

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church

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Sermon Title: Scripture, Faith, and Grace are Still Relevant for Today, Various Scriptures

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INTRODUCTION: I'll be using several scriptures, so it'll be a bit of a challenge to keep up, but I encourage you to do your best to follow me, or at least write down the scripture references.

It is my hope you will gain a lot from today's message. Today is the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, and many people around the world are speaking about Martin Luther—that simple man who wanted to know more about God. Today's message has a lot of summarized history, but it is much more than a history lesson.

BACKGROUND: The period of time from roughly 500 AD until 1500 AD is known as the Middle Ages, the Dark Ages, and also “a thousand years without a bath.” Illiteracy was at an all-time high. We watch movies about castles and kingdoms, and with that, comes all the romance of the era—knights in shining armor. But, really, it was an awful time in human history. While there are some exceptions, most of those thousand years were characterized by plagues, filth, ruthless kings, cruel and unusual punishment, famines, and kingdoms overthrowing kingdoms.

The largest Church of the day was the Catholic Church, and over time, they built a loose federation of kingdoms and smaller fiefdoms called the Holy Roman Empire, which lasted until 1806.

In such a male dominated world, if a man wanted to learn the scripture, he had to commit his life to being a priest, because the Church controlled the ownership of

the Bible. Bibles were chained to pulpits, and few had their own Bibles. If you wanted to hear the Bible you had to go hear the priest read it.

A young man named Martin Luther wanted to learn the Bible for himself, so he entered training to become a priest. He had a passion to learn the scripture and studied it day and night. He had a brilliant mind, and brilliant minds ask questions.

Luther had been taught he must go to the priest for confession of sin. He had such a desire to be forgiven of his sin that he rushed to the abbot father (who was the head of the monastery) every time he sinned to seek forgiveness. One day he rushed to the abbot father and confessed that at meal time he had been jealous because the monk sitting next to him had a larger potato than he had. The abbot father became so frustrated he told Luther, “I absolve you of all sin for all time.” This and other things made Luther question if what he heard was true. He studied the scripture for himself, and he found out he didn’t need to confess his sins to a priest. I will talk more about that later...

As Luther studied the Bible and matured in his faith, one day at a church in Wittenberg, Germany, he nailed his famous 95 Theses to the door on October 31, 1517. In the Theses, he outlined his grievances with the Catholic Church. And, his work sparked the Protestant Reformation. In addition, an industrious man named Johannes Gutenberg introduced the printing press to Europe, and in time, the Bible became mass produced.

Today, over 500 biographies have been written about Luther. He had recurring themes in his Reformation revolution. And, in the 20th century, those who have studied Luther’s teachings condensed his reforming themes into 3 and later 5 *solae* or (*solae* depending upon how you read the Latin).

Today I will pick three solas, which carry the spirit of all 5.

1. **Scripture** alone.
2. **Faith** in Christ alone.
3. **Grace** of God in Christ alone.

First, SCRIPTURE ALONE—

SCRIPTURE: 2 Timothy 3:16-17 ¹⁶*All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,* ¹⁷*so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

Before the Reformation (and today in some faith traditions), creeds, teachings, doctrines, and Church traditions are seen as equal or above scripture. However, *sola scriptura* or “scripture only” leads quickly to the conclusion that scripture is the driving force behind our doctrines and traditions. As Timothy wrote, it is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness.

Now, as Baptists, we are known as people of the Bible. You also might hear we live in the Bible belt. People might ask you, “What do you believe as a Baptist?” And, many might answer, “I just believe the Bible.” And, as you know, this can cause problems when people use the Bible to justify whatever they want—like slavery, for instance. But, when we say we believe the Bible, what we are saying is we believe the Bible is the Word of God and tradition is not.

The roots of all this goes back to our Reformation roots. There are different opinions about our Baptist heritage, but no doubt, it was influenced by the Reformation. When people began to read the Bible for themselves, they saw a lot of problems in the Church.

ILLUSTRATION: If we take a look back into Martin Luther’s life, we see he discovered an understanding that he could not earn his salvation. He learned and understood this while reading the Book of Romans. He said,

Meditating day and night...I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous one lives by a gift of God, namely by faith. And this is the meaning: the righteousness of God is revealed by the gospel, namely the passive righteousness with which merciful God justifies us by faith...Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates.

Let's look in Romans ourselves:

SCRIPTURE: Romans 1:17 ¹⁷*For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.”*

Luther felt this saving faith through the Gospel only. And, scripture is how he came to know about the Gospel and receive faith—

There are other verses for the importance of scripture:

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 24:35 ³⁵*Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.*

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 4:12 ¹²*For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.*

On April 18, 1521: Martin Luther stood before Emperor Charles V and Germany's nobles in the city of Worms. Charles V, Germany's nobles, and the pope commanded Luther to recant his theological views—but he refused. The punishment for this could be death.

Even when it came to the authority of the Church, Luther stood on scripture as the highest authority. Here's what Luther said:

Unless I am convinced by the testimony of Scripture or by clear reason, for I do not trust either in the pope or in councils alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves, my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not retract anything....I cannot do otherwise, here I stand, may God help me. Amen. (From Luther's Works)

Second, FAITH in CHRIST ALONE—

It's how Paul says people were saved even before Christ came to earth in flesh.

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 11:1-3, 39-40 ¹*Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.* ²*This is what the ancients were commended for.*

³*By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.*

[It goes on and on]...*by faith Abraham, Abel, Enoch, Noah...etc...*

³⁹*These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised,* ⁴⁰*since God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.*

EXPLANATION: Martin Luther read those scriptures. We are saved by our faith. Hebrews 12 says **JESUS** is the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 12:1-3 ¹*Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us,* ²*fixing our eyes on Jesus, **the pioneer and perfecter of faith**.* *For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.* ³*Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.*

ILLUSTRATION: Martin Luther, in a prayer to God during a terrifying thunderstorm, promised God he would become a monk if God spared his life. And, he did, but during his time as a monk, he wrestled with the role his deeds played in his salvation. As a monk, Luther tried to be “good enough.” But, he always could think of another sin he had not confessed, and then he doubted his own sincerity.

APPLICATION: Sound familiar to anyone? Have you ever prayed a prayer and then later wondered if you were really sincere with that prayer? Have you ever confessed a sin and then later committed the other sin and wondered whether you were really sincere in your confession?

Luther said, “When someone thinks about earning salvation, he is pleasing and enjoying himself in his own works—“*ador[ing] onelf as an idol*”[quoted in Philip S. Watson, *Let God be God!* Fortress Press, 1947; p.90].

- Ephesians 2:8, 9, 10 make it clear that we are saved by faith, and works is the outgrowth. I am amazed how many people miss that.

ILLUSTRATION: One time I was preaching, and I preached through this passage of scripture. And, a woman met me on the way out the door, and she grabbed my arm and said, “It’s what you do that gets you there, and don’t you ever forget it.” Really? Many think this way—that it’s about what you do.

Quote from 95 Theses:

(1)When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, “Repent (Matthew 4:17) He willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance”

(95) And thus be confident of entering into heaven through many tribulations rather than through false security of peace (Acts 14:22).

[He based that on Acts 14:22, which says believers will endure tribulation.]

Third, we have the GRACE of Christ ALONE—

In the Church in Luther’s day, people were taught they could be saved through a system of confession followed by penance. People could even pay for their sins and buy years out of purgatory through indulgences. Now, when we use the word indulgence today, we think of luxury—an extra piece of pumpkin pie.

But, indulgence in the original use, was a payment. A person could pay for an indulgence, which, based on the amount of money, would buy a person a certain number of years. They used it as a fund-raising technique to raise money to build great cathedrals which still exist today. For instance, they would sell fingernails, and locks of hair, and so on and say these were from the disciples themselves. People, in their ignorance, in their desire to be saved, bought the indulgences. Some

people still believe similar things today. Some televangelists teach similar heresies—“Give to me and watch your bank account grow.”

But, what is grace alone? It is unmerited favor...an unearned gift from God.

Luther believed we are powerless without God’s grace. Even the fact we are able to receive salvation is by God’s grace.

Listen to these verses on God’s grace:

SCRIPTURE: Romans 3:23-24 ²³*for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,* ²⁴*and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus*

SCRIPTURE: Ephesians 2:8-9 ⁸*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—* ⁹*not by works, so that no one can boast.*

SCRIPTURE: Ephesians 4:7 ⁷*But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.*

SCRIPTURE: Romans 11:6 ⁶*And if by grace, then it cannot be based on works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace.*

APPLICATION: Aren’t you grateful for God’s grace? Don’t we need God’s grace? Aren’t our works no more than filthy rags compared to God’s grace?

How many of you here are saved by God’s grace? It has to be this way. There’s no other way.

ILLUSTRATION: A friend of mine, who has spoken at this church, has worked in youth ministry all over the world and sees the great importance of training leaders in the Gospel.

He wrote on Facebook this morning:

I feel so privileged to be speaking in Germany this Reformation week, I'm even stirred to post on Facebook again! Beethoven and all the German

musicians, Einstein and all the German scientists, Kant and all the German thinkers and philosophers, Charlemaine and the world leaders, Daimler and the industrialists, all trumped by a 16th century monk, when it comes to shaping world history. The gospel is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes for in it a righteousness from God is revealed!

CONCLUSION:

1. Scripture alone
2. Faith in Christ alone
3. Grace of Christ alone

You may be here today listening. You've listened to this message, and you've been caught up in thinking tradition will save you because you did something at one time. You might be thinking, "I've put my faith in my works hoping some day I will have earned enough to be saved." Well, scripture tells us we are saved by faith in Christ alone. If you wrestle with that, ask God to help you understand. And, believe me, he will help you understand.

If you are here, and you believe you can be saved some other way besides through Christ, surrender to this: It is the grace of Christ alone that saves.

Why don't you unlock the shackles? You have the key. You've got the knowledge. You can unlock the shackles. They can drop to the ground. You can raise your hands, and say "I am going to be free. I am going to let go of thinking my own works save me. I am going to let go of thinking tradition saves me. I am going to let go of thinking I can be saved another way besides Christ." There is freedom in Christ.

ILLUSTRATION: We are going to face judgment one of these days. Somebody asked me a couple of weeks ago—a woman I know who had been to lunch with a friend claiming to be an atheist. And, he posed the question that atheists like to dwell on: "What about the people who have never heard about Jesus?" You see, atheists like to divert the attention away from themselves. The real question is, "What about you—because you have heard?"

Here's the answer to the question: Everyone who is in Heaven is there because Christ has let them in. You see, Jesus comes to us through knowledge and revelation in different ways. And, he meets us where we are intellectually. He meets us where we are emotionally. He meets us where we are with our miniscule amount of faith. And, he holds us accountable for our response to what we know. He holds us responsible for our response to his revelation to us.

APPLICATION: If we know and we don't respond, we have everything to worry about. The question is not about those who haven't heard. That's up to God to figure out. The question is up to us who have heard—what will be your response today?

Will you let go? Will you trust God? Will you humble yourself like this monk, Martin Luther, who owned nothing and just said, "I just want to know the truth. I just want to know it." If he can do it, you can do it.

Additional Notes:

One could get into the predestination discussion (Calvinism versus Arminianism), but that would defeat the point this morning. One could even argue what the authority of scripture means as the Lutherans at the time did. In the midst of lots of arguing, Luther said it perfectly:

They are trying to make me into a fixed star; I am an irregular planet.
(Quoted in Bainton, *Here I Stand*, p. 296).

Even in celebrating the Reformation and Luther's life, we can't take everything he said either. Luther, himself, had his short-comings and prejudices. He called James an "epistle of straw" and said Revelation wasn't revealing to him.

Other people to look up/reference:

- Zwingli
- Philip Melanchthon

- John Calvin

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I use the NIV translation of scripture because of its conversational nature. Feel free to go to Bible Gateway and copy and paste whichever translation you want to use. This transcript has been edited to an outline format that improves readability and therefore may not exactly follow the video edition.

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Sincerely, Paul Gunn
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