

“Reformation Sunday”

Most of us spend time reading in the newspaper and with newscasts to be aware of important events of our time. We easily understand that news has bearing upon us. Yet, how could something which happened 491 years ago this month make that much difference? Believe it or not, it does.

In 1517 Pope Leo X issued a special sale of indulgences since the Roman Catholic Church was short on cash. Indulgences were donations given to the Church which Catholic leadership promised would bring forgiveness of sins for the giver.

On October 31 of that year a thirty-three year old Augustinian monk and university professor by the name of Martin Luther challenged these indulgences and other abuses of the Roman Catholic Church. He did this by nailing his 95 theses to the door of the chapel in Wittenberg, Germany. Luther had no desire to leave the Roman Catholic Church, but to reform it in line with scriptural truths which he had come to cherish. The result for Luther was that he was eventually excommunicated. The result for the Church and the world was that the same New Testament gospel preached by the early Church was restored through the birth of the Reformation and the Protestant Church.

Every year, the Sunday prior to October 31 (Oct. 26 this year) is recognized as Reformation Sunday. This becomes a wonderful time each year for us not only to thank God for those Christians through history who have benefited us so richly, but also to be reminded of six crucial biblical truths that stand at the heart of our walk with Christ. These truths, which the Reformers encapsulated in six Latin phrases, are worth our attention in preparation for 2008’s Reformation Sunday.

Sola Scriptura (Scripture alone): The Bible, contained in the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments, is the only ultimate inerrant binding rule for salvation, faith, and practice. All other proposed truth claims must be judged by the Bible.

Solus Christus (Christ alone): Our salvation is accomplished by the substituting work on the cross of Jesus Christ alone—plus nothing else.

Sola Gratia (Grace alone): We are rescued from God’s wrath and from sin by God’s unmerited favor alone and not by anything we add to the equation, such as works. Not even our faith is the cause of our salvation, but only the necessary means whereby it is applied.

Sola Fide (Faith alone): God declares us to be righteous only on the basis of Christ's righteousness credited to us and applied by faith alone (not merited by our works).

Soli Deo Gloria (God's glory alone): Our ultimate purpose in life and the ultimate purpose for which God saves us is His glory and nothing else.

Semper Reformanda (always reforming): Christians are to be continually reforming or reshaping their beliefs and practices to fit with the scriptures as we grow in Christ.

As we go through this month give thanks to God for Martin Luther and others in history who have defended, preserved, and faithfully served the gospel. Also, meditate on and recommit to these six important truths. It is a great way to celebrate Reformation Sunday!

Pastor Tom