

I.N.I.

Reformation 1 Sunday
October 8, 2017
Col.3:16-17

In Christ Jesus, Who Himself commands us to search the Scriptures, for in them we have eternal life, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

As we said earlier, this morning is the first of three Reformation services. For those who have been coming to Bible Class and saw both the Martin Luther documentary and the Luther movie the introduction for this morning's sermon will be a review of the life and times of the Reformation. So lets go back some 500 years to get a better idea of what the Church was like in Luther's day. As we walk through the streets of the cities of Germany we see the marvelous cathedrals, monasteries and nunneries. We are surprised at the great number of them. In Cologne, a city of only 50,000 people we see 11 large churches, 22 monasteries and 76 convents. In Nuremberg, a city of 30,000 there are 15 churches and 12 monasteries. As we pass by them we notice that all of them are Catholic churches; for there is no other denomination, no other church body exists.

Let's go inside one of these great cathedrals of the past. The first thing we notice as we come inside are the hundreds of relics. There on the wall we see what is said to be the very slivers of wood from Jesus' cross. We also see on the shelf over there what is said to be two jugs of wine from the first miracle of Jesus (His changing water into wine). We also see Aaron's rod that budded and bits of the burning bush that Moses saw in the wilderness. And more!

Do you notice what the people are doing? It is not like our worship service where there is singing and preaching. The priest is doing all the talking and reading and it is all in Latin. The people are all kneeling in front of these relics and praying. Some are crying and kissing the pieces of wood, others are holding the jars up as if in worship. But, what don't we see? We don't see any Bibles.

Let's go back outside. Do you hear that? A trumpet is sounding. A young boy comes running up and is shouting something. "The Indulgence seller is coming, the indulgence seller is coming!" Suddenly the street is alive with activity. People from the shops and the houses and the churches come streaming out into the street. There down the street comes a crowd of people. They stop right in front of the church we were just in. What an impressive group of people. There are many priests and monks, the town mayor and the town council, the schoolmasters and other scholars gathered on the church steps. Some young lad is ringing a bell, others are holding up the banner of the church and the flags of the city and province. Some are holding up candelabras which are now lit. A wooden, red painted cross is now set up. In front of this cross is a large iron chest that is open. A man steps forward, he says his name is John Tetzl. Let's listen to what he has to say: "Sobald die pfenning im kasten lingt; die seelen aus dem fegfeuer springt!" Unbelievable! These German words in English translate this way: "As soon as the gold in the casket rings; the troubled soul from purgatory springs."

Look what's happening. People are pushing in line. It looks like some great sale or free giveaway. They are all digging in their purses and pockets for the required amount of money and tossing it in the huge metal chest. In return they are being given a sheet of paper. Let's see what that paper says. Here it is. It is so ornate and elaborate. I see it is signed by the Pope himself. It says that the purchaser of this piece of paper has the temporal or earthly punishment of his sins removed and one hundred years off in purgatory.

What? What is this? Can this be happening? People buying the temporal forgiveness of their sins, paying money to some man and eagerly doing so to receive some paper, some signed sheet of paper that says they are assured of forgiveness and that they have so many years off of purgatory for a payment of gold or silver? This has to be stopped. This is nothing but outright blasphemy against God and His Word. It is the devil himself who must have duped these people into such a false belief. Something must be done!

Well there was one man who did something. After months of warning his people against such

ungodly practices, but not being able to stop them from taking part in it, Martin Luther wrote 95 statements condemning this practice as being nothing but godless and faith destroying. And so it was on October 31, 1517 that this lowly monk nailed 95 theses on the Church door in Wittenberg, Germany. Unknown to him at that time, that event began the Reformation of the Church.

How could this happen to a church, to an entire church? How was all of this allowed to take place? How did all of this happen?

Let's look back on history. During the first several hundred years after Christ's resurrection, the Scriptures were read and translated from region to region, from country to country. People eagerly received the four Gospels and the many letters written by the Apostles. They read about Jesus' perfect life and His substitutionary suffering and death for them and for the whole world. They read about the gift of forgiveness of sins and believed that they had peace with God through their Lord Jesus Christ, not by what they could do or had done. They lived their lives as Christians according to one source: God's Word.

But as the church grew and more and more power came into the hands of the church leaders, more and more of the Bible was lost until the church leaders actually forbade the people to read the Bible. In 1080 Pope Gregory forbade the church leaders to hold the worship services in the language of the people, of course making it impossible for the people to understand anything except for the few who knew Latin. In 1199 Pope Innocent III forbade the citizens of the Holy Roman Empire "the free and private reading of the Bible in their own language." In 1229 the Council of Toulouse passed the church law which forbade even owning a Bible. Sometime later Pope Paul II renewed these commands forbidding the people to have any religious books at all. The decree of Ferdinand and Isabella, the king and queen of Spain during the days of Columbus, put the people under a severe penalty if they were caught with a Bible in their own language. These historical facts are hard to believe. Today we give Bibles away. We plead and urge people to read God's Word.

But back then, even if you dared to go against the law and tried to buy a Bible, the cost was prohibitive. So few were made that they were very expensive. A cheap one cost \$75. Good ones were around \$300 and the best were around \$2,000--for a Bible. The people of the Middle Ages were nowhere near rich enough to pay such exorbitant prices.

When Martin Luther, as a young monk in the monastery, began reading the Bible on his own, he quickly realized how corrupt the leaders of the church had become. By removing the Scriptures from the people, the leaders were able to lead them around by the nose; or perhaps we should say by the pocket book. Everything had its cost. Salvation was not through a personal faith in Christ, rather it was through the institution of belonging to the church, paying your dues, doing your works. Many people were being taught to flee the wicked world, give up all that they had to the church and enter the monasteries and the convents. There was a definite separation that came about between the clergy and the lay person. The lay person was told that he could be married, but the priests and nuns could not, for they were married to the church and to Christ. The people could not read the Bible, it was too dangerous for them, for they might misinterpret them, so it was up to the priests and church leaders to tell the people what to believe. The people could not partake of the wine of the Lord's Supper but the priests could. It was reserved for the priests alone to pray for the people and to announce forgiveness of sins. This was the way it was all over Europe wherever the church was from about 1200-1500.

How could one man even begin to make any inroads, make any little changes in such a completely corrupted system? He couldn't! But God could and He did! Through Luther and the many followers that joined him over the years the church was Reformed, that is "changed." It came about by tremendous devotion to one thing: the Bible. Luther and the other reformers spent day after day studying Scripture passages, trying to find out what God had to say, not what man or the church decreed. Within one man's lifetime, the church was changed. The corrupt, ungodly teachings that crept in over the years were exposed and changed in a little more than 50 years. Amazing!

Martin Luther based all of his teachings on one thing: **THE SCRIPTURES!** The same Scriptures that we read today, only ours is in English. Luther stressed three main truths: Our

salvation comes from **GRACE ALONE**= that is the undeserved love of God. This salvation is received by mankind through **FAITH ALONE**= faith in Jesus Christ and all that He has done for us, not what we have done for Him. And this teaching of man's salvation is found in **SCRIPTURE ALONE**. Luther fought for the **OPEN BIBLE**. How else could the common people learn of their salvation unless they are taught correctly from the Bible and what better way to learn than to read it themselves.

After Luther's New Testament translation in German came out, 3,000 copies were sold in two months. The cost: \$6. Luther did not accept one penny for all of his work in translating either the Old or the New Testament. The people paid only for the printing cost. And the people read and read and read. They read about what Jesus had done for them, how He had lived that perfect life of love in thought, word and deed. They read about Jesus being their perfect substitute who had come to take their place under God's wrath and paid the price of their sins and brought about peace with the Father forever. Within 11 years, 16 editions were printed with 54 reprints. It is estimated that over 200,000 copies were sold in those 11 years.

The **OPEN BIBLE**--free for all to read, to learn from, to have the Holy Spirit work faith in their hearts. There are many, many passages in the Bible that tell us of the importance of knowing Jesus Christ from the heart; that is through faith and the way to do this is through His Word. Solomon in Proverbs exhorts us: **MY SON, PAY ATTENTION TO WHAT I SAY: LISTEN CLOSELY TO MY WORDS, DO NOT LET THEM OUT OF YOUR SIGHT. KEEP THEM WITHIN YOUR HEART FOR THEY ARE LIFE TO THOSE WHO FIND THEM.** Moses tells us: **IMPRINT THEM (GOD'S WORD) ON YOUR CHILDREN. TALK ABOUT THEM WHEN YOU SIT AT HOME AND WHEN YOU WALK ALONG THE ROAD, WHEN YOU LIE DOWN AND WHEN YOU GET UP.** Jesus says: **BLESSED ARE THEY THAT HEAR THE WORD OF GOD AND KEEP IT;** and again as we heard from our Gospel reading **IF YOU CONTINUE IN MY WORD THEN ARE YOU MY DISCIPLES INDEED AND YOU SHALL KNOW THE TRUTH, AND THE TRUTH SHALL MAKE YOU FREE.**

Unfortunately the Lord prophesied through Amos: **BEHOLD THE DAYS ARE COMING, SAYS THE LORD GOD, THAT I WILL SEND A FAMINE ON THE LAND, NOT A FAMINE OF BREAD, NOR A THIRST FOR WATER, BUT OF HEARING THE WORDS OF THE LORD. THEY SHALL WANDER FROM SEA TO SEA, AND FROM NORTH TO EAST; THEY SHALL RUN TO AND FRO, SEEKING THE WORD OF THE LORD, BUT SHALL NOT FIND IT.** These words should send shivers up and down our backs. A world, a life without God's Word! Look at the Middle Ages. It happened then. People were kept in fear and spiritual captivity. Fear for their soul's future, captive to their sins, never knowing if they had done enough or paid enough for their salvation.

In our text this morning, from Paul's letter to the Colossian congregation, the Apostle Paul admonishes us to keep God's Word an **OPEN BIBLE**, open to all and we can do this only by making use of it ourselves.

LET THE WORD OF CHRIST DWELL IN YOU: literally "be digested by you." May the Word of God be the only spiritual food that we eat, so that this Word, even as food and water nourishes the body, also nourishes our souls. We must eat this Word in order to stay spiritually alive. We must spiritually digest these blessed teachings in order to be spiritually fit and strong.

Paul continues: **LET THE WORD OF CHRIST DWELL IN YOU RICHLY** -- abundantly. Paul says "get fat on the Word!" We never, never can get too much of the Word. The person who thinks that he knows enough, that he does not need the Word hasn't listened to God's Word of warning: **LET HIM WHO THINKS HE STANDS TAKE HEED LEST HE FALL.**

Paul continues: **LET THE WORD OF CHRIST DWELL IN YOU RICHLY IN ALL WISDOM.** To young Pastor Timothy the Apostle Paul wrote: **AND THAT FROM INFANCY YOU HAVE KNOWN THE HOLY SCRIPTURES, WHICH ARE ABLE TO MAKE YOU WISE FOR SALVATION THROUGH FAITH WHICH IS IN CHRIST JESUS.** With this spiritual wisdom given to us from God through His Word we are to teach and admonish one another. When are we old enough that we will never have to eat again? Only when we die. When are we old enough that we will never have to spiritually digest God's Word? Only when we are

taken from this life to be with the Lord in everlasting life through death or the final judgment. Both young and old need to be taught continually.

This is especially true for those of us who are years removed from our Confirmation training. At the end of your two or three years of confirmation, you probably knew the six chief parts of the Bible. You knew the ten commandments and their meanings. You knew about Baptism, the Lord's Supper, Keys and Confession and the Apostles' Creed and the teaching of three persons and activities of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. You knew your Bible passages and the Bible Stories. Now it is years later. How much do you remember? How much have you forgotten? We all need to get back into the Word, reading it at home, studying it in our Sunday School and Adult Bible Class. We need to do this so that we are not deceived and led astray. It happened to the people of the Middle Ages who did not have so many other outside activities to distract them as we do. They lost the Word. If we ignore it, despise it, not teach it to our youth, or not come to be taught it in our Bible classes, we too will lose it.

Notice also that Paul does not say that ONE should teach all the rest, but that we ALL teach one another. Parents, you teach God's Word to your children and our Sunday School teachers will also. If we as parents keep our Bibles closed and dusty, up on a shelf or in a closet, our children will do the same. Adults, you too need to read the Word so that you can compare what I teach you in church and Bible Class to what God's Word says to see if it is the truth. If you do not, then you too could be led astray. Then how far off will be the days of the Middle Ages where no one really knew what God's Word had to say, but only what man had to teach.

Paul already warned Timothy in his day: **YES, AND ALL WHO DESIRE TO LIVE GODLY IN CHRIST JESUS WILL SUFFER PERSECUTION. BUT EVIL MEN AND IMPOSTERS WILL GROW WORSE AND WORSE, DECEIVING AND BEING DECEIVED. BUT AS FOR YOU CONTINUE IN THE THINGS WHICH YOU HAVE LEARNED AND BEEN ASSURED OF, KNOWING FROM WHOM YOU HAVE LEARNED THEM.**

How can we rely upon the Word when these deceivers and false teachers come if we have not been first instructed in it. Do we know what God's Word says about: justification, the end times, the resurrection of the dead, Baptism, Lord's Supper, verbal inspiration and inerrancy, heaven and hell, the deity of Christ, the virgin birth, the Trinity, creation, original sin, homosexuality, decision theology, gambling, abortion, euthanasia, the Antichrist, prayer, church fellowship and the Means of Grace? Do we know why the teachings of other churches are wrong concerning the rapture, millennialism, prayers to saints, good works for salvation, speaking in tongues, synergism, ecumenism in the church, prayer fellowship, women pastors and the historical-critical analysis of the Bible? All of these teachings are in the Bible and many of them have been and will be covered in our Bible Classes on Sunday and Wednesday. Here at Peace Thru Christ we also have been teaching one another in our worship services with Psalms, hymns and spiritual songs sung with thanksgiving in our hearts to God over the past 45 years.

The mark of a healthy, spiritually strong congregation is not only if the Word of God is being taught in its truth and purity from the pulpit and in the classrooms; but by the number of members who come to hear and learn the Word in church and in Sunday School and Bible Class. How would someone rate our congregation? How spiritually healthy are we as a congregation? How spiritually healthy are you and I as individual Christians?

May it never be said of us that we neglect the great gift of God, the **OPEN BIBLE** through which we are taught about Jesus and brought to faith in Jesus as our Lord and Savior and through which our faith is strengthened. Remember how easily over the centuries the church leaders removed the Word from the hearts and hands of the people in the past. Let us not throw our Bibles aside into some dark corner of our homes and of our hearts, but open it, use it, read it, study it (both privately and personally with our families and publicly together with our family of brothers and sisters in Christ) and the Holy Spirit will strengthen us all.

Thank God that He once again brought His Word back into the hearts and hands of His people through Martin Luther and the other Reformers of his day so that they could know that Jesus lived and died for them as their Savior. May we by the grace of God stand as firm as Luther did on that solid Rock, Jesus Christ and His Word so that when we are tempted by the old evil foe

who means deadly woe, who in deep guile and great might tries to destroy our faith; we too can confidently exclaim: **HE CAN HARM US NONE; HE'S JUDGED THE DEED IS DONE, ONE LITTLE WORD (GOD'S WORD) CAN FELL HIM.**

Amen.