

American Council of Christian Churches
76th Annual Convention, October 24-26, 2017
Faith Free Presbyterian Church, Greenville, South Carolina
Resolution on the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification

The apostle Paul instructs the church of Corinth about spiritually dangerous influences that needed to be cut off (2 Cor. 11:12-15). The ability of wolves in sheep's clothing to disguise themselves as true apostles intensifies the danger (v. 12). In reality, these are "false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore, it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works."

One such work is titled, "Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification" (JDDJ), completed in 1999 by the Roman Catholic Pontifical Council for Promoting Church Unity and the Lutheran World Federation, and cosigned by the World Methodist Council in 2006 and the World Communion of Reformed Churches this year. Letters of encouragement from Pope Francis, Patriarch Bartholomew of the Eastern Orthodox Church, and the World Council of Churches gave their approval to welcome the newest member of this effort to undo the Protestant Reformation that exposed Romanism's errors on justification 500 years ago.

In response to that exposure, Popes Paul III, Julius III, and Pius IV convened the Council of Trent from 1545-1563. The Preamble of the JDDJ recognizes the continuing validity of the anathemas of that Council: "Doctrinal condemnations were put forward both in the Lutheran Confessions and by the Roman Catholic Church's Council of Trent. These condemnations are still valid today and thus have a church-dividing effect" [para. 1].

Trent affirms baptismal regeneration: "And this translation [from the state of sin to that of grace], since the promulgation of the Gospel, cannot be effected, without the laver of regeneration, or the desire thereof, as it is written; unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God" [Session 3; Chapter 4]. The JDDJ emphasizes baptismal regeneration: "[Justification] occurs in the reception of the Holy Spirit in baptism and incorporation into the one body" [para. 1.11]; "By the action of the Holy Spirit in baptism, they are granted the gift of salvation, which lays the basis for the whole Christian life" [para. 4.3.25; see also paras. 4.3.27, 4.3.29, 4.3.30, 4.4.28]. Romanists mean the sacrament of *water baptism* by these words, but without exposure of their error, their false gospel is transformed into a message of light.

Trent affirms the necessity of penance for those who lose justification: "As regards those who, by sin, have fallen from the received grace of Justification, they may be again justified, when, God exciting them, through the sacrament of Penance they shall have attained to the recovery, by the merit of Christ, of the grace lost: for this manner of Justification is of the fallen the reparation: which the holy Fathers have aptly called a second plank after the shipwreck of grace lost" [Session 6; Chapter 14]. Although using the word *unconditional*, the JDDJ also places a condition on ultimate justification: "But the justified must all through life constantly look to God's unconditional justifying grace" [para. 4.4.28]. Romanists mean the sacrament of *the confessional* by these words, but without exposure of their error, their false gospel is transformed into a message of light.

Trent affirms purgatory: "Whereas the Catholic Church, instructed by the Holy Ghost, has, from the sacred writings and the ancient tradition of the Fathers, taught, in sacred councils, and very recently in this ecumenical Synod, that there is a Purgatory, and that the souls there detained are helped by the suffrages of the faithful, but principally by the acceptable sacrifice of the altar [i.e., the Mass]; the holy Synod enjoins on bishops that they diligently endeavor that the sound doctrine concerning Purgatory, transmitted by the holy Fathers and sacred councils, be believed, maintained, taught, and everywhere proclaimed by the faithful of Christ" [Session 25; First Decree]. The JDDJ distinguishes between spiritual renewal in this life and possession of eternal life in the next: "[Justifying] Faith is itself God's gift through the Holy Spirit who works through word and sacrament in the community of believers and who, at the same time, leads believers into that renewal of life which God will

bring to completion in eternal life” [para. 3.16]. Romanists mean *purgatory* by these words, but without exposure of their error, their false gospel is transformed into a message of light.

The apostle John condemns the doctrines of baptismal regeneration, penance, and purgatory simply and forcibly: “And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath [the] life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not [the] life” (1 John 5:11-12). In the same Epistle, he cautions: “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. . . ; and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world” (1 John 4:1-2). The spirit of antichrist through false teachers is forming his one-world church disguised as the light-bearing angel of Christian unity.

Therefore, the American Council of Christian Churches at its 76th annual convention, October 24-26, 2017, at Faith Free Presbyterian Church in Greenville, SC, resolves to believe not this spirit of ecumenism but rather to condemn it as the work of false prophets in the world. We summon true believers to the spirit and courage of true Protestantism. We exhort them to come out of the Roman Catholic Church, the Lutheran World Federation, the World Methodist Council, the World Communion of Reformed Churches, the Eastern Orthodox Church, the World Council of Churches, and other forms of religious apostasy infested with false apostles and deceitful workers of iniquity (2 Cor. 6:14-7:1). Endeavoring by God’s grace to maintain the same allegiance to truth that caused an Augustinian monk, not only to post his 95 theses against the Roman Catholic sale of indulgences, but also to stand at Worms with his Bible unadulterated and his conscience undefiled, we reject efforts to undo that work of God remembered on this 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation, which brought millions out of Roman Catholic darkness and into the marvelous light of the New Testament “faith once delivered to the saints” (Jude 3).



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