

Reformation Sunday 10/29/2017: The SOLAS of the Reformation

What is the Reformation? Why is the Reformation important? The word reform means to change. Usually we reform from something bad to something good. Why did the church need a reformation? How does a church go from a Bible-believing church to a church that doesn't base its truth or teaching on the Bible in need of a reformation? Often this walk away from God's Word starts in a very small way. Instead of clinging to the truth, a church may make small compromises which make it easier to fit in with other church bodies, society as a whole, or simply not to make waves with its members. At the time, nobody thinks the small compromise is a big issue or problem. But history shows us that when churches, or people, make small compromises in faith and doctrine, larger ones will follow.

These larger compromises come because the devil wins even when we make the smallest compromises to God's Word. The small compromise opens the door, until finally, any teaching of the Bible can be questioned even the simplest teachings of the Bible that we are saved by faith in Jesus alone.

In the Middle Ages, the Catholic church was the Christian church. Everyone belonged to it and no one questioned what was being taught. However, this church has strayed from the simple truths of God's Word. This teaching taught that we work with God in order to earn our own forgiveness. Jesus worked to forgive some of your sins, but there were others that you had to take care of yourself.

This error grew into other errors. The Catholic church began to teach that there was a place between heaven and hell called purgatory. There were many ways to avoid or lower the time you spent in purgatory but, once again, they all centered on works. One of the worst of these ways was the indulgence.

The Catholic church taught that you could buy your way, or your relatives way, out of purgatory by buying a piece of paper called an indulgence. Once the indulgence was signed the soul was released.

Rich and poor alike scrambled to buy these indulgences. They no longer yearned to hear God's Word, they yearned to make enough money to buy the indulgence for themselves and their families.

This was one of the sparks that set off the need to reform the Catholic church from bad to good. Even in the midst of this false teaching and others just as evil and dangerous, God was there. He worked through men like Martin Luther and the other Reformers to refute these false teachings and to bring the truth of his Gospel to people.

These Reformers stood fast in their faith and trust in the Lord. They were not interested in compromising their doctrine and beliefs with other churches for a false peace and unity. They looked to Scripture first, last and everywhere in between. This focus on Scripture became the basis for many conferences and councils debating what God's Word actually said. These men searched the Scriptures and formulated a concise summary of biblical doctrine and teaching that we still use today called the called the Lutheran Confessions. While we do not have time to look at all of those Confessions this morning, a summary of the Reformation stand and doctrine can be seen in the 5 statements listed in your bulletin: The 5 Solas of the Reformation.

This morning will look at those 5 statements. We will see the rock of God's Word that the Reformers took their stand on. As Lutherans their stand on God's Word is also our stand. We thank God that he keeps his Word pure and holy. We thank God that he gives us preachers and teachers who search the Scriptures, we thank God that we too can search his Scriptures to build our lives on his Word.

Matthew 7: 24. Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.

Part I: SOLA GRATIA: By Grace Alone

John tells us that our God is love. When Moses asked God who he was, God gave Moses a simple answer. "I am the LORD, the compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love and mercy." Out of all the things that God wants us to know about him, he wants us to know that he loves you and me.

Imagine that you are driving down the road in a rain storm. You look out the window and see the most disgusting looking dog sitting by the side of the road. He is drenched in rain, he smells bad, he has one eye and three legs, his coat is a snarled mess of stains and dirt, he has sores all over his body, he is even sitting in a pile of garbage. What would it take for you to show compassion, to show, love to that dog?

There are times that we might think that we have some characteristics that God might like or love. We want to think we are a puppy at the shelter or store that wags its tail and looks so cute. We want to think that, like that puppy, there is something that God has seen in us that moves him to look at us and love us. We want to think the better we are, the more we try, God will love us and bless us more. In reality, when God looks at us, he sees nothing to love. He sees only our sins. We are a miserable dog sitting on the side of the road. There is nothing that is lovable about us. In fact, God should turn from us and leave us be. But he doesn't. This is the definition of grace: love for those who are unlovable, for people who do unlovable things. God shows his love for us by loving us, even though there is nothing that is lovable about us.

Without this kind of love, God could and should have punished Adam and Eve when they sinned against him. But he didn't turn away from them, he didn't destroy them. Instead, he showed his grace, his love by forgiving them and promising them a Savior.

God does the same thing with us, when we sin. In his great love, he does not turn his back on us, he forgives us and promises us a new life in him.

One of the great truths of the Reformation is that our hope of forgiveness and salvation do not come because we have earned or deserved them. It is by God's grace alone that we are forgiven our sins and heaven is ours.

Ephesians 2:8,9. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast.

Part II: SOLA FIDE: By Faith Alone

There are two types of religions in the world. The one religion says that God has done everything for you. God loved you from eternity, he sent his son to live perfectly for you and take your punishment for your sins. The Holy Spirit brings those gifts to you through faith.

In the other religion, whether in big ways or small ones, we have to earn our God's love and his blessings. In this religion, a person must make god happy first and then god will bless you. However, if you are good enough, your god will not bless you.

These two religions are really opposed to one another. Either God gives you all of his gifts without you doing anything or you must earn them and work for them.

We just read Ephesians 2:8,9. Let's listen to that passage again. **For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast.** Paul states his case that God gives us his gifts fully and freely.....by grace through faith alone. Paul is so very clear. He repeats the truth 3 times so that we don't miss it. 1. It is by grace you have been saved, through faith , 2. This salvation is NOT from yourselves it is God's gift to you, 3. This is not by WORKS so that no one can boast of what he or she has done.

Paul is very clear in this passage. If salvation were by works this passage would read very differently. But it's not. And this is not the only passage that says this.

This is but one of the passages that state the same truth. One is listed for you in your bulletin Romans 3:20. This was one of the passages that Martin Luther stumbled upon through which God showed him what the Gospel was really about. **For we maintain that a man is justified by faith, not by faith in self, but by faith in Jesus, apart from observing the law.**

God's Word stands in direct conflict with any religion that says that we earn our way to heaven. We can never attain God's standard of perfection. Paul says, **“There is no one righteous not even one, there is no one who does good not even one.”**

And yet we have a God who loves us and has given us a way to have forgiveness and salvation that is apart from works. ***It is by grace you have been saved, through faith.*** He grants us his grace and through that grace he works faith in our hearts so that we believe that what Jesus has done, he has done for us.

Another great truth of the Reformation is that we are saved by faith alone and not by works. Our loving God has worked faith in our hearts by which he gives his gifts of forgiveness, life and salvation fully and freely.

Romans 3:20 For we maintain that a man is justified by faith, apart from observing the law.

Part III: SOLUS CHRISTUS: By Christ Alone

If you had the blessing of meeting God today and he asked you, "Why should I let you into my heaven?" What would you say? How can you give an answer and be sure that that answer is correct?

So many people struggle with the answer to this question. For those who are trying to earn their way to heaven there is no security, there is no peace. They can never be sure they have done enough. Martin Luther was one of those people who struggled with doubt that he was good enough before God.

Luther tried to use the confessional booth to remove his own sins. He had been taught that there were sins that were not forgiven unless he confessed them before the priest. Confession became the work by which he earned his forgiveness.

Luther tried. He would spend hours confessing his sins. But when he left he felt no peace, he would return minutes later because he had remembered more sins.

For Martin and for many others, forgiveness does not lie in a loving Savior, but forgiveness lies in you. It lies in your ability to remember them, confess them, or work them off. This turns Christ our loving Savior, into an angry judge because every sin you commit damns you to hell. Luther said, "I was myself more than once driven to the very abyss of despair so that I wished I had never been created. Love God? I hated him!"

God was at work. God brought Martin back to the truth of his Gospel. Martin's priest understood Luther's struggle so he gave Luther a new job. He told Martin to search the Scriptures to find the loving Savior.... and that's exactly what God led Luther to find.

When we look at Scriptures it does not give us hope in our ability to earn our salvation, it gives us the hope and comfort that Jesus did all the work that his Father had sent him here to earth to do.... COMPLETELY. When Jesus called from the cross, "**It is finished**" he was declaring to the world that he had forgiven all sins. There was not one sin that was left unpaid. The Apostle Peter tells us, **For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.** There is not one sin that Jesus has not paid for. There is not one sin left for us to work off ourselves.

If God were to ask you "Why should I let you into my heaven?" What would you say? You can answer boldly and confidently, Jesus has died on the cross and taken away my sins. Jesus has opened the doors of heaven for me and through him alone I can enter.

John 14:6. Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

Part IV: SOLA SCRIPTURA: By Scripture Alone

You can go to any Christian book store and see that there are many wise teachers out there that write many books. There are many self-help gurus out there that say they can lead you to a happy life, even a happy spiritual life.

But not all of those books are good for you because not all of them have Scripture as their basis. Without the truth of Scripture, the help that these can give is only temporary. We cannot learn the way to heaven without the truth Scripture.

It is only through the Gospel in the Word that we learn that Jesus has come to save us. It is only in the Word that we can hear the truth that we are saved by grace, through faith in Christ alone. It is only in the Word, that we hear of the gift of faith that the Holy Spirit works in our hearts. As we look at these truths we see that standing on God's Word alone is something we **MUST** do. Standing on this Word and holding to this Word alone, not adding or subtracting to it, is the only way that God's Word is kept pure.

At the time of the Reformation, there was much religious discussion, but it was not centered on the Scriptures. Much of that religious discussion was centered on the teachings of men. It was centered on the traditions of the church.

The Reformers had a choice. They could choose what foundation to stand on. They realized the errors that came from standing on the foundation of people who contradict one another or who may even be teaching things that are not in the Bible. They took their stand on Scripture alone. They would appeal to the source of divine truth. They let Scripture speak for itself. By doing this, they let the Holy Spirit do the work in the hearts and minds of many people and did not rely on their own teachings, thoughts, or words.

This is the truth of the Reformation, we hold to Scripture alone. It is only Scripture alone that shines the light on Jesus who gives us heaven. It is only through Scripture alone that the Holy Spirit calls us to faith, strengthen our faith, and keeps us in the faith to heaven.

Romans 1:16. I am not ashamed of the Gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.

Part V: SOLI DEO GLORIA: To God be the Glory

Luther never wanted a group of Christians named after him. He even said, "I pray you leave my name alone and not to call yourselves Lutherans, but Christians. Who is Luther? My doctrine is not mine: I have not been crucified for any one...How does it then benefit me, a miserable bag of dust and ashes, to give my name to the children of Christ? Cease, my dear friends, to cling to these party names and distinctions; away with all of them; and let us call ourselves only Christians, after Him from whom our doctrine comes." Luther never wanted glory for himself because he realized it was God at work to bring the Gospel to light.

On this Sunday, as with all other Sundays, we give glory to God. It is through him that we have the hope of eternal life. It is through him that he maintains and strengthens his church in times of need to stand up under persecution, strife and struggle. May we be so bold as to bear the name of Jesus in any circumstance.

To God be the Glory, it is by his grace that he has sent the Holy Spirit to work faith our hearts that as we hear the Gospel message in the Scriptures, our faith in Jesus as our Savior and hope for heaven may grow and be strengthened. We read the words of John 3:16 together:

John 3:16. For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life.