

Indulgences

by Ian Paisley

The doctrine of Indulgences is a Catholic teaching that undermines the grace of God and the work of Christ by suggesting that individuals can purchase forgiveness for their sins.

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 11:13, Ephesians 5:6, Colossians 2:8, 1 Timothy 4:1, 2 Peter 2:1

Topics: "Reformation History", "Christian Doctrine"

Description

Ian Paisley delves into the controversial topic of Indulgences, tracing its significance in European history and its connection to the Reformation, particularly through the lens of Martin Luther's life and teachings. He highlights the excessive practices of priestly imposture by figures like Tetzel, leading to the calamities of the Lutheran revolt, and the subsequent attempts by the Papal writers to moderate and restrain the doctrine. Paisley emphasizes the dangerous implications of Indulgences, portraying it as a virtual license to sin and a system that confuses and manipulates believers, ultimately undermining the grace of God and the work of Christ.

Transcript

The subject of Indulgences is one which occupies a conspicuous place in European history, from the relation in which it stands to the Reformation. That the doctrine may be rightly understood, it must be examined through the medium of Luther's life and labours. In this way, and in no other, can the real truth be got at.

Tetzel bent the bow of priestly imposture too far, and thus unwittingly brought upon his church all the calamities of the Lutheran revolt. This great fact has led to a vast amount of shuffling, equivocation, misrepresentation, and downright falsehood from the Papal writers who have treated of it. It is a thing-and almost the only thing of which it would seem the priesthood are rather ashamed.

As it was carried on in the days of Tetzel, human nature could hardly bear it, and hence the revolt to which the excesses gave birth, and there has since been a disposition to moderate and restrain the doctrine, and wherever the violation of truth has been wanted to serve the purpose, as usual, the father of lies has been present to give his aid.

The first and just plan, however, and that against which it is in vain for the priests to object, is at once to repair to the literature of Luther's day, which will most incontrovertibly demonstrate that the Protestant view was the true one -viz., that it is a virtual licence to commit sin.

Next to this, we may have recourse to the Council of Trent, and to various authorized catechisms of the Papacy. By this, the matter must be tested, and from this there is no appeal. We set very light by the representations of Bossuet, Gother, and others, and the whole of the Irish priesthood at the present hour.

The great French Jesuit, as he was wont when pressed by truth, deliberately falsified; and it is a fact worthy of notice that the Irish bishops, in 185, in their examination before Parliament, in connection with their demand for what is called Emancipation, acted a part but too much resembling that of Bossuet. Kelly, Doyle, and Murray, all varied from each other. Even the last, by far the most candid, was highly culpable in his representations.

This is one of the few things in which the Council of Trent showed a spice of moderation: they appear to have been deeply impressed with the memory of the disgrace which attended the sale of Indulgences by Tetzel, and hence, while still assuming that "Christ had given to the Church the power of granting Indulgences, and that the use of them was very beneficial to the Christian people," they took care, as usual, to pour a curse on the head of all that deny it; they were careful, however, to abstain from defining what Indulgences really mean, simply designating them the "heavenly treasures of the Church."

In the Papal standards, the doctrine of Indulgences is defined as that which secures not only the remission of canonical penance imposed by the Church, but a remission of the temporal punishment, with which the sins of men are visited after their guilt and liability to eternal punishment has been removed by the Sacrament of Penance; and this temporary punishment maybe endured either in this life or in purgatory, so that a man may take his choice: if he will do penance here, he may leave the world with his guilt discharged; but if not he must suffer the punishment in purgatory! They are shut up to one or the other-penance here, or penal fires there!

The principle, on which Indulgences proceed, is very simple, more simple, generally, than is compatible with so much falsehood. It is assumed that fasts, alms, penance, pilgrimages, the hair shirt and the hard living, to which we have elsewhere referred, possess a power to satisfy.

Should they, however, in any case fail, they are then to go for supplemental merit to the great storehouse of merit laid up in the Church, the management of which is committed to the Pope. It lies with him, therefore, to grant remission of temporal punishment on such terms as he may think proper to impose. This is called an Indulgence. It may be limited to a fixed period, or it may extend through the whole life.

Neither is the benefit confined to men on earth, but maybe extended to souls in Purgatory; so that a powerful hold is gained on the benevolent and affectionate feelings of survivors, who are blind enough to believe the monstrous imposture.

The conditions on which the Indulgence is granted, are very varied; sometimes one penance is prescribed, and sometimes another, but the thing is never so thoroughly Popish, and to the priestly taste, as when it is-money! Pope Leo, who understood the matter thoroughly, condescended to enlighten the world on the mystery of this merciful provision. He tells them that it was permitted to him, by his apostolic authority, to grant Indulgences out of the superabundant merit of Christ, to the saints and to the faithful who are united to Christ as well for the living as for the dead.

It was a master-stroke to extend the bounty to both worlds, since it greatly enlarged the sphere of blessing. The same Pope Leo says, "Wherefore all persons, whether living or dead, who really obtain any Indulgences of this kind are delivered from so much temporal punishment, due, according to Divine

justice, for their actual sins, as is equivalent to the value of the Indulgence bestowed and received."

The intelligent author of "Rome in the Nineteenth Century," described things as they came before his eyes in a residence in the Eternal City. He says, "Plenary Indulgences and remission of sins are offered here on very easy terms. I was first rather startled with the prodigal manner in which that full pardon of all transgressions which the gospel promises only as the reward of sincere repentance and amendment-language which shows our author knew but little of the gospel-was bestowed at Rome in consideration of repeating certain prayers before the shrine of certain saints, or paying a certain sum of money to certain priests, you may buy as many masses as will free your souls from purgatory for twenty-nine thousand years at the Church of Saint Lateran, on the festal of that saint, and at another on the Quirinal Hill for ten thousand, and for three thousand years, and at a very reasonable rate. But it is in vain to particularize; for the greater part of the churches of Rome and the neighbourhood are spiritual shops for the sale of the same commodity."

This iniquitous system is not confined to the Continent and foreign countries: to say nothing of Ireland, it abounds in England. It is but a few years back since one was unblushingly proclaimed in the address to the British people. In 1845, the last Jubilee was called "the year of expiation and pardon, of redemption and grace, of redemption and indulgence."

Papal cupidity conjured the people to turn it to account. The Vicar-apostolic of the London District exhorted his charge to make the most of it. "Only sin," said he, "can exclude you from that kingdom; only the debt of temporal punishments incurred by sin can retard your entrance into glory Avail yourselves of every means of displaying the debt to Divine justice. Spare no pains to prepare yourselves for the remission of your sins, and for the benefits of this plenary indulgence-the happy effects will be felt by you in that peace of soul and spiritual joy which the world could never give, and in a well-grounded hope of eternal happiness."

These are sentiments concerning which there can be no mistake. They form a distinction which has no foundation in the Word of God between punishment temporal and eternal-representing the eternal to be remitted, while the temporal are retained; professing to look sometimes to Christ for the remission of the eternal; and to the sinner's own works or sufferings, for the remission of the temporal; ever and anon confounding the temporal with the eternal, and thus, teaching him to view himself as his own sole and only saviour.

There is no point in which the Papal system is more vulnerable, and none through which it has received more deadly stabs from the sword of the Spirit. In spite of all that has been said, the thing, in plain expression, amounts simply to a licence of iniquity, and permission with impunity to perpetrate crimes!

It is to no purpose to say that the Indulgence is only-granted after the sin has been committed, and that it has, not, a prospective, but a retrospective bearing. What child sees not that this leaves the matter precisely as we have put it? A man is going to commit a sin, and beforehand he knows the price it will cost him. The price lie stands prepared to pay. He perpetrates the enormity, and pays accordingly, and there is an end of the matter!

But this is not all. Indulgences have been sold in abundance for sins to be committed! Nay, reader, start not. Tetzel himself, the Caliban of the Papacy in matters of Indulgence, did so. Hear him as, addressing the multitude, he exclaims:

"Come, and I will give you letters furnished with the seal by which the sins, even those you may have a mind to commit hereafter, shall be all forgiven you. I would not exchange my privileges for those of St. Peter in heaven; for I have saved more souls by my indulgences, than the Apostle by his discourses. Indulgences not only save the living, but they save the dead too. Priest, noble, merchant, woman, young girl, young man, hearken to your parents and your friends who are dead, and who cry to you from the bottom of the abyss, ` We are enduring tortures! A small alms would deliver us; you can give it, and you will not!' The very instant the piece of money chinks at the bottom of the strong box, the soul is delivered out of purgatory, and flies up to heaven."

We might very copiously illustrate this point, but we abstain. Since it to say, that the result has been both from its prospective and its retrospective bearings, to embolden sinners in their career of transgression; and hence, it is testified by all competent witnesses who have sojourned in Popish countries, that the system of Indulgences most fearfully contributes to laxity of morals.

Mr. Eustace in his "Classical Tour," thus explains the state of things in Italy when he was there, and ascribed it to the sale of Indulgences. Mr. Graham, too, tells us of an individual pointed out to him, who had stabbed his brother so that he had expired immediately after the deed.

What was the result? Was the murderer apprehended and dealt with according to his wickedness? Not so! He repaired to Rome, purchased his freedom from the Church, and received a written protection from a Cardinal, in consequence of which he was walking about without concern-a second Cain!

Reader, we have done. "Let no man deceive you with vain words." Take not the account of the matter, as you will find it in Romish books, since nothing can be more contrary to facts than the representations of the Jesuits. We appeal to history, the history of the Church of Rome, and refer you to the recent work. of D'Aubigne on the Reformation, which will supply you with facts illustrative of the basis we have laid down, and demonstrative of our entire argument.

Indulgence, although one of the weaker points of the Romish system, is, nevertheless, a part in admirable harmony with the whole. It is essentially anti-Christian; no part of the mighty scheme of error and falsehood is more skilfully levelled against the grace of God and the work of Christ. None better deserves to be stamped with the image and superscription of Antichrist. It is one of the master strokes of the Prince of Darkness!

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