

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

Irreconcilable Differences: Catholics, Evangelicals, and the New Quest for Unity, Parts 1-3

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

Code: GTY54

1995

ANKERBURG: We're here in Fort Lauderdale, Florida in the beautiful Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church. My guests are Dr. D. James Kennedy who is the pastor of this wonderful church, and the well-known popular Dr. John MacArthur and Dr. R.C. Sproul. Our program today is about a document that is called, "The Evangelicals and Catholics Together, The Christian mission in the Third Millennium." We're also going to be talking about a New Clarifying Doctrinal Statement that was just written by the evangelical signees of this document.

The ECT, the Evangelicals and Catholics Together document as we call it, was written by 20 well-known evangelical leaders and 12...and 20 well-known Roman Catholic leaders. The purpose of this document was stated to be:

Number one, to provide a statement that would advance Christian fellowship, cooperation and mutual trust between evangelical Protestants and Roman Catholics.

Number two, it was to provide a world view for Protestants and Catholics to unite on in defense of the truth here in the North American cultural wars. That is, these men saw the benefit of Catholics and Protestants standing and fighting together on the critical moral issues of our day.

And third, the document was written to establish some basis for civility and mutual respect between Roman Catholics and Protestants in Latin America and some other countries who because of rivalry were in conflict over evangelism.

Now I want to make it clear that those who wrote this document said, "It is not an official document binding Roman Catholics and Protestants together. It is not meant to be precise or theologically comprehensive. And the only authority it has stems from the personal credibility of those who signed it."

At the same time, the signatories of this document said they hoped it would make waves and change established patterns of behavior in this country and overseas. If it did they thought its strategic importance would be far-reaching. And apparently its impact has been wide and powerful.

For example, it's been reported to have circulated inside the Vatican and been received there with great enthusiasm. One Christian publication said it was a landmark document. Christianity Today and the Christian Coalition have both referred to it as a historic document. The Wall Street Journal, of all places, said, "This document was the wave of the future."

Now the very fact that many people feel this document is uniting Catholics and Protestants in North America to stand together on social issues and it is helping stop the conflict in Latin America and other countries, it shows how important and influential this document is. Now Chuck Colson who helped draft this document has acknowledged that it created a lot of controversy and has raised genuine concern over whether it clearly represents what evangelical Christians believe. And just a few weeks ago Chuck requested a private meeting with ten evangelical leaders, including the four of us that are here. He expressed his concern over the document and the confusion that it caused as well as its lack of clarity concerning what evangelicals believe. And he said that he wanted to resolve and remove any contentious issues so that there would no longer be any doubt as to where he and the other Protestants signees stood. To this end, together we all composed a statement that clarifies and clearly defines our evangelical beliefs...not all of them but some primary ones.

And to begin, I'd like to come to you, Dr. R. C. Sproul, when we all got together we were concerned about the statements and Evangelicals and Catholics Together document that seemed to give an unwarranted stamp of legitimacy to Roman Catholic doctrine. For example, the ECT document implies that evangelicals and Roman Catholics should and can be united on the basis of their being able to affirm this statement, "That we are justified by grace through faith because of Christ." Now we all agreed this statement still needed to be clarified.

Some may wonder, "What in the world is wrong with that phrase?" All Roman Catholics will say that they accept and believe these words, but we know that if you add the word "alone" to this sentence so that it reads this way, "We are justified by grace alone through faith alone because of Christ alone," the Roman Catholic friend that you're saying this to will back away from it and he won't accept it. R. C., why is that one little word sola, the Latin word sola, alone, that's missing in the ECT document, why is this so important to us? And then please explain why we did place it in the New Clarifying Doctrinal Statement.

SPROUL: Well, John, as you will certainly remember when we had our private discussions behind closed doors with Chuck and Jim Packer and Bill Bright and the other signatories there, I made the comment at the time that that word "alone" which is so conspicuously absent from ECT has emerged as something of a shibboleth in church history, not in the pejorative sense, the negative sense but in the positive sense of a shibboleth that this is a watershed statement that separates people on what they really believe.

Now to get to the heart of that, let me jump down the funnel to the bottom line of the controversy historically between the Roman Catholic Church and evangelicals that provoked the Reformation in ways...I'm trying to say this in a way that my mother, God bless her, if she were still alive would be able to understand it and I hope she understands it now far more clearly than I do in her felicity in heaven, but in any case if my mother were here I would say, "Mom, here's my problem. God is just, God is righteous and I'm not. How can I possibly survive a tribunal before a just and holy God since I know that that God requires and demands perfect righteousness for Him to justify anyone?" And so the issue in the sixteenth century was not whether God demands righteousness in order for Him to declare somebody just, but the issue is where do we get that righteousness?

The Protestant view was this, that the only righteousness that has the merit necessary to meet the requirements of the holiness of God is that righteousness that was achieved and performed by Jesus Christ and by Jesus Christ alone. There's where the word "alone" comes in, John, because all Protestants have acknowledged historically that the phrase, "Justification by faith alone" really means, it's shorthand for "Justification by the righteousness of Christ alone, that only His righteousness is sufficient to save us."

The Roman Catholic Church said that the only way God will ever declare me righteous or you righteous or anybody else righteous is if they have a righteousness that inheres within them, an intrinsic righteousness, a righteousness that really belongs to John Ankerburg. They would say that you can't be righteous, John, apart from the help of Christ and the grace of Christ and the infusion of His power and so on with which you must assent and cooperate, *es ara cooperas???*, the language they use, and so you can't be saved without the help of Christ or without grace or without faith, but added to that faith, added to that grace, added to that Christ must be the contribution of John Ankerburg without which God will not declare you just. Now that's all the difference in the world. And the word "alone" is trying to draw a line in the sand and say that the gospel of Jesus Christ says that the ONLY way a person can be saved is by the righteousness of Christ imputed to us by faith.

ANKERBURG: Amen. How did we clarify that in our doctrinal statement?

SPROUL: In the doctrinal statement we spent most of our discussion time that day focusing on this question, "What is the gospel? And is the doctrine of sola fide, justification of faith alone, essential to the gospel and essential to Christianity unto salvation?" Because the problem that I had and others had with ECT is with the statement that we are justified by grace through faith because of Christ...I've been saying for ten months that every delegate to the Roman Catholic Council of Trent in the sixteenth century would have happily signed that, that ECT nowhere explicitly mentions the Protestant and Reformation doctrine of sola fide, justification by faith alone. It doesn't affirm it, it doesn't deny it but what I have been concerned to say is that implicitly and inferentially and I think the necessary inference of the document is that sola fide is not necessary to believe in order for one to be a brother or sister in Christ because the Roman Catholic Church certainly does not affirm sola fide.

MACARTHUR: I think that's... if I may jump in...

SPROUL: Jump in, John.

MACARTHUR: I think that's more than implicit in the document, I think it's explicit.

ANKERBURG: Yeah. Let me come to a question for you, John, that will help us out on that and that's one of the things that we told Chuck and Jim Packer and Bill Bright and that was this statement, "We together, evangelicals and Catholics, confess our sins against the unity that Christ intends for all His disciples." Now the assumption in that statement is that evangelicals and Catholics are all Christ's disciples. What do you think of that assumption?

MACARTHUR: Well, I think that's...that's in grave error. And just going back, if I can make the point solidly, to borrow the language of the Apostle Paul, any attempt at self-righteousness, no matter how noble the effort, no matter how frequently the God vocabulary is used and the divine is brought into it, any attempt to self-righteousness Paul classifies as skubalon in Philippians 3. That word is about as vivid a word as he could possibly use. It can be translated rubbish, the most accurate translation is dung. When you're talking about...when you talk about a works/righteousness system of any kind, the word is skubalon, you're not talking about somebody who is almost there and God is going to say, "Well, you're close enough, you know, a leaner counts too." It's not that way at all. It's so far from saving that it's rubbish, it's garbage. That's why Paul said, "All my life," he said, "I tried to achieve this stuff and I had all this stuff in my gain column," remember that in Philippians 3? "And then I saw Christ and a righteousness which came not by the law but a righteousness that was given to me by faith, the righteousness of God, and immediately all that was gained was skubalon." And what you've got is a whole system built on skubalon and you can't throw your arms around that system. You can't embrace it and simply say..."Well, they talk about Jesus and they talk about God and they talk about faith and they talk about grace and we've got to embrace them. And if we don't embrace them, we're violating the unity of the body and we're being ungracious to other disciples." That is a frightening misrepresentation of the distinctiveness of justification by faith and faith alone.

ANKERBURG: Dr. Kennedy, you know, Catholicism believes that evangelical Protestants do not emphasize or put enough significance on the changed life. Okay? They hear us talk about justification by faith alone and they think that nothing has to happen in terms of the life. But they get mixed up, justification with sanctification. Would you define those and talk about the relationship?

KENNEDY: They state very clearly in their both in Trent and also in their modern catechism that's just come out that justification encompasses sanctification so they confound the two. And justification and sanctification must always be distinguished but they can never be separated. Justification is an act, once and forever, instantaneous, whereby God declares a sinner, an ungodly, unrighteous sinful

man, declares him righteous for the sake of Christ, having imputed to him the righteousness or the perfect obedience of Jesus Christ. And that is once and for all done. No Christian is more or less justified than another. We are all justified instantaneously, all justified totally and completely. Sanctification is a process which begins at the moment of regeneration, the moment of salvation, and grows all through our lives. It is different in every believer. Sometimes you hear people say they don't like people that are "holier than thou," holier than me, but the fact of the matter is there are Christians that are holier than I am, holier than you are and holier than everyone here is and everyone sitting in this room is at some different degree of cleansing and growth in the Christian faith. That is completed by glorification which again is an act which takes place after death, immediately after death, where all of the vestigial remains of sin are removed and we are made absolutely perfect. That's it. It's as if as if the perfect white robe of Christ's righteousness were placed upon us once and for all. Internally we were gradually being cleansed and purified throughout this life. And at glorification after death inwardly we were made as perfect as outwardly we are counted for Christ's sake right now. But they make sanctification a part of justification so that a person must work long and labor hard.

I was just reading some of the things which they tell a person they must do in order to receive the grace of justification. Consider these things. They must love and worship God, pray, fasting. They must one love one's neighbor. They must practice self-renunciation. Obey the commandments of God. Bear witness to the Catholic faith. Follow supernatural inspiration and deeds. Confess the major doctrines of the church. And if they do all of these things, they may become worthy of justification. But the Bible says that God justifies the ungodly and that we are justified apart from works.

In the third chapter of Romans where Paul gives the fullness statement of the gospel, he concludes with this concluding statement, "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from...chorus...apart from the works of the law." Now that is nothing other than sola fide stated in other words, faith alone. A man is justified by faith apart from the works of the law. But they are saying a man is justified by faith based upon his completion of a whole series of years of efforts to keep the law. And finally, he is justified by his own merit, in effect. John?

MACARTHUR: John, I was just going to add. The process of justification, and it is a process in the Catholic faith, starts with infant baptism. And they say that justification is initiated as a process at infant baptism and it progresses through life based upon what you do with infused grace, that grace is infused into you supernaturally, it's infused into you through the Mass, it's infused into you through the sacraments. And as it's infused and you cooperate with it, you keep the justifying process going.

Now you can stop that process at any point in time with a mortal sin. But you keep it going. Even when you get to the end of your life the odds are you haven't kept it going good enough and you're going to purgatory. Now when you get in purgatory you hang around there for an eon or two doing whatever you can do to keep that process moving, hoping somebody up on top is sending down something from the treasury of merit to add to you so that eventually justification may actually be

completed and you'll get out of that place into heaven. Nothing could be a more convoluted view of what is an instantaneous act in the Word of God as He said exactly by which God places the righteousness of Christ on you. And the truth is, I am no more righteous to the satisfaction of God now than I was before I was declared righteous.

SPROUL: That's not true. That's not the truth. The truth is, John MacArthur is a changed man. And the truth is John MacArthur has had some degree of sanctification in his life.

SPROUL AND MACARTHUR TALKING AT THE SAME TIME

MACARTHUR: This is true...this is true. But what I said was...what I said was...you've got to get my qualifier, I said I am no more righteous in the sense of satisfying a just God. In other words, I cannot achieve a righteousness that satisfies His requirement. Yes, I believe in regeneration, that's a different issue and that there is a work of God in my life that is a sanctifying work.

SPROUL: That's why I was joshing him there because we don't want to give the impression...

MACARTHUR: No, I appreciate it.

SPROUL: That people think that just because we believe we're justified by faith that nothing happens, that we remain unchanged.

ANKERBURG: Take 45 seconds for the person that tuned in just to this program that would like to have his sins forgiven and have Christ's righteousness imputed to him...R.C., how does he do it?

SPROUL: In 45 seconds I would say his only hope of being forgiven and restored to a relationship with God is to confess his sins, acknowledge his sin and repent of his sins and look to Christ and to Christ alone who is the only person who is sufficient to give him what he desperately needs to be reconciled to God, that Christ will cover your nakedness, that Christ will supply the righteousness from Himself and grant you all of His righteousness as a robe to put upon your nakedness. And if you would receive Him by faith and trust in His righteousness, then you will be received by the Father into the Father's house and adopted into His family.

END OF SEGMENT ONE

Now our program is about a document called "The Evangelicals and Catholics Together, The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium." We're also going to be talking about a New Clarifying Statement that was just written by the evangelical signees of this document.

You may not know but The Evangelicals and Catholics Together document was written by evangelicals and Protestants and signed by 20 well-known leaders in the evangelical world and 20

well-known Roman Catholic leaders. Now Chuck Colson who helped to draft this document has acknowledged that it has caused a lot of controversy and he has admitted that it raised genuine concerns over whether this document clearly represents what evangelical Christians believe.

So just a few weeks ago we met with Chuck at his request. We had ten evangelical leaders there. The four of us were there. And Chuck expressed his concern over the confusion the document has caused, the lack of clarity concerning what evangelicals believe. And he wanted to resolve and remove any contentious issues so that there would no longer be any doubt as to where he and the other Protestant signees stood.

To this end together we all composed a statement that clarifies and clearly defines our evangelical distinctiveness. Not all of them, but some of the primary ones. Now, Dr. John MacArthur, when we met together, we agreed that the ECT document, the Evangelicals and Catholics Together document, was attempting to join Roman Catholics and evangelical Protestants together as co-belligerents, the word that Francis Shaeffer coined, working at the grassroots level in terms of social issues. And we were going to work together against the many social evils, including secular humanism, the rising tide of Islam, pornography, abortion, and things like that. But we also agreed that this work has been perceived as going too far in proclaiming the kind of unity that exists. I'd like you to define the kind of unity that can exist between evangelicals and Roman Catholics and the kind of unity that cannot exist until the doctrine of justification by faith alone has been dealt with clearly.

MACARTHUR: Well, I might be a little bit radical on this, so...but I'll go ahead. I think the way we can work together on it is for the Catholics to work against those things like they want to work against them and we'll work against those things like we want to work against them, but we can't really...we can't really throw our arms around each other in a common effort because that confounds the issue of spiritual truth.

Look, if the Catholic Church is already a co-belligerent, if they're already anti-abortion, and pornography and homosexuality, they're going to use all of their energies within the framework of their system to go after that. We're committed to that and we're going after that. There's already a collective movement. Once you then sort of try to define that as common spiritual mission built on common spiritual unity, you just take doctrine and throw it out the window. And perception is violated, particularly because the Catholic Church claims to be true Christianity. And when we reverse 450 years of history and just throw our arms around the Roman system, which I think we have to say, John, in all honesty, is not a group of wayward brothers but is an apostate form of Christianity. It is a false religion, it is another religion. When you throw your arms around that you...you literally have to undo any doctrinal distinction. And in fact, ECT doesn't just do that implicitly, they do it explicitly. In the document, in effect they say, we have to accept all baptized Roman Catholics as brothers and sisters in Christ. And in an article that followed that up in Christianity Today, J.I. Packer said, "We should acknowledge as brothers and sisters in Christ anyone who lives to the highest ideals of their

communion."

My response to that is the opposite. I maybe could fellowship with a bad Roman Catholic, that is one who rejected the system but was still in the church and came to know Christ. But one who holds the highest ideals of Roman Catholicism, on what grounds do I have spiritual unity? And when you get spiritual leaders from both churches coming together to sign a common effort, you may say it is to fight a cultural war but people are going to see it as infusion over doctrine.

SPROUL: John, can I say something about this?

ANKERBURG: Yeah, let me just throw in here, that's why we put in here paragraph one in this new doctrinal statement, which let me read it. "Our para-church cooperation with evangelically committed Roman Catholics for the pursuit of agreed objectives does not imply acceptance of Roman Catholic doctrinal distinctives, or endorsement of the Roman Catholic Church system."

SPROUL: Now that's important, John, that Chuck and Dr. Packer and Bill Bright wanted to make that point clear. I just wanted to comment on John's statement that he prefaced by saying it was a little bit radical, like being a little bit pregnant, I think, because when somebody on national television representing evangelicalism makes the comment that in their opinion or in their judgment the Roman Catholic Church is apostate, is not a true Christian community, in this day and age of tolerance and pluralism and relativism and the milieu of irenic, peaceful, gentle co-existence...we live in a world that's fed up with theological controversy and disputes and divisions and all of that. We don't live back in the sixteenth century where people burned each other at the stake over that. For John MacArthur to make a statement like that about the Roman Catholic Church which is the largest professing body in the world that claims Christian position is just plain inflammatory, incendiary and will provoke a howling outcry of people who...you're going to get an enormous amount of mail for saying that, John, you know that. You know... (Applause) Because...

MACARTHUR: I want the punch line, what's the punch line.

SPROUL: The punch line is this, John. That the one thing that the spirit of tolerance of our day cannot tolerate is intolerance because relationships have become more important than truth. Now what's at stake here? If I understand the New Testament where the Apostle Paul writes to the Galatians and says, "If anybody...anybody, if it's Peter, if it's Barnabas, if it's an angel from heaven teaches any other gospel, let him be anathema." That's not Sproul, that's not MacArthur, that's not Kennedy, that's not Ankerburg, that is the apostolic position. And Paul wanted to make sure that he made himself clear so he repeated that. And then he goes on to say that he had to resist Peter himself as Peter started to..to..to crack and compromise and negotiate the gospel.

Now think about the people in the first century who got that letter. They were horrified. They said, "Oh, the last thing we can have happen is a breakup of fellowship and unity between Peter and Paul." All I've listened to for ten months is, "Oh my goodness, what would happen if we saw a split among people like Colson and Packer and Sproul and MacArthur, we can't have that happen?" Well I'm the last person in the world that would want to have that happen. I can't stand that either. These people are my friends, my comrades and everything. But, John, what he is saying here, the Catholic Church understood in the sixteenth century at Trent, Rome placed its unambiguous anathema on the Protestant doctrine of justification by faith alone and it never in any magisterial sense removed that anathema. The Roman Catholic Church condemns sola fide. Now if...if...please understand this...if sola fide is the gospel, then the Roman Catholic Church has condemned the gospel of Jesus Christ. Now nobody who went to the Council of Trent as a delegate went there with the intention of condemning the gospel. The theologians of Rome really believed they were defending the gospel and the Protestants had in fact committed apostasy.

Now I admire the church, the Roman communion of the sixteenth century, for at least understanding what apparently people don't understand today and that's what's at stake here, that they understood that somebody is under the anathema of God. And we can be as nice and as pleasant and as gentle and as loving and as charitable and as tolerant as we possibly be but it's not going to change that, folks. Somebody is preaching a different gospel and when Rome condemned the Protestant declaration of justification by faith alone, I believe that Rome when placing the anathema on sola fide placed the anathema of God upon themselves. And I agree with his assessment that the institution is apostate.

(Applause)

MACARTHUR: I don't want to leave Jim out of this but I just..I think it's so important to know this. In a time like this of tolerance, listen, false teaching will always cry intolerance, it will always say you're being divisive, you're being unloving, you're being ungracious because it can only survive when it doesn't get scrutinized. And so it cries against any intolerance. It cries against any examination, any scrutiny, just "let's embrace each other, let's love each other, let's put all that behind us." False doctrine cries the loudest about unity. And listen carefully when you hear the cry for unity because it may be the cover of false doctrine encroaching. And if ever we should follow 1 Thessalonians 5 and examine everything carefully, it's when somebody is crying "unity, love and acceptance."

ANKERBURG: Yeah, Dr. Kennedy, not Chuck and not J.I. Packer and some of our evangelical buddies that came out with ECT document, but others have gone one step further and have said, "You know, evangelicals and Catholics should overlook doctrinal differences and distinctives and unite to survive today here in America. If we don't stand together, we don't fight together, we're all going down." How does that come into your theology of the sovereignty of God? Should we give up doctrinal distinctives just to survive? What do you think about that?

KENNEDY: Well, John, first of all let me, if I could, just add one little thing to this discussion that went on here and then I'll get back to that.

ANKERBURG: That's all right.

KENNEDY: For those lay people here that are not familiar, the Council of Trent which was held from 1645 to 1663, 18 years that they spent examining the doctrines of the Protestant Reformation. And at the end of that time they came out with many canons of the Council of Trent. And this is the particular one that R.C. was referring to, and I'd just like to have you hear the words, this has never been altered or denied by the Catholic Church, quote: "If anyone says that the faith which justifies is nothing else but trust in the divine mercy which hardens sins because of Christ, or that it is trust alone by which we are justified," which is what every evangelical Christian would say, and they end with, "let him be anathema." Which means, "Let him be accursed." Every evangelical Christian in the world stands under the official never-changed curse of the Roman church. And we need to be aware of that fact.

Now I think that the Bible says we are to hold to the truth in love. Now that's difficult to do. Only Christ ever did that perfectly. We always tend either to slip into a rigidity or legalism or to slide down the other side into some sort of wishy-washy compromise of the gospel. But getting to your question, and that was one of the reasons for ECT that we live, as Chuck told me on the phone when he called me, we live in a time when the very concept of truth is under attack, when the values and morals that Christians hold in common are under enormous assault, that we must stand together or we are going to fall together. And what the question is if in the process, and I believe in co-belligerency, I think that we should endeavor to work together to fight the evils of our time. And I believe that I can't...and I'm supposed to love everybody and I love people whether they're Roman Catholic or Presbyterian and I've known some Presbyterians that were a lot harder to love than some Roman Catholics. You're married to him...huh? Okay.

But the problem with this document is it goes beyond just simply saying we need to fight for these...on these social issues together, and it gives the appearance of compromising the basic doctrine of the gospel...of the Bible which is the gospel. And this is the heart of all Christianity. And this is why we had this meeting right here in my office, to try to work these things out so there would not be a schism among evangelicals and happily got all of these gentlemen to sign a statement that they do affirm the basic Reformational truths. I still would have difficulty having my name on that document, which it is not, because I think of the ambiguity of it, the lack of clarity and the way it opens the door for people to think there is no difference of any significance pertaining to the gospel of salvation between Protestants and Catholics.

ANKERBURG: I think it's very important right now that we for the people that are tuning in because they want to know where do we stand right now...what does this doctrinal statement mean in terms of where we're at?

SPROUL: That was...that was what I was going to address, John, that so we have an understanding of this. The purpose of this meeting here for the clarification was, as Chuck Colson has passion concern to communicate, he said, "Can't we come together and agree to disagree as brothers in Christ?" Because the controversy had escalated to such a point that the issue became now what is the relationship between Catholics and evangelicals but what will the relationship now be between evangelicals who endorse this position and those who didn't, are we facing a serious and permanent breach within evangelical ranks? I mean, was it necessary...I mean, are we going to break fellowship over our disagreement over ECT? That was what...what provoked this. And at that meeting everybody expressed their concerns in a candid way. And Chuck, of course, said, you know, the whole thing was provoked in the first place because of their deep concern of what was happening in Latin America and they didn't want to see another Belfast erupt and trying to come to a united front against the increasingly hostile secularism. And we all said, hey, we share that concern. We don't want to see Latin America become a Belfast and we recognize the hostility of secularism. Our concern was, as I stated in that meeting as clearly as I knew how, that as far as I could see ECT in my judgment betrayed the gospel of Jesus Christ. And I also went on to say, and I've said this as loudly as I can every time I discuss this, I don't for one minute think that Bill Bright, Jim Packer, Charles Colson at all ever in their wildest dreams ever intended any such thing. But by the same token, neither did the signers of the Council of Trent. I wasn't...this was not a personal thing with me. I was saying the document in what it says and proclaims because it goes beyond just standing together as co-belligerents, it declares a unity of faith, John, where there is not a unity of faith. And that's what...and that's what deeply, deeply concerns me.

So what the concern of them men was at this meeting was to say, "Hey look, let's say to the world we do believe in sola fide." And Chuck Colson says, "I believe in justification by faith alone," and he wanted to put on paper his statement that this is central to the gospel of Jesus Christ because he realizes the people were interpreting the document the way I was interpreting it. And he believed that's a misinterpretation. Packer thinks it's a misinterpretation. I think it's one that the document screams, but we still disagree on that. And Chuck is still committed to ECT. My fondest hope was that these men would remove their names from it...A, and if they couldn't do that, if they couldn't formally recant of it...B, that they would at least revise the document itself. And we couldn't get them to do that. At least, please give a clarification that we can print separately of what you meant.

ANKERBURG: Dr. MacArthur, there might be some people that are listening in and saying that's all fine and dandy in terms of what you guys are debating, but they picked up on some good things in terms of the relationship they might have with God. Take 45 seconds and close this with the good news that we think is so important and how can the people that are watching get into it themselves?

MACARTHUR: You know, I think the simplest way that I can say that is God has commanded all men everywhere to repent because He has ordained a day in which He will judge the world by that man whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus Christ. There's...there's forgiveness for sin to those who repent. And it's as simple as a beggar coming and crying out for something. It's as simple as hungering and thirsting for a righteousness you desperately need, don't have and can't earn. It's pleading with a gracious God to give you the forgiveness of your sins purely and simply because He wants to do it. It's a beggar's position. And if a person is overwrought with sin and feels the burden and the weight of sin and the heart anguish of sin, come to God, cry for mercy and God in His grace will reach out and by virtue of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ which satisfied His justice with regard to your sin grant you saving grace.

END OF SEGMENT TWO

ANKERBURG: We're talking about The Evangelicals and Catholics Together, as well as a new Clarifying Doctrinal Statement that was just written by the evangelical signees of this document. We had a private meeting with Chuck Colson and J.I. Packer and Bill Bright and we forged out the clarifying statement. But as I have told Chuck, we would talk about some of the things in the ECT document that we have felt since we wrote a clear doctrinal statement to clarify some of the things that were in there that there would be no way that we could talk without sounding a little bit critical of that document simply because we felt there were things that did need to be clarified.

One of those things has to do with sheep stealing, proselytization that comes in to the great commission. Jesus commanded every Christian to go into all the world and preach the gospel. The ECT document though in talking about this area says, "The one Christ and one mission includes many other Christians, notably the Eastern Orthodox and those Protestants not commonly identified as evangelicals." And we assume that means liberal Protestants. "All Christians are encompassed in the prayer, 'May they all be one.'"

Now before we get on to the sheep stealing and proselytization, I think that we wanted to stop right there, Dr. Kennedy, and we took exception to the assumption that all of these folks under these church titles were automatically Christians. Now Chuck says that's not what he intended, he never intended to say that they were all Christians. But that's the way a lot of people have interpreted it, including Dr. Carl Henry who said that as he looked at the mass media that's how they interpreted it. Now we clarified that, but let's start at the beginning. Do you assume that everybody that's a member of Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church, an evangelical church, or everybody that's in a Roman Catholic Church just because they are a member of a Catholic Church or a liberal Protestant church that all of these under these titles that they are automatically true Christians?

KENNEDY: I certainly don't make any such assumption, John. In fact, I've said from this pulpit right here that there are a number of members of my church that I would not want to be hand cuffed to when they die. The ECT document says that all active Roman Catholics are brothers and sisters in Christ and therefore should not be evangelized. Well I am certainly not ready to give up evangelizing active Presbyterians, much less active Roman Catholics or anybody else. My wife, to use a very personal example, went to the Presbyterian church six times a week all of her life as she was a soloist, she was a choir member, she played the piano, she taught Sunday school, her father was an elder. She was as active a Presbyterian as Paul was a Jew. And yet, she was not saved. And I witnessed to her and someone else witnessed to her and finally she accepted Christ. And I can tell you this, my wife would be very happy to stand up here and tell this audience that she is very happy that I did not assume that all Presbyterians, active Presbyterians, were Christians. I don't assume anything about anyone. And when we evangelize, we use diagnostic questions. Wouldn't it be foolish of a doctor to assume that all blondes are healthy and therefore they don't have to be checked. They have good hearts so they don't have to check their hearts?

ANKERBURG: It's true.

KENNEDY: That would be very foolish. And so we would be foolish to make such assumptions. So we ask diagnostic questions. We as evangelists, which every Christian is to be, should be spiritual physicians. We should ask diagnostic questions. Do you know you have eternal life? What are you basing your hope? Why should God let you into heaven if you were to die tonight? So we find out.

And I don't care what the label on the person's back says, whether it's a Presbyterian, Baptist, Catholic or Muslim, if that person is not trusting in Jesus Christ alone for His salvation, that person in my opinion, and I believe certainly in the historic opinion of all Protestant churches is not really a Christian and is desperately in need of hearing the gospel and being saved. And we have among the thousands of members of this church, thousands of them who have been active members of all kinds of churches, including Roman Catholics, who discovered years into their maturity, after 30, 40, 50, 60 years of active service in this church or some other church that they really never understood the gospel, they have never put their trust in Christ alone and they had never experienced the saving power of the grace of God which can not only declare us righteous in the sight of God but it can change and transform our lives and make us new creatures and turn us around and start us off in a new direction and give us a joy and a purpose and a meaning in our life that we've never had before. And that is what I believe every Christian ought to be doing, not checking to see the label in the coat before you decide to share the gospel with them, but finding out diagnostically in whom are they trusting for their salvation. And that, I believe, is what the great commission commands everyone to do.

(Applause)

ANKERBURG: Dr. Kennedy, I think you'd be great in instructing Christians on how to witness, you know that?

KENNEDY: I've thought about starting that.

ANKERBURG: Yeah. John MacArthur, let me come to you because I want to get to this thing of sheep stealing. I've heard you preach on this and you've got some neat illustrations here. Carl Henry, so it's not us saying this and it's not other folks that are close by but he quotes the media and he says, "The ECT document deplores proselytizing or sheep stealing saying that the energies might be better deplored in reaching the unchurched. Whatever may have been the intention of the ECT writers, this was interpreted by the media and by many evangelicals as an annulment of the great commission." Now let me read the statement and we told Chuck this and we've also written a clarifying statement on this.

"There's a necessary distinction," ECT said, "between evangelizing and what is today common called proselytizing or sheep stealing. We condemn the practice of recruiting people from another community, Protestants from Catholics or Catholics from Protestants, for purposes of denominational or institutional aggrandizement and we call upon Christians to refrain from such activities." One more statement, it says, "In this country and elsewhere, evangelicals and Catholics attempt to win converts from one another's holds. Such efforts at recruitment," ECT says, "undermines the Christian mission by which we are bound." Talk to me.

MACARTHUR: That's a frightening statement. That little sort of caveat in there about "for institutional aggrandizement" is meaningless because they come right back and use the word "convert people" which is a distinctively spiritual term, not an organizational term. Look, I could start as a pastor of a church like Jim has seen and my church is particularly filled with ex-Roman Catholics because of the large Hispanic community in Southern California and the most conservative figure that I could give you would be that 50 percent, the upper end would be 70 percent of the entire membership of our church, and we probably have 10,000 people on a Sunday, 50 to 70 percent of those people are converted Roman Catholics. You're talking about a massive amount of people who have had Roman Catholic influence. Every Sunday night in our church, every Sunday night of the year we have baptism. And when we have baptism people stand there who are confessing Christ publicly and they give their testimony. There is not a Sunday night that goes by in my memory when there hasn't been at least one, two, three and there will be anywhere from five to ten people on a Sunday night who say, "I was in the Catholic Church, I went through Catholic school, I grew up in that whole system, I never knew Christ. I never knew God. I was in a system. The Church is a surrogate Christ. The Church has all the authority. I sucked my life from the Church, from the system. But as far as the knowledge of Christ or the reality of the forgiveness of sin, or the power of the Holy Spirit in my life, absolutely didn't have any idea about that." I'm talking from a pastoral standpoint.

The Catholic Church from my vantage point is the single most fertile ground for evangelism that exists in this community in which I minister. These people know about Christ, they know about the...(applause)...they know about the Bible, they believe all that. What they don't know about is how to become a Christian, how to be genuinely converted and saved, they don't know that. And for somebody to try to back me off of that would be to bring me under the judgment of God because I am commanded to be faithful to the discharge of the gospel, to the ends of the earth and to every creature that I can reach. And I think what that document did was just immediately with one sweep just sanctify or justify, whatever you want to say, all the Roman Catholics and say "Hands off." You know, all of the Protestants unloaded all their guns and said, "Oh, well that's good news, we don't have to bother with those folks, we'll just re-label them." I mean, that's the way the thing reads. And that's what frightened me because people actually in my church came to me in tears saying they had read that thing and if somebody hadn't given the gospel to them, I mean, they would have never come to know the Lord Jesus Christ to that point.

So I think it's a tragic thing. And I think as far as this unity thing goes, I need to add a footnote, I'm really kind of weary of this misinterpretation of John 17 that Jesus praying that they may be one, that they may be one like, "Oh please, I just really want you to do this, and I really hope it works out this way." Listen, when Jesus prayed that they may be one, that prayer is fulfilled in the baptizing work of the Holy Spirit that takes every single believer and baptizes them into the one body. That is a fact, that's not a wish. And that they are one. But the ones that are one are he that is joined to the Lord as one Spirit. So we can't just say, "Well, the Catholics, he wants them to be one with us and he wants the orthodox to be one and the liberals to be one and he's hoping we'll all get together in an organizational way." That's not it. That prayer is fulfilled in the baptism of the Spirit. Jim?

KENNEDY: John, let me add an illustration to that. Just a few weeks ago I was out on visitation and I ended up in a home where there were 17 people present. There was a family that were in our new member class. There was a visiting family that were part of our sponsors that happened to be there visiting them. There were a bunch of kids. And there was a mother of one of the adults there, an elderly woman from Brooklyn and she was a Roman Catholic. Now these other people, there were some other relatives there, they came from four or five different...five or six maybe different churches and backgrounds. And I went around and asked them these questions, I asked them in all of them, each of them one by one, in what were they trusting for their hope of eternal life? Why should God admit them into heaven? And this woman before had said with a little bit of hostility that she thought it was terrible that there were all these different religions, everybody had their own religion, their own views, they're all different. And she didn't like this idea everybody had a different religion, we all ought to be one.

And it was fascinating to see that one after another after another, a person said the reason God should let me into heaven is Christ died for my sins, Jesus paid for my sins, I have no hope but

Christ, by the grace of God through faith in Christ alone, it was through Christ who died for me, I put my trust in Jesus Christ, Christ paid for my sins, I'm trusting in Jesus Christ, Christ is my Savior, I have no hope but Jesus, and on and on it went. And this woman said, "Because I'm good." But she was stunned by the fact that what she thought were all of these different churches in disunity were all in perfect unity when it came to the essence of the gospel. And I like the statement that Paschal said, and Paschal was a Roman Catholic, semi-Calvinistic Roman Catholic, I must say, looked on a little strangely by the Vatican but a great philosopher, scientist and theologian, and he said in essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty and in all things charity...and the original meaning of that word meaning love. And I think there's a lot to be said for that. And I think as John has said, there is a unity of Christians, of true believers...and you can go anywhere in the world as many of you have and you'll find a person is a true Christian and you have discovered a brother or sister in Christ regardless of what denomination he's in if he's really trusting Christ...you have been joined together in one and you are one in Him.

SPROUL: That gets, I think, John, to the crux of the matter.

(Applause)

SPROUL: I think what Dr. Kennedy has just said gets to the heart of the concern of those who did sign ECT as well as getting to the heart of the concern who would never sign ECT. And let me explain what I mean by that. Chuck Colson, Jim Packer, Bill Bright, they say we don't embrace the system of doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church, we acknowledge that there are long-standing things that divide us and that these matters are serious. But we want to affirm, as the document did, that everyone who accepts Christ as Lord and Savior is a brother and sister in Christ and that Catholics and evangelicals are brothers and sisters in Christ. And what's behind that, I believe, is a conviction that though there are serious divisions historically between Roman Catholicism and evangelicalism, there is an agreement at the essential level of historical Christianity.

For example, both communions affirm the Apostle's Creed. All evangelical confessions historically have reaffirmed the so-called Ecumenical Councils of Nicea, Chalcedon, etc. And we share a common catholicity in terms of essential things to the Christian faith like the trinity, the deity of Christ, the atonement of Christ, the resurrection of Christ, all of these doctrines that have been attacked by modern liberalism. You know, and at least the Roman Catholic communion has been heroic in defending the deity of Christ, the resurrection of Christ, the supernatural elements that the Protestant liberals have jettisoned. So they say, "Hey, the Catholic Church has been heroic and faithful in holding to these essential truths." And I say that's right, those are essential truths. The tragedy that breaks my heart, John, is that I believe that justification by faith alone is an essential truth and if all of Rome would repent of her rejection of sola fide and be as heroic and consistent in reaffirming the gospel of Jesus Christ as well as the person of Jesus Christ, we wouldn't have this problem. But what is at dispute here is the essential aspect of the work of Jesus Christ. And so I cannot sign ECT

because I cannot recognize that we have a common faith and a common witness and a common ecclesiastical vision for the simple fact that we don't agree on the gospel. And that's essential.

ANKERBURG: And I think we need to say...(applause)...I think we need to say that on this area of sheep stealing, proselytization and evangelism we have two points in the new doctrinal statement that Chuck and J.I. and the Protestant signees have agreed to. But, Dr. Kennedy, with a minute left, for people that again are listening, the gospel is always good news. When you start to grasp it, it really grabs your soul. And the fact is in this one minute that we've got left, for the person that's listening and saying...Hey, don't leave me hanging now, how do I get into this relationship with Jesus? Tell me more.

KENNEDY: Delighted to do it, the great joy of my life. God is holy and we are sinful. That's the problem. And if that were all there were to the problem, God would solve it very simply. He would send us all to hell. But God is also loving, infinitely so. And because He loved us He sent His own Son into the world and He imputed, or laid upon Jesus Christ all of our guilt and sin. And then something which astounded me when I first learned it as a father, God poured out all of His wrath for sin upon His own Son and Jesus Christ in body and soul suffered infinitely in our behalf and paid for the penalty of our sins. As I've told many, the problem for you is simple, your sins are going to be punished by God. The question is, are they going to be punished on you in hell forever? Or on Jesus Christ on the cross? If you would prefer the latter, you need to abandon all trust in yourself, repent of your sins and receive Him into your heart as Savior and Lord, trusting in His atoning death and perfect life as your only hope of salvation. And His promise is, "He that trusts in Me already has everlasting life."

Available online at: <http://www.gty.org>

COPYRIGHT (C) 2015 Grace to You

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright>).