

## **Differences between Lutherans and modern Evangelicals**

While I concur with them on many moral issues and issues like the inerrancy of the Bible, the Trinity, etc., I feel that my view of salvation is very different than most of them. Their view of salvation seems to be one where a sinner is changed from someone with an improper view of the law (with a distant view of God) to someone with a proper one (which is what they label “a personal relationship with Christ”). While it is good for this change to occur, it is not much more than coming to a proper understanding of the first commandment and should not be used as the believer’s assurance of salvation. But it is widely used for this purpose. The cross is given only lip service. There is not a deep daily dependence on the cross, which is the heart of “a personal relationship with Christ”. However, I am not comfortable using this expression because it is not commonly used in the Bible and most people will assume that I infer or endorse the meaning that Reformed church evangelicals associate with it. The Catholic Church was not comfortable with just faith in the cross, so they added in Mary, the saints, and purgatory as aids for salvation. Now, many (if not most) Evangelicals are not at ease with just faith in the cross, so they prefer the expression “a personal relationship with Christ” which allows them to focus on their own part of the relationship (along with some mystical signs from God for His part) for salvation.

Unfortunately, the direction of the church today is to greatly elevate the use of a conversion experience for assurance of salvation. One thing that seems lacking is any clear scriptural passage affirming his concept. I once looked for such verses and was amazed to find very little reference to a conversion experience as the basis of a right standing before God in any of the believers from Adam and Eve and throughout the rest of the Bible. They mainly just trusted the promises of God.

I don't believe it is a healthy situation to have a church where some of those in attendance have had this initiation experience and others haven't, so the pastor can lay it on those who haven't and those who have can feel secure in their Christian resume and proclaim "Amen". The law should bring us all under conviction and the gospel should proclaim a savior for us all.

At least the Baptists have a more workable system. If someone doesn't believe in eternal security, I don't see how there can be much assurance of salvation from a conversion experience if there is the chance you have left the faith. So, I guess, he must also add a good Christian life (a personal relationship with Christ) for assurance of salvation. The conversion experience is in actuality a part of sanctification anyway.

I remember traveling with a pastor. In one of his sermons, he expressed dismay with pamphlets that had steps to salvation. He liked to joke, so a friend and I approached him later and told him that we had completed 7 of the 14 steps to salvation. He responded, "Oh, that's great. You're doing very well."

I feel those who emphasize a conversion experience as the grounds for assurance have done great harm to our understanding of the holiness of God. Instead of a great God who

requires perfection and the complete keeping of the law to be justified in his sight, He is satisfied with a small good action on the part of a sinner in receiving, trusting, committing to, accepting, choosing, etc. what God has provided. These words were originally chosen to direct our attention away from ourselves and to the Cross as a free provision of salvation. Now, they have been made into a smaller, keepable version of a "plan of salvation". (This was the same debate Luther had with Erasmus, but it looks like Erasmus's followers are winning the battle in our age.)

Supposedly these actions carry no merit, but of course any action always will. They can also be widened out to include much more of life, at least to a level that the promoters can carry out in their own lives.

While Lutherans certainly don't believe that God twists people's arms or uses force to achieve salvation, I think the word "choice" can be very misleading. Some believe in "prevenient grace". This is just a scheme to try to justify a belief that is contrary to Lutheran doctrine, especially with Luther's "Bondage of the Will". Certainly God does work in the lives of people before they are brought to faith, but as I understand it, the teaching here was that God removes the bondage during the moment of conversion so that the person can make a free choice again. This, of course, is neither scriptural nor Lutheran.

Even promoters of "free will" must realize that not every one has an equal access to the gospel. Certainly, a greater percentage of those brought up in a Godly home and church with many praying for them are more likely to be members of the Kingdom. Even for those with similar access, it is a mystery why some people are receptive to the message of God and others are not. I can't explain it. The scriptures clearly state that the difference is God's choice, and not our choice. If we try to go beyond this, we will be lead into the error of the reformed church where this teaching became central instead of justification and the cross. I am concerned that some people who God has chosen and have been given a tender heart for the Gospel are responding to the "conversion experience" people and losing out on an experience of the free gospel as well as becoming presenters of a false view of salvation to the world. The world can sense our spiritual pride as the result of this.

I am concerned because the some of the conversion experience advocates were feeling that children shouldn't be confirmed unless they had that experience. I couldn't agree with that idea. Even though I don't feel that you should confirm kids who were openly hostile to God or the church, I felt that it could be a very unhealthy situation for students whose families expected them to be confirmed. They would come under pressure to say things they didn't feel, or maybe were not even old enough yet to understand. Either way, it could be a force to drive them away from God and his grace, or make it more difficult to comprehend free salvation in the future. Many Junior High students are still just kids and should not be forced into that situation. They are affirming their family's or churches teachings about God and his salvation and against the devil at that point in their lives. I think that combining confirmation with a Baptist view of salvation will lead to lots of spiritual problems down the road for many kids.

I don't fully understand the position of the Lutheran pietists. I have not read many of their historical works. To me, it seems that quotes from their works often run contrary to the Lutheran faith. At least the people quoting them today seem to have a Baptist or Assemblies of God approach to salvation but with a Lutheran shell. I wouldn't be surprised to see those with this view even thrive and grow. But the growth and staying power of the Mormons and Muslims shows that growth and perseverance is not a sign that God is pleased.

I am very discouraged with what I see happening with most Lutheran bodies today. The Missouri synod seems severe in their positions sometimes, but they are one of the very few churches that is still clinging to the true Biblical (Lutheran) faith. Maybe that is why Jesus said in Matthew 18:8, "when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?"

Most evangelicals use the preaching of the law to get Christians to change some specific behavior. They see it in a practical light only. Lutherans have a different view of the use of the law from most evangelicals. Lutherans believe that the ultimate of all preaching of the law should be to show us not just our sin, but also our sinful nature. Only then will we be receptive to the gospel. And only out of appreciation for the gospel will flow true good works. Sometimes it will take a long while for God to work using this method. Meanwhile, we will be tempted to use the methods of the evangelicals so we can directly obtain the desired results in the kingdom of God here on earth. But, their methods will in the end only lead to spiritual pride and a block to the real growth of the kingdom in the long run.

Lutherans believe that all good works here on earth should be attributed to the work of the Holy Spirit. Those who put trust in a conversion experience try to deflect the merit derived from such an experience by stating it is the work of the Holy Spirit. However, the foundation of our belief is not to be the incomplete work of the Holy Spirit here on earth. It is to be the finished work of Christ on the cross.

We all need daily repentance and assurance of forgiveness. This process should also be taught to our little children. What is being generated today with the conversion experience practice being advocated is the idea that we can regularly approach God without the cross. Even the Catholics seem to be better off in this regard than the evangelicals. Whenever I associate with those holding this view, it seems like they are always trying to decide whether I am on the "in" group based on this experience. I think it is better to associate with others based the belief that we are both sinners in need of grace.

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