

198. This Article of the Christian Church Distinguishes It from All False Religions.

Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. Rom. 16, 11.

How is man justified? All religions give an answer to this vital question, and with one accord all false religions teach that man is justified by the deeds of the Law. Turk and Pope, heathen and rationalist, declare: Do good, lead an upright life, and God will forgive your sins. But what says the true religion? What says Scripture? Does not God say in language which cannot be misunderstood: "We conclude that a man is justified by faith, without the deeds of the Law"; and: "By grace are ye saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast"? And when the keeper of the prison at Philippi asked Paul and Silas: "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" did they not answer, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ"? What would the Savior from sin and death be for if by the works of love which we perform we could attain to heaven?

We are justified before God, not by our works, but by grace, for Christ's sake, through faith — this is the chief point by which our Christian religion is distinguished from all other religions on earth. All other religions teach that man, by keeping certain statutes and doing certain works, must conciliate God and must so save himself. They have no mediator, no one to bring them to God. Alone our Christian religion teaches that man does not and cannot save himself by the keeping of ordinances and the doing of works, but salvation is alone in and by Jesus Christ, the one Mediator between God and man, who gave Himself a ransom for the redemption of the world. In Him God is reconciled, by Him man comes to God and aside from and without Him there is neither reconciliation nor justification nor salvation.

Prayer.

O merciful God, since the Gospel-message of the love of God as revealed in Christ is the only means of reconciling men with God, do Thou grant that all who go forth to preach the Gospel, proclaim this Word of Reconciliation with wisdom from on high, that they seek naught else than the honor of Thy name and the advancement of Thy kingdom. Grant that they clearly recognize the mystery of the Cross to be the center of our evangelical doctrine and not pretend to know anything save Christ Jesus and Him crucified and extol Him as the Hope of glory and the Fountain of salvation. Grant this through the grace of Jesus, the great Shepherd and Bishop of our souls. Amen.

Abide, O dearest Jesus,
Among us with Thy grace
That Satan may not harm us
Nor we to sin give place.

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