

The Pastor's Pen

“When we say that justification is apart from works, we are not saying that faith is unaccompanied by works. It is one thing to say that we are justified through faith in Jesus Christ apart from works. However, it is a completely different thing to say that faith can somehow exist without works that demonstrate it. Faith is a living and a restless thing, and it cannot be inoperative. We are absolutely not saved by our works, but if there are no works that demonstrate a person's faith, then something is terribly, terribly wrong with that person's faith.” ~ Martin Luther

This October 31st will mark 508 years since Martin Luther's courage and commitment to the Biblical doctrine of salvation *by God's Grace Alone through Faith Alone in Jesus Christ Alone* sparked the Protestant Reformation. Luther's words echo down through the halls of time to speak to us today.

Luther points out in the quote above that we can easily fall prey to two different and seemingly polar opposite heresies with relation to salvation. The first heresy that we must vigilantly guard against is the false belief that we must either work *to be* saved, or work *to remain* saved. Luther is well known for his valiant and solitary stand against the Roman Catholic Church in her propagation of this heresy. Over half a millennium later, Luther's gallant stand against the heresy of works-based salvation is the thing for which history best remembers him.

However, contrary to the mistaken notion of many people today, Luther was no proponent of easy believism. He writes above that, *“it is one thing to say that we are justified through faith in Jesus Christ apart from works. However, it is a completely different thing to say that faith can somehow exist without works that demonstrate it.”* Here, Luther identifies a second heresy that many fall prey to in our day. This heresy basically asserts that because God justifies (saves) us *entirely apart from* our own works, this must mean that we can be truly justified (saved) – *yet remain completely unchanged*. Such a concept is utterly foreign to the Bible, and it is *actually deadly* because it gives completely false assurance of salvation to unregenerate people just because they give mental lip service to Jesus – even while they continue going their own stubborn way in in willful and unrepentant rebellion.

So, how are we to know if we have confused justification completely *apart from works* (which is absolutely foundation to the Gospel itself) with justification *unaccompanied by works* (which is a heresy)? Well, we must realize that when God saves us, He *always changes* us. Critical to understanding this is understanding that, at the moment of salvation, the 3rd Person of the Godhead (the Holy Spirit) – literally moves in and takes up residence in our hearts.

When we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, we can no more remain unchanged than a dark room can be filled with light – while simultaneously remaining filled with darkness. In this analogy, the issue is not that a room that is filled with light should not remain filled with darkness. The issue is that a room that is filled with light cannot remain filled with darkness – *it is a definitive impossibility*. So, in a very real sense, it does not matter whether we *claim* that a room is filled with light. If the room that we claim is filled with light is *obviously* filled with darkness then, say what we will, that room *is not filled with light*.

Likewise if we profess to have saving faith in Jesus Christ and to be born again, yet our life is wholly and completely *unaffected by* the Gospel we claim to believe, then what is going on? The answer is not actually complicated, even if it is disconcerting. If we can be *utterly unaffected* by the presence of the Holy Spirit *dwelling in us* – the reason is that Holy Spirit actually *does not* dwell in us, and we actually do not *possess* the salvation we *profess* to possess. In other words (to quote Luther), “*something is terribly wrong*” with our faith.

If this is where we find ourselves, the next question we should be asking is – “what do I do”? Well, first understand what you *must not* do. *Do not* try to pull yourself up by your own bootstraps and “do better”! This will not *solve* the problem – it will only *exacerbate* it. Instead, what you must do is simple – cry out to Jesus in true *Repentance* and true *Faith*. *Repentance* is the complete and abject surrender of our will to Jesus, turning away from ourselves as our own masters to bow the knee to Jesus as our Master. Saving *Faith* is heart, soul, mind, body trust in Jesus’ Life, Death, Burial, and Bodily Resurrection as the only hope we have in this life or the next. If we cry out to Jesus in true Repentance and Faith, we will discover (in Luther’s words from another discussion) that – “*God’s grace alone saves us, but the grace of God that saves us is never, ever alone.*”

I pray that you have a wonderful week. Anytime you ever need me, please know that my door is always open to you and I’d love to talk with you. I’ll even personally brew you a cup of the finest coffee that the church’s Keurig machine produces.

Your brother in Christ,

Heath