

“Sola Fide – By Faith Alone!”

Sermon October 29, 2017

The Church needs constant reformation.

This year marks the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, an important event in the history of Western Civilization and the Christian Church. Many churches and groups are coming together to mark the occasion this fall. The Reformation started 500 years ago by the Roman Catholic priest and theological professor Martin Luther, and it was dated on October 31, 1517.

Who was Martin Luther?

Martin was born on November 10, 1483, in Eisleben, Germany.

- Luther's father decided that his son was to become a lawyer, so Martin went off to law school in Erfurt.
- But circumstances soon would place young Luther on a different path.
- Luther, instead of being a lawyer, became a monk.

Two experiences turned Luther's attention from law to the monastery.

1. First, Luther lost a close friend when the plague swept through Erfurt. This loss seems to have shaken the young Martin and turned his attention to deeper spiritual concerns.
2. The second, and more famous, reason Luther became a monk was that, soon after beginning law school, he was returning to Erfurt when he was overtaken by a sudden thunderstorm. A lightning bolt struck a tree close by. The young Luther, in a fit of fear, called upon God's help and vowed to become a monk if God would spare his life. After the storm, Luther entered the monastery of the Augustinian Hermits in July 1505.

Luther was a successful monk.

- He was ordained to the priesthood in 1507 and later appointed as an instructor at the new University of Wittenberg.
- As a young professor, Luther lectured on books of the Bible.
- He was also a pastor and preacher in the parish church, regularly preaching three sermons a week.

Luther started the reformation because he became annoyed by a piece of paper

- In 1460 Pope Sixtus IV decided to collect more money for Vatican and the Roman Church. For this, he created “Indulgences”.

- Indulgences were pieces of paper with papal insignia that granted remission of temporal punishment for sin.
- By the pope's order, people were told that the buying of indulgences not only was good for the sinner in this life, but also could be applied to deceased family members in purgatory as well.
- This had a profoundly powerful emotional appeal.
- According to the pope, sinners were given the opportunity to reduce or even end the suffering, pain, and punishment of beloved family members.

During Luther's generation, these elaborations of the doctrine of indulgences were still relatively new.

- In 1507, the next pope, Pope Julius II, permitted the sale of indulgences to raise money to build St. Peter's Basilica in Rome.
- The next pope, Pope Leo X renewed approval in 1513.
- In fact, Pope Leo, who was in Rome, made a deal with Albert of Brandenburg, archbishop of Mainz (Germany): if Archbishop Albert would agree to allow the sale of indulgences, Leo agreed to split the profits with him.
- Johan Tetzel, a monk, was hired to travel all over Germany to sell indulgences, whose sales pitch was, "Once a coin into the coffer clings, a soul from purgatory springs."

In Germany, there were princes who refused to let Johan Tetzel into their territory.

- In response, Tetzel set up shop just over their border.
- The stage was set for the Reformation.

Martin Luther's 95 Theses

- Luther was upset that people believed that buying the indulgences could save their spirit.
- Luther was concerned that this action abused the Bible, and he shared his concerns with his congregation in Wittenberg and with his students as well.
- The church door functioned as an academic bulletin board, so it was the appropriate place to notify fellow faculty members of a faculty meeting.
- For this, he summarized his 95 THESES and placed them on the church doors.

Luther was NOT REVOLTING against the Roman Catholic Church.

- The posting of the theses was not an act of rebellion against the church.
- Instead, it was the work of a responsible church theologian who was seeking to address what he discovered to be false Catholic teaching.

Rome response was not positive.

Even though the 95 Theses were intended for discussion purposes of the theological faculty at Wittenberg, the papacy saw in them an implicit challenge to the authority of Rome.

Luther was forced in many ways to change his mind about the 95 THESES but he stood firm on the Bible.

- For this, he was excluded from the Roman Catholic Church.

At the same time, in Switzerland, John Calvin developed similar teachings as he was the minister in Geneva and the director of Theological University.

- Their followers were called REFORMERS.

Students from England, who were taught at Wittenberg by Luther, had a major impact in bringing the Reformation to Great Britain. Probably the most important person in the English Reformation was William Tyndale, who translated the Bible into English. In 1524, he left England and studied at Wittenberg. His first edition of the New Testament was published in Flanders in 1526.

The English Reformation was also influenced by John Calvin. He was a Frenchman from Paris. The reformers were not welcomed in Paris. Their lives were in danger for this; many of them found refuge in Geneva. Calvin's pulpit and teaching ministry in Geneva, Switzerland became known around the world. Geneva became a city of refuge for exiles who fled there for safety from all over Europe.

John Knox, who led the Reformation in Scotland, spent some time in Switzerland at the feet of Calvin, learning his Reformation theology there. Though Calvin was twenty-six years younger than Luther, Luther's views made a dramatic impact on the young Calvin's life while he was still in his twenties. Unfortunately, Luther and Calvin never met in person.

The Reformation of the 16th century changed Christianity forever.

Visionary pastors and leaders like Martin Luther and John Calvin started and spread a movement that transformed Christianity forever and led to creating those Protestant denominations that exist today.

- They, as Reformers, were guided by the conviction that the church of their day had drifted away from the original teachings of Christ, especially in regard to: what it was teaching about salvation; how people can be forgiven of sin; where we are going and what is happening to us after we die; what the

value is of Jesus' death and His resurrection; and how we can receive eternal life with God.

- The Reformation re-oriented Christianity on the original message of Jesus.

“The Roman Catholic Church today accepts that there was the need of reform most obvious in the exaggerated practice of indulgences [which] by the Middle Ages ... had been vulgarized to include remission of punishment in purgatory and even remission of sins themselves.”

Michael Glazier and Monika K. Hellwig, eds.
THE MODERN CATHOLIC ENCYCLOPEDIA
(Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2004), p. 506

SOLA FIDE – BY FAITH ALONE

One of the principle teachings of Reformation also was **justification by faith alone**: faith in God, faith in what God proclaimed to us in the Scripture and through His Son Jesus Christ.

Sola fide emphasizes salvation as a free gift of God.

- We cannot buy out God.

Sola fide stated that salvation is a free gift to all who accept Jesus Christ by faith.

- *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”* John 3:16

Salvation is NOT based on human effort or good deeds

- *“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God, not by works, so that no one can boast.”*
Ephesians 2:8-9

The most important things you have to know about your future is that *“People are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment”*. Hebrew 9: 27

- In front of the judgement throne, only two things will be asked from us:
 - o Did you believe in the Saviour and Redeemer Jesus Christ?
 - o Did you follow Him and His commandments faithfully?

Some are very confused and misinformed, thinking that their **actions** will satisfy God.

- I met people who said that they were expecting God to forgive them because once a week they went into a church and lit up a candle.
- Others said: Who can enter into heaven if not me? I paid enough to God so far so He is obligated to prioritize me.

We are judged righteous in the sight of God purely on the basis of our faith.

- We are saved solely through faith in Jesus Christ because of God's grace and Christ's merit alone.
- We are NOT saved by our merits or declared righteous by our good works.
- God grants salvation, not because of the good things we do, and despite our sin.

We can only stand before God by His grace as he mercifully attributes to us the righteousness of Jesus Christ and attributes to Him the consequences of our sins.

- Jesus' life of perfect righteousness is counted as ours, and our records of sin and failure were counted to Jesus when he died on the cross.

Justification is a declaration of God, based on the work of Christ, what Christ did for me on Golgotha.

- It flows from God's grace and it comes to you and me, not by anything we might do but by faith alone.
- We may state the full doctrine as: *Justification is the act of God by which he declares sinners to be righteous because of Christ alone, by grace alone, through faith alone.*

Salvation is a gift which cannot be earned, but only received by faith.

I close my sermon with two very important statements from Heidelberg Catechism, written in 1563.

Why do you say that you are righteous by faith alone?

- Not because God accepts me for the worthiness of my faith.
- Rather, only Christ's satisfaction, righteousness and holiness make me righteous before God,
- and I can receive this righteousness and make it mine in no other way than by faith alone.

How are you righteous before God now that you believe all this?

- Only by true faith in Jesus Christ:
- That is, although my conscience accuses me that I have grievously sinned against all God's commandments and never kept any of them,
- and that I still am always inclined to all evil,
- nevertheless God, without any merit of mine,
- out of His grace,
- grants and credits to me
- the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ,

- as if I had never sinned nor been a sinner, as if I had been perfectly obedient as Christ was obedient for me,
- if only I accept this gift with a believing heart.