

TAPE # 4

990919PM RC-4

HOW TO LEAD A ROMAN CATHOLIC TO CHRIST

MARTIN LUTHER'S LIFE STORY

In the summer of 1505 Luther entered the Augustinian convent at Erfurt and became a monk, as he thought, for his life time. The circumstances which led to this sudden step we gather from his fragmentary utterances which have been embellished by legendary tradition.

He was shocked by the sudden death of a friend struck dead by lightning at Luther's side. Shortly afterward, on the second of July, 1505, two weeks before his momentous decision, he was overtaken by a violent thunderstorm near Erfurt, on his return from a visit to his parents, and was so frightened that he fell to the earth and tremblingly exclaimed: "Help, beloved Saint Anna! I will become a monk."

LUTHER AS A MONK (1505-1507)

If there ever was a sincere, earnest, conscientious monk, it was Martin Luther. His sole motive was concern for his salvation. To this supreme object he sacrificed the fairest prospects of life. Luther was welcomed by his brethren with hymns of joy and prayer. He was clothed with a white woollen shirt, in honor of the pure Virgin, a black cowl and frock, tied by a leathern girdle. He assumed the most menial offices to subdue his pride: he swept the floor, begged bread through the streets, and submitted without a murmur to the ascetic severities. He said twenty-five Paternosters with the Ave Maria in each of the seven appointed hours of prayer. He was devoted to the Holy Virgin, and regularly confessed his sins to the priest at least once a week. At the same time a complete copy of the Latin Bible was put into his hands for study, as was enjoined by the new code of statutes drawn up by Staupitz.

At the end of the year of probation Luther solemnly promised to live until death in poverty and chastity according to the rules of the holy father Augustin, to render obedience to Almighty God, to the Virgin Mary, and to the prior of the monastery. He was sprinkled with holy water, as he lay prostrate on the ground in the form of a

cross. He was greeted as an innocent child fresh from baptism, and assigned to a separate cell with table, bedstead, and chair.

The two years which followed, he divided between pious exercises and theological studies. He read diligently the Scriptures, he excited the admiration of his brethren by his ability in disputation on scholastic questions.

His heart was not satisfied with brain work. His chief concern was to become a saint and to earn a place in heaven. "If ever," he said afterward, "a monk got to heaven by monkery, I would have gotten there." He observed the minutest details of discipline. No one surpassed him in prayer, fasting, night watches, self-mortification. He was already held up as a model of sanctity.

But he was sadly disappointed in his hope to escape sin and temptation behind the walls of the cloister. He found no peace and rest in all his pious exercises. The more he seemed to advance externally, the more he felt the burden of sin within.

LUTHER AS A PRIEST (1507-1510)

Staupitz was Luther's spiritual father, and "first caused the light of the gospel to shine in the darkness of his heart." He directed him from his sins to the merits of Christ, from the law to the cross, from works to faith, from scholasticism to the study of the Scriptures, of St. Augustin, and Tauler. He taught him that true repentance consists not in self-imposed penances and punishments, but in a change of heart and must proceed from the contemplation of Christ's sacrifice, in which the secret of God's eternal will was revealed. He encouraged Luther to enter the priesthood (1507), and brought him to Wittenberg; he induced him to take the degree of Doctor of Divinity, and to preach.

In the second year of his monastic life and when he was still in a state of perplexity, Luther was ordained to the priesthood, and on May 2, 1507, he said his first mass. This was a great event in the life of a priest. He was so overwhelmed by the solemnity of offering the tremendous sacrifice for the living and the dead that he nearly fainted at the altar.

LUTHER'S STUDY OF THE SCRIPTURES

By the continued study of Paul's Epistles, he was gradually brought to the conviction that the sinner is justified by faith alone, without works of law. He experienced this truth in his heart long before he understood it in all its bearings. He found in it that peace of conscience which he had sought in vain by his monkish exercises. He pondered day and night over the meaning of "the righteousness of God" (Rom. 1:17), and thought that it is the righteous punishment of sinners; but toward the close of his convent life he came to the conclusion that it is the righteousness which God freely gives in Christ to those who believe in him.

- ✓ Righteousness is not to be acquired by man through his own exertions and merits; it is complete and perfect in Christ, and all the sinner has to do is to accept it from Him as a free gift.

- ✓ Justification is that judicial act of God whereby he acquits the sinner of guilt and clothes him with the righteousness of Christ on the sole condition of personal faith which apprehends and appropriates Christ and shows its life and power by good works, as a good tree bringing forth good fruits.
- ✓ For faith in Luther's system is far more than a mere assent of the mind to the authority of the church: it is a hearty trust and full surrender of the whole man to Christ; it lives and moves in Christ as its element, and is constantly obeying his will and following his example. It is only in connection with this deeper conception of faith that his doctrine of justification can be appreciated. Disconnected from it, it is a pernicious error.

The Pauline doctrine of justification as set forth in the Epistles to the Romans and Galatians, had never before been clearly and fully understood, not even by Augustin and Bernard, who confound justification with sanctification. Herein lies the difference between the Catholic and the Protestant conception. In the Catholic system justification (dikaivwsi") is a gradual process conditioned by faith and good works; in the Protestant system it is a single act of God, followed by sanctification. It is based upon the merits of Christ, conditioned by faith, and manifested by good works.

This experience acted like a new revelation on Luther. It shed light upon the whole Bible and made it to him a book of life and comfort. He felt relieved of the terrible load of guilt by an act of free grace. He was led out of the dark prison house of self-inflicted penance into the daylight and fresh air of God's redeeming love. Justification broke the fetters of legalistic slavery, and filled him with the joy and peace of the state of adoption; it opened to him the very gates of heaven.

LUTHER'S TRIP TO ROME AND CONVERSION (1510)

In the autumn of the year 1510, after his removal to Wittenberg, but before his graduation as doctor of divinity, Luther was sent to Rome in the interest of his order and at the suggestion of Staupitz, who wished to bring about a disciplinary reform and closer union of the Augustinian convents in Germany, but met with factious opposition.

He ascended on bended knees the twenty-eight steps of the famous Scala Santa (said to have been transported from the Judgment Hall of Pontius Pilate in Jerusalem), that he might secure the indulgence attached to this ascetic performance since the days of Pope Leo IV. in 850, but at every step the word of the Scripture sounded as a significant protest in his ear: "The just shall live by faith" (Rom. 1:17).¹ Thus we have the marvelous conversion of Martin Luther. After many years Martin Luther explained this moment to his son Paul. In the library of Rudolstadt, Germany, a glass case holds a letter written by Luther's youngest son, Dr. Paul Luther. It reads:

In the year 1544, my dearest father, in the presence of us all, narrated the whole story of his journey to Rome. He acknowledged with great joy that in that city, through the Spirit of Jesus Christ, he had come to the knowledge of the truth of the everlasting gospel. It happened this way. As he repeated his prayers on the Lateran staircase, the words of the Prophet Habakkuk came suddenly to his mind: "The just shall live by faith." Thereupon he

¹Schaff, Philip, *History of the Christian Church*, (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.) 1997.

ceased his prayers, returned to Wittenberg, and took this as his chief foundation of all his doctrine.²

WHAT IS OUR BASIS FOR ANY EVANGELISM³?

There are three truths others have taught to me over the years, that have guided my pilgrimage as a soul winning servant of the Lord

ONLY GOD CAN GIVE SINNERS THE HUNGER FOR TRUTH

I was sitting for supper one evening with Francis Schaffer. It was the summer of 1978 at L'Abri in Switzerland. That evening I heard the incredible story of a man from India who had come to Christ. The meal went from 6 to 10 PM but I only remember the story, not the food. It went something like this. In the 60's, in a remote village of India a poor and hungry young man was thrown a scrap of food by a tourist. It was wrapped in a paper with something in German printed on it. He kept the paper for years trying to find what it said. Finally someone read it and translated the words of a page from the Gospel by John.

The words sunk into the boys heart and he wanted to know more. As the years of searching went on he found that the paper was about what his countrymen called the "religion of Europe" so off he went. Begging and working his way across Asia he made it to Europe and began his search. After dozens of people read the scrap and pointed him various ways he walked into the L'Abri fellowship back in the 1970's. There he was led to Christ and returned home to share his hope with all who would listen. What is the lesson?

The first key to salvation is a love for the truth.

2 Thessalonians 2:10

and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved.

Next, a sinner must come to know and understand certain teachings (doctrines) from the Bible. "Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ" (Romans 10:17).

Thirdly, the message must be from the Word of God, not from the teachings and traditions of men. However, even those who hear the word of Christ may not understand. Jesus said there would be some who are, "ever hearing but never understanding; otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!" (Mark 4:12).

Finally, only God can open their hearts and make them understand. (Luke 24:45; 1 Cor. 2:14, Col. 1:9, 1 John 5:20).

²Hughes, R. Kent, *Preaching the Word: Romans—Righteousness From Heaven*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books) 1997.

³ Parts adapted from Mike Gendron, *Proclaiming the Gospel Newsletter*, July/August and September/October, 1999.

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Thus salvation is wholly of the Lord. The object is for an unbeliever to understand God's grace. No one can merit God's favor through good works, because works always nullify grace (Rom. 11:6). And since grace is the only means by which God saves sinners, we must come to the cross with empty hands of faith (Eph. 2:5-9).

ONLY THE SPIRIT OF GOD CAN DRAW SINNERS TO JESUS

A sinner must have the conviction or certitude that these teachings are true. This is a work of the Holy Spirit, "because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction" (1 Thes. 1:5). It is the Holy Spirit who "will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment" (John 16:8). When the Holy Spirit opens our eyes to behold the glory of Christ we begin to see our sin in the light of His perfect righteousness. The unbeliever will not see his need for a Savior until the Holy Spirit brings conviction that "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23) and that God "will by no means leave the guilty unpunished" (Exodus 34:7). Most Roman Catholics never understand God's punishment for sin is death. So instead of trusting Jesus as a substitute to die in their place, they try to appease God with good works and penance.

ONLY THE GRACE OF GOD CAN SAVE A SINNER

When God opens the heart, the Holy Spirit convicts and the message of the cross will be understood. A sinner must then make a volitional decision to forsake his own works and righteousness and put his complete trust and confidence in the Lord Jesus Christ. For it is written, "to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness" (Romans 4:5) Both Jews and Greeks "must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus" (Acts 20:21). Anyone who refuses to repent of his dead works has not understood the grace and righteousness of God. Ultimately it is man's pride, a belief that his goodness will give him a right standing before a holy God, that leaves him condemned. I was stripped of my pride when I understood that nothing good dwells in man; his righteous deeds are like filthy rags in the sight of God (Rom. 7:18; Isaiah 64:6).

Mere intellectual assent to believing certain doctrines as true will not save anyone. Believing must come from the heart (Rom. 10:9-10). This can best be illustrated by the story which is used in our EE training. The story goes that there was a tight rope walker who stretched a wire across Niagara Falls. He then carefully walked across, carrying a 200-pound dummy on his back from the New York side to the Canadian side. Upon safely reaching the Canadian side he asked the spectators to raise their hands if they believed he could now carry a real person back to the other side. They all raised their hands. He then asked for a volunteer. Immediately all the hands went down. They all believed he could do it, but none chose to trust him with their life. This is similar to the one who refuses to trust Jesus with his eternal life. He clings to his own efforts because

he believes Jesus may be unable to save him completely and forever. Only by God's amazing grace will he ever trust Jesus to carry him to the other side of eternity.

ARE THERE ANY CATHOLICS WHO ARE CHRISTIAN?

Not if you believe the Bible which describes a Christian as one who has been eternally saved by God's unmerited grace (Eph. 2:5-7), justified freely by faith without works (Rom. 4:5), and accepted by God only because of Christ's imputed righteousness (Phil. 3:9). Yes there are born again Christians who worship in the Catholic Church, but they usually leave soon after they have been converted. For a Catholic to be converted he must repent of dead works and believe the Gospel (Mark 1:15). He cannot believe salvation is by grace through faith and at the same time believe it is through water baptism and good works (Eph. 2:8-9). He cannot believe Jesus paid the penalty for sin completely and still believe sins are remitted through indulgences and purged in the fires of purgatory (Hebrews 10:14).

How to Witness Effectively⁴ to Roman Catholics

Seeking to win a Roman Catholic is much like talking to an Orthodox Jew about the merits of boneless hams. They won't even hear you because of their culture. Roman Catholicism is a culture and identity as much as it is a religion. The key is to get to God's Word and stay there. The only hope is to be a loving friend who has found some verses in the Bible and wants to share them. You can use their Bible if they have one as easily as your own

USE THE BIBLE AS THE GUIDE FOR YOUR DISCUSSION

In any witnessing opportunity, a major issue that needs to be dealt with is authority. Resolve the question: "In what or in whom will you trust for your eternal destiny?" Each person ultimately must choose between man and his teachings or Jesus and His word. To choose the latter is the safest and wisest decision anyone will ever make because Jesus is the truth (John 14:6); His word is truth (John 17:17) and He came to testify to the truth (John 18:37). Furthermore, every religious leader must be held accountable to Scriptural authority (Acts 17:11). No man or pope is infallible (Gal. 2:11-14) and tradition must never suppress the authority of God's word (Mark 7:7-13; Col. 2:8).

USE THE BIBLE TO DEFINE TRUTH

Make sure you have agreement on the meaning of essential terms of the Gospel because the Vatican has redefined many of its key words. To a Catholic:

- ✓ "justification" is not God declaring one righteous but the process through which one becomes righteous;
- ✓ "sin" is not always mortal because lesser sins do not cause death;
- ✓ "repentance" is not a change of mind but penance or punishment Catholics must do to be absolved of their sin and

⁴ Parts adapted from Mike Gendron, Proclaiming the Gospel Newsletter, July/August and September/October, 1999.

✓ "eternal life" is not eternal because it terminates whenever a mortal sin is committed.

START WITH SIN

What does God's justice demand as punishment for sin? In all my years of asking Catholics this question, not one has ever given the correct answer. The truth must be made known -- God imposes the death penalty when His law is broken. The wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23). The second death is the eternal lake of fire where the unredeemed will pay the eternal punishment for sin (Rev. 20:14). People must first understand they are condemned before they will see their need for a Savior. They must know they are hopelessly lost before they seek God's provision.

POINT TO CHRIST

It is so easy to get lost in the complexity of the Catholic religion. Therefore, avoid any trails that lead you away from the saving power of the Gospel (Rom. 1:16). Proclaim the sufficiency of Christ -- His perfect and finished sacrifice (Hebrews 10:10-14), His grace (Rom. 11:6), His word (2 Tim 3:15), His righteousness (1 Cor. 1:30) and His intercession (Heb. 7:25). This is of utmost importance because Rome adds so much that denies Christ's sufficiency. To His word they add tradition; to His headship they add the pope; to His unique role as mediator they add Mary; to His finished and complete sacrifice they add the Mass; to His high priestly office they add the confessional box; to His righteousness they add their own; to grace they add merit; to faith they add works and to heaven and hell they add purgatory. It is only when Jesus is presented as the all-sufficient Savior that Catholics can be called to repent of these ungodly perversions of the Gospel and be saved by Christ alone.

EXPLAIN THE FREE GIFT

There are three promises Jesus offers to repentant sinners which are totally foreign to most Catholics. They are: 1) the complete forgiveness of sins; 2) the imputation of His perfect righteousness; and 3) the assurance of eternal life. These promises are foreign to Catholics because their church opposes them with a vengeance. Any Catholic who believes these promises of God is condemned with anathema by his church councils (Trent and Vatican II). Rather than trust Jesus for the complete forgiveness of sins, Catholics look to purgatory and indulgences to pay for the residual sin and punishment that still remain. Rather than receive the perfect righteousness of Christ by faith, Catholics seek their own righteousness through good works and sacraments. And finally, rather than believe God's promise of eternal life, Catholics are taught they are committing the "sin of presumption" if they claim to know with certainty they have eternal life. By offering Catholics what Jesus offers, we are proclaiming the Good News which has never been proclaimed from their church. Clearly, for a Catholic to believe the Good News, they must repent of the false gospel of works. Only then will Jesus save them completely and forever and only then can they stand before a Holy God in the perfect righteousness of His Son.

EMPHASIZE BY GRACE ALONE

Since grace is the only means by which God saves sinners, anyone who attempts to merit salvation actually nullifies God's grace (Rom. 11:6). We must, therefore, persuade Catholics to come to Jesus with empty hands of faith. One illustration that has been effective in doing this is to imagine a set of monkey bars suspended over hell. Catholics are hanging and swinging from different rungs labeled baptism, good works, sacraments, indulgences and the Mass because they are taught that these things will keep them out of hell. Now picture Jesus suspended between them and hell saying: "I am the only one who can save you but I can't until you first let go." For Catholics this is a giant step of faith because it goes against everything they have been taught. If they are still hanging on when they die, it will be too late. They must let go and believe Jesus will save them before they perish. This is a picture of the very first command of Jesus when He said, "Repent and believe the Gospel (Mark 1:15).

STICK TO GOD'S WORD

Finally, always remember to use the word of God. It is living and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword (Hebrews 4:12). Let it speak for itself. Avoid using your own words because they are void of power. Ask Catholics to read selected Scriptures out loud and then ask them to tell you what God is saying through His word. This eliminates your interpretation and removes you from the middle. A good way to get them into the Bible is to ask them how they hope to get to heaven. If they give the wrong answer, ask them if they would like to know the only way, according to their own Bible. If they say "yes", take them to The Roman Road, an excellent outline to follow because it presents the bad news first, then the Good News!

The Roman Road

from the eternal lake of fire. . . to eternal life with Jesus

The Bad News

The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18).

There is none righteous, not even one (Rom. 3:10).

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23).

The wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23).

The second death is the eternal lake of fire (Rev. 20:14)

The Good News

But God demonstrated His own love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners Christ died for us (Rom. 5:8)

God justifies (believers) as a gift, by His grace, through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus (Rom. 3:24).

If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved, for with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. Whoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved. (Rom. 10:9-10, 13).

Those God justifies He glorifies. Nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 8:30, 35-39).

**NEXT WEEK:
AN INTERVIEW
WITH ST. PETER⁵**

⁵ Adapted from John Phillips, Interview with St. Peter, Moody Monthly, April, 1982.