**ALL SCRIPTURE IS INSPIRED**

***Martin Luther’s Epistle of Straw***

On October 31, 1517 Martin Luther was fighting mad. A priest named Johann Tetzel was going around Germany on behalf of Pope Leo X selling pieces of paper (called “indulgences”) that offered forgiveness of sins to the people. It even offered forgiveness to dead relatives and loved ones who were at that moment burning in purgatory, thus releasing them into heaven. It was a fund-raising scheme that the Vatican had invented in order to finance the renovation of St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome. Luther, a popular priest of the people, was furious at such a scheme. He could read the Bible and see that God had never offered such a thing as indulgences to forgive sins. Christ’s blood was the only remedy for man’s sins, and it was not for sale.

On that historic day in 1517 Martin Luther nailed what became known as his 95 Theses to the church door in Wittenberg Germany. He wanted all to see his convictions that would help reform the apostate Catholic Church. For this act he was excommunicated by Pope Leo X, and then declared an outlaw and a heretic by Emperor Charles V in his infamous Edict of Worms. Thus began the Protestant Reformation that would radically change the religious and political landscape of Europe, then the world.

I admire Martin Luther in many ways. Under threat of death he translated the Latin Bible into the common German tongue so the people could read God’s Word for themselves. He dedicated his life to throwing off the shackles of Rome and allowing the common people to think for themselves. He believed the Catholic Church was not the God-appointed official translator of the Scriptures. Men had a mind of their own and God meant for each one to come to faith by reading the Bible (Rom. 10:17). The Catholic position of “Salvation by Works” (keeping the Sacraments and obeying all the Pope and Priests declared) was fully rejected by Luther, Calvin and all other Protestant teachers. For this bold and courageous stand I admire Martin Luther so much.

However, as is so often the case, in seeking to reform the broken religious system based on works salvation, Luther swung from one end of the pendulum to the extreme other end. Suddenly, to Luther, works had nothing to do with a man’s salvation. He now believed in what he called Sola Gratia / Sola Fide (Grace Alone / by Faith Alone).

Of course the student of the Bible is right to then ask, “What about James 2:14-26?” This was the very sticking point Martin Luther had to deal with. Which leads me to show you an astounding quote from Luther. I ask you to read it slowly, letting your mind digest it carefully. After you think about it I will meet you on the other side and offer my comment. Luther said,

**"If I had to do without one or the other - either the works or preaching of Christ - I would rather do without his works than his preaching. For the works do not help me, but His words give life, as He Himself says. Now John writes very little about the works of Christ, but very much about His preaching. The other Evangelists write much of His works and little of His preaching. Therefore, John's Gospel is the one, tender, true chief Gospel far, far to be preferred to the other three and placed high above them. So, too, the epistles of St. Paul and St. Peter far surpass the other three Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke.**

**In a word, St. John's Gospel and his first Epistle, St. Paul's Epistles, especially Romans, Galatians, and Ephesians, and St. Peter's first Epistle are the books that show you Christ and that teach you all that is necessary and good for you to know, even though you never see or hear any other book or doctrine. Therefore, St. James' Epistle is really an epistle of straw, compared to them; for it has nothing of the nature of the gospel in it."**

I hope you were sitting down when you read that. In amazing candor Mr. Luther showed his real colors concerning the inspiration of scripture. It is as if he were saying the revelation of the Spirit to James was inferior, and even contradictory, to the revelation to John, Paul and Peter. He believes Matthew, Mark, Luke, James and Jude emphasized *works* over the *person* of Christ, therefore downgrades them to a second-place status. According to Luther, all we need are the “preaching of Christ” from Peter, Paul and John. This should be an eye-opener to those who revere Luther.

To call James “*an epistle of straw*” was to claim it is weaker and expendable compared to the epistles to Rome, Galatia and Ephesus. Luther believed James 2:14-26 contradicted Ephesians 2:8-9 regarding works versus grace. He so deplored the works-salvation of Catholicism that he could not see straight when interpreting the words, “*faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead*” (Jam. 2:17). The vast majority of present-day religious teaching accepts the conclusion of Luther, who casts a large shadow over modern evangelical Christianity.

Martin Luther was wrong. Dead wrong.

PAUL: “***All*** *scripture is inspired of God*” (2 Tim. 3:16).

JAMES: *“But someone will say, ‘You have faith, and I have works.’ Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works… You see then that a man is justified by works and not by faith only”* (Jam. 2:18,24).

Paul and James had met (Gal. 1:19) and were in fellowship (read Acts 21:17-20). Inspiration from the Holy Spirit does not allow for contradictions, or epistles of straw. I hope you believe that and don’t see any part of the Bible as inferior or contradictory to any other Scripture. I admire Luther for many things, but not his hermeneutics (i.e. the method of interpreting the Bible).

Let PETER have the last word: *“And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit”* (2 Pet. 1:19-21).

Don’t swing the pendulum! - Rick