

*Let us pray: Father God, grant that I, who preach today, may speak with the Spirit of Christ in me, and my brothers and sisters who listen may hear with the Spirit of Christ in them, that we may all be filled with the mind and heart of Christ. In our Lord Jesus' name. Amen.*

Today is Reformation Sunday. Reformation Day is October 31. Instead of celebrating Halloween, it is more beneficial for Christians to commemorate the Reformation as a day of hope, repentance, and prayer for a new reformation. A common slogan among the Reformers was, "The church must always be reformed."

What happened on October 31, 1517? Martin Luther nailed a list of 95 arguments on a church door. He wanted to awaken the Roman Catholic Church to the simple teaching of the Bible that we are justified by faith in Jesus Christ alone. Luther was not originally a priest. He was a devout Roman Catholic who had graduated from law school and planned to become a lawyer. However, he struggled with the issue of guilt from a young age. One day, while riding on horseback, he was caught in a thunderstorm and nearly struck by lightning. He believed he was being judged by God. This led him to the path of becoming a priest.

Luther thought that by living more holy as a priest, he could solve the problem of sin, but he came to realize that he could not keep the two greatest commandments, loving God and his neighbors as himself. When he realized that his works could only earn God's wrath rather than fulfil God's righteousness, he agonized. Later, while studying Romans, Luther had a conversion experience. He was shocked to discover the meaning of Romans 1:17, which says, "For in the gospel, the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: 'The righteous will live by faith.'" He realized that it is only through faith in Jesus Christ that the problem of sin is resolved, and this led to the Reformation, which impacted society as a whole.

In the Middle Ages, the reading and interpretation of the Bible were limited to clergy, and ordinary people could not access the Bible personally. Books were rare in a time without printing, literacy rates were low, and the Roman Catholic Church's authority restricted access. So Luther translated the Latin Bible into German and encouraged educational programs to help people learn to read, laying the groundwork for them to be able to read the Bible. Luther's reformation was successful because the people read the Bible and discerned what was true.

What kind of reform do we need today? If we participate in rituals but don't read the Bible, we are no different from medieval Catholic believers. Worship is important, of course. It is right that we offer worship to God as the body of Christ. However, if we only attend worship and are not engaged with the Word, we are living in the Dark Ages. If you are communing with the Lord through the Word, worship becomes an extension of that relationship, a place of grace where you experience God's presence within the faith community. So, should we stop coming to church if we don't read the Word? No. In fact, we should come even more to receive grace, be restored, and gain new strength to start again. Gathering in assembly is within God's will for the visible body of Christ.

People are born into a dark age because they do not know Jesus. Without restoration of the relationship with God the Father through Jesus, people cannot resolve the deep sense of separation within their souls. To alleviate that anxiety, people turn to other things—sometimes even to destructive habits like alcohol, gambling, drug, or any other addictions. This is why we must expose children to the gospel through the Bible early. Today, we have many age-appropriate Bible versions. Many people faced persecution and risked their lives to bring the Bible closer to us, but we live in a time where the Bible is so common that its value is often overlooked. If we only focus on secular education, we are raising disciples of the world. Teaching children of all ages to be disciples of Jesus, learning and following the Word, must start at home.

In Hebrews 7, we encounter Christ as our eternal High Priest, just as Luther rediscovered Christ as God's righteousness through the Word. Luther endured all persecution by keeping his eyes on Christ, and we must also train ourselves to look to Christ through the Word when we grow weary. This brings great benefit.

How did Luther have the courage to stand against the entire Roman Catholic Church? It wasn't just through his willpower. Through the Word, he received the "power of an indestructible life" mentioned in Hebrews 7:16. Before his conversion, Luther lived by "the law of a fleshly commandment" mentioned in the same verse, but Hebrews 7:19 says, "The law made nothing perfect." While the law is strong in revealing sin, it is weak in giving life, salvation, and making a person useful for God. However, God initially gave the law because it serves a great function. The law reveals sin and leads us to Christ. Through the law, we understand God's heart and it gives us an accurate accounting of our sins. Only when sin is precisely accounted for can it be settled. If God had sent Christ to die without first giving the law, we would not know the full extent of our debt. Some might even think that Christ didn't need to die.

The law convicts us of sin. The commandment "Do not steal" is not just God's desire for us to refrain from stealing; it also pronounces us as thieves. The Apostle Paul says in Romans 7 that without the law, we wouldn't realize we are sinners. So, God's law was given to us as a settled account. Jesus died to pay for the exact amount of sin calculated by the law. His cross is a fully settled account gifted to us.

When we read the law in the Old Testament, therefore, we should read it as a pronouncement of guilt against us. Only by realizing the gravity of our sin can we appreciate grace. Meditating on how a sacrificial offering was brutally killed makes us aware of the seriousness of our sin. Only then do we begin to understand the weight of Jesus' death and the immense grace of God.

In Hebrews 7:25, we meet the One who gave Luther the power for remarkable reform. This verse tells us, "He is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them." Not only did

Jesus become a sacrifice, but He also intercedes for us as our eternal High Priest. Isn't it amazing that this Jesus is with us? Verse 26 says that this High Priest is "exalted above the heavens." Where is He now? He dwells in our spirit. If He is in our spirit, then our spirit is that heaven which is higher than the heavens. When can we experience this heaven within our spirit? When the spirit, which is attached to the soul and governed by it, is separated from the soul.

The soul is part of the flesh, and it is swayed by thoughts and emotions. If we don't live by the spirit, we are living by the soul. Only the Word of God can divide the spirit and soul. Hebrews 4:12 says, "the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit." When the Word separates the two, we can bring our emotions, ideas, and stubborn thoughts into submission to the spirit. Also, when reading the Word, you can go beyond the level of a soul that's just being comforted. The Word also penetrates "joints and marrow," enabling us to offer our bodies to God as living sacrifices. In other words, the Word helps us dedicate our lives to living in alignment with God's will.

Christianity is about life. Even though we may all have Bibles at home, if that Word is not dwelling in our spirit, our souls are still living in the Middle Ages. When the Word enters and fills us with life, we can live lives led by the Word. May a new season of training in looking to Jesus Christ, our eternal High Priest, who gives us the power of an indestructible life, begin afresh in your spirit and mine. Amen.

*Let us pray: Heavenly Father, how thankful and relieved we are that Jesus, as our eternal High Priest, intercedes for us even now. Supply us daily with the faith that gives us indestructible life through your Word, so that we may not walk after the flesh but after the Spirit. In the name of Jesus Christ, who reforms us. Amen.*