



1517<sup>AD</sup>

KEY DATES IN THE LUTHERAN REFORMATION

Psalms 29 Ephesians 2:1-10 John 14:1-6

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In **theology**, there are four general areas of study. The first two are the most common and probably the most well-known.

1. The first is called **Exegetical Theology**, and it means the study of the Biblical text. In *Exegetical Theology*, you use the Old Testament Hebrew and New Testament Greek texts in order to understand what God is teaching us in His Word.
2. The second area of theology is called **Systematic Theology**; this is a study of the doctrines and the teachings of Scripture, bringing them together around Christ, and teaching them as a whole.
3. A third area of theology is called **Practical Theology**; in *practical theology* you take the Biblical texts and the doctrines of Scripture and apply them to the Christian faith in life.
4. The final area of study in theology is called **Historical Theology**. This is a study of how the Holy Spirit has worked through the centuries to lead and guide the Holy Christian Church to carry out its mission to make disciples of all nations.

Over the next several weeks, as a lead up to the celebration of the Lutheran Reformation, we will spend some time with **Historical Theology**. We'll take a look at the **key dates of the Lutheran Reformation**, and see how the Holy Spirit has worked through history to preserve the Gospel, and what the implications are for us today as conservative Lutheran Christians.

The place to start then is the year **1517<sup>AD</sup>**. This is the year that Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the door of the Wittenberg, Germany church. This is considered the beginning of the Lutheran Reformation.

**Martin Luther** was a Roman Catholic monk and teacher in northern Germany. At the time, the Roman Catholic Church was 11 years into their massive building project for St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. The pope has issued an **indulgence** in order to raise money for the building project<sup>1</sup>. An indulgence is literally where you pay money for the forgiveness of sins<sup>2</sup>. The Pope had issued indulgences as a fund-raiser to build St. Peter's basilica<sup>3</sup>.

Even as a Roman Catholic monk, Martin Luther realized that this was not right. As we know, he would go on to realize that salvation is not by works that we do, *nor money that we pay*, but it is a gift of God, a work God does by grace.

**Salvation By Works** is the default position of every human being, including us, because of **original sin**. Your sinful nature is **very proud**, and it thinks that it is good, and it believes that it does things that are right and true. It is deceptively easy to justify yourself and your actions. And so it is easy for man to create a checklist in order to be save himself. It is easy to deceive yourself into thinking that you are "pretty good." When you think that you are "basically good", then you do not need a Savior. This is **Salvation By Works**. Your pride wants nothing to do with God; you can do it on our own because you think you are a good person and have the power to do "good" things to make up for your "bad" things. This kind of thinking is way of the flesh, it is from the sinful nature. In theology, it is called *justification by the law*; or *salvation by works*; or *works righteousness*. **Salvation By Works is the way the flesh, and the sinful nature; it is a rejection and denial of Christ and His Word.**

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<sup>1</sup> In 1506 the cornerstone for a new basilica of St. Peter was laid and Pope Julius II authorized an indulgence to finance its construction. In exchange for a contribution to the building fund, a papal indulgence offered huge benefits, such as the forgiveness of future sins and the release of loved ones from purgatory. "Indulgences Explained." An article from Martin Luther: Visionary Reformer by Scott Hendrix, published by Yale University Press, quoted in <https://wng.org/roundups/indulgences-explained-1617229570>

<sup>2</sup> A Dominican monk named Johann Tetzel sold indulgences in the region around Wittenberg in a very ostentatious (= **showy, flamboyant**) manner. Many stories started popping up about him such as, that Tetzel could redeem the sins of the deceased. Further sayings of Tetzel, such as, "When the money clangs in the box, the souls spring up to heaven", also brought protests from Luther. <https://www.luther.de/en/anschlag.html>

<sup>3</sup> If you take time to really think about this, this will show you how utterly depraved the Church had gotten under the Papacy. They were selling forgiveness of sins to build a basilica. They had lost their way, and this is just the tip of the iceberg. By God's grace, Martin Luther survived excommunication and condemnation to bring the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ back to chief importance in the Christian Church!

And so from this, you have **WORLD RELIGIONS**; every world religion is built on some form of good works: whether that be obeying some laws, making some sacrifices, living in poverty, or praying to idols. Every world religion is built on some form of good works. **Salvation By Works** is the way the flesh, and the sinful nature; it is a rejection and denial of Christ and His Word.

In Martin Luther's day, the **ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH** had created its own checklist for salvation. *Penance, Prayers, Mass, and Purgatory* were taught as “good” things you could do in order to make up for any “bad” things you did. *Indulgences* were a part of this; you pay money to cover up your sins. Of course, the Bible condemns this kind of thinking<sup>4</sup>.

Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law Romans 3:20

So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified. Galatians 2:16

**Salvation By Works** is a danger for all of us. You always have to check yourself so that you do not think that your “good” works can make up for your “bad” works.

⇒ Make sure that you're not following some kind of a checklist to **please** God.

⇒ Make sure that you are not cultivating an attitude of thinking that God “**owes**” you something.

Salvation by works comes out in difficult times: if something difficult happens in your life, you start thinking that you don't “**deserve**” this. You don't “**deserve**” this because you have done so many “good things”. Test yourself and make sure you are **NOT** looking to your own works for salvation<sup>5</sup>!

The Lutheran Reformation is all about *salvation by grace*, through faith, in the Lord Jesus Christ alone. Grace means “gift”; your sins are forgiven as a gift

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<sup>4</sup> Both the books of Romans and the book of Galatians' main themes are that we are saved by God's grace, and *not by our own works*!

<sup>5</sup> Test Yourself . . . The following is a flawed question, but it can help you think this through for yourself. Ask yourself: "If you were to stand before God and He were to ask you, 'Why should I let you into heaven?, what would you say?" If your answer is anything you yourself did, then you are thinking works righteousness. The Biblical answer is “because of Jesus.” Salvation is through faith in Christ ... **ALONE**. Salvation is not by “Jesus + your good works.”

from God. You have eternal life as a gift from God. It's all by grace. And God's grace comes to you through His Son Jesus.

## **This is the message of the Lutheran Reformation!**

The Roman Catholic Church had turned everything *upside down*.

The Lutheran Reformation turned everything *right side up again!*

The Lutheran Reformation *returned the emphasis* of the Christian faith to Christ and His life, death, and resurrection for the salvation of the world.

Jesus saves us; we do not save ourselves, nor do we help Jesus somehow. Your sins are forgiven because of Jesus' work on the cross, not because you think you followed some checklist. Jesus suffered and died for you to take your sins away; your own efforts could never do it, nor would God ever accept anything you think you did.

Salvation is by **grace** in the Lord Jesus **Christ** alone.

Salvation is by **faith** in God's promises, *not by works that you do*.

But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness is given through **faith in Jesus Christ** to all who believe.  
Romans 3:21-22

For we maintain that a person is **justified by faith** apart from the works of the law.  
Romans 3:28

This is what the year **1517AD** is all about. It is not so much about Martin Luther, but how God worked through Martin Luther<sup>6</sup> to bring the Gospel to the forefront. He taught that salvation is by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ --> and not by indulgences, good works, or any other human effort.

**1517** ... it's a date that is worth knowing.

- ✓ Indulgences were denounced;
- ✓ The Reformation was beginning;
- ✓ and the focus of the Church was shifting back to the grace of God in the Lord Jesus Christ! Amen!

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<sup>6</sup> **Martin Luther Biography** If you would like to read up on Martin Luther, a good, concise biography is Luther the Reformer: The Story of the Man and His Career, second edition by James M Kittleson. This is an updated edition of the biography that was assigned to us to read in seminary. I saw that it was available at Amazon.com for \$21.59 (Kindle \$18.99, used \$7.26; the older first editions are \$2.31 used).

**God the Father,**  
while we were yet sinners You  
send Your Son Jesus to do the  
work of salvation for us.

**We thank you for His life, death,  
and resurrection that has earned  
our eternal salvation.**

**Send your Holy Spirit, to deepen  
our conviction of your grace and  
mercy,**

**and to guard and protect us from  
thinking that we can contribute  
to our own salvation.**

**We pray this in Jesus' Name,  
Amen!**

# Psalm 29

Ascribe to the LORD, O heavenly beings, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength. 2 Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness. 3 The voice of the LORD is over the waters; the God of glory thunders, the LORD, over many waters. 4 The voice of the LORD is powerful; the voice of the LORD is full of majesty. 5 The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars; the LORD breaks the cedars of Lebanon. 6 He makes Lebanon to skip like a calf, and Sirion like a young wild ox. 7 The voice of the LORD flashes forth flames of fire. 8 The voice of the LORD shakes the wilderness; the LORD shakes the wilderness of Kadesh. 9 The voice of the LORD makes the deer give birth and strips the forests bare, and in his temple all cry, "Glory!" 10 The LORD sits enthroned over the flood; the LORD sits enthroned as king forever. 11 May the LORD give strength to his people! May the LORD bless his people with peace!

## **Ephesians 2:1-10**

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins <sup>2</sup> in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience-- <sup>3</sup> among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. <sup>4</sup> But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, <sup>5</sup> even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ--by grace you have been saved-- <sup>6</sup> and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup> so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. <sup>8</sup> For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, <sup>9</sup> not a result of works, so that no one may boast. <sup>10</sup> For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.



# John 14:1-6

Jesus said, "Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. 2 In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. 4 And you know the way to where I am going." 5 Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" 6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

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