***The Benediction, No. 4
RO202-01***

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**Opening Prayer**

God, our Father, we do thank Thee for the fact that Thou hast called us to a series of ministries in Berean Church, which over the years have demonstrated to deal with the real world in which young people and adults live. As we catch a breather during the final weeks of the summer, we pray that God the Holy Spirit will walk before us in guiding us day and night as we put together our ministries of Christian education, the youth clubs, the musical ministries, the fellowships of men and women, all of the areas of Sunday School and Training Union and our Christian education outreach. We pray that Thou will give us renewed vision and a new sense of the importance of what we're doing. We must plead with Thee to give us the means to do the work. We need a lot more students in the Academy. We pray that Christian parents all over this city would realize that if they join with us, they have strengthened our hand in the cause of Christ in opposing the humanism that the minds of their children are exposed to in the public school system. We ask Thee to give us the physical capacity and the workers on the renovation projects. We commit this to Thee and we pray for that paltry gift of 5,000 dollars so that we can soundproof this auditorium and resolve some of the problems of hearing just so important in a ministry which teaches and things that people have to hear. So, we ask Thee now to guide us in the work that is before us. We pray that Thou will help us to rally as the people of Israel did to the rebuilding of their walls around Jerusalem. The Word of God tells us that the work was done quickly, efficiently, effectively, simply because the people had a will to work. We pray that the Spirit of God would give us that will and that resolve. We ask for enlightenment now in this, the Word of God, and that Thou will inform us on that which is pertinent to our lives at this point in time. We pray in Christ name. Amen

**Romans 16:20b-27**

Our text this morning continues at the end of Romans, Romans 16:20b-27. Our Subject, The Benediction Segment Number 4.

**Justified By Grace Alone**

Since the dawn of human history in the Garden of Eden, people have been enraged by the realization that they are not sovereign creatures free to do their own thing. People don't like to realize that they are not their own free independent agents on this planet. People simply cannot exercise their own wills independently of God's will. The unbeliever thinks he can and he pretends he can. A lot of Christians are foolish enough to forget this principle and they pretend that they can do it their way and ignore the will of God in the process.

Sin entered the human race, as a matter of fact, when Adam and Eve tried to act as sovereign beings, not subject to the laws of God. The attempt for fallen man to live as if God did not have the last word has only brought suffering and death to mankind for centuries. To this day, people will challenge the biblical revelation that man is by nature morally evil and doomed by the justice of God to pay the penalty of eternal death in Hell. One of the articles that I have given you this morning deals with Ted Turner's award, the Humanist Award of the Year, and he deals with that subject, he who was reared in a Christian home and in a Christian school context. Take a look and see where negative reversionism can take you. A man who is in a powerful position today, who could be a great testimony for God, and instead, he has fallen for whatever reason to be a great testimony for Satan and all of the doctrines of demons that begin with the basic premise, man is good, man is not by nature evil. This rebellion against God's sovereign authority finds ultimate expression today in man declaring himself to be a God. This is the principle of Hinduism and it is expressed in modern terminology under the New Age movement. The unsaved person thus is in fact enslaved to a sin nature, which cannot produce anything but evil by God's evaluation. No amount of human good works can cover one's sins to satisfy the justice of God and so escape hell. No amount of human good works will cover your sin. No amount of human good rituals (Remember that rituals are good works.), no amount of taking the Lord's Supper, no amount of water baptism, no amount of any of those works will gain you one iota of merit with God. In fact, it will gain you only additional condemnation, because to present that to God for salvation is an act of sin.

People try to atone for their sins with religious rituals, acts of penance and good conduct. But it is never enough. Millions follow counterfeit religions which have been designed by Satan, which can never secure eternal life in Heaven for their followers. All of these are based on offering God human righteousness to atone for one's sins. In the Bible, God tells man that he cannot do anything to merit salvation. No amount of human righteousness will gain entrance into Heaven for any individual. This is made so clear in Titus 3:4-7 where the apostle Paul says, "But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that being justified by His grace, we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life." Please remember those verses this morning as we go along. This clear statement by the apostle Paul that God, in His kindness and out of His love, provided a solution for our sin/guilt. And none of our deeds of human righteousness count one iota toward God. Not one ritual, not one act of human good, not one church attendance, not one act of giving money, nothing counts of human righteousness, but the washing of regeneration and the renewing of us spiritually, bringing us to spiritual life by the Holy Spirit, which He has poured out upon us richly in the Church Age.

God the Holy Spirit is our constant companion so that we who have been justified by grace, who have been declared absolute righteousness in the sight of God as a gift from God, we have been made heirs of a certain absolute hope of eternal life in Heaven. Because of those verses you can breathe a sigh of relief, those of you who aren't trying to make it by adding something to the grace gift of God so that you spoil grace and keep yourself out. You can breathe a sigh of relief. You can wake up in the middle of the night without terror. You can wake up with complete peace and repose. You can face the issue of checking out of this life and knowing that it's only going to be better on the other side, not worse.

The provision of salvation from Hell, you see, is not a matter between God and a church, which can dispense salvation to the faithful. That's what Roman Catholicism tells people: your going to Heaven is a matter between you and your church, your church will take you into Heaven or your church will keep you out. Therefore, it is a deal between obedience to the church and the individual. The Bible says, "That's not true.

**Salvation Depends Solely on What God Has Done**

The provision of salvation is not even a matter between God and man who earned salvation through human righteousness efforts. The issue of salvation is not a matter between you and God. The issue of our salvation is a matter between God and Himself. Count yourself fortunate to know that truth; that is at the core of the biblical teaching on getting into Heaven. The issue of salvation is a matter between God and Himself, what God alone has done. Only God can pay the penalty of death for human sin to satisfy the demands of His own justice; no human righteousness can satisfy that justice. So, the Lord Jesus Christ took on Himself the sin of mankind, and He has paid the penalty of death so that God the Father, is now free in love to offer salvation as a free gift to hopelessly and helplessly lost sinners so that we can be spiritually born again.

And make no mistake about it, if you are not born again spiritually, you do not go to Heaven. Make no mistake about it, if you are not born again spiritually God's way, you don't make it! God's salvation is thus an act of divine grace to those who do not merit salvation, but who do have the sense to trust in His Son Jesus to save them, "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved," and furthermore, who had the sense not to try to add any human doing to what God has provided! I cannot caution you enough. You must caution people that the addition of water baptism to the grace of God in provision of the death of Christ will keep you out of Heaven. The addition of the Lord's Supper, to have your sins forgiven, to what Christ has done on the cross will keep you out of Heaven. Romans 11:6 tells you that in just so many words. Romans 4 tells you that in just so many words. It's got to be of grace or it's nothing at all. You cannot mix grace and works. Salvation is not based on relative human righteousness, but only on the absolute righteousness of Jesus Christ. Your human relative righteousness does not come into the picture.

Martin Luther once urged a friend who desired salvation to pray in this way, Luther told his friend to pray, "Thou Lord Jesus are my righteousness, but I am Thy sin. Thou has taken upon Thyself what is mine and has given to me what is Thine. Thou has taken upon Thyself what Thou was not and has given to me what I was not." What Luther was telling his friend to pray was an expression of 2 Corinthians 5:21 which says, "He made Him [God The Father made God the Son Jesus] who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the absolute righteousness of God in Him." That's what it takes, absolute righteousness.

The apostle Paul has written this whole book, which we have been studying for so long, the whole book of Romans to explain the grace of God and the grace way of salvation, walking into Heaven on the basis of the merit of Christ, not contaminated in any way by your own merit, your own efforts in any way whatsoever. The world, however, has been deceived by the satanic deception about grace salvation. The Mariolatry of the Roman Catholic Church is enormous. The recent trip of Mrs. Danish and myself through some of the countries of Eastern Europe, where Catholicism is 80 to 90% of the people, have given me a new perspective and appreciation for the enormity of the domination of the Virgin Mary in the minds of Roman Catholics as the access and avenue into eternal life.

One of the places we visited was a monastery called Jasna Agora in Poland which means Bright Hill. The monastery was in Czestochowa, Poland. This is the site of one of the most sacred relics of the Roman Catholic Church. It is a picture called the Black Madonna, which is the patron saint of Poland. 90% of the Polish people stand in awe of the picture of the Black Madonna. You can come up and take a look at it a little later, more closely. The Black Madonna: purportedly painted by the evangelist Luke, called the Black Madonna because Mary and the baby Jesus have black faces. This was purportedly painted by Luke on a plank from the house that Jesus and Mary lived in in Nazareth. This is one of the dumbest things, Catholics believe a lot of dumb things, but this has to be one of the all-time great dumb things to believe. But I'm telling you, we are standing there with one of the representatives, a knowledgeable priest who had lived in Florida, spoke good English and who understood the Catholic system and is standing there at this very sacred site at Czestochowa, Poland, telling us about this picture that Luke painted. I can imagine Brother Luke painting livers and hearts and intestines and that sort of thing. But to be painting a black Madonna stretches the credulity. But you see what the theory is that's behind this? This worship of Mary was something that evolved centuries after New Testament Christianity began. It is the result of gradually bringing in the mother and child worship system of the Babylonian mystery religions. How wonderful it would be to be able to lock it right back to the disciple Luke: the follower of Christ, the medical doctor who wrote one of the gospels, to tie to him this adoration and worship of Mary the Virgin and Child Cult.

The Black Madonna picture, if you stand in the presence of the original, you will find where it is purported that it has magical powers, that it can do great things for you. We viewed the original icon in the monastery chapel while a Roman Catholic mass was in progress. The Chapel was packed shoulder to shoulder with people standing there, pilgrims who had come from everywhere to stand before this mass, to eat the bread which the priest was converting into the body of Christ, so that they could eat the body of Christ to gain eternal life, and at the same time do it in the presence of this picture, appealing to Mary, literally worshiping her through that picture to intervene for them against the wrath of her son, Jesus. Always Jesus is portrayed never as a God of love/compassion, but as the stern and harsh individual ready to cast people into the Lake of Fire.

**The Link Between a Lost Sinner and Christ**

All of these people were doing one thing as I looked at them, as we stood there. This whole crowd in this congregation, as the priest was going through the ceremony of the mass and preparing to distribute this bread for them to eat, all these people were eagerly but vainly seeking a link which they felt there must be between a sinner and what Christ has done on the cross that would take them into Heaven. What is the link? That's what the whole book of Romans was about, the link between a lost sinner and what Christ did on the cross to get people into Heaven. People are sinners. Christ has done his work on the cross to pay for the sins of the world. Unless you have the right link, the 2 do not get together. These people thought just like Luther did; he was seeking the link in his day. These people thought that if they eat this bread and if they worship before this picture, they would receive eternal life. In the adjoining room, there was on display a series of pictures of the current John Paul II in various poses of adoration before the icon, as well as a very saintly looking picture of Lech Walesa, the prominent Solidarity Labor leader, and who, when he received his Nobel Prize, the awards and the medallions, brought, as hundreds have, and put it up there, and they displayed in the chapel in honor of Mary as many men brought their military medals to attach in this way.

The present pope is a great devotee of the Virgin Mary as the means for securing the mercy of God and salvation. When our missionary, Wayne Gudy, was with us a few weeks ago, we had him over for lunch just before I went to camp the first week. And at lunch we were talking about this Pope and his devotion to Mary. And Wayne said when he came to Guatemala, he called for a special gathering of his priests. It was to be a private gathering where the Pope was going to speak now to his priests out of the earshot of the general public. He said a couple of our Central American missionaries got into the room so they could hear what was going on. He said the whole message of the Pope was Mary is our channel to God for salvation. You must exalt Mary before the people. The Virgin Mary always portrayed as gentle and compassionate, while Jesus is portrayed as acting in wrath and stern justice. Roman Catholic doctrine tells us that if you go to Mary for your needs, including salvation, she will deflect the wrath of her son against your sins. She does this by exposing to him her breasts on which she nurtured him.

If you visit the Vatican, you will see an image in their museum of Diana of the Ephesians with an image of this woman with multiple breasts. That was the concept out of the Babylonian pagan mystery religion, a mother goddess whose breasts deflected the wrath of the judge in her son. So, Mary has ended up, and very clearly under this present Pope's administration, has ended up as being the mediatrix between God and man. That's why Catholics, when they say their rosary, (their beads on which they keep track of how many prayers they say in a certain stretch,) when you go through the rosary 50 times, you pray to Mary. You say 'Hail Mary, full of grace. The Lord is with thee. Blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen.' When a Catholic faces death, he does not look to the Lord Jesus Christ. He does not look to the living God. He always looks to Mary as his entree into eternal life. When this present Pope was shot right there in the plaza of the Basilica of St. Peter's in Rome, the first words that left his mouth when he realized what had happened to him was "Oh mother of God."

**Christ is The Mediator**

When you face death, are you going to look up, as Stephen did, into the face of Jesus? Are you going to look up to the God who has a plan to link you a sinner with what Christ has done on the cross to result in your eternal life in Heaven? Or are you going to look to a dead woman who is upheld as having some special access, influence, and merit with God? Obviously, I know you recognize that making her the mediatrix between God and man is a clear violation of the principle enunciated in 1 Timothy 2:5 which says, "For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and man, the man Christ Jesus." It's very simple: Christ Jesus is the mediator.

The Roman Catholic Church teaches that the Virgin Mary was immaculately conceived by her parents so that she had no sin nature to pass on to the Lord Jesus Christ. For that reason they defend themselves that Mary has a certain quality about her that other human beings do not, because she was immaculately conceived. They have not explained how simple parents could produce a child without a sin nature. But that is their explanation of why Jesus did not have a sin nature rather than the fact that he did not have a human father through whose sperm the sin nature is always transmitted.

But the truth of the matter is that Mary herself was a sinner and recognized her need of the Savior that she bore. Luke 1:47 in Mary's Grande Song, as she realizes how God has honored her, Mary says in Luke 1:47, "And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior." You don't talk like that if you are a sinless person, if you are without a sin nature, if you are already, absolute righteousness with God: "My spirit has rejoiced in God, my Savior."

While we were touring one of the magnificent cathedrals in Vienna, our tour guide pointed out that in this particular cathedral, female saints were placed in prominence. A saint is someone that the Pope has canonized, someone that has more merit to get into Heaven than she needed, and therefore she's been elevated to sainthood. The remains of her good deeds has been put in the treasury of the pope, the depository of the pope, where he can dispense it to other people who need it by selling indulgences and masses and that sort of thing. The guide said 'this church is devoted to female saints.' Then she reminded us that that the adoration of Mary has been a comparatively recent development in church history from the 14th century when Mary was placed in such prominence at the center of all Catholic worship. She also pointed out that under the present pope, there has been what she called a renaissance in the worship of Mary, and she used the word "worship." The Catholics wouldn't like that. They want to use the word adoration and veneration, but what they do is really worship. And she understood this Pope, that he is a great devotee of the worship and adoration of Mary. Now, if that doesn't fit in with the Book of the Revelation and the woman and child cult and the antichrist, the destruction of this religious system that is centered upon the mother and child cult, I don't know what does.

I notice that regularly in Europe, as we visited cathedrals, Mary was always the prominent figure at the altar. Jesus Christ was always off to one side, hanging dead on the cross. I did not realize how absolutely devoted they are to Mary. You could not come to any church, but what Mary was the exalted one. They regularly had monuments and cities that were pointed out to us: monuments on occasions when they were preserved from natural disasters, when the bubonic plague stopped, when they were preserved from a flood. And guess who the statues were always raised to: Mary, every time. I never saw one statue that was raised to the praise of Jesus Christ for having preserved them from some natural disaster, always it was Mary. Folks, that's creepy. This is Satan in one of his most magnificent delusions. The directing of millions of Catholics to Mary by the Pope and his priests as the object of their faith for salvation will take them all uniformly together into the Lake of Fire forever. That is a shocking thing to realize.

**Adding Works Deny God the Grace Basis for Salvation**

The Pope and his priests, by directing devotion to Mary, an expectation from her, have misdirected these people so that they will never have the eternal life they wanted. Satan has blinded them to the link between the sinner and the work of Christ. This is exactly the picture that the Word of God confirms for us in Matthew 7:13-14, where Jesus says "Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide, and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter by it. For the gate is small, and the way is narrow that leads to life, and few are those who find it." As I thought about this during our tour, this verse came to my mind and I said 'Ya' know, this verse could not be true if these millions of Catholics are going to Heaven. They form a huge part of the human race.' But Jesus says, 'Only a small part of the human race is going to make it into Heaven because Satan is taking the death of Christ on the cross and he's contaminating it, he's confusing the link between the sinner and the work of Christ that gets him into Heaven. He interjects a human action. There are many religions that have interjected a human work of some kind, so the connection is never made.' These verses in themselves to me confirm that Catholics are not going to Heaven. Their works system and their looking to Mary is not a system that trusts in the grace of God for a gift of salvation from Christ. They do not even give God the basis, the freedom to act on grace toward them. That's the point. When you give works for salvation, you have denied God the grace basis.

**Beware False Prophets!**

Matthew 7:15 says, "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves." When you look at the Pope, he looks very holy. During my stay in Europe, I attended 3 different masses, went to a confessional. I'll tell you about that a little later. I have had an education and I saw how even during the mass, everybody involved knows what to do with his hands, knows how to put their head, knows how to look holy. I practiced before the mirror since I've been back on some of those myself and I haven't got it down. When I do, I'm going to do that. There's ways that you can do that, you know. The Bible says, 'Watch out for those suckers in those dramatic clothes and in those clothing's of prophets as the voice of the living God. They're going to deceive you.'

[continuing in Matthew, verses 7:16-20] "You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes, nor figs from thistles, are they? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit: but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. So then, you will know them by their fruits." What is He talking about here? What is the fruit that's going to identify that you're dealing with a false prophet, that you're dealing with a contaminated tree, that if you eat the fruit, you will be destroyed forever.

A lot of people make the mistake of thinking this is lifestyle. 'Look how this person lives. Awe, he's a nice guy, he's a Christian. Look at this person over here. Let's see how that bum acts. That's not a Christian.' This is not lifestyle. What this is, is clarified for us a couple of chapters later in Matthew 12. Matthew 12:33-35. Speaking of the same image, the same analogy is being used again and this time, it's very clear what the fruit is. And it isn't lifestyle. Here, Matthew says, "Either make the tree good and its fruit good or make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for the tree is known by its fruit. [Same analogy, same comparison. Now He explains it. Verse 34] You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? [Doctrine.] For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart [The mind.]. The good man out of his good treasure brings forth what is good [Doctrine.]; and the evil man out of his evil treasure brings forth what is evil [Doctrine.]."

So, the fruit of Matthew 7 is not lifestyle of people; it is what they teach. The fruit of the Pope and his priests is a contaminated fruit, not their holy pretenses and the nice guys that they are, but what they teach that is taking people into the Lake of Fire. So, we read in Matthew 7:21, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of Heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in Heaven." So, those of you who think you're going to get in because you're sincere in what you're doing even if you're wrong, you better look at this verse. You're not going to make it. [continuing in Matthew 7:22-25.] "Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.' [How could people do this, this kind of thing, and still not be a child of God?] Therefore, everyone who hears these words of Mine [Doctrine.], and acts upon them, may be compared to a wise man, who built his house upon the rock. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and burst against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded upon the rock."

Your life, based upon the truth of doctrine, will carry you through the crises of life. Your life pretended to be based upon the doctrines of Scripture will very quickly show up as you crumble and crash when the crises of life comes upon you. [Matthew 7:26-27] "And everyone who hears these words of Mine, and does not act upon them, will be like a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and burst against that house; and it fell, and great was its fall."

As we proceeded on the tour at Czestochowa, at the Jasna Agora monastery, the priest from Miami who was guiding us, told us that their facilities are used for many traveling groups. They have many choral groups who come and they sing in their chapel. He said, we recently had a group of young people from America. They were a born again group, and he started making jokes about the fact that because they were born again, they tried to convert their pilgrims. But he said he assured us that their efforts were to no avail because their Catholic people were very firm in their faith. Well, his belittling attitude ticked me off. So, I opened my camera case and pulled out one of our evangelism brochures that I had been carrying around a supply of. I intended to give this to him after his guide tour was over of the facility. Well, he led us into a book room, and there were a couple of things I wanted to buy. So, I got the books that I wanted and I thought this was the end of the tour. So, I got the little books that I wanted on this particular place and I'm waiting to pay the lady. And some guy with 100 dollar American bill next to me is trying to convey something to the lady. I don't know what they're arguing back and forth, and everything is stopped. People are trying to buy stuff and this guy is holding up the line. The priest walks up to me and says, "Let me add it up. You can pay me." So, he added it up and I paid him. You know, when you exchange money in these Eastern European countries like Hungary and Czechoslovakia and Poland, and you have to spend it all there because you can't change it into American money later, it's funny money. It doesn't have any value, any place else in the world. It's like what our tour guide kept referring to as monopoly money. It just is worthless once you leave the country. So, I'm buying and exchanging little small amounts, so I'm glad to be able to spend a little here. So, I added it up. I paid him and I said, 'here's something that I think you might enjoy reading for you.'

And I took my books, and left him. Lo and behold, he said 'All right folks, let's gather to the next place.' The tour wasn't over. So, he takes us outside, walking across the courtyard to the next building. He opens the brochure and I see him looking at it, turning it over, looking at it back and forth, reading it, reading the little letter that's included. Then he stops the group and he says, "I have been given from Berean Memorial Church in Irving, Texas. It says, "Hell or Heaven, which will it be for you?" He's holding this thing up in front of our tour group, about 40 people who are watching and wondering what's going on here, and where'd this thing come from. He says, "Let me tell you a joke. For me, it's neither! It'll be purgatory."

**The False Doctrine of Purgatory**

The Doctrine of Purgatory, obviously, is never mentioned in the Bible. It too was incorporated from pagan Babylonian mystery religions. It was centuries after New Testament times that this doctrine was pronounced by one of the popes, one of the popes, interestingly enough, whose banner can you believe that I saw at Wheaton College in the Billy Graham Evangelism Center, Pope Gregory somebody, I forget which number. And there his banner hangs as one of the great evangelists of the gospel of the centuries. They have the banners of Moody and so on. And here this Pope Gregory some number. And when I looked at the number, I said, this is a guy that came up with the doctrine of purgatory. He's the one that sat on the Pope's throne in its Cathedral declared the Doctrine of Purgatory. We got some loose screws, even at Wheaton College. Since no Catholic is ever good enough by his own efforts to go to Heaven (Nobody is.), you need some kind of substitute to give him hope. That's where the Doctrine of Purgatory had to come in.

So, the Roman Catholic Church says, "Nobody ever goes to Heaven." The church used to say, I don't know if it still says, they said, 'Only two individuals we know are in hell. One is the devil, and the other is Martin Luther. Everybody else goes to Purgatory and has a chance to make it off to a better place, though it is a very painful place to be in.' But Purgatory, you see, is a financial gold mine. It's the Klondike of the Roman Catholic Church, because church members pay vast sums of money to get their children, their parents, their husbands, their wives out of Purgatory as fast as possible by having masses said in their behalf so that they would be released from that suffering. But again, when you come to the Enlightenment of the Word of God, you must gasp indeed at what that priest said, 'For me, it will be purgatory. Let me tell you a joke. For me, it will be purgatory.'

When he said that, I thought to myself, that is a joke. That is a joke you will regret for the rest of your life, for the rest of your eternity. In Hebrews 9:27, "And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment." No second chance, no second opportunity, you die, you face the judgment of your destiny. And then that unbelievable verse in Romans 8:1, which if you have in your King James translation, one copyist could not believe that this verse could be true and he contaminated it in some of the ancient manuscripts by adding the statement of verse 4 to it, he combined it. Romans 8:1 says, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." Once you're born again into the family of God, you're spiritually born again. No matter what you do, you can never again be condemned. Some monk copied that and said that's got to be a mistake. And he added the end of verse 4 to it, "who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the spirit." But fortunately we have enough manuscripts to realize what he did that that he shifted that up there because he just couldn't believe as a Catholic that there is now no condemnation to anybody on the face of the earth once he is trusted in Christ as Savior.

And then there's 2 Corinthians 5:8 that contradicts this concept of purgatory. "We are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord." Once your eyes close in death, they will open immediately, either in the presence of the Lord and great rejoicing, or they will enter in the horrors of Hades, the holding pen, to be emptied into the Lake of Fire.

What the tour priest said, was indeed a joke. Father Simon Stephanowitz, pray for him; pray that he might read the brochure seriously, and pray that his nuns would read it, that his priests might pick it up and start discussing it. Pray for the salvation of this man. This man is cocky, he's confidently assured he knows where he's going and he's mistaken. He has listened to his pope. He has listened to his church. They both deceived him and deceived him terribly,... Father Simon Stephanowitz. He dismissed us at the end of the tour when finally the tour did come to an end with a special blessing and a sign of the cross. As people sauntered away, I fell in step with him, introduced myself, and I urged him as a theologian, to read the brochure.

He wondered what this Berean Church meant, how many churches were like it in the United States, its home. It was a Bible church, and there were hundreds of them in the United States. He wondered what the word Berean meant. I said, 'well, it's a word from Acts 17:11, where Paul complimented the people of Berea to whom he preached because they willingly received the Word of God, and they searched the Scriptures daily to confirm that what he told them was true. I could tell by his response that he didn't have foggiest notion of the church at Berea. He had no connection. I thought, here's the example of this well-educated priest, well versed in Catholic dogma, but basically ignorant of Bible doctrine.

Back on the tour bus, our general guide euphorically exuded that it was a bright, sunny day here in Czestochowa, Poland. We had visited the Black Madonna and had been in the presence of the Madonna. We had received the priest's blessing and our sins were forgiven and all was well with us. I had a real problem being a nice guy that I usually am, as one misconception upon another was poured out. Yet, this is the general public and in benighted Europe, it's even worse than it is in the United States. Consider yourself fortunate that you have been led into a knowledge of the Word of God with a simple, basic truth. You know the link that connects the cross and the death of Christ and you as a sinner so that you end up in Heaven. And that the link has not been contaminated by the fact that you are ignorant of Doctrine. There is no delusion like religious self-delusion, but there is no peace in that delusion.

**The Church - Trophies of His Grace**

In our closing verses here, in Romans 16:25 Paul says, "Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel [the gospel of the grace of God] and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past." Paul speaks of this great gospel, the link into Heaven. He referred to the gospel of the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ throughout this book. This magnificent grace salvation of God has since the day of Pentecost, been displayed as a brilliant gem in the setting of the Church Age dispensation, which is the secret that he refers to in this verse 25: the setting of the Church Age and the brilliance of the grace salvation in that setting. The church was a divine secret or mystery in Old Testament Times. The Church was a new body of believers made up of Born-Again Jews and Gentiles formed on the day of Pentecost. Christians of the church age possessed unique blessings from God not enjoyed by and have never been enjoyed by previous saints. The Dispensation of the Church in which we live today is the greatest era in human history portraying the grace of God. And it is the era in which the grace of God is most resisted and most contaminated. How sad!

In Ephesians 2:1-7 we read, "And you were dead in your trespasses and sins [helpless and hopeless], in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh [our sin natures], indulging the desires of the flesh [the sin nature] and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. But God being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus." See that? No matter what kind of a bum you may become, no matter how you may separate yourself from a true source of biblical instruction, you are still in Christ positionally seated already in heaven, in the eyes of God. [continuing Ephesians 2:1-7] "in order that in the ages to come He [God] might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." You are the trophy of His grace. How wonderful to know that grace, how privileged you should consider yourself!

A trip to benighted Eastern Europe, with its Catholic domination for centuries, gives you a new appreciation for the beauty of the gem of grace salvation and the setting of the grace of God.

**Closing Prayer**

Our Heavenly Father, we ask Thee to help us to be aware of the fact that our time is short. Life is moving along, and we need to make forward motion for Thee. We have the truth. We have the message because we have the doctrines of Scripture. And we thank Thee that there were other believers in centuries past who fought the same battles of identifying that knowledge about God comes from Scripture, a Scripture which is interpreted in consistency without contradiction as God the Spirit wrote it: without the interjection of some human leader who became enthusiastic for some concepts that had nothing to do with the Word of God. We do pray that Thou will help us to be aware of the fact that it is our great privilege to serve Thee and that we can enrich our eternity by the investments of our time now, our abilities, and indeed our money, into the Berean Ministries so that we who know the truth can proclaim it without having to make do and to patch up, while the world of Satan puts on its glitter and glamor and marches people into the Lake of Fire. Preserve us we pray from religion. Help us to appreciate Biblical Christianity at our place as members of the Royal Family of God. We ask in Jesus name, Amen.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1977

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