

Why Anabaptists Are Not Welcome in Most “Anabaptist” Churches

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The title might sound rather strange, that it's a hard thing to be an Anabaptist in an Anabaptist church. Let me explain; by the end of tonight hopefully you'll understand the meaning of the title. Where it all started for me would have been just about 11 years ago. My family and I were getting ready to move to Pennsylvania and I had decided to plunge into the Anabaptist world and that's where I would make my identity and my home. I was very excited about moving to Pennsylvania. I was moving to the church where John D is, that definitely preaches Kingdom Christianity and the genuine Anabaptist understandings of things.

About three weeks before I moved, I had been invited to speak at a colloquy, just a meeting where people were going to talk at Faith Builders on the subject the Anabaptist view of salvation. I thought, "This is great. This will be a good way to kick off my new life." The topic was wonderful, the Anabaptist view of salvation. I'd heard the Evangelical, Luther's view nearly my entire adult life. This was great. I was going to explain the Anabaptist view. So I prepared a message and showed up and did that.

There was a time for questions and answers or responses after I gave my presentation, and the audience politely handed me my head. I suddenly realized I wasn't preaching to the choir. I just assumed preaching to Anabaptists about the Anabaptist view of salvation, what more pleasant topic, have everybody agreeing with you. Certainly many there did, but the ones who didn't were very vocal. Unfortunately, I had not come to defend the view because I assumed we all believed it, and so I came prepared to explain it, not defend it. I suddenly found myself having to defend it on the fly and that's where I got my baptism that being an Anabaptist in an Anabaptist setting doesn't mean you're going to be welcome. You personally will be, but not necessarily your message.

Let's talk about this. As I said, that's where I firsthand saw how Martin Luther... This is a strange thing: he has far more influence today now that he's in his grave than he did when our forefathers were living. He had little influence on them then. From the grave, he has greatly undermined the Anabaptist message, the message of our forefathers.

I want to ask you, has your understanding of scripture and Christianity been influenced by Martin Luther? Don't raise your hand. Just answer it ... Probably if we were all honest, we'd all have to raise our hands somewhat. "Not me," you might be thinking. "I haven't been." You may even be saying, "I've never even read a word of Martin Luther's writings." The problem is that even though Luther influences the biblical interpretation of millions of people, very few of them have ever read his writings, but his influence is there.

Here's a simple test you could take a look at and it will ... Again, I'm not going to ask you to do this openly. It'll reveal whether or not you've been influenced by Luther and you will be somewhat of a rare character, a rare person if you have not been. This passage, you've read it many times, "Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? You see then that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone."

Here's the question, would you feel comfortable saying out loud to people that we're saved by works and not by faith alone? Would you feel comfortable saying that? I'm not going to ask you to raise your hand. If you don't feel comfortable, I'm going to have to tell you, you've been influenced by Martin Luther. I'll explain why I say that. Would you feel comfortable saying that we are saved by works and not by faith alone? Most people would be very uncomfortable saying that. It's because of Martin Luther's influence and hopefully I can convince you of that.

Would you feel, if you're a brother, would you feel comfortable preaching a sermon from the second chapter of James, the passage we just read, taking what it says at face value, not explaining it a way as it's usually done, would you get comfortable getting up and giving a sermon like that? John D, yes, he has of course been doing this for decades, he's finally been joined by some more people. He's been carrying the torch alone for a long time. Let me ask you this, would you feel comfortable having David Bercot come to your church and preach a sermon on James chapter 2? That's stretching it huh? If not, you've been influenced by Martin Luther.

Why do I say that? It's because before Martin Luther, the word "works" was not a bad word. Nobody hesitated to say that we're saved by our works anymore than they would hesitate to say that we're saved by our faith. Christians didn't see a conflict between faith and works. They didn't see a conflict between Paul and James. I'm telling you, you can read the early Christian writings, they're not even aware that anyone would find a conflict there. And it's not that they have to explain, "You can harmonize it this way." They just don't even see an issue. It's something that was invented by Martin Luther.

Let me just give you some example quotes from the early Christians. I could spend the whole evening just reading quotes just like these. "We're justified by our works and not our words." That wasn't just some strange person saying that. That was Clement of Rome. He was one of the ministers, one of the elders in Rome, almost certainly the man that Paul mentioned in his letter to ... mentions Clement as one of his fellow workers whose name is in the Book of Life. He had no problem saying that.

"The way of light then is as follows, if anyone desires to travel to the appointed place," that's heaven by the way, "he must be zealous in his works." It's from the letter of Barnabas. We're not sure which Barnabas wrote it. It could have been written as early as 70 A.D., as late as maybe 130 A.D.

Justin Martyr, writing about 150 A.D.: "If men by their works show themselves worthy of his design, they are deemed worthy of reigning in company with him, being delivered from corruption and suffering. This is what we have received." He's not trying to preach this to Christians and change their view, he's explaining to the Romans, "This is what we believe. This is what's been handed down to us, if men by their works show themselves worthy." That wasn't a strange thing to say. It has nothing to do with Roman Catholicism. People read the Bible. They saw no issue with works until Martin Luther.

How about this quote, “All who from their hearts believe this Gospel which is the joyful and happy message, who turn from their evil ways and undertakings, who fear and love God above all else and their neighbor as themselves, who follow Christ their forerunner with patience in every adversity and desire to serve Him in righteousness, holiness and truth with a good conscience, who in this manner are motivated by the spirit of God, such are the children of God.”

Now, do any of you recognize that last quote? It’s not an early Christian. I snuck it in on you. That’s from the Swiss Brethren. That’s from the book that Chester Weaver mentioned, *Golden Apples*. It’s that book. This is what the Swiss Brethren came up with, it’s their articles of faith, very similar to the Dordrecht Confession. They were not at that time influenced by Luther. They ignored Luther. This is how they explained salvation.

As I said, before Luther everybody saw that the New Testament teaches that we have to walk obediently with Christ after we have been initially saved. They understood that it’s all a matter of grace. They understood it’s faith. They understood that they didn’t earn their salvation. But they also understood, once you have been saved from this world, once you have been rescued, you have to walk obediently with Jesus Christ. Everybody understood that.

The error of the Roman Catholics, the medieval Roman Catholics wasn’t that they believed this, it’s that they didn’t believe this. They thought there were all of these little shortcuts you could take instead of being somebody who really loves God and who therefore obeys his commandments. “Hey, you can take these pilgrimages to Jerusalem and all that. You can add up these brownie points and be an ungodly person but God will take you because you’ve created all of these artificial means of getting to heaven.” That was their sin. It wasn’t because they believed in walking obediently with God. Many of them did; there were some outstanding Roman Catholics. But far too many were looking to all these little shortcuts, and Luther gave them a giant one.

If Luther’s understanding of Christianity is true, this is what you have. Picture this as a clock dial. You’d have to say that the whole church was in darkness until around 1519. Now, I use that year, I’m not sure exactly when Luther first taught salvation by faith alone. It wasn’t when he first nailed the 95 Theses. It was a short time after that. I’m just using that as a guesstimate. Now, does that make sense to you? Jesus said, “Lo, I am with you all the days until the end of time,” that for 1500 years no one knows the gospel, suddenly Martin Luther discovers it? A guy who never knew the apostles, who wasn’t a particularly godly man, who had blood on his hands, but this is a guy who discovers the real gospel that nobody before him saw?

That makes no sense to me. Hopefully, it doesn’t to you, but nevertheless, for 500 years Luther’s view of salvation has been propagated through millions of sermons, books, commentaries, study bibles, pamphlets, tracts, hymns, and so many of the Christian songs we sing. It’s even reflected in all Protestant Bible translations, which we use. The King James probably has the least influence.

My question is what do you think, can David Bercot undo all of that in 40 minutes? How many think I can? I don’t. I can’t do all of that in 40 minutes. I hopefully can open your eyes to some things to look at a little bit differently. But no, I’m not deluding myself into thinking I can change somebody’s perspective on that, not after all of these centuries of being indoctrinated, hearing it from every sort of angle. People have told me, and I hadn’t even realized this, but at this conference the Old Order’s say it’s very pervasive, that even in the Old Order’s that I thought were insulated from this, Luther’s influence, the Protestant influence, is there.

To begin with, let's look at what I call Luther's quartet. These are all legitimate passages from scripture. Romans 4:2-5, "For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.' Now to him who works, his wages are not counted as grace but as debt. But to him who does not work, but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness." We've heard that quoted, I'm sure, hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of times. We can't just ignore it. It certainly sounds when you look at that verse that, wow, how we live doesn't matter.

What about this? "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and not that of yourselves. It is a gift of God. Not of works, lest anyone should boast." "Who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to his own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus." I'm sure you've heard these verses many times. "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit."

Needless to say, every one of those statements is true or they wouldn't be in the New Testament. I'm not going to get up here and tell you, "Just ignore those verses. Pretend they're not there." I cannot tell you how many salvation sermons I've heard in our Anabaptist circles where the minister goes through this quartet of scriptures; more than I can count. If we look at just those four passages, it seems perfectly plain that our works of obedience play no role in our salvation. If that's what's presented to you of course you're going to go away believing that works don't have any part in salvation. But are those passages the only thing the New Testament has to say about salvation? Is that a fair representation of what the New Testament teaches? Why do our speakers never use the following quartet of New Testament passages?

How about this one? This is Jesus our Lord saying, "Therefore whoever hears these sayings of mine and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat on that house. And it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock." And how do you found it on the rock? It says, "Whoever hears these sayings and does them." It's not just believing in Jesus Christ that builds on the rock, it's hearing his teachings and doing them.

He says, "But everyone who hears these sayings of mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat on that house, and it fell. And great was its fall." That's just a little different story than the four that we just read. When I hear salvation sermons, no one ever reads that. I shouldn't say nobody, I've heard John preach. He does.

How about this from Hebrews, "If we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses." Does he say we're under grace, we don't have to worry if we disobey? He says, "Of how much worse punishment do you suppose will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he would sanctify a common thing, and insulted the spirit of grace." We can insult the spirit of grace.

1 John, "Now by this we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He who says, 'I know him,' and does not keep his commandments is a liar." These writers aren't mincing words. "And the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps his word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in him." And of course there's the passage in James we've already read. So a speaker's being very dishonest to you, who gets up and reads Luther's quartet ... I've seen this so many times. I've been in the audience so many times. I've preached the Anabaptist view of salvation only to sit down and have the next speaker get up and preach the Luther's quartet and totally confuse the audience.

How honest is it to preach those four and ignore these other ones? It is not honest just to preach the four I just showed you and not read the first four. We got to find a way for these to make sense. James says that Abraham was justified by works, but in Romans, Paul says he was justified by faith apart from works. What we have to face up to is that we have two sets of verses that on their faces seem to contradict each other. We believe this is God's word, so we all know they can't really contradict each other.

What do we do when we have two parts of a document, in this case two parts of the New Testament, that seem to say the exact opposite thing. Let's first look at how Martin Luther resolved this dilemma. His solution was to say, "Some New Testament books have precedent over other books. They're not all on the same level." That would be a surprise to people today who say they believe in the inspiration of scripture, every word of it. This is what he wrote.

When he translated the Bible into German so the common people could read it, he wanted to make sure that before they read it, they'd have their minds already prejudiced. He put an introduction at the beginning of the New Testament and he said this in it. He's gone all on this whole explanation of why these various books you can throw out and which ones are important. "You can now judge all the books and decide among them which are the best," he's already decided for you, but anyway, "John's Gospel and Saint Paul's Epistles, especially that to the Romans, and Saint Peter's first Epistle are the true kernel and marrow of all the books. They ought rightly be the first books, and it would be advisable for every Christian to read them first and most." He was telling people, "Hey, they're not all equal."

It gets worse, "John's Gospel is the one understandable, true, chief gospel, far, far to be preferred to the other three and placed high above them. So, too, the epistles of Saint Paul and Saint Peter far surpass the other three Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke." Imagine saying that. The epistles of Paul surpass Matthew, Mark and Luke where you read the words of Jesus Christ. Matthew contains more words of Jesus than any other book of the Bible. Here he told his readers you can safely ignore them. Paul's epistles are what you want to look to.

He continues, "In a word, Saint John's Gospel and his first Epistle, Saint Paul's Epistles, especially Romans, Galatians, and Ephesians, and Saint Peter's first Epistle are the books that show you Christ and teach you all that is necessary and good for you to know, even though you were never to see or hear any other book or doctrine." You'd have all the truth just from those books. "Therefore," he concludes, "Saint James' Epistle is really an epistle of straw, compared to them, for it has nothing of the nature of the gospel about it."

In the introductions to Hebrews and Revelation, he disparaged them and said that they were not apostolic because Hebrews has those verses that say that if we sin willfully, that then we have insulted the spirit of grace and we will be punished. And in Revelation, in the seven letters to the churches, what does Jesus say first each time? “I know your works.”

Now, I realize that no Anabaptist would say that he agrees with what Luther said. In fact, no Baptist would say that. No Methodist would say that. Nevertheless, it’s what everybody practices. Let me just ask you, how many times have you heard someone give a sermon from James chapter 2, and I’m not talking about because they’re exegetically going through the book of James, but they come to your church or your preacher gets up and tonight or this morning we’re going to preach on James chapter 2. Has it happened to you very often? It hasn’t happened to me. The only time I’ve heard it preached on is when someone is going through the book of James exegetically.

Yet in the church I attend, which a sister church of the John’s, where we do preach the Anabaptist doctrine of salvation, even there in the past 12 months alone, I’ve heard three sermons from the fourth chapter of Romans, zero from the book of James. In fact, I’ve never heard a sermon from the second chapter of James, like I said, unless it was part of an exegetical teaching.

This isn’t accidental. It’s not that these brothers just open the bible, “I just came to Romans 4.” This is Luther’s influence. It’s very pervasive. People don’t even realize, “I’m doing this because of Luther.” They don’t realize that before Luther, Romans was just a book like any other book, in the Bible I mean. Romans didn’t have some kind of precedence over First Corinthians or over James.

The oldest Bible we have, the oldest complete Bible that is bound as a book, the order of the books is different than in our Bibles. When you get through with Acts, you actually go right to Romans. In the oldest one we have, when you get through with Acts, guess which book you’ll go to – the book of James. It’s the one that follows Acts, for a good reason, because it’s addressed to everyone. Paul’s letters are mainly addressed to either individuals or specific churches. Not that they don’t apply to everybody, but they started with whoever called the Catholic or general epistles. As I’ve said, it’s because of Luther.

Imagine what it would be like if we interpreted contracts and wills that way. Let’s suppose that two businessmen, I’ll say John and Nathan here, they enter into a contract that places responsibilities and benefits on both sides; that’s what contracts normally do. Businessman 2, Nathan here, he decides he doesn’t want to fulfill his responsibility, but he expects to still receive the benefits from John of the contract but he doesn’t like the part of the things he has to do. Being a clever fellow, he hires David Bercot to represent him.

I argue to the court that paragraph five, which is the paragraph that explains all the benefits he receives from the contracts, I say, “Your honor, this is the one chief true paragraph of this contract. All you need to read are paragraphs five through eight and it will give you the true meaning of the contract, even if you never read another paragraph in it. In contrast, paragraph nine (that’s the one that puts responsibilities on Nathan), it’s a paragraph of straw. It has nothing of the nature of this contract to it.” What do you think? Do you think the judge would say, “Hey, that’s a good argument David.” I would be lucky if I wasn’t physically thrown out of the court room.

In real life, courts begin with the four corners rule. Here’s the legal definition of that: “To look at the four corners of an instrument is to examine the whole of it so as to construe it as a whole without reference to any one part more than another.” In other words, we do not do what Luther did. We don’t say this part’s more important than that part. We look at the whole thing. Life would be pretty unjust if it was any different from that.

Another step courts take is to see if a word is being used in a particular sense in one paragraph but in a different sense in another one, because the same word can have different meanings, even in the same sentence. “Tom ran fast to reach Tim who is stuck fast in the ice.” Same word fast, two entirely different meanings. The first part it means to run quickly. The second part it means unable to move. Still it said fast. “Bob left for town. This left only Jim at home.” Bob went somewhere, Jim stayed at home but we still used the same word, left. That’s strange, word have different meanings. “David is presently speaking, Dean will be speaking presently.” Perfect English. It means that I’m speaking right now, Dean will be speaking in a short while. Words have different meanings so you have to look at their context.

It doesn’t take a genius to figure out that if Paul said Abraham was not saved by works, and James says he was saved by works, the two men are using the word “works” in two different senses. What do you think courts do to determine what meaning a particular word carries? If the document doesn’t give a direct definition of the word, they look at the context.

I have an illustration; this just came up a few weeks ago in the US Supreme Court. I thought it was very interest... illustration of just what we’re talking about. The Sarbanes-Oxley Act, you may or may not remember it, of 2002 ... this was after the big stock market crash ... it forbids the destruction of any record, document or tangible object with the intent to obstruct a federal investigation. It was after the Enron collapse and they had destroyed records and it wanted to keep people from doing that.

A fisherman by the name of Yates was charged with breaking this law because he was out fishing and he was catching small fish that were illegal. I guess you have to wait until they get bigger. The Coastguard was about to board his ship and so he told the sailors, “Hey, throw all of these fish overboard.” The Coastguard didn’t like that and the US government charged him under the Sarbanes-Oxley Act of destroying tangible evidence or a tangible object. The question before the Supreme Court, is a fish a tangible object? In general, yes of course, but under that Sarbanes-Oxley Act, that’s the question.

The Supreme Court looked at the context of the act and they said no. I’ll show you why. When they went through it they said this act is dealing entirely with accounting books, records, receipts and all of that, they counted the number of nouns and verbs and they all referred to accounting. None of them deal with something like fishing. The actual name of the act, the official name, is the Public Company Accounting Reform and Investor Protection Act. They said the context of this act has nothing to do with fishing, so under this context, tangible object is not a fish, which is correct. Does that sound strange to you? Just funny, not strange. Okay.

It would be terrible if a law that that was meant to apply to one thing got applied to another when that wasn’t the intention, but that’s what’s happened with Romans and James. What’s the context of James? When he uses the term “works”, what is James talking about? Or I should say, what is the Holy Spirit talking about there? We can look it up. “What does it profit my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works?” What does it mean by works? Can faith save him?

“If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food and one of you says to them, 'Depart in peace. Be warmed and filled,' but do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.” James is talking about acts of love, acts of faith, acts of obedience. In fact, he talks about the things, it dovetails with Matthew 25 which we read this afternoon. Are you helping the hungry, visiting the sick, etc. He calls those things “works” and he says without them we will not be justified.

What about Paul? What's the context of his letters? The background of all of them. It says, "And certain men came down," this is from Acts 15. This was the big issue that covered all of the New Testament but particularly Paul's ministry. "And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, 'Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom of Moses, you could not be saved'" Catch that, these Pharisees, they were converted Jews, they were Christians but they were saying, "Unless you are circumcised, you cannot be saved." "Some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up saying, 'It is necessary to circumcise them, the Gentiles and to command them to keep the Law of Moses.'" That was a big issue. You have these Gentiles coming in, and yet for 1500 years the way to God was to the Law of Moses. So they naturally thought, "The Gentiles, they're welcome in, but surely they have to keep the law, if not the whole law at least being circumcised, because that goes back to Abraham."

Galatians, I won't read it all, read chapter 2 sometime. It is so clear that the issue is, Paul has preached to these Galatians, they understand that they can come into the church so they can be saved without being circumcised, without keeping the law. But what happens? Some men came from Jerusalem and next thing you know, they're telling them, "You guys have got to keep the law. You must be circumcised." This isn't a little thing when you're talking to adult converts. This was putting a pretty heavy burden on them, a very heavy burden.

The context of Romans... Everyone goes to Romans 4. It amazes me, how can you just skip chapters 2 and 3 which lay out the context? Chapter 3, Paul is writing the Romans, he's talking to the Jews, he says, "Indeed you are called a Jew, and rest on the law," the Mosaic Law, "And make your boast in God and know his will and approve the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the law, and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness." The Jews were feeling superior to the Gentiles, "We'll tell you the way to do things because we know the law and you don't."

He goes on, "Where is boasting then? It is excluded by what law, of works? No, but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the law." Not the kind of works that James is talking about, but the works of the law, the Mosaic Law. And listen as he says, "Or is he the God of the Jews only? Is he not also the God of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also, since there is one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith." That is the context. You go to Ephesians, it's the same thing. It's his whole ministry because he has the same issue every town he goes to, the Jews want the Gentiles to come under the Law of Moses.

The Anabaptist pointed this out, there's nothing complicated. They saw that the Jews were trying to make the Gentiles get circumcised, that's what Paul is writing about. Everyone understood that for 1500 years, but Luther takes it and says, "No. He's saying that God doesn't want you to try to be good, just have the faith of Jesus and his righteousness imputed to you."

Question and Answer Time:

Andrew Saint Marie, Manchester, Michigan: Brother David, maybe you could comment on this. I thought your explanation was right on. Most people will say that passage in James 2 is about proving you're saved, or you have faith, but it says, "What does it profit, though man say he hath faith, and have not works? Can faith save him?" It doesn't say can faith prove him to be saved.

David Bercot: Okay. Good observation. It doesn't say ... I think it's the New King James, maybe it's the NIV, says, "Can *that* faith save him?" The word *that* isn't in there. James is only talking about the things that Jesus talked about that we will face on Judgment Day. He says if you're not doing those things then you will not be justified, your faith is dead if you do not have those works. "Works," again, was not a bad word until Martin Luther.

Vincent Saint Marie, Manchester, Michigan: What would you say to our Protestant friends who would say, "Ah, yes. But what about John 6:29, 'Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God that you believe on him whom he hath sent.' There you go. There's your works." Please comment.

David Bercot: You get confronted with that all the time. It's a classic example of proof-texting. Proof-texting is when you take verses of the Bible, ignore their context and just pick and ... That's what Jehovah's Witnesses do; it's what I got good at as a young boy. Boy, I could argue with anybody, even a seminary trained minister, when I was only 16. You proof-text and you just say, "But yeah what about this one." Can you imagine, again with a contract, that, "It says here in this, look at these three words, ah, but look at these five words over here, ah, but look at these seven words." You don't do that, you read the whole thing, what's it all talking about.

It's the same thing with the New Testament. You can't jump here, "Jesus said this is the work of God that you believe in me." In John 14 and 15, Jesus says, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." Yeah. You can play that game of jumping around, but sure, it's the will of God that we believe in Jesus. It's one of the works, but He goes on to explain many more. We just read Matthew 25 this afternoon and there He's not talking about just believing that He is the Son of God and that His blood has saved us, He's talking about going out and doing something. It's all through His ministry. It's not just one verse here or there. But thank you, yes, that's a proof text that is thrown up so often.

Aaron Stoll, Caneyville, Kentucky: I have had men tell me that they lived their whole life believing they were in God's will, believing they were saved, and doing good works, and that the people around them, including their own family members felt like they were Godly, but that they came late in life to see that they did not understand grace and that all their works were actually works of the flesh and God was not pleased. Can you comment on that?

David: Yeah. It makes me think of what I experienced as a Jehovah's Witness. We'd get all of these people who would come in. They had been a Baptist all their life. They had been this or that. And, "I have finally found God. I finally found truth. Everything I believed was a bunch of lies," and all of that. People can come to personal decisions and can look at themselves a certain way and it doesn't mean that that's how God looks at it. They can be totally deceived. They could have been in the light and moved into the darkness and decide they've found the light at last, when they found the darkness.

This particular person, perhaps they had no relationship with God. I can't answer for them. I think that's possible, but I think more than likely, they didn't have a true appreciation for grace. It's a message I didn't give here, it's in the book I wrote: there's different kinds of obedience. Slave obedience is not what God wants, He wants obedience that comes from the heart. He will accept slave obedience, to a degree, that we will do His laws. He wants us to love His laws, so that we enjoy doing them.

I think John mentioned that in his message that it's not a matter of, "This is a burden, we've got to keep these commandments." You said that in the statement it called them restrictions. That's how they are to a slave, but to a son of God, "We want to know your ways Father, teach us your ways because we know we'll be happiest on this earth doing it your way." And so that person maybe didn't understand grace. On the other hand, he maybe got tired of obeying God and decided to ditch it. That often happens if you're just doing it out of sheer determination and after a while you tire of it and you hear this message of grace and it's like, "Now, I found the answer to everything," and you really haven't.

Are you curious, Nathan, what that means (slide on projector)? It's up there because I wanted to finish saying this. I thought if it's up there, you'll get curious and say, "David, I'll give you a few minutes to finish it."

Nathan: Okay. We'll have to pass on the questions. Go ahead David.

David Bercot: You also have to look at the tense of these passages. When I was a boy, we drove out West to California where my grandparents lived. We went through some mountains and there was a sign that said, "Watch for falling rocks." I remember we were in the car, my dad said, "What am I supposed to do? Drive? Be looking for rocks falling on me?" We were all confused. What does that mean? How can you look for falling rocks and still drive? Three years later when we came back, they changed to, "Watch for fallen rocks." Okay, that made sense, you can watch for rocks that have fallen in the road. The tense can mean a lot.

The passages of Paul, if you'll notice it, it is always past tense when he says we are not saved by works. "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us," past tense, "through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit. But God who is rich in mercy, because of his great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead and trespasses, made us alive together with Christ by grace you have been saved," past perfect tense.

Remember the illustration of leaving Egypt? The Israelites were saved when they came out of Egypt and went through the Red Sea. That was past tense. Yes, there wasn't any obedience ... there was obedience; they had to put the blood on the doorpost and get ready to leave. But it was a total gift to them, but then they had to walk faithfully. That's why Jesus says, "But he who endures to the end shall be saved." There is a future aspect; we have to walk faithfully and then we experience the final element of salvation.

I think I've got two slides. Luther's dilemma, now he says you're saved by faith alone, but every professing Christian I've ever met believes that Jesus is the Son of God and that He died for our sins. Catholics believe that, unless you find just a really, really, ignorant one who's just nominal. So every professing Christian has been saved because of his faith, whether he's a Catholic, Anabaptist or Lutheran. If we're saved by faith alone, then yeah, everyone believes that Jesus died for them. But of course, Luther couldn't say that, hey, everybody's okay, where does that put him? Nowhere. His answer was that unless you hold to his view of the gospel, particularly his new views about salvation, your faith won't save you.

"If you think that Christian works play any role in your salvation, you aren't saved," Luther said. So what is it? In the end, it's really salvation by theology, not salvation by faith. You have to hold to this view of salvation or you're not saved. If you think that it's faith and something else, you're not saved buddy, that is what is taught in Protestant churches. So don't be sucked into this; our forefathers had it right. They believed what everyone had believed for 1500 years. Jesus did keep his promise, "I will be with you all the days." There was corruption that came in the church, but never where the whole Gospel was lost by the entire church. That would make Jesus a liar. I will close with that and give Dean some time for his presentation. We'll look forward to that. God bless you.