

# EVANGELICALISM: THE NEW ROMAN CATHOLICISM?

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## Introduction

I have chosen this provocative title exactly for that reason—to be provocative. Evangelicalism as a whole (more on this generalization later) is like a sailor in a deep slumber upon a sinking ship, with the last lifeboat about to depart. This is no time for gentle waking!

Not that I have any illusions about the impact of this essay. I do not imagine that “God will use me to do great things,” as a budding young evangelical “prophet” once told me (I dare not think what kind of “prophecies” he is uttering today). Rather, my aim in this essay is to use this *exposé* of the shocking apostasy of evangelicalism as an occasion to stir us up to two things. First, to gratitude for the precious truths of God’s Word recovered at the Reformation, and kept alive in the (few) faithful Reformed and Presbyterian churches left today. Second, to ensure these truths *continue* to be preserved, for “let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall” (I Cor. 10:12). I also hope that some sensitive evangelicals might read this and come to see, with us, the beauty of the Reformation doctrines which they have lost or, which is more likely, they have never even known.

“Evangelicalism” is obviously a very broad term with vastly differing definitions and usually comprising a myriad of different sub-groups. I use it in the very broad sense of *all Protestants and Protestant churches who claim to believe the Bible to be literally God’s Word*. Usually, there is an emphasis on evangelism, as well as the use of slogans such as “relationship, not religion.” This is in distinction from liberal Protestantism, which openly denies the infallibility of Scripture, and whose practical Christianity often extends no further than Christmas and Easter church attendance. Technically, then, I include myself under the evangelical umbrella.

When describing any group of people, avoiding generalization is impossible (this statement is probably itself a generalization). Generalization is not itself deceptive or sinful, as long as it is presented honestly and openly

as a generalization and not as an absolute statement without any exceptions. Whatever description I make of evangelicalism below *is* a generalization and, therefore, does not include every single evangelical person or church. Most of the descriptions I will make, if not all of them, are quite obviously true of the bulk of evangelicalism as defined in the previous paragraph. Wherever this is not the case, it was certainly true in my experience, and I would be only too happy to discover that my experience was far from representative. Therefore, if you are one of those rare evangelicals to which these things do not apply, I hope you are not content selfishly to be satisfied with saying, “Well, it is not happening in *my* church.” Instead, I hope you are following the example of the prophets of Scripture in witnessing against the apostasy of the visible church, out of love for your fellow evangelicals but, above all, out of jealousy for the glory and name of God.

## **Roman Catholicism**

I should clarify immediately that the Roman Catholicism I have in mind is more that of the pre-Reformation (medieval) and Reformation era, not modern Roman Catholicism.

This is not to say that I have joined the rank of those evangelicals who think “Rome has changed.” According to Vatican II, Rome has not changed in a single important doctrine. Rome reaffirmed the *Canons of Trent* in their entirety, upholding even Trent’s anathemas (curses) against all those who believe the truth of justification by faith alone. What Vatican II *has* changed is her own public image to fit with modern political correctness. Trent’s anathemas are rarely mentioned (though certainly not revoked); the Bible has been removed from the list of forbidden books (technically at least); masses are now said in the vernacular (though there has been a recent resurgence in Latin masses); Protestants are no longer burned at the stake (most of them no longer protest anyway); the sexual immorality of the clergy has been reined in (comparatively); and the Counter-Reformation now consists of convincing the (hundreds of) millions of pseudo-Catholics to stop pretending to be Protestants and formally “come home.”

We aim to show that modern evangelicalism is no different in any important sense except for one: they do not (yet) call themselves “Roman Catholic.”

## **Experiential Worship**

The worship service (“mass”) of the Roman Catholic Church is thoroughly focused on man’s senses. The building itself with all its glory and decoration; the clothing of the priest; the luxuriously adorned “altar;” the various actions of the priest including the “hocus-pocus”<sup>1</sup> of the mass itself; the incense to bring in the sense of smell; the images, paintings and sculptures lining every wall—all of it is designed to appeal to man’s senses.

Replace a few of the props, and you have the most popular type of worship service in evangelicalism. Witness the stage with lights of various colours shining; projectors with flashing images; the loud blaring of music. Usually more than half the worship service is spent “worshipping,” which is synonymous for “emotional experience.” This happens through a band performing on stage and the audience physically participating through raising of hands, dancing and other forms of participation, all while under the influence of manipulative music and large crowd effects.

Several aspects deserve special treatment.

## **Levitical Priesthood**

Both evangelicalism and Roman Catholicism have a kind of “Levitical” priesthood for worship. This term refers to the Old Testament practice of having only a certain class of people (the Levites) “perform” in the worship service, with the lay person (non-Levite) simply watching in the audience. In Romanism, this Levitical priesthood consists of the priest and the choirs who do almost all the singing. In modern evangelicalism, the worship band and the “worship leader” perform on stage, while the rest of the congregation is reduced to audience status.

The Reformation returned to the glorious biblical truth of the priesthood of all believers. This truth implies *congregational worship*, where the entire congregation participates in worship. This is most beautifully expressed in

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<sup>1</sup> The phrase “hocus pocus” may be derived from the Latin phrase in the mass *hoc est corpus meum*, in which the bread and wine are supposedly transubstantiated into the body and blood of Christ.

*congregational singing*. Evangelicalism initially inherited congregational singing from the Reformation, but on its way back to Rome has mostly given up on this heritage. Even where the congregation still sings, it is often impossible to hear your own voice, much less that of the other saints, above the blaring of the Levitical priesthood at the front.

### **Tongues/Latin**

The masses of the medieval church were conducted in Latin, which almost none of the people understood. Not only was the Bible not available in the vernacular, even the church service was held in a foreign tongue. Worst of all, the priests, who performed all the Latin masses, often did not understand Latin themselves!

Increasingly, evangelicalism is moving toward worship services not held in the vernacular. Instead of Latin, this foreign language is called “tongues” and usually has a very narrow vocabulary of around three to four words: “blah,” “boo,” “di-boo” and “dish” (there are various dialects, differing slightly in pronunciation and spelling). Not only are the speakers of this language as ignorant of the language’s meaning as many medieval priests were of Latin, but many Pentecostals boast that only God and the angels understand their “heavenly” language.

The Reformation returned to worship in the language of the people for a very simple reason: “if I know not the meaning of the voice, I shall be unto him that speaketh a barbarian, and he that speaketh shall be a barbarian unto me” (I Cor. 14:11). In that passage, Paul is teaching the proper use of “tongues” (simply an old word for “languages”) in the church. He concludes that tongues (i.e., foreign languages) must always be interpreted, so that the other members of the church may be edified. This edification involves a concept foreign to many modern evangelicals: intellectual learning, that is a nourishment of the *mind*.

### **Images**

Excluding Lutheranism, which sadly never fully abandoned Rome’s images, Protestant churches have historically been easily distinguished from Roman

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Catholic ones. Protestant churches lack images and sculptures of saints. This change was based on the second commandment (which the Roman Catholic Church conveniently hides as a footnote to the first commandment, dividing the tenth into two to hide this gloss). Evangelicalism is not as sophisticated as that, preferring simply to disregard the Ten Commandments by restricting God's moral law to the Old Testament, since in the New Testament we are "no longer under the law." Few think to ask *in what sense* we are no longer under law but under grace.

What is usually forgotten today is that the Reformation opposed not only the worship of images, but also the use of images *to replace the preaching of the gospel*. Both the Lutherans and the Reformed insisted on the primacy of preaching. God will have His people instructed through preaching. This primacy is established not only by the fact that Scripture is given in written form (and not in pictures), but also in the explicit teaching of Scripture itself, such as I Corinthians 1:17-25. *Preaching* (which refers not only to *content*, but also to *method*) is the "foolishness of God." The "wisdom of the world," such as replacing preaching with any form of images, God has "made foolish."

The evangelical world, following the example of Rome, is busy replacing preached sermons with "relevant messages," through the use of drama, videos, movies and various other forms of media. In fact, again following the lead of Rome, evangelicalism is even busy reducing the *amount* of instruction (no matter what form it takes) by replacing it with entertaining and mind-numbing "worship."

### **Anti-Intellectual**

These Romanist trends in worship are all part of the anti-intellectualism of medieval Roman Catholicism and of much of modern evangelicalism.

### **Implicit Faith**

The medieval church taught a doctrine of implicit faith, where it was not necessary for the laity, that is, the non-clergy "class," to believe the truth. It was sufficient if the layman believed and trusted the church. The church (i.e., the priest, bishops and, ultimately, the pope himself) knew the truth on the people's behalf.

A similar trend is occurring in evangelicalism. Ask an average member why their church does something a certain way. They will likely not know, but more importantly, they will not *care* to know. Often, they are content to believe that since their “Senior Pastor” had a “vision from God,” he must know what he is doing, and they follow him. Others, of a less Charismatic bent, will simply say that their “Senior Pastor” has studied the Bible and that is good enough for them. Such evangelicals are far removed from the noble-minded Bereans praised in the Bible for searching the Scriptures daily (Acts 17:11).

The Reformation recovered the biblical doctrine of saving faith. In this context, the Protestants insisted that saving faith is personal and includes knowledge. It is personal in that no one else (such as the priest or the church) can believe *for* you; the elect are personally brought to saving faith in Jesus Christ, so that they personally trust in Christ alone and receive all His saving benefits. This faith necessarily includes knowledge, because faith has an object, which generally is the Scriptures, and specifically Jesus Christ as revealed therein; trust in an object requires knowledge of the object.

Faithful churches, following the example of Scripture, emphasize the necessity of knowledge and growth in knowledge (II Pet. 3:18; Hos. 4:6). The people are taught *why* they believe what they believe. They are warned against believing anything simply because the pastor says it is true. And knowledge of Scripture and of Christ revealed in Scripture is celebrated as the biblical way in which God sanctifies His people (II Tim. 3:16-17).

### **Biblical Illiteracy and Sermonettes**

As a result of the medieval doctrine of implicit faith, the people were completely ignorant of Scripture. They could not read the Bible even if they wanted to, as the Bible was only available in Latin. Worse, even many priests could not read Latin and were equally ignorant of the truth of Scripture. A story of a martyr in Scotland tells of him being led to the pyre by a priest who, upon finding a New Testament in English in the soon-to-be-martyr’s sleeve, declared triumphantly concerning this New Testament: “Here are those blasphemous writings of Luther which are to blame for all this heresy!”

Biblical illiteracy in evangelicalism is rampant. This is especially bad in Charismatic circles, where the favourite verse is “the letter killeth, but the

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spirit giveth life” (II Cor. 3:6). This biblical phrase is corrupted to mean that detailed knowledge of Scripture destroys spiritual life, while emotional experience and wild babblings supposedly give spiritual life. Biblical illiteracy can be easily demonstrated by investigating the top one thousand books being sold in evangelicalism and looking (almost in vain) for exegetical material (quite tellingly, most evangelicals have no idea what “exegetical” means). The same biblical illiteracy is found in many evangelical “sermons.” These messages, which aim to be “relevant” (as if the Word of God could ever be irrelevant!) rarely explain a passage of Scripture. Evangelical leaders usually prefer to treat a “practical” topic, and they saturate their messages with illustrations taken from modern culture (especially movies), anecdotes, funny one-liners, and with a Bible verse included as a postscript of the message (perhaps to lend some semblance of legitimacy and authority to the message). It is a terrible indictment that today’s Christianity, which has by far the easiest access to the Bible ever witnessed in history, is the least knowledgeable of its contents. Many evangelicals—may it never be said of Reformed church members—know more about sports statistics, movie stars, the popular music charts and celebrity gossip than they do about the Bible!

The Reformation was a return to a people educated in the Scriptures. The Bible was translated into the vernacular, and every attempt made to make it available to the people. When English Bibles were first made available to every church in England, they had to be chained to the pulpit to prevent the people, who were queuing up to read them, taking them home. The worship service’s central activity became exegetical preaching, that is, preaching in which the Bible was explained, often verse by verse. Education was developed so that all the people, from the ploughman to the smith, were able to read the Scriptures for themselves (ironically, many of today’s Christians use their education, which historically was made available to the “common people” so that they could know the Christian faith, for everything *but* the nourishment of their faith).

In churches faithful to the Reformation today, you will find an unmistakable emphasis on teaching the Bible. Beginning with the children of the church, who are usually catechized from age five (not through drawing pictures of David and Goliath but through instruction in Bible history and doctrines), to

weekly in-depth Bible studies for the adults, all members of such churches are expected to be intimately acquainted with God's holy Word. This instruction in God's Word finds its climax in exegetical preaching on the Lord's Day where a passage of Scripture is explained and applied to the congregation.

## **Papal Authority/Senior Pastor**

Possibly the best known difference between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism is the office of pope in the Roman Catholic Church. So strongly did the Reformers reject this unbiblical office that all of them came to identify the pope as *the* Antichrist himself. This position even attained confessional status in some cases, such as in the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (25:6).

Even today, the office of pope is a stumbling block to many pseudo-Catholics who still identify themselves as evangelical. Submission to a single man at the top, confessing his infallibility (when speaking "*ex cathedra*"), is still too much to stomach for many friends of Rome who are half-way across the Tiber.

This, however, should be no real stumbling block. The reality is that many evangelicals already submit to leaders considered well nigh infallible. They are called "Senior Pastors." Dare to criticize one of these hallowed leaders, especially publicly, and you will quickly learn that you have committed a (nearly) unpardonable sin. Going to a preacher after a sermon and asking a mildly critical question regarding something preached will be taken as a personal attack. You will be quickly reminded that "you did not go to seminary." To make matters worse, Charismaticism allows Senior Pastors to claim they have received personal visions from Christ regarding how they should lead their church, with the explicit expectation that the members must "submit" to Christ who supposedly gave the vision. "Touch not the Lord's anointed" is enough to silence many would-be critics. The recent rise of largely unaccountable "evangelical celebrities" has only exacerbated this, and shown that it is a problem even among conservative and mildly Reformed evangelicalism.

Churches of the Reformation, on the other hand, have church offices which are clearly limited in power. Every member exercises the office of believer of prophet, priest and king—the special offices of minister, elder and deacon *serve* the office of believer. All office-bearers are elected by the congregation, and

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even ministers must submit to the rule of the elders. Therefore, a Reformed church member may—and must—correct unorthodox preaching in a proper ecclesiastical manner. The welfare of the church depends on the truth. The only infallible head of the church is Christ Himself, not only in theory but also in practice.

### **Fleecing the Sheep**

Even in the Roman Catholic country in which I attended school, we learned about the abuse of the medieval Roman church in using the sacramental system to extract money from the poor. This money was used to support not only the building of elaborate cathedrals, but also the excessive lifestyles of the bishops, cardinals and even of the common priests. Meanwhile, the people they were to shepherd languished in stifling poverty, woeful ignorance and comfortless misery. Johann Tetzel, the medieval Grand Commissioner for Indulgences in Germany, whose excesses were instrumental in prodding Luther to pen his Ninety-Five Theses, famously taught: “As soon as a coin in the coffer rings / the soul from purgatory springs.” He was collecting for the reconstruction of St. Peter’s Basilica and for the repayment of the personal debts of the local archbishop.

Much of contemporary evangelicalism is under the influence of various forms of prosperity theology, also known as positive confession, name-it-and-claim-it, health-and-wealth gospel, etc. According to a recent *Time* magazine poll, 61% of Christians—comprising all kinds of professing believers and not merely evangelicals—believe that “God wants people to be prosperous.”<sup>2</sup> And 31% of those polled—a far higher percentage than there are Pentecostals in America—agree that “if you give your money to God, God will bless you with more money.” Fundamentally, this false gospel teaches that God wants to make you healthy, wealthy or “happy.” Very often, your prosperity is conditioned on “giving to God” so that He will give back to you. “Giving to God” is conveniently understood as donating to the “ministry” of the prosperity preacher. Famous prosperity teachers such as Kenneth Copeland, Creflo Dollar (a strangely appropriate surname), Joyce Meyer and Benny Hinn have become fabulously

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<sup>2</sup> <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1533448-2,00.html>

wealthy, largely through the donations received on the promise of “multiple returns.” Worst of all is the exporting of the prosperity gospel to areas deep in poverty, such as Eastern Europe and Africa, where the poor are pressured to give “\$5 for \$50 [in return from God],” which can be the equivalent of several weeks’ wages. The preacher collecting the donations is bedecked with golden jewellery (perhaps to help convince others that their doctrine works), while the people often struggle to have enough to eat.

The most shameful aspect of this is that the few evangelicals who are not promoting prosperity theology are largely silent about it, and thus fail to warn the people against wolves preying on the sheep. In many such churches, the members read the books and watch the television shows of these prosperity gospel peddlers. I remember visiting the house of an elder of a conservative evangelical church who would never dream of preaching prosperity theology. Sitting in the living room, I discovered that his wife regularly watches (and loves) Joyce Meyer. I am not even sure if the elder realized Joyce Meyer is a prosperity teacher.

## **Sacramentalism replaced by Moralism**

Fundamentally, the medieval church taught a “gospel” of salvation by works. Though the Catholic Church had rejected Pelagianism, asserting instead the absolute necessity of grace in salvation, it had never agreed that grace was *sufficient*. In fact, by the late Middle Ages, the insufficiency of grace (Semi-Pelagianism) was basic Roman Catholic dogma. The sacramental system arose out of this error. In this demonic scheme, the church (i.e., all those formally in submission to the pope) owns the treasury of merit, in which not only the merits of Christ, but also the (supposed) “excess” merits of the “saints” are deposited. The church then dispenses these merits through the sacraments, which must be constantly used to reduce the time in purgatory. Committing a “mortal” sin resets your merit collection to zero, because a mortal sin destroys sanctifying grace in the soul. Since it was mainly the merit of others acquired through the sacraments that led to salvation, personal holiness was not much of a priority. This was amply demonstrated by the infamous immorality not only of the people in general, but also of the priests, bishops, archbishops, cardinals and even the popes. True faith and understanding were not required to benefit from the sacraments and personal good works were not really required at all.

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Though still formally rejecting “salvation by works,” much of modern evangelicalism *does* teach salvation by works, albeit a different type of works than the medieval church. Whereas Roman Catholicism taught (and teaches) an elaborate system of sacramentalism for the obtaining of grace and salvation, many evangelicals have replaced the gospel with moralism. The work of Christ on the cross (in fact, all His works except where He healed or fed people) is rarely, if ever, mentioned, being replaced by various rules and regulations for how to live the Christian life. This is probably because many evangelicals assume that the people know about the significance of Christ’s atoning work—they do not—and they imagine (wrongly) that the cross of Christ is not really needed after a person is converted or “accepts Jesus.” In other words, they do not understand the sanctifying power of the cross and the need for the cross to be constantly preached.

The moralism found in evangelicalism can be broadly divided into two types.

The more popular is found in liberal evangelicalism, among those enamoured by “church growth” and “seeker-friendly churches.” Here, the word “law” is a dirty word, with its old-fashioned and, most importantly, culturally-offensive prohibitions. The “thou shalt not” of the law is mentioned only to be condemned as “legalism.” Ironically, what is preached in its stead is more or less the same law, with a simple revision of the language. Love—not legalism! Of course, Christ summarized the law with the command to love God and the neighbour. The Ten Commandments show us how we love—by not committing idolatry; by honouring God’s name and hallowing His day; by not stealing, lying, murdering, coveting, etc. The modern evangelical moralistic pep talk urges Christians to social work such as cleaning the city and feeding the poor. Others are neo-legalistic sermons against “judging people” (in particular, homosexuals; it is, however, perfectly acceptable to “judge” conservative Christians who speak out against homosexuals). Thus, the “friendly seeker” is continuously being given a long list of rules to keep, especially calling to radical “love” (by which usually a sentimental feeling, similar to a flutter in the stomach, is meant; or by which is meant being nice or kind to others). The “law” of God is not preached, because the law is too negative—“thou shalt not” does not fit today’s evangelical culture.

The evangelical moralism which is, in our day, less popular, is found mainly in the American Bible Belt among fundamentalist churches. In some of these

circles, the preaching of the gospel is often absent. The good news of forgiveness of sins in the blood of Christ is replaced by preaching against sexual sin and other forms of gross wickedness, often using “thou shalt not” language. In many cases, the error here is not that of wrongly identifying sin—sin should be identified and condemned, especially the sins of the congregation—but of giving the distinct impression that our standing before God depends upon our keeping ourselves pure. Forgiveness, justification, the imputed righteousness of Christ—these recede into the background. And the law as a rule of gratitude is forgotten.

Luther’s inability to gain assurance of salvation in the medieval system of works righteousness led him to rediscover what he called the “article upon which a church stands or falls:” justification by faith alone. In a faithful church, sermons focus on the cross of Christ. The law is preached to drive men to repentance and faith in Christ, when they realize they have no hope of keeping the law. The law is preached as the rule of gratitude to show those saved by His blood how they may thank Him. But centrally, the incarnate Son of God is declared, in His work of redeeming His elect people through His life, death and resurrection, and in His gathering of them as He sits on the right hand of God and pours out His Spirit. Christ crucified is central in the life and preaching of the churches of the Reformation (I Cor. 2:1-2). Never is there a mention, nor even a hint, that we can contribute the least to our salvation. It is all (according to the five solas of the Reformation) by grace alone (*sola gratia* in Latin), through faith alone, on the basis of Christ’s work alone, as revealed in Scripture alone, to the glory of God alone.

## **Free Will, the Fundamental Point of Agreement**

We have already touched upon the fundamental soteriological error of the medieval church—a denial of the *sufficiency* of divine grace. What we have not yet explicitly mentioned, much less demonstrated, is that modern evangelicalism *also* denies the sufficiency of divine grace.

This fundamental agreement between Roman Catholicism and modern evangelicalism can be demonstrated most clearly by identifying the most basic denial of the sufficiency of grace common to both: the doctrine of “free will.” To be more specific, the teaching that man (aided by grace) is able to determine,

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by his “free will,” whether or not to repent and believe in Jesus Christ, and thus be saved. Thus God’s grace is insufficient to bring about salvation. Man must consent by his “free will” before God saves. In Roman Catholicism, the entire system of merit relies entirely on man’s “free will.”

What may come as a shock to most evangelicals is that all the Reformers rejected “free will.” Instead, they taught that man’s will after the fall of Adam is in bondage to sin and “cannot” please God (Rom. 8:8); that faith is “the gift of God” (Eph. 2:8); and that God sovereignly predestines the eternal destiny of all men, showing mercy to whom He will, and hardening whom He will (Rom. 9:18). In fact, they understood that free will was the most fundamental error of all. So much was this position a consensus among the Reformers that all Reformed doctrinal standards include it. Luther, in his book *The Bondage of the Will* in which he responds to Erasmus’ defence of free will, famously stated that, compared to the Roman Catholic error of free will, things such as “popery, purgatory, indulgences, and other like baubles” are almost non-issues. The sufficiency of grace, as guaranteed by predestination, Luther declared was “the grand hinge upon which the whole [Reformation] turned.” To deny it by asserting free will was to “attack the vital part” of the Reformation and of the gospel.

Luther understood what St. Augustine had understood over a millennium before him: the great battle of the church has never really been for the *necessity* of grace, but for its *sufficiency*. Denying the necessity of grace is too obvious, and was far too clearly and universally condemned by the early church after it was developed and popularized by the arch-heretic Pelagius. Even Trent, the anti-Reformation general council of the Roman Church, anathematized those who deny the necessity of grace.

But sinful man could never accept the sufficiency of God’s grace. That would strip man of all glory—so perversely prideful are we as fallen creatures that we want to share in the glory of God in our own salvation. That would leave man completely helpless in God’s hands and, more importantly, take away the power of the church to dispense merit by the sacraments in order to imprison and enslave the people. For if God’s grace is sufficient, what need is there of the merit of saints and what need is there of sacraments to obtain salvation? And if man’s will is enslaved to sin, how can he cooperate with the grace of God and thus attain salvation?

What need is there for the modern evangelical moralist; what point is there in moralistic pep talks, if there is no feeling of guilt left in the people—if the people understand that they are freely and fully forgiven, justified and sanctified by the blood of Christ? If salvation is entirely the work of God, how can the evangelist boast of the number of “decisions for Christ” in his latest crusade? What place is left for manipulative emotional techniques; for innovations in worship; for all the other means invented to please the masses, grow the churches and tickle the pride of the worship leaders and Senior Pastors?

Here, most clearly, the absolute, categorical difference between faithful and unfaithful churches is seen. In truly Protestant churches—that is in truly evangelical churches, because “evangelical” simply means a person or church believes and teaches the *gospel*—grace, as it is preached in the gospel, is the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16). It is not a tool to be used by man’s free will. Grace is the work of the Holy Spirit in His elect people, regenerating them, calling them inwardly, sweetly and irresistibly drawing them to Himself, granting them true faith and repentance, writing the law on their hearts, sanctifying them, conforming them to the image of Christ, preserving them despite their sins faithful unto the end, and finally bringing them home to glory. God is not a beggar, standing in front of the door of man’s heart, pleading for the sinner not to allow the blood of His Son to be wasted. God is the Omnipotent King, opening the heart of Lydia so that she attends unto the things spoken by the Apostle Paul (Acts 16:14). Christ is not a spurned lover weeping over His latest rejection, but the Mighty Shepherd who knows His sheep by name, commanding Lazarus, while dead, to rise and come out of the tomb, with His voice and command giving life.

On this point, which Luther considered the “grand turning point” of the Reformation, most of evangelicalism is in complete agreement with the Roman Catholic Church, and in disagreement with the Reformers and, more importantly, in disagreement with God’s Word. God’s grace, though necessary, say both Rome and evangelicalism, is not sufficient. Man must contribute, at the very least, his “permission” so that God may save him. As Luther put it so well, all the other issues such as popery, purgatory, indulgences and “other like baubles” are “irrelevant” compared to this “grand turning point.”

That is why the bulk of evangelicalism is friendly with Rome; that is why they have started crossing the Tiber; and that is why more and more are

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“returning home,” having overcome their personal prejudices against bells and incense and funny robes. However, one whose heart has been captivated by grace alone rejects the claims of the Roman harlot and is not attracted by her allurements.

### **Conclusion**

The history of the church has shown that the path from orthodoxy to heresy is a very short and steep one. Once apostasy begins in the heart of a people, the truth is often entirely overthrown and rejected within one or two generations. Evangelicalism is, sadly, a case in point. The sad truth is that the majority of evangelical churches are no longer different, in any important sense, from Roman Catholicism. In the face of such terrible apostasy, our calling is clear. We must hold to the truth entrusted to us. We must treasure and defend it dearly. We must not be proud and think we can keep it by our own power. The history of evangelicalism proves we cannot. We must trust in Christ who has promised that He will preserve the church through all ages such that the “gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” He has said, “I will build my church” (Matt. 16:18). In Him we trust, for He has the words of eternal life.