

HOW TO STUDY WITH A CATHOLIC

A Catholic who is willing to consider what the Bible teaches as compared to what he/she believes is a great opportunity! However, most Catholics fear the Bible and are usually unwilling to study it with someone else. This fear is a result of being taught that "laity", or the common Catholic, are unable to properly understand what it is the Bible teaches and that only those of the Catholic hierarchy are able to render it's members what is to be understood and needed from the Bible.

However, if the Catholic has broken through the fear of examining the Bible, he/she has then accepted that what the hierarchy is teaching may indeed be insufficient for spiritual life. A Catholic then who is willing to study the scriptures is generally "good soil" and will be open to the plain gospel message. The very acceptance to a Bible study invitation reveals that he/she has already given up on one of the strongest doctrines that enslaves and blinds Catholics, and that doctrine is that man cannot study and properly understand the Bible without the hierarchy doing it for them.

If a study is agreed upon, the transition to truth can be quite smooth. Most Catholics, even moderate to weak in their beliefs, understand certain proposed tenants of Roman Catholicism that give them a level of comfort for remaining Catholic. Usually, Catholics believe the pope to be the final authority in all matters of religion, believe the Roman Catholic Church to be the first and only church, and believe the traditional practices of Catholicism to be finalized and unable to be altered or removed. Therefore, if a Catholic is willing to examine the Bible to determine what it says regarding these core areas of belief (that is authority, the first and only church, and unchanging practices), then he/she will be surprised very quickly as to the contradictions between what is taught by Roman Catholicism and what is found in the Bible. However, through study the core beliefs are simply replaced with what is provided in scripture as compared to what is being taught by Catholicism. The Bible then becomes the final authority rather than the pope (cf. Col. 3:17), the Lord's church which was originally birthed in Jerusalem becomes the first and only church (cf. Acts 1:12; 2:14, 47; Eph. 1:22-23; 4:4), and the tradition and doctrine of the apostles becomes the unchanging practice one is to observe (cf. Acts 2:42; 2 The. 3:6; 2 John 9).

As initially shown, there are generally two categories that most Catholics fit into: 1) those unwilling to study the scriptures due to a belief that the hierarchy does it for them and 2) those willing to study scriptures acknowledging the hierarchy may be wrong. These two categories will be examined and practical instruction will be provided as to how one can approach either one. The first category, those unwilling to study, must not be ignored as many in this category could be convinced already that the hierarchy is wrong they are just unwilling initially to admit it out of fear. The second category is a prime opportunity that can yield great fruit for the Lord and His kingdom.

Those Unwilling To Study The Scriptures

Catholics who are unwilling to study the scriptures fall into three classes. The first class are those who are aware that Catholicism is in contradiction to the Bible and are convicted that the pope and the hierarchy are all authoritative over what is taught in the word of God. This is a small class of people and are generally the most faithful and convicted proponents of Catholicism. Usually those of the Jesuits, Knights of Columbus, or Opus Dei would be within this class along with any others who have given themselves wholly to the Catholic order of doctrine regardless of what is found in the Bible. This class of those unwilling to study ought to be offered an invitation to examine the Bible, but once that is rejected it would be best to concentrate evangelism efforts elsewhere and move on since they have already made up their mind to choose Catholicism over scripture, regardless of what the scriptures actually teach.

The second class of those unwilling to study are those who are Catholics due to family tradition. It is not as strong as it once was, but Catholicism is a strong, traditional denomination that many families hold over all members as being a requirement in order to remain in good standing with the family as a whole. This knowledge and fear will cause many Catholics to avoid the study of anything that may cause them to realize that their family is incorrect and face expulsion from the family if a change from traditional Catholicism is sought. There is more potential for this class than the first because a study of the scriptures and choice between the Bible or Catholicism (after actually viewing what the Bible teaches) has generally not yet been made.

Depending on how deeply rooted the family ties are, there are many avenues that could be used in approaching a Catholic in such circumstances, for which a view of approach will be proposed. If the family ties are weak and strained (maybe due to distance between family members, turmoil in the family, or a crises in the family (such as the death of the patriarch)), then an invitation to spend time with the family of God, the church, for worship, fellowship, and/or just fun get-togethers could soften the heart to eventually accept a Bible study invitation. This would be made possible by breaking down fears of being expelled from a loosely tied physical family and becoming a member instead of the most bonded family on earth, which is the church of Christ. If the Catholic's family ties are very strong then seeking a long term relationship may be best. A long term relationship could yield to access of the patriarch of the family. If then a relationship can be developed with the patriarch and a study could eventually be established with him, then the entire family could likewise follow suit and be open to study. However, if the patriarch cannot be reached, the long term relationship will be beneficial if and when the family ties ever become weakened because of circumstances. It is at this point a study may be possible at the very early signs of family weakness, given that comfort will be desired by the Catholic whose life, the family, is being weakened.

The third class of those unwilling to study are those who are Catholic, unhappy with Catholicism, but due to a lack of Biblical knowledge are fearful to be swayed, as they see it, into a protestant viewpoint. These folks may say things such as, "I don't agree with everything that Catholicism teaches, but I have just always been a Catholic." The best approach to this class is to sow the word of God into their hearts with a special focus on areas that Catholicism differs from the Bible. Generally today, Catholics who are dissatisfied with Catholicism realize the corruption of the priesthood by the molestation of children; therefore, a good scripture to sow would be 1 Tim. 4:1-3 which reveals that those who forbid marriage have left the faith (Catholic priests have been forbidden to marry by the Catholic hierarchy). Another scripture that is powerful is Matt. 23:9 when Jesus forbids calling any man "father" (priests and those of the Catholic hierarchy are called father by Catholic members).

Those Willing To Study The Scriptures

Whether a Catholic is willing immediately to study the scriptures or the acceptance of a Bible study invitation takes years (possibly because he/she fell into one of the classes mentioned above in the "Those Unwilling To Study The Scriptures" section), the following approaches should be considered in both cases. On the outset, let it be known that most Catholics are taught and firmly believe that all "protestants" (those not Catholic) are in the wrong. Therefore, a focus must always be emphasized that the study is taking place not to sway the Catholic into a group that is simply opposed to Catholicism, but to teach the Catholic about the one true gospel, church, and traditional practices as shown in the Bible.

Those willing to study ought to first be shown that the Bible is the final authority for all matters of religion and that today man is to live by the words of Jesus as given in the New Testament (cf. Col. 3:17; John 12:48). In the short period this author has been studying with the lost, it has been learned that there is no amount of time too great that can be spent studying the authority of the scriptures over the doctrines of men. Too often, whether it be a Catholic or those of any belief system, when it is confessed that the Bible is the final authority by the one who is being taught, a full and proper understanding is not comprehended of what is really being confessed which yields to difficulties later in future Bible studies. The Catholic should agree that the Bible is correct over what is taught by the pope, over what is taught by the Catholic tradition, over what is taught by the family, over what is taught by the world, and over what is believed by the individual Catholic. It is best to get this down in writing so that it can be shown to the Catholic later if he/she is hung up on deciding between what the Bible teaches as compared to what he/she has believed or been taught. Bible authority will need to be emphasized and reemphasized throughout the study.

Next, the Catholic should be taught the truth about sin. Infant baptism is practiced by Catholics because of the doctrine of "original sin" which teaches all men are born sinners. Therefore, scriptures such as Matt. 18:3; Jonah 4:11; and Eze. 18:20 must be taught and

understood by the Catholic. Once it is confessed that children are not born in sin, the Catholic needs to understand that adults, those able to comprehend and are accountable, have all sinned and that there is a consequence for that sin (cf. Rom. 3:23; 6:23). It is good to show scriptures that teach that lying is a sin (cf. Eph. 4:25; Rev. 21:8) and to have the Catholic admit to sin even writing it down. Then, it should be shown to the Catholic the consequences of sin- that it separates man from God (cf. Isa. 59:1-2) and that it results in death (cf. Rom. 6:23). The Catholic must understand that being in sin separates him from God which means he/she has no eternal hope (cf. Eph. 2:12).

Once sin is taught and admitted by the Catholic, he/she must be shown how to be forgiven of such. As God's plan of salvation is taught, the conversion of the Ethiopian Eunuch in Acts 8:26ff ought to be emphasized. It is within this account that a belief in God is a required condition prior to one being able to be baptized for salvation (cf. Acts 8:36-38); likewise, this account shows that full immersion is required and is what it means to be baptized. Many Catholics will question the method of baptism because of what is taught in by the Catholic church, and Paul's description of baptism in Romans 6:3-4 will help to show that baptism is immersion, or a burial in water. The Catholic should then be asked if he has been baptized as the Ethiopian Eunuch (chances are he/she has been "baptized" either as a child or sprinkled as an adult). Then, the Catholic should be shown that those who are baptized are added by the Lord to His church and that if he/she makes the decision to be baptized he/she will also be added to Christ's church (cf. Acts 2:40-41, 47).

Gaining a study with a Catholic is the hardest part of assisting him/her to reach the point of conversion. However, if the Christian prayerfully seeks to present the Catholic the truth and consider the points mentioned above, there is great opportunity to gain a soul to the Lord's kingdom. Since most Catholics are very unfamiliar with the Bible, there is not a great deal of argumentation and resistance once it is agreed upon to open the Bible and study. Many Catholics have been freed from the bondage and slavery of Roman Catholicism and it is the hope that many more will continue to do so as this series is studied and applied by the children of God. There are many good studies which can be found online or by contacting us at Only Hope Publications which will help to study with a Catholic in a very concise and goal oriented method of using the scriptures to teach the Gospel.

Review Questions:

Question 1) How do Catholics view the Bible and why?

Question 2) Why would a Catholic who is willing to study the Bible for the first time, probably be "good soil"?

Question 3) What areas of Catholicism could yield to a "smooth" transition to truth?

Question 4) In what three classes do those who are unwilling to study fall?

Question 5) What are some ways to approach a Catholic who is initially unwilling to study and has a deeply rooted traditional family bond?

Question 6) How can you approach a Catholic who is initially unwilling to study because he says, "I have always been a Catholic"?

Question 7) What is good place to start when studying with a Catholic?

Question 8) How could a Catholic be approached regarding the topic of baptism?

