

# FAITH ALONE

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THE EVANGELICAL DOCTRINE  
*of* JUSTIFICATION



R. C. SPROUL



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To Dr. John H. Gerstner



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# FOREWORD

While only a generation ago Roman Catholics and Protestants rarely found their way into each others' spiritual company, we now see them praying and reading Scripture together, and joining hearts, heads, and hands in the struggle against secularism. With the catholic creeds as a basis for cobelligerence, this grassroots ecumenism has produced much fruit. But it has also led to some rather naive lurches that substitute appearances of unity in the gospel for the reality. As today's political and moral struggles often form the basis for common action, the charismatic movement had already provided the tendency to relativize doctrinal distinctives and create a common basis in experience.

The evangelistic energy of evangelical Protestants has added the tendency to bury concern over the actual content of the evangel. One might say that in all of the activity, evangelism is too busy to be troubled with the evangel. In his broadly representative crusades, the Reverend Billy Graham was simply following in the footsteps of an earlier generation of evangelicals whose missionary and evangelistic

zeal encouraged them to play down doctrinal issues when founding the World Council of Churches. Reverend Graham recently reasserted his view of Roman Catholicism: "I have found that my beliefs are essentially the same as those of orthodox Roman Catholics."<sup>1</sup>

After decades of scurrilous caricatures and misinformation, Roman Catholics and Protestants are finally speaking to each other, and this is revealing a greater variety of viewpoints within both camps. It is also revealing (a) how little most Protestants know about their own convictions and (b) with what great ease they find the concerns raised by the Reformation to be simply irrelevant. How can this be? Has Rome's position changed? In fact, it has not. The Vatican II documents as well as the new *Catechism of the Catholic Church* reinvoked the theological position of the Council of Trent, condemning the gospel of justification by an imputed righteousness. If it is not Rome that has altered its position in favor of the gospel, then it must be the other partner that has moved from its earlier position.

According to George Barna, James Hunter, and others who have surveyed the drift in evangelical conviction, evangelicalism is redefining itself doctrinally. From its views of the self (77 percent of evangelicals say that man is basically good by nature) to its views of salvation (87 percent insist that, in salvation, God helps those who help themselves), evangelicalism has every reason to adopt a more sympathetic attitude toward Rome.

After all, the concerns raised by the Reformers (and by those today who believe that the gospel taught in Scripture in 1517 is still taught in Scripture now) were not expressions of bigotry or party spirit. The gospel defines the church,



not vice versa, they insisted, and in our day we must defend the gospel without concern for party labels. If we come to believe that the formula “justification by grace alone through faith alone because of Christ alone” is no longer adequate or foundational for the Christian message, then only spiritual pride would keep us from pursuing a common evangelistic and missionary strategy. But if that is, in fact, the teaching of Scripture, then an evangelical Protestant who obscures, denies, or fails to defend the doctrine of justification is as unfaithful to the gospel as a Roman Catholic in the same position.

Rome still believes what it did on that day in 1564 when it condemned the evangelical truth and those who maintain it. This is no surprise in a body that claims its decisions to be infallible and irreformable. But when the heirs of the Protestant Reformers no longer find this doctrine essential or central in defining the gospel, this is cause for deep sorrow and lament.

In our day, it is common moral or political agendas, common experience, or common zeal and piety that define Christian unity. *Evangelical* once meant “one who embraces the catholic creeds, the formal principle of *sola Scriptura*, and the material principle of *sola fide*.” It now seems to refer to a common “spirituality”—a concern for making converts, an emphasis on the experiential side of faith, and a “personal relationship with Christ.” Since Mormons and other cults are increasingly adopting this “evangelical spirituality,” those who fail to define unity in clear doctrinal terms may be at a loss when explaining to these zealous and deeply committed individuals why they cannot join the roundtable. Today, one can easily find theological professors at leading evangelical

institutions who no longer find justification by faith alone to be true, much less necessary.<sup>2</sup> In much evangelical preaching, teaching, publishing, broadcasting, and evangelism, a steady diet of self-help moralism and shallow sentimentality buries whatever formal position concerning justification one might hold. For the Reformers, it was not part of the gospel or the “fine print” on a piece of paper that was locked in the vault for safekeeping. It was the “good news” and was to be proclaimed far and wide as “the power of God unto salvation,” as the most important thing for a Christian to know.

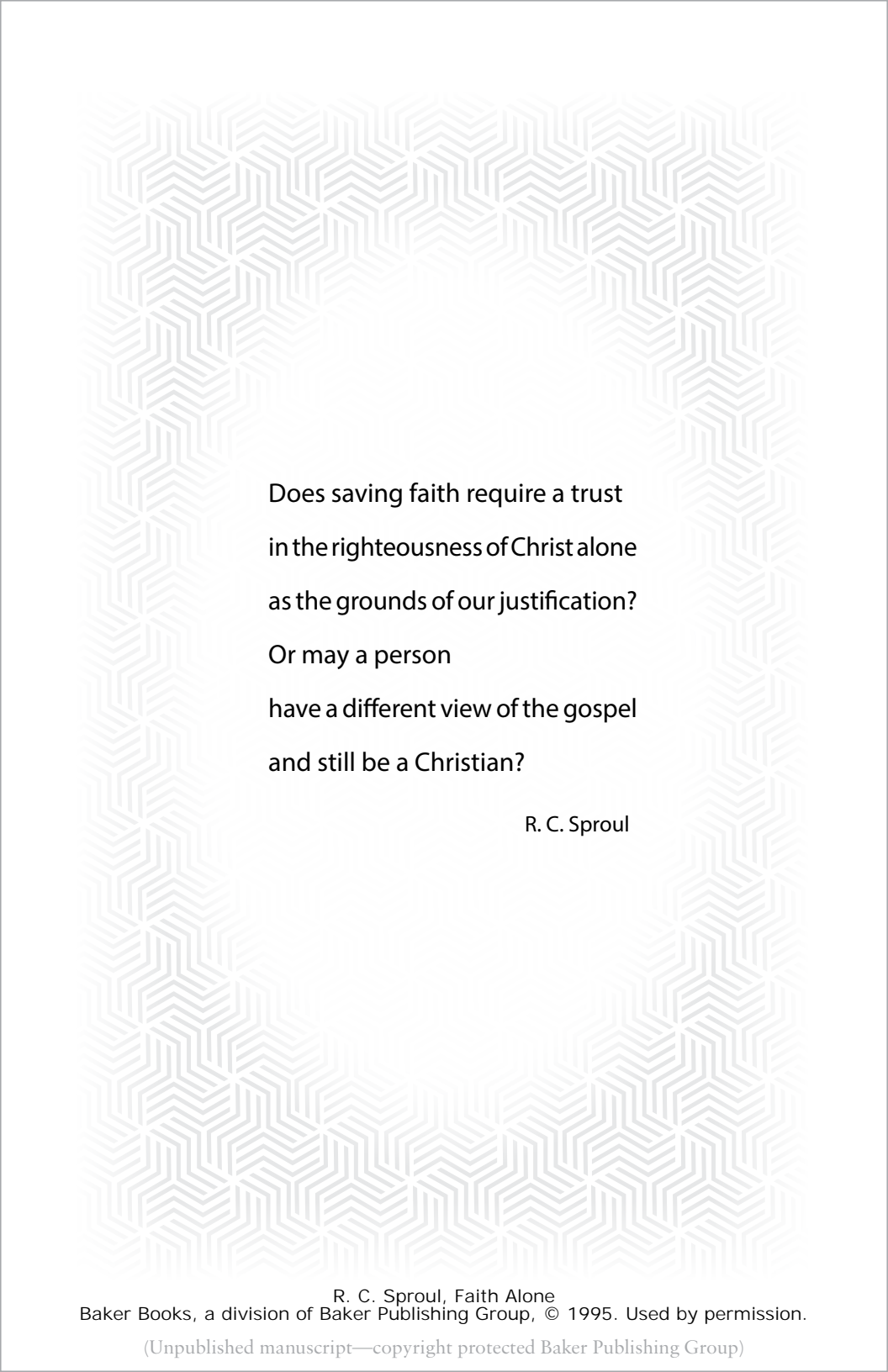
In this immensely readable and relevant treatment of the great biblical announcement, R. C. Sproul has rendered the church an enormous service at a critical moment. The Reformation was not primarily concerned with the issues that evangelicals today often think of first: the papacy, superstition, and the cult of the Virgin and the saints. First and foremost, it was a challenge to Rome’s confusion over the very meaning of the gospel. How can I, a sinner, be accepted by a holy God? That was the question that sent the hearts of those who really knew themselves and their own wickedness racing. If such questions no longer disturb the conscience of the average person (including the Christian) today, it is not because God’s Word has changed but because we have been seduced by our culture into asking the wrong questions. It is not the gospel that is irrelevant but we who, in spite of our feverish activity, proudly assert ourselves as the Red Cross Knight driving back the forces of darkness. The only torch that will enlighten our dark age is the gospel, which we now consider an impediment to our very progress.

With Martin Luther, Philipp Melancthon, Martin Bucer, John Calvin, the heroes of the modern missionary movement,

*Foreword*

George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards, Charles Spurgeon, and millions of evangelical brothers and sisters around the world, R. C. Sproul points us to the Atlas upon whose shoulders rests the entire Christian faith. With precision, warmth, humility, and passion, Sproul reminds us why this “good news,” far from being an irrelevant historical curiosity, remains the Rock of Ages in the stormy harbor of contemporary Christianity. For those with ears to hear, his labors will not be lost.

Michael Horton



Does saving faith require a trust  
in the righteousness of Christ alone  
as the grounds of our justification?  
Or may a person  
have a different view of the gospel  
and still be a Christian?

R. C. Sproul

# 1

## LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS

In the old city of Geneva, Switzerland, there is a lovely park adjacent to the University of Geneva, close to the church where John Calvin preached and taught daily. The park contains a lasting memorial to the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation. The central feature is a magnificent wall adorned with statues of John Calvin, John Knox, Huldrych Zwingli, Theodore Beza, and others. Chiseled into the stone are the Latin words *Post tenebras lux* (After darkness, light).

These words capture the driving force of the Reformation. The darkness referred to is the eclipse of the gospel that occurred in the late Middle Ages. A gradual darkening of the gospel reached its nadir, and the light of the New Testament doctrine of justification by faith alone was all but extinguished.

The firestorm of the Reformation was fueled by the most volatile issue ever debated in church history. The church had faced severe crises in the past, especially in the fourth and fifth centuries when the nature of Christ was at stake. The Arian

heresy of the fourth century culminated in the Council of Nicea and the subsequent confession, the Nicene Creed. The fifth century witnessed the church's struggle against the monophysite and Nestorian heresies that resulted in the Council of Chalcedon and its clear declaration of the humanity and deity of Christ. Since Nicea and Chalcedon, the ecumenical decisions of these councils have served as benchmarks for historic Christian orthodoxy. The doctrines of the Trinity and the union of Christ's divine and human natures have since been regarded, almost universally, as essential tenets of the Christian faith.

Every generation throughout church history has seen doctrinal struggles and debates. Heresies of every conceivable sort have plagued the church and provoked fierce argument, even schism at times.

But no doctrinal dispute has ever been contested more fiercely or with such long-term consequences as the one over justification. There were other ancillary issues debated in the sixteenth century, but none so central or so heated as justification.

Historians often describe justification as the *material* cause of the Reformation. That is, it was the substantive and core issue of the debate. It was this doctrine that led to the worst rupture Christendom ever experienced and the fragmentation of the church into thousands of individual denominations.

How could a dispute over one doctrine cause so many splinters and provoke so much hostility? Was it simply a case of conflict among contentious, obstreperous, bellicose theologians inclined to wage war over trivial matters? Was it a case of repeated misunderstandings leading to a tempest in a teapot, much ado about nothing?

We know how Martin Luther felt about the controversy. Luther called justification by faith alone "the article upon

which the church stands or falls” (*articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae*). This strong assertion of the central importance of justification was linked to Luther’s identification of justification by faith alone (*sola fide*) with the gospel. The “good news” of the New Testament includes not only an announcement of the person of Christ and his work on our behalf but also a declaration of how the benefits of Christ’s work are appropriated by, in, and for the believer.

The issue of *how* justification and salvation are received became the paramount point of debate. Luther’s insistence on *sola fide* was based on the conviction that the “how” of justification is integral and essential to the gospel itself. He viewed justification by faith alone as necessary and essential to the gospel and to salvation.

Since the gospel stands at the heart of Christian faith, Luther and other Reformers regarded the debate concerning justification as one involving an essential truth of Christianity, a doctrine no less essential than that of the Trinity or the dual natures of Christ. Without the gospel, the church falls. Without the gospel, the church is no longer the church.

The logic followed by the Reformers is this:

1. Justification by faith alone is essential to the gospel.
2. The gospel is essential to Christianity and to salvation.
3. The gospel is essential to a church’s being a true church.
4. To reject justification by faith alone is to reject the gospel and to fall as a church.

The Reformers concluded that when Rome rejected and condemned *sola fide*, it condemned itself, in effect, and ceased

to be a true church. This precipitated the creation of new communions or denominations seeking to continue biblical Christianity and to be true churches with a true gospel. They sought to rescue the gospel from the impending danger of total eclipse.

The eclipse metaphor is helpful. An eclipse of the sun does not destroy the sun. An eclipse *obscures* the light of the sun. It brings darkness where there was light. The Reformation sought to remove the eclipse so that the light of the gospel could once again shine in its full brilliance, being perceived with clarity.

That the gospel shone brilliantly in the sixteenth century is not much disputed among people who identify themselves as evangelicals. The life of the Protestant church in the sixteenth century was not perfect, but the revival of godliness in that era is a matter of record that attests to the power of the gospel when viewed in full light.

### Evangelical Distinctives

Evangelicals are called evangelicals for a reason. That reason may change as words undergo a fluid evolution through variations of usage over time and in various cultural settings. Language changes. Words undergo sometimes radical, sometimes subtle changes in nuance and meaning. The science of lexicography is cognizant of such change. Lexicographers pay attention chiefly to two factors in the process of defining words. The first is etymology or derivation. We search for the original roots of words and their historic meanings to gain insight into present usage. Since words and their meanings can and often do change, however, it is not enough merely



to examine a word's root to discover its current meaning. Philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, chief architect of linguistic analysis, argued that words must be understood in terms of their contemporary or "customary" usage.

Words are a part of the *customs* of a people. Words change their meanings as the people change. Take, for example, the word *scan*. If I tell my students to scan the textbook, what would they understand their assignment to be? Most would understand that they need only skim lightly over the material.

Historically, the word *scan* meant to examine closely with fixed attention to detail. The word still carries that idea with respect to the task of air-traffic controllers. The radar scan is not a loose skimming of planes in the air. A brain scan done by a physician is likewise not a casual, "once over" viewing.

The word *scan* sounds enough like the word *skim* for people to begin confusing the two. In this confusion, the term *scan* began to be used to refer to a process that means the very opposite of the word's original meaning. So what is the correct "meaning" of *scan*? Most modern lexicographers, because of the confusion in the term's contemporary usage, would probably cite both meanings.

I labor the point of language because the meaning of the word *evangelical* is not immune from such fluid development, change, and confusion. The etymology of *evangelical* is simple. It comes from the Greek word *euangelion*, or "evangel," which is the New Testament word for gospel. Historically, the term *evangelical* meant literally "gospeler." It was a term used by Protestants who identified with the Reformation doctrine of justification by faith alone.

Fig. 1.1  
Doctrinal Causes of the Reformation

	Formal Cause	Material Cause
Latin name	<i>Sola Scriptura</i>	<i>Sola fide</i>
Translation	Scripture alone	Faith alone
Explanation	Scripture is the sole authority in doctrinal matters.	Justification is by grace alone through faith alone.

If the Reformation had two chief causes, a formal and a material cause, historic evangelicalism has the same two causes. The formal cause of the Reformation was declared in the formula *sola Scriptura*, meaning that the only source of special written revelation that has the authority to bind the conscience absolutely is the Bible. The material cause was declared by the formula *sola fide*, meaning that justification is by faith alone.

Over the centuries evangelicalism became manifest in a wide variety of forms. Manifold denominations emerged with individual doctrinal distinctives. Protestants were divided over a host of theological points, including the sacraments, church government, and worship. We have seen divergent views of soteriology and eschatology—Arminianism, Calvinism, Lutheranism, dispensationalism, and many other “isms”—all flying under the generic banner of evangelicalism.

The term *evangelical* served as a unifying genus to capture under one heading a wide assortment of species. The two prominent doctrines that served as the cohesive forces of evangelical unity were the authority of the Bible and justification by faith alone. Though Protestants historically were divided over many issues, they were united on these two points as well as in their affirmation of the main tenets found

in such ecumenical creeds as the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the formulas of Chalcedon.

### **Protestant Liberalism**

The unity of evangelicalism came under attack and began to disintegrate in the nineteenth century. The use of post-Enlightenment modernism reached a crescendo with the advent of nineteenth-century liberal theology. Nineteenth-century liberalism refers not merely to open-mindedness or anything so vague. It refers to a specific school of thought that departed systematically from historic Christianity. The writings of David Strauss, Wilhelm Wrede, Adolf Harnack, Albrecht Ritschl, Friedrich Schleiermacher, and others belong to this movement. Christianity was desupernaturalized, the Bible as divinely inspired revelation was rejected, and the gospel was reduced to a matter of values, ethics, or social concern. The so-called social gospel of Walter Rauschenbusch and others shifted attention away from personal reconciliation to God via redemption from personal guilt and punishment and toward social and cultural renewal.

The fundamentalist-modernist controversy early in the twentieth century was marked by a fierce struggle concerning the faith and mission of the church. During this century, the term *evangelical* began to be used not so much as a synonym for *Protestant* but to distinguish between liberal and conservative Protestants, between modernist and fundamentalist Protestants. The two doctrines of biblical authority and justification by faith alone were tenaciously maintained as vital elements of twentieth-century evangelicalism.

With the increasing spread of liberalism, however, particularly through the so-called mainline denominations, the term *evangelical* began to assume an added nuance. An evangelical was now someone who believed in personal salvation via personal faith, as distinguished from a salvation that is understood chiefly in social or cultural terms. Personal evangelism became a point of emphasis for evangelicals. For many, the word *evangelical* now began to serve as a synonym for *evangelistic*.

For several decades evangelicals seemed suspicious about the church's involvement in social, cultural, and political matters, stressing instead the church's evangelistic mission. An unnatural split occurred between personal and social concerns in the mission of the church. Social action was now the "liberal" agenda and personal evangelism the "conservative" agenda.

The descriptive phrase "born-again Christian" came into vogue. Though historic Christianity had uniformly confessed the need of fallen sinners to be regenerated by the Holy Spirit as requisite for conversion to Christianity, some professing Christians now distinguished themselves by the term "born-again Christian."

This phrase highlights the confusion provoked by nineteenth-century liberalism with respect to the nature of Christianity and with respect to what it means to be a Christian.

Historically, the phrase "born-again Christian" sounds like a kind of stuttering. It is redundant. Classical theology would argue that because regeneration is necessary to one's being a Christian, there is no such thing as an unregenerate (non-born-again) Christian. Likewise, because the rebirth in view refers to the Holy Spirit's changing a person from

a sinner to a believer, there is no such thing as a born-again non-Christian.

It had been assumed that if you were a Christian then you were regenerate, or if you were regenerate then you were a Christian. Nineteenth-century liberalism and modernism changed all that. Christianity was in the process of being redefined at its core. The old assumptions no longer sufficed. Thousands, if not millions, of church members throughout Protestantism now claimed to be Christians while rejecting the categories of faith and doctrine of historic Christianity.

The second half of the twentieth century witnessed a marked change in evangelical concerns. Several factors combined to provoke these changes. First, evangelicals began to realize that the dichotomy between personal evangelism and social concern and action was a false dichotomy. They began to understand that evangelicalism had torn asunder what God had joined together. Historic and biblical Christianity saw personal redemption and social concern as vital ingredients of Christian faith. It was not an either/or dilemma but a both/and mandate from God. Evangelicals became active in the social arena, demonstrating concern both for personal conversion to Christ and for societal problems.

Another factor changing the face and landscape of evangelicalism was the meteoric rise of the charismatic movement. This movement exploded in force in the 1960s, breaking into mainline denominations and Roman Catholicism. A new “unity” was experienced, articulated in a kind of spiritual unity (we are one in the Spirit) that transcended old denominational lines. Doctrinal differences began to be played down in light of a new experience of fellowship

among people from diverse ecclesiastical and theological backgrounds.

At the same time, liberal theology was making a strong impact on evangelical groups, particularly with an avalanche of criticism leveled against the trustworthiness and reliability of the Bible. This onslaught of criticism created a crisis within evangelicalism with respect to one of the two chief points of unity. The doctrine of inerrancy long upheld by evangelicals came under attack. Harold Lindsell chronicled the debate in *The Battle for the Bible*.<sup>1</sup> The International Council on Biblical Inerrancy (ICBI) was formed to define and defend the conservative view. The work of ICBI during the ten years of its existence served to rally evangelicals and shore up this sagging point of unity.

This defense of Scripture did not stop the erosion of unity among professed evangelicals. Many individuals and institutions historically tied to evangelicalism defected from the doctrine of inerrancy. Some opted for a watered-down view of “infallibility,” while others sought a *via media* in the view of “limited inerrancy.” The internecine struggle within the Southern Baptist Convention on this issue attracted the attention of the secular media.

With the deterioration of one pole of historic unity, the authority of Scripture, that left one crucial point of unity: the doctrine of justification by faith alone.

### “Lordship Salvation” Controversy

In the final quarter of the twentieth century, the last bastion of evangelical unity was put under siege. The problem became manifest in two distinct areas. The first was

the outbreak within the ranks of dispensationalism of the “Lordship salvation” controversy. This controversy was carried on chiefly between John MacArthur on one side and Zane Hodges and Charles Ryrie on the other. The chief question in dispute was whether a person can be saved by embracing Jesus as Savior but not as Lord. At issue were the necessary conditions or requirements for justification. The debate did not center on merit and grace, but it did center on faith and works.

At the heart of the issue was this question: Does saving faith *necessarily* produce the works of obedience? MacArthur insisted that true saving faith must necessarily and inevitably yield works of obedience. Ryrie and Hodges insisted that though faith *should* immediately produce works of obedience, it does not always do so. The “carnal Christian” is one who receives Jesus as Savior but may die without ever embracing him as Lord.<sup>2</sup>

MacArthur protested that this was a blatant form of antinomianism and a departure from both the biblical view of justification and the historic Protestant view. Ryrie and Hodges said MacArthur was teaching a form of neonomianism or legalism, by which works are added to faith as a necessary condition for justification. Each side argued that the other preached a gospel different from the biblical gospel and hence a “different gospel,” which placed them under the anathema declared by the apostle Paul in Galatians 1.

As this intramural debate among dispensationalists spilled over into the broader evangelical community, leaders from Lutheran and Reformed communities became involved. James Boice, Michael Horton, J. I. Packer, Rod Rosenblatt,

and others entered the debate, basically siding with MacArthur. John Gerstner did the same, though he added another crucial dimension. He argued that not only are works of obedience necessary and inevitable results of true faith but they also begin to be manifest *immediately*, being inseparable from faith.

None on the Lordship side regarded works as contributing anything to the *grounds* of our justification. They insisted that the works of Christ alone furnish the ground for our justification. The issue was this: What constitutes saving faith? Is it possible for a person to have true faith and not have works?

As we will see later, the Reformers insisted that true faith necessarily, inevitably, and immediately yields the fruit of works. They argued that though justification is *by* faith alone, it is not by a faith that is alone.

Lurking behind the scenes of this debate was a crucial difference in what happens in regeneration. Is the person who exercises saving faith a changed person or not?

All who are regenerated are changed. Reformed theology views regeneration as the immediate supernatural work of the Holy Spirit that effects the change of the soul's disposition. Before regeneration the sinner is in the grips of original sin, by which he is totally disinclined toward God. He is in willing bondage to sin and has no desire for Christ. Faith is a fruit of regeneration. The believer is a changed person. He is still a sinner but is in a process of spiritual reversal that has, by the efficacious work of the Holy Spirit, already begun.

The necessity, inevitability, and immediacy of good works are linked to the work of regeneration. Also *at* and *with*



justification the believer is indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and this indwelling initiates the work of sanctification.

### **Justification Controversy**

This debate among professed evangelicals reflected one crisis over the evangelical doctrine of justification. A second and perhaps more serious crisis was provoked by dialogues between Roman Catholic theologians and Protestants. In an effort to reach accord over the issue that had been so divisive over the centuries, some of the sharp edges of the historic debate were smoothed over and blunted. This was seen in the widely publicized document that was made public in the spring of 1994. It is entitled *Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium (ECT)*.<sup>3</sup>

This twenty-six-page document was the product of a consultation among Roman Catholic and evangelical representatives who began their task in September 1992. Participants in the framing of this document included (among others) Avery Dulles, George Weigel, Richard John Neuhaus, Herbert Schlossberg, Charles Colson, Richard Land, and Bishop Francis George.

*ECT* was signed by many representatives from both the Roman Catholic communion and the evangelical communion. Some of the noted signatories were Catholics Peter Kreeft, Keith Fournier, Michael Novak, John Cardinal O'Connor, and Carlos Sevilla, and evangelicals Bill Bright, Os Guinness, J. I. Packer, Richard Mouw, Mark Noll, and Pat Robertson.

Our chief interest at this point is in the evangelical representatives. They included men and women from the charismatic

community, the Southern Baptist Convention, Campus Crusade for Christ, Fuller Theological Seminary, Wheaton College, and Regent University. The diversity was broad, reaching far across the spectrum of contemporary evangelicalism. Evangelicals with the stature and leadership positions of Charles Colson, Bill Bright, J. I. Packer, Os Guinness, and Pat Robertson attracted major attention in the evangelical world.

Framers of *ECT* made it clear that they were participating as individuals, not as official spokespersons for the Roman Catholic Church or other denominations: "This statement cannot speak officially for our communities. It does intend to speak responsibly from our communities and to our communities."<sup>4</sup>

Since *ECT* was not an official pronouncement issued by the communities represented, it may be lightly dismissed as a mere agreement of forty or so individuals. It must be seen, however, that the document affirms not only what each of these individuals privately believes about the Christian faith but also what they believe to be common points of faith between Roman Catholicism and evangelicalism.

*ECT* is introduced by this statement:

We are Evangelical Protestants and Roman Catholics who have been led through prayer, study, and discussion to common convictions about Christian faith and mission. . . . In this statement we address what we have discovered both about our unity and about our differences. We are aware that our experience reflects the distinctive circumstances and opportunities of Evangelicals and Catholics living together in North America. At the same time, we believe that what we have discovered and resolved is pertinent to the relationship

between Evangelicals and Catholics in other parts of the world. We therefore commend this statement to their prayerful consideration.<sup>5</sup>

*ECT* then asserts the unity of the Christian mission:

As Christ is one, so the Christian mission is one. That one mission can be and should be advanced in diverse ways. Legitimate diversity, however, should not be confused with existing divisions between Christians that obscure the one Christ and hinder the one mission. . . .

The one Christ and one mission includes many other Christians, notably the Eastern Orthodox and those Protestants not commonly identified as Evangelical.<sup>6</sup>

Here, without equivocation, *ECT* affirms that the mission of Christians is one. Diversity is acknowledged, but not at the expense of true unity. It proclaims a unity within diversity. The document implies that there are other Christians besides Catholics and evangelicals who are included in this mission. Two groups are explicitly mentioned: Eastern Orthodox Christians and non-evangelical Protestants (at least those who are “not commonly identified as evangelical”).

This last group is vaguely defined. Does this mean that there are evangelical Protestants who are not commonly identified as evangelicals, or does it mean that one can be both a non-evangelical and a Christian?

This is no small question, especially in light of the modernist controversy. The issue focused on what is fundamental or essential to Christianity. Historic evangelicalism strongly asserted that the gospel (evangel) is essential to Christianity and that belief in the gospel is necessary to be a Christian. If indeed belief in the gospel is necessary or essential to

salvation, then a non-evangelical Christian is a contradiction in terms.

Though the wording here is unclear, I think it probably means that there are people who truly believe the gospel (and are evangelical in that sense) but who do not customarily identify themselves with any particular group that uses the term *evangelical* as a label.

### Brothers and Sisters in Christ?

Later *ECT* partially clarifies this point: “All who accept Christ as Lord and Savior are brothers and sisters in Christ. Evangelicals and Catholics are brothers and sisters in Christ.”<sup>7</sup> This statement seems to qualify the earlier statement about non-evangelical Protestants. If we take the statement “All who accept Christ as Lord and Savior are brothers and sisters in Christ” in a restrictive sense, it means that accepting Christ as Lord and Savior is a necessary condition for being a brother or sister in Christ. This implies that those who do not accept Christ as Lord and Savior are not Christians. *ECT* does not say this explicitly, but this statement, in context, suggests it.

As it stands, the assertion appears to be more than a statement about a necessary condition. The assertion goes beyond a necessary condition to a *sufficient condition*. The statement is what logicians call a universal affirmative proposition. It asserts that all  $P = Q$ . That is, all who do *A* are in the class of *B*. If a person truly accepts Christ as Savior and Lord, that person is a Christian.

But what is meant by “accepting” Jesus as Savior and Lord? Since the document later speaks of *faith* in Jesus

Christ as Lord and Savior, we take it to mean “possessing true faith.”

Certainly the Reformers of the sixteenth century would agree that true faith in Christ as Savior and Lord qualifies a person to be a Christian. (This assumes that the “faith” does not involve a denial of some essential Christian truth such as the deity of Christ. For example, Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses claim to have faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord while denying his deity.)

But given an orthodox view of the person and work of Christ, then the basic confession would suffice for one to be a Christian.

A burning question, however, remains: Does faith in Christ as Savior and Lord include a trust in the biblical gospel? Does saving faith require a trust in the righteousness of Christ alone as the ground of our justification? Or may a person have a different view of the gospel and still be a Christian?

The question in the sixteenth century remains in dispute. Is justification by faith alone a necessary and essential element of the gospel? Must a church confess *sola fide* in order to be a true church?

Or can a church reject or condemn justification by faith alone and still be a true church? The Reformers certainly did not think so. Apparently the framers and signers of *ECT* think otherwise.

I say “apparently” because the document does not explicitly address the issue. The document can be read in at least two ways. The first is to assume that, though it does not affirm *sola fide*, Rome is still a Christian body because it does affirm (among other essential truths of Christianity) that Christ is Savior and Lord. The second is to assume

that, though it *once* denied and condemned justification by faith alone, thereby condemning the gospel, Rome has since so modified its doctrine of justification that it may presently be seen as embracing the doctrine of justification by faith alone.

It seems clear that *ECT* assumes that Rome is a true church and that whatever doctrinal differences divide it from evangelicalism, though they may be serious, they are not essential to true Christianity or to personal salvation.

*ECT* places great stress on cooperation between Roman Catholics and evangelicals in the sphere of activity often called the arena of common grace, in other words, in matters of social justice, ethics, religious freedom, abortion, and others. Yet the call to common labor rests on a stated unity of the church's theological mission, a unity of mission with respect to special or saving grace. Here the clear assumption is that the two communions share a common faith, at least in its essential elements.

The assertion that "evangelicals and Catholics are brothers and sisters in Christ" is problematic. It doesn't say "*all* evangelicals and Catholics." Surely the framers of *ECT* would grant that not all who profess Catholicism or evangelicalism are brothers and sisters in Christ. Rome, as clearly as Protestantism, has acknowledged that the visible church is a mixed body (*corpus per mixtum*) composed of true believers and false, wheat as well as tares.

Nor does it seem that *ECT* affirms merely that there are true brothers and sisters in Christ found in both communions. I know of no one who argues that there are no Christians in the Roman Catholic Church or no Christians outside of it. Rome has clearly broadened the original Cyprianic formula,

*Extra ecclesiam nulla salus* (Outside the church there is no salvation). Even Trent hinted at this, and Pius IX's *allocutiones* gave more definition.<sup>8</sup>

The statement "evangelicals and Catholics are brothers and sisters in Christ" assumes that these people are either "true" Catholics or "true" evangelicals.

Richard John Neuhaus declared this affirmation to be at the core of the entire document. It is the center around which the unity of faith and mission revolves. It is this assertion, so central to *ECT*, that provokes serious concern about evangelicals who endorse this document and their commitment to the essential character of justification by faith alone.