

Romans 3:19 - 28 The Reformation gives lasting truths! Pentecost 22 Oct. 30, 2016

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Grace and peace are ours from God our Father through faith alone in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

God's Word to teach us the only truths that can save us are written in Romans 3:19-28

These are Your words heavenly Father. Sanctify us so that by faith we know the truth. Your Word is truth!

Dear Christian friends,

Many people are talking about the Reformation since next year we'll celebrate the 500th anniversary. Sadly, people today talk of the "Reformation" as only an historic event with Martin Luther that has little effect on them. Yet we know the Reformation restored God's saving truths to us. The Roman church at Luther's time and today teaches: 1. God's grace is a power given to believers so they can do good works and merit a place in heaven. 2. It was taught that eternal life in heaven depended partly on Christ and partly on people's status of works with the church on earth. There was no certainty of salvation. People never knew if they had done enough. 3. They also taught that although Christ was spoken of as a Savior, He was often pictured as a judge ready to condemn. That's why so often saints were invoked to intercede with Him. It is no wonder that in his early life Luther despaired and said he hated this angry God.

But God loved him and led him to a university where he was able to teach the Bible, specifically the book of Romans. There, he finally understood God's truths. God's grace was not a power but His undeserved favor toward sinners. His love caused Him to send His Son to save us. Instead of our works, Luther clearly knew that we are saved by faith alone in the sacrifice of Christ Jesus. These are the Lutheran Reformation truths which are just as valid for us today as they were 500 years ago.

The Reformation gives lasting truths!

First, we need the law in all its fullness. There is no half measure with God. It's all or nothing. Paul wrote, *"No one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin."* (v.20) Our Monday Bible study asks the question, "How can they teach falsely and still say that they have the Bible?" Groups do that by dismissing parts of the Bible as not true or as not inspired by God or they redefine one part of the Bible and use it against the verses they don't like. Today many churches say that they are showing God's love by supporting abortion; they say they are showing love by redefining marriage or just throwing out the idea that God instituted marriage and people can live any way they want. The Bible says, *"They exchanged the truth of God for a lie."* (Romans 1:25)

God will not forget sins against Him. He is our Creator; we owe Him everything. His law and His demand for perfection will not change. And, we can't just pick one part of the law and forget the rest, hoping that it will be enough for God. We should admit that we sin daily and can't earn His love. Our sinfulness taints our works so that God sees nothing in us worthy of His praise. (v.23) If we were called into God's courtroom, we must plead guilty because it says, *"Every mouth will be silenced before Him and the whole world held accountable to God."* (v.19)

If anyone tries to be justified or declared innocent by keeping the law, the law he is trying to keep will condemn him. The Roman Catholic church states that people must be saved by faith and by works of love. But our works of love are never enough; and they will condemn us before God if we try to be saved through them. That's the message Luther learned and believed. It is a truth that still stands today! He realized that the purpose of God's law was to lead us to see that we cannot win God's favor. Yet, at the same time, as we repent of our sins and plead for His mercy, God offers so much more!

The other truth which Luther taught is that **our salvation is complete in Christ**. Paul wrote, *“This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.”* (v.22-24) Only God can save us from His judgment. In a regular court of law, if a judge declared a criminal justified or “not guilty,” the victims of the crime will complain that justice has not been served. We were guilty, but went free. Yet, God’s justice was met through His Son.

Throughout Jesus’ life on earth the God said He was worthy of praise for His perfect obedience. Yet, Christ took our sin on Himself. God found Him guilty and made Him pay the penalty for sin by dying. Paul wrote, *“God presented Him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in His blood.... He did it so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.”* (v. 25-26) Christ has fully covered our sins by His blood. On the Old Testament Day of Atonement the high priest approached the Ark of the Covenant which had God’s condemning laws inside it. The priest took the blood of a sacrifice and sprinkled it on top of the cover known as “the Mercy Seat” of God. Christ is the true mercy seat. His blood was shed completely to cover our sins. His perfect life is credited to us so that God praises us as perfect in Christ.

We receive God’s free gift of eternal life only through faith in Christ. We can add nothing to Jesus’ saving work. Picture a bridge over a large chasm. It’s held in perfect balance at one point in the middle. So Christ provides the perfect way to God. If we walk on the bridge by faith we’ll get safely to the other side. If we try to add our works to steady the bridge, it will become off balance and we will fall to our death. God has complete salvation through His Son. Believe this Reformation truth and it will be your treasure forever!

Second, proclaim these Reformation truths! A growing number of people in our country don’t know even famous Bible stories. If they don’t know them, they won’t know the saving Reformation truths. What if Martin Luther had discovered these wonderful truths and decided that they were too radical? What if he kept them to himself? God would have found someone else for the Reformation. Yet, Luther could not contain himself about the Gospel. In 1517 he nailed his early findings on the door of the Castle Church to debate the 95 theses. Rather than debate them, the statements were copied into the language of the people. And the Gospel quickly spread across many parts of northern Germany. The Reformation had begun!

Luther continued to study and compare the false teachings of his day with the clear teachings of the Bible. If church tradition, such as saying masses to the saints, led people away from Christ as the only source of salvation, Luther condemned it. This caused a great stir among Christian leaders of his time. They had gained money and power by using the tradition and laws to bind the people. Now God’s Word of the Gospel had made their threats meaningless. Luther continued to preach, teach, and write hymns to proclaim the saving truth, even when he was threatened by death.

Today, the devil still tries to stop us from speaking God’s truths. He wants people to be ignorant of their sin so they see no need of a Savior. He wants people to live in fear of the future. But God has given us His truth so we say with Paul, *“We maintain that [we are] justified by faith apart from observing the law.”* (v.28) We should daily pray that God would help us speak and live with confidence in Christ. God help us, like Martin Luther, to personally keep digging into God’s Word that we may better understand and believe from the law so we daily repent; and on the other hand we thank God that He is keeping us in the true faith by good news of Christ. The Bible is just as relevant today as always, and the truths of the Reformation are still precious to sinners like us and Martin Luther. With him, we hold up Christ for all people to see. Amen.