

All Hallows Eve

How does a day before a major remembrance or celebration day become so well-known, often to the eclipse of the next day? I have in mind All Hallows Eve which is a day before the major church date known as All Saints Day. Halloween is of pagan origin and has really no connection with Christianity. However, something momentous did happen on October 31, 1517. Little did the monk Martin Luther know what would issue from his posting in Latin his 95 theses - assertions inviting a debate concerning his objections to the sale of indulgences in Saxony Germany. However, the translation and printing of these theses in the common language was the spark that lit the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century. There are a few statements in the 95 assertions that laid the groundwork for a theological rediscovery of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, "Repent" (Mt 4:17), he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.

The true treasure of the church is the most holy gospel of the glory and grace of God.

He lit a spark and over the next few years his studies and defense of his theses resulted in a recovery of the Biblical gospel.

In 1518 at the Heidelberg meeting with his fellow Augustinian monks, Luther and others discussed how we are made righteous with God and how we can stand before him. There is a clear enunciation of the Biblical doctrines of total depravity and salvation by grace alone through faith alone in the work of Christ alone. Hear these statements from that meeting:

16. The person who believes that he can obtain grace by doing what is in him adds sin to sin so that he becomes doubly guilty.

17. Nor does speaking in this manner give cause for despair, but for arousing the desire to humble oneself and seek the grace of Christ.

18. It is certain that man must utterly despair of his own ability before he is prepared to receive the grace of Christ.

25. *He is not righteous who does much, but he who, without work, believes much in Christ.*

26. *The law says, “do this,” and it is never done. Grace says, “believe in this,” and everything is already done.*

In the few months, between October 1517 and April 1518 Luther came into a clear understanding of the gracious work of God in the person and work of Jesus Christ that gives to believers the righteousness that God requires. This righteousness is a free gift through faith in Jesus Christ. This is truly a recovery of the gospel. As Protestant and especially evangelical believers we have much to celebrate and rehearse on what properly is called Reformation Day. Let us do so not by imitating pagan rituals but by singing and reading the Scriptures and teaching the great truths recovered during the Protestant Reformation over many years and among various groups.

Let me offer some comments from the Bible on the Gospel assertions Luther makes.

The Gospel as the true treasure of the church

Paul references the gospel as a treasure in 2 Corinthians 4 as the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, “For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake, ⁶ seeing it is God who said, “Light will shine out of darkness, (Genesis 1:3) who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.⁷ But we have this treasure in clay vessels, that the exceeding greatness of the power may be of God, and not from ourselves.”

Total Inability of a person to contribute to his own salvation

Grace is God’s action and his gift on our behalf. One cannot earn grace. Such an idea is a contradiction.

Luther wrote:

Man...does not do evil against his will, under pressure, as though he were taken by the scruff of the neck and dragged into it, like a thief...being dragged off against his will to punishment; but he does it spontaneously and voluntarily. And this willingness or volition is something which he cannot in his own strength eliminate, restrain or alter.

The Bondage of the Will, Revell, 1957, p. 102.

The most damnable and pernicious heresy that has ever plagued the mind of man was the idea that somehow he could make himself good enough to deserve to live with an all-holy God.

We see that Luther's theology flows directly out of the Bible in such passages as these:

The Prophet Isaiah 64:7

7 There is no one who calls upon your name,
who rouses himself to take hold of you;
for you have hidden your face from us,
and have made us melt in the hand of our iniquities.

Paul in 2 Corinthians 4:3-4

3 And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. 4 In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

1 Corinthians 2:14

14 The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

Romans 3:11

11 no one understands;
no one seeks for God.

Ephesians 2:5

5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—

Jesus in...

John 6:65

65 And he said, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father."

John the Baptist stated in John 3:27

27 John answered, "A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven.

Salvation by grace alone without any mixture of works is seen in texts such as...

Ephesians 2:8-9 **ESV**

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.

Romans 11:6 **ESV**

But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace.

John 6:28-29 **ESV**

Then they said to him, "What must we do, to be doing the works of God?" Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent."

John 5:24 **ESV**

Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment but has passed from death to life.

Summary

People are not able to save themselves, to come into a right relationship with the holy God because they are born in a state of spiritual death and condemnation. Transgressions flow from a polluted source. The unclean cannot make themselves clean.

Man must be rescued by an outside agent. Only the one who created the universe and humanity in his image can have the power to bring spiritual life, the birth from above by his life-giving Spirit.

God has acted from his deep eternal love by sending his Son, his very self into our world as One united with us and with God and who gave himself for us. He did for us what we could not do for ourselves. He discharged our debt, took our punishment, and removed our shame.

God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. How He did this is stated in 2 Corinthians 5:21 ^aFor our sake he made him to be sin ^bwho knew no sin, so that in him we might become ^cthe righteousness of God.

And 1 Peter 2:22-24 states:

Jesus committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself

to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.

All that God in Christ has done for you and in your stead is yours through his grace which you lay hold of by trust in Him and his word of promise. He is an all sufficient and complete Savior. Look to Christ alone and live!