

A Biblical Look At “Promise Keepers”

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NOTE: The bulk of this document is a revision of what was originally produced in one of our prayer letters, *The Robinsons’ Herald*, for October to December 97

I must preface this document by saying some things up front. I have no personal grievances with people who are; Roman Catholic, Pentecostal, Charismatic, in various denomination churches, ecumenical, etc. I have found that such are no worse or better than any who hold to other spiritual persuasions—including those of my own. In fact, I have friends and acquaintances with many who are in some of the afore mentioned groups—and even more. My focus of attention is directed toward postulated ‘Christian’ perspectives and teachings that run contrary to what I believe is Biblical. There may be times when I will address the questionable practices and activities of various individuals who have made claims to being Christians, but I will not engage in attacking individuals character.

As mentioned in the [Current Work](#) page in the section entitled “About The Founder” of LCM, early in 1997 I authored, produced, and self-published fifty copies of my second book, *Apollo’s Revival*. In this book I revealed the historical origin, dogma, and practices of the modern Pentecostal and Charismatic movements. I also took the same investigative look into Roman Catholicism and the modern ecumenical movement, which actually began with the Church of Rome also.

The release of *Apollo’s Revival* has prompted dialogue among some believers about some issues, including a religious movement known as “Promise Keepers” (PK), which focuses on a ministry to men. In this document I will refer to an article that appeared in *Our Sunday Visitor* (OSV)¹, which is actually a Roman Catholic weekly newspaper. This article focused on PK from a Catholic perspective. It is an eye-opener.

I have communicated with a number of believers who claim to share my biblical perspectives and have actually attended PK’s meetings. They usually limit their conversation about the so-called “good work” of PK. They also assure me that PK’s speakers shared the “gospel of salvation by grace.” They consider PK people as coworkers in the faith and they often assert that believers like those with whom I cooperate should be willing to work with them.

But is this actually so? Does PK really proclaim the gospel of salvation by grace through faith—“*apart from works*”? As I believe you will soon see, this group fails this crucial test.

Salvation By Grace Alone?

Simply because one claim that they believe “salvation is by grace through faith” does not necessarily mean they believe salvation is granted without works, which is true Biblical *grace*.

*Roman Catholics, as reflected in the beliefs of Augustine of Hippo, believe they are “being saved” by grace. But, they believe this grace can only be received by partaking of the sacraments of the church—which includes water baptism and celebrating the mass. They also believe practicing good deeds, confession, offering prayers and devotion to dead saints and Mary, and even church membership are all needed to help them be saved.*² All true

Catholics are also adamant about being able to receive ‘grace’ through works. What the article in OSV said about this issue is very enlightening about the Roman Catholic perspective;

Yet, profound differences remained between the evangelicals of Promise Keepers and Catholics who were sympathetic. Last year, Promise Keepers published a “statement of faith” with lines that seemed to be crafted to exclude Catholics—or force them to reject their Catholic faith.

Section five of the Promise Keepers credo reads: “We believe that man was created in the image of God, but because of sin, was alienated from God. That alienation can be removed only by accepting, through faith alone, God’s gift of salvation, which was made possible by Christ’s death.”

“Faith alone” is a key doctrine of the Protestant Reformation. Though the phrase appears nowhere in Scripture, it was inserted by Martin Luther into his German translation of the Bible.

The Biblical passage under discussion actually is as follows:

⁸For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God: ⁹Not of works, lest any man should boast. (Ephesians 2:8–9 KJV)

⁸Τῇ γὰρ χάριτι ἐστε σεσωσμένοι διὰ πίστεως· καὶ τοῦτο οὐκ ἐξ ὑμῶν, θεοῦ τὸ δῶρον· ⁹οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων, ἵνα μὴ τις καυχῆσθαι. (Ephesians 2:8–9)³

The author of the above excerpted article in OSV was technically correct in his claim that the phrase “faith alone” is not in the Bible. The original Greek of verse eight instead contains the phrases that are properly translated, “... and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God.” But, verse eight continues on into verse nine to add, “*not of works, lest any man should boast.*” Taken in proper context the passages clearly teach that salvation is obtainable only by *Biblical grace*, which is merited only by faith (*i.e., taking God at His word* [Romans 10:17]), *and not by anything in any one’s own person.*

The overall teaching of the Holy Scripture repeatedly affirms this position. For instance, Romans 6:23 states, “For the wages of sin *is* death; but the **gift** of God *is* eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” To make sure that He would be misunderstood, the Holy Spirit also inspired Paul to write;

Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. ⁵But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. (Romans 4:4–5)

What the Bible says about salvation being by grace that is merited by faith apart from works can be misunderstood only by not reading it. Obviously, one can choose not to believe it, or perhaps even ignore it if they wish, but that does not change the true teaching of scripture.

Because of the concern expressed to PK by Catholics over this issue, the author of the OSV article was happy to report ...

Early this year, Promise Keepers revised the statement in a way that passed theological muster with those Catholics: “Only through faith, trusting in Christ alone for salvation, which was made possible by His death and resurrection, can that alienation be removed.”⁴

Official Roman Catholic Doctrine about Grace and Faith

Regardless of how it may sound to some, the above statement cannot mean salvation is granted apart from works, for this is the issue that upset Catholics and prompted its revision in the first place. Instead the word “gift” has been dropped and the remaining is worded to limit salvation to being by “faith.” For Roman Catholics, faith is believing whatever their church says about salvation—which claims works are necessary. Consider the following excerpts taken from a booklet of stated doctrines that is officially sanctioned by the Church of Rome:

9. What is faith?

Faith is a supernatural gift of God, which enables us to believe without doubting whatever God has revealed.

11. How are you to know what God has revealed?

I am to know what God has revealed by the testimony, teaching, and authority of the Catholic Church.

135. Will Faith alone save us?

Faith alone will not save us without good works: we must also have Hope and Charity.

140. How must we obtain God’s grace?

We must obtain God’s grace chiefly by prayer and the holy Sacraments.

249. What is a Sacrament?

A Sacrament is an outward Sign of

inward grace ordained by Jesus Christ, by which grace is given to our souls.

252. Ought we have a great desire to receive the Sacrament?

We ought to have a great desire to receive the Sacraments, because they are the chief means of our Salvation.

256. What is Baptism?

Baptism is a Sacrament which cleanses us from original sin, makes us Christians, children of God, and members of the Church.

261. Is Baptism necessary for salvation?

Baptism is necessary for salvation, because Christ has said: ‘Unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God’ . . .⁵

The revision of PK’s “statement of faith” is a natural consequence of engaging in cross-doctrinal ecumenism. It is no skin off Satan’s nose to credit such ventures with some good—but likely temporal—benefits and experiences in order to pervert the true gospel. Paul condemned such in the strongest words;

⁶I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: ⁷Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert [*μεταστρέψαι*, lit. *to turn around*] the gospel of Christ. ⁸But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. (Galatians 1:6–8)

Just as with this issue involving PK, Paul also encountered those who believed “faith alone” was insufficient for salvation;

¹And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, *and said*, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved. (Acts 15:1)

Concerning these who were perverting the gospel, Paul was inspired to respond by writing;

⁵To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you. . . . ¹⁶Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified. (Galatians 2:5, 16)

Continuing with the theme of arguing for salvation by grace as opposed to being by works, Paul also warned . . .

⁷Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth? ⁸This persuasion *cometh* not of him that calleth you. ⁹A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump. (Galatians 5:7–9)

In spite of all the above being said about salvation being a free gift offered by grace through faith, PK dropped the word “gift” (*i.e., grace*) from their statement of faith. They also continue to bend to please Roman Catholics. The same article carried in OSV also stated;

While there are no hard figures, some say that 10–20 percent of those men [attending PK meetings] are Catholic. And, recently, Promise Keepers, a largely evangelical movement, has taken steps to attract even more Catholic men to its events and principles of discipleship.

- At its March meeting, Promise Keepers’ board of directors welcomed Mike Timmis as a new member. A Detroit-area lawyer and businessman, Timmis is a longtime leader in the Catholic charismatic renewal.

- At several rallies this year, Promise Keepers has spotlighted Catholic evangelist Jim Berlucchi as a speaker.

As a Catholic evangelist, Berlucchi would preach the official Catholic “gospel” that claims works is necessary for earning salvation.

The true gospel is the scriptural story of how Jesus’ life, death, and bodily resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:1-4) paid the full debt for the sin of the world. It also claims this was a complete and perfect substitutional sacrifice. (Hebrews 9:12, 28 and 10:10–12) *This made salvation a gift that can only be received through faith.*

Consequently, PK’s gospel is perverted—not biblical—as it has been purposefully worded in their adjusted statement of faith. It appears close, but it is actually “another gospel” (Galatians 1:8) heralding “another Jesus” (2 Corinthians 11:4) which are compatible with the teachings of the Church of Rome.

PK’s founder, Bill McCartney, had an agenda that included Roman Catholics from PK’s inception. The following was stated in the same OSV article under consideration;

Promise Keepers founder Bill McCartney told *Our Sunday Visitor* recently that full Catholic participation was his intention from the start.

“Back in 1992, at our first stadium event, we very clearly stated from the podium that we eagerly welcomed the participation of Roman Catholics, and we’ve had scores of Roman Catholics attend and go back to their churches excited. . . .”

The article also reported that “McCartney is a former Catholic...” who “... was active in Christ the King Association, a Catholic charismatic community based in Ypsilanti.” He was also “associated with the ecumenical Word of God covenant community” and actually claimed to be a “born-again Catholic.” Since then he has been associated with the “Boulder Valley Vineyard, which is affiliated with the Vineyard Christian Fellowship [VCF].” VCF is an outgrowth of John Wimber’s teaching on the so-called “The Third Wave” movement of the Holy Spirit, and it has many serious doctrinal problems and practices. The article also said;

Still, as recently as 1995, McCartney was identifying himself privately as a Catholic and admitting that he still prayed the Rosary. Today, he denies both, though he praises the information he received as a Catholic.

From its inception PK has been charismatic and ecumenical by nature. It also has an increasingly strong Roman Catholic influence and inclusive policy by design. Its doctrinal stance is so broad the “gospel” it *officially* promotes is perverted. Nevertheless, I believe most involved with PK sincerely desire to do something good for the “cause of Christ.” But good motives mixed with bad doctrine in “Jesus’ Name” will only produce eternal heartache and suffering in the end. (Matthew 7:21–27)

I believe Biblical Christians should avoid participating in PK activities. This is obviously a matter of personal discernment and choice for many. But as it pertains to local Bible teaching churches, pastors should become concerned when some in their congregations—and especially

those in leadership—become involved with PK. The same applies to any who get involved in any ministry that utilizes any who embrace doctrinal error. (See Romans 16:17 and Titus 1:9, 16) Titus 2:7–8 literally calls for those who oversee ministry to be *uncorrupted in doctrine*, and to use *right and accurate words that cannot be criticized!* This rules out vaguely worded statements crafted to facilitate cross-doctrinal cooperation.

Further, cooperating with the likes of PK can actually desensitize believers to doctrinal error and perversion—including those practiced by Charismatics. Thus, believers in general are also admonished . . .

And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove *them*. (Ephesians 5:11)

Biblical Christians should not “give place by subjection, no, not for an hour” unto those who pervert the gospel in any way. Nor to those who *knowingly* and *willfully* sit under the influence of those who do. This is necessary to insure “that the truth of the gospel might continue with” believers. (Galatians 2:5)

But what about the apparent needed ministry to encourage men in the things of God and family? Why not challenge sound believers to put together local ministries that are participated in by local churches that are sound in both doctrine and practice?

Such local events would not likely have the large numbers, the grandeur, the public eye, nor the large coffers that supports PK events. They are even likely to be persecuted by most religious groups that are excluded from participation as leaders and speakers. But such has always been the case with God’s true workers doing His work. (See Ezra 4:1–5, Acts 16:16–24, and 2 Corinthians 4:8–9) Yet, bringing men who have not experienced Biblical grace to such events could actually be instrumental in leading them to true biblical salvation and spiritual growth. This would include Roman Catholics, some Pentecostals and other Charismatics who also believe that salvation is imparted by grace that is aided through works (such as water baptism), and also those in the Church of Christ.

Perhaps most Biblical Christians who frequent PK events are merely uninformed. Maybe some pastors are also uninformed about the true nature of this ecumenical and charismatic movement, and by thus have failed to properly inform their flocks. If that is the case, perhaps this document can help by serving as a primer.

Feel free to copy and distribute this article as needed. I am currently out of stock on “*Apollo’s Revival*,” but if enough people contact me to express an interest in getting a copy I will either produce more copies or perhaps make it available as a download here on LCM.

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¹ *Our Sunday Visitor*, July 20, 1997, as reproduced in the September 1997 issue of “The Berean Call,” Bend, Oregon.

² I have supplied several official statements enumerating Catholic beliefs in *Apollo’s Revival*. My sources were Encyclopedias and official literature that is sanctioned by the Holy See of Rome.

³ *Nestle Aland 26th Edition Greek New Testament*, by Aland, Kurt, Black, Matthew, Martini, Carlo M., Metzger, Bruce M., and Wikgren, Allen, *The Greek New Testament*, (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft Stuttgart) 1983.

⁴ I verified this statement on October 24, 2000 at Promise Keepers' official web-site which is located at <http://www2.promisekeepers.org/sof.htm>. (NOTE: The author checked PK's website on October 27, 2003 when converting this document to the PDF standard. We are pleased to report that they have made the following change to their detailed 'Statement of Faith.' "[10] Salvation is a free gift of God, not of any works we do. We are justified by faith alone in Christ alone. The moment we believe, Christ's righteousness is accounted or imputed to us." <http://www.promisekeepers.org/faqs/core/faqscore23.htm>)

⁵ Excerpted from *A Catechism of Christian Doctrines*, "Approved by the Archbishops and Bishops of England and Wales and directed to be used in all their Dioceses. First published 1889, Revised Edition 1985, London, Catholic Truth Society, Publishers to the Holy See." Reprinted in *Apollo's Revival*, pp. 67-68, by Walter Robinson II, Copyright 1997.