

*Jeremiah 18:1 This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: “Go down to the potter’s house, and there I will give you my message.” So I went down to the potter’s house, and I saw him working at the wheel. But the pot he was shaping from the clay was marred in his hands; so the potter formed it into another pot, shaping it as seemed best to him.*

*Then the word of the LORD came to me: “O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter does?” declares the LORD. “Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel. If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed, and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned. And if at another time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be built up and planted, and if it does evil in my sight and does not obey me, then I will reconsider the good I had intended to do for it.*

*“Now therefore say to the people of Judah and those living in Jerusalem, ‘This is what the LORD says: Look! I am preparing a disaster for you and devising a plan against you. So turn from your evil ways, each one of you, and reform your ways and your actions.’*

Dear Friends in Christ,

### **TO TELL THE TRUTH**

Have you ever noticed how different things look depending where you are standing? Perhaps nowhere is this more obvious than something people see every day—the sun. For thousands of years people thought that the sun rose in the east, climbed the sky, only to go down in the west. Now we know that the earth rotates on its axis, and moves around the sun. It’s a matter of perspective.

Not only is perspective important in science, it is important in our relationships. The Prodigal Son—the son who despised his father, took his inheritance, squandered it and then in desperation returned to his father—the prodigal son was certain that his father would never again love him. But when he returned home, he found out that while he, the son, may have changed from disrespectful to rebellious to sorrowful, the father never changed. He always loved his son.

What we perceive is not the way things always are.

Sometimes it is the same about God. The way we think God is, is not always how he really is.

#### **I. The Truth about God’s Unchanging Will**

Jeremiah was a prophet in the days of Israel’s decline. At the time, Israel faced many military threats. The only way to avoid the military threats was to send huge amounts of tribute, gold and silver, to foreign powers. Of course, the Israelites resented it, just as we would resent paying taxes, not to Frankfort or Washington, but to Moscow, Russia. A couple times the Israelites got sick of it all and stopped paying their taxes. Then the Assyrians or Babylonians or Egyptians (depending on who was in power at the time) marched in, killed a bunch of people and took more as slaves, and reinstated the tribute system. Jeremiah was God’s prophet to Israel in those dark days.

One day the Lord told Jeremiah to go down to a potter who was making pots—you know, plain old clay pots. And Jeremiah stood there, waiting for the word of God. Standing there waiting, Jeremiah watched the potter. He watched the flat, round stone wheel, powered by the potter’s feet, going round and round, round and round. Jeremiah watched the potter, a lump of clay in his hand. His hands shaped the clay, stretched it, pinched it, making it to the perfection of his mind’s eye. But there was a flaw in the work. The potter squashed the wet clay back into a lump and started over, round and round.

Suddenly, the Lord broke into Jeremiah's reflections with a revelation. ***“O Israel, can I not do with you as this potter does?”***

What is it the potter does? The potter decides what he is going to do with the clay. He forms what he wants out of the clay. And if the clay should be flawed, he destroys it. And the Lord can do whatever he chooses to do, even with us people.

Now when we hear that someone can do whatever he wants, we think of somebody who changes his mind all the time. But God, while asserting his independence and right to do what he wants to do, he is not arbitrary. How do I know this? Listen to his words to Jeremiah:

***“If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed, and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned.”***

On the other hand, God said, ***“If at another time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be built up and planted, and if it does evil in my sight and does not obey me, then I will reconsider the good I had intended to do for it.”*** Now I said that God does not change. Is that true? To our perceptions, it sounds like God changes.

As he told Jeremiah, when someone is rebellious, and God says, “I’m going to come down hard on you,” but as soon as the person repents, God is all forgiving. Sounds like God changes to me, doesn’t it? God also says that when a godly person changes and leaves God’s ways, he will not do the good he had intended to do to that person. To me it sounds like God changes, doesn’t it?

Well, that is because you are watching the sunrise while you stand on the earth. The sun is there all the time, but the earth is spinning! God’s will is absolutely unchanging. You can bank on it. As dependable and unchanging as God is in showing mercy to the repentant, God is equally dependable in punishing the unrepentant. God does not change his will, people change!

So when God tells Jeremiah that he, God, can do with Israel whatever he wants, that like a potter, he can create or destroy, it is not that God arbitrarily changes. God does not change. He *is not* like us people whose mood changes depending which side of the bed we wake up on, how hungry we are, how stressed we are, what the weather is like, how much sleep we got last night, our stage in life, whether the stock market is up or down. God is not an infinitely variable and changing human being. We know what to expect from him. And that is a good thing. We might like variety, but we don’t appreciate people who jerk us around, who change the rules. God is dependable. He consistently promises grace and every blessing to those who believe in him and trust his mercy in Jesus Christ. He promises the punishment of hell to all who do not trust him and honor him.

So we know that the same message God gave to Jeremiah, or Moses, or Isaiah, or the Apostles John or Paul is the same message that applies to us today, because while God can do whatever he wants with us, he does not change the rules for how he deals with each of us.

Which makes God’s grace all the more amazing. He did not have to do that, but God’s chose to be merciful. He is not merely trying out grace for a little while, and then (like us) when he gets bored with that desktop background, he changes his plan. God’s right is to do whatever he wants, but in his choice he has chosen one dependable plan: grace for all who call on the name of the Lord Jesus.

## **II. Our Need to Proclaim That Will**

Since God’s plan is unchangeable—though he could do whatever he wants—that message needs to remain clear and pure. That is what Reformation is about.

A university in a state next door recently promoted a list of pronouns people can use in reference to certain people. No longer are “he” and “she” enough, but there are several other options of pronouns for people who don’t fit into traditional categories. Whatever you think about that, it actually has a lot

to say about Reformation Day.

We live in a day and age when you are free to redefine anything and everything, and demand that other people accept this newly created reality. When people talk about their grave emotional suffering caused by the wrong pronoun—how are such people are react when God’s word tells them, ***“This is what the LORD says: Look! I am preparing a disaster for you and devising a plan against you. So turn from your evil ways, each one of you, and reform your ways and your actions.”***

Reformation is not easy. It has never been easy, because by definition, religious reformation is opposing prevailing opinions which are opposed to God’s Word.

Martin Luther wanted to reform the church he belonged to. His first impulse was not that of a rebel. He didn’t want to break from the church, to offend people. His focus for reformation was always on the Gospel. Oh, yes, he saw other abuses. There were power politics in the church. There was financial corruption. There was hypocrisy and immoral living among many of the clergy. But that was not what the Lutheran reformation was about. Martin Luther’s cause was not the politics, corruption or even the immorality. His cause was God’s clear and gracious will—the same will that God revealed to Jeremiah watching a potter in the noisy city of Jerusalem. The core of the Reformation was that God will finally destroy in hell all who reject his way of being saved, but that he is merciful, compassionate and forgiving to all who turn to him in faith. It was about souls and their eternal destiny. That’s why Martin Luther wrote that document with the strange name “The Ninety-Five Theses.” That was why years later he stood before his emperor and the church’s representatives and boldly stated, “I cannot and will not recant [take back what I have sai]... Here I stand; I cannot do otherwise!” (Just, *Life of Luther*, 60). It was about salvation.

Reformation is not a celebration that Martin Luther in 1517 was right and everyone else was wrong. That mindset leads to pride. Reformation is Thanksgiving, a few weeks early. When we think of the many people who don’t know their Savior, or even those who know him, but in a distorted way, we must thank God. We realize that it is only God’s grace that has kept God’s Word pure among us over the centuries. Several times, reformations have had to occur. Each time, in a recommitment not to one man’s teaching or another, but a recommitment to the truth of God’s Word.

This happened 500 years ago, and it needs to continually happen. We too must be vigilant. It is easy for us to follow the changing opinions of the world around us. As soon as we make maintaining Christian morality in our nation more important than proclaiming the good news of Jesus the Savior, we need reform. As soon as we make social causes, instead of spiritual causes the focus of our ministry, we need to reform. As soon as we start to think in our own minds, “Some of God’s Word just doesn’t apply any more”, it is time for reform. Reform, because only God’s word tells us God’s will.

Hopefully, reformation doesn’t get to the point where it was in Martin Luther’s day. Think of it like driving. In his day the Christian Church was so far from the truth of God’s Word that it needed to swerve out of the other lane of an on-coming 18-wheeler. Instead, may our reformation—and because we are human, we will need to continually reform our sinful ways—may our reformation happen in daily devotions and meditations upon God’s word. Not the wild swerving of an inattentive driver, but the continual small but important adjustments that a careful driver makes every second to keep the car within the lines. The continually reigning in of a sinful nature which chooses sin over God’s way.

There is something that I noticed in the past few decades. [With an upturn in the voice at the end.] There, I just did it. I noticed it because we rarely heard people in America speaking. But over the years, people, when bringing up a controversial point have started to turn their voices up at the end of the sentence. Americans didn’t talk like that in the past. Statements were statements, not questions. People didn’t assume that apologetic “This is my personal opinion and I’m very sorry if you don’t agree with me” tone. I’m not saying that is altogether bad. It is good to promote peace and agreement. But here is the problem for the Christian on Reformation Day. When the time comes that we need

Speak the truth that without Jesus, people will be condemned, there is no upturn in the voice of God's prophets. There cannot be, for it is not an opinion, but a warning. And when people repent and are brought to trust in Jesus as their personal Savior from their personal sin they will be saved—that too is a promise, not a question.

May God grant us the faith to hold onto that truth and not give in to the assaults of the world. May God grant us the courage to tell the truth to people around us. Amen.