

500 years ago, on October 31, 1517, an Augustinian monk and professor of theology at Wittenberg University named Martin Luther nailed a paper to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany. This in itself was not unusual. In those days the church door served as the town's bulletin board. If someone wanted to publicly debate an issue, he would make it known by nailing it to the church door. But what was unusual was the topic of that paper, as it was written against many of the commonly accepted beliefs and practices of that time. In particular, it wanted to address the selling of indulgences.

It was a small, seemingly common event that sparked a worldwide revolution and Reformation of the Church. A remarkable and historic event, but is it still relevant for today? Well, the same enemies of the Gospel exist. The same attacks exist, if not even more pervasive. I can enthusiastically answer without qualification that it most certainly is!!!

As you well know, a major force in modern day society is one of tolerance with the battle cry/language of political correctness. You must be accepting of all others and see their beliefs and values as being equally correct as yours (unless of course, you are a Christian and your values are based on God's Word, which suddenly means your opinions are less valued, and in fact you are seen as being offensive and are unwelcomed in society.)

Acceptance/Tolerance - we are to be tolerant of each other's religions and beliefs and hold that Christianity is just one option among many, in fact probably the lesser option. We are expected to just give warm fuzzy hugs to those who oppose the Cross of Christ.

But the One True Living God instructs us in His Word that we are not called to tolerate the lies of the devil or the false teachings of the world. We are to oppose them. We are to fight against false teachings in a world that calls evil good and good evil; a world that is insane, that murders babies, the weak and unwanted; that wants us to pursue our selfish lusts and even twists God's most foundational relationship of marriage; and even questions our basic identity of whether we are male or female, and we can change if we are not happy.

We are commanded to proclaim the truth of God's Word in all of its entirety and purity, without watering it down. Condemning Full Law. Sweet healing Gospel. We are to proclaim the Truth

that No one comes to the Father, No one gets to heaven except through faith and trust in the Blessed work and person of the Resurrected Jesus Christ. That there is no other Name under heaven by which we must be saved except Jesus Christ. Period. That is the unyielding, invariable truth, rejected by the heart and mind of fallen mankind.

Yes, we are also commanded by our Lord to be loving and caring to those around us, and speak the Truth in love. But we are still to speak THE TRUTH (Not A truth, as in one of many possible ones, but THE TRUTH) and to do so with gentleness and respect.

What could be a more offensive statement for the ears of our modern society today than, "Yes, we have the truth." Not, a truth, or one of many truths, but The Truth. Modern man will not accept such a statement. How offended will someone get if you tell him he is wrong. How arrogant can you be to say that you have the truth?

How dare you Lutherans. How can you say such a thing? Are you alone right in all the world. Are all other denominations wrong? Are millions of fellow Christians in error? You members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church are alone right and have the Truth?

Yes, you do have the truth. But before you begin to feel smug or have an arrogant spirit begin to fester within you, having the truth is not about being right. As I have pointed out repeatedly, having a pure doctrine is not about being right. It is about comfort. It is about having the peace and assurance (and certainty of salvation) that God intends for His children to have that the Truth of His Gospel alone gives. It is about having the truth that sets you free.

The devil is a thief. With smooth subtlety and twisted lies, the devil sweet-talked and deceived our first parents into sin, robbing us of everything we had as those alone created in God's image. This thief literally robbed us blind as with our rebellion we became spiritually blinded, our souls murdered with spiritual death, to be followed by the slow agonizing life-long process of a dying body, and awaiting the horrors of eternal death where we would be forever robbed of God's presence - all hope, relief, comfort and joy taken forever.

And when God gave us back what was stolen by means of the Messiah Jesus Who accomplished the forgiveness of our sinful guilt that separated us from our Lord and restored true Life back unto us, the Thief would not sit idly by. For years the devil would work through false teachers to twist the Good News

of the Gospel of Christ, robbing Christians of the hope and comfort God would have His people enjoy.

Eventually, the Gospel was all but lost, buried under the false teachings of men that would have people look to their good works for salvation, or being near holy things such as relics, and when that failed to comfort, to rely upon another lie of the devil called indulgences. There the Christian could buy "hope" and "comfort" in that one could escape at least some of the sufferings of purgatory. What lies and cheap substitutes for the Gospel of Salvation by Grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone - lies that further robbed the child of God of the true comfort God would have them enjoy in Christ.

And here on Reformation Sunday, we do give thanks unto our loving God that through men like Martin Luther, we enjoyed the recovery of a stolen/hidden object, namely the gospel. Once again, the Truth of God's love for us in Christ and the Life He alone has won for us on the cross and given to us through faith alone created in our hearts by His Means of Grace has been delivered to God's people.

But the Thief would not rest. It was but a mere moment later when the devil again would work through false teachers to deny and twist the Gospel of salvation. Through the Radical Reformers and other protestant leaders, once again Law and Gospel were confused, people were again to focus not on the gracious work of God in Christ alone given to them in Word and Sacrament, but look instead to their own faithfulness and commitment for "assurance and hope". (Return to Rome) The Gospel was at risk.

Later the devil stole more of the Gospel hope away through pietism. This false teaching even further focused people away from Christ alone and instead to look inwardly to their hearts and feelings for assurance and certainty for salvation. The Christian was told that only by their faithfulness and holy living could they be sure of their salvation. Hope and comfort stolen again. And I could go on and on about the various attacks of the devil against the Gospel. From the beginning the devil has always worked at getting people to deny the Word of God, to get them to no longer trust in His Word and Promises alone, but instead to trust in themselves or their own philosophies and ideas - and he will continue to attack the Word until the end of days.

All of these lies and false teachings feed our sinful flesh which despises the truth that we can do absolutely nothing to accomplish or help out our salvation. Our fallen natures can't stand grace - the thought that we are totally spiritually dead in our sinful rebellion, that there is no way that we can come to our Lord or believe in him by our own reason or strength;

that instead we can only reject him and always desire to work our way back into heaven -- that we always want to rely on ourselves to some extent for salvation.

This is what I lived with daily for the first third of my life. Daily I would struggle with fear and doubts about my salvation. Daily I would feel my spiritual pulse and wonder whether or not I felt saved today or not, or whether I had done enough, been faithful enough to be certain. I was enslaved by guilt and false teaching.

Until the Lord helped me back to the truth of His Gospel and I was set free from such doubts and fears. It was when God used some Lutherans and their funny little blue book, the catechism, to open my eyes to the Truth of His Word, the Word of God in its fullness and purity, that I was set free from the burden of a life of works righteousness, and always trying to be assured of God's love and salvation by my faithfulness and efforts.

What sweet relief there is to simply look upon the Lord Crucified and Risen for me, to simply trust in His declaring me His beloved child in my baptism, to simply trust in His promises which are all yes in Christ, and not in myself.

Folks, there is nothing in here (heart) for you to trust in, only death and vile sinfulness. (Only weakness and failings) That is where the devil, your sinful flesh and all the false teachers and religions of this world would have you look. Your Lord instead would have you always look outside of yourself to Christ and Him alone for hope and salvation. That is the truth that sets you free. (From guilt, death, doubts, fears, the grave, hell).

You have the truth. But beware, the devil will never sit idly by and let you enjoy such life and freedom unchallenged. Every day he will work to rob you of God's word and try to get you to look to yourself in some way for assurance and salvation.

God grant each of you the grace to be rescued from such lies and the despair they lead to, and this by abiding in God's Word. Continue to come where God's Word is proclaimed in all its fullness and all its purity, and where His sacraments are offered rightly. Continue to look to His Word and Promises and know that the Truth of God's love for you and eternal life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the lies of the devil and the false teaching of man. You have the Truth and you have been set free! Free to oppose lies and foolishness, to proclaim the truth in gentleness and care.

Amen