



SAFE HARBOR

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500 Years and Counting

On October 31, 1517 Martin Luther published his 95 Theses in Wittenberg, Germany calling for a debate over the theology of salvation and the abuses he saw within the Roman Catholic Church. There is some conflicting doubts if it was Luther who posted them on the church door or someone else, or if they printed and sent to Luther's friends and fellow scholars. Whatever the truth, this event was pivotal in the reform movement that arose. Luther was by no means the first reformer but his impact was the most significant and lasting. The Theses were primarily directed towards the sale of indulgences within the Church and the abuse that characterized these sales. His insistence on the doctrine of salvation by faith alone, *Sole Fide* and his insistence of the primacy of Scripture as the sole authority, *Sole Scriptura* shook the very foundation of a Church that had slipped far away from being the Spiritual Force and had been more and more a secular body that moved at the whim of the Pope. Luther followed the lead of Francis of Assisi, Savonarola, John Hus, John Wycliffe and others who had seen the Church slipping away from the Bride of Christ and becoming in nature the church of Laodicea.

There are some truths that should have carried over from the Reformation into our lives today.

First is that the salvation we cherish is solely the work of God. When Christ became our sacrifice for sin he won salvation for all humankind that comes by faith and not any works. It is not dependent on any ritual, sacrament or, in Luther's case, indulgence.

Secondly Luther attested to the primacy of the word of God, Scripture, as the basis of faith. The key to our justification is hearing the Word of God, taking hold of it, clinging to it, and not calling God a liar. Gospel is the Word of God with power to save us because it gives Christ, his forgiveness and grace and righteousness to all who put their faith in it.

Thirdly, if we are justified by faith alone then works of love serve our neighbors not our desire to justify ourselves or make ourselves holy. Christian love takes root in our hearts because we believe what Christ has done. Thus we continue in the law of love truly from our hearts because of what Christ has done.

Finally we are reminded that the kindling that started the blaze of Reformation burning was the corruption of the Church. The indulgences that the 95 Theses mostly spoke against were in essence money producing schemes which played upon the concern for salvation, a salvation already available through faith in Christ. The funds paid for many buildings, church offices, luxuries for the wealthy, etc. The unashamed greed of the princes, clergy and church hierarchy literally preyed upon those who could least afford it while giving a false hope of salvation.

It is not in cathedrals, megachurches, media ministries that the work of salvation is accomplished. “So faith comes by hearing and hearing through the word of Christ.(Rom. 10:17) That faith then shows itself in a changed life, filled with works love and charity which are the outward signs of a pure and holy religion. By retreating to the weekly gathering of people who come together to have their ears tickled and their hearts resting in this “pious” duty they are led to believe that all is well.

So the prayer is that you may find the truth of the Gospel and that it will set you free to live in the faith that God intended for you.

Reflections

November 1st is traditionally celebrated as “All Saints Day” originally designated to honor all the minor saints of the Church. It is a celebration that is fitting today, not as a day of veneration but rather a remembrance of the history of the Church through the ages. It reminds us of the faithful sharing of the Gospel in reaching out to humanity.

In virtually every agrarian culture there is a harvest celebration to give thanks for the fruitfulness of the harvest. It was also a marking of the time to rest from the labors of planting, to prepare for the coming year, to worship God as Ultimate Provider, and to ask for His grace to be given abundantly.

Is this part of your Thanksgiving Celebration? Our modern culture has lost the lessons of faith that the farm teaches. In its place is a superficial gratitude and a praise for the works of man. Faith demands that we share the abundance that God provides out of the love which is ours through Christ Jesus.

After Thanksgiving we enter into the Advent Season of the 4 Sundays prior to Christmas. This is a time for the preparation of the heart and looking forward Christmas. It is a time of expectation and hope. The candles remind of the progressively growing light that found its full brilliance in the Incarnation.

Finally we come to the celebration of Christmas. We celebrate the Incarnation of Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith. He is the One who would secure salvation and enable restoration of unity with God. The mystery of the how of the Incarnation is hidden from our understanding. It is by faith that we accept the reality of this history of this event and the ongoing effects in the changing of lives.

So to close, consider, “God loves the world so much that He gave His Only Son that the ones who find faith in Him would not perish but have eternal life and fellowship with their Creator.

For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world but in order that the world might be saved through Him.”

Words of Encouragement

Romans 5:6-11 English Standard Version (ESV)

⁶ For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— ⁸ but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹ Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. ¹⁰ For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. ¹¹ More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.