

REFORMATION DAY 2009

Sermon Notes

Outcomes of the Lutheran Reformation Hebrews 8:6-13 November 1, 2009

- October 31, 1517, is known well by each of us at GRBC as the day when Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses to the door of Wittenberg Chapel, thus sparking the Protestant Reformation.
- However, Luther's greatest contributions to the Protestant cause would occur over the next thirty years of his life.
- In fact, so profound was Luther's influence, that nearly every subsequent Reformer would build upon the truths that Luther himself affirmed.
- Consider the words of John Calvin, who regarded Luther as "a great miracle of God" and one that God Himself had raised up "to light us into the way of salvation." Calvin also praised Luther for his attack of the Roman Catholic doctrine of Transubstantiation, "By the achievement of one man in our own age, in the eyes of God undoubtedly a chosen instrument, I mean Martin Luther, this horrible monstrosity [of the Mass] has fallen headlong into ruin."
- Heinrich Bullinger agreed calling Luther "a learned man" and a chosen "instrument" of God, whose "faithful and useful labors" commanded respect.
- Yet, as we pause to remember October 31 as Reformation Day, I would like to examine several of Luther's most significant contributions to Protestant Orthodoxy. My purpose is not to praise Luther, but rather to remember how God raised up a man nearly five hundred years ago who pointed the world back to the Scriptures and the true Gospel they proclaim.

- I. Scripture is our Final Authority
- II. Scripture Must Be in the Language of the People
- III. Man is Sinful
- IV. Distinction between Law and Gospel
- V. Justification by Faith Alone
- VI. The Priesthood of Believers
- VII. All Christian Work is Sacred

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I. Scripture is our Final Authority

- Perhaps the most foundational contribution of Martin Luther to Western Christianity was his reassertion of Biblical Authority.
- Prior to the Reformation, the Roman Catholic Church asserted its primacy over
 matters of faith and practice. Furthermore, the Bishop of Rome, that is the Pope,
 was heralded as the Vicar of Christ and the one whose authority was derived from
 his Apostolic Succession back to the Apostle Peter (who was viewed as the first
 Bishop of Rome).
- Gerald Bray, in his book *Biblical Interpretation*, writes, "For Luther the Bible is not simply a catalogue of truths, but a record of God's saving purpose, which came to fulfillment in Jesus Christ. Everything in Scripture pointed towards him, and anything which was not read in the light of Christ was fundamentally misinterpreted."
- Nearly two years after he nailed his 95 Theses to the door of Wittenberg Chapel, in July of 1519, at the famous Leipzig Debate, Luther debated the Dominican Roman Catholic Scholar Johann Eck. Theologian John Clarke explains, "Luther was debating with the able scholar, John Eck. Eck accused Luther of resurrecting the old doctrines of John Hus which had been condemned by the Council of Constance one hundred years earlier."

One of Luther's arguments at Leipzig was intended to attack the doctrine of papal infallibility. However, he simply used Scripture, not tradition. Clarke provides the explanation, as set forth by Luther:

"In contrast to the complete lack of evidence in support of Rome's claim, there are many passages of Scripture that clearly contradict the belief in Peter's supremacy and headship of the church. When the disciples disputed who should be the greatest, the very question here at issue, Christ did not say, 'Of course, Peter—for he is the Pope'; but He rather

taught them their equality (Matthew 18:1-4). In Galatians 2:11-14 we read of Paul's rebuke to Peter. Here two important things are stated. First, that Peter 'was to be blamed' and therefore not infallible. Secondly, that Paul 'rebuked him before them all.' Can it be imagined that any of the Pope's underlings would publicly rebuke him today?

The Roman claim that Peter was the first Pope, can be tested by the record of the first days of the church as given in the Acts of the Apostles. We would expect to find that now that Christ is no longer present in body, His Vicar and representative would have assumed the rulership in His stead. Yet we never find Peter exercising such supreme authority. No doctrinal question is entrusted to his final judgment. On no occasion does he act as Head of the church. In Acts 10:25, 26, when Cornelius would show him the homage commonly demanded by the Popes, Peter protested and said, 'Stand up; I myself also am a man.'

Nowhere in Scripture does Peter claim supremacy or enlighten the church as to the glorious office into which Christ had placed him. There is not a word in Scripture to inform us that Peter was Bishop of the church at Rome or that Rome was to remain the center of power for the church."

- At the Diet of Worms in May of 1521, Luther stated, "Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures, or by evident reason (for I put my faith neither in popes nor councils alone, since it is established that they have erred again and again and contradicted one another), I am bound by the scriptural evidence adduced by me, and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot, I will not recant anything, for it is neither safe nor right to act against one's conscience. God help me. Amen."
- One of Luther's later statements makes his convictions even clearer, "When the pope acts contrary to the Scriptures, it is our duty to stand by the Scriptures, to reprove and then constrain him..."
- One of the results of the Reformation was the drafting of the Second Helvetic Confession, in 1566. In condemnation of the Church at Rome it states, "Concerning the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven which the Lord gave to the apostles, many babble many astonishing things, and out of them forge swords, spears, scepters and crowns, and complete power over the greatest kingdoms, indeed, over souls and bodies. Judging simply according to the Word of the Lord, we say that all properly called ministers possess and exercise the keys or the use of them when they proclaim the Gospel; that is, when they teach, exhort, comfort, rebuke, and keep in discipline the people committed to their trust."

II. Scripture Must Be in the Language of the People

 Possibly the most significant confrontations between Martin Luther and the authorities of the Church of Rome occurred at Worms in May of 1521 – The Diet of Worms.

- As I stated previously, it was here that Luther publicly proclaimed, "My conscience is held captive to the Word of God..."
- Yet, in the days following Luther's public speech, the civil and ecclesiastical authorities convened to determine what they should do with Luther.
- On May 25, 1521, Emperor Charles V presented the edict, which read, "For this reason we forbid anyone from this time forward to dare, either by words or by deeds, to receive, defend, sustain, or favor the said Martin Luther. On the contrary, we want him to be apprehended and punished as a notorious heretic, as he deserves, to be brought personally before us, or to be securely guarded until those who have captured him inform us, whereupon we will order the appropriate manner of proceeding against the said Luther. Those who will help in his capture will be rewarded generously for their good work."
- Therefore, following the issuing of the edict, even though Luther had been promised safe travel to and from the Diet of Worms, he and his supporters new his life was in danger. Therefore, Frederick III, Elector of Saxony planned a "kidnapping" of Luther on his return to Wittenberg from Worms. His friends then took him to the Wartburg Castle in Eisenach, where Luther hid for nearly a year, assuming the identity of a monk named Junker Jorg.
- However, it was during his stay at the Wartburg that Luther completed part of his most significant work he translated the New Testament into German.
- In the Wartburg, in December of 1521, Luther wrote, "I shall remain here in seclusion till Easter, and write postils, and translate the New Testament into German, which so many people are anxious to have...Would to God that every town had its interpreter, and that this book could be had in every language and dwell in the hearts and hands of all."

III. Man is Sinful

- As Martin Luther began to commit himself to the reading of the Scriptures, he discovered truths that often stood in direct contradiction to established Roman Catholic dogma. One of these was the sinfulness of man. Particularly, man is wholly unable to come to Christ on his own will and effort.
- In several letters between himself and Desiderius Erasmus, Luther emphasized the inability of man:
 - "You say: Who will endeavor to reform his life? I answer: Nobody! No man can! God has no time for your self-reformers, for they are all hypocrites. The elect who fear God will be reformed by the Holy Spirit. The rest will perish unreformed."

- "For if it is not we ourselves, but God only, who works salvation in us, it follows that nothing we do before HIS working in us, avails unto salvation"
- o "For I have shown that free will belongs to none but God alone."
- o "As for myself, I frankly confess, that I should not want free will to be given to me, even if it could be, nor anything else be left in my own hands to enable me to strive after my salvation."
- "But now that God has put my salvation out of the control of my own will and put it under the control of His, and has promised to save me, NOT ACCORDING TO MY OWN EFFORT OR RUNNING but according to HIS own grace and mercy, I rest fully assured that HE is faithful —"
- o "The essence of Christianity which you (Erasmus) describe -- <u>is without</u> Christ, without the Spirit, and chillier than ice -"
- In one of his most significant works, *The Bondage of the Will*, Martin Luther responds to the work of the humanist Desiderius Erasmus, writing:

Sect. 44. – UPON the authority of Erasmus, then, 'Free-will,' is a power of the human will, which can, of itself, will and not will to embrace the word and work of God, by which it is to be led to those things which are beyond its capacity and comprehension. If then, it can will and not will, it can also love and hate. And if it can love and hate, it can, to a certain degree, do the Law and believe the Gospel. For it is impossible, if you can will and not will, that you should not be able by that will to begin some kind of work, even though, from the hindering of another, you should not be able to perfect it. And therefore, as among the works of God which lead to salvation, death, the cross, and all the evils of the world are numbered, human will can will its own death and perdition. Nay, it can will all things while it can will the embracing of the word and work of God. For what is there that can be any where beneath, above, within, and without the word and work of God, but God Himself? And what is there here left to grace and the Holy Spirit? This is plainly to ascribe divinity to 'Free-will.' For to will to embrace the Law and the Gospel, not to will sin, and to will death, belongs to the power of God alone: as Paul testifies in more places than one.

Wherefore, no one, since the Pelagians, has written more rightly concerning 'Free-will' than Erasmus. For I have said above, that "Free-will" is a divine term, and signifies a divine power.

IV. Distinction between Law and Gospel

- In his study of the Scriptures, Martin Luther also began to understand the true purpose of the Law and its relationship with the Gospel.
- Gerald Bray states, "For Luther the law was the principle of condemnation, which sent Christ to death on the cross for our sins. The gospel, in contrast, was the word of forgiveness and restoration."
- In a 1532 sermon on the Book of Galatians, Luther states, "This difference between the Law and the Gospel is the height of knowledge in Christendom. Every person and all persons who assume or glory in the name of Christian should know and be able to state this difference. If this ability is lacking, one cannot tell a Christian from a heathen or a Jew; of such supreme importance is this differentiation. This is why St. Paul so strongly insists on a clean-cut and proper differentiating of these two doctrines."
- In his Commentary on Paul's Epistle to the Galatians, Luther writes, "The law is the Word in which God teaches and tells us what we are to do and not to do, as in the Ten commandments. Now wherever human nature is alone, without the grace of God, the Law cannot be kept, because since Adam's fall in paradise man is corrupt and has nothing but a wicked desire to sin and in his heart cannot be favorably disposed toward the Law, as we know by our own experience. For there is no one who would not rather have no Law at all, and everyone finds and feels within himself that while it is difficult to be pious and do good, it is easy to be wicked and to do evil. And this difficulty or this unwillingness to do what is good prevents us form keeping God's Law; for what is kept with dislike, difficulty, and unwillingness, rates before God as not having been kept at all. And so the Law of God convinces us by our experience that we are naturally wicked, disobedient, lovers of sin, and enemies of God's commandments."
- Later, in his Commentary on Galatians 3:24 ("²⁴Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith." [King James Version]), Luther writes:

"This simile of the schoolmaster is striking. Schoolmasters are indispensable...How can a pupil love a teacher who frustrates his desires? And if the pupil disobeys, the schoolmaster whips him, and the pupil has to like it and even kiss the rod with which he was beaten. Do you think the schoolboy feels good about it? As soon as the teacher turns his back, the pupil breaks the rod and throws it into the fire. And if he were stronger than the teacher he would not take the beatings, but beat up the teacher. All the same, teachers are indispensable, otherwise the children would grow up without discipline, instruction, and training.

But how long are the scolding and the whippings of the schoolmaster to continue? Only for a time, until the boy has been trained to be a worthy heir of his father. No father wants

his son to be whipped all the time. The discipline is to last until the boy has been trained to be his father's worthy successor.

The Law is such a schoolmaster. Not for always, but until we have been brought to Christ. The Law is not just another schoolmaster. The Law is a specialist to bring us to Christ. What would you think of a schoolmaster who could only torment and beat a child? Yet of such schoolmasters there were plenty in former times, regular bruisers. The Law is not that kind of a schoolmaster. It is not to torment us always. With its lashings it is only too anxious to drive us to Christ. The Law is like the good schoolmaster who trains his children to find pleasure in doing things they formerly detested."

"The Law is not to teach us another Law. When a person feels the full force of the Law he is likely to think: I have transgressed all the commandments of God; I am guilty of eternal death. If God will spare me I will change and live right from now on. This natural but entirely wrong reaction to the Law has bred the many ceremonies and works devised to earn grace and remission of sins...The Law means to enlarge my sins, to make me small, so that I may be justified by faith in Christ."

• Pelikan quotes Luther, stating, "Far from bringing confidence and assurance, the law brought only accusation and terror to the conscience, 'the terrible and indescribable wrath of God,' for the law was 'the word that denounces sin.' The law was indeed an illumination, but 'a light that illumines and shows, not the grace of God or righteousness and life, but the wrath of God, sin, death, our damnation in the sight of God, and hell.' Such an awareness of divine judgment, which brought knowledge of oneself thought he revelation of the law of God, was the basis of authentic repentance."

V. Justification by Faith Alone

- Arguably, Luther's greatest contribution to the church was the reclaiming of the true gospel through the affirmation of the doctrine of justification by faith alone.
- Yet, it is quite helpful to understand the historical and political setting the led to Luther's "discovery."
- To begin, The Fourth Latern Council in 1215 declared, "All believers of both sexes who have attained the age of discretion must faithfully confess their sins in person at least once a year to their own priest, and must make the effort to carry out the imposed penance according to their ability."
 - This decree was based in large part on the fourth century Latin translation of the Scriptures where Jerome translated *Repent* in Matthew 4:17 as *Do Penance*. Consequently, this interpretation became dogma within the Roman Catholic Church.

- Not only did the Roman Catholic Church declare that "doing penance" was required for the forgiveness of sins, but by the 16th Century, it had developed the practice of selling indulgences as a means of raising money for projects within the Church especially the building of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome.
- One of the leading preachers of indulgences was the Dominican monk John Tetzel.
- Tetzel traveled throughout Germany attempting to raise money for the Church by promising to remove years off of purgatory for paying individuals and their family members. Reportedly, one of his common sayings was, "As soon as the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs."
- Further, in one particular "sermon" Tetzel cried out, "Don't you hear the voice of your wailing dead parents and others who say, 'Have mercy upon me, have mercy upon me, because we are in severe punishment and pain. From this you could redeem us with a small alms and yet you do not want to do so.' Open your ears as the father says to the son and the mother to the daughter... 'We created you, fed you, cared for you, and left you our temporal goods. Why are you so cruel and harsh that you do not want to save us, though it only takes so little? You let us lie in flames so that only slowly do we come to the promised glory.'"
- Tetzel had even developed a "fee" schedule for the forgiveness of sins:
 - Witchcraft 2 ducats
 - Polygamy 6 ducats
 - Murder 8 ducats
 - o Sacrilege 9 ducats
 - o Perjury 9 ducats
 - o In fact, "it was said of these indulgences that they would forgive even the sin of having intercourse with the Virgin Mary, if that were possible."
 - To make matters worse for Luther, one of the most extensive collects of relics outside of Rome. These were the personal collections of Frederick the Wise and Cardinal Albrecht.
 - In 1509, Wittenberg had 5,005 fragments, and viewing them could reduce time in purgatory 1,443 years.
 - By 1520, there were 19,013 fragments, and viewing them could take up to 1,902,202 years off of purgatory.
 - Reportedly, the purchase of relics even forgave **future sins** as well.

"Indulgences could also be obtained by viewing or venerating certain religious relics. Luther's prince, Frederick the Wise, owned one of the largest relic collections in the area, over 19,000 pieces, worth more than 1,900,000 days' indulgence. Frederick's collection included a piece of the burning bush, soot from the fiery furnace, milk from Mary's breast, and a piece of Jesus' crib, just to name a few. Cardinal Albrecht's collection of relics was worth 39,245,120 days' indulgence!"

NOTE: In an article on December 6, 2007, the BBC online reported: "Pope Benedict XVI has authorized special indulgences to mark the 150th anniversary of the Virgin Mary's reputed appearance at Lourdes. Catholics visiting the site within a year of 8 December will be able to receive an indulgence, which the Church teaches can reduce time in purgatory."

- As an Augustinian monk, Luther took the business of "doing penance" very seriously. In fact, he was a tormented soul as he sought to fulfill the righteous demands of Scripture with no success.
- Luther wrote, "I tortured myself with prayer, fasting, vigils and freezing; the frost alone might have killed me...What else did I seek by doing this but God, who was supposed to note my strict observance of the monastic order and my austere life? I constantly walked in a dream and lived in real idolatry, for I did not believe in Christ: I regarded Him only as a severe and terrible Judge protrayed as seated on a rainbow."
- "But I, blameless monk that I was, felt that before God I was a sinner with an extremely troubled conscience. I couldn't be sure that God was appeased by my satisfaction. I did not love, no, rather I hated the just God who punishes sinners. In silence, if I did not blaspheme, then certainly I grumbled vehemently and got angry at God. I said, 'Isn't it enough that we miserable sinners, lost for all eternity because of original sin, are oppressed by every kind of calamity through the Ten Commandments? Why does God heap sorrow upon sorrow through the Gospel and through the Gospel threaten us with his justice and his wrath?' This was how I was raging with wild and disturbed conscience. I constantly badgered St. Paul about that spot in Romans 1 and anxiously wanted to know what he meant."
- Luther realized, that "no one is sure of the integrity of his own contrition"; therefore, as Jaroslav Pelikan writes, "there could be no assurance of forgiveness based on the quality or quanity of one's cotrition, which could never be worthy or sufficient."
- Luther wrote, "As the eternal and immutable judgment of God, whose accusation and assault you will not easily endure," this divine justice created "horrible torments of the ehart and fury of conscience." In these torments or "terrors of a

conscience that feels God's wrath against our sins and looks for forgiveness of sins and deliverance from sin,"

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- Yet, Luther's "evangelical breakthrough" would occur sometime after 1515, the year he began lecturing on the Book of Romans at the University of Wittenberg.
- It was then that Luther had his "Tower Experience", an experience that would change his life and the course of Western Christendom forever.
- As Luther recalls, one day in about 1516, the young Professor sat in his study in the tower of the Black Cloister at the University of Wittenberg reading the Apostle Paul's Epistle to the Romans. Then, it was as though a light broke upon him and according to his personal account, it "struck my conscience like lightening...it was like a thunderbolt in my heart." The man was, of course, Martin Luther, and the particular passage was Romans 1:17: "For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, 'The righteous shall live by faith.'"
- Luther further describes this "Tower Experience" in his Preface to his Latin works, published in 1545

I meditated night and day on those words until at last, by the mercy of God, I paid attention to their context: 'The justice of God is revealed in it, as it is written: 'The just person lives by faith.' I began to understand that in this verse the justice of God is that by which the just person lives by a gift of God, that is by faith. I began to understand that this verse means that the justice of God is revealed through the Gospel, but it is a passive justice, i.e. that by which the merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written: 'The just person lives by faith.' All at once I felt that I had been born again and entered into paradise itself through open gates. Immediately I saw the whole of Scripture in a different light...

- The "Tower Experience" would lead Luther to quite possibly has greatest contribution to Protestant Orthodoxy the affirmation of **justification by faith alone**. This doctrine, more than possibly any other, gets to the very **heart of the Gospel message**.
- As Luther would write in 1517, "The true treasure of the church is the most holy gospel of the glory and grace of God."
- Lutheran scholar, Martin Brecht, writes, "The essential centre of Luther's discovery [of justification by faith alone] consists in the recognition that in Christ, God's son, true man and true God, God freely gives us his rightouesness, wisdom,

and strength. This is the content of the gospel and this faith believes and therefore is justified."

- Luther, writing in 1519, stated, "Through faith in Christ, therefore, Christ's righteousness becomes our righteousness and all that he has becomes ours; rather, he himself becomes ours. Therefore the Apostle calls it 'the righteousness of God' in Romans 1: For in the gospel 'the righteousness of God is revealed...as it is written'the righteous shall live by his faith." Finally in the same epistle, chapter 3, such a faith is called 'the righteousness of God.'...This is the righteousness given in place of the original righteousness lost in Adam."
- Philip Melanchthon would echo the words of Luther, "all our righteousness is the gatuitous imputation of God."
- In the imputation of Christ's righteousness to our account, Luther meant that "God averts his eyes from our sins, yes, even from our righteousness and virtues, and reckons us as righteous because of faith, which lays hold of his Son."

For God to justify His people means that He declares them righteous because of the work of Christ on their behalf. It is a forensic, or legal term; whereby God, as the great Judge declares His people righteous.

Therefore, our righteousness, as God's people, is a foreign righteousness, not from ourselves, but from Christ alone.

Philippians 3:9

"and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith,"

Romans 4:5

"But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness,"

"Those whom God effectually calls, he also freely justifies, not by infusing righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins, and by accounting and accepting their persons as righteous; not for anything wrought in them, or done by them, but for Christ's sake alone; not by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any other evangelical obedience to them, as their righteousness; but by imputing Christ's active obedience unto the whole law, and passive obedience in his death for their whole and sole righteousness by faith, which faith they have not of themselves; it is the gift of God."

Second London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689

VI. The Priesthood of Believers

- Another of Luther's tremendous contributions to Protestantism, was his assertion of the Priesthood of Believers.
- Luther would write, "[The] claim that only the pope may interpret Scripture is an outrageous fancied fable."
- At the famous Leipzig Debate in the summer of 1519, Luther stated: "I assert that a council has sometimes erred and may sometimes err. Nor has a council authority to establish new articles of faith. A council cannot make divine right out of that which by nature is not divine right. Councils have contradicted each other... A simply layman armed with Scripture is to be believed above a pope or council without... Neither the Church nor the pope can establish articles of faith. These must come from Scripture. For the sake of Scripture we should reject pope and council."
- In the *Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, Luther writes that, "All of us who have been baptized are priests without distinction...the sacrament of ordination, therefore, can be nothing other than...choosing a preacher..." Two important aspects of Luther's thinking are illustrated here.
- In Volume 6 of *Luther's Works*, the reformer declares that, "**Through baptism** we have all been ordained as priests." Luther could find no New Testament justification for the priestly caste that was part of the Catholic Church.

VII. All Christian Work is Sacred

- Finally, Luther laid the foundation for the assertion that all Christian work is sacred. This was the basis of what we now refer to as the Protestant Work Ethic.
- "It is pure invention that pope, bishops, priests and monks are to be called the spiritual estate, while princes, lords, artisans, and farmers are called the temporal estate...all Christians are truly of the spiritual estate, and there is among them no difference except that of office."
- In May of 1520, Luther published a tract entitled, *On Good Works*, noting that "faith in Christ is the first, highest, and most precious of all good works. In it, Luther criticized thoughs who "define good works so narrowly that they are made to consits only of praying in church, fasting, and almsgiving."
- Williston Walker writes, "This vindication of ordinary life in the world as the best field for the service of God, rather than monastic-ascetic flight from the world, was to be one of Luther's most improtant contributions to Protestant thought, as

well as one of the most significant departures from ancient and medieval conceptions of 'Christian perfection."

• Finally, Luther wrote, "Your work is a very sacred matter. God delights in it, and through it, He wants to bestow His blessings on you. This praise of work should be inscribed on all tools, on the forehead and faces that sweat from toiling."

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- Luther would pass away on February 18, 1546. His dying words are a fitting conclusion to a life of such consequence, "I am fully conscious and certain that I have taught correctly from the word of God, according to the service to which God pressed me against my will: I have taught correctly about faith, love, the cross, and the sacraments. Many accused me of proceeding too severely. Severely, that is true, and often too severely: but it was a question of the salvation of all: even my opponents."
- His wife Katie a former nun herself died four years later. Her final words are an appropriate ending to a study on the reclaiming of the Gospel message, "I will cleave to the Lord Christ as a burr to the cloth."