

The Gift of Salvation

In December 1997, a grassroots group of evangelical theologians (Charles Colson, Timothy George, Bill Bright, J. I. Packer, Max Lucado, *et al.*) and Roman Catholic theologians (Richard John Neuhaus, Michael Novak, Peter Kreeft, *et al.*) issued "The Gift of Salvation," a follow-up statement and doctrinal clarification of Evangelicals and Catholics Together (1994). The purpose of "The Gift of Salvation" as communicated by its compilers was to directly address "two important topics of perceived ambiguities in ETC [Evangelicals and Catholics Together]: the doctrine of justification by faith alone and the biblical mandate for world missions and world evangelization."¹

While these Roman Catholic theologians (speaking for themselves alone) express consent to the statement that salvation is "by grace alone, through faith alone, and in Christ alone," large problems remain despite claims that "only less essential differences remain."

1. The Roman Catholic Church has never renounced the condemnations of the Council of Trent, but in fact reinforced them in such recent publications as *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.² The concept of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, and in Christ alone was condemned by the Council of Trent.

2. Signers of "The Gift of Salvation" purport that "Roman Catholic interlocutors. . . agree with what the Reformers meant by justification by faith alone," but that differences remain. These stated differences are such matters as:

The meaning of baptismal regeneration, the Eucharist, and sacramental grace; the historic uses of the language of justification as it relates to imputed and transformative righteousness; the normative status of justification in relation to all Christian doctrine; the assertion that while justification is by faith alone, the faith that receives salvation is never alone; diverse understandings of merit, reward, purgatory, and indulgences; Marian devotion and the assistance of the saints in the life of salvation; and the possibility of salvation for those who have not been evangelized.³

Paul the apostle declared that if "anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed" (Galatians 1:9, NKJV). Paul also publicly withstood the eminent apostle Peter to his face, since Peter was adding elements of works to the truth of the gospel (Galatians 2:11, 14). Even if it is granted that the doctrine of justification has been correctly and Biblically identified by these Roman Catholic theologians, the addition of

any of the above-mentioned "works" nullifies the gospel of the grace of Christ, and is in fact "a different gospel, which is not another" (Galatians 1:6, 7). This trend toward doctrinal tolerance and cooperation between evangelicals and Roman Catholics is destructive to the cause of Christ because it blurs the distinction between Biblical truth and a system of false teaching.

THEREFORE we, the assembled messengers meeting at the Annual Conference of the General Association of Regular Baptist Churches (GARBC), June 27–July 1, 1998, in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, do state publicly that there may be individuals within Roman Catholicism who are genuine believers in Jesus Christ. We urge each of these to pursue a faithful study of the Scriptures apart from the competing authorities of church dogma and tradition, and to separate from the fellowship of the Roman Catholic Church (2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1); and

WE FURTHER RESOLVE to declare that any gospel that adds works to the gospel of grace is in fact the communication of "another gospel," which is no gospel at all. We call upon all to be engaged in a thorough understanding of the Reformation doctrines of faith alone (*sola fide*), Scripture alone (*sola scriptura*), and Christ alone (*solus Christus*); and

WE FURTHER do publicly state the need of Bible-believing churches throughout the world, particularly those in fellowship with the General Association of Regular Baptist Churches, to share the gospel in all its purity and authenticity to all who need its message, regardless of church affiliation, whether it is those blinded by the system called Roman Catholicism or any other unbiblical religion or philosophy. This we must do with passion, urgency, and integrity, communicating the gospel in a Christlike manner; and

WE FINALLY RESOLVE to call upon the pastors and churches of the GARBC to announce, teach, and explain faithfully the gospel to saved and unsaved alike, to separate from ecclesiastical apostasy, and to confront kindly and compassionately brothers in the faith who promote a gospel alien to the Scriptures.

1. Timothy George, "Evangelicals and Catholics Together: An Evangelical Assessment," *Christianity Today* (Dec. 8, 1997), p. 34, 35.
2. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (New York: Catholic Pub., 1994).
3. "Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Gift of Salvation," *Christianity Today* (Dec. 8, 1997), p. 38.

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