

Saints

... Thus whenever Paul writes to Christians, he calls them saints, sons and heirs of God, etc. Therefore saints are all those who believe in Christ, whether men or women, whether slaves or free. And they are saints, on the basis, not of their own works but of the works of God, which they accept by faith, such as the Word, the sacraments, the suffering, death, resurrection, and victory of Christ, the sending of the Holy Spirit, etc. In other words, they are saints, not by active holiness but by passive holiness.

Such genuine saints include ministers of the Word, political magistrates, parents, children, masters, servants, etc., if they, first of all, declare that Christ is their wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption (1 Cor. 1:30), and if, in the second place, they all do their duty in their callings on the basis of the command of the Word of God, abstaining from the desires and vices of the flesh for the sake of Christ. They are not all of equal firmness of character, and many weaknesses and offenses are discernible in every one of them; it is also true that many of them fall into sin. But this does not hinder their holiness at all, so long as they sin out of weakness, not out of deliberate wickedness. For, as I have already said several times, the godly are conscious of the desires of the flesh; but they resist them and do not gratify them. When they fall into sin unexpectedly, they obtain forgiveness, if by faith they return to Christ, who does not want us to chase away the lost sheep but to look for it. On no account, therefore, am I to jump to the conclusion that those who are weak in faith or morals are unholy, when I see that they love and revere the Word, receive the Lord's Supper, etc.; for God has received them and regards them as righteous through the forgiveness of sins. It is before Him that they stand or fall (Rom. 14:4).

Luther's 1535 Galatians Commentary

LW, AE vol. 27, p. 82

Posted by Jesse Jacobsen in Quotables at 15:43

The struggle between spirit and flesh

... Yet God does not impute this sin, for He is gracious for the sake of Christ. It does not follow from this, however, that you should minimize sin or think of it as something trivial because God does not impute it. It is true that He does not impute it, but to whom and on what account? Not to the hardhearted and smug but to those who repent and who by faith take hold of Christ the Propitiator, on whose account sins are forgiven them and the remnants of sin are not imputed to them. Such people do not minimize sin; they emphasize it, because they know that it cannot be washed away by any satisfactions, works, or righteousness, but only by the death of Christ. Yet they do not despair because of its size but are persuaded that it is forgiven on account of Christ.

I say this to keep anyone from supposing that once faith has been accepted, sin should not be emphasized. Sin is really sin, regardless of whether you commit it before or after you have come to know Christ. And God hates the sin; in fact, so far as the substance of the deed is concerned, every sin is mortal. It is not mortal for the believer; but this is on account of Christ the Propitiator, who expiated it by His death. As for the person who does not believe in Christ, not only are all his sins mortal, but even his good works are sins, in accordance with the statement (Rom. 14:23): "Whatever does not proceed from faith is sin." ...

Luther's Lectures on Galatians, 1535

Quoted from Luther's Works, American Edition, vol. 27, p. 75-76

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Tolkien and Contemporary Worship

You probably never thought of these two things at the same time before. I don't think I did, until I read just now this great little commentary in the words of Saruman of Many Colors. (White robes were no longer good enough for him.) I am amazed at how fitting they are in the context of contemporary worship. You see, worship is about power. In the true worship of the Christian Church, it's God's power to save, manifested in the forgiveness of sins and administered through the Means of Grace -- Word and Sacrament -- by those appointed to do so, according to His will. However, it's possible to substitute something else for that power of God. Hear Saruman:

"And listen, Gandalf, my old friend and helper!" he said, coming near and speaking now in a softer voice. "I said we, for we it may be, if you will join with me. A new Power is rising. Against it the old allies and policies will not avail us at all. There is no hope left in Elves or dying Numenor. This then is one choice before you, before us. We may join with that Power. It would be wise, Gandalf. There is hope that way. Its victory is at hand; and there will be rich reward for those that aided it. As the Power grows, its proved friends will also grow; and the Wise, such as you and I, may with patience come at last to direct its courses, to control it. We can bide our time, we can keep our thoughts in our hearts, deploring maybe evils done by the way, but approving the high and ultimate purpose: Knowledge, Rule, Order; all the things that we have so far striven in vain to accomplish, hindered rather than helped by our weak or idle friends. There need not be, there would not be, any real change in our designs, only in our means."

The point is that God has provided certain means to accomplish His gracious will, when and where it pleases the Holy Spirit. I use the term "Contemporary Worship" to describe the worship movement that seeks not "any real change in our designs, only in our means." If you or your pastor is considering changes to the Divine Service in the interest of evangelism, or in search of effectiveness among a certain demographic, then there is a good chance that you are playing the part of Saruman of Many Colors. Yes, there is such a thing as Christian freedom, but even the Wise can easily lose their way in matters greater than themselves.

Posted by Jesse Jacobsen in Doctrine, Fun at 15:12