

How many passwords and user ID's do you have? The other day I was figuring out that I have around 20 user ID's and passwords. To try and keep them all straight, I have an app on my IPAD called MSecure. I have to put a password into that app, in order to see a list of the various user ID's and passwords I have established for bank accounts, credit cards, ebay accounts, amazon, dropbox, Facebook, gmail, etc. So many of my passwords are different. Then what gets me is that every 3-6 months, you are asked by some of these companies or banks to change your password. I don't know how many times I have tried to get into an account, thinking I knew the userID and password, and got blocked. Then if you try more than 3 times and fail, you get locked out. You have to make a phone call to get things straightened out.

Further, we tend to get creative with our passwords, so that no crook gets into our account. I had one password that was domocogro56. Do was my nickname when our daughter was young. Jeanne was called Mo, Carolyn, our daughter was Co and my mother-in-law was gro, the 56 was the year of my birth.

Today is Reformation Sunday. Notice the red paraments and stoles. Today is a festival in the Lutheran Church. Lutherans celebrate this day because we honor Dr. Martin Luther for cracking the user ID and Password to access God's love. Because of Martin Luther there are no more security blocks to accessing God's love. This is the number 1 User Name and Password, you never want to forget. Don't just store it in the MSecure App on your Tablet. Make sure this one is always in the MSecure of your heart. So Christian, Cheer up, "Your Access Is Granted To God's Eternity Website!"

The church during the middle ages had grown corrupt. The church had its own idea of the proper user ID and password to gain God's love and favor. The church capitalized on their power over people when it came to sin. Using that power the church taught that God's people would be abandoned in purgatory forever unless they could somehow atone for the sin which landed them there. If they had sins which were not confessed they would remain in purgatory for centuries to come. With sins unconfessed they didn't have access to the kingdom of heaven and with no money for indulgences they were locked out of heaven. However, if they purchased indulgences they could buy their way out and they could also rescue their deceased loved ones as well. Not only that, Pope Leo X could finance the building of St. Peter's Cathedral at the same time. The selling of indulgences became the primary money making machine and the church was embezzling money out of the poorest of people.

It was during this time that Martin Luther was doing studying himself. He, too, was trying to find ways to access God's love and mercy. His life in his early priesthood years was all about 'if-only'; if only I pray enough, if only I abstain from life's pleasures, if only I suffer for Christ, if only I work harder, if only, if only, if only.

Then one study session while pouring over St. Paul's letter to the Romans he made a discovery. He discovered a scriptural nugget which he had read many times before. Luther discovered there that we cannot be declared righteous before God on the basis of the righteousness we try to produce in our lives.

Paul writes in our lesson, "Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God." God's law speaks to us on the pages of the Holy Bible. It tells us what God requires of us. It says that we are to love the Lord our God with all our hearts and all our minds and all our strength. It says that we are to love our neighbor as much as we love ourselves. The Lord does not say to us, "Try your best." God's law says that we must love him perfectly and love our neighbor perfectly if we are going to be saved and have eternal life with him.

Even if I commit only one little thing wrong in my lifetime, that small sin would still condemn me before God and cause me to put my hand over my mouth and say, "I am guilty." I remember watching in horror the Space Shuttle Challenger soared into the sky and then suddenly exploded. What caused the space shuttle to explode? It was a tiny O-ring that caused a leak that caused the aircraft to malfunction. Even one small sin causes me to fall short of God's glory and my righteousness cannot save me.

Paul drives home this point about our righteousness being inadequate to save us by adding, "Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather through law we become conscious of sin." In other words God's law is meant to be a mirror. Without it, we wouldn't see how badly we are in need of a savior. We're like the boy who scrubbed his hands really well before sitting down for dinner. He's offended then when Mom tells him to go to the bathroom and get cleaned up. What's she talking about? He is clean! His hands are clean but his face is not. Dirt streaks his cheeks. It's not until the boy returns to the bathroom and looks at himself in the mirror that he sees why Mom sent him back to wash. In the same way we may think that we have cleaned up or kept our life clean from obvious sins like adultery, stealing, and murder. Yet if we think that we can sit down at God's banquet table in heaven, we're wrong. God sends us back to the mirror of his law to learn that sin doesn't start when we misuse our hands; it starts when we misuse what we've got between the ears. Thinking of committing adultery, for example, or harboring thoughts of jealousy is as dirty to God as strangling a baby! Until I can rid my life of every sin and pay for the sins I've committed, I won't be welcome at God's banquet table in heaven.

Don't think you have sins that have left streak marks on your life? Then listen again to what Paul said in verse 23: "There is no difference, 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Notice that passage does not say "all of them" have sinned. It says all have sinned. ALL, not just the child molesters in Thailand, or the terrorists of the Middle East, or the drug dealers of North America. I have sinned. You have sinned. We ALL fall short of God's approval because we harbor bitterness, shave the truth to our advantage, fail to put the best construction on our brother and sister's words, and roll our eyes when someone says something we don't like.

If all have sinned who then can be saved? Again Paul gives us the answer. He said: "There is no difference, 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and [all] are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus" (Romans 3:23, 24). Who has been forgiven? Everyone! The child molester, the terrorist, the drug dealer...you and I, we all have been justified, that is declared not guilty in God's hall of justice because in his grace God the Father sent Jesus to hell's prison to do the time for our sins. By God's grace, Luther summarized. It's by God's grace alone that the door to heaven stands open to all.

Think of the word "GRACE" as "God's Redemption At Christ's Expense." "My hope of standing before God and being accepted by him depends on this sacrifice of atonement that Jesus made for me. He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Since all have been declared not guilty of their sins because of God's grace in Jesus, does this mean that all will go to heaven? Sadly it doesn't. For while we all have been declared not guilty it's only through faith that we receive the benefit of this favorable verdict. Paul wrote: "21 But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. 22 This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe"

By Faith alone. It's through faith alone that we enjoy the benefit of God's grace. We

shouldn't think that faith is the one thing we now have to do to get into heaven. Faith is not the hand that reaches to take the gift of salvation. Faith is the hand that receives the blessing of grace because the Holy Spirit has lifted our hands into position to receive the benefit of salvation. Without the working of the Holy Spirit we would be like the 3-year-old trick or treating for the first time. He is so overwhelmed by the other costumed kids and afraid of the stranger on whose doorstep he stands to get candy that he doesn't even hold out his bag when offered a delicious chocolate bar. Dad has to gently take the hands of the child and extend them to receive the gift. When that child gets home to count all the candy he received, he can't claim any credit for the stash. He didn't buy any of the candy with money he had earned. He couldn't even hold out his bag to receive the candy. Dad had to be there standing behind him at every house. The Holy Spirit is the one who has lifted our hands into position to receive the benefits of salvation.

It's been said that if you want something done right, do it yourself. That's not true when it comes to salvation, however. If any part of our salvation depended on our works, we would always wonder whether or not we had done enough. It's the way I would feel if you expected me to build a new church. I would try my best. I would watch all the how-to-build-a-church videos on YouTube, but I would never be sure that I got anything right. I would be afraid that at any moment the roof could collapse. No, better leave the church building to experts. It's the same with our salvation. Leave it to the experts: God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. On this Reformation Sunday we are reminded that they've done enough to wipe away our sins. We will not only rejoice in this truth, we will live in it as we gladly serve our Savior-God and one another. Amen.