

# MAN LIVES BY GRACE OR HE DOES NOT LIVE AT ALL

Let not your minds be corrupted by "...the simplicity that is in Christ"  
2 Cor. 11:3.

Human depravity is the doctrine on which justification stands or falls. It is well known that Martin Luther championed the Bible doctrine of justification as the sufficient, imputed righteousness of Christ alone, apart from all works, good, bad, or otherwise. And he was convinced that justification was that doctrine upon which the Church stands or falls. Lose trust in the free grace of the righteousness of Christ alone, and the holiness of the Church and all in her is lost. Less understood, perhaps, is the realization that Luther did not come to his rediscovery of the sufficiency of the righteousness of the crucified Christ until he realized the full extent of the problem of sin. Human depravity has rendered even the most virtuous citizen of the world, or the whole for that matter, as not needing improvement, but dead in his trespasses and therefore beyond all help.

Luther's struggles to find a gracious God were based on the conviction that Paul's declaration that by the one man's sin Adam, spiritual death has been passed to all future generations, especially to him Rom. 5:17. Continual reflection on his own life and works was in direct contradiction with what he was taught about original sin. The dominant theology in Luther's day held that original sin has made us all spiritually sick but not dead. We are spiritually able to do almost nothing that God would find pleasing, almost nothing.

It was believed there is always something that sinners can do and therefore they are duty-bound to do it. Everyone must do for their salvation whatever is in them to do. God's infused grace provides healing and power to do even more God-pleasing works which increasingly bridge the gap between our sin-sick condition and the eventual healing in righteousness that we need to be acceptable to God. This same deception lies in the hearts of many of those in the church of our day.

The program did not work for Luther and it will not work for you. We need to remember that the saving work and gifts of Christ in the Gospel are THE solution to our real problem of sin and evil. If the problem of sin is watered-down or misunderstood, the solution of God's saving work in Christ will be corrupted and missed as a matter of course. Spiritually sick people need healing and spiritually weak people need help.

But, if you are dead in your trespasses as Luther understood himself to be, you are out of the running. Dead people are beyond help and all spiritual therapies are of no benefit. All spiritually dead people can do is stink! Justification as the complete imputed righteousness of Christ only makes sense as the solution to

sinners who understand that they are dead in their trespasses; completely unrighteous, not semi-righteous or in the needs-improvement category.

Thus, Luther insisted that sinners who do what is in them to do, apart from Christ, sin! And they sin necessarily. Learning from the apostle Paul, Luther held that there are only two classifications of persons before God: those who are perfectly righteous and those who are unrighteous and spiritually dead. Luther followed the apostle in Romans 5 where Paul distinguished all of humanity accordingly: those who have inherited spiritual deadness from Adam Rom. 5:12 and those who have been made alive in the righteousness of Christ Rom. 5:17. Therefore, you are either bound to Christ, or you are bound to sin.

Those who celebrate the Reformation in Wittenberg is for those who, like Luther, count themselves dead to sin in themselves but alive to God in Christ Jesus according to the sufficiency of His utterly-justifying grace. This is a grace alone apart from all your works or all your experiences which reinforce the truth that apart from Christ you are dead in your trespasses and bound to sin. Reformation Day is to celebrate the recovery of the precious gift of life in Christ for dead sinners like me.

Stand righteous before God with all who experience the freedom of the Gospel, because you are convinced that we live by grace, or we do not live at all. Thank God for the justification of sinners like each of us in Christ Jesus, and that we have not lost sight of our own sinful depravity upon which our trust in the sufficiency of Christ's justification stands and will not fall.