

Doctrine not Deeds

John 7:16-18, Reformation Sunday

October 28, 2007

Beloved of the Lord.....Having the right of Christian liberty, today we mark and observe Reformation Day. On the date of October 31st, 1517, the monk Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses to the Castle Church door, protesting various abuses within the Church of Rome. This began a glorious chain of events, wherein all of Europe was delivered both politically and spiritually from the primacy of the pope. The monk Martin Luther was delivered from the power of the devil when the Holy Spirit working through the Word taught him, "a man is justified by faith, without the deeds of the law." Rom. 3:28 Luther was converted the moment he realized that God through Christ Jesus had justified him.

But we are not gathered here today to glorify the man Martin Luther. We are here to glorify and give all praise to the Son of God. "For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord." 2 Cor. 4:5 We praise Christ Jesus our Lord, for it was His doctrine of justification by faith that brought about the Reformation of 1517. It was not the deeds nor works of Luther. Therefore, the theme for our sermon today is Doctrine not Deeds. The good deeds of man will not justify any man before God. But instead a man is justified in God's eyes, through the glorious doctrine of justification by faith in Jesus Christ. This precious doctrine, justification by faith in Christ, has the power to convert, strengthen, and heal our broken heart. The doctrine of justification brings life. Jesus said, "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life." Jn 6:63 Today then let us discuss the importance of doctrine and not deeds. For "a man is justified by faith, without the deeds of the law." First.....

I. God does not justify anyone by their good deeds. This is because the Bible says, "By the deeds of the law, shall no flesh be justified in His sight." If we trust that we are going to heaven by our own good works, our faith is built upon sand. Sinners will find no comfort, nor spiritual peace, if their faith is built upon their own good deeds. True faith is built upon Christ. I Corinthians 3 says, "But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is." On Judgment Day, God will divide all people into two classes: those who built their faith upon their own good deeds, and those who built their faith upon Jesus Christ! God's children who trusted in Christ will go to heaven.

The devil's children who trusted in their own good deeds, God will cast into hell.

Of course, this makes no sense to the natural man. For all the world looks upon and admires outward deeds. The world knows nothing of repentance, faith, and Christ. Consider that Martin Luther, before his conversion, trusted (or rather tried to trust) in his own good works. He was an exceptional monk, who fasted and starved himself often, even beat himself, prayed for hours on end. But the more he tried to please God by his good deeds, the more he began to despair. For Luther was at least honest with himself, and his own conscience told him that everything he did was not enough. God was angry with Luther, and Luther knew it, and it made Luther hate God all the more. For no matter how many good deeds Luther did, he found no peace in his heart with God. God does not justify anyone by their good deeds. Trusting in deeds brings no spiritual happiness.

Perhaps you heard about Mother Teresa in the news recently. Though she is now dead, the world still looks upon her as a model believer, for all the work she did for the "poorest of the poor" in Calcutta India. There was an article on her in the September 3rd issue of *Time Magazine* entitled, "Mother Teresa's Crisis of Faith." Some of her confessions to her priests are quoted there. She says of herself, "The smile is a mask or a cloak that covers everything....I spoke as if my very heart was in love with God, tender, personal love,....If you were there you would have said, 'What hypocrisy'". In other words, she knew that all her good deed were not done out of love for God. She could see her own hypocrisy. Martin Luther and Mother Teresa were the same. The more they tried to please God, the more they fell short. They both knew God's anger still burned against them.

But there are also people who do good works, and they take a false comfort in them. These are the Pharisees. Jesus said of them, "He that speaketh of himself seeketh his own glory." They Pharisees also fasted like Luther, except they would purposefully disfigure their faces to make it look as if they were suffering greatly for God's kingdom. They would also pray publicly on the street corners, so passers-by would look and admire them for being so religious. They looked down upon others. They caressed their own ego and tooted their own horn. But their outer goodness was nothing more than a mask which covered an evil heart. God sees right through such people.

But what about our works? What about the good works of a Christian? Certainly they are pleasing to God, right? Well, yes the good works of a believer are pleasing to God, if done by faith. "But whatsoever is not of faith, is sin." In other words, if we are moved by anything other than love for God, we sin. Consider that children often obey their parents, only so that they do not get a spanking. Fear of punishment is the wrong motive for a good work.

If we do the right thing because we are afraid of hell, this is not pleasing in God's eyes. What about obeying the powers that be? Do you obey the laws of the land because this is the will of your Savior, or do you obey the laws so you don't get thrown in jail? What about marriage? Husbands, don't you love your wife a little less when she is mean and grumpy? Yet shouldn't your love for her be a constant, regardless of her mood? Wives, do you just as easily obey your husband when he is belligerent, as when he is kind and gentle? The point here is that all the "good" we do, is not so good, indeed our sins stain everything. And even if we committed only one sin in our lifetime, we are still worthy of damnation because we have rebelled against the Almighty God.

Good deeds do not atone nor make up for sin. Just imagine a doctor who performs the evil work of an abortion. If he then goes to another room and helps deliver a new baby into the world, has he just made up for his evil? In like manner our own good deeds do not cancel out our evil deeds. "By the deeds of the law, shall no flesh be justified." The Bible teaches there is no forgiveness of sins, unless there is the shedding of blood (Heb. 9:22).

II. The doctrine of justification brings peace. If then we desire to be saved from our evil works, our evil deeds, we need to throw away our dead works, and look to Jesus Christ, who shed His holy blood for all men upon the cross. "Being found in fashion as a man, He humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." All this He did for you. "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." The chief doctrine then of the Christian Church is this: **GOD, THROUGH CHRIST JESUS, HAS JUSTIFIED AND RECONCILED THE WHOLE WORLD UNTO HIMSELF.** We call this doctrine Universal Grace, or Objective Justification, meaning that through Christ Jesus, God does not lay sin to your charge, nor count your sins against you, for all your sins have been paid for by the blood of Jesus Christ. This is the Gospel doctrine which saves, delivers, and justifies all men before Almighty God! For this doctrine does not come from man's heart, but from God's mouth. Jesus said, "My doctrine is not mine, but His that sent Me. If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine."

There is peace and safety and comfort in the arms of your Good Shepherd, who gave His life for the sheep. But if we turn to our works for comfort, we will be comfortless. In the case of Luther, the more he tried to ascend up to heaven by his own good works, the deeper he slipped into hell. But when the light of the Gospel shined upon his heart, He suddenly realized that Christ as not Luther's enemy, but Christ was Luther's friend, and Christ by way of the cross had already justified Luther. Luther was "justified freely by [God's] grace through the

redemption that is in Christ Jesus." Suddenly the gates of paradise were opened before Luther. Christ the Living Word came to Luther by the Gospel Word. The Holy Spirit convinced Luther that a "man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law." Faith is kindled in the heart, the moment the sinner forsakes his own works, and sees that in Christ Jesus, all men are justified by the holy and innocent blood of God's own Son! He died for all!

Dear sinner, do you want to be saved? Do you want heaven to be your home? Forsake your own good deeds which cannot save **AND LOOK TO CHRIST JESUS**, who paid for the sins of all men on the cross! Believe in Him. Trust in Him, for all the sins of which you know, and even those sins which you don't know, have been paid for with God's own blood! God through Christ Jesus is perfectly at peace with you. And His love for you through Christ, is able to turn your own soul to Him. And all He wants from you is your faith. He does not require even one single good work for your salvation, He only desires you believe in Him. His holy precious blood, and His innocent suffering and death, is a sweet-smelling savor to God.

And you too are acceptable to the Lord, if only you believe in the Lord Jesus, who is the Savior of all men. We are justified therefore by faith, because God through Christ has justified us. And there is no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus. God does not, nor will not lay your sins to your account, for all sin has been laid upon our Savior, and paid in full. "God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved!" By faith each believer has and holds all the righteousness of Christ earned for him.

Dear friends, justification is a judicial act of God, which takes place outside and apart from us, for our justification took place in the very heart of God. When Jesus said on the cross, "It is finished", God in His heart long ago was reconciled with you. Your faith, or even lack of faith, does not change or alter the fact, that God through Christ Jesus reconciled the whole world unto Himself. Therefore God requires not even one single work from you, He only desires your faith. "Fear not, only believe", our Jesus says. You are lost **ONLY** if you don't believe, **ONLY** if you don't desire to be saved, **ONLY** if you don't want the forgiveness of Jesus. But I trust that we all desire to be saved from our sins and delivered. The good news is, we have been! Believing in Him you will find perfect spiritual peace. And God will not let the devil, nor the world take that away from you! Through Jesus blood and merit, we are at peace with God. "For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved." Amen.

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