**Mary, the Mother of Jesus (SR: Matt. 1:18-25)**

 The most challenging stipulation of Christianity is to lay aside all earthly things for the glory of the Cross. We speak broadly when we say such things, but the true challenges associated with this requirement of our Lord become real as we count the cost of discipleship. Nowhere is this more relevant than the laying aside of false religion that may have been a part of our family heritage for generations. Going against the grain of our family heritage means burned bridges, fractured relationships, and the ever-present concern that generations of family members may be eternally lost. For many of us, the laying aside of our family’s religious heritage has brought this anxiety, frustration, anger, bitterness, and questioning. This stressful weight exists among those who have been converted for decades and those who are only months into the faith.

 Today, I want to study one pillared aspect of the common religious backgrounds of many of us and our families – the role of Mary in Christianity. I do this because it was requested by one of our members in an effort to provide clarification on what the Bible does and does not teach regarding Mary. Much of what I will be doing today is comparing what Catholicism says with what the Bible says regarding Mary. I want to be clear that I do not do this with malice in my heart towards anyone. I affirm that the RCC believes and teaches many correct things about Christianity, as do most all other religious groups. I also want to inform everyone that my family has strong Irish Catholic roots for many generations. I have a family member who has been a nun for over 75 years & has been publicly awarded by the RCC for her service. Moreover, my maternal grandparents received recognition from Pope John Paul II for their 50th wedding anniversary. I want everyone to know that I, too, personally face the challenge of going against family religious tradition in the claims and beliefs that I hold sacred today.

**I. Mary Is Unique Among Mankind.**

 A. In an effort to counteract false teaching, it has become conventional to regard Mary as common or unexceptional. This should not be.

 B. God chose Mary to be the subject of fulfilled prophecy (Isaiah 7:14). This makes her esp. exceptional. Very few individuals fulfilled prophecy in such a direct way.

 C. Mary is the only recorded example of virgin birth. There is nobody in the history of the world with all of our available information that has ever done such a thing. This makes her esp. exceptional.

 D. She not only had a virgin birth, but she gave birth to God in the flesh, God with us. No single person ever, anywhere, at any time, has ever done this. This makes her esp. exceptional.

 E. And it wasn’t just the nine months and delivery that made her unique. She also had to raise Jesus—nursing Him, teaching Him, loving Him, protecting Him. What a challenging endeavor for any mother, let alone the mother of Jesus! Then she had to watch as her Son went from being regarded as the Son of David to the crucified criminal. These things make her esp. exceptional.

 F. Mary was chosen by God for a totally unique objective. As such, she deserves to be highly esteemed among all mankind. All should regard her as blessed (Lk. 1:48). Even so, Jesus did not allow others to use this truth as a pretext for the elevation of Mary to the divine (Lk. 11:27f).

**II. Mary Is Not Divine & Is Not Worthy Of Worship (CC #963-964, #971).**

 A. There is no doubt that Mary was totally unique. Yet, elevating her to the status of Godhood or divinity is to dishonor her role in God’s plan.

 B. What would Mary say about her identity if we could ask her? Well, she actually has already answered this (Luke 1:46-55). She calls herself the maidservant and vessel for God’s use. She calls God her Savior. She calls God holy in contrast to herself. She identifies God as the mighty one who has acted on behalf of her. She distinguishes her name from the name of the Lord. She regards herself as lowly.

 C. In direct contradiction of how Mary perceived herself, the RCC teaches that Mary was sinless (#411, #966, #972). If she was without sin and divine, why would she describe herself in need of salvation and depicting God as her redeemer? Truly any who would regard her as otherwise do that which she herself would not do! Mary was unique, but she was also someone who faced the real problem that we all face, our sins. Mary was a sinner in need of salvation, just as everyone else (Rom. 3:10-12, 23).

 D. The RCC also teaches that Mary is not subject to Christ (*Glories of Mary*, 200). The Bible clearly teaches otherwise and identifies Jesus as Lord over all, “ALL” including Mary (Acts 10:36; Matthew 28:18-20). At His name, every knee shall bow with the singular exception of God the Father (Phil. 2:11-13). If Mary was in the church, she was in subjection to the Head of the church, Jesus! Consider also John 2:1-11 and Matthew 12:46ff where Jesus clearly identifies Himself on a higher level than Mary.

 E. In saying that Mary is the “Mother of God” much more is being referenced than that she was simply a vessel for God’s usage. The idea that is being falsely taught is that the very existence of Jesus came into effect because of Mary. This is not true as Jesus was present at Creation and, like the Father and HS, is eternal. Through Him all things have been created and all things, including Mary, were created for Him and to the end that they give Him glory (Col. 1:15ff). Let us never put the creation on an equal plane or on a higher plane than the Creator!

 F. Related to our last point, no person on Earth should ever refer to Mary as their mother in a religious sense. Such would be in direct violation of Jesus’ command in Matt. 23:9. Nobody should use such expressions as, “Our Blessed Mother” in reference to Mary or anyone else.

**III. Mary Was Not A Perpetual Virgin (CC #499, #510, #500).**

 A. As a result of the irreverent exaltation of Mary and based on an improper understanding of sexual relations based on the twisting and misapplication of several passages of Scripture (sp. Lev. 15 and 1Cor. 7; contrast Heb. 13:4 and SOS which affirm the purity & sanctity of marriage & the marital bed), the RCC teaches that Mary remained a virgin her entire life (*Glories of Mary*, 331, 627, 641, 642). What does the Bible teach?

 1. *“It has been the firm and constant belief of the Catholic Church from the beginning that our Blessed Lady remained a spotless virgin to the end…A virgin before her childbearing, during and after that childbearing.”* (Vassal-Phillips, *The Teachings of the Catholic Church*, V.I., 520).

 2. Of course, other churches have fallen prey to this heresy as well. Bishop Bull of the Protestant Episcopal Church of England wrote: *“It cannot with decency be imagined that the most holy vessel which was once consecrated to be a receptacle of the Deity should be afterwards desecrated and profaned by human use.”*

 B. Matt. 1:25 says that Joseph kept her a virgin UNTIL she had given birth to her FIRSTBORN son. After this, Mary and Joseph engaged in the regular course of marriage and had more children. Mark 6:3 teaches us that Mary also gave birth to James, Joses, Judas, Simon, and at least two daughters. That means that Mary and Joseph had at least seven children!

 C. Those who advocate for the perpetual virginity of Mary have one of two options. Some teach that these are her stepchildren that Joseph had from another marriage. Others teach (as the Catholic Catechism, that these were not really Mary, the mother of Jesus, children but rather another Mary’s children. What though is the simpler explanation that relies on what the Word of God actually says rather than an argument from silence or twisting of figurative language, and what is the motivation to make these anything other than Mary’s own children in light of what Matt. 1:25 clearly teaches? The Catechism admits this explanation was a historical development to defend this false doctrine! (cf. #499)

**IV. Mary Is Not A Mediator Between You And God (CC, #829, #966, #969, #975)**

 A. The RCC teaches several things about Mary as a mediator between mankind and God. Among these teachings include that she alone can obtain pardon for the sinner (*Glories of Mary, 51, 71, 83*) and that one cannot be saved without praying to Mary (*Glories of Mary, 254, 255, 189*). But what does the Bible teach?

 B. Regarding mediation, the Bible clearly and unequivocally teaches that there is ONE mediator between God and man and that is Jesus Christ (1Tim. 2:5f). “But is He the only mediator,” the question is asked. If He is not the only mediator, please show which passage teaches that there is another mediator? Who else would be qualified? He is the perfect high priest who can sympathize with our weaknesses (Heb. 2:16f; 4:15). I would also add that the Greek here points out that Jesus is the only one of His class. The grammar suggests that He is utterly unique. So, no matter who is compared to Him, they always fall short. No matter what objects we bring to our prayers to try and access a different mediator, none will succeed.

 C. Regarding salvation, the Bible clearly and unequivocally teaches that salvation is in Christ alone (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). And while Mary is the vessel through which Jesus entered the world, she did not die for the sins of mankind, she does not possess equality with the Godhead, and it is not by her power or glory that salvation is made available. It is through Christ that salvation comes, not Mary.

  *“Mariolatry is not taught in the New Testament. One cannot help appreciating the motive behind men’s wanting to honor Mary, but we must recognize that one gets on uncertain and dangerous grounds when he teaches doctrines for which there is no Bible authority.”* (Paul Matthews, *Basic Errors of Catholicism*, 115) Mary was totally unique, but she was not divine. She was a vessel for God’s use and you know what? You can be a vessel for God’s use as well. Mary brought good news through Jesus; we do the same. Mary’s role as earthly mother of Christ was empowered by her dedication to serving God; we serve in same way! (Mt. 12:46-49)

 Let us never exalt a person above Christ. Let us never have any gods before the one true God. Let us never exalt manmade traditions and claims to equality with the Scriptures. And let us always keep our family and its traditions in their proper place, as secondary to God.