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# Editor's Note



Jonathan Leeman

It's the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Protestant Reformation, and right now there's no shortage of material being published on the topic. Why might this 9Marks Journal possibly add to the pile?

We asked our contributors to consider the Reformation's relevance specifically to the local church and the pastor. Why should pastors care? Take a look at D. A. Carson's piece. What does it have to do with expositional preaching, evangelism, church discipline, church authority more broadly, the ordinances, even pastoral counseling? There are articles on each of these topics, too.

There is, of course, a danger in idealizing the past. Brad Littlejohn's piece offers a crucial warning. But there might be a greater danger in forgetting it altogether. For instance, Michael Reeves' piece on expositional preaching quotes John Calvin's characterization of pre-Reformation sermons. They were filled, says Calvin, with "sweet stories" and "not unamusing speculations" and "only a few expressions . . . thrown in from the Word of God." That sounds like a decent description of much preaching today, no?

Start, therefore, with Stephen Nichols' piece. It takes you back in time, and lets you imagine what you might have heard in church the Sunday before Luther nailed his 95 theses on the

Wittenberg Door. It's a snapshot of what the Reformers were responding to—the darkness that prevailed across “Christian” Europe.

Then ask yourself how you might teach your congregation about the Reformation. So far in 2017, Mark Dever has devoted every sermon introduction and conclusion to teaching his church this history. How are you equipping your church with knowledge of the wisdom and folly of the past? If you haven't been doing this, I'm excited about the wonderful stories and truths your church still gets to learn from those who came before us—like hearing a great symphony for the first time!



# The Reformation and the Glory of God



John Piper

**T**he Protestant Reformation was fundamentally a controversy with the Roman Catholic Church over how helpless we really are in our deadness and guilt. The Reformers believed that *only grace* could raise us from the dead, and *only Christ* could become our punishment and our perfection. These two miracles—of life from the dead and wrath removed—could only be received as a gift *through faith*. They could never be merited or earned, all so that the entire transaction would culminate *solī Deo Gloria*—to the glory of God alone.

## 1. WHAT IS THE GLORY OF GOD?

The basic meaning of *holy* is “separated” from the common. When you carry that definition all the way to the infinite “separation” of God from all that is common, the effect is to make him the infinite “one-of-a-kind”—like the rarest and most perfect diamond in the world.

From cover to cover, the great dominating reality of the Bible is that this infinitely valuable, infinitely pure and beautiful divine uniqueness shines forth through creation and through all the acts of God in history and in redemption as the *glory of God*, that is,

*the outward radiance of the intrinsic worth and beauty and greatness of his manifold perfections.*

I refer to the radiance of the beauty of his “manifold perfections” because the Bible can speak of the glory of God’s might (2 Thessalonians 1:9), the glory of God’s grace (Ephesians 1:6), and so on. Every attribute of God is a facet in the diamond that is the glory of God. If God lost any of his attributes, he would be less glorious. Indeed, he would not be God.

So when I speak of the glory of God, I am not treating it as something God possesses, as if it’s different from his own essence. No, God’s glory is the radiance of the worth and beauty and greatness of God *himself* to be spiritually seen and savored and shown by his redeemed people.

## **2. WHY IS THE GLORY OF GOD THE GOAL OF EVERYTHING?**

God wanted it this way. This was his plan from eternity. This was his purpose and design in all creation, all history, and all redemption. God created, sustains, governs, and saves in such a way as to reveal his glory.

It all began with his purpose in creation: “The heavens declare the glory of God” (Psalm 19:1). That’s what they are for. “Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth, everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made” (Isaiah 43:6–7).

This purpose extends to everything God does: “God works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory” (Ephesians 1:11–12). “From him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen” (Romans 11:36).

Why is there such a vastness of uninhabited galaxies and only one tiny dot of human existence? This universe is not intended to portray the importance of man or even creation itself. God intends it all to give us some inkling of his own grandeur and majesty. And it is an understatement.

God created and sustains and governs and justifies the ungodly *soli Deo gloria*.

### **3. HOW IS GOD GLORIFIED MOST FULLY BY HIS JUSTIFIED PEOPLE?**

I am a Christian Hedonist. I believe that *God is most glorified in his justified people when those justified people are most satisfied in him*. And I believe that the pastors and theologians who wrote the great summary of Reformation teaching in the Westminster Catechism were giving expression to this as well when they said, “Man’s chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.”

They did not just say that our goal is to glorify God, but to glorify God *and* enjoy him. And they did not call glorifying and enjoying two ends, but one singular end. They discerned what Paul meant when he said, “To die is gain” (Philippians 1:20). The way Christ’s supreme beauty and value would shine brightest would be for Paul to be most satisfied in Christ—even in suffering, and ultimately death.

God planned for us to discover his glory as all-satisfying, not because our happiness is the ultimate aim of the universe, but because the all-glorious God—the ultimate value in the universe—is shown to be the supreme Treasure when he becomes the supreme Pleasure of his people.

### **4. IF GOD ALONE GETS THE GLORY, WHAT ABOUT OUR GLORIFICATION?**

When we say “*soli Deo gloria*”—“to God alone be glory”—we should mean: Whatever glory is shared with man is a glory that calls attention ultimately to the source and end of all things—the glory of God alone.

The Bible is stunningly clear that the children of God will be glorified with the glory God.

We all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. (2 Corinthians 3:18)

Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. (1 John 3:2)

Those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. (Romans 8:30)

Why is God so intent on making us glorious with his own glory? The reason for this is not hard to see. Jesus said his aim for us is that *his* joy—his divine joy—might be in us and our joy might be full (John 15:11; 17:13). But you can't put the jet engine of a 747 in a tiny Smart Car. You can't fit the volcano of God's joy in the teacup of my unglorified soul. You can't put all-glorious joy in inglorious people. We *will* be glorified, because it is the only way we can be fully satisfied in God, so that God alone will be fully glorified in us (John 17:24–26).

I hope you feel drawn to Jesus—to embrace him by faith. Because all of us who trust him, no matter how sinful we have been, are now justified *by grace alone*, with no merited favor whatever, *on the basis of Christ alone*, with no other sacrifice or righteousness as the foundation, *through the means of faith alone*, not including any human works whatsoever, to the end that we might enjoy God alone as the supreme Treasure of our lives, and so display that all glory belongs ultimately to him alone.

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR:**

John Piper is founder and teacher of [desiringGod.org](http://desiringGod.org), and chancellor of Bethlehem College & Seminary. For 33 years, he served as pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church, Minneapolis. You can find him on Twitter at @JohnPiper.

# The Sunday before the 95 Theses



Stephen Nichols

**T**he chime rang out from the bell tower. Time to gather for Mass.

Yet this was not a regular Sunday. Someone told us we would hear a homily. Usually we only heard homilies at Lent or Advent, as well as on the feast day of our church's namesake. But this was October, and we weren't sure why we would hear a homily in October.

Then Jonas, the cloth merchant, explained. Last week's business took him to the town across the ridge. All his customers there were still reeling from what they had heard last Sunday. Their priest read a homily that could only be described as a tale of horror. He described dead relatives screaming out in pain in purgatory. He put his hand to his ear and bent down toward the ground as if he could hear the groans. He depicted flames so real that everyone in the pews thought they felt the temperature rising. One customer told Jonas that women had actually swooned. Afterward, no one dared to utter a single word. All shuffled out in silence.

All this happened last Sunday, said Jonas. Then on Monday a monk named Tetzl pulled into the same town in a grand wa-

gon. Trumpets blew and banners unfurled. The archbishop's own guards surrounded him. In the shadow of the steeple in the middle of the town square, his attendants set up a table. They piled a stack of parchment high on the one side and cautiously placed a chest on the other. The chest had three locks. Everyone knows that if a chest has three locks it is owned by three people who do not trust each other.

Then Tetzal cried out, "Friends of this town, you have heard how your loved ones suffer in purgatory. You have heard their cries. The flames have reached up and licked your very own boots."

"How shamefully," Tetzal continued, "you go about your business. You spend your money on every little trifle. And, oh, how your loved ones suffer. Enough. Step forward. Leo X, the Pontifex Maximus, Vicar of Christ on earth, has been gracious and merciful to you and has affixed his seal to this indulgence. Now come and do your duty. And now you have a very special deal reserved for you. For a little extra guilder you can free yourself from purgatory. Yes, God be praised, give to the church your mite and the gracious Holy Father in Rome will see to it that you and all your dead relatives will be in Paradise itself, not enduring for a moment the purging flames of purgatory."

Then he added with a rhythm in his voice:

Every time a coin in the coffer rings,  
A soul from purgatory springs.

*Agh*, said Jonas. He had travelled to this town on Tuesday to sell his cloth. Yet not a single soul had a coin left. They'd given all their money to Tetzal.

So we knew what to expect of the homily in the cathedral in our town on this last Sunday of October 1517: vivid depictions of pain and agony; shrieks echoing through the cathedral; women

swooning. And we knew that Tetzels carriage with its load of parchment papers and the thrice-locked trunk would pull into town the next day.

Sure enough, we listened. We watched others get caught in the sermon's grip. The whole affair was unseemly. I stopped listening. Words from the Nicene Creed rumbled around in my head: "Propter nos homines et propter nostrum salutem," and again, "propter nos homines et propter nostrum salutem."

"For us men and for our salvation."

Sometimes in Mass we would recite this creed. But only sometimes—certainly not as often as the Credo, the Creed of The Apostles. Yet those words had stuck in my head. I would wait for them whenever we said the creed. Such hope, such beauty. This Jesus, very God of very God and very man of very man, came for us and for our salvation.

Today they drowned out this silly clod in the pulpit. Why did our priest not love this line? Why did he not tell us about it?

I hear there is a friar in the town of Wittenberg, Brother Martin. It is said he teaches and preaches differently than all these others. I wonder what he thinks of this homily and this Tetzels. I wonder if he thinks of these words, "propter nos homines et propter nostrum salutem." Maybe he will help us.

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR:**

Dr. Stephen J. Nichols is president of Reformation Bible College, chief academic officer for Ligonier Ministries, and a Ligonier teaching fellow. He is author of many books *A Time for Confidence*. He is on Twitter @DrSteveNichols

# Should Pastors Today Care about the Reformation?



D. A. Carson

**P**astors devoted to their ministry have so many things to do. Apart from the careful preparation week by week of fresh sermons and Bible studies, hours set aside for counseling, care in developing excellent relationships, careful and thoughtful (and time-consuming!) evangelism, the mentoring of another generation coming along behind, the incessant demands of administration and oversight, not to mention the nurturing of one's own soul, there is the regular array of family priorities, including care for aging parents and precious grandchildren and an ill spouse (or any number of permutations of such responsibilities), and, for some, energy levels declining in inverse proportion to advancing years.

So, why should I set aside valuable hours to read up on the Reformation, usually thought to have kicked off about 500 years ago? True, the Reformers lived in rapidly changing times, but how many of them gave serious thought to postmodern epistemology, transgenderism, and the new (in)tolerance? If we are to learn



from forebears, wouldn't we be wise to choose more recent ones? Not necessarily.

### **THE PASTOR AS GENERAL PRACTITIONER**

A pastor is by definition something akin to a GP (a “general practitioner”). He is not a specialist in, say, divorce and remarriage, missions history, cultural commentary, or particular periods of church history. Yet most pastors will have to develop competent introductory knowledge in all these areas as part of his application of the Word of God to the people around him. And that means he is obligated to devote some time each year to reading in broad areas. One of those areas is historical theology. Well-chosen historical literature exposes us to different cultures and times, expands our horizons, and enables us to see how Christians in other times and places have thought through what the Bible says and how to apply the gospel to all of life. Keep reading!

Second and more specifically, a growing knowledge of historical theology accomplishes wonders in destroying the illusion that insightful and rigorous exegesis began in the nineteenth or twentieth century. Not everything that was written 500 years ago, or 1500 years ago, is wholly admirable and worth repeating, any more than everything written today is wholly admirable and worth repeating. But such historical reading is the only effective antidote to the tragic attitude of one seminary (name withheld to protect the guilty) which long argued that its students needed to learn only good exegesis and responsible hermeneutics: they didn't need to learn what others think, for with exegesis and hermeneutics under their belt they could turn the crank and deliver faithful theology all by themselves. How naïve to think that exegesis and hermeneutics are neutral, value-free disciplines! The reality is that we need to listen to other pastor-theologians, both from our own day and from the past, if we are to grow in richness, nuance, insight, self-correction, and gospel fidelity.

## WHY THE REFORMATION?

But why focus on the Reformation in particular? Although it was triggered by the question of indulgences, debate over indulgences soon led, directly or indirectly, to probing debates on authority, the locus of revelation (Should we seize on a deposit ostensibly given to the church embracing both Scripture and Tradition, or on *sola Scriptura*?), purgatory, the authority by which sins are forgiven, the treasury of satisfactions, the nature and locus of the church, the nature and authority of priest/presbyters, the nature and function of the Eucharist, saints, justification, sanctification, the nature of the new birth, the enslaving power of sin, and much more.

All of these are still central issues in the theological syllabus today. Even the issue of indulgences is still important: both Pope Benedict and Pope Francis have offered plenary special indulgences under certain circumstances (though in a more restrained structure than that adopted by Tetzl). Moreover, the study of the Reformation is especially salutary as a response to those who think the so-called “Great Tradition,” as preserved in the earliest ecumenical creeds, is invariably an adequate basis for ecumenical unity, as if there were no heresies invented after the fourth century. On this front, study of the Reformation usefully fosters a little historical realism.

In addition to the hermeneutical distinctiveness of the Reformation that sprang from *sola Scriptura*, the Reformers worked hard to develop a rigorous hermeneutic that was clear of the vagaries of the four-fold hermeneutic that crested during the Middle Ages. This does *not* mean they were simplistic literalists, unable to appreciate different literary genres, subtle metaphors, and other symbol-laden figures of speech; it means, rather, that they worked hard to let Scripture speak on its own terms, without allowing external methods to be imposed on the text like an extra-textual grid designed to guarantee the “right” answers. In part, this was tied to their understanding of *claritas Scripturae*, the perspicuity or clarity of Scripture.

Catholic theory on spirituality commonly distinguishes between the living of ordinary Catholics, and the spiritual living of those who are really deeply committed Catholics. It's almost a Catholic version of "higher life" theology. It is said to lead to mystical connection to God, and to be characterized by extraordinary spiritual practices and disciplines. But although I have read right through, say, Julian of Norwich, I find a great deal of subjective mysticism and virtually no grounding in Scripture or the gospel. And for the life of me I cannot imagine either Peter or Paul recommending monastic withdrawal in order to attain greater spirituality: it is always a danger when certain ascetic practices become normative paths to spirituality when there is no apostolic support for them.

Our contemporary generation, tired of merely cerebral approaches to Christianity, is drawn to late patristic and medieval patterns of spirituality. What a relief, then, to turn to the warmest of the writings of the Reformers, and discover afresh the pursuit of God and his righteousness well grounded in holy Scripture. That is why Luther's letter to his barber remains such a classic: it is full of godly application of the gospel to ordinary Christians, building up a conception of spirituality that is not reserved for the elite of the elect but for all brothers and sisters in Christ. Similarly, the opening chapters of Book III of Calvin's *Institutes* provides more profound reflection on true spirituality than many much longer contemporary volumes.

The Reformation is of central importance for understanding modern Western history. Three large-scale movements set the stage for the contemporary Western world: the Renaissance, the Reformation, and the Enlightenment. Each of the three is complex, and scholars continue to debate their many facets. Nevertheless, the raw claim for the pivotal role of these three movements cannot easily be challenged.

## WHY THIS REFORMATION?

There are lessons to be learned from the Reformation about the sovereignty of God in movements of revival and reformation. After all, there were other reformers and reform movements that showed early promise, but largely sputtered out. John Wycliffe (c.1320–1384) was a theologian, philosopher, churchman, ecclesiastical reformer, and Bible translator, and the work he did anticipated the Reformation, but it could not be said to have precipitated it. Jan Hus (1369–1415) was a Czech priest, reformer, scholar, rector of Charles University in Prague, and architect of a reforming movement, often called “Hussitism,” but of course he was martyred and his movement, important in Bohemia, achieved little more in Europe than predecessor status.

Why did Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli live on, long enough to give direction to a massive Reformation, while Bible translator William Tyndale (1494–1536) was murdered? Historical hindsight offers many reasons why this one lived and that one died, why this reforming action fizzled and that one ignited an irrepressible flame. The historical details are worth understanding, but the eyes of faith will see the hand of God in genuine reformation, and remind us to offer him our praises for what he has done, and our petitions for what we still beg him to do.

## EXPOUND THE BIBLE, ENGAGE IN THEOLOGY

The Reformation stands out as a movement that sought to integrate exegesis of the biblical books with what we would today call systematic theology. Not all the Reformers did this the same way. Some acted as if they were expounding the biblical texts, but tended in reality to jump from seminal word or phrase to the next seminal word or phrase, stopping at each point to unload theological treatments of the various “loci.”

Others, such as Bucer, followed the text more closely, but also unloaded his treatment of the “loci” as he went along, making

his commentaries extraordinarily long and dense. Calvin strove in his commentaries for what he called “lucid brevity,” and reserved his systematic theology primarily for what grew to become the four volumes of *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Indeed, Calvin’s commentaries are so “bare bones” that not a few scholars have criticized him for not including enough theology in them.

But what is striking about all these Reformers, regardless of their successes or failures to bring about appropriate integration, is the way in which they simultaneously attempted to expound the Bible and engage in serious theologizing. By contrast, today few systematicians are excellent exegetes, and few exegetes evince much interest in systematic theology. The exceptions merely prove the rule.

### **UNDERSTANDING THEIR TIME—AND OURS**

The Reformers read their own times well. While leaning on the “norming norm” of holy Scripture, they truly understood where the fault lines lay in their own time and place. Some of the same issues prevail today. On the other hand, what we should take away from the Reformers in this regard is not simply the list of topics on which *they* majored, but the importance of understanding *our* times and learning how to engage our times with the truth of Scripture.

Keep reading!

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR:**

Don Carson is research professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois, and co-founder of The Gospel Coalition.

# Connecting the Church and the Gospel: A Reformation Perspective



Michael Horton

**A**nglican theologian Paul Avis observes, “Reformation theology is largely dominated by two questions: ‘How can I obtain a gracious God?’ and ‘Where can I find the true Church?’ The two questions are inseparably related.”<sup>1</sup>

Evangelicals have not been particularly known for their interest in ecclesiology. There are many reasons for this. One is the fact that, as a theological tradition, it represents the confluence of Anabaptist, pietist, and revivalist streams as well as the magisterial Reformation. At least in official teaching, when it comes to the formal and material principles (*sola scriptura* and *sola gratia/Christo/fide*) evangelicals look to Protestant orthodoxy.

Yet when it comes to the doctrine of the church and the ministry of Word and sacrament, as well as discipline, the movement’s “low church” heritage becomes especially evident. In fact, salvation by grace alone is frequently set over against all insti-

<sup>1</sup> Paul D. L. Avis, *The Church in the Theology of the Reformers* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981), 1

tutional elements as man-made “churchianity” and trust in formal rituals. “Getting saved” and church membership, a personal relationship with Jesus and communion with his visible body, direct experience and public accountability, are frequently treated as antitheses rather than consistent and in fact integrated aspects of union with Christ.

So, in an age marked so radically by individualism and autonomy, it is not surprising that in recent decades, younger evangelicals have discovered ecclesiology with considerable delight, intrigue, and in some cases creative as well as biblically faithful applications for contemporary church life. And, as is often the case with new discoveries, this renewed interest in ecclesiology has encouraged many to move in “high church” directions—that is, toward Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Anglican traditions.

In a number of learned and creative explorations of ecclesiology by evangelical, charismatic, and Pentecostal scholars, I have noticed a tendency to skip over the Reformation. The assumption seems to be that reformers like Luther and Calvin were interested in soteriology, not ecclesiology, and that even if one finds their emphases helpful, one will have to look elsewhere for robust accounts of the latter.

However, Avis is exactly right: ecclesiology and soteriology were integrally related in the teaching and practice of the magisterial reformers. One may even say the Reformed tradition was particularly concerned with ecclesiology.

## **ECCLESIOLOGY AND THE REFORMATION**

Under King Edward, Archbishop Cranmer solicited the assistance of Martin Bucer and Peter Martyr Vermigli in further reforms, resulting in the revised Prayer Book and various changes in discipline and government.

While Lutheran pietism tended to ignore the formal ministry and government of the visible church in favor of informal gathe-

rings of the truly committed, Puritanism was distinguished by its commitment to reforming the visible church itself. Rather than separating into conventicles and avoiding the official church as much as possible, Puritans were just as concerned as Orthodox, Roman Catholics, or non-Puritan Anglicans in the public forms, rituals, and government of the visible church. In fact, they were devoted to the *established* church, whether as episcopalians, presbyterians, or independents.

Even critics of the liturgy established under Queen Elizabeth I did not make their arguments based on the principles of informality, spontaneity, and individualism but on the principle of *sola scriptura*: the refusal to bind consciences to any form of worship not expressly commanded in Scripture. Precisely because the visible order, government, liturgy, and discipline of the church mattered so much, Puritans were willing to give up their livelihood and even their lives, if necessary, for the further reformation of the church.

It is this gospel that makes the church one (with a faith that is personal but never private), holy (sanctified by the Word of truth, [Jn. 17:17]), catholic (across all demographics and generations), and apostolic (anchored to apostolic doctrine rather than a supposedly contemporary “apostle”). Thus, this true church—the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church—is “the congregation of all believers” (Augsburg VII; Belgic XXVII), “the communion of all the elect” (Heidelberg Cat. q. 54). For the time being, however, the catholic church comes to visible expression in “particular churches, which are members thereof . . . more or less pure, according as the doctrine of the gospel is taught and embraced, ordinances administered, and public worship performed more or less purely in them” (Westminster Confession, XXV.IV).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The Westminster Confession, Ch. XXV.V, in *Trinity Hymnal*, revised ed. (Atlanta/Philadelphia: Great Commission Publications, 1990), 863



## TWO EXTREMES TO AVOID

Consequently, there are two extremes to be avoided in interpreting the relationship of the Reformation to ecclesiology. The first is to underestimate the reformers' interest in ecclesiology, as if they only cared about recovering a few *solae*. A cursory review of the Lutheran and Reformed confessions and catechisms will dispel that misunderstanding. In a strange irony of history, Luther included discipline as a mark of the church in *On Councils*, although Calvin did not, the Lutheran Book of Concord did not, and the Reformed churches did! There is no article given to the doctrine of election, much less “the five points of Calvinism” in Calvin's Geneva Catechism, but there are several on the sacraments. This is not to downplay the importance of the doctrines of grace: Calvin certainly defended double predestination with Augustinian vigor. It is instead to point out the sense of proportion that the Reformation gave to the whole teaching of Scripture and, within that, the remarkable importance it gave to the doctrine of the church.

The second mistake is to exaggerate the role of ecclesiology, as if the Reformation was really about the doctrine of the church rather than the gospel. Both of these assumptions results from a false choice between gospel and church. For the reformers, these were not hermeneutically-sealed compartments. Again, Avis's point above is exactly right: Lutheran *and* Reformed traditions emphasized that the gospel is a message about a historical event outside of us and our experience, the alien righteousness of Christ imputed to sinners through faith alone.

Furthermore, they insisted that the means through which this gospel comes to us is external. We do not discover the truth by looking within our individual souls, but through the public proclamation of the Word and the administration of baptism and the Lord's Supper—by submitting to the discipline that keeps us in the care of Christ to the end of our life. Luther and Calvin were

fond of appealing to Cyprian's dictum, "He cannot have God as his Father who takes not the Church as his Mother." Like her individual members, the church collectively is simultaneously sinful and justified. She is not yet the spotless wife, but the bride who must always confess her sins. Against all perfectionism, which they detected especially with the Anabaptists, the reformers urged believers not to imagine that they could be in communion with Christ while excommunicating themselves from the communion of saints.

While church and gospel were inseparable, the reformers did believe the latter was the wellspring of the former. The church is the *creatura verbi*—creature of the Word, they insisted. It was not surprising that Rome regarded itself as the mother of Scripture, since it also saw itself as the dispenser of grace. The keys of the kingdom were given to St. Peter and his successors, it was believed, and this meant—especially by the fifteenth century—that the "treasury of merit" (the accumulated rewards of Mary and the saints) was analogous to a central bank to which the pope had been given the power of attorney. If salvation is of the church, then it makes sense to say that the church is the source of the gospel and therefore gives birth to itself.

## THE ANABAPTIST ERROR

Yet the Anabaptists were no less in error than Rome with respect to the gospel. As Anabaptist theologian Thomas N. Finger observes, attitudes toward the Reformation's teaching concerning justification ranged from disinterest to outright hostility.<sup>3</sup>

Basically Manichean in its worldview, the Anabaptist movement drew a sharp contrast between creation and redemption;

3 Thomas N. Finger, *A Contemporary Anabaptist Theology: Biblical, Historical, Constructive* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 562–64. Though in some respects more radical in distancing itself from the medieval church than were the Reformers, *Anabaptists* were closer to Rome on justification. Contemporary Anabaptist theologian Thomas Finger observes, "Robert Friedmann found 'A forensic view of grace, in which the sinner is . . . undeservedly justified . . . simply unacceptable' to Anabaptists. A more nuanced scholar like Arnold Snyder can assert that historic Anabaptists 'never talked about being 'justified by faith.'"

between everything that is physical, external, apprehended by the senses, public, and formal to everything that is spiritual, inward, apprehended directly and immediately by the soul, personal, and spontaneous.<sup>4</sup> The goal of salvation was the merging of the individual's will with God's—full surrender, or *Gallasenheit*.

As it often was in late medieval teaching, grace was seen as medicinal substance infused into the soul directly—that is, apart from preaching and sacraments—by the Holy Spirit to aid the believer in his or her struggle to break free of everything human and to become one with divinity. The gospel, therefore, was an internal message of mystical absorption into God.

Consequently, Anabaptist ecclesiology was sharply dualistic, opposing their “inner light” to the external means of grace and the visible church. In a moving letter to Cardinal Sadoletto, Calvin complained of being assailed by “two sects”—“the Pope and the Anabaptists”—which, though quite different from each other, “boast extravagantly of the Spirit” in order to distort or distract from the Word of God.<sup>5</sup>

The reformers had a name for this: “enthusiasm.” Meaning literally “God-within-ism,” this penchant for confusing ourselves with God was a perennial temptation, they lamented. In his Smalcald Articles (III. 4–15), Luther argued that Adam was the first enthusiast. His point was that the craving to identify the Word of God with our own inner voice rather than heed Scripture and preaching is part and parcel of original sin.

We're all enthusiasts. Müntzer and other radicals claimed the Spirit spoke directly to them, above and even sometimes against what he had revealed in Scripture. The secret, private, and in-born “word” was contrasted with the “outer Word that merely

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4 Thomas N. Finger, *A Contemporary Anabaptist Theology: Biblical, Historical, Constructive* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 563.

5 John Calvin, *Reply by Calvin to Cardinal Sadolet's Letter*, in *Tracts and Treatises on the Reformation of the Church*, ed. Thomas F. Torrance; trans., Henry Beveridge (reprint of Calvin Translation Society edition: Baker, 1958), I, 36

beats the air.”<sup>6</sup> The reformers pressed: is this not what the Pope does? While enthusiasm works from the inside out (inner experiences, reason, and free will expressed outwardly), God works from the outside in (the Word and the sacraments). “Therefore we ought and must constantly maintain this point,” Luther thunders, “that God does not wish to deal with us otherwise than through the spoken Word and the Sacraments. It is the devil himself whatsoever is extolled as Spirit without the Word and the Sacraments (SA III. 8.10).”

## MYSTICISM & OUR AMERICAN RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

We see the triumph of this radical mysticism in American religious experience, which has been characterized generally by some scholars as “Gnostic.”<sup>7</sup> This is perhaps not surprising, especially given the fact that our new nation had become a harbor of freedom for radical sects expelled from the Old World to pursue their experiments without molestation. Restorationist movements proclaimed the dawn of genuine Christianity, which had run underground since the death of the apostles.

Revivalism also championed the antitheses of the radical Anabaptist and pietist sects. Exemplifying this outlook, Southern Baptist theologian E. Y. Mullins developed the doctrine of “soul competency” as an outgrowth of the broader Transcendentalist philosophy of Ralph Waldo Emerson and William James. The idea is that no one and no thing can stand between God and the individual soul. Religion is intensely individual and personal (i.e., autonomous) and no one can tell another person what to believe or how to live.

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6 See for example, Thomas Muntzer, “The Prague Protest,” in *The Radical Reformation: Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought*, ed. and trans. Michael G. Baylor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 2-7; “Sermon to the Princes,” *The Radical Reformation*, 20. Cf. Thomas N. Finger, “Sources for Contemporary Spirituality: Anabaptist and Pietist Contributions,” *Brethren Life and Thought* 51, no. 1-2 (Winter/Spring 2006): 37.

7 Philip Lee, *Against the Protestant Gnostics* (New York: Oxford University Press, XXXX); Harold Bloom, *The American Religion: Christianity in a Post-Christian Nation* (New York: Simon and Schuster, XXXX).

More recently, in his *Revisioning Evangelical Theology*, theologian Stanley Grenz argued for a retrieval of evangelicalism's pietist heritage over Protestant orthodoxy. "In recent years," he wrote, "we have begun to shift the focus of our attention away from doctrine with its focus on propositional truth in favor of a renewed interest in what constitutes the uniquely evangelical vision of spirituality."<sup>8</sup> He invokes familiar contrasts: "creed-based" versus "piety" (57), "religious ritual" versus "doing what Jesus would do" (48), "our daily walk" over "Sunday morning worship attendance" (49), and individual and inward commitment over corporate identity (49–53). "A person does not come to church to receive salvation," but to receive marching orders for daily life (49). Grenz adds, "We practice baptism and the Lord's Supper, but understand the significance of these rites in a guarded manner." They are "perpetuated not so much for their value as conduits . . . of grace from God to the communicant as because they remind the participant and the community of the grace of God received inwardly." They are part of "an obedient response..." (48). Thus, the emphasis is not on God creating a communion of saints by gift-giving through his means of grace, but on the people's work of creating a society of pious individuals through means of commitment.

Given the history of enthusiasm, Wade Clark Roof's findings are hardly surprising when the American sociologist reports, "The distinction between 'spirit' and 'institution' is of major importance" to spiritual seekers today.<sup>9</sup> "Spirit is the inner, experiential aspect of religion; institution is the outer, established form of religion."<sup>10</sup> He adds, "Direct experience is always more trustwor-

8 Stanley Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 56. See also Veli-Matti Karkkainen; ed. Amos Yong, *Toward a Pneumatological Theology: Pentecostal and Ecumenical Perspectives on Ecclesiology, Soteriology, and Theology of Mission* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2002), 9–37. In all of these cases, a "pneumatic hermeneutics" is put forward as a way of attaining rapprochement with Rome.

9 Wade Clark Roof, *A Generation of Seekers*, Wade Clark Roof, *A Generation of Seekers: The Spiritual Journeys of the Baby Boom Generation* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1993), 23.

10 Wade Clark Roof, *A Generation of Seekers*, 30.

thy, if for no other reason than because of its ‘inwardness’ and ‘withinness’—two qualities that have come to be much appreciated in a highly expressive, narcissistic culture.”<sup>11</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The connection between gospel and church runs deeper even than Paul Avis’s comment above. If Christ creates the church through his gospel (Rom 10:14–15), then especially in the context of a divided church, the question of finding the true church becomes acute.

But the connection runs deeper still. Rome’s interpretation of the gospel message cannot but generate an ecclesiology that confuses Christ the head with his ecclesial ministers. If salvation comes from the church, then it cannot fail to be the church that is the mother not only of the faithful (which we affirm) but of the faith itself. Similarly, the Anabaptist’s gospel, centered on the inner birth and inner light, cannot fail to generate an inner church, where the external institution’s means and ministers of grace are seen as threats to the personal perfection of the individual.

Despite varying emphases of different traditions, the ecclesiological presuppositions of the Reformation reflect distinct convictions concerning the gospel message. Salvation comes to us from outside ourselves and forms a communion of saints. It is not by the individual’s ascent to God, but by God’s descent to us—in *the flesh*—that we are reborn, justified, sanctified, and finally glorified. The church is the creation of the Spirit, to be sure, but *by the Word*. Thus created in a public event of hearing, it is sustained and grows in its orderly way according to that Word.

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<sup>11</sup> Wade Clark Roof, *A Generation of Seekers*, 67.

# Wise Men are Men, and Truth is Truth



Brad Littlejohn

**N**o impulse is so deeply embedded in human nature as the urge to worship. And it is ever so much easier to worship flesh and blood than an invisible spirit. As young children, we are tempted first to worship our fathers—“My dad knows *everything!*” Then, when they fail us, we worship sports heroes or movie stars, defending them against all critics far more fiercely and stubbornly than we would ever defend ourselves.

When it comes to the realm of truth, our propensity to hero-worship is fortified by two more human impulses—fear and laziness. For nearly all of us, our beliefs are anchored more upon people than ideas; and if we have staked our lives upon confession of some truth, we fear that we have also staked our lives upon the credibility of those from whom we derived the truth. Too lazy to grapple with the logic of a truth-claim on its own, we rest our faith instead on the people who first taught it, or who taught it to us. And if, God forbid, they should disappoint us, our whole system of beliefs is apt to crumble.

## FACING THE GIANTS OF THE REFORMATION

This dynamic has produced an unhealthy posture among many

conservative Protestants toward the giants of the Reformation: a fear that admitting the messiness and ambiguity of their reforming efforts means admitting a similar messiness and ambiguity in our Protestant convictions. Of course, the temptation to hagiography is hardly a new one, but this unhealthiness has been intensified by the steady shrinkage of our historical awareness.

Most of us can name only a handful of Protestant Reformers—perhaps just Luther and Calvin—and we tend to place the full weight of our confidence in Protestantism on their all-too-human shoulders. Can we admit to ourselves that Luther was hot-tempered, hasty, and stubbornly unwilling to admit mistakes? Must we willfully ignore his most despicable utterances regarding Jews, Anabaptists, and Zwinglians? Can we concede that Calvin was something of a control freak who could confuse personal loyalty to himself with allegiance to the gospel?

Not that we should credulously lap up all the smear stories peddled by counter-Reformation critics or liberal historians scandalized by the illiberality of the Reformers. Neither Calvin's dealings with Servetus nor Luther's dealings with the peasants were half as sadistic as they are now standardly portrayed. But neither were they above reproach, by any stretch of the imagination. Taking their reforming careers as a whole, we must concede that their motives were mixed, their methods were mixed, and some of their ideas were at times frankly half-baked—or worse.

How do we cope with the legacy of such flawed heroes?

## **OUR IMPERFECT HEROES**

In part, to ask the question is to answer it. We must sheepishly admit that none of our heroes is perfect, and that “warts and all” is the only sane way to embrace another human being. Still, there are at least two strategies to help contemporary children of the Reformation cultivate a healthier relationship toward their sixteenth-century fathers and mothers.



The first, as I've already alluded to, is to broaden our historical vision. It is much easier to admit that Calvin erred on some point if you can take comfort in the fact that at least Bucer and Vermigli did not make the same mistake, or to smooth over some of Luther's rough patches with his ever-moderate disciple Melancthon. The broader our heritage, the more loosely we can sit toward any one piece of it, while still cheerfully owning the heritage as a whole.

Conversely, the more contemporary Protestants cling doggedly to an ever-narrower and more poorly understood sliver of their theological tradition, the more vulnerable they will be to being dislodged from that tradition altogether. We urgently need projects of resourcement that will introduce twenty-first-century Protestants to a far larger and more diverse cast of sixteenth-century characters than they have been accustomed to.

The second strategy is to remember, in the words of Richard Hooker, "that wise men are men, and truth is truth."<sup>12</sup> Hooker makes this statement, in fact, in the context of critically assessing the legacy of John Calvin against a rising generation of English Puritans disposed to hero-worship. Wise Calvin may have been—indeed, extraordinarily so, in Hooker's estimation—but he was still a mere man, and his views were still fallible.

Truth, however, is not. Lazy as we are, we are disposed to treat the teachings of some favorite leader as the index of truth, but truth has to be discerned on its own criteria—chief among them fidelity to Scripture and conformity with reason. Hooker was later to lament, "Two things there are which trouble greatly these later times: one that the Church of Rome cannot, another that Geneva will not, err."<sup>13</sup> The great mistake of Rome, which Luther and Calvin had opposed with all their strength, was to equate human teaching with

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12 *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, Preface.2.7 (<http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/hooker-the-works-of-richard-hooker-vol-1>).

13 Hill, W. Speed, and Georges Edelen, eds. *The Folger Library Edition of the Works of Richard Hooker, vol. 1: The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity: Pref., Books I to IV* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1977), 133n.

divine truth, and yet within a generation, their own followers were doing the same. A commitment to critical thinking, and a determination to acquire the hard-earned tools for engaging in it, is essential if Protestants today are to stay truly Protestant, testing every human teaching against the bright light of biblical truth.

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# Is the Reformation Just a White Man's Legacy?



Mika Edmonson

**O**n April 3, 1963, as Martin Luther King Jr. sat frustrated in the musky confines of a Birmingham jail cell, he took issue not so much with the hatred of the world but the apathy of the church. King had just received a letter signed by eight concerned clergy that encouraged the Negro citizens of Birmingham to withdraw support from the non-violent protest movement and denounce it as extreme, unwise, and untimely. In a tone dripping with patient indignation, King responded, “In the midst of a mighty struggle to rid our nation of racial and economic injustice, I have heard many ministers say: ‘Those are social issues, with which the gospel has no real concern.’”

Over a half century later, King’s assessment remains mostly true among conservative evangelicals. For many, the Reformation has nothing substantial to say to racial and economic injustices.

## THE REFORMATION & SOCIAL EXPLOITATION

However, the eve of the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation, we must not forget that the theological errors of Medieval Catholicism were deeply intertwined with economic exploitation. Take a look

at the 43<sup>rd</sup> of Luther's 95 Theses: "Christians are to be taught that he who gives to the poor or lends to the needy does a better deed than he who buys indulgences." Moreover, his 45<sup>th</sup> thesis explains, "Christians are to be taught that he who sees a needy man and passes him by, yet gives his money for indulgences, does not buy papal indulgences but God's wrath." From the very beginning, the Reformation represented a direct response not only to doctrinal errors, but also to the social exploitation and devastation which sprang from them. This alone suggests that perhaps Wittenberg has more to say to ongoing racial and economic injustice than we might have originally thought.

The problem of race in America is also deeply rooted in doctrinal errors that helped establish social exploitation. In her book, *The Baptism of Early Virginia*, historian Rebecca Goetz chronicles the way Anglican planters in colonial Virginia crafted the idea of "hereditary heathenism," the belief that enslaved Africans and indigenous peoples couldn't be converted to Christianity. She explains, "As they began to think of Indians and Africans not as potential Christians but as people incapable of Christian conversion, Anglo-Virginians laid the foundations for an emergent idea of race and an ideology of racism."

### **HEREDITARY HEATHENISM & CATHOLICITY**

Hereditary heathenism represented a direct repudiation of the doctrine of catholicity, a core theological tenet of the Reformed tradition that had been handed to the Virginia planters. As Anglicans, they regularly confessed with one voice, the words of the Apostles Creed, "I believe in . . . the holy catholic church." Sixteenth-century Reformer Zacharias Ursinus explains that catholicity meant "the church is gathered out of all sorts of men, all states, kindreds, and nations." Catholicity became a matter of Anglican (and Reformed) orthodoxy; it simply follows the redemptive pro-

mise that in the messiah “all nations shall be blessed” (see Genesis 12:3, 26:4; Galatians 3:8; Revelation 5:9)..

Even as colonial planters laid the foundation for a racial caste system in America, they did it despite the theological tradition coming out of the Reformation. Imagine if the Anglican Planters had been faithful to this single point of the Reformed tradition handed to them. The entire tragic history of slavery and the racial caste system in America might have been different.

### **WHAT'S NEXT?**

Continuing the tradition of the Protestant Reformation, the church today must use every theological tool at its disposal to confront and stand against the longstanding legacy, social exploitation, and devastation that has its roots in the doctrinal error of hereditary heathenism. Whatever they confess with their mouths, churches that refuse to practically live out their doctrine of catholicity may not be as orthodox or Reformed as they think.

Historically speaking, the Protestant Reformation was a European movement, and its confessional documents will always be culturally European documents. But insofar as they reflect the enduring truth of God's Word and a moment in the history of God's people, the Protestant Reformation has something to say to every diverse culture.

Here are a few practical suggestions churches might employ to be more faithful to the doctrine of catholicity.

#### ***Step 1: Recognize the Gospel Stakes***

In the church of Antioch, cross-cultural fellowship became a proving ground for orthodoxy. In Galatians 2:11, Paul knows the Galatians had become infected with the theological error of legalism because some Jews refused to have full and free fellowship with their Gentile brothers and sisters in Christ. Due to their behavior toward the Gentiles, Paul knows the Judaizers have made

Jewish cultural practices part of the currency of acceptance in the household of faith.

Although we cannot uncritically map the distinctions between Jew and Gentile directly onto ethnic divisions in the church today, we are still taught the danger of thinking any cultural practice or distinction purchases our seat at God's table of acceptance. For Peter to give preference to the Jews was to participate in legalism that expressed itself through ethnocentrism. Evangelicals are good at spotting legalism when someone says, "Christians don't dance." But do we recognize it in the heart that says, "My people are better than yours"? Throughout the history of the American church, white supremacy has functioned as a form of legalism. In colonial America, enslaved Africans were often denied formal membership in churches, relegated to the balcony during worship services, forced to sit on the floors in shackles, and to take communion after whites. «Whiteness» was part of the currency of acceptance in the American church. The formation of the black church was a theological response to that form of legalism. During the civil rights period, southern white churches often excluded blacks within their written by-laws. Even today, many churches practices a soft separation, communicating in various ways that certain cultures are not welcomed on an equal footing. When we force other cultures to assimilate to our cultural practices in order to be accepted to into our churches, it says something about how we believe people are accepted before God. We need to ask ourselves: are we communicating something about the currency of acceptance with God simply in the way we relate or do not relate across cultural lines?

***Step 2: Preach the Word without ignoring cultural contexts and implications.***

This doesn't mean putting something in the sermon that's not in the Bible. It means, don't leave out of the sermon something

that *is* in the Bible. If you preach the Bible without ignoring these dynamics, you'd be surprised what you find.

For example, in Mark 11:15–19, the day after his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, Jesus returns to the Temple to cleanse it. Part of the corrupt situation that he finds at the Temple involved race-based, systematized injustice. Whereas the religious leaders protected the peace of the Temple's inner courts where the Jews prayed and worshipped, because of ethnic strife, they brazenly turned the court of the Gentiles into a noisy and smelly livestock exchange and marketplace. In his zeal, Jesus completely dismantles the livestock exchange, refuses to let anybody pass through, and so restores the court for the Gentiles to pray. Then he expositis Isaiah 56:7, which says, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations?'" This passage is clearly about the inclusion of the nations among the people of God. It has tremendous implications for engaging racial divisions and disparities in the church.

***Step 3: Administer baptism without ignoring the cultural implications.***

Because baptism and the Lord's Supper signify not only our communion with Christ but also our communion with one another in Christ, it served as a powerful witness against racial divisions and disparities. Remember Galatians 3:27–29: "For as many of you were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise."

We know from 1 Corinthians 12:13 and Colossians 3:11 that when he wrote Galatians 3:28, Paul was almost certainly quoting an ancient baptismal formula. As believers prepared to enter the community of faith, the Lord gave them a reorientation that challenged their previous thinking. Jews who were used to being on

top among the people of God confessed there is “neither Jew nor Greek” because it is Christ alone, not one’s race or culture, that affords one’s place in God’s house. Men who were used to having greater access and status in every other place in society confessed “there is neither male nor female” because it is Christ alone, not one’s gender that affords a place in God’s house. The wealthy who were used to being on top confessed “there is neither slave nor free” because it is Christ alone, not one’s wealth, earthly citizenship, or political affiliation that affords a place in God’s house.

We all need the same blood and the same empty tomb. In Christ, we all—regardless of race, class, or gender—have equal status and equal access and equal inheritance as co-heirs in the household of God. As Martin Luther explained in his commentary on Galatians 3:28, “There is much disparity among men in the world, but there is no such disparity before God.”

***Step 4: Carry out worship with a view toward the unity and catholicity of the church.***

Part of orthodox worship means being intentional about helping diverse people to better understand the claims of the gospel and in so doing more faithfully worship the Lord. In my domination (the OPC), the directory for public worship says, “The unity and catholicity of the covenant people are to be manifest in public worship. Accordingly, the service is to be conducted in a manner that enables and expects all the members of the covenant community—male and female, old and young, rich and poor, educated and uneducated, healthy and infirm, people from every race and nation—to worship together.”

This is a wonderful statement that could go a long way toward making the household of faith an expression of the racial unity that the Lord intends among his people. We have to consider the cultural choices we make that might undermine some members’ ability to worship together.



***Step 5: Pursue cross-cultural exposure and training.***

In Acts 10:13, as Peter is on a roof, the Lord gives him a vision in which a sheet is let down from heaven with all these non-kosher animals on it. Then the Lord speaks to him from heaven, commanding him, “Rise up, Peter. Kill and eat.”

In the Great Commission (Matt. 28:16–20), the Lord had already instructed Peter and the other apostles to disciple the nations. So Peter already knew he was supposed to preach to the Gentiles. The Lord could have simply repeated this command. But this vision, while carrying that same basic message, is also doing something else. Through having Peter go through the cultural practice of eating like a Gentile, the Lord is equipping him not only to preach to the Gentiles but to *live* with them, to have cross-cultural fellowship with them. The Lord is training Peter to get over his Jewish cultural scruples and do what he must to convey to them that by faith alone, they too can be cleansed and accepted in Christ.

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# What Your Church Members Should Know About the Reformation



Shawn Wright

## LATE MEDIEVAL BACKGROUND

The Reformation began with Martin Luther, but he was influenced by doctrine and pastoral practices that preceded him by centuries. We need to begin by understanding some of the main currents that impacted Luther's Reformation breakthrough.

1. Others had seen problems in the Catholic church prior to Luther.
  - John Wycliffe (d. 1384) and Jan Hus (d. 1415), for instance, saw doctrinal errors within the Catholic church that needed to be addressed.
  - Even some Catholic humanists like Cardinal Gasparo Contarini (d. 1542) taught justification by faith until the Catholic Council of Trent (1545–63) condemned that view.
  - The great humanist Desiderius Erasmus and others knew that the Church needed moral reform in its upper echelons, including the papacy, and wrote bitter satires directed against the immorality of the church.

2. There were a variety of Catholic doctrines of salvation.
  - There was a renewed interest in Augustine’s (d. 430) thought, including its emphasis on God’s complete sovereignty. This, though, was the smallest stream.
  - Most believed, as did Thomas Aquinas, that one had to cooperate with God’s grace available to people through the sacraments.
  - The smallest stream—nominalism, or “the modern way”—declared that before one could receive God’s grace in the sacraments one had to make the first move. This “doing your best” in order to receive God’s grace (Latin: *facere quod in se est*) was what Martin Luther was taught. It almost drove him crazy as he struggled with his sensitive conscience to know if he had done enough.
  - These latter two views led many to wonder if they had done enough good works to ultimately get to heaven and if they would be punished for centuries in purgatory.
  - In a real sense, then, we can say that the Reformation was fundamentally a biblical and pastoral reaction to Catholic theology in which assurance of salvation was the most existentially important issue. Beginning with Luther, there was a biblical answer to “What must I do to be saved?” that did not place the emphasis on a person’s effort but on God’s grace given to us in Christ.
  
3. Humanism was significant.
  - Humanism was an educational approach which stressed the need to go *ad fontes* (“to the sources”), reading ancient Greek and Roman literature in the original Greek and Latin.
  - Out of this humanistic interest Erasmus published the Greek New Testament in 1516. This had more of an impact on the Reformation than any other single event because now university-trained thinkers could—for the first time in centu-

ries—read the New Testament in its original language.

- For example, the year after its publication Luther made use of it in the first of his 95 Theses when he noted that Jesus’ message was “repent” (the Greek), not “do penance,” which had been the Latin rendering for centuries.

## MARTIN LUTHER (1483-1546) AND LUTHERANISM

*Luther’s quest for certainty of salvation—aided by his reading of Augustine and especially of the New Testament—led to his Protestant Reformation breakthrough. It began with Luther struggling to understand Romans 1:17 in its immediate context, led to his questioning the appropriateness of selling indulgences, moved to Luther’s questioning of more Catholic doctrines in the hope that the church would reform itself, and ended with his excommunication. Thus began the first of the “Protestant” groups, aptly named after its affable, always-quotable founder. James Atkinson is right: “The Reformation is Luther and Luther is the Reformation.”*

- Because of his desire to save his soul, Luther entered an Augustinian monastery in 1505.
- He struggled with deep spiritual doubts (German: *Anfechtungen*). Luther began reading St. Augustine and found solace there. But he was especially helped by his reading of the New Testament in the original language.
- To take his mind off his introspective questions, Luther’s superiors made him get a Ph.D., and he became professor of the Bible at Wittenberg in 1512.
- He taught whatever books of the Bible he was interested in studying, and his choices were a wonderful I-want-to-become-a-Protestant reading list: Psalms (1513–1515); Romans (1515–1516); Galatians (1516–1517); Hebrews (1517–1518); and Psalms again (1518–1519).
- On October 31, 1517 Luther posted his 95 *Theses* which were meant to debate with other academics the appropriateness of

- the church's relatively recent practice of selling indulgences to those who could afford them in order to decrease the amount of time they would be punished in purgatory for their sins. Luther didn't think this was his clarion call for a Reformation. In fact, reflecting on them later, he called the theses "weak and popish."
- But these theses drew the church's response and led to Luther's development of his thinking at a breakneck pace. Some of the more important events were:
    - His exposition of "the theology of the cross" (in contrast to "the theology of glory" that marked the works-righteousness and pride of the Catholic church) at the Heidelberg Disputation (1518). The reformer Martin Bucer traced his conversion to hearing Luther at Heidelberg.
    - In "Two Kinds of Righteousness" (1518) Luther distinguished between the "alien righteousness" of Christ that was accounted to a Christian by faith and the believer's "proper righteousness" that was the result of this imputed righteousness of Jesus.
    - At the Leipzig Disputation (1519) against Johann Eck, Luther came to the conclusion that the Bible alone (*sola Scriptura*) was authoritative in matters of Christian doctrine and practice.
    - In *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (1520) Luther denied the church's seven sacraments in favor of just the two biblical ordinances—baptism and the eucharist.
      - o Luther came to teach the bodily presence of Christ "in, with, and under" (in the words of later Lutheran theologians) the bread and wine of the Supper.
      - o Luther believed that infants should be baptized after the gospel was preached in the baptismal service since God sovereignly grants faith through the gospel.
    - In *The Freedom of the Christian* (1520) Luther beautifully expounded the role of faith in uniting a Christian with Jesus and giving all the benefits of Christ to him from the beginning point of faith.

- Luther had initially been protected from the Catholic church by both his wily protector, Frederick the Wise of Saxony, and the desire of the young Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V, to move slowly in his imperial duties. But Luther's developing theological understanding called down the church's and the empire's wrath. He was excommunicated by the Catholic Church in January 1521. He was declared an outlaw by the Empire at the Diet of Worms in April 1521, after he famously said he was captive to Scripture, not the tradition of the church.
- In his following exile at Frederick's Wartburg Castle (where Luther said he was plagued by laziness) he translated the New Testament into German in about 11 weeks!
- Luther returned to Wittenberg and led the reform efforts there for the rest of his life. His approach to reform was to move slowly, only changing Catholic liturgy and practice when it was essential to the gospel.
  - This led to the so-called "normative principle" of Lutheranism (and Anglicanism), the idea that anything was permissible in the worship of the church as long as Scripture did not explicitly condemn it.
  - This is in contrast to Calvinism's "regulative principle," the notion that God has carefully regulated in Scripture how he is to be worshiped. The church is obligated to do only what Scripture explicitly requires or models.
- Luther married Katherine von Bora in 1525
- In 1525 Luther wrote one his great treatises, *On the Bondage of the Will*, responding to Erasmus's *On Free Will* of the previous year. Luther's *Bondage* is an exhaustive defense of the biblical doctrine of God's sovereignty in salvation necessitated by the utter deadness of humanity in sin.
- At the Marburg Colloquy in 1529, Luther and Ulrich Zwingli failed to come to a Protestant consensus about the meaning of

the Lord's Supper. Because of this, the Lutheran and Reformed traditions of Protestantism were seen as distinct movements throughout the rest of the sixteenth century.

- The Lutherans were first called “Protestants” at the Diet of Speyer in 1529.
- Luther believed that justification by faith alone (*sola fide*) was central to the Christian faith. In the Smalcald Articles of 1537, he said, “Nothing in this article [justification] can be given up or compromised, even if heaven and earth and things temporal should be destroyed....On this article rests all that we teach and practice against the pope, the devil, and the world. Therefore we must be quite certain and have no doubts about it. Otherwise all is lost, and the pope, the devil, and all our adversaries will gain the victory.”
- Toward the end of his life, Luther more and more spoke out in frustration against the Jews, being frustrated that they hadn't turned en masse to Christ as their Messiah. His acerbic and sinful comments were employed by the Nazis as justification for the Holocaust.
- After Luther's death in 1546, Philip Melancthon (d. 1560) led Lutheranism. He changed Luther's Augustinian theology, instead stressing the necessity of humans' cooperating with God's wooing of the sinner in the gospel. By the end of the century Lutheranism had developed—at least soteriologically-speaking—in a direction Luther would not have recognized.

### **JOHN CALVIN (1509–64) AND THE REFORMED TRADITION**

*The other main tradition of Protestantism traces its heritage to Calvin. Calvinism had much in common with Lutheranism (e.g., sola Scriptura, justification sola fide, and infant baptism). Yet it also developed in more consistently biblical directions on doctrines such as predestination and worship in the church.*

- The founder of this tradition was Zwingli, who ministered in Zurich, Switzerland from 1519–1531. He died fighting against an invading Catholic force. His theological emphases were:
  - expository preaching (not knowing where to begin, since he'd never seen it done before, he started in Matthew 1:1)
  - the regulative principle of worship
  - a covenantal approach to reading Scripture, seeing a great deal of continuity from Old to New Testaments, unlike Luther's approach which stressed the discontinuity of Law vs. Gospel
- John Calvin then took up the leadership of the tradition. His biography is not as exciting as either Luther's or Zwingli's.
  - Born in France, educated as a lawyer in the humanist tradition, Calvin converted to Protestantism somewhere between 1533 and 1535.
  - Desiring to be an author, while fleeing France due to his Protestant faith, he stopped in Geneva, Switzerland overnight in 1536. The Protestant evangelist Guillaume Farel (d. 1565) convinced Calvin to stay and help lead the Reformation cause there.
  - Calvin was exiled from Geneva from 1538–41 to Strasbourg where he was deeply influenced by Martin Bucer (d. 1551), one of the great pastors of the Reformation. While in Strasbourg Calvin married Idelette de Bure.
  - When back in Geneva, Calvin was the chief theological prosecutor of the Unitarian Michael Servetus who was executed as a heretic in 1553. Calvin was not the judge and jury. That dubious honor goes to the city council of Geneva.
  - Calvin worked tirelessly almost until the end of his life, suffering from health problems probably caused partially by the small amount of sleep (around 4 hours) he got every night most of his adult life so that he could work.



- Calvin was the great systematizer of the Reformation. Some of his more important theological contributions include:
  - The *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. The first edition was published in 1536; the final edition of 1559 was about five times as long as the first. The important doctrines Calvin discusses here include:
    - o Knowledge of God.
    - o Scripture—God accommodates himself to our limited ability, even lisping as a parent would to a child; the Spirit authenticates the truthfulness of Scripture to Christians as they read it.
    - o God’s providence is absolute.
    - o Because of our sin in Adam, God must save us; we can do nothing to save ourselves.
    - o Justification is by faith alone, through Christ’s work alone, because of God’s grace alone.
    - o It results in union with Christ.
    - o It only happens because of God’s predestining work of the elect, a predestination which is gracious, sovereign, and double (meaning that God also has eternally decided the fate of the non-elect).
    - o The chief metaphor of the Christian life is that of a pilgrim; a believer is a stranger in this world, bearing the cross of Christ, on his or her way to heaven.
    - o The visible church is not the same as the invisible church, which is composed of the elect. The church is to be led by four officers (professors, teaching elders, ruling elders, and deacons)
    - o Christ is spiritually present in the Lord’s Supper as the Spirit raises a Christian to commune with Christ in heaven.
    - o Infant baptism is correct because of the continuity of the old covenant rite of circumcision with baptism in the new covenant.

- Calvin was an energetic commentary writer, starting with his commentary on Romans (1540). His goal throughout was “lucid brevity.”
- His *Reply to Sadoleto* (1539) is the shortest and punchiest introduction to Calvin’s theology. It also includes some of the only autobiographical statements in all his writings.
- Calvin staunchly followed the regulative principle, including only allowing acapella singing of the Psalms in worship.
- The city counsel of Geneva paid a stenographer to write down Calvin’s sermons (he preached multiple sermons a week, usually with no notes and just the Hebrew Old Testament or Greek New Testament) which were subsequently published.
- Calvin stressed the importance of doing missions, sending well over 100 young men into Catholic-controlled France as church planters and even sending a pair of Genevans to reach the natives of Brazil. He was not a hyper-Calvinist!

## THE ANABAPTIST TRADITION

*Luther’s and Calvin’s were “magisterial Reformers” in the sense that they were supported by the government (the magisterium). The Anabaptists were the first in the “free church” tradition because they thought that church and government should be disassociated from each other. Although their name might lead you to think they were just a sort of proto-Baptists, they held many other distinctive views. They were persecuted ferociously by Protestants and Catholics alike throughout almost all of Europe, finding refuge only in parts of Moravia and the Netherlands.*

- Some of their important leaders and events are these:
  - 1525: the first “baptism” of someone as a professed follower of Christ in Zurich, followed by almost immediate persecution wherever they fled.

- 1527: the publication of *The Schleitheim Confession*, a seven-point doctrinal statement of the essential components of their faith.
- 1528: the best-trained theologian of the Anabaptists, Balthasar Hubmaier, and his wife, were executed by the Catholics in Vienna.
- 1529: the Diet of Speyer made it illegal throughout the Holy Roman Empire for anyone to be “re-baptized” (*ana-baptized*).
- Thomas Müntzer (d. 1525), a radical who led armies during the Peasants’ War, and the immoral debacle in the city of Münster under the leadership of two Anabaptists from 1534–35, regularly tarnished the reputation of the Anabaptists as a sinful sort of cult.
- Menno Simons (d. 1561) was the earliest, longest-living Anabaptist writing theologian.
- Distinctive Anabaptist beliefs:
  - The church was a community of committed disciples who had counted the cost to follow Jesus, including showing a willingness to suffer for their faith. It was to be distinct from the secular society around it.
  - Baptism (generally performed by the pouring of water on the one being baptized, not his or her immersion in water) was reserved for those who made a credible profession of faith in Jesus.
  - Christians were to be separated from the world, so they could not serve in municipal government or the military.
  - The church was to “ban” (i.e., excommunicate) those who failed to live according to the requirements of the church.
  - An aversion to Calvinistic soteriology.

## **CATHOLIC REACTION AT THE COUNCIL OF TRENT**

*We already noticed how Luther fared in relation to the Catholic Church. Finally, from 1545–1563, the ecumenical Council of Trent*

responded to Protestants in decisive fashion, countering the novel doctrine concerning authority in the church, justification, and the sacraments, among many others.

- Concerning authority in the matters of doctrine, Trent said that truth is contained in both “the written books [of the Bible] and in unwritten traditions—those unwritten traditions, that is, which were either received by the apostles from the mouth of Christ himself or were received from the apostles themselves (having been dictated by the Holy Spirit) and have come down even to us, haven been transmitted as it were hand by hand.” *Sola Scriptura* was nullified.
- Concerning justification, Trent clearly identified it as both the forgiveness of sin and sanctification: “Justification is not only the remission of sins, but sanctification and renovation of the interior man through the voluntary reception of grace and gifts whereby a man becomes just instead of unjust.”
  - Trent proceeded to anathematize (excommunicate) those who taught that justification was *sola fide* (“by faith alone”) due to the imputation of Christ’s righteousness alone.
  - Trent also anathematized the view that a justified person could have assurance of his or her salvation in this life (that privilege being reserved for only a few “saints”).
- Trent also reaffirmed Catholic teaching on the sacraments, including the doctrine of transubstantiation (the bread and wine are miraculously transformed into the body and blood of Christ) along with its accompanying belief that the Mass is a true propitiatory sacrifice that represents in an un-bloody manner Christ’s self-offering on the altar of the cross anew for the faithful as they take the eucharist.

Trent’s reaction to the “formal principle” (*sola Scriptura*) and the “material principle” (justification *sola fide*) demonstrates that

the Reformation still matters deeply to Bible-believing Christians. Since we know our sin and our inability to do anything good, and since we see that Christ has done everything necessary for our salvation, we throw ourselves on his mercy and find our soul's rest in him alone. What Luther, Calvin, and others rediscovered in the sixteenth century is as relevant for us today as it was for them.

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# Four Ways the Reformation Changed Church History



Alex Duke

**M**artin Luther has a complex legacy. Many laud him as a historical and theological hero—the German reformer who drove a nail through the heart of works-based righteousness. Others lambaste him as a derisive, ego-driven anti-Semite. And still others champion Luther as the humanist’s humanist, a 21<sup>st</sup>-century man liberating personal freedom and reason from the cold clutches of the dogmatic Catholic Church.

This is the kind of stuff that happens after half a millennium, when the tug-of-war between hagiographic fact-or-fiction is won and lost by a slew of different card-carrying demographics: Nazis, evangelical Southern Baptists, liberal historians, and so on. But after reading two delightful works of intellectual history (Timothy George’s *Theology of the Reformers* and Michael Reeves’ *The Unquenchable Flame*), it’s clear that Luther and his fellow Protestant reformers changed the course of church history.

How so? Let me name a four.

## FIRST, THE REFORMATION HELPED DISARM THE ECCLESIOLOGICAL MERITOCRACY THAT SUPPRESSED AND AFFLICTED THE COMMON MAN.

“Do, or be damned”—that was the calling card of the Catholic Church, willing to anathemize any antinomians who said otherwise. The sixteenth-century church service, before the Reformation took hold, was a mindless chore, a political requirement to accrue whatever grace dripped from the priestly faucets. The Mass trickled out in Latin, unintelligible murmurs to most. And the Eucharist was a one-man show, wherein the priest would engage in a confusing act of metaphysical hijinks, transubstantiating bread to flesh and wine to blood for the supposed edification of all.

Luther, Huldrych Zwingli, and others after them saw a problem with this. They believed justification was a one-time, unassailable verdict predicated on nothing more than the triune God’s election of a person. The Reformers pointed to the Christian’s “alien righteousness,” attained fully through Christ’s finished work at Calvary. This understanding upended the Roman Catholic Church and its notions of “progressive,” drip-drip-drip justification.

Luther’s fully fleshed-out soteriology was still to come, and only after an intense study of Scripture. In other words, *sola scriptura* predicated *sola fide*; this is crucial to understanding the thrust of Reformation theology.

The Swiss Zwingli came to similar convictions as Luther, without any direct influence, so he says, from Luther’s writings. On January 1, 1519, Zwingli, still a “Roman Catholic” priest at this point, did away with the traditional Latin lectionary and began expository sermons on the New Testament in his own native tongue (George, 113).

By 1525, he’d finished the entire New Testament and then moved on to exposit the Old. In the interim, Zwingli dissocia-

ted himself from the Roman Catholic Church, decried absolute papal and conciliar authority, and had the Mass abolished in Zurich, making it the world's first magisterial Protestant state (George, 116–118). Concurrently, Luther translated the Bible into German for his people and had published the Old Testament by 1534 (Reeves, 63). All of this was in the name of getting Scripture as the very Word of God to people in a way they could not only understand, but respond to.

These actions changed the face of the European church, paving the way for Protestantism as we know it. No longer were churchgoers passive recipients. Now they were free to be active participants, both intellectually and otherwise. Before, church was exclusively a top-down endeavor, but these breakthroughs opened the door to widespread ecclesiological shifts.

## **SECOND, THE REFORMATION RECLAIMED A BIBLICAL IDEA OF THE PASTORATE.**

The Reformation also reclaimed the biblical picture of what a “pastor” or “priest” is supposed to be. The days of unintelligibly going through the motions had passed. In its place stood pastors that were *not* mediatorial, but instead were tasked with riveting their people's hearts and minds on no one else than Jesus Christ, the sole and perfect mediator between a perfect God and sinful man.

Post-Reformation, pastors no longer try to impart grace or effect salvation in any way. They merely lift eyes to the cross and all the heavenly blessings therein. They're no longer fountains of grace, but arrows pointing us to the inexhaustible riches that God's people have in Christ.

Here, however, we find a two-edged sword, one that cuts in a positive direction, but also leaves an individual without their previous mediator before God. *If the priest won't mediate for us, then who will?* The Reformation highlighted the fact that the cir-



cumstance of the individual Christian is indeed dire; previously, this may have been obfuscated by pious and sacramental charades, but now it stands in plain sight. One begins to resonate with Luther's perpetual *Anfechtungen*, his soul-wrenching doubt.

### **THIRD, THE REFORMATION RESTORED THE SACRAMENTS TO THE PEOPLE—AND AS A RESULT BEGAN UNTETHERING THE CHURCH FROM THE STATE.**

How did this shift play itself out practically? It most obviously changed the sacraments—baptism and the Lord's Supper. Paedobaptism was an unquestioned staple of the Catholic Church. But it was also a theological conviction held by Luther, Zwingli, and the Frenchman a generation later, John Calvin (along with basically all their contemporaries). With considerable disagreements everywhere else, why the similarity at this point?

Answers to these questions have countless layers. But given that not *all* Reformers held to paedobaptism—Menno Simons and the Anabaptists, to be more specific—one must venture an answer as to why the stalwarts of the Reformation adhered to it so unswervingly.

Here's a possible reason: Luther, Calvin, and the rest simply couldn't envision a church independent from the state. The religious-political roots ran too deep, so much so that Luther referred to the Church as the "right hand of God" and the State as "the left hand of God" (George, 100). Though Simons and the separatist Anabaptists likely pushed the buck too far in of pursuing baptism *apart* from the church, they're closer to how credobaptists today would understand the ordinance. So, though the Reformation proper didn't jumpstart a universal acceptance of believer's baptism, it certainly provided the framework for it in the future, greasing the skids, as it were. One could say this was the Anabaptists' main goal—to reform the Reformation toward even tighter biblical standards.

## FOURTH AND FINALLY, THE REFORMATION PAVED THE WAY FOR COOPERATION THAT UPHELD UNITY AMIDST THEOLOGICAL DIVERSITY.

This brings us to the Lord's Supper. Throughout the Reformation, little caused as much dissension as the Lord's Supper. Though the Reformers departed from the Roman Catholic Church, they also departed from one another.

For example, Luther vehemently decried transubstantiation as a kind of metaphysical mysticism and instead argued for a theological halfway house called "consubstantiation," which depended on an Aristotelian model of "forms" and "accidents." According to Luther, during the Eucharist the forms of the body and blood of Christ join "in, with, and under" the accidents of the bread and the wine.

Calvin thought the views of both Luther and Rome were metaphysically untenable. He affirmed what's called a "spiritual presence" view where, during the Lord's Supper, Christ *is* present, but only spiritually so.

Zwingli took it a step further, arguing for a "memorialist" view where, in eating the bread and drinking the cup, God's people simply proclaim Christ's death and resurrection until he returns while simultaneously reaping the benefits of his presence, unity, peace, and joy.

Zwingli's departure, Luther snorted, was sacrilege. To deny the bodily presence of Christ in his Supper is to deny his omnipresence. This disagreement came to a head in October 1529 when Luther and Zwingli met, at the behest of Phillip of Hesse, to attempt a pan-Protestant alliance over and against the Pope and his pressing military force. Given Luther's precocity, it's no surprise that the two couldn't ignore their differences, and no alliance was born.

In retrospect, such theological quibbling seems myopic. With all that was at stake, couldn't these two Protestant figure-

heads forego the theological minutiae and establish some sort of co-belligerency? Unfortunately not.

Nonetheless, the Reformation's reframing of the Lord's Supper had overwhelmingly positive results. Though out-and-out agreement rarely came, one truth remained unalterably clear: the Eucharist does not confer grace; that's exclusively the purview of Christ and his cross.

The same should be said about the other biblical sacrament, baptism. With Simons and the Anabaptists, the groundwork toward credobaptism had been established. Despite what the Catholic Church said, paedobaptism cannot confer grace and is not salvific. No one, by mere happenstance of his or her birth, is wrought in spiritual privilege.

At the same time, neither is one born in under-privilege because the Reformation made it startlingly clear: Golgotha's ground is level. And the blood shed there is for Protestants and Catholics, anti-Semites and evangelical Southern Baptists, Germans and Frenchmen, liberal historians and first-year seminarians—all unrighteous ones in need of a Savior's alien righteousness.

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# The Five Solas



An Interview with Matthew Barrett

## WHAT'S THE GOAL OF THE FIVE SOLAS SERIES?

Historians and theologians alike have long recognized that at the heart of the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation were five declarations (or “*solas*”) that distinguished the movement from other expressions of the Christian faith. Five hundred years later, we live in a different time with fresh challenges to our faith. Yet these rallying cries of the Reformation continue to instruct us, addressing a wide range of contemporary issues.

So, the goal of The Five Solas series is to help Christians understand the historical and biblical context of the five *solas* and how to live out the relevance of Reformation theology today.

## SUMMARIZE EACH BOOK FOR US AND TELL US THE CONTRIBUTION EACH MAKES.

*God's Word Alone:  
The Authority of Scripture,*  
by Matthew Barrett

In this book, I look at the historical and biblical roots of the doctrine that Scripture alone is the final and decisive authority for God's people. I examine the development of this theme in the Reformation and trace the crisis that followed resulting in a shift away from the authority of Scripture. I also explore how biblical authority is portrayed throughout the storyline of Scripture, from Genesis

to Revelation. I give attention to the way God speaks a covenantal word to his covenant people and to the way that covenantal word carries authority.

Finally, I turn to systematically address biblical authority, defending its inspiration, inerrancy, clarity, and sufficiency. I show that we need to recover a robust doctrine of Scripture's authority in the face of today's challenges and why a solid doctrinal foundation built on God's Word is the best hope for the future of the church.

*Faith Alone:*  
*The Doctrine of Justification,*  
**by Thomas Schreiner**

In *Faith Alone*, Thomas Schreiner looks at the historical and biblical roots of the doctrine of justification. He summarizes the history of the doctrine, looking at the early church and the writings of several of the Reformers. Then he turns his attention to Scripture and walks readers through an examination of the key texts in the Old and New Testament. He discusses whether justification is transformative or forensic, and introduces readers to some of the contemporary challenges to the Reformation teaching of *sola fide* with particular attention to the new perspective on Paul.

Five hundred years after the Reformation, the doctrine of justification by faith alone still needs to be understood and proclaimed. In *Faith Alone* readers will learn how the rallying cry of "sola fide" is rooted in the Scriptures and how to apply this sola in a fresh way in light of contemporary challenges.

*Grace Alone:*  
*Salvation as a Gift of God,*  
**by Carl Trueman**

In this work, Carl Trueman explores the notion of grace as it's found in the Bible and church history, particularly in the Reformation. He ends the historical discussion with the Reformation

because he believes the basic patterns of Protestant and evangelical understandings of grace are sufficiently developed in the Reformation to allow us to draw lessons for the present day.

*Christ Alone:*

*The Uniqueness of Jesus as Savior,*

**by Stephen Wellum**

In *Christ Alone*, Stephen Wellum considers Christ's uniqueness and significance biblically, historically, and culturally for our pluralistic and postmodern age. He examines the historical roots of the doctrine, especially in the Reformation era, and then shows how the uniqueness of Christ has come under specific attack today. He walks the reader through the storyline of Scripture; explains Christ's unique identity and work as prophet, priest, and king; and highlights the application of his work via believers' covenantal union with him in order to show that apart from Christ there is no salvation. Wellum argues we must recover a robust biblical and theological doctrine of Christ's person and work for our day. A fresh appraisal of the Reformation's cry of *sola Christus* is desperately needed today.

*God's Glory Alone:*

*The Majestic Heart of the*

*Christian Faith and Life,*

**by David VanDrunen**

In *God's Glory Alone*, David VanDrunen looks at the historical and biblical roots of the idea that all glory belongs to God alone. He examines the development of this theme in the Reformation, in subsequent Reformed theology and confessions, and in contemporary theologians who continue to be inspired by the conviction that all glory belongs to God. Then he turns to the biblical story of God's glory, beginning with the pillar of cloud and fire revealed to Israel, continuing through the incarnation, death, and

exaltation of the Lord Jesus Christ, and culminating in Christ's Second Coming and the ultimate glorification of his people. In light of these wonderful biblical themes he concludes by addressing several of today's great cultural challenges and temptations—such as distraction and narcissism—and reflecting on how a commitment to God's glory alone fortifies us to live godly lives in this present evil age.

### **HOW DO ALL FIVE SOLAS FIT TOGETHER AS AN INSEPARABLE WHOLE?**

All five books (and *solas*) fit together and are inseparable from one another. It's only on the basis of the work of Christ alone that sinners receive the perfect righteousness of Christ and the total forgiveness of sins. Reception of this imputed righteousness, however, isn't by works but through faith alone in Christ alone.

But even our faith is a gift from God. Therefore, it's by God's grace alone that we're raised from spiritual death to life, that our eyes are opened to our sin and our desperate need for a Savior. It's precisely because salvation is by grace alone that all glory goes to God alone.

So, how do we know about this good news? Through the Scriptures alone! Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, Melancthon, and many others cried *sola scriptura*, which means that *only Scripture, as God's inspired Word, is the church's inerrant, sufficient, and final authority. Scripture read, preached, and proclaimed feeds the sheep with the good news, the gospel of Jesus Christ. To paraphrase Luther, the Scriptures are the swaddling clothes in which we're presented with Jesus, our Savior.*

### **WHAT'S SOMETHING SURPRISING YOU LEARNED FROM WRITING YOUR BOOK, GOD'S WORD ALONE?**

God's Word is inherently and invariably *Trinitarian* in nature. Throughout redemptive history, each person of the Trinity parti-

icipates in the delivery of divine revelation, yet it's the Holy Spirit in particular who takes on a central role, carrying along the biblical authors so they speak from God (2 Pet 1:21).

Additionally, God's Word, though communicated in a variety of ways, is undeniably *covenantal* in character. God communicates who he is and what he will do via divinely initiated covenants—and Scripture itself is a covenantal document. It's the constitution of the covenant between God and his people. To reject God's Word is to reject his covenant. Redemptive history demonstrates that the covenantal Word of the triune God proves true. His covenantal promises, both spoken and written, will not fail, and nowhere is this more evident than in the incarnation of Christ, the Word made flesh.

### **WHAT OTHER BOOKS ON THE REFORMATION— BIOGRAPHIES, THEOLOGY, ETC.—WOULD YOU RECOMMEND TO PASTORS? TO CHURCH MEMBERS?**

First, the best book someone could read to become more familiar with the Reformation is a book by one of the Reformers. As great as literature *about* the Reformers may be, nothing compares to hearing the Reformers speak for themselves and benefitting from their writings directly. So where should you start? Begin with Luther. Start with three of his early works: *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation*, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, and *The Freedom of a Christian*. All three have been collected in one volume called *Three Treatises*. But to see Luther at his best, at least in terms of the doctrine of justification and interaction with the biblical text, pick up his *Lectures on Galatians*.

Next, turn to John Calvin, specifically his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. If you're overwhelmed by the size of the contemporary 2 volume set, try Calvin's 1541 edition (translated from the French!), which has been published in one attractive volume by Banner of Truth. Calvin's *Institutes* are not only a



theological feast, but they act as a medicine to the soul, full of pastoral wisdom. Not only will you meet Calvin the theologian, but Calvin the shepherd, as he teaches you how to live the Christian life.

If you're looking, however, for books on the theology of the Reformers, be sure to read any of the outstanding authors in the recent Crossway volume I edited, *Reformation Theology: A Systematic Summary*. Here you'll find chapters organized doctrinally, from biblical authority to eschatology, as well as bibliographies at the end of each chapter directing you where to turn for further study.

Books about the Reformation and the lives of the Reformers are many, but there are a handful of classics you can't afford to pass up. Roland Bainton's *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* is still the best concise narrative of Luther's life. You won't be able to put this book down as Bainton paints Luther in full color. Pastors will also enjoy the writings of Timothy George who has spent his life telling others about the theology of the Reformers. Two must-reads include his *Theology of the Reformers* and his *Reading Scripture with the Reformers*.

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# What Role Did Expositional Preaching Play in the Reformation?



Michael Reeves

**A**lmost certainly, the most striking practical change at the time of the Reformation was the rise of expository preaching in local churches.

## PRE-REFORMATION PREACHING

In the centuries preceding the Reformation, preaching had been a practice in steady decline. Eclipsed by the Mass and rendered non-essential by the theology of medieval Roman Catholicism, preaching had lost the primacy it had once enjoyed in the days of the early post-apostolic church.

By the fifteenth century, only a very small percentage of people could expect to hear their priest preach to them regularly in their local parish church. The English Reformer, Hugh Latimer, spoke of “strawberry parsons” who, like strawberries, appeared but once a year. Even then, the homily would often be in a Latin

unintelligible to the people (and, perhaps, to the priest). As for the content of these rare delicacies, they were highly unlikely to go anywhere near Scripture. The vast majority of the clergy simply didn't have the Scriptural knowledge to make the attempt. Instead, wrote John Calvin, pre-Reformation sermons were usually divided according to this basic pattern:

The first half was devoted to those misty questions of the schools which might astonish the rude populace, while the second contained sweet stories, or not unamusing speculations, by which the hearers might be kept on the alert. Only a few expressions were thrown in from the Word of God, that by their majesty they might procure credit for these frivolities.<sup>14</sup>

As a result, ignorance of the Word and gospel of God was profound and widespread.

## REFORMATION PREACHING

In eye-catching contrast, the Reformation made the sermon the very focal point of the church's regular worship, and emphasised it architecturally through the physical centrality and conspicuousness of the pulpit. And while today we tend to think of the leading Reformers as theologians (and therefore not preachers), it was preaching—especially expository preaching—that normally defined and took up the bulk of their ministry.

In Wittenberg, for quarter of a century, Luther preached through the Bible, usually at least twice on Sundays and three times during each week. In Zurich, the Reformation really began on 1 January, 1519, when Zwingli announced from the pulpit of the Great Minsster that, rather than fill his sermons with the thoughts of medieval theologians, he would preach his way through Matthew's Gospel verse by verse. And when he had finished that, he'd keep going through the rest of the New Testament. In Geneva, Calvin spent much of his time preaching: twice on Sundays (New Testament)

<sup>14</sup> John Calvin and Jacopo Sadoletto, *A Reformation Debate*, ed. John C. Olin, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1966, 65.

and, on alternate weeks, every weekday as well (Old Testament), each time for about an hour.

## **NO WORD, NO CHURCH**

It is not hard to see why expository preaching was so intrinsic to the Reformation and so marked a feature of the Reformers' personal ministries. It was through the Word of God that Luther had first heard the joy-giving message of the gospel. The early English Reformer, Thomas Bilney, found on first reading it that "the Scripture began to be more pleasant unto me than the honey or the honey-comb." Their longing, then, was that many others might, as Luther put it, "seize and taste the clear, pure word of God itself and hold to it."

More, wrote Calvin: the church "cannot be brought to soundness, or continue in a good state, except by means of the preaching of the Word." In fact, declared the Lutheran Augsburg Confession—and here it would speak for all the mainstream Reformation—the church is defined precisely as being that place where the Word of God is purely preached and the sacraments are duly administered. The church is the creature of the Word of God. Thus: no word preached, no church.

Whether in Germany, Switzerland, England, or elsewhere, the expository preaching of the Word of God was the real engine-room of the Reformation. And therein lies both challenge and encouragement for all today who see themselves as heirs of the Reformation. When we read all those horrifying statistics about current church drift and decline, it is easy to lose confidence in the simple preaching of the Word. It is tempting to look elsewhere for the silver bullet.

But 500 years ago, the Reformation demonstrated the astonishing transformative power of regular and clear Scriptural exposition. It stands as historical evidence that there is nothing inevitable about church decline. The spiritual darkness of our day can

be checked and turned back. Five hundred years ago, it was—and by the same Word which has lost none of its inexorable power.

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# A Brief Look at John Calvin on Imputation



Thomas R. Schreiner

One of the contributions of the Reformation is a clear understanding that righteousness is imputed to us. Here we think of John Calvin since he represents a clear understanding of this doctrine. Righteousness can't come from ourselves since even our best works are still marred by sin.<sup>15</sup> Our works can't bring right standing with God since he demands perfection, and we all fall short in many ways. Those who are in the right before God, then, are forgiven of their sins, which means their sins are no longer counted against them or imputed to them.<sup>16</sup>

This is another way of saying that justification is *forensic*. It follows, then, that justification, according to Calvin, doesn't mean we are *made* righteous but that we are *counted as* righteous; believers are not transformed in justification, but forgiven.<sup>17</sup> Justification is extrinsic instead of intrinsic, so that those who are justified have a new status before God. Our justification, then, is perfect from the beginning. Believers don't become more justified as they progress in holiness, for justification doesn't denote inner renewal but the declaration from God that one is acquitted and not guilty before him.

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<sup>15</sup> *Institutes*, III.xiii.9.

<sup>16</sup> *Institutes*, III.xi.22.

<sup>17</sup> *Institutes*, III.xi.6.

Even after our conversion, our faith remains imperfect. Calvin appeals to 1 Corinthians 13:12 where Paul says our faith is incomplete and partial in this life.<sup>18</sup> In other words, sin continues to bedevil believers. The continuing presence of sin indicates that righteousness has to be forensic, for no one can claim to be right before God while they are still stained with sin.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, faith can't count for our righteousness since it isn't perfect or constant, and therefore we need righteousness to be imputed to us to rest assured that we are right with God.<sup>20</sup> Trusting in our works troubles our conscience since we all fail, and thus believers must rely on Christ to enjoy peace with God.<sup>21</sup> Calvin teaches that we won't have peace and rest unless we "are entirely righteous before him."<sup>22</sup> And this righteousness is in fact ours by imputation.

We can see, then, why imputation is so important in Calvin's theology, for our assurance rests upon the truth that Christ's righteousness is imputed to believers. Believers don't locate righteousness in themselves but are righteous because Christ's righteousness is reckoned to them.<sup>23</sup> Calvin puts it this way: "Therefore, we explain justification simply as the acceptance with which God receives us into his favor as righteous men. And we say that it consists in the remission of sin and the imputation of Christ's righteousness."<sup>24</sup> A person "is not righteous in himself but because the righteousness of Christ is communicated to him by imputation."<sup>25</sup> In Calvin's interpretation of Romans 5:19, which speaks of believers being made righteous on account of Christ's obedience, he says, "what else is this but to lodge our righteousness in Christ's

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18 *Institutes*, III.ii.20

19 *Institutes*, III.xi.21.

20 *Institutes*, III.xiii.10.

21 *Institutes*, III.xiii.3.

22 *Institutes*, III.xi.11.

23 *A Reformation Debate: John Calvin and Jacopo Sadoletto*, ed. John C. Olin (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1966), 67.

24 *Institutes*, III.xi.2.

25 *Institutes*, III.xi.23.

obedience, because the obedience of Christ is reckoned to us as if it were our own.”<sup>26</sup>

For Calvin, “imputation is made possible only by our union with the Christ and because we become at that same moment members of his body.”<sup>27</sup> Therefore, believers are counted righteous as those who belong to Jesus Christ, as those who are engrafted into him.<sup>28</sup> The crucial role that union with Christ plays in imputation is often expressed in Calvin.<sup>29</sup> “You see that righteousness is not in us but in Christ, that we possess it only because we are partakers in Christ.”<sup>30</sup>

Calvin summarizes well the Protestant doctrine of imputation, a doctrine which has continued to be a great comfort and strength for believers and for those who are heirs of the Reformation.

#### **EDITOR’S NOTE:**

This essay is a slight revision of material found in Thomas R. Schreiner, *Faith Alone: The Doctrine of Justification. What the Reformers Taught . . . and Why It Still Matters* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), pp. 59-60. Used with permission.

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26 *Institutes*, III.xi.23.

27 See Wendel, *Calvin*, 256-58; Helm, *Calvin*, 76; McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 2:37-38.

28 *Institutes*, III.xi.10.

29 See Gaffin, “Justification and Union with Christ,” 252-54, 258-69. Craig B. Carpenter, “A Question of Union with Christ? Calvin and Trent on Justification,” *WTJ* 64 (2002) 363-86.

30 *Institutes*, III.xi.23.



# How the Reformers Rediscovered the Holy Spirit and True Conversion



Sinclair B Ferguson

Luther's story is well known; Calvin's less so. Luther was wrestling with the concept of the righteousness of God, and had come to hate it; Calvin had an immense thirst for a secure knowledge of God, but had not found it. While not the whole truth, there is something in the notion that Luther was looking for a gracious God while Calvin was seeking for a true and assured knowledge of him.

In Luther's case, the ordinances of late medieval Catholicism could not "give the guilty conscience peace or wash away the stain." In Calvin's case, neither the Church nor the immense intellectual discipline he had displayed in his teens and early twenties, and certainly not all his acquisition of the skills of a post-medieval humanist scholar, could bring him to an assured knowledge of God.

## ROMANS 1:16

For all the differences in their backgrounds, educations, dispositions, and personalities, a good case can be made for thinking that Romans 1:16ff played a crucial role in the conversion narratives of both these reformers. We know that Luther wrestled hard with the meaning of Romans 1:16–17. He came to hate the words, finding in them an insoluble conundrum. How can “the righteousness of God” be constitutive of the good news of which Paul was so unashamed? Luther felt keenly that all it did was to damn him.

But then, as he later wrote, his eyes were opened. He had, as it were, been blind while reading the text; he had seen the words, he had not grasped their meaning. Now he saw that this righteousness was the righteousness of God by which the sinner is justified. The gates of paradise swung open; he felt himself to be born again.

Calvin seems to have been deeply affected by the verses that follow in Romans 1:18ff on the knowledge of God revealed, possessed, repressed, exchanged for idolatry, and ultimately abandoned by humanity—with faith in Jesus Christ as the alone path back to knowing God. Certainly, Ford Lewis Battles, the translator of the final Latin edition (1559) of Calvin’s *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* thought so. I am inclined to agree, given the tenor of Calvin’s theology and its constant focus on knowing God the Father through the Son and by the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

## WHAT WAS THE REFORMATION ABOUT?

If asked, most of us might instinctively say that the Reformation was about *justification* or about (the later coined) *sola fide, sola gratia, sola scriptura, solus Christus*, and *solus Deo Gloria*. But in fact, it was about much more.

For none of these five solas exists in isolation from the others or more especially in isolation from the Holy Spirit. He is the *sine*

*qua non* of each. Thus, the Reformation was a rediscovery of the Holy Spirit. Calvin, as B.B. Warfield famously remarked, was “the theologian of the Holy Spirit.” Faith is not born in us apart from the Spirit. Grace saves and keeps, but it is not a substance received by us but the disposition of God toward us that is made known to us only through the Spirit. The Scriptures come to us from the mouth of God, as the Spirit breathes out the Word of God through human authors. Furthermore, as Calvin stressed, all that Christ has done for us is of no value to us unless we are united to him—and this takes place through the Spirit. He thus brings glory to the Father and the Son.

What then did the Reformers discover? Luther’s references to the Spirit, like most of his theology, are not found tidily packed in their own separate compartment. Calvin comes nearer to a systematic presentation in *The Institutes*. But both made a simple but monumental discovery.

### **A REDISCOVERY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT**

Increasingly over the centuries, the Church had usurped the role of the Holy Spirit in the economy of salvation. The most obvious indication of that emerged in the way—indeed quasi-physical way—grace and salvation were mediated to the individual through the sacraments. In a sense, for all practical purposes, salvation was *locked up* in the sacraments—with the keys kept safely in the pockets of the priests and prelates of the Church.

The consequences of this were theologically and existentially disastrous. The role of the Spirit had been usurped; his authority was sequestered by the priesthood. Consequently, instead of experiencing assurance of forgiveness and personal knowledge of God, both of which are the birth right of every true child of God, members of the Church were kept in doubt and suspense about their salvation. As Luther saw, they were being urged to build up righteousness with the aid of the sacraments, so that, perhaps,

they just might develop a faith so suffused with perfect love that they would have become justifiable.

This was the medieval doctrine of “heaven helps those who help themselves,” the justification of those who have been made just, the justification of the righteous-by-sacramental cooperation. While the system enabled the Church to claim this justification was “by grace,” this grace was never “alone.” It required co-operation and progress. But how could people be sure they had “done enough”? No one could be sanguine about his or her salvation. How could they be?

It was just here, for Luther and Calvin, that the Holy Spirit entered, opening eyes to the fact that all our salvation and every part of it is found in Christ alone (as Calvin loved to say); here the Holy Spirit entered, opening blind eyes, melting hardened affections, and drawing forth the response of saving faith.

No wonder Luther felt himself born again, and that “the Gates of Paradise had been flung open.”

No wonder, if Calvin experienced his “sudden” or “unexpected” conversion when he realized the Church had taught him “knowledge falsely so-called.” She had wrongly interposed herself between the believer and Christ. But then the Spirit came and Calvin discovered that every part of salvation is found in Christ alone.

No wonder then, that John Knox said the explanation for the Reformation was that God gave the Holy Spirit to ordinary men in great abundance.

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# The Reformation's Legacy of Personal Evangelism



Paige Patterson

Critics of the Reformation enjoy referencing the paucity of evangelism among the major Reformers. The inconsistency of Luther in his emphasis on *sola fide*, salvation through faith alone, while continuing to baptize infants, is a case in point where almost all the major Reformers in their compromises were hurtful to the cause of evangelism. That said, however, the Reformers were not without an evangelistic impulse. Consider the following points.

Martin Luther's transition from Augustinian monk to cogent Reformer began with a dark night of the soul. As this monk grappled with the question of how to be acceptable to God, Johann von Staupitz evidently had been the unintentional evangelist who told Luther to read the Bible. Luther was thoroughly acquainted with Scripture, but now he read with insight. Describing his own pilgrimage, Luther said, "It was as though I were born anew." The remainder of his life, Luther lived in the light of this new birth.

No event of the Reformation was more determinative for evangelism than Luther's year of "friendly captivity" in Wartburg Cast-

le. Luther used that year following the Diet of Worms to translate the New Testament into German. The invention of the printing press and the availability of the Bible to the common man were two of the most “evangelistic events” of history. Luther’s own experience of seeking right standing before God and discovering that status through the reading of Scripture led him to translate the Bible into the vernacular so that all might find Christ. At this stage, Luther was not as much interested in making Protestants out of Catholics as he was in making genuine followers of Christ out of professing “Christians.”

## **WHAT HAPPENED IN SEVILLE**

A relatively little known incident from Seville in southern Spain illustrates the intense evangelistic activity during the Reformation. Around 1535, a layman associated with the cathedral in Seville travelled north to other European countries. During this journey, he met Reformers, he was introduced to Christ, and he was gloriously saved.

Returning to Seville, he consistently shared Christ with Constantino Ponce de la Fuente (1502–1560), one of the major preachers at the cathedral. Constantino was a graduate of the celebrated Spanish Catholic University of Alcalá, which gave the world Cervantes and others. Eventually, this sharing of the faith led to Constantino’s conversion as well as to the conversion of the local monastery’s monks, who apparently became evangelists of the faith.

Constantino became a powerful preacher of Christ and a target for the Inquisition. Only recently has this full history come to light. Recently discovered graffiti on the walls of the monastery revealed the evangelistic fervor of the monks, and books on preaching were discovered in the library of the University of Seville, unveiling the gospel preaching of Constantino and

others. In short, Seville was awash with evangelism even in the midst of the Inquisition.

## **ANABAPTIST EVANGELISM**

The earliest discovery of evangelistic and missionary fervor belongs to the detested Anabaptists of the Reformation. Two examples will demonstrate this awareness. Early in 1525, Conrad Grebel of Zurich preached the gospel by the Rhine River. Wolfgang Ulimann, a local monk, responded to the public invitation to receive Christ. When the attempt was made to baptize Ulimann by affusion using a milk pail, he refused. Instead, he pointed to the Rhine and insisted on immersion as the appropriate New Testament form. The ultimate practice of baptismal immersion was taught to the Anabaptists by a Roman Catholic monk who read Greek.

A few days later, Ulimann joined with other Anabaptists in preaching at Saint Gall, where they broke the ice of the Sitter River to baptize 200 new believers who would never forget their cold baptism. That's "evangelism" in anyone's book, and these Anabaptists were characterized by that commitment to evangelism.

A final example concerns Balthasar Hubmaier, the only Anabaptist to have completed a Ph.D. Trained by Roman Catholic debater John Eck, Hubmaier was an effective preacher. From the day of his conversion under the oversight of Anabaptist evangelist Wilhelm Reublin, he exercised his gift to the ends that hundreds were converted.

However, the most amazing years of Hubmaier's life were the final two when he was pastor in Nikolsburg, located in what is now the Czech Republic. There, after two short years in a rural farming community, Hubmaier baptized according to some reports as many as 6,000 new believers. Such a feat had to involve not only powerful preaching but also effective daily work dealing with the souls of men.

## THE LEGACY OF EVANGELISM

Incumbent upon every Protestant should be the recognition that evangelism is actually a legacy from pre-Reformation evangelicals. The priceless Reformation monument to Luther at Worms has at its four corners the precursors of Luther. One of those is Peter Waldo of Lyon, who presided over one of the most intensive evangelistic enterprises in pre-Reformation Europe. Note the poem penned by John Greenleaf Whittier demonstrating the witness of *The Vaudois Teacher*:

O Lady fair, these silks of mine are beautiful and rare,  
The richest web of the Indian loom, which beauty's queen might wear;  
And my pearls are pure as thy own fair neck, with whose radiant light they vie;  
I have brought them with me a weary way, will my gentle lady buy?

The lady smiled on the worn old man through the dark and clustering curls  
Which veiled her brow, as she bent to view his silks and glittering pearls;  
And she placed their price in the old man's hand and lightly turned away,  
But she paused at the wanderer's earnest call, 'My gentle lady, stay!

'O lady fair, I have yet a gem which a purer lustre flings,  
Than the diamond flash of the jewelled crown on the lofty brow of kings;  
A wonderful pearl of exceeding price, whose virtue shall not decay,  
Whose light shall be as a spell to thee and a blessing on thy way!

The lady glanced at the mirroring steel where her form of grace was seen,  
Where her eye shone clear, and her dark locks waved their clasping pearls between;  
'Bring forth thy pearl of exceeding worth, thou traveller gray and old,  
And name the price of thy precious gem, and my page shall count thy gold.'

The cloud went off from the pilgrim's brow, as a small and meagre book,  
Unchased with gold or gem of cost, from his folding robe he took!



‘Here, lady fair, is the pearl of price, may it prove as such to thee  
Nay, keep thy gold I ask it not, for the word of God is free!’

Or consider the astonishing correspondence of Jerome about a missionary named Vigilantius in the Pyrenees Mountains. It would be difficult to find a more acerbic letter in Jerome’s correspondence than his letter to Vigilantius. What is clear, in an otherwise hazy period, is that Vigilantius was an evangelistic missionary evidently from the Piedmont in Italy who took seriously the gospel message as early as 400 A.D. Also evident is the embrace of what would become “Protestant thinking” by this missionary to the mountains of northern Spain and southern France.

The Reformation was concerned to rescue the gospel from the failed system of Rome. It is understandable that the era was more concerned with defining the gospel than taking that same gospel to the world. However, evangelism did occur, and the basis for all future evangelism was certainly established. Having rediscovered the doctrinal foundations essential to evangelism, the Reformers provided the legacy and sometimes the example for intense evangelism.

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# Did the Reformation Recover the Great Commission?



Michael Haykin

It is well known that the Reformation entailed a recovery of core New Testament doctrines regarding salvation and worship. Did it also involve a recovery of the Great Commission? In one sense, no. The Roman church had been involved in a variety of missional enterprises throughout the Middle Ages. But in another, much deeper sense, *yes*—the Great Commission did have to be recovered because medieval missions all too frequently involved forcible conversions like those of the Saxons by Charlemagne in the ninth century and the Albigensian Crusade in the early thirteenth century.

And yet, it has been maintained that the sixteenth-century Reformers had a poorly-developed missiology and that overseas missions to non-Christians was an area to which they gave little thought. Yes, this argument runs, the Reformers rediscovered the apostolic gospel, but they had no vision to spread it to the uttermost parts of the earth. What should we think of this?

Possibly the very first author to raise the question about early Protestantism's failure to apply itself to missionary work was

the Roman Catholic theologian and controversialist, Robert Bellarmine (1542–1621). Bellarmine argued that one of the marks of a true church was its continuity with the missionary passion of the Apostles. In his mind, Roman Catholicism’s missionary activity was indisputable and this supplied a strong support for its claim to stand in solidarity with the Apostles. As Bellarmine maintained:

In this one century the Catholics have converted many thousands of heathens in the new world. Every year a certain number of Jews are converted and baptized at Rome by Catholics who adhere in loyalty to the Bishop of Rome. . . . The Lutherans compare themselves to the apostles and the evangelists; yet though they have among them a very large number of Jews, and in Poland and Hungary have the Turks as their near neighbors, they have hardly converted so much as a handful.

But such a characterization fails to account for the complexity of this issue. First of all, in the earliest years of the Reformation none of the major Protestant bodies possessed significant naval and maritime resources to take the gospel outside the bounds of Europe. The Iberian Catholic kingdoms of Spain and Portugal, on the other hand, who were the acknowledged leaders among missions-sending regions at this time, had resources aplenty. Moreover, their missionary endeavors were often indistinguishable from imperialistic conquests. It is noteworthy that other Roman Catholic nations of Europe like Poland also lacked sea-going capabilities and evidenced no more cross-cultural missionary concern at that time than Lutheran Saxony or Reformed Zurich. It is thus plainly wrong to make the simplistic assertion that Roman Catholic nations were committed to overseas missions whereas no Protestant power was so committed.

Second, it is vital to recognize that, as Scott Hendrix has shown, the Reformation was the attempt to “make European culture more

Christian than it had been. It was, if you will, an attempt to re-root faith, to rechristianize Europe.” In the eyes of the Reformers, this program involved two accompanying convictions. First, they considered what passed for Christianity in late mediaeval Europe as sub-Christian at best, pagan at worst. As the French Reformer John Calvin (1509–1564) put it in his *Reply to Sadoletto* (1539):

The light of divine truth had been extinguished, the Word of God buried, the virtue of Christ left in profound oblivion, and the pastoral office subverted. Meanwhile, impiety so stalked abroad that almost no doctrine of religion was pure from admixture, no ceremony free from error, no part, however minute, of divine worship untarnished by superstition.

The Reformers viewed their task as a missionary one: they were planting true Christian churches.

In what follows, I offer an ever so brief examination of the misiology of John Calvin, which shows the error of the perspective that the Reformation was by and large a non-missionary movement.

### ***The victorious advance of Christ’s Kingdom***

A frequent theme in Calvin’s writings and sermons is the victorious advance of Christ’s kingdom in the world. God the Father, Calvin says in his prefatory address to Francis I in his theological masterpiece, the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, has appointed Christ to “rule from sea to sea, and from the rivers even to the ends of the earth.” The reason for the Spirit’s descent at Pentecost, Calvin notes further in a sermon on Acts 2, was in order for the gospel to “reach all the ends and extremities of the world.” In a sermon on 1 Timothy 2:5–6, one of a series of sermons on 1 Timothy 2, Calvin underlines again the universality of the Christian faith: Jesus came, not simply to save a few, but “to extend his grace over all the world.”

From that same sermon series, Calvin can thus declare that “God wants his grace to be known to all the world, and he has commanded that his gospel be preached to all creatures; we must (as much as we are able) seek the salvation of those who today are strangers to the faith, who seem to be completely deprived of God’s goodness.” It was this global perspective on the significance of the gospel that also gave Calvin’s theology a genuine dynamism and forward movement. It has been rightly said that if it had not been for the so-called Calvinist wing of the Reformation many of the great gains of that era would have died on the vine.

### *Calvin’s prayers for the extension of Christ’s Kingdom*

Calvin was convinced that God “bids us to pray for the salvation of unbelievers” and Scripture passages like 1 Timothy 2:4 encourage us not to “cease to pray for all people in general.” We see this conviction at work in Calvin’s own prayers, a good number of which have been recorded for us at the end of his sermons, thanks to the labours of the stenographer Denis Raguenier, who was appointed to record Calvin’s sermons by the Company of Elders who labored with the French Reformer.

Frequently, we hear Calvin praying for the spread of the gospel to the ends of the earth. Each of Calvin’s sermons on Deuteronomy, for instance, ends with a prayer that runs something like this: “may it please him [i.e. God] to grant this [saving] grace, not only to us, but also to all peoples and nations of the earth.” In fact, in the liturgy Calvin drew up for his church in Geneva, there is this prayer:

We pray to you now, O most gracious God and merciful Father, for all people everywhere. As it is your will to be acknowledged as the Saviour of the whole world, through the redemption wrought by Your Son Jesus Christ, grant that those who are still estranged from the knowledge of him, being in the darkness and captivity of error and ignorance, may be brought by the

illumination of your Holy Spirit and the preaching of your gospel to the right way of salvation, which is to know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

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# Two Views on Church Discipline: Protestant vs. Roman Catholic



Jeremy Kimble

**T**here have been various debates over the centuries regarding the differences between Catholic and Protestant doctrine. These disputes have ranged from topics such as justification by faith, baptism, the Lord's Supper, the veneration of the saints, and the way in which a church should be structured and led. Rarely, however, does one see a discussion about how Roman Catholics and Protestants differ on the issue of church discipline. In the following, I will offer brief historical background on the topic, outline both views of discipline, and then assess and suggest appropriate application for the Protestant position.

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

It appears that for the first several centuries the church consistently sought to apply disciplinary measures in keeping with Scripture. The early church disciplined members both for the propagation of false doctrine and lack of moral purity. Most churches recognized two kinds of repentance: a one-time repentance accompanied by faith in Jesus Christ for salvation, and a continual repentance

of sin throughout one's life. Christians confronted for grievous, ongoing sin had to confess their wrongdoing before the church, which then resulted in their restoration to fellowship.

Eventually, by the third and fourth centuries, reinstatement to the church became more difficult. Undergoing “penitential discipline,” those seeking repentance had to take specific steps (e.g., solicit the prayers of others for their sin, attend services without partaking of the Lord's Supper, etc.) to be restored to full membership. This kind of prescribed penitential action contributed to a shift in ecclesial discipline (see Wills, “A History of Church Discipline,” 132–39).

Over time, the process of biblical church discipline—as seen in passages such as Matthew 18—withered and changed in the church, both in the East and West. Church leaders didn't repudiate discipline in principle, but they slowly abandoned it in practice. In its place emerged a system of confession and individual penance.

## ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH DISCIPLINE

The sacramental practices of confession and penance were eventually codified and normalized in the life of the Roman Catholic Church. After sinning, the Catholic Church taught that reconciliation with God entails “sorrow for and abhorrence of sins committed,” and the commitment to sin no more in the future (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1490). Penance consists of three actions of the penitent (along with the priest's absolution): repentance, confession of sins to the priest, and the intention to make amends by doing works of reparation (CCC, 1491).

Repentance (also called contrition) must be accompanied by faith-filled motives, and arise from love for God (CCC, 1492). One who desires to obtain reconciliation with God and with the Church “must confess to a priest all the unconfessed grave sins he remembers after having carefully examined his conscience”



(CCC, 1493). The confessor (presiding priest) then proposes the performance of certain acts of “satisfaction” or “penance” to be performed by the penitent in order to “repair the harm caused by sin and to re-establish habits befitting a disciple of Christ” (CCC, 1494). Typically, these acts of penance consist of fasting, prayer, and almsgiving (CCC, 1434), but could also include acts of justice, acceptance of suffering, the Eucharist, reading Scripture, and observing seasons and days of penance in the liturgical year (CCC, 1435–39).

It’s important to note that in Roman Catholicism only priests, successors of the apostles who “possess the ministry of reconciliation and have received the faculty of absolving from the authority of the Church,” can forgive sins in the name of Christ (CCC, 1461, 1495). The effects of penance include reconciliation with God and the Church; remission of the eternal punishment incurred by mortal sins; remission, at least in part, of temporal punishments resulting from sin; peace and serenity of conscience; spiritual consolation; and an increase of spiritual strength for the Christian battle (CCC, 1496).

Beyond these practices, when necessary, excommunication was also upheld in the Roman Catholic Church. Under Catholic standards, certain particularly grave sins incur excommunication, the most severe penalty the Church can render. This act “impedes the reception of the sacraments and the exercise of certain ecclesiastical acts, and for which absolution consequently cannot be granted, according to canon law, except by the Pope, the bishop of the place, or priests authorized by them.” (CCC, 1463; further details regarding excommunication can be found in *The Code of Canon Law*, canons 1331 and 1354-1357).

If excommunication aligns with Scripture and Magisterial renderings throughout history, it is deemed infallible, in an indirect way, and the one under excommunication, if they’re not absolved of their sins by means of penance, is outside the church and

thus liable to damnation. In summary, the Roman Catholic view of discipline centers on private confession, penance, and, in some cases, excommunication, all under the banner of authority vested in apostolic succession.

## **PROTESTANT CHURCH DISCIPLINE**

Unlike the Catholic practices of confession and penance, Protestant teaching on church discipline focuses on repentance and restoration under the auspices of the priesthood of the believer. Martin Luther, who had experienced the weight of the penitential system, determined that it was a non-biblical practice. His criticism of these practices as substitutes for true repentance and contrition in the context of a local church was a necessary catalyst in precipitating the Protestant Reformation. This also allowed for a more biblical comprehension and application of church discipline by Luther and others.

While a number of his works would be applicable to this issue, Luther wrote three treatises/sermons that relate specifically: *A Sermon on the Ban* (1520), *The Keys* (1530), and *On the Councils and the Church* (1539). Much of the discussion in these documents stems from Luther's opposition to the Roman Catholic Church's view of penance and the abuse of papal authority. Luther cites texts such as Matthew 18:15–17, 1 Corinthians 5:1–13, 2 Thessalonians 3:14, and 2 John 1:10–11 to encourage Christians to submit to a local church's discipline for their own spiritual good. Discipline would serve as a means of their bearing spiritual fruit as they responded to the rebuke for their sin with heartfelt repentance. However, no additional acts of penance were necessary to attain forgiveness from the congregation or from God.

Luther also stressed that the authority of the keys did not reside with Popes or bishops, but with the congregation and its leadership. Matthew 18 and 1 Corinthians 5 demonstrate that church members should be involved in disciplinary cases; discipline was

not rendered by mere apostolic (or papal) fiat. Moreover, the goal of discipline was not to put someone permanently out of the church with no hope, but to work toward restoration by means of genuine repentance. As such, the church was involved in the process and responsible (if it came to excommunication) to render a verdict in keeping with Scripture. But their responsibility didn't stop there, as church members also had the ongoing responsibility to exhort the excommunicant to repent.

Another Reformer, John Calvin, also practiced church discipline with specific aims in mind. First, he argued, churches should practice discipline to preserve right doctrine, the reputation of God, and godly living among God's people. Discipline should also be implemented, according to Calvin, for the correction of sinning individuals and, hopefully, their restoration (*Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 4.12.113–).

Anabaptists, such as Balthasar Hubmaier, also believed strongly in church discipline. Hubmaier linked baptism, membership, the Lord's Supper, discipleship, and discipline together doctrinally, arguing these practices were inextricably linked. As such, he also believed there was a call to uphold biblical standards of discipline exacted by the local congregation in order to protect the church as a whole and hold out to the unrepentant sinner the hope of repentance.

While differing on certain ecclesiological matters, these Protestant representatives repudiated the key-holding authority of popes and bishops, as well as the practice of penance. Instead, local churches exercise authority themselves as it relates to discipline, calling for repentance and not ongoing acts of reparation.

## **ASSESSMENT AND APPLICATION**

The first critique of the Roman Catholic view centers on the idea of “penance.” Scripture advocates for repentance, that is, changing one's mind and life. This involves acknowledgement that one's

thoughts, words, and actions are sinful and thus grievous to God, as well as sorrow over one's sin and a decision to turn from sin and toward righteousness. This differs from observing penitential acts that gain favor with God in accordance to the sin committed (i.e., the bigger the sin, the more penance is needed). While repentance certainly requires change, it does not *earn* grace; rather, it's rooted in grace already given (Phil. 2:12–13), acknowledging the one who paid the ultimate price for sin (Rom. 3:21–26). A Protestant view of repentance more faithfully renders the realities of Scripture.

Second, the ability to wield the keys of the kingdom doesn't belong to those deemed authoritative by apostolic succession. Rather, it's based in the local church and its membership, while church leaders certainly must play a critical role in the process. One can see this in the repeated phrase found in Matthew 16:19 and 18:18 where Jesus grants the authority of the keys of the kingdom, such that “whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”

In Matthew 18, Jesus says this in the context of church discipline being enacted, which culminates in the whole church taking action. A test case for this is found in 1 Corinthians 5:1–13, where Paul tells the church to act in removing an unrepentant member. The authority of the keys is vested in local churches, not the upper realms of a hierarchical structure of church governance.

In keeping with this truth, the Protestant view of church discipline must be applied in certain concrete ways, three of which will be mentioned here. First, we must take seriously as church members our role and responsibility to fellow church members in exhorting one another and charging each other to flee sin. Second, local churches should not expect more or less than what the Bible requires when we seek to restore a person under discipline, namely, repentance. And finally, while discipline is not going to be

popular in our present-day culture, we trust the authority and sufficiency of Scripture and we remain faithful to the task of making disciples, loving God and one another, and pursuing holiness.

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# Two Views on Church Authority: Protestant vs. Roman Catholic



Gregg Allison

**T**hink of a three-legged stool.

Now imaginatively label one of those legs “Scripture,” label the second leg “Tradition,” and label the third leg “Magisterium” (I’ll explain these labels in a bit).

You now have a mental picture of the threefold authority structure of the Roman Catholic Church.

Now think of a marble column supporting, say, a statue. Imaginatively label that column “Scripture.”

You now have a mental picture of the authority structure of Protestant churches.

Two considerations should come immediately to mind. The authority structures of these two branches of Christendom are very different. One is like a three-legged stool; the other’s like a marble column. And there is one common element: Scripture.

## THE ROMAN CATHOLIC STOOL

So let’s compare and contrast these two approaches to authority, imagining first the three-legged stool.

## ***Scripture***

Roman Catholic authority structure consists of three elements. The first, Scripture, is the written Word of God. The Catholic Church considers the Bible to be divinely inspired, authoritative (along with Tradition and the Magisterium), true (maybe even inerrant), and transformative for sinful people. Whereas the Roman Catholic New Testament is identical to the Protestant New Testament, their Old Testaments diverge. The Roman Catholic version contains the Apocrypha and its seven additional books: Tobit, Judith, Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus, Baruch, and First and Second Maccabees. It also has additional sections in Esther and Daniel. Catholic beliefs such as purgatory (2 Maccabees 12:38–46) and meriting eternal life (Ecclesiasticus 16:14) are grounded in these extra writings. Importantly, though Roman Catholic and Protestant churches share Scripture, we must realize they don't share the same Scripture.

## ***Tradition***

The second authoritative element is Tradition, which refers to the teachings of Jesus that he orally communicated to his apostles, who in turn orally communicated those teachings to their successors, the bishops of the church, who up until this day continue to nourish and protect them. At times, as head of the Catholic Church, the pope has proclaimed an aspect of this Tradition as official dogma that's binding on the conscience of the Catholic faithful. For example, in 1854 Pope Pius IX announced the Immaculate Conception of Mary,<sup>31</sup> and in 1950 Pope Pius XII proclaimed the Bodily Assumption of Mary.<sup>32</sup>

Importantly, the Catholic Church “does not derive her certainty about all revealed truths from the holy Scriptures alone. Both Scripture and Tradition must be accepted and honored

31 Pope Pius IX, *Ineffabilis Deus* (December 8, 1854). <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/pius09/p9ineff.htm>

32 Pope Pius XII, *Munificentissimus Deus* (November 1, 1950). [http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/apost\\_constitutions/documents/hf\\_p-xii\\_apc\\_19501101\\_munificentissimus-deus.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/apost_constitutions/documents/hf_p-xii_apc_19501101_munificentissimus-deus.html)

with equal sentiments of devotion and reverence.”<sup>33</sup> Divine revelation consists of Scripture plus Tradition—not two sources, but two aspects of the authoritative revelation from God.

### *Magisterium*

The Magisterium is the third authoritative element. This teaching office consists of the pope together with the bishops in unity with him. Among its responsibilities are the authoritative determination of the canon of Scripture, the authoritative interpretation of Scripture, and the authoritative pronouncement and interpretation of Tradition.<sup>34</sup>

“Accordingly, the Catholic Church possesses a tripartite structure of authority: written Scripture, Tradition, and the Magisterium. Just as the three poles of a three-legged stool, provide support for whoever sits on it, these three elements provide divine revelation and its authoritative interpretation for the Church.”<sup>35</sup>

## THE PROTESTANT COLUMN

Now let’s switch from imagining a three-legged stool to imagining a marble column.

The Protestant authority structure consists of one element: Scripture as the written Word of God, divinely inspired, authoritative, true, sufficient, necessary, clear, and transformative for sinful people. In contrast to Roman Catholics, Protestants hold to *sola Scriptura*: Scripture is the church’s sole authority, ultimately determinative for doctrine, practice, faith, worship, and ministry. At the time of the Reformation, this principle was coupled with an explicit rejection of the Roman Catholic authority structure. Scripture alone, not Scripture plus Tradition plus the Magisterium, is the church’s authority.

33 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 82; citation take from Vatican Council II, *Dei Verbum* 9.

34 According to the Catholic Church, “the task of giving an authentic interpretation of the Word of God, whether in its written form or in the form of Tradition, has been entrusted to the living, teaching office of the Church alone” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 85).

35 Gregg R. Allison, *Roman Catholic Theology and Practice: An Evangelical Assessment* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2014), 80.



Three qualifications are needed at this point: First, biblical authority must always be related to God himself, who as the sovereign Lord reveals himself and his ways through inspired, and thus authoritative, Scripture. God sustains the closest possible relationship to his Word. Accordingly, to obey God's Word is to obey God himself. To disobey God's Word is to disobey God himself. To trust God's Word is to trust God himself. To mistrust God's Word is to mistrust God himself. In the words of Timothy Ward: "God has so *identified* himself with his words that whatever someone does to God's words . . . they do directly to God himself." This affirmation does not equate God with his Word. But it does make clear that the God to whom all authority belongs to command what believers are to do and believe, and prohibit what they are not to do and believe, stands behind his authoritative Word.<sup>36</sup>

Thus, the authority of the Word of God goes hand in hand with the authority of the Holy Spirit, who inspired that Word (2 Pet. 1:19–21; 2 Tim. 3:15–17) and enables the church to understand it (1 Cor. 2:10–16).

Second, *sola Scriptura* is the principle of *ultimate* authority and does not mean the church is without *any other* authority. Though Protestant churches rightly reject the Tradition (capital T) of the Catholic Church, they do not reject tradition (small t), or the accumulated wisdom of the historical church. Examples of tradition include the doctrines of the Trinity (one God, three persons) and of Christ (one person, two natures) that were forged in the early church.

Whereas Scripture possesses *magisterial* (leading) authority for Protestant churches, tradition possesses *ministerial* (serving) authority. Whereas Scripture enjoys *ultimate* authority, tradition enjoys *presumptive* authority: given the fact that it is grounded on Scripture, rightly summarizes Scripture, and has been cherished by

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<sup>36</sup> Timothy Ward, *Words of Life: Scripture as the Living and Active Word of God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 27.

the church from the beginning, tradition is to be regarded as a true secondary authority until proven wrong.<sup>37</sup>

Third, Protestant churches are characterized by some type of authoritative governance. Within congregational churches, for example, pastors/elders exercise their office with the authority delegated to them by Jesus Christ, the head of the church. Thus, they are responsible to teach (1 Tim. 3:2; 5:17; Eph. 4:11), lead (1 Tim. 3:5; 5:17), pray (especially for the sick, James 5:13–16), and shepherd (1 Pet. 5:1–4). They possess the requisite authority to carry out these responsibilities. Church members also have responsibilities such as the acceptance and excommunication of members (Matt. 18:15–20) and affirming key decisions of their pastors (for example, the annual budget and changes to the church’s constitution). They also possess the requisite authority to carry out these responsibilities.

In other Protestant churches, bishops exercise an authoritative role (episcopal governance) or local elders of a session exercise authority via presbyteries, synods, and general assemblies (presbyterian governance). None of these structures, however, comes close to approximating the authority of the Magisterium of the Roman Catholic Church.

On the eve of the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Protestant Reformation, our imagination should be fixed on a marble column rather than a three-legged stool. *Sola Scriptura* is more than just a Reformation motto. It’s the authoritative structure of Protestant churches.

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<sup>37</sup> Gregg R. Allison, “The *Corpus Theologicum* of the Church and Presumptive Authority,” in Derek J. Tidball, Brian S. Harris, and Jason S. Sexton, eds., *Revisioning, Renewing, Rediscovering the Triune Center: Essays in Honor of Stanley J. Grenz* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2014), 313–339.

# The Reformation's Restoration of the Sacraments



**Bobby Jamieson**

**T**he Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century restored the gospel to the sacraments and the sacraments to the congregation.

Why did the sacraments need restoring? Penance, purgatory, indulgences, the cult of the saints—these all added up to a system in which the sacraments enabled individuals to chip away at the hopelessly massive debt of their own or others' sins. And the late medieval mass was fundamentally something the laity watched, not a meal they ate.

Along with recovering the biblical gospel, the Reformers recovered a doctrine and practice of the sacraments that flow from and fit with the gospel. Because Christ has paid the entire debt of our sins, the sacraments picture and promise complete forgiveness; and because the gospel gathers God's people into a local body, the sacraments embody and enact the congregation's unity in Christ.

In what follows I will briefly illustrate this twofold restoration from the writings and practice of three key Reformers: Luther,

Calvin, and Cranmer. I will give more attention to the Lord's Supper than to baptism, for two reasons. First, in some respects the contrast between the Protestant Lord's Supper and the Roman Catholic mass is more striking and pronounced than the contrast between their practices of (usually) infant baptism. Second, as a Baptist, I think baptism is a key place where the magisterial Reformers did not go far enough. In the interest of objectivity, however, I'll table my disagreement and show how, even in the practice of infant baptism, the Reformers intended to restore the gospel's primacy and the congregation's participation.

## LUTHER

Consider first how Luther restored the gospel to the Lord's Supper (which he still calls "the mass," though radically redefining the term). In *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (1520), he wrote,

According to its substance, therefore, the mass is nothing but the aforesaid words of Christ: "Take and eat, etc" [Matt 26:26], as if he were saying: "Behold, O sinful and condemned man, out of the pure and unmerited love with which I love you, and by the will of the Father of mercies [II Cor. 1:3], apart from any merit or desire of yours, I promise you in these words the forgiveness of all your sins and life everlasting. And that you may be absolutely certain of this irrevocable promise of mine, I shall give my body and pour out my blood, confirming this promise by my very death, and leaving you my body and blood as a sign and memorial of this same promise. As often as you partake of them, remember me, proclaim and praise my love and bounty toward you, and give thanks."<sup>38</sup>

Because the Lord's Supper is nothing but Christ's promise held out to us, what it requires of its recipients is faith:

From this you will see that nothing else is needed for a worthy holding of

<sup>38</sup> Martin Luther, "The Babylonian Captivity of the Church," in *Three Treatises* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1970), 158.

the mass than a faith that relies confidently on this promise, believes Christ to be true in these words of his, and does not doubt that these infinite blessings have been bestowed upon it. . . . Who would not shed tears of gladness, indeed, almost faint for joy in Christ, if he believed with unshaken faith that this inestimable promise of Christ belonged to him?<sup>39</sup>

In his 1519 *Sermon on the Blessed Sacrament of the Holy, True Body of Christ* Luther argues that the congregation should receive both elements. Why? Because distributing only one fails to indicate the “complete union and undivided fellowship of the saints.”<sup>40</sup> Luther argues, “Thus in the sacrament we too become united with Christ, and are made one body with all the saints, so that Christ cares for us and acts on our behalf.”<sup>41</sup> For Luther, our communion with Christ in the “sweet exchange” of the gospel creates a congregational communion: “Through the interchange of his blessings and our misfortunes, we become one loaf, one body, one drink, and have all things in common.”<sup>42</sup>

## CALVIN

Here now is Calvin on the relation between the gospel and the Lord’s Supper. The point will be proved long before the end of the excerpt, so take the rest as medicine for your soul:

Godly souls can gather great assurance and delight from this Sacrament; in it they have a witness of our growth into one body with Christ such that whatever is his may be called ours. As a consequence, we may dare assure ourselves that eternal life, of which he is the heir, is ours; and that the Kingdom of Heaven, into which he has already entered, can no more be cut off from us than from him; again, that we cannot be condemned for our sins, from whose guilt he has absolved us, since he willed to take them upon himself as

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39 Ibid.

40 The phrasing is that of Dean Zwick, “The Communion of Saints in Luther’s 1519 Sermon, The Blessed Sacrament of the Holy and True Body,” *LITJ* 49 (2015): 118, summarizing Luther.

41 *LW* 35:58; cited in Zwick, “The Communion of the Saints,” 119.

42 Ibid.

if they were his own. This is the wonderful exchange which, out of his measureless benevolence, he has made with us; that, becoming Son of man with us, he has made us sons of God with him; that, by his descent to earth, he has prepared an ascent to heaven for us; that, by taking on our mortality, he has conferred his immortality upon us; that, accepting our weakness, he has strengthened us by his power; that, receiving our poverty unto himself, he has transferred his wealth to us; that, taking the weight of our iniquity upon himself (which oppressed us), he has clothed us with his righteousness.<sup>43</sup>

As to the Supper's role in embodying the whole congregation's communion with Christ and each other, Calvin connects the two in his comments on 1 Corinthians 10:16–17, “For we must first of all be incorporated (so to speak) into Christ, that we may be united to each other.”<sup>44</sup> And again in his *Institutes*: “Now, since he has only one body, of which he makes us all partakers, it is necessary that all of us also be made one body by such participation. The bread shown in the Sacrament represents this unity.”<sup>45</sup>

What is the practical, pastoral effect of this twofold restoration? If the Lord's Supper confirms our communion with Christ and with each other, how should we live together?

We shall benefit very much from the Sacrament if this thought is impressed and engraved upon our minds: that none of the brethren can be injured, despised, rejected, abused, or in any way offended by us, without at the same time, injuring, despising, and abusing Christ by the wrongs we do; that we cannot disagree with our brethren without at this same time disagreeing with Christ; that we cannot love Christ without loving him in the brethren; that we ought to take the same care of our brethren's bodies as we take of our own; for they are members of our body; and that, as no part of our body is touched by any feeling of pain which is not spread among all the rest, so we

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43 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, vol. 2, The Library of Christian Classics (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1960), 1361–62 (4.17.2).

44 John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, trans. John Pringle, Calvin's Commentaries 20 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 335.

45 Calvin, *Institutes*, 2:1415 (4.17.38).

ought not to allow a brother to be affected by any evil, without being touched with compassion for him.<sup>46</sup>

## CRANMER

What about Thomas Cranmer, chief liturgical architect of the English Reformation? For Cranmer, both sacraments tangibly present the gospel to the congregation. In both baptism and the Lord's Supper we not only hear the gospel, but see and touch and feel and taste it:

So that the washing in water of baptism is, as it were, shewing of Christ before our eyes, and a sensible touching, feeling, and groping of him, to the confirmation of the inward faith, which we have in him. . . . And for this cause Christ ordained this sacrament in bread and wine (which we eat and drink, and be chief nutriments of our body), to the intent that as surely as we see the bread and wine with our eyes, smell them with our noses, touch them with our hands, and taste them with our mouths, so assuredly ought we to believe that Christ is a spiritual life and sustenance of our souls . . . Thus our Saviour Christ . . . hath ordained sensible signs and tokens whereby to allure and to draw us to more strength and more constant faith in him.<sup>47</sup>

For Cranmer, it is precisely because the sacraments physically portray and present the gospel that they nourish faith. Further, for Cranmer, similar to Luther and Calvin, the common loaf and cup of the Supper signify our spiritual union not only with Christ but with each other: “[T]he bread and wine do most lively represent unto us the spiritual union and knot of all faithful people, as well unto Christ, as also among themselves.”<sup>48</sup>

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> John Edmund Cox, ed., *Writings and Disputations of Thomas Cranmer Relative to the Lord's Supper* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1844), 41; cited in Ashley Null, “Thomas Cranmer,” in *Christian Theologies of the Sacraments: A Comparative Introduction*, ed. Justin S. Holcomb and David A. Johnson (New York: New York University Press, 2017), 220.

<sup>48</sup> In *An Answer to a crafty and sophisticated cavillation devised by Stephen Gardiner* (1551); spelling modernized. I owe this citation, and the following points on Cranmer's theology of baptism, to my friend Stephen Tong's excellent essay for the 2016 Lightfoot Scholarship at Cambridge, “The Sacraments as Practical Ecclesiology in the Church of

Finally, a word about infant baptism, taking Cranmer as our exemplar. While I detect here certain inconsistencies, it is worth pointing out that Cranmer's confession and liturgy rightly highlight baptism's corporate, congregational dimensions. Here, for instance, is part of Article 29, the Thirty Nine Articles' statement on baptism: "Baptism is not only a sign of profession, and mark of difference, whereby Christian men are discerned from others that be not christened, but it is also a sign of Regeneration or New-Birth, whereby, as by an instrument, they that receive Baptism rightly are grafted into the Church."<sup>49</sup> And again, per the *Book of Common Prayer* (1552), following the "baptism" the minister is to pray, "We receive this child into the congregation of Christ's flock."<sup>50</sup> While I think there is something wrong here, there is certainly something right. Baptism is not a private ordinance, but the front door into the local congregation, a "mark of difference" between the church and the world.

## TODAY?

While we might not state it so baldly, we modern evangelicals are tempted to treat the Reformation as the triumph of the gospel over the sacraments. The Roman Catholic Church had lost the gospel in its wrongful adoration (literally) of the sacraments, and so the Reformers regained the gospel by sidelining the sacraments. Well, not quite.

For the Reformers, Word and sacrament are not enemies but the best of friends. The Word is powerful and primary. And yet Christ has wisely and kindly joined two sacraments to that Word, both to nourish our faith and to mark off his people from the world. We rightly celebrate the Reformation's recovery of justification by faith alone. But the gospel the Reformation recovered gives birth to a gospel people who form a gospel polity. So let us

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Edward VI, 1547–1553," 29. Cheers, mate!

49 Accessed at: [http://anglicansonline.org/basics/thirty-nine\\_articles.html](http://anglicansonline.org/basics/thirty-nine_articles.html).

50 Available at: [http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bcp/1552/Baptism\\_1552.htm](http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bcp/1552/Baptism_1552.htm); spelling modernized.



also learn from the Reformers' insights into the signs of the gospel that bind together the people of the gospel.

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# Martin Luther: Reformer of Pastoral Counseling



Bob Kellemen

## LUTHER'S PASTORAL MOTIVATION FOR THE REFORMATION

Compelled by intense pastoral concern, on October 31, 1517, Martin Luther nailed his Ninety-Five Theses to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg. That same day, Luther dispatched a cover letter to Cardinal Albrecht, Archbishop of Mainz, outlining his pastoral motivation for this reformation ministry. Luther began the letter by expressing alarm for his flock—many of whom were journeying to the Dominican, John Tetzel, in an attempt to purchase their freedom from guilt. He wrote, “I bewail the gross misunderstanding among the people which comes from these preachers and which they spread everywhere among common men. Evidently the poor souls believe that when they have bought indulgence letters they are then assured of their salvation.”<sup>51</sup>

The reformer then directly addressed the Cardinal. “O great God! The souls committed to your care, excellent Father, are thus directed to death. For all these souls you have the heaviest and a

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51 Luther, *Luther's Works*, Vol. 48, “Letters I,” 46.

constantly increasing responsibility. Therefore, I can no longer be silent on this subject.”<sup>52</sup>

Clearly, Luther the pastor and shepherd inspired Luther the reformer.

Historian John T. McNeil rightly observes that “in matters concerning the cure of souls the German Reformation had its inception.”<sup>53</sup> R. C. Sproul concurs: “To be sure, the Ninety-Five Theses posted on the church door at Wittenberg were penned in Latin as a request for theological discussion among the faculty members of the university. But what provoked Luther to request such a discussion? Simply put, it was pastoral concern.”<sup>54</sup> Historian Theodore G. Tappert further explains:

Martin Luther is usually thought of as a world-shaking figure who defied papacy and empire to introduce a reformation in the teaching, worship, organization, and life of the Church and to leave a lasting impression on Western civilization. It is sometimes forgotten that he was also—and above all else—a pastor and shepherd of souls. It is therefore well to remind ourselves that the Reformation began in Germany when Luther became concerned about his own parishioners who believed that if they had purchased letters of indulgence they were sure of their salvation.<sup>55</sup>

Luther empathized deeply with his flock’s fears because not too long before he nailed his Theses, he had wrestled personally with demons of doubt about the grace and forgiveness of God. In his own words: “Though I lived as a monk without reproach, I felt that I was a sinner before God with an extremely disturbed conscience. I could not believe that anything that I thought or did or prayed satisfied God.”<sup>56</sup> The thought of standing face to face with

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52 Ibid.

53 McNeil, *A History of the Cure of Souls*, 163.

54 Sproul, *The Legacy of Luther*, 280.

55 Tappert, *Luther: Letters of Spiritual Counsel*, 13, emphasis added.

56 Luther, *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 34, “Career of the Reformer IV,” 336.

a holy God created in Luther a lifelong dread and constant apprehension that he would never find peace with God (often referred to as his *anfechtung*). Luther's agonizing personal search for a gracious God merged with pastoral care for his confused flock. His biographer Heiko Oberman put it this way:

It is crucial to realize that Luther became a reformer who was widely heard and understood by transforming the abstract question of a just God into an existential quest that concerned the whole human being, encompassing thought and action, soul and body, love and suffering. . . . The upheavals in Luther's soul, which he described as hellish torments, had far-reaching consequences. The Reformer went his own perilous way, not only as a biblical theologian but also as a psychologically experienced minister.<sup>57</sup>

Luther's personal quest for God's grace not only animated his personal religious experience, it also motivated his reformation agenda and his pastoral counseling work.

### **LUTHER THE PASTOR AND THE PERSONAL MINISTRY OF THE WORD**

While we often see Luther as a theologian-reformer, he envisioned himself as a pastor not only engaged in pulpit ministry of the Word—preaching—but also in the personal ministry of the Word—counseling. Luther believed every pastor should be a soul care giver.

In his lectures to his students on Galatians, he identified the pastor's calling: "If I am a minister of the Word, I preach, *I comfort the brokenhearted*, and I administer the sacraments."<sup>58</sup> Luther never made a dichotomy between preaching and counseling; both were gospel-centered, Word-based ministries.

Luther had the same message in his letter to Lazarus Spengler, penned on August 15, 1528. After speaking of administering the

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<sup>57</sup> Oberman, *Luther*, 151, 179.

<sup>58</sup> Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*, 21, emphasis added.

sacraments, Luther outlines the calling and role of God’s minister: “This is the same as their obligation to preach, *comfort*, *absolve*, help the poor, and visit the sick, as often as these services are needed and demanded.”<sup>59</sup>

## LUTHER THE PASTOR AND THE SUFFICIENCY OF SCRIPTURE

For Luther, the sufficiency of Scripture equals the sufficiency of Christ’s gospel victory narrative. He looked at Scripture and counseling *through the lens of the cross*. In his *Freedom of the Christian*—Luther’s most focused writing on the application of the gospel to daily life—Luther offers a summary of how to apply the gospel:

You may ask, however, “Which is the word that gives such abundant grace, and how shall I use it?” The answer: “It is nothing but the preaching of Christ in accordance with the gospel, spoken in such a way that you heard your God speaking to you. It shows how your whole life and work are nothing before God but must eternally perish with everything that is in you. When you truly believe that you are guilty, then you must despair of yourself and confess that the verse in Hosea is true, ‘O Israel, in yourself you have nothing but your destruction; it is in me alone that you have your help.’ So that you can come out of yourself and away from yourself, that is, out of your perishing, God places the dear Son, Jesus Christ, before you and allows you to be addressed by this living and comforting word.”<sup>60</sup>

How does the Christian grow in grace? Through applying the Word—Christ’s victory narrative—to our lives. Luther again: “Thus it is appropriate for all Christians to let their only work and exercise be forming the Word and Christ in themselves, constantly practicing and strengthening such faith, because no other work can make a Christian.”<sup>61</sup>

59 Luther, *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 49, “Letters II,” 207, emphasis added.

60 Luther, *The Freedom of the Christian*, in Krey, *Luther’s Spirituality*, 72.

61 *Ibid.*, 73.

After Luther's work on Psalms, Romans, and Galatians, and after his posting of the Ninety-Five Thesis, the core of his theological development was complete. Another Luther biographer, James M. Kittelson, summarizes it this way:

What remained was to spell out its impact on the daily conduct of the Christian life. In this regard the first and highest task was to ease the consciences of the faithful. His own conscience had been tortured by the religious world in which he became an adult, and now he sought to warn others away from this agony. He started on the path to reform when Tetzel's indulgence sale contradicted his teachings as a professor and threatened his concerns as a pastor. Now these same concerns thrust him back into the fray, even if from afar. By explaining the practical consequences of his theology, he took responsibility for all he had earlier said and done.<sup>62</sup>

In his public writings and in his private letters of spiritual counsel, "Luther was once again reducing everything in the life of the Christian to the promises of God that called forth trust in his goodwill."<sup>63</sup> That promise was made visible in the Christ of the cross who forever answers the question, "Does God have a good heart?" All of Luther's life, ministry, and letters of spiritual counsel sought to apply to the lives of faithful Christians the truths of justification and reconciliation by faith alone through grace alone.

In 1955, prior to our modern debates about whether counselors should integrate divine revelation and human reason, Tappert edited and translated *Luther: Letters of Spiritual Counsel*. Tappert maintains that "an examination of the collected works of Luther makes it clear that his spiritual counsel was not simply the applications of external techniques. It was part and parcel of his theology."<sup>64</sup> He explains that in Luther's day people espoused several

62 Kittelson, *Luther the Reformer*, 168-169.

63 *Ibid.*, 149.

64 Tappert, *Luther: Letters of Spiritual Counsel*, 14.

routes to wisdom for daily life. Luther rejected the assumption of the medieval scholastics that wisdom for living in a broken world could be known by means of reason or logic. He also disavowed the theory of the medieval mystics that God and his will can be known by means of self-mortification or ecstasy.

What then is the sufficient source for scriptural care? Tappert answers the question: “In Luther’s eyes, therefore, spiritual counsel is always concerned above all else with faith—nurturing, strengthening, establishing, practicing faith—and because ‘faith cometh by hearing,’ the Word of God (or the gospel) occupies a central place in it.”

Put simply, Luther grounded his theology of counseling on the sufficiency of Christ’s gospel of grace. The aim of Luther’s counseling “is not to get people to do certain things—fasting, going on a pilgrimage, becoming a monk, doing ‘good works,’ even receiving the Sacrament—so much as it is to get people to have faith and to exercise the love which comes from faith.” Tappert captures it succinctly: “The ministry to troubled souls is a ministry of the gospel.”<sup>65</sup>

## **THE GOSPEL VICTORY NARRATIVE IS SUFFICIENT FOR LIFE IN OUR BROKEN WORLD**

None of this was theoretical for Luther. He lived and breathed Scripture for his life. This was Luther’s testimony: “No other study pleased me like that of the Holy Scripture. I read in it diligently and imprinted it upon my memory. Often a single passage of weighty import occupied my thoughts the whole day.”<sup>66</sup> And elsewhere: “For some years now I have read through the Bible twice every year. If you picture the Bible to be a mighty tree and every word a little branch, I have shaken every one of these branches because I wanted to know what it was and what it meant.”<sup>67</sup>

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 15, emphasis added.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>67</sup> Luther, *LW*, Vol. 54, “Table Talks,” 165.

What was true for Luther's life was also true for his counseling ministry. In a letter to Henning Teppen, Luther recommends the Holy Scriptures as the only true comfort in distress. Applauding Teppen's "great knowledge of Scripture," Luther directs him to Paul: "You have the Apostle who shows to you a garden, or paradise, which is full of comfort, when he says: 'Whatever was written, was written for our instruction, so that through patience and the consolation of the Scriptures we might have hope.' Here he attributes to Holy Scripture the function of comforting. *Who may dare to seek or ask for comfort anywhere else?*"<sup>68</sup>

Is there any clearer statement of the sufficiency of Scripture for counseling?

Luther also saw Scripture as sufficient for fighting temptation: "Nothing helps more powerfully against the devil, the world, the flesh, and all evil thoughts *than occupying oneself with God's Word, having conversations about it, and contemplating it.*" He continues, "Notice how the first psalm even praises that one as blessed who 'mediates on the law day and night.' Without a doubt, you will not be able to burn a stronger incense or fragrance against the devil than involving yourself in God's commandments and words and speaking, singing, or thinking about them."

The same Scripture is also sufficient for spiritual doubts and for self-counsel. Luther writes, "Let us learn, therefore, in great and horrible terrors, when our conscience feels nothing but sin and judges that God is angry with us, and that Christ has turned His face from us, not to follow the sense and feeling of our own heart, but to stick to the Word of God." That same Word is useful for counseling others: "So we also labor by the Word of God that we may set at liberty those that are entangled, and bring them to the pure doctrine of faith, and hold them there."<sup>69</sup>

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68 Luther, *LW*, Vol. 49, "Letters II," 161, emphasis added.

69 Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*, 333, 126.



## CONCLUSION

The church has always been about the business of helping hurting and hardened people. Luther didn't *invent* pastoral counseling; he *reformed* it. He applied the gospel to the daily hurts and the spiritual struggles of his flock, and in so doing reformed both theology and pastoral counseling—all of it under the cross.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Bob Kellemen is the Founder and CEO of RPM Ministries through which he speaks, writes, and consults on biblical counseling and Christian living. Kellemen also served as the founding Executive Director of the Biblical Counseling Coalition. He currently serves as one of the Lead Elders at Bethel Church in Northwest Indiana. Dr. Kellemen is the author of fourteen books including *Counseling Under the Cross*.

