

Romans 1:16,17

Dear Friends in Christ,

Next comes the abuse of eating and drinking, which gives us...a bad reputation in foreign lands, as though it were a special vice of ours. Preaching cannot stop it, so deeply is it rooted and so firmly has it got the upper hand. The waste of money would be its least evil, were it not followed by all the vices that accompany it - murder, adultery, stealing, blasphemy, and every other form of immorality. Government can do something to prevent it; otherwise, what Christ says will come to pass, that the last day shall come like a secret snare, when they shall be eating and drinking, marrying and wooing, building and planting, buying and selling. It is so much like what is going on that I sincerely hope the day of judgment is at hand, although very few people give it any thought.

This was written by Martin Luther in 1520 and is entitled "To The Christian Nobility." (Luther's Works, American Edition, Fortress Press/Philadelphia, 1966, Vol. 44. p. 214) I'm thinking if Luther could be here today he would be stunned that so much time has passed and the Lord hasn't returned. He would even be more stunned that the evils of his day have greatly intensified.

This is Reformation Sunday, and in spite of all the history that has passed, in spite of the incredible significance of October 31, 1517 and a little monk nailing the 95 thesis to the door of the castle church in Wittenberg, Germany and turning the church on its ear - in spite of all that, we're considering ...

## THE LAST REFORMATION

### I. Deformation.

In January, 1999, Pope John Paul visited St. Louis. In one on-the-street interview regarding that visit, a person said, "I think, that as in all religions, you take the parts that best fit your life and struggle with the others." And it was the church father Augustine who said, "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."

In a simplistic way, the on-the-street interview accurately pictures what most Christianity has become: Pick and choose what you like and don't like, but, whatever you do, comply with social demands - what everybody wants and wants to believe - a god in man's image. Blaise Pascal, the 17<sup>th</sup> century mathematician, physicist, theologian and philosopher very correctly observed, "Men despise religion (and I would add, particularly the Christian); they hate it and fear it may be true." Thus, the outcry of the Atheist/Evolutionist. Get rid of God and anything goes. Which might appear okay to many; at least until you reach the final moment of life here.

We've come some distance from 1517. We traversed The Reformation and, long ago, entered into the **Deformation** of Christianity. And "deformation" defined is, "the result of deforming; a change in form, especially for the worse...distortion; disfigurement." (Dictionary.com)

### II. Nothing Has Changed.

I want to tell you of an experience I had 28 years ago. It was a moment etched into my memory and life. It dealt with a Pilgrim brother who loved to go to church. He was in church every chance he had. I long ago sought his permission to share this incident (1) so others wouldn't think I was talking about him behind his back and (2) because I know there are those here who struggle with eternity.

The brother was afflicted with heart issues. On one of my first visits with him, I sat next to his sick bed and noted upset and conflict from his voice and movements. He was afraid and tearful, because the finality that we would prefer to ignore, and, maybe, sometimes, think it won't happen to us - that finality was facing him.

As I sat there and listened to him voice his fears and concerns, he stated what most hope will go away: "Pastor," he said with tears in his eyes, "I don't want to die. I'm afraid of death." My heart broke because we both knew that the reason for his fear of death wasn't because he was going to leave behind a wonderful world. It was because of the uncertainty of what he would face.

I then asked him the question I have asked here in funeral sermons and in private settings a multitude of times: "If God were to ask you why He should let you into heaven, what would you say?" He looked into my eyes and said, "I've always wondered about that. Quite frankly, I don't know."

That was Martin Luther's dilemma. "How can I know? How do I make myself right with God?" He opened the Scripture and these words, among others, ultimately confronted him; our text: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes...For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, 'The righteous shall live by faith.'" (Rom. 1:16,17) In other words, God counts us as righteous, perfectly obedient to His Law, though we are not. He counts us as righteous through faith in Christ's righteousness.

And that's it: It is through faith, not by our works which are destroyed by sin, that we know God's love and forgiveness. I put my very favorite verse concerning this issue in front of the Pilgrim brother; Romans 8:1: "There is therefore now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus." That verse follows Paul's confession of his still sinful ways: "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (Rom. 7:24) - the same death that confronted the Pilgrim brother. And this from the Book of Romans: "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God..." (Rom. 3:23) And this from Ephesians 2:8,9: "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast." And this, from Jesus: "...whoever believes has eternal life." (Jn. 3:16)

The next day, I stopped by to talk with the Pilgrim brother. I asked him how he was doing. He grinned and laughed and said, "Those Scriptures have changed everything! Now I know!" You see? In spite of the deformation of the church, nothing has really changed at all. This is still a very sinful, evil world. The need for God's love in Christ is without change!

### III. We Thank God.

Simply put, we thank God for Martin Luther and his words, "Here I stand. I can do no other." We thank God for using him to bring to the forefront of church history salvation by grace through faith alone in Jesus Christ; to bring to the forefront of church history the Holy Scriptures which are the inspired, inerrant, authoritative Word of God. They don't need a new approach; some sinful human's new vision. They don't need more grinning, honey dripping gurus and cute formulas. Come on! This is the very Word from Heaven. The only way sinful humans can "dress up" the Word of God is to diligently study it!

Simply put, The Great Commission of Jesus to make disciples of all nations still stands. The work of the church - that would include you and me - has not changed. What the Holy Spirit says of us comprises a tremendous and incomprehensible blessing, honor and responsibility: "...you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." (1 Pet. 2:9) Proclaim! You! Me! To the world!

I know: it's becoming more difficult. But, then, Jesus said it would. He said, "...many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end will be saved." (Matt. 24:10-13) To "endure" tells us there will be difficult moments. But, look, we have been given everything in Christ. The church cannot sit in the shadows wringing its hands. We know what's to come. Maybe, for some, the problem is that we have become very, very comfortable pursuing a very, very "this world" life style. And I don't really see that as a "Maybe it's the problem." It is.

Everything points to that moment. Everything points to that day - maybe, today - that day when the Lord Jesus Christ returns and brings the suffering and death of this world to its conclusion. For those who have hated and reject Him we're told, "Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn (wail, be saddened and horrified), and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory." (Matt. 24:30) But for those who believe; for those clinging to Christ we're told, "And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other." (Lk. 24:31)

We're told from Scriptures:

"For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage (encourage!) - one another with these words." (I Thess. 4:16-18)

We're in The Last Reformation! Here we stand. We can do no other. Indeed, a Mighty Fortress is our God! We cry, "Come, Lord Jesus!"

Amen!

Pastor Bill Abbott

*REFORMATION*

*October 25, 2015*

*Romans 1:16-17: “The Last Reformation”*

*I. Deformation.*

*II. Nothing Has Changed.*

*III. We Thank God.*

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