

Eastern Mission

Apostolic Lutheran Church of America

October 2018

The Righteousness of Faith

This month we are remembering one of the most significant events in the history of the Christian Church: The Protestant Reformation and the life and contributions of Martin Luther (1483-1546) toward this reformation that came into the God's Church during that era. The word Protestant comes from the word protest and the term Reformation from the word reform. God's Church at that time had strayed away from the Scriptures and the time came in God's oversight of His kingdom for much needed reforms.

All Christian congregations hold to the truth that their church exists because they are followers of Jesus Christ and they desire to continue the church that He promised to build (and has built) as it is recorded in the Gospel of Matthew. The impetus for continuing the church of Jesus Christ is that we as believers have received the Good News from God through Jesus Christ and we are commissioned to preach repentance unto the remission of sins in His Name. Our understanding of the church and its role cannot be understood outside of the biblical revelation of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, in His Life, Death and Resurrection for the forgiveness of our sins. We must start there and remain there.....

Martin Luther was a monk who was tortured by this question: How does one please God? He had tried to live a good life, had confessed his sins as much as he could, but was left in a condition that was without peace. He would go to confession so much that the priests hated to see him come to them since he would take up so much of their time. This is how it went for Martin Luther. He just could not live up to the demands of the Church and therefore of God. The Good News of the Gospel was Bad News!

Then one day he was reading in the book of Romans and he came to these two verses that were written by Apostle Paul under the direction of the Holy Spirit, or to say it another way, were written by God.

Romans 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

17 For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.

Luther's struggle with God came to a head as he was wrestling with this Romans 1:17. He tells us that he was extremely zealous to understand Romans but that this phrase about God's righteousness stood in the way. This phrase, which to us is so clearly good news, was for Luther bad news.

Whenever he came across the phrase "the righteousness of God" in Scripture, it terrified him ("struck my conscience like lightning," "was like a thunderbolt in my heart") because he knew that he was an unrighteous sinner who fell far short of God's righteous (perfect) demands. It was Bad News.....

Even worse, Rom. 1:17, filled Luther with anger and hatred toward God. "I did not love, yes, I hated the righteous God who punishes sinners." Is it not enough, Luther tells us he murmured, that God crushes us miserable sinners with His law, that He has to threaten us with punishment through the Gospel, too?

After meditating day and night, finally the breakthrough came when Luther gave heed to the words at the end of 1:17, "He who through faith is righteous shall live." Then he realized that the verse was not talking about the active righteousness that God demands, but the passive righteousness that He freely gives to those who believe the Gospel. The sinner is justified (declared righteous) by God through faith in the work and death of Jesus, not by our work or keeping of the Law. Put another way, the sinner is justified by receiving (faith) rather than achieving (works). Later Luther would say that we are saved by the alien righteousness of Christ, not by a righteousness of our own doing.

When he had discovered that God gives His righteousness as a gift in Christ, he felt that he "was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates . . . that place in Paul was for me truly the gate to paradise." Now his conscience was at rest, now he was certain of his salvation. Before there had been only unrest and uncertainty.

Faith now connected him to the Gospel, faith united him with the forgiveness of his sins through Christ.

KJV Romans 4:3 For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.

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