

(1) Why We Are Protest--ants? The Hinge Of (Our) Salvation

(2) Truly these were the Dark Ages!

The Gospel of grace had been overlaid with hundreds of years of gradual growth of reliance on human merit for salvation. Everywhere men and women, by their own strivings and their own pious endeavors, sought to save themselves by their own good works.

It has been said that we live in a time when there is a dearth of real heroes. A recent survey of showed that the heroes for American youth included such “notable and noble” examples as Panic at the Disco, Fifty-cent, and Justin Timberlake; I’m sure you heard of them all. Surely there is some need for some godly heroes in our day, and I think that those who led the Reformation rank up there along side our national heroes. These Protestant Reformers put their lives on the line every bit as much as did our heroes of war.

(3) Jon Huss, the forerunner of the Protestant church, was burned at the stake on July 6, 1415 by order of the Council of Constance. His crime was preaching in the native language (Czechoslovakian) instead of in Latin, teaching that the Bible was the sole authority for faith and practice, teaching that salvation is by faith not works, and speaking against indulgences (the sale of assurances that loved ones or one’s self would have years deducted from the time spent in purgatory, a second-chance place to “work” out one’s salvation in suffering) of and transubstantiation (the belief that the elements of communion become in essence the body and the blood of Christ). After Huss was burned at the stake (and his ashes were thrown into the Rhine River) the people in various sections of modern Austria and Czechoslovakia rose in open revolt. When word of this revolution reached the Waldensians (4) (largely Italian Protestants), they promptly dispatched several of their teachers to go to Bohemia and learn what was happening. The Waldensians received from the Hussite movement training in theology, (5) which was to prove very helpful to future generations. No official ties were forged between the Waldensians and the other Protestant Churches until 1532 when they fused with the Reformed Church and today have a working relationship with our own Presbyterian denomination.

(6) This statue of Jon Huss is in the main town square of Prague. Sadly, most of the Czechs have no idea what he stood for or why. They think he was a fanatic. When burned at the stake he almost prophetically said, “You are going to burn a goose (Huss means goose in Czech), but in a century a black swan will come which you can neither roast nor boil.” **And the black swan came!** -- That black swan was Martin Luther.

(7) On October 31, 1517, 489 years ago one humble monk shattered centuries of dogma and tradition that had hidden the Gospel from the world. It was the day upon which the grace of God was again poured forth upon the world. (8) It is the day we have come to call Reformation Day. It was the day in which an Augustinian monk, Martin Luther nailed his 95 thesis (9) to the church door in Whittenberg as an invitation to scholars in the church to debate those issues.

Unfortunately, it is an evident fact that we have again sunk back into much of the darkness of the Middle Ages. We are aware that on October 31 we celebrate Halloween, but most people are unaware that more significantly it is Reformation day and unless you have been attending a Lutheran church, you probably have not heard a sermon preached

about the Reformation in decades. Other than our calendar from Presbytery, it seldom appears on any of our church calendars. Yet it is a most significant day for us.

(10) Recently I heard that a Protestant church dropped the word Reformed from the name of their church because its members did not know what they were reformed from. Do we know why we are Protestants and what we protest against? Indeed, the Dark Ages, in a great measure, are back with us again.

Martin Luther whose rediscovery of the truths of justification (that is how we may be declared righteous by God) (11) wrote, "When the article of justification has fallen, everything has fallen." He called the article of justification by faith ; the article upon which the church stands or falls. He argued, "It alone begets, nourishes, builds, preserves, and defends the church of God, and without it the church of God cannot exist for one hour."

John Calvin called the article of justification by faith as the main hinge of salvation. These statements are not an exaggeration of the truth because justification by faith is God's answer to the most basic of all religious questions. How can a man or woman become right with God? We are not right with Him in ourselves: this is the doctrine of sin. We are in rebellion against God. We are all transgressors as Paul writes (12) in Romans 3:23, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." The doctrine of justification by faith says that we may become right with God by the work of Christ alone received by faith alone. Paul continues in verse 28, "A man is justified by faith apart from works of law." Justification is God's work. In Romans 8:33 we read, "It is God who justifies."

God's judgment is always according to truth and equity. We are ungodly. How then can God justify us? If we were to declare a person who is guilty to be innocent, our act would be an outrage before both God and man. Yet that is exactly what God does. How can He do it?

Justification is God's act and is entirely apart from any good works or any other form of human improvement or endeavor. (13) Justification is by the grace of God through faith, not by works. But does this mean that works no longer have any place in Christianity? If not, Christianity would seem to promote immoral conduct and we can forget all about Al's excellent sermon of about six weeks ago. On the other hand, if we must have works, then isn't it the case that we are not saved solely by the work of Christ after all?

Here is where Roman Catholic and Protestant theology part company most radically.

(14) The major debate back in the 16th. Century centered not on the sale of indulgences, the role of the papacy, penance, purgatory or Mary and saints, but on the article of how is a person justified. These items on which Roman Catholics and Protestants differ, all hinge on our respective view of justification and the role of works in our justification. To this day this article continues as the focal point or the difference between our theologies. We Protestants do an injustice to our Roman Catholic brethren when we say Roman Catholics do not believe that justification is by the grace of God through faith. Roman Catholicism taught that back in the 16th. Century and Roman Catholicism teaches that today. However, they add that works enter into justification in the sense that God justifies us in part by producing good works in us, so that we are justified by faith plus those works. Protestants reply that we are justified by faith alone in Christ alone. No works enter in. Not even faith is a work. But Protestants add, or they should add (there is much deficient Protestant theology being espoused today) that good works, again as Al

emphasized in his sermon, must necessarily follow if we are truly justified, though they do not enter into justification itself.

(15) This difference may be expressed in two formulas:

Roman Catholic theology says -- Faith + Works = Justification

Protestant theology replies – Faith = Justification + Works

All other differences between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism are mere trifles.

What is at stake here is the Gospel itself. It answers the question raised by the Philippian jailer to Paul, “What must I do to be saved?” We are not engaged in a controversy over whether to sprinkle, dip or immerse during baptism; of whether to pray to Mary and the saints or not -- but of salvation itself. It is the most important question we have as Christians. It is the problem of the justice of God. God is just and you and I are not. David raised that question in antiquity when he asked, “If the Lord mark iniquities, who would stand?”

We are not righteous. Most of us think if we work hard, do the best we can, try to live a good life we can earn our salvation. This is the myth of the popular culture that has even penetrated the church today. But we are told by God’s word in Romans 3:20, 28, Gal. 2:16 and elsewhere, (16) “By works of the law shall no flesh be justified.”

Well then if God is not going to negotiate His justice, how are we saved. This was the question that men like Luther and Calvin who were initially trained as lawyers wrestled with. This is why the Gospel is such great news for it is only when God the justifier declares us just that we are indeed just. This was the debate of the 16th. century between Luther and Rome and which continues today between Roman Catholicism and evangelical Reformed Protestantism. Does God wait until we become just before He declares us just, or does He declare us just in His site before we are just? (17) Luther’s formula was *simul iustus et peccator*, translated as at the same time just and sinner. That is we are justified by the work of Christ yet we still sin.

Rome heard in this formula a legal fiction. It would be unworthy of God and make Him a liar to declare a person just before a person is indeed just. Roman Catholicism agrees that justification occurs when God declares one to be just, but He does not do so, according to Rome, until one is indeed just. (18)

The Reformers countered that it is not a legal fiction, but a legal diction. God declares one just on the basis of the real work of Christ. We are justified by faith, and that little word by, is the means through which we are justified.

In Roman Catholicism, the sacrament of baptism confers the grace of justification. (19) In baptism, according to Rome, the righteousness of Christ is poured into the soul. This infusion of grace makes it possible for one to become righteous. If a catholic cooperates and assents with it he or she can become righteous until a mortal sin is committed. A mortal sin is serious enough to kill the justifying grace in the soul. But all is not lost. Justifying grace can be restored by the sacrament of penance, the second plank of salvation for those who have made shipwreck of their souls according to Roman teaching. Thus, the Roman Catholic goes to confession, performs works of satisfaction which earns what is called congruous merit. Congruous merit is merit that makes it fitting for God to restore one to justification.

Furthermore, according to Roman Catholic theology, if one at death has not performed sufficient works of satisfaction, one spends an appropriate time (which could be an indefinite period of time, indeed thousands or even millions of years) for the purging of

one's soul in purgatory. One's time in purgatory may be shortened by drawing on the treasury of merit held by the Catholic Church. (20) This treasury of merit, also referred to as works of supererogation or works beyond the call of duty, are works that were performed by Mary, the apostles, and other saints of the church that were over and above those needed to make it fitting for God to restore their justification; yet Pope Benedict just last month accused us Protestants of holding to a primordial (elementary) form of faith.

Purgatory is nowhere to be found in Scripture. (21) One may find reference to it in Second Maccabees. That book is among a collection of books in the inter-testament period that are not included in either Jewish or Protestant Bibles but are included in the Roman Catholic Bibles. For Roman Catholics purgatory is really a place of mercy because for them it provides a second change, a place where one's soul may be purged or cleansed, obviously to us by this doctrine they ignore the biblical fact that Christ paid it all at Calvary. (22) Roman Catholicism posits two instrumental causes of justification, baptism and penance. Protestantism posits only one, faith, which lays hold of the merit of Christ. Is justification infused through the Roman sacraments of baptism and penance? Or is justification imputed (reckoned or transferred) to us by the righteousness of Christ? A righteousness that is not IN us, but a righteousness that is FOR us. Is it justification by infusion or by imputation? (23)

This is the good news of imputation in that it is a double imputation. This doctrine is good news because in double imputation the works of Christ are imputed to us, while our sins are imputed to Him. We read in Scripture that Christ said, "Unless our righteousness exceeds that of the Scribes and Pharisees we shall not enter the Kingdom of Heaven." Have any of us come close to the fulfillment of the law, as did the Scribes and Pharisees? It is only Christ whose righteousness meets that condition. So in our Protestant doctrine of imputation, His perfect righteousness is imputed or transferred to us so that when we stand before the judgment seat, God the Father does not see our unworthiness but rather see us perfectly robed in the righteousness of His son. You see if all Christ had to do was die for us He could have come straight down from heaven to Calvary. But Christ also had to live for us as the second Adam. Thus, in His death our sins are imputed or transferred to Him in that He paid the penalty for you and for me.

And that is the main doctrine of Protestantism in that we have the assurance of our salvation in Christ. (24) In first his letter to us, John 5:13 assures us that, "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may **know** that you have eternal life." This is an assurance that our Roman Catholic friends can never have because by their doctrine they can never know whether their works are enough to get them into heaven or how many years they will have to spend in purgatory. (25)

Beloved, are you tired of the uncertainty of your own righteousness and of trusting in yourself? Then look unto Jesus Christ for the certainty we have as Reformed Protestants of being clothed with His perfect obedience and cleansed by His blood.

(26) This, dearly beloved, as John Calvin so aptly phrased it, and as his followers continued to state it, is the hinge of our salvation!

Let us pray: (27)

Grant, O Father, to each that are gathered here the great joy of knowing that which our great theologians of the past uncovered for us. That joyful assurance of knowing that You are alive in our lives today and that You are willing to use even such as we are to the

glory of Your name in spreading the good news of this doctrine of our salvation thanks be to you. And, Father, should there be those who do not know even Jesus Christ as Savior or Lord, we ask that on this day you open their hearts so that they may cease to trust in themselves for their hope of eternal life, but rather in Him who lived and died that they might receive the gift of everlasting life. In His name we pray. Amen.