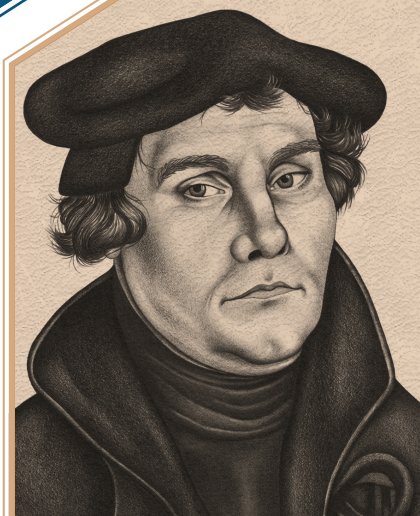
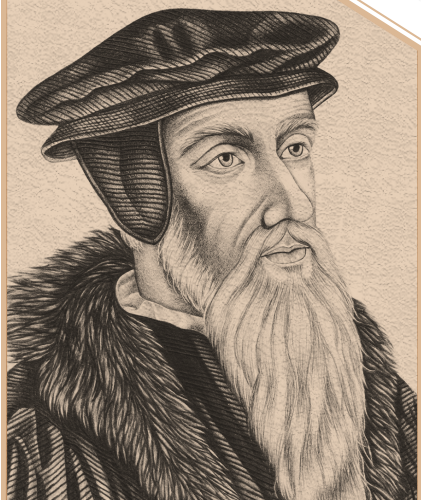


Why We're **Protestant**



by Daniel Hyde



Why We're Protestant

A Reformation 500 Declaration

Daniel R. Hyde



A L L I A N C E[®]
OF CONFESSING EVANGELICALS

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

You know the story. On the Eve of All Saints' Day, October 31, 1517, Martin Luther (1483–1546) walked up to Wittenberg University's bulletin board—the door of the Schlosskirche, the Castle Church—and nailed his *Ninety-Five Theses*. What started out as a desire for academic debate on the practice of “indulgences,” the offering and selling of pardon from sin, ended in what we call the Reformation.¹

One of the end results were statements like this: “There is no other head of the Church but the Lord Jesus Christ. Nor can the Pope of Rome, in any sense, be head thereof; but is that Antichrist, that man of sin, and son of perdition, that exalts himself, in the Church, against Christ and all that is called God.” These words of chapter 25.6 of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* are embarrassing to most Protestants today. In fact, modern American Presbyterian denominations that affirm the *Westminster Confession* as their statement of faith have deleted the entire clause beginning with “but is that Antichrist.”

To call the Pope “Antichrist,” though, was the universal consensus of Protestant churches whether Reformed or Lutheran. In 1537 Martin Luther wrote in *The Smalcald Articles*, the Pope “is the true and end-times Antichrist, who has raised himself over and set himself against Christ, because the Pope will not let Christians be saved without his authority” (2.4.10). In the same year Phillip Melancthon (1497–1560) wrote, “...the marks of the Antichrist clearly fit the reign of the pope and his minions” (39).

But more than being a *Protestant* distinctive, in speaking this way our Lutheran and Reformed Protestant forefathers evidenced themselves to be truly catholic by continuing a long medieval critique of the Papacy. Stretching all the way back to a 950 A.D. letter by the West Frankish monk, Abbot Adso of Montier-en-Der (920–992), which in turn was based on eastern sources, Western Christianity had an exegetical tradition of expecting a future antichrist whose

life and works would mimic Jesus' works. Based on 2 Thessalonians 2, he would perform miracles, convert kings, and seek to convert the nations; but when unsuccessful, he would in turn persecute the faithful until the return of Christ when he would be killed.² This would later be adapted by Joachim of Fiore (1135–1202), who viewed his time as a period of great spiritual decay culminating in the Antichrist. Based on the seven-headed dragon of Revelation 12, Joachim believed these "heads" were persecuting kings with the sixth being the Muslim Saladin, who had recently recaptured Jerusalem in 1187, and the seventh being a false pope.

On the heels of Joachim came Francis of Assisi (1186–1226) and his followers who sought to live a life like Jesus and his apostles without possessions. This simple life was a direct rebuke to the Pope's lavish lifestyle. One of Francis' successors, Ubertino of Casale (1259–1329), critiqued in writing Pope Boniface VIII (1230–1303/Pope: Dec. 24 1294–Oct. 11 1303) calling him "not only the mystic Antichrist but the beast arising out of the sea, whose seven heads represented the seven deadly sins, while his ten horns were his infringements of the Ten Commandments."³ When the later Pope John XXII (1244–1334/Pope: Aug. 7 1316–Dec. 4, 1334) declared the Franciscan belief in apostolic poverty heretical, leading to arrests, imprisonments, and executions, he was called the "Abomination of Desolation" from Daniel 9/Matthew 24:3.

By the fourteenth century Popes were kings, complete with lands, taxes, and their own armies to fight against rivals to their throne. And from 1378–1417 the Great Schism of the West led to there being three rival Popes at the same time. In this era, men like John Wycliffe (1320s–1384) and Jan Hus (1369–1415) arose, condemning the Papacy as Antichrist in contrast to Jesus Christ himself.

Throughout the ages, God-fearing men have spoken the truth to power, criticizing Popes and the Papacy as an institution. To protest doctrinal and moral error is a Christian virtue. But it's not enough to protest what is wrong and what you don't believe. We need to know what we believe and why we believe it. Jesus, after all, commissioned His apostles to go into the world to make disciples, to teach, and to

baptize (Matt. 28:18–20).

We've passed the five hundredth anniversary of the Protestant Reformation; I want to present a positive vision of *why we're Protestant*, not merely *why we're not "Catholic."* I do so with two caveats. First, in order to positively declare what we believe I have to first explain negatively what we don't believe. This will be brief in each chapter, but bear with me. Second, this small book finds its origin in a series of sermons I preached to my congregation in October 2017. This means what follows is not comprehensive nor an academic piece. My purpose is to give a popular declaration of what it means to be Protestant.⁴

We should not simply remember and celebrate the past; we must also recommit ourselves to who we are and what we are praying for: the Lord's reviving grace in His continual work during the next five hundred years. We do this in the spirit of Martin Luther before he faced the Diet of Worms on April 18, 1521:

Almighty and eternal God, what a strange cause this is! How it loosens peoples' tongues! How small and insignificant is their trust in you! How weak and tender is the flesh, and how powerful and busy is the devil, with the help of his apostles and the worldly wise! How quickly the world withdraws help, does an about-face, pursues the easy way, and speeds on the broad road to hell where the godless belong. It sees only what is brilliant and powerful, great, mighty, and respected! If I should turn my eyes to it, I would be done for.

Oh God, Oh God, Oh my God, Oh my God, stand by me against all the wisdom and reason of the world. Do it. You alone must do it. It is not really my concern; it is yours. Alone I have nothing to do with these great lords of the world. I want good and quiet days, undisturbed. But it is your cause; it is righteous and eternal. Stand by me. Oh true and eternal God. I do not rely on human counsel, for it would be in vain. All that is carnal and tastes carnal falters.

O God, O God, do you not hear me, my God? Are you dead? No, you cannot die; you are only hiding. Have you called me to this place? I ask you so that I may be sure. God, grant it! Never in my life had I thought to oppose such great rulers and never had I set out to do it.

O God, stand by me in the name of your dear Son Jesus Christ who shall be my Protector and Defender, even my mighty Fortress, through the power and help of your Holy Spirit.

Lord, where are you? Come, come, I am ready like a patient lamb to lay down my life for this cause. It is your cause and it is righteous. I will not separate myself from you forever. Be it resolved in your name that the world cannot force me to act against my conscience, even if I had still more devils, and if my body which is first of all your creation should have to perish. So your Word and Spirit come to my rescue even if only for the body. And my soul is yours. It belongs to you, and may it remain with you forever. Amen. So help me. Amen.⁵

Reformation Day, October 31, 2017

WE'RE REFORMED CATHOLICS

To say we're Protestant is to say we're catholic—we're just not Roman Catholic. We're Reformed Catholics. What's the difference? The English theologian, William Perkins (1558–1602), said a "Reformed Catholic" is a person who believes the same fundamental articles of universal Christianity that even the Roman Catholic Church professes to believe but without all the errors that have corrupted them.⁶ Where I live in Southern California, many cities have piers that go out into the ocean for people to walk on. Holding the pier up are numerous wood pylons. When these are first dug down into the seabed, they are pristine. Over time they accumulate barnacles. And if you were to scrape off the barnacle you'd see that the original wood was still there. Our forefathers viewed the church of Jesus Christ in the same way. To be a Christian was to be a "catholic," which means part of the universal Christian Church. But over the course of history the Roman branch of the universal catholic Church claimed to be *the* Church outside of which there was no salvation. Do you see the oxymoron here? A local church—Rome—claimed to be the catholic or universal Church!⁷ *Reformed* Catholicism is not a new branch of Christianity, but a return to the true catholic Church through the means of its renewal.

Rome's Doctrine of Catholicity

"But," our Roman Catholic friends say, "your church started just five hundred years ago by men. Ours was founded two thousand years ago by Christ." Here's what Martin Luther said to that:

The first thing I ask is that people should not make use of my name, and should not call themselves Lutherans, but Christians. What is Luther? The teaching is not mine. Nor was I crucified for anyone. St. Paul,

in 1 Corinthians 3, would not tolerate Christians calling themselves Paul's or Peter's, but only Christians. How did I, poor stinking bag of maggots that I am, come to the point where people call the children of Christ by my evil name? Not so, dear friends, let us do away with party names, and be called Christians, for it is his teaching that we have.

We're Protestants because we're *Reformed* Catholics, which is to say we're Christians. And as Christians, we believe what all of God's people have believed since the dawn of human history. But Rome makes this claim, too. In its 1566 catechism, the Roman Catholic Council of Trent contrasted itself with "human republics" and "the conventicles of heretics"—meaning Protestant assemblies—because they are confined to one place, while

...the Church is not circumscribed within the limits of one kingdom only, nor is she confined to one class of men; but embraces in the bosom of love all mankind, whether they be barbarians or Scythians, or slaves or freemen, or males or females.

And not only did it claim it was catholic in this geographical sense but also in a chronological sense as within this church "belong all the faithful who have existed from Adam to this very day, or who shall exist, professing the true faith, as long as the world shall last."⁸ We make these claims, too. So let's test who is truly catholic.

Our Faith is That of Our First Parents

While Rome claims to believe what Adam believed, we Protestants say *our faith is that of our first parents*. The Lord God planted a garden in the Paradise land of Eden (Gen. 2:8). But Paradise was lost. Instead of guarding its sanctity (Gen. 2:15), Adam allowed the insidious serpent to enter. Satan twisted God's Word in the ears of Eve. She then ate of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil of which God forbade them to eat. She then gave it to Adam—standing right there the whole time!—who ate as well. Paradise was lost by sin.

Nevertheless, when the Lord God entered the garden to execute His judgment as He had threatened (Gen. 2:17), He also spoke of word

of justification. Even as the gavel of His law came hammering down upon the serpent, He spoke a word of Gospel in the famous words of Genesis 3:15: "I will put enmity (or, "hostility;" CSB) between you and the woman, and between your offspring (or, "seed;" NASB) and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." This is the "mother promise;" this is the "first gospel." Notice how this enmity or hostility between the two offspring or seeds would begin immediately but have a future resolution. And notice how that future resolution would be Eve's seed bruising the head, not of the serpent's seed, but of the serpent or Satan himself.

The way that the serpent's head would be bruised is the bruising of the heel of Eve's offspring. Hence this mother promise is of Eve's offspring's suffering and glory, tragedy and triumph, dying and destroying. Who is this "offspring?" Peter said the ancient prophets "search and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories" (1 Peter 1:10–11). Why did Peter use that language? Because Jesus spoke of His sufferings and glories both before (Luke 24:7) and after His resurrection (Luke 24:26).

Notice that while this promise would have a future resolution it had present application and signification. After the Lord God speaks, Adam proclaims that "his wife's name [was] Eve, because she was the mother of all living" (Gen. 3:20). By faith alone Adam expressed his application of the Gospel promise that through Eve would come One to crush the serpent. Then the Lord God confirmed Adam's faith with a sacramental sign of the Gospel: "And the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them" (Gen. 3:21). Naked Adam and naked Eve stand spiritually naked and ashamed so the Lord not only covers their bodies but their sin and shame! How? Through sacrifice; through substitution; through satisfaction. Is not all this grace alone in providing Christ alone to be received by faith alone? Thus Heinrich Bullinger (1508–1575) said, "The Christian Faith...has endured since the beginning of the world."⁹ All the elements of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ are found in the Garden: grace alone, Christ alone, faith alone.

Our Faith Is That of the Patriarchs

This faith of our first parents that God alone saved by His gracious provision of a substitute in their place that they simply received by faith was then passed down. Continuing through the history of redemption, then, we see that *our faith is that of the patriarchs as well*. Before the giving of the Law at Mount Sinai, Genesis 4 says Abel offered to God animal sacrifice; Hebrews 11 explains the significance of this offering was that he offered it by faith alone. Later, Genesis 6–9 chronicles the story of Noah, whom Hebrews 11, again, says built an ark by faith alone to save his family.

Moving from those antediluvian patriarchs to the post-diluvian, we come to a man named Abram in Genesis 12. He was raised in an idol-worshiping family (Joshua 24:2), but the Lord in His grace alone called him out to make a new nation that would bless all the nations of the earth. Later, in Genesis 15, the Lord promised him a son in his old age. Then what do we read? "And he believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness" (Genesis 15:7). Whom did he believe? The Lord alone. Who is that Lord? Jesus said in John 8:56, "Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad." Christ alone. He did nothing to cooperate, earn, or merit this calling of God; he believed the Lord by faith alone and was justified through it! Paul's whole argument in Romans 3–4 is that Abraham was not justified by works but by faith! Therefore he is "the father of all who believe" (Romans 4:11). I could go on about Abraham being promised a seed (singular) not seeds (plural) who is Jesus (Galatians 3:16); how that promise was passed down from Isaac to Jacob, who wrestled with God and saw a ladder coming down from heaven (Genesis 32:22–32), which Jesus said was Him in John 1:51; and eventually Jacob's son, Judah, was the family line from which came King Jesus (Genesis 49:10).

So before the giving of the Law the faith of the patriarchs was trusting by faith alone in the Lord's grace alone. And this was the same method of salvation *under the Law* as this was Israel's same faith. But why did God give Israel all His moral, ceremonial, and civil laws, then? Galatians 3:24 says the law was like a tutor to lead sinners by the

hand everyday to school so that they would learn to put their trust in Jesus Christ. Again, our Protestant faith was the same as our first parents and the patriarchs.

Our Faith Is That of the Prophets

What if I told you that you were the heir of an ancient kingdom in the heart of Africa? That would be a stupendous claim! What if I then showed you your family tree, tracing it back, and then I showed you pictures and documents chronicling this kingdom and how it all led to you? You'd be blown away! The New Testament makes a stupendous claim about Jesus. But it's not make-believe for illustration only. He is traced from the faith of our first parents, through the patriarchs before the law and under the law, then through the ancient prophets who preached of a Savior to come (Romans 1:2). Hebrews 1:1–2 says it like this: "Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son." *Thus our faith is that of the prophets.*

Did the prophets proclaim to wicked and wayward Israel before their exile, in their exile, and even after their exile that salvation was coming to all who cooperated with God's grace by their works in this life? Did they threaten God's people with the punishment of suffering millions of years in purgatory? Did they proclaim their chaotic lives would all be better one day because a Pope in Rome was coming to set the affairs of God's people in order? Clearly not. To them God revealed that the Savior Himself was coming! They preached Christ alone! To David the Lord made a promise that he would have a son to sit on his throne forever (2 Samuel 7). The prophet Micah was told that this king would be born in the insignificant city of Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). The prophet Isaiah was told the coming Savior would be born of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14). David, Isaiah, and Daniel, among others, preached that this promised anointed One would suffer, die by crucifixion (Psalms 22; Isaiah 53; Daniel 9), yet be raised again to the joy of new life (Psalms 22; Isa. 55). Jesus Christ alone is Christianity!

Conclusion

What is the true catholic Christian faith? It's that the Creator God alone in His grace alone has provided a Savior from sin for rebels like Adam and Eve; and the Savior alone has accomplished all that is necessary for sinners like you and me to stand acceptable before a Holy God; and apart from any works we can attempt to do or even think we have done, this Savior is received by faith alone. That's the most ancient Gospel! That's the most catholic faith! We believe it!

This means that the rediscovery of this message was not an innovation or restoration of the holy catholic Church that had been erased but a purification of the Church that had been effaced. We are Reformed Catholics. Rome objects that our faith is "new" and "novel." John Calvin (1509–1564) once answered this by saying, "I do not at all doubt that it is new to them, since to them both Christ Himself and His Gospel are new."¹⁰

The ancient theologian, Vincent of Lérins (d. 445), said to be catholic was to believe what everyone, at all times, everywhere have believed. Our faith is the faith of Adam. I'm not sure how much further back you can go than that! I'm not sure how much more ancient and catholic you can get.¹¹

We're *Reformed* Catholics.

WE'RE FOUNDED ON SCRIPTURE

Raising kids in their early years, you find yourself as a parent teaching very negatively: "Don't do that, don't touch this, we don't believe that." But then at a certain point you realize you have to start positively training them for life: "Here's how to mow a lawn, let me show you how to forgive, because God loves us we are to love every neighbor as ourselves." It's this positive vision of why we're Protestant that we continue here with a second theme: what's the church's foundation?

Foundations are absolutely necessary. Here in Southern California we live under the constant threat of "the big one"—the earthquake that's going to give my friends in Yuma, Arizona beachfront property! Elsewhere there are floods and hurricanes. These "natural disasters" or better "acts of God" remind us that every house needs a foundation to give it stability, so that whatever comes against it you and your family will be protected. The question to consider spiritually, then, is this: "What is the foundation upon which Jesus wants His Church built?"

Rome's Foundation: Scripture and Tradition

One of the ways the Roman Catholic Church's leadership responded to the Protestant Reformation was by calling a church council. I mentioned the Council of Trent in the previous chapter, which met from 1545–1563. Against the Reformation's doctrine that God has spoken in His Word and that all traditions must be judged by the written Scriptures, Rome said it "receives and venerates with an equal affection of piety and reverence" the Old and New Testaments *and* traditions of the Church. Did you hear that? *Equal affection*. Their conclusion was if anyone "knowingly and deliberately contemn[s] the

traditions...let him be anathema."¹² That means eternally accursed by God. Afterwards the council's teachings were summarized into a creed in which Pope Pius IV (1499–1565/Pope: Dec. 25 1559–Dec. 9 1565) professed: "I do, at this present, freely profess and truly hold this true Catholic faith, without which no one can be saved." Closer to our time at the Second Vatican Council in 1965, Pope Paul VI (1897–1978/Pope: June 21 1963–Aug 6 1978) decreed this meant "it is not from Sacred Scripture alone that the Church draws her certainty."¹³ Because of this the Pope John Paul II's (1920–2005/Pope: Oct 16 1978–Apr 2 2005) recent Catechism of the Catholic Church says the Scriptures and tradition can only be authoritatively interpreted by the Church's bishops who are in obedience to the Pope.¹⁴

So what is Rome's foundation? It sounds to us like there are two sources: Scripture plus tradition. Rome will say, though, that it's really one source—the revelation of God. Practically, though, Rome's foundation is the Pope and those others who surround him. Why do I say this? Because Rome says they alone can speak with authority to the people of God what Scripture and tradition says.

Our Foundation of Scripture

There are a number of ways we can approach our foundation, but I want to narrow it down. To do that, we need to look at the example of 1 Corinthians 3–4.

Chapters 1–2 explain why Paul wrote this letter: the big struggle in the Corinthian congregation was its internal division between various factions that were following those they deemed "celebrity pastors," to use a term in vogue today (1:10–17). But it wasn't Cephas, Apollos, Paul, or Jesus that was the problem; it was those who fractured the Church this way. Because Paul was onto their agenda, he knew the remedy was to point away from himself and to preach Christ alone (1:18–2:16). To preach Christ meant preaching the cross—foolishness to the world but the wisdom of God; weakness to the world, but the power of God. Paul summarized this by saying he did not come with lofty speech or human wisdom but in demonstration

of the Spirit and power so *that*—and here's the key—"your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God" (2:5). To the mature Paul, imparted wisdom that came from the Spirit and was spiritually discerned by the Spirit-filled (2:6–16).

But as we come to chapter 3, Paul says the Corinthians were not mature, spiritual people, but infants in the flesh who had to drink milk and couldn't eat meat (3:1–2). So he asks them, "What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each" (3:5). Servants. Keep that word before you as it keeps coming up in this passage. Paul then said of the Corinthians' favorite pastors: "One plants, one waters, but God gives the growth" (3:6–7). The planter or waterer is nothing but a mere servant.

Paul then switches metaphors and speaks of a foundation and building. The one foundation is Jesus Christ (3:11) and any minister who builds must build on that already existing foundation (3:10–11). That's the test whether you are called a Pope or pastor. Recently there was a celebrity pastor whom many had pointed out was a manipulative narcissist, yet who was fond of saying, "It's all about Jesus," but it was obviously it was about him. It came out he had several affairs and the whole empire came crashing down on him. A while back I saw he had a new website. There were several posts: one from him describing his past in the passive voice as if everything came crashing on him due to no fault of his own, another by his new pastor saying he deserves grace, and the kicker—one by a devotee with this line: "The world needs (name)." The world doesn't need us, brothers and sisters. *It needs Jesus Christ!*

Back to Corinthians: in the end what a minister has built will be exposed and judged (3:12–15). This verse is often ripped from its context and applied to salvation; however, Paul is not talking about salvation, but the rewards for servants of the Word. In the end, God will judge Rome's and the Reformation's buildings! And here's the warning: if one destroys God's temple, God will destroy him (3:17).

That brings us to chapter 4: "This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God" (4:1). Notice verse 6: "I have applied all these things to myself and Apollos

for your benefit, brothers, *that you may learn by us not to go beyond what is written*, that none of you may be puffed up in favor of one against another" (4:6). What's he saying? It's not about opinions, pontifications or traditions of men, but about service to Christ, who has revealed Himself His Word. We are servants and stewards of "what is written" not merely by Paul but by all that has been written by Old Testament prophets and New Testament apostles. He's saying, "Don't think more highly of the mere men you idolize than Scripture does."

What Paul says here is consistent with *the evidence of all Scripture*. How are our souls saved? "Faith comes by hearing the word of Christ" (Romans 10:17). And as Peter said to Jesus, "You have the words of everlasting life" (John 6:68). How are our souls satisfied? Man does not live by bread alone but by every word of the Lord as the bread of our souls (Matthew 4:4). How are our souls sanctified? Jesus prayed to the Father: "Sanctify them by your word. Your word is truth" (John 17:17). John Chrysostom said ignorance of Scripture was the cause of all evils, including "negligent lives." To not have the light of the Word in your life means "walking in the worst darkness."¹⁵ This is why Jesus says the wise builder is the one that builds upon the solid rock of His Word, and not the shifting sands of men's traditions (Matthew 7:24).

Building on This Foundation

Jesus' saying brings us back to Paul's metaphor: true ministers and ministries are built on the one foundation that is Jesus Christ Himself as He is revealed in His Word. And beyond what is written, we must not, we cannot, and we will not go! Because the Word of God says of itself that it saves, satisfies, and sanctifies, we are Protestant, we are Reformed Catholics, we are Christians. This is not nostalgia; we must continue on, building upon Jesus Christ's Word. How?

First, if all this is true, then *crave the Word*. John Chrysostom was called "Chrysostom," which means "golden tongue," because he was such an orator. He once said people came to hear him, "they do not lay to heart, they do not consider that they are entering the

presence of God, that it is He who addresses them."¹⁶ We should not come craving a mere catechism, or the recovery of tradition, or what my favorite pastor has to say—we should crave the Word!

Second, if all this is true, then *catechize with the Word*. We have amazing Reformation-era catechisms, brothers and sisters. But they're amazing not only because they are derived from the truth of Scripture, but they also take us back to Scripture with every question and with every answer. That's the true test of any writing. It needs to get us into Scripture so that we can get Scripture into us. Again Chrysostom said,

Let us make [children] from the earliest age apply themselves to the reading of the Scriptures...Study not to make him an orator, but train him up to be a [Christian] philosopher...all the rhetoric in the world will be of no advantage...These gain a man the kingdom...Whet not his tongue but cleanse his soul.¹⁷

Third, if all this is true, then *converse around the Word*. Let's not come craving the Word of the Lord and catechizing our children with the Word, only to fill our everyday conversation with the things of the world. One final quote from Chrysostom:

Is it not strange that those who sit in the marketplace tell the names, and races, and cities and talents of charioteers and dancers, even accurately state the good and bad qualities of horses, while those who assemble in [the church] understand nothing of what is taking place here and even are ignorant of the number of the [sacred] Books?¹⁸

Nothing has changed since the fourth century (American sinners: we love our sports!). But take my exhortation and challenge to heart. Talk about the Word today and every day of your life!

Why are we Protestant? Because our foundation is the Word that God has spoken, not the words men have spoken about the Word. Augustine said the so-called church fathers themselves were aware that they needed to be corrected because they were mere men:

Neither weigh we the writings of all men, be they ever so worthy and catholic, as we weigh the canonical scriptures; but that, saving the reverence that is due unto them, we may mislike and refuse somewhat

in their writings, if we find that they have thought otherwise than the truth may bear. Such am I in the writings of others, and such would I wish others to be in mine.¹⁹

Even the greatest of men in the history of the church are just that—men. Their words cannot be the infallible foundation that is needed when spiritual storms attack the Church. Only God can provide this foundation and He has done so in His revealed Word written.

We're founded on Scripture.

WE'RE SAVED BY JESUS ALONE

To be Protestant is to be a Reformed Catholic whose faith, life, and Church are founded on the Word of God. But these are more historically oriented, theological claims. What about when it gets personal? When you're at a birthday party and your Roman Catholic family members are there, can you answer their questions and explain to them why you believe you are saved? Or at your kids' soccer game, when a parent says they're Roman Catholic and you tell them you're Protestant, "What do you believe about salvation?" It's not good enough to say, "My pastor knows." You need to know what you believe and why!

This brings us to the third theme to consider in terms of why we're Protestant: "Who saves you?"

Rome's Confused Confession: Jesus + Mary

The context of our protest is the confused confession of Rome. Rome confesses, in agreement with Scripture, that Mary's son would be called Jesus because He saves His people from their sins (Matthew 1:21) and that, in the words of the Nicene Creed, He is the Son of God "who for us and for our salvation came down from heaven." Jesus is the Savior.

Yet, when the Roman Catholic leaders responded to the Reformation at the Council of Trent, they said some things that were quite different. For example, when the Catechism of Trent spoke of giving thanks in prayer it added this: "...the Church of God has justly added prayers also to, and an invocation of, the most holy Mother of God." This is a title we accept; it was historically used at the Council of Chalcedon (451) to say more about Mary's son than Mary, as her Son

was not merely human but also divine. The Catechism continued: "by which we mightily devoutly and suppliantly fly to her, that **by her intercession she may conciliate God to us sinners, and obtain for us those blessings which we stand in need of in this life, and in the life to come.**" The message is clear: Mary does the things Jesus does: intercede, reconcile sinners, and obtain the blessings of salvation!

Because we are "exiled children of Eve, who dwell in this vale of tears, we ought, therefore, **earnestly to beseech the Mother of mercy, and the Advocate of the faithful people**, to pray for us sinners." Again, Mary is called what God is called, who is the "Father of mercy" (1 Peter 1:3), and what Jesus is called, "Advocate" (1 John 2:1). Why did the Catechism of Trent say Mary should be invoked in prayer? "To implore by this prayer aid and assistance from her whose **exalted merits with God**, and whose earnest desire to assist mankind [by her prayers], it were impious and wicked for anyone to doubt."²⁰ In other words, Mary is said to have more merit than she needed, which in fact we need to stand reconciled to God.

Rome confesses that Jesus is the Savior, but then goes on to say Mary is intercessor, reconciler, Mother of mercy, advocate, and meritorious. This confusion led to the Second Vatican Council in 1965, when Pope Paul VI said Mary "cooperated by her obedience, faith, hope and burning charity in the work of the Saviour in giving back supernatural life to souls." After she was "exalted by the Lord as Queen of the universe... by her constant intercession [she] continued to bring us the gifts of eternal salvation" (citing John 16:13, which is of the promise of the Spirit to lead into all truth). Therefore Mary is invoked as "Advocate, Auxiliatrix, Adjutrix, and Mediatrix" (citing Ephesians 1:11–12; 1 Corinthians 12:4; Galatians 5:22, which refer to the Holy Spirit!).²¹ The idea is this: fear Jesus, fly to Mary.

Our Alone Mediator

As you may have heard, there's a lot of protesting going on today. In some of these protests, the protesters are clueless as to why they're even protesting. We Protestants can't be! We can't just protest and say, "We're not Roman Catholic." We protest Rome because we stand

with believers from the time of Adam and Eve to say something positive: Jesus Christ is *our alone mediator*! The Son of God became man so man might be led to God. This is fundamental Gospel truth.

In Hebrews 7, the author makes the critical point that Jesus is greater than the Levitical priesthood. "If perfection," which in Hebrews means to make us fit for fellowship with God, "had been attainable through the Levitical priesthood... what further need would there have been for another priest to arise after the order of Melchizedek, rather than one named after the order of Aaron?" (v. 11)

The law commanded a priesthood, but David later speaks of another to come who is not according to the line of Aaron. The writer admits, though, that Jesus "belonged to another tribe" (Judah, the line of kings), "from which no one has ever served at the altar" (v. 13). But Jesus' priesthood is "not on the basis of a legal requirement concerning bodily descent [as the Levites' were], but by the power of an indestructible life," meaning His resurrection (v. 16). Therefore, the legal priesthood "is set aside because of its weakness and uselessness" and in its place "a better hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God" (v. 19).

The Old Testament priests acted as mediators between God and the people, but they were unable to give the reality of eternal fellowship with God. That's where Jesus comes in! Notice there's not a hint of Mary in any of this! Jesus' priesthood is by an oath of the Lord, which the Levites never had (vv. 20–21). Then the conclusion is in verse 22: "This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant." While "the former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office" Jesus "holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever" (vv. 23, 24).

There were many priests, but now there is one. They all died, He lives forever. Then we read those amazing words: "Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them" (v. 25).

What does this mean in the context of the Roman Catholicism, given the quotations above?

- We don't need Mary's intercession, because we have Jesus'.
- We don't need Mary to reconcile us to God, because Jesus saves to the uttermost.
- We don't need any other blessings Mary can obtain, because Jesus obtained them all for us.
- We don't need Mary's advocacy, because Jesus ever lives to be our Advocate.
- Most importantly, Jesus doesn't need Mary's cooperation!

What a mediator! He has "the power of an indestructible life," He introduces "a better hope," He is "the guarantor of a better covenant," He "continues forever," He "is able to save to the uttermost," and He "always lives to make intercession for" us!

Our Approachable Mediator

Those who have loved ones still in Roman Catholicism (myself included) know that, for them, having direct access to God through Jesus is unheard of. To take an analogy from American football, it's like trying to run the ball up the middle through the league's top defense (imagine going up against "the Steel Curtain" or "the Monsters of the Midway"). In a situation like that, the best strategy is often not *through*, but *around*. In Roman Catholicism, Jesus is to be feared as the one who comes "to judge the living and the death." So they go around to Mary.

But as we protest, we also proclaim we believe Jesus is *our approachable mediator*. "He is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him." There's no reason Jesus should cause fear in us, leading us to seek a friendlier mediator. There is no one in heaven or on earth who loves us more than Jesus Christ. Who loves us more than He who invites the weary: "Come to me...and I will give you rest?" (Matthew 11:28) Who loves us more than He who calls us friends: "Greater love has no one than this, that he lays down his life for his friends?" (John 15:13) Who loves us more than He whose love "surpasses knowledge?" (Ephesians 3:19) What in all

creation, whether friend or foe, angel or demon, pastor or Pope "will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord?" (Rom. 8:39) Jesus shows us that He loves us more than any other by stepping out of eternity into time; leaving fellowship with the Father for the rejection of His own; setting aside the glorious kingship of being "in the form of God" to make Himself "nothing, taking the form of a servant" for us (Phil. 2:6, 7).

"But what about the saints and Mary?" What about them? Praise God for them! Praise God for their example to us! "Bless [His] holy name for all [His] servants departed this life in [His] faith and fear; beseeching [Him] to give us grace so to follow their good examples, that with them we may be partakers of [His] heavenly kingdom" (Book of Common Prayer). But Christians only turned to the saints out of distrust of Jesus' promises. Honoring the saints actually *dishonors* them.

Why would I say that? The saints never, ever received prayers or required prayers be made to them. Never! Peter, the supposed first Pope, did not accept bowing to him; instead he told Cornelius, "Stand up; I too am a man" (Acts 10:26).

"But I'm unworthy to pray to God directly because of my sins." You're missing the point of prayer. We don't offer prayer because we are worthy in ourselves; we offer them because Jesus is! And His righteousness is ours by faith. Listen to Hebrews 7 again: on the basis of Christ's unchangeable priesthood, "he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them."

Did you hear that? "He is able." He has the ability and the authority, the right and the might to save. Approach Jesus the Savior! God knew when He gave Him for you, that you were a sinner.

Our Ability to Pray

Because of what Jesus has done as your alone mediator whom you can approach we learn of our ability to pray. Are you one of "those who draw near to God through him?" If so, because Jesus intercedes

for you, you can intercede with God! Every single one of us is like an Israelite, camping around the Lord's camp in the Tabernacle. Because Jesus has gone in through the courtyard entrance, offered Himself on the altar of burnt offering, rose again and washed Himself in the bronze basin, ripped down the curtain into the Holy Place, torn the great veil to the Holy of Holies in two, and taken His seat on the Ark of the Covenant between the wings of the cherubim, we now follow Him! And it's not that you have to pray; you get to pray. As one hymn puts it:

*Arise, my soul arise; shake off your guilty fears;
The bleeding sacrifice, in my behalf appears . . .
With confidence I now draw nigh,
And "Father, Abba, Father!" cry.*

Do you know why you are a Protestant? It's not good enough to say, "because I'm not Catholic." To be a Protestant is all found in one word: Jesus!

We're saved by Jesus alone.

WE'RE ALREADY JUSTIFIED

I came across a great quote recently: "I would rather have thousands say to me at the judgment, 'We heard you preach, and you hurt our feelings,' than have just one lost soul to say, 'I heard you preach, but you did not tell me the truth.'" If you don't like hearing about the holiness of God, how your sins are an abomination in His sight, and the vocabulary the Bible uses to describe salvation—justification, redemption, propitiation—then I'm going to hurt your feelings in this chapter (if I haven't already). This is especially true as we continue with the next reason why we're Protestant: we're already justified.

Rome's Doctrine: Ongoing Justification

For the Roman Catholic Church, the Lord gave the power to forgive sins to bishops and priests only and "the manner of exercising that power" comes "only through the sacraments, when validly administered," meaning, "no power has been given to the Church otherwise to remit sins." Therefore, "both priests and the sacraments were as instruments to the forgiveness of sins, by which Christ the Lord...accomplishes in us the remission of sins and justification."²² Since there are seven sacraments, this means that justification is a multi-step process.

The new Roman Catholic Catechism defines justification as "to cleanse us from our sins and to communicate to us 'the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ' and through Baptism."²³ Baptism is the "instrumental cause" through which God grants initial justification.²⁴ Quoting the Council of Trent, the new Catechism explains that this justification is "not only the remission of sins, but also the sanctification and renewal of the interior man."²⁵ Justification

is sanctification. Those made just through baptism are "bidden...to preserve it pure and spotless, as the first robe given them through Jesus Christ...that so they may bear it before the judgment-seat of our Lord Jesus Christ, and may have life eternal."²⁶ And how long a process is sanctification? Our whole lives. Therefore justification "establishes cooperation between God's grace and man's freedom" so that over the course of our whole lives we can participate in the sacramental system of Rome and become more just.²⁷ Finally, "moved by the Holy Spirit and by charity, we can then merit for ourselves and for others the graces needed for our sanctification, for the increase of grace and charity, and for the attainment of eternal life."²⁸

The Foundational Concept of Righteousness

To illustrate the Reformation's difference with Rome on justification, let's turn to what one commentator said is "possibly the most important single paragraph ever written."²⁹ Romans 3:21–26 is like a big pile of Legos. When a child wants to build the biggest and best Lego building, they first take some of the big pieces and make a foundation. Second, they build on top of that a structure. Romans 3:21–26 has both a foundational concept and a structural concept. We'll look at the foundational concept of righteousness first.

Back in Romans 1:17, Paul said in the preaching of the Good News of Jesus the righteousness of God was revealed. Righteousness can either be what God is or what God gives. From 1:18–3:20 Paul speaks of the righteousness that God is, judging unrighteous sinners. In 3:21, though, he speaks like he did in 1:17 of a righteousness that God gives: "But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it."

This righteousness God gives is revealed by God's grace alone. "But now" in the Gospel of Jesus Christ God reveals His righteousness "apart from the law" so that we can be acceptable to Him (v. 21). What God's righteousness requires, He gives. Note what Paul says in verse 24: we were "justified by his grace as a gift." Paul doesn't

merely say we are "justified by his grace," which would have been sufficient to show that it is by grace alone, but in the original text he actually inserts the adjective, "freely," in between the verb and the noun to say that we are "justified freely by his grace." He is intentionally redundant to make sure we are clear: justification is by God's grace alone.

This righteousness God gives is accomplished by Christ alone. Because "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (v. 23) and are therefore incapable of being righteous as God requires, we are justified "through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood" (vv. 24–25). As the hymn says, "Jesus paid it all."

Finally, this righteousness God gives is received by faith alone. Note that God's righteousness is revealed "apart from the law" and instead it is revealed "through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe" without "distinction" (v. 22). And again, in verse 25 "the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" is "to be received by faith." The end of verse 25 and then 26 seem strange to us, but here is what he is saying: God sent His Son Jesus as a propitiation. In the previous chapters we read all about God's wrath. "But now" because of the death of Jesus we can experience God's grace. Propitiation is the turning away of God's face of anger and wrath because it is satisfied in the death of Jesus so that God's face of acceptance and joy will be turned towards us.

If you've ever read *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, you may remember this idea. Why did Aslan die for Edmund? Because of the demands of the deep magic. Edmund could only be redeemed from belonging to the White Witch if someone else died to satisfy the deep magic's demands. That's propitiation. God's righteousness must be satisfied. Jesus dies in our place, and now we are accepted by God. Why? "This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins" (v. 25). God must punish sin. He did that in Christ. Therefore He shows Himself to be "just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (v. 26). "Righteousness" is the foundation of our salvation.

The Structural Concept of Justification

Paul then speaks of the structural concept of justification. When God's grace enters our lives and by faith alone we embrace Jesus Christ alone we are justified. In contrast to our condemnation in the previous chapters Paul says "but now" (v. 21) we "are justified by" God's "grace as a gift" (v. 24). Ultimately justification is God accepting us back into His favor. It's a universal longing of human beings to be accepted. How much more so, then, as image-bearers of our Creator do we long to hear Him say, "well done, good and faithful servant" (Matt. 25:23)?

In life, we think we can get God's approval by working hard, being the best, and doing spectacular things. But look at 3:20: "through the law comes the knowledge of sin." We cannot achieve acceptance with God on the basis of our obedience. That's what makes verse 21 so beautiful: "but now the righteousness of God" that we need in the place of our unrighteousness "has been manifested apart from the law." The righteousness that God is and that He requires, He gives.

Imagine there is a great king in a great castle. He sends out a decree that anyone can come to see him, but first you must put on new, spotless clothes made from the finest materials. Then when you come you must give everything you have, including your own life, to him. If you don't do this you cannot see him. There you are reading this decree on the pub wall—as a pig farmer. You stink. Your clothes are ripped to shreds and stained so bad that even if you scrubbed them for hours and days they would still look filthy. Even worse, you have nothing to give equal to the king's glory. This is like what God's righteousness requires and this is like who you are. But then, to make you acceptable to the king, he orders his only son to go find you in your thatched roof, one room home, to take off your filthy rags, to clean you up, to give you his own regal robe, and finally his title deed to the entire kingdom. This is like what God has done for you to make you acceptable to Him. He takes away your sins (forgiveness) and He gives you everything Christ has done (righteousness). That's what happens when we believe in Jesus. It cannot happen by our efforts; we don't deserve it at all.

In Romans 4 Paul goes on to say dramatically that God “justifies the ungodly.” And he illustrates how from the world of business: “Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due” (4:4). If you work 40 hours in a week and your employer agrees to pay you \$10 an hour, he has an obligation to pay you \$400 for your work. Then he switches the illustration from our realm of work to God’s realm of faith: “And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness” (4:5). But this is outrageous! “You mean to say that I don’t have to do anything for God to accept me?” Every other religious path is one of works. And that’s the kind of response Paul anticipates. He was accused of unbiblical novelty. But earlier in 1:2 he said that God promised the Gospel beforehand in the Scriptures; in 1:17 he quoted from the prophet Habakkuk that the righteous live by faith; and in 3:21 he says the law and prophets testify of this truth. Here in chapter 4 he gives two more examples of this.

If there was anyone who had “something to boast about” (v. 2) surely it was father Abraham. In fact, the Jewish book known as Jubilees, said, “Abraham was perfect in all his dealings with the Lord and gained favor by his righteousness throughout his life (23:10). This is how we think when we judge things “according to the flesh” (v. 1), that is, according to ethnic and outward forms of righteousness. That’s why Paul then says “but not before God” (v. 2), meaning, Abraham could boast before men but not before God. So too with us. Do you realize that the Old Testament describes Abraham as a sinner? Joshua 24 says he came from an idolatrous family. Over and over again in Genesis we read of his lack of faith, of his polygamy, and of his lying to save himself. But “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness” (v. 3).

Then Paul gives the example of David: the murderer of Uriah; the adulterer with Bathsheba. Yet David the sinner knew that “apart from” his “works” his faith in the Lord to come made him “blessed” because “God count[ed]” him “righteousness” (vv. 6–8). Why? Because his lawless deeds were forgiven, and his sins were covered—that’s what God takes away in justification—and because “against” him “the Lord” would “not count his sin,” implying that God had imputed to

His account righteousness—that's what God gives us in justification. This is the structure of your salvation.

Why is this is "possibly the most important single paragraph ever written?" Because this passage is why we're Protestant! Do you see God's heart towards you today in Jesus Christ this paragraph? God is saying to you that He has sent His eternal Son from heaven to earth out of His deep love for a lost and dying world, of which you are a part. What a God! He knows you must satisfy the just demands of His righteousness, but that you can't. But in the length and breadth, the height and depth of His love the same Son He provided makes satisfaction for us, in our place, on our behalf—because we can't. What a love!

- God's heart is open to you today as He provides you justification; God accepts me as righteousness despite my unrighteousness.
- God's heart is open to you today as He provides redemption; God frees me from my sins despite my struggles with sin.
- God's heart is open to you today as He provides you propitiation; God smiles upon me because He frowned upon His only Son Jesus on the cross.

We're already justified.

WE'RE ASSURED OF SALVATION

An old seventeenth-century preacher called Romans 8 “the grand Charter of believers” (or, in American terms, the Bill of Rights). But this chapter is not about rights; rather, it’s about all the blessings that are ours because of Jesus Christ. That’s why it has also been called “the chapter of chapters” in the Scriptures.³⁰ Notice how it begins in verse 1 with that assuring declaration of “no condemnation” and then ends in verse 39 with that glorious declaration of “no separation.”

What does God want us to see here in Romans 8? Not only does he teach us that we’re accepted by God, but also that we can be assured of that fact. In Adam we’re condemned, but in Christ we’re justified. In Adam we’re declared guilty and are punished. In Christ we’re declared righteous and are accepted. I want to conclude this declaration of why we’re Protestant on the high note of Romans 8: we’re Protestant because we’re assured of salvation.

Rome’s Denial: the Assurance of Salvation

The Roman Catholic Church denies that Christians can have assurance of their salvation in this life. When the Roman Catholic Council of Trent responded to the doctrine of our forefathers on assurance, they began similarly to how we do: forgiveness of sins only comes “gratuitously by the mercy of God for Christ’s sake.” But then they said this forgiveness was not given “**to any one who boasts of his confidence and certainty of the remission of his sins**”—then here’s the key phrase—“**and rests on that alone.**”

This is a caricature of our position; we don’t rest in our confidence, but in Christ! Another misrepresentation is in the next paragraph where they said we believe that to be justified you “must needs,

without any doubting whatever, settle within themselves that they are justified, and that no one is absolved from sins and justified, but he that believes for certain that he is absolved and justified." Their conclusion is similar to what we say again: that while we do not doubt the objective promises and work of Christ, we oftentimes subjectively doubt when we look to ourselves. The difference between Rome and us, though, is they say this tension exists because "*no one can know with a certainty of faith*, which can not be subject to error, that he has obtained the grace of God."³¹

We can illustrate what Rome says this way: in a marriage, a business transaction, or a friendship, you can know what the other person has said: "I'll be faithful, I'll finish the job by this time for this much, whenever you need me, I'll be there." But inwardly you can never feel secure that what they've said *is for you*. You know they've said it, but you cannot know they've said it to you. This is why the Council of Trent anathematized the Protestant doctrine of assurance:

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

If any one saith, that he will for certain, of an absolute and infallible certainty, have that great gift of perseverance unto the end,—unless he have learned this by special revelation: let him be anathema.³²

Assurance Is for Sinners: "Therefore"

To the contrary, we believe we can have this subjective certainty that God is gracious to us in Jesus Christ. We believe this because Paul says *assurance is for sinners*. The essence of Romans 7 is that sinners who are declared righteous and acceptable to God still struggle with their inherent sin. We are saints *and* sinners, simultaneously. This causes great spiritual struggle within the believer. Imagine being at a company that comes under new management, with new purpose and plans. Yet what remains? The old workers who often frustrate all the plans for newness. This is what it is like to be a Christian. As Paul says, "So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin" (7:25).

What is the "therefore" in Romans 8:1 there for? It's there precisely for us who are under the new management of God's grace, but who still struggle as old workers! We are not under the condemnation the guilt of our sin deserves (3:21–5:21) or that the practical power of sin makes us feel we deserve (6:1–7:25).³³ "Therefore" you—sinner—who "do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate" (7:15) and who "do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing" (7:19) can have the assurance that you've been accepted by God into His own presence.

Assurance Is a Present Reality "Now"

And here's the amazing thing: *this assurance is a present reality*. "There is therefore now no condemnation." Did you hear that? Now! One little word shakes the foundation of all man-made religion. All religions base acceptance with their deities on the efforts or partial efforts of man. Islam is a religion of giving oneself to the will of Allah, who may or may not accept you into paradise when you die. Rome says again, "no one can know with a certainty of faith...that he has obtained the grace of God." Having assurance now is what makes biblical Christianity unique!

What does it mean that "now there is therefore...no condemnation?" Paul is using "condemnation" here to mean the final judgment that awaits all mankind on the last day of human history when Jesus "shall come again to judge the living and the dead." To say "there is therefore now no condemnation" is to say that final judgment has already been executed.³⁴ How? Look at verse 34: "Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us."

Notice that list: death, resurrection, ascension. Why is there "no condemnation" now? Because Jesus died a death of condemnation for me. Why is there "no condemnation" now? Because Jesus rose again, leaving my condemnation behind in the tomb. Why is there "no condemnation" now? Because Jesus' sitting at the right hand of God is His intercession perpetually reminding God, as it were, that I am His! And "who is to condemn" with Him there? As Jesus

said, "Whoever believes in [the Son] is not condemned" (John 3:18). Now means not only "no condemnation" in this life, but "no condemnation" ever.³⁵

When a child knows they're accepted by their mom and dad, how does that make them feel? Does it make them uncaring towards their parents? Does it make them lazy when asked to do something? Does it make them bored with their life? No! Knowing and feeling a parents' acceptance is amazing, isn't it? In the same way when you know that now—right now—you have peace with God you love Him and obey Him back. When you know the Judge's judgment has already been rendered against you on the cross, you find true intimacy with God as Father.

Assurance Is through Faith: "Those who are in..."

"Okay, so assurance is for sinners now in this life, but how do I, as a sinner in the here and now, find this assurance?" Now we move from the objective to our own subjective. It's like there's a will with your name in it listing your inheritance of an untold fortune. But as you know, it's one thing to hear this, but quite another to get your hands on it.

Paul says "there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." *Assurance is through faith*. To say "in Christ" is to say we are in Him legally. Just as we are in Adam by nature, Paul says we are also in Christ by grace. To say "in Christ" is also to say we are in him vitally. He is the vine, we are the branches (John 15:1–7); He is the head, we are the parts of the body (1 Corinthians 12:27; Ephesians 1:23). Being "in Christ" is "for those" who are united to Jesus by the bond of faith. He dwells in our hearts "through faith" (Ephesians 3:17). Through faith we receive Jesus, who is committed to us believing sinners. So faith is the means by which you and I receive this acceptance with God our Father and come to experience the assurance of this reality.

I want to point out two things about the phrase, "those who are in Christ Jesus." First, this is a *limiting phrase*. It is saying only those who

have faith “in Christ Jesus” enjoy this status of “no condemnation” or justification. In other words, if you don’t believe then none of what Paul says here is yours.

Second, this is *an indiscriminate phrase*. All “those” who believe have everything Jesus has to give! As far as Jesus is concerned, if you’re one of the “those” who believe in Him, your ethnicity is no barrier. As far as Jesus is concerned, if you’re one of the “those” who believe in Him, the color of your skin is no barrier. As far as Jesus is concerned, if you’re one of the “those” who believe in Him, your maleness or femaleness is no barrier. As far as Jesus is concerned, if you’re one of the “those” who believe in Him, your bank account or lack thereof is no barrier. As far as Jesus is concerned, if you’re one of those who are in Him, you can have the assurance of being accepted by God right here, right now!

Assurance Is in Christ: “In Christ Jesus”

It’s not faith itself, though, or faith in faith, or the quantity of faith, or even the quality of your faith, but faith just in Jesus that justifies and assures. Assurance is in Christ: “for those who are *in Christ Jesus*.” What is it about Jesus that my faith in him grants acceptance with Almighty God and assurance of that fact? Look at verse 3: “For God has [taken the initiative and] done what the law, weakened by the flesh [that is, my sinfulness], could not do.” How? “By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh [that is, as a true human being like me] and for sin [because that’s the barrier between God’s righteousness and my acceptance with Him], he condemned sin in the flesh.” When I put my faith “in Christ Jesus” it means that my sins were condemned in him on the cross and therefore I am acquitted and accepted! It’s not my obedience to God’s laws that brings this acceptance:

- Jesus is the one who takes the sinful and makes them righteous.
- Jesus is the one who takes the unclean and makes them clean.
- Jesus is the one who takes the orphaned and makes them sons and daughters.

- Jesus is the one who takes the naked and ashamed and gives them clothes and dignity.
- Jesus is the one who takes the enemy and makes them friends.
- Jesus is the one who takes the condemned and makes them innocent.
- Jesus is the one who takes the dead and makes them alive.
- Jesus is the one who finds the lost and makes them found.

Do you believe in Jesus? Then "there is now no condemnation" for you!

I began by saying there once was an old preacher in the seventeenth century who called Romans 8 "the grand charter of believers." Let me conclude by saying there once was a young man who came to realize that there was a God. He came to realize that he had sinned against God. He came to realize that he was under God's just condemnation. He came to realize and to feel his guilt more and more, until, he heard the glorious news that there was one—only one—who ever lived up to what God required and who gave himself to be condemned in the place of sinners, so that sinners could be accepted by God. And a couple of years later when that young man was disillusioned and full of spiritual doubts, he heard Romans 8:1: "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." This promise opened up to him that grand charter and began to assure him more and more that God already accepted him. You don't know that seventeenth century man; but you do know that young man. He writes to you today declaring that we're Protestant because God says you and I can have assurance.

We're assured of salvation.

NOTES

1. I realize that this event has been reconsidered since the twentieth century. For the most current statement of the issue, see: Volker Leppin and Timothy J. Wengert, "Sources for and against the Posting of the Ninety-Five Theses," *Lutheran Quarterly* XXIX (2015): 373–398.

2. On 2 Thessalonians 2, see my *From the Pen of Pastor Paul: 1–2 Thessalonians* (Welwyn Garden City, UK: EP Books, 2015), 241–266.

3. Lawrence P. Buck, *The Roman Monster: An Icon of the Papal Antichrist in Reformation Polemics*, *Early Modern Studies* 13 (Kirkville, MO: Trueman State University Press, 2014), 77.

4. To learn more about what it means to be a Reformed Christian, see my *Welcome to a Reformed Church: A Guide for Pilgrims* (Orlando: Reformation Trust, 2010). For historic material interacting with the Roman Catholic Church's condemnation of Protestantism, see John Calvin, "Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent, with the Antidote," in *Selected Works of John Calvin, Tracts and Letters: Volume 3: Tracts, Part 3*, trans. and ed. Henry Beveridge (Edinburgh: The Calvin Translation Society, 1851), 17–188; Martin Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, trans. Fred Kramer, 4 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia, 1971). For a recent Reformed interaction with the new Roman Catholic Catechism, see Gregg R. Allison, *Roman Catholic Theology and Practice: An Evangelical Assessment* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014).

5. *Luther's Prayers*, ed. Herbert F. Brokering (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1994), 87–88.

6. William Perkins, ed. Ian Breward, *Courtenay Library of Reformation Classics* (Berkshire: The Sutton Courtenay Press, 1970), 521.

7. Peter Martyr Vermigli, "Whether Evangelicals Are Schismatics for Having Separated from the Papists," in *Early Writings: Creed, Scripture, Church*, trans. Mariano Di Gangi, ed. Joseph C. McLelland, The Peter Martyr Library, volume 1 (Kirkville, MO: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1994), 176.

8. *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, trans. J. Donovan (Dublin: James Duffy and Co., 1829), Part 1, chapter 10, question 15 (p. 99).

9. Cornelis P. Venema, "Heinrich Bullinger's *Der Alt Gloub* ("The Old Faith"): An Apology for the Reformation." *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 15 (2004): 17.
10. "Prefatory Address to King Francis I of France," *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1:16.
11. Jeremias Bastingius called this "the antiquitie of the doctrine of Christ." *An Exposition or Commentarie Upon the Catechisme of Christian Religion Which Is Taught in the Schooles and Churches both of the Low Countryes, and of the Dominions of Countie Palatine* (Cambridge: John Legatt, 1589), 22 col. 1.
12. *The Canons and Dogmatic Decrees of the Council of Trent, in The Creeds of Christendom, Volume II: The Greek and Latin Creeds* (1931; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), Session 4, April 8, 1546 (p. 80).
13. *Dei Verbum*, II.9. This is also quoted in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (New York: Doubleday, 1994), sec. 82 (p. 31).
14. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, sec. 83–84 (pp. 31–32).
15. Homily 9 on Colossians; Introductory Homily On Romans.
16. Homily 9 on Thessalonians.
17. Homily 21 on Ephesians.
18. Homily 32 on John.
19. Epistle 111 to Fortunatus.
20. *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, Part 4, Ch 5, Q8 (p. 423).
21. Chapter VIII.III.61, 59. www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html (Accessed April 26, 2016). See also *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 969.
22. *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, Part 1, Ch 11, Q 4 (p. 106).
23. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, sec. 1987 (p. 535).
24. *The Canons and Dogmatic Decrees of the Council of Trent*, Session 6, January 13, 1547 (pp. 91, 95).
25. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, sec. 1989 (p. 536). See *The Canons and*

Dogmatic Decrees of the Council of Trent, Session 6, January 13, 1547 (p. 94).

26. *The Canons and Dogmatic Decrees of the Council of Trent*, Session 6, January 13, 1547 (pp. 96–97).

27. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, sec. 1993 (p. 537). *The Canons and Dogmatic Decrees of the Council of Trent*, Session 6, January 13, 1547 (pp. 99–102).

28. *Ibid.*, sec. 2010 (p. 542). *The Canons and Dogmatic Decrees of the Council of Trent*, Session 6, January 13, 1547 (pp. 107–110).

29. Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 173.

30. Thomas Jacomb, *Sermons on the Eighth Chapter of the Epistle to the Romans* (1868; repr., Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth, 1996), 12 col. 1

31. *The Canons and Dogmatic Decrees of the Council of Trent*, Session 6, January 13, 1547 (pp. 98–99).

32. *The Canons and Dogmatic Decrees of the Council of Trent*, Session 6, January 13, 1547 (pp. 113–114).

33. William Hendricksen, *Romans*, New Testament Commentary (1980, 1981; Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, sixth printing 1989), 245. For the view that the "therefore" is referencing the entire epistle previous, see Charles Hodge, *Romans*, The Geneva Series of Commentaries (1835; repr., Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth, 1989), 248–249. For the view that it is referencing the previous chapter, see John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (1968; repr., Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1977), 274–275.

34. Hodge, 249; Schreiner, *Romans*, 398–399.

35. Morris, 300.



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