

Pope Benedict's Address on "Faith Alone"
By Miles McKee and Richard Bennett

In an address on November 19th 2008, Pope Benedict XVI reflected on the topic that is at the very center of the division between all gospel-based churches and the Church of Rome—the issue of justification, or how we accepted as just (righteous) in the eyes of God.¹

In his teaching, the Pope said something very radical, in that he recognized the correctness of "faith alone" (faith alone—the heart of the grand doctrine of justification by grace and by faith). Here is what he says, "*That is why Luther's expression "sola fide" ["faith alone"] is true if faith is not opposed to charity, to love. Faith is to look at Christ, to entrust oneself to Christ, to be united to Christ, to be conformed to Christ, to his life.*"

So let's get this straight, if we are to take the Pope at his word and he really means what he says, then Luther was correct on "faith alone"! Of course there is one caveat, that "faith alone" is not opposed to charity. So was Luther indeed against charity? Far from being against charity (love), Luther and the reformers taught that "faith alone" was the very basis for good works. Indeed they reasoned that it is only "faith alone" that frees a man for a life of true charity. They reasoned that unless faith grasps that we are saved by the work that Christ has already finished, we would spend our time in the useless pursuit of good works to obtain right standing with God. They knew from Scripture and experience that this kind of labor is both exhausting and redundant because right standing (justification) with God can only be found in the work of another, the Lord Jesus.

We should note that when a man is engrossed in trying to save himself by his works, he could become so self-absorbed that he does not show appropriate charity to his neighbor. Because of his self-absorption, his neighbor and his neighbor's needs rarely, if ever, hit his radar screen. If, on the other hand, the self-engrossed man does in fact take note of his neighbors needs and decides to help, his works of charity are then performed for his own benefit (to improve his standing before God) and not for the glory of God.

By contrast, "faith alone" majors on the perfect, finished work of Christ and receives His activities and His person as a sacrificial offering for sin as having been performed on the sinner's behalf. "Faith alone" realizes that our good works can never supplement the perfect, finished work of Christ. Thus, believing in "faith alone," we are released to a life of good works, performed, not for self-advancement, but for the glory of God alone. Believing in the finished work of Christ, we are free to enjoy doing good works because we know that our works play no part in our obtaining right standing before God. "Faith alone" embraces this!

Benedict XVI, being well educated, knows of Luther's insistence that good works are the companion of the justified man. He knows that, in Luther's mind, "faith alone" could not and would not oppose good works. Thus, the caveat is satisfied and, if the Pope were sincere, Luther's correctness on "faith alone" would be established.

If the Pope, therefore, really meant that Luther was correct in saying we are saved by "faith alone," then we would have expected wonderful things in days to come. Why? Because, once embraced, "faith alone" refuses to be peaceably locked away in some dimly lit and quiet corner.

¹ For a copy of the Popes address see <http://www.zenit.org/article-24302?l=english> 12/8/2008

“Faith alone” becomes, as it were, an uncaged lion as it will call into question everything we believe. However, the real reason that the Pope accepted “faith alone” was just another ploy to bring unsuspecting Christians back to Papal Rome. In this, he was simply following the mandate that Papal Rome disclosed at Vatican Council II. The tactic is stated in their own official words, “...it [ecumenical dialogue] serves to transform modes of thought and behavior and the daily life of those communities [non-Catholic churches]. In this way, it aims at preparing the way for their unity of faith in the bosom of a Church one and visible: thus, “little by little, as the obstacles to perfect ecclesial communion are overcome, all Christians will be gathered in a common celebration of the Eucharist into the unity of the one and only Church, which Christ bestowed on his Church from the beginning. This unity, we believe, dwells in the Catholic Church as something she can never lose.”²

Misleading Double-talk

The Pope is therefore involved in “double speak” because the Church of Rome has consistently condemned the biblical doctrine of justification by “faith alone.” This was done at the Council of Trent. Present-day dogma of the Roman Church not only upholds the teaching of the Council of Trent but also declares that such Councils are infallible.³ The Council of Trent proclaims the following curses:

If anyone shall say that justifying faith is nothing else than confidence in the divine mercy which remits sins for Christ's sake, or that it is this confidence alone by which we are justified: let him be anathema [cursed].⁴

If anyone shall say that by the said sacraments of the New Law, grace is not conferred from the work which has been worked [*ex opere operato*] **but that ‘faith alone’ in the divine promise suffices to obtain grace: let him be anathema.**⁵

Papal Rome’s reason for such a curse on those who hold to “justification by faith alone” is logical because of what she refuses to concede. For her, justification is not an immediate declaration of God and received by “faith alone”; rather, she teaches that grace is conferred through her sacraments. Thus, she is able to make a place for herself as a necessary means through which inner righteousness is given.

If the Pope, like the Reformers before him, had been sincere about his belief in “faith alone,” he would have applied this Gospel truth to all that he believes. That would have meant the abolishing of the Mass; for in the Mass a bloodless sacrifice for sin is made. “Faith alone” sees that Christ has been offered once and that there is, therefore, no more sacrifice for sin.⁶ “Faith alone” sees that divine justice has already been satisfied and that redemption has already been accomplished. “Faith alone” sees that the righteousness of God, with its demands of total obedience and righteousness on our part, has been fulfilled for us by our substitute, the Lord

² No. 42, “Reflections and Suggestions Concerning Ecumenical Dialogue” in *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, Austin Flannery, O.P., editor, 1981 edition (Northport, NY: Costello Publishing Co., 1975), S.P.U.C., 15 August 1970, p. 541.

³ CCC, Para. 891.

⁴ Henry Denzinger, *The Sources of Catholic Dogma*, Tr. by Roy J Deferrari from *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, 13th ed. (B. Herder Book Co., 1957), #822, Canon 12.

⁵ *Ibid.* #851, Canon 8.

⁶ “But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.” Hebrews 10:12, 14

Jesus. Therefore, the Pope does NOT teach “faith alone” which would destroy his Papacy and his own position. Rather, he leaves precious Roman Catholics—in distress for their souls—wondering whether or not they have done enough to get into heaven.

The truth is “faith alone” in Jesus Christ—that God has provided for Himself the entire righteousness that He demands. “Faith alone” not only sees that Jesus Christ provided the righteousness that God demands, but it also sees that Christ’s perfect righteousness will not help us unless somehow it becomes ours. This is why the Pope just cannot recognize “faith alone”—for it is by “faith alone” that we grasp this righteousness and make it our own.

We look forward to hearing from Catholics and others who have been helped by this response, which is the Gospel Truth.

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