

In the name of Christ Jesus, dear fellow redeemed, (Ephesians 2:1-10; Romans 4:1-8,16-17; 2 Timothy 3:10-17)

It's hard to do a Reformation service and cover every aspect of the Reformation itself. Often times we have to pick one or two aspects of the Reformation and try to do it justice. This year I thought we could again consider the three truths that guided Luther's understanding of our salvation. It was by God's grace alone, through faith alone, revealed in Scripture alone. These three truths served as the foundation for a reformation in the church at Luther's time and still today. These same truths guide us as Lutherans who seek to preserve not just a Lutheran heritage, but a Biblical heritage that clearly teaches what God has revealed concerning our salvation in Christ Jesus. Let us consider LUTHER'S THREE SOLAS. We are saved 1) Sola gratia – by grace alone. We are saved 2) Sola fide – by faith alone. We are saved 3) Sola Scriptura – by Scripture alone.

The first foundational truth of the Reformation that we will consider is our salvation by grace alone based on **Ephesians 2:1-10** (please read on your own). Paul says we are dead in our sins. Something that is dead is obviously not alive. Paul is referring to our spiritual condition before God – that condition is dead, without life. All of us by our very nature are sinful. Our spiritual condition is dead to God but not dead to sin. We continue to gratify the cravings of our sinful nature. Like the rest we deserve only God's wrath and punishment. There is only one place we should be heading and that is eternal punishment in hell. Nothing but an act of God's grace could change our hopeless and helpless spiritual condition. There was absolutely nothing in us that moved God to do what he did for our salvation. It was entirely an act of his grace, his undeserved love for sinners. God did us the greatest favor of all. He substituted his Son Jesus to live under the law in our place and to die on the cross as the punishment for our sins. So sure is Paul of our salvation by God's grace that he speaks of heaven – our being seated with Christ in the heavenly realms – as having already happened. How can this even be possible? Paul says we are saved by grace alone. And now recreated in our new spiritual condition, alive in Christ, we are active in good works as we show our gratitude for God's saving grace.

Luther emphasized sola gratia – by grace alone. Luther was constantly troubled by his sins even from little on. He tried to do everything humanly possible to be acceptable in God's sight. Yet he was keenly aware that as a sinner he had miserably failed in earning his way to heaven. Luther even became a priest and lived in a monastery dedicating his life to God. He worshiped and prayed to God all day long, but he knew that his good works were still not pure. Such futility only reinforced Luther's hatred of God as the angry judge who only punishes sinners. Then by God's grace the Spirit led Luther to the Bible where the God of all mercy and grace is revealed. The one true God is not just an angry judge who punishes sin, which he certainly does. The one true God is also the loving God who amazingly forgives sin, not because of anything we as sinners have done but because of what Christ has done for us pouring out his lifeblood on the cross for our sins. Luther said, "Grace is freely given to the most undeserving and is not obtained by any strenuous efforts, endeavors, or works, either small or great, not be by the efforts of the best and most honorable men who have sought and followed righteousness with a burning zeal." He also said, "But conscience cannot be brought to rest and joy unless it has peace through this grace, that is, through the forgiveness of sins in Christ. Therefore there will be no peace for my bones and yours unless we hear the word 'grace' and cling to it steadfastly and faithfully. But then our conscience will surely find peace."

Luther believed as God's Word taught that we are saved sola gratia – by grace alone. This grace of God is received by another one of the great Reformation truths – sola fide – by faith alone.

The second foundational truth of the Reformation, by faith alone, is given to us in **Romans 4:1-8, 16-17** (please read on your own). In the previous chapter of Romans (chapter 3), Paul emphasized that we are justified freely by God's grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. In Christ a righteousness from God is revealed that saves us from our sins. Paul states that this righteousness from God is received by faith. Paul uses an O.T. hero of faith, Abraham, to illustrate this truth. How was Abraham saved? Was he saved because of his good works? Paul says Abraham believed. He believed that God would send the promised Savior. Abraham's faith was credited with Christ's righteousness not because of anything he did but by trusting in God's promise. Christ's righteousness and holiness was credited, given to Abraham as a gift, which he received by faith. Paul uses another great hero of faith from the O.T. – King David. Sins and transgressions are forgiven not because of what we do but because of what Christ has already done for us. The guilt and punishment for our sins are not charged to our account before God. Rather, our sins are covered by the blood of Christ, and God will not and cannot count these sins against us. This truth of salvation by grace through faith is not restricted to Jews or to those who live in North America. Paul says that Christ's righteousness and forgiveness is guaranteed to all of Abraham's offspring, to all who have the same saving faith as Abraham did. Like Abraham and David, those who rely not on their own works but put their

trust solely in the work and merits of Jesus Christ are given spiritual life with God now and eternal life with him in the resurrection on the Last Day.

Luther emphasized *sola fide* – by faith alone. Luther grew up and was raised in a very work-righteous religious climate. Heaven was earned. Good works were the ticket to eternity, despite some time to work those sins off in purgatory. Indulgences were sold to shorten the soul's time in purgatory. Pilgrimages to Rome and the adoration of relics were taught as ways to make the sinner more righteous. But such work-righteousness is exactly what Paul speaks against. It destroys salvation by faith alone in Christ. Again it was Luther's study of God's Word that led him to this saving truth. In Galatians Martin Luther was led by the Spirit to understand Paul's statement, "the just shall live by faith." He says it was as if the heavens were opened. His salvation was sure, not by works but by faith in Christ. Even faith itself he learned was not the work of sinners but what the Holy Spirit works in our hearts to receive Christ and his work. Luther says, "Righteousness is given to Abraham not insofar as he works, but insofar as he believes. Nor it is given to faith as a work we perform, but because of God's promise, which faith apprehends." He also said, "Faith is a divine work which God requires of us; but he himself must give us the strength to do it." Luther also reminds us, "Human reason looks to the law: This I have done; this I have not done – But when faith performs its proper office, it looks to absolutely nothing except Jesus Christ, the Son of God, given for the sins of the whole world. It does not look at love, does not say: What have I done? Which sin have I committed? What have I merited? It rather says: What has Christ done? What has Christ merited?"

Luther proclaimed God's truth that we are saved *sola gratia* – by grace alone, which is received *sola fide* – by faith alone, which is revealed *sola Scriptura* – by Scripture alone.

The third foundational truth of the Reformation is by Scripture alone which we read about in **2 Timothy 3:10-17** (please read on your own). Paul reminded Timothy that he should not to be surprised at being persecuted for following the Apostle's example and way of life. And it was only going to get worse. This is because unbelievers are deceiving and being deceived. They do not listen to the truth of God's Word but are led astray by the lies of Satan. In contrast to the deceivers and those being deceived by the devil, we follow God's truth in his holy Word. God's children continue in what they have learned from his Word. God's Word is truth. The Holy Scriptures makes us wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. But even this Word of God falls on deaf ears unless the Spirit works through that Word to bring a sinner, darkened in their understanding and dead in their sins to faith in Christ. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 2, "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned." How important it is, then, to continue to study and meditation on the Word of God. All Scripture, Genesis to Revelation, is God's Word. This Word is useful to every Christian in every circumstance of life. It teaches everything God wants us to know. It rebukes us when we do wrong. It corrects or restores us by directing us to Christ's forgiveness. It trains us in a life of righteousness and holiness. God's Word is our great heritage.

Luther spoke of *sola Scriptura* – by Scripture alone. You don't have to be a great scholar of Luther's life to know the importance he placed on the Word of God. His first order of business as a great reformer was to translate the Bible from Latin, which few Germans could even read, into German so that every one of his countrymen could read and study God's Word on their own. He also wrote the Small Catechism, which is still in use today over 400 years later, so parents could teach their children the basic truths of God's Word. Luther wrote commentaries on the books of the Bible, letters and treatises to those who opposed God's truth. He wrote more than most people read in a lifetime, all because he wanted to defend the truth of God's Word against any error. Luther said, "Is it not true that God's Word is greater and more important than faith? For God's Word is not based and built on faith, but faith is built on God's Word. Besides, faith may waver and change, but God's Word remains eternally true." Luther says, "Nothing is more beautiful in the eyes of God than a soul that loved to hear his Word." He also writes, "Learn, learn, I say, what a treasure you have in the Word of our Lord Jesus Christ: that there is no other help and aid against the devil, sin and eternal death than to cling to the Word of Christ, that is, to believe his promise and to make bold – to take him at his word."

These three truths: *sola gratia* - by grace alone, *sola fide* – by faith alone, *sola Scriptura* – by Scripture alone, that Luther restored during the Reformation still serve today as the foundational truths of the true Lutheran church. This is more than just a Lutheran heritage. This is God's saving message. Luther didn't even like the name Lutheran. He says, "I do not like it that the fold call our doctrine and people 'Lutheran' and that I must suffer them to disgrace God's Word with my name in this shameful manner. Nevertheless, they shall let this Luther, the 'Lutheran' doctrine and people, remain and come to honor." May God continue to preserve our Lutheran heritage of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, revealed in the Scripture alone. Amen.