

The Papal Visit: *Why We Oppose It*

September 2010 is to witness the visit of one Joseph Alois Ratzinger to the United Kingdom. Better known as Benedict XVI, Ratzinger was elected Pope in 2005, and he comes to these shores as sovereign of the Vatican State. Once here, he will attend events in England and Scotland – where he is also due to meet Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

Recent scandals in the Roman Catholic Church have ensured that Pope Benedict will not receive a universal welcome. Representatives of a variety of interest groups have organized protests, and the Church hierarchy stands in fear of a rising tide of negative publicity.

The Free Presbyterian Church opposes the visit of Pope Benedict to this realm. Our opposition is not on grounds of blind sectarianism: it is not the product of an innate hatred of all things Roman Catholic. We bear no ill will towards our Roman Catholic neighbours, but rather wish that they might enter into the freedom of the glorious Gospel of Christ. Thus, while we might speak of concerns that are constitutional, moral and financial, we choose instead to highlight matters spiritual – for it is with the spiritual well being of citizens in this kingdom that we are occupied first and foremost.

What follows is a compilation of brief articles penned by some Free Presbyterian ministers, giving a summary of our church's position on this issue. We commend it and the Scriptures on which it is based, to your careful consideration.

Rev Timothy Nelson
Editor

The Man: Peter's Successor or Papal Usurper?

Joseph Ratzinger, Benedict XVI, was elected 'Pope' in April 2005. He serves as Bishop of Rome, head of the Roman Catholic Church, and is frequently styled 'Holy Father', 'Supreme Pontiff' and 'Vicar of Christ'. And here, immediately, for Bible-believing Christians, is confirmation of an institution that stands at variance with Scripture. These papal titles are "a very grave usurpation of the titles of the Godhead. We bow and worship the Holy Father, our Creator, Lord and Judge. We come through the sole mediator-ship of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Supreme Pontiff and the great High Priest (Hebrews 4:15). We rejoice in the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, the Vicar of Christ, who makes the presence of the heavenly Christ a deep reality in our own experience. To take on our lips these great titles, is to tread on holy ground as we are in the presence not of man, but of the triune God". (H. Carson, *The Faith of the Vatican*). Moreover, the Roman Catholic Church argues that every Pope stands in succession to the apostle Peter. But is the Pope really the Peter we know from the New Testament?

'On this rock'

There can be no doubt that Peter was a prominent figure among the apostles in the New Testament church. Some see him as first among equals ('*primus inter pares*') in that body, and, within limits, this may be acknowledged. The Gospels contain more references to Peter than to all of the others combined. He is at the head of every list of the twelve (Matthew 10:2, Mark 3:16, Luke 6:14, Acts 1:13), and, with James and John, was privileged to witness some events denied to the nine. He appears to be 'spokesman' for the group on numerous occasions (cf. Matthew 15:15, 17:24-25, 19:27). He remained to the fore after the ascension – overseeing the selection of Judas's successor, preaching on the Day of Pentecost, and continuing to evangelise boldly for years to come.

The Roman Catholic Church views all of these things, and more, as confirmation of the primacy of Peter – a position supposedly established by Christ when He addressed His servant memorably at Caesarea Philippi: "And I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church" (Matthew 16:18). Is this Christ's institution of what we now know as the Papacy? Was Peter himself, and in the person of his successors, to be 'the rock' on which He would build His church? There are very many reasons for rejecting such an interpretation. The Jewish disciples who listened that day would have recognised the symbol of the rock as an image of the Divine (see Deuteronomy 32:4, 1 Samuel 2:2, Psalm 18:31), in this case, Christ, the Son of God (cf. v16-17) – and this would square with Matthew's purpose in presenting Him as the Messiah, the stone (rock) which Israel would reject (cf. 21:42). Further, it is clear that the theme of this passage is the identity of Christ, not Peter (v 13f) – Christ does not say 'Peter, upon *you* I will build my church', but "upon this rock", making a rather obvious distinction. Much is made of the Greek words for

“Peter” (‘petros’) and “rock” (‘petra’), and they are different. Roman Catholic writers who seek to sweep aside this point by suggesting that, in all likelihood, Christ spoke in Aramaic, where there is but one word, miss the point. Why would Matthew, directed by the Holy Spirit, have used two Greek words? “Christ evidently made a play on words. Peter was a small rock hewn out of the large rock mountain. Peter recognised this difference (1 Peter 2:4-8)” (Gromacki).

The truth is that Papal apologists have altogether failed to make the case for identifying Peter as ‘the rock’ in Matthew 16:18. And even if they could, on what grounds do they maintain that this singular authority may be transmitted, and actually has been so transmitted, to those who profess to be Peter’s successors?

Chequered history

The Roman Catholic position finds no support in history, neither in the New Testament age nor beyond. There is no evidence that Peter laboured in Rome, and it is doubtful if he was ever there. Paul’s letter to the Romans is not addressed to him, does not refer to him, and does not greet him even though no less than twenty-six individuals are mentioned in the final chapter! Later, when Paul was resident at Rome, and wrote various letters in confinement, he makes no reference to Peter. And this is not surprising since Peter had been commissioned to labour among the Jews: his ministry would not have brought him to the imperial city (Galatians 2:7-8 cf. 1 Peter 1:1).

It is significant that the orthodox Roman Catholic understanding of Christ’s’ words in Matthew 16:18 did not have majority support in the early centuries. In a paper prepared for Vatican 1 (1870), but not permitted to be read, Archbishop Kennick showed that only about 20% of the ‘Fathers’ held this view, with many of the most important individuals dissenting – a case where church tradition doesn’t really count!

And what of the ‘unbroken line of succession’? Roman Catholic sources acknowledge that from the 4th – 11th centuries many papal elections were manipulated and corrupted by secular political forces. The 14th and 15th centuries saw rival popes ‘reign’ at Rome and Avignon, France, and it is “impossible to determine in certain cases whether the claimants were popes or anti-popes” (New Catholic Encyclopaedia).

To survey the history of the Papacy is to discover that many of those who occupied the office in the middle ages and beyond were guilty of moral bankruptcy, and the story of the institution is “a horror show of madness, mayhem and murder, and is a damning contradiction to the biblical account of true church leadership” (De Courcy). How could such men claim to stand in the line of Peter? And how could any mere man claim

infallibility – pronounced at Vatican 1 in 1870 – while professing to stand in the shoes of the one who said “Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord” (Luke 5:8)?

Unanswered questions

To recognise any pope as the legitimate successor of Peter is to fly in the face of scripture. It is to leave many key questions unanswered. Even after that momentous conversation at Caesarea Philippi, Peter is far from being the forerunner of flawless and infallible popes. And his frailty, his humanity, is not long in manifesting itself, Matthew 16:21-23 cf. John 13:8-9, Matthew 26:36-45,51-54,69-75, John 21:21-22, Galatians 2:11-14. It is evident that Peter’s companions did not bow before the concept of his primacy, Matthew 18:1, 20:20-28 cf. Acts 11:1-18. Peter himself claims to be no more than “an apostle of Jesus Christ” and “an elder” (1 Peter 1:1,5:1), and throughout his writings he stands in direct opposition to cardinal Roman Catholic teachings on such things as indulgences, the priesthood, papal authority, the mediation of Mary and the ‘sacrifice’ of the mass. Peter is at pains to make much of Christ, who has “once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God” (1 Peter 3:18).

It is not difficult then to see why the reformer John Calvin should reach his own pointed verdict on the Papacy: “I deny him to be the successor of Peter who is doing his utmost to demolish every edifice that Peter built”. And it is understandable why one Roman Catholic writer, surveying the tumultuous history of this office, observed, that “Luther, in the conflict between his search for salvation and the tradition of the Church, ultimately came to experience the Church, not as the guarantor, but as the adversary of salvation”. This verdict was delivered in 1989. It was pronounced by Joseph Ratzinger.

Rev Timothy Nelson

The Mediator: Jesus Christ Alone

Protestantism affirms the supreme importance of the office and work of Christ as mediator. This emphasis flows from the significance placed upon this doctrine in scripture. The apostle Paul wrote, “For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 2:5). Here we observe that:

1. The mediator is ‘a middle person’, standing between God and men, with the view to reconciliation.
2. The man Christ Jesus is specifically identified as this mediator.
3. He is the only mediator between God and men.

Christ applied these distinctive aspects of the mediator’s office to Himself when he said, “I am the way, the truth and life, no man cometh unto the Father but by me” (John 14:6). He is the only mediator between a holy God and sinful mankind. The sinner may only come to God to receive pardon and reconciliation by Jesus Christ.

At this juncture, Protestantism stands at variance with the claims of Roman Catholicism. Throughout the centuries, the Roman Catholic Church has developed a system of theology that not only undermines, but also usurps Christ’s position and prerogative as the sole mediator between God and sinners.

Christ exercises his office as mediator in three distinct functions: as prophet, priest and king. All are necessary in the grand scheme of salvation, but all are usurped by the unscriptural claims of Roman Catholicism.

First: Roman Catholicism usurps Christ’s role as Prophet

As prophet, Christ reveals to us the will of God in all things concerning salvation and edification. Moses wrote of a prophet whom God would raise up to communicate the Word of God to the people (Deuteronomy 18:15-19), and Christ is the fulfilment of that promise. Addressing His disciples, He said: “All things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you” (John 15:15). He gave a full and sufficient revelation of the truth now preserved in the Holy Scriptures. Thus Protestants view the Bible as the sole means by which Christ governs and guides his church.

Roman Catholicism, however, usurps Christ’s position by giving the Pope supreme apostolic authority to define all doctrine – infallibly – concerning faith or morals. Successive Pontiffs have exercised this power to promulgate dogmas binding upon all the faithful, dogmas that have no foundation in Scripture, and indeed are contrary to the Word of God!

One example is the doctrine of the assumption of Mary, decreed by Pope Pius XII in 1950. Pius asserted that when Mary died, all the apostles except Thomas were miraculously conveyed in the clouds to witness her death. They buried her in Gethsemane, and three days later, when Thomas was present, they opened her tomb to find only her grave clothes, from which they concluded that she had been taken up into heaven!

Scripture contains no mention of Mary's death, or her alleged assumption into heaven. This is but one example of how Roman Catholicism has replaced truth with tradition, and thereby usurped Christ's position as the true prophet of God.

Second: Roman Catholicism usurps Christ's role as Priest

As priest, Christ made atonement for the sins of His people by the sacrifice of Himself, and He now lives to intercede for them.

His priestly ministry was represented throughout the Old Testament era by the sacrifice of animals offered by the patriarchs and later by the Levitical priesthood. The one chief difference, however, was that all the sacrifices of that economy had to be repeated: they had no power to take away sin. They were but types and shadows.

But Christ "*offered one sacrifice for sin forever*" and "*sat down at the right hand of God*" (Hebrews 10:12). His sacrifice was final and never to be repeated, thereby bringing to an end the priesthood and sacrifices of the Old Testament.

Roman Catholicism has rejected Biblical teaching by introducing a sacerdotal priesthood with the power to offer a propitiatory sacrifice in the Mass. And in relation to the ongoing intercessory work of Christ at the Father's right hand, she has set in place an array of 'intercessors' in those saints and, chiefly, in the Virgin Mary. In fact she has made Mary a co-mediator with Christ in the work of redemption.

Alphonsus de Ligouri in 'The Glories of Mary' declares: "Because men fear Jesus Christ, that Divine Person who is destined one day to judge them, it has been necessary to give them a Mediator with the Mediator, and none was so fit for this office as Mary His mother." He continues, "No grace, no pardon emanates from the Throne of the King of Kings without passing through the hands of Mary ... no one enters heaven without passing through her."

And the Decree of the Second Vatican Council issued in 1964 states: "In an utterly singular way she (Mary) cooperated by her obedience, faith, hope and burning charity in the Saviour's work of restoring supernatural life to souls. For taken up to heaven she did not

lay aside this saving role but by her manifold acts of intercession continues to win for us gifts of eternal salvation. Therefore the Blessed Virgin is invoked by the Church under the Titles of Advocate, Auxiliatrix, Adjutrix and Mediatrix” (Paragraph 61-62, chapter 8 of the Dogmatic Constitution of the Church).

The Bible clearly states that there is only one mediator between God and men – allowing no room for Mary, or any other ‘saint’, to stand alongside Christ in the work of redemption.

Third: Roman Catholicism usurps Christ’s role as King

As King, Christ exercises sovereign headship over the church He has redeemed with His own blood. He is identified in the New Testament as the head of the church (Ephesians 5:23, Colossians 1:18). He has not delegated His supreme authority to any person on earth.

Yet, in Roman Catholicism, the Pope assumes Christ’s kingly power by claiming to be the ‘Vicar of Christ’, the representative of Christ upon this earth. Thus the Second Vatican Council decreed: “For in virtue of his office, that is as vicar of Christ and pastor of the whole church, the Roman Pontiff has full, supreme and universal power over the church. And he can always exercise this power freely” (Paragraph 22, Dogmatic Constitution of the Church).

This statement vindicates the authors of the Westminster Confession of Faith who wrote: “There is no other head of the Church but the Lord Jesus Christ: nor can the Pope of Rome in any sense be head thereof; but is that Antichrist, that man of sin and son of perdition, that exalteth himself in the Church against Christ, and all that is called God” (Chapter 25 Section VI).

Truly, in the Church, there is no King but Christ!

Rev Noel Hughes

The Message: Justification by Faith

With the most acute insight, Martin Luther declared that a church's doctrine of justification indicates whether that church is standing or falling. His observation is in keeping with the inspired words of Paul in Galatians 1: 8-9. Here, presenting the centrality of justification in the Gospel message, the apostle pronounced a divine anathema on anyone, even an angel from heaven, who would deviate from God's way of justifying sinners. The inescapable conclusion is that to err on this doctrine is to contribute to the eternal damnation of souls! The church must be right on justification; this doctrine lies at the very heart of Divine revelation concerning the salvation of the sinner.

What is this justification? It is the establishment of the sinner in a standing of righteousness before God. The New Testament verb translated 'justify' means "to declare or demonstrate to be righteous". A careful and honest study of this verb will reach the conclusion that it is a purely legal term. Therefore, justification is God's action in declaring sinners 'righteous' and placing them in a state of legal perfection before His law (Luke 18: 14).

Foundation

Scripture shows that God's pronouncement of a sinner to be righteous is not arbitrary but has a clear foundation. God justifies sinners (Romans 8: 33); and does so on the basis of a perfect righteousness freely provided in Christ (Romans 5: 19). The obedience mentioned here is Christ's perfect obedience to the law – given in His sinless life to the law's precept, and in His atoning death to the law's penalty – thereby providing a perfect righteousness for sinners. For this reason, Christ Himself is revealed in Scripture to be the sinner's righteousness (Jeremiah 23: 6). God, through the obedience of Christ, has provided a perfect righteousness for sinners, a righteousness whereby they may be justified (1 Corinthians 1: 30). Thus, He may freely justify the sinner without compromising His own holiness (Romans 3: 26). And so, when the sinner trusts in Christ for salvation, Christ's perfect righteousness is imputed to his account before God, and he receives the forgiveness of his sin and full acceptance before the moral law (Romans 4: 6-7, 5: 1).

Features

The chief feature of justification is that it is an act of God (Romans 8: 33, Luke 18: 13-14). In faith alone, the publican cried to God to be "merciful" to him, the word meaning 'to be appeased toward'. The immediate result was that the publican was "justified" – the word denoting a completed act that is neither reversed nor repeated, an act that cannot be supplemented or diminished (Romans 8: 30, Hebrews 10: 2). It is therefore the act of God's grace (Romans 3: 25), and is legal or forensic in nature. As a result of Christ's obedience "shall many be made righteous" (Romans 5:19) – this too is indicative of a legal act, because the verb translated "made" means 'to appoint' or 'to constitute'. The word defines

the place of legal acceptance that the sinner possesses through faith alone, in Christ alone, and by grace alone. In 1 John 4: 17 the Apostle sums up this acceptance in the thrilling statement: “As He (Christ) is, so are we in this world.”

Falsehood

Despite the clear teaching of Scripture on this matter, confusion has prevailed and error has abounded. This is often a consequence of the failure to understand the legal nature of justification.

Before the Reformation, justification was confused with regeneration and sanctification. Thomas Aquinas taught that the first element of justification was the infusion of grace, on the basis of which the second element, forgiveness, was given. In this manner, the foundation of Roman Catholic teaching on justification by baptism was laid, and then further developed, with the assertion that the justification thus received could be increased or lost depending on ones actions. The ultimate result of this teaching is that justification depends upon personal merit.

Furthermore, Roman Catholicism confuses justification and sanctification by teaching that as a result of grace infused at baptism, the individual is enabled to obey or observe certain rites and ceremonies, and thereby become holy – and so he finds favour with God. This is to place sanctification before justification, and results in justification being viewed as a process. This contradicts Scriptural teaching: justification is at once complete, and is irreversible.

The teaching of the Roman Catholic Church on justification was formally endorsed in the documents produced at the Council of Trent (1545-1563). At this Council, convened specifically in order to counter the Protestant Reformation, she affirmed that justification consists of the two elements already noted – the infusion of grace in baptism and the forgiveness of sins. But it is vital to note that in the teachings of Trent, the first element is the crucial one, with the second being merely supplemental. Thus the grace infused in baptism results in the individual being enabled to follow rituals such as confirmation, penance, confession, and the celebration of the mass. Moreover, depending on one’s performance in these rituals, the forgiveness of sin was held out as a mere possibility, so that no one could ever be assured of having that blessing.

And this teaching on justification is also clearly documented in the most recent writings to receive the imprimatur of the Roman Catholic Church. Thus, to determine present and official teaching, one needs only to turn to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, published in 1994. In paragraphs 1996/7 the catechism states: “by baptism the Christian participates in the grace of Christ.” This element of ‘baptismal grace’ is as evident in the 1994 catechism as it was in the documents of Trent! Again, in the catechism, the unscriptural

notion of the sinner meriting justification and eternal life is equally present – “Moved by the Holy Spirit and by charity, we can then merit for ourselves, and for others, the graces needed for our sanctification...and for the attainment of eternal life.”

Since the attitude to the doctrine of justification indicates whether a church is standing or falling, we may conclude that the Roman Catholic Church is fallen! It fails the test. It is not, in the scriptural sense, a truly Christian church, and should not be accepted as such. With such a church, there can be no fellowship. To enter into communion with a body that embraces and promulgates the most blatant error, and pronounces anathemas on those who hold the truth, is a gross betrayal of the Gospel. Many in pursuit of an ecumenical agenda are guilty of pursuing such a course, but the true Christian must not follow their lead. It is to lend credence to a body that has long flouted Scripture, and which has hounded those who dared believe in the simple but scriptural doctrine of justification by faith alone.

Rev John Greer

The Mass: Sham not Sacrifice

Today, the notion is propagated that there is little difference between the Roman Catholic mass and the simple observance of the Lord's Supper as practised by Protestants. This is not so. Roman Catholicism makes the mass the central and supreme act of worship, a ceremony upon which everything else hinges, and around which everything else revolves.

Meaning

According to Roman Catholic teaching, the mass is a continuation of the sacrifice of Christ. It is claimed that, at ordination, the priest is given special power by the bishop to display the wafer, bless it, and change it into the actual body of the Lord Jesus Christ! The Roman Catholic Church claims that Christ Himself descends upon the altar, that He comes whenever the priests call Him and as often as they call Him, and that He places Himself in their hands. The Church states: "The bread and wine are not the type of the body and blood of Christ, God forbid, but they are the very deified body itself of the Lord".

This supposed change of the bread into the body and the wine into the blood of Christ is termed 'transubstantiation'. Before consecration, the wafer is just bread. However, after consecration, the wafer, now called "the host", is to be worshipped and adored as truly God. Often on "holy days", the host is carried out of the church in procession and adored by the people, who fall on their knees as it passes.

Roman Catholic doctrine is that "the sacrifice in the Mass is identical with the sacrifice of the cross" and "that in the Mass is offered to God, a true, proper and propitiatory sacrifice for the living and the dead".

Mockery

So much of what the Roman Catholic Church teaches is indeed a sham and a mockery of the truth.

- The mass mocks at **common sense**. What a mockery to claim that a mere man pronouncing, "*This is my body*", over a piece of bread, could change it into the Lord! There is no visible change. It has the same taste, colour, smell, weight and dimensions. It still looks like bread, tastes like bread, smells like bread, and feels like bread, yet the Roman Catholic says it is no longer bread, it is now the actual body of Christ!
- The mass mocks at **clear scripture**. At the Passover ceremony Christ took bread and wine, and said, "This is my body" and "This is my blood of the new testament" (Matthew 26:26, 28). He did not mean His literal body and blood. He meant it in a figurative sense, just as He referred to Himself elsewhere as "the vine" and "the door".
- The mass mocks at **Christ's sacrifice**. Because of the infinite worth and the

absolute perfection of Christ's one sacrifice of Himself, scripture calls us to rest our hope of salvation and eternal life upon Him alone. Roman Catholicism, however, teaches that the priest has the power to bring Christ repeatedly from heaven and to offer Him as a sacrifice for sins over and over again! The Mass is therefore nothing less than an attack upon efficacy and sufficiency of the one true sacrifice of Christ.

- The mass mocks at **completed salvation**. Scripture teaches that the work of salvation is complete. On Calvary Christ cried, "It is finished" (John 19:30). Christ cannot be brought back to earth at the whim of a priest to be sacrificed again because we read "But this man after he had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down on the right hand of God" (Hebrews 10:12). Yet Rome claims that there can be no hope of salvation except by the repeated sacrifice of the Mass. No wonder the historic creeds of Protestant churches reject the Mass! The articles of the Anglican Church refer to masses as "*blasphemous fables and dangerous deceits*", while the Westminster Confession of Faith says, "*the Popish sacrifice of the Mass, as they call it, is most injurious to Christ's one only sacrifice, the alone propitiation for all the sins of the elect*".

Money

Roman Catholics are taught that when a priest says a mass, some of their sins (or the sins of a loved one, living or dead) will be remitted. But the priest must be paid to say mass. Family and friends are assured that if they pay to have masses said for departed loved-ones, this will atone for some of their sins and earn them an earlier release from purgatory, thus sparing them years of agony. The Church states, "The Eucharistic sacrifice is also offered for the faithful departed who have died in Christ but are not yet wholly purified, so that they may be able to enter into the light and peace of Christ".

It is interesting to note that many years after the death of Pope John XXIII, masses were still being said for the release of his soul from purgatory. One wonders, what hope is there, then, for 'ordinary' people? The truth is, God's salvation cannot be obtained through any man or purchased with any amount of money. It is a free gift (Ephesians 2:9). To attempt to buy it is an insult to God!

Martyrs

Throughout the history of the church, many faithful believers in Christ have suffered severe persecution and some have been martyred because they refused to attend the mass.

Bishop J.C. Ryle, the former Anglican Bishop of Liverpool, wrote a tract entitled, "Why were our reformers burned?" In it he described the cruel deaths which many suffered because they denied that the "host was to be worshipped and adored as God...did they or did they not believe that the real body of Christ ... was present on the so-called altar so

soon as the mystical words had passed the lips of the priest? Did they or did they not? That was the simple question, if they did not believe and admit it, they were burned”.

One of the aims of the modern ecumenical movement is to devise a form of words that will enable Roman Catholic theologians and compromising Protestant counterparts to claim that agreement has been reached on the understanding of the mass. But we can be sure that the substance of Roman Catholic dogma will remain unchanged. The Vatican has publicly declared that participation in ecumenical discussions is on the basis that Roman Catholic doctrine is “irreformable” – it cannot be altered.

And indeed her doctrine of the mass has not changed. It leads sinners to trust in the priest and in the ritual of the church, rather than in Jesus Christ, the great High Priest who made the one perfect sacrifice for sins forever. His is the only sacrifice that can deliver from sin!

Those who hold to the truth that man is justified through grace alone, by faith alone, in Christ alone, can never be at peace with the Roman Catholic doctrine of the mass.

Rev Ron Johnstone

The Mandate: Exposing Error

Today the lines of demarcation between truth and error are more blurred than ever. Many denominations and inter-church organizations are sadly divided on the fundamentals of the gospel. False teachers are tolerated and even accompanied in evangelistic ventures. And we find some in the main Protestant churches, or in other evangelical fellowships, associating with liberals, modernists and Roman Catholics in acts of worship.

Ministers from a variety of Protestant denominations will perjure their ordination vows when they meet the Pope and accept him as head of a Christian church. Sadly, many professing evangelicals see no wrong in such meetings! The argument is that every opportunity must be taken to preach the truth – wherever it takes us. We are not to judge other ‘Christians’ therefore we must allow the wheat and tares to grow together until the time of harvest. Did not Christ pray for unity? Surely all Christians must work to bring this about; to embark on any other course is to be guilty of the sin of schism.

There is a degree of plausibility about all of this. However, it makes unwarranted assumptions, and it fails to take account of what the Bible teaches regarding our response to false teaching and departure from the faith. We must stand apart from any form of religious teaching or practice that contradicts or undermines the fundamentals of the gospel.

There are five specific New Testament commands relating to this matter:

1. We are to *mark* those who teach error. “Now I beseech you brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them.” (Romans 16:17) Here, the word ‘*mark*’ has the sense of ‘scrutinizing’. We are required to examine that which professes to be of God. We are not to accept things at face value. We are warned: “Believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.” (1 John 4:1) There are many who corrupt the Word of God (2 Corinthians 2:17). It is wholly unscriptural to accept and believe everything that comes along professing to be of the Lord! We must mark out those who depart from the truth, and so cause divisions and offences.

2. We are to *reprove* those who teach error. “And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.” (Ephesians 5:11) Silence is not an option in the face of false teaching and departure from the faith! When error has been observed, we are not to remain silent, fearful of creating division. Truth is more important than false unity. There is an onus upon those who love the Lord Jesus to speak out for His truth. And this is not to be a token expression of unhappiness. The word ‘*reprove*’ suggests a firm rebuke, made with the intention of convincing someone of the wrong he is teaching or

practicing. There must be the strongest refuting of error that is possible. Nothing less is agreeable to God's Word. Thus, the true minister of Christ will speak out against error wherever it is found. He has a God given duty to do so.

3. We are to *reject* those who teach error. “A man that is an heretic after the first and second admonition reject” (Titus 3:10) Instead of associating with false teachers and seeking to bring them around to our way of thinking, we are to reject them when there has been a repeated refusal to forsake false teaching or practice. We must reject those who persist in propagating error. Just as the physical body seeks to eradicate and reject a virus that is harming it, so the spiritual body must do likewise. These false teachers are not to be looked upon as belonging to the Church of Christ. They are to be denounced as those who bring in damnable heresies (2 Peter 2:1).

4. We are to *have no fellowship* with those who teach error. “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? Or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols?” (2 Corinthians 6:14-16) There is no common ground between truth and error. It is impossible to worship the Lord ‘jointly’ – such as we find in many modern ecumenical services. “God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). Truth and error cannot worship God side by side. There can be no fellowship, communion, concord, part or agreement between those who are essentially different in nature!

5. We are to *separate from* those who teach error. “Wherefore come out from among them and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you” (2 Corinthians 6:18). This word ‘separate’ means ‘to mark off by boundaries’. We are required to mark off a boundary beyond which we will not cross. False teachers and their errors must be out of bounds to us. They are beyond the pale. We are not to be involved with denominations or alliances where false teachers are given recognition or encouragement, nor are we to co-operate with them in any supposed evangelistic venture.

In separating from false teachers we are assured that the Lord will receive us and be a Father unto us. The Lord is outside the camp. He has no part with those who deny His truth and despise His name. In separating we go outside the camp unto Him (Hebrews 13:13).

Rev Brian McClung

Conclusion

Having considered some of the fundamental differences between justification by faith alone and justification by works, it is important, finally, to highlight the spiritual pedigree of all who are born into this world.

The Word of God reveals that, by nature, we all are sinners. “ For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). Our sins and iniquities have separated us from God (Isaiah 59 v 2). In such a state, we are totally incapable of initiating reconciliation between ourselves, and the holy God of Heaven. And so the answer to this universal problem must come from God – there must be a divine plan of redemption.

Mercifully, God has revealed, in the person of His Son, the one effectual means of salvation. Moved with love for the sinner, the Lord Jesus Christ became bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, in order to lay down His life on the cross at Calvary as a ransom for many.

But not everyone who dies goes to heaven. Men and women who die rejecting the free offer of God's salvation will be forever separated from Him in hell (Luke 16:19-31). Responding to this solemn fact, Paul exclaimed: “Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord we persuade men” (2 Corinthians chapter 5:11). And this the apostle did by exposing the error of those whose teaching was centred purely upon human structures, human institutions and human leadership – rather than upon the One who is the way, the truth and the life (John 14:6).

Reader, the message of the Gospel still points to Christ, and only to Christ! He shed His precious blood to make atonement for the sins of His people. Only His perfect sacrifice is able to reconcile man with God. Will you turn from your sin and come to God through Him?

“All that the Father giveth me shall come to me. And him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out” (John 6:37).

“Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Romans 10:13).

Rev David McIlveen