

**Drowning in the Tiber (Part 12)**  
**Responding to Francis Beckwith's 2009 Book:**  
***Return to Rome: Confessions of an Evangelical Catholic***  
**-Theology, the Reformation and the Theology of the Reformation-**  
**(Selected Scriptures)**

\* \* \* \* \*

Transcript of a Sermon Preached at Christ Church of Clarkson  
by  
Tony A. Bartolucci on September 6, 2009

---

*[Scripture reading and prayer]*

Well this is week 12 in our series. One of my greatest strengths is also one of my greatest weaknesses and that is the need to be thorough. I could easily spend 2 or 3 more weeks on this material. But I thought all along that for the series to be practical it should not go over 12 parts; after all Beckwith's book is only 7 chapters. In fact, when I first started doing this I thought maybe I would do a one or two part message— and it just kept unfolding and unfolding. But those of you who know me know that I have a penchant to be thorough (sometimes to a fault).

If you want a subtitle for today's message it would be this: *Theology, the Reformation, and the Theology of the Reformation.*

I want to wrap up our look at Roman Catholicism by way of Francis Beckwith's book with a series of several questions. Some of these questions will be under this very heading "Theology, the Reformation, and the Theology of the Reformation." And then we will turn our focus elsewhere.

The first question—and this is where we are going to spend most of our time—the first question is this: "Is justification progressive as it relates to a Christian's salvation?" All along we have seen that Beckwith refers to "the journey of justification." That there is no single declaration that proclaims the believer righteous before the bar of God's court on the basis of the finished work of Jesus Christ for that individual. Rather, Beckwith, in keeping with Roman Catholic theology, sees justification and sanctification as much the same thing, no distinction (we covered that a few weeks ago in week 9 and due to time I am not going to delve back into it).

There are three essential biblical doctrines that Beckwith confounds: justification, sanctification and assurance. Now justification, as it relates to our judicial standing before God, the word means "to declare righteous." We have noted that more and more Catholic scholars are coming to admit this. It is simply the best understanding of what the word means in its context, that is why we call it a forensic term. It is drawn from the courts of law. When a sinner comes to a humble faith in Jesus Christ, trusting in His provision for his salvation, God declares that person just. You can picture it as a courtroom: God, the judge of the universe, slams down the gavel and says, "Not guilty on the basis of the work of Jesus Christ!" It is not that God *makes* us righteous in His declaration, but He *declares us righteous* because we are now united with Jesus Christ and identified with Him.

Now we ask the question, "Why was this essential truth of the Gospel for the most part missing during the middle Ages?" There are several reasons for that, including the fact that there was no formulated doctrine of justification until the 16<sup>th</sup> century. That includes, by the way, the Roman Catholic Church. They formulated their doctrine of justification at The Council of Trent.

But another key issue is the Bible that was in use.

The church was not studying from the Greek text but from the Latin, specifically Jerome's Latin Vulgate. God in His providence raised up two men, Erasmus and Luther. Erasmus kept one foot in the Roman Catholic Church and one foot out of it, while Martin Luther who left the Church entirely. Interestingly enough, they were rivals— especially over the issue of free-will. The rivalry resulted in Luther writing his well known tome *The Bondage of the Will*. Yet, while they were rivals, Erasmus provided the Greek text that was essential for the Reformation.

If I may go back to Luther: he was born in Eisleben, Germany, in the year 1483, to John and Margaret Luther. As a young man he studied law at Erfurt. Luther had no aspirations unto formal ministry until, in the midst of a violent storm, a lightening bolt fell at his feet and he cried out, "Help me Saint Ann and I will become a monk!" True to his word, on August 17<sup>th</sup> of 1505, Martin Luther reentered the University at Erfurt, this time to pursue scholastic theology.

Within him burned a desire to be forgiven, a desire to have a peace with God. He prayed, he fasted, he confined himself to a small cell. He wished to have assurance of salvation, yet he had none. His fellows exhorted him to find peace through meritorious works. Yet Luther sensed that he was depraved at heart and no good thing could come from within him. He visited the confessional daily, sometimes spending three or four hours confessing sin after sin. His friend and mentor John Staupitz reported that Luther once rehearsed the sins of the previous day for six hours straight. So Staupitz took him aside and said, "Martin you are getting a little carried away; you need to confess some real sins." But the truth is he had no lasting peace. He would leave the confessional, head straight to his tiny cell, and then he would remember a sin he had forgotten or had committed along the way, and fear would rush over his soul all over again. He wrote of that time: "Christ seems to me as an angry judge with a sword in His hand. Do I love God who judges sinner, who imposes the relentless decrees of His laws on men's conscience? *Love God?* Sometimes I hate Him!"

Luther knew that nothing, humanly speaking, could remove his sin. Having grace infused to you through sacraments, all in an effort to be more holy, was like putting makeup on a pig. Even our best—as Isaiah tells us—our best deeds are as a filthy garment.

Luther's friends encouraged him to make a pilgrimage to Rome. Rome was the spiritual, if not the political capital of the world. He was awestruck by the spiritual heritage that he found there, but he was also puzzled by the vice, the ignorance, the superstition. He plunged himself into the Church. He performed Mass several times. He pondered what was for him a great dilemma: His parents were yet alive while he visited Rome, but he thought to himself that if they were dead their release from Purgatory could be secured while he was there.

Pilate's Staircase was in Rome. The Church taught that this staircase had been miraculously transported from Jerusalem to Rome—and it was said to be the place where Jesus walked—and pilgrims were encouraged to ascend on their knees while praying on each step. In doing so they could gain an indulgence.

Luther, like so many before him, ascended the stone steps one-by-one on his knees. He goes up, one after the other, and gets to the top. And he is puzzled. *What does this have to do with having my sins forgiven?* Suddenly a voice thunders in his heart: "The just shall live by faith!" And that was it—the message of the Old Testament prophet cited by the Apostle Paul in Romans 1:17—the passage that ignited a flame in Luther's heart. Not only do the just live by faith, it is by faith that they are just.

Romans 3:22-24:

Even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.<sup>1</sup>

The word translated "justified" in verse 24 is the verb *dikaioō* (δικαίωω). The noun form is *dikaioōsunē* (δικαιοσύνη). These are the words that were used in the original Greek text. The New Testament was written in Koine (common) Greek. But Greek, as I said before, wasn't the language of the Bible during the middle ages. It wasn't the language of the Bible at the early part of the Reformation either. It was Latin. It was Jerome's Latin Vulgate that served as the Bible for the church for about 1000 years.

Now why is that important?

Well, for one thing, the word for "righteousness" or "justification" in Latin is *iustificari*. *Iustificari* means "to make righteous." Not "declare righteous" but "make righteous."

Some say, "Well, that seems reasonable; after all God is righteous and He expects us to be so." The problem, as we saw before, is we can't be righteous. Our sin trumps our human goodness. We're totally depraved. We can't be *made righteous*.

Jeremiah 13:23 "Can a leopard change his spots?"

No! And neither can any man cease from being sinful.

I cannot be what I am not. I cannot cease to be what I am—and what I am is someone who is inherently sinful—and therefore separated from the glory of God.

---

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

But this led to a key error in Roman Catholic theology: that we have to have righteousness *infused* in us. In other words, we have to inheritantly be made righteous or holy. How do we do that? Through participation in the Mass where someone eats the body and blood of Christ; through penance and prayer and sacrament. But since we all still have remaining sin, the best that a Roman Catholic can hope for is a stay in purgatory, where their remaining sins are purged from them.

But you see, as Luther studied the Greek text he started to realize that when the Bible talks about justification, it is not talking about "our being made righteous" (our trying to ascend some unattainable standard of holiness). It is talking about *God declaring us righteous by the one true standard of holiness, Jesus Christ the Righteous*. It is a legal term. When a judge pronounces condemnation on a criminal, he doesn't make him guilty of the offense of which he is condemned, he simply recognizes that he is guilty and pronounces the judgment. And in the same way, when the judge pronounces somebody just, he doesn't make him just (*iustificari*), rather he declares him to be just before the bar of the law. And if you say, "Well, how can that be, because we are not 'just' before the bar of God's justice," the answer is God justifies us solely on the basis of the person and work of Jesus Christ. God declares us just before we are in fact just. That's great news, that's the Gospel! Justification is to be declared righteous. It is not on the basis of your righteousness (remember you have none). It's on the basis of Another's Righteousness. That is why we call it a *foreign righteousness*. It is on the righteousness of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, Himself God, the spotless Lamb of God. And as I said, Roman Catholic scholars are beginning to admit to this: that the word does not mean "to be made righteous" but "to be declared righteous."

I cited this earlier in our series. Joseph Fitzmeyer, a Roman Catholic scholar, in his commentary on the book of Romans writes:

'Justification' is drawn from Paul's Jewish background, expressing a relationship between human beings and God, a judicial relationship, either ethical or forensic (i.e. related to human conduct and law courts: Deut 25:1; cf. Gen 18:25-26). *Dikaios*, "righteous, upright," usually denoted a person who stood acquitted or vindicated before a judge's tribunal (Exod 23:7; 1 Kgs 8:32; Job 31:35-37), and thus a right relationship with other human beings.<sup>2</sup>

He goes on to say:

When, then, Paul in Romans says that Christ Jesus "justified" human beings "by his blood" (3:25; cf. 5:9), he means that by what Christ suffered in his passion and death he has brought it about that sinful human beings can stand before God's tribunal acquitted or innocent, with the judgment not based on observance of the Mosaic law. Thus "God's uprightness" is now manifested toward human beings in a just judgment, one of acquittal, because Jesus "our Lord...was handed over (to death) for our trespasses and raised for our justification" (4:25). This was done for humanity "freely by his grace" (3:24). For God has displayed Jesus in

---

<sup>2</sup>Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J., *Romans, A New Translation with introduction and Commentary, The Anchor Bible Series* (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 116.

death ("by his blood") as "a manifestation of his uprightness...at the present time to show that he is upright and justifies the one who puts faith in Jesus (3:26; cf. 5:1). . . . Paul insists on the utter gratuity of this justification, because "all alike have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (3:23). Consequently, this uprightness does not belong to human beings (10:3), and it is not something that they have produced or merited; *it is an alien uprightness, one belonging rightly to another (to Christ) and attributed to them because of what that other has done for them.*<sup>3</sup>

That sounds like the writing of a Reformer, not a Roman Catholic scholar.

There's no double-jeopardy in God's court. We are justified once just as Jesus Christ died and rose again once. There is no "journey of justification" as Dr. Beckwith likes to put it, that you are justified at the moment of baptism, that is as an infant, and you go through the hoops and the steps in the Roman Catholic church trying to accrue a greater justification (a justification that can be totally lost through mortal sin—and you are back at the bottom of the ladder to start all over again). Then, hopefully, if you have enough (righteousness) you will gain entrance into heaven or have a shorter stay in purgatory. But that is faulty theology based in large part to an inaccurate translation from a Latin Bible.

And that is not the only reason, mind you. The entire doctrine was perverted, at least in part, if not entirely, by the Vulgate.

The entire doctrine of repentance was perverted, at least in part, if not entirely, but the Vulgate which translated "repent" in Matthew 4:17 by *penitentiam agite* (to "do penance").

By using Erasmus' Greek New Testament, Luther recognized the error and wrote, "When our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, said 'Repent,' he meant that the entire life of believers should be one of repentance."

The gospel called not for *an act of penance* but for a radical change of mind-set and an equally deep transformation of life. Later he would write to Staupitz about this glowing discovery: "I venture to say they are wrong who make more of the act in Latin than of the change of heart in Greek!"<sup>4</sup>

Beckwith clearly misunderstands what Justification is all about. He cites Roman Catholic Richard A Wright:

. . . Justification, though momentary when one first receives it through Baptism, is also progressive. . . . So, then, the real question is whether Paul and the other non-Gospel New

---

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 117-118. Italics mine.

<sup>4</sup>Sinclair Ferguson, "Medieval Mistakes."

Testament authors teach that the entirety of justification is mere imputed righteousness that occurs once and for all. The answer to which I arrived was "no."<sup>5</sup>

Beckwith admits that justification in Scripture is portrayed as a past event. But he also claims that it is portrayed as a present and future reality. He cites the following passages as being indicative of a past justification:

Romans 5:1-2 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 hope of the glory of God.

Romans 5:9 Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him.

1 Corinthians 6:11 And such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God.

Romans 8:24 For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one also hope for what he sees?

Well, he cites three passages correctly, but the fourth, Romans 8:24, isn't talking about justification at all—well not specifically—but I will give him that. These are talking about something that happened in the past.

But then he cites some passages that claim justification is also a present reality:

1 Corinthians 1:18 For the word of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

1 Corinthians 15:2 by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain.

2 Corinthians 2:15 For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing;

Very good Dr. Beckwith. But none of those passages are talking about justification. The word for justification is not being used. You see this is what we call in logic *a category error*. He takes something from a different category to prove a point. But it is apples and oranges. Justification and salvation both relate to what we call soteriology, the doctrine of salvation. But they're different. It would be like me talking about election and claiming that election is unconditional: "Yes, the Bible

---

<sup>5</sup>Francis J. Beckwith, *Return To Rome: Confessions of an Evangelical Catholic* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2009), 101.

says we are predestined but it also warns we need to continue in the faith if we are to be saved." No, you have crossed categories. You've taken a concept related to perseverance and tried to import that into predestination. You can't do that, yet I see this all the time. People try to make some doctrinal point using a passage that isn't talking about the same doctrine they are trying to prove.

We see the same thing when he cites passages that relate to a future justification:

Romans 2:13 for not the hearers of the Law are just before God, but the doers of the Law will be justified.

We looked at that passage in Part 11. This is not saying that anyone can be justified by keeping the Law. You've got to read the context clearly.

He also cited Galatians 5:5 (For we through the Spirit, by faith, are waiting for the hope of righteousness). That's not talking about justification.

Then there's 1 Corinthians 3:15:

If any man's work is burned up, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire.

That's not talking about justification. And please, this is not purgatory. It doesn't even apply to every believer. This is about Christian leaders. This is about the faithfulness of ministers of the Gospel. Again read the context.

1 Corinthians 5:5 where Paul says:

I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

This is about church discipline, not justification.

1 Timothy 2:15:

But women shall be preserved through the bearing of children if they continue in faith and love and sanctity with self-restraint.

I have no idea why he cites that passage; it has nothing to do with justification.

2 Timothy 4:8:

in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.

This is glorification, not justification. Again we have a category error.

And 2 Timothy 4:18:

The Lord will deliver me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom; to Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Again, a passage that's not talking about justification.

You see, you can't sling verses around like paint from a bucket hoping that it sticks somewhere and ends up looking good. Doing the with paint might get you a grant from the NEA. Doing it with the Bible gets you in trouble.

Now I want to look at something very, very important. This is our second question. "What is the relationship between justification, sanctification, and assurance (or assurance of salvation)?" What is the relationship between these three things"

Well, first of all, justification occurs when someone who is elect, who is chosen before the foundation of the world, comes to saving faith in Jesus Christ. It is by Grace through faith. In other words, it is simply by believing in Christ that we are saved. God quickens our hearts, we believe and repent, and are declared righteous in Christ. Our sin is credited to him. His righteousness is credited to us. That is purely grace: we don't earn it, we don't merit it. It's not, as Roman Catholics claim, that God gives us the grace to merit salvation. That is the heresy of Semi-Pelagianism. No, it is 100% unconditionally by God's sovereign grace to his Glory.

However, whenever a sinner is justified, the same one is also sanctified and put on the road to sanctification (or growing in Christian graces / discipleship). Justification happens once, only once. The elect can not lose it and it cannot be improved upon. It is not that my justification is better than yours. Or my justification is more mature than yours, or holier than yours. How could that be? It is all about Jesus Christ. If my justification is 100% in Christ, how can that be improved upon? How can Christ improve upon Himself? Is He divided, giving to one 80% of Himself and another 100 %? That's ludicrous! He is the standard for perfection and that standard is immutable.

Now while justification occurs apart from works, that doesn't mean that justified sinners go on living like they did before they were justified. When someone is born again they receive the fullness of the Holy Spirit. They are a new creation in Christ. They are partakers of the New Covenant, adopted as children of God. God ensures that His children walk worthy before Him. As I like to put it, our spiritual DNA has been changed so we can't live like we did before.

This was the accusation of Rome against the reformers: "If you make it all of grace and take away works people are going to live sinful lives."

Well that's the same argument Paul dealt with in Romans 6. After talking about God's rich grace, and how grace abounds over sin, he addresses the question in verse 1, "Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?" After all, if grace trumps sin, then the more you sin the more grace, so let's sin so we can just have a heyday in grace! And what does he say that that? *Mē genoito!* "May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?" It's incongruous. If you are a believer in Jesus Christ your DNA is changed, you've died to sin, you can no longer live the way you did before.

Luther wrote:

True faith, of which we speak, cannot be manufactured by our own thoughts, for it is solely a work of God in us, without any assistance on our part. As Paul says to the Romans, it is God's gift and grace, obtained by one man, Christ. Therefore, faith is something very powerful, active, restless, effective, which at once renews a person and again regenerates him, and leads him altogether into a new manner and character of life, so that it is impossible not to do good without ceasing. . . . [if works] do not follow, it is a sure sign that there is no faith there; but only an empty thought and dream, which they falsely call faith.

That's what is taught in the Scriptures. Ephesians 2:8-10:

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

You see, it's one thing to be religious, it is another thing to be regenerate. My experience as a Roman Catholic back then, and my experience with Roman Catholics today (including my family members) is that they are religious, but not regenerate. My friends, it is difficult to feign genuine salvation. Either someone is a new creation in Christ or they are not.

Now as I mentioned a couple of weeks ago, one of the things we have to be clear on is to keep justification and sanctification separate. *Not separated, but separate*. If you don't keep them separate, then you mistake living the Christian life, or obedience, with your very salvation (justification). If you blend your obedience with your salvation what do you get? In other words, if your salvation hinges on what you do, what do you get? You get a works salvation right?

Justification, being declared righteous in and through Christ, is not of works. But wherever there is true justification works follow. And that's why we say they are separate, but not separated. If you don't separate them you have a Roman Catholic view of salvation: "by works + God's grace = merit = equals heaven."

If you isolate them, you have a view of salvation that says that you can be a true Christian and good works are of no consequence. That is antinomianism, what Paul argued against in Romans 6.

Now what about assurance? What about assurance of salvation? In other words, can I know with any degree of certainty that if I were to die I am going to go to heaven? Can I have that assurance of that?

Beckwith talks about a friend (the footnote tells you it's the Christian apologist Grek Koukl) who has stated that Roman Catholics can have no assurance of eternal life. Beckwith tries to turn the tables and asks:

. . . it seems that one can present the Reformed view in such a way that 'works' are as much a necessary condition for justification as they are for the Catholic view. Remember, the Reformed view asserts that good works follow from true conversion and are part of one's post-justification sanctification. Presumably, if one claims to have been converted to Christ, i.e. justified, and no good works follow, then one was not ever really justified. This means that for the Protestant view of justification, good works are a necessary condition for true justification. The fact that the good works occur chronologically after conversion does not change their logical character as a necessary condition for justification.<sup>6</sup>

Beckwith continues to demonstrate that he knows very little of Evangelical Theology. He says that this means, for the Protestant view of justification, that good works are a necessary condition for true justification. No, there are no conditions for true justification. Evidences are not conditions. In fact if I use his faulty logic I could say that according to Hebrews 12:6 God disciplines every true child of His. Therefore, God's discipline is a condition of justification. This, of course, is foolishness.

Now he goes on to say:

And neither view is better at establishing for the believer subjective certitude of heaven. For example, the Protestant, who said the sinner's prayer or answered an altar call,<sup>7</sup> but shows no evidence of justification, is likely to have less certitude about his eternal fate than the faithful Catholic who, confident in God's promises, regularly attends Mass, receives the sacraments, engages in spiritual disciplines, and tries to obey the commands of Christ.<sup>8</sup>

I would hope that someone who "says the sinners prayer" or "answers an altar call" but doesn't have any change of life giving "no evidence of justification"—I would hope that they would have no assurance. Read James, 1 John, Hebrews. But that doesn't mean assurance is grounded in works. It's not, it is grounded in Christ.

Now it's interesting to note that traditionally Roman Catholics have been warned against claiming any assurance of salvation. Here's the council of Trent on assurance (Canon XV):

---

<sup>6</sup>*Return to Rome*, 109.

<sup>7</sup>It is noteworthy that Beckwith uses for an example historically recent, not to mention unbiblical, practices such as saying "the sinner's prayer" or answering "an altar call."

<sup>8</sup>*Return to Rome*, 109-10.

If any one shall say, that a man, who is born again and justified, is bound of faith to believe that he is assuredly in the number of the predestined; let him be anathema.

You see, there is no assurance in the Roman Catholic system. Beckwith and others can try to spin Reformed theology in a way to try to make it look the same, but it's just spin.

Now I think we are ready for the Roman Catholic slide entitled "Justification, Sanctification, and Assurance."<sup>9</sup>

Note—*Justification and Sanctification*—there is no real distinction, or to put it in more common Evangelical jargon, we talk about "when you were saved." Okay, that was something that most of us can point back to and say, if not a date or a moment, a season in our life when we passed from darkness to light. We don't say, "Oh when were you following Christ?" "Oh, I followed haltingly here and better there." No, when you "were saved" is something we talk about that happened only once. That's justification. Sanctification is our discipleship.

In Rome there is no real distinction. Remember it is "the journey of justification." We could talk about "the journey of *sanctification*," growing in the Christian life. They talk about a "journey of justification." Trying to achieve that which, in reality, is not achievable.

Salvation in the Roman Catholic scheme of things is by righteousness infused, not imputed. Imputed means "charged or credited." I can credit money to Jerry (he doesn't need it) but I could credit it to him. That means he did not deserve it. Or he can go out and earn it on his own, then it would be infused by him. So salvation is infused to the soul through baptism, these are the works, baptism into the Roman Catholic church, sacraments, the Mass is a big one it— is essential (one must eat literally the flesh and divinity of Christ in order to have the hope of salvation)—and faith cooperating with works. So the Catholic is on a journey of progressive justification. Cooperating with grace to become more righteous. Cooperating with grace, again that is the grace being infused to the soul. (However, all but the most holy, pious of men and women will have to undergo a final purging of sin in purgatory—unless you have a lot of money—then money does take away sin!)

Any assurance of salvation is based on obedience . . . Real assurance is not possible, and as we saw, is forbidden. So for a Catholic to have any assurance of salvation? I am not sure what that really means. For me? As a Catholic I was not sure what that meant. Especially when you've got purgatory standing before you. Any assurance, any hope of salvation, is based on one's obedience. It is based by having grace infused to the soul, through baptism, through the Catholic Church, through Mass, faith cooperating with works, through the confessional.

God is not sovereign in justification or sanctification. There is no unconditional election in Roman Catholic Theology. There's no perseverance of the saints in Roman Catholic theology. Rather it is a semi-pelagian synergism of grace and works (contrary to the spin that their apologists put on it).

---

<sup>9</sup>A PDF copy of the original PowerPoint slide is available online ([www.tonybartolucci.com/sermons/rome.pdf](http://www.tonybartolucci.com/sermons/rome.pdf)).

Again, on Page 110, Beckwith refers to the Catholic understanding that justification is a process that is a result of a Christian's cooperation with God's grace. That is the age-old heresy of Semi-Pelagianism. (You can look it up in Wikipedia later.) That man cooperates with God in order to be saved.

I want you to compare our second chart: The Biblical, Reformation Doctrine of Justification, Sanctification, and Assurance.<sup>10</sup>

I want you to note that justification and sanctification are separate. Remember in the Catholic slide there were no distinctions, they were together. Here they are separate; however, they are not isolated. Where justification truly is, sanctification follows (a change of life ensues). Our salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Our sanctification is the *essential fruit* of justification. Assurance is a fruit of saving faith based upon the object of faith, Jesus Christ the Righteous.

This is so important. Most Christians at one time or another (me included) have struggled with the assurance of salvation. *Am I really regenerate? When I stand before God is He really going to say, "Yes, My beloved, enter in."?*

Most Christians at one time or another have struggled with that question. And the problem is that, they are looking at their works. They are looking at their sanctification. Calvin warned against this. Don't look at yourself for assurance. There is no assurance to be found in self.

Let me ask you who are doubting: "Who did you believe to save you?" You answer, "Jesus Christ." *Why would you then look to yourself?* No, you look to Christ! When you doubt you flee to the cross! You embrace Christ! That is what I do. This is why I say the Gospel should be music to our ears. The fact that Christ is our Sufficient Savior who loved us, who died for us, who paid the penalty that we could never pay. And when we hurt, when we doubt, we flee to the Cross and there is hope, all of our hope, bound up in Christ! That's the Gospel!

So the true Christian evidence is a change of life and a process of sanctification. Part of that evidence is recognizing how wretched we are and how much we deserve the eternity of Hell. In fact, the phrase we use is *simul iustus et peccatore*: "we are once righteous and sinful." Our righteousness is in Christ. God is sovereign in the moment of justification, as well as in the process of sanctification. He wills to work in us according to His good pleasure.

Now compare that to the category errors Beckwith makes in saying that justification, quote,

. . . has no ontological status, that it is not a divine quality that can change nature over time in the soul of the believer who cooperates with God's free gift of grace. For my friend as well as many others, the 'grace' the Christian acquires at his initial conversion (and/or baptism) is just the name the Bible attributes to the legal declaration that we are no longer considered

---

<sup>10</sup>A PDF copy of the original PowerPoint slide is available online ([www.tonybartolucci.com/sermons/reformation.pdf](http://www.tonybartolucci.com/sermons/reformation.pdf)).

guilty in the eyes of God for our sins because Christ took our punishment on the cross. . . .  
But again, for Catholics the gift of grace is far more than a legal declaration.

*What does that mean?* For us justification is nothing more than a legal declaration? Now again the misunderstanding of someone who should know better. I don't know how many times I can reference this, but he does not understand Reformed theology and the relationship between justification and sanctification.

Justification leads to sanctification as part of the entire *ordo salutis*, the *order of salvation*, but justification should not be confounded with sanctification.

In saying that "for Catholics the gift of grace is far more than a legal declaration" Beckwith sets up another straw man. I agree that the gift of God's grace is more than a legal declaration, but that's because I understand God's grace as encompassing not only my justification, but my sanctification and glorification, as well. Romans 5 says "we stand in grace."

We see the same thing in this quote from pages 84 and 85 :

But the grace one receives is legal or forensic. This means that grace is not real stuff that changes nature, but *merely* the name given to God's graciousness by legally accounting to us Christ's righteousness.<sup>11</sup>

Let me give you a much better treatment by Charles Hodge, the wonderful theologian of generations past:

So when righteousness is imputed to the believer, he does not thereby become subjectively righteous. If the righteousness be adequate, and if the imputation be made on adequate grounds and by competent authority, the person to whom the imputation is made has the right to be treated as righteous. And, therefore, in the forensic, although not in the moral or subjective sense, the imputation of the righteousness of Christ does make the sinner righteous. That is, it gives him a right to the full pardon of all his sins and a claim in justice to eternal life.<sup>12</sup>

It gives him a new nature and it makes him a partaker of the New Covenant and it gives him the Spirit of Grace.

---

<sup>11</sup>Emphasis mine. Beckwith uses the term "merely" several times in his book in an attempt to downgrade the quality of what well-informed Evangelicals hold dear. God's righteousness in Christ is not "merely" anything.

<sup>12</sup>Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, III:145.

Beckwith also writes that:

For the practicing Catholic, good works, including participation in the sacraments, works of charity, and prayer, are not for the purpose of earning heaven. For good works are not meant to pay off a debt in the Catholic scheme of things. Rather, good works prepare us for heaven by shaping our character and keeping us in communion with God so that we may be "holy and blameless and irreproachable before him." (Col. 1:22).<sup>13</sup>

Another common spin put out by Roman Catholic apologists that Roman Catholicism is not a works righteousness system. Sometimes when you unwind their argument you find out that what they are saying is that God is gracious in allowing men to merit eternal life.

I think we have demonstrated clearly enough throughout the series that the sacraments and good deeds are essential in the Roman Catholic scheme of things to any hope of salvation. In fact, the Roman Catholic Church teaches that some saints have so many good deeds they go into what is called a "treasury of merit" whereby others in need can borrow from the bank and get some of their loss filled up by means of another's gain.<sup>14</sup>

Here is a quote on the treasury of merit:

The good works of Jesus Christ, the saints, and others could be drawn upon to liberate souls from purgatory. In 1343 Pope Clement VI decreed that all these good works were in the Treasury of Merit, over which the pope had control.<sup>15</sup>

Then, Why the doctrines of grace?

First of all, what are the doctrines of grace? I am sure most of you know what I mean when I use that phrase. These are the doctrines that were revived, not invented, in the 16<sup>th</sup> century Reformation. Revived from Augustine, from the Council of Orange in 529. Revived from the teaching of Scriptures. The Doctrines of grace includes God's sovereignty in salvation, unconditional election, man's inability to save himself (that's total depravity), the all-sufficient death of Christ on the cross (that's particular redemption), God's preservation of the elect, that is those whom he calls will be saved (we call that perseverance). I am a fanatic when it comes to the doctrines of grace. Why? Because the doctrines of grace stand sentry over the purity of the Gospel.

---

<sup>13</sup>*Return to Rome*, 105.

<sup>14</sup>Is this not a form of imputation, the same thing that Romanists claim is contrary to the Bible and reason? Yet our imputation comes from the riches of Christ, not the supposed graces of sinful men who have been granted saintly status by an institutional church.

<sup>15</sup>[www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/1070220/Treasury-of-Merit](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/1070220/Treasury-of-Merit).

The doctrines of grace, like a raging flood, drowns all manner of works righteousness, all boasting, all sacramentalism, all the efforts of men to control who can be a Christian by saying, "You must come through our church our way." In fact Beckwith's free will theism stands in contrast to God's sovereign grace. His very first paragraph is telling in that regard:

It's difficult to explain why one moves from one Christian tradition to another. It is like trying to give an account to your friends why you chose to pursue marriage to this woman rather than another, though both may have a variety of qualities that you found attractive.<sup>16</sup>

You see, you place this under the category of "choosing my religion." A shift from one Christian tradition to another, like a shift from one woman to another. And throughout his book he appeals to reason (that's in keeping with his Thomist philosophy). And I wish I had more time to develop that; I don't, but suffice it to say, in the philosophy of Thomism, which comes from Thomas Aquinas, the theological father of the Roman Catholic church, reason reigns supreme.<sup>17</sup>

But if the doctrines of total depravity and unconditional election are true, Thomism is false. Romanism is false.

What about Augustine? I am always careful when I go back to quoting the early church fathers (because the writings are so voluminous, there are so many of them, and people pick and choose—and Augustine, of course, has been claimed by both sides, the Reformed and the Roman Catholic).

Now keep in mind that Augustine is one of the Four Doctors of the Catholic Church. And clearly he upheld total depravity and predestination. He also said that perseverance to the end was a gift of God's grace. Even faith was a gift of God's Grace.

I just want to give you these two quotes. This is Augustine on the predestination on the saints. I want you to know that both these quotes are contrary to stated Roman Catholic theology and contrary to what Beckwith has written in his book (and his understanding of God's sovereignty).

Here we have Augustine in the 5<sup>th</sup> century:

Certainly such an election is of grace, not at all of merits. For he had before said, "So, therefore, even at this present time, the remnant has been saved by the election of grace. And if by grace, now it is no more of works; otherwise grace is no more grace." Therefore the election obtained what it obtained gratuitously; there preceded none of those things which they might first give, and it should be given to them again. He saved them for nothing. But to the rest who were blinded, as is there plainly declared, it was done in recompense. "All the

---

<sup>16</sup>*Return to Rome*, 11.

<sup>17</sup>The Thomist concept of natural reason is not to be confused with the reformational view of logic which has a rightful place in a biblical worldview when understood in keeping with the nature of God and the depravity of men.

paths of the Lord are mercy and truth." But His ways are unsearchable. Therefore the mercy by which He freely delivers, and the truth by which He righteously judges, are equally unsearchable.<sup>18</sup>

The faith of these, which worketh by love, either actually does not fail at all, or, if there are any whose faith fails, it is restored before their life is ended, and the iniquity which had intervened is done away, and perseverance even to the end is allotted to them. But they who are not to persevere, and who shall so fall away from Christian faith and conduct that the end of this life shall find them in that case, beyond all doubt are not to be reckoned in the number of these, even in that season wherein they are living well and piously.<sup>19</sup>

In other words, even when you look and say, "Well that person really looks like a Christian, they look like they are living piously," but then they apostatize from the faith— you can be confident they weren't given the gift of perseverance because they weren't in the number of the elect and weren't given the gift of true saving faith.

So Augustine understood that election, faith, and even perseverance were sovereign gifts of God given to whom He wills to His Glory. That was revived at the 16<sup>th</sup> century Reformation.

And this is our second main point—even though we are about three-fourths done—this is our second main point:

The Reformation, Revival or Rebellion?

Was the Reformation of the 16<sup>th</sup> century a great revival or an act of rebellion against the Church of Rome?

Roman Catholics consider us to be in schism, to be rebels. They claim that this started with Martin Luther, who rebelled against the true Church of Jesus Christ. And as a result of this rebellion, fueled by *sola scriptura*, we today have more (and this is the number they often give) more than 33,000 different denominations all at odds with one another. This because we have no apostolic interpreter of the Scriptures. So none of us know what it means and we all get in our little groups, 33,000 different denominations. The fact is, that number is a myth. A man by the name of Eric Svendsen finally found where it came from. Some guy who . . . counted every independent church as a separate denomination. And that's how he came up with a number: 33,000. There aren't 33,000 different denominations; probably not any more than about 200 meaningful different denominations. And the

---

<sup>18</sup>*On the Predestination of the Saints*, 11.

<sup>19</sup>*Treatise on Rebuke and Grace. By Aurelius Augustine, Bishop of Hippo. In One Book, Addressed to Valentine, and with Him to the Monks of Adrumetum, A.d. 426 or 427 Chap. 16.—Whosoever Do Not Persevere Are Not Distinguished from the Mass of Perdition by Predestination.*

fact is that those that believe in the inerrancy and inspiration of Scripture are very much united. We are not all really at odds with one another.

But beyond that I am going to argue that the Reformation was the greatest revival this side of Acts chapter 2.

I've got a rather long quote. It is from a 1951 book *Heroes of the Reformation*. You can follow along (I want you to think about what happened at the Reformation, how the Gospel spread throughout Europe as I read this quote):

The Protestant Reformation possessed definite characteristics, many of which set it apart from any other revolution in history. One of the distinguishing features was its territorial scope. It began simultaneously and independently in various European countries. About the time that Martin Luther posted his ninety-five theses on the church door in Wittenberg in 1517, John Colet, dean of St. Paul's in England, was denouncing the abuses of the Catholic Church and upholding the supremacy of the Bible as the rule of faith. Lefevre in France and Zwingli in Switzerland were at the same time preaching against the evils of the church and pointing to Christ as the door of salvation. Although Luther is called the originator of the Reformation, the other Reformers discovered and preached the same message that he did, without having received knowledge of it from him.

There was a power, however, that brought the Reformation into existence and made its progress possible and that was the Holy Scriptures. The Greek New Testament prepared by Erasmus was a help to scholars all over Europe in learning the way of truth and life. After the Reformation once got under way, there existed a great friendship and fraternization among the Reformers. There was frequent interchange of ideas, and hospitality was freely extended. One of the surprising features of the Reformation was this extent of contact and cooperation among the Reformers as they encouraged each other in their efforts. The Reformation spread with great rapidity.

Of course, consolidations, refinements, and extensions needed to be made; but that so tremendous a revolution, on such a vast scale, could be executed in so short a time, bringing with it a complete change in thought and habit, still remains one of the amazing events of history.

The Protestant Reformation actually began in Europe's citadels of learning, her universities. There were scholars, such as Luther and Melancthon at Wittenberg; Erasmus, Colet at Oxford; Bilney, Latimer, and Cartwright at Cambridge; and Lefevre and Farel at Paris. Almost without exception the leaders of the Reformation were highly trained men of that generation. In some instances, as Beza and Tyndale, they ranked high as men of letters. Others, like Cranmer and Valdes carried responsibilities at court. . . .

Why was this so necessary at that time, when in other ages men of lesser abilities and education have been used effectively to preach the gospel with power? At least two answers can be given: Only the educated knew the Hebrew, Latin, and Greek necessary to read the

Bible as it then existed. Then, too, it was essential that the Bible be translated into the vernacular of each country so that the common people could have the privilege of reading the Scriptures in their own tongue. This task demanded scholarship.

All the preaching of many Luthers, Latimers, Zwinglis, Knoxes, and Wisharts would have failed to accomplish the Reformation if, at the same time, the Bible in the vernacular had not been provided for the common people. If at the moment Latimer was preaching at Cambridge it had not happened that Tyndale, who had fled to the Continent, was smuggling back thousands of copies of the English New Testament so that every Englishman could read the way of salvation for himself, there would have been no Reformation in England. A similar situation occurred in Germany, France, and other countries.

With these two phases must be combined the indispensable third: the invention of printing, which had made possible the publication of the translations of the Bible and had brought the price within range of the common man's purse. Within a ten-year period many of the nations of Europe had received translations of the Bible in their own tongue. Luther had translated it for Germany in 1522, Lefevre for France in 1523, Tyndale for England in 1525, Brucchioli for Italy in 1532. Within the next ten years Francisco Enzinas had translated the Bible into Spanish, and Petri had translated it into Swedish. Shortly after, Karoli, one of the most energetic of Magyar preachers, had done the same in the Magyar tongue. Another noteworthy characteristic of the Reformers was the basic agreement on important doctrines. The tenet upon which all Reformers agreed was justification by faith. They believed that salvation is not obtained by works, fasting, money, or penance, but that it is God's free gift. This doctrine formed the cornerstone of the Reformation. Agreement also existed on the supreme and sufficient authority of the Scriptures, Communion in both kinds, and the disavowal of saint worship, images, relics, purgatory, mass, celibacy, and the pope as head of the church. . . .

The Reformation proper, the break with Roman Catholic authority, was accomplished in a relatively short time; but not all the papal teachings were abruptly terminated....The Reformation was a continuous, all-enveloping movement of action and reaction, accruing more glory by the addition of more light. It was a glorious spiritual awakening.<sup>20</sup>

Beginning with the Reformation, almost 500 years ago, we are seeing the evangelization of the world. Think about groups like Wycliffe Bible Translators, named after "the morning star of the Reformation," John Wycliffe, who was the first to translate the Bible into English from Latin.

His followers traveled around England preaching the Gospel. Decades after his death in 1384 the Roman Catholic Church dug up his remains and burned them to powder as a way to condemn his soul to eternal torment. Today the Bible is being translated into thousands of languages by men and women who work under his name.

---

<sup>20</sup>Gideon and Hilda Hagstotz, *Heroes of the Reformation* (Rapidan, VA: Hartland Publications, 1951),12-16.

Think about the myriads of mission organizations working in partnership with one another around the world. There are revivals in Latin America and East Asia. Positive reports from places like the former Soviet Union.

Some of the places that are being evangelized are steeped in Roman Catholicism and have been so for generations. I think of places like Brazil and the Philippines. Rome brought no light of the Gospel of Christ in these places; the people there are steeped in superstitions and dead religiosity. It is the truth of the Gospel that has brought new life to those formerly darkened nations. The Reformation may have been a rebellion against the state Church, but it wasn't a rebellion against God. It was fueled by His Spirit.

Is Rome the true church, the true church of history? Beckwith's use of quotes (I wish I had more time to unwind the statements of Evangelicals that he quotes in his favor). He quotes advocates of the New Perspective on Paul. Well, they are not Evangelical. I never did get to that did I? The New Perspective, a movement popularized by the Anglican churchman N.T. Wright. Advocates of the New Perspective claim that justification is by faith and works.

Guy Prentice Waters writes in his book on the subject:

The soteriological sympathies of the New Perspective on Paul (NPP), to the degree that these sympathies exists, are not with Protestantism, but with Roman Catholicism.<sup>21</sup>

Beckwith also quotes Allistair McGrath, unfairly; J.N.D. Kelly, also unfairly; and Carl Truman who is professor of theology at Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia. Interestingly Truman wrote a book recently in which he countered Beckwith's claims. Truman, also claims that his extensive study of the early church fathers has solidified his decision to remain in Geneva (that is, being an Evangelical rather than cross the Tiber to Rome).

Well, here is the biggest question of all (and the last one): What is the Gospel?

Does Rome possess a simple answer this question: *What must I do to be saved?*

I discovered that my series had made it out on the blogosphere— at least to one blog where zealous Evangelicals and equally zealous Roman Catholics were debating my character, veracity, and everything else. I don't have time for blogs, but I just saw some things that were just so badly misrepresented that I thought, "Well, I am going to go in there and see if I can clarify a few things." Probably surprised some people. And I just cut to the chase, I said, "Can one of my critics simply answer this question: *What is the Gospel?* Over 250 posts on this one page. Over 250. From my looking through it, I found two people, two Roman Catholics that attempted to answer the question. One cited Pope John Paul. The other who claimed to be a convert from Evangelicalism gave an almost Evangelical answer, which was not too surprising. *No one mentioned anything related to the Cross.*

---

<sup>21</sup>Waters, xi.

What is the Gospel? What do I need to do to be saved? The answer Paul and Silas gave in Acts 15:29 was very simple: "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved."

You see, there has to be regeneration.

Turn to John chapter 3 quickly. Here we have a man of the Pharisees, Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. He comes to Jesus by night and says, "Rabbi we know that you have come from God, as we know that no one can do these signs you do unless God is with him."

*Yeah you think you know?*

Jesus said to him: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the Kingdom of God." And Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born again when he is old, he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born can he?" And Jesus answered, "Truly I say to you, unless one is born of the water *even* the Spirit (it's a concessive *καὶ*) he cannot enter the Kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is born of the flesh, that which is born of the spirit is Spirit. So don't marvel, I say to you he must be born again."

Being born again is the same thing as being regenerate. It's the work of regeneration, it's a work of the Spirit. And Jesus said the wind blows where it wishes, and you don't hear the sound of it or know where it is going. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit. The Spirit works sovereignly as He will.

You know how Roman Catholics take this passage? This is baby baptism. Born again, being baptized as an infant into an institutional church. When Jesus says, "Are you not THE (definite article), teacher of Israel, you don't understand these things," He's pointing back to New Covenant promises in the Old Testament, such as those we find in Isaiah chapter 44 and Ezekiel as well. Born of the water, *even* the Spirit: this is the work of the Holy Spirit. The washing of regeneration by the Spirit (Titus 3:5). This is regeneration. There has to be regeneration. Religion without regeneration is just religion.

And it's interesting that the New Perspective on Paul and the Roman Catholic Church have no substantive doctrine of regeneration. There is an assent to certain facts, "Well you say certain creeds which are true and you try to live right and you hope for the best." There is no quickening of the heart. There is no being born again. That is evident throughout Beckwith's book. He never tells you what the Gospel is. He talks about the Person of Christ, infused grace and merit, but nothing that I can find, no concise statement about how sinners are saved.

It's simple. What is the Gospel?

Romans 5:1 Having been justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

It is what we see in Philippians chapter 3, verses 8 and 9c where Paul says:

More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith,

It's as simple as John 3:16:

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.

In John 14:6 Jesus declared that "no one comes to the Father but through me." I told a Roman Catholic apologist once that Rome would change John 14:6 to read, "No one comes to the Father except through Rome." He didn't like that. But it's true. You see it's all been about power, about keeping men's souls captive by saying, "We are the true church; salvation comes only by us and through our system." And if you doubt that look no further than Pope Benedict XVI who in my opinion is a breath of fresh air in contrast to the ecumenical side-stepping that characterized John Paul.

In that regard, Nicole Winfield of the Associated Press, on July 11, 2007 wrote:

Pope Benedict XVI reasserted the primacy of the Roman Catholic Church, approving a document released yesterday that says other Christian communities are either defective or not true churches and Catholicism provides the only true path to salvation.

Is that the Gospel? *Come to our church. You've got to be baptized in our church and do the sacrament thing. And get blessed when you die and partake of our Eucharist and only our priests have the magic wand to turn the thing literally from bread into the body and blood of Christ.*

Is that the Gospel? Does that fit, "What must I do to be saved?" with the answer being, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved."

Jesus Christ is our only hope. Not a church, or sacrifice, or works, or purgatory, or Mary. What more can I do but cast myself on the mercy of Jesus Christ, believing that He died for me that I could live? What more can I do? What more can any sinner do?

While in Wittenburg, Martin Luther, in the midst of his spiritual anguish, found a mentor in a man by the name of John Staupitz (I mentioned him twice before). John Staupitz, in his assignment to the school, saw Luther—this emaciated young monk who was suffering to no end—and he befriended him. Staupitz was a reformer in his own right. And upon Luther's complaint that in spite of his repeated promises to God to overcome his sin, sin was always the victor within him, Staupitz replied:

More than a thousand times have I sworn to our holy God to live piously, and I have never kept my vows. Now I swear no longer, for I know I cannot keep my solemn promises. If God will not be merciful towards me for the love of Christ and grant me a happy departure, when I must quit this world, I shall never, with the aid of all my vows and all my good works, stand before him. I must perish!

Staupitz understood it was all about Jesus Christ: the One slain for sinners.

Where do we go? We flee to the Cross! How do I have any hope of assurance of salvation? How do I know, maybe Rome is right, maybe I am wrong? All I do is I flee to the Cross! I'm with Staupitz: If God will not be merciful to me for the love of Christ and grant me a happy departure— for my love of Christ—my clinging to Him—I shall never with the aid of all my vows and my good works stand before him. I must perish. I cling to the Cross of Jesus Christ, my only hope.

I pray that is your only hope as well. God so loved the world He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. The wonderful truth of the Gospel.

*[Closing Prayer]*