

October 28, 2001

Reformation Sunday

The Ninety-five Theses

Of this Luther knew nothing until some time afterward. For him, the provocation lay in the extravagant claims of an old, tried hand at this kind of thing, the Dominican salesman of indulgences Johann Tetzel. With these claims in mind, Luther drew up the Ninety-five Theses, "for the purpose of eliciting truth," and may have fastened them on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, on October 31, 1517, the eve of All Saints' Day and of the great exposure of relics there.

On October 31, 1517 a German monk and professor of theology by the name of Martin Luther nailed a piece of paper on the Wittenburg Church door. This paper contained 95 errors of the Catholic Church. Those errors centered around the church selling indulgences, or forgiveness of sins. The church developed the doctrine of Purgatory, a place just short of heaven. Then Roman preachers went throughout the areas controlled by Rome with boxes. The message was that when the money went into the box, a soul was released from Purgatory.

The purpose of the money was to build St. Peter's Basilica in Rome.

Martin Luther challenged the Church and the pope, and revealed to the people the wickedness of the practice of selling indulgences.

In fact, one point Luther's theses made was, "If money in the box freed souls from Purgatory, then why did not the pope sell all he had and put it in the box?"

Historians mark Luther's challenge against the Church as the beginning of the Modern Age. It is commonly called the Reformation. The Revolution which followed Luther's stand changed the world. Great religious, economic, political, and social ideas swept through Europe, molding Europe and eventually the United States of America into the greatest civilizations in history. These ideas, many which we cherish to this day, were contained in seed form in the Bible and cultivated during the Reformation.

Basically, the 95 points of Luther's theses were against Rome's corrupt practice of selling indulgences. Luther called attention to the fact that the practice was wickedly corrupt, and had nothing to do with the forgiveness of sins nor with one's relationship with God. Luther's 95 points were ultimately summed up by 4 great Scriptural truths:

1. Sola Scriptura (Scripture alone)
2. Sola Christus (Christ alone)
3. Sola gratia (grace alone)
4. Sola fide (faith alone)

If any day should be honorable among Non-Romanists, it should be October 31. Instead, there are more people honoring the Romanist high holy day, Halloween, than even know about the Reformation. In fact, Halloween is second in spending only to Christmas.

Though I don't believe the Baptist came out of the Reformation, I certainly hold to the four main points that the Reformation stood on.

I claim to be a Reformed Baptist, not because I came from Rome nor because I hold to the infant baptism that is a Roman holdover. I proudly claim that title because I hold firmly to the following four points:

1. Scripture alone
2. Christ alone
3. Grace alone
4. Faith alone

First, *Sola Scriptura*, or *Scripture alone*.

Of course, this is where it all starts. If one cannot accept the Scripture as the final rule for all faith and action, we have no further argument with them.

2 Timothy 3:10 *But thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, patience, 11 Persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra; what persecutions I endured: but out of them all the Lord delivered me. 12 Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. 13 But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived. 14 But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; 15 And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. 16 All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:*

Now, so the reader will not think that the word of God only contains instruction in religion, Paul goes on to say,

17 That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

All good works is pretty much an open ended statement. Every work, thought and action, is to be a good work, or it is a **bad work**.

Holy Scripture alone defines good work and bad work God defines good, not man.

Holy Scripture alone tells us how to live

Holy Scripture alone tells us how to please God and how to have eternal life.

Martin Luther went against the Church of Rome, which up to that time, pretty much held the Christian world in its grips. But the individual members of the Church were held to the doctrines and traditions of the Church, and were not allowed to think for themselves. They had to accept what the Church taught regardless of the word of God.

Since Luther, the Protestant pressure on Rome has forced Rome to back off of their strong stand on tradition and church teaching. This is especially true in non Roman countries.

I find it hard to believe that folks do not believe that God has given us instructions for all faith and actions, especially among those who claim to be preachers or pastors.

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The author is an Episcopal priest, and he compares the Muslim fundamentalist to Christian fundamentalist. And a FANATICAL fundamentalist is one who considers his holy book as the ultimate source of knowledge.

Second, *Sola Christus*, or *Christ alone*.

This is speaking of Christ alone for salvation.

Acts 4:8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel, 9 If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole; 10 Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole. 11 This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. 12 Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.

John 14:6 Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.

2 John 1:7 ¶ For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist. 8 Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which

we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward. 9 Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son.

Though the name of Christ may be used in all the churches we know of today, if He is not presented as the **only way** to the Heavenly Father, the church is **not part of the Christian religion**. Here we see that many Protestant churches have left the Reformed Faith they have left Christ. Without Christ, they are not Christian, but pagan churches.

Third, *Sola gratia*, or *grace alone*.

Grace must be understood in the light of

Philippians 2:13 *For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.*

Grace is God giving us both the desire and the power to please Him. We must realize that we are fallen sinners.

This is a major disagreement between **Arminianism** and **Calvinism** who seeks whom first? Does fallen man seek God first or does God seek fallen man first?

Grace alone says that ***while we were yet sinners, God loved us.***

Grace alone says that we have done nothing, nor can we do anything to deserve Him working with His power in us.

Ephesians 2:1 *And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; 2 Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: 3 Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. 4 ¶ But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, 5 Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) 6 And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: 7 That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: 9 Not of works, lest any man should boast. 10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.*

James 1:18 *Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.*

Grace alone everything is totally of the Lord.

The vast majority of churches and Christians today are Arminian, for they say they have within themselves the power to believe the gospel and turn to Christ.

Fourth, *Sola fide*, or *faith alone*.

Again, speaking primary of Salvation and of seeing God.

Romans 3:19 ¶ *Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. 20 Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin. 21 But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; 22 Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: 23 For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; 24 **Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:** 25 Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of*

sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; 26 To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. 27 Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith. 28 Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law. 29 Is he the God of the Jews only? is he not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also: 30 Seeing it is one God, which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith. 31 Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law.

Luther was against the selling of indulgences, or the promise of forgiveness of sins in exchange for money to build St. Peter's Basilica. Paul makes it clear that justification is by faith alone, apart from any works of the law. But in v. 31, he is quick to add that justification will make the sinner desire to establish the law, or keep the law.

Ephesians 2:10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

Luther made a point of this, that repentance is not noted by the coins in the box but by the change in life. Justification means change of life, or there is not justification. Though we are justified by faith and without faith it is impossible to please God, justification will change one's outlook on life.

Seemingly in a contradiction, there are those who claim to be of the Reformed Faith who demand the need for infant baptism. In making that demand, they have denied that salvation is by faith, for how can an infant exercise faith in Christ? And hence they deny a key point of the Reformation, **FAITH ALONE**.

Galatians 3:1-13

The blessings of Abraham are passed down by faith, not by the law. In other words, natural law does not make one a child of Abraham according to the promise, including the blessings. Rather spiritual law, faith in Christ, makes one the legal heir to Abraham's blessing.

I can identify with the Reformed Faith based upon these four points. I believe the hold over from Rome, Infant Baptism, is totally unscriptural, though that Baptism is a key point of the Reformed movement. My unity is with the four points:

1. Scripture alone
2. Christ alone
3. Grace alone
4. Faith alone