

REFORMATION

October 26, 2025

Romans 3:20-24,28:

## **There Is Nothing New to Say**

- I. Deformation
- II. "Lifeless but Cut Flowers"
- III. Nothing New

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Dear Friends in Christ,

“All talking stopped when the emperor and his advisors returned to the hall. Eck looked at Luther and said, ‘Martin, we are not interested in your argument about what the Bible does or does not say... I now ask you, Martin - and answer clearly and without any double talk - do you or do you not recant your books and the errors in them?’

“... Beads of sweat appeared on his face as he began. ‘Since your majesty and lordships want a simple, clear, and true answer, I will give it. Unless I am convinced by the teachings of Holy Scripture or by sound teaching - for I do not believe either the Pope or councils alone, since they have often made mistakes and have even said the exact opposite about the same point - I am tied by the Scriptures I have quoted and by my conscience. I cannot and will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither safe nor right. Here I stand. God help me! Amen.’” (Frederick Knoll, Luther, Concordia Publishing House, Saint Louis, 2003, PCP, 106, 107.)

Raymond J. Brown referred to “... The gradual loss of Christendom's strength, numbers, quality, and value among the citizenry of our era.” Unfortunately, much of the church has acquiesced to the wants and thinking of the day to maintain acceptance. On this Sunday, as we recognize the Reformation, which is officially this coming Friday, October 31<sup>st</sup> – on this Sunday...

## **THERE IS NOTHING NEW TO SAY**

### I. Deformation

I have kept an “on the street interview’ that was made in St, Louis 27 years ago during a visit by Pope John Paul. The person being interviewed said, “I think, that as in all religions, you take the parts that best fit your life and struggle with the others.” With that, I recalled this statement that was made by the early church father Augustine: “If you believe what you like in the gospel and reject what you do not like, it is not the gospel you believe, but yourself.”

I then recalled a lecture by one of my college professors from 62 years ago. I have referred to it in the past. The man was an atheist. Standing on top of his desk, he spent the last 15 minutes of a lecture ranting about how ridiculous religion is, especially Christianity. He closed the lecture with this statement: “Belief in God is stupid!” He didn't ask for comments or questions. No-one said a word. The class was dismissed.

Blaise Pascal referred to as a 17th century mathematician, physicist, theologian and philosopher, correctly observed, “Men despise religion; they hate it and fear it may be true.” I would say that this was the case for my professor. I would say, the more a person rants against God the greater the fear - and then comes the last heartbeat followed by a horrid discovery! Sadly, what this professor taught has muddied our entire education system.

### II. “Lifeless but Cut Flowers”

Your pastors would be rejected from most churches today since we teach that all people are by nature sinful, unworthy of God's love and eternally condemned unless they believe in Christ's payment for sin; that He is the only way to eternal life. Jesus' words, “Whoever believes in Him (in Jesus) is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God (Jn.3:18).” – Jesus' words would be and are rejected.

Since there's nothing new to say, please listen to these excerpts from the preface of the Packer-Johnson translation of Luther's *The Bondage of the Will*, published 68 years ago, keeping in mind that Luther considered his *Small Catechism* and *The Bondage of the Will* two of his most important works:

Much modern Protestantism would be neither owned nor even recognized by the pioneer reformers... 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... Do we not too often try to minimize and gloss over doctrinal differences for the sake of interparty peace?... Do we still believe that doctrine matters?... 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, and enmity with God, blind and dead to the things of the Spirit? (*The Bondage of the Will*, translated by J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnston, Fleming R. Revival company, 1957, pages 59-60).

Over the years I have referred to much of the church in America as the Americanized version of Christianity. I call it *Americanity*. Much of the church has sold out on so many if not all crucial doctrines of Scripture and accentuates social and individual wants.

For example, I recall from around 12 years ago when a funeral home called the church and said that a certain man wanted to know if he could have his deceased loved one "displayed" at Pilgrim for a visitation. That was the term he used: *displayed*. He did not want a service. The man who made the request and the deceased had both been members of this church years before, got distracted, lost interest, walked away, refused our pleas to return. Such is the "I want things my way" attitude. They were removed. We did not host the visitation. It has been stated...

Most of us desire a little illusion to spice up our reality but that is itself the greatest illusion - to think that attractive options can serve either to cover the consequences or enhance the prospects of reality. Illusion, however, dies hard and we are mostly self-kidders who continue to seek new life in beautiful but lifeless cut-flowers.

### III. Nothing New

I believe a number of you are familiar with the Lutheran Confessions as found in The Book of Concord. The Confessions are not a substitute for the Bible but state what we believe, teach, and confess according to what the Bible teaches. They were formulated and written as a response to the false teachings of Luther's day, and they do apply to our day. Please listen to these words of the Augsburg Confession:

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 4 [Justification], p.301-3.)

You might recall a reference from some years ago to a pastor Malcolm Nygren, a Presbyterian pastor and author who was a longtime 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 do not admit that anything is sinful." Nygren was correct! That's where we are today. And that brings us to our text for this morning from Romans 3:20-24,28, one of texts reflected in the statement from the Augsburg Confession:

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 (Rm.3:20-24,28).

Through the life, suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ God did everything necessary to win our forgiveness and eternal life. This is what the Holy Spirit brought the great Reformer, Martin Luther, to see, believe, confess and teach. The guilt and condemnation of sin are removed though the reality and struggle with sin are always there and will be until the Lord takes us home. The questions, "Does God love me?" – "Will He see me through this messed up dying world?" – "Will He forgive me all my sins?" – "What's going to happen when I die?" - have been answered. "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast (Eph.2:8-9)."

There is nothing new to say. The Reformation continues - and will to the end. Here we stand!

Amen!

Pastor Bill Abbott