

Greg Koukl's Stand to Reason Interview with Francis Beckwith

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Koukl [opening music and sound clip] Well that is quite an appropriate lead-in for today's show. Of course the show is Stand to Reason and I'm your host, Greg Koukl; and we have dedicated the entire show—pretty much—to one topic today and a conversation with a very dear friend of mine. And we're glad that you've tuned in, and if you want to participate in the conversation, you are welcome to in hour number two. There are some qualifiers and I will let you know what they are.

My guest is Dr. Francis J. Beckwith and you might recognize the name as my co-author—or I'm his co-author—I don't know, what is it, Frank? Am I the co-author or are you the co-author?

Beckwith I think we both are one in substance.

Koukl [laughs] But different in person.

Beckwith Well, I'm just like, into Nicaea lately, so.

Koukl My dear friend Frank Beckwith—we wrote a book together, and it was actually your idea to write this book, so your name starts with a "B" and mine with a "K" so your name comes first on the book. Relativism: Feet Firmly Planted in Mid-Air, I am just thrilled to have you on the air again. It's been, actually, quite a while.

Beckwith Let me say one thing, Greg, is when we were at Summit Ministries last week, a couple of the students all bragged about the other sections of the book that I didn't write.

Koukl Oh, did they?[laughs]

Beckwith So, I just wanted to—really. And they'd say, "I really loved those first couple of chapters."

Koukl [laughs] Yeah, yeah.

Beckwith So.

Koukl That's what I hear too, they say, "The first couple of chapters really started out well, and then it got kind of dull in the middle, then it picked up again at the end." Of course, those are my sections.

Koukl But, I understand you hear just the opposite when people talk to you most of the time about your book—our book. So, anyway, Frank, what is your—you've been on the show many times so you hardly needed an introduction but, um—how would you characterize your, um, what is your new title, or what is your title over at Baylor, where you're now a tenured professor?

Beckwith Yes, I'm Associate Professor of Philosophy and Church-State Studies. I'm now fully in the Philosophy Department at Baylor—

Koukl Okay. I wasn't sure which department you were in with the—

Beckwith Yeah, sometimes I wonder, too. My first four years at Baylor I was in the Department of Church-State studies, which—it was an odd department because nobody in the department who was a professor had a Ph.D in Church-State Studies, they all had backgrounds in different disciplines. Since it's happened is the university has gotten rid of that department and there's just now an Institute of Church-State Studies, those of us that were in it as faculty are in more appropriate departments given our disciplines.

Koukl Well, congratulations, on your appeal on the very highly politicized and publicized row regarding your tenure over there, I'm glad that's been resolved. But now you're in a new—in the spotlight for a different reason, let's put it that way—and I'll let you talk about it a little bit, about what we're here to discuss, except for I'll just open with a couple of thoughts.

Beckwith Okay.

Koukl First, what I want everybody to know, that what I'm looking for here in our conversation together is clarity, not agreement; and probably Frank and I are going to disagree on a lot here in the next two hours. And I need to confess at the outset, a little bit of discomfort with that—I'll tell you, the listeners, I mentioned this to Frank earlier in the week when we met together at Summit Ministries in Colorado where we were both speaking—we have two hours to talk together about a topic we both care deeply about, and I suspect that the major portion of the time we'll be disagreeing, and I don't think we've hardly ever disagreed, Frank, on anything we really care about in the past—anything substantive.

Beckwith No, I think that's right. The only time I think we disagreed were over tactics, and things of that sort. Or even there, it was the general principles we agreed with, it would be something like, you would say, "Frank, you shouldn't use that lie."

Koukl Yeah, or something like—it was very, but very modest, you know, very simple.

Beckwith [laughter]

Koukl And, we're good friends, and Frank, I count you as one of my best friends, especially in the professional realm: as a colleague. And in general, I think we're comfortable with disagreements of any sort, especially since our theological and philosophical convictions—or disagreements as they may be—don't bear on our friendship.

Beckwith No, I don't think so.

Koukl And I think this is valuable for people to see. But, having said that, you have just gone through a significant, shall we say, change of life of sorts, and a lot of people are asking, "Well, what is it that you did?" and "Why did you do it?" So, why don't we just start with that, with you giving a little bit of your story, here, on changes that were made recently as you stepped down as the president of the Evangelical Theological Society, based on the recent change of convictions in your life.

Beckwith Sure. Now, boy—what I will do, Greg, and we didn't actually talk about this beforehand; but if you don't mind, I will talk a little bit about, sort of what's happened recently, but at some point I would like to be able to share—sort of—my own sort of early pilgrimage as a Christian. Which I think has some bearing on this.

Koukl Sure. Yeah, that's fine, Frank. We want to know—a lot of people just really want to hear from you directly: why did you make the change that you made? What was driving you, and theological issues, personal issues, philosophical—whatever it happens to be.

Beckwith Yeah, you know, I—this is what happened: On April 29th of this year, I was received into full communion with the Roman Catholic Church. I was baptized and confirmed Catholic as a youngster, so for me to return to the church, merely involved going to confession—which I had not done in over thirty years. My brother, one of my brothers—my brother Jim, actually—when I told him I was doing this asked if I needed help recalling my sins.

Koukl [laughter]

Beckwith Beforehand! [laughter] He apparently has a longer list than I have, but in any event—I'm trying to be a little funny—but it is a serious matter, I understand that. But, what happened, I'd say about two and a half, maybe three years ago—and actually may even go back further than that—I think that philosophically, I had accepted—and I don't think it was a conscious thing as much as so many of the people that I admire and people I've read, I think, hold to a largely Catholic view of faith and reason. Now, I do want to be clear that one can hold that view and not become Catholic.

Koukl Uh huh.

Beckwith You don't want to commit the slippery slope fallacy that if you accept Thomas Aquinas on X, then you must then go to Rome or something along those lines. But, I do think that that particular understanding of faith and reason—which is one that I'd say a vast majority of evangelical intellectuals accept anyway, and they may not even realize that it comes from that tradition, but, be that as it may—I think it opened me up to reading, for example, *Fides et Ratio*, the work by John Paul II, which is an outstanding defense of the relationship between faith and reason.

Koukl That would be the last—the pope just before the current pope, Benedict.

Beckwith Right. It's actually something—I remember reading it one night—and it occurring to me that there were things in there that sounded like J. P. Moreland. Now, that's a different J.P. than John Paul II [laughter], but I mean in the sense—there's actually a passage in JP II's *Fides et Ratio* where he talks about, you really can't approach the Biblical text without a cluster of philosophical understandings.

Koukl Uh huh.

Beckwith And this one had a big influence on me, and that's something that some evangelicals have argued; but, that didn't in any way—I didn't, having read that, say, "Oh, I'm going to become—"

Koukl Yeah, 'cause in both traditions you see that, even though you have maybe a more ancient rooting in the Roman tradition than you do in, obviously, 15th—16th century—Protestant tradition. Which started 16th century, for the Protestants—

Beckwith And so that was—I think that was part of it, so it's a combination. First it was, initially, the sort of the works I was reading, the people that influenced me, and then some of the aspects of my own philosophical view of the human person. Then, as I began, I gave a talk in February 2005 at Boston College—

Koukl Which is where Peter Kreeft is at—

Beckwith Yeah, Peter Kreeft, who I actually—I think I've spoken to once in my life, twenty years ago, so. If people are wondering, he actually had nothing to do with this [laughter]. I happened to be at Boston College, I was invited to speak there at a conference on the philosophical influence of John Paul II—and I was the sort of token evangelical invited to speak—and I gave a talk on the importance of creeds and the influence of creeds on the way in which we look at Biblical texts—especially on issues like the Trinity, and the Deity of Christ and so forth—and how anti-creedal evangelicals are really caught in a conundrum because at the end of the day they wind up implicitly accepting creeds even if they reject them explicitly.

Koukl When you say "the anti-creedal" you mean more the emerging church, or those aspects of the emerging church that are hostile to that, or are you talking about evangelicalism in general?

Beckwith No, no. I'm talking about—you know, I didn't even think about the emergent guys—I'm thinking about the sort of old-time Baptists of the 19th century, which still roam the countryside of Texas. [laughter] It's like zombies.

Koukl So there is an element within Protestantism that is anti-creedal, and yet characteristically Protestantism doesn't demonstrate that, would you say?

Beckwith That's right. I mean there are—so for me, this talk had really nothing, there was nothing in my talk or my lecture that I don't think anybody who's an evangelical who is creedal would disagree with.

Koukl There you mean—for those listening—those that acknowledge the truthfulness, legitimacy of the early creeds of the church: Apostles' Creed, Nicene Creed, and the others.

Beckwith That's right, there's also councils that—they don't call them creeds but they wind up—like the Council of Orange dealt with the Pelagian heresy and things like that. So, but there was a question asked by my good friend Laura Garcia, who is on the faculty there at Boston College—she's a philosophy professor, she's married to another philosophy professor, Jorge Garcia—she raised her hand, she goes, "How come you're not Catholic?" And there was this—talk about uncomfortable and awkward, because here I was at a conference celebrating the life of John Paul II with an audience that's 90% Catholic and I was being—

Koukl Yeah, put on the spot, there.

Beckwith So, I actually—I thought—gave an answer, and it's an answer (I will tell you I did not anticipate that question, so it's a 'seat of my pants' -type answer)—

Koukl But it certainly is possible for a creedal Christian—Protestant Christian that is—to be, well, to be creedal, and to share those things with what Rome holds now, and because this history is a history that Protestants can claim as their own too: Nicaea, Apostles' Creed, all of those things. It isn't like that those are uniquely Roman Catholic.

Beckwith My answer, actually, my answer was very similar to what you just said; and I also pointed out—her question centered on the whole question of the Magisterium and her point was that these councils had an authority to them. It wasn't simply that they happen to be sort of the committee to decide this, it was in fact something that the church believed about itself and its—

Koukl That would be—just for clarity's sake—that would be the Roman Catholic claim. A lot would depend on what one means by authority; if it's kind of "capital a" or its "small a" derived authority given that one is understand the early concepts accurately. I have the same authority in that sense if I am properly understanding the earlier concepts and I am promoting them, then they're authoritative—but not because it's coming out of my mouth, but because I'm accurately understanding what the apostles delivered.

Beckwith That's right. Yeah, I mean, I do not want to have a dispute now over this, but I will—yeah, let me just continue with the story.

Koukl Sure.

Beckwith Sorry. But any event, the answer I gave, actually I think, looking back, her concern was the Magisterium and I said, "Well it's certainly possible for one to be a sort of 'Magisterial Reformer' in the sense that one could believe that the Holy Spirit did work in the Magisterium until the Reformation.

Koukl Uh huh.

Beckwith It's certainly a plausible view to hold. It's not one that I hold any more—

Koukl Uh huh.

Beckwith But it's one that I don't think is a crazy view or anything, and one that would preserve the—sort of—the integrity—

Koukl Just for clarity, when you say it's not one you hold anymore, you mean, you don't think it was just merely working through, but the Magisterium has a different kind of authority than you were speaking of then. Is that what you mean now?

Beckwith That's right. I also think that the Catholic Church did continue to hold that sort of authority after the Reformation. And, you know, obviously—

Koukl I see. Okay.

Beckwith —that's where we're going to part ways. But, in any event, one could hold to—in fact there are a group of what they call themselves "Reformed Catholics" who kind of hold—this Magisterial view of the Reformation's predecessors. It's a very interesting—now, it's a view that tries to sort of reconcile this.

Koukl Uh huh. Okay.

Beckwith In any event, so that question actually got me thinking. And it shook me up a little bit, not because I didn't think I answered the question well, it was because I actually thought to myself, "Did I really give—have I really dealt with this issue of Catholicism in a way that was fair to me, as well as my intellectual development?" I mean, one thing—and this is where I think I, maybe the threshold is lower for me than for other people—I do have—I was baptized and confirmed Catholic and my family—my larger family, my parents and my siblings—are all real serious Catholics. So it's, a lot of people I know have a kind of background in Catholicism where they grew up in a nominal Catholic home, they grew up in a home where it was just simply a formality. That wasn't the case with—

Koukl Right.

Beckwith So, by the way, there was actually nothing—my parents and my family have been so supportive of my career and you have been, Greg; there has never been anything remotely like pressure.

Koukl It wasn't like you were the black sheep or the outsider or the separated brethren or anything like that.

Beckwith When people would come to see my parents for their—they work as accountants in Las Vegas—my dad would haul my books out there and brag.

Koukl Uh huh.

Beckwith It wasn't like—it was nothing like that. But it did—I thought to myself, "I have to deal with this in a pretty serious way," but I was busy at that time with a lot of the problems at Baylor. And I began reading different books, and to tell you the truth, I read a couple of sort of, you know, "I was once a fundamentalist, now I'm a Catholic" type books. And they were not that convincing, and those weren't maybe the best books for me to read initially, but they got me looking at other sorts of questions about the church fathers and the history of the church. But none of that really—didn't seem to make much of a difference to me. I was at, immediately after that—or a couple of months after that—I ascended to the vice-president—or the president-elect—status of ETS and put together the program, and the furthest thing from my mind was becoming Catholic.

Koukl Uh huh.

Beckwith Then, in October of 2006, I was invited to speak at the University of Dallas to a—to the—Society of Catholic Social Scientists. I was invited to deal with a paper offered by—represented by—J. Budziszewski.

Koukl Right, we know J. And he is a convert to Catholicism as well.

Beckwith Yeah. And so, I gave—it was actually about a fifteen minute—response to J. where, just like you and I, I don't think I disagree with J. And he dealt with natural law stuff and I actually dealt with some of the criticism of natural law by reformed thinkers. And the next morning, my wife and I had breakfast with J.'s wife and J., and Frankie broached the topic of Catholicism (Frankie's my wife)—

Koukl Right.

Beckwith —and we talked for about three hours. And I think some of what—you know, I had some pretty serious questions to ask. Especially about some of the doctrines that I think most evangelicals are uneasy about.

Koukl Uh huh.

Beckwith You know, the purgatory/Mary stuff.

Koukl Uh huh.

Beckwith And I—

Koukl The authority claim and justification, it's kind of all wrapped in there. Right.

Beckwith That's right. I mean for me, ultimately the issue of justification really was the lynchpin. And something that actually didn't—I had not overtly thought about until after the November meeting at ETS. What

happened is that after that meeting with J., he offered to talk with me privately over the next couple of months, and that never happened. What happened was we just had a—I was just very busy—so I went to ETS, was elected president, the meeting—I thought—went very well. We had some very good speakers, and then in January of this year I took it upon myself to sort of go through a kind of reading marathon to try to read as much as I can on these questions, and though I read first Mark Noll's book: *Is the Reformation Over?* I read a number of—actually portions of—a book by Wolfhart Pannenberg and Karl Lehmann, who are both German Catholic—actually Lutheran and German—theologians called *The Condemnations of the Reformation Era: Do They Still Divide?* Read the portions of the *Catholic Catechism*, and just read lots of stuff and in March I began to really start to think—and this was—the issue of justification really was the thing that I began to turn on.

Koukl Hold on, Frank, we've got to go to break, okay? And when we come back you can wrap this section up and then we'll start chatting about some of the particulars, is that all right?

Beckwith Okay, sure.

Koukl Dr. Frank Beckwith is my guest, we're talking about his recent reversion—is that the correct term? Or return? Is there a correct term for this?

Beckwith Well, according to one website, I'm an apostate, so I don't...

Koukl Well, so if I said, "reversion" or "return?" I don't want to use the wrong terms here.

Beckwith Reversion is fine.

Koukl Okay, reversion to Roman Catholicism, and of course stepping down as president of the Evangelical Theological Society. We'll hear more from Frank coming up, and then my questions of him here in this special edition of this show. We'll be going for two hours on this issue—or the majority of two hours on this issue—I want to reserve the last twenty minutes for my own comments and reflection. But, you'll be able to call in at the top of the hour.

I might as well tell you, if you want to get in the queue you're able to. We are only taking calls from Protestants who want to ask questions of Frank on this particular show; principally because this is a Protestant show and we want to talk about Frank's ideas from that perspective. Frank goes on a lot of Roman Catholic shows and has talked with Roman Catholics about this, we want you to be able to ask your questions of him on this show. 1-800-227-5278 and in the 714 area code 754-4150 for Stand to Reason.

[commercials]

Greg Koukl back with you here on Stand to Reason, and we're talking these two hours with Dr. Frank Beckwith, my dear friend and colleague, co-author of the book *Relativism*, and he's done tons of books on his own. In fact, you've got a new one coming out: *Defending Life with is—is it—Cambridge University Press?*

Beckwith Yes, sir. Yeah.

Koukl You're doing—you're just—a writing machine it seems to me, so congratulations on that. And I did see some blurbs you sent me the other day of some very, very good endorsements from people that really matter in the industry.

Beckwith I'm floored, this has been just an incredible blessing. I submitted this to Cambridge about two years ago. I thought—I was actually—the book was actually going to be a revised edition of Politically Correct Death—

Koukl Right, which many people know about because we promote it here.

Beckwith What I did is I just sort of rewrote Politically Correct Death but with a sort of early 21st century response to some more recent arguments so it doesn't—it duplicates a little bit in the middle part in terms of popular arguments, but everything else is new.

Koukl Plus, we'll be speaking together about that in September, I think. I mean we'll have an hour devoted just to that topic. But we left off here—and to bring people up to speed if they haven't been listening, if they've just tuned in—this is Frank Beckwith, the former president of the Evangelical Theological Society, stepped down in virtue of his reversion back to the faith of his childhood and as a young man: the Roman Catholic Church. And, this a principled move, and one of the things that stood in your way—you were talking about just in the last break—was what you understood the Roman Catholic view of justification to be, in light of your convictions as an evangelical Protestant, and you were concerned about that. And apparently in your studies, that had been resolved.

So tell me what you understand the—because I have a lot of questions about this, and I was raised Roman Catholic myself and then moved away from that and came back as a Protestant Christian when I became a follower of Christ, so I have very strong memories of what I learned in catechism and many, many conversations on the air, on TV, and radio with Roman Catholic priests representing the church since then, and the conflicts that we've had (the ideological and theological conflicts that we've had). So, I have this backlog of information just from my own studies that relate to this question; but I'd like to hear what you have to say about how you resolve the question of justification which was, to some degree, the lynchpin of the Reformation, as some would characterize it.

Beckwith Yeah. By the way before I go on, I do want to thank you for not playing "Let it Be" or "Lady Madonna."

Koukl [laughter] We'll have to remember that it might be up—

Beckwith —they were telling me before you were going to play a Beatles song, and I thought, "Oh my gosh, I hope they don't play "Let it Be". That would just sound—that would be so—you know when 'I find myself in times of trouble, Mother Mary, comes to"—

Koukl Yeah, yeah [laughter] well, we don't have any Bob Dylan here, so we figured The Beatles would be the second best for you.

Beckwith I just thought I had to say that, Greg, sorry.

Koukl [laughter] That's okay, go ahead: justification.

Beckwith For me, there were—well let me just tell you sort of my thought process, and then I'll sort of explain to you why I think, how I came to draw the conclusions I did about the Catholic view of justification. I mean, the first thing that occurred to me while reading the vast amounts of material—and by the way, I had been like you, taught by John Warwick Montgomery at Simon Greenleaf and one of my professors back then at Simon Greenleaf was Michael Smythe. And I had taken a course on the history of the church, and one of the benefits

of having been educated by Lutherans is that you do get a real sense of what happened during that time, and of course I had to pull out of mothballs some of my old books. I had not read a lot of these things for some time because it just wasn't the center or focus of my ministry work, which I think all of us can probably speak to that at some point. You know, we tend to concentrate on one area and not really read—keep up—on everything.

So the thing that occurred to me was that, I think, having read the catechism as well as some contemporary Catholic authors—and even going back to the Council of Trent—that I think that the Catholic view is Biblically and historically defensible. Now the one thing I did conclude, though, is that I think that the Reformed view is also Biblically and historically defensible.

Koukl Uh huh.

Beckwith I think the Scriptural data on the topic, that is, everything from what we get in Romans to Hebrews to Galatians—and even the words of Christ in the Gospels—gives us a wide range of ways in which justification or eternal salvation is presented.

Koukl Uh huh.

Beckwith I think at the end of the day, that the Catholic view is the one that best accounts for all those Scriptural passages.

Koukl How would you characterize that view then, Frank?

Beckwith Okay. It's—let me—

Koukl Let me, maybe I'll lead off with asking a question, okay? Because this has been a big deal for me when I left the Catholic church in the mid '60s, having been—I guess I would say—a faithful but spiritually nominal Catholic; I wasn't, I was just 16 at the time and so I had grown up with this and I was wedded to that way of thinking as a youngster and a member of my family. You know how that happens with familial background, cultural this-and-that. And then when I became someone who was thinking for myself in this, I had to decide whether I actually believed these things. When I then in 1973 became a follower of Christ, I heard a gospel message that was quite a bit different than had ever been delivered to me before. In the multitude of Roman Catholic churches that I'd been in and having gone through four years of Roman Catholic schooling and then CCD after that up to high school—which was Catholic Christian Doctrine I guess is what it stands for, the catechism stuff—and what set me free as a follower, as a new follower of Christ, is the contrast that I saw in the message that was being communicated by my brother Mark and other Christians at the time, and that is what informs this question.

And so my question is this: Is the Christian immediately forgiven and cleansed of his sins in virtue of his faith in Christ, and therefore can have the assurance of eternal life as a present possession, and not just a future hope?

And I take Rome's answer to be no.

Beckwith I'm going to give you a lawyerly answer: It depends what you mean by each one of those words.

Koukl Well, I mean, when a Christian is—and your understanding of, I think, Protestant justification is pretty straightforward—when a Christian genuinely (and I'm not just talking about, you know, the hope that springs up and they don't have the root and so they die away), but there's a genuine turning to Christ and genuine faith, and so there is a regeneration that happens, part of the package is a justification that secures for the follower of Christ at that point eternal life in virtue of the fact that the work of Christ has been applied to their life. And because of that, the good news becomes good news, we know we have eternal life as a present possession, and that's not a statement that lacks humility because there's no personal merit that's involved in that statement—it is fully and completely in the merit of Christ—and therefore I could say as a follower of Christ, that because of what Jesus did for me I am not only forgiven but cleansed of all my sins, and when I die I can go directly to be with Christ because to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.

It's that kind of thing, and that bears no resemblance to—or very little resemblance to—what, or let's say it's different in key areas, than what I understand Rome to be saying then and even now.

Beckwith I think it bears—I think there are actually close resemblances—when we start sort of parsing out these terms. I'll explain to you why I kind of agree with this view that you presented and disagree with it. I agree with it insofar as the Catholic view, is that at conversion or regeneration a person is in fact cleansed of their original sin and they are a child of God, and they are in the Kingdom.

Koukl Uh huh. When you say—so cleansed of original sin, but not any subsequent sins, would that be fair, just for clarification?

Beckwith I believe the death of Christ does cleanse those subsequent sins, but those subsequent sins that we commit, we have to confess for. In other words, it is the death of Christ that in fact, does cleanse us.

Koukl Yeah, eventually. But one is not cleansed until one goes to confession, is that right?

Beckwith Uh...

Koukl Or something akin to that?

Beckwith You are—I'm going to try to explain this in a—you are in fact forgiven for all your sins, Christ does cleanse you, but part of the process of when one becomes a Christian is the internal workings of God's grace to change one to conform to the image of—

Koukl Yes, that I agree with. And that's what we would call sanctification

Beckwith That—I think that's where the real rub is this: The Catholic view includes within justification, sanctification.

Koukl Okay.

Beckwith And, one by the way, does not have doubts about one's salvation while one is a practicing Christian. That is, it isn't as if—and I think you and I grew up in roughly the same times, I went to catechism just like you did, and I think it was presented in a way that was inaccurate and part of it is the horrible catechization that a lot of people underwent during the times right after Vatican II—

Koukl Right, and that may be true, but that raises other difficulties that we can get to later. But, just for clarification then, if I as a Protestant Christian feel that the Scripture teaches that all of my sins are cleansed, irrespective of my confession at some future day, failure to confess some sin—according to my view now—is not going to change my eternal destiny because I am presently a possessor of eternal life—

Beckwith It's true of the Catholic view too, insofar as—certainly when I go to confession I don't remember every single sin—

Koukl Right.

Beckwith And not all sins are of the same gravity. So, it isn't as if the Catholic view is that: My gosh every day I'm wondering whether I'm going to lose my salvation or not, I'd better live a perfect life. Actually, that is a sign of a lack of faith in God's ability to infuse His grace into you.

Koukl It's partly because there's different sins like cardinal sins, venial sins, and mortal sins. And only the mortal sin that—

Beckwith Well, there's no cardinal sins, there's only cardinal virtues.

Koukl [laughter] Okay, virtues—

Beckwith [laughter] Now, there are cardinals, however one of whom lives [inaudible]

Koukl [laughter] Sorry, there are sins of cardinals, okay, all right.

But there are venial sins and there are mortal sins. In other words there are sins that you can lose your salvation if you haven't confessed and there are—but see that in itself indicates, it seems to me, that salvation then is something that is continuously in question. That is you don't possess eternal life at the moment, you possess the possibility of having eternal life in the future because you may commit one of those sins—and I remember in the list of mortal sins when I was a kid that could disqualify you from going to heaven included missing church, eating meat on Friday, masturbation, just to cite a few—these are the kinds of things that if you did them and didn't go to confession or say a sincere act of contrition, that you were then in jeopardy of going to hell fire. Is that the way you understand it now?

Beckwith That's not the way I understand it. I mean, there are mortal sins, and they do separate us from the love of God—that is to say the separate us from the grace of God. But those sorts of sins have to be committed with a certain intent to them; that is, the church does take into consideration the fact that people can commit sins—for example in a legal case where there could be mitigating circumstances.

Koukl Right, I understand. And I'm with that at all, I'm just trying to draw a distinction between two different views in which—in my view the forgiveness is a past act of God in my life and it never has to be repeated because I have been born again and brought into the Kingdom. And currently, as a possessor of eternal life, and there are many passages that make this very clear. And on the Roman view, then, I wouldn't have that—it's not that kind of thing—it seems to me which is why confession is important and mortal sins are a factor in the equation and purgatory enters in et cetera.

Beckwith But you see I think—now I want to tweak the paradigm here in this sense: it seems to me you're looking at the Roman view as if it were a forensic view. That is, you're looking at the actions of the individual Christian as if they somehow count towards or subtract from salvation. But the Catholic view is not that at all, it's that we walk with Jesus and we allow Him the opportunity to change us as we cooperate with Him throughout our lives. So the sort of—clearly there are people within the Catholic community who obsess about these things in ways that are unhealthy, and I think ultimately sinful. So, for me the thing that I found actually the most amazing about the view that I suspect you're defending—and I don't want to assume something that's inaccurate—but that in fact that Christ's righteousness is not infused in me at all but it's just imputed. That is, it's a kind of legal fiction.

Koukl Uh huh.

Beckwith And that to me, is something that I just don't think the Scriptures teach.

Koukl Well, it's not a legal fiction. It's just what—you have not been transformed in actuality into a sinless person, but it is forensic in the sense that "God made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." And so in terms of the forensic or the bookkeeping if you will, God sees me as Jesus, because He saw Jesus as me. This is why Paul can say in Romans 4, "For him who does not work but believes in a God who justifies the ungodly, to him it's reckoned—" notice reckoned there, it's a bookkeeping term—"it's reckoned as righteous." I could agree entirely, Frank, with your comment just earlier that Jesus participates with us in helping us to grow in our actual progress of living a sanctified life, but that is something—I can walk safely with Him—because of the fact that the question of my eternal security, my eternal forgiveness has been settled.

And I think this is why Paul makes the point in Romans 5, where he says, "Therefore being justified by grace, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have received our introduction into this grace in which we stand." To me that's a very different message than—not only did I get as a youngster—but what I've heard since then from everyone except for you just now and making these very, very qualified distinctions about faith and justification.

Beckwith Yeah, I mean—

Koukl Everyone on the Roman Catholic side, I should say.

Beckwith Yeah, now, you know, look, I believe all of those particular passages that you asserted are in fact—I believe in them as well.

Koukl Right.

Beckwith I do think, though, that when Paul talks about us being a new creation, all those passages have to be accounted for too. As well as those passages that talk about—and I'm going to cite passages and I know there are answers to them so I'm just going to sort of just lay them out there—things where Paul talks about working out—

Koukl Your salvation in fear and trembling, right, Philippians 2.

Beckwith The even the James—I found by the way, the James 2—the answer to James 2 just to be unconvincing.

Koukl Did you read my answer to it, or someone else's?

Beckwith No, not your—I've not read your answer—

Koukl You need to read my answer to it; it's on the website, because I do a piece between James 2 and Romans 4. And from what I've read, I think that I come down maybe similar to maybe you would here—I don't know Roman Catholics have said—this is a passage that talks about what happens with a genuinely regenerated person, they demonstrate certain things as characteristic of their life, and those who just have the word "faith" attached to their convictions, and nothing to demonstrate it is real, we have no good reason to trust that.

Beckwith And I do think that when you look at the way in which faith is presented in Scripture, there is a deeper connection between love and hope and the way in which people conduct their lives as a manifestation of that faith.

Koukl Uh huh.

Beckwith And I do believe that that sanctification is in fact, important in contributing to how God makes a judgment about us in the afterlife.

Koukl There's—there I think right now we're really at a watershed here, because as I read the Scriptures, the judgment that God has already—is to make about me—has already been made. And it's been made in virtue of what Jesus Christ has done. You know, that we have an advocate [inaudible] the Father in Christ Jesus and so it is the evidence for others' eyes—and I think this is pretty clear in James 2—that I have been justified; the works that I do is evidence for the others' eyes, it isn't evidence for Christ. The Father—Jesus—rather Paul writes in Titus that we have been washed and cleansed not by our works in any sense, but by the washing and regeneration of the Holy Spirit. God has done that work in us.

Beckwith You've got to understand the Catholic view when it comes to—I forget the name of the tactic that you call it when you reel off a bunch of Bible verses and the person talking to you can't respond.

Koukl Oh, well, it's—

Beckwith [laughs]

Koukl [laughs] Okay, well, I hope I'm not committing that; that would be the steamroller tactic, but that's the person who keeps interrupting and I'm just making the point and showing the verse that seemed to support the point I'm making. But, I know it may be difficult to respond to every single verse, but at least in part of this—like I said—clarity, not agreement. I think that there are two distinct views that are working here in terms of justification, and that's part of what I want to get to and it isn't—well, go ahead, Frank.

Beckwith Yeah, now you know, there's a number of things that I've had to work through intellectually and spiritually through this entire process. And one of the things that some of the passages you mentioned, especially when the term law is used, and it's clear to me from reading a number of these passages that when Paul talks about—especially in certain sections of Romans, but not the entirety of Romans—that he's talking about the Mosaic law and he's actually addressing the question of those Jewish Christians that were requiring

other Christians to have to go to the Mosaic law to join the church. That's the sort of thing that I think he's dealing with in those cases.

Koukl Do you—you don't think there's any, in a sense, parallel to that—even if it's not precisely the Mosaic law that's in view but any other system of human works that is placed in addition to—

Beckwith Oh no, I absolutely think that—I think that's absolutely right it also, it could also apply to any human works that are done without the grace of God. In other words, one is saved initially—that is to say one is regenerated initially wholly by the work of God in His grace. That is pretty clear.

Koukl Uh huh.

Beckwith And that's the view that has been held from Augustine, believe it or not, to the Council of Trent.

Koukl Uh huh.

Beckwith If you read the Council of Trent—which by the way really shocked me. I expected to read this sort of horrible document requiring people to stick pins in their eyes [laughs]

Koukl [laughs]

Beckwith Flagellate themselves, you know. And it turns out, that there are things in there that are quite amazing, that the initial grace is given to us by God—in fact there's a condemnation in there for anyone who says that our works depart from grace.

Koukl Okay, well here's—

Beckwith This is—I thought to myself, "I have not been told—" I had been misinformed.

Koukl Right, okay, here's—this is an important juncture here for me because there is a—for me there is a difference between explaining a doctrine in precise terms that sounds right and then actually having other doctrines or other teachings or habits or behavior or conditions in the church that seem to belie those other things. It's like Jesus said, you know, "You call me Lord, but you don't do the things I say." Words are cheap. And I've heard lots of careful characterizations of justification so it sounds like the Protestant position, even though they even have—as you've characterized it—I think there are some differences.

Beckwith Sure.

Koukl But I look at other things in the church, I mean like, the sacrament of penance, the issue of purgatory, the whole idea of having a sincere act of contrition, the idea of—even the defense that Catholics don't say that they have eternal life because they think this lacks humility; well that implicitly suggests that there's some kind of meritorious claim that's involved there. All of these things seem to me to be implicitly working against—in some cases almost explicitly—working against the doctrine of free grace.

Beckwith Yeah, I don't think that implies a meritorious claim at all, I think if anything it says that I am trusting God and putting my trust in Him and I'm not going to be presumptuous. I mean that's what I think, that's what you get from—

Koukl But what would be presumptuous about taking God at His promise? I'm thinking of 1st—

Beckwith They believe they're taking God at their—we believe [laughs]

Koukl [laughs]

Beckwith That we're taking God at His promise—

Koukl Understandable slip there, Frank.

Beckwith What?

Koukl That was an understandable slip, I won't hold it against you. [laughs]

Beckwith Thank you. I think that in—look, I am confident that I'm going to be in heaven. Okay. Am I absolutely certain? Absolutely not. Who knows, a year from now I could be—I could do something and reject my faith. It's possible.

Koukl Well there are a lot of Protestants who say you reject your faith and that's the end too—in fact most—and they would just have different characterizations about how that works out theologically. But I'm thinking of 1 John 5 here, and this was a very important verse to me after I became a follower of Christ in the Protestant tradition here, and that was John says, "I'm writing these things to you—" well first he says—I've got to go find it now I'm tripping up, if I get started by myself then I wouldn't need the book here but let me just find it here to get rolling.

He says, "And the witness is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the life—has the Son rather—has the life. He who does not have the Son does not have the life. These things I've written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God in order that you may know that you have eternal life."

Now this didn't fit into any characterization of grace that I had learned in the Roman Catholic Church, and it doesn't fit into any that I've heard since then. That seems to me a very, very straightforward declaration that grace is my possession that gives me eternal life today that I can count on in the future. And it may be that I don't go to heaven, but it might be because I'm misunderstanding the Bible or something, but that seems straightforward.

Beckwith That's absolutely consistent with the Catholic view as I understand it. That—let me give you sort of an insight into my own sort of personal spiritual life in this regard. Having become Catholic, or returning to the Catholic Church, I feel liberated now.

Koukl Uh huh.

Beckwith Able to engage in a sort of prayer life, and self-awareness of how I treat others that I never had—

Koukl Uh huh.

Beckwith —as an evangelical. And to me that is precisely the sort of thing that John is talking about when he talks about the grace of God. It's not simply "You've made a commitment to me, you're now in heaven."

Koukl Right, okay.

Beckwith Here's the grace so that you can function in a way that you can be a witness to others and evangelize them and lead them to Christ.

Koukl But those two—

Beckwith That's the way—

Koukl Right, but those two are not inconsistent, Frank, in fact evangelicalism is filled with people who hold the first view and hold to the second as well. And I'm not a cheap grace kind of guy either, even you know that, and so I—and it may be that there are certain aspects of Roman Catholicism that offer psychological kind of inducements or encouragements in your situation. But it's still ultimately a theological issue of what is my state right here, based on the grace of Christ.

Beckwith You know, Greg, though, when you mentioned earlier about the assurance you have one could easily have accused you of a psychological inducement too. I mean that's—it's like—I don't have the confidence anymore in going to heaven.

Koukl No, what I meant about that—

Beckwith What I'm saying is that's sort of—

Koukl Okay, well what I meant by psychological inducement is that it's one thing to have some feature in the church that is an encouragement for you to do those other things. And certainly I wouldn't gainsay that or take exception with that. And some people believe they're going to heaven and that's just a psychological commitment too, but I'm citing the text that seems to say clearly that this eternal life is something that I possess now, and that is the particular thing that I'm putting my trust in, in terms of my assurance, and not any capability I have in the future of kind of working that out in a particular way. And certainly no need of subsequent kind of weekly or temporal forgiveness that I would get from a priest that would keep me qualified for that grace. Does that make sense?

Beckwith Not really.

Koukl Okay. When you came back to the church, you went to confession.

Beckwith That's right.

Koukl As I read your piece—if I'm not misquoting it—you said you went to confessions to receive absolution of your sins.

Beckwith That's correct.

Koukl And my thought at that time was, was Frank in virtue of his faith in Jesus Christ not already absolved and cleansed of his sins before he went back to the priest; or has he been in a state of mortal threat this entire time until he went back. Or maybe there's some third alternative. But were you forgiven before then, or not?

Beckwith Before I could go to—well look, only God knows.

Koukl Well, no, based on your understanding. Just based on you—

Beckwith I was confident that I was a Christian.

Koukl Right.

Beckwith Obviously, and that I was going to heaven.

Koukl Right, so you—

Beckwith Once I accepted the Catholic understanding of the relationship that I have with Christ and the sorts of things that are required of me, I went to confession.

Koukl Uh huh.

Beckwith And it's not the priest that absolves me of my sin.

Koukl Uh huh.

Beckwith It's God that absolves me—

Koukl No, I understand that. And I didn't mean to suggest that it was the priest that did that, but the priest was an important step to initiate the absolution that came from God, so therefore the absolution wasn't there beforehand and came as a result of—from God—through the priest to you, is my point or question. It sounds to me that's what you're saying happened.

Beckwith I did it, I did it out of obedience.

Koukl Okay.

Beckwith And it, whether God had absolved—whether in fact, how God works it out—I'm not—

Koukl Okay, it wasn't meant to be a—

Beckwith As part of my process of returning I had to do that.

Koukl It wasn't—and I respect that—it wasn't meant to be a trap. You just used the word absolution which implied that there wasn't absolution beforehand, which would be consistent with my understanding of the way that grace works through the Roman system but would be inconsistent with my understanding here.

We skipped a break, but that's okay because this is important and we're not paying any advertisers—or they're not paying us anyway—so I want to ask about purgatory because this is a very important piece of the puzzle here that seems to tell me much more about the de facto situation of justification in the Roman Catholic Church. Can you explain purgatory to me as you understand it to be in the Roman system?

Beckwith Okay.

Koukl Theological system, I mean.

Beckwith Can we—and I—you know, I am not done with my story yet, but I haven't told my entire thought process we kind of got hooked on justification.

Koukl Yeah, well part of it is I wanted to be able to get to some of these kinds of theological issues that people are raising questions about.

Beckwith Sure.

Koukl Including me, and a lot of the listeners too, so—

Beckwith Okay, let me just—I'll do it real brief then in terms of the doctrine of purgatory. First thing you've got to understand, and I've said this to many people, I think I may have said this to you last week at Summit Ministries. When it comes to—when one enters a theological tradition, it doesn't mean that one has the same sort of confidence in every single doctrine that one may—

Koukl Fair enough.

Beckwith And I think this is probably true of most evangelicals.

Koukl Yeah, the hitch there, and I think what people are thinking is, "Yes, but Rome makes a different authority claim which you've come underneath."

Beckwith That's right. Now, in terms of the doctrine of purgatory, it is—without getting into much detail—there's a lot of people out there who are much more adept than me in dealing with this issue. But I will tell you the way I understand it. That the purpose of purgatory is ultimately to rid us of the temporal effects or consequences of sin. Not the eternal consequences of sin. People that go to purgatory, in fact, are people that are destined for heaven.

Koukl They're on their way, right, that's my understanding.

Beckwith So it's not a half-way house. The other thing is that the church is actually quite modest about what it claims about purgatory whether it's a place or a state, or whether there's even anything like temporal sequential events. Ratzinger before he became pope actually talked about this in his books. And so the problem, this is the issue that, this is actually why you find the doctrine of purgatory very early on in the Christian church. The problem was this, you had Christians who were regenerated, came to Christ, committed... after they became Christians... committed grievous sins, were forgiven, did penance as a result—not to absolve their sins, but in order to discipline themselves so they can become more virtuous people as a result of their confession. They would die, and so the thinking was, "Well how can we account for the fact that one cannot be in the presence of God unless one is holy and one has not achieved holiness in this life?" And so the inference is, well, there must be a state somewhere between—before—heaven in which this sort of thing occurs and there are a number of Scriptural passages that are—they're obviously not explicit—

Koukl Uh huh.

Beckwith -defenses of purgatory.

Koukl 1 Corinthians—

Beckwith But the assumption is that at least there are principles in place from which one could argue. So basically, if one begins with that understanding of relationship between grace and justification, then the

doctrine of purgatory actually makes sense. And this is why, for example, someone like C. S. Lewis entertained the possibility.

Koukl Right, right. Well, you know, it seems to me the answer to the question that was raised, how could this be is in the Scriptures quite clearly, that Jesus Christ is the One who has made those people pure and clean. You know, your sins and transgressions I will remember no more. That we have a great high priest over the house of God, we can draw near with a sincere heart and full assurance of faith having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water, He who promised is faithful. We have Christ who has done that cleansing for us and therefore there's no need for anyplace like purgatory, which is why purgatory is never mentioned in the New Testament.

Beckwith Why does—I mean—what's the point of sanctification at all then?

Koukl Sanctification is developing our souls to be more like Christ in this life.

Beckwith Why—so when you die though, what happens?

Koukl Well, I'm not exactly sure but I'm not sure why—how does—why invoke something like purgatory, extra-Biblically when there's no need to? I think what happens is we go—when we see Him we will be like Him because we will see Him as He is.

Beckwith Now, it wasn't—by the way, I didn't invent the doctrine—

Koukl No, I'm talking about Rome here, not you, of course not. Right.

Beckwith Something that has deep and ancient roots. And this was actually at the end of the day, this kind of leads me to, kind of a segue to things I was going to say—I hadn't finished saying.

Koukl Frank, we got one minute before the end of this hour just to let you know.

Beckwith I think the doctrine of purgatory it is, like any sort of theological term that is used to account for something—

Koukl Right.

Beckwith —so for example I would say the term Trinity—

Koukl Yes, I am with you on that.

Beckwith —depravity, I mean these are terms that are not found in—

Koukl I'm not straining at the fact that the word purgatory is not there, but the concept is so central to the whole enterprise you'd expect there would be something like a straightforward characterization of this as it fits into the description that Rome gives it. As it sits—

Beckwith See, you're assuming though that the only data we get for our theology is the Bible. And that's where [laughs]

Koukl That maybe is another—of course but okay, then, that's another discussion that we can take up in the next hour. And I just realized here my original commitment was to let people weigh in here with their calls,

Frank, starting hour number two. But we still have a lot more ground to cover, so let's just see if we can do some more things together on some of these issues and see if we can fit the callers in as we move forward.

That's the end of hour number one, hour number two coming right up. Greg Koukl, Stand to Reason, stay with us.

[commercials]

Koukl All right, hour number two here at Stand to Reason and for those of you listening, I mean live, not on podcast but live, the podcast will be put up tonight. And if you're listening by podcast you already know that. There's a lot of people waiting for this chat, friendly chat that I'm having with Dr. Frank Beckwith, my dear friend and co-author with me on the book on Relativism: Feet Firmly Planted in Mid-Air. And Frank has, earlier this year, returned to the Roman Catholic Church which is the church of his youth, and done so in a thoughtful and committed way—stepping down as president of the Evangelical Theological Society. And we're kind of doing kind of a haphazard job here, Frank, of kind of listening to your story and jumping into theological issues and then jumping into your story a little bit, too. So it's not exactly tidy but—in that regard—but there's been, we only have two hours here and I thought there's obviously a lot of things here.

What I'd like to do is, I want to raise two questions about purgatory that I'd like to hear your answers to. And then since you brought up the authority issue just a few moments ago as being really part of the dividing line between our convictions that informs the whole process of these other theological issues, I'd like to touch base on those too. And then we can move more into your story or to some calls or whatever after that. Is that all right?

Beckwith Yes.

Koukl Okay, the questions that I had about purgatory [talking while trying to find a paper] here are the two thoughts that came up to me. I've already made a point about some textual issues, but I had two thoughts that came up to me. The way I've heard it—the explanation I've heard in the past was the explanation that you gave me. That we are not in a state of kind of actual perfection and so we have to have a period of time or a place or something where we have this transformation so we are ready to move into heaven. And this is called purgatory, where there's a purging that is done.

But, as it turns out, on the Roman Catholic view, you don't actually have to spend that time there in purgatory because there is a system of indulgences—including a plenary indulgence—which is a full indulgence in which someone can circumvent purgatory and go directly to heaven. And this is based on, as the catechism said, as I read it, the merits of Christ and the merits of the saints and Mary. So the merits of Christ at least are available to the follower of Christ who dies in grace to avoid the torments of purgatory and they are made available through this indulgence system. Why—then it seems to me if that's the case, then the justification for purgatory is made null and void because the merits of Christ are available for us to avoid purgatory if they are mediated to us through the indulgences done by the Roman Catholic Church.

Beckwith Do you have a question?

Koukl Yeah, the question is, then: Why is purgatory necessary then, if indulgences can get you off from purgatory through the merits of Christ?

Koukl You see the problem that I'm raising here.

Beckwith Yeah, this—all this stuff you're bringing up has virtually nothing to do with why I became a Catholic, but I will answer it if you want me to.

Koukl Yeah, I would, but the reason is—

Beckwith There's only four pages in the catechism on indulgences.

Koukl The reason is, Frank, is it's not just—we're talking not just because—to find out why you became Catholic but that you were the president of the ETS and became Roman Catholic then raises significant questions about the differences between Catholicism and Protestantism on these vital issues like authority and justification; which were in some degree issues you had yourself.

Beckwith You're not raising questions about authority and justification, you are going through particular doctrines and asking me to justify them—

Koukl Right.

Beckwith -[inaudible] from the general theological tenor of the church. And that I think is not fair. And it's not my experience or the way in which I became a Catholic. Now, I do have answers to these questions,

Koukl Okay, no, Frank—

Beckwith But I just think that, you know, if this was going to be a debate you should have told me ahead of time.

Koukl Okay, well, if that's the way you feel about it—

Beckwith I'm not [?prepared? inaudible due to cross-talk] for that. I actually entered the show kind of thinking this is going to be a time where I'll be able to share my journey in a safe place, and I just don't sense that.

Koukl Okay, well, no. I guess you and I had a little bit different expectations here. But I don't want to pursue something that isn't what you had in mind, and I don't want to be untoward in my questions here. I thought partly when I started up the show talking about that we were going to disagree on a lot of things, these were the kinds of issues that would be coming up and this was my expectation of what we would be talking about. Not just a matter of reporting, you know, your journey as it is because the journey raises questions to listeners about exactly how do we make sense out of this decision that you're making. Because you didn't just make a change of denominations, you went to what you thought was the true church and therefore that leaves the rest of us kind of not in the true church, and you adopted doctrines that we disagree with or that you held before but now you disagree with. And so, it's a matter of trying to figure this thing out. But I don't want to be contentious about this, and if—we can just change the mode—

Beckwith Well let me just briefly, a couple of things about the doctrine of indulgences. It is obviously, there are some good reasons why Protestants raise questions about them. They factor—they're a big factor—in Luther's breaking away from the Catholic Church. But the thing that a lot of people don't realize, they really make such a minor part of the catechism—four out of the one thousand pages deal with the issue of indulgences.

Koukl Uh huh.

Beckwith When it talks about Christ's merit, when it comes to indulgences, it's not referring—it's referring to the suffering He underwent as a man that we can—that can be distributed to us in the process in which we become more virtuous Christians throughout our lives. It's not talking about the aspect of Christ's merit as it refers to the eternal removal of our sins.

Koukl Uh huh.

Beckwith It's talking about the temporal consequences of sins and that aspect of Christ's—in actually many ways it's almost an unfortunate term that the catechism uses because it doesn't precisely mean the same thing as it does when it's referring to Christ's death removing us from our sins.

Koukl Uh huh.

Beckwith And the way I like to look at it, Greg, is that it allows what essentially penance and indulgences and these sorts of things do, I look at it as a loving father disciplining his children so that the children can become more like he wants them to be.

Koukl And that, that—

Beckwith To me, that's liberating, not oppressive.

Koukl Right, but in terms of the Catholic system, though, that's not the purpose of—isn't the purpose of indulgences to take time off of purgatory, and that's why we—

Beckwith Well, no, actually it's to take time off penance. It's—

Koukl Okay.

Beckwith —the whole thing about time is actually, that's why Paul VI—Pope Paul VI—altered it so that it would be more clearly—

Koukl Okay, okay, well I'm just using that term time then in a very, very general sense. But let's just say "take off penance" then. So, if the penance is meant—I guess I'm, now I'm left very confused about this because—

Beckwith It is confus—I will admit to you it is confusing. And [laughs]

Koukl Okay.

Beckwith And look, I think I'm a smart guy and I've reread this stuff all the time. [laughs]

Koukl Okay. All right, let's just pick up from here, and why don't you pick up from where you would like to talk about your story; wherever we left off.

Beckwith Okay this—

Koukl Is that all right, Frank?

Beckwith Yeah, that's fine.

Koukl Okay.

Beckwith This is—let me just, before I go on, I want to tell you that I—this process that I've been through, I mean I haven't really said much in terms of on the Internet.

Koukl Uh huh.

Beckwith I've remained largely silent about the things said about me and my wife. And they've been—many unkind things said and so my reaction a few minutes earlier, Greg, is not anything to do with the sorts of questions you're raising.

Koukl Uh huh.

Beckwith The questions you're raising are perfectly legitimate ones.

Koukl Uh huh.

Beckwith It's just that , you know, there's been some—we've gotten some—

Koukl Sure.

Beckwith -really nasty e-mails from people and so I, at time—this is the first time I've actually publically—

Koukl Uh huh.

Beckwith -addressed this in a broadcast setting and so—

Koukl Okay.

Beckwith -it's something I—

Koukl [laughs] Of course, you used to get nasty e-mails before this, you know.

Beckwith But this is different; this is people who are saying that I am eternally banished to hell.

Koukl Uh huh.

Beckwith I don't believe they're right—

Koukl Right.

Beckwith -I think that they're nuts. I mean most of them are sort of you know, sort of the crazy people—

Koukl Right.

Beckwith -that you often get letters from. Not, of course, your regular listeners who are—

Koukl Uh huh.

Beckwith -[inaudible] smart people. [laughs]

Koukl I felt a little bad because maybe I did not communicate as clearly as I might have that there might have been—be—a more polemical element to our discussion here. Principally, because this is...people want answers to this, and they want to hear kind of both sides. But that's okay. Thank you for that qualification.

Beckwith Because, yeah, for me so many of these things—and I think it's just the result of the fact that for me this has been (and I understand that I was president of ETS and I always have to remind myself that I'm in a different position than a lot of other folks)—

Koukl Uh huh. Yeah, I don't think you realize—this has always been the case—I don't think you realized the profound impact that you have on Christendom in this country and the role that you played. And of course that's a compliment, as you know, and I think just in your own native humility you don't realize that and you're a bit surprised at the stir you created when you made this move.

Beckwith I think there's a difference, too, between having reconciled things in my own mind and worked it through and being articulated in a way, let's say, as glib and as quick as I'm able to deal with issues like abortion.

Koukl Uh huh.

Beckwith It's just simply not—in terms of my own—

Koukl In terms of practice and everything, right.

Beckwith My practice clearly [inaudible] there. And so—

Koukl Right, okay, fair enough.

Beckwith —and so that's, you know, I'm trying my best.

Koukl Sure. You're—

Beckwith Let me just say—we left—we talked about the portion of my journey where I dealt with the issue of justification. The other—

Koukl It was January 2007 is where we left off.

Beckwith [laughs] A couple months ago. The other thing that occurred to me, you know, this is where I started reading some of the early church fathers that J. Budziszewski had recommended I read and some more on church history, and I was actually shocked to find, and this amazed me because I had delved much into the early fathers when dealing with Mormons—

Koukl Uh huh.

Beckwith —and but somehow I missed all the other stuff. That is to say, I dealt with issues of God and Christ and the Trinity and things of that sort, and didn't really deal much with the practices of the early church. And so when I, for example, discovered that the Council of Nicaea, which gave us the Nicene Creed, during that time we have the practices such as—in fact the Council of Nicaea actually in its thirteenth canon mentions indulgences.

Koukl Uh huh.

Beckwith Not by name, but refers to the practice.

Koukl As related to purgatory? Were the indulgences related to the doctrine of purgatory?

Beckwith I don't think—no, I don't think it relates to purgatory.

Koukl Okay, okay.

Beckwith I'd have to reread it. It's a very brief canon.

Koukl Right, yeah.

Beckwith But you find, actually, very early on at that time penance, the notion of the real presence in communion—

Koukl Uh huh.

Beckwith —you don't find the, obviously, the theory of transubstantiation.

Koukl No, that's more worked out.

Beckwith And that's actually one of the things that—there's a difference between holding a belief and having a theory about it. Which is—in any event, one of the things that you find I think very early on is that the practices and beliefs such as penance, confession, real presence, and even the notion of apostolic succession are widely held.

Koukl Uh huh.

Beckwith Or they're not explicitly resisted.

Koukl Uh huh.

Beckwith And to me that, you know, I thought, if I'm going to—if the church was wise enough to come up with the Nicene Creed, and then later on able to fix the canon of Scripture. Then it seems to me that they're—that I have to take seriously the practices that that church has. And then I had to ask myself, even if I had doubts about it, even if I thought, well it may be that they could have been wrong. Is schism justified? And is that something that Paul—

Koukl When you say "schism" you mean schism, you mean like the Reformation? Is that what you mean?

Beckwith No, I'm talking about my own personal separation from the church.

Koukl You're talking about the Roman Catholic Church.

Beckwith That's right.

Koukl Right.

Beckwith I believe that my, in the case of those of us that have been baptized and confirmed Catholic, we have a different relationship than those that have always been Protestant. That is to say I think I have a lower threshold and have to come back.

Koukl Right, right, I understand that, sure. So, because there's a sense in which there are—this has been part of your past and it isn't like a whole new—it's a reversion, it isn't a conversion. In a sense, and that's what you mean by lower threshold.

Beckwith There is that fifth—I think it's the fourth commandment in the Catholic [laughs], the fifth commandment in the Protestant.

Koukl [laughs]

Beckwith Honor your father and mother. And my parents baptized me Catholic. And that, that may not be to some people such a great [laughs]

Koukl Argument.

Beckwith Knock-down drag-out theological reason, but it certainly wasn't decisive, but it contributed to my reason.

Koukl Uh huh. Uh huh. Now, you mention Nicaea, though, and you also mention the canon. Is it—it's sounding—by the way I thought you said the canon came after Nicaea but—

Beckwith It did.

Koukl —but you have the Muratorian Canon that's—

Beckwith In terms of a fixed canon, in terms of a fixed canon.

Koukl Okay, well then that was 16th century then.

Beckwith Well, no, you've got—in terms of the New Testament canon—you have the church fixing the twenty-seven books. Now clearly the Old Testament never gets resolved.

Koukl Yeah, possibly Jamnia, end of the 1st century, but, in any event—so you see, okay. But you see, that it's your understanding then that it was the Roman Catholic Church, what we understand to be the authority of the Roman Catholic Church that fixed the canon and that gave us Nicaea.

Beckwith That to me makes the most sense.

Koukl Well, okay. What's confusing to me is the historical circumstances around Nicaea for example. While Sylvester was the bishop of Rome, he sent two representatives just like everybody else. So you've got 318 representatives, the bishop of Rome sends two.

Beckwith Yes.

Koukl And you have bishops all around the Mediterranean region who are making their contribution. So you don't have Rome that's presiding over this in any way, shape, or form.

Beckwith That, though, that may very well be—count against the apostolic supremacy of Rome but it doesn't count against apostolic succession or the fact that there are five central sees or focuses of apostolic succession in the early church. The question of the primacy of Rome is a different question than apostolic

succession. So you do have, in Nicaea five central sees, which I believe is: Rome, Jerusalem, Antioch, Constantinople, and did I say Jerusalem?

Koukl No, Jerusalem, right.

Beckwith I think those are the five. And those all sent representatives there and clearly, one could make the argument—and I'm not a historian or anything but the stuff that I've read on this—indicates that there is clearly an understanding of one apostolic church having a unity between the sees that in fact give authority to the council—the ecumenical council.

Koukl Yeah, I, yeah, this is where we part—

Beckwith But even so, the difference of—my point is—the difference, there's a difference between the question of apostolic succession, the primacy of Rome, like the Eastern Church would acknowledge them.

Koukl Uh huh.

Beckwith And I'm not Eastern Orthodox, but—

Koukl But of course this presumes that there is such a thing as apostolic succession in the sense of apostles that have the same authority as the early apostles and carry the authority of Christ.

Beckwith No, they don't have the authority of the apostles. The apostles were unique, but they had the authority to in fact, in other words, if for example the apostles had a different—

Koukl Role in the church, but in terms of their authority though—

Beckwith Some would express it differently, but there are certain powers and obligations and what's the right word...responsibilities of the shepherd that the successors have that are clearly similar to the apostles.

Koukl Yeah, well the one that I'm most concerned with is the authority claim that they stand in the place of Christ—the seat of Christ—and in the chair of Peter et cetera. To be able to speak infallibly when it speaks from the chair or tradition or the teaching Magisterium of the Church. And so that's a different kind of authority claim, obviously, than any Protestant is going to make; and that was the kind of claim that I was talking about. That they share that kind of authority, even though there are some differences in the way they operate.

Okay, we've got to go to break, Frank, and then we're going to come back and take some phone calls. That all right with you?

Beckwith That's fine, yeah.

Koukl Okay, will do. Frank Beckwith is my guest here. We're talking about his journey from Catholicism to Protestantism back to Catholicism again, and we're taking your calls—we've got banks of calls already in. We'll do that when we return in just a moment. For Stand to Reason.

[commercials]

[intro music—The Beatles "We Can Work It Out"] Greg Koukl with Stand to Reason, talking with Frank Beckwith, my Roman Catholic friend. Frank, I didn't choose this title [laughs]

What we'd like to do is bring up some callers here that can raise some questions for you, Frank, and in the process we're going to talk more about your own journey. That'll be great. You're writing a book—you're planning to write a book about your own spiritual journey here, right?

Beckwith Yeah, I am and you know it's—we actually talked about this last week and I'll share with the audience some of my thoughts on this, briefly. You know there's a lot of people—especially my evangelical friends who are nervous thinking, "Well, this is going to be just a Roman Catholic apologetic and you're going to move away from the issues that have defined your life in terms of your ministry," and that's—I don't want the book to be that way. It will talk about my own journey, but one of the things I am going to do is talk about my early days as a young Catholic—actually very young teenager—and some of the ways in which I think the Catholic Church failed to do its job. The other thing I'm going to talk about are the things that the Catholic Church can learn from evangelicals.

Koukl Uh huh.

Beckwith That there's an enormous amount of literature produced by evangelicals—in fact your guest last week, J. P. Moreland, his book *The Kingdom Triangle*—

Koukl *The Kingdom Triangle*, yes, right.

Beckwith That there's a lot of material out there. In fact it's interesting that since returning to the church I've probably endorsed more books by evangelicals than I have in my entire two years. I've got publishers sending me PDFs asking me to endorse books by mostly evangelical publishers which is fine, but my point—I think it's—there's a lot of stuff that evangelicals do very well. In fact, I mention this in this article I have coming out next month with *Lay Witness* magazine (which is a Catholic magazine for laypeople) and I mention *Stand to Reason* and *Summit Ministries* as examples—

Koukl Uh huh.

Beckwith —that Catholics should emulate, in terms of their ministry. And I do think I have a role in the Catholic Church as an evangelist to Catholics.

Koukl Hm.

Beckwith I do think there are many people in the Catholic Church that are not, in fact, walking with Christ.

Koukl Uh huh.

Beckwith And I think that they need to hear the gospel.

Koukl Uh huh. I was thinking about this—we're going to go to Misty in San Diego in just a second here—but this, I was thinking when I was driving out here because I thought about your comment that, "I'm not going to be a Roman Catholic apologist." It occurred to me since your change to Catholicism is based on the fact that you think Roman Catholicism represents the true Church, why wouldn't you be a Roman Catholic apologist? And I

think you mentioned before, well, you're kind of Mere Christianity, we talked about this on the phone, but wouldn't Mere Christianity now be Roman Catholicism?

Beckwith No.

Koukl And therefore it would be appropriate to promote that? Or.

Beckwith I was never really a Protestant apologist. I mean, if you think about the works that I published in the areas concerning questions like the existence of God, the resurrection—

Koukl Uh huh.

Beckwith —[inaudible]—

Koukl Right.

Beckwith —the issue of abortion, all those—

Koukl Those were the plight of both sides, correct.

Beckwith —of both sides. And that's my ministry. Clearly, there's a difference between sort of, my—and I don't want to make this difference, I mean it's not a clear distinction that there's a sort of personal Beckwith and a public Beckwith—but there is, and there's a difference between my personal spiritual life, and the sort of things that I'm good at that I can write about and hopefully benefit the wider Christian world.

Koukl And that's what you'll be doing in the piece you'll be writing.

Beckwith And that's what I'll be doing. Now if people invite me on their radio show and ask me questions, [laughs] I'm going to answer them. You mentioned at the very beginning how difficult, you know, you anticipated this to be; you know from my point of view, I walk a difficult tightrope as well, in terms of just—I want to honor the things that I've learned and the people that have influenced me in the evangelical world.

Koukl Uh huh.

Beckwith I mean, I have no doubt in my mind my formation—in fact I'm convinced my formation as a Christian is inexorably tied to the number of authors and teachers and Bible lecturers that have shaped me.

Koukl Uh huh.

Beckwith And so there's—I want to honor that and I don't want to be somebody who says, "The Holy Spirit doesn't work in the evangelical movement." That's not true.

Koukl Uh huh. Okay, let's go to Misty in San Diego and see what she has in mind. Misty, welcome to the show, you're on with Frank Beckwith and Greg Koukl.

Caller Hi, how are you?

Koukl Good, thanks.

Caller Thanks for taking my call.

Koukl Sure.

Caller My ears perked up last week when you had mentioned that your guest was going to be on because it hits home with me. I am a born-again Christian, and I'm living with my husband, who is a Roman Catholic. And he was born into that religion, and I made a decision when I was about eighteen to become a born-again Christian. So we're both very devoted to our faith and beliefs but sadly, we have absolutely no spiritual connection. We have a great marriage, but we are empty as far as God in the midst of our marriage. We've made attempts to discuss our differences, but unfortunately they all ended up in some very ugly, ugly debates. In fact, the topic is so hot that we actually just avoid it at all costs; which leaves me feeling very disconnected in the spiritual aspect of my marriage. And unfortunately for me, Greg and Frank, the more that I study both of course the Bible and commentaries and tapes and books and study guides, church history, the authenticity of the Bible, and all the texts that I read including STR publications, the more I'm convinced that there are some holes in—again it's a belief—that there are some holes in what my husband believes.

And I mean no disrespect to the Catholic religion or anybody who is a Roman Catholic, but I truly believe in my gut that there are some flaws and when I use—for me it comes down to one thing—when I use the Bible to support and justify my position as a born-again Christian, my husband's response is that the Bible is not the sole repository of God's truth. And he states the tradition—well some of the Catholic doctrines from the Vatican—as equally, if not more important, than the Bible. And he has admitted that he believes more in the Vatican's doctrines and authority over the Bible. So I feel like I've lost all of my footing when I have made my—

Koukl Yeah, well, it does make it difficult at that particular point. I actually had a Roman Catholic priest, Father Gregory Coiro who is the spokesperson for the Archdiocese of Los Angeles say that it really doesn't matter if we have the Bible because we have the Church. And the Church is the—gave us the Bible and is the final authority of what it means, so the Church is really all you need. Now, he wasn't trying to diminish the Bible, I think there was an implicit hierarchy that he was offering there and this is the same thing that you've run into.

Caller My whole question is what came first. Did we have the Holy Scriptures first, or did we have the authority of a Catholic Church? Anytime that the church is mentioned in the New Testament, I'm not thinking that it is the Catholic Church, I'm thinking it is Paul's missionary trips and all of the disciples that have gone out and made these churches that someone then has come along in the Roman Empire and said, okay, we're going to now—if you can't beat them, let's join them. So let's start more of a—I think—a power issue, the government—

Koukl Okay, let's hear from Dr. Beckwith. There's a couple things going on here, Frank. One is the personal issue, that's very—you know—near to Misty's heart you know, with her husband, and then the broader issue of authority.

Beckwith Yeah. I can't really speak to the personal issue, other than to say that—boy, it's going to depend, I think, how you resolve this personal issue is a sort of—look, my understanding, I know of couples that one is Catholic and the other born-again Christian and they get along very well. They actually, one guy that I know who's—he's—Catholic, his wife is Presbyterian, and he goes to the Presbyterian service with her and then goes to the Catholic Church. So there is a sense of a deep understanding; they're both Christians, they're both committed to Christ. Obviously there's the difference in terms of ecclesiology and other doctrinal issues, but—

Koukl Would there be some inconsistency, though, at least in some part, given the fact that the Roman Church—and this Roman Catholic—would be making a different kind of authority claim? Ah, because that would be a step down in a sense?

Beckwith The Catholic Church teaches that the Holy Spirit can be present when people worship Christ. There's a difference between being in full communion with the Church and being in partial communion with the Church or to be a Christian that is receiving God's graces but is not in full communion with the Church; which is the understanding of Protestantism.

Let me say a few things about the nature of Scripture. It's very clear in the catechism—in fact in some ways the catechism holds almost a stronger view of inerrancy than most evangelicals. I'm actually quite shocked at how strong the Catholic Church—because it doesn't say—the Catholic Church doesn't say "in its original autographs" it just says "the Bible that we have right now is inerrant." So it's—actually it sort of surprised me how strong it takes a position on Scripture.

Koukl Do you think that's an—there's an implicit qualification there or do they actually mean that the translations are the inspired words?

Beckwith I think they don't mean translations.

Koukl Yeah, okay.

Beckwith [?It could be they? Cross-talk garbles this a bit] think that whatever text we have in Greek, or Aramaic, or Hebrew. I'm just not sure but I was sort of surprised because evangelicals will typically qualify it by talking about original autographs, but the Catholic catechism doesn't actually do that.

Koukl So that's a claim that both Protestants and Roman Catholics agree on. But then Rome makes an additional claim, and that has to do with those three areas of authoritative teaching that also are inerrant, that they add to the claim. And this is why it seems to me that Rome bears a tremendous burden of proof at this point because they are expanding the claim of Protestants beyond into three additional areas and I haven't seen any evidence that this claim has been justified.

Beckwith I think the burden is on Protestants, and here's why: That claim was—the claim that there are three aspects of authority you find very early in the church, all the way to the Reformation. That's 1500 years. You have the Reformers challenging that, so it seems to me that the burden's on them.

Let me explain that the terms of the relationship between tradition and Scripture. One of the things I had to get over is what I consider a false dilemma. Or looking at tradition and Scripture as sort of adding to each other. Once you start thinking of them—once you start thinking of Scripture as something that the Church reads and that we as Christians should read the Scripture with the Church, then I don't think of—or I think one no longer thinks of—the Magisterium or the Church itself as something adding to the Scripture. But something that—the entity that in fact reads the Scripture and helps us to understand it. So it isn't like the Catholic Church says, "Here's the Bible and other stuff." It's that the Church developed over time, in the first several hundred years, these letters and gospels were distributed throughout the Church. There was never a fixed canon until probably the 4th century. So, in terms of your chronological question, it wasn't which one came

first, they both developed together. And so it's not a which came first: Bible or Church? They both developed at the same time.

Koukl Yeah, but to be fair, Frank, it really isn't just a matter of kind of the Church working with the believer to help understand the Scripture. I mean, the church at Rome makes a very particular and peculiar authority claim. Along with the Scripture, and that it is the one that can speak infallibly under its proper modes for God, and for the truth, and it's not just a matter of reading the Scripture. And so it puts itself—it does put itself at equal level with Scripture in terms of authority. I mean there are four different things, and this is why I think that the burden of proof is not on the evangelical, because I simply hold that the Bible is the authoritative Word of God and authoritative for morals and actually everything to which it speaks. Rome adds three more sources of authority, in the de facto way it operates. And because it has been around for 1500 years, that doesn't create any burden on me to disprove their claim. It is seems to me that they have the response—

Beckwith No, no, I'm not saying it's not—I'm saying that if you look at the history of the Church, this connection between the teaching authority of the Church, the formation of Scripture is in place for 1500 years. Then you have individuals saying, "That's inaccurate." It seems to me—I mean, Greg, you're...if in fact adding more means that you have the burden, that would mean that a guy that believed in fewer books of the Bible would actually have less of a burden than you. That is, if somebody said, "I only believe the first four gospels."

Koukl No, I'm just, what I'm—

Beckwith So that means that the guy that believes the other 23 in addition now has the burden. That doesn't make any sense. What makes sense is to say, "How long has the Church held this view?"

Koukl Now the reason I say that is because infallibility and authority can't be something that's bestowed upon oneself from the inside. Because the—

Beckwith The Catholic Church believes that it is in fact Jesus that gave—

Koukl Okay, well now, see now this is a different kind of argument then.

Beckwith Yeah.

Koukl In the case of the apostles, they were chosen by Christ and their office was affirmed by signs and wonders. And they had unique authority; it seems that subsequent church authority is acknowledged and this is why the canonicity question had to do with being ancient and not just it was by apostles and ancient sources because if they weren't ancient, then they couldn't have been the apostles. This seems to me to put the Bible, the writings of the early apostles in a separate category. Now when Rome claims to say, "We have the authority to tell you what the Bible means," that is an additional claim. Since Rome agrees with me on my authority claim—that is the Bible—but adds an additional claim, then I think they should shoulder the burden. That's the point I'm making.

Beckwith Yeah, but see that particular connection between—if you go all the way back to the early councils—that connection was there from very early on. What the Reformers are saying, is that we reject that connection. Well, they have the burden, then.

Koukl Well the question—

Beckwith I mean after all, why is it that—I mean don't forget, *sola scriptura*. The word *scriptura* refers to not a collection of 27 books, but 27 books as a whole. That is to say, the whole is greater than the sum total of its parts. So there is something more to—that is to say that you have a church that not only said that these particular books belong together, but that as a cumulative authority these books in fact limit the things that the church could do. I mean, remember, saying that there are prior councils and claims made by the Magisterium, or let's say that there are claims that Scripture limits the things that the church could do. If anything it restrains the Catholic Church from going in the directions that we find—for example—in the Anglican Church, among evangelicals, I mean, the openness view, all these things—

Koukl Yeah, but that doesn't go to the question of the authority. That does limit them, I agree with you, but I don't even see the creeds as being authoritative in the same sense that the Bible is. The creeds are authoritative in the sense that they are derivative from what the Scripture says.

Beckwith But they're not obvious. Look, the Arians were dominant.

Koukl Right, okay.

Beckwith In the Church and so it's, it [inaudible]

Koukl But that is not—that problem isn't solved by making an authority claim about an inspired interpreter. It's solved by battling it out on the words themselves. That's the point.

Beckwith But here you're appealing to the authority of a text and you think your interpretation is correct. Now, it seems to me that—you know—if we're going to start—you know—saying things that Jehovah's Witnesses for example are going to hell because they deny the Trinity; I mean that's a pretty strong thing to say if it's something that comes—that you have to be a kind of quasi-Greek scholar who can evaluate the text and come up with the Trinity. I mean, who the heck is going to just by picking up the Bible going to come up with the Nicene Creed?

Koukl So, I'm not sure the point, though, that we're talking here about the issue of authority and whether there's an infallible interpreter here and that some group like the Roman Catholic Church can speak with the authority of Jesus on these issues or whether the ultimate authority resides in the text. And it's anybody's job—everybody's job—whoever, to try to figure out what the words mean.

Beckwith See, I think that—and you agree to disagree with me on this, Greg—[laughs] is that I think that you are relying on the capital produced by this authority in order to interpret Scripture. And then you say, well look, I could pick up the Bible and find all these things really easily. Well the reality—I don't believe that's actually true. I think what's happened is that this entire tradition has been built up with all these understandings of the Trinity, the Deity of Christ—

Koukl No, I agree with that, Frank.

Beckwith —[inaudible] for it.

Koukl Oh I agree. We all stand on the shoulders of those that come before us, but I can stand on those shoulders, and they can make their contribution without at the same time, we have this authority claim that

is offered. And the problem with the authority claim is it goes beyond what the Scripture says about lots of different things. That—there's Mariology and all the things related to that—which we don't need to get into now. But there are lots of things that Rome has declared on, that are significant and important for the believer that have an impact on one's spiritual life, and I think an impact on the whole doctrine of the cross, *et cetera*, that are not things that are just a matter of a mere interpretation.

Ultimately, I think you can't avoid the fact that any individual—all verbal communication has a certain possibility of ambiguity that cannot be circumvented by a mere authority claim. And this kind of thing is unavoidable, and this is why you have the Bible.

Beckwith Why should I just believe what you just said?

Koukl Pardon me?

Beckwith [laughs]

Koukl I missed you, I missed it. Go ahead, did I lose you? Or is that Misty in the background?

Beckwith Misty, we forgot about Misty.

Koukl Oh, I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

Beckwith I'm so sorry.

Koukl Misty, well, we did respond a bit to her. Misty, I want to thank you I should have probably let you go a long time ago. I'm going to thank you.

Caller I just wanted to make one last point [inaudible] for all of us out there that are listeners that don't have theology degrees, it really comes down to one thing, and that is: What do you believe? If you believe that the Catholic Church is the end-all-be-all, that that is the sole authority of our future, our faith, our salvation, that is exclusive and that if you are not a Catholic, I believe that I am not going to have—go to heaven. You have to make a choice. It's exclusive. The Catholic religion is exclusive.

Beckwith Well that's not the, that's not the Catholic view. That there will be—

Caller The Christian community

Beckwith —that one does not have to join the Catholic Church to be in heaven. That's pretty clear in the catechism.

Koukl Yeah, and in some—

Beckwith I wouldn't be surprised if you, if there's going to be—well I've got to say this in the right way—there may very well be more Protestants than Catholics in heaven, for all I know.

Koukl [laughs]

Beckwith I don't know. I mean, I really don't know.

Koukl Misty, I want to thank you for your call, and you know in a very practical sense it does come down to what you believe; but I don't think Frank or I would limit it to that because you hold beliefs for reasons and our beliefs should be carefully assessed and of course that's what we're in the habit of attempting to do here.

Frank, we have to go to break. Do we have to go to break? No, we don't. Okay, well let's just, let's take some other calls, okay?

Let's see, Algonquin, Illinois, and Paul, welcome to Stand to Reason.

Caller Hi guys. I'm really enjoying the discussion.

Koukl Good, thank you.

Caller I, like the two of you, am also a former Catholic. I was raised Roman Catholic and at age 34, like Greg, I supernaturally heard the gospel and was regenerated and given the gift of faith. And for the last 11 years I've been gaining more and more desire and hunger to investigate church history and study Scripture and, Greg, I realize you really hit it on the head with the two aspects of this argument which is authority and justification. And what I found, I want to refer to just a couple books quickly. One of them is by James White, it—

Koukl Okay.

Caller —is called The God Who Justifies.

Koukl Right, yeah. James is—we're familiar with James. Do you have a question for Dr. Beckwith? We can use that time better that way.

Caller Yeah, my question originally, and you've already addressed it, but my question was when you called yourself an evangelical, Dr. Beckwith, what was the gospel of salvation that you believed was accurate and true? And what is it now?

Koukl Okay, that's pretty straightforward. Thank you, Paul.

Beckwith Well, I'll tell you, the gospel of salvation is actually specifically mentioned in 1 Corinthians 15.

Koukl Uh huh.

Beckwith In fact, I'm going to open up my handy-dandy Bible here.

Koukl And what version are you reading from, just out of curiosity?

Beckwith I'm reading the Official Pope Benedict Version

Koukl [laughs]

Beckwith No—

Koukl [laughs] The autographed edition.

Beckwith I passed onto you what I received—actually this is the believe it or not, the Good News Bible, which is not a very good translation, I understand.

Koukl We'll get the basic sense of it, I think though.

Beckwith Yeah, 15:3, "I passed on to you what I received, which is of the greatest importance: that Christ died for our sins, as written in the Scriptures; that he was buried and that he was raised to life three days later, as written in the Scriptures; that he appeared to Peter, and then to all the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred. Then he appeared to James, and afterwards to his apostles." And Paul refers to this as the gospel. You are saved by the gospel if you hold firmly to it unless it was nothing that you believed. So, I mean, this is—Paul actually calls that the gospel.

Koukl Uh huh.

Beckwith Now, the question is, is there a particular theory of justification that's the gospel. That's a different sort of question.

Koukl Uh huh.

Beckwith I think, as I said earlier, that I think you can find the Reformed and Catholic views both in the Bible, but I think that the Catholic view does the best job of accounting for the wide range of Scriptural passages in comparison to the Reformed view.

Koukl Okay. Paul, thank you for your call. Let's go to Ralph, Ralph, welcome to Stand to Reason with Greg Koukl and Frank Beckwith.

Caller Hi, Greg, hi, Frank.

Beckwith Hey, Ralph!

Koukl It's a familiar voice, huh?

Beckwith Oh yeah.

Caller It strikes me that one of the problems that you're both having is the problem of terminology. Catholics and evangelicals use different terminology. For instance, Catholics use the term justification to cover the entire salvation process. Whereas evangelicals talk about justification, sanctification, glorification—

Koukl Yeah, this is a point that Frank made early on in the discussion, didn't you, Frank? You began to talk about it.

Beckwith Yeah, I didn't do it as well as Ralph has done it—

Caller I would refer your listeners, since already a book has been mentioned, to the one I co-authored with Norm Geisler, *Roman Catholics and Evangelicals, Agreements and Differences*—

Koukl Yeah, Baker Book House published that, it's a good book, I have it.

Caller We very clearly talk in eight chapters in part one about the areas of agreement and then in part two the areas of disagreement. And we're very careful to correct misnotions on both sides.

Koukl Yeah, I think one of the things I liked about the book that you did with Norm Geisler, Ralph, is that you are very even-handed in this, and are clear to distinguish between dogma—for example—and things that are part of the tradition and things that are mistaken notions, et cetera, and you quote from a lot of primary source materials.

Caller As a matter of fact, in part two we don't call the disagreements with Catholics heresies, we call them errors. In part two. But, Frank, you should have paid more attention to part two, brother.

Koukl [laughs]

Caller You read part one and part three, where we talk about good things about Catholics.

Beckwith I read the whole thing. It's a great book, I mean, I think that they are fair-minded. You know, I don't want to—well—

Caller Well, and then also evangelicals are upset with a handful of intellectual evangelicals who become Catholic and they should realize that there are literally hundreds and thousands of Catholics primarily from the third world who have been influenced by the Charismatic Movement, Pentecostals, and Evangelicals, and are becoming evangelicals.

Koukl Yeah, that may be true, I don't know if that's going to really weigh much in terms of the kind of discussion that Frank and I are having because that's just counting heads, so to speak. It may bring comfort to some others who are bemoaning the fact that Mr. Beckwith has gone to Rome.

Beckwith I think that, you know, Ralph raises a good point though about sort of the shifting global focus of Christianity. You know, we in the west talk about how Europe is becoming secular and there is problems here in the United States with all sorts of Christian denominations, but you go for example, to Africa; you've got a very strong Orthodox, Episcopalianism or Anglicanism, you also have strong enclaves of evangelicals that are quite orthodox and—which is also true—of the Catholic Church as well. And it's interesting because they don't have the sort of histories that we're accustomed to referring—

Caller Oh other discussions that are going on that I would recommend that people look into, and that that's the Evangelicals and Catholics Together dialogues. There are at least six separate documents that have come out and these—this—group is made up equally of Catholic and Evangelical scholars and they've done some great work in correcting misconceptions and clarifying the issues on both sides.

Koukl Thank you, Ralph, I'm glad you mentioned ECT and thanks for your contribution here, that's an example of the series of documents now that have really kind of worked through some of these differences about Roman Catholicism and Protestantism in a way that I think is really a good spirit. Uh, Frank?

Beckwith Yeah, I mean I actually was influenced by the one on salvation, the gift of salvation. One of the things that very much stood out about that document was the fact that the Cath—both sides agree that obviously grace has to be present in order for justification to occur. The difference, and I do think this is where Ralph is right, is that for Catholics no work that one does can save one. It's not a works-righteousness.

Koukl Uh huh.

Beckwith But one, in fact, embodies the faith by doing acts of charity by the grace of God. That is to say we are new creatures, new creation and of course evangelicals would interpret that as sanctification.

Koukl Yeah, what you just said, there I would be totally comfortable with that.

Beckwith And so there is, now the difference comes—I mean a lot of it's terminology difference, I do think the difference between infusion and imputation makes a big difference because for the Catholic, salvation is a literal change—that is there is an ontological change in the individual. And that there's a certain sense of responsibility and what they do with that grace given to them.

Koukl Yeah, I think I'd agree with that, too. But to hear, if we take Ralph's comment too far, it's almost like the Reformation was just a big misunderstanding, and of course that's not the case.

Beckwith I think what happened—I think, looking back, especially at Trent—things happened very quickly, and there were a lot of political players involved, especially in Germany. I'm not saying Luther, obviously was not a part of that, but that by the time Trent issues its document, it's too late.

Koukl Uh huh.

Beckwith Because much of—there's actually a very interesting part of Trent—the Council of Trent—that there's this section—

Koukl This was, like 1545, or thereabouts.

Beckwith Yeah, and it's or it was 1560, there was like 1545-1563, it was an 18 year council. So they had to call out for food a lot.

Koukl [laughs]

Beckwith The pizza parlor in Italy did really well during those 18 years. But, [laughs] the part that's very interesting is there's a section on the four causes of justification which correspond to the four causes of Aristotle. And one of the causes that is missing is your own agency.

Koukl Uh huh.

Beckwith Which I found to be just, you know, as a philosopher just stunning, because I had heard so much about Trent teaching works-righteousness. And I do think, I mean there are legitimate Protestant criticisms of Trent, but in fact that I don't think one of them can be that it teaches works-righteousness.

Koukl Uh huh.

Beckwith I just never got that from it.

Koukl Frank, what do you think about, have you done any thinking about the inclusivistic teaching of the Roman Catholic Church and especially since Vatican II? And just for clarification's sake inclusivism is the view that Jesus Christ's blood was necessary for salvation, but it is not always mediated only through faith in Christ, but others pursuing their own faith tradition can benefit from the blood of Christ. Or to put it kind of in a casual way, is the good Buddhist, or the good Hindu, or the good Muslim can be saved by the blood of Christ, through their religion. That would be an inclusivism, and when I started doing Religion on the Line with Dennis Prager

almost 20 years ago now, every single Roman Catholic priest that I talked to objected to me trying to suggest that the Jewish rabbi in the program actually needed to believe in Jesus because as one put it, he has a separate—they have a separate covenant. And others said, "They don't need to because they are saved through their own religion by the blood of Christ."

Beckwith Yeah,

Koukl Which I almost fell off the chair when I heard that. But every single priest that I've talked to including Vivian Ben Lima who studied these things in Rome said the same thing. So, what is your take on that?

Beckwith Well, it's not quite what the catechism says. And in fact I'm actually looking at it right now. If anybody has a copy of the, if anyone wants to get online to—I think—the Vatican website, and it's section 839. It's divided up like the Bible into sections.

Koukl Right.

Beckwith It's clear from the cat—this is the problem that—the Catholic Church is dealing with the same problems that evangelicals deal with when you hear—when you ask the question: What about those who haven't heard?

Koukl Right.

Beckwith It's a variation on that question. Now, the question is what about those who have grown up in tradition and they may have come in contact with Christians, but they've never, maybe, really heard in the sense they really got a full, true, presentation of the gospel. And the attempt here is to not say, by the way—it's a type of inclusivism insofar as it's saying that these individuals may come to—may receive eternal life. It doesn't say they will as a result of their faith tradition. It says they may. That's a very important distinction. But this is the same problem, though that Christians have, let's say about individuals who, let's say, were alive right after the resurrection of Jesus and the church couldn't get out fast enough—

Koukl Right, right.

Beckwith —with the gospel.

Koukl I understand the problem they're trying to solve.

Beckwith It's simply an attempt to wrestle with an issue that I think all Christians face, to a certain extent. In a way—but I do think these priests are wrong. And here's a couple of reasons—the ones you spoke to—

Koukl One was a bishop, by the way. Bishop Blair.

Beckwith Don't get me started with bishops.

Koukl Okay.

Beckwith [laughs]

Koukl Frank, we have two minutes before I have to roll out, so.

Beckwith Some bishops are like the DMV of the Catholic Church.

Koukl Okay, we've got two minutes before we have to—we're finished here. Go ahead.

Beckwith But, real briefly, the...oh gosh. I've lost my train of thought.

Koukl I'm sorry. About inclusivism, and the bishops were wrong, those people were wrong.

Beckwith Okay, here's why: The Catholic Church—at least the Catholics that I know—for example Ignatius Press just published a book of conversions of Jews to Catholicism. This received the Imprimatur of a bishop. If in fact this was considered to be wrong, the bishop would not be giving an Imprimatur.

Koukl Uh huh.

Beckwith What the Catholic Church teaches, is that—at the end of the day—we know that we're all saved through Jesus Christ.

Koukl Uh huh.

Beckwith Whether that means that an individual has to have a sort of verbal—

Koukl Explicit faith.

Beckwith -[inaudible] of acceptance is a different sort of question.

Koukl Uh huh.

Beckwith And they may be saved, and—but however, since the life of Christ makes somebody—allows somebody—to tap into something that's virtuous and important to the shaping of their character and the sort of person they can become and to receive God's grace, they ought to become Christians.

Koukl Uh huh.

Beckwith So, I do think that's the view.

Koukl Okay.

Beckwith That's the way I understand it. But I encourage people to read the catechism because you know—one of the—

Koukl I marked at 839, we're just about out of time here, Frank, and I want to be sure to thank you for spending the time for these now two hours, and that's a long time to be talking about this. This went pretty quickly, actually, for me.

Beckwith Well, it means I have less time in purgatory.

Koukl [laughs]

Koukl I just truly appreciate you coming on and being willing to knock this around, and I know that Frankie's listening, so I will give my best to Frankie and we've—of course we've had a great friendship over the years, I look forward to more of the same. In fact, you'll be on in a couple of weeks and we'll be talking about your new book Defending Life.

Beckwith Thank you, Greg, I appreciate it, and you're always my friend, buddy.

Koukl Thank you. All the best to you.

Beckwith All right, bye-bye.

Koukl Bye-bye. Frank Beckwith, friend of Stand to Reason's and a friend of mine. And, that's it for the show, friends, I hope it started some thinking and maybe next week we'll talk some more about some of the details with your calls. In the meantime, be a good ambassador for Christ. And go out and give 'em heaven. I'm Greg Koukl for Stand to Reason. Bye-bye.

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