

Romans 3:19-28

Dear Friends in Christ,

Martin Luther wrote:

See the great prosperity of the wicked, and by contrast the great adversity of the good.... Yet all this, which looks so much like injustice in God...is most easily cleared up by the light of the gospel and the knowledge of grace...in a single little word: *There is a life after this life; and all that is not punished and repaid here will be punished and repaid there....* (Martin Luther, The Bondage of the Will, translated by J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnston, Fleming H Revell Company, 1957, p. 57)

It's what most try to avoid. It's the last breath of the atheist's cry of unbelief. It's the delusion of the works righteous: good people earn God's love. It's the neglected reality of the world lover. It's this: Everyone will die; each will die alone; each will enter into.....what?

WHERE DO YOU STAND?

I. Remembering the Issue.

Ronald Wallace was Professor of Biblical Theology at Columbia Theological Seminary. He died in 2006. He made this observation:

The church's future today depends, not on its being able to assume a mighty and popular form of dignity, impressiveness, and stability before men, but simply in its being able to utter to the world the same life-giving word Jesus uttered from the cross.

The church was given its mission. "Make disciples...(by) baptizing them...and teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." (Matt. 28:19,20) Observe **all** - not selected pieces of what He commanded. The Great Commission has mostly been cut and scarred by the whining and wants of dying flesh! For all its efforts to win the masses with this world's song and dance the efforts of the church have torn out the heart of the Gospel message! And, still, everyone will die. Each will die alone. And each will enter into.....what? "Whoever believes will have eternal life" has been replaced with "Believe whatever makes you feel good about yourself!"

Martin Luther wrote:

"One should think of no other God than Christ. The god who does not speak through Christ is no God at all.

"Men seek God everywhere: but because they do not seek for him in Christ, they never find him." (*Daily Readings With Martin Luther*, Templegate Publishers, Springfield, Illinois, 1987, p. 40)

It's been said before. It bears repeating: The Reformation is not past tense. It's not some historical drama that's interesting to recall. When Martin Luther stood for the truth of Holy Scripture and cried out, "Here I stand, I can do no other," we stand on the same ground. God said through the prophet Jeremiah:

"Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the Lord." (Jer. 9:23,24)

To know and understand the Lord is the One “who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth” is fully and clearly revealed in the Word. In this we boast. And of the Word of God Paul writes, “the Gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes...” (Rom. 1:16).

II. We Are a Reformation Church.

And there is something else that needs repeating, especially at this hour; something that must be understood by everyone here: We are a Reformation Church. By that we confess in the first place this, as stated in 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 (that is, we become holy, acceptable before God by grace (God’s undeserved love), 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)

In the second place, we believe, teach and confess that the Holy Scriptures are the inspired, inerrant, and authoritative Word of God. They are not subject to change with the times, and, as stated in 2 Timothy 3:16, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness.” That is tied into Jesus’ statement: “Scripture cannot be broken.” (Jn. 10:34b)

In the third place, for the church to be the church it must always grasp the essence and totality of what Scriptures teach from that moment when God said to Adam, “but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.” (Gen. 2:17) Dying, death and damnation are the consequences of sin, as stated in our text:

“Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For by works of the law (doing perfectly what God demands ,which no one can do in the first place) no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

“But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law...the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe...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...

“For we hold that one is justified (forgiven and pronounced ‘not guilty’) by faith apart from works of the law.” (Rom. 3:19-24, & 28)

It is as Jesus said, “I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins.” (Jn. 8:24) With sin - regardless of all the positive thinking and happy, sunny days - with sin we are left with this world’s unceasing march with struggle, jealousy, hatred, disease, accident, murder, wanton lust, perversion and decadence. And death from sin is not simply the end of “here” but it is entrance into burning darkness and the horror of timeless separation from God.

I’ve shared this before, but what it represents has never gone away. I recall many years ago an atheist asking me, “What if you’re wrong about heaven and hell? What if there is nothing? Then what?” I said, “There is a heaven and a hell, but to answer your questions, if they didn’t exist it wouldn’t make any difference. I wouldn’t be aware if they didn’t exist.” And then I asked the person the obvious: “What

if you discover there is a heaven and hell, which there are? And what if you discover that Jesus is Who He says He is, which He is? Then what?" He smiled and responded with the absurd, "We'll see." Indeed, we will.

III. Where Do You Stand?

At the beginning of this sermon I placed Luther's statement before you: "in a single little word: *There is life after life; and all that is not punished and repaid here will be punished and repaid there...*". Luther was, of course, right. Those without a covering for their sin, those who stand naked before God with innumerable sins of thoughts and words and deeds which out-distance by innumerable light years their self-understood goodness - these will begin the unending punishment and payback.

The great Reformer, Dr. Martin Luther wrote:

Grace consists in this: that God is merciful to us, shows himself gracious for the sake of the Lord Christ, forgives all sins, and will not impute them to us for eternal death. That is grace: the forgiveness of sins for the sake of the Lord Christ, the covering-up of all sins.

We hold to the clear and eternal Word of God:

...the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. (All!) If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sin and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. (1 Jn. 1:7b-10)

We must move beyond the question of "Where do *you* stand?" God help us each to declare, "Here I stand, I can do no other!"

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott

REFORMATION SUNDAY

October 27, 2019

Romans 3:19-28:

“Where Do *You* Stand?”

- I. Remembering the Issue.
- II. We Are a Reformation Church.
- III. Where Do *You* Stand?

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