

October , 2017 Florida Hospital Seventh-day Adventist Church
 Romans 1:16-17 Pillars of the Reformation: By Faith Alone (Sola Fide) by Andy McDonald

The difference one week can make. Last Sunday morning 59 people rolled out of bed with plans for their life with no sense that it would be their last day. Another 527 got up expecting a good day. No anticipation they would be attacked. And yet before that day would end that would be the result. We don't need to know all the details about the shooter to know that evilness, man's inhumanity to fellow humans, raised it's ugly head in a terrible way. Today, nearly a week later many are still reeling, some consciously some unconsciously. And so today we read the words Jesus said to his followers the night before he would be crucified and die. While they may not feel right, while they might not seem intuitive, and while they may seem to not match our recent history, they are the words of Jesus: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I don't give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." John 14:27

Let's pray: Father right now we think of 59 families who are short someone integral to the family make up. We think of 59 empty chairs around 59 Thanksgiving tables just weeks from now and we pray for your comfort for those who mourn. We pray for all those wounded physically, those traumatized by their proximity, and for all of us even at this distance damaged by this evil. I pray for you to heal, strengthen, restore, and comfort all. And when possible we'd like you to pull back the curtain and let us see how you might work your miracle of bringing good from bad. That you might work your great reversal and by your grace that this horrific tragedy which was meant for evil might bring good. Right now we place all of our hope and all of our confidence in you, and we believe, and where there is doubt we pray for belief that you, in your time will make all things right. We have this hope, In Jesus' name we pray, Amen

The last day of this month, October 31, marks the 500th anniversary of the beginning of what we know as the Protestant Reformation. It was the day that Martin Luther the professor of theology at Wittenberg University nailed his 95 thesis to the church door and put the Roman Catholic Church on notice regarding what he believed to be errors in their teaching and practice of the Christian faith.

It is this anniversary that sparked the series of sermons we begin today, Pillars of the Reformation. This week someone asked me which reformer I was going to speak about this week. I explained that the pillars we are going to be addressing aren't the brave people who led out in the reformation but rather 5 pivotal points 5 pillars of belief.

From the Latin they are known as the Sola's. That word sola translates into lone, alone, only, sole. The five we will be exploring are: By Faith Alone, By Grace Alone, By Scripture Alone, By Christ Alone, For the Glory of God Alone.

I haven't seen the commercial in a while, but there was a period where it seemed unavoidable. It wasn't meant to be a theological or anthropological or philosophical statement. But at the same time, without intending to, it defined the great human condition. "I've fallen and I can't get up."

The good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the very heart of that gospel which we are going to explore today, is necessary because of the very bad news that precedes it.

Do you remember the story? Jesus was teaching and a guy we've come to call the "Rich Young Ruler" comes up and asks Jesus a great question: "What good thing must I do to get eternal life?" Jesus answer was telling, and true and scary. It might well be the same answer

were we to ask the same question today. Jesus answered: “You can receive eternal life if you keep the commandments.”

Listen carefully because I don’t say this enough. The ticket to being in God’s presence for all eternity, for getting eternal life, is PERFECT obedience to God’s holy law. This is the only way we can exist in the presence of God, is to be absolutely holy, perfect in every way.

This reality makes us hopeless unless we are completely out of touch with who we are. We are messed up. We have fallen and we can’t get up.

Paul makes this as clear as a Claritin ad in Romans 3:10 and following: “No one is good—not even one. . . All have turned away from God; all have gone wrong. No one does good, not even one.” Later in vs 23 Paul writes, “For all have sinned; all fall short of God’s glorious standard.”

Theologically it doesn’t matter if you were born with the proverbial silver spoon in your mouth or not, the reality is that all of humanity is lost, undone, living, as it were on death row.

It is this mountain of bad news that makes the good news of the gospel such great news.

Luther wrestled with this bad news. At 21 years old on his way back to Erfurt he was nearly struck by lightning and he vowed to become a monk. Luther was extraordinarily successful as a monk. He plunged into prayer, fasting, and ascetic practices—going without sleep, enduring bone-chilling cold without a blanket, and flagellating himself. As he later commented, "If anyone could have earned heaven by the life of a monk, it was I."

Though he sought by these means to love God fully, he found no consolation. He was increasingly terrified of the wrath of God: "When it is touched by this passing inundation of the eternal, the soul feels and drinks nothing but eternal punishment."

During his early years, whenever Luther read what would become the famous "Reformation text"—Romans 1:17—his eyes were drawn not to the word faith, but to the word righteous. Who, after all, could "live by faith" but those who were already righteous? The text was clear on the matter: "the righteous shall live by faith."

Luther remarked, "I hated that word, 'the righteousness of God,' by which I had been taught according to the custom and use of all teachers ... [that] God is righteous and punishes the unrighteous sinner." The young Luther could not live by faith because he was not righteous—and he knew it.

Luther said, “If I could believe that God was not angry with me I would stand on my head for joy.” “At last meditating day and night, by the mercy of God, I...began to understand that the righteousness of God is that through which the righteous live by a gift of God namely faith.”

They were verses like: Romans 1:17 It is through faith that a righteous person has life. Romans 3:20 For no one can ever be made right in God’s sight by doing what his law commands. Romans 3:27-28 Can we boast, then, that we have done ANYTHING to be accepted by God? No, because our acquittal is not based on our good deeds. It is based on our faith. So we are made right with God through faith and not by obeying the law.” Vs 30 “...He makes people right with himself only by faith.

Listen and listen very closely. Paul is caught off guard by his own understanding and in Romans 8 he writes “What can we say about such wonderful things as these? If God is for us, who can be against us?”

Brought into court and charged with every wrong thing we have ever done or thought we are guilty as charged. But God in Christ overturns every charge against us. He has taken our sin and given us his righteousness. Jesus is our righteousness, our perfection, our law keeping. We are accused and we self-accuse that we are a law breaker and God says, “No in Christ Andy is a law keeper not a law breaker.”

Paul writes: “Who dares accuse us whom God has chosen for his own?” Will God? No! He is the one who has given us right standing with himself. Who then will condemn us? Will Christ Jesus? No, for he is the one who died for us and was raised to life for us and is sitting at the place of highest honor next to God, pleading for us. NOTHING can ever separate us from God’s love.

When Martin Luther came to see this he said, “Here I felt as if I were entirely born again and had entered paradise itself through the gates that had been flung open.”

For much of his life Luther, like many Christians still today, like many within our denomination, were thinking of being made righteous. The Latin word for justify is *iustificare* (you *stif i car a*) to make right. And Luther understood that through the church and the sacraments of the church through penance and obedience and other practices God would make the unrighteous righteous.

In his study he discovered the Greek text and the word *dikaiósis* justify which means regarded as, declared, count as, assume. And Luther realized that the righteousness by which I am save is not my own, it is not God making me righteous, but it is an alien righteousness, a righteousness is that is not my own, but it is Christ’s righteousness given as a gift to me that covers me over completely.

Listen when this truth that it is faith in Christ’s righteousness that sets me right with God, that puts me in God’s favor, that makes it so that no one can accuse and God not acquit, life is forever altered.

We come into this place where God is 100% for you and not against you, 100% for your good, 100% for your happiness. We come into this place, says the first great pillar of the reformation, by faith ALONE.

Let me reiterate because we slide so easily from this perfect precipice of truth. Romans 3:28 We are made right with God through faith and not by obeying the law. Philippians 3:9 “I no longer count on my own goodness or my ability to obey God’s law, but I trust Christ to save me. For God’s way of making us right with himself depends on faith. To the Galatians Paul writes 2:21 “For if we could be saved by keeping the law, then there was no need for Christ to die.”

The question that is important to address in this pillar of the reformation is it really by faith ALONE? Isn’t there room for faith plus a little achievement on my side? Can’t I rely on faith 99% and then 1% on my law keeping?

For some of you this may be hard to hear but the good news is I’m not making it up. These are words from our Bible Galatians 5:1-4 “So Christ has really set us free. Now make sure that you stay free, and don’t get tied up again in slavery to the law.” Paul was writing to a church where there were some wanting to say Christ’s righteousness can take you so far but then it’s your observing the law! So he wants to make this unequivocally clear.

“Listen! I, Paul, tell you this: If you are counting on circumcision to make you right with God, then Christ cannot help you. I’ll say it again. If you are trying to find favor with God by being circumcised, you must obey all the regulations in the whole law. For if you are trying to make yourselves right with God by keeping the law, you have been cut off from Christ! You have fallen away from God’s grace.”

If we choose to rely on law keeping, just a little bit, as a way of getting justified as a way of getting into the position where God is 100% for us, Christ is no good to us.

Faith plus a little work to justify means you are stepping over and all your justification must be through your law keeping.

Justification by faith alone means Jesus plus nothing.

There are two ways to be justified. They are distinct. They are separate, They cannot be mixed at all.

We can be justified by law keeping our perfection

We can be justified by faith, Jesus law keeping

But we cannot be justified by a mix of the two Jesus plus anything lands us in the damnation of law keeping. And Paul is clear, Romans 3:28 We are made right with God through faith and not by obeying the law.

Is it wise to seek to live in harmony with God’s laws. You bet. It makes as much sense to walk in harmony with God’s spiritual laws as it does to cooperate with physical laws like gravity. Life works better when we live God’s way. But PLEASE keep it clear that living God’s way, avoiding sins and mistakes isn’t what makes us right with God or puts God 100% behind us. That is the work of Jesus and our belief in him.

We need an alien righteousness that is not our own but one that enables God to declare us righteous and by faith that he gives us, we grasp onto the justification that he gives us in Jesus. It is all his gift.

So, how will knowing this, or if you already knew it so, being reminded of this effect how we live this week? Wake up to the reality of Justification by Faith Alone and let the religious pressure subside? Feel this same rebirth Luther felt swelling up in you and live in the paradise of knowing the almighty, perfect God of the universe is for us not against us and that nothing in all the universe can every separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. You, by faith alone are justified.

Benediction

Now Go! Go live in the blessed freedom and calm assurance that God is for you and not against you. Go love someone enough to let them know that they don’t set themselves right with God it’s already been done for them. Go live free and light God is for you. Amen.



How tied have you been to achieving righteousness?

What life experience has most discouraged you in pursuing righteousness?

What “monkish” practices have you tried?

What was it like for you, if this has happened for you, to realize that it isn't your performance but Jesus performance that counts?

What are the risks of the freedom in Jesus work for you?

What is the difference between being made righteous as the way to God vs. being declared righteous by God?

What do you think about not being able to mix a little law keeping with a little of Jesus Righteousness to make us good with God?

How does the idea of God being for you not against you affect you?

How does it feel to need an alien righteousness?

Who do you know that needs to understand justification by faith alone, Jesus only? Would you want them to tell you if you didn't know?



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