



Reformation History #1: Indulgences

by Pastor Glenn Huebel

Note: October 31, 2017 will be the 500th anniversary of the Reformation of the Church through Martin Luther. I will devote my newsletter articles during this year (November 2016-October 2017) to Reformation history and its theology. The world will be focusing upon the Reformation this year. Lutherans ought to be able and willing to articulate why we are Lutherans today. It is a magnificent witnessing opportunity.

"When a penny in the coffer rings, a soul from Purgatory springs." This was the sales pitch of Johann Tetzel in the early 16th century. He hawked forgiveness of sins for a price, not only for the living, but for those souls suffering in purgatory. Purgatory was conceived to be a temporary holding pond for dead Christians who had not gained sufficient merit in life to go directly to heaven. In this holding area they would be "purged" of remaining sins through sufferings. Tetzel was selling indulgences authorized by the Pope himself. These indulgences were a kind of "get out of jail free card." Theoretically they could reduce time in purgatory, or even "spring" a soul from purgatory immediately. They could also give partial or complete forgiveness of sins to the living. This was a lucrative business for the Church - all profit, no expense.



The Pope as the Antichrist, signing and selling indulgences, from Luther's 1521 *Passional Christi und Antichristi*, by Lucas Cranach the Elder.

The idea of indulgences began with the Crusades. It was a way to incentivize Christian men to go fight for Jesus. In the course of time, the theologians of the Church worked to provide a theological basis and justification for this pragmatic and economic necessity. Technically, the absolution of a priest alone removed a mortal sin and its eternal judgment. But the temporal judgments for sin and the judgments of purgatory could be removed by an indulgence. Was this forgiveness (or the merits that earned forgiveness) created out of thin air? That would never do! The Pope was selling merits that had been earned. Some of the canonized "saints" had presumably earned more merits than they themselves needed for passage into heaven. Superfluous merits of the saints, together with those of Jesus, were stored in a Treasury of merits to be distributed as the Pope saw fit. The Pope alone, in Roman theology, has the power of the keys. It is not clear how one determined the number of merits available to distribute, but evidently the supply was inexhaustible. Naturally, these merits were not only a valuable incentive for manipulating behavior, but an excellent fundraising opportunity. In the 16th century, Pope Julius II needed funds to build the great St. Peter's basilica in Rome. He authorized the selling of indulgences in Germany in 1510. Pope Leo X revived this indulgence in 1515. Unprincipled men like Johann Tetzel were more than willing to use this opportunity to feather their own nests through sales commissions. They knew how to pluck the heartstrings. Such greedy charlatans are still with us today, unfortunately.

Martin Luther, a 34 year old monk and professor in Wittenberg, Germany, was not the only one who recognized the scam. His Elector, Frederick the Wise, had already

(Continued on page 2)

Inside this issue:

Library Fundraiser	2
Deaconess Field Work	2
Who Can Discern His Errors?	3
Miscellany	4

*That you may believe that Jesus is the Christ,
the Son of God, and that by believing
you may have life in His name. —John 20:31*

forbidden indulgences to be sold in his lands. In fact the corruption and greed of the religious leaders of the Church in that day was deplored by all, even laymen. The people knew very well that the Church needed reforming. They just did not have the power to clean house. By his formal protest against the sale of

indulgences, Luther ignited a blaze that needed only a spark. Luther had not yet come to maturity in the doctrine of justification when this event occurred, but the attention his protest received drove him further into Scripture and the discovery of the marvelous Gospel of Jesus, the good news that we are forgiven for

all sins and punishment by grace for Christ's sake through faith alone. We celebrate the nailing of the 95 theses on October 31, 1517 as the event that sparked the Reformation and the glorious proclamation of the Gospel. I will take up the subject of the 95 theses in the next Reformation article.

Help our Library!

Order from schwans.com and use
campaign # **29877**



Our church and school library is conducting a fundraiser through the Schwan's corporation. Messiah will receive 20% of every food purchase made from Schwan's, either by phone or online, using the **code 29877**, between now and December 21. Gift card purchases (one per customer) will give us 40%! This includes new and repeat customers.

Funds will be used to purchase new books for our church members and Academy students of all ages: enduring works of literature for young children through adults, theological books for youth and adults, and quality non-fiction books for all ages. Please consider participating in this fundraiser!

With Schwan's Home Service, you get hundreds of high-quality products, including USDA choice meats and Grade A vegetables, flash frozen at the peak of freshness, conveniently delivered right to your door. Visit Schwans.com to get started. Or, purchase through, our campaign page: <https://www.schwans-cares.com/c/29877>

Deaconess Field Work — by Pamela Buhler



As a new deaconess student at Concordia Theological Seminary, I would like to introduce myself to the members of Messiah. I am the wife of Buckley Buhler and a mother of six precious children. My husband and I decided it was time for me to enter the deaconess distance program at Fort Wayne this fall. I am now

beginning my deaconess field work here at Messiah. My

field work will consist of calling or visiting members and their loved ones as directed by my supervisors. My focus will be on women in the congregation and community under the supervision of Pastor Huebel and Pastor Chryst. My field work will also include, but is not limited to, participating in the following ministries: Pregnancy Help 4U, Angel Tree, Swaddling Clothes, nursing home visits, and ministries which feed the needy. If you have any desire to reach out to me, I can be reached at 972-342-7697.

“Who can discern his errors?” Psalm 19:12

by Pastor Tom Chryst



Even strict Calvinists who teach “Total Depravity” give with one hand and take away with the other: for they also teach that once saved, the sinner cannot fall. But if “once saved – always saved” is really true, what are we to make about all the Scriptural warnings, like

making a “shipwreck of faith” and “Be careful lest you fall”?

Lutheran theology has the deepest, darkest, fullest, broadest, most thorough understanding of sin.

Evangelicals minimize sin in many ways. Some believe that once conversion happens, Christians don't sin anymore! Others minimize sin by teaching the non-scriptural doctrine of the “age of accountability”. Baptism isn't necessary for the forgiveness of sins, because, after all, that infant isn't accountable for sin, they say. Others teach that we can gain entire mastery over sin in this life. And many seem to believe that sin can be dealt with, minimized, or controlled by exercise of the law.

Rome semi-Pelagianizes sin. They teach that in some sense one can cooperate with God to earn salvation, in a sense paying for your own sins (at least in part). But this takes away from Jesus, the only Savior and sacrifice for sin.

Joel Osteen simply ignores sin. It's apparently too much of a downer. Instead the problem for his theology becomes “wrong thinking”. Maybe that's also why he talks a lot about “God” and very little about “Christ”. Without a sin problem do you really need a Savior?

Secularists make sin clinical. Psychology is offered to explain all manner of human misbehavior, which is stripped of moral value judgments. But sin can't be fixed by therapy. And sin's guilt doesn't go away if I re-define it in some modern terms.

Hedonists revel in sin. “If it feels good, do it!” is their mantra. That can never end well.

But Lutherans... we confess sin. We teach the thorough and complete corruption of human nature that scripture teaches. “In sin did my mother conceive me” (Psalm 51), and so we are sinful even at birth. “Our best works are as filthy rags” (Isaiah 64:6), and so even what looks good to me is inadequate before God. “Out of the heart come sinful desires” (Matthew 15). Sin doesn't just happen to us, it comes from us, it's inherited to our very nature. “The Spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Matthew 26:41). Indeed, we are weak in our sins – weaker than we know. For, “who can discern his errors?” (Psalm 19:12) We see some of our sins, but we can't really comprehend how sinful we are. We are burdened by some of our sins, but it's impossible for us to see or know everything we do wrong. Rather, we confess the truth that Scripture teaches us: that we are poor, miserable sinners, who sin in thought, word and deed, by what we do and by what we leave undone.

We can't explain sin away. We can't make it look good by comparison to someone else's sins that are worse. We can't make up for our sin by being extra good. We can't put sin in a little box somewhere and hope it goes away. Sin and its wages of death hang over us constantly like a sword of Damocles. One day, the sharp blade will fall. Doom is on the horizon. And there's nothing you can do about it.

Rather, let us fall on the mercies of Christ and his cross

to do with sin what only he can: forgive it, freely and fully. Only the blood of Christ is powerful enough to cover sin. Only Jesus is strong enough, good enough, wise enough, faithful enough to do what must be done. Only Jesus died on a cross for you and all fallen humanity. And so only Jesus can save you from a fate worse than death.

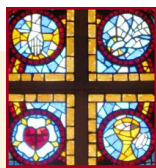
So cast off your fig leaves, whatever they may be. Bring your sins to Christ. Wicked thoughts. Poisonous words. Foul deeds. Glaring omissions and obvious commissions. The burdens that weigh upon you and the sins you know you don't even know. All are dissolved by the grace of God in Christ.

Let your sins be strong, for indeed “who can discern his errors?” Who can have any idea how big and bad his sins are? Who can know the extent? But let His grace be stronger, for so it always is, in Christ.

In the font, the bread, the cup, and the sure word of absolution: your paths are made straight, for you are in Christ. And your sins are gone, gone, gone.

Lord Jesus, forgive us for the multitude of our sins of every variety and severity, in every aspect of our lives. Assure us of the sufficient and complete forgiveness which you suffered and died to procure for all mankind, but even for a wretch such as me. By Your Spirit, empower us to go and sin no more, for the love of Your Holy Name and in service to your neighbor, for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.





Messiah Lutheran Church & School

The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod

1308 Whitley Rd. Keller, TX 76248

Church Office: (817) 431-2345

Academy Office: (817) 431-5486

Sunday Worship: 8:00 a.m. & 10:45 a.m.

Sunday School & Adult Bible Class: 9:30 a.m.

Rev. Glenn Huebel, Senior Pastor
Rev. Thomas Chryst, Associate Pastor

www.messiahkeller.org

A Service of Thanksgiving

Wednesday, November 23, at 7:00 p.m.

Let us enter His gates with thanksgiving!

Miscellany (/ˈmɪsəˌlənē/) noun. —a mixture or collection of different things



Christmas by Candlelight: will be held on Monday, December 5, at 7:00pm. Please mark your calendars and plan on joining us this

Advent season for our ladies dessert social by candlelight. If you would like to host or co-host a table this year please give Joan Burk or Pamela Buhler a call and they will get you a hostess packet. Tickets are available in the narthex on Sunday morning.

Help wanted! The library needs help with covering books and preparing them for cataloging, shelving books, and shelf-reading. No experience necessary—we will

show you what to do. Some jobs can be done at home. If you would like to help in the library, please see Marcia Huebel.

Hymnal Sale! Our hymnal, the **Lutheran Service Book**, is ten years old. To celebrate, Concordia Publishing House is offering them for a sale price. Normally \$25.99, they are available until Ash Wednesday for \$20.00. The leather gift edition, regularly \$40.99 is on sale for \$36.00. You can order yourself at www.cph.org until Ash Wednesday. Or, we will be placing a group order on December 1. There is no sign up sheet. Just write down the number and type of hymnal you would like, along with your name and phone or email address, and submit it to the

church office with payment. Please add in \$3.50 per hymnal for shipping. (This is less than shipping an individual copy to your home.) That brings the price to \$23.50 for the pew edition and \$39.50 for the leather. Please contact Marcia Huebel if you have any questions.

Our Braille Center needs paper towel rolls and egg cartons to use as packing materials.

Plastic grocery bags are a hot commodity at Messiah! Save them for the Braille Center for packaging, or the Bags Mat-ter group, who turns them into sleeping mats for the homeless.



Dining for Dollars

Wednesday, November 16, 4—9pm

**at the Alliance Mooyah
9604 Old Denton Rd Suite 108
Fort Worth, TX 76244**