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Dear Associates and Friends,

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“[Jonah and the New Testament](#)” is the subject of this month’s article. Last month Dr. Martin’s presentation dealt with the background of “[The Book of Jonah](#).” This month, in a follow-up presentation, he shows how the messages of Jonah’s story, the subject of repentance, and the inclusion of Gentiles into salvation is shown in the narratives of Jesus and Peter in the New Testament.

The message from God given by Jonah to the Assyrians was for them to repent. If they did so the destruction that God predicted for them would be abated. They did repent and God’s judgment was postponed. It came decades later when the Assyrians of Nineveh returned to their old ways of evil.

The Book of Jonah is about salvation, and it concerns those receiving God’s salvation at that time. Before the time of Christ to be “saved” meant a physical salvation. There was no spiritual salvation in view for the Old Testament saints. Christ had not yet paid the price for sin, or been resurrected, or put His blood on the altar in heaven (Hebrews 9:11–15, 10:18–19; 1 Peter 1:18–19). God’s Holy Spirit was not yet given. Their faith and hope of future salvation (read Hebrews chapter 11) was in God through Christ, so they had a firm foundation. In the Book of Jonah, YHWH had universal power and incomprehensible compassion. God does as He chooses, and His actions are limited only by His compassion.¹

And now, news comes that recognition of the full extent of God’s compassion is finally being recognized by the world’s largest Christian denomination.

Pope Francis Teaches Universal Salvation

In my August 2010 article “[Modern Recognition of Universal Salvation](#)” on pages 8–13, I reviewed a book by an important Roman Catholic theologian that teaches universal salvation. It has the explicit title *Jesus Christ: Salvation of All*. That theologian was sponsored and mentored in his career by Pope Benedict the 16th. In addition, this retired professor of theology is still the Secretary of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. This organization within the Catholic Church used to be called “the Inquisition.” In former times the Inquisition would consign and condemn heretics to death and presumably to eternal hell.² Until recent decades the doctrine of eternal hell has been a central teaching of Catholic doctrine and can be found in the [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) today. Slowly Catholic doctrine has begun to change

In my review I praised the Catholic theologian and the book he wrote for its strong biblical presentation, although I pointed out flaws: salvation came through works, and that salvation could only come through the Roman Catholic Church, which would be accomplished by God in some mysterious way in the future. It has become clearer to me that the teaching of universal salvation has been the trajectory of Roman Catholic doctrine since Vatican II. The continuity extends from the leaders of Vatican II, through the Catholic theologian who strongly teaches universal salvation, approved of and taught by Pope Benedict 16th,³ and continuing to be taught by Pope Francis early in his tenure.

¹ James Nogalski, *The Book of the Twelve: Hosea–Jonah* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2011), p. 452.

² While this did occur in history, it did not happen as frequently as most people believed. Most Catholic heretics and witches were condemned and killed by local courts and not by the formal Inquisition. However, the Inquisition set the standards of belief and orthodox Roman Catholic doctrine, just as the renamed organization does today.

³ See my January 1, 2011 Commentary, “[Melchizedek and Benedict the 16th](#).”

So yes, the doctrine of universal salvation is now being taught by the Roman Catholic Church and its leader Pope Francis. It is being taught openly and powerfully with increasing frequency. It is being done much more quickly than I thought it would occur. The newly installed Pope Francis presented this teaching this month in a recent mass. Consider the May 22, 2013 Vatican Radio print article, "[Pope at Mass: Culture of encounter is the foundation of peace.](#)" Within a general topic about atheists, the Pope made an explicit statement regarding universal salvation:

"The Lord has redeemed [1] all of us, [2] all of us, with the Blood of Christ: [3] all of us, not just Catholics. [4] Everyone! 'Father, the atheists?' Even the atheists. [5] Everyone! And this Blood makes us children of God of the first class! We are created children in the likeness of God and [6] the Blood of Christ has redeemed us all! And we all have a duty to do good. And this commandment for everyone has redeemed us all! And we all have a duty to do good. And this commandment for everyone to do good, I think, is a beautiful path towards peace.

If we, each doing our own part, if we do good to others, if we meet there, doing good, and we go slowly, gently, little by little, we will make that culture of encounter: we need that so much. We must meet one another doing good. 'But I don't believe, Father, I am an atheist!' But do good: we will meet one another there."

He stated 6 times in 59 words that the redemption of Christ is totally inclusive. Every human being will be included. This is a remarkably outspoken statement by the Pope, and it comes early in his pontificate.

[1] **"all of us"**

[2] **"all of us"**

[3] **"all of us, not just Catholics"**

[4] **"Everyone!"**

[5] **"Everyone!"**

[6] **"the Blood of Christ has redeemed us all!"**

How more clear and direct could his statement be? He says all or everyone six different times, in three different ways. He means every single human being. Francis says this because he is informed by the clear biblical evidence that says "all." That evidence is thoroughly documented in Dr. Martin's book [The Essentials of New Testament Doctrine](#).

Furthermore, Pope Francis states there are no second-born children of God when he says the redeemed are **"children of God of the first class!"** This is also biblically true. The apostle Paul says the same thing and must have been the Pope's source. (If not, it should have been.) Paul presents the message of the Mystery first revealed by God to him in the twin epistles of Ephesians and Colossians. God revealed to Paul that no child of Adam has any preeminence before God and Christ, whether they are of Israel or not, whether they are male or female, or whether they are young or old, rich or poor.

I divided this portion of Francis' statement into two sections. The first section is biblically accurate, the second is a statement of salvation by good works. The blood of Christ does bring us near to God, as the apostle Paul states in Ephesians 2:13 (Concordant Literal Version): **"Yet now, in Christ Jesus, you, who once are far off, are become near by the blood of Christ."** All in the heavens and earth will be made at peace with God through His blood (Colossians 1:16–20). Does this mean God will save everyone immediately upon death, even those who do not believe in Christ's death and resurrection? No. Yet God will save every human being when He sees fit to do so:

"Who will have all men to be saved, ... and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time."

• **1 Timothy 2:4–6**

We who believe have been chosen and saved before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4), along with the Old Testament saints, will have the opportunity to experience the God's Kingdom before others.

“For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming. Then comes the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he has put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. ...

And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all.”

• 1 Corinthians 15:22–26, 28

So Why Is This Disturbing?

For believers in universal salvation as taught in the Bible, this would seem to be a welcome trend. And indeed, biblical truth is being presented to a much larger audience around the world. However, there are problems. This statement by Pope Francis and the “new” trend in Catholic theology is disturbing to me because the Roman Catholic hierarchy has held this view for some time. They could have preached this biblical truth all along, since the time of the apostles.

The truth has been available openly in the pages of the Holy Scriptures. Politics and earthly power and money got in the way. Only now is this doctrine of universal salvation beginning to be taught to the people within the Roman Catholic denomination. Why is this biblical truth being presented now? I believe, with the ongoing sexual and financial scandals, the Roman Catholic Church is in much greater financial trouble than is generally known. They may be teaching universal salvation now to retain members and by being more inclusive, perhaps even expand their membership rolls, or have lapsed Catholics return.

Will official Roman Catholic teaching revise their doctrine of hell, which began as a Greek philosophy and came into Christian belief in the 3rd century AD? Already the folk theology of limbo has been rejected, and teaching of purgatory has been greatly diminished. It will be interesting to see how Catholic Church doctrine will proceed from here. If all are saved, then hell, as Christians commonly (and unbiblically) understand it, is temporary and redemptive. If so, this will be another form of salvation by works, another standard Roman Catholic teaching.

Perhaps the doctrine of hell will be presented as a place of temporary suffering for the working out of penance (much like the original concept of purgatory, which was for believers who did evil). The root meaning of penance is “an act done to make up for sin.” Suffering could, in a warped and unbiblical theology, fulfill that requirement, while still being able to say that all will be saved. More will come out on this subject from Catholic leaders in the future.

Thank You

In the Book of Jonah, twice Jonah was thankful to God. The first time he was thankful was because God brought him back to life after he died (Jonah chapter 2): **“But I will sacrifice unto you with the voice of thanksgiving”** (Jonah 2:9). The second time he was thankful for the gourd plant that grew in one day to give him shade while he waited and hoped for God to destroy the city and people of Nineveh. While the text says Jonah was “glad” for the plant, he knew such plants do not grow to such size in one day (Jonah 4:5–6). God performed a personal miracle just for him! The next night, God brought up a worm to suddenly kill the plant.

Nineveh survived; the plant died. Nineveh repented; Jonah was angry and suffered from the heat. God’s humor in this whole matter was delightful.

We at ASK are thankful to God for the support that you give to ASK. Your encouragements over the last month for the work we do and particularly about the [Temples DVD](#) not only bring us joy, but they also encourage us to do more to please God and educate you about His Word. We need your continued and regular financial support to do this. God bless you and thank you all.

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