



Rooted Disciples

Session 5

The Life of Faith (2)

The following are lecture notes shared by Rev Dr Andrew Atherstone, based upon WH Griffiths Thomas book, 'The Principles of Theology.'

Article 15: Of Christ Alone Without Sin

Christ in the truth of our nature was made like unto us in all things, sin only except, from which He was clearly void, both in His flesh and in His spirit. He came to be the lamb without spot, Who by sacrifice of Himself once made, should take away the sins of the world: and sin, as Saint John saith, was not in Him. But all we the rest, although baptized and born again in Christ, yet offend in many things: and if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

- Article 14 teaches that we can never exceed God's requirements
- Article 15 teaches that we can never attain God's requirements

- Humanity of Christ
 - 'in the truth of our nature ... like unto us in all things' (Hebrews 4:15)
 - Compare Article 2
- Sinlessness of Christ
 - 'without sin ... the lamb without spot' (1 Peter 1:19, 2:22)
- Sacrifice of Christ
 - 'sacrificial lamb ... to take away the sins of the world' (John 1:29)
 - One of the four references in the Articles to the doctrine of the atonement (see Articles 2, 15, 28, 31)
- Sinfulness of everyone else, even Christians
 - 'If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves' (1 John 1:8)
 - Against the 'immaculate conception' of the Virgin Mary
 - Against the 'sinless perfection' of the Anabaptists
 - Compare Article 9



Article 16: Of Sin after Baptism

Not every deadly sin willingly committed after Baptism is sin against the Holy Ghost, and unpardonable. Wherefore the grant of repentance is not to be denied to such as fall into sin after Baptism. After we have received the Holy Ghost, we may depart from grace given and fall into sin, and by the grace of God we may arise again and amend our lives. And therefore they are to be condemned, which say they can no more sin as long as they live here, or deny the place of forgiveness to such as truly repent.

- Article 15 teaches that everyone is a sinner (no heaven on earth)
- Article 16 teaches that there is hope for every sinner (no hell on earth)

- Two old errors, rife at the reformation
 - 1) that great sins after baptism cannot be forgiven
 - revival of 3rd century mistake, based on Esau's tears in Hebrews 12:16-17
 - see also passages like Hebrews 6:4-6, 10:26-29
 - 2) that it is impossible for the regenerate to sin

- Article 16 deals with both of these errors
 - Yes, it is possible to 'fall from grace'
 - Yes, it is possible to be restored by grace
 - Restoration comes through 'true repentance' leading to amendment of life

- What about 'the unpardonable sin against the Holy Spirit' (Matt 12:31-32)?
 - Article 16 of 1553 was entitled: '*Of Blasphemy Against the Holy Ghost*':
'Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost is when a man of malice and stubbornness of mind, doth rail upon the truth of God's Word manifestly perceived, and being enemy thereunto persecuteth the same. And because such be guilty of God's curse, they entangle themselves with a most grievous, and heinous crime, whereupon this kind of sin is called and affirmed of the Lord, unpardonable.'
 - Deleted in 1563, to avoid giving precise definition to sin against the Spirit
 - Compare, policy of Elizabethan's to delete controversial or speculative articles.



Article 17: Of Predestination and Election

Predestination to life is the everlasting purpose of God, whereby, before the foundations of the world were laid, He hath constantly decreed by His counsel secret to us, to deliver from curse and damnation those whom He hath chosen in Christ out of mankind, and to bring them by Christ to everlasting salvation as vessels made to honour. Wherefore they which be endued with so excellent a benefit of God be called according to God's purpose by His Spirit working in due season; they through grace obey the calling; they be justified freely; they be made sons of God by adoption; they be made like the image of His only-begotten Son Jesus Christ; they walk religiously in good works; and at length by God's mercy they attain to everlasting felicity.

As the godly consideration of Predestination and our Election in Christ is full of sweet, pleasant, and unspeakable comfort to godly persons and such as feeling in themselves the working of the Spirit of Christ, mortifying the works of the flesh and their earthly members and drawing up their mind to high and heavenly things, as well because it doth greatly establish and confirm their faith of eternal salvation to be enjoyed through Christ, as because it doth fervently kindle their love towards God: so for curious and carnal persons, lacking the Spirit of Christ, to have continually before their eyes the sentence of God's Predestination is a most dangerous downfall, whereby the devil doth thrust them either into desperation or into wretchlessness of most unclean living no less perilous than desperation.

Furthermore, we must receive God's promises in such wise as they be generally set forth in Holy Scripture; and in our doings that will of God is to be followed which we have expressly declared unto us in the word of God.

- By far the longest Article

- Notice the limit of the Article
 - Predestination to life
 - Focus on believers not unbelievers, election not reprobation

- Many quotations from Scripture
 - 'predestined' (Ephesians 1:5, 11, Romans 8:29)
 - 'before the foundations of the world' (Ephesians 1:4)
 - 'chosen in Christ' (Ephesians 1:4)
 - 'vessels to honour' (Romans 9:21)
 - 'called according to his purpose' (Romans 8:28)
 - 'justified freely' (Romans 3:24)
 - 'sons of God by adoption' (Romans 8:15)
 - 'good works to walk in' (Ephesians 2:10)

- Pastoral value of this teaching
 - Notice again the Article's pastoral concern (compare 'full of comfort' in Article 11 on Justification)
 - '*full of sweet, pleasant and unspeakable comfort to godly persons ... drawing up their mind to high and heavenly things*'
 - Assurance of Faith: '*it doth greatly establish and confirm their faith of eternal salvation to be enjoyed through Christ*'



- Warmth of Hearts: *'it doth fervently kindle their love towards God'*

- But care needed when teaching this doctrine
 - Helpful for believers (*'godly persons'*)
 - Unhelpful for unbelievers (*'curious and carnal persons'*), if ceaselessly taught, leading either to spiritual *'desperation'* or to *'unclean living'*

- Practical action and attitude?
 - Believe God's promises
 - *'generally set forth'* in Scripture
 - i.e. don't limit the offer of salvation generally promised to all people, where Scripture casts a veil over God's eternal purpose
 - Obey God's will
 - *'expressly declared'* in Scripture
 - i.e. don't lessen the obligation to obedience, where Scripture is clear about God's commands

Article 18: Of Obtaining Eternal Salvation only by the Name of Christ

They also are to be had accursed that presume to say that every man shall be saved by the law or sect which he professeth, so that he be diligent to frame his life according to that law and the light of nature. For Holy Scripture doth set out to us only the name of Jesus Christ, whereby men must be saved.

- The only Article to pronounce an anathema
 - *'accursed'*, Latin: *anathematizandi* (Galatians 1:8-9)
 - Compare the large number of anathemas of the Council of Trent

- The Error
 - *'It doesn't matter what you believe as long as you are sincere'*!

- The Truth
 - Eternal salvation is only found in Jesus Christ
 - Again, an appeal to Scripture – Peter's words before the Sanhedrin (Acts 4:12)