

Interview with

Gregg Allison and Chris Castaldo:

Author of

The Unfinished Reformation: What Unites and Divides Catholics and Protestants

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The Protestant Reformation shook the world and shaped it in many ways. But was it finished? And if not, what's left for it?

Hi, I'm Fred Zaspel, editor here at Books At a Glance, and we talking today to Gregg Allison and Chris Castaldo, authors of the new book, *The Unfinished Reformation*.

Gregg, Chris – welcome! And thanks for talking to us today.

Zaspel:

Let's start with your title – *The Unfinished Reformation: What Unites and Divides Catholics and Protestants*. First, what was the Reformation, and what were the issues that gave rise to it.

Castaldo:

Well, you know, it's been said that the Reformation was a church split caused by a building project – St. Peter's Basilica – that went bad. That's one way of understanding it. Or you might say, more carefully perhaps, that the term, "the Reformation" describes an array of different renewal initiatives during the 16th century, all aimed at restoring fidelity to Scripture. And there were numerous issues that gave rise to it: an appalling standard of morality among Renaissance popes; the rise of Democratic values by intellectuals, such as Erasmus; the construction of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome which promoted the selling of indulgences, the cause of Luther's protest; inadequate education of clergy whose ministries were often marked by venality and superstition; but most of all it was theological impoverishment. In the day when life was especially nasty and brutish and short people longed to find a gracious God. And this was the cry of Luther's heart and he became his discovery. As you've read in Romans 1:17, the just shall live by faith, a faith that comes as a gift from a merciful father, and it's this same faith that resonates in the present among evangelical Christians.

Zaspel:

So then what is "unfinished" about the Reformation?

Allison:

The Reformation, as Chris emphasized, was largely a theological movement. And the Protestant Reformation was grounded on two axioms or principles. One was the formal principle of Protestantism, which was Scripture alone, *sola Scriptura*. The material principle of Protestantism was justification by God's grace, received through faith in Christ and Christ alone. Those two principles ignited the Protestant Reformation. They were at the foundation of the Reformation. And both of those issues, both of those principles, continue today in terms of what divides Catholics and Protestants. As we will get into later, I'm sure, Scripture and tradition and the magisterium are at the heart of Catholic authority and Scripture is, and Scripture alone, the

primary principle, formal principle of Protestant churches. And justification according to Catholicism is not only the forgiveness of sins, but also sanctification and the renewal of the inner person, so regeneration. Whereas the Protestant notion of justification is God's declaration of the fact that we are not guilty, but righteous instead through Christ. And these two issues continue today to divide Catholics from Protestants, so I guess we could say the Reformation is *unfinished*.

Zaspel:

One of the unique touches of your book is its emphasis on issues that Catholics and Protestants hold in common. Talk to us about that.

Castaldo:

You know, it's interesting, Fred, when Luther stood before the authorities at the Diet of Worms, on the second day, he was told to recant of his writings. He responded by saying, and I quote here, "Some of these writings deal with faith and life so simply and evangelically that my very enemies are compelled to regard them as worthy of Christian reading." This is interesting because it highlights that there are a considerable number of doctrines on which Catholics and Protestants agree. So what would that be? Well, we agree on the triune God, the nature of God, the revelation of God, the person of Jesus Christ, the saving work of Christ, the plight of humanity. In fact, the book has a chapter devoted to this very question where it unpacks 10 African areas where Protestants and Catholics are in agreement. At one place we quote Charles Hodge. Hodge, the great Protestant theologian from Princeton, was invited by Pope Pius IX to attend Vatican I, and he writes a response. And in this response he offers an insight. Here's what he says, "Although we cannot return to the fellowship of the Church of Rome, we desire to live in love with all men. We love all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. We regard as Christian brothers all who worship, love, and obey Him as their God and Savior and we hope to be United in heaven all who unite with us on earth in saying, 'to Christ who loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood and has made us kings and priests to God and His father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever, amen.'" I think that's beautiful because it articulates the fact that there are, indeed, these real doctrinal agreements, and yet, it's also being forthright about the fact that we stand apart with reference to the issues that Greg has highlighted. Namely, authority and salvation.

Zaspel:

Two issues that divide are perhaps most significant – authority and salvation. Let's take authority first. Explain for us the different understandings here.

Allison:

The Catholic view of authority, I guess we could say, is like a three-legged stool that has Scripture, church tradition and the magisterium as the three legs. Scripture is the written word of God, God's written revelation, and we hold that is Protestants in common with Catholics with this difference: in Catholic Bible, the Catholic Old Testament, has the apocryphal writings, and ours doesn't. We agree that Scripture is the written word of God. Where we disagree are the other two legs. The church tradition would be the teaching that Jesus orally communicated to his

apostles, who, in turn, orally communicated that teaching to their successors, the bishops in the Catholic Church. And this tradition is fostered and maintained, nourished hierarchy of the Catholic Church, the magisterium. And is at times proclaimed as official dogma. For example, the immaculate conception of Mary and her bodily assumption. This oral teaching of Jesus, then, which is proclaimed to be official dogma by the Catholic Church, adds more revelation to the Protestant view of *sola Scriptura*, Scripture only. The third leg of the three-legged stool in the Catholic system is the magisterium, or the teaching office of the church – the Pope, and the bishops in concert with him. The responsibility of the magisterium is to render the authoritative official interpretation of both Scripture and tradition, and, when warranted, to proclaim new tradition; to proclaim it as official dogma. So Catholic authority: Scripture plus the Apocrypha, tradition, and the magisterium. The primary ground of Protestant authority, as we've already mentioned, is that formal principle of Protestantism: *sola Scriptura*, Scripture alone. It doesn't mean that we neglect the great tradition of the church – the early creeds affirming the triune God; Christ fully God and fully man, and so forth – we don't ignore that. But our ultimate, final authority is God's written word – Scripture. And the local churches have pastors like Chris and I are, and you, Fred, we have pastors who authoritatively preach and teach the word and guide the church, lead the church. But it's quite different than the magisterial authority of the teaching office of the Catholic Church.

Zaspel:

What about the Apocrypha? Why do Protestants not recognize it as Scripture? Is there a short answer here?

Allison:

Let's try a short answer. First and foremost, the Hebrew Bible, which was the Bible of Jesus and the apostles, never contained the apocryphal writings. Those writings were added before the time of Jesus and the apostles. They were written in Greek and they were added to the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible called the Septuagint. These writings include Tobit and Judas, and I & II Maccabees; seven writings in total, as well as additions the Protestant versions of Esther and Daniel. So, as the Septuagint became popularized in the early church, the churches were familiar with the apocryphal writings, but there is a strong tradition (I'll just mention two theologians: Athanasius and Jerome) who never included the apocryphal writings as part of the church's Old Testament. So there was a strong tradition of identifying the apocryphal writings as non-canonical, therefore not usable for determination of doctrine. This all changed at the end of the fourth century and beginning of the fifth century with our dear friend Augustine, a great theologian who insisted that because the New Testament authors quoted from the Septuagint, therefore the apocryphal writings which were part of that Septuagint should be included in the church's Old Testament. Basically Augustine won the day and so from that point on the church at least regionally considered the apocryphal writings as part and parcel of Scripture. This was officially proclaimed in 1546 at the Council of Trent. But from Augustine's day until ours the Catholic Old Testament has contained the apocryphal writings. The reformers rejected those apocryphal writings because, again, they were not part of the Bible of Jesus and the apostles, they were considered non-canonical by people like Athanasius and Jerome, and for other reasons. We have a major difference here between the Catholic Old Testament and the Protestant

Old Testament; that is the Catholic Old Testament includes apocryphal writings; the Protestant Old Testament does not.

Zaspel:

Does Jesus giving his imprimatur on the law of the prophets and the writings play into this as well? In other words, he endorses explicitly the Old Testament Scriptures, but not the others?

Allison:

So Jesus's expression: the law, the prophets, the writings – that would be the Hebrew Bible without the apocryphal writings. According to Luke chapter 4 when Jesus took the scroll of Isaiah in the synagogue and read from it, that would have been the Hebrew Bible. So Jesus and the apostles, though familiar with the apocryphal writings, don't have those included in the Scriptures that they used.

Zaspel:

How do Catholics and Protestants differ with regard to how a person is saved? That's a big question that involves quite a bit, but can you zero in on the most important essentials?

Castaldo:

I once heard a statement by Tony Lane, who answered this question. Here's how he put it, "for the reformers, we're accepted because of the work of Christ on the cross; for Trent, and the Catholic tradition to the present, it's because of the work of the Spirit in our hearts." So it's the difference between *salvation for us* and *salvation in us*. I think that's helpful. Let me unpack that a little bit. For the Catholic, salvation starts with the sacrament of baptism. There the stain of sin is removed, one is spiritually enlivened and justified. Throughout life he faithfully receives the sacraments, particularly the Eucharist, and his justification grows. In this way, grace is infused, it's imparted into one's soul, making one actually righteous. One becomes righteous. All of this moves toward final justification at the end of life. It's then that God analyzes one's soul to find sanctifying grace or internal righteousness – to see that one has actually been made holy. After which, if one is in a state of grace, he is cleansed in purgatory and then finally accepted. So that is the basic trajectory of salvation from a Catholic point of view. This differs from the Protestant understanding which, as Greg mentioned, locates God's acceptance i.e. justification, in nothing that is inside of us; but instead, the external reality of Jesus' righteousness which God graciously attributes to us. That's our doctrine of imputation. It is reckoned or credited to the sinner. It's Luther's dunghill analogy. Perhaps you've heard this before. I think it's apocryphal; it may be; I've never read it, but I think it, nevertheless, accurately describes Luther's understanding. One day he's with his friends having a meal, looks out the window, points to a pile of manure and says, "That is what we are like in our sin – wretched in the side of God." Over time, the snow falls and an hour later he points to the same hill, but now it is covered by snow. It's white, gleaming in the sunlight, and he says, "That is what we are like in God's sight, because we're closed in the righteousness of Christ." That's a way of understanding imputation. God looks upon us in the light of his Son's perfection; and on that basis he accepts us as his children. Now I must hasten to add, that that analogy is flawed because in addition to recognizing us as righteous in Christ, God also gives us the Spirit so that we are, subsequent to that declaration, we are made

righteous; and that's part of salvation broadly conceived. So we need to underscore that. God is deeply concerned with seeing us become holy. But when you asked the question, "Why is one accepted by God? Why is a sinner accepted?" We want to say there is one reason and it is the finished work of Christ, the benefits of which are attributed to the sinner.

Zaspel:

So, what in your view is yet needed in order to *finish* the Reformation?

Allison:

Well, what Chris has just said so beautifully is what is needed to finish the Reformation. That acknowledgment of the work of God to save us through the completed, finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross and the grace that God gives to us to believe in that and trust in that alone. That's the key. At the end of our book, Chris and I asked the question, "Is the Reformation finished?" And we answer, "Yes," "no," and, "no, but..." Yes, it's finished because we are now 500 years removed from that original context, and the world in which we live is so different. We don't kill one another over theological issues. We can actually sit down and have a charitable and warm discussion. No, the Reformation is not over for the reasons we have listed and others; because of the issue of authority; because of the issue of salvation; because of the issue of what the church is; and how grace is expressed and like that; the Reformation is not over. So, no, the Reformation is not over, but there is a different context in which we live. Catholics and Protestants can be co-belligerents against abortion and the culture of death. We can sit down over a cappuccino and enjoy talking about theological commonalities and differences without punching one another; without killing one another. There is a different context. We urge everyone – Catholics and Protestants alike – to grasp the gospel of Jesus Christ and be saved by Him. And that will help finish the Reformation.

Zaspel:

Gregg, we should mention that you have another book on Roman Catholicism that we should mention. Would you tell us about that?

Allison:

It is published by Crossway in 2015. It is: *Roman Catholic Theology in Practice and Evangelical Assessment*, and it is a walk through the catechism of the Catholic Church going section by section, describing what Catholics believe and what they practice and then assessing that section according to Scripture and our evangelical theological perspective.

Zaspel:

Chris, you've written on the subject before also, is that right?

Castaldo:

Yes, there are two books in particular. The first is titled *Holy Ground: Walking with Jesus as a Former Catholic*. This is written for individuals who have grown up Catholic, want to relate to family and friends around issues of faith, struggle doing so, and need support and insight on how

to navigate the complexities of that conversation. The second one is entitled *Talking with Catholics About the Gospel*, and this is written for a person who, perhaps, has no background in Roman Catholicism but, nevertheless, has friends and neighbors and coworkers who are Catholic. So it presents the rudiments of Roman Catholic thought and proposes some practical strategies for engaging such friends in conversation about the gospel.

Zaspel:

We're talking to Gregg Allison and Chris Castaldo, authors of the new book, *The Unfinished Reformation: What Unites and Divides Catholics and Protestants*. It's a very helpful resource and a delightful read. We encourage you to pick up a copy – and maybe share it with your Catholic friends!

Gregg, Chris, thanks so much for talking to us today, and we wish you well with the new book!

Note: This interview first appeared on [Books At a Glance](#) and is used with permission.