

Remembering the past: The sale of indulgences.

(by George Battey)

A wise man once said: *People who do not study history are doomed to repeat it.*

In the early 1500s the Catholic Church was in complete control of Europe. Because it was in such complete control, when someone said they were a member of “the church,” everyone understood it to mean the Catholic Church.

The Popes who ruled the church also ruled the world. They manipulated kings and queens. The Pope was able to place a king on his throne and he was able to remove the king from his throne.

In these days John Tetzel, a Dominican friar, became the chief advocator of indulgences. An indulgence was a license to commit sin. For example, if a person wanted to commit murder, all he had to do was purchase an indulgence which would allow him to “indulge” in this sin without being held responsible. Or, if a person wanted to commit adultery, he could purchase an indulgence which would allow him to “indulge” in the sin of adultery.

Here is a portion of the sermon John Tetzel would preach when he came into a town:

“Indulgences are the most precious and most noble of God’s gifts. ... Come and I will give you letters, all properly sealed, by which even the sins you intend to commit may be pardoned. I would not change my privileges for those of Saint Peter in heaven; for I have saved more souls by my indulgences than the apostle by his sermons. There is no sin so great that an indulgence can not remit; and even if one ... had offered violence to the Virgin Mary, Mother of God, let him pay – only let him pay well, and all will be forgiven him. ...

*”But more than this, indulgences avail not only for the living, but for the dead. ... Now you can ransom so many souls! Stiff-necked and thoughtless man! With twelve groats you can deliver your father from purgatory, and you are ungrateful enough not to save him! I shall be justified in the day of judgment; but – you will be punished so much the more severely for having neglected so great salvation. I declare to you, though you should have but a single coat, you should strip it off and sell it, in order to obtain this grace. **The Lord our God no longer reigns. He has resigned all power to the pope.**” (Shepherd, pp. 69-70)*

This, among other things, is why Martin Luther revolted against the Pope and started the Protestant Reformation Movement.

What does the Bible say about indulgences? Does God allow men to use money to pay for their sins – even sins they plan to commit in advance? What saith the scripture?

1 John 3:7-8 (NKJV)

7 Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous.

*8 **He who sins is of the devil**, for the devil has sinned from the beginning.*

...

Listen carefully to this.

“let no one deceive you” – people are easily deceived. If someone already has their mind made up, they quickly find excuses to believe what they want to believe. If someone wants to commit adultery or tell a lie, they easily find excuses to justify committing those sins.

But the scripture teaches that someone purposefully sinning is of the Devil. They can excuse themselves all they wish, but the scripture is plain.

Furthermore, the scripture plainly teaches that money cannot pay for the sins of men – especially premeditated sins.

1 Peter 1:18-19 (NKJV)

18 knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers,

19 but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.

Silver and gold could not redeem mankind from eternal punishment. Only the precious blood of Christ can save sinners.

“Precious” – very valuable. A “precious stone” is a very valuable, rare jewel. When this passage speaks of the “precious blood of Christ,” it means the valuable, rare and expensive blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the only thing that can redeem a sinner.

When John Tetzel taught that a piece of paper, called an indulgence, could save men from their sins, he was teaching false doctrine. If the scriptures mean anything, they teach that Tetzel died lost for teaching this doctrine. The Pope on the throne of the Catholic Church also died lost and both will stand before God in judgment for leading people astray like they did.

Money cannot save people from their sins. People cannot pre-plan sin and get away with it. Only the precious blood of Christ can take away the sins of sinners. If anyone would ever be saved in heaven, they must have their sins washed away by the blood of Christ. According to Acts 22:16, the blood of Christ washes away sins when a sinner is properly baptized in water in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

After being baptized and washing away sins by the blood of Christ, a Christian must continue “walking in the light” in order for the blood of Christ to keep on cleansing him (1 Jn 1:7). This means simply that a Christian must keep living faithfully for God after they are baptized. If they sin again, they must be cleansed again by the blood of Christ. If a person dies with unforgiven sins on their account, they die lost – forever lost.

Salvation is not to be trivialized. According to Jesus salvation is very difficult (Mt 7:13-14). Men cannot buy their way into heaven with money. They cannot earn their way into heaven without money. Men can go to heaven only when they humble themselves before God and obey the gospel which He Himself ordained (2 Th 1:7-9).

GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION

Five steps in God's plan of salvation:

- 1) **Hear** the word of God (Rom 10:17).
- 2) **Believe** Jesus is the Son of God (Mk 16:16).
- 3) **Repent** of sins (change from living a sinful life) (Acts 2:38).
- 4) **Confess** your faith verbally before men (Rom 10:10).
- 5) **Be baptized** (immersed) in water in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (Mt 28:19) for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38).

Mark 16:16 (NKJV)

*16 He who **believes** and is **baptized** will be saved; ...*

Acts 2:38 (NKJV)

*38 Then Peter said to them, "**Repent, and** let every one of you **be baptized** in the name of Jesus Christ **for the remission of sins**; ...*

After being baptized, one must continue to be faithful (Acts 2:42; Mt 28:20; Rev 2:10).