



## Articles on Catholic Theology and Teachings - Part 8 - What is the Redemption?



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For God so loved the world, as to give his only begotten Son; that whosoever believeth in him, may not perish, but may have life everlasting. --John 3:16

Sin separates us from God

You might hear a Christian say, "Jesus saved us all." What the person is really referring to is something Catholics call the redemption of humanity. Catholics believe that Jesus Christ willingly sacrificed himself on the cross for the redemption of human sins on the behalf of all humanity.

Our beliefs tell us that through one man, Adam, sin entered the world in the form of original sin. Since that time, humans have been cursed with original sin, the results of our first parent's defiance and rejection of God's love. Original sin is harbored in every descendant of Adam, the entire human race, from the very moment of conception. It is original sin that weakens the will of man, and creates a tendency in man to embrace evil and selfish passions. Original sin places a barrier between God and us, and the effects of original sin are so devastating that no man, by his own willpower, can overcome the selfishness inherent in original sin.

St. Paul tells us that, "For the wages of sin is death. But the grace of God, life everlasting, in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 6:23)." Sin, both original and personal, separates man from God. Because God is the perfection of all that is holy, just and good he cannot tolerate sinful humanity in the fullness of his presence. Sin places a chasm between man and God that cannot be overcome by human religions, good works without grace, and man's attempts to "try their best to live a good life." In essence no created person can bridge the gulf of sin between God and man.

God promised the coming of the Messiah to the Jews

We are very fortunate to have a loving and merciful God. No human can reach across the chasm of sin by his own power; fortunately God could. In fact, following the fall of mankind in the Garden of Eden, God began his divine plan to redeem humanity from the suffering of sin. God's plan of salvation began with the Jewish people, the children of Abraham. Based on Abraham's faith, love and hope for God, God proclaimed Abraham the father of a new nation, the Jews. As God's chosen people, they received prophecies and teachings of the Lord from the prophets. Israel was given hope from God, who promised to send a messiah for the redemption of sin. The Jewish prophet Isaiah prophesied the coming of the messiah, the suffering servant, "Because of his affliction he shall see the light in fullness of days; Through his

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The love and mercy of God has redeemed humanity, but it is the responsibility of the individual to justify their salvation by responding to Christ's grace in baptism and obeying his words of truth. How can we know what the truth is? St. Peter says, "Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life (John 6:68)." It is the words of Christ that the Catholic Church preaches, for the "Church of the living God [is] the pillar and foundation of truth (1 Timothy 3:15)."



suffering, my servant shall justify many, and their guilt he shall bear. Therefore I will give him his portion among the great, and he shall divide the spoils with the mighty, because he surrendered himself to death and was counted among the wicked; And he shall take away the sins of many, and win pardon for their offenses (Isaiah 53:11-12)."

The 'Suffering Servant' fulfills the Jewish law

Jesus Christ, the suffering servant, fulfilled the Jewish prophecies and perfectly upheld the Old Covenant of the Jewish people to the extent that it was perfected in the New Covenant. Christ brought a new perfection to the Jewish law, and this is best explained by Jesus two commandments, "You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments (Matthew 22:37-40)". Jesus both preached and upheld the new spirit of the law with absolute, perfect love for God. He did not abolish the old Jewish covenant but rather fulfilled it and correctly interpreted the Jewish law as only the Messiah could. The Jewish circumcision eventually gave way to Baptism by grace and the sacrifice of animals gave way to the perfect offering of the Sacrifice of the Mass. Christ fulfilled the Passover banquet of the lamb through the ultimate sacrifice of himself, the paschal lamb, for the life of the world. Jesus also fulfilled and perfected the Jewish laws of ritual cleansing, "Hear me, all of you, and understand. Nothing that enters one from outside can defile that person; but the things that come out from within are what defile." Christ's new teachings of sin are placed in the context of love for God. Christ teaches that sin is not breaking rules and rituals, but the rejection of the perfect divine love of God himself. Only Jesus Christ could have perfectly explained, fulfilled and lived according to the Law.

Jesus Christ Suffered and Died for the redemption of the sinful

God's love sent Jesus Christ into the world to teach his people the spirit of the law as well as to perfectly atone for the forgiveness of sin. Jesus tells us, "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I no longer call you slaves, because a slave does not know what his master is doing. I have called you friends, because I have told you everything I have heard from my Father (John 15:13-15)." He laid his life down, "to serve and to give his life as ransom for many (Mk 10:45)." Indeed, Jesus Christ, true man and true God, willingly accepted the crucifixion at the hands of the Jewish Sanhedrin and Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor. Those who feared and hated him had him crucified for false charges of inciting discord among the Jews and

uttering what seemed to the Jewish leaders to be blasphemous words, "Amen, amen, I say to you, before Abraham came to be, I AM (John 8:58)." Thus Jesus testifies that he is God, and that "he who sees me sees the Father also. Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in me? (John 14:8-11)" Christ reveals to the Jews that he not only is the human messiah but also God himself, for "I and the Father are one (John 10:30)." The Jewish leaders, who expected a political messiah, could not accept Jesus' divine words of truth and had him crucified.

Because Jesus Christ was both true God and true Man, he served as the divine and human sacrifice for the atonement of the sins of mankind. His perfect fulfillment of the law, the agony of his Passion, and his death on the cross, paid once and for all for the sins of man. "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man's obedience many will be made righteous (Romans 5:19)." God's justice demanded expiation for sins that could not be paid for by any human. Only the perfect, willing and loving sacrifice of the Son of God could atone for sin and bridge the gap between man and God. Jesus himself "by his obedience unto death accomplished the substitution of the suffering Servant, who 'makes himself an offering for sin,' when 'he bore the sin of many,' and who 'shall make many to be accounted righteous,' for 'he shall bear the iniquities (CCC 615)." Because Christ was truly righteous and truly human, he could sacrifice his life in love for the redemption of all mankind. Thus Christ's death was an act of the purest love, for his death and resurrection allowed us to die to sin and rise with him in the new life of grace.

Did Jesus die so all humankind could be saved?

Yes, God gave his only son so that all humans, be they believers or unbelievers, could be redeemed by Christ's sacrifice. Christ did not die for a predestined elect. The Church tells us "Christ died for all men without exception: 'There is not, never has been, and never will be a single human being for whom Christ did not suffer (CCC 605 and Council of Quiercy)." The Catholic Church does not agree with the Calvinistic doctrine that Jesus died for the salvation of a predestined elect, or that certain people are destined to damnation. Church Tradition preaches in unity with Holy Scripture, "he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey them."

The justice of God demands that no human being can be predestined to hell. God desires all to be saved, but only the individual can reject God's love and his gift of redemption.

Then all people are guaranteed salvation?

God has given us the gift of free will. The death of Christ on the cross opened the gates of heaven so that all people might be saved, but because of free will we can choose to reject Christ's free gift of redemption. Christ's death on the cross cannot force anyone into heaven, and it is conditional. Only those who return the love of Christ and obey his conditions can justify their place in the kingdom of heaven. We call this process justification.

What are the conditions?

Christ preaches that, "No one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit (John 3:2)." We are also told, "[Circumcision] prefigured baptism, which saves you now. It is not a removal of dirt from the body but an appeal to God for a clear conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 3:21)." St. Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit on Pentecost further explains, "Repent and be baptized every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38)." St. Peter refers to the gift of grace, the free gift of God imparted on all baptized believers. Grace, merited by Christ's death on the cross, breaths supernatural life into the soul, cleanses the soul of sin (both original and personal sin) and allows the baptized person to live a life of Christian holiness (provided they do not choose evil over grace by sinning mortally). It is grace that justifies us and allows us to have supernatural faith, hope and charity. "For by grace you are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, for it is the gift of God (Ephesians 2:8)."

A rich, young man also asks Jesus, "what good must I do to gain eternal life?" Jesus replies, "If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments (Matthew 19:16-17)." Christ also tell us of his two great commandments, "You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments (Matthew 22:37-40)." Jesus makes it clear that we are justified firstly be the free gift of grace through baptism and secondly by obeying the commandments out of faith, hope and charity. Notice Christ's exact wording, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." This not only means that we refrain from evil toward our neighbor, but that we obey the positive spirit of Jesus two commandments and the beatitudes he preached at the Sermon on the Plain and the Sermon on the Mount. Not only are baptism, repentance, faith, and obeying the commandments necessary for justification, but also good works for love of God and neighbors.