

Today is Reformation Sunday. It is the day we celebrate an event almost 500 years ago on October 31, 1517 when a young Monk named Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses or questions for discussion on the door of the Wittenberg Chapel. As an aside, that is how they did things in those days because they didn't have chat rooms or twitter – if you wanted to discuss theology or something you nailed your questions on the church door.

Those 95 Theses were in essence the proverbial shot heard around the world and they became the start of what is now known as the Protestant Reformation. As I said, Luther was a Roman Catholic Monk. As he was studying the Book of Romans the Lord revealed to him one foundational truth – “*the just shall live by faith.*” Hence, the theme of the Reformation was *sola fide* – by faith alone.

The other foundational doctrine that came out of the Reformation was *sola scriptura* – the Scriptures alone as our sole rule of faith and practice. This is essential because some of the teachings of the Roman church were not based on the Scriptures and hence they were not biblical, by our definition. Every church has traditions, but in Protestant Churches those traditions are subservient to the Scriptures. In the Roman church Scripture and Tradition have equal weight. Our purpose is not to examine those.

However, the thing that triggered Luther's 95 Theses was that the Roman Catholic Church was teaching that salvation could be bought or earned by the works you did. In fact, in order to finance the construction of St. Peter's in Rome, they were in essence selling salvation on the street corners by the way of Indulgences. The purchasers thought that by paying money they would get out purgatory faster and into heaven.

Luther saw the heresy in this dogma of the church as he seriously studied the Book of Romans. For your information, doctrine is that which can be proved by the Scriptures, and dogma is the teachings of the church that sometimes have their basis in the Word of God and sometimes do not. In this case, Indulgences not only cannot be proved by the Word of God, but are in fact a damnable heresy.

Martin Luther challenged the church leaders because he really wanted to know the truth. He wanted to be as faithful to the Word of God as possible. The Roman Church's response was to put a contract out on his life. I guess this was the beginning of the Mafia in Italy. Anyway, Luther had to go into hiding.

In any event, what Luther started eventually became the Protestant Reformation of which we are the descendants today. We believe that we have been justified by faith in Christ. That is — because of our faith in Christ as Savior we are accounted as righteous before God. It doesn't mean that we are made righteous, rather when God looks at us through Christ, He sees the righteousness of Jesus Christ, and not our sin.

Again, this is one of the differences between Roman Catholic Theology and our theology. The Roman Church teaches that salvation is by faith plus works. We believe that salvation is

by faith alone and our works are an evidence or proof of our faith. As James, the brother of our Savior says in James 2:26: “*For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.*”

This is exactly what we have been looking at the past few weeks in the passages that we have looked at in the book of Ephesians. And that is exactly what we see in the passage that is before us today from Ephesians 5:15-21 (READ). Please turn with me there.

This passage is part of Paul’s continuing exhortation to the Christians at Ephesus and us as to how we should walk as a result of all that God has done for us through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Remember, God has chosen us before the foundation of the world to be His children – we have been adopted into His family – we are no longer at war with Him – we have forgiveness of our sins, access to God through the Son – and the list goes on. But as a result of all that God has done for us, we are then to “*walk worthy of the calling that we have received.*” This worthy walk is the evidence of our faith in Christ as Savior and Lord – our good works, if you will.

As I said previously – the 1st three chapters of Ephesians spells out all that God has done for us and the last three chapters is the application of what that means. And again, he calls what we do or don’t do, our walk.

Note what he says first – “*See then that you walk circumspectly*”. The idea here is to be very diligent and careful in our walk, always looking out for danger. In the context of the book it means that as a result of who we are and what God has given us we are to be careful in our walk because others are looking at us.

I have said it before, that when someone who is a well known Christian falls into sin – think Jim Baker or Jimmy Swaggert – it reflects on all of us. Think about the small percentage of Roman Catholic priests who abused children and how it reflects on the whole church. That is why as Christians – we are to *walk circumspectly*.

Paul goes on to tell us what this entails – “*not as fools but as wise*”. As Christians we are not to walk as the people of the world live, indulging in foolish pleasures and desires, but as those who have been taught the truths of God’s Word – what He desires for us. In a sense, we have the wisdom of God, and therefore we are to walk in that wisdom.

Back in Ephesians 5:8, Paul puts it another way: “*For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light.*” The light of the gospel has been revealed to us – therefore we are to walk as those who have received the light.

One of the ways that we are to do this is seen as Paul goes on: “*redeeming the time, because the days are evil.*” I have a group of cousins who are constantly frequenting casinos – whether it be Atlantic City or the new one at the race track outside of Philadelphia. Every time you talk to them, they remark how frequently they go. Aside from the money that will

be lost – remember the casinos win 97% of the time – I can't believe that this is good use of time.

Just think of the craziness surround the city with the Phillies in the World Series again. I am happy for them and I will be disappointed if they don't win it all again – but my life does not begin and end with the Phillies.

That is why Paul goes on: *“Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is.”* And what is the will of the Lord – to know His Word and to live by it to the best of our ability. As I have said before, we will not do it perfectly, but we are to strive to do it the best that we can. This is walking circumspectly.

He then tells us what we are not to do and then what we are to do. First, what not to do – *“And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation;”* This is not just a prohibition on drinking wine – although we aren't to get drunk. Paul is probably referring to a form of worship, such as to Dionysus, also known as Bacchus, the god of wine where people got drunk in their worship. This worship is dissipation.

On the contrary, Paul tells them *“but be filled with the Spirit.”* In other words, instead of being drunk worshipping the god of wine, we are to be filled with Spirit of God – the same Spirit that raised up Christ from the dead.

When we accepted Christ as Savior the Holy Spirit came into our lives. But, we are to be continually filled with the Spirit and as we do so we are to let the Spirit control our actions and our reactions. In a parallel passage in Colossians 3:15-16 we read: *“And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.”*

As we read and study God's Word, then the Word of Christ by his Spirit will dwell in us and we will know what to do and what not to do. Jesus, in his prayer for all Christians says in John 14:26: *“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.”*

One of the things that we are to do is contained in the concluding words of our passage – *“speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another in the fear of God.”*

This does not mean that we should go around singing to each other, but rather this has reference to our true worship of God. *Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs* should be part of our worship of God – which in our case, they are. As we do this we are to be *singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord*. Christians should be the most joyful people in the world.

Again, think of all the blessings that have received from God – forgiveness of sins, fellowship with God, a place reserved in heaven for us. Now, this does not mean that our lives will be a bed of roses. On the contrary, Jesus has promised us tribulation – that is, troubles in this world.

But, in spite of the troubles that we have, we can still be joyful and make a joyful noise unto the Lord, as the Scriptures says. I am reminded of the account in the book of Acts, where Paul and Silas after being beaten with rods, were thrown into prison.

And this is what we read in Acts 16:23& 24: *“And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely. Having received such a charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.”*

Now, were Paul and Silas having a pity party for themselves? No, the very next verse says Acts 16:25: *“But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.”* They were praying and singing – why, because they had the joy of their salvation in their hearts.

No doubt they were also giving thanks to God as we read on another occasion. We have much to be thankful for – as I said all the blessings of our salvation. Therefore we are to give thanks always to God in the name of Jesus Christ.

With the concluding words of our passage exhorting us to follow the example of our Savior – *submitting to one another in the fear of God*. Regardless of our social or economic status, we are to follow the example of our Savior – in humility and kindness.

We read these words in Philippians 2:1-8: *“Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.”*

This is the example that our Savior has given us that we are to follow. Remember, our Savior washed his disciples feet and we read in – John 13:13-17: *“You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.”*

As you know I have said on numerous occasions that God has given us all things for life and godliness – that is, how to live in this world and the world to come. He has given us His Word to live by here on earth – seeing things as we saw in 2nd Peter and the few messages in Ephesians. He has also told us how to get to the world to come – to heaven when this earthly life is ended.

And that is only by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior. Again, the rallying cry of the Reformation – *sola fide* – by faith alone. Let us be thankful that God has revealed these things to us, because they really are a matter of life and death.