

GREAT RESOLUTIONS

Program Twenty Five

The Recovery of Justification by Faith Part Four of the Life of Martin Luther

A Chosen Vessel

For, behold, the darkness will cover the earth / And deep darkness the peoples; / But Jehovah will rise upon you, / And His glory will be seen upon you. (Isaiah 60:2).

At the darkest hour of the night, daylight begins to break upon the earth. When the spiritual darkness resulting from the corruption of the Roman church seemed to cover the entire earth, light came forth.

The first glimmerings of this light were seen as early as the twelfth century, through the Spirit's working in men such as John Wycliffe and Jan Hus. It was in the fourteenth century, however, that the full day began to dawn. The Lord used Martin Luther, a chosen and prepared vessel, to bring in this brighter light – a light which effectively put an end to the dark ages and ushered in a new age of light – commonly referred to as the Reformation.

The Reformation was, among other things, a recovery. For centuries, the pure truth of the gospel had been buried under the false teachings, superstitions and corruption of the Catholic Church. Once Luther saw some of these truths, he was bold to declare and publish them. Luther declared, "If what I preach is contrary to this Bible, I am willing to die, but if what I preach is according to this Bible, no one can kill me!" He did not care for his own life, but was willing to be martyred for the Lord. This was why he became such a useful person in the Lord's hand.

We will look at three important matters related to the truth of justification that was recovered by Martin Luther.

Three Key Matters

(1) Faith Alone - Sola Fide

Martin Luther is widely acknowledged to have recovered the truth of justification by faith. The truth of the way of salvation had

been lost in Catholicism, which became full of many heresies and stressed approaching God by various works.

The light of the truth that man is justified by faith (sola fide) came to Luther as he was studying and praying over the Scriptures for his lectures. Particularly, Scripture passages in Romans, Galatians and Habakkuk came alive to him. He saw clearly that man is not justified out of works of law, but through faith in Jesus Christ.

The Lord revealed to Luther that God's pardon and forgiveness from the guilt of sin were based on the redemptive work of Christ alone, not on man's works. If man would lay hold of the living person of Christ as his righteousness, he would freely be justified before God, and would have the right to come to God directly. As Luther pointed out in his commentary on Galatians, "Christ, whom God the Father has raised from the dead, is our righteousness and our victory."

As one who had previously suffered many self-punishments and deprivations in his endeavor to relieve his conscience and gain God's approval, it was a great liberation for Luther to see that to be justified before God was to have Christ as his righteousness.

Though others before him had begun to see this, it was Luther who unveiled this truth more clearly and proclaimed it in a much stronger way than his predecessors.

In the more recent time, Witness Lee helped elucidate this great truth: Justification," he pointed out, "is God's action whereby He approves people according to His standard of righteousness . . . God can do this

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Luther*

on the basis of the redemption of Christ.”

Although Luther was not as clear as Darby and other brothers who would come later to further unfold this precious truth, the Spirit used him to bring in light by proclaiming this truth that had been hidden for centuries. Praise the Lord! It is faith in Christ that justifies us, not any works of our own.

(2) Grace Alone - Sola Gratia

Luther also saw that the grace of God comes to man through faith alone and was not something gained by fasting, doing penance, giving money, repeating prayers or receiving the sacraments. Luther had come a long way from his former days as a striving monk. He now understood that grace and righteousness were God's gifts to him. Contrary to his previous concepts, he was now persuaded that man was unable to save himself, and declared that man's good works were just sin, and had nothing to do with salvation. He affirmed the truth that it is not by the merits of works, but by grace alone (sola gratia) that one is saved. Luther recognized that believers are made the righteousness of God in the person of Christ. As 2 Cor. 5:21 says, “Him who did not know sin He made sin on our behalf that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” Witness Lee said, “God's intention at Luther's time was to recover His Son Jesus Christ as our righteousness.” Hallelujah, the living person of Christ is our righteousness before God (1 Cor. 1:30)!

(3) Scripture Alone - Sola Scriptura

All that was necessary for salvation, Luther said, could be found in the Bible alone. He came to believe that all other authorities, including the pope himself, were subject to the teaching of the written word of God. Luther believed that what mattered was not what the church of Rome said, but what the Bible said. Luther wrote, “A simple layman armed with the Scriptures is to be believed above a pope or council without it. For the sake of Scriptures we should reject popes and councils.”

The Accessible Bible

The release of the Scriptures and of other publications by Luther and other reformers at this time was facilitated by the invention of Johann Gutenberg's printing press with movable type. This timely invention became so useful throughout Europe to spread the newly recovered truths. Now, the Bible did not have to be copied by hand; it could be printed and circulated, thus making it available to thousands. The impact was prevailing. Some former nuns and monks began to study the Word and stand for the truth, even at the cost of their lives. The common people and even children began to know the truth in the Scriptures, some more than many of the clergy. Although Luther's writings had been banned in Germany by the edict of Worms, many German princes stood by Luther and his teachings and defied this edict. They declared before the emperor and others that they would not “consent nor adhere in any manner to anything that is contrary to God, to His holy Word, to their conscience, and to the salvation of their souls.” This protest is how they began to be known as Protestants.



Watchman Nee said, “The Bible was opened up and men began to see light; men and women everywhere were enlightened about their salvation. They declared that they would no longer trust in their own work or in the priests for their salvation but would put their trust solely in God. This indeed was a great work of the Holy Spirit!”

A Real Age-Turner

Luther stood firm, even in the face of severe persecution, to rebuke many of the evils and superstitions of Roman Catholic Church. Luther, as an overcoming one, stood as an anti-testimony. He stood as God's mouthpiece before the entire Roman Catholic Church and the Roman Empire, thus allowing light to pierce the darkness of a

thousand years of human history. He stood alone during hours of trial before cardinals and princes and effectively ushered in the Reformation. This was truly the work of the Holy Spirit.

We can learn much from the pattern of Martin Luther. Witness Lee said of him, "Luther stood up as an anti-testimony. He was originally a priest in the Roman Catholic Church. When he saw that the Roman Catholic Church did things completely contrary

to the truth, he rose up and became a strong anti-



testimony. Luther was also a person who read the Bible. He saw from the Bible that man is justified by faith and not at all by works. Immediately, he accepted God's Word and joined himself to this Word. He was also a man of prayer. Each time he came across important issues, he would fight in prayers before God. At the same time, undoubtedly, Luther was one who cared not for his own life and was willing to be martyred for the Lord. Only this kind of person can be used by God to turn the age."

— Marty Robert and Bill Lawson

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