

Ben Libby

Sermon

November 1st, the 22nd Sunday after Pentecost | Reformation Sunday

To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. AMEN. Our sermon text this morning comes from Galatians, chapter 2, the verses 15 to 21.

**15 “We are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners. 16 We know that a person is not justified by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ. So we also believed in Christ Jesus that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because no one will be justified by the works of the law. 17 But if, while seeking to be justified in Christ, we ourselves were also found to be sinners, then is Christ a servant of sin? Certainly not! 18 “In fact, if I build up again those things that I destroyed, I bring on myself the judgment of being a lawbreaker. 19 Indeed, through the law I died to the law that I might live for God. 20 I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I am now living in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. 21 I do not regard the grace of God as nothing. As a matter of fact, if righteousness is through the law, then Christ died for nothing!”**

This is the Word of The LORD!!! The congregation may be seated...Mercy, Grace, and Peace ARE YOURS from your God and Father and your Savior from sin, Jesus Christ. Dear fellow Redeemed...

As you can tell from our paraments and our bulletin cover, today is Reformation Sunday. It's unique. Every other Holiday that we celebrate is something that happened in Biblical history. This day is outside of that. Why do we celebrate Reformation day?

Well, to get to that answer, let's first ask a theoretical question. Where would we be if Martin Luther never posted those 95 thesis? It is a historical moment that not only shaped the Church, but also the world. The Thirty Years' War was fought as a result of this, and it changed the future and landscape of Europe. Nations went from being a part of the Holy Roman Empire to religious independence. Many immigrants came to America as a result of religious persecution. And that is just the tip of the iceberg of the effects of the Reformation.

Of course, all of that history is important. But the real reason that we celebrate Reformation day is because

of what it did to the Word of God. The Catholic church had kept the Word locked into Latin only, imposed many teachings that had no scriptural basis, and turned justification into something that must be earned. The Word of the LORD is not bound, and Martin Luther was one of the many tools that the LORD used to spread the good news of Justification by Grace through Faith.

Yes, when Luther nailed that Paper on the Wittenberg church doors, it was truly a watershed moment. But, the danger he was trying to warn people about still remains a threat to us here today. It was a threat in the days of Paul, the days of Luther, and even today in 2020. The threat of legalism is very real and dangerous, both in 1520 and 2020. - MAY THE WORDS OF MY MOUTH AND THE MEDITATIONS OF OUR HEARTS BE ACCEPTABLE IN YOUR

SIGHT O LORD, OUR STRENGTH AND OUR REDEEMER, AMEN!!!-

The background of this text is important to what these words are directly addressing. Even though our text speaks to larger principals, it is important to understand why Paul brings them up in the first place.

Paul brings up a confrontation that he had had with the Apostle Peter. What was the bone of contention? Peter had been dining with certain Gentile Christians. Then, certain Jews came around. When they did so, Peter abruptly got up and left. He did so because these Jews insisted that Gentiles keep certain Old Testament ceremonial Jewish laws. He gave into these "Judaisers" legalism. That is what legalism is. Insisting on laws and requirements which do not exist.

Our text is sort of what we assume is what Paul more or less said to Peter. Perhaps it is what Paul, now removed from that situation and under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, wished he would have told Peter in the moment. He starts out by saying:

**"We are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners. 16 We know that a person is not justified by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ. So we also believed in Christ Jesus that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because no one will be justified by the works of the law.**

Paul's whole point here is that no matter who you are, there is only one way to be saved. Paul lays it all out quite clearly. First, he says how we are not saved. **We know that a person is not justified by the works of the law.** There is no way we can keep the law because of how sinful we are. It is something we simply cannot do. We cannot be justified through the deeds of the Law. Rather, we are justified **through faith in Jesus Christ.** It is all so simple. But that's the problem with legalism. It takes clear and simple teachings, and it adds things to them, making them something else entirely.

Paul brings up a difference in race to clarify the universal principle of justification by faith. If Paul, who had this elite Jewish upbringing, along with the other Apostles who had the same background, if they knew

that they themselves were justified not by keeping the law, but rather by faith in Jesus, then surely this applies to all people. The negative side of that coin was also true. No one can be saved through the law. **no one will be justified by the works of the law.**

While Paul dealt with Judiasers who insisted on extra laws, Luther dealt with government and church authorities who also insisted on extra rules. The 95 Thesis had primarily to do with the sale of indulgences. But that was just the beginning. The sale of indulgences really was a symptom of a much larger issue. The church had neglected biblical doctrine in favor of what the Popes and councils came up with to be true. They had not only added more laws, they added an entirely different way of thinking. That men could somehow earn their way through heavens gates. This was why a reformation was so necessary.

And what about us here today? Do we rely on old ways? Do we rely on keeping the law and looking to our works to aid us? Of course not! Right? Are we in danger of legalism as well?

We are descendants and beneficiaries of the Lutheran Reformation. But maybe we trust in that background a bit too much. The Judiasers saw themselves as special because they were descendants of Abraham. Do we do something similar because we are spiritual descends of Luther? Do we view ourselves as somewhat superior to others because we grew up in the church? That whole way of thinking is the old way, and that old way of thinking does not work.

**18 "In fact, if I build up again those things that I destroyed, I bring on myself the judgment of being a lawbreaker.**

Why would you go back to something that had never worked in the past? That is Paul's point here. These people were trying to insist that new believers believe in Old Laws that did not apply. But they also missed the point that they couldn't keep these laws either. They were trying to justify themselves through deeds. This was insane. The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results. To go back to the law and expecting to be

justified therein is insane. It didn't work in the past, it will not work in the future. Instead, we go back time and again, to faith in Christ. We don't expect different results, we expect the same result. Whenever we go to the cross of Christ the result is justification.

Paul then throws in the topics of life and death to make this more truth abundantly clear. **19 Indeed, through the law I died to the law that I might live for God. 20 I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.**

And this is the whole key, right here. This is the biggest reason why going back to law was insane. Because Christ had come and fulfilled the LAW! Why would you try to do something that A. is impossible and you as a sinner could never do and B. is something that Jesus Christ already did fully on your behalf?

The Cross changes everything. Once Jesus died, the promised payment for the sin of the world was finally delivered once and for all. The moment He was crucified, so too was your sin. **I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.** When Jesus went to the cross, He took your sin as His own. God's wrath was poured out on Jesus for that sin. And then, Jesus rose from the dead. We too have newness of life through that same resurrection. When Luther nailed the 95 thesis to the Wittenberg church door, he started the reformation of the Church. When Jesus was nailed to the cross at Calvary, He started the reformation of our souls.

We saw that again today. When we baptized William a few moments ago, we saw a death and a rebirth. That act is a good metaphor and reminder for all of us here. We were just like that infant. We were all born in sin. We were helpless. But then the Holy Spirit called us by the Gospel. Paul also writes in Romans: **Ro 6:4 Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.** Our sin was washed away, and the death that resided in all of us was killed. We have been reborn through the work of Jesus Christ. It is no longer us the sinner who lives. Rather now it is Christ who lives in us!

**The life I am now living in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.**

We now have a new way to live life. We do not live by trying to keep the law. Can't do it. Rather, Christ did it all for us. Now we live through faith in Jesus. We live by relying on Jesus to be righteousness for us. He loved us and gave Himself for us. He became our sin and died the death we deserved. As a result, we became His righteousness and because He lives, so too shall we eternally.

And still, there is always that temptation to go back to works. It is in us all. I think it is a testament to just how fallen we truly all are. Even though we know that Jesus paid for our sins fully by Himself, there is that innate drive inside of all men that wants to play a part in it. We want to earn God's favor. We want partial credit for our salvation. We want to point out how good of a life we live. Whether we admit it or not, this is all trying to be justified by the works of the law.

Yet, there is a difference. There is a difference between doing good deeds to earn our salvation and doing good deeds out of love and gratefulness to God. We can do morally good things, but so can even the staunchest of unbelievers. The difference is the attitude of the heart. If you do something that is considered good or praiseworthy, why did you do it? Because you had to? Because it was expected of you? Because you looked good doing it? Those are all wrong motivations and they are all motivated by legalism and work righteousness. But, when we do something good out of love for love that God showed us in Christ, that is different. That is not trying to earn God's forgiveness. It is thanking Him for forgiving you!

**21 I do not regard the grace of God as nothing. As a matter of fact, if righteousness is through the law, then Christ died for nothing!"**

This last verse really puts it all into perspective. It frames the motivation part of this really well. But it also summarizes Paul's whole point in our text and in the entire book of Galatians as well. It's either one or the other. It's either all by grace through faith in Jesus, or it isn't. If it's anything added on top of that, that

nullifies the reason Jesus came to earth. It's either reliance on grace, or it's reliance on ourselves. If it's the former, then it is all a gift from God. If it's the latter, then Jesus died for nothing.

Let's put it into context for today. Yesterday was Halloween. If you were able to take your kids out for that, they would have collected a bag full of candy. Perhaps you remember when you were a child and you did this. Who earned that candy? Did you? Yes, you went around your neighborhood in a costume ringing door bells. But did you earn that candy? You might think you did, but you did not. It was all given to you.

When we knock on God's door, what do we get? Is it a trick or a treat? It depends upon your attitude! If we know full well that God gives us His forgiveness of our sins because of grace, well that is a treat. But if we think we have earned it somehow, we are playing a dangerous trick on ourselves.

**16 We know that a person is not justified by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ. So we also believed in Christ Jesus that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law**

Why is the Reformation important? Because through it we gained the same knowledge that Paul is talking about here. What Paul knew here and what we have come to know is something that we can certainly take for granted. For a large portion of history, many people did not know this beautiful and simple truth. People tried to earn their salvation. They paid money for forgiveness. They did things not of the motivation of love, but out of the motivation that they would end up in purgatory. They lived in fear, and works were the only way they could be comforted.

But that so called comfort of works was candy. It wasn't sustenance. That could only be found in God's Word. There we find the true bread of life. It is Jesus! That is what fills us here today. It is freedom from trying to do the impossible. Only Jesus could do that. We no longer live in fear. We now live by faith in the Son of God! We live by grace through faith in Jesus and what He has earned for us. There is nothing more

that needs to be added. He did it all already. We are justified, that is declared to be righteous, because the righteous Son of God died for us. Jesus has reformed our hearts through His sacrifice. All praise and thanks be to Jesus Christ, who earned our salvation, and lives so that we will live eternally with Him in heaven! AMEN!!!