

Discerning New Evangelicalism

Lesson Eleven

The Soteriological Inclusivism of New Evangelicalism

⁶ I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: ⁷ Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. ⁸ But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. ⁹ As we said before, so say I now again, If any *man* preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed. ¹⁰ For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ. ¹¹ But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. ¹² For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught *it*, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ” (Galatians 1:6-12).

Soteriological inclusivism is the broad acceptance of almost any position on what is required of a person to be saved (“born again,” go to Heaven at death). This inclusivism comes in various degrees. It begins with Only Believism, than Easy Believism and ultimately to the subjective *Gospel* of Ecumenicism.

ONLY BELIEVISM

Only Believism is a reductionism. It reduces all the various words of the Bible regarding a response to the gospel to mean BELIEVE. The words repent, accept, confess, and receive all simply mean to believe. In this position, all a person must do is believe the gospel and he/she is saved. There is no need to pray and ask God to save you; no need to repent of sin; not need to receive Christ or confess Christ as Lord. A person needs to ONLY BELIEVE.

According to this position, in believing, a person repents of sin, accepts Christ, confesses Christ as Lord and receives Christ all in the simple act of believing. For the Only Believer, these various responses of faith cannot be separate responses. For them, these separate responses become WORKS. Of course, that is not what the Bible is referring to in using the word “works”

EASY BELIEVISM

Easy Believism is a further reductionism. In Only Believism, a person needs at least to believe in the objective facts of the gospel of Jesus Christ; i.e. His death, burial and resurrection from the dead (although, even in this there exists considerable ambiguity of what these things procure for the believer). In Easy Believism a person only needs to *believe in Jesus* and confess that belief in some way or fashion. In this position, there is no need of understanding the objective facts of the gospel, no need to believe the gospel, repent of sin, confess Christ or receive Christ. In the extremes of this position, one does not even need to believe in the deity of Jesus; just the *historical Jesus*.

ECUMENICISM

The ecumenical position on salvation is as broad as broad can be. In this position, a person must simply believe in *God*. That can be the *god* of Buddhism, the *god* of the Muslims, the Christian Catholic *god*, the Christian Protestant *god* or any other *god* that one might imagine, as long as a person believes in *god*. What salvation is to these people is as ambiguous as their *god*. This really is nothing more than a degree of Universalism.

SOTERIOLOGICAL INCLUSIVISM

I believe the New Evangelical’s acceptance of many very diverse and opposing doctrinal positions regarding salvation (soteriological inclusivism) is due to their acceptance of the Reformation as a return to orthodox theology. In many areas of theology the Reformation did return to orthodoxy. However, in the area of the gospel they continued to “come short of the glory of God.”

Almost all the Reformers continued to hold to varying positions on baptismal regeneration and some form of transubstantiation or consubstantiation. In most cases, they did discover justification by faith, but failed to discover that justification was available only through faith in the propitiatory work of Christ and totally apart from participation in any religious rituals or good deeds. Central to this failure was their ecclesiastical view that Israel as a nation was replaced by the visible organization called the Church.

This of course was due to the fact that almost all the Reformers were Covenant Theologians. Although they did recognize an *invisible church*, the invisible were only those who made up the visible organized church (usually referring to whatever denomination they had founded). An initiate became a part of the *invisible church* by becoming a part of the visible church. This was done through ritual baptism and catechistic confirmation.

The Reformers continued to replace the sacerdotal practices of the nation of Israel with a sacramental approach to God. Circumcision was replaced with ritual baptism (usually Pedit-baptism) as the initiatory rite of entrance into the covenant. All the Old Testament sacrifices were replaced with Holy Communion as the means of conferring the *grace* of the *forgiveness of sin*. The most serious aspect of this is that the sacrifice of Christ was never considered sufficient for man's salvation. The sacraments were viewed additionally as necessary to attain and retain a person's salvation.

There is probably no better evidence to this theological struggle between a complete abandonment of faith/works salvation and a grace/faith salvation than in Martin Luther's **Lectures on Galatians** (American Edition published by Concordia Publishing House). In a superficial reading one would think Luther to be a fundamentalist. However, under closer scrutiny it is quite evident he got stuck somewhere between the Christianity of Rome and a total abandonment of law/works theology. He adopts what I call a faith/works theology which is consistent with most of the Reformers. Luther reveals this in numerous statements in his **Lectures On Galatians** and his obvious hatred of Anabaptists.

“ ‘A little yeast leavens the whole lump.’ This is a caution which Paul emphasizes. We, too, should emphasize it in our time. For the sectarians {referring mainly to the Anabaptists} who deny the bodily presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper accuse us today of being quarrelsome, harsh, and intractable, because, as they say, we shatter love and harmony among the churches on account of the single doctrine about the Sacrament.”

The argument for the “bodily presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper” was (and is) a major point of theological contention between the Anabaptists and the Reformers because it was (and is) a denial of the “once for all” “finished” work of redemption through the “one” sacrifice of Christ on the Cross of Calvary. The Anabaptists rightly concluded that this very thing was what Paul was talking about when he stated “a little leaven leavens the whole lump.” Although the “bodily presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper” may seem insignificant to many, to the Anabaptist (then and now) it was a perversion of the gospel and a denial of the “finished” work of redemption.

The book of Hebrews accentuates the seriousness of proposing a “bodily presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper” by many of the Reformer's and establishes that it is a denial of the “once for all” satisfaction of God's judgment on sin (propitiation). Zwingli opposed Luther in this and Luther frequently denigrated him for it. Zwingli denied a corporal presence of Christ for a spiritual presence. Therefore Zwingli is more the father of consubstantiation than Luther. Calvin agreed more with Zwingli than Luther. It is also clear from the book of Hebrews that the sacerdotal system of religious sacrifices (Law/works) was not replaced with a sacramental system of Law/works as in Roman Catholicism or faith/works as in the Reformed churches. Hebrews chapter 10 alone makes this clear. The sacerdotal system (the sacrifices and Priesthood) of the Old Testament was abrogated by the New Covenant in Christ's Blood. It was not replaced with a sacramental system.

¹ For the law having a shadow of good things to come, *and* not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect. ² For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins. ³ But in those *sacrifices there is* a remembrance again *made* of sins every year. ⁴ For *it is* not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins. ⁵ Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me: ⁶ In burnt offerings and *sacrifices* for sin thou hast had no pleasure. ⁷ Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God. ⁸ Above when he said, Sacrifice and offering and burnt offerings and *offering* for sin thou wouldest not, neither hadst pleasure *therein*; which are offered by the law; ⁹ Then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second. ¹⁰ By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once *for all*. ¹¹ And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: ¹² But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; ¹³ From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool. ¹⁴ For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified. ¹⁵ *Whereof* the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us: for after that he had said before, ¹⁶ This *is* the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; ¹⁷ And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more. ¹⁸ Now where remission of these *is, there is* no more offering for sin” (Hebrews 10:1-18).

Luther, like many of the Reformers, never fully escaped the influence of Augustinian theology. Therefore, Luther never fully escaped the Law/works of Roman Catholicism because he continued to view ritual baptism and the Lord’s Supper sacramentally (vehicles for the conference of grace).

Therefore, Luther set the stage for a new false doctrine of faith/works as opposed to the purity of Scripture truth, which demands grace/faitn only, totally apart from any religious ritual or works. Luther’s belief in the sacramental efficaciousness of ritual (water) baptism and his *middle ground* position is revealed by the following statement he makes in his **Lectures On Galatians** (page 148-149).

“The papists and the Anabaptists are harmoniously agreed today on this one proposition, over against the church of God, despite their verbal pretenses: namely, that a work of God is dependent on the worthiness of man. For this is what the Anabaptists teach: ‘Baptism is nothing unless a person is a believer.’ {A complete misunderstanding of what the Anabaptists taught.} On the basis of this principle, as it is called, it necessarily follows that none of the works of God are anything if a man is not good. Now Baptism is a work of God, but an evil man can make it not a work of God. . . The Anabaptists themselves had bodies and souls before their rebaptism; but because they were not godly, they did not have genuine bodies and souls. Similarly, they admit that their parents were not truly married {the sacrament of marriage was only recognized between a man and a woman when they were both baptized}, because they had not been rebaptized; therefore all the Anabaptists are illegitimate children, and all their parents were adulterers and fornicators.”

Although varying in some areas, **The Augsburg Confession of 1530** reflected the belief of the majority of the Reformers (Protestants, the Baptists were not Protestants in that they never came out of Romanism) regarding the bodily presence of Christ in the Lord’s Supper.

“Art.X. Of the Supper of the Lord they teach that the [true] body and blood of Christ are truly present [under the form of bread and wine], and are there communicated to [and received by] those that eat in the Lord’s Supper. And they disapprove of those that teach otherwise.” (as quoted in the **History of the Christian Church**, Vol. VII by Schaff and published by Eerdmans page 671).

Local churches and Bible Schools that do not address and correct the theology of the Reformation and deal with the fact that most of the Reformers never truly abandoned sacramental grace soteriology, continue to sow the seeds of both soteriological inclusivism and New Evangelicalism in those that they train. In failing to do so, they are undermining the very theological foundations they seek to establish. A great source of failure is often found in the heroes we choose to promote and follow.

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1. Discuss why New Evangelicalism's acceptance of the Reformation as a return to orthodoxy is a major source of giving itself permission for co-operation with liberal churches and their practice of Ecumenical Evangelism. _____

2. How does the fact that the Reformers viewed the nation of Israel as being replaced by the "Church" impact how the Reformers continued to see the ordinances of Christianity? _____

3. Discuss the comment made on Martin Luther's **Lectures On Galatians** and what is meant by the statement that the Reformers (following Luther's leading) "got stuck somewhere between the Christianity of Rome" and its Law/Works theology of Sacramentalism and the grace/faith theology of the true gospel of Jesus Christ held by the Anabaptists. _____

4. Discuss the Reformation *middle ground position* and why it can aptly be called a "faith/works" position. _____

5. Luther vehemently argued for the "bodily presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper" until his dying day. Discuss why this was such a point of theological contention between the Reformers and the Anabaptists and why it should continue as a viable reason for separation today. _____

6. Read Hebrews 10:1-18. Thoroughly discuss what these verses say to accentuate the seriousness of proposing a "bodily" (or spiritual) "presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper." _____

7. Discuss why it can be said that Zwingli should be credited with the doctrine of consubstantiation more than Luther. _____

8. Augustinian Theology (the central theologian of ancient Catholicism) developed the heretical doctrine of Sacramental Grace (Sacraments as the vehicles for the conference of the grace that saves). Discuss how we can know that the majority of the Reformers never really abandoned this heresy and why this is critical to the reason no Christian should accept them as true believers in Christ and His gospel of grace. _____

9. Discuss why local churches and Bible schools must address and correct the fact that the Reformers never abandoned a sacramental grace soteriology if they want to avoid sowing the seeds of New Evangelicalism and its soteriological inclusivism in those they train. _____
