

## Protestant Reformation

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### What Was the Basis of the Reformers' Courage?

By Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Part 6 of a series. [Read part 5.](#)

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**The basis of the Reformers' courage, even in the face of death, was the same as that of the early Christians. While Rome continued to insist that no one can have assurance of salvation, the Protestant Reformers believed, taught, lived, and even died on the basis of God's Word: The believer who is justified by faith in Christ alone has full assurance of eternal life.**

#### What Do You Believe?

As Martyn Lloyd-Jones continued his address, *Remembering the Reformation*,<sup>1</sup> he said this:

These Reformers were also men who believed in possessing assurance of salvation. Now I am somewhat more controversial, am I not? Do you believe in assurance of salvation as the Protestant Reformers did? I have known people who have paid great tribute to the memory of John Knox and others, who deny the possibility of assurance and regard it as almost an impertinence...The Protestant Reformers were so against the Roman Catholic Church which teaches that a man can never be certain...and they would have been equally against a modern movement, which likes to claim itself as Reformed, but which denies the possibility of assurance.

#### Rome: "The Uncertainty of the State of Grace"

Most nominal Protestants in the early 21st century do not realize that Rome's centuries-old position, which is diametrically opposed to authentic Biblical Christianity on the central issues of Scripture and salvation, remains unchanged. Rome — based on church tradition and not Scripture — teaches that no one can have assurance of salvation. Statements from official Vatican publications, the *Catholic Encyclopedia* and *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, could not be more clear:

Protestants claim the following three qualities for justification: certainty, equality, the impossibility of ever losing it. Diametrically opposed to these qualities are those defended by the Council of Trent:

- uncertainty [no one can be sure he is justified]
- inequality [some are more justified than others]
- amissibility [justification can be lost].<sup>2</sup>

This is because saving grace, in Catholic false teaching, is not the free gift of God. It is something for which the sinner must work:

Every adult soul stained...with original sin...must, in order to arrive at the state of justification, pass through a short or long process of justification, which may be likened to the gradual development of the child in its mother's womb.... The Catholic idea maintains that the formal cause of justification does not consist in an exterior imputation of the justice [righteousness] of Christ but in a real, interior sanctification.... Although the sinner is justified by the justice of Christ, inasmuch as the Redeemer has merited for him the grace of justification, nevertheless he is formally justified and made holy by his own personal justice and holiness.<sup>3</sup>

The reason for the uncertainty of the state of grace lies in this, that without a special revelation nobody can with certainty of faith know whether or not he has fulfilled all the conditions that are necessary for achieving justification.<sup>4</sup>

...[O]ver and above faith other acts are necessary for justification, such as fear, and hope, charity, penance with contrition, almsgiving.... Faith alone does not justify.

The "justification by faith alone" theory was by Luther styled the article of the standing and falling [of the] church...and by his followers was regarded as the material principle of Protestantism, just as the sufficiency of the Bible without tradition was considered its formal principle. Both of these principles are un-Biblical....<sup>5</sup>

Present-day neo-liberals' teachings on Scripture and salvation — that Scripture alone is not enough (and therefore we must add our words to it), and that justification is by faith plus works (and therefore you can never be sure if you've done enough) — are essentially those of Rome above. Men like Norman Shepherd and N. T. Wright, the signers of the *Evangelicals and Catholics Together* documents, and leading spokesmen of the Purpose-Driven Church and the Emergent Church readily admit that they seek to reunite Evangelicals and Roman Catholics. Since justification by faith alone and the authority of Scripture over church tradition were the basis of the sixteenth century break, it is their view that Evangelicals and Catholics must reach an understanding on these points that will facilitate re-union.

But Antichristian Rome is patiently intransigent while modern-day Evangelicals are increasingly eager suitors. The ever more one-sided "compromises" in the *Evangelicals and Catholics Together* documents demonstrate this clearly. Reaching an "understanding" with Rome by definition means the surrender of authentic Biblical Christianity recovered at the Reformation, and the Vatican has made it clear that it will not be satisfied until the surrender is complete. Thus the displacement of Protestantism in Evangelical and Reformed churches in recent decades is a most welcome development in the eyes of Rome.

## **The Reformers: Full Assurance of Faith, Based on Scripture Alone**

What is needed in our time? As Martyn Lloyd-Jones continued his address fifty years ago, he said that what is needed is the same assurance of salvation in our own hearts that both early Christians and the Reformers of a later century possessed. It was by that assurance that they faced even death for their belief, and by their own example they won others to the Savior.

[W]henver the church is powerful and mighty and authoritative, her preachers and ministers have always been men who speak out of the full assurance of faith, and know in whom they have believed. It was for that reason that the martyrs could smile in the face of kings and queens, and regents and local potentates, and go gladly to the stake; they knew that from the stake they would wake in Heaven and in glory and see Him face to face! They rejoiced in the assurance of salvation!<sup>6</sup>

Let us stand, as the early Christians and the later Reformers did, upon the firm foundation of Scripture alone:

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man

someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation. (Romans 5:1-11)

**Next: [Can you imagine John Knox on television?](#)**

#### **References:**

1. Quotations in this article are from D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, "Remembering the Reformation" in *Knowing the Times: Addresses Delivered on Various Occasions, 1942-1977* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth. 1989).
2. "Justification" in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 8, [www.newadvent.org/cathen/08573a.htm](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08573a.htm). See also Dr. Ludwig Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, (Rockford, Illinois: Tan Books, 1974), 261-263. The cover describes this book as "A one-volume encyclopedia of the doctrines of the Catholic Church, showing their sources in Scripture and Tradition and their definition by Popes and Councils." The book bears the imprimatur (mark of official approval) of Rome.
3. "Sanctifying Grace" in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, reproduced at [www.newadvent.org/cathen/06701a.htm](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06701a.htm). See also Ott, 250-252.
4. Ott, 262.
5. *Catholic Encyclopedia*, entry on "Sanctifying Grace." See also Ott, 5-6, 253-254, 272-291.
6. Lloyd-Jones, "Remembering the Reformation"

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