

The Importance of the Gospel in Reformation

I have been thinking about this day ever since January 1 of this year. Today is very significant in the life of even Baptist churches. It marks the Sunday of Reformation that “officially” began on October 31, 1517. Do the math and yes, this will be the 500th year of the Protestant Reformation. We mark October 31, 1517. For it was the day Martin Luther nailed the 95 theses to the door of Castle Church in Wittenburg, Germany. The sound of the hammer is much like the sound of the first shot of the American Revolution that was heard around the world.

As we have learned on Wednesday nights on occasion, Luther was not the only reformer. There were others. The spark perhaps started by John Wycliffe who desired a Bible in the language so that the common plough boy could read it. John Hus preached the Word of God in the language of the people in Bohemia. There were group of reformers who saw the need for baptism of believers. They all were “re-baptized.” For this, they received the name anabaptist. Many lost their lives because of the simple act of baptism. Menno Simons was one of the leaders of the Anabaptist movement. Today the group who continue in that teaching are the Mennonites. In England, reformation was taking place. Many saw the need for a pure church in the Church of England. Thus, they gained the name Puritans. Later this group evolved to be called Separatists. Two men took their following and left England to go to Amsterdam to escape persecution. While there, John Smyth and Thomas Helwys were influenced by the Mennonites. After being baptized, their new group began. Helwys returned to England and began what we know now as the Baptist Church.

All the reformers can summarize their faith in one statement.

Our being made spiritually alive, and God’s becoming 100% for us in Christ is

- By grace alone
- On the basis of Christ alone
- Received through faith alone
- So that all things lead ultimately to the glory of God alone
- With Scripture alone as the final, decisive authority for discerning, teaching, and defending these truths.

The first four are the Gospel as proclaimed in the fifth, Scripture, the Word of God.

Reading and studying the reformers for the past year or so, I can clearly see that the reformation does not have as its origin any one or two men. The reformation has as its origin God as He revealed Himself to men and women through scripture alone. Only after God revealed Himself to these men and women through scripture did they so move to bring in the Reformation.

So, this morning, in the time we have before the Lord’s Supper, I want us to take this Sunday of the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation to look at the importance of Scripture as it proclaims the Gospel.

Have your Bible. Galatians 1:6-10. We will break away from John for today.

6 I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel;

7 which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.

8 But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed!

9 As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!

10 For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ.

There are some strong words in these verses. I want to present this in light of what I consider to be the key to the whole of the reformation which is the recognition of scripture alone being the final and decisive authority of truth. Truth is centered on God, for God is truth. Scripture proclaims the truth of the Gospel which is the central theme of these verses. The gospel is simply the good news that our being made spiritually alive, and God's becoming 100% for us is in Jesus Christ.

Must be acknowledged as the only Gospel

This is the whole purpose of the letter to the Galatians. Paul had come into Galatia region and had started churches whose sole foundation is the good news that in Christ alone is forgiveness of sin and eternal life. There is nothing else. As Paul left the region, in came others who disturbed the Galatian churches with a different gospel, a distorted gospel. If you want to get right down to what Paul was saying. These proclaimers of another gospel were proclaiming a perverted gospel. As verse 6 tells us some quickly abandoned, changed allegiance. As the scripture indicates, these deserters changed who they honored and worship and have abandoned God, not just the gospel. Verse 7 is the key to understanding that we must acknowledge the Gospel of Jesus Christ as the only Gospel. The first part of that verse reads literally there is not another. There is no other gospel. There is no other remedy for sin. There is no other means of being rescued from sin and all that it brings. There is no other means through which we become right with God. The scripture goes further in the seriousness of acknowledging only one Gospel. Look again at verse 8 and 9. If any man or woman preaches to you a gospel contrary to what you have heard, or even an angel from heaven preaches a contrary gospel, let them be what? Accursed. The same is repeated in verse 9. Accursed is to be dedicated to the destruction by God. It is not Paul doing the destruction. They will face the Almighty God Himself. So, as you can see this is serious stuff.

You be careful of what you hear on TV. I watched one person talking recently. They used scripture. But they took the scripture completely out of context. They sounded good. They sounded right. They sounded like a preacher. Early in my ministry here, we had a man preaching for a search committee. He yelled, and proclaimed. The committee was impressed in how he delivered his sermon. But the committee and some of our people did not hear and pick up on the heresy he preached.

You be careful of what you hear on internet. YouTube is not always the most reliable authority on truth.

Must be preached

The true Gospel must be proclaimed. The word used in original language is literally translated evangelize. It the proclamation of the good news of Jesus Christ. It is not only to be done in the pulpit. It is something you can do and are to do. Some of you have been taught how to. Now you bear the responsibility to proclaim. These early reformers of the reformation experienced the good news, and they could not help but to proclaim the good news.

Must be served in the manner of a bond-servant

The proclaiming of the good news was not a manner of pleasing men. That is so contrary to the nature of the Gospel. The Gospel offends. It is offensive because it reveals our sinfulness. It reveals our wrong. We live in a world where there is now a new right to not be offended. So, that to which we are called to do, is so counter-cultural these days. For us to have a heart that seeks to please God rather than man is the heart of a bond-servant, a slave. Note how Paul saw Himself tells his heart. Verse 10 says, "For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ."

That which you have experienced is now that to which you have been entrusted.

Must be received

Verse 9 gives that teaching, indirectly, but it is there. To receive the Gospel is to hear it, understand it, and trust the Christ that makes it alive in our lives.

We get an idea of what happens when the Gospel is received when you look at the early verses of 1 Thessalonians. The people received the word in tribulation with much joy of the Holy Spirit. They became examples, and proclaimers of the Word to those around that city by their actions and by their words.

When you receive it, you will become a different person. That is promised of scripture. When you receive it, you will be empowered to live and serve God in His power.

All because of Christ in our lives. To that which we give thanks. We give thanks through the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Giving thanks for giving his body to be broken for us. Giving thanks for shedding His blood for the forgiveness of our sins.