

St. John 8:31-32, Romans 3:20-24 & 28

Dear Friends in Christ,

This morning we are observing the Reformation although its official date is October 31<sup>st</sup>. It is a privilege and blessing to remind us that we worship in a Reformation Church. This is a Reformation Church. And by that I mean - first and foremost - this statement from the Augsburg Confession of our Lutheran Confessions:

It is also taught among us that we cannot obtain forgiveness of sin and righteousness before God by our own merits, works, or satisfactions, but that we receive forgiveness of sin and become righteous before God by grace, for Christ's sake, through faith, when we believe that Christ suffered for us and that for his sake our sin is forgiven and righteousness and eternal life are given to us. For God will regard and reckon this faith as righteousness, as Paul says in Romans 3:21-26 and 4:5. (Tappert, The Book of Concord, The Augsburg Confession, Article IV [Justification], p. 30.1-3.)

With this we believe, teach and confess that the Scriptures are the inspired, inerrant, authoritative Word of God, that the only true God is the Triune God, that Christ is God the Son and only Savior of fallen mankind, that God speaks to us and works and sustains faith in us through His chosen means: The written and spoken Word, and the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. We confess. . .

## **THIS IS WHERE WE STAND!**

### **I. Where We Never Want to Go.**

A number of you are familiar with Luther's work, "The Bondage of the Will." Near the close of the exceptional preface to the Packer-Johnston translation, which was first published in 1957 (61 years ago), the translators state the following which are excerpts from a larger paragraph - and I beg you from my heart to listen carefully to this from 61 years ago:

Much modern Protestantism would be neither owned nor even recognized by the pioneer Reformers. *The Bondage of the Will* fairly sets before us what they believed about the salvation of lost mankind. In the light of it, we are forced to ask whether Protestant Christendom has not tragically sold its birthright between Luther's day and our own [For the most part it has!]....Do we not too often try to minimize and gloss over doctrinal differences for the sake of inter-party peace? [That's a definite "yes"!]....Do we still believe that doctrine matters? [No! Not really!]....Is it not true, conversely, that it is rare today to hear proclaimed the diagnosis of our predicament which Luther - and Scripture - put forward: that man is hopeless and helpless in sin, fast bound in Satan's slavery, at enmity with God, blind and dead to the things of the Spirit?" [It is becoming extremely rare to hear the proclamation of man's condition before a Holy God!]. (The Bondage of the Will, translated by J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnston, Fleming H. Revell Company, 1957, pp. 59-60.)

As most of you know, I have referred to American Christianity as *Americanity*. I stand by that word of reference. It is the Americanized version of Christianity which has mostly sold out on every doctrine of Scripture and emphasizes the worldly comfort, happiness and wants of the individual. It is where we never want to go! But more . . .

### **II. The Dogged Reality.**

I'm entitling this part of the sermon "The Dogged Reality." Webster defines dogged as "Marked by stubborn determination." The Dogged Reality is this: Man's propensity to Sin.

Malcolm Nygren was a Presbyterian Pastor and author, and a long time resident of Champaign, Illinois. He died in 2015 at the age of 89. He wrote:

“Denying sin has not freed us from it any more than hiding death has kept us alive. It has only made us unable to deal with it....If we dare not admit to any sin, in the end we dare not admit that anything is sinful.”

We have had people say, “Well, we hear this all the time. We need to hear something more upbeat.” But, you see, there’s a problem here that calls for the persistent confrontation with the sin that *dogs* our lives: We struggle with sin, and sin all the time!!

If we’re not constantly reminded of our sin we will become self-righteous. We will judge others not according to their theology but according to our self-righteous tendency to think that they’re not living up to what we personally think. We will start to believe that God loves us because we are doing something that earns His love.

If we’re not consistently confronted with our sin Jesus will become less the Savior from sin, death and hell as Scriptures teach (Luke 1:76-77). He will become a good example to follow. We will start jumping into all sorts of ridiculous programs, such as the parade of absurdities we’ve witnessed over these past 40 plus years, instead of being **motivated** by **what Jesus did and promised**; namely, save us from eternal wailing and gnashing of our teeth!

Nygren’s statement is absolutely correct: “If we dare not admit to any sin, in the end we dare not admit that anything is sinful.” That is exactly where much of the church in this country has been heading for generations! “We want to grow!” “We want to make money!” “We want to be successful!” When that becomes the church’s thinking then it will have to appeal to the world’s thinking because the world wants absolutely nothing to do with the reality of sin and need of a Savior to pay for it. Listen carefully. God says through Isaiah . . .

Woe to those who draw iniquity with cords of falsehood, who draw sin as with cart ropes (that is, like animals who pull a cart loaded with sin)...woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness. (Is. 5:18 & 20)

And listen to what God says through Paul . . .

But understand this, that in the last days (which is where we are) there will come times of difficulty (the word refers to super-human, demonic strength). For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive (that is, blasphemers), disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy (that is, irreligious), heartless, unappeasable (that is, without natural affection, irreconcilable), slanderous, without self-control, brutal (beasts!), not loving good, treacherous (that is, betrayers), reckless, swollen with conceit (try self-esteem) lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people. (2 Tim. 3:1-5)

It’s the dogged reality: Stubborn determination to okay godlessness!

### III. Saved by the Gospel.

Well, here’s our direction; from the Gospel lesson: “So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, ‘If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.’” (Jn. 8:31,32) To abide in His Word is to live in His Word! It’s our food and drink for eternal life.

And here's the truth we know and always want to know, from our Epistle lesson:

"For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight (declared not guilty of sin), since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

"But now the righteousness of God (the perfect life God demands from every human) has been manifested apart from the law (the thinking if we do the best we can God will love and forgive us and take us into eternal life)....the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus (that is, He bought us from sin, death and hell through His Blood shed at Calvary)...For we hold that one is justified (pronounced "not guilty") by faith apart from works of the law. (Rom. 3:20-24 & 28)

This is what the Holy Spirit brought the great Reformer, Martin Luther, to see, believe, teach and confess. We are forever forgiven of our miserable sin and granted the gift of eternal life by grace through faith in Jesus Christ! The questions, regardless of how much they are ignored, are: "Does God love me? Will He see me through this maze of life? Will He forgive me all my sins? What's going to happen when I die?"

Well, here is what Scriptures teach, what Martin Luther boldly confessed, what our Lutheran Confessions teach, what we, with tears of joy proclaim from Scripture: We are "by grace...saved through faith. And this is not (our) own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast." (Eph. 2:8-9)

I've given you nothing new because there is nothing new! We are saved only by the Gospel of Jesus Christ! To cite Luther: "Therefore, (we) cannot and will not recant. Here (we) stand. (We) can do no other. God help us!"

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott

*REFORMATION SUNDAY*

*October 28, 2018*

*St. John 8:31-32, Romans 3:20-24 & 28:*

## ***“This Is Where We Stand”***

*I. Where We Never Want to Go.*

*II. The Dogged Reality.*

*III. Saved by the Gospel.*

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