

October 31, 2021

Reformation Sunday

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A LUTHERAN

There are many opinions as to what it means to be a Lutheran. The Lutheran church today represents a broad spectrum of views in this regard. What does it mean to be an heir of the Lutheran Reformation of the 16th century?

First, to be a Lutheran is to be one who believes that the Word alone is the true source and authority for all matters of faith and life. This is held as truth because of one's underlying conviction that the Bible is, in its entirety, God's inspired and inerrant Word. The Bible is opened with the confidence that all is true. Like the Bereans of old in Acts 17:11, all religious opinions one might encounter are tested with the divine Scriptures. . . . Our Lutheran confessions clearly point to the Word alone. . . .

Secondly, to be a Lutheran is to be a person who believes that salvation is by grace alone. One believes that the law of God reveals the total depravity of man's spiritual condition and one's utter helplessness to save oneself. At the same time, one rejoices in the revelation of the divine plan of salvation: that God has sent His only Son to die on the cross as the perfect sacrifice for one's sin. A Lutheran recognizes the Word and Sacraments as God's gracious means of saving sinners through the work of the Holy Spirit. Luther says in this regard, "Neither you nor I could ever know anything of Christ, or believe in Him and take him as our Lord, unless these were first offered to us and bestowed on our hearts [as a gift] through the preaching of the Gospel by the Holy Spirit" (*Book of Concord*, Tappert edition, 415).

Thirdly, to be a Lutheran is to confess that salvation is received by faith alone. To be saved is to be justified by grace alone through faith alone. Luther's long struggle was caused by his erroneous idea that faith and good works were together necessary for salvation. He was finally converted as the light of Romans 1:17 dawned on his soul: "The just shall live by faith" (KJV). He saw that it is the object of faith, Christ and His atoning work at the cross, that alone justifies a sinner. . . .

Thank God for the great witness to fundamental Bible truths given fresh and courageous testimony at the time of the Reformation. May God empower us all to proclaim and live these crucial biblical teachings in our own time!

—Dr. Francis W. Monseth, excerpt from recently published *One Thing I Seek: Selected Writings of Francis W. Monseth*, AFLC Heritage Series Volume V (Minneapolis: Ambassador Publications, 2021), 146–147.

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