

The Reality of Luther's Theology – Part 2

Introduction

a. objectives

1. subject – An examination of the reality of Luther's theology, politically and ecclesiastically
2. aim – To cause us to understand some of the basics of the Protestant church in the world

b. outline

1. The Effects of Luther's Theology
2. The Content of Luther's Theology

c. overview

1. the **question** at the heart of this lesson
 - a. how do we get from one man's theological epiphany to a Reformation movement throughout W Europe? how do we get from Luther to Lutheranism (and, eventually, Protestantism as a whole)?
 1. the answer comes on two (2) distinct fronts:
 - b. (**before**) a discussion of some of the *immediate* effects of his thinking in Germany (and beyond)
 1. the initial effects at Wittenberg during his absence at Wartburg (including his marriage)
 2. the later effects during the socio-economic and political realities of the times (**e.g. revolts**)
 3. **LOW**: a "rethinking" of much of the spiritual realities of the times, resulting in *concrete* effects upon the political and socio-economic realities of the early 16th C.
 - c. (**now**) an overview of where Luther's theology went following his new view of justification
 1. **LOW**: what kinds of *theological* "rethinking" had come about in Luther, which then "spread out" from him throughout Europe, changing both the political *and* ecclesiastical landscape
 2. **note**: Gonzalez devotes an entire chapter to this because the Reformation was born out of *theological changes* in Luther that had been cemented by the time he went to Worms
 - a. however, I intend to use Gonzalez more as a "framework" because he misses two things:
 - b. he doesn't "move" the theology of Luther forward into later reformers, and
 - c. he doesn't address how *modern* theology has gone "back" (in many ways) to Rome

II. The Content of Luther's Theology

Content

a. the Word of God

1. for Luther, Scripture was *more* than what was written in the Bible
 - a. the issue for Luther was the "Word of God" as more than a "simplistic" view of Scripture
2. the Word of God = God himself, the fullest revelation of the *nature* and *actions* of God
 - a. **i.e.** the *logos* of **John 1** = God the Son, the Second eternal, coequal Person in the Trinity – the One who took on flesh and dwelt among us *and made God known in every way*
 - b. when God speaks, both his *nature* and his *actions* are revealed (**e.g. Genesis 1** – God speaks *from his nature* and *creation is formed*; God's nature and actions are revealed)
 - c. so, the Word is Christ, in whom is found God's greatest revelation (of himself) and God's greatest action (to redeem) – in Jesus, God is revealed to us, *and he is also God's victory*
3. for Luther, what makes the Bible the "Word of God" is *not* that it is infallible (or a source of authority), but that it is **the revelation of Jesus** – to read the Bible is to encounter Jesus
 - a. Luther (a man early in the Reformation) did not yet understand *sola Scriptura*
 1. *sola scriptura* – the tenet of reformed theology that insist that the Bible *is* the final authority of all matters of faith and practice *because God has inspired and preserved it to be so*
 - b. in Luther's day, the authorities of the church were (in ascending order): the Bible, the traditions of the church, and the papacy (**i.e. sola ecclesia**, the leadership *interpreting* the others)
 - c. so, for Luther, the **question** was: which of these authorities possessed the greatest *possibility* of pointing a man to Jesus? which was *more likely* to lead a man to the *Word of God*?
 - d. the church, corrupt and filled with evil, could not (and did not!) point men to him – the Bible, however did point *exclusively* to the Word (**i.e.** Jesus), thus it stood as the *greater* authority
 - e. **e.g.** which explained why Luther could *criticize* certain parts of Scripture, like Jude and Revelation
 1. he felt that these books did not lead *directly* to Christ (**i.e.** Jude as a book of "straw")
 2. **i.e.** he was not beholden to the Bible as an "inspired" book, but as a book *pointing correctly*

4. the objection by Catholics was: the church created the Bible by determining which books were in it, thus the church stands in authority *over* the Bible
 - a. Luther responded that *both* the Bible and the church were formed *by the gospel*, thus the *final* authority was Christ and his gospel – it gives a more *trustworthy witness* to the gospel
5. later reformers would see this *hierarchy* differently in developing *sola Scriptura*
 - a. **i.e.** God had made the Bible the authority by inspiring it as an inerrant and infallible work
 - b. thus, since the Bible *of itself* was fully proscribed by God to be an authority, it was an authority *even when it wasn't speaking specifically about Christ* (**e.g.** Paul speaking of marriage)
6. the modern church has *abandoned sola Scriptura*, embracing again the teachings of Rome:
 - a. some (like liberal mainlines), have *purposely* done so, abandoning the authority of Scripture *for their own* (**i.e.** a new form of *sola ecclesia*)
 - b. others (like typical Baptists), have *unwittingly* done so, *claiming* the Bible is authoritative, but failing to embrace it *fully* (**e.g.** the Bible clearly says “X”, but I don't want to believe “X”)

b. the Theology of the Cross

1. Luther was a man of the *scholastic* age: raised in a world where it was generally accepted that *reason* could not sufficiently investigate or prove matters of faith
 - a. however, he still believed most *traditional theology*: that God had (in fact) revealed his nature and existence in the created world (**i.e. Romans 1:18ff**)
 - b. **e.g.** the philosophers and law-systems of the past could distinguish good from evil
2. so, Luther argued that one cannot know God “by speculation” – all human efforts to know God are futile *on their own* (**i.e.** without revelation)
 - a. such efforts he called a **“theology of glory”** – an attempt to know God through the things *humans* consider most valuable and praiseworthy; the vain attempt to know God *on our terms*
 - b. **ITC**: “glory” = what *we* want God to be; how *we* perceive him – and, the *means* of using the things of the world in order to “ascend” into heaven and know God *in our own image*
 1. **e.g.** the deep “materialistic” nature of the Catholic church; buildings, statues, icons, relics, religious acts (including the bread and wine), saints (other humans), purgatory (our “purging”), and heaven (the reward)
3. Luther contrasted this with a “theology of the cross” – where God has *truly revealed himself*
 - a. **i.e.** in weakness, in suffering, as a stumbling block to religious expectations
 - b. **i.e.** that God acts in a radically different way than we would expect, a way of *humiliation* (**Phil. 2**)
4. later reformers would view this differently in developing *solī deo gloria*
 - a. a similar idea, but “extended” to the notion that Christians come to Christ, not out of a desire to “get something” from him, but with an “empty hand” of faith that *humbles oneself* before God
 - b. **i.e.** that the *entire purpose* of salvation is to *glorify God* – that the elect are an *instrument* of God's decree to bring all glory and honor to himself, *not to us*, even as the *recipients* of his intention
5. the modern church has embraced *fully* a theology of glory
 - a. although most do not embrace the theology of Joel Osteen (**although many read him!**), the reality is still the same: a gospel that offers “something” to you and that is its primary purpose

c. the Law and the Gospel

1. **note**: the Catholic church (then and now) is *only* law; there is no “gospel” in it
 - a. **i.e.** the “good news” of the Catholic church is that you *can* (eventually and through your own effort) achieve a state of righteousness and go to heaven – but, there's really no guarantee ...
2. Luther drew a distinction (then) between law and gospel – the revelation of God is such that he is manifest in two distinct ways: law and gospel
 - a. **not**: law in the OT, gospel in the NT (which caused many Lutherans to become *anti-Semitic*)
 - b. **rather**: the revelation that God reveals himself as both a God of *judgment* and a God of *grace*
 1. God is not indifferent to sin (that it is *consequential*), that God is *holy* – when God speaks, we are (or should be!) overwhelmed by the contrast between him and us
 - a. **i.e.** what Luther experienced as the “crushing” nature of his own sin before God
 2. yet, God also extends his grace and mercy and forgiveness – the gospel is *also* a part of the nature of God and the *gravity* of our sin makes the gospel such surprisingly good news
 - c. **IOW**: the “conversion” of Luther through God's grace as an *imputed* righteousness brought Luther to a *deeper* understanding of the distinction between law and grace
3. Luther (then) came to a *deeper* understanding of the law of God, specifically for the believer
 - a. **i.e.** what had seemed earlier as *unbearable* now became sweet and good

“At an earlier time there was no pleasure in the law for me. But now I find that the law is good and tasty, that it has been give to me so that I might live, and now I find my pleasure in it.”

- b. **IOW:** Luther came to understand Paul's view of the law in **Romans 7:12**
"So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good."
1. that the law has two (2) distinct purposes: for the reprobate, to convict and (hopefully!) turn to Christ; for the justified, to act as a guide to living (**Matthew 22:37**)
 2. **i.e.** the regenerated man *loves the law* – his heart is such that God has "written" (**Jeremiah 31:33**) the law upon it so that he *desires* to obey his redeemer in every way possible
 3. **i.e.** the commands of God (or the church!) are no longer a "curse" (**Galatians 3:10**), but a delight for the saved man – he no longer sees himself as *needing* to "get righteous"
4. later reformers would utterly embrace Luther's position here
 5. the modern church has *eliminated* this distinction *by eliminating law entirely*
 - a. **i.e.** the law is no longer mentioned *at all* – either before (in a call to repentance) or after salvation (in a call to holiness) – now it is only "gospel", which (without the law) has no *real* ability to save
 - b. **e.g.** Sproul's question: saved from *what*?