



25 October 2024

Reformation Sunday

October 31 is almost here. For most people the spotlight and celebration is on Halloween, *of course!* But for Protestants it marks something much more important.

On October 31, 1517 Martin Luther posted 95 theses, or his positions which he wished to debate, on the church door in Wittenberg, Germany. The flash point and focal point was the Catholic church's practice of selling indulgences, that is, grating removal or reduction of the penalty of forgiven sin because people gave the church money. That church practice was based on the Catholic church belief that we are sinners in need of God's grace to be saved, that Christ won that grace for us, *and* that the church is the dispenser of that grace.

Luther's action is commonly seen as the beginning of the Protestant Reformation, although God had been rising up others before Luther such as John Wycliffe, 1324-1284, and others along side in his era such as Ulrich Zwingli and John Calvin.

Why is this a big deal? In short, it marked the beginning of dispelling the darkness that shrouded the church and the gospel in the Dark Ages (roughly from 500-1500 A.D.) by shining the light of the Scriptures, the gospel.

More specifically, the Reformation had a number effects which were and still are vital. Think of just three of them today.

- Scripture is our sole guide and authority for faith and practice. It is Scripture, and only Scripture, that is inspired, breathed out by God. In Luther's day the Catholic Church believed in the inspiration of the Bible, but added tradition and the pronouncements of the church, which then became the final authority. Creeds, confessions of faith and doctrinal statements have value, but only as they rightly reflect Scripture and never replace Scripture. In our time some in the church talk about their visions, their truth. We should be thankful that the Reformers put the spotlight on God's Word and make sure that is where our focus is.
- Salvation from sin to life with God is only by God's grace through personal faith in Jesus Christ. Luther was convinced that the church stands or falls on the truth of justification by faith in Jesus Christ. You probably have heard about some surveys on this. In recent years



surveys show that 60 to almost 70% of evangelicals, born again Christians, believe that there are other ways to heaven beside personal faith in Jesus Christ. God's word is clear,

“The one who believes in the Son has eternal life; but the one who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him” (John 3:36).

“there is salvation in no one else [than Jesus]; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among mankind by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

“And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. The one who has the Son has the life; the one who does not have the Son of God does not have the life” (1 John 5:11-12).

Thank God that the gospel is clear. Determine to hold it firmly and to share it clearly.

- One vital result of the Reformation that sometimes is not well recognized is the availability of the Bible to all. When the Reformation dawned the Bible was largely in Latin, inaccessible by both language and ability to get copies, compounded by the Catholic Church forbidding translations of the Bible into the language of the people without its consent. The Reformers were convinced that, as one historian writes, “the key to the reform and renewal of the Church was to put the Bible in the hands of lay people.” Luther wrote,

“Above all, in schools of all kinds the chief and most common lesson should be the Scriptures, and for young boys the Gospel; and would to God each town had also a girls' school, in which girls might be taught the Gospel for an hour daily, either in German or Latin!”

Thank God for having the Bible in our language and so readily available. Don't take it for granted.

This weekend and through the 31st thank God for raising up people who called the church back to the truth, and also do your part in keeping the flame burning brightly.

Pastor Lyle