

#5. NOW WHAT?

Luther was charged with heresy and ordered to Augsburg to appear before church leaders and retract his teachings or face punishment. In Augsburg, Luther submitted his response in writing after a day of questioning by the papal legate. Not convinced of Luther's teachings, he was again ordered to recant or appear no more before the council. Luther and his associates left the hall and escaped during the night. Luther's preaching of the Scripture teaching of justification by faith alone was vehemently opposed by the Church of Rome.

Justification by faith alone is still opposed by the Church of Rome today. The word 'alone' was the Reformation battle for 500 yrs. The Council of Trent was organized to stop the teachings of the Protestant Reformers. Though Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, Knox and others taught this clear Bible doctrine, the denominations that were spawned by their teachings are now returning to an understanding similar to the Church of Rome.

The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification has been signed by the Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation on October 31, 1999, the World Methodist Council on July 23, 2006, and the World Communion of Reformed Churches which includes some 233 denominations in 110 countries totaling 80-100 million members in July, 2017, and on October 31, 2017, the Anglican Communion told the world they are affirming the substance of the Joint Declaration. It was noted that "all the historical Churches of the west have now a shared understanding of justification."¹ Catholics and many Protestants now agree on how a person is saved.

This declaration can be found on the Vatican website at the following address.

http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/documents/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_31101999_cath-luth-joint-declaration_en.html

Notice some of the parts of this document.

Paragraph 40 and 41 declare:

“40. The understanding of the doctrine of justification set forth in this Declaration shows that a consensus in basic truths of the doctrine of justification exists between Lutherans and Catholics. In light of this consensus the remaining differences of language, theological elaboration, and emphasis in the understanding of justification described in paras. 18 to 39 are acceptable. Therefore the Lutheran and the Catholic explications of justification are in their

¹ <http://www.anglicannews.org/news/2017/10/lutherans,-catholics-methodists-reformed-and-anglicans-drawn-into-deeper-communion.aspx>

difference open to one another and do not destroy the consensus regarding the basic truths.”

“41. Thus the doctrinal condemnations of the 16th century, in so far as they relate to the doctrine of justification, appear in a new light: The teaching of the Lutheran churches presented in this Declaration does not fall under the condemnations from the Council of Trent. The condemnations in the Lutheran Confessions do not apply to the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church presented in this Declaration.”²

The Catholic condemnations by the Council of Trent of Luther’s teaching and Luther’s condemnation of Roman Catholic teaching on the subject of justification by faith do not apply anymore. The reason being that both Lutherans and Catholics agree on the basics of the idea. However, it is not the Roman Catholic teachings that are changing but rather the teachings of Martin Luther are being slowly surrendered.

What are some of the teachings of this document? The statement of common belief in justification by faith in Paragraph 15 is the key to the document.

“15. In faith we together hold the conviction that justification is the work of the triune God. The Father sent his Son into the world to save sinners. The foundation and presupposition of justification is the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ. Justification thus means that Christ himself is our righteousness, in which we share through the Holy Spirit in accord with the will of the Father. Together we confess: By grace alone, in faith in Christ's saving work and not because of any merit on our part, we are accepted by God and receive the Holy Spirit, who renews our hearts while equipping and calling us to good works.”³

It would seem from this paragraph that there is nothing amiss for justification is “by grace alone.” However, the document states that the grace by which a person is justified comes, not through faith alone, but through the sacrament of baptism administered by the church. Here are the relevant sections of paragraphs 25, 27, and 30. Each shows that grace comes as a result of receiving the “sacrament” of baptism.

“25. We confess together that sinners are justified by faith in the saving action of God in Christ. By the action of the Holy Spirit *in baptism, they are granted the gift of salvation*, which lays the basis for the whole Christian life.”⁴ [emphasis supplied.]

² The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, October 31, 1999, taken from the Vatican website at http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/documents/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_31101999_cath-luth-joint-declaration_en.html

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

The above declaration states that salvation is granted when you are baptized.

“27. The Catholic understanding also sees faith as fundamental in justification. For without faith, no justification can take place. *Persons are justified through baptism* as hearers of the word and believers in it...”⁵ [emphasis supplied.]

The above declaration states that you are justified when you are baptized.

“30. Catholics hold that the grace of Jesus Christ imparted in *baptism takes away all that is sin ‘in the proper sense’ and that is ‘worthy of damnation’ (Rom 8:1)*”⁶ [emphasis supplied.]

It is in baptism that the Catholic Church believes that grace is imparted resulting in the cleansing of all sin. But the Bible says that grace, justification and salvation all come through faith without any prerequisite works.

“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.” Ephesians 2:8,9

If salvation is through works, if only through baptism does justification and salvation come, how could the thief on the cross have been saved? If forgiveness and cleansing from all sin comes through something we do, like baptism, then we can boast of our accomplishments just as the Pharisees did.

“Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.” Romans 3:28

However, justification is by faith not by the sacrament of baptism. You are baptized as a result of your relationship with God after receiving His gift of salvation not in order to receive the gift of salvation. What part do works play in salvation? Here is paragraph 38 of the document.

“38. When Catholics affirm the ‘meritorious’ character of good works, they wish to say that, according to the biblical witness, a reward in heaven is promised to these works.”⁷

The Catholic Church states that works have merit, are meritorious, because works are to be rewarded.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

“2010 Since the initiative belongs to God in the order of grace, *no one can merit the initial grace* of forgiveness and justification, at the beginning of conversion. Moved by the Holy Spirit and by charity, *we can then merit* for ourselves and for others the graces needed for our sanctification, for the increase of grace and charity, and for the attainment of eternal life. Even temporal goods like health and friendship can be merited in accordance with God’s wisdom. These graces and goods are the object of Christian prayer....”⁸

In the Catechism of the Catholic Church, initial grace, at the beginning of conversion, cannot be merited. This initial grace comes through baptism as they have previously stated. Baptism, for those in the Catholic Church most often happens when one is just a babe in the arms of your mother. But it is after your baptism as an infant that your works have merit and can gain grace for yourself and others “the attainment of eternal life.” Does the Bible say we merit anything by our good works?

“What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found? For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath *whereof* to glory; but not before God.” Romans 4:1,2

If justification is by works, we can boast of our accomplishments.

“For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt.” Romans 4:3,4

If justification is by works, then the reward is not a gift, “reckoned of grace,” but the reward is “of debt,” something that God owes you.

“But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.” Romans 4:5

But Paul clearly states that in contrast to works for salvation, it is he that “believeth on Him,” the one who by faith accepts the death of Christ as atonement for their sins, it is “his faith” that “is counted for righteousness.” We are declared righteous because of our faith in Christ and not because of the works that we do. It is faith that is counted for righteousness and righteousness brings heaven.

“For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, *was* not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.” Romans 4:13

⁸ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Article 2010

The inheritance of Abraham was by promise, not by works “through the law,” but “through the righteousness of faith.” It was not something God owed Abraham but something He had promised Him through faith. What was Abraham promised?

“By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as *in* a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker *is* God.” Hebrews 11:8-10

Abraham and his family left Ur of the Chaldees “by faith.” They traveled in the land that God had promised them “by faith.” But it was not the literal land of Canaan that was the ultimate fulfillment of the promise of God but the “city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.” Abraham and his family looked for a heavenly country.

“For if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect.” Romans 4:14

If the inheritance of that heavenly country, if it is through “the law” that we become “heirs” of heaven, then the reward of heaven is by works and “faith is made void, and the promise” is worthless. Paul teaches that Justification and Salvation are gifts received by faith. The works we do after we receive the gift of salvation are fruits of our faith in Christ not the cause of our salvation. It is only the merit of Christ that makes our works acceptable to God. We are rewarded with Heaven because God is good not because God owes us something for our works.

In the churches of Galatia, Paul met the problem plaguing them at the time. Certain individuals were teaching that salvation was by faith plus something else. In the case of the Galatians that something else was circumcision.

“O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you? This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?” Galatians 3:1-3

The Galatian churches had embraced the idea that Justification was *not* by faith in Christ *alone* but by faith & works of law, that salvation was *begun* by faith but *completed* by works. Paul reasons with them by asking the rhetorical question, Did you receive the Holy Spirit because of your good works or did you receive Him by faith? The answer was “by the hearing of faith.” After all, good works cannot be performed without the Holy Spirit so why would be able to do good works would bring us the Holy Spirit. In light of the fact that the Holy Spirit was given in answer to the prayer of faith, Paul wonders, If you began the Christian life receiving the Holy

Spirit by faith, why do you now think that you are going to bring your character to perfection by your works of the flesh? Paul wrote to Galatians to correct the error.

“Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing.” Galatians 5:1,2

Our freedom from the power of sin comes from faith in Christ. Why now become ensnared again by works-for-salvation mentality? This only ends in bondage because the Holy Spirit that frees us only comes through faith. If you believe works, in this case, circumcision, brings you salvation, Christ is profitless to you.

“For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace.” Galatians 5:3,4

If salvation is by works then you must keep the whole law. Then Christ is worthless to you because salvation is now something owed you for your works rather than through faith in Christ. You have fallen from grace. Yet this is the doctrine of justification taught by the Catholic church, faith plus something else.

“1459 Absolution takes away sin, but it does not remedy all the disorders sin has caused. Raised up from sin, the sinner must still recover his full spiritual health by *doing something more to make amends for the sin: he must make satisfaction for*’ or ‘expiate’ *his sins*. This satisfaction is also called ‘*penance*.’ ”⁹

The Catholic Church teaches that Jesus does part of the saving and you do part. Jesus is not capable alone. Even after you are forgiven, in order to recover your “full spiritual health” you must do “something more to make amends” for your sin. Christ’s forgiveness is not enough. You “must make satisfaction for or ‘expiate’” your sins. The dictionary definition for “expiate” and “make amends” is “to atone for.” In other words, the Catholic Church teaches that Christ’s atonement is not enough, you must do “something more” to atone for your sins. Salvation, according to the Catholic Church, is faith plus meritorious works, that salvation is partly of debt, that may be earned as wages. However, the Bible teaches that salvation is through faith in Jesus Christ *alone*; that man cannot, by any of his good works, merit salvation. It is wholly of grace, wholly a free gift, received by man as a sinner because he receives and believes in Jesus. If faith and works were to purchase salvation, then you would be in the same position as the Catholic to do penance to make amends for your sins, something Paul condemned.

Jesus is able to save to the uttermost. Yes, there’s cooperation with Jesus in forming characters for Heaven, but that cooperation does not have any merit to it. Salvation is a free gift!

⁹ Ibid., Article 1459

“For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith.” Galatians 5:5

The hope of righteousness by faith is eternal life. The motivation for our works is not to earn salvation but rather to demonstrate our love for Christ. Jesus said, “If you love me, keep my commandments.” John 14:15

“For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love.” Galatians 5:6

It is not faith **plus** works that procures salvation for us but rather faith **that** works by love and purifies the soul. The works we perform are motivated by love for Him, love that has been shed in our heart by the Holy Spirit. They are the fruit of our faith in Christ.

“And the third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive *his* mark in his forehead, or in his hand,”
Revelation 14:9

Last great battle over the mark of the beast will involve each of us. It will be fought over righteousness by faith vs. righteousness by works. How?

“Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.” Revelation 14:12

Righteousness by faith is manifested in keeping all 10 of God’s commandments, including the seventh-day Sabbath. It is our love for Christ that motivates us to keep His commandments. Righteousness by works is manifested in keeping commandments of men including the false sabbath, the first day of the week.

“Moreover also I gave them my sabbaths, to be a sign between me and them, that they might know that I *am* the LORD that sanctify them.” Ezekiel 20:12

The seventh-day Sabbath is a sign that God is sanctifying us. It is a fruit of righteousness while the Sunday sabbath is the fruit of another master, Satan working through the Roman Catholic Church. Only those who have been prepared by trusting and clinging to Christ for their salvation and righteousness will be prepared for the last crisis at the end of the world. Our strength will lie, not in our own abilities, but in Christ our righteousness.

Study diligently to know Jesus Christ and the power of His righteousness. Our eternal life depends on it. Consecrate yourself to Christ each day, indeed, each moment, and seek His guidance for your life. God is calling you to live for Him and be a strong witness of His marvelous grace.