

Scripture Reading: I John 1

“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life— 2 the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us— 3 that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. 4 And these things we write to you that your joy may be full. 5 This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. 6 If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. 7 But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. 8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.”

"Cleansed of All Unrighteousness"

Tuesday night we will gather to celebrate the Reformation as we try to do each year on October 31st! That is the day that Martin Luther began a world-wide discussion about the various abuses that had become prevalent in the Roman Catholic Church. Pastor Sumpter's messages at camp focused on the courage of the men who lived in that era, and we would honor them by being courageous today!

When I began this short series of messages, I pointed out that it would center around the instructions that the Apostle Paul gave to young Timothy: “If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine which you have carefully followed.” That is the spirit in which I want to approach these sermons AND it is the spirit that all of our parents, along with us as their helpers should approach in the instruction of our covenant children. Now I am going to quiz our children again this morning on those groups of five we discussed, but I also gave a homework assignment...

- So, who read & meditated on all or part of First Timothy?

We need to remember that one of our lessons was to be good examples! OK, children let's begin with the easy list of five parts or movements in our order of worship that we do each week:

- Call to Worship
- Confession of our Sin
- Consecration by God's Word
- Communion
- Commissioned to serve

Now, here is another easy one... With the text I read from First John this morning which part do you think I am going to discuss? Yes, the confession of our sins which is something we do at the beginning of the service after we have been called together and have given the proper adoration to our Triune God.

- Here we should immediately see our need to confess our sins, something we see in the Bible when people come into the very presence of God.
- As Pastor Doug Wilson often says, we come into God's house with dirty boots and we need to wipe them!

This is pictured beautifully by Jesus as He washes the feet of the disciples on the night that He instituted the Supper we celebrate each week! [John 13]

As I mentioned I am not going to spend a great deal of time on each element of our worship this year as I have in the past because I want to also cover the importance of the Reformation. *[mention sermons on sermon audio]* There were two other lists of five, both of which came out of the work of the reformation: The Five solas & what many call the Doctrines of Grace:

Remember, sola is simply the Latin word for alone...

1. Sola scriptura: "Scripture alone"
2. Sola fide: "faith alone"
3. Sola gratia: "grace alone"
4. Solo Christo: "Christ alone"
5. Soli Deo gloria: "to the glory of God alone"

With only one Lord's Day left before the 31st, I had to pick one over the other and I chose to discuss the Doctrines of Grace, so I will cover these solas in more detail next week...

And remember I wanted us to be pondering why we have 'five alones.' One might think there should be only one alone or at least one that is the most important?

- Lord willing, what we cover today will better prepare us to answer that important question!

Considering our confession of sin in the worship services and Reformation Day coming on Tuesday, the proper focus this morning should be on the Doctrines of Grace and if we come to understand them better it will inform our time of confession as well as help us to see how the five solas are all necessary and work nicely together. So the five Doctrines of Grace are often remembered by the acronym TULIP:

What are they?

Total Depravity

Unlimited Favor

Limited Atonement

Irresistible Grace

Perseverance of the Saints

Now if you pick up this week's handout you see that I have suggested an alternative way to remember them and as I work my way through them I trust I can show you why I think it is a bit of an improvement. Always dangerous to suggest changing something that has been used for hundreds of years, but we should remember that the reformers did that very thing: I am not suggesting a major change like our view of justification by faith but rather I am suggesting a newer tool that is more helpful when it comes to understanding and sharing our faith. So why suggest a change with regard to this well-worn acronym?

- Well, I have a couple of reasons that were born largely out of my personal experiences.

Linda and I were both saved in Christian & Missionary Alliance Churches which are evangelical churches that preach the Gospel, which we are both very thankful for! As a young Christian, God worked in a mysterious way with my early discipleship: I studied at our local church under a man who was a strong Arminian... Someone who followed the teachings of the man who the doctrines of Grace were formulated to oppose or correct!

As a typical young Christian I could not get enough of the Bible and spent a great deal of time reading books like John, Romans, Ephesians and Colossians! It also helped that one of the first books I was given to read was *Knowing God* by J.I. Packard. Obviously, I had many questions for this teacher and I am sure I tried his patience! But while he often had ready answers, I kept coming back with lines like ‘but what about what Paul or John say here?’ For example this man thought that a Christian could lose their salvation and yet I could not get past Jesus saying that He would lose none who were His! Going forward the work of Francis and Edith Schaeffer had a strong influence on both Linda and myself.

So while neither Packard nor Schaeffer wore their reformed standards on their sleeves if you will, we ended up being almost fully reformed before we even knew what reformed was! When we first attended Covenant Reformed Church about thirty three years ago, we looked around and said, ‘Huh, so this is what we are!’ It was there that we and our children learned about what I am reviewing in this series of reformation sermons this year.

So, all of that background to hopefully help you see where my two concerns came from... I have often told people that the reformed faith simply comes from the Bible! When you read it honestly and fully it is where you will likely end up.

- That was my experience so it has to be right, right? 😊

Seriously I do think it is where the Bible leads us & often those who stop somewhere short of the full truth are not wrong, just not complete. The five points given to us in TULIP were formulated as a defense against error and I would suggest that we should be more on offense, stating clearly what the Bible teaches about man’s salvation.

My second concerns is with how a few of the points are phrased to come up with TULIP: Not with a doctrine itself, but how it is presented. I think we often get into debates that are not useful because of this, which I will try to demonstrate as we go through my suggested alternative.

And please note, whether one sticks with the traditional TULIP or goes with an alternative like PRAISE the core doctrines remain unchanged and are important because they are what the Bible declares & teaches. A proper understanding of them helps us to see why weekly confession is appropriate and why all of the solas work so well together!

We can think of it this way: The Christian faith can be summarized by that children’s song, *Jesus Loves Me*.

- We can assure our children, and anyone else, that Jesus loves us because that is what the Bible teaches.

Simple enough for a child to understand and embrace, but profound enough that all of these doctrines of grace are essential to help us fully understand the breadth and depth of that love.

- So let me walk us through the doctrines of Grace in a new way and as I do I would encourage all of us to be those Good Bereans who take everything that is taught back to the Scriptures to see if it is true!

You will notice on my worksheet, there are many, many Bible references for your further study. And note that I often do not give just a ‘proof-text’ but rather whole chapters or even entire Books where that doctrine is taught. I chose PRAISE as a new acronym for two reasons: First it is a strong Biblical word that is popular today and also it allows me to add a point about the Great Commission and evangelism!

Reformers are often referred to as the frozen chosen which we must dispel!

So we being with “P” :

The Plight of Mankind which is a reality: A reality that all honest people must face.

In the Garden of Eden, God gave Adam a real choice with real consequences: Eternal life with God or death.

Now, those of the Arminian persuasion will often say they support the Arminian view because man's choices must be real choices or else we are mere robots.

- But when we show them from the Scriptures that Adam's real choice left all of mankind in a sorry state, they often say, 'that is not fair.'

The Bible is clear that Adam's wrong choice left mankind "dead in their trespasses and sins." Without God, man's estate was truly hopeless with "none that seek after righteousness, no not one." As we learned a few weeks ago, the death or separations that resulted from the fall of Adam involved our relationship with God, our relationships with each other, with the Creation and even with ourselves with the final separation being our physical death. By understanding the truly bad news we can then see the need for the True Savior: If man is not fully lost in his body soul and spirit, then he could play some small role in his salvation.

- If man is truly lost, then the rest of the Doctrines of Grace are not only true, but absolutely essential to our salvation.

Remember the wise man who told me that if someone is struggling with any of the other four points, they likely do not understand the truth of the first one:

- Man's plight is real!

Under TULIP we have used Total Depravity for the 'T' which is the point we are making here, but that phrase often leads to discussion about whether man is still made in the image of God: Man is not worthless in his lost estate, just in a state of hopeless rebellion.

BUT, all is not lost for man because we then learn of the Resolve of Our Triune God: Giving us the "R" in praise. A Mystery in the sense that we as mere creatures cannot fully understand all that God is doing, but it is a truth that has been revealed nonetheless: I can think of my grandchildren exploring the wonders of their new home in Huntington Beach: They can enjoy it and know that it is real, and that someone built it.

- But Rosy or Sophie would be incapable of fully explaining everything with regard to how it was built.

The Bible is God's story where He reveals His eternal plan to demonstrate his great mercy and love through the salvation of His saints and His justice with the punishment of the wicked. While a full understanding of God's purposes is beyond our human understanding, we do see the end of the matter, "For of Him and through Him, and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever.- Amen."

At this point it is appropriate to ask how this is going to work out in history and thus we come to our "A" in praise.

- Our salvation requires the application of the Work of Jesus: And that is truly a Wonder!

The Apostle Paul explains this at great length in the Book of Romans and the bottom line is that God could not "wink" at sin, but had to maintain His justice while justifying those chosen to be saved. To accomplish this work of salvation, God the Son became flesh: "to save His people from their sin." He lived a perfect life; took the punishment of our sins on the cross, and was raised in power. He now sits at the right hand of God the Father as King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

In Christian circles this is perhaps the most controversial of the points, and some of that controversy is caused by the standard acronym when the "L" is used to say limited atonement.

- The atonement is the work of Jesus!

And it seems strange to imply that any of the work of Jesus could be limited. When we look at how the Bible speaks of His work we see it is not limited in its scope or power, but it is limited in its application:

- **Jesus came to save His people from their sins, not every human being that has ever lived.**

So, this brings up another question and leads to the next important doctrine: How is the work of Jesus applied in the lives of God people? We come to our next letter “I” in praise & the mission of the Holy Spirit!

- **It is through His power and work that we are brought into the Body of Christ, which I am calling the inclusion by the Holy Spirit.**

Again, this I believe this is a stronger way of stating this true: With irresistible Grace in the standard TULIP we have folks thinking, but we know that people can resist the Holy Spirit, so how sure is this work? God the Holy Spirit provides the gift of faith & new hearts for God’s people, giving us the power to repent of our sins, to live lives of obedience and to be protected in this life from the devil, the world and our own flesh. It is in the Book of Acts where we learn about His great work where He unites God's people to Christ, as the earth is filled with the Kingdom of Jesus.

- **Here again we can agree with the Arminian who says that man’s will is real and his choices significant.**

We are not puppets who the Holy Spirit leads along in a puppet show, but rather we are men and women made in the image of God who have been given new hearts and then walk with God as He gives us commands and instructions! But, we had no way to turn our hearts of stone into flesh...

- **Only the Spirit could do that and we do not get to say ‘no thank you.’**

That inclusion is His work and that is why the reformers have said it cannot be resisted.

BUT, when it comes to hearing and doing the commands of Jesus as believers, we should heed the wisdom that we find in Psalm 32 right after the portion we often use in our time of confession: Psalm 32:8: “I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you with My eye. 9 Do not be like the horse or like the mule, Which have no understanding, Which must be harnessed with bit and bridle, Else they will not come near you.”

And this leads to the final point in TULIP where those reformers spoke of the perseverance of the Saints, but again, it is not we who persevere but God Who preserves and so I prefer to use the “S” in praise to say that we are Secure in the Hand of God, which is truly a Blessing! Just as we were not able to save ourselves from sin, we cannot live the Christian life without the power and protection of our God, as the Spirit accomplishes what was planned: "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God has before ordained that we should walk in them."

- **Yes, we are secure in the hands of our loving God.**

We will certainly see this again next week as we consider how all of those solas work together for our good, but for this morning I want to explain why I added what I think is an important sixth point of doctrine: My “E” at the end of PRAISE. Extending the Kingdom, which is our calling as Christians! We are not saved to be part of a secret club or to wait around until we go to heaven!

As thankful children of God, we are to be those beautiful feet that preach the Gospel of Peace and bring glad tidings to all the nations of the earth, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them all the commands of Jesus!

We evangelize, and our evangelism will be successful in extending the kingdom of Jesus, because our sovereign God does the electing, applying, including, and preserving.

- **This is the confidence that we should have when we share the Good News and it is the confidence we should have as we live the Christian life!**

It is also why we should be confident in our time of confession which properly prepares us to be instructed, to bring our gifts and prayers, to feast with our Savior at His Table and to go forth doing His work day by day.

When we understand the Doctrines of Grace we know that we are forgiven when we confess our sins and that is why we must be careful to properly confess our sins each week, individually and corporately.

Let me conclude with a few of the examples that we have in the Scriptures that teach us about proper confession. First, we have examples to avoid! Yes, there are wrong ways to confess and we should avoid them at all cost! The classic example is Adam who said when confronted with his sin, ‘the woman you gave me did it!’ The classic example of blame-shifting.

- Your sin is your fault and not someone else’s fault!

We next come to King Saul who is the classic example of someone who meant well... I did this wrong thing but for the right reason, so God should be pleased.

And of course, we have the parable of Jesus that clearly contrasts proper and improper confession with the Pharisee and the tax collector.

We learn there that it does us NO good to confess our comparative actions.

God will not look favorably upon us because we did better than someone else. God is only pleased with the perfect righteousness of Jesus.

- And this is what we see in the good examples of confession that we find in the Scriptures.

I would begin with the other side in the parable of Jesus where that tax collector shows us clearly what honest confession looks like. Joining with the Prophet Isaiah before the presence of God, they cry woe is me!

- It is honest and it is devastating until we know the forgiveness of God, which is why Jesus could say that this man went away justified.

We see this clearly with King David, who was a mighty sinner who came honestly before God saying that it was against him and only him that he had sinned. And it is this type of honest confession that the Apostle John commands us to bring which we saw in our morning text:

I John 1:8: “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.”

There is much here to ponder as we celebrate the work of the Reformers on this 500th Anniversary and I trust that these messages and the study materials will be a help as we all strive to walk in God’s blessings and to pass those blessings on to our children!

Communion Meditation: John 13

“13 Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end. 2 And supper being ended, the devil having already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, to betray Him, 3 Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God, 4 rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself. 5 After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded. 6 Then He came to Simon Peter. And Peter said to Him, “Lord, are You washing my feet?” 7 Jesus answered and said to him, “What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this.” 8 Peter said to Him, “You shall never wash my feet!” Jesus answered him, “If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me.” 9 Simon Peter said to Him, “Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head!” 10 Jesus said to him, “He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you.” 11 For He knew who would betray Him; therefore He said, “You are not all clean.”