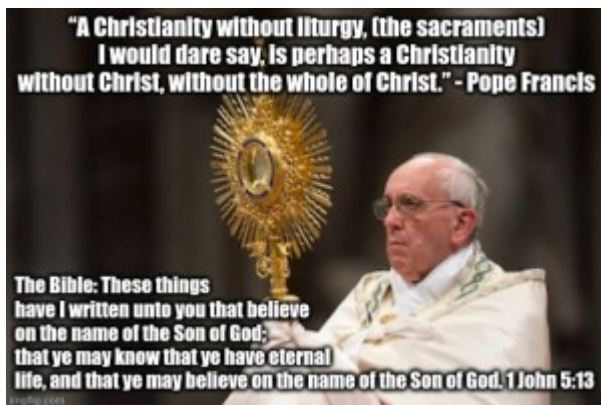


What The Pope Refuses To Believe



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WHEN ROMAN CATHOLICS say to me they cannot believe that they can be saved completely and without the ministrations of their priests, I think back to the time when I too, as a priest, could not believe it. Like Martin Luther struggling to find the light, I thought of God's righteousness as a punitive righteousness. And like Luther I wondered in despair how God could expect me to become righteous, and make others righteous, by the works of my own hands.

Luther's discovery of the correct interpretation of the 17th verse of the first chapter of Paul's epistle to the Romans, touched off the spark that set the Protestant Reformation going. He read there about "The Gospel of Christ . . . for therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, the just shall live by faith."

No conversion of priest or layman from Roman Catholicism is complete without full acceptance of the fact here set forth, that the Gospel of Jesus Christ reveals that through faith in Jesus Christ man is actually invested with the very righteousness of God.

Like all other priests who have been converted to the Gospel teaching, Luther had believed, as he was taught in Roman Catholic theology, that this righteousness was solely an attribute of God which man could never attain, and which God held like a big stick over his head. For this reason he accepted the Gospel as a system of modified law under which salvation had to be earned by good works.

Two other Scripture passages clearly confirm Luther's discovery. The first is Romans 3:21: "But now, without the law, the righteousness of God is manifested... righteousness by faith of Jesus Christ unto all, and upon all them that believe." And again, in Phil. 3:9: "Not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is of God through faith."

Now, it is obvious that this "righteousness of faith" must mean that

justifying righteousness with which we are invested by God through faith. It cannot mean the attribute of righteousness in God himself, which is an abstract thing, and which obviously is not possessed by God from faith or anything else, since it is inherent in Him by His divine nature. It comes to us instrumentally from faith, however, not from works. Paul describes it in the Greek as springing out of or from faith – *ek pisteos*. It is put onus by God, and is in every sense His work and gift.

Roman Catholics cannot understand how this is possible, because they are never taught to believe that salvation and justification can come to them in any other way except it is earned by conforming to the laws of the Church. This is the old pagan Roman principle that salvation must be earned piecemeal, the same as a salary or reward for proportionate work done by slaves for a master.

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It must be remembered that the apostle Paul wrote this epistle about this new teaching of the Gospel to Romans in Rome itself. They knew of the pre-Christian religious principle of having to earn one's salvation by works. If what Paul told them was in no way different from what they knew and saw around them, why should he want to explain it at all? His object was to show the Romans by contrast how much the Gospel teaching differed from the Roman principle of being justified by obedience to external law.

It is also necessary to explain further to Roman Catholics, as Paul did to the Romans of his day, that the actual act of faith, from which the righteousness of God comes, is not in itself anything that is meritorious, any more than other human acts are. A rope cast into the water is the instrument by which a drowning person who grasps it is saved. Faith is similar to the act of the hand that grasps the proffered aid. Paul brings this out farther on, in the fourth chapter of this epistle to the Romans, where he expressly contrasts faith with works of righteousness: "To him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted FOR righteousness." Far from faith being the meritorious root of righteousness, he makes it clear that, on the contrary, it is merely imputed for righteousness.

In other words, it has pleased God to attribute a value to faith which intrinsically it has not in itself. It is in a sense similar to what the Government does when it makes a piece of paper into a \$ 100-bill by its official stamp of authority. The piece of paper thus obtains a conventional value which intrinsically it has not.

It is strange, tragic in fact, that the apostle Paul explained all this clearly for the Christian Church in Rome, and yet the Roman Church today refuses to accept it or teach it to the millions of people under its dominion throughout the world. Instead, it holds on to the opposite teaching of salvation by works as it existed in Rome before the Gospel was preached there by Paul. By so doing, it completely rejects the very pith and center of the whole Gospel message of "righteousness derived from faith" (*dikaiosisune ek pisteos*), as Paul puts it, and thus robs its people of the knowledge of the

Gospel of Christ, which is “the power of God unto salvation” and their spiritual birthright.