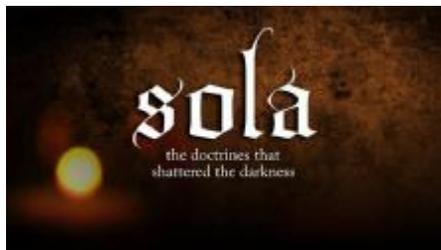


Reformation Sunday: October 24/25, 2015

Reformation Hallmarks



It was in April, 1521, that a young Augustinian monk by the name of Martin Luther was called before Holy Roman Emperor at the Diet or Council of Worms. Luther thought he would have a chance to defend his ideas. Emperor Charles would only accept an ironclad recantation. What Charles got was Luther's defiant "Here I Stand" speech that we just heard dramatically presented in the 2003 Luther movie. It was a defining moment in the Reformation.



We use catchphrases all the time to make things memorable. For Walmart it is "Save Money. Live Better." For KFC it's "Finger Lickin' Good." What about the two words that have defined our worship life? Loved+Sent. The Protestant Reformation also has given us some memorable watchwords by which we remember not only the reason for the power of this reforming movement in Christian history. You have heard these words before. *Sola gratia. Sola fide. Sola Scriptura.* Do you remember their meaning? You should. They are *Reformation Hallmarks.*

Grace is God's motive



"Pay me what you owe me." That is language we understand. You put in a long workweek and you expect to be paid for your hard labor. We fully support St. Paul's counsel to the Thessalonians: "If someone will not work, neither shall he eat." When somebody invites you to dinner, there is the implied expectation that you will return the favor. Which is why grace is so disarming. It doesn't ask for anything in return. Grace= "God's Riches at Christ's Expense." "And if by grace," says St. Paul, "then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace." The beginning of the Gospel is *sola gratia*. Latin for "grace alone." We are saved by grace alone.



My newest grandson is precious to a fault. He smells good. His smile lights up a room. When he's sleeping his face is angelic. But he's a handful. And he's got this fussy time every night as he fights going to sleep. This much is true. He is totally and completely dependent upon others for his survival. *God bless all the moms and dads that give sacrificially of their resources—especially their sleep—to provide this care!* Liam can do nothing except eat and sleep and fill an occasional diaper. His care is *sola gratia*. This is our

Grace is God's motive



first *Reformation Hallmark*.

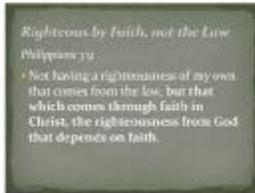
God cares for you, he saves you—from the guilt and curse of your sin—because he loves you. It's just that simple. There is nothing you can do to change that. You can grieve him by your misconduct. You can reject him as irrelevant. You can even deny that he exists. But you cannot change him. He will always love you because “God is love.” We are uncomfortable with this kind of grace because it is counter-intuitive to everything we have learned in life. We don't like to be indebted to another. And when it comes to our salvation, the debt is enormous. Our Reformation Hallmark exists because there was and still is the tendency to want to participate, to add something, some contribution of our own, to our salvation. Otherwise, why should God save me any more than the intolerable neighbor down the street? Martin Luther understood that *he* was that intolerable neighbor. So he held tenaciously to *sola gratia*. He says, “So Paul discards all boasted free will, all human virtue, righteousness, and good works. Paul concludes that they are all nothing and are wholly perverted, however brilliant and worthy they may appear, and [he] teaches that we must be saved solely by the grace of God. Works never merit heaven; heaven is conferred purely of grace.” Your takeaway? Do not attempt to manipulate God by your “virtuous” actions, and do not flee from God because of your grievous sin. He loves you! *Sola gratia*.

Faith is God's gift



St. Paul: “By grace you have been saved *through faith*.” If grace is God's *motive*, faith is God's *gift*. He saves us through faith, and faith alone. We all want to believe in something. I want to believe that my orthopedist is the best and that my broken finger will heal properly. I want to believe that my therapist knows her stuff and will restore my hand

to full function; just as we want to believe in our mechanic, our tax consultant, our legislator. Too often we are disappointed. When you hear the *Reformation Hallmark sola fide*, “faith alone”, this is not faith in “happily ever after” or “wishing upon a star.” This is faith which has an object, and that object is Jesus. We are saved by grace through faith *in Jesus Christ*. Our confidence is in Jesus and what he accomplished through his sacrificial death on the cross. Our faith is that he took *my* sin, he took *your* sin to the cross, and there paid its awful price. Jesus took our sin; He gave us his righteousness. Believe and live!



The Bible teaches “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.” St. Paul would interpret this for us. “Understand, then, that those who have faith are children of Abraham. Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: “All nations will be blessed through you.” So those who rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith” (Gal 3:6-9). Though all others disappoint. Though all our friends betray us and our family desert us. Though the mountains fall into the heart of the sea. God will faithful remain. His promise to you in Jesus—of forgiveness, life and salvation—his promise is resolute, unwavering. Hold onto that promise by faith and you will never be disappointed. *Sola fide*. Faith *alone*. “All who rely on the works of the law are under a curse,” St. Paul says. “But now apart from the law, the righteousness of God has been made known through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. For we maintain that a person is justified by faith in Jesus apart from the works of the law.” (Rom. 3:21-24). Lay down your heavy burdens and your vain strivings. Jesus did the heavy lifting at the cross. Luther puts a capstone on *sola fide* for us: “In my heart reigns this one article: Faith in my dear Lord Christ, the beginning, middle and end of whatever spiritual and divine thoughts I may have.”



Ever felt overwhelmed by the explosion of information swirling around you. My “to read” book stack grows faster than my ability to read them. My email inbox overloads faster than my circuit breaker when I turn on my outside Christmas lights. Between news feeds on my iPhone, talk radio, TV and newspapers, I can’t keep up. Little wonder that something as established and unchanging as the Bible, though steadfastly a best seller, yet it remains a mystery to so many. There are simply too many “experts” who would counsel us on how to live and what to believe. How do you distinguish good counsel from so much noise? If grace is God’s motive, and faith is God’s gift, then Scripture is his means. *Sola Scriptura* is our

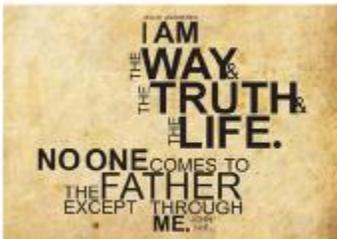
Scripture is God's means



third *Reformation Hallmark*.

We call Scripture a “means of grace.” Why? Because God attaches promises to his Word that he attaches to no other resource.

- *The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever.* Isaiah 40:8. As fast as something becomes news, it fades away. 9/11, the moon landing, Pearl Harbor, the stock market crash: As quickly as they capture our attention they fade from memory. God’s word always retains its grasp on our condition and its vitality for our life.
- *Your word is a lamp for my feet and a light on my path.* Psalm 119:105 Jesus says “wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction.” Each generation fears for its children and the world they are inheriting. To ground them in the Word of God is to give them guidance and insight into navigating the dangerous choices they will confront.
- *How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!* Psalm 119:103 The bitter taste of guilt and shame, of defeat and despair, these lay heavily upon our tongues too often. We need the “sweeter than honey” word of God and its declaration that “God so loves the world” and “Father forgive them.” There is no other place to find these words.
- *But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.* John 20:31 The Bible reveals Jesus. And he is the “one thing needful” in all of life. With Jesus we can face all things. Without him even the simplest of things can overwhelm us.



Our *Reformation Hallmarks* of *Sola gratia, sola fide, sola Scriptura*, these are signposts. Unlike popular slogans that point us to a product or service, they point us to a person. They point us to Jesus, who is the way the truth and the life. Above all other things, this is the gift that the Reformation has given us. It restored the Gospel of the glory and grace of God in the face of Jesus. And he has shown us the way to the Father. You will never be disappointed on that journey. Amen!