

# Roman Catholicism

by Thomas Watson

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*Thomas Watson warns against the soul-damning error of idolatry and the corrupting influences of popery.*

**Scripture:** Deuteronomy 31:11, Ecclesiastes 5:4, Isaiah 53:10, Ezekiel 23:37, Luke 11:52, Romans 5:6, Ephesians 5:23, Colossians 2:9, Colossians 2:19, Hebrews 10:12, 1 John 5:21, Revelation 13:1, Revelation 14:9, Revelation 22:18

**Topics:** "Idolatry", "Roman Catholicism"

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## Description

Thomas Watson preaches a sermon warning against idolatry, specifically addressing the errors and dangers of Roman Catholicism. He highlights the soul-damning nature of idolatry, the spiritual adultery it entails, and the opening it provides to God's judgments. Watson dissects various popish doctrines such as the worship of the pope, transubstantiation, denial of Scripture to the common people, salvation by personal merit, and the belief in purgatory. He also condemns practices like praying to saints and angels, image-worship, and the denial of Christ's sufferings in His soul. Watson concludes by emphasizing the unscriptural, carnal, unedifying, proud, immoral, toothless, bloody, blasphemous, ridiculous, God-provoking, and soul-destroying nature of Roman Catholicism, urging believers to keep themselves from idols.

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## Transcript

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"Keep yourselves from idols!" 1 John 5:21

IDOLATRY is a soul-damning error! In the law, God laid claim to the fat of the sacrifice, Leviticus 3:3. Just so, all divine worship, which is the fat of the sacrifice, the Lord will have peculiarly reserved for Himself; whereas the idolater gives that to the idol which is due to God. Idolatry is spiritual adultery. Ezekiel 23:37, "With their idols have they committed adultery!" Idolatry opens the sluice to all God's judgments; therefore, the Jews used to say in all the punishments which befell them--there was an ounce of the golden calf in them.

Our nature is as prone to idolatry--as dry wood is to take fire. This plague is catching. The Jews "made cakes to offer to the Queen of Heaven. And they gave drink offerings to their other idol gods!" Jeremiah 7:18. Rather than not worship something, men will worship the devil! Leviticus 17:7, "They must no longer

offer their sacrifices to the goat-demons that they have prostituted themselves with." In the Hebrew, it is "to the hairy ones," because the devils appeared to them in the form of satyrs or goats.

Let all God's people, as they prize their salvation, beware of idolatry. It is remarkable when the Apostle has said, "You are the temple of the living God," he adds presently, "What agreement has the temple of God with idols?" and verse 17, "Come out from among them, and be separate, says the Lord."

And what is POPERY, but Romish idolatry? That God's living temples may not be defiled with idolatry of the church of Rome, I shall show some of the chief teachings in Popery, and anatomize that religion a little. And, when I am done, I think everyone should abhor that cheat of Rome, and say of the papists, as once Jacob did of Simeon and Levi, brethren in evil, Genesis 49:6, "May I never enter their council; may I never join their assembly!"

1. The first popish doctrine is, that the pope is appointed by Christ to be the head of the church, and that he is the Vicar of Christ upon earth. This contradicts Scripture, which call Christ expressly the head of the Church, Colossians 2:19, Ephesians 5:23. For the pope to be head would be to make the church monstrous--to have two heads. I read of a beast rising up out of the sea, and the dragon gave him his power and his authority. Revelation 13:1. By the beast I understand Antichrist; and the dragon giving him power, that is, Satan giving power to the pope to exercise his papal greatness. If, then, the pope is the beast, he is very unfit to be the head of the church.

2. The second popish doctrine is the Mass, which is gross idolatry. Herein there are two errors:

The first error of the mass is transubstantiation. The papist's hold that the host or bread in the sacrament, after the words of consecration, is turned into the very body of Christ! This is against reason. A body, having its dimensions, cannot be in several places at once. If Christ's body is locally and physically in heaven, then it cannot be in the bread--but it is in heaven. Acts 3:21, "Whom the heavens must receive until the time of restitution of all things." That the bread is not turned into the body of Christ, I prove thus. If the bread is the very body of Christ--then all who eat the bread in the sacrament receive Christ; but that is not so, for the Apostle said of some, they did "eat and drink their own damnation," 1 Corinthians 11:27. The fathers were against this opinion of the corporal presence of Christ in the host. We eat Christ's body, said Cyprian, sacramentally by faith. "This is My body," that is, a sign and figure of my body, said Tertullian.

The second error of the mass is the papist's daily offer up Christ by way of sacrifice in the mass. This reflects dishonor upon Christ's priestly office--as if His sacrifice on the cross was imperfect. Hebrews 10:12, "This man after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God;" verse 14, "For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are sanctified." Behold the completeness of Christ's sacrifice. He has finished His work, and there remains nothing for us now, but to believe in Him.

3. The third popish error, is that they hold the Scriptures are not for the common people. They lock them up in Latin--an unknown language. They make the Scripture a book sealed. Faith comes by knowledge--but they, as Christ said, "take away the key of knowledge," Luke 11:52. If the Bible is searched into by the common people, it is a crime and is brought into the inquisition. God would have the Law read before all Israel in their hearing, Deuteronomy 31:11. Therefore, surely it was not to be in an unknown language. The prince of Rome does as the prince of the air--he blinds men's eyes--and then leads them to execution! 2 Corinthians 4:4.

4. The fourth error in the church of Rome, is their doctrine of satisfaction for sin. They exalt human nature and make it copartner with Christ in Justification. They hold that we, in our own persons, satisfy God's justice by penance, fasting, and good deeds. So said the council of Trent and the Rhemists. But where does the Scripture mention any such thing? Our confession of sin is no satisfaction for sin. If a traitor confesses his guilt, his confession does not satisfy justice for his treason. Our contrition is not satisfaction for sin. If a man is sorry that he owes such a debt, this does not at all satisfy for the debt. God's justice receives no satisfaction, except through Christ. The publican "smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner!" Luke 18:13. Here was a confession, a sinner; and contrition, he smote upon his breast--but it was far from satisfaction for his sin; therefore, he cries out for mercy, "God be merciful to me."

5. A fifth soul-poisoning doctrine in popery, is their distinction of mortal and venial sins. Mortal sins, they say, such as perjury, adultery, murder--cast us out of God's favor and deserve damnation. But venial sins are such as somewhat displease God--yet do not deserve death--but are of their own nature pardonable. For instance, lust, rash anger, vain thoughts are venial sins. But we affirm, according to Scripture, that there are no venial sins, none of which we can say they do not deserve damnation. Lust is a violation of God's law, therefore, not in its own nature venial. Matthew 5:28, "Whoever looks on a woman to lust after her, has already committed adultery with her in his heart." Christ makes an impure glance of the eye, to be adultery. The least tincture of sin exposes to God's curse, Galatians 3:10. It is true, the greatest sins, through Christ's blood, are pardonable--but none are pardonable in their own nature.

6. The sixth error in the Romish religion, is the doctrine of free-will. Bellarmine holds that the will is piously inclined, and that a man has an innate power to do good. But Augustine denies this, and I think our own experience may confute it. It is a saying of Chrysostom, "As a ship, when the rudder is broken, is carried up and down in the sea wherever the tempest will, so man, having lost the rudder of free-will, is carried up and down to sin where the devil will." The papists affirm that a man has some seeds and relics of spiritual life, and has power to convert himself. But the Apostle tells us that we are, by nature, without spiritual strength, Romans 5:6. Sin has cut the lock of righteousness where our strength lay. A man cannot of himself know the things of God, 1 Corinthians 2:14. He cannot think a good thought, 2 Corinthians 3:5. Nay, there is in the will of man not only impotency but obstinacy; our will is in rebellion against God! Acts 7:51. It is crooked, like a piece of iron that is bent awry. It is only the sweet efficacy of omnipotent grace, which can overcome us. We yield not to God by surrender, but storm. We do not lay down our weapons--but they are beaten out of our hands. Whenever God converts, He creates, which is a sufficient confutation of the proud doctrine of freewill. "Man," said Ambrose, "has free-will to sin--but none to conversion."

7. The seventh popish error, is their indulgences. They affirm that the pope, as Peter's successor, has power to grant an indulgence to men, by virtue whereof they are set free in the sight of God from the guilt and punishment of sin. This brings grist to the pope's mill. To give a pardon or indulgence is a flower of the crown of heaven alone! Mark 7:2, "Who can forgive sin but God alone?" The indulgence which the pontiff of Rome grants, is a key that opens the door to all vice. For what do the papists care what sins they commit--when they have a license from the pope! Roger Holland, the martyr, who was at first a Catholic and later converted, made this confession before Bonner, "At first," said he, "I was of your popish religion and I made no reckoning of any sin, trusting the priest's absolution; swearing and immorality were no sins with me, because I could have them absolved for money."

8. The eighth popish error, is their doctrine of salvation by personal merit. They hold that their good works expiate sin and merit mercy. Bellarmine said that a man has right to heaven upon a double title: the one is Christ's merit, and the other his own merit. And he brings that Scripture, 2 Timothy 4:8, "Henceforth is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord the just judge shall give me, at that day." His argument is this: If God crowns our good works--then they have merit. I answer, this does not follow. A king may confer a large gratuity not because it is deserved--but because he has a mind to set forth his bounty. God crowns us not for our works sake--but for His name's sake, Ezekiel 20:9.

OBJECTION. But if God, in justice, bestows the crown--then do not our works merit?

ANSWER 1. God gives a reward as a just judge; not to the worthiness of our works, but to the worthiness of Christ.

ANSWER 2. God, in justice, gives a reward not because we have deserved it but because He has promised it. The truth is that God, in free grace, crowns those works in the court of mercy, which He condemns in the court of justice. That good works cannot merit appears thus:

1. That which merits at God's hands must be a gift, not a debt. If a debtor pays his creditor what he borrowed, he does not merit anything from the creditor. Whatever service we do for God is a due debt; nay, it is but part of the debt. How then can we merit?

2. He who will merit must give God that which is perfect. But our good works are but shining sins, they are showered with pride, tainted with hypocrisy, so that we are far from meriting. I conclude this from Bernard, "Good works are the way to the kingdom, not the cause of it."

9. The ninth popish error, is their purgatory fire. There is, said Bellarmine, an infernal place in the earth called purgatory in which the souls which were not fully cleansed in this life, are purged there by fire, before they can be received into heaven. Purgatory fire the papists make satisfactory for sin; which much derogates from the virtue and benefit of Christ's sufferings, "who Himself has purged our sins," Hebrews 1:3.

The Scripture nowhere asserts this doctrine of purgatory. It mentions no middle place. The wicked, at death, go immediately to hell. Luke 16:23, "The rich man was buried--and in hell he lift up his eyes in torment." Believers, at death, go immediately to heaven. Luke 23:43, "This day you shall be with Me in paradise." Christ was to be instantly in heaven, and the penitent thief was to be with Christ that very day. So that he was in no such place as purgatory--but went immediately from the cross to paradise. Christ's blood is purgatory in this life, 1 John 1:7. If men are not purged by Christ's blood, there is no purging by fire. Not only the Scripture but the Fathers were against purgatory. We do not read of two fires, said Augustine, only of hell-fire, not purgatory-fire. But this imaginary fire of purgatory, makes for something to sell in the pope's kitchen. For when men are about to make their will, if they leave good sums of money to the pope and his priests--they tell them that they will pray for them that they may be speedily released out of the pains of purgatory!

10. The next popish error, is their praying to saints and angels.

Their praying to saints: The papists pray to several saints for the removal of temporal evils. They pray to St. Apolline to ease their toothache, and to St. Petronelle to cure their fevers. They pray to other saints for the removal of spiritual evils. One said, if we pray to the departed saints, they, being stricken with

compassion, pray to God for us. But how absurd is this! The saints in heaven do not know our grievances. "Abraham is ignorant of us," Isaiah 63:16. When Elijah was to be taken up to heaven, he said to Elisha, "Ask what I shall do for you before I am taken from you," 2 Kings 2:9, clearly implying that there was no place to ask him, after he was gone.

Their praying to angels: They bring that Scripture, Revelation 8:3, "Then another angel with a gold incense burner came and stood at the altar. And a great quantity of incense was given to him to mix with the prayers of God's people, to be offered on the gold altar before the throne." They say, that if the angels pray for us--may we pray to them. I answer, the angel there is to be understood of Christ, the Angel of the covenant, who offers up our prayers and puts His incense on them to perfume them. Just so, Augustine expounds it. Angel worship is prohibited, Colossians 2:9, "Let no man beguile you of your reward in worshipping of angels." And what is praying to them but a part of divine worship?

They distinguish between mediators of redemption, and intercession. They say they pray to Christ only as a mediator of redemption--but to angels as mediators of intercession. To this I answer, Christ is not only a Redeemer but an Advocate 1 John 2:1. He pleads our cause like the advocate for the client. Now, as it is a sin to make any our redeemer, but Christ--so it is a sin to make any our advocate but Christ. Those who pray to angels make them their advocates. That we may not pray to angels, I prove by two Scriptures. The first is Romans 10:14, "How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed?" We may not pray to any but whom we believe in. But we may not believe in an angel; therefore, we may not pray to him. The second Scripture is Hebrews 10:19, "Having boldness therefore to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus." The argument is this: he only is to be prayed to, by whom we have admission into heaven. By the blood of Jesus alone, we have admission into heaven; therefore, He alone is to be prayed to. When the angels can purchase for me an entrance into glory--then I will pray to them--and not before!

11. The next popish error, is their image-worship. Pope Stephen the Third, maintaining images in temples, proclaimed their veneration, and caused the people to burn incense to them. This is contrary to the letter of the commandment, "Do not make idols of any kind. You must never worship or bow down to them." Images are teachers of lies; they represent God in a bodily shape. God said, "Let us make man in Our image," Genesis 1:16. But the papists say, "Let us make God in our image!" When the Lord delivered the Law, the people "heard His words but didn't see His form; there was only a voice," Deuteronomy 4:12. God cannot be pictured by any image. You cannot picture the soul--much less God, Isaiah 40:18, "To whom then will you liken God?" The papists tell us they worship God by the image. I answer, if it is absurd to bow down to the picture of a king--when the king himself is present--then much more to bow down to the image when God Himself is present! Jeremiah 23:24, "Do not I fill heaven and earth, says the Lord?"

12. The next popish error, is that they deny that Christ endured the pains of hell in His soul. They are very rhetorical in setting forth the torments of His body--but they deny the sufferings of His soul. This opinion much derogates from Christ's sufferings, Isaiah 53:10, "You shall make His soul an offering for sin." Whatever would lessen Christ's sufferings, would lessen Christ's love to us. Jesus Christ underwent those pains which were equivalent to the pains of hell. He felt the displeasure of the Almighty; He was in a soul-agony when He was deserted. All which aggravates Christ's passion all the more--and declares His compassion to us.

13. The next popish error, is their assuming power to themselves to absolve men of their oaths. Ecclesiastes 5:4, "When you make a vow to God, don't delay fulfilling it, because He does not delight in fools. Fulfill what you vow." But the papists make nothing of absolving and freeing men from their oaths.

They hold that the pope has power to dispense with all vows made to God, and oaths of fidelity to princes. The pope, having Peter's key in his hand, undertakes to unlock men's consciences and loose them from all their obligations. How can that be good doctrine, which teaches men how they may be perjured, yet innocent? You who are the temples of the living God, take heed of defiling yourselves with these popish doctrines. Do not pollute and adulterate your souls by joining the temple of God to the house of demons. 2 Kings 5:18.

Besides, these soul-poisoning doctrines in popery, I shall show what a detestable religion it is--where you may see the wrinkled face of the whore of Rome!

1. The Romish religion is an UNSCRIPTURAL religion. The papists cannot say as much, as once the devil said, "It is written." They have not God's Word to show, for what they do. What Scripture have they to show, for their seven sacraments? What Scripture have they to show, for keeping the cup from the people? What Scripture have they to show, for their dirges and pilgrimages, going many miles to visit the shrines of saints? The Lord will say to them at last, "Who has required these things at your hand!"

2. The Romish religion is a CARNAL religion. It consists only of worshipings, cringings, and penance. 1 Corinthians 3:3, "Are you not carnal?" Whereas God will be worshiped in spirit, John 4:24. Living by faith, examining the heart, mortifying sin--these things Catholics are wholly strangers to. Popery is a mere external shell. It is a carcass, which has no soul in it.

3. The Romish religion is an UNEDIFYING religion. 1 Corinthians 14:12, "Let all things be done to edifying." But what edifying is done in their ceremonies? Their candles, flowers; their 'Hail Marys'; their incense, their beads, rings, medals, altar-clothes--what intrinsic goodness can there be in these? They draw the heart from the serious worship of God, causing it to mind superstitious vanities! What are the baptizing of bells, adoring of crucifixes, and sprinkling with ashes--but the deliriums of sick brains? Can these things purify the conscience? What is there in holy water to wash a defiled soul? Will the papist's balm and incense make them a sweet odor to God? Will their lighted candles show them the way to heaven?

4. The Romish religion is a PROUD religion. The pope calls himself Peter's successor--but he more truly exceeds him in pomp--than succeeds him in humility. The pope of Rome sets his mitre above all temporal crowns. He calls himself "servant of the servants of God," but he insults princes. He makes them stand barefoot at his holiness' gate and hold his stirrup. Pope Alexander the Third trod upon the neck of Frederick the Emperor. The pope causes the monarchs of the earth to become his tributaries.

5. The Romish religion is an IMMORAL religion. The papists are not the holy catholic church. At Rome, fornication keeps open shop and is, in some cases, preferred before honorable matrimony. The pope is called his holiness--but his chair is fouled. Pope Plus the Second and Julius the Third were stained with vice. Some of their popes have been guilty of sodomy, as Dr. Rivet relates out of their own writers. Pope John was guilty of selling sacred things and murder.

6. The Romish religion is a TOOTHLESS religion. It never hurts Satan. Popery is like a sword with a fine hilt--but has no edge; or like weak medicine which will not work. Some of the popish writers say that the cross is a holy charm or spell against the devil. But I think that it rather invites the devil--than frightens him! Their singing, and their prayers in Latin, is the devil's music. Their whipping themselves, will not let out the blood of one sin. There lent-fasts will no more starve the devil, than it does their fat monks.

7. The Romish religion is a BLOODY religion. The pope does not content himself to have Peter's key in his hand, the power of excommunication--but he gets the civil sword too. That what he cannot defend by strength of argument, he may maintain by force of violence. Popery is propagated by violence. Witness the persecution under Pope Pius the Fourth, where multitudes of Christians were put to death. Witness the many thousands of the Albigenses and Waldenses who were cruelly murdered. Witness the Spanish inquisition, the massacre at Paris. Our own nation has felt the weight of antichrist; they who would not drink in the golden cup of Rome's fornication were forced to drink in the bloody cup of martyrdom! We know the papists are good at fireworks. It is an observation of a learned man that the persecutions under the bishop of Rome have been far greater than those under the emperors of Rome. God forbid we should ever nourish that Italian wolf which has sucked so much blood!

8. The Romish religion is a BLASPHEMOUS religion. The papists hold:

- That the pope is above Scripture; that he may dispense with it, and that his canons bind more than the Word of God.

- That infallibility is a jewel of his mitre; in his pontifical chair he cannot error.

- They hold that the virgin Mary is to be worshiped; they give her veneration. They call her "the queen of the world", "the ladder of heaven", "the gate of paradise". They say we may appeal from God's court--to the Virgin Mary's court. They affirm that she is at the golden altar in heaven--not only requesting mercy but commanding it. "God has decreed to give nothing without her," said Ozorius the Jesuit. The papists honor the Virgin Mary above Christ, ascribing more to her milk--than His blood! In their doxologies they say, "Praise be to God and the Virgin Mary, and also to Jesus Christ." What Christian ear can endure to hear these blasphemies!

9. The Romish religion is a RIDICULOUS religion, more fit to move to laughter, than devotion. What are their adoring of relics--but a Romish toy! The papists pretend to show Paul's chain with which he was bound, and the tail of the donkey which Christ rode on. They show John the Baptist's ear for a relic in Floride, his forehead in Spain--yet his whole head they affirm is to be seen in Rome! Thus the Roman faith is turned into a fable!

10. The Romish religion is a GOD-PROVOKING religion. As if the Lord were not wise enough to appoint the manner of His own worship--they will prescribe rules to Him. This sin has made God divorce a people. Hosea 2:2, "She is no longer My wife, and I am no longer her husband." It has made the fury to come up into His face. Ezekiel 6:4, "I will cast down your slain men before your idols." Seeing you will be kneeling to your idols--I will lay your dead men at the feet of your altars!

11. The Romish religion is a SOUL-DESTROYING religion. Worshiping the beast, and drinking the cup of God's wrath are put together in Revelation 14:9. It is not clear to me how men dying in the Roman religion, can be saved. For besides all that has been said, the papists bring themselves directly under that curse, Revelation 22:18, "I solemnly declare to everyone who hears the prophetic words of this book: If anyone adds anything to what is written here, God will add to that person the plagues described in this book. And if anyone removes any of the words of this prophetic book, God will remove that person's share in the tree of life and in the holy city that are described in this book." The papists are guilty of this: they take away from Scripture for they blot out the second commandment; and they add to Scripture. They say that Scripture is not perfect; therefore replace it with their traditions, which they hold to be not only equal with Scripture, but superior to it.

Oh, then, if we are the temples of God, let us not defile ourselves with popery! Let us not receive the mark of the beast--either in our right hand or forehead. For what agreement has the temple of God with idols! It would be worse for us to embrace popery, than for our forefathers. They lived in times of darkness and knew no better; but we, like Jonathan, have tasted the honey of the Gospel and our eyes have been enlightened. Therefore, if we should pollute ourselves with idols--what judgment and fiery indignation might we expect! "Keep yourselves from idols!" 1 John 5:21

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