

# THE TRINITY REVIEW

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare [are] not fleshly but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. And they will be ready to punish all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.

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## The Babylonian Captivity of the Church

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*Three Treatises: To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation; The Babylonian Captivity of the Church; The Freedom of a Christian.* Martin Luther. Fortress Press.

Though the Romans conquered the Greeks militarily, the Greeks conquered the Romans intellectually. The Romans' ideology and philosophy could not escape the dominance of Greek thought. Whose was the real victory? Likewise, the heirs of the Reformation at the end of the twentieth century proved unable to escape the theology of Roman Catholicism. The Reformation had broken the chains that had captured the consciences of men, but her children are now busily welding them back on. Just as the Jewish nation was carried away from their Temple into captivity to Babylon, so Christians are being carried away from Scripture into captivity by man-made rules. After five hundred years, the church has come full circle. The mortal wound is healing.

### *Three Walls*

In *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation*, Luther attacked three tyrannical abuses of authority by the Roman ecclesiastics. Luther called the three abuses "three walls" that the Roman church had built to protect itself from all criticism. The first wall is the distinction between the clergy and the laity. The second wall is the sole authority of the Roman church to interpret Scripture. The third wall

that Roman Catholicism set up to protect itself is that only the pope can call a council—that the Roman church is not answerable to any council that it itself has not called. Or, to put these three walls another way, laymen can't say clergy are wrong; if laymen use Scripture, their interpretations are faulty since they do not have any seminary training; and, if their interpretation and application are correct, the clergy still are not answerable to the laymen. The observant reader will immediately perceive that Protestantism has not escaped these central ideas of Roman ecclesiology.

The Romanists have very cleverly built three walls around themselves. Hitherto they have protected themselves by their walls in such a way that no one has been able to reform them. . . .

In the first place, when pressed by the temporal power they have made decrees and declared that the temporal power had no jurisdiction over them, but that, on the contrary, the spiritual power is above the temporal. In the second place, when the attempt is made to reprove them with Scriptures, they raised the objection that only the pope may interpret Scripture. In the third place, if threatened with a council, their story is that no one may summon a council but the pope.

In this way they have cunningly stolen our three rods from us, that they may go unpunished. They have ensconced themselves within the safe stronghold of these three walls so that they can practice all the knavery and wickedness which we see today. . . .

May God help us, and give us just one of those trumpets with which the walls of Jericho were overthrown to blast down these walls of straw and paper in the same way and set free the Christian rod for the punishment of sin, [and] bring to light the craft and deceit of the devil, to the end that through punishment we may reform ourselves and once more attain God's favor (10-12).

The first wall, the class distinction between "full-time" Christian workers (*i.e.*, pastors, missionaries, seminarians) and ordinary Christians, is apparent today. Clergymen are sought out to pray for the sick, or to lay their hands on them, as if the clergy have a direct toll-free line to God, and as if the prayers of fellow Christians were of lower value. The views of pastors are usually accepted at face value without a comparison with the Scriptures. Even with those in part-time ministries, or unofficial positions, there seems to be an ecclesiastical caste system. The choirs' alleged function, for example, is to "offer a sacrifice of songs to God on behalf of the congregation," as if the robed choir members were mediators between God and ordinary men. Women seek spiritual help from the wives of pastors, regardless of whether they have any spiritual gifts or not, as if one can marry into the spiritual aristocracy. In fact, in Chinese churches, wives of pastors actually are called by the title "Mrs. Pastor." Children born to pastors have an automatic status above ordinary children. And if they choose to enter the ministry, they can be hired without strict consideration of whether they have the necessary spiritual gifts, just like the Roman church used to assign pastoral positions to relatives and illegitimate children regardless of their qualifications. And if you think that Protestantism has rid itself of Roman

vestments, look at the choir and priestly robes and listen to the rationale for having them.

Luther blasted down this first wall with *1 Peter* 2:9, that all Christians are priests before God, and therefore need no mediator other than Christ; and *Revelation* 5:9-10, that all Christians are kings also by the blood of Christ, and therefore can have no class distinction. Christ does not have two bodies, Luther said; one spiritual and one temporal, but Christ is one head over one body. That some are preachers is so because of their calling by the election of fellow Christians to fulfill certain functions, not status. They are "nothing else but an office holder" (14). If they should abuse that trust or calling, they may be deposed (as we will see in his third treatise). For example, if one is called to fulfill the office of preaching, and in time it is obvious that he has not the gift of preaching, he may be deposed, or as Jay Adams says, given "an honorable discharge." Luther wrote:

To put it still more clearly: suppose a group of earnest Christian laymen were taken prisoners and set down in a desert without an episcopally ordained priest among them. And suppose they were to come to a common mind there and then in the desert and elect one of the number . . . to baptize, say mass, pronounce absolution, preach the gospel. Such a man would be as truly a priest as though he had been ordained by all the bishops and popes in the world. That is why in cases of necessity anyone can baptize and give absolution. This would be impossible if we were not all priests. . . . Augustine, Ambrose, and Cyprian each became a bishop in this way (13).

Many denominations are unwilling to ordain to the ministry anyone who has not a seminary degree, even though he has the spiritual gift and qualifications. Many churches are unwilling to depose anyone for lack of spiritual gifts if he has a seminary degree. This wall of class distinction was set up by the Roman church, and re-established by the modern Protestants, in order to make the clergy immune to any criticism from the laity. The laity

ought to respect the clergy by not disagreeing with them. "Touch not the Lord's anointed," the clergymen intone, as if all Christians were not the Lord's anointed.

Now, should the laity appeal to the Scripture for the authority to criticize errors, the Roman church and modern Protestantism retreat behind the second wall of immunity: The interpretation of Scripture can properly be done only by the clergy class. Though the Protestant churches have no popes, nor a doctrine of ecclesiastical infallibility, the idea is nevertheless prominent. Take, for example, the common practice of "stacking up rabbis." "Pastor so-and-so says this," or, "Dr. so-and-so says that," as if their interpretations are, if not infallible, at least better than the laity's. I often remind my Sunday school class not to say, "the Sunday school teacher says this or that." If they are convinced that what was taught was Biblical, they should say, "The Bible says this." "It is written" should settle all debates. It is true that I, too, often quote from others, like Luther and Calvin, but I do this as an *ad hominem* method. Because my audience could not escape the idea that somehow the clergy is above the laity, I often quote respected theologians to them. Because my opponents claim to be evangelicals, I quote the Reformers against them. By their own hands I cover their own mouths. In the same way Calvin and Luther quoted Augustine and the church fathers against their opponents. Jesus also quoted their own words to the Pharisees in *ad hominem* fashion. Luther wrote,

If it were to happen that the pope and his cohorts were wicked and not true Christians, were not taught by God and were without understanding, and at the same time some obscure person had a right understanding, why should the people not follow the obscure man? . . .

Besides, if we are all priests, as was said above, and all have one faith, one gospel, one [baptism], why should we not also have the powers to test and judge what is right or wrong in matters of faith?

If God spoke then through an ass against a prophet [Numbers 2:21-25], why should he not be able even now to speak through a righteous man against the pope? Similarly, St. Paul rebukes St. Peter as a man in error in *Galatians 2*. Therefore, it is the duty of every Christian to espouse the cause of the faith, to understand and defend it, and to denounce every error (20-22).

Luther was that "obscure person." When he nailed the ninety-five theses on the doors of Castle church, all he wanted was an open dialogue with the Roman Church. He had no plans to start any sort of revolution. The antagonistic reaction of the Roman Church took him by complete surprise, and her persecution propelled him to "stardom," to the limelight, so to speak, and made him the father of the Reformation. So it was with Calvin, whose only wish in life was to be an obscure scholar writing down his studies. But the insatiable hatred of Satan simply would not leave them alone. In his madness he sought to destroy every one of God's people, and, unknowingly and against his will, he instigated the very occasions which thrust the defenders of the faith onto the world's stage and broadcast throughout the world the very message he sought to suppress. Had Satan left them alone in obscurity, perhaps the world might still be lying in ignorance of justification by faith alone, the bondage of the will, predestination, limited atonement, etc.

The third wall of immunity with which Romanism protects itself is the pope's sole authority to call a council. If the laity are to accuse the clergy, Luther said, they "must naturally call the church together." But if the right to "take the case to the people," so to speak, is taken away, then the clergy are immune to all criticism. Luther noted that the council at Jerusalem (Acts 15) was called together by Christians, and "even the Council of Nicaea, the most famous of all councils," was not called nor confirmed by the clergy of Rome. Luther wrote:

The third wall falls of itself when the first two are down. When the pope acts contrary to the Scripture, it is our duty to stand by the Scriptures, to reprove him and

to constrain him, according to the Word of Christ, *Matthew* 18:15-17, "if your brother sins against you, go tell it to him. . . ." But if I am to accuse him before the church, I must naturally call the church together (22).

Obviously, Luther considered erroneous teachings "sins," liable to confrontation according to the rules of church discipline laid out in *Matthew* 18 and *Luke* 17. (The first two steps of church discipline, that of one-to-one or two-to-one, do not apply in this case, since public teaching or preaching already involves more than two or three people. Confrontations of erroneous teaching must be public for the sake of those who had been taught the wrong doctrines.) When a friend of mine wrote letters to several members of his church to correct some teachings of the pastor, the wife of the assistant pastor censured him because she said he should have gotten the pastor's approval first before sending out the letters. This is obviously designed to shield the ecclesiastical class from criticism. Should the pastor have edited the letter first? Luther wrote,

Would it not be unnatural if a fire broke out in a city and everybody were to stand by and let it burn on and on and consume everything that could be burnt because nobody had the authority of the mayor, or because, perhaps, the fire broke out in the mayor's house? In such a situation is it not the duty of every citizen to arouse and summon the rest? How much more should this be done in the spiritual city of Christ if a fire of offense breaks out, whether in the papal government, or anywhere else! The same argument holds if an enemy were to attack a city. The man who first roused the others deserves honor and gratitude. Why, then, should he not deserve honor who makes known the presence of the enemy from Hell and rouses Christian people and calls them together (23-24)?

After Luther explained these three walls which Romanism erected to protect itself, he went on to list many specific ways in which the Roman church

takes captive the consciences of men. The Babylonian captivity of the church begins when the Word of God is ignored and, in its place, a ton of commandments after the traditions of men is installed. Luther derides these man-made laws with great sarcastic humor. Here are some samples:

And when a lackey comes along from Rome he should be given a strict order to keep out, to jump into the Rhine or the nearest river, and give the Romish ban with all its seals and letters a nice, cool dip (46).

It is actually a greater sin to silence or suppress the Word and worship of God than if one had strangled twenty popes at one time . . . (71).

One of the reasons this [man-made] law is called "spiritual" is that it comes from the spirit: not from the Holy Spirit but from the evil spirit (72).

No wonder many clergymen and seminaries want to keep their congregations and students in ignorance of Luther and the Reformation!

### *The Babylonian Captivity*

In *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, Luther continued his attack on the captivity of men's consciences to man-made rules. He attacked sacramentalism, clericalism, and monasticism. Fundamentally, however, Luther was really criticizing Rome's haphazard and whimsical way of interpreting the Scripture every which way it pleased and then holding men's consciences captive under such interpretations. Luther was attacking false opinions which were "generally held" and "firmly believed" (152). He wrote,

I am attacking a different matter, an abuse perhaps impossible to uproot, since through the century-long custom and the common consent of men it has become so firmly entrenched that it would be necessary to abolish most of the books now in vogue . . . (152).

This statement can easily be applied to the doctrines currently in vogue in so-called Protestant churches, such as: the free-will of man, the universal love of God, the universal atonement of Christ, etc. These falsehoods are so entrenched in modern minds that they more than qualify to be called the modern Babylonian captivity of the church. Men's consciences are so enslaved that they are reluctant to leave churches that teach these heresies. Their reluctance may be due to one of the following reasons:

1. They are ignorant. No one has shown them the truth from the Bible.
2. They are arrogant. Though shown the truth from the Bible, they refuse to admit that they are wrong.
3. They are stupid. Though shown the truth, they do not understand it; and/or, they do not understand the difference between the truth and their errors. (Those who advocate contradiction seem to be of this class.)
4. They don't care. Truth is not important to them.

None of these possibilities reflects well on them. Ignorance, arrogance, stupidity, indifference—these are the inevitable results of the Babylonian captivity of the church. Or,

5. They do, in fact, understand and believe the truth, but they have not yet left that church in order actively to teach the truth and actively to combat errors. Such people ought to be commended for their continuous efforts.

Other than this one, there aren't any good reasons for staying in a church that propagates a false gospel. Some may object that since there are no perfect churches on Earth, one might as well stay where he is. But though there are no perfect churches on Earth, this does not imply that there are no churches that preach the Gospel. By the same stupid argument, since there are no perfect women on Earth, one might as well marry a prostitute. Or, since there are no perfect jobs, one might as well be a contract-killer, or work for the IRS. Luther tried to reform the church from within, but he was kicked

out. Though against the tide, though feeling like a drop in the ocean, Luther contended:

But my Christ lives, and we must be careful to give more heed to the Word of God than to all the thoughts of men and of angels. I will perform the duties of my office and bring to light the facts in the case. As I have received the truth freely [*Matthew* 10:8], I will impart it without malice. . . . I do my part faithfully so that no one may be able to cast on me the blame for his lack of faith and his ignorance of the truth when we appear before the judgment seat of Christ (153).

One example Luther cited of Rome's whimsical interpretations is that she denies the cup to the laity in the Lord's Supper on the basis that in *John* 6:51, Jesus said, "I am the living bread," and not, "I am the living cup" (127). She conveniently forgets the next few verses: "Unless you eat My flesh and drink My blood. . . . For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed" (53, 55). Luther replies, first, that the interpretation is out of context. And secondly, the text is misapplied to the Lord's Supper, for the passage in *John* 6 is referring to spiritual food and drink, as Jesus says, "My words are spirit and life" (63). The sacramentalism of denying the cup to the laity, but giving both bread and cup to the clergy, accentuates Romanism's separation of two classes of people in the church. And when anyone in the laity confronts such errors, even on the basis of Scripture, the ecclesiastical aristocracy claims the sole authority to interpret Scripture.

This kind of out-of-context interpretation and haphazard application of the Scripture is rampant in Protestant churches today. And when Luther used the correct passage which applies to the Lord's Supper, *1 Corinthians* 11, the Roman church rebutted that this passage applied only to the Corinthian church, and not to all churches. Today, the prohibition of women preaching is also brushed aside on the pretext that it only applies to the first-century Corinthians. Of this whimsical method of hermeneutics, Luther wrote,

[I]f we permit one institution of Christ to be changed, we make all of his laws invalid, and any man may make bold to say that he is not bound by any other law or institution of Christ. For a single exception, especially in the Scriptures, invalidates the whole (135).

Romanism is both anti-Scriptural and, like many of their Protestant theological brothers who revel in contradictions, anti-logical: "[W]hen the Scripture is on our side and against them, they will not allow themselves to be bound by any force of logic" (134). When silenced by Luther's arguments, the Roman church resorted to smearing Luther. Luther rejoiced in this. He wrote,

[I]t is a pleasure to be blamed and accused by heretics and perverse sophists, since to please them would be the height of impiety. Besides, the only way in which they can prove their opinions and disprove contrary ones is by saying, "That is Wycliffite, Hussite, heretical!" They carry this feeble argument always on the tip of their tongues, and they have nothing else (146).

In other words, when shown from the Scripture itself that Romanism is wrong, Rome spat the label "heretic" in the face of Luther, with no Scriptural foundation whatsoever. To shield themselves from criticism, the modern Romanists in Protestant clothing also have a few favorite pithy platitudes to spit out: "Love," "Unity," "Heresy-hunter" and especially "Judge not." Meanwhile, they criticize their critics with such labels as "heresy hunters," "schismatics," "Lone Rangers," etc. These abusive labels are nothing but convenient methods of diversion from the discussion at hand. Why debate the issue when one can resort to character assassination?

The call to "judge not" the clergy for the sake of "love and unity" is a good example of the Babylonian captivity of the church. First, it exemplifies the class distinction. The ecclesiastical elite may criticize anyone they please, especially those who disagree with them, but no one is allowed to criticize the clergy without drawing down their

heavy curses. "Judge not us, but let us judge you!" In direct contradiction to this man-made rule, the Bible expressly commands that all teachings should be judged: "Let the prophets speak, but let the people judge" (*1 Corinthians* 14:29; see also *1 Thessalonians* 5:21, *1 John* 4:1). Second, it demonstrates the pick-and-choose method of hermeneutics. The Bible clearly states that both love and unity must be in the context of the truth (*1 Corinthians* 13:6; *Ephesians* 4:13; *Philippians* 3:15-16). Yet, the modern Romanists in Protestant clothing insist on a love and unity devoid of truth, in fact, against the truth. And it is highly ironical, indeed hypocritical, that those who advocate "judge not" and "love and unity," should at the same time judge those who judge them, and advocate hatred toward and separation from those who criticize them. Now, which is better: to avoid people whose speaking truth causes divisions, or to avoid people whose heresies bring unity?

In attacking sacramentalism, Luther did not merely argue against transubstantiationism, or the denial of the cup to the laity. He attacked Romanism's doctrine of *opus operatum*—that the sacrament is effective without regard to any faith or lack of faith on the part of the person for whom it is performed. From pages 152 to 165, Luther carefully expounded the utmost importance of faith. Faith is to believe in the promises of God from the Word of God. Faith gives rise to hope and love. And without faith, hope, and love, there can be no service to God. In the sacraments, it is the explanation of the promises of God, followed by faith on the part of the person receiving the sacraments, which makes the sacraments effective. The ceremonies are merely signs to remind of the promises of God. Without faith, ceremonies are not good works. Luther wrote,

For anyone can easily see that these two, promises and faith, must necessarily go together. For without the promise there is nothing to be believed: while without faith the promise is useless, since it is established and fulfilled through faith. [Luther is saying that faith is intellectual assent to the propositional promises of God.] (160).

It is already easy to see what is the inevitable result of this extinguishing of the faith, namely, the most godless superstition of works. For where faith dies and the word of faith is silenced, these works and the prescribing of works immediately crowd into their place. By them [works] we have been carried away out of our own land, as into a Babylonian captivity, and despoiled of all our precious possessions (166).

The practice of deliverance is one example of godless superstition in the modern church. That modern evangelicalism is buzzing with works like Sardis is the direct effect of its loss of biblical faith. Men's consciences are held in captivity to the fear of facing Judgment Day without works rather than a fear of being without Christ. "Must I go empty-handed?" goes the hymn, as if the works of our hands could contribute anything at the Judgment Day. Today, even faith is measured in terms of works: the more money one gives, the more his faith; the more committees one is on, the more his faith; the more the involvement, activities, services, fasts, short-term missionary trips, etc., etc. Luther accused them:

Blind and godless Pharisees, who measure righteousness and holiness by the greatness, number, or other quality of the works! But God measures them by faith alone, and with him there is no difference among works, except insofar as there is a difference in faith (199).

Faith comes from the Word of God. In attacking monasticism, Luther attacked the fundamental evil that supports monasticism, the evil of man-made rules over Scriptures, and the tendency to spiritual snobbery on the basis of works:

But whatever is without the warrant of Scripture is most hazardous and should by no means be urged upon any one, much less established as a common and public mode of life . . . (201).

For in the religious order, there is scarcely one in many thousands who is not more concerned about his works than about faith, and on the basis of this madness,

they claim superiority over each other, as being "stricter" or "laxer," as they call it (202).

On this subject, Calvin wrote: "For there are always superstitious little fellows who dream up something new to win admiration for themselves." And: "[S]ome will try to win praise for humility through ensnaring themselves in many observances, from which God has with good reason willed us to be free and exempt" (*Institutes of the Christian Religion*, IV, XII, 27, and XIII, 3). Fasting is one such example. (Calvin wrote centuries before Bill Bright.) And to those who contemplate entering "full-time" or short-term ministry, Luther wrote:

Therefore I advise no one to enter any religious order or the priesthood . . . unless he is forearmed with this knowledge and understands that the works of monks and priests, however holy and arduous they may be, do not differ one whit in the sight of God from the works of the rustic laborer in the field or the woman going about her household tasks, but that all works are measured before God by faith alone . . . (202-203).

Next, Luther attacked the sacramentalism of marriage. The Roman church asserts that marriage is a sacrament on the basis of *Ephesians* 5:31-32, where the Latin Vulgate has "the two shall become one. This is a great sacrament." Luther replied:

This argument, like the others, betrays great shallowness and a careless and thoughtless reading of Scripture. Nowhere in all of the Holy Scripture is the word *sacramentum* employed in the sense in which we use the term . . . (221).

. . . Plainly, it was their ignorance of both words and things that betrayed them. They clung to the mere sound of the words, indeed, to their own fancies. For, having once arbitrarily taken the word *sacramentum* to mean a sign, they immediately, without thought or scruples, made a "sign" of it every time they came upon it in the Holy Scriptures. Such new

meanings of words, human customs, and other things have they dragged into the Holy Scriptures. They have transformed the Scriptures according to their own dreams, making anything out of any passage whatsoever. . . . For they employ them all after their own arbitrary judgment, learned from the writings of men, to the detriment of both the truth of God and of our salvation (222).

Once again it is plain that Luther was not attacking merely sacramentalism, nor marriage, but the haphazard way of interpreting Scriptures, and then holding men's consciences captive to such interpretations. The Greek in *Ephesians* 5:31-32 should be properly translated "mystery," not "sacrament."

One good example of such "shallowness and thoughtless reading of Scriptures," of "ignorance of words," of taking certain words "arbitrarily every time they came upon the word"—one good example is the arbitrary interpretation of the word "world" in *John* 3:16 to mean "every single person." In fact, the Chinese Bible does not have "world," but "people of the world," implying universalism. Another example is *1 Timothy* 3:11, where some English Bible translations have "deaconess." The Chinese Bible also has "deaconess," though in the margin it notes that the word does not appear in the original Greek. Notwithstanding, pastors tenaciously "cling to the mere sound of the words," insisting on their own arbitrary interpretations, thereby showing their ignorance, and their tyranny over men, "learned from the writings of men, to the detriment of both the truth of God and our salvation." Luther stated the crux of the matter in these words:

But most of all we should guard against impairing the authority of the Holy Scriptures. For those things which have been delivered to us by God in the sacred Scriptures must be sharply distinguished from those that have been invented by men in the church, no matter how eminent they may be for saintliness and scholarship (224).

It is a shameful and wicked slavery for a Christian man, who is free, to be subject to any but heavenly and divine ordinances (243).

Though Luther attacked all seven of Rome's sacraments, ordination will be the last one considered in this brief article. Even though Protestants no longer consider ordination as a sacrament, they nevertheless prove unable to extricate themselves from some ideas inherent in Romanism. Rome asserts that ordination is indelible—*character indelibilis*—the idea that "once a priest, always a priest." The Council of Trent (1563) condemned anyone who argues that priests can once again become laymen, even if they do not exercise the ministry of the Word of God. This is, once again, the first wall that Luther complained about. To the contrary, Luther maintained that whoever does not preach the Word, the Gospel, ought to be deposed.

. . . [W]hoever does not preach the Word, though he was called by the church to do this very thing, is no priest at all, and that the sacrament of ordination can be nothing else than a certain rite by which the church chooses its preachers. For this is the way a priest is defined in *Mal.* 2[:7]: "The lips of a priest should guard knowledge, and men should seek instruction from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts." . . . They are also called pastors because they are to pasture, that is, to teach (245).

O the disgrace that these monstrous priests bring upon the church of God! Where are there any bishops or priests who even know the Gospel, not to speak of preaching it? Why then do they boast of being priests? . . . The duty of a priest is to preach, and if he does not preach he is as much a priest as a picture of a man is a man. . . . It is the ministry of the Word [not merely the ordination] that makes the priest and the bishop.

Therefore my advice is: Begone, all of you that would live in safety; flee, young men, and do not enter upon this holy estate, unless you are determined to preach the Gospel, and can believe you are made not one whit better than the laity through this "sacrament" of ordination (247-8).

Whoever, therefore, does not know or preach the Gospel is not only no priest or bishop, but he is a kind of pest to the church . . . (249).

The "Protestant" churches are plagued with such pests.

The reader is reminded of what Luther said about the Gospel in *The Bondage of the Will*. It is not "God loves everyone," nor "Christ died for everyone," nor "Man has the free will to believe," nor "God sincerely desires the salvation of all men." Such are false gospels. And anyone preaching these doctrines ought to get the Gehenna away from the pulpit!

Granted, ordained pastors are sometimes deposed due to public scandals. But there seems to be a popular opinion that it is not a scandal when men without the requisite spiritual gifts are ordained to the ministry. The congregation of one pastor (a friend of mine) complained that he preached nothing, multiplying words without point or lesson. I sympathize with the congregation for having to endure terrible sermons week after week, full of nothing but pithy platitudes. I also sympathize with my friend. So, I sent him books on sermon improvements; but it seems that he simply does not have the requisite spiritual gift. After years of status quo, some in the congregation finally left the church because the senior pastor simply will not fire my friend. This is unbiblical. This is a remnant of Romanism, a spiritual tyranny enslaving the sheep to spiritual starvation. (The modern Protestant equivalent to Rome's *character indelibilis* seems to be the seminary degree.)

The early church may have been corrupted much the same way Protestant churches are being corrupted today. First, there may have been the appointment to leadership of those without the

requisite spiritual gifts. Many churches, for example, appoint novices, recent converts and seminary graduates who have not been tested first. Some churches even appoint unbelievers to various services (e.g., choir). The rationale behind it is that the novice, or the unbeliever, will learn as he goes, or will acquire the zeal for God as he serves in the church. This is contrary to the Bible directives (*I Timothy* 3:6; 3:10; *Titus* 1:9). Second, these leaders in turn appoint others to the leadership who are just as ignorant of the Bible as they. Since they are ignorant of the Bible, they adopt worldly solutions to the problems they face. One example I could give is a meeting I was in some years ago, where pastors and leaders were deciding salary policy. Almost an hour of worldly solutions (e.g., kinds of degrees, number of years of experience, etc.) later, I asked, "What does the Bible say?" They were stunned and silenced as if with a totally unheard-of idea. They had never even thought of consulting the Bible. After a moment or two of this stunned silence, they all went back to discussing worldly solutions, as if my question never existed, somehow sucked into the Twilight Zone. After one or two generations of this kind of leadership, the church will be completely dominated by unbelieving professors. The Babylonian captivity will then be complete.

### *The Freedom of the Christian*

Believe it or not, this third treatise begins with an open letter, almost conciliatory in tone, to Pope Leo X. Luther assured the pope that he was not attacking him personally, being, he said, "conscious of the beam in my own eye." But toward false doctrines, Luther gave not the least compromise.

I have, to be sure, sharply attacked ungodly doctrines in general, and I have snapped at my opponents, not because of their bad morals, but because of their ungodliness [in doctrines]. Rather than repent this in the least, I have determined to persist in that fervent zeal and to despise the judgment of men, following the example of Christ who in his zeal called his opponents "a brood of vipers," "blind fools," "hypocrites," "children of the devil" [*Matthew* 23:13, 17, 33; *John*

8:44]. Paul branded Magus [Elymas the magician] as the "son of the devil . . . full of all deceit and villainy" [*Acts* 13:10], and he calls others "dogs," "deceivers," and "adulterers" [*Philippians* 3:2; 2 *Corinthians* 11:13; 2:17]. If you will allow people with sensitive feelings to judge, they would consider no person more stinging and unrestrained in his denunciations than Paul. Who is more stinging than the prophets? Nowadays, it is true, we are made so sensitive by the raving crowd of flatterers that we cry out that we are stung as soon as we meet with disapproval. When we cannot ward off the truth with any other pretext, we flee from it by ascribing it to a fierce temper, impatience, and immodesty. What is the good of salt if it does not bite? Of what use is the edge of a sword if it does not cut? "Cursed is he who does the work of the Lord deceitfully" [*Jeremiah* 48:10].

...

... I have no quarrel with any man concerning his morals but only concerning the word of truth. In all other matters I will yield to any man whatsoever; but I have neither the power nor the will to deny the Word of God (267-8).

As mentioned above, instead of facing the issue at hand, the modern counterparts often flee behind slogans of "unity," "love," "judge not." These platitudes conveniently change the subject of doctrinal discussions, and immediately throw subtle insinuations (of temper, impatience, immodesty) at the one trying to bring forth the truth. The same with Luther. Though Luther attacked not the immoral character of the popes, but only their doctrines (in obedience to *1 Corinthians* 14:29), his own character was often assassinated. The true descendants of the Reformation can expect nothing less.

After this somewhat conciliatory dedication, Luther began his discussion of the freedom of a Christian. Christian freedom begins and continues with the doctrine of justification by faith alone. Once a

Christian understands that righteousness comes by faith and faith alone, without any works, all man-made rules and traditions in the world cannot bind his conscience. Luther said, "There is no more terrible disaster with which the wrath of God can afflict men than a famine of the hearing of his Word" (*Amos* 8:11). He was referring to preaching Christ and the doctrine of justification by faith alone, for the ignorance of any aspect of this doctrine of grace will lead to spiritual captivity. If you sit in a church year in and year out and have never come to a right understanding of this doctrine, you can be sure that it is no different from sitting in a Roman Catholic church all those years.

Faith alone, on the other hand, does not make the Christian lawless. Though he may disregard man-made rules, he is not free from the Word of God. He may not give up his Christian liberty for the sake of those who stubbornly put a premium on the rules of man; in fact, he must be an offense to them. But to the brother weak in faith, he must take care not to be a stumbling block for the sake of love. "A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none," said Luther. Yet, too, "a Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all." Luther explained:

Our faith in Christ does not free us from works but from false opinion concerning works. . . .

Hence the Christian must take a middle course and face those two classes of men. He will meet first the unyielding, stubborn ceremonialists. . . . There he must resist, do the very opposite, and offend them boldly lest by their impious views they drag many with them into error. In the presence of such men it is good to eat meat, break the fasts, and for the sake of the liberty of faith do other things which they regard as the greatest of sins. Of them we must say, "Let them alone; they are blind guides." According to this principle Paul would not circumcise Titus when the Jews insisted that he should [*Galatians* 2:3], and Christ excused the apostles when they plucked ears of grain on the Sabbath

[*Matthew* 12:1-8]. . . . The other class of men whom a Christian will meet are simple-minded, ignorant men, weak in the faith. . . . Since they do and think as they do, not because they are stubbornly wicked, but only because their faith is weak, the fasts and things that they consider necessary must be observed to avoid giving them offense. This is the command of love that would harm no one but would serve all men. It is not by their fault that they are weak, but by that of their pastors who have taken them captive with the snares of their traditions and have wickedly used these traditions as rods with which to beat them. They should have been delivered from these pastors by the teachings of faith and freedom. . . . (311-312).

. . . Therefore fight strenuously against the wolves, but for the sheep and not also against the sheep. . . . [U]se your freedom constantly and consistently in the sight of and despite the tyrants and the stubborn so that they also may learn that they are impious, that their laws are of no avail for righteousness, and that they had no right to set them up (313).

Over time, traditions of men, even traditional interpretations of certain verses, have a way of creeping up from behind and gradually becoming the laws of God. The Christian, freed by Christ through faith in the Gospel, must ever be on guard against losing his freedom. He must ever watch and pray against the Babylonian captivity of the Church. And, as Luther opposed the Roman Church, he must clearly and boldly oppose the Babylonian captivity of the so-called Protestant churches.