



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Various

“Evangelicals and Catholics Together and the Grace of God, Part II” TRANSCRIPT

[Message] It's an encouragement to us who preach and teach the word of God to see the way in which the word does have an effect; it is the power of God unto salvation. And that was very encouraging, the word from a brother from Mexico and then the testimony just then. It's a great encouragement, I appreciate that so much. And given me and Martha reasons to pray for you and ask your prayers for us as well. There is one thing I'd like to add that I had been referring to this morning and I mentioned that after the declaration was issued and there were some objections to it that there was an Orlando summit of sorts in which Charles Colson, Bill Bright, Michael Horton, D. James Kennedy, John Ankerberg, R. C. Sproul, John Woodbridge, John MacArthur were there and discussed the question because of the disagreements that had developed in evangelicalism as a result of the declaration Evangelicals and Catholics Together. And I made reference to John MacArthur's statement that after they had come to an agreement and the making of a statement for publication, he had said, "It still doesn't go as far as I would have hoped." And I was not looking at my notes and in fact I didn't have them clearly before me, but he also said one other thing. He said, "Roman Catholicism is another religion." So I think for John's benefit I want to be sure to quote him accurately.

Well we are thinking about the church of Rome, the sacraments and the grace of God and this morning I gave the first half, in fact a little more than a half of the paper that I had written sometime ago with reference to this. And we talked this morning about the heresy among the Galatian churches. And tonight I would like to discuss the gospel and the sacraments of Rome, and make some observations, give some reflections and judgments with reference to it. And so this is the second part of my outline, “The gospel and the sacraments of Rome.” I hope we’ll be able to finish it fairly rapidly because it is a bit less than I was talking about this morning.

The number of the sacraments. Simply put, the Church of Rome defines a sacrament as quote, “a visible sign instituted by Christ which effectively communicates the grace it signifies,” unquote. Rome recognizes seven sacraments as channels of divine grace, baptism, confirmation, the Eucharist, penance, anointing of the sick, holy orders and marriage. The virtues of faith hope and love are conferred along with sanctifying grace. And these are infused, that is poured in by God, the Latin word is the word *infundo* and the infinitive form usually is cited *infundere*. And so the grace in Roman Catholic theology is poured into an individual by God as he receives the sacraments. In other words, in water baptism, the grace is poured in the individual by the sacramental service. Not by faith alone of course, through the sacraments. As the council of Trent which is the official statement of the beliefs of the Roman Catholic Church today, that statement in fifteen hundred and forty-six affirmed quote, “If anyone saith that by the said sacraments of the new law grace is not conferred through the act performed, *ex opera operato*, (That is by the work having been worked, having been done.) But that faith alone in the divine promises suffices for the obtaining of grace, let him be anathema,” Cannon nine session seven. It is clear where they who believe in justification by grace alone through faith alone by reason of the cross of Christ alone stand.

The efficacy of the sacraments, the sacraments communicate *ex opera operato* that is by virtue of the work that has been worked. The sense being the divine grace is

promised by the church to all who duly receive the sacraments. For example, in the sacrament of baptism by the sprinkling of the water, original sin and all actual guilt and liability to punishment are remitted. Further, baptism infuses into our souls the life of grace that Christ won for us by death and resurrection and unites us to him with the promise of salvation.

The other sacraments according to Roman Catholic thinking are also efficacious in accomplishing what they are intended to accomplish. It's important to note that the sacraments are not simply signs of the removal of sin and the reception of the grace of salvation as the catechism says, “No, the heart of the sacraments is that they actually produce the grace which they signify. They are like instruments in the hands of Christ who through them confers the graces proper to each sacrament.”

The necessity of the sacraments, the necessity of the observance of them follows inexorably. That is if one expects to receive the benefits of the work of Christ. Quote, “If anyone saith,” Trent warns, when I say Trent I mean the council of Trent. Quote,

“That the sacraments of the new law are not necessary unto salvation but superfluous and that without them or without the desire thereof, men may obtain of God through faith alone, the grace of justification though all (that is the sacraments) are not indeed in necessary for every individual, let him be anathema.”

Of course there's one matter that must also be kept in mind to. While the sacraments provide the specified grace that is open to all, it is not experienced according to the church's teaching if one fails to cooperate with the graces offered. The semi Pelagianism of the church is very clear here. In other words, we're talking about a church that believes in free will and the necessity of a free will decision. It remains then for the individual to finish the work that Christ has begun or to use John Stott's words, “You must finish Christ's unfinished work.”

Emil Brunner in a volume that has some interesting things within it, also some very good things, *the Mediator*, comments in a footnote on a German scholar's admission that the same effects ascribed to baptism seem connected with faith alone. He explains this as an inconsistency that is an incongruity. I must say, that word surprised me, I looked it up in the dictionary, inconsistency, it's not something I use all the time in fact I still don't use it. I looked it up in the dictionary and then a month or too later I read it again and I said I've got to look that word up again. And so in order to be sure about what it means I even added something on the last page of my notes, inconsistency, from the dictionary, “lack of suitability or congruity, inelegance.” So I'm waiting for an opportunity to use it and impress my friends. At any rate, he says that Heicht Muller explains this as an inconsistency and adds in support of the incongruity the familiar statement that Paul was not a systematic theologian. Brunner in response writes,

“We ought to remind ourselves that real sacramentalists always regard the sacraments as the chief thing, as the highest point of their religion, and that they could never say like Paul I thank God that I baptized none of you save (and you remember the remainder of the statement.) Besides, I know not whether I baptized any other. For the real sacramentalist it is impossible to ascribe the same affects also simply to faith apart from baptism even if he is in no sense a systematic theologian.”

Brunner is right, the sacramentalist has faith, but it usually rests chiefly in the sacramental work. And this raises serious questions regarding the nature of the person's spiritual status before God. In pastoral experience in years past, I have from time to time in discussing spiritual experiences with individuals who were recent attenders at the church where I was ministering; ask about the spiritual experience of the individual. And have heard them reply in terms of their sacramental experience. I specifically remember one middle aged man who had become a regular attender at the ministry of the word

service. He thought I was a great preacher. When someone asked him “Why do you like Dr. Johnson?” He said, “Well I like the way he crosses his legs on the platform before the service begins.” [Laughter] That stuck with me through the years that that was the reason that he appreciated me. I had not even practiced doing that, it made such a great influence upon him. Well his son in law and his daughter had also begun to attend and they seemed clearly to be new believers. One morning they called and said they would like to be baptized and join the church and I made arrangements to go to their home to talk with them concerning their spiritual experience. As soon as I hung up the telephone, it rang and the father began the conversation with these words, “We’d like to make it a double wedding.” He wanted to join the church at the same time also. I arranged to talk with him and when I asked him how he knew that he was a believing Christian he replied, “I was baptized by Dr. Truett,” the famous pastor for many years of First Baptist Church in Dallas. While I spoke a number of times with him in the weeks following, there was never any indication that his spiritual experience rested on any more solid ground than in the observance of the ordinance or the sacrament of Baptism. The elders of the church never received him as a member while I was the pastor of that church.

Now I’d like to make a few observations and reflections and judgments on this matter and sort of draw it to a conclusion. Salvation in the cross of Christ alone is the heading of the paragraph. We’re hearing often today the Latin phrases that succinctly express some of the most essential doctrines of the faith. For example, the gospel of the five onlies as it has been called is constantly before us and particularly since the publication of *Evangelicals and Catholics Together*, the *Christian Mission in the Third Millennium*. Incidentally, the person who first used the term at least in my hearing, the gospel of the five onlies was Jim Packer. And you will find it in some of his earlier writings. We hear the phrases, *Sola Scriptura*, by Scripture alone, *Sola Gratia*, by grace alone, *Sola Fide*, by faith alone, *Sola Christo*, by Christ alone, and *Solo Deo Gloria*, to God alone be the glory, the so called five onlies, the gospel of the five onlies. Galatians, I

think very interestingly, has an emphasis on the sufficiency of the atoning death of Christ for salvation apart from sacramental addition. I think it's reason to add a sixth only, *Solo Stauro*, by the cross alone. I'm not going to argue in detail for that, but I think it's justifiable.

What would Paul say to those who say as the endorsers of Evangelicals and Catholics Together have said that a person committed to a salvation or justification that can be obtained only through faith and the observance of the ordinance of baptism is an evangelical Christian? After all, the judaizers also preached Christ, they preached him as the Messiah of Israel, they promised by the Scriptures of the Old Testament and as the one who has come suffered and died for the sins of sinners and as now risen and ascended to the right hand of God. They affirmed the necessity of faith in the Messiah. Their only difference so far as we know from the message that Paul had preached to them was over the addition of the necessity of circumcision for salvation. Now it's true that in chapter 4 verse 10 he does say “you observe days and months and seasons and years.” It's possible that the judaizers were suggesting the observance of various aspects of the Jewish calendar. But it's evident from reading the epistle that the main concern as Paul understood it was the principle of the necessity of circumcision in order to be justified.

It's likely that to the Galatians, the modification of the gospel of the Judaizers, namely to use language the Judaizers might have used, that believers should follow the Scripture and be circumcised was an insignificant matter. After all, at that time the Bible of the Galatians was the Old Testament. Large numbers of professing believers such as Timothy and even Paul himself had received the covenantal sign of circumcision. Why would anyone be upset over others being circumcised as well? After all, dispensational differences were not very clear to them at that stage in the ongoing [indistinct] program of God. And further, would such a common procedure really affect the essence of the gospel?

Now, in Paul the apostle, there burned the most fervent zealous commitment to the message that the Lord God in heaven had called him to preach. To the Corinthians he said, “I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.” 1 Corinthians 2:2. And that very message he had placarded he says to the Galatians, Galatians chapter 3 and verse 1. The message of the Judaizers might have seemed to be the same as the apostles’; they preached that justification could be had in Christ’s name, and through his cross. They denied however that it could be had by his cross alone. Something else was required, men must accept the Messiah as Warfield remember has said, but men also must be circumcised and must keep the law. Men must enter into life by the gate of Judaism. It was this teaching, not the proclamation of an entirely anti-Christian system which Paul brands as “a different kind of gospel or rather no gospel at all, but only a troubling of Zion by those who would pervert the gospel of Christ.”

It surely would seem as plain as day that Paul considered the double requirement of faith and circumcision to destroy the essence of the gospel of grace. Such a requirement raised the apostle’s passion against the Judaizers to such warmth that he expressed a desire that they may fall under the divine curse. In fact Rome gets its own, “Let him be anathema” from Galatians chapter 1. This violent assertion that if circumcision be received by the Galatians Christ will be of no profit to them, chapter 5 verse 2, seems by ordinary standards to be an abandonment of Christian love. “The apostle however thought in a system,” Warfield points out, “He traced apparently small differences back to their principles perceived clearly the issues to which they tended and condemned according to fact and not according to appearances. He is the type of the dogmatic spirit.” That’s an interesting statement of Warfield, because that’s the type of person Warfield was. He is the type of the dogmatic spirit. And Warfield continues, “And we who would be followers of Paul as he was of Christ may learn some very valuable lessons from him.” That’s the end of the Warfield quote.

The problem that has arisen over Evangelicals and Catholics Together is therefore nothing new in principle. Over and over again in the history of the Christian church issues arise that focus on theological principles that distinguish sound Christianity from error. The same warfare that began in Eden, in fact before there was an Eden between Lucifer and the throne of his Creator continues. During the reformation period, the reformers knew what was taking place and they sang about it. Luther's great hymn which we have sung here took its theme from the conflict, and we still sing, “A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing, our helper he amid the flood of mortal ills prevailing. For still our ancient foe doth seek to work us woe, his craft and power are great and armed with cruel hate on earth is not his equal.” That we should be concerned about the purity of the gospel of Christ is no small matter. For the struggle of the church and the struggle of its members in what Donald Grey Barnhouse used to call the warfare of the ages. That warfare is hot and heavy today.

In some words that beautifully define what I'm trying to point out, the great Princeton professor also wrote, “The chief dangers to Christianity do not come from anti-Christian systems, Mohammedanism has never made inroads upon Christendom save by the sword. Nobody fears that Christianity will be swallowed up by Buddhism or we might say today in nineteen ninety-five, New Age theology. It is corrupt forms of Christianity itself which mimics from time to time the life of Christianity. Why make much of minor points of difference among those who serve the one Christ? Because a pure gospel is worth preserving. And is not only worth preserving, but is logically and logic will always work itself ultimately out into history, the only saving gospel. Those who overlay the gospel with man made additions no less than those who subtract from it God given elements, are not preaching the gospel in another form, but are offering a different kind of gospel which is essentially no gospel at all. They are troublers of Israel who are perverting the gospel of Christ.

Now a word about fullness of salvation in Christ alone. In Christ alone then is there salvation and we must keep this great fact before us at all times. At the same time, we remember that the fullness of salvation is also found in him. There is no other salvation outside of him that we should strive for. In him there is everything that we need and long for. For in him dwells all the fullness of the God head bodily. Paul said to the Colossians and you are complete, that is if I translated it literally it would be filled full in him who is the head of all principality and power, Colossians 2:9 and 10. “In Christ alone and that in both senses of the word alone” Warfield says, “Not only can there be no salvation except in him, but in him is all that is needed for salvation, Jesus only.” It’s interesting to hear Warfield just say, “Jesus only” exclamation point.

No salvation in the Roman system is the head of the next paragraph. What we have sought to show in this paper is the parallel between the problem that Paul had in the churches in Galatia and the problem facing the evangelical churches today by the declaration Evangelicals and Catholics Together. In the document composed under the leadership of John Richard Newhouse, the Roman Catholic editor of the periodical, *First Things*, a Roman Catholic who some years ago converted to Roman Catholicism from Lutheranism and of the well known evangelical leader of a prison ministry, Charles Colson. A number of evangelicals including such individuals as Charles Colson, Kent Hill, Richard Land, now remember, I mentioned the two Southern Baptist that they have had their name dropped from it now since then, John White, J.I. Packer Elizabeth Achtemeier, Os Guinness, Richard Mouw, Pat Robertson and Bill Bright have collaborated either by participating in the construction of the document or by endorsing it. The document plainly states that the evangelicals recognize the participating Roman Catholics as quote, “Brothers and sisters in Christ,” unquote. And together with the Roman Catholics, the evangelicals quote, “Affirm together that we are justified by grace through faith because of Christ,” unquote. The significant omission of the word alone after faith should be noted. What we have clearly seen in this paper is that there is a fairly strict parallel between the

problem in the Galatian churches and the problem evangelicals still have with Roman Catholicism due to that church’s commitment to the doctrinal stand that sins are forgiven through the sacraments of the church.

Implicit throughout the document is the conviction of the participants that Roman Catholics are Christians whose sins have been forgiven and who have been born again in water baptism. This baptismal grace is to be continuously reawakened and revived through conversion. The Protestant signatories do not agree with this relation of baptism and the new birth, but they grant the reality of Christian life in the Catholics. The document acknowledges that there are points of difference in doctrine, worship, practice and piety that are thought to divide us. And included in the differences are sacraments and ordinances as symbols of grace or means of grace. Yet still the two groups quote, “Thank God for the discovery of one another as brothers and sisters in Christ,” unquote.

Many areas of mutual concern and possible cooperation in civil and social and public affairs exist, but still the Catholics affirm that the new birth is quote, “originally bestowed in the sacrament of baptism.” So there is a problem. Is there a salvation in the doctrine that the new birth and forgiveness of sins is infused into the person who is baptized in water? If the parallel between baptism and circumcision is valid, and I believe it is, then are we not face to face with a new Galatianism? Or perhaps the old paganism of salvation by pagan sacramental works?

Karl Barth, I know that you’re surprised that I quoted Emil Brunner and now, he was the Zurich of reformed scholar actually, professor of systematic theology in the University at Zurich and now I’m going to quote Karl Barth from Basel and the university there. Karl Barth is reported to have said that there is one little word that keeps Protestants and Roman Catholics apart, the little word and. Wrong as he may have been in some things, in this he was absolutely right. Reunion is impossible as long as Rome continues to insist that there must be the Bible and church tradition, grace and works, faith and the sacraments, Christ and the pope and prayer to God and to the saints. All of

those little ands just mark the difference, just that one little word, but what a difference one little word can make.

What are the things that mark out the act of circumcision? I've been saying that there's a parallel, I'm going to spell it out now for you so that when you leave here you'll know at least what I was talking about. What are the things that mark out the act of circumcision? It is a visible act. It is performed by a human agent. It is performed physically; it is performed with material elements. Let me say that again, it is a visible act. It is performed by a human agent. It is performed physically; it is performed with material elements. That is precisely the case with the act of baptism. Since in the Epistle to the Galatians the apostle makes it plain that he regards the claim that circumcision is necessary for salvation to be system of salvation by works, it seems self evident that the requirement of baptism for salvation is a works salvation position condemned by all of the word of God from Genesis 15:6 through Ephesians 2:8 and 9 to the freely of Revelation chapter 22 and verse 17. In a recent work Allister McGrath, Allister McGrath is a young scholar from the University of Oxford who has written a number of books, I think about twelve already. He's a very young man; he's written a number of very interesting books. They're mainly works of historical theology, not a whole lot of exegesis in anything that Allister McGrath writes, but he's a very gifted man, a very intelligent man a very smart man, he is an evangelical, he is an Anglican. In a recent work Allister McGrath has said quote,

“We owe it to Roman Catholics to take the trouble to get them right instead of perpetuating whether by accident or design inaccurate stereo types of their beliefs. For example, some evangelicals continue to insist that the Roman Catholic Church officially teaches justification by works. Yet this is simply not true.”

“Evangelicals and Catholics Together and the Grace of God, part II” by S. Lewis Johnson
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That’s the end of the quote. I ‘m puzzled over this comment, but have come to the conclusion that the operative word for McGrath is officially. The Roman system however is a system of sins forgiven ex opera operato, by the work having been done. It’s plainly stated, ex opera operato, you do the sacrament and that the sacrament promises becomes yours by the doing of the sacrament, ex opera operato, by the work having been done. Those of you who’ve had Latin, you know that’s precisely what it means. So, the Roman system is a system of sins then forgiven in that way. That is from or through or by a work that has been worked. And the system surely fulfills the requirements of a works salvation. In fact, the Roman church officially teaches that the sacraments are efficient causes of grace that term is used, causes. I think we’ve gotten the Roman church right. Warfield is on the mark, “the only saving gospel is to find in him, (he refers to Christ) all.” I concur and I also think that’s ...

[AUDIO ENDS ABRUPTLY]