



"October 31"

October 31 is most commonly known as Halloween. For some, it is an innocent holiday marked by funny costumes, pumpkin carving, and trick or treating for candy. For others it is a rather grim celebration of the occult and ancient pagan rituals. Actually, Halloween comes from "All Hallows Eve," the day prior to All Saints Day, when the Roman Catholic faithful pray for divine protection. All Saints Day (November 1) is a day designated for Catholics to offer prayers for the dead who are believed to be in purgatory.

For 499 years, October 31 has also held great significance for Bible-believing Christians. It was on All Hallows Eve in 1517 that a German monk named Martin Luther nailed his famous 95 theses to the door of the Castle Church at Wittenberg. He did this so all those coming to church the following day would see his posting. The 95 theses was a list of questions and propositions challenging the Roman Catholic system that promised forgiveness of sin for the performance of rituals and the purchase of indulgences. Luther had learned from the inspired writings of Paul that "the just shall live by faith" (Rom. 1:17). It is trusting in Christ, not financial donations or religious ceremonies that brings a man into a right relationship with God.

Little did Luther imagine the impact the posting of his 95 theses would have. It marked the beginning of what became known as the Protestant Reformation. This proved to be more than a religious reform movement. It was a sweeping work of God that quite literally changed the world.

First and foremost, Luther's rediscovery and communication of salvation by grace through faith resulted in the conversion of millions - not just in his native Germany, but throughout Europe, and eventually the world.

Second, when Luther realized that the dogma and practice of the established Church contradicted the Scripture, he translated the Scripture into the language of the common man so that all could read the truth for themselves. In the providence of God, Luther was instrumental in bringing enlightenment and literacy to a society trapped for centuries in ignorance. The Protestant Reformation brought a revolution in education.

Third, by questioning the authority of the established hierarchy, and encouraging the common man to seek the truth for himself, Luther reawakened a democratic principle that had been dormant for over a thousand years. If all men are individually accountable to God for their own souls, then each man has a capacity for decision making and self-determination. This new emphasis on the dignity of the individual had religious importance, and later proved to have economic and political importance as well. The demise of absolute monarchies and the establishment of constitutions that limit government's power over the lives and consciences of men sprang from the Protestant Reformation.

Fourth, no longer enslaved by autocratic tyranny in the religious, political, and educational realms, men began on their own to study, think, explore, discover, and invent. It can be argued that our modern industrialized world came about ultimately because of the ideals of the Reformation.

As Baptists we do not trace our spiritual roots directly back to Luther. However, we have been greatly blessed by the fruit of his faith. Prior to Martin Luther, the western world was enslaved in what is known as the Dark Ages. Psalm 119:130 says, "The entrance of thy words giveth light." A new age of enlightenment started when Luther found the gospel in the Bible and then posted his findings on the Wittenberg door. In some circles October 31 is still celebrated as Reformation Day. One does not need to be Reformed in theology to join in thanking God for the positive effects of the Protestant Reformation.