient for salvation and relating to God. It isn't Christ plus.
- C. *Grace alone*. Salvation is by God's grace alone. Nothing we do can merit salvation.
- D. *Faith alone*. Justification is by faith alone. We do not receive God's grace by works but by faith.
- E. *The glory of God alone*. Everything is for the glory of God alone.

II. Mary: Areas of Agreement between Roman Catholics (RC) and Protestants

- A. She is the mother of Jesus (Luke 1:31).
- B. She is the fulfillment of prophecies (Gen. 3:15, Is. 7:14).
- C. The virgin conception of Jesus in her womb (Is. 7:14, Luke 1:27, 34-35).
- D. Mary is an example of godliness and trusting the Lord (Luke 1:38, 46-55).

III. Roman Catholic Teaching on Mary and Responses to It

A. *The Immaculate Conception of Mary*

- 1. *Pope Pious IX*: "The most Blessed Virgin Mary was, from the first moment of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege of almighty God and by virtue of the merits of Jesus Christ, Savior of the human race, preserved immune from all stain of original sin."¹
- 2. *Romans 5:19* "For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous."

B. *The sinless life of Mary*

- 1. *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)*, "By the grace of God Mary remained free of every personal sin her whole life long" (493).
- 2. *Biblical Response*
 - a. *Romans 3:23*, "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (see also *1 John 1:8*)
 - b. *Luke 1:46-47* "Mary said, 'My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior'"

C. *Mary was a perpetual virgin*

- 1. *The CCC* confesses "Mary's real and perpetual virginity" (499).
- 2. *The Bible* contradicts this in *Matt 1:25*, *12:46*, and *Luke 2:7*.

D. *The bodily assumption of Mary (rather than death)*

- 1. *Pope Pius XII* wrote "Finally the Immaculate Virgin, preserved free from all stain of original sin, when the course of her earthly life was finished, was taken up body and soul into heavenly glory, and exalted by the Lord as Queen over all things . . ."²
- 2. *The Scripture* gives no indication of this doctrine and affirms that believers die and their spirits go to be with the Lord while they await the resurrection of the body when Christ returns (see *2 Cor. 5:1-9*).

¹ Pope Pius IX, "Ineffabilis Deus," December 8, 1854, accessed at <https://www.papalencyclicals.net/pius09/p9ineff.htm>.

² Pope Pius XII, "Munificentissimus Deus," November 1, 1950, accessed at Vatican.va.

E. *Mary is mediatrix*

1. CCC: "Taken up to heaven she did not lay aside this saving office but by her manifold intercession continues to bring us the gifts of eternal salvation. . . . Therefore the Blessed Virgin is invoked in the Church under the titles of Advocate, Helper, Benefactress, and Mediatrix" (969).
2. *Biblical Response*
 - a. 1 Timothy 2:5 "there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus"
 - b. See also Mark 3:20, 31-34 and Luke 11:27-28 for pictures of Jesus having opportunities to elevate Mary as a mediator but doing the opposite.

F. *Mary is the mother of the church*

1. *Redemptoris Mater*, "Mary's divine motherhood is to be poured out upon the Church"³ (note, they point to Jesus' words to John while on the cross and to Mary's "role" in Pentecost).
2. *Colossians 1:18* "And he [Christ] is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent."

G. *The veneration of Mary is "intrinsic to Christian worship"*

1. *RC Teaching*:
 - a. "Mary, the Virgin Mother of God, reigns with a mother's solicitude over the entire world, just as she is crowned in heavenly blessedness with the glory of a Queen."⁴
 - b. CCC, "The Church's devotion to the Blessed Virgin is intrinsic to Christian worship. . . . The liturgical feasts dedicated to the Mother of God and Marian prayer, such as the rosary, an 'epitome of the whole Gospel,' express this devotion to the Virgin Mary" (971).
2. *Protestant Response*: Do any of the Scriptures teach Christians this devotion? How do they handle it when people try to exalt them (see Acts 10:24-26, "Stand up, I too am a man."). Do we see prayers offered to anyone other than God in the Bible?

IV. The Saints

- A. ***Who are the Saints***: Those with enough merits to go straight to heaven (not purgatory). Their extra merits are in a treasury that the church can use to help others out of purgatory (CCC 956, 1478).

B. ***RC Sproul summarizes the issue Protestants have with this well***:

"A person who believes in justification by faith alone weeps at this notion. This is because Protestants also believe in a treasury of merit, one that is infinite and inexhaustible, but we believe that treasury is filled with the merit of the Son of God alone. The issue in the indulgences controversy is the sufficiency of Christ alone to redeem a person. According to Protestantism, justification happens on the basis of Christ's merit credited to His people. For Rome, we are never finally saved until we have sufficient merit of our own."⁵

V. Christ Alone to the Glory of God Alone

Protestants wonder, "If Christ's merits are indeed infinite, as Catholic theology maintains, then what possible benefit could be superadded . . . by the deeds and prayers of Mary and the saints?"⁶

³ John Paul II, "Redemptoris Mater," 24.

⁴ Pius XII, 1954 "AD CAELI REGINAM, 1, accessed at vatican.va

⁵ R.C. Sproul, *Are We Together?: A Protestant Analyzes Roman Catholicism* (Reformation Trust Publishing, 2012), 76.

⁶ Gregg R. Allison, *40 Questions about Roman Catholicism*, ed. Benjamin L. Merkle, (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2021), 274.