

Bishop's Letter on Reformation Day

31 October 2015, Anno Domini



Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses on the door at All Saints in Wittenberg, Germany, 498 years ago. The Roman Catholic Church had grown more and more corrupt in both worship and fidelity to the Word of God. She began to assert her own Word took precedence over the Bible. Sins could be bought and paid for through indulgences. Luther had seen enough. His familiarity with Holy Scripture, somewhat rare for a Roman clergyman, told him the Pope was wrong, and the errors of the Papacy flowed downward to infect the entire church. Luther was a man of courage - but not his own. He relied upon the courage of the Holy Ghost in taking an uncompromising stand for Holy Writ.

If Luther were here today, he would doubtless be one of those committed Christians of the Levant whom the Islamists are beheading if they fail to renounce Christ. Luther would not have done so. He would have stood on the Foundation of Truth and not consider otherwise. There are many Christian children of Syria today who have been beheaded because they refused to renounce their Christian faith. I wonder if the pulpit dandies of our day in America would demonstrate such faith and courage. I wonder if you and I would do so.

There is a trend today to disregard everything that is negative. All are supposed to have a positive outlook and always to expect the best. How far would such an attitude benefit the martyred Christians of the Reformation, of China, of Africa, of South America, etc? The Scriptures do not teach such foolishness. Eight of the Ten Commandments are negative, and there cannot truly be positives in the absence of negatives. Without both negatives and positives, electrical current could not be generated. God promises blessings for certain behaviors, and curses for others. As we read them from Holy Scripture, I hope you will ask two questions - how does this relate to me? and secondly, How does this relate to my country.

God's promised blessings for those who honor His Word

¹ Ye shall make you no idols nor graven image, neither rear you up a standing image, neither shall ye set up any image of stone in your land, to bow down unto it: for I am the LORD your God. ² Ye shall keep my sabbaths, and reverence my sanctuary: I am the LORD. ³ If ye walk

in my statutes, and keep my commandments, and do them; ⁴Then I will give you rain in due season, and the land shall yield her increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit. ⁵And your threshing shall reach unto the vintage, and the vintage shall reach unto the sowing time: and ye shall eat your bread to the full, and dwell in your land safely. ⁶And I will give peace in the land, and ye shall lie down, and none shall make you afraid: and I will rid evil beasts out of the land, neither shall the sword go through your land. ⁷And ye shall chase your enemies, and they shall fall before you by the sword. ⁸And five of you shall chase an hundred, and an hundred of you shall put ten thousand to flight: and your enemies shall fall before you by the sword. ⁹For I will have respect unto you, and make you fruitful, and multiply you, and establish my covenant with you. ¹⁰And ye shall eat old store, and bring forth the old because of the new. ¹¹And I will set my tabernacle among you: and my soul shall not abhor you. ¹²And I will walk among you, and will be your God, and ye shall be my people. ¹³I am the LORD your God, which brought you forth out of the land of Egypt, that ye should not be their bondmen; and I have broken the bands of your yoke, and made you go upright. (Lev 26:1-14)

God's assured curses for those who dishonor His Word

¹⁴But if ye will not hearken unto me, and will not do all these commandments; ¹⁵And if ye shall despise my statutes, or if your soul abhor my judgments, so that ye will not do all my commandments, but that ye break my covenant: ¹⁶I also will do this unto you; I will even appoint over you terror, consumption, and the burning ague, that shall consume the eyes, and cause sorrow of heart: and ye shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it. ¹⁷And I will set my face against you, and ye shall be slain before your enemies: they that hate you shall reign over you; and ye shall flee when none pursueth you. ¹⁸And if ye will not yet for all this hearken unto me, then I will punish you seven times more for your sins. ¹⁹And I will break the pride of your power; and I will make your heaven as iron, and your earth as brass: ²⁰And your strength shall be spent in vain: for your land shall not yield her increase, neither shall the trees of the land yield their fruits. ²¹And if ye walk contrary unto me, and will not hearken unto me; I will bring seven times more plagues upon you according to your sins. ²²I will also send wild beasts among you, which shall rob you of your children, and destroy your cattle, and make you few in number; and your high ways shall be desolate. ²³And if ye will not be reformed by me by these things, but will walk contrary unto me; ²⁴Then will I also walk contrary unto you, and will punish you yet seven times for your sins. ²⁵And I will bring a sword upon you, that shall avenge the quarrel of my covenant: and when ye are gathered together within your cities, I will send the pestilence among you; and ye shall be delivered into the hand of the enemy. ²⁶And when I have broken the staff of your bread, ten women shall bake your bread in one oven, and they shall deliver you your bread again by weight: and ye shall eat, and not be satisfied. ²⁷And if ye will not for all this hearken unto me, but walk contrary unto me; ²⁸Then I will walk contrary unto you also in fury; and I, even I, will chastise you seven times for your sins. ²⁹And ye shall eat the flesh of your sons, and the flesh of your daughters shall ye eat. ³⁰And I will destroy your high places, and cut down your images, and cast your carcasses upon the carcasses of your idols, and my soul shall abhor you. ³¹And I will make your cities waste, and bring your sanctuaries unto desolation, and I will not smell the savour of your sweet odours. ³²And I will bring the land into desolation: and your enemies which dwell therein shall be astonished at it. ³³And I will scatter you among the heathen, and will draw out a sword after you: and your land shall be desolate, and your cities waste. ³⁴Then shall the land enjoy her sabbaths, as long as it lieth desolate, and ye be in your enemies' land; even then shall the land rest, and enjoy her sabbaths. ³⁵As long as it lieth desolate it shall rest; because it did not rest in your sabbaths, when ye dwelt upon it. ³⁶And upon them that are left alive of you I will send a faintness into their hearts in the lands of their enemies; and the sound of a shaken leaf shall chase them; and they shall flee, as fleeing from a sword; and they shall fall when none pursueth. ³⁷And they shall fall one upon another, as it were before a sword, when none pursueth: and ye shall have no power to stand before your enemies. ³⁸And ye shall perish among the heathen, and the land of your enemies shall eat you up. ³⁹And they that are left of you shall pine away in their iniquity in your enemies' lands; and also in the iniquities of their fathers shall they pine away with them. (Lev 26:14-39)

Since God's blessings are of greater potency than His curses, the curses outnumber the blessings by far. Of course, to summarize the blessings: If we have the FAVOR of God, we have all others of His blessings. If we have the DISFAVOR of God, we are devoid of hope.

The answer for Sin

40 If they shall confess their iniquity, and the iniquity of their fathers, with their trespass which they trespassed against me, and that also they have walked contrary unto me; 41 And that I also have walked contrary unto them, and have brought them into the land of their enemies; if then their uncircumcised hearts be humbled, and they then accept of the punishment of their iniquity: 42 Then will I remember my covenant with Jacob, and also my covenant with Isaac, and also my covenant with Abraham will I remember; and I will remember the land. 43 The land also shall be left of them, and shall enjoy her sabbaths, while she lieth desolate without them: and they shall accept of the punishment of their iniquity: because, even because they despised my judgments, and because their soul abhorred my statutes. (Lev 26:40-43, see also 2 Chron 7:14)

Perhaps our churches are reaching the proliferation of error and wickedness as the Roman Church prior to the Reformation. It is likely that another Reformation is in order - not to introduce a new worship and a new Word, but to return to the ancient worship of the early Church, and the inerrant and immutable Word of God that was first given to the saints in the remote shadows of ages past. That is what our Reformers did, and we can do no less.

Jerry L. Ogles, Presiding Bishop
Anglican Orthodox Communion Worldwide
Chancellor, Faith Theological Seminary
Latimer Hall School of Divinity

The Reformation

The Reformation, sometimes referred as the Protestant Reformation, was a movement which attempted to correct the deviations from Scripture of the Roman Catholic Church. When it made no progress, churches formed separate from the Church of Rome. The reformation was initiated by Martin Luther, John Calvin, Huldrych Zwingli, Thomas Cranmer, Hugh Latimer and other early Protestant Reformers in the 16th century Europe and England.

Although there had been significant earlier attempts to reform the Roman Catholic Church before Luther — such as those of Jan Hus, Peter Waldo, and John Wycliffe — it is Martin Luther who is widely acknowledged to have started the Reformation with his 1517 work The Ninety-Five Theses. Luther began by criticizing the selling of indulgences, insisting the Pope had no authority over purgatory¹ and the Catholic doctrine of the merits of the saints had no foundation in the gospel². The Protestant position was based solely on Scripture, nothing which is not clearly contained therein is to be required for salvation and that which is contrary is not to be accepted.

The core motivation behind these changes was theological. The Roman Church did not want the Bible translated into the language of the people, it was only available in Latin

¹ In Roman Catholic doctrine - *Purgatory* - a place or state of suffering inhabited by the souls of sinners who are expiating their sins before going to heaven. It must be clearly noted that the Bible does not teach or even mention purgatory. And, it must also be equally clearly noted that the Roman Church made huge profit from sales of Get out of Purgatory Free cards.

² In point of fact, Jesus tells us not even to pray to Him, but to pray to the Father in His Name, thus it seems quite contrary to pray to Saint Bob.

and its distribution closely contained. When the Bible was translated into the language of the people, such as the Geneva Bible, the Tyndale Bible and the Coverdale Bible, people and clergy found how far from the Truth the Roman Church had grown and how corrupt it had become.

The church in England had become a national church in the early 1530s under the leadership of King Henry VIII. It was reformed, but not completely. That took place under King Edward VI, setbacks happened under Queen Mary and the church reached its more or less final form under Queen Elizabeth.