

Drowning in the Tiber (Part 10)
Responding to Francis Beckwith's 2009 Book:
Return to Rome: Confessions of an Evangelical Catholic
-The Voice of Scripture #2 -
(The Gospels; Judgment according to works)

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Transcript of a Sermon Preached at Clarkson Community Church
by
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Well, if you would, stand. If you like to follow along, we'll be reading Philippians, chapter 3, verses 1-11.

The apostle Paul writes:

Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord! To write the same things again is no trouble to me and it is a safeguard for you. Beware of the dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the false circumcision. For we are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God, and glory in Christ Jesus, and put no confidence in the flesh. Although I, myself, might have confidence even in the flesh, if anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more, circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews, as to the law, a Pharisee, as to zeal, a persecutor of the church, as to the righteousness, which is in the law, found blameless. For whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I've suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the law. But the one, which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness, which comes from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.¹

[Opening Prayer]

Well, this morning we return to our study on Roman Catholicism, doing so by way of a rejoinder to Francis Beckwith's book, *Return to Rome: Confessions of an Evangelical Catholic*. Beckwith, of course, the former president of the Evangelical Theological Society, who shocked the Society and much of the evangelical world—at least those who were paying any attention—when he announced that

¹Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture citations are taken from the New American Standard Bible (The Lockman Foundation, 1971).

year that he was returning to the Roman Catholic Church of his youth. Last time we looked at three key passages that are used by some to deny the doctrine of forensic justification. And by forensic justification, I mean what you would understand as something central to the Gospel itself, that by believing in Jesus Christ, you are justified apart from works. Your salvation is secure totally in the righteousness of Christ. And I thought it might be helpful at this point to define some terms. We need to be clear in our definitions—and when we get sloppy with definitions, especially as they relate to different passages of Scripture and different theological topics—that’s when we can quite easily slip astray. So four basic terms, I just want to define for you again (for some of you it’ll be a refresher, for others, maybe just undergirding what you had known, but had forgotten).

The word, “salvation,” first of all (σωτηρια) you have to understand, is a very broad term. It’s a word that most generally means "deliverance" or "rescue." We tend, in our English evangelical jargon, to use it as a synonym for justification, and that’s okay if we’re talking about the right context. If we try to force that definition of justification into every passage that we see the word salvation, we’re going to run into some problems. So we need to be careful when we go about importing meanings into places where they ought not be, and this is something that Beckwith does with regularity. I can refer to my salvation in lots of different ways. I can refer to my salvation as that when I came to believe, which would be synonymous with my justification. I can refer to it as my preservation. In other words, God is keeping me saved. I can refer to it as my future hope, in a sense, as my glorification. I can work at my salvation, or work out my salvation (Philippians, chapter 2, verse 12), which is in that sense synonymous with sanctification. So the word “salvation” is very broad and we need to understand it by the context in which it’s found.

Another word that’s more specific is the word “justification.” Justification comes from the Greek word group that shares as its root the letters “d-i-k,” words like δικαιοσυνη, δικαιως. while the word “justification” can mean "vindication," or "proven righteous" (and we saw that in James; “Abraham was justified by works” means that his works prove the reality of his faith; not that his works contributed to his salvation)—and while the word can mean that in specific contexts, theologically, and the way Paul generally uses it, when we talk about justification, we’re talking about the language from the courts of law. We’re talking about justification as being, "to be declared righteous." As I’ve said many times, it pictures God in the bar of heaven, slamming the gavel down, saying, "This sinner is not guilty by virtue of the work of Christ of his or her behalf and the fact that she or he is in Christ!" We could look at it this way: First we heard the Gospel, then the Holy Spirit regenerated our hearts, and we believed and repented, and then God justified us solely on the basis of Christ’s righteousness. We see that in Romans, chapter 5, verse 1. Paul says:

Therefore having been justified by faith . . .

It’s in the perfect tense; it’s something that happened in the past. The ramifications of that past act continue in the present.

. . . having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

And we need to understand there's no double jeopardy in the courtroom of God. When somebody is truly justified, they're justified once, not multiple times. And that justification is complete; it's not half of a justification, or a weak justification that can grow through good works. And this is a key issue. You have Roman Catholics, like Beckwith, who talk about a journey of justification. And so they would argue that you can be justified and lose that justification, and that you can even have degrees of justification, and the more good works you do, and the more you interact with the merits that are offered in and through the Roman Catholic Church, you can gain, then, more holiness, and gain in more justification. And then, hopefully, if you have enough justification, you can gain entrance to heaven, but for most people, that, after a time in purgatory.

So we have salvation; we have justification; thirdly, sanctification, and again, this is a word with some nuance. We could say that we have been sanctified, set apart as holy. We can say that we are being sanctified, the present life of discipleship, growing in the Christian life. But one of the things we have to be very clear on—and I'm going to revisit this in a week or two—is that we have to keep justification and sanctification *separate*. Not separated or isolated, but separate. One of the biggest theological blunders anyone can make is to blend justification and sanctification. Why do I say that? Well, let me give you an example. If you don't keep them separate, then you make the mistake of looking at the Christian life, or obedience, as your very justification. Now follow me. If you blend your obedience with your salvation, what do you get? In other words, if your salvation hinges *on what you do*, what do you get? You end up with a works salvation. Justification, as we've seen, however, is being *declared righteous* in or through Christ. It's not of works. So, if you start blending justification and sanctification, you start messing with all sorts of things. For one thing, your assurance of salvation becomes grounded in your works, or in your performance, and when you start doubting, "Maybe I'm not a Christian, because I look at myself and I see a lot of unholiness and I see a lot of sin." So then, what do I need to do? Well, I need to start living more righteously. Well, then you are simply adding works to your salvation, or attempting to be justified by the law, which is an impossibility. Now, I said that they're to be separate, *but not separated*. In other words, where there is genuine justification, sanctification follows. That's why, again, we cannot blend them together. If we blend them together, then we have a Roman Catholic view of justification: sanctification and justification brought together. And if we totally isolate them, then you have a view of salvation that says you can be a true Christian and good works are of no consequence. And we call that antinomianism, or lawlessness. You can simply say a prayer and if your life never changes, you never have any hunger for the things of God, go on sinning your merry way, you're still, in some people's eyes, deemed a believer in Jesus Christ. This is something that Paul argued against in Romans, chapter 6, verse 1 and following, among other places.

So, specifically, when we talk *theologically* about justification, we're talking about being declared righteous in Christ. When we talk about sanctification, we're talking about the call of discipleship, the Christian growth process. And again, where justification starts, sanctification follows. But we have to understand that these two things are not to be blended together.

Thirdly, we have the word "imputation." To impute means to credit or charge something to someone else. Our sin was imputed, or credited, to Jesus Christ on the cross. He didn't, Himself, sin. He

didn't, Himself, become a sinner. It was *charged* to Him. He didn't deserve it. Now for believers, for the elect, Christ's righteousness is imputed, or credited, to them. We don't deserve it. And we don't become inherently sinless by it. The whole doctrine of imputation is portrayed so wonderfully in Paul's letter to Philemon. You remember Paul wrote that little letter, and he writes it to a slave owner, named Philemon. And Paul had, while he was in Rome, providentially met up with this run-away slave, named Onesimus. Paul leads Onesimus to saving faith in Christ, and sends Onesimus back to Philemon, a Christian, along with the letter to Philemon, and Paul says in verse 18 of that letter:

If Onesimus has wronged you in any way, or owes you anything, charge that to my account.

And that is such a beautiful portrayal of what Christ has done for us. Was Paul the guilty party? No. Paul was the innocent party, and yet, he says, "If Onesimus has wronged you, if he owes you anything, you credit that to me." And that's exactly what Jesus Christ did on the cross for every believer. So when a sinner comes to saving faith in Christ, Christ's righteousness is imputed to that one, who is thereby justified, declared righteous, which puts them on the road to sanctification, and we could say that all of that relates to our salvation, the broader term. Now, hopefully, that's helpful, because what we tend to find out or discover among false teachers and those that get sloppy with their theology is that there's a muddling of these sorts of terms. Now, I see that time and time again in Beckwith's book, and perhaps he would argue that they ought to be muddled. But I want to move forward by attempting to cover most, if not all, of the passages that he deals with in chapter 6 of his book. Now, remember, we covered the big three last week: Romans, chapter 4, James, chapter 2, and Hebrews, chapter 11. And we addressed the contention that Abraham was justified multiple times, and not just once. We looked at that last time. I want to go on now to cover, not all, but at least [some of the passages] under the category [of Jesus' teaching from the Gospels]. So we're going to look at these sort of categorically, and hopefully, it'll be a little easier to follow.

I'd hoped to get through all of these this morning, but we're just not going to have enough time. So what I want to spend the rest of our time looking at are the teachings of Jesus—and this is something that Beckwith addresses in his book—and he has a whole section dealing with the teaching of Jesus in chapter 6 under a section entitled, "What the Scriptures Tell." [There] he writes:

As I more deeply delved into the issue of justification, I was struck by how the Catholic view seamlessly tied together the teachings of Jesus with the teachings of the New Testament found outside the Gospels. It is a testimony to the hegemonic influence of the Reformation's reading of Paul's epistles, and its assumed canonical and interpretative priority, that forensic justification colors every apparently contrary text with which I had come in contact during my Protestant days. (I call this "methodological Protestantism.") It is no wonder, then, that Lit was only when I began to reconsider Catholicism that I consulted, with an openness to be corrected, the teachings of Jesus, the larger context in which the Pauline Protestant proof-

texts rested, and those New Testament passages that seemed "Catholic" but were often "reinterpreted" to fit the Reformed theological system.² [96]

In other words, he's saying that, "In the past I used to kind of look at all of the teachings of Jesus through the lens of this concept of evangelical forensic justification, and I stopped doing that, and now I see that the teachings of Jesus really support Roman Catholicism much more clearly than they do an evangelical view." After conceding (and he does concede this) that the reformed defense of justification is not unreasonable, he adds that:

. . . all things considered, the Catholic view has more explanatory power than the Protestant view. This is why it made sense to me that the Early Church Fathers, as I noted in chapter 5, were so Catholic in their teachings. They held to a view that, I believe, does the best job of accounting for all the New Testament's passages on justification and sanctification.³

So these are passages that Francis Beckwith, along with Roman Catholic apologists, believes support Roman Catholic theology on justification and sanctification. Now remember, what's Rome's view on justification? It starts with baptism. That's considered the initiatory rite into a state of justification. Now for the great majority of Catholics, that happens when? When you're a baby. So you are justified as a baby. As you continue in the church, through the grace of Christ, through the grace of the Roman Catholic Church, that individual, then, can grow in righteousness, and thereby grow in justification. So justification can be gained; it can be lost; it can be even improved upon; you can get more justification and more righteousness. And the more you have, the more likely that you will get to heaven more quickly than those who don't have enough righteousness. There's a lot I could quote on this and we've really done that already back in week four, but if you, again, check authoritative Roman Catholic sources, those documents that have equal authority to the Bible in the eyes of the Roman Catholic Church, you will find things like this:

Council of Trent, Chapter X, under "Justification:" Having, therefore, been thus justified, and made the friends and domestics of God, advancing from virtue to virtue, they are renewed, as the apostle says, day by day; that is, by mortifying the members of their own flesh, and by presenting them as instruments of justice unto sanctification, they, through the observance of the commandments of God and of the Church, faith co-operating with good works, increase in that justice which they have received through the grace of Christ, and are still further justified . . .

Chapter XIV: As regards those who, by sin, have fallen from the received grace of Justification, they may be again justified, when, God exciting them, through the sacrament of Penance they shall have attained to the recovery, by the merit of Christ, of the grace lost:

²Francis J. Beckwith, *Return To Rome: Confessions of an Evangelical Catholic* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2009), 96.

³Ibid., 97.

for this manner of Justification is of the fallen the reparation: which the holy Fathers have aptly called a second plank after the shipwreck of grace lost. For, on behalf of those who fall into sins after baptism . . .

That's, remember, when you're initial justification comes.

. . . For those who fall into sins after baptism, Christ Jesus instituted the sacrament of Penance, when he said, Receive ye the Holy Ghost, whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them, and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained.

That last statement is talking about the priesthood, whom Rome believes has the power to forgive sin or retain sin when somebody comes in penance and confesses their sin. That chapter in the Council of Trent goes on to talk about the need to forsake sin, confess it before a priest for absolution; it talks about the practice of prayers, fasts, alms, and ". . . other pious exercises of the spiritual life. . . ." That's all related to justification.

Well, what about sanctification? We could simply say, "Same thing!" Right? You need to be doing these things. You see how the doctrines of justification and sanctification are blended together? And it ends up being a works-grace system of righteousness. Whenever you add works to grace, you obliterate grace. So, I find it quite puzzling as I've gone through these passages this week, that any sort of text teaching of Jesus that talks about obedience, the call to discipleship, the need to persevere, those things Dr. Beckwith believes supports Roman Catholic soteriology, or the doctrine of Roman Catholic justification. He cites two passages out of Mark's gospel in that regard, Mark, chapter 4, verse 16 and 17, where Jesus says:

And in a similar way these are the ones on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy; and they have no firm root in themselves, but are only temporary; then, when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately they fall away.

Well, you recognize that passage as the Parable of the Sower. And he's using it to sort of demonstrate that we have to have some sort of synergistic works, kind of working, cooperating with grace in order that we not fall away and lose our justification. We find this same parable, not only in Mark, but also in Matthew 13 and Luke 8. I want to ask you to turn to Matthew, chapter 13. I just want to look at Matthew's account of the parable very quickly. Matthew 13, if you look at verses 18 and 19. Here's where Jesus gives the interpretation to the disciples, He says:

Hear, then, the parable of the sower. When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart, this is the one on whom seed was sown beside the road.

We could call this an *unresponsive heart*. This is somebody who hears, [yet] there's no understanding, and before the truth can crystallize in any way whatsoever, the devil comes in and snatches it away.⁴

Verses 20 and 21:

And the one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, but he has no firm root in himself, but it is only temporary. And when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away.

We could call this an *impulsive heart*. These two verses, verses 20 and 21, describe the majority of contemporary, American evangelicals, don't they? This is a revival crusade, where dozens go forward on emotional impulse, but there's no real life, it's temporary. And you see people like this all the time. Maybe they're going through a difficult situation in life and they're grasping for anything to help them. And so they turn to Christ, not in any sense of believing in Him as Savior and Lord, submitting to His Lordship as a servant, but as some sort of an out for their problems. And when they see that the call to Christ is difficult, maybe it doesn't get them out of whatever dilemma they've found themselves in, and if the call to Christianity is indeed a call to suffer, well, then, they're gone.

If we go to verse 22, we see a *preoccupied heart*:

The one on whom seed was sown in the thorns, this is the man who hears the word, and the worry of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.

James Boice calls this *the strangled heart*. It describes a person who wants Christ cheap. One foot in the world; one foot in the kingdom. This is the rich young ruler of Matthew 19. He thought he had kept all the law, but was unable to see over the mound of his own wealth and self-importance.

And then, verse 23. This is the *regenerate heart*. And I believe this is the only group that is truly justified.

The one on whom seed was sown on the good soil, this is the man who hears the word, understands it, and indeed bears fruit and brings forth some one hundred fold, some sixty, and some thirty.

You know, it's the same seed, it's the same message, but the soil of the heart is different in each case. This man hears, he understands, and it's demonstrated in his life. He bears fruit. You saw that in James. Fruit evidences his justification; it doesn't cause it or increase it. And if you look at the connection of this parable to that of the wheat and the tares that follows, you see the same thing from

⁴Cf. D.A. Carson, *Expositor's Bible Commentary, Matthew 13-28*, 315.

a different perspective. But here the emphasis isn't on the soil, but on the seed. Here we see in the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares, verse 24 and following, that good seed sown by God brings forth wheat: real Christians. Bad seed sown by the enemy brings forth pseudo-Christians: tares. But notice that the tares don't become wheat; the wheat doesn't magically transform into tares, which is what can, and does, happen in Roman Catholic theology. Those whom God brings to birth are those whom God will one day harvest, verse 30. So we see that God is sovereign over the entire process. In fact, if you go back to verse 10, what does it say? Chapter 13, verse 10:

The disciples came and said to Him, Why do You speak to them in parables?

One of the reasons why Jesus speaks in parables was *not* to clarify things, but rather, to hide things.

And He said to them, To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted.

You see, it always comes down to God's sovereign grace. It's no chance occurrence that some see and others don't. The fact is that none would see apart from God's electing grace. And that He chooses to open the eyes of any is totally of His choice and keeping with His mercy. So this is not some proof-text of works-salvation. Rather, it upholds a reformational understanding of salvation, grace, and perseverance.

A couple of other passages, Mark, chapter 8, verses 34 and 35:

And He summoned the multitude with His disciples, and said to them, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's shall save it."

That's Mark, chapter 8:34-35.

And then John, chapter 14, verses 20 and 21:

"In that day you shall know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you. He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me; and he who loves Me shall be loved by My Father, and I will love him, and will disclose Myself to him."

Now these are two passages, again, cited in the book as those which Beckwith believes support a Roman Catholic understanding of salvation. And, again, I find that quite puzzling. One of the things that he claims in the book—and I read it earlier—is that he had to learn how to read the Bible without what he calls “Methodological Protestantism,” which he defines as seeing everything through the lens of forensic justification by the way of the apostle Paul. There's a problem (because he traded in his glasses). The problem is, he traded the lens of forensic justification for a broken pair of glasses with lenses crafted by the Church of Rome. So he ends up seeing everything through the lens of

“Methodological Romanism.” Listen, no Evangelical, especially no Calvinist worth his salt, is going to flinch at passages like Mark 8:34-35 and John 14:20-21. Listen, we’re not lordless salvationists who think that you can mouth a prayer or walk an aisle resulting in God being obligated to justify you and then you can go your merry way living as you want. That’s just inane. But historically, Beckwith is following in the footsteps of misunderstanding that have been walked by Rome centuries ago, claiming that if you preach a gospel of salvation by grace through faith alone, you’re going to get a bunch of Christians that live like the devil. That was the accusation that Luther heard all the time: well, they’re going to live like the devil because they don’t have to be concerned with works, so we have to make works a very part of the requirement for salvation. That way people will have to act godly, and of course, the proof is the opposite. I look at my own life, as an unregenerate Roman Catholic. I lived an ungodly life because I wasn’t regenerate. And when God caused me to be born again, I was given a new nature under a new covenant and now do good—yes, imperfect, but do good because it’s part of my spiritual DNA to do so, not because I have to be to be saved.

I want you to turn to Matthew, chapter 19. Here’s another passage that Beckwith cites in support of his decision to embrace Roman Catholicism. I want to spend a little more time here. This is an oft misinterpreted passage. I’ve taught it here before so some of you are no doubt familiar with it, but we’ll do an abbreviated treatment of it this morning. Matthew, chapter 19. We’ve got the story of the rich young ruler. If you go to verse 16:

And behold one came to Him and said, "Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may obtain eternal life?"

This is in all the three synoptic gospels. And if we put all three gospel accounts together, we discover that this man was young, wealthy and a ruler among the Jews. So he comes to the right person, that is, Jesus. He’s asking the right question: *What can I do to obtain eternal life?* He seems to sense some sort of need that he doesn’t have eternal life. In fact, Matthew uses what’s called an *ingressive aorist*, which indicates a desire to enter into a state or condition. The idea is, "What can I do that I might come to possess that which I don’t possess." And here’s Jesus’ reply in verse 17:

And He said to him, "Why are you asking me about what is good? There is only One who is good. But if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments."

Now again, this is cited by Dr. Beckwith. "Keep the commandments." These are people that say that works are an essential part of our justification and they point to what Jesus says here and they say, "See? This is not forensic justification, right? There’s no imputation going on here. Jesus requires the keeping of the commandments for salvation. And, gee, that’s consistent with *our* theology, not with yours. "And a Roman Catholic can point you to the official catechism, section #2068, which reads:

The Council of Trent teaches that the Ten Commandments are obligatory for Christians and that the justified man is still bound to keep them; the Second Vatican Council confirms: "The bishops, successors of the apostles, receive from the Lord . . . the mission of teaching all

peoples, and of preaching the Gospel to every creature, so that all men may attain salvation through faith, Baptism and the observance of the Commandments."

Did you get that?

. . . so that all men may attain salvation through *faith, Baptism* and the *observance of the Commandments*.

And this is why Beckwith writes in his book:

Mere imputed righteousness seems like the furthest idea from what one finds in these and other sayings of Jesus.⁵

But is this what Jesus is teaching? *Keep the commandments and then you'll be saved*. Is He pointing this young man to the Old Testament law so that this man can find eternal life there? If He is, there's a problem. He's contradicting the rest of the Scripture, Romans 3:28:

For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.

Galatians 3:2, when Paul asked the church in Galatia:

This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?

Chapter 3, verse 10 of Galatians:

For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, to perform them."

We have a little bit of a problem here. We could look at Jesus' own words in John, chapter 3:

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; that whoever believes in Him may have eternal life.⁶

You see, this is a bit of a conundrum, isn't it? On one hand, keeping the law is a requirement for salvation, and that includes the Ten Commandments. On the other hand, Roman Catholics have to wrestle with passages, and even books like Galatians, that scream out that this isn't so. So what do we have here? What is Jesus doing? *But if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments*.

⁵*Return to Rome*, 99.

⁶3:14-15.

It's very simple. He's preaching law. Why is He preaching law, not grace? Because before you can ever preach grace, you must first preach law, because grace assumes sin. Romans 7:7:

I would not have come to know sin except thru the law.

It's not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are what? Sick. The gospel is for those who despair of their sin before a holy God. So in effect, Jesus is saying:

"You want eternal life? You know the commandments. You're a ruler among the Jews. You know Leviticus 18:5, *do these things and live*. Well, then, keep the commandments without fail. But recognize they reflect a perfect, thrice-holy God, so you must keep the commandments in perfect holiness."

You see what we have here is a second use of the law or what's called the *theological use* of the law: the law of God as it reveals our sin and need for a Saviour. It's what we see in Galatians 3:24, where it says that:

Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, that we may be justified by faith.

The word "tutor" is παιδαγωγός. In Greek culture, this [*paidagōgos*] was a hired slave whose job it was to bring a child to adulthood. And Paul says that was the role of the law. It reflects your sin. It shows your inability. It shows God's holiness and therefore it leads you to the foot of the cross to be justified by grace alone through faith alone. The rich, young ruler was looking for works and so Jesus simply pointed him in that direction. He's sent back to the law, which is the perfect mirror of righteousness. You see, true salvation demands a hatred of sin, a desire to turn from that, and turn to Jesus Christ, the only Saviour from sin. There must be a sense of remorse. There's no remorse here, no sense of sorrow over sin. In fact, if you look at the beginning of verse 18, what does he say? *Which ones?* "Which ones do you want me to keep? Moses gave 10, but the rabbinics counted out 613." And so Jesus goes easy on him and He gives him the second of the decalogue, commandments 5-10 (these are the commandments that relate to man). Verses 18 and 19:

"You shall not commit murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; Honor your father and mother."

And then He adds Leviticus 19:18: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself"—a summation of the 10th commandment. "Keep these. I'm not going to give you 613, I'll give you 5."

The young man said to Him, "All these things I have kept."

He went through the checklist: *adultery*, I haven't done that; *murder*, I haven't done that; *steal*, I'm innocent; *bear false witness*, innocent; *honor father and mother*, innocent; *love your neighbor as yourself*, innocent. See, he didn't see his failure to keep the law. As far as he was concerned, he

didn't have a problem with sin. But, again, salvation is for those who despair of their own efforts at saving themselves. That's the point. Those who realize that in and of themselves they're desperately sinful and helpless, and know that they are powerless to extricate themselves from the plight of their spiritual poverty. Salvation is for those who view themselves as living violations of God's holiness and who fall before the cross of Christ as their only hope. It's for those who recognize they can't contribute one single act of human goodness to a God who's perfectly holy and dwells in inapproachable light. Salvation is for those who see Jesus Christ as God's only provision for forgiveness and they cast themselves at His feet, saying, "Be merciful to me, the sinner!" Here's a man, in Matthew 19, aware of what he did not have—eternal life—but unaware of what he did have—sin.

He says, "What yet am I lacking?" *I've kept it all. What do I need to do?* This is deception, the deception of all false, self-righteous religion. And so Jesus takes it a step further, verse 21:

Jesus said to him, [*Mark adds "He looked at him with love"*] "If you wish to be complete, go and sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me!

This is really another test as to the law. When Jesus asked the rich, young ruler to sell everything he owned, He was testing his claim to have kept the commandments, especially the command, "Thou shall love thy neighbor as thyself." If he really loved his neighbor as he loved himself, he would have been willing to give up his possessions. And so Jesus proves to him that he is a law breaker, not a law keeper.

But when the young man heard this statement he went away grieved; for he was one who owned many possessions.

He was grieved, but not over his sin. When the law of God strikes a fertile heart, the response is always grief, but not this kind. The response is a grief that says, "I can't keep the law. I can't be good enough, I can't be religious enough to earn salvation." No matter what I do I stand guilty with blood-stained hands, therefore by the law I am driven to grace.

The seventeenth-century English preacher Samuel Bolton said:

When you see that men have been wounded by the law, then it is time to pour in the gospel oil. It is the sharp needle of the law that makes way for the scarlet thread of the gospel.⁷

Only a misguided interpretation of this passage would see it as teaching anything other than amazing grace. And yet here's what Beckwith writes on page 99 of his book:

⁷Cited in John MacArthur, *Matthew 16-23*.

Mere imputed righteousness seems like the furthest idea from what one finds in these and other sayings of Jesus. What one finds is an active faith by which God's grace gives us new life (not just new status), and therefore there is a responsibility of obedience on our part to remain faithful, bear fruit, practice charity, and persevere.

In these passages, Jesus isn't specifically referring to "mere imputed righteousness." And by the way, I really resent that adjective. He uses it quite a bit: *mere*. I think it's a derogatory term. It's not *mere imputed righteousness* as if that's all there was, or as if it wasn't all that important. No, these passages, as we've seen, are referring to different aspects of salvation. In some cases, how the law applies in bringing a sinner to conviction; in other cases, the cost of discipleship, or what a genuine Christian looks like as opposed to a sham Christian. But note the rest of his quote:

What one finds is an active faith by which God's grace gives us new life (not just new status), and therefore there is a responsibility of obedience on our part to remain faithful, bear fruit, practice charity, and persevere.⁸

I have to chuckle at that. Don't you get the idea that he really didn't ever get it? Yes, the Bible teaches that we are to have an active faith; we saw that in James and 1 John. And we indeed have new life, a changed life, not just a new status, as he says. And again, by saying "just a new status," he's making it sound like, again, "I want to raise my hand, God justify me, I believe, You have to justify me and now I can go and live however I want." That's a mischaracterization. Yes, there's a responsibility for obedience and faithfulness and perseverance. But, again, I'm convinced by what he writes that he hasn't the foggiest what good, evangelical, biblical theology consists of. In reality, good, biblical theology is like a diamond. We can even just look at the doctrine of salvation. It's like a diamond with lots of facets. There are things like faith and grace and mercy, imputation, propitiation, expiation, justification, glorification, all of these like a diamond. But it seems like all Dr. Beckwith, with all due respect, sees is just a pane of glass.

Let's go backwards to Matthew, chapter 7, and park on verse 17 (we'll get there in a moment). Now remember what we saw last time (it was two weeks ago, in James and 1 John). James and 1 John are two letters that complement one another. They talk about the fact that genuine saving faith is a faith that has works. Works don't make the saving faith what it is; works simply demonstrate that the saving faith is what it is. So the issue to James, the issue to John in 1 John, is the type of faith that one has. The Bible's clear; there's such a thing as *non-saving* belief. Non-saving belief becomes evident by what it confesses—is it orthodox, or is it not orthodox?—and by the change of life that regeneration produces—does it have good works or does it not? That James' readers were orthodox is evident from chapter 2:19: "You believe in the *Shema*; you believe that God is one." But they weren't, or many of them, were not demonstrating the change of life that issues from true repentance. Mindful of Matthew, chapter 3, verse 8: "Bring forth fruits in keeping with true repentance."

⁸*Return to Rome*, 99.

And so James qualifies what genuine saving faith looks like. James is consistent therefore with the doctrines of grace when he says, "Faith without works is dead." (2:26)

So for James, here's the issue: can faith with no change of heart save from sin? And that's what he says in chapter 2, verse 14:

What use is it brethren, if a man says he has faith, but he has no works? Can that faith . . .
[What faith? A workless faith; lip-service faith] . . . Can that save him?

Implied answer: "No." That's the issue. He gives an illustration, which is no demonstration of love for a fellow believer, which, providentially, is the illustration that John also gives in 1 John, chapter 3, verses 15-17:

If a brother or sister is in need of clothing and daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed, be filled," yet you don't give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?

It's of no use! So the conclusion is that faith that has no works is dead faith. It's not alive, James 2:17. Similar to what John says in chapter 3, verse 18:

Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.

So [we see] two kinds of faith. There's faith that has no works. That's a dead faith. This is belief in Christ without the evidence of repentance demonstrating non-saving belief. Then there's faith that has works, which shows that it's a living faith. Belief in Christ with evidence of repentance demonstrating saving faith. In both cases, the issue is the *type of faith*. So to go to James or 1 John and start putting the emphasis on works, or meritorious works, is to completely miss the boat, as far as what they're talking about. The emphasis is on *the nature* of the profession of faith (the nature of the faith itself). After all, works can't bring dead faith to life. The solution isn't, "You've got dead faith, do some works and maybe you'll get your dead faith pumping blood again." No, the issue is, "You need to have a living faith, and a living faith will evidence itself by good works." Now this is consistent—and I bring all this up because this is consistent with what Jesus says in Matthew, chapter 7:

". . . every good tree bears good fruit; but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit."

Now He goes, after warning in verses 13 and 14 of Matthew 7:

Enter by the narrow gate . . . *[You're familiar with that warning.]* . . . for the gate is wide, and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter by it. For the gate is small, and the way is narrow that leads to life, and few are those who find it.

And He goes on to say in verses 15 and 16:

"Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing . . ."

That is, they're dressed like prophets.

. . . but inwardly are ravenous wolves. . . .

How are you going to know them?

You will know them by their fruits.

By their works, by their deeds. And He gives an illustration in verse 16 and following:

Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes, nor figs from thistles, are they?

That's just common sense; you want grapes, you go to a grapevine. You don't go to someplace where you find figs.

Even so, every good tree bears good fruit . . .

Now, note the wording:

. . . every good tree bears good fruit; but the bad tree bears bad fruit. . . .

In fact, He says:

A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. So then, you will know them by their fruits.

Now, the fruit doesn't make the tree, right? *The tree makes the fruit.* Elementary biology, or horticulture. In fact, Jesus says it is *impossible* for a bad tree, or we could say an unregenerate person, to produce good fruit, that is, good works. But a regenerate person, somebody who's truly born again, illustrated by the good tree, will produce fruit that evidences the reality of that person's transformed heart. So, hence, we have the Reformer's well-known, oft-quoted statement that "Faith is pregnant with good works." In other words, don't worry about people making a profession of faith in Christ. If it's a false profession, it's going to be evident. But where God is at work and where He's planting, good trees, good soil, they're going to be saved by faith, through faith alone, and that faith will be pregnant with good works. It's going to demonstrate itself. That's the chain of Ephesians 2, verses 8, 9, and 10. And so the great expositor of a generation ago, Dr. Donald Barnhouse, said, "Holiness starts where justification finishes; and if holiness doesn't start, we have the right to suspect that justification has never started."

Now, this is hardly “Methodological Protestantism.” This is just simply being a good student of the word of God. It’s good exegesis.

Now another passage, Matthew, chapter 16, verse 27. This is going to lead us into our last issue.

For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and will then recompense every man according to his deeds.

Which really proves nothing, because we know that Jesus will reward or judge everyone on the basis of what they’ve done. And we see this, for example, in 2 Corinthians, chapter 5, verse 10. What does the apostle Paul say?

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

But this brings us to a bigger issue: the issue of *works judgment*. Here’s part of the moment that you’ve all been waiting for. I’ve told you many times throughout this series that Beckwith borrows from the New Perspective on Paul. Here’s where he does it best. I had hoped to get into a definition of the New Perspective on Paul, but we’re not going to have time. I’m going to do that, Lord willing, as an introduction for next week. But this relates to a works judgment. Here’s the argument– there are professed Evangelicals making this same argument, and it fits right into Roman Catholic theology (that’s why I say all false teaching ends up on a road to Rome–here’s the argument: whenever you see final judgment in Scripture, that is, the judgment of people, these judgments are based on works. Therefore, the argument goes, our works are the basis, at least in part, for our salvation. Pretty simple? I’ll give you some examples. I read Matthew 16:27:

For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and will then recompense every man according to his deeds.

You can also note–it’s too long to read–but Matthew 25:31 and following. Then we have Romans, chapter 2, verses 5 and 6, where Paul talks about:

. . . the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who WILL RENDER TO EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS . . .

Revelation 20:12:

. . . the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds.

Revelation 20:13:

. . . they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds.

Revelation 22:12:

Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done.

So every time we find a judgment in the Bible, it's a judgment according to works. Now how do you reconcile passages like these with a concept of grace and forgiveness, Romans 8:1:

There's no condemnation for those that are in Christ Jesus.

Ephesians 2:8-9:

For by grace we have been saved, through faith, that not of ourselves. It's a gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.

Titus 3:5:

He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we've done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing and regeneration of the Holy Spirit.

How do we reconcile this? End judgment according to works, and yet we're justified now solely by grace alone through faith alone. Well, you can become a strict dispensationalist and chop all the judgments into segments and make them all different so that believers aren't part of any one of them except the bema seat judgment, which is only for rewards—a view I once held to. I don't think that's a feasible argument. You can say that there's just a contradiction here, and some have done that. You can overlook the wealth of passages that say we're saved by faith apart from works, and we will be judged by our works. That's what Beckwith seems to do. Or you can bring the two together to harmonize them so that violence isn't done to either, which is what I'm going to do. But I want you to note something significant in that regard. If you study the language of the apostle Paul—of course, the New Testament's written in Greek—he's very consistent with the prepositions he uses when he's talking about justification and when he's talking about judgment. It's always justified *through*, or *by*, faith (the preposition *διὰ*, *through*, *ἐκ*, *by*). And then it's always *κατά*, *according to* works. That's always consistent with Paul's terminology. Now, if you think about it, that's also consistent with what Jesus taught, as far as the tree and the fruit are concerned. A tree is known by its fruit. How can I judge whether a tree is a peach tree or an apple tree. If it has peaches, it's what kind of tree? A peach tree. If it has apples, it's an apple tree. What did Jesus say?

Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes, nor figs from thistles, are they? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit; but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. So then, you will know them by their fruits.

So the issue when it comes to being judged by works is that there's going to be a demonstration based on our fruits. We're going to be known by the fruit that we've demonstrated. Here's how one writer phrases it:

. . . obedience is not merely evidential . . . [*That is, our obedience as Christians*] . . . is not merely evidential but is rather built into the very fabric of salvation itself . . .

That's what I mean when I say for a believer in Jesus Christ, a changed life is part of their spiritual DNA. And if that's not there, the DNA is corrupted, or there's been no life.

. . . obedience is not merely evidential but is rather built into the very fabric of salvation itself, yet without contributing to justification. Justification and judgment are linked not so much in cause-and-effect or linear progression as they are organically unified. This organic bond is union with Christ, in which one is not only declared righteous . . . but also indwelt by the Spirit. Justification and obedience both sprout from the seed of union with Christ.⁹

You will know them by their fruits. As Edmund Clowney writes:

A dead and empty faith cannot justify, but this is not because it lacks works as a supplement. It is because it lacks the living bond of trust from which works must flow.¹⁰

We are justified once for all by faith in Jesus Christ. And that salvation will evidence itself in our lives, and it will so evidence itself that we will be known by our fruits and on that day of judgment, God will publicly raise us up and say, "Yes, look, he's mine, she's mine. I purchased them with the blood of Jesus Christ. They've loved Me. They've been fruitful. And I'm showing them off before all creation so that they may be known by what they've done to My glory and by My grace."

And, again, you're going to get tired of my saying this, but in the final analysis, even this judgment is all based on God's grace. Turn to Revelation, chapter 20. I want you to note something very, very important here. Here's the Great White Throne Judgment. Revelation, chapter 20, beginning in verse 11 (the last book in your Bible):

And I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them

⁹Dane, *JETS*, June 2009, 338.

¹⁰Edmund P. Clowney, "The Biblical Doctrine of Justification by Faith" in *Right with God*, 49.

according to their deeds. And death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Did you get that?

. . . if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

What is the basis for someone's name being recorded in the book of life? Is it their deeds? Their good works? What they've done in time? No, God's sovereign election done in eternity. In fact, Revelation, chapter 13:8 and 17:8 state that these names have been written in the Lamb's book of life from before the foundation of the world, the same thing we see in Ephesians 1:4 and 5:

just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world . . .

Before creation, from eternity past.

. . . that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will.

Listen, understanding God's unconditional call, His predestinating work in calling sinners to repentance, strips away all claims toward works-righteousness. And this is why cultists, this is why Romanists hate the doctrine of election, because it leaves no room for works.

Some time ago I wrote a little essay entitled "Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God." I'm just going to read you a little paragraph. I wrote:

According to Revelation 13:8 and 17:8, the names of the elect (those who will be saved from God's wrath) were written in the Lamb's Book of Life from the foundation of the world. In the mind and plan of God the issue is settled. Your unsaved neighbor has his name written there or he does not. Perhaps you have not come to saving faith in Christ. If so, think about this: either your name is written there or it is not. If this frightens you, then perhaps the Spirit of God is calling you to forsake your sin and believe in Christ as the one who died for your sin that you may find forgiveness and live.

[Closing Prayer]