

Reformation 500 . . . and Counting

After all the build up to and hoopla surrounding the five hundredth anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation last year, a lot of people seem to be happy it's "over and done with." I even heard some scholar friends of mine express their relief that the celebration was past and now they could "get back to talking about other things," other than Luther, that is.

No, I don't want to get stuck in the 16th century, either. The world was a very different place five hundred years ago, and we have very different challenges we need to meet today. That being said, there were also some wonderful things that Luther did say long ago that shouldn't be forgotten.

Six months after he wrote the 95 Theses, Luther wrote another document intended for debate. The document is called "The Heidelberg Disputation," a series of twenty-eight paradoxical statements that Luther wrote and defended in April of 1518. Among those statements are the following words:

19. That person does not deserve to be called a theologian who looks upon the invisible things of God as though they were clearly perceptible in those things which have been made [Rom. 1:20].

20. He deserves to be called a theologian, however, who comprehends the visible and manifest things of God seen through suffering and the cross.

21. A theologian of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theologian of the cross calls the things what it actually is.

Sometimes, tremendous evil happens. On the outside, it looks like God is responsible. We can respond to such a crisis as theologians of glory, or as theologians of the cross.

"Theologians of glory," as Luther calls them, think they can look into and understand the "invisible things of God" by looking at what they see around them. They come up with rational "explanations" to make sense of what God is doing behind the scenes. Trouble is, every time they do that, they wind up denying or contradicting something God has said clearly about Himself elsewhere in the Bible.

"Theologians of the cross," on the other hand, simply say what God has said, what He has revealed about Himself in the Bible: no less, no more. Theologians of the cross don't try to come with explanations for God that will satisfy human logic, for they recognize that God and His ways are far beyond human understanding.

So, for example, when a storm or accident or illness strikes, the theologian of glory might instantly name it "evil" and perhaps call it God's judgment on sin, sometimes even naming a specific sin that's responsible. We become the ones responsible for "fixing" the problem.

The theologian of the cross, however, recognizes that God works in mysterious ways, bringing about blessings through suffering as well as through the good things that happen in life. We know that, no matter what we may suffer, we trust in Jesus to rescue us in God's way and in God's good time. After all, Jesus died on a cross—a terrible death, to be sure—yet through that death, God brought life to the world.

Don't look around you and try to 'figure out' God. That's what a theologian of glory does, and that gets it wrong. Look at what God has said, and trust Him when things don't make sense in your life. Know Christ, and you will also come to know God hidden in your suffering, and you will learn to rejoice that He is with you, always!