

Ephesians 2 (8-10) – The Reason Why Rome Is Wrong

When discussing the errors of the Roman Catholic Church, it would take more than just a few messages to completely run through the catalogue. We could talk about the supposed infallibility of the Pope, and the authority of Tradition and the church Magisterium. We can mention the fact that the Pope accepts the titles and supposed positions of the Trinity as he is called the Holy Father, the Head of the Church, and the Vicar of Christ. We could talk about the doctrine of apostolic succession. Then there are the terrible Marian dogmas, including their belief in her Immaculate Conception, her Bodily Assumption, and her supposed roles as co-redeemer, and co-mediator, and her status as the Queen of Heaven. We have millions of Romans Catholics who are bound with shackles of superstition, saying the Rosary, praying to saints, putting faith in Marian apparitions, and the scapulars, relics, other superstitions. We have the continuing and blasphemous sacrifice of Christ in the Mass. We see the errors of both sacerdotalism and sacramentalism. And of course we could speak of the fear that is fostered by the Church; its people never have any sense of assurance, and instead they have the Christ denying doctrine of Purgatory, where people are purified by paying for their own sins, and the demonic idea of indulgences and the damnable notion of the Treasury of Merit.

But we are not going to take the time to confront all of these today. Instead we are going to focus on the root of the problems. I believe that all of these errors flow from one main fountain, one main problem, and that there is one main reason why Rome is wrong. It is because Rome gets the Gospel itself wrong. When you get the Gospel wrong in the way that Rome does, it is no wonder that all of these other errors have sprung up like a satanic wellspring.

In addressing that, the question we need to answer is how is a person made right with God? To answer that question, we can go many places in Scripture (cf. Romans 3:20-24, 28, 4:2-8, 5:1 / Galatians 2:16, 3:11, 24). We are justified by faith. The problem is that Protestants and the Roman Catholic Church mean very different things when they talk about being “justified”. To the RCC, justification is something you attain, while to the Protestant, justification is a free gift.

Now let’s take a look at Ephesians 2:8-10. In the broadest biblical sense of the word, grace refers to God’s unmerited favor. We do not deserve it and cannot earn it. We are not entitled to it and we do not have a right to it. This passage teaches us four basic things, and they will clearly show us the reason why Rome is wrong.

- Salvation is by grace
- Salvation is through faith
- Salvation is never the result *of* good works
- Salvation will always result *in* good works

Salvation is by grace – In stating that, we must have a firm understanding of what being “saved by grace” means. To a Roman Catholic, “saved by grace” does not mean “justified by faith alone”. Certainly, the Roman Catholic Church talks of grace and being saved by the merits of Christ alone. However, they teach that “grace” is an infused power, which is received by the taking of the sacraments, administered by a priest, and that this is God helping you live the life you need in order to merit heaven.

The RCC says that you can fall in and out of justification, and you may have to do “penance”, and other works of merit. At death, when you don’t measure up, then you are sent to Purgatory, where you will be purified, making satisfaction for your own sins. If you are fortunate enough, someone on earth gets you an indulgence, and then you can receive from the Treasury of Merit of the Church, which includes not only the good deeds of Christ, but also of Mary and the saints, and their “extra righteousness” can help you attain the perfections you need to enter heaven.

This Roman Catholic conception is not the New Testament teaching on saving grace. First of all, there are the errors of both sacerdotalism (power of the priesthood) and sacramentalism (power of the rituals). Even if we were to ignore those errors, this false notion of “grace” is still at best a horribly wrong confusion of justification (being declared righteous) and sanctification (living righteously). This text excludes our works as meritorious. Works are the fruit, but not the root of justification, as we see in Ephesians 2:10.

The Greek word for “justified” means to regard as righteous, not to make righteous. God is declaring us just in His sight because of the imputation (the crediting) of the righteousness of Christ to our account. However, the RCC says that to justify means to *make* righteous rather than to *declare* righteous. This is the great danger, the teaching that the *imparted* righteousness whereby we can indeed do good works is the grounds of our justification, instead of the *imputed* righteousness of Christ to our account.

2 Corinthians 5:21 – Jesus was without sin, but sin was credited to His account as if He had personally committed it, and then God punished Him, though the fact is He never committed any of it. God treated Him as if He was guilty but He wasn’t. You were guilty, but God poured His wrath on the innocent Christ who was in our place as our substitute (Isaiah 53:10 / cf. Acts 8:32 / Isaiah 53:6-7 / John 1:29). God accredits the righteousness of Christ to our account. God rewards us as if we are the righteous, not that we are actually righteous. We see imputed righteousness also in Luke 22:37 (what was written about ME) where Jesus connects Isaiah 53 (see vs.11) with Himself (cf. Jeremiah 23:6). On the cross, God treated Jesus as if He had lived your life, so that God could treat you as if you had lived His. That is how someone is made right with God, and this is received by faith in Christ and His work alone, not as mediated by the priesthood through the sacraments (cf. 1 Timothy 2:5).

Salvation is through faith – salvation is all by God’s grace, and salvation comes into an individual’s life through the instrumentality of faith. Faith is a trusting response, taking God at His Word. Think of it like water flowing through a hose. The hose does not quench your thirst; the water does. But the hose brings water to the place you can benefit from it.

Salvation is through faith in the worth and work of Christ alone, not a faith “in Christ” as mediated through the sacraments or acts of obedience. Salvation is by God’s grace, and it is received through our own faith, but Paul wants to make sure that we understand that even the faith to believe is the gift of God. The faith *is not your own doing*.

How does a person get right with God? By grace through faith; but being justified by faith is not attained through our faithful acts; it is freely given by having faith in the acts of Christ.

Salvation is never the result of good works – Christianity is the one worldview that is not works based. All other religions provide a set of rules that must be followed if an adherent wants to be saved. Every false system of faith is constructed around the righteousness that can be achieved by each individual, rather than the righteousness that is ascribed by God. Only true Christianity contains the concept of unmerited favor that we know as “grace”. Even those who deny the existence of God are operating within a work-based worldview; their value is directly related to what we can achieve, accomplish or perform.

The New Testament refers to the Law (Romans 2:12-27, 3:19,21,31, 4:13-16, 5:13,20, etc. / Galatians 2:19,21) but also “the works of the law” (Romans 3:20,28 / Galatians 2:16, 3:2,5,10), or “a law of works” (Romans 3:27), or just “works” (Romans 4:2,4,6, 9:11,32, 11:6 / Ephesians 2:9 / 2 Timothy 1:9). These terms can be used to refer to application. This means not only the Mosaic Law, but any law or works are not the source of being set right with God.

Here in Ephesians 2, “works” is not “works of the Mosaic Law” but human effort in general. Paul’s emphasis is that the entire process of salvation, from eternity past to our eternal state, including our faith, and including the works we are born again to do, are all initiated by God. We are responsible to believe, but we can and will by God’s plan. We are responsible for obedience and effort, as participants in our progressive sanctification. But we are born again of God so that we will indeed make progress, and we will live out God’s plan and purpose to His glory. It is not of works, but we are His workmanship (cf. Galatians 6:14).

How does a person get right with God? The Bible says that salvation is by grace through faith, and not a result of works, but the RCC says that your meritorious works attain and maintain your justification. The difference is damning.

Salvation will always result in good works – The Protestant Reformers had a saying: faith alone justifies, but not the faith which is alone! Luther said, “It’s not against works that we contend; it’s against *trust* in works that we contend.” Salvation is not *by* works but *for* works.

Apart from the work of the Spirit of God none of our good works would have ever gotten done, but because of the Spirit, the pattern of our life will include the devotion to and demonstration of good works (cf. Philippians 2:12-13). And these works are not the simple taking of the sacraments of the church. What are these good works? Obviously this would include living a godly life, and dying to self (Mark 8:35 / John 12:26 / 1 Peter 4:1-12). Furthermore, I believe that we can classify good works into the three basic categories of living for Christ (Philippians 1:21 / Galatians 2:20), winning others to Christ (1 Corinthians 9:19-27 / James 5:19-20 / Proverbs 11:30 / Luke 5:10), and edifying our brothers and sisters in Christ (Ephesians 5:18-21 / Romans 15:1-6). But these works don’t save you, they happen because we are saved. We won’t do things perfectly but we will do things purposefully.

Have you ever wondered why Israel never realized they were wrong? They were doing wrong, but they didn’t think that they were doing wrong. They deceived themselves into believing they were still following God because they still circumcised their sons, and the priests were still making sacrifices. After all, isn’t that what God wanted? God was being appeased, wasn’t He? To them, the essence of the covenant was being fulfilled, so certainly God was pleased.

We do the same things in essence and we often don't realize it. The Roman Catholic Church ran off the rails by focusing on rituals and man-made contrivances that had the appearance of holiness but which only distracted people from the truth of how they should be living for Christ.

So we are justified by faith, and not by works. Of course, people will point to James 2:24 and say that justification is not by faith alone. But is James contradicting what Paul says about justification? No, he isn't. When Paul talks about being justified by faith, he is talking about being justified in the sight of God, we are declared righteous *based* on our faith in the work of Christ. When James talks about being justified by works, he is talking about being justified in the sight of men, we are demonstrating righteousness *because* of our faith in the work of Christ.

- Paul is addressing legalism. James is addressing lifelessness.
- Paul is arguing against works as a *condition* of salvation. James is arguing for works as a *consequence* of salvation.
- Paul is saying that works are not a *requirement* for salvation. James is saying that works are the *result* of salvation.
- Do you need works in order to be saved? No. Do you accomplish works because you are saved? Yes.
- Do our works deserve, earn, or merit salvation? No. Do our works demonstrate, evidence, and manifest salvation? Yes.

While faith and works are distinguished from one another, they are never divorced from one another. Salvation is not *by* works but *for* works. A new birth means a new life. Works do not *get* you saved, and works do not *keep* you saved, but works are the evidence that you *are* saved. James and Paul are not contradictory, they are complementary.

The question is how is a person made right with God? The RCC says that justification is not by faith alone, and it is not completed in this life. The RCC affirms that “the sacraments of the New Covenant are *necessary for salvation*.” They declare that “Justification is not only the remission of sins, but also the sanctification and renewal of the interior man.”

But the heart of the Gospel is that justification is by faith alone, and it means that we are declared righteous based on the saving work of Christ, and that our salvation rests upon the fact that we are regarded as righteous, not that we are made righteous. We will do works that glorify God, but that is sanctification, not justification. The difference is the difference between a saving faith that relies on an external atonement for sin and a misplaced faith that relies in an internal abatement of sin. We cannot equate our good works and godly living with our righteous standing before God. It is not the righteousness He gives *to* us, but that righteousness He is *for* us that saves.

We come to these great saving truths, not through the magisterium, and not through tradition, but through Scripture alone. The Latin phrase “*sola scriptura*” was born out of the Reformation, and we can sum up saving grace by the use of the other four “*solas*” of the Reformation. Salvation is by grace alone (*sola gratia*), through faith alone (*sola fide*), in Christ alone (*solo Christo*), to the glory of God alone (*solus deo Gloria*). In contrast, and in conclusion, the RCC does not teach a Gospel that is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, to the glory of God alone, and that is the reason why Rome is wrong.