

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

A Biblical Response to the Catholic-Evangelical Accord

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I want to take this opportunity to let you know about a document that you perhaps have heard of that's called The Evangelicals and Catholics Together document, the Christian mission in the third millennium. And it's something that was put together by Charles Colson and Richard John Neuhaus as a way to conciliate Roman Catholics and Evangelicals for basically purposes of evangelical mission in the world and purposes of the betterment of human life in America, by their definition. It's being spread far and wide, quite remarkably it has shown up in one form or another in the major newspapers here in California and I'm sure all over the United States.

What makes this document quite unique is that it is an accord really between Roman Catholics and Evangelicals and not just Colson and Neuhaus, but it was signed on the evangelical side by quite a remarkable group of people like Pat Robertson, Bill Bright, Mark Knoll from Wheaton College, Thomas Oden of Drew University and J.I. Packer of Regent College. These are people who are prominent evangelicals in one way or another. And perhaps it is shocking if not surprising, at least, to evangelical people that these folks would agree on this particular accord because of the character of it.

It's 25 pages long and I don't have the time to go through the whole thing. But just a couple of general comments, to begin with.

The Roman Catholic Church has always desired to absorb all its dissidents. The Roman Catholic Church has always wanted to spread itself as far and wide as it can so it has always tolerated aberrations throughout all of its history. For example, even in our contemporary society, you can belong to a very Charismatic Catholic group and even though that's not consistent necessarily with Roman Catholic theology, they'll allow that because they will absorb that dissident rather than put him out. They have people like Hans Koon(?) whose theology is much more liberal and modern than historic Roman theology, but they will continue to embrace him to one degree or another so that they keep the system intact. So they've always had a sort of altitudinous perspective and that's another way for them to just continue to embrace as wide a range of influence as is possible. And, of course, since Vatican II, there has been definitely movement between Roman Catholicism and Evangelical Protestantism toward each other.

So this kind of document is an attempt, I really believe, to blur the line between clear biblical Christianity and Roman Catholicism. Because of the prominence of Colson and the others who signed this document, it will have far-reaching impact and that's why I feel maybe I need to make some comments about it.

I don't want to discount the faith of these evangelical people, I don't want to discount the legitimacy of their trust in Christ, but certainly there is reason to question their discernment in being engaged in this kind of dialogue.

The bottom line here seems to me to be that they're trying to get together to form a powerful, political bloc to effect change in the United States of America on the political side, to put pressure on the system, things like abortion which, of course, is a legitimate issue. But even things like a free market economy which are certainly not a biblical issue, all of this is swept in and they're coming together to try to form a power bloc to effect the political situation, political system in America to get what they want to get in the system which is certainly not the mission of the church in any way, shape or form. And to sacrifice the distinction of the true Christian faith and to talk about unification of evangelicals and Roman Catholics to accomplish political ends is really, really a serious, serious situation because they're basically jettisoning a true biblical theology and a proper understanding of the gospel, not even ultimately for Kingdom causes but for earthly causes which is even worse.

There are a number of things in this document that should be perhaps addressed. The document starts out by saying, "We together, evangelicals and Catholics, confess our sins against the unity that Christ intends for all His disciples."

Well the assumption in that statement is that evangelicals and Catholics are all His disciples. The assumption that Roman Catholics are true disciples of Jesus Christ is an assumption that is certainly not true to fact. We can only wish that all Roman Catholics were disciples of Jesus Christ, but that, in fact, is not the case. I would say through the years at Grace Community Church in these 25 years I've been there, probably 50 percent of the people that have come into our church have been converted out of Catholicism. And they would all look back and affirm unequivocally that they did not know Christ, they did not know God, they were not disciples of Jesus Christ when they were in that system. And there are a number of reasons why, but the primary reason why people in the Catholic system are not Christians is because the system becomes a surrogate Christ and salvation is a mechanical thing by being attached to the Church. And you're attached to the Church by means of rituals and sacraments and ceremonies and all of that. That's a sacramental kind of religion that basically says the path to God is through mechanical means, standing up, sitting down, genuflecting, praying prayers, going through beads, lighting candles, you know, waving incense, eating a wafer, drinking from the cup.

All of those external mechanical means in the case of the Mass, they actually believe that through a miracle, the wafer is transformed into the body of Christ and the wine is transformed into the actual blood of Christ and that you're literally eating the flesh and drinking the blood of Jesus Christ literally. And so what you have there, of course, is great confusion because the once-for-all sacrifice which Christ made on the cross which was sufficient for all the sins of all time is now in some strange way repeated over, and over, and over, and over, and over, and over, and over again. And this is more like the Old Testament sacrificial system with repeated sacrifices and thousands and thousands and thousands and tens of thousands and hundreds of thousands of animals being slaughtered over and over and over again for years and years and years. And what it really is is more of an Old Covenant type of religion which has passed away than it is an understanding of the significance of the single sacrifice of Christ.

And by the way, in a recent debate between a Protestant and a Catholic, the Catholic priest advocated the legitimacy of the Roman Catholic religion as over against Protestantism, evangelical Protestantism because he said, "Only the Roman Catholic faith embraces both the Old Covenant and the New Covenant." Which is not a commendation of the faith, of the Roman Catholics, but denunciation of their faith because the Old Covenant has passed away. Hebrews 8:13 says, "The Old Covenant is obsolete, the sacramental approach, the shadows, the pictures, the images, the types are unnecessary." That's why in an evangelical church, we don't have incense and we don't have candles and we don't have a Mass and we don't have priests in clerical garb with all kinds of symbolic meaning, and we don't have statues and ornate stuff hanging all over everywhere because all of those smack of the ceremonial system, all of that smacks of the Old Covenant which has been set aside. It's another form of a sacramental kind of religion. And it was exactly that which the Apostle Paul intended to keep out of the church when he attacked the Judaizers. You remember, they came in and they were saying you have to be circumcised and keep the whole Mosaic ceremony and the feasts and the new moons and the festivals and the Sabbath days and the washings and all of that kind of stuff. And he said, "Not so, you corrupt grace. The Old Covenant is gone, you have begun in the Spirit, you will not be made perfect by those kinds of ceremonies." And he wanted to root that out of the church.

Well it's come back, that same Judaizing ceremonialism, it's come back in another form and that's the Catholic form with all these rituals and all these mechanical things. And, in effect, it totally obscures the reality and the people feel that if they've gone through the formalities, they therefore know God.

So there are a number of problems in regard to just simply saying Roman Catholics are Christians. Let me give you the one that is the ultimate issue. The Roman Catholics do not believe, and I want you to understand this, they do not believe that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. And the word "alone" I emphasize because that's the word *sola* that was the watershed term in the Reformation. You will read in Roman Catholic theology that they believe in salvation by

grace through faith in Christ, but the word “alone” will not be there because they want to add works. Yes it's by grace, yes it's by faith, yes it's in Christ, but there is something in me that produces a worthiness.

Let me read you from the Council of Trent document, this is the official document of Roman Catholic theology. This isn't somebody's opinion. This isn't some side view. This is the heart and core of what the Roman Catholic Church posits as their theology. Here's Canon Nine from this document on justification.

“If anyone says that the sinner is justified by faith alone, let him be anathema.” Let him be damned. Now there right at that point you have the reason for the Reformation. A Roman Catholic could say, “Yes, we believe the sinner is justified by faith.” And you might say, “Boy, isn't that wonderful? They believe in salvation by faith.” Put the word “alone” in and they back out. And they would go so far as to say, “If you say it's by faith alone, you're damned.” That's the reality of Roman Catholic doctrine.

It's essential to understand that what the Roman Catholic Church is saying is that our being right with God, our being righteous is dependent on something within us, rather than the righteousness of Christ imputed to us. There's something in us that qualifies us and makes us worthy. And that is exactly the error which Paul addressed in Judaism in Romans 10:3 when he said, “They went about trying to establish their own righteousness.” And that was their damning error. There was the belief that there was some capacity, some capability in them to please God. There was some achievement. It may not even have been an external work, but an internal thing even. There was something in them that they could produce that would bring righteousness. And the amazing thing about it, Paul says, is that they did not understand the righteousness of God. How could the Jews who had the Law and the Prophets and the Priesthood and the Covenants and the Adoption, as Paul says in Romans 9, and all that stuff, miss the point? How could they miss the whole point? They did not understand the righteousness of God, he says. They didn't understand how to be right with God. They went about trying to establish their own righteousness. They missed the whole point. And, frankly, that is exactly what sacramental religion does today, whether it's sacramental Protestantism, Greek Orthodox, or Roman Catholicism. In an effort to establish their own righteousness, they missed the righteousness of God which is granted by Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ alone as His righteousness is imputed to us by grace through faith alone in Him.

I look at a list of men like this who got in to this dialogue and I say, “How in the world could these men sign this document?” And I could see some of them are not theologically trained. They might be bright and they might be, you know, Christian leaders and all that, but it seems to me as I heard one theologian say, “They were overmatched when it came to dealing with theology and they couldn't hold their own in the dialogue with these very, very astute Roman Catholic theologians. But there, on the other hand, are a couple of names in there that it would seem to me would know better than that. Perhaps they'll change their mind as things begin to fall out in this document. We can certainly pray

that they will.

I can understand that they don't want to be unloving and ungracious and merciless toward Roman Catholics. I can understand an irenic spirit, but not to the point where you begin to accept their doctrine. And that's unacceptable.

To say nothing of another issue. What also convolutes Roman Catholicism is that they believe there's a massive body of divinely revealed truth outside the Bible. And that just confuses everything. Evangelicalism is bound to Genesis 1:1 to Revelation 22 the end of the chapter. That's it. Within the framework of Genesis 1 and Revelation 22 is all divinely inspired and authoritative truth. In other words, we believe the faith was once for all delivered to the saints in the context of Scripture and Scripture alone. The Roman Catholic Church comes along and they say, "No, there's a lot more stuff. There's a lot more beyond that which they call the Authoritative teaching, the Magisterium, tradition, whatever it is and it's equally binding with Scripture. And it's out of that they get things like Purgatory, perpetual virginity of Mary, veneration of angels, the transubstantiation of the Mass and on and on and on it goes. When they say in their document that we are one in Christ and we are all disciples of Christ and that's the premise on which they build the next 23 pages, we don't agree with that premise. I wish it were true. We really wish it were true.

The document also says that Eastern Orthodox people are also evangelical. I've been in the eastern world where Eastern Orthodoxy reigns very strongly, the Arab world is divided, for example, between Muslims and what they call Christians and the Christians are orthodox Christians but they have really no understanding of a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. They're trusting in the trappings of the system, for the most part. I'm not saying that there aren't some people in those systems who see the symbols for what they are, symbols and have seen through to the reality of Christ. But that's a rare situation.

So just to embrace Greek Orthodoxy and the Roman Catholic Church and call them all believers is really not acceptable. Now let me go one step further. The document later on even wants to include liberals. That would be anybody who would say that Jesus Christ is their Lord without qualifying their theology, without asking them, "What does that mean? Who is Jesus Christ? Is the Bible an inspired record? Do you believe, for example, in the Trinity? Do you believe in the virgin birth? And all of that." In other words, it's simplistic enough to say that if you accept Jesus, you're in the one church.

Well, how do you fit that into Matthew 7 where Jesus said, "Many will say unto Me, Lord, Lord, and I will say to them, 'Depart from Me, I never knew you, you workers of iniquity.'" Why does Paul say, "Examine yourselves whether you be in the faith?"

Now, not only does this Document simply posit that we're all one in Christ and therefore we all ought to get together, but it even gets to the point where it will not question the legitimacy of anyone's claim.

And that is totally foreign to Scripture. Scripture is always demanding that we examine ourselves. Every time we come to the Lord's table...Examine yourself, examine yourself, examine yourself. Because there are so many who are deceived.

Now let me take it a step further. The Document so strongly affirms that all who claim the name of Christ and all who belong within the visible organization of Christianity at any point, that they're all one, it claims at that point that if we have failed to recognize that, it is a sin. And if we have tried to evangelize Roman Catholics, we have sinned against them and we need to confess the sin of sheep stealing because all we're really doing is stealing sheep out of somebody else's pasture. That is to say we're all sheep, it's just that the pastures are different. And so, when you evangelize a Roman Catholic, you've sinned against God and against that Roman Catholic because you have tried to steal him from another pasture. In other words, all evangelism that's been done with Roman Catholics is to be confessed as sinful.

That is an absolutely and inconceivable thing. How people could ever come to that point, they certainly are not ex-Catholics signing this Document. There are Catholic people all over this world who have been led out of the darkness of that heresy by faithful missionaries. There are people who have died through the years. They died during the Inquisition. They were persecuted by the Catholic Church for preaching the gospel, including the Reformers themselves. There have been missionaries in Latin America and missionaries in Europe for literally centuries who have preached the gospel to people bound in the Roman Catholic sacramental system and certainly through this country's history we have done everything we can possibly do to evangelize those Roman Catholics who are stuck in a sacramental situation and don't know the Lord Jesus Christ. And the church today is literally filled with ex-Roman Catholic people who have been converted to Jesus Christ. To just sweep them all up and say we've got to confess we've sinned against them, is just unacceptable.

So, you have to understand that just saying we need to get our arms around the Catholics and accept them as brothers and sisters in Christ and bring them all together, it's a gross simplification of the real issues and it sweeps truth under the rug. And I'll tell you something else. If I commend Roman Catholics as Christians and fail to give the gospel to them, then I have a responsibility before God for my unfaithfulness. It's a sin not to proclaim the gospel. It's a sin not to try to call somebody out of that kind of error.

So, the whole Document then is built on a false premise. They do admit that there are some differences. In the Document there's a little list of the things that they do differ about, that is Roman Catholics and Evangelicals. And here are the things they differ on. Here's a few. I won't give them all to you.

One of them is "Sacraments and Ordinances as symbols of grace or means of grace." Now is that just a simple difference? That is not a simple difference. You either believe that when you go to the Lord's

table, it is a symbol of what is provided in Christ or it is the means by which God dispenses saving, cleansing grace to you. That's a huge difference. And in Baptism, Catholics believe Baptism as a sacrament of regeneration and Evangelicals, a testimony to regeneration. There's a big difference. Either Baptism saves you or it symbolizes salvation that God has granted you by grace.

We can't just say, "Well, we know we disagree, but as brothers we just have to allow those things to exist." That disagreement right there as to whether Baptism saves or is a testimony to salvation is a dividing point that is eternally significant. It's the difference between heaven and hell, my friends.

Now let me say that the reason this Document is written and the reason these guys are getting together is really not in my judgment for a Kingdom cause. I mean, it's not for the spread of the gospel because they can't even agree on the gospel. That's not what it's for. What it's for is more of this politicization of the church. It says here, "Together we contend for the truth that politics, law and culture must be secured by moral truth." So what they're trying to do is to bring cultural morality, to save the culture.

You know, in one sense that's fine. But that's not the mandate of the church. And what's the difference if a whole culture goes to hell with a superficial morality or with no morality? That's not our purpose. That's not the church's purpose, to moralize the culture. In fact, sometimes the more moral the culture is, the more self-righteous they are and the less likely they are to embrace the gospel. I mean, there's nothing in the Bible that indicates the church's job is to secure civil virtue. That is not what we're to do. Here are the things they say they want to do. They want to maintain religious freedom because it's the first freedom. Do you know the Bible never guarantees to Christians religious freedom? And throughout the history of Christianity, I would have to say that history proves that Christians have flourished better under religious hostility, bondage, persecution, martyrdom. There's nothing in the Bible that guarantees religious freedom. And nothing that tells us we should battle for religious freedom.

The church behind the Iron Curtain for all those 75 years, when I met with their leaders and talked with their people, I said, "Did you ever lobby for religious freedom?" They said we never made an issue of anything except Jesus Christ. Religious freedom is not an issue, yet that's their agenda, to maintain religious freedom. So what happens is there's a certain hostility, there's a certain embattlement that takes place between the Christian coalition and the non-Christian coalition as they war over issues that are not even eternal.

Then they have another thing they're after and that is the separation of church and state. That's another issue that isn't a biblical issue at all. They want to make sure that there's a place for moral conviction in our public life. They even have a section here on lobbying for public education, for schools that anybody could choose any school they want to go to. They contend together for comprehensive policy of parental choice in education. They content against the widespread

distribution of pornography. They contend for a renewed spirit of acceptance and understanding all across lines of religion, race, ethnicity, section, class...contend for a vibrant free market economy which is an economic issue, for public policies that demonstrate renewed respect for the family and voluntary associations.

And they contend for realistic US Foreign Policy. You see, what this whole thing is about is it's more of the politicization of the church, more of making the church a player in a political scheme.

So you have in this the setting aside of historic evangelical biblical doctrine for purposes that are temporal, to jettison eternal truth for temporal causes seems to me to be a tragic thing, a tragic effort. And that's what concerns me.

Now let me say this. I would never for one split second set aside any...any doctrine of Scripture or any scriptural truth at all to achieve some temporal goal like that. The goal of the church is to preach the clear unadulterated, unexpurgated pure gospel of Jesus Christ that salvation comes by grace alone through faith alone by Christ alone and not cloud that at all, no matter what it does with the culture. And we all know if we think about it clearly that the only thing that's ultimately going to change the culture is transformed lives and that's got to start from the inside out.

So this is a concern. And I'll tell you, it just seems to me to be...I've been preaching through the book of Revelation, another indication that we're coming together toward a one-world religion, that it's all coming together. You have to know too that while the Catholics are doing this with evangelicals in the U.S., they're doing it with Buddhists in the east and they're doing it with Muslims. And they're talking about accord all over the world. The Pope has met with the Dalai Llama, to Tibetan Buddhism, they're doing it everywhere. They're just trying to suck up the whole world and embrace the whole world at whatever point and whatever level they can possibly do it. And I really feel that this is part of pulling together the whole final form of world religion. And if we keep jettisoning our theology and keep flopping over into a mystical explanation of every religious experience, this is going to come all the more rapidly. And, of course, the Scripture says it will come. So see it for what it is, it's an attempt I think on the part of the enemy of men's souls to stop the church from evangelizing, to cloud the purity of salvation dogma and doctrine and to build the one-world false religious system ultimately that's going to tolerate any kind of belief for the sake of unity and redefine our theology. We can't allow tis to happen. This is exactly where we have to fight. This is an un-Reformation. This is undoing what God did through the Reformers and what He has maintained through the history of the church by the martyrdom of many and certainly the efforts of many.

So see it for what it is and realize that it's an attack on the truth. And pray for these people that are involved in this. I find it very difficult. I know them personally, of course, and find it extremely difficult to understand how they can be drawn into this. Love your Catholic friends, love them enough to recognize that they probably don't know Jesus Christ. Don't attack them unkindly, but point out the

issue is not external, it's internal.

I was talking to a young man the other day, and a wonderful young man, and I said, "What's your church background?" He said, "I'm Roman Catholic." And he said, "I'm very serious about it." He said, "I go every week."

I said, "You do?"

He said, "Oh yeah," he said, "I go every week."

You know, I said, "It's not the brand of your religion, is it? It's whether you have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, isn't it?" And he had kind of a blank look on his face and he said, "Well yeah, I guess it is." I said, "You know, as you go, have you found something really personal and life changing?"

He said, "Well you know, I've been going for a number of years," and he said, "You know, I'm very devout and," he said, "It's very important to me." But he said, "You know, I don't get anything out of it, it's just a lot of stuff and I don't feel like I'm going anywhere."

This is typical and so I just explained to him that behind all that stuff there's a reality that makes all that stuff needless and pointless. I mean, Paul said, "Now that the reality is here, why would we mess with the shadow? Don't let anybody hold you to a dietary law." And that was even revealed by God in the Old Testament. And the law had a glory of its own when it was given. Don't let anybody hold you to a festival or a feast, or a Sabbath, or a new moon, or washings, or any of that stuff. That's a shadow and the shadow is gone and the reality is here.

So I told that young man what he already knew in his heart, that he had a religion without a relationship. You know...listen...I wouldn't even confess to my congregation to people who attend my church that I had sinned against them for assuming that some of them weren't saved. I would even confront the people at Grace Community Church and say, "You better examine yourself to see if you're really a Christian." I don't think you should ever apologize for evangelizing anybody, even somebody very close to you, even somebody in your own church. Judgment must begin at the house of God.

I want to say in closing, thank you so much for requesting this tape and we've tried to say some things that will be of help to you. Some of you listening may even be Roman Catholics. I don't want to offend you, I do want you to understand the truth. And what you're looking at in the church is an accumulated proliferation of symbolic stuff that maybe in the beginning was intended to represent spiritual reality, but somehow has totally obscured the reality. Somebody once described a saint as a stained glass person who keeps the light out. And I think, you know, when you think about Roman

Catholic Churches with all their stained glass windows, what they've done is keep the light out. They've blurred and obscured and made opaque the clear light of truth with all the symbols.

And, I think, if you're Roman Catholic, you've got to see past all of that stuff to the reality of Jesus Christ and you can't trust in the church and you can't trust in your own righteousness or your ability to achieve that righteousness or to possess that righteousness, you must trust in Christ Jesus alone to give you that righteousness by His grace through your faith in Him and nothing else. And I would frankly be unkind, unloving, in fact I would be downright merciless to any Roman Catholic to whom I didn't say that because your eternal soul is at stake in this issue.

I want you to pray for our ministry. We're not trying to just make issues but when issues arise, we're trying to give God's people a clarity and discernment so they can understand these things. And that's our desire so that Jesus Christ would be exalted and glorified, that His Word would be lifted up, that His church would be pure in its life and pure in its doctrine so that it might be effective in reaching the world.

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