

Can the Reformation Message of the Gospel Matter Even Today?



The Reformation is 500 years old this year, if you haven't heard. Martin Luther brought Christ back to the center of the theological universe, as Copernicus brought the sun back to the center of our solar system. The Reformation begun in 1517 is the movement based on an old, old message from the Word of God. 500 years is really old and we are blest to celebrate it! Does the Reformation message still matter today? Absolutely!! But, it is a bit more challenging today to get that message out. While it is true that times have changed and this is a different world than the one that was in Luther's day 500 years ago. But, for all the technology, all the so-called wisdom, we really haven't changed all that much.

In Luther's day, people had devised a plan to get right with God. They were constantly beaten down with the reality that they were sinners; they needed to make amends, if you will, with the righteous judge of heaven and earth. So, there was a system set up in the Roman Church to pay for your sins with indulgences, penances. Now, we are not as religiously guilty today, but we are still guilty and even many who aren't religious feel that just as in Luther's day.

With all the psychoses and problems, many today feel just as guilty as in Luther's day, thinking that they can do works of righteousness to overcome the big problems of the world, the big problems in their life. Their pride makes them think that they are ultimately in control. That might sound modern, but that's the oldest sin of all. But sadly, at the same time, most people don't believe or feel that they must get right with God.

This is not just a particular blindness of today. There were other times in history where people felt exactly the same way we do today. Nonetheless, we still have these things that overwhelm us, we feel judgments that are waiting for us, and we live oftentimes in the terror of our own mistakes. One different is that we just don't pay for it the way people of Luther's time tried to do it. For instance, there are people today who actually feel more righteous than others because of the car they drive, the light bulbs they use, or the taxes they pay, and so much of that is the same about assuaging guilt. But here's the point; just as true, even that kind of guilt cannot so easily be dismissed. Even worse, that kind of guilt can also be used to manipulate us, not for our good but for our ill.

We sometimes yearn for leaders to solve all our problems ... that's another troubling similarity with the ancients. There are false messiahs then just like today. The Reformation message, then, was like a lightning bolt that hit the culture. It undermined all that public works righteousness stuff and said that the way to deal with real sin and guilt was to look to God in heaven Who had every right to judge, but instead came to save people by forgiving them as a gift of His grace in Jesus alone. And that message shocked the world and it changed the world too! Suddenly, life was no longer lived to just overcome guilt. God did that! Now it could be lived in His grace, to give Him glory, to serve others in His Name joyfully and to let God not only transform their lives, but even their communities as well. That understanding of what it means to get "right with God" by grace, through faith in Jesus alone, that is a whole new way to look at life.

It has led to many wonderful freedoms; but as sinful people, we've also taken it for granted. People have a hard time thinking about their powerlessness in dealing with sin and guilt as well as the wonderful potential when their lives are in Christ alone by grace. It seems we always find a way to get back into the same predicaments as in Luther's day.

So, that message would not only seem to be just as relevant as in the day of Luther, but perhaps even more so today. All this talk about being "***saved by grace alone through faith in Jesus,***" is really talking about what it means to ultimately be free. In Galatians 5 it says, "***It is for freedom that you have been set free, do not let yourselves again be burdened with a yoke of slavery.***"

As we're talking about this freedom, it's a real freedom that can't be bought, it can't be earned, and it can only be received by grace, and lived in grace, in joy, which makes it sound relevant to today. But it challenges our self-righteousness, our over-estimation of our self-sufficiency, and of course, it exposes our need for life on God's terms. It's just as needed today, just as powerful as ever, and just as available.

That's the View from Here.

Pastor

Bill

Winter