

GLAD TIDINGS

“And we bring you good tidings of the promise made unto the fathers...” (Acts 13:32)

Vol. XVIII

April 26, 2009

No. 17

Between Extremes

Jerry Fite

The old axiom of “the truth lies between two extremes” is interesting in the way many apply it. Often it is merely a compromise between extremes. Truth does not stand on its on, but lies in one’s mind at a comfortable place where one is not accused of holding extreme positions. “They are bending over backwards to be straight” may be used to embarrass one from radical positions, but has not established what is truth.

The word of God is the standard for “truth”. We can be set apart from sin and error through revealed truth from the mind of God. Jesus prayed, “*Sanctify them in the truth, thy word is truth*” (John 17:17). Jesus did not pray that truth would be established in his apostles by taking a compromised position between extremes, nor did he pray that they would find out what is straight by not bending backwards. The word of God is truth. The revealed message sets the standard. We can know saving truth by abiding in God’s word (John 8:31-32).

Extremes surface when truth is firmly settled by the word of God.

Let us examine the truth of justification before God for a vivid example.

Catholicism emphasizes works in terms of “merit” that is not taught in God’s word. The Catechism Of The Catholic Church defines “merit” in general as “recompense owed”. By acknowledging God’s saving grace it adds, “Moved by the Holy Spirit and charity, we can then merit for ourselves and others the graces needed for our sanctification, for the increase of grace and charity, and for the attainment of eternal life”. St. Augustine said, “Grace has gone before us now we are given what is due...Our merits are God’s gifts” (p. 541-542).

Protestants in protesting the Catholic position of meritorious works believe that no works of any kind have any place in determining our salvation. Sam Norris, a Baptist preacher wrote in a tract, “*We take the position that a Christian’s sins do not damn his soul. The way a Christian lives, what he says, his character, his conduct or his attitudes towards other people have nothing whatever to do with the salvation of his soul. . . . All the ordinances he may observe, all the*

laws he may keep, all the benevolent acts he may perform will not make his soul one whit safer. . .” Faith only, apart from works is the way of justification in the minds of those who have protested the teachings of Catholicism.

The truth is that man is not justified before God by meritorious works of man or works done under the law of Moses (*Ephesians 2:8-9, Titus 3:5, Gal. 2:16*). But there are works that we must do if we are to be saved. Salvation is not by faith only (*James 2:24*), but by faith working through love (*Gal. 5:6*).

By establishing truth, we then can see the extremes. On one end, the error of meritorious works of Catholicism exist, and on the other, through protest, the other extreme of “faith only” is found. The extremes occur by over emphasizing one point and neglecting another. Generally speaking, the truth lies between two extremes. But truth stands on its on. It is not determined by compromise. By first establishing truth, we can determine extremes.