

Title: The Reformation

In October, we remember the Reformation. the rediscovery of the joy of being a Christian, the rediscovery that the promise of eternal life in Heaven, the very promise that God would take care of us, our VERY Salvation, comes to us as a gift. Amen

Has anyone ever asked you “When were you saved?” I’m usually not sure how to answer that. I know what they are asking... They want to know if I am a Christian. They want to know if I am saved. They want to know if I am going to Heaven. However, many times they are asking “when did I made a decision to become a Christian?” They are asking “if and when did I become a believer.” However, these questions are based on some assumptions. It assumes my salvation is dependent on my decision to become a Christian. It assumes that my salvation is dependent on my efforts to follow Christ. Now, don’t get me wrong. It is a good thing to make decisions to follow Christ. It is a good thing to make a commitment to holiness. However, it is important to remember that your salvation was not because you made a decision. Your salvation was totally a gift. Your salvation was a gift from God.

During Martin Luther’s time, during the Reformation, these kind of questions were foremost on people’s minds. In answer to these questions, three sayings came out of the Reformation, called the Three Great Solas! In English, that means the three Great “Alones”! It sounds so much cooler in Latin. The three Great Solas - Sola Gratia, Sola Fide, Sola Scriptura answered the question - “How do I know if I am saved.

Sola Gratia means Grace alone. Sola Fide means Faith alone. Sola Scripture means Scripture alone. Grace alone was the answer to the question “What do I have to do to get saved.” Grace means “gift” Sola Gratia meant that your ability to get to heaven was a gift. There was nothing you could do that was good enough for you to be worthy of heaven. Your ability to get to heaven was totally a gift a gift from God. No decision on your part... no walk of holiness on your part... merited your salvation.

So, this naturally led to the next question “If I cannot work my way to heaven then, ‘How DO I get into heaven?’” Sola Fide, faith alone, gave us the answer. It told us that by simply believing in Jesus, not just with your mind but trusting Jesus trusting in his promises, trusting that He was the way, the truth and life and following him, having faith in Jesus saved you. Faith in Jesus is what connected you to God, Faith in Jesus is what made you a child of God. Faith in Jesus is what saved you.

Thirdly, in answer to the question, How can I be assured these things are true? The third Sola, “Sola Scriptura - Scripture Alone” said that you can be assured that the promises are true because God told them to you. He told them to you in the Bible. John 3:16 God so loved the world that he gave is only son, that whoever believed in him shall not perish but have eternal life. No other source of information is needed.

St Paul, in his letters to the Church in Rome, had to deal with the Jewish leadership, who struggled with this. They couldn't accept the fact that Jesus was the answer, that Jesus was the way, the truth and the light. It was too much for them to admit that "they;" "the pure blooded Jews" were NOT "the righteous," that "they themselves" did not hold "the way, the truth and the light." The Pharisees believed they were saved because they were related to Abraham, to whom was given the promise of salvation. They believed they were saved because they followed the Law of God. But St. Paul said "no, no, no. You are not saved by your works. You are saved by faith. Even Abraham was saved NOT by his works NOT by his obedience, but by his faith, by his faith in the promise of the Messiah of God.

So, what does it mean to be saved by faith? This was the major discovery of the Reformation, or rather, it was the major re-discovery of the Reformation. Just prior to the Reformation, it was believed that you could work your way into Heaven. Scripture tells us that in the Gospel, in the good news of our salvation, the righteousness of God was revealed. Earn (i.e. "pay for") the righteousness of God and Heaven was yours. Martin Luther used to struggle with this. At the time, Luther understood that only a righteous man could come before God. Luther originally understood the righteousness of God meant "the perfection of God," "His virtue of being good." So, logically, he thought, only a man who had "the virtue of being good" could come before God. But he also knew from experience that all men were sinful and imperfect. So Luther thought to himself, how could "revealing the righteousness of God, be a Gospel?" All it does is tell me that "I am sinful and unworthy of heaven." What kind of Gospel is that?

But then the Holy Spirit showed Luther that the Gospel meant something else. He began to realize that the "righteousness of God" was not a thing to be imitated, but rather it was a gift. The righteousness, that it speaks of, is not a perfection of God, which we were to try to achieve. The righteousness, that it speaks of, is a status which comes to us through faith in Christ. What does that mean to have a status of righteousness before God? Since the fall of Adam and Eve mankind was stuck in Sin. We were unable to do the righteous things required for salvation. Our sinfulness earned death and hell. However, when we were stuck in our sinfulness, when we were unable to be righteous before God, when we were destined for death and hell someone came up and said - "I will be righteous for them. Not only that, but I'll suffer the cost of their sinfulness for them, the cost being death. I will die for them, I will go to the executioner so that they can go free." That person was Jesus.

A man is made righteous not from following the law, or by doing the righteous things. A man is made righteous because God marks him as righteous. We were given the status of righteous. At your baptism God marked you as one redeemed by Christ. At your baptism the Holy Spirit brought you faith. Luther wrote: When I understood it... the light of the gospel came into my soul. The gates of paradise opened, and I walked through. Salvation was a gift. Salvation was through faith in Christ. Faith means believing and receiving the message that His death on the cross, 2000 years ago, paid for your sins. What an awesome gift that is, that when we were unworthy when we were enemies of God, Jesus stomped right in and changed how God sees us. God now sees us in a radical new way, not as enemies but as his children. We have been

converted from slaves into children of God... from creatures worthy of God's wrath into creatures receiving God's love. And as God's children, God has granted us eternal life in Heaven. You are a new creation. You are loved by God. This is the Gospel that we live in. The life of a Christian is a thing of joy!!!

When were you saved? 2000 years ago, when a man named Jesus died on a cross for your sins. Even the people who have not heard the Gospel, have their sins paid for, too. However, our connection to that gift comes through faith. A better question to ask if you want to know if a person is a Christian is "When did you receive faith?" For many, they received it as a child at their baptism, when the miraculous word of God combined with the waters of baptism and washed your sins away, bringing the Holy Spirit and faith. For others, faith came as an adult, when they heard the promises of God and believed, and in obedience entered the waters of Baptism.

But as it turns out, even the question itself is not the point. Forget the question. Celebrate that you are free. This is the gift of salvation. You are free. Free from death. Free from sin. Free to serve God. That's what the Reformation was all about. Freedom As Christ said, "know the truth and the truth will set you free." We are freed from our debt of death. We are freed from Hell. We are no longer enemies of God, no longer slaves to sin. What an awesome gift that is that when we were unworthy when we were enemies of God, Jesus stomped right in and changed how God sees us. God now sees us in a radical new way, not as enemies but as his children. We have been freed from being slaves to being children of God, from creatures worthy of God's wrath to creatures receiving God's love. And as God's children, God has granted us eternal life in Heaven. You are a new creation. You are loved by God. The life of a Christian is a thing of joy!!! You are free.

This freedom has formed us into a family. This freedom binds us together as citizens of a kingdom. the kingdom of God. This freedom binds us not only in heaven but on Earth as well. For God has made us His church here on Earth as well. You are a citizen of the greatest kingdom in the universe. You are a citizen of a kingdom with the greatest freedom in the universe. Celebrate! Amen.