

God Reforms His Church by His Word
II Chronicles 34:29-33, Reformation Sunday
November 1, 2009

Beloved of the Lord.....Was Luther a rebel or a reformer? Did Luther rebel against the pope and the Roman Catholic Church or did Luther work to reform it by God's Word? Luther by no means was a rebel as many believe, rather he in all sincerity worked to reform the Catholic Church by the Gospel. In 1517 when he posted the 95 Theses on the door of his church, he did not the next day leave the Church of Rome. Indeed when others like Carlstadt taught the people to riot and rebel against the Catholic Church Luther taught the people that riots are the work of the devil and Christians are to labor only by word of mouth. No matter how right a man may be, he puts himself in the wrong by using force. Luther was not a rebel, but a reformer. He did not leave the Catholic Church, but the Catholic Church left him. In 1527, when the pope sent Luther the Papal Bull of excommunication, Luther for the sake of the Gospel publicly burned it saying, "Because you have grieved the Holy One of God, the eternal fire consume you." Luther was not a rebel, but a reformer by the power of the Gospel.

When we speak properly of a reformation, it is God Himself who reforms His Church solely through the preaching of the Word. When we then as Christians see abuses and errors among people we do not try to compel them to believe the truth with threats of force, rather we speak God's Word to them for the reformation of their soul. "Reform takes up no weapons, seeks no revenge of its own, but it simply confronts those doing harm with the fact that their behavior is harmful, and asks that they change it, so that they should be helpful instead" (Young). The only weapon God has given us for the growth, defense, and preservation of the Church is His Gospel Word. His Word alone carries in it the power to reform, turn, and transform the heart. The great Reformation which began in 1517 came about simply by the preaching of the pure and unadulterated Gospel of Jesus Christ.

I. Josiah and his reforms. In the sad history of wicked kings who followed after Solomon, there is the shining example of Josiah the Reformer. When he was only sixteen "while he was yet young, he began to seek after the God of David his father and in the twelfth year [of his reign] he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem from the high places." As a king in a Theocracy where God's Word alone had the rule, Josiah broke apart the pagan alters, and beat their graven images to powder. When he

repaired Solomon's Temple, the priest Hilkiah "found a book of the law of the Lord given by Moses." This was most likely the original manuscript written by the hand of Moses, the first five books of the Bible. Notice this was God's law given by Moses, a proof of verbal inspiration. The Scriptures "contain no errors or contradictions, but that they are in all their parts and words the infallible truth." God reforms His Church by His Word.

After Josiah heard all the words of God's law, he was filled with grief and terror over his sins and that of his people. In true sorrow of heart he humbled himself before the Lord, even tearing up his clothing, crying, and praying for God's mercy. Through a woman prophet named "Huldah" Josiah was told God would indeed pour out his wrath upon the people for their sins, yet because Josiah had humbled himself, Josiah would go to his grave in peace. The Lord said to Josiah, "neither shall thine eyes see all the evil that I will bring upon this palce." After this Josiah gathered all the people of Judah and Jerusalem together, "great and small", rich and poor, men, women, and children, and in Solomon's Temple Josiah "read in their ears all the words of the book of the covenant." Josiah made a public oath before God to walk faithfully in God's commandments, "with all his heart and with all his soul." His people take the same oath. In like manner Jesus said, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself."

Among the Old Testament saints, Josiah stands as a true reformer among men. Like Martin Luther, he taught God's Word to the people of a crooked and perverse nation. We too should use God's Word to rebuke and correct the sins of our nation today. As Josiah's outward words and deeds testified to the faith of Christ within so our words and deeds testify. Josiah's vow reminds us of our own vow when we joined this congregation, either by baptism, confirmation, or affirmation to the Word of Truth. We renounced the devil and all his works and ways. We confessed the Father who created us, the Son who redeemed us, and the Spirit who sanctified us. We vowed to make diligent use of His Means of Grace "and lead a godly life, even unto the end." We promised "I will, with the help of God." Our promises, the promises of every believer, are the fruits of God's Gospel promises to us. When we are grieved over our sins and heartily sorry for them, in Holy Communion God promises us His True Body and Blood are "given and shed for you for the remission of sins." His Gospel promises then are the promises we need to keep our own promises to Him. We commune

to receive strength to obtain a holier life. In the Christian Church, we obey God's commandments for the sake of the Gospel. Ephesians 5 says, "The fruit of the Spirit *is* in all goodness and righteousness and truth.....have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove *them*."

II. Luther and the Reformation. As God used Josiah to reform His Church in the Old Testament, so God later used Martin Luther to reform His Church in the Middle Ages. Though as a monk Luther had been a captive to the papistic teaching that good works are the path to heaven, the light of God's grace fell upon Luther the moment he understood God gives sinners the righteousness of Christ by faith! Suddenly the gates of paradise were open before him! The Catholic monk Luther began preaching the Gospel. It was really Luther's love for the Gospel then, which caused him to decry the sale of indulgences, by hammering those 95 Theses to the Castle Church door in the year 1517.

It is noteworthy that Luther did not attack the outwardly wicked lives of the popes, though he had intimate knowledge especially after his visit to Rome. Instead Luther attacked the false teachings of the Papacy, salvation by works rather than grace. Luther showed time and time again that the works of monks or nuns or popes have no merit or value in God's sight, but the blood of Jesus Christ alone cleanses us from all sin. If it were true that the pope had a large treasury of forgiveness, why doesn't he freely give it out to all instead of selling indulgences and making money off the backs of the poor people? Luther also through the Scriptures attacked what is called the Primacy of the Pope, the official teaching of the Catholic Church that the pope is the best pastor, THE pastor or priest above all others. Using God's Word alone, I Peter 2:9, Luther showed that in the sight of God every Christian is a priest. Christ is our only Mediator and only Savior and His forgiveness through His blood is free. In Him "we have redemption through his blood, *even* the forgiveness of sins." Concerning the Primacy of the Pope, Luther also with God's Word showed that the pope has no authority over all Christendom, nor can he stand in the place of Christ and make new laws or commandments which God has not made. Jesus said, "in vain they do worship me, teaching *for* doctrines the commandments of men." Concerning his own vow of chastity as a monk, Luther realized God had never taught that priests cannot marry. For the sake of the Gospel Luther broke his vow which contradicted God's Word and married Katherine von Bora. "Marriage is honorable in all and the bed undefiled."

III. God is the True Reformer. It is always His Reformation. Beloved of the Lord, reform is not rebellion, but obedience to God's Word. Christ alone and not the pope or any pastor rules His Church through His Word alone. God reforms His Church by the same. While Josiah and Luther were indeed great reformers, it is always God who reforms His Church by His Word. His first Word which comes to us is the Ten Commandments, the law of Moses. We realize we are the crooked and perverse people of a crooked and perverse nation. "By the law is the knowledge of sin." But the second Word God brings us is the Gospel Word. In the Gospel Jesus the Living Word comes to us and declares "Fear not, only believe" and "My forgiveness through My blood is free". We cannot buy that which has already been given. Take and eat, take and drink. In Hebrews 10 the Lord says, "I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more. Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin." This is God's solemn promise to you dear sinner, that through the blood of Christ, this one time offering for the sins of all, God cannot remember your sins, nor will He count them against you! For "where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin." Not one single good work is necessary for your salvation, for Christ's one time sacrifice is sufficient for all!

Hence dear Luther, dear Josiah, dear Christian, all we can do is say "Amen" to all He has done. We say "Amen" when we now out of thanks reform ourselves, crucifying our flesh, amending our sinful ways and doing good works. We reprove the sins of our darkness BECAUSE Christ is our light. We reprove the sins of others, BECAUSE Christ seeks to be their light also. We do good because of the good Christ has done us. Sanctification, that holy life of obedience to God's commands, always follows on the heels of justification. "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Let us therefore keep our baptismal vow and for the sake of the Gospel obey the voice of our Good Shepherd. For God is the True Reformer and His Word has reformed and changed us! It is always and ever shall be His reformation. To God alone be glory. Amen!