

**Romans 5:1-5**

“What this world needs is faith in God.” I believe that all of us would agree with this statement. And so would most teachers in our schools, and most elected officials in government. In fact, the average person on the street would likely agree that what this world needs is faith in God. But is faith in God enough? What this world needs is not faith in some kind of a god, but faith in the true God. It makes a lot of difference who the “god” is that people have faith in.

Muslims believe in a god. They call him Allah. According to his laws, death and destruction were brought to large parts of the world and it’s still going on today. Radical Muslims are not “abnormal” Muslims—they’re the normal ones! It’s the peaceful Muslims who are not living according to the teachings of Allah. Mormons believe in a god. They even use the name “Jesus Christ” for their Church. But their god is not the God of the Scriptures. Their beliefs are completely contrary to the teachings of Christ and His Apostles. The Jews believe in a god. But because they, too, deny and reject Jesus Christ, their god is a false god. “Whoever denies the Son,” writes St. John, “does not have the Father.”

The sad truth is that many church leaders are claiming that belief in a “god” is enough! Some years ago, Bishop Swing of the Episcopal Church wrote: “One can get to God by many ways... We all believe in the same God whether we are Christian, Jew, or Muslim... And each of us in our own way will get to heaven.” And what’s alarming for us is that some of our Synod’s elected officials actually agree with him!

But let’s not point our finger too far away from ourselves, for our thoughts and ideas about God may also be pretty extreme and downright false. What “god” do you and I believe in? Apparently not the God who gave the Ten Commandments on Mt. Sinai, because we think nothing of breaking those commandments; and the “god” we believe in doesn’t mind at all. He’s a “god” who does not forgive, but overlooks our sin.

We believe in a “god” who said, “Come to My Holy Supper, but just every now and then... only if you feel like it.” We believe in a “god” who said, “Baptize your children, but don’t worry about teaching them, and above all, don’t bring them to church—at least not very often.” We do believe in these false gods, don’t we? Because we act and live as though we do.

But no matter how we live and no matter what people believe, there is only one true God. And the Scriptures bear witness to Him. He is Triune—three Divine Persons in one Divine Essence. “The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God, and yet they are not three Gods but one God.” And the world needs to know the truth about this God. The world needs to believe in God the Father. So many think that they came into existence by sheer accident. They think they came from nowhere and that they are going nowhere. There is no real meaning to their life. People need to know—we need to know—that our loving Father fashioned us by His own hand. We are not here on earth by chance. God knew just what He was doing when He gave us the breath of life.

But there’s a problem. Since God created us, we are accountable to Him. We are not free to live for ourselves; we must answer to God for how we live. And that, right there, is the

reason why people everywhere are afraid of God. We know that we daily fall short of what He expects of us. We know that we have offended Him by how we have lived. The world, therefore—we, therefore, need to know not just about God the Father; sinners everywhere need to believe in God the Son. Romans 5 says, “We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” “You have been justified,” it says, “through Him.” God the Father declares that you are forgiven for everything wrong about you and every wrong thing you have done because Jesus Christ suffered and died for you.

You know what’s amazing? People don’t have to believe in God for Him to declare them justified and forgiven; because God doesn’t forgive you based upon what you believe and how you live—He forgives you because Jesus died for you. Every Muslim, every Mormon, every Jew has already been declared forgiven by God for Jesus’ sake. Each and every one of you, whether you strive to obey the Ten Commandments or not—all of you are forgiven. Jesus’ blood did not just bleed for those who love God. It was shed for all sinners. Friend, it was shed for you.

And if you believe this, it’s because God the Holy Spirit has been given to you through the living Word of God, to bring you to this faith and conviction. Without God the Holy Spirit, no one would know the true God; no one would believe in the true God. God the Father created you and sent His Son for you. God the Son lived and died and rose again for you. God the Holy Spirit gives you faith to believe this so that you do not perish in unbelief, but that you live forever in heaven.

Do you believe in the true God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? Then it’s because the true God has come to you through His powerful Word to abide in you, so that you can live in peace and have the hope of eternal life. And believing in the true God, your life will proclaim what you believe by what you say and how you act.

One day the Green Bay Packers under their great coach, Vince Lombardi, were playing the Detroit Lions. It was in the heyday of the Packers. They were one of the greatest football teams that was ever assembled, but this particular day they were getting beat by the Lions. In the first half they just couldn’t do anything right. Mercifully, the first half came to an end, and the players knew that Coach Lombardi was going to be very angry with them at half time, and they were going to have to endure his anger for their sloppy play. To make matters worse, as Lombardi was walking across the field into the dressing room, a member of the opposing team called out an ethnic slur to insult him. The players thought, “Oh, no! It’s going to be even worse.” During half time the coach made some comments about their need to improve their play in a very mild-mannered way. He suggested some new ideas for the defense, all the time completely keeping his composure as the players waited for the explosion. Just before they were to go back on the field for the second half, Lombardi said, “And, oh, by the way, fellows” (the players thought, Uh-oh, here it comes!) “We are the Green Bay Packers. Now go out on the field and act like it.” And they went out and won the game.

That’s the way it is with us. God gives us His Holy Spirit to remind us that we are His children—believers in the true God. We have been claimed by the life and death of our Lord Jesus Christ. Now go out into life where you have been called and act like children of the true God. Husbands and wives who are faithful to their spouses. Workers who give an honest day’s work for an honest day’s pay. People who give witness to the true God as

they worship regularly; participate in family devotions; read the Scriptures daily; regularly attend the Sacrament. We are, after all, children of the true God. We are His forgiven sons and daughters. By the grace of God, let's act like it. Amen.