

Drowning in the Tiber (Part 11)
Responding to Francis Beckwith's 2009 Book:
Return to Rome: Confessions of an Evangelical Catholic
-The Voice of Scripture #3 -
(Romans 2:12-13; Philippians 2:12-13; Colossians 1:22-23; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Peter 1:2)
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Transcript of a Sermon Preached at Clarkson Community Church
by
Tony A. Bartolucci on August 9, 2009

Let's stand, if you would. And, if you've got a Bible handy, open it to Romans, chapter 5. Actually, we're going to be reading Romans, chapter 5, verses 1 and 2 and then flipping over to chapter 8, reading chapter 8, verses 28, 29, and 30.

Romans, chapter 5, beginning in verse 1:

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through Whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we exult in the hope of the glory of God.¹

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the Firstborn among many brethren. In whom He predestined, these He also called, whom He called, these He also justified, whom He justified, these He also glorified. (Romans 8:28-30)

[Opening Prayer]

Well, this morning, we continue in our study—a study of Roman Catholicism that we've been involved in really by way of Francis Beckwith's 2009 book, *Return to Rome: Confessions of an Evangelical Catholic*. And we've covered some very important topics through the course of this series. Someone said to me the other day, "When this is done, I want to get the entire series of messages and listen to them in order." And that would be very, very helpful. As I was kind of pondering this the other day, I thought, "One of the benefits of doing a conference, when you've got, maybe, two or three days to cover a singular topic, is that you can bombard that issue or that passage." It makes it much easier, then, for the hearers to remember and to see how all the parts fit together, to form the context, and whatnot. Due to various interruptions, we've only covered 11 messages, and that includes today's, in the course of 28 weeks. By that, I mean, we started on February 1st and if you count the Sundays

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

from February 1st to today, August 9th, you get 28. Out of 28 Sundays, I've given 11 messages on *Drowning in the Tiber*. And that sounds quite poor and disjointed, and I'll admit it's not ideal. The best thing would be a two to three day seminar, or maybe, just 11 straight Sundays in a row. But consider this: I was out of the pulpit 7 of those 28 weeks, vacation, conferences, missionary speakers, and whatnot, and that leaves 21 weeks. Eleven out of 21 still isn't so great, but 3 of those 21 were special occasions, like Palm Sunday, Easter Sunday, and Mother's Day. So that leaves 18. Eleven out of 18 isn't really so bad when you consider some of those other messages. Those 7 have been sprinkled with things like a review of 1 Peter.

Looking back to part 1, we've covered some significant issues. We did, on the very first week, just an overview of the entire controversy and how essential it is to be in the right side of it. The second week we did a complete go-through of Francis Beckwith's book and talked about that. The third week, we started getting into the Roman Catholic connection with mysticism. We looked at relics; we looked at things like Lourdes and Fatima, as well as the Catholic Charismatic Movement and how that has influenced Dr. Beckwith and how that sort of feeds the whole drive towards mysticism and experience. And how, also, that has contributed to a sentiment that's rampant in Evangelicalism, that Roman Catholics are not to be evangelized. We went on, the fourth week, to look at the Ecumenical Movement in Roman Catholicism, the connection to fighting the so-called Culture War. We asked if Vatican II changed anything, as well as ECT1 and 2. And then we asked, "Well, what does the Roman Catholic Church really teach as to salvation? Are they really ecumenical? Do they believe and teach that in the end we're all brothers and sisters in Christ who will inherit eternal life and just have some minor points of disagreement?" We looked at church history on the fifth week, and Beckwith's contention that the Early Church Fathers, those Christian leaders that lived after the apostles, that they, in their writings, supported the Roman Catholic doctrines of the Eucharist and the priesthood, purgatory, apostolic succession. And then we followed that up the next week, as to apostolic succession, with what we call the claim upon which Rome stands or falls, and that's the papacy. So we looked at Matthew, chapter 16, Peter's confession. We looked at history, as it relates to the interpretation of that passage. We spent a couple weeks looking at sola scriptura, asking the question, "Is the Bible really sufficient?" And also, "Did the Roman Catholic Church give us the Bible? Were they the ones who canonized the New Testament?" And then the past two messages—and this brings us to 9 and 10—specifically have been devoted to the teaching of Scripture. Now, we've covered a lot, and frankly, as much as I loathe listening to myself, I would like to get the complete series and listen to them, because I know how much I've forgotten, and I'm the one who's doing the studying! So I would encourage you, if you have any real interest, which I trust you do, in gaining some sort of mastery over the content that we've covered, when we're done, get the series, download them off the internet, or whatever, and listen to them in your car and one after the other. By the time you get to 10, we'll be done, so then, you can listen to the final two or three. And, of course, that brings up the question, *What's left?* After this morning, there are really only two other main topics before we're done and back in 1 Peter. I want to look, Lord willing, not next Sunday, but the Sunday after—I'll be out of town this next Sunday—I want to look at some theological issues and Dr. Beckwith's very, very obvious misunderstanding of systematic theology. And then I want to delve a little bit into the false doctrine called the New Perspective on Paul, how that relates and how he draws from that false teaching. And then we'll answer the question, "Was the sixteenth Reformation the start of a great

revival, or was it an act of rebellion against the true church?" And we'll also answer the question, "What is the Gospel when it comes right down to it? What is required of a sinner in order to be in right standing before a holy God."

Well, this morning, I want to finish what we started three weeks ago and that's examining the passages that Beckwith puts forth in supporting a Roman Catholic view of salvation. Two weeks ago, we looked at three key passages: Romans, chapter 4, verse 6, talking about Abraham, that he believed God and God reckoned it to him as righteousness, that a reflection on Genesis 15, the promise to Abraham and Abraham's belief, which is a passage that we classically use to defend the concept of salvation apart from works, that we are justified by grace alone through faith alone. And so we looked at that passage and how it relates to James 2:21:

Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar?
[A reference to Genesis 22]

And also Hebrews 11, verse 8:

By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going.

And that refers to Genesis, chapter 12. So the accusation is that Dr. Beckwith puts forth, and other Roman Catholic apologists, that there are *multiple justifications*. Abraham was justified in Genesis 12, he was justified in Genesis 22, he was justified in Genesis 15. So that was Part 9.

And then last week, we spent our time on the teaching of Jesus, answering the contention that our Lord's teaching in the Gospels supports a works-grace salvation. We looked at Mark, chapter 4, verses 16 and 17—actually we looked at it by way of Matthew, the parable of the soils, Matthew 19—the rich young ruler and Jesus' statement to him, "You want life, keep the commandments." And Matthew, chapter 7, looking at the whole issue of fruitfulness. And then, final judgment according to works (that was Part 10). So I want to spend the rest of our time now this morning taking a quick tour through a few of those other passages that Dr. Beckwith brings forth in his book. In fact, I was planning on trying to cover them all anyways. There are about 12 or 14, and most of them really just do not support his point at all, so it's kind of like, what's the use? So I tried to pick out his best, and we'll answer those.

As you know the spark that lit the fire of the Reformation nearly 500 years ago was Romans, chapter 1, verse 17. It's a citation that's on the front of this pulpit. Romans 1:17, "The just shall live by faith." That, of course, written by the apostle Paul, and that was the verse that struck fire into the heart of Luther [who] went on to embrace the truth of the Gospel. His further study in Galatians, and his subsequent commentary, served to champion the Gospel of Grace, again, that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone. So it's fair to say that the writings of the apostle Paul have been at the

forefront of a systematic definition and defense of the Gospel.² So we're going to look at the teaching of the apostle Paul (with one exception at the end). We're going to finish and close [by] looking at 1 Peter, chapter 1.

In his book, Francis Beckwith cites no less than ten Pauline passages that he believes should be considered as support for salvation from sin contingent upon works. In other words, faith alone does not save, but good works working with faith provide the means to final salvation. He writes, in that regard, on page 102:

Moreover, works done in faith by God's grace contribute to our inward transformation and eventual justification.³

There's probably no passage more central in this regard, at least among Paul's writings, than Romans, chapter 2, verses 12 and 13, so I'm going to ask you to turn there. Romans, chapter 2, verses 12 and 13 are really the highlight in that regard, although we're going to take a broader look at the entire context. Here the apostle Paul writes,

For all who have sinned without the Law will also perish without the Law; and all who have sinned under the Law will be judged by the Law;

Now, note verse 13:

for not the hearers of the Law are just before God, but the doers of the Law will be justified.

So here we have a classic passage used by Roman Catholics, and the argument goes like this: *How can you, my evangelical friend, maintain that justification is a once-for-all event that is by grace through faith apart from works, something done in the past when Paul clearly says here that only the doers of the law will be, future, justified?* Some time ago a friend of mine who was in the process of converting to Roman Catholicism used this very passage to justify his decision to convert, and he also used it as a standard by which he should be judged as a Christian. So we ask the question: Does this passage shoot a hole in our understanding of justification; that when a sinner by God's grace believes in Jesus Christ, God declares that sinner "not guilty" as a once-for-all declaration? Is this somehow problematic in that regard? You have to understand the context in Paul's argument. I think it's quite ironic that Beckwith writes in his book that:

²In Romans 1:17 Paul quotes Habakkuk 2:4.

³Francis J. Beckwith, *Return To Rome: Confessions of an Evangelical Catholic* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2009), 102.

The whole idea that, according to the Westminster Confession, one may deduce necessary doctrines from 'scripture' treats theology as if it were a branch of mathematics.⁴

Yet he throws proof-texts around without much consideration for any scientific method of biblical interpretation, sort of like throwing Bible passages around like darts hoping they stick somewhere. I know *you* know better— and I know better; it surprises me that he doesn't. So we're going to look at Paul's argument in Romans, chapter 2. And to understand that, you've got to go back into chapter 1. Paul is building an argument that begins in verse 18 of that chapter. He's establishing the universality of sin and he begins, in addressing that issue, not with the Jews, but with the Gentiles. If you look at chapter 1, just to summarize what we find beginning in verse 18 through verse 27:

. . . the wrath of God revealed from heaven against all ungodliness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness . . . that which is known about God is evident within them . . . His invisible attributes have been clearly seen, being understood . . . they're without excuse. Even though they knew God, they didn't honor Him as God . . . they were futile in their speculations . . . they were wise fools . . .

Verse 22:

. . . exchanging the glory of the incorruptible God for images in the form of creatures. So God gives them over . . . that they would exchange the truth of God for a lie . . . worship and serve the creature instead of the Creator.

And God further gives them over to all sorts of sexual debauchery, and on and on it goes. And we look at the argument going through verse 27, even to the end of the chapter, and we see an argument that is directed towards Gentiles. These sorts of sins: homosexuality, lesbianism, idolatry (at least in a blatant form)—those sorts of things that weren't named among the people of God, the Jews— those were the things the Gentiles were guilty of. But what about the Jews? And here, Paul, in chapter 2, suddenly shifts his attention to them. James White, in his book, *The God Who Justifies*:

Romans 2:1-3:8 comprises a whole argument meant to convince the Jewish reader that the charge of sinfulness is universal (Romans 3:9) and that the possession of the covenant promises of Israel does not put them in a separate class when it comes to the means of justification.⁵

Now if you miss that, you miss Paul's entire point. Now if you go on to chapter 2, here's where Paul's starting to turn the corner. Just follow along with me, we'll just read it in verses 1-8:

⁴Ibid., 80.

⁵James R. White, *The God who Justifies* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2001), 166.

1 Therefore you are without excuse, every man of you who passes judgment, for in that you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. 2 And we know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things. 3 And do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment upon those who practice such things and do the same yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God? 4 Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance? 5 But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, 6 who will render to every man according to his deeds: 7 to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; 8 but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation.

Now if you were a Jew and you weren't a Christian, reading what Paul was writing here, you'd probably be saying, "Yeah, that's right! Those Gentiles are godless pigs. They don't keep the law of YHWH; they're not His covenant people." And then you come to read verse 9:

There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek,

Now you've got his attention!

[Then] verse 10:

but glory and honor and peace to every man who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

And going on to verse 11:

For there is no partiality with God.

There's no partiality with God. That was something that the Jews had a hard time grasping hold of. They believed that they were God's favorites and that there was partiality. And Paul says again, verse 12:

For all who have sinned without the Law will also perish without the Law; and all who have sinned under the Law will be judged by the Law;

Now note verse 13:

for not the hearers of the Law are just before God, but the doers of the Law will be justified.

It sounds a little bit like James, but what in effect Paul is saying is, "Put your money where your mouth is. You have the law and you've sinned under the law, therefore, you will be judged by that same law you have violated."

Douglas Moo, in his excellent commentary on Romans, writes:

The question arises here again: Who are those whom Paul views as vindicated in the judgment by their doing of the law? . . . We think it more likely that Paul is here simply setting forth the standard by which God's justifying verdict will be rendered. This verse confirms and explains the reason for the Jews' condemnation in 12b; and this suggests that its purpose is not to show how people can be justified but to set forth the standard that must be met if a person is to be justified.

I might interject there. I'm mindful of Jesus to the Pharisees, "You must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." That's a high standard!

Moo continues:

As he does throughout this chapter, Paul presses typical Jewish teaching into the service of his 'preparation for the gospel.' Jews believed that 'doing' the law, or perhaps the intent to do the law, would lead, for the Jew already in covenant relationship with God, to final salvation. Paul affirms the principle that doing the law can lead to salvation; but he denies (1) that anyone can so 'do' the law; and (2) that Jews can depend on their covenant relationship to shield them from the consequences of this failure.⁶ [Moo, Romans, 147-48]

In other words, *they can't*. So, it's like Jesus with the rich, young ruler. Paul is pointing the Jews back to the law, a standard they cannot possibly keep. Even though they're possessors of the precious law of God, simply possessing that, and even professing that, cannot save them. It's like Jesus to the rich, young ruler, "Keep the commandments." So we ask, "Well, what about sin?" Anyone who boasts that they can keep God's law unto salvation doesn't see their sin and God's holiness and that's the point. So follow where Paul was going with his audience. Look at verses 17-20:

17 But if you bear the name "Jew," and rely upon the Law, and boast in God, 18 and know His will, and approve the things that are essential; being instructed out of the Law, 19 and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, 20 and are a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of the immature, having in the Law the embodiment of knowledge and of the truth.

I get a little hint of sarcasm here. He goes on to say (verse 21):

⁶Douglas Moo, "The Epistle to the Romans." *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 147-48.

21 you, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that one should not steal, do you steal? 22 You who say that one should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? 23 You who boast in the Law, through your breaking the Law, do you dishonor God?

You see how this argument has shifted? Beginning in chapter 1, verse 18, he's hammering on the Gentiles; chapter 2, verse 1, he starts directing his attention to the Jews. And he says, "In fact you're failure to keep God's holy standards, your sin is so evident that, (verse 24) *the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you, just as it is written.*"

So, is Paul's point that they need to buck up and keep the law so that they can be saved? Is that Paul's point here? No, not any more than Jesus was teaching the rich, young ruler that salvation comes by keeping the commandments. You see, Paul's point is that you can't. Therefore the law reveals your sin and points you in the direction of what? *Grace*. Now if you're doubting this, Paul drives the point home in chapter 3. He asserts, yes, the Jews were a privileged people in verses 1-8, but then he goes on, verse 9:

What then? Are we better than they?

Who's the "they"? The Gentiles!

Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin; as it is written . . .

Here he fires off several Old Testament passages.

. . . There is none righteous, not even one; There is none who understands, There is none who seeks for God; All have turned aside, together they have become useless; There is none who does good, There is not even one. Their throat is an open grave, With their tongues they keep deceiving, The poison of asps is under their lips; Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness; Their feet are swift to shed blood, Destruction and misery are in their paths, And the path of peace have they not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes.⁷

Paul is coming down like a load of bricks!

And now look at verses 19 and 20 of chapter 3:

Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, that every mouth may be closed, and all the world may become accountable to God;

Now, note verse 20:

⁷Romans 3:10-18.

because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.

It's saying, *Shut your mouth!* The law mutes you, dear Jew, from any claim to righteousness. No flesh shall be justified by keeping the law for through the law comes the knowledge of what? SIN! Chapter 3, verse 23: *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*

So, understanding that, and being convicted of our sin and inability to keep God's law, what do we need? Do we need more law? No, we need grace. We need Gospel. And what does Paul say in chapter 3, verse 28?

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

You see, if you try to make chapter 2 say anything other than which I'm explaining to you, all you're doing is making Paul contradict himself. You're missing his entire argument. How can he be saying, on one hand, the doers of the law will be justified, and then, on the other hand, nobody can be justified by doing the law? That's a contradiction. You're putting Paul on his head! You've got to understand the context. That's a basic principle of good exegesis, good Bible study. What we have is the New Covenant. And what we have, going back to the New Covenant, is we're back on God's sovereignty. In fact, did you notice the end of chapter 2? Paul addresses what was always a key issue among the Jews as to the law, what? Circumcision. Why was that such a key issue to them? Because it was a mark of the covenant. This was [their] badge of honor. And Paul addresses physical circumcision in verses 25-27—but note what he goes to in verses 28-29:

28 For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly [Physically]; neither is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. 29 But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God.

This dovetails right into the New Covenant prophesied through Moses back in Deuteronomy, chapter 30, verse 6:

Moreover the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, in order that you may live.

It's that which Jeremiah talks about so wonderfully in Jeremiah 31:

Behold, days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them, "declares the LORD. But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD. I will put My law within them, and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be

My people. And they shall not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, "Know the LORD," for they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them," declares the LORD, for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.

Note that *God is going to do this*. This is the New Covenant under which we live: "I will write my law upon their hearts." In the Old Covenant, God wrote with His finger on tablets of stone. Under the New Covenant, God writes with His finger on hearts of stone turning them into hearts of flesh in order that they may keep His commandments. That's a sovereign work of God, my friends. We see the same thing in Ezekiel, chapter 36, verse 25:

Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols.

Verses 26-27:

Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put My Spirit within you and [note this] cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.

How does God cause us to walk in His ways? By reprogramming the very DNA of our hearts, by making us new creations in Jesus Christ.

So [we ask], is this us? Is this now? Colossians chapter 2, verse 11:

. . . and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ;

And that's why Paul could say, in Galatians, chapter 6, verse 15:

For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.

That's the point. And we're not made new creations by keeping the law, or by works, we're made new creations by the grace of God through faith in Christ. Even going back to Romans, chapter 4, Abraham – this is Paul's point – is justified by faith before he was ever circumcised so that he might be the father of all who believe without being circumcised, that righteousness might be reckoned to them. That's verses 11 and 12. So, you see Paul's point? To throw verses around without consideration for their context is criminal. It's like going to a gun range and randomly shooting at everything but the target. And that's exactly what Beckwith and others like him do.

The second passage I want you to look at is Philippians, chapter 2, verses 12 and 13, another often misunderstood passage. I don't think it's that difficult. Philippians 2:12 and 13. Here Paul writes:

So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.

It doesn't say "work for your salvation;" it says, "work out your salvation." And remember, salvation isn't the same thing as justification. We looked at that last time. Salvation is a general term. We don't work out our justification, but we can and ought to work out our sanctification and our salvation, as those are broad terms. So this isn't we're contributing to our justification, but rather, our responsibility in all that is our salvation. And note the promise:

. . . for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.

It echoes chapter 1, verse 6:

He Who began a good work in you will complete till the day of Christ Jesus.

So that's not a very weighty argument and neither is Colossians, chapter 1, verses 22-23. We'll go there next. Colossians, chapter 1, and just to establish the context, I want to go to verse 20. Paul writes:

and through Him [That is, through Christ] to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven. 21 And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, 22 yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach—

Okay, no problem yet. But now we get to verse 23:

if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister.

Well, Beckwith, in his book, alludes to this passage and basically says—I don't have the quote in front of me—basically, to paraphrase the thought, "Well, see? See? You can continue not to walk in the faith. You can walk away from the Gospel, therefore our justification hinges on our sanctification and our works." Well, is that what this is saying? *He has reconciled you in His fleshly body, if, indeed, you continue in the faith firmly established?* Is this a warning that genuine justification can be lost? Is this a proof-text for the necessity of doing good works as a means to be fit enough for heaven, as if our deeds ever could do that anyways?

I want you to look again at verses 22 and 23:

He has now reconciled you . . .

Genuine believers—and underline the word “genuine”—genuine believers have been reconciled. It’s an aorist active indicative from a word that means *to reconcile completely*. God did this; it’s His work, not ours, and it’s based on the person and work of Christ. That’s the context. But we’ve also noted (we talked about this last week, we’ll talk about it again, perhaps, next time) that where genuine justification occurs, sanctification will follow. If somebody’s really saved, there’s going to be a change in that person’s life. His or her desires, attitudes, beliefs, actions, words will be different. It’s like a pulse. A person’s pulse does not make them alive, right? It’s an evidence that they are alive. If someone has no pulse, they’re what? Probably dead. Now sanctification is as to our salvation what a pulse is as to life. It doesn’t make one alive, but if it’s absent, then it’s a good bet that you’re dealing with a corpse. In this case, a spiritual corpse.

So Paul says:

yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach—

Does that mean we can be lax? Does that mean the message goes out to the entire church and I can say, “Raise your hand, walk an aisle, say a prayer; you’re in and it doesn’t matter how you live?” You see, there is a legitimate warning here:

if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel . . .

I suppose we could look at it this way, even though the terms aren’t directly synonymous: to be reconciled is to be justified. In other words, where there’s genuine justification, there’s genuine reconciliation; where there’s genuine reconciliation with the sinner and God, there’s genuine justification. Verse 23 is talking, at least in a negative sense, about sanctification, continuing in the faith. Now, what did we say? We said those two things can’t be mingled together, or overlapped. We have to keep justification and sanctification distinct, yet we can’t isolate them. Where genuine salvation or justification occurs, there will be sanctification. Now, again, verse 23 is the pulse. If verse 23 isn’t there in somebody’s life—I don’t care what kind of profession they had, what kind of experience, how Christ-like they appeared to be—if they fall by the wayside, they give evidence that they’re tares.⁸ John talks about that in 1 John, chapter 2, *They left us because they were never one of us.*⁹ And by their leaving, they demonstrate the fact that they were never one of us. So what we’re seeing here is the perseverance of the saints. To look at it positively, those who are truly born again will persevere by virtue of God’s preservation.

But there’s a noteworthy exegetical clue here. The warning in verse 23 in the Greek text in which it was originally penned, forms a first-class condition. You’ve heard me, no doubt, talk about that

⁸Cf. Matthew 13:24-30.

⁹1 John 2:19.

before. It's a little conjunction in the Greek *ei*, used with an indicative forms a condition of the first-class, which demonstrates future expectation. In other words, while the warning is real, Paul's expectation was that he was dealing with regenerate people here, and they would continue in the faith, not be moved from the hope that was theirs in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. So I love the balance. We have a warning here, a very real warning, a very good warning, but not a sloppy warning. We also, while we have a warning, we have a glimpse of the assurance that is ours in Christ, that if we are truly reconciled, then we will indeed continue on. There's a tremendous lesson here.

Now, to go on. [There are] two other passages that we're going to look at together. [First], 2 Thessalonians 2:13. And then we're going to go from there right into 1 Peter, chapter 1, verses 1 and 2.

Paul writes to the Thessalonians:

But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth.

Of course, when I looked this up and I saw that this was one of the passages that Beckwith cites, I [was puzzled]. [After all], this is a wonderful text that supports God's sovereign grace. I had to look at it a bit.

Here we have election:

God has chosen you from the beginning . . .

What's that mean? "From before the foundation of the world." Chosen you for what?

for salvation . . .

Well, he must be looking at the sanctification part, that our salvation comes through sanctification, that is, Christian graces, living the Christian life.

by the Spirit and faith in the truth.

So, he's getting caught up in the word "sanctification" and thinking that sanctification means works. So we're saved through works, "by the Spirit and faith in the truth." But that's not what Paul was saying at all. Yet, Beckwith writes:

Thus, one does not find in Paul the sharp distinction between justification and sanctification that one finds among Reformed writers. In fact, the passages we have covered seem to indicate that justification includes sanctification.¹⁰

And I want to say, "Doctor, very, very sloppy." There is a distinction between justification and sanctification, but, yes, where there's justification, sanctification follows. And you can't make the word *sanctification* mean the same thing every place you find it. Now, follow me, because this dovetails—and kind of hold that thought of 2 Thessalonians 2:13—because it goes right into 1 Peter, chapter 1, verses 1 and 2. So we're going to sneak a little review of 1 Peter in here also, because, again, here are some key words: *obedience* and *sanctification*. And this is always a tactic of false teachers. You see these key words and they jump off the page because they support your bad theology!

1 Peter, chapter 1, verses 1 and 2. In fact, we can just look at verse 2:

Chosen [and that word's carried over from verse 1] according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, with the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling with His blood. May grace and peace be multiplied to you.

Now, I guess, if you are going to put on the spectacles of methodological Romanism, then you will read this and say, "Ah, okay. Well, chosen according to the foreknowledge of God, you know we reject that sovereign grace stuff, so it must be God looking down the corridors of time; chosen with sanctification of Spirit, for obedience to Christ. So *sanctification*, *obedience*, these are our works. And then, *sprinkling with His blood*, that's the hope of our eventual salvation." Of course, part of the problem in all of this, even as I talk about Christian graces and works, is that, according to Rome, these have to be done in their church. I mean, it would be one thing to say, "Okay, we're Evangelicals, and we do have changed lives, and we try to do good, we don't live perfectly, but we try to good and walk in sanctification in Christ's likeness." But according to Rome, that's not good enough. You don't have the means to grace in your Evangelical church. In fact, as Pope Benedict XVI reminded us so well, soon after taking office, we're not even deserving of the title "church." We're an "ecclesial community," because there's only one true church and that's the Church of Rome. And it's through the Church of Rome that one can do confession and penance, can partake of the Eucharist, which is required for any hope of justification. So, in some ways, Beckwith's argument is a mute point, but we'll go with it anyways.

So, again, we see these words *obedience* and *sanctification*. Back, if you remember . . . back when we studied that passage, we called this section "Satisfaction in the Sovereign Source of Our Salvation." *Satisfaction*, because it's a passage that talks about joy. *Sovereign source*, because it is based on God's sovereign grace, chosen by His foreknowledge, His foreordination, His forelove. And then, sovereign source also reflecting the fact that God is Triune: Father, Son, Holy Spirit; we see

¹⁰*Return To Rome*, 103.

all 3 persons of the Trinity here involved in securing our salvation. So, in that regard, verse 2 begins, *we have been selected by the Father.*

[Chosen] according to the foreknowledge of God the Father . . .

This is God's foreordination. And there's a theologically consistent progression here. If you understand theology, you'll note this progression. The first thing is election (predestination), *chosen in Him before the foundation of the world.* That's in eternity past. This is the decree of God in that before you were ever born, before you ever knew Christ, your name was written in the Lamb's Book of Life as one chosen for salvation. And we see that this is a unique work of God, the Father. Election (predestination) in the Bible is almost always related to the Father—this is the work of the Father. That, of course, did not save you. You were still lost when you were born and lived whatever wicked life of debauchery you may have or may not have lived; you were lost. So election didn't save you; it secured your salvation, but didn't save you. You also needed to be *sanctified by the Spirit.* The Father elects, the Spirit sanctifies. This is uniquely the work of the Third Person of the Trinity. Now, while the word means to be set apart as holy — μ — the nuance that Peter is using it with here is what we call "effectual calling." In other words, sanctification—again, we mentioned this last time—sanctification is a word that refers to Christian living. That's the way, theologically, we tend to understand it, but we've got to understand the context. Sanctification and salvation are broad terms. [Sanctification] is used, as we see here, of the sense of the Spirit's work in convicting and drawing a sinner to saving faith. There's what we call *the outward call.* In other words, if I had 200 people here from all walks of life and I gave a Gospel presentation, as I do, for example, at a funeral, that's *the outward call.* It goes to everyone: "whoever will, come to the fountain of grace." However, there has to be an *inward call* and that is the work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration, in opening blind eyes; quickening the heart to draw the sinner to Christ. That is the work of the Holy Spirit. That's the *inward call.* We see that, for example, in Acts, chapter 16 and verse 14:

And a certain woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul.

So, bringing you to the point of faith so that you may be justified is the work of the Spirit, and that's what it means here: [*Chosen by Him*] according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, with the *sanctification of the Spirit.*

You might write down Titus 3:5:

He saved us . . . according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit.

That's effectual; it's irresistible, okay? You were like Lazarus: God called you forth and that's specifically a work of the Spirit. It's like what Paul talks about in 1 Thessalonians 1:4 and 5. He speaks of their election in verse 4:

. . . knowing, brethren beloved by God, His choice of you . . .

Then he refers to how they were saved in verse 5:

. . . for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction . . .

God chose you in the past. But in the present, the Word went out, the Gospel went out and the Spirit gave you ears to hear.

So, *selected* by the Father, *sanctified* by the Spirit.

Thirdly, *saved* by the Son.

. . . for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling with His blood.

I don't want to beat a dead horse, but, again, note the progression. The Father elects, the Spirit sanctifies, or draws, the Son saves. So the entirety of the Trinity was at work in securing and effecting your salvation. Praise the Lord!

[However], the Holy Spirit has to lead us to something, specifically, to Someone, and that's the third part, the role the Son of God played in dying for us, being resurrected from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep and that's the, "for obedience to Jesus Christ, and sprinkling with His blood."

This is not saying that we have to obey Christ in the sense of our works in order to be saved. This very passage I used in teaching a class on homiletics— which is how to preach, how to study and put together a sermon, deliver a sermon—I used this very passage as an example of why you don't outline a passage until you've studied it out (because I've made that mistake on this very passage). I thought, "Oh, this is talking about obedience, our life of obedience," and so I came up with this great outline that I had to trash, because after I studied the passage, I realized that's not what this is talking about. "Obedience" in verse 2 is talking about our belief in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Now, good Calvinists don't get caught up in the idea of faith and obedience somehow overlapping as if this is some sort of human work. We know it isn't. God grants repentance leading to life, but we're still commanded to repent, right? Obedience is our belief in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. There are times in the New Testament when the belief of sinners in the Gospel is referred to as obedience. Sometimes it's called *the obedience of faith*. When you believe the Gospel for the very first time and you're saved, for you it is an act of obedience to the faith. The very first act of full-fledged obedience that any person can render to God is to believe in the Gospel and repent.

Acts, chapter 6, verse 7, says:

. . . many of the Jewish priests were becoming obedient to the faith . . .

What's that saying? They were submitting themselves to Jesus Christ; they were believing. Romans 1:5 talks about *the obedience of faith* among the Gentiles, and chapter 16, verse 26 talks about the Gospel being made known to all the nations, leading to *the obedience of faith*.

Sometimes it's put in negative terms. John 3:36 (note this):

He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.

He who believes is saved; he who does not obey is going to suffer God's wrath. This is what we call a figure of speech known as *hendiadys*, two different words used in parallel structure to say the same thing. That's what Peter is referring to here. In fact, he uses the same word in chapter 1, verse 22, "obedience" or "to obey" ():

Having purified your souls *by obedience to the truth* for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love each other from a pure heart.

Now this isn't salvation by works. To obey the truth is to say, "Yes, I'm sinful and subject to condemnation by a holy God, and I believe in Jesus Christ and I turn from my sin to Him." And even if you look at the connection there in verse 22-23:

22 Having purified your souls by obedience to the truth for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love each other from a pure heart. 23 You have been born again not out of perishable seed, but imperishable: through the living and enduring Word of God.

There's the Gospel!

So obedience to Jesus Christ, again, this is *faith*, this is *belief*, this is *repentance*.

This fits the order:

<i>[chosen] according to the foreknowledge of God the Father</i>	God elects in eternity past
<i>with the sanctification of the Spirit</i>	The Holy Spirit draws the elect to faith in Christ in time
<i>for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling with His blood</i>	We believe and the blood is applied

We sometimes talk about the *analogy of the faith*. That's a fancy term for "Scripture interprets Scripture." And we see this *analogy* in 2 Thessalonians, chapter 2, verse 13. Note again:

God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth.

God has chosen you from the beginning: that's election. *Through sanctification by the Spirit:* that's the work of the Holy Spirit in the conviction of sin and in quickening our hearts. And, then, *faith in the truth:* our belief in the truth, which is then applied.

This isn't works-salvation. We don't obtain salvation by work. Look no further in Peter's writings than the 9th verse of that 1st chapter where he says, "obtaining *as the outcome of your faith*, the salvation of your souls."

There are several other passages that Dr. Beckwith offers in his book. Suffice it to say they're not worth our time exploring, I mentioned that earlier, and I really don't get the point he's trying to make in citing them. I think they do damage to his argument. If you want to write them down, maybe, to look up later, here they are for those of you that are interested. Maybe if you see something there, you can let me know: Romans 6:19-23, 8:3-4; 1 Corinthians 6:11; Galatians 6:8; 2 Timothy 4:7-8; Titus 3:5-8; Hebrews 10:10-14, 13:12.

If you go back about 139 years ago Archbishop Kenrick, a Roman Catholic, Bishop of St. Louis, gave his controversial speech before the First Vatican Council in 1870. And he gave the following advice in his speech, short and sweet. He said:

I believe that the proofs of the Catholic faith are to be sought rather in tradition than in the interpretation of the Scriptures.¹¹

At least he was being honest . . .

The only way anyone can have peace with God and avoid the penalty of eternal hell is by believing in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, by casting himself upon His mercy and grace. If you've not done that, I pray that God would convict you of your sin, sin that you can in no wise extricate yourself from. Your fallen estate will only lead you to hell. And so I pray that the Spirit of God will convict you of that and that you cast yourself on the mercy of Christ, believing that He died for sinners like you and like me, and rose again so that we might live.

[Closing Prayer]

¹¹Cited in Leonard Woolsey Bacon, Ed., *An Inside View of the Vatican Council in the Speech of the Most Reverend Archbishop Kenrick of St. Louis* (New York: American Tract Society, n.d.), 120.