

Midweek Message

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation;” (2 Corinthians 5:17, 18 ESV)

This past Sunday we focused on our great heritage as Presbyterians in light of the Protestant Reformation. We do this every year, often as a “Kirkin” service, focusing on our Scottish roots and how God has continued His work of grace in our lives. As I mentioned Sunday, there are five principles of the Reformation upon which our protestant faith is based. All of those principles point us to the reality of what the Apostle Paul tells us in Scripture above that it’s God Himself who has accomplished every aspect of our salvation and continuing transformation into new creations. What I would like to do in this article is to share with you a brief summary of each of those five principles of the reformation so we can all greatly understand and appreciate the work of God in our lives and in this world.

The first point is Sola Scriptura which, when translated, is Scripture Alone. One of the main issues regarding the reformation was that of the infallibility, sufficiency, and authority of Scripture versus the declarations of popes as well as church traditions which were considered equal to the Scriptures. The reformers emphasized that only Scripture itself was infallible and an as such, authoritative. The Apostle Paul tells us, *“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16, 17 ESV)*. The Bible alone is the instruction manual for life teaching us everything we need to know about who God is and what He requires of us. The Westminster Confession of Faith, the theological standard of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, makes it very clear that the Bible is our only infallible rule of faith (what we are to believe concerning God) and practice (what duty God requires of us). The 2008 General Synod, the highest court of our denomination, ratified this statement in regards to Scripture: *“The Bible alone, being God-breathed, is the Word of God written, infallible in all that it teaches, and inerrant in the original manuscripts.”* You see, the Bible is the only book that will never, ever, lead you astray, but will always bring us to that place of perfect blessing as it will always lead us to the Lord. Whatever God has said in His Word is always correct, always good, always helpful, always absolutely true. It alone is the foundation for every aspect of Christian life as it alone leads us to God and His way of life for us.

The second point is Sola Gratia which points us to Grace Alone. From beginning to end the Bible is the story of God’s grace, and grace is the principle that brings change to our lives. Grace is nothing more than God’s unmerited favor, giving the opposite of what’s deserved, bestowing kindness and mercy where justice and punishment are warranted. God tells us, *“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9 ESV)*. every human being born through natural means are sinners and we deserve God’s wrath and His eternal condemnation. However, God bestows His grace instead. Where we deserve the worst God gives us the best, giving it freely, without any strings attached. Grace is God’s unmerited, unearned favor, given to those who deserve it the least, but who need it the most. Grace is a gift. For you to believe that you have to do something to earn it is to lose it, to forfeit the very grace God desires to give us. As believers, all we are, all we have, all we’ll ever be, and all we’ll ever have is by the grace of God. We who deserve judgment are instead lavished with God’s grace that brings us to our knees in repentance as we grasp the reality of our sinfulness, it’s consequences, and God’s mercy, love and grace expressed toward us.

The third point is Sola Fide which is, Faith Alone. We’re told in Scripture, *“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, ‘The*

righteous shall live by faith” (Romans 1:16, 17 ESV). Once again there was great concern on the part of the reformers regarding the avenue through which we are saved. In the church of that day there had come to be a heavy emphasis on faith plus works as the only way one can genuinely be saved and inherit eternal life. However, as we’ve just seen from Ephesians, works has no place in bringing salvation to us. Faith, which also is God’s gift to us as it comes through His grace lavished upon us, is all that God requires for us to experience salvation. Our works, regardless of how wonderful they may seem to us are as the Prophet Isaiah reminds us, *“We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment” (Isaiah 64:6 ESV).* Regardless of how hard we try, even our best efforts are tainted with sin. Faith alone, absolute trust in the work of Christ on our behalf is what we need to cleanse us from sin. Faith alone means that Jesus is your whole earth, your whole heaven, your whole life. Faith alone is the vehicle, the pipeline, through which we receive the benefits of the cross.

The fourth point is Solo Christo (Solus Christus) and points us to Christ Alone. Scripture tells us, *“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23 ESV).* Since it’s impossible for us to save ourselves through our own works which are tainted with sin and which bring about the consequences of our sin, then we must find another way by which we can be saved. This is why Jesus came, to pay the price we could never pay by taking upon Himself our sins and their consequences. As we’re told in Scripture, *“For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21 ESV).* This is what theologians call the great exchange; our sin being nailed to Jesus on the cross and His perfect record of righteousness being credited to our account. Jesus, the eternal Son of God, became a human being like us so He make restitution for our sins, paying their price in full. Jesus alone lived the perfect life we haven’t, keeping every commandment of God as expressed in the moral law. Jesus alone gave up His life for us on the cross, taking upon Himself the wrath of a just God, the punishment that we deserved. You see, only in the cross of Jesus are we set free from the punishment of sin due us. Only in the cross of Jesus are we set free from the power of sin over us. Only in the cross of Jesus will we one day be set free from the very presence of sin in us. Only through the person and work of Jesus are we forgiven of all sin, restored fully to fellowship with God, and given the assured hope of eternal life.

The fifth and final point is Soli Deo Gloria which means to the Glory of God Alone. When we consider, as the Apostle Paul tells us in our opening Scripture, that this is all of God then it makes sense that we have no room to boast and that God alone should receive all the glory. The Apostle Paul tells us, *“For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen” (Romans 11:36 ESV).* Everything God does, whether it be for us or some other aspect of His creation, is first and foremost for His own glory. God is the center of all of creation and He’s to be the focus of our praise and adoration. The very purpose of life is to know and glorify God, to rejoice in Him, to enjoy Him, to love and obey Him. There’s nothing and no one higher than God and as such it’s God alone who is to be glorified. God’s glory is the end all of creation, so much so, that we’re told, *“So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31 ESV).* Glorifying God is living our lives in such a way that God is honored by everything we think, say, and do, ultimately bringing Him praise. As the Apostle Paul reminds us, *“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10 ESV).*

Listen, our great heritage is built upon the Five Points of the Reformation as that’s what truly makes us protestant. I do hope and pray that these principles will help us continue to live as God’s people with greater humility and trust in our God as we reflect upon this amazing redemption that’s ours as well as the marvelous love God has lavished on us through Jesus Christ.

Pastor Mark