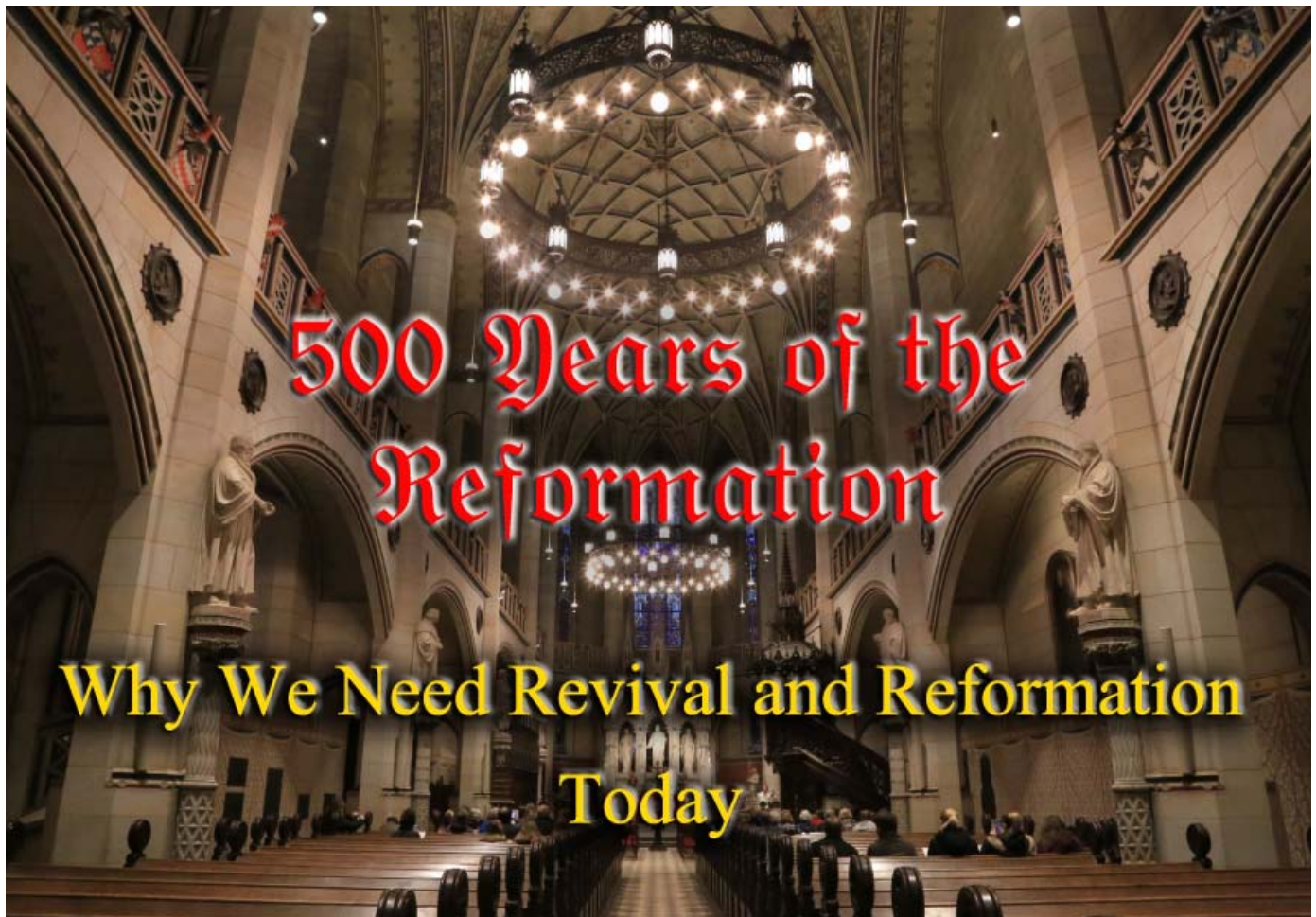


Theology for Life

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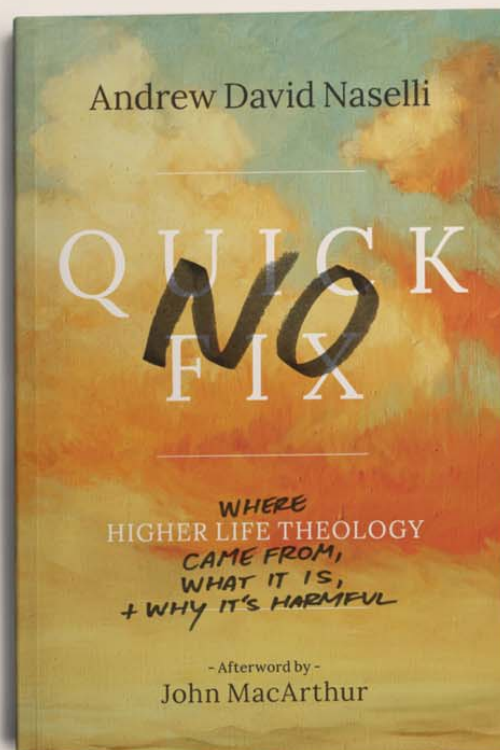
- ***Sola Scriptura*: Returning to the Fount of the Word**
- **Does the Reformation Still Matter?**
- **Being John Calvin**



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Andy's work on Keswick theology is first-rate. This is a model of scholarship serving the church. His analysis of Keswick's history and his tight theological work on sanctification are extremely valuable. I enjoyed this book. I learned from this book. I will be able to help my congregation as a result of reading this book.

KEVIN DEYOUNG

Senior pastor, Christ Covenant Church (Matthews, NC)

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Editor's Corner

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Few issues are as essential to understanding as the place of doctrine in the Christian life. It's common for people today to say to say, "Well that's just what you believe", as if belief were only a private affair. When people make such statements, what they are saying without realizing it is that there is no foundation for orthodoxy, and no way to know the Truth. Without realizing it, they are making sweeping statements with little-to-no understanding of the consequences of them.

Truth not a private; it is *public*. When we truly believe something, we will not be silent about it. For example, when someone enjoys a particular TV series or movie they will tell others about it. They will become evangelists of that TV series, movie, or hobby. They will also recruit people to watch that series, to engage in that hobby or sport. One other recent example comes from the NBA (the National Basketball Association). Franchise players recruit other major players to play on their team. Why do they do that? They do that to make the team *stronger* by having stronger and more talented individual players join, so they have enough talent to win the NBA Championship. Whether it's in the practices of the NBA in the secular world, or in any other form of lifestyle/hobby, we are all evangelists of the things we love most. After all, what we love most is what we treasure most. As Christians, we are to supremely revere the treasure of Christ in the Gospel.

Truth is not relative to how you and I feel on a given day. Truth is also not a popularity contest. Truth has to have an objective standard by which it can be evaluated, believed, taught, and lived out. And this is ultimately why—whether it's from advertising, sports, television, or movies—truth in our culture is portrayed as a subjective, private affair rather than as a public. Here we need to understand that behind this action is a theological, not philosophical, motivation.

When Jesus said in John 14:6, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life", He forever shattered the idea that there was any other Way to God but through Him. He also demolished the idea we could have Life any other way but through Him. And when He proclaimed that He is the Truth, He forever obliterated the concept of Truth as a private matter. Instead, Truth is both a private and a public matter. We know personally and privately the Truth in Christ Alone to make it known publically.

The Reformation was fueled by Christ-centered and gospel-fueled preaching and teaching of the Word. Martin Luther publically confronted the teaching of indulgences because he

was concerned for the souls of men. He made known the truth of the gospel no matter what the cost. Men like John Calvin sent thousands of personal correspondence letters to pastors and missionaries all over the world to bring about Reformation in his day. Even Charles Spurgeon wrote thousands of letters to do the same.

In our own day, we need Reformation around the Word of God. From “pastors” saying that Jesus died in our place and for our sin is the equivalent of “cosmic child abuse”; to questioning whether Adam and Eve are real people, who lived in real history; to issues surrounding homosexuality, transgenderism, gender roles, and more; we are in dire Reformation inside and outside the Church.

At stake in all these issues is the authority of the Word of God and the gospel of the Lord Jesus. These are not issues that are secondary—instead, they are primary. When the authority of God’s Word is undermined, there is no ground for Truth. Furthermore, when the Gospel is denied and dismissed there is no hope for mankind. Truth absolutely matters and must be defended with all of our heart, mind, soul, and strength. We must stand up to those who are denying the gospel and lovingly say you are wrong, and here is why from the Word of God.

The Reformation was a public movement oriented towards the Truth for the sake of the gospel. It was not just men trying to proclaim their own teaching and understanding. Instead, it was men and women seeking to reform the Church around the Word of God to proclaim the whole gospel to the glory of God.

When men and women love the Word, love the Church, and love one another, they are obeying the teaching of the gospel. Such men and women are needed today those who take their faith seriously and seek to fan the flame of faith in others. The more we love the Lord Jesus, the more we will seek to take forth the gospel message. Since what we love most is what we treasure most, the gospel ought to be supreme in our hearts and affections. We ought to carry forth the Gospel and share it with others because we are truly being satisfied by it. Our desire to know God is by no other means than the Truth of God’s Word. Our great need for Reformation in our day is dire. People are perishing because they don’t know the Truth of the Gospel.

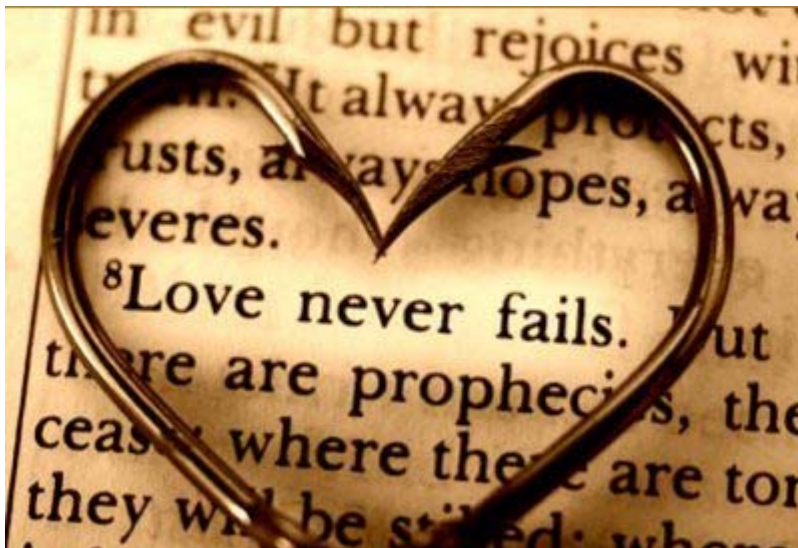
In this issue of *Theology for Life*, we are exploring the *Five Solas*. Also, you will read a number of other articles surrounding issues related to Reformation in biblical counseling, missions, preaching, and others. Our hope in this issue of *Theology for Life* is that you would learn historic Protestant Theology. And by doing so you’ll understand that doctrine is not an, “I feel proposition” instead it is a truth claim with serious and life-altering and life-demanding implications for all of God’s people.

As you read this issue of *Theology for Life*, I’m praying for you that you’ll learn that what we believe actually matters. It matters because nothing more than the Truth of God’s Word will satisfy the heart, and mind created by God to image Him. It’s only through understanding the Truth of *Sola Scriptura* (Scripture Alone), *Sola Fide* (by Faith Alone), *Sola Gratia* (by Grace Alone), *Solus Christus* (Christ Alone), and *Solo Deo Gloria* (to the Glory of God Alone), that we come to learn the real storyline of Scripture that finds its apex in the person and finished work of Christ, and His soon return. Pick up, read, and learn the vital truths of the Reformation that began 500 years ago and our great need for Reformation in the Church around the Word today.

Dave Jenkins
Executive Editor, *Theology for Life Magazine*

***Sola Scriptura*: The Heart of the Reformation**

By Nate Pickowicz



Within a year of posting his *Ninety-Five Theses*, Martin Luther was summoned to appear before Cardinal Cajetan to be examined for his accusations against the Roman Catholic Church's theology and practice. When the Cardinal pressed him on the issue of the church's authority, Luther responded, "The truth of Scripture comes first. After that is accepted one may determine whether the words of men can be accepted as true." Now, Luther was not discrediting the words of men completely, rather, he was claiming that, far and above anything or anyone else, Holy Scripture was first and foremost. This led to the development of *Sola Scriptura*—"Scripture

alone". But in order to examine this principle within the context of the Reformation, we first need to explore the doctrine of Scripture itself. For the rest of this article, we will examine four foundational claims regarding the Word of God: its *inspiration*, *inerrancy*, *authority*, and *sufficiency*.

The Issue of Inspiration

The most dynamic and explicit passage in all of Scripture about the nature of the Bible's own divine inspiration comes in 2nd Timothy 3:16-17. The Apostle Paul writes:

"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work."

In the Greek, the word *theopneustos* is used to describe how Scripture came to be; it was literally "God-breathed". It was as if the Lord took a deep breath in, and then exhaled Holy Scripture. Further, the means by which God brought Scripture about was through the pens of human writers—"men [who] spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2nd Peter 1:21). Both the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestant Reformers did not disagree about divine inspiration. What *was* and *is still* contested, however, is the *content* of the revelation.

Paul's use of the word "all" in 2nd Timothy 3:16 leads us to examine: *What books of the Bible are contained in the "all" of Scripture?* This is the question of the *canon*. The word "canon" comes from the Greek word *kanōn*, meaning "measuring rod", which came to be used in speaking of a "rule" or "standard". And in the most general sense, the canon is *"the authoritative books that God gave his cor-*

porate church.” Historically, the accepted canon consists of 66 books—39 Old Testament books (Genesis to Malachi) and 27 New Testament books (Matthew to Revelation).

During the Reformation, the Roman Catholic Church asserted that there were additional books inspired by God, which belonged in the canon. What came to be known as the *Apocrypha* consisted of the books of Tobit, Judith, the Additions to Esther, the Additions to Daniel, the Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus (also called Sirach), Baruch (Hebrew for *Blessed*), the Letter of Jeremiah, and 1st and 2nd Maccabees. In response to the Reformers’ claims that many of the Catholic Church’s practices were unbiblical, the Council of Trent (1545-1563) canonized the Apocrypha, thus deeming it to be the inspired and authoritative Word of God. But after 1,500 years of being absent from the canon, did the Apocrypha suddenly deserve to be included? Certainly not.

Contrary to the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church, the canon of Scripture was not decided by popes and councils. Rather, it was “determined by God and discovered by man.” Even as early as AD 68, the Apostle Peter notes that Paul’s writings stand alongside “the rest of the Scriptures” (2nd Peter 3:16), indicating an acknowledgment of an accepted canon (see also 1st Timothy 5:18). And while it took some time for the church to stand together on what they recognized as being Scripture, the Council of Laodicea (AD 363), Athanasius of Alexandria (AD 367), and the Third Council of Carthage (AD 397) acknowledged the 66 books of the canon, as we do today.

“But the 66 books of the Bible are inspired by God—
“breathed out”; they are the very word of God.”

The Apocrypha, on the other hand, is not quoted or referred to in either the Old or New Testaments. Jesus and the Apostles never made reference to it. Many of the church fathers, as well as Palestinian Jews, rejected it. Further, the Apocrypha contains historical errors. Above all, however, there are doctrines and practices that directly contradict the teaching of the rest of Scripture! In short, the Apocrypha cannot be listed as belonging in the canon because it is not inspired by God. But the 66 books of the Bible are inspired by God—“breathed out”; they are the very word of God.

The Issue of Inerrancy

The Apostle Paul once wrote, “Let God be found true, though every man be found a liar” (Romans 3:4). God is a God of truth (Isaiah 65:16; Jeremiah 10:10; John 17:3; 1st John 5:20), and He cannot lie (Numbers 23:19; Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:18). Since God is true, His revealed Word to us is true, as it reflects the truthfulness of His divine character. In His high priestly prayer, the Lord Jesus entreated the Father, saying, “Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth” (John 17:17).

The *inerrancy* of Scripture means that the Scriptures are true in all that they claim, and are without error. And while it has been pointed out that there have been human mistakes in the process of transmission of the Bible, we affirm that no such errors exist in the original manuscripts—those written down by those who were “carried along by the Holy Spirit”. In fact, if the Scriptures be found to err in even the smallest detail, we would have to question the character of Author—would God inspire error? Surely the Holy Spirit did not “carry men along” into error, as that would be the height of deception; not the mark of the truthfulness of the Lord.

The Issue of Authority

The heart of the battle over *sola Scriptura* is a battle over the issue of authority. Who has the right to tell people what to believe and what to do? If the Bible is inspired by God, and thereby inerrant, then it is also authoritative. In other words, the revealed commands of God in Scripture are binding on the believer. When Scripture speaks, God speaks. However, during the medieval period, the Catholic Church raised “tradition” to a place of equal authority with Scripture. Terry Johnson writes:

‘Tradition’ included a host of extra-biblical practices and beliefs which had been received into the church over centuries, whether by common acceptance or by the decisions of Popes and councils. ‘Holy writ’ and ‘Holy tradition’ were both accepted as authoritative sources of divine truth. Over both stood the church’s magisterium, its infallible teaching office, to which belongs final authority in interpreting both tradition and Scripture.

Even today, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* notes, “the Church, to whom the transmission and interpretation of Revelation is entrusted, ‘does not derive her certainty about all revealed truths from the holy Scriptures alone. Both Scripture and Tradition must be accepted and honored with equal

sentiments of devotion and reverence” (§82). Not only is this a denial of the principle of *Sola Scriptura*, it is a rejection of the inherent authority of the Word of God. Further, it is claimed that “the task of interpreting the Word of God authentically has been entrusted solely to the Magisterium of the Church, that is, to the Pope and the bishops in communion with him” (§100). Therefore, according to the essential documents of the Roman Catholic Church, the elite spiritual hierarchy in Rome is uniquely vested with sole authority to create, institute, and mandate all religious belief and practice for every Christian in the world.

“Matthew 16 is not about Christ granting to Peter the authority over the church...”

In 1870, at the First Vatican Council, it was decreed that when the Pope speaks *ex cathedra* (“from his chair”), he is speaking on behalf of God, and thereby, his words are infallible. And so, today, not only is the Magisterium of the Catholic Church deemed to be authoritative in all matters of faith and practice, but the Pope himself wields the power and authority of God when he is speaking *ex cathedra*. But the question must be asked, by what authority has the Magisterium claimed ultimate authority?

The Supposed Apostolic Succession of Popes

According to the *Catechism*, the Lord Jesus entrusted Peter with the unique mission of being the universal leader of the church. Citing Matthew 16:18, it asserts that “because of the faith he confessed Peter will remain the unshakeable rock of the Church” (§552). Further, Peter is believed to have been entrusted with “a specific authority”—“the keys of the kingdom of heaven”—which is nothing short of the “authority to govern the house of God, which is the Church” (§553). Based primarily on this text, it is believed that Peter was commissioned by Christ to be the very first Pope, thus beginning a line of papal succession which has continued even until today.

Matthew 16 is not about Christ granting to Peter the authority over the church; it’s about *Christ* declaring *His* intention to build the church! And the “rock” on which Christ builds is not Peter himself,

but rather, his earlier confession of faith in Jesus (verse 16): “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God!”

While it’s true that Peter’s name (*Petros*) means “rock” in Greek, Matthew records the word in the feminine form (*petra*), thus leading the reader to a different conclusion. It’s almost as if Christ was saying, “You are Peter (*petros*, a “rock”), and on this rock (*petra*, “mountain top” of faith), I will build My church.” Now, it may seem futile to wrangle over such grammar, but the question persists: *Is Peter the rock on which the church is built?*

Ephesians 2:20 teaches that the church is “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone.” Elsewhere, Christ is called “the stone which the

builders have rejected...which has become the chief cornerstone” (Psalm 118:22; Matthew 21:42; Mark 12:10; Luke 20:17; Acts 4:11). The apostle Paul wrote, “for no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1st Corinthians 3:11). Further, he asserts that even during their wilderness wandering, the Israelites “drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them,



and the Rock was Christ” (1st Corinthians 10:4). Even Peter himself taught that Jesus Christ was the “the cornerstone” (1st Peter 2:4, 6-7); and Christians are “living stones... being built up as a spiritual house” (verse 5); they are built squarely on Christ.

Jesus did not announce or intend that Peter would be the first pope, nor did He impart to him any kind of authority as Head of the Church; Christ Himself “is the head of the body, the church” (Colossians 1:17). And the “keys of the kingdom” were given collectively to the Church, to be exercised under the spiritual authority of Christ’s true vicar—the Holy Spirit (John 14:16-17; 16:5-15). Neither the Pope nor the Magisterium has the authority to speak for God; only the Holy Spirit

speaking through His living Word (Hebrews 4:12). And so, recognizing the inherent authority of the Word of God, we must affirm *Sola Scriptura*. John Calvin writes, “Our conviction of the truth of Scripture must be derived from a higher source than human conjectures, judgments, or reasons; namely, the secret testimony of the Spirit.”

Rome has no true power; the emperor has no clothes. Rather, Scripture is vested with the full authority of Jesus Christ, as it is His revealed Word. And if the Word of God is *inspired*, *inerrant*, and *authoritative*, then we must also concede that it is altogether *sufficient*.

The Issue of Sufficiency

The danger comes when the traditions of men assault the authority of the Word of God. This was the reason for Jesus’ rebuke of the Pharisees in Matthew 15 when they asked Him why His disciples violated the tradition of the elders. He responded, “And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?” (Verse 3). Because for years, they had been burdening believers with the yoke of legalistic religion and placing their traditions above God’s revealed commands. So, Jesus rebuked them saying, “You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said: “This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men”” (verses 7-9). Even Paul warned the Church to “see to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elementary spirits of the world, and not according to Christ” (Colossians 2:8). Again, tradition is fine, but not when it supersedes the Word of God, and takes captive the believer. No, we are “not to go beyond what is written” (1st Corinthians 4:6). John warns, “if anyone adds to [the revelation of Scripture], God shall add to him the plagues which are written in [the Bible]” (Revelation 22:18). Scripture alone is our authority—not traditions, no councils, not denominations, not popes, not even the angels in heaven (Galatians 1:8).

The Lord Jesus claims for Himself all authority in heaven and on earth

(Matthew 28:18; John 3:35; 5:22-24), and He has given us His Spirit, who has given us His Word. And it is *sufficient* for us. W. Robert Godfrey writes, “The Protestant position...is that all things *necessary* for salvation and concerning faith and life are taught in the Bible with enough clarity that the ordinary believer can find them there and understand.” In summation, Matthew Barrett writes: “*Sola Scriptura* means that *only Scripture, because it is God’s inspired Word, is our inerrant, sufficient, and final authority for the church.*”

How did the Roman Catholic Church respond to the Protestant declaration of *Sola Scriptura*? In 1559, Pope Pius IV said:

“Since experience teaches that, if the reading of the Holy Bible in the vernacular is permitted generally without discrimination, more damage than advantage will result because of the boldness of men, the judgment of the bishops and inquisitors is to serve as a guide in this regard.”

And with that, Rome banned all Bible translations except the Latin Vulgate, placing them on a list of “forbidden books”.

The Pope added, “Whoever reads or has such a translation in his possession without...permission cannot be absolved from his sins until he has turned in these Bibles.” This was nothing less than an attempt to wrestle authority away from the Word of God

Paul warned the Church to “see to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition...”

and confer it on the Magisterium. We have a living God who speaks to us presently through His Word. And through the word of truth—the Gospel of our salvation, we are saved and sanctified; our conscience held captive to the Word of God.

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The Protestant Reformation and Biblical Counseling

By Heath Lambert



On the 500th Anniversary of the Protestant Reformation, I am profoundly thankful for the many efforts to commemorate the theological themes central to the great recovery of the gospel in the 16th century. Most people summarize those key themes in the *Five Solas* of the Reformation: *Sola Fide*, *Solus Christus*, *Sola Gratia*, *Sola Scriptura*, and *Soli Deo Gloria*.

Sola Fide, or the doctrine of faith alone, teaches that Christians are justified by faith, and not by any work they can perform. *Solus Christus*, or the truth about Christ alone, teaches that the exclu-

sive object of faith is Jesus Christ, who earned righteousness for His people in His life, death, and resurrection. *Sola Gratia*, or the glorious teaching of grace alone, underlines that our salvation is based entirely on the kindness of God, and not on the merit of people. *Sola Scriptura*, or Scripture alone, is the conviction that the Bible is the authority for all Christian belief and practice. *Soli Deo Gloria*, or glory to God alone, reminds Christians that God is to receive all glory for our salvation because of the gracious intervention of Jesus to spare us from Hell, and because of His revelation to us of this fact in Scripture. On my way to explaining the close relationship between the Reformation and biblical counseling, I would like to make two observations about the *Five Solas* of the Reformation.

All the Solas Are Linked Together

The first observation is that the *Five Solas* are inextricably linked together. That is to say that Reformation theology is a web, rather than a list. You can remove items on a list without necessarily damaging other items on that list. That is not the case with a web. You cannot damage one part of a spider web without risking the integrity of the entire structure. So it is with Reformation theology. None of the *Five Solas* can be preserved in isolation from the others. Each individual piece requires the other four.

Let me explain. If we keep intact the Reformation teaching on faith, grace, Christ, and the glory of God, but remove our commitment to the authority of Scripture, then we destroy the entire configuration, because it is the Bible alone that explains the other elements. If we keep every element of the system except Christ, then we destroy the whole thing, because our faith has no object. If we keep everything but faith, we have no way to lay hold of the work of Christ. You see the point. If one portion of the theological superstructure of Reformation theology is destroyed, the other pieces go with it.

The Five Solas and Counseling Conversations

The second observation I would like to make about the *Five Solas* of the Reformation is that—far from being theoretical matters of abstract theology—they are each crucial to addressing the very practical matters on the table in counseling conversations.

On this anniversary of the Reformation, it is common to point out how indispensable these theological commitments are to Christian theology. What I wish to do here is point out how indispensable those commitments are to any practice of counseling that would be worthy of being labeled *Christian*.

Let me demonstrate this by addressing just one topic, namely, the issue of whether and how counselors speak of Jesus Christ in counseling. Most self-styled Christian counselors subscribe to codes of counseling ethics that make it unacceptable, or else optional, to engage in proselytizing during counseling. That is to say that most Christian counselors do not have an unshakable commitment to sharing the gospel in counseling because of requirements of state licensure, or even in some cases, the requirements of the “Christian” counseling organization of which they are a part. That means that, for the most part, there are Christians engaging in counseling all across the country and world who are willing to let counseling conversations progress without reference to Jesus Christ, or the need that troubled people have to depend on Him for eternal life.

“That means that, for the most part, there are Christians engaging in counseling all across the country and world who are willing to let counseling conversations progress without reference to Jesus Christ....”

This is a significant problem that compromises biblical authority for any counselor who agrees

to play by those rules. Jesus Christ commands in Matthew 28:19-20 that His people are to “go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I command you.” The Apostle Paul describes his own commitment to this command when he says in 1st Corinthians 2:2 that he “determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified”. Examples could be multiplied, but the point is already obvious: Jesus and His apostles do not give Christian people the option of whether to speak of salvation in Jesus’ name. It is required in Scripture. To choose to behave in any other way during a counseling conversation is to trade in the authority of Scripture for the authority of secular ethical standards.

If that reality were not bad enough, it is important to remember the first observation I made. When you destroy one element of Reformation theology, you destroy the others. Whenever Christian counselors reject biblical authority on the issue of speaking of Jesus they also destroy the truth about Christ alone, and the teaching about faith, which is the exclusive vehicle for laying hold of His work. When these realities are destroyed they take the beauty of God’s grace with them since they will not be on display where Christ is concealed. In such situations, God’s glory will be obscured since we will be talking about paths to joy and wholeness which are devoid of Christ.

Biblical Counseling is To Embody the Reformation

That is why I believe authentically biblical counseling is required to best embody the Reformation themes that we all cherish so much. There is only one counseling code of ethics in the entire world that requires the proclamation of Christ in the counseling room. It is the code of ethics of the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors (ACBC). Article XIV of their Standards of Doctrine is entitled, *The Doctrine of the Great Commission*, and says:

The church has been called to go into the world with the task of evangelism and discipleship. In giving this commission, Jesus requires his people to use their conversations to point people to Christ in evangelism and to build people up in Christ in discipleship. The Great Commission necessitates that all faithful counseling conversations must have Jesus Christ as their ultimate goal. Our Lord and Savior does not give believers the option to avoid counseling conversations or to avoid directing those conversations toward Jesus. The commitment of Christians to the Great Commission and to faithful biblical counseling is therefore one and the same.

This is not an extreme statement, but one that simply applies the biblical teaching about Scriptural authority and the necessity of Christ to counseling practice. It is decidedly reformational, and sets the standard that absolutely every Christian should commit to. It undermines the truth of Scripture, the work of Jesus Christ, and the principles of the Reformation for any Christian to avoid using their conversations to point to Jesus Christ merely because that conversation is labeled “counseling”.

This is, of course, just one very important example. But we could see the same thing over and over again with how so-called Christian counselors deal with everything from fear in counseling to gender confusion. The Bible practically addresses the issues that counselors are concerned to address, and the principles of the Reformation summarize the broad theological themes of how those issues are addressed. A practical commitment to embodying the principles of the Reformation will require a commitment to biblical counseling as well.

Christ Alone as Central to the Reformation Solas

By Stephen Wellum



Reformation theology is often summarized by the *Five Solas*. Scripture Alone (*Sola Scriptura*) stands as the formal principle of the Reformation, and the foundation of all theology. God's glory alone (*Soli Deo Gloria*) functions as a capstone for all Reformation theology, connecting its various parts to God's one purpose for creating this world and humanity in it. In between these two *Solas*, the other three emphasize that God has chosen and acted to save us by His sovereign grace alone (*Sola Gratia*), through faith alone (*Sola Fide*), which is grounded in and through Christ alone (*Solus Christus*).

To stand on the shoulders of the Reformers today, we need to take seriously these *Solas*. But to truly understand the substance of the Reformation *Solas*, and profit from them, we must also remember two points. First, all of the *Solas* are interrelated and mutually dependent. Second, without minimizing their mutual dependence, it is *Solus Christus* which uniquely unites the other *Solas* to bring us the full glory of God in the Gospel. Let us consider why *Christ alone* is at the center of the Reformation *Solas* and the rest of Christian theology.

Five Reasons *Solus Christus* is At the Center of the Reformation

First, *Christ alone* offers coherency to Reformation doctrine. We come to know the glorious person and work of Christ only by God's self-disclosure through the Scriptures. Yet, the Triune God speaks not simply to in-

form us, but to save us in Christ alone. We are saved through faith alone, but the object of our saving faith is Christ alone. Our faith in Christ guards us by the power of God and His grace alone. Yet, the purpose of God's grace leads to, and culminates in, our reconciliation and adoption through Christ alone. In the end, the ultimate goal of God in our redemption is his own glory, even as we are transformed into a creaturely *reflection* of it. And yet, the *radiance* of God's glory is found in Christ alone. The word spoken by God, the faith given by God, the grace extended by God, and the glory possessed and promised by God cannot be grasped apart from the divine Son who became a man for our salvation.

Second, the Reformers placed Christ alone at the center of their doctrine because Scripture places Christ alone at the center of God's eternal plan for His creation. Despite the diversity of human authors, Scripture speaks as God's unified voice by which He reveals Himself and the whole history of redemption—from creation to new creation. And this unified Word of God has one main point: the Triune God of the universe in infinite wisdom and power has chosen to bring all of His purposes and plans to fulfillment in the person and work of Christ. No doubt, the centrality of Christ does not diminish the persons and work of the Father and the Spirit. Rather Scripture teaches that all the Father does centers in His Son and that the Spirit works to bear witness and bring glory to the Son. Michael Reeves is on track when he states that "to be truly Trinitarian we must be constantly Christ-centered."

"The Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son..."

Third, the Christ alone of the Reformation reflects our Lord's own self-identity. Jesus knew that He was central to the manifestation of God's glory and the salvation of His people. On the road to Emmaus, Jesus explained His death and bore witness to His resurrection as the Messiah by placing Himself at the focal point of God's revelation: "Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself" (Luke 24:26-27). He confronted the religious leaders for not finding eternal life in him as the goal of humanity: "These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life" (John 5:39-40). And He was remarkably clear about His role as the anointed one entrusted with the end of the world: "The Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him" (John 5:22-23). To follow Jesus, the Reformers rightly confessed that Christ alone is the person around whom all history pivots and the focus of all God's work in the world.

Fourth, the Reformers emphasized the centrality of Christ alone because they accepted the apostolic witness to the person and work of Christ. The opening verses of Hebrews underscore the finality and superiority of God's self-disclosure in His Son: "In the past God spoke...at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son...the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being..." (Hebrews 1:1-3a). Paul comforts us with the cosmic pre-eminence of Christ: "For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together" (Colossians 1:16-17). And Paul encourages our hope in Christ by declaring that God's eternal purpose and plan is "to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ" (Ephesians 1:9-10). The Apostles unanimously agree: Jesus is *the most important person* in God's new creation

work—a work that restores and surpasses what was lost in Eden. God brings forth a new, redeemed and reconciled creation by and through Christ alone.

Fifth, beyond the Reformation *Solas*, Christ alone is the center of all Christian theology. Herman Bavinck's, *Reformed Dogmatics* is one of the finest works in systematic theology. Bavinck rightly taught that Christ was central to Christian theology and it was in His person and work that all theology found its coherence: "The doctrine of Christ is not the starting point, but it certainly is the central point of the whole system of dogmatics. All other dogmas either prepare for it or are inferred from it. In it, as the heart of dogmatics, pulses the whole of the religious-ethical life of Christianity."

In late 20th century, J. I. Packer used the helpful analogy of a central hub that connects the spokes on a wheel. Packer explains that "Christology is the true hub round which the wheel of theology revolves, and to which its separate spokes must each be correctly anchored if the wheel is not to get bent." And most recently, theologians like Michael Reeves have recognized the same truth: "the center, the cornerstone, the jewel in the crown of Christianity is not an idea, a system or a thing; it is not even 'the gospel' as such. It is Jesus Christ." In short, our entire theology ultimately rises and falls with *Christ alone*. Only a proper view of *Him* can correctly shape the most distinctive convictions of Christian theology.

Let me illustrate this truth with four theological examples. One of the most distinctive truths of Christian theology is the *Trinity*. Yet, this fundamental truth only comes to us by the divine Son's incarnation. The Church confesses the tri-unity of God because Scripture reveals the coming of God the Son as a man in eternal relation to the Father and the Spirit. Christ alone opens our eyes to see the Father, Son, and Spirit working distinctly, yet inseparably, as the one Creator-Covenant Lord. Being human, we might think that the *doctrine of humanity* is comprehensible on its own. But we cannot understand who we are in all of our dignity and fallenness apart from comprehending the person and work of Christ. Christ alone is the image of God, the last Adam—the beginning and end of humanity. And Christ alone is the hope of humanity.

The *doctrine of salvation* brings us even closer to the center of theology because it brings the other doctrines to intersect as God's eternal plan progresses to its end. And yet again, even more clearly now, it is Christ himself, unique in His person and sufficient in His work, who makes sense of the why and how of divine-human reconciliation.

Finally, at the heart of the Gospel stands the *doctrine of the atonement*. In his classic work, *The Cross of Christ*, John Stott argues that fully understanding the biblical language regarding the *death* of Christ requires correct conclusions regarding the *person* of Christ and especially making sense of the cross as penal substitution. After surveying a number of options in Christology, Stott draws this crucial conclusion: "If the essence of the atonement is substitution...[t]he theological inference is that it is impossible to hold the historic doctrine of the cross without holding the historic doctrine of Jesus Christ as the one and only God-man and Mediator...At the root of every caricature of the cross lies a distorted Christology. The person and work of Christ belong together. If he was not who the apostles say he was, then he could not have done what they say he did. The incarnation is indispensable to the atonement." In addition, by understanding the substitutionary death of Christ, we can look through His atonement to gain still more clarity in all other doctrines. e.g., the problem of human sin; the mercy and grace of God in sending His Son; the wisdom and

"...We can look through His atonement to gain still more clarity in all other doctrines..."

goodness of God in His redemptive plan; God's sovereign power in overcoming evil and restoring His creation. The glory of God in all His ways depends upon Christ alone.

Christ Alone at the Center of Theology

In truth, *Christ alone* is the central truth that connects all other theological doctrines. This is why if we fail to grasp *who* He is and *what* He does in His life, death, and resurrection, then all other

doctrines will suffer. This is no small matter. Misidentifying Christ will cause confusion in the church and harm our witness in the world. However, if we rightly identify Christ in all His unique and exclusive identity and all-sufficient work, then we can proclaim the same Christ as the Reformers with the same clarity, conviction, and urgency.

"There are many good things in life which legitimately demand our attention."

Christ alone is not a slogan; it is the center of the *Solas* by which the Reformers recovered the grace of God and declared the glory of God. It must be so for us too. We cannot afford to pursue *Christ alone* as a mere academic interest. We

must proclaim the excellences of Christ alone, "who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9b). Living under the Lordship of Christ, it is our privilege to follow Paul and "proclaim [the supremacy of Christ alone], admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ" (Colossians 1:28). For this proclamation, we want to stand with the Reformers to declare and delight in *Christ alone* to the glory of God alone.

There are many good things in life which legitimately demand our attention. Yet, it is far too easy to forget who is central to everything, namely our Lord Jesus, and that Christ alone must be central to our lives. My prayer is that *Christ alone* will become more precious to us and that in our individual lives and in our churches, we will commit ourselves anew to believing, living out, and proclaiming the unsearchable riches of Christ.

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Who is George Whitefield?

By Thomas Kidd

George Whitefield was the most famous man in America before the American Revolution. The Church of England minister was the most visible leader of the Great Awakening, a series of revivals that swept through Britain and America in the mid-eighteenth century, invigorating the faith of untold thousands. Whitefield drew massive audiences wherever he went, and his publications alone doubled the output of the American colonial presses between 1739 and 1742. If there is any Christian historical figure with which to compare Whitefield, it would be Billy Graham in the twentieth century. But Graham was following a path that Whitefield cut first.

What made Whitefield and his gospel message so famous? First, Whitefield mastered the use of the new media of his time. Cultivating a vast network of newspaper publicity, printers, and letter-writing correspondents, Whitefield used all means available to get the word out about the gospel. He employed the best new media experts of the time, whether they agreed with his gospel message or not. Most importantly, he partnered with Benjamin Franklin of Philadelphia, who became Whitefield's key printer in America, even though Franklin was no evangelical. Their business relationship transformed into a close friendship, although Whitefield routinely pressed Franklin about his need for Jesus. "As you have made a pretty considerable progress in the mysteries of electricity," Whitefield wrote to Franklin in 1752, "I would now humbly recommend to your diligent unprejudiced pursuit and study the mystery of the new-birth." Franklin never accepted Whitefield's evangelistic overtures, but Franklin always insisted that Whitefield was a man of impeccable integrity.

Whitefield also wielded incredible God-given talent for preaching. I wish we had a YouTube clip of Whitefield's preaching, but we can imagine what it was like to hear him based on the testimonies of contemporaries. David Garrick, one of England's most famous actors of the time, noted with a touch of jealousy that Whitefield could "make men weep or tremble by his varied utterances of the word 'Mesopotamia.'" Whitefield trained as an actor himself as a young man, and he adapted theater techniques to his preaching. Taking on the character of biblical figures during his sermons (which were often delivered outdoors to accommodate the vast crowds), he would weave dra-



matic, emotional stories rather than reciting dry doctrine from a written text. Whitefield was also able to project his resonant voice far across the wide fields. Franklin estimated that as many as thirty thousand people could hear Whitefield speaking at one time—without electric amplification, of course.

Whitefield's talent for media and public performance raises the question of his sincerity. Was he just an evangelical salesman, more concerned with his own fame and profit than really bringing people to God? Whitefield confessed his struggles with the "fiery trial of popularity" that came along with his celebrity status, including the temptations of arrogance and self-indulgence. But Whitefield seems to have weathered that trial as well as any famous pastor. He did not personally profit much from his ministry. Most of his donation revenues went into his charitable projects (especially an orphanage in Georgia), and into the costs of traveling all over Britain and America. Whitefield's greatest personal failing was one shared by many prominent whites in America: he was a slave owner. He did criticize masters' abuse of slaves in the South and believed that Christian masters should evangelize and educate enslaved people. But this idea of "benevolent" enslavement strikes modern observers as an insufferable contradiction. Whitefield, along with other slave-owning Founders (including Ben Franklin), compounded the glaring incongruity of holding people in bondage while trumpeting the value of liberty.

In spite of his obvious failings, Whitefield was a gospel minister of great seriousness. The Bible, he proclaimed, showed that people's sins separated them from God, but that Jesus offered them forgiveness and freedom through his death on the cross, and his resurrection from the dead. That message drove Whitefield to risk health and safety in his relentless schedule. Although it is impossible to count precisely, he probably delivered around 18,000 sermons during his ministry, routinely preaching twice or more a day. He survived multiple assassination attempts by people who hated him, or who wanted to become famous themselves. Not only did he traverse the length of the American colonies from Maine to Georgia, but he made an incredible thirteen transatlantic voyages between Britain and America, any one of which could easily have led to his death. His strength finally ran out on his last visit to America, where he died (and is buried) in Newburyport, Massachusetts in 1770.

Sola Gratia: Understanding Grace Alone

By David Steel



On October 31st, 1517, Martin Luther hammered his now famous *Ninty-Five Theses to the castle door at Wittenberg.* It wasn't long before his "beef" with Rome went viral and led to his excommunication. Less than four years later, Luther was summoned to appear at the Diet of Worms. He was asked if the books, which were publicly displayed, were his. Indeed they were, according to Luther. When Luther was asked to recant, his response reverberated throughout Germany and echoed around the world: "Unless I am convicted by Scripture and plain reason—I do not accept the authority of the popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other—my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against con-

science is neither right nor safe. Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise.”

The central question of the Reformation was, “How can a sinful person stand in the presence of a holy God?” We might say, “How is a person saved?” Before we answer this important question, we turn our attention to a question that lurks in the background, namely, “Why do we need saving?” Ephesians 2:1-3 provides a sobering answer:

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

Paul tells us in verse 1 that, apart from grace, we are dead in trespasses and sins. Simply put, unregenerate people are spiritual corpses, destitute and without life. They lack the desire and ability to approach God or please him in any way. According to Ephesians 2:2, apart from grace, we are walking according to the dictates of this world; following the prince of the power of the air. That is, prior to receiving grace, we willingly followed the devil and lived according to his delights. Additionally, we lived according to the passion of the flesh and were in bondage to sinful impulses (verse 3). We were lovers of self and incapable of breaking free from the demands of sin.

“First, salvation is generated by God. The Bible is clear about this..”

And apart from grace, we were children of wrath (verse 3b). Apart from grace, we were wicked (Jeremiah 17:9) and unrighteous (Romans 3:10). We had no desire for God (Romans 3:11) and had no inclination to do good for the glory of God (Romans 3:12). Indeed, we hated God and were hostile to him (Romans 3:13-17; 8:7-8). We were slaves to sin (John 8:34) and unable to come to Christ apart from God’s empowerment (John 6:44, 65). It is in this context that we begin to comprehend the need for God’s grace. Who is behind our salvation? And how are we saved from the wrath of God? Ephesians 2:4-9 helps us make sense of these questions and offers hope for needy people.

Salvation Is Generated By God

First, salvation is generated by God. The Bible is clear about this. Indeed, salvation belongs to the Lord (Jonah 2:9).

The Fact of Regeneration

Regeneration is the decisive act of God whereby he sovereignly grants new spiritual life to dead people. R.C. Sproul adds:

“Regeneration is the work of the Holy Spirit upon those who are spiritually dead. The Spirit recreates the human heart, quickening it from spiritual death to spiritual life. Regenerate people are new creations. Where formerly they had no disposition, inclination, or desire for the things of God, now they are disposed and inclined toward God. In regeneration, God plants a desire for Himself in the human heart that otherwise would not be there.”

Regeneration is the sole work of God. John writes, “But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:12-13).

Regeneration is the special work of the Holy Spirit. In his fascinating exchange with Nicodemus, Jesus helps this man understand the role of the Spirit: “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (John 3:5–6). Regeneration is the *sovereign work* of God. Paul makes this clear in his letter to the Romans: “For he says to Moses, ‘I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.’” So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy” (Romans 9:15–16).

Regeneration is never based on works: “*Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness ...*” (Romans 4:4–5). Regeneration precedes faith. While many evangelicals are content to believe that sinners must believe in order to be regenerated, the New Testament teaches something very different. John writes, “Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him” (1st John 5:1).

The Fallout of Grace

The blessing of receiving God’s grace become immediately clear in Ephesians 2:6. First, Paul says, “God raised us up with him.” *Sunegeirō* means “to raise together from mortal death to a new and blessed life that is dedicated to God.” Spiritually dead people are granted new life in Christ, which is all due to the grace of God. Second, God seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ. Notice that the purpose is to “show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:7).

Salvation Is By the Grace of God

Acknowledging that salvation is generated by God is a theological boon for the soul. But it doesn’t end there. We also recognize that salvation is by the grace of God.

The Basis of Salvation Has Always Been the Grace of God

There has never been another route to God. The basis of our salvation is grounded in God’s grace alone. Wayne Grudem writes, “God’s grace means God’s goodness toward those who deserve only punishment.” One definition of God’s grace is stated as follows: “Grace makes up the difference in what we lack.” Jerry Bridges confronts this pagan notion of grace and responds rightly by arguing that “grace is not a matter of God’s making up the difference, but of God’s providing all the ‘cost’ of salvation through His Son, Jesus Christ.”

There is no price tag on God’s grace. The grace He sovereignly grants to His people is a gift. And gifts by definition are free. There is no possible way to buy our way to God our work for our salvation. The basis of salvation is by grace alone. However, the means to receive it is by faith alone (Ephesians 2:8–9). “We are not in Christ because of our initiative,” writes Thomas Schreiner and Ardel Caneday, “But by virtue of God’s work in our lives. In other words, we do choose to be in Christ, but we only make this choice because God has effectively worked in our lives so that we desire to make this choice.” Notice the language of Scripture:

- “This is not your own doing.”
- “It is a gift of God.”
- “Not a result of works.”
- “So that no one can boast.”

How can a sinful person stand in the presence of a holy God? Salvation is by grace alone through faith

alone in Christ alone. Are you a “religious” person or do you have a relationship with God through Jesus Christ, by grace alone through faith alone? The Scripture is clear on this matter—“who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began...” (2nd Timothy 1:9).

Exactly how are we saved from God’s wrath? How are we saved from the penalty of sin and the power of sin? Again, salvation is by the grace of God alone. Yet, we are hardwired to think we only get what we *earn*. R.C. Sproul comments:

Perhaps the most difficult task for us to perform is to rely on God’s grace and God’s grace alone for salvation. It is difficult for our pride to rest on grace. Grace is for other people - for beggars. We don’t want to live by a heavenly reward system. We want to earn our own way and atone for our own sins. We like to think that we will go to heaven because we deserve to be there.

Final Thoughts

Martin Luther died in the early hours of February 18th, 1546. His final words are consistent with the discoveries he made and fought for: “We are beggars. This is true.” Are you a beggar? Or are you too proud to receive God’s grace? Are you totally dependent upon the grace of God? Do you believe in sola gratia or do you hold to grace plus self-effort or grace plus self-discipline, ad infinitum, ad nauseam?

Salvation is generated by God, by grace alone. This mighty theological reality humbles us and causes us to recognize that we, like Luther, are only spiritual beggars. This weighty theological reality reminds us that God’s grace is totally undeserved! But we are also reminded that since God has been gracious to us, we, in turn, are called to be gracious to other people. Paul writes, “For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God” (2nd Corinthians 4:15). We are completely dependent upon that grace of God in Christ. This is the critical gospel truth that the Reformers rediscovered in the sixteenth century. They called it *Sola Gratia*—grace alone. And a rediscovery of the Gospel brought radical life change. This is the reign of sovereign grace in the soul of man!

The reign of sovereign grace changed the life of an Augustinian monk and propelled him onto the world stage as he went from Wittenberg and Worms, to Wartburg where he translated the Greek New Testament, and further fueled the fires of the Reformation cause in Europe. Has the Gospel brought change into your life? Do you stand forgiven by a holy God on the basis of God’s grace alone through faith alone? Let us glory in the grace of God as He makes us into the people he wants us to be! *Sola Gratia!*

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A Brief Introduction to the Life and Ministry of William Tyndale

By Stephen Nichols



William Tyndale's life story is one of adventure (see the movie *God's Outlaw*; 1986).

This is not the story of some scholarly, ivory-tower theologian. Tyndale had a singular desire, and that was to see the Word of God available in the *native language* of his people. The people of his time did not have the Bible available to them—it was only available in Latin, which few people could read. Even many of the priests didn't know Latin. This was a time in the Church when there was simply not wide-spread access to the Word of God. And without access to the Word of God, one cannot hear or know the Gospel.

Tyndale was sometimes referred to as God's outlaw. That's indeed what he was. Tyndale wanted precisely this—for people to hear and know the Gospel. But this was against the law in England at that time—a law that, if broken, was punishable by

death. And so, Tyndale realized that he could not complete his translation work in England. Therefore, he left and went to Mainz, Germany. The city of Mainz has a rich history in printing because that's where the very first printing press was set up by Johannes Gutenberg. And, of course, the first book to come off of Gutenberg's press was the Bible—the Gutenberg Bible—written in Latin.

So Tyndale went there to print the Bible in English for the first time in history. He assumed a false name so that he could fly under the radar, and he gathered just a few people to work on this project with him, selecting a printer that he could trust.

The Secretive Work of William Tyndale

William's group would do their work during the day, going about their normal business that would pay the bills as a printer and keep the shop open. After they all went home in the evening hours, they would quietly make their way back to the shop, and overnight, they would work on printing the Bible in English. At some point, one of them betrayed Tyndale, turning him over to the authorities. As the authorities came, Tyndale's betrayer had a change of mind, and just as he tipped off the authorities, he also gave Tyndale a warning that the authorities were coming for him.

Tyndale quickly gathered up as many of the pages as he could. He'd only made it into the first

few chapters of Matthew, so he gathered up the few pages that were printed, bundled them in his satchel, and ran out the back door of the print shop, literally as the authorities were coming in. He ended up going to the city of Wittenberg, where he associated himself with—and learned from—Martin Luther. Yet, his commitment remained to print the Word of God in English, and God blessed his efforts. He succeeded in his mission and produced the Tyndale New Testament.

God's Outlaw

The fascinating thing is that approximately 85% of the King James text is taken from the original Tyndale translation from Latin. And of course, many of the English texts since then have come back to the King James as their base. So, as we sit today and read our different versions—for instance, the English Standard Version—we need to remember the debt that we owe to William Tyndale. He eventually was caught and martyred for his commitment to see the Word of God in English. His status as God's Outlaw, while a burden to him in life, became one of the greatest gifts to the Church.

Sola Fide: Trusting in the One Who Saves

By Grant Castleberry

Critical to the Reformation was the recovery of the great doctrine of justification by faith. Martin Luther believed this doctrine was the doctrine on which the Church stands or falls. I will not assume that everyone understands the meaning of the word *justification*. But by *justification*, both Reformers and Catholics were referring to the act by which God granted sinners to enter into His favor.

The Disagreement Over Faith Alone

Protestants assert the Bible teaches that we are justified by grace alone (Ephesians 2:8-9) through Christ's work alone (Galatians 2:21; 1 Corinthians 15:1-4) in faith alone (Galatians 2:16; Romans 3:21-25). The Protestant Reformers believed all three of these elements were equally and necessarily true. We are saved by Christ alone because it is His obedience and substitutionary death, which is credited to us as "righteousness" (Romans 1:17; 5:18-19). We are saved by grace alone because all of Christ's benefits are given to us as a "gift" apart from works. And finally, we receive the gift of Christ's righteousness by faith alone.

The Catholic Church believed (and still maintains) that we are justified by six other key virtues in addition to faith. They include *fear, hope, love, penitence, the sacraments, and a life of obedience*. In addition to faith, the Catholic Church taught that these six virtues were necessary for men to enter into the favor of God. The big problem with this doctrine, of course, is that there is no Scripture to support it whatsoever. The Bible never asserts that we are justified by fear, hope, love, penitence, the sacraments, or obedience.

Catholics like to point to James 2:24, where James asserts that we are justified by "faith and works". But in the second chapter of James, he is not referring to the *act* of justification, but the *assurance* of justification. That is clear from James 2:14, where he asserts, "*What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him?*" Notice what James is addressing. James is concerned with those who claim to have saving faith, but exhibit no evidence of it



in their lives. He asks specifically, “*Can that faith save him?*” James is not answering the question about how we are justified, but instead, teaching us about what type of faith justifies.

The Nature of Saving Faith

This leads to an important question, “What is justifying faith?” If faith is the instrument by which we are justified, then what does this faith consist of? Catholics and the Reformers could not even agree on this question. For Catholics taught that faith consisted of assent (*assensus*) and knowledge (*notitia*). Knowledge referred to the awareness of the truths of Christianity: Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection. Assent is the intellectual belief that these were indeed true. One must simply believe in her or his mind that Jesus is Lord and is risen from the dead. But Protestants did not believe that intellectual assent completely captured how the Bible referred to faith. They said that true faith trusted and placed its confidence in Christ himself. This was more than mere intellectual assent. This was *trusting* Christ as an act of the will (*fiducia*). This was the type of faith that Jesus demanded over and over again in the gospels when He entreated His would-be disciples to “follow” Him (Luke 9:23; Luke 18:18-30). It was not enough to merely believe in Him with intellectual knowledge. But they must place all their confidence and trust in Him.

This Reformation and biblical idea of trust in Christ is beautifully preserved in Question 60 of the *Heidelberg Catechism* (1561). The question asks, “*How are you righteous before God?*” The following answer is given:

Only by true faith in Jesus Christ. In spite of the fact that my conscience accuses me that I have grievously sinned against all the commandments of God, and have not kept any of them, and that I am still ever prone to all that is evil, nevertheless, God, without any merit of my own, out of pure grace, grants me the benefits of the perfect expiation of Christ, imputing to me his righteousness and holiness as if I had never committed a single sin or had ever been sinful, having fulfilled myself all the obedience which Christ has carried out for me, if only I accept such favor with a trusting heart.

I love the last sentence of that answer. “If only I accept such favor with a trusting heart.” That is a true conversion. That is the essence of the Christian faith. Trusting Christ with all of our hearts as an act of the will.

Where Does Faith Come From?

I once heard a friend say that Christian faith was just like anything else. The faith we place in the sun to come up the next day. The faith we have that the news will be on at the television at night. Or as a religious comparison, the faith that Muslims have in Allah. But that understanding of Christian faith fails to understand not only what we have previously argued about faith being an act of the will, but it also misses the nature of our own depravity. Such faith cannot be conjured up by our enslaved souls. We must be regenerated and given new hearts in order to believe (Jeremiah 31; Ezekiel 36). Left to ourselves, we are “dead in our trespasses and sins” (Ephesians 2:1-8). That is why faith is described as a “gift”. Morally speaking, we do not trust God. We do not believe God at His Word. We reject God, and we rebel against His desires. So the Holy Spirit must regenerate our hearts and wills so that we can exercise faith.

This is why when Nicodemus asks about being “born again”, Jesus answers him by pointing him to the work of the Holy Spirit. “*The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit*” (John 3:8). Jesus’s response to Nicodemus is to point to the supernatural act of the Holy Spirit in giving the

gift of new birth. The disparaging part about this for us is that this means we cannot control who has saving faith. There are no human formulas to engineer faith. There are no “programs” or “strategies”, which are guaranteed success. No, the gift of faith is a work of the Holy Spirit, and we do not know where He “blows”. But we do know that “faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ” (Romans 10:17). Therefore, our vigilance must be in gospel proclamation and articulation. That is our task in today’s world.

Reformation Faith

On this day, the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, it is important that we remember these debates and the heroes who led in the Reformation. But more importantly, we should remember and champion the doctrines and truths, which they taught. That would be their desire, I am sure. And no truth is more important than the fact that we may be justified before God through simple, child-like faith. This is the truth of the gospel, which we must champion above all-else. If we do that, then we will have honored God and the Reformers well.

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The Reformation, Preaching, and What is Needed Today

By Josh Buice



Five centuries ago, an unknown Augustinian monk named Martin Luther rocked the world with his *Reformation* theology and preaching. What started out as an attempt to engage in a debate turned into the greatest awakening in human history since the explosion that occurred at Pentecost.

In 1517, the front of the Castle Church's door served as a large social media outlet in primitive form. Long before the social media platforms of our day with smartphones and apps at our fingertips, Luther, and his colleagues would enter into friendly and passionate discussions by nailing documents containing their ideas on specific matters to the front of the Castle Church's door. Little did Luther know, God would have other plans for his *Ninety-Five Theses*. Rather than a localized debate in the city of Wittenberg Germany—those statements would spark a world-wide debate that would end in Luther's anathema and the unleashing of the Protestant movement.

Not long before Luther's spark, a Roman Catholic named Johannes Gutenberg converted an old wine press into a printing press with moveable type. This invention would revolutionize the world of literature. Little did Gutenberg know, but God would take a Roman Catholic's invention and use it as a weapon against the Roman Catholic Church. When Luther's *Ninety-Five Theses* were printed on the moveable type press and distributed all around Europe—it would spark a massive wildfire of controversy.

Eventually, Luther himself would come to faith in Christ through his reading of Romans 1:17. After his conversion, his protest would intensify greatly. In 1520, he gathered his theology students on the outer edge of Wittenberg and publicly burned the papal bull that he received from Pope Leo X calling for him to recant of his beliefs and

tactics. It was clear at this point—what began as an inner debate was now moving on toward a collision of two worlds. As Luther saw it—it was the gospel of Christ in contrast to the false gospel of

works—clearly seen in the selling of indulgences.

In 1521, Luther was summoned to stand before the imperial Diet in the city of Worms. Although his friends cautioned him against appearing based on the fact that anti-Reformation protests had been taking place where Luther's books were being burned in the streets. Luther's friends feared he would be burned too. Nevertheless, he insisted that they travel to Worms and, in Luther's mind, even if they must go through the gates of hell, he would appear there to defend the gospel.

After preaching his way all the way to Worms, Luther arrived in the city in a covered wagon. The entire city was filled with an intense buzz as everyone wanted to see this monk who dared to stand up to the Holy Roman Empire and the pope himself. Luther was a protestant celebrity preacher before such a thing was cool.

After arriving in the city, the following day, two guards made their way to the place where Luther and his friends were staying. They escorted him to the bishop's palace where the Diet was being held. So many people were gathered in the streets to see Luther, they had to slip him in a back door of the palace.

When he walked into the room to stand before the royal assembly which included representatives from as far away as Spain, Italy, and various other places throughout Europe—the emperor Charles V was also present. The tension could be cut with a knife. Luther appeared in his humble monk's attire. When Charles V first saw the monk enter the room, he said, "He will not make a heretic out of me."

"The answer came from the royal assembly—he could have one day to consider his response."

In front of the room was a table that contained all of Luther's books. The spokesman of the emperor demanded that Luther not speak until he was called upon. Finally, pointing to a pile of books on the table, he asked, "Are these your books? If so, will you recant?" Luther finally spoke. In a humble tone, he admitted that all of the books on the table were indeed his books. However, in a strange twist to the tense moment, Luther asked for more time to consider his answer.

Perhaps caught off guard by the royal assembly's desire for Luther to recant of every word and every line in every book made him pause and ask for additional time to weigh out the consequences of his answer.

Anyone who has written anything—blog or book—has certainly regretted specific word choices and arguments at times. For Luther, this was not just a few lines in a few books—it was everything he believed.

The answer came from the royal assembly—he could have one day to consider his response. The following day, at 6:00 o'clock in the evening, Luther was readmitted into the emperor's presence. The hall was filled with personalities, politicians, and invited guests. The air was thick with intense drama. The temperature of the room was sweltering due to the people, intensity, and the torches that were used to light the room. Luther's face was filled with beads of sweat as he considered his answer.

After considering his answer, the rulers who were present in the room expected and even demanded that he come in with an apology and beg for forgiveness. Rather than a humble soft tone, Luther stood upright and spoke loudly with great confidence.

Luther stated emphatically that he would not retract anything he had written in the books and anything that he had said about the Roman Catholic Church in his public polemical attacks. As Luther reasoned, the Emperor shouted "NO!" to Luther's comments, but the poised Reformer continued

to speak. He insisted that if he is wrong, he must be refuted with Scripture—and he would be the first to burn his books. Finally, one last time the spokesman of the emperor demanded an answer from the zealous monk, “Will you recant?” It’s at this point that Luther said the following:

“I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant of anything since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. I cannot do otherwise. Here I stand—may God help me. AMEN.”

As Luther was being escorted out of the room—shouts of protest and requests for Luther’s life were ringing in his ears. As he was taken back to his private quarters—upon entering the room—he was instantly relieved that he had come through. He then turned to a friend and said, “If I had a thousand heads I would rather have them all lopped off than to abandon my gospel.” If the *Ninety-Five Theses* in 1517 was the spark of the Reformation, Luther’s stand at Worms was the explosion of the Reformation. As Luther made his stand, we too continue to stand in our day.

Reformation Preaching

Reformations are not led by lazy men. Martin Luther had his flaws, and we must be balanced in how we view historic figures. We should remember—especially in this year that we commemorate the 500th anniversary of the historic movement, that we know as the Protestant Reformation—Luther was a sinner who needed a Savior. In all of Luther’s faults, it must be pointed out that he was no lazy man. Each Sunday, Luther would begin the day of worship at five o’clock in the morning with a sermon on an epistle. At ten o’clock he would preach from a Gospel. In the afternoon, Luther would preach a sermon from an Old Testament passage. Through the week, Luther remained busy in his preaching. On Monday and Tuesday, he would preach from the catechism. On Wednesday he would preach from Matthew. On Thursday and Friday, Luther focused on the apostolic letters. The Gospel of John would be his focus for Saturday.

Luther is remembered for many things, such as his Wittenberg protest, his theology, his unyielding courage in the midst of theological darkness, and his work as a professor and an author in his classic, *The Bondage of the Will*. However, at the foundation of Luther’s existence as a Christian is the preacher who emerged from his passion for the true gospel of King Jesus. Between 1510 and 1546 Luther preached approximately 3,000 sermons. He preached several times each week—sometimes two or more times each day.

“The story of Luther cannot be told without the story of the Reformation.”

This was the approach of Luther as we survey church history, we see similar passion in other places, such as Geneva with John Calvin, and Scotland with John Knox. All of these men who led the Reformation in their day were pas-

sionate preachers of God’s Word. That’s why we know them today. They did not play at preaching, and as a result, they did not disappear into the pages of history.

The Need of the Hour

The story of Luther cannot be told without the story of the Reformation. Likewise, the story of the Reformation cannot be told without the story of Luther. The two are inseparable. As we think about the need of Luther’s hour, we must look to our present day and consider the need of this present hour.

We Must Not Neglect the Mind

Today, we have far too much laziness in our American evangelical culture. Too many Chris-

tians have capitulated on the idea of pragmatic church growth schemes in order to see their churches increase and become successful. Today's church is weak and superficial. In many circles, it's as if the mind has no place in worship. Everything is driven by feelings, emotions, and shallow theological clichés.

Jesus, in an answer to a scribe who asked about the greatest commandment, said the following, "And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength" (Mark 12:30). God desires for His people to think. Luther understood this point as a part of the discipleship commission (Matthew 28:18-20). That's why, when you travel all throughout Europe, you discover that as the Reformation spread—universities were setup to teach people more than economics and world history. They were used to instruct people with the gospel of Christ.

That same thing is true with our first universities here in America. Consider how Harvard was instituted to train ministers of the gospel. Today, such institutions have been overtaken by liberals who deny the gospel of Christ. As we consider the fact that God is interested in our minds, we must not approach our worship with a mindless approach to Christianity.

We Need Courageous Preachers

Why was Luther's preaching so relentless and bold? Luther believed that preaching was a noble and serious task. According to Luther, "The pulpit is the throne for the Word of God." Luther ascended the pulpit with the Word of God in complete confidence. He pointed to the Scriptures and asserted at one point, "The Holy Spirit is the Author of this book." He went on to say, "They are God's Scriptures and God's Word."

When Luther burned the papal bull in protest in 1520, he was drawing a line in the sand. When Luther refused to recant at the Diet of Worms in 1521, he sent shockwaves throughout all of Europe directly to Rome. Luther was not approaching the weekly preaching of God's Word with a slapstick approach, in hopes to *grow* his following. Luther had a following and it was based on his unwillingness to compromise the true gospel. Today's evangelical church has a reversed trend. Many popular preachers have a following, and lead mega-churches, simply because they refuse to preach the gospel boldly.

The need of the hour is for bold preachers to confront the shallow and man-centered theology of our day with the true gospel of King Jesus. No reform happens without a cost. No genuine reformation will happen without bold and courageous people who continue to uphold the true gospel of Christ to a lost and dying world. John Huss understood the cost and he gave his life for the cause. Luther would come 100 years later and put his neck on the line.

Tyndale would read Luther's works and eventually become a believer. He would dedicate his life to the translation of the Bible into English and as a result, he would suffer the flames of the infamous stake. The Reformers were bold, their preaching was courageous, and their sacrifice was based on the true gospel of Christ. They were not puppeteers or comedians. They were preachers, Bible translators, and faithful Christians who obeyed God. The health and strength of our local churches depends on a serious approach to worship, preaching, and missions. Reformations don't happen by accident. The need of the hour is for bold preaching to thunder from pulpits around the world by men who have great confidence that God's Word will always accomplish God's purpose and will never return void.

Luther: The Monk Who Set the World Aflame

By James Forbis



When tasked with writing about Martin Luther there are many ways in which one can approach the man. There are books on his influence on the Christian life, biographies aplenty, commentaries on his Tabletalks, commentaries on his letters and writings, there are even books devoted to the sheer volume of pithy sayings he had. I myself am quite fond of *The Wit of Martin Luther* and find the collection of sayings to be useful in sermon prep or whenever I want to rib one of my friends or family members. For example, I once sent this quote to my father on the occasion of his birthday, “Whoever is not handsome at twenty, not strong at thirty, not wise at forty and is not rich at fifty might as well give up hope. Age does not protect against foolishness.” All this to say the man is well written about and so one must ask the question what else needs to be said?

Luther is, in fact, one of the most written about men to ever walk the face of the earth. Except

for Jesus Christ of Nazareth, there is no one else who has been written about more than Luther. My goal is not to write anything relatively new or newsworthy; I don't have the historian qualifications like Steven J. Nichols or Carl Trueman or any of Luther's other magnificent biographers to do that. My goal is to give a fresh perspective on the very beginnings of Martin Luther. To open the door to some who've never experienced the monk from Wittenberg and invite them in to study him for the first time. I love Martin Luther. I love his stubbornness, wit, bluntness, and courage. I love that God used one of the most unlikely people this side of Heaven to change the world forever. I love that God used a man who once exclaimed "Love God? I hate him!" to bring the Scriptures to the people in their own language and give them a powerfully glorious love for God. I have done my best to give a broad enough overview of who Martin Luther was before he became the Martin Luther many Christians know today so as to whet the appetite for deeper study and reflection.

For reference and personal help, I've included two timelines that depict major milestones in the life of Martin Luther. The first is a timeline before his exile and the second picks up right after the Diet of Worms and his subsequent exile. This is not an exhaustive biography, and I only deal with Martin Luther up till the posting of the *Ninety-Five Theses* on the door at Castle Church in Wittenberg, but it is my sincere prayer that those who take the time to read this will desire to learn more about the monk who set the world aflame.

Timeline Prior to Diet of Worms

- **1483:** Born in Eisleben on November 10th
- **1492-98:** Attended schools at Mansfield, Magdeburg, and Eisenach
- **1501-05:** Attended the University of Erfurt. Earns B.A. in 1502, M.A. in 1505
- **1505:** Luther makes his vow to St. Anne on July 2nd to become a monk. Enters Augustinian cloister in Erfurt
- **1507:** Luther is ordained and performs his first Mass
- **1509:** Earns a B.A. in the Bible
- **1510:** Makes a pilgrimage to Rome on behalf of the monks and his mentor Johann von Staupitz.
- **1511:** Enters the Black Cloister, the Augustinian monastery in Wittenberg
- **1512:** Earns Th.D. (Doctorate of Theology) and appointed as lecturer of theology at the University of Wittenberg
- **1513-17:** Expositional lectures preached on Psalms, Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews
- **1517:** Oct. 31st Luther posts his *Ninety-Five Theses* to the door of the Castle Church
- **1518:** Heidelberg Disputation
- **1518:** Debates Cardinal Cajetan in Augsburg
- **1519:** Luther has his "tower experience" or breakthrough on justification by faith alone
- **1519:** Debates Johann von Eck in Leipzig
- **1520:** Writes the Three Treatises
- **1520:** Receives the Papal Bull of Excommunication and subsequently burns it publicly
- **1521:** Appears at the Diet of Worms on April 16th -18th

- **1521:** Placed under the Imperial Ban, condemned as a heretic, and deemed outlawed, all in May.

Timeline Post Diet of Worms

- **1521-22:** Luther is in exile at Wartburg Castle from May of 1521 to March of 1522
- **1522:** Comes out of exile, returns to the Black Cloister in Wittenberg
- **1523:** Writes *On Temporal Authority*
- **1523:** Secures the rescue of the nuns from Marienthron abbey on April 4th; Katharina von Bora is among the rescued nuns.
- **1524:** Publishes first hymnal
- **1524-25:** Peasants War occurs, Erasmus writes *Diatribes on Free Will*, Luther reclaims the reigns of the Reformation
- **1525:** Marries the former nun, Katharina von Bora, on June 13th
- **1525:** Writes *Bondage of the Will* in response to Erasmus' *Diatribes on Free Will*
- **1526:** Writes *German Mass*
- **1527:** Black Plague arrives at Wittenberg. Black Cloister, the Luther's home, becomes a hospital
- **1527:** Composes his greatest hymn, "A Mighty Fortress is Our God"
- **1529:** Attends Marburg Colloquy on October 1st - 4th to bridge Swiss & German Reformation
- **1529:** October 4th Luther fails to agree on Lord's Supper doctrine with Huldrych Zwingli of Zurich. Causes rift that exists today between Lutheran and Reformed churches
- **1529:** Writes *Small Catechism*
- **1530:** *Augsburg Confession* is written primarily by Philip Melancthon
- **1534:** Published his completed translation of the Bible into German
- **1546:** Preaches his last sermon at Wittenberg on January 17th
- **1546:** Traveled to his birth home of Eisleben to help solve a political dispute where he took gravely ill and died on February 18th. Entombed at Wittenberg in the Castle Church on February 22nd.

Beginnings of Martin Luther

Martin Luther was born on November 10th, 1483, to Hans and Margaret Luther in the small town of Eisleben. His father Hans was born to be a farmer and grew up in a farming family, but according to archaic medieval inheritance laws, he was relegated to finding his own fortune and profession in life. Hans started out working as a miner in Eisleben and worked his way up to mine manager before the family had to move to Mansfeld just a few short weeks after the birth of Martin. Hans did very well for himself and for his family and quickly earned the position of manager in Mansfeld's mine. This would not only give the Luther family social mobility, but also a sense of financial freedom, and moved them out of the poor class to the upper levels of the working class.

At the age of five, a young Martin Luther was sent to school in Mansfeld and then a private

school at age thirteen in Magdeburg, which was roughly forty miles from his parents' home in Mansfeld. He then was transferred to a school in Eisenach roughly one hundred miles away from home. Luther didn't write much about his early childhood days or his schoolboy days. What he has written paints the picture that he hated grammar school and despised his parents for sending him so far away. As Martin grew up in this working-class home, his father became increasingly insistent that Martin should not be relegated to a life of hard labor. Martin was to become a lawyer and his parents both encouraged him to pursue liberal arts and law at Erfurt University. This background in law would later be a useful skill to rely on as Luther penned his arguments for Reformation and debated the scholars of the Catholic Church, Erasmus, Zwingli, and others, but for now, Martin was focused on graduating and appeasing his father's wishes.

Martin graduated from the Erfurt University in one year with his Bachelor's degree and then only two years later with his Master's degree. Hans was very proud of his son and was known to brag about him in the taverns and city square in Mansfeld. Hans was so proud that he began to address Luther with the German pronoun *ihr*, which is the more formal and respectful "you", instead of the very familiar *du*, this to demonstrate he, Hans, considered his son an equal. A professional man. Martin was now well on his way to continuing on at Erfurt in pursuit of a Juris Doctorate until the stormy evening on July 2nd, 1505, that radically changed not only Martin's life, but the very fabric of the Roman Catholic Church and all of Christendom.

On the night of July 2nd 1505, Martin was on his way traveling back to Erfurt from the village of Stotternheim, where his family had relocated. All at once he was caught up in a sudden summer thunderstorm and fearing for his life began to run erratically to the cover of some trees. While the lightning was flashing around him and the deafening thunder filled the countryside, Luther clung to a tree and cried out to Saint Anne, the mother of the Virgin Mary and patron saint of miners, "Saint Anne, help me! I shall become a monk!" And so it was, this young promising German law student was to become a monk. What though drove young Martin to make such a serious vow or to even keep to it? Well, for one thing, Martin was already struggling with his faith in God. He was caught up in such spiritual anxiety that it would keep him up at all hours of the night. He would relentlessly pray to God, to the saints, and go to confession as a law student, even to satisfy the vengeful and wrathful God that he believed was out to get him. Therefore because all of this and in a moment of panic and fear Luther cried out to his family's patron saint that he would become a monk if he survived the storm, and so a monk he became. Thus the life of this quiet, introverted law student would forever be changed, and by the sheer sovereignty of God, so too would the world be changed.

Martin Luther, the Monk

On July 2nd, 1505, Martin threw a "going away party" of sorts for his classmates as one final last "hurrah" before he would enter the monastery. He gave to them his law books and his master's cap and withdrew from the University of Erfurt doctoral law program. He and his friends drank and reveled late into the night as Luther recounted the tale of the storm and how he had pledged to Saint Anne that he would become a monk if she would only save him from death during the storm. And so, the following morning, Martin said his final goodbyes and proceeded to the Augustinian cloister in Erfurt to live out his life devoted to orders of the Catholic Church and God. We know that Luther desired to have his father's blessing on this sudden change in career, but Luther's father was not the least bit pleased and withdrew himself from his son's life. Luther, by trading in the master's cap and books on law for celibacy and a monk's tunic, in essence, ostracized himself from his father for the remainder of his life, save for a few times after his first Mass, and later his wedding.

Upon entering the cloister in Erfurt, Luther was put on "probation" for one year, during which

he was referred to as a “novice” and nothing could be further from the truth. Luther was a novice in spirituality, in pursuing personal holiness, knowing God, and most significantly in feeling loved by God. You see, Martin joined the cloister in hopes that this would bring him out of spiritual depression and loneliness, but in fact, Luther never felt more abandoned by God than he did in the cloister. This sense of abandonment accentuated his feelings of being lost, that he was always condemned by God, and fueled his spiritual anxiety or *anfechtung*. This word, *anfechtung*, can roughly be translated and described as “crisis” or “intense struggle”, or in Martin’s case, “an intense spiritual struggle and a crisis. In fact, it is better to use the word in the plural, *anfechtungen*, for in reality, a series of spiritual crises marked Luther’s early life of study.”

It was during this time of intense spiritual struggle that he devoted himself to the rigid lifestyle of a monk in hopes that it might free him from his depression and bondage. Luther said once during one of his Tabletalks that he later felt tortured during his twenty years as a monk: “I tortured myself with praying, fasting, keeping vigils, and freezing...the cold alone was enough to kill me...and I inflicted upon myself such pain as I would never inflict again, even if I could.” Martin would go on to recount that “if any monk ever got to heaven by monkery, then I should have made it all. All my monastery companions who knew me can testify to that...if it had lasted much longer, I would have killed myself with vigils, praying, reading, and the other labors.” In all this Luther never found the hope and the freedom from sin that he was looking for. In all of this, Luther never felt the love of God, the hope, or peace that God affords those who cry out to Him, or the true forgiveness of his sins. Yet, in all of his struggles, he persisted and clung to the vow he made to Saint Anne because he didn’t want to incur the wrath of God for a broken vow.

During one of his marathon confession sessions with his mentor, Johann von Staupitz, Martin was instructed to go to school once more to learn the Bible and learn theology so that maybe this would bring some comfort to him. Luther was sent to the University of Wittenberg, that Frederick the Wise had created just years before, along with Staupitz and others. Luther, while at the university, lectured on both the arts and the philosophy of Aristotle, in which he was able to put his law studies to good use and began developing his skills as an orator and teacher. Staupitz had high hopes that, while in university, Luther would be so occupied with his studies and lecturing that he wouldn’t have the time in the day to worry about his spiritual anguish and struggles. Needless to say, Staupitz was wrong. Upon graduating in 1509 with his second B.A., but this one in Bible, Luther moved back to Erfurt and the Augustinian cloister to continue his monk duties and see his oath fulfilled.

“I fell to the ground, lifted my hands, and said, ‘Hail to thee, O Holy Rome’.”

While back in Erfurt, Luther was tasked with taking some important monastery documents to the Vatican in Rome. Staupitz saw this request from Rome as an incredible opportunity for Martin to “make peace with God”, and draw near to God and seek true repentance for his sins. Staupitz hoped that this trip to Rome would heal Luther, would set Luther on the path to success as a monk, and give Luther the desired level of personal holiness and piety he sought. Oddly enough it was this trip to Rome that started Luther on the journey to questioning everything the Catholic Church taught on forgiveness and justification.

When he arrived in Rome, he cried out in somewhat of a prayer to Rome itself, “I fell to the ground, lifted my hands, and said, ‘Hail to thee, O Holy Rome’.”

This excitement and anticipation soon left as he saw the debauchery all around him and saw

how the Catholic Church was doing nothing to abate the sinfulness of the “Holy City”. While Luther was in Rome, he ascended the Scala Sancta, the staircase that led to Pontius Pilate's throne, stopping to pray at each step as was tradition in order to relieve time in purgatory once he died. Well, when he made it to the top, Luther recalls that he cried out, “Who knows if this is true?” in regards to how this could free him from sin and some time in purgatory. Luther, on arrival in Rome, was optimistic about how Rome would fill him up spiritually, but when he left he was even more depressed and distraught than before.

The trip to the Vatican and Rome did nothing to silence the fear, anxiety, and disillusionment Luther felt towards God. If anything it only exacerbated it. Upon his arrival back at Erfurt, Luther confessed to Staupitz that he could not love God or understand God's love for him; in fact, Luther said “Love God? I can't love God; I hate him.” Staupitz then recommended that Luther devote himself to the studies of the church fathers and medieval theology. He believed this would end Luther's struggles with his faith and understanding of God. Therefore, Luther found himself once again back in Wittenberg, in school, pursuing a doctorate of theology. When he completed his doctorate in 1512, he summarily joined the faculty at the University of Wittenberg as a lecturer of theology and preacher.

Luther at Wittenberg

Luther did not realize at the moment, but his time spent in Wittenberg was just what the doctor ordered, so to speak. Staupitz, albeit in a roundabout way, would finally be right. Luther would find the spiritual relief he sought, and in doing so he would change the world. But for now, we still need to understand his backstory, before we get to the rest. Luther, a generally stubborn man, was going to need more than a quick fix before he was able to be reconciled to God and feel the love of God, and so Luther saw more spiritual heartache and depression before he saw the light shining brightly through Scripture. In fact, it would take Luther the better part of five years, from 1512-1517, to work through lectures on the Psalms, Romans, Galatians, and then Hebrews. It was in these lectures, however, that Luther started to truly see what the Scriptures taught and what they, in fact, did *not* teach. Some scholars like Carl Trueman, for example, have pointed out that it was during this time that Luther saw some of the Catholic Church's teachings as seriously misleading and flat-out wrong. Trueman points out that Luther shifted his views on the nature of sin and baptism to the radically left of what the Catholic Church taught:

“First, he changed his mind on the nature of sin and baptism. He had been taught that sin was a fomes, akin to a piece of tinder. The implication was that sin was a weakness that needed to be dealt with via the sacraments. One might say that such an understanding of sin meant baptism was understood as kind of damping down of the problem or a temporary fix. Once sin reared its ugly head within the life of the subject after baptism, then there was need for further moral triage in the form of the other sacraments. Luther, however, became convinced that sin meant that human beings were morally dead.”

During his doctoral work Luther was led to Peter Lombard's book, *Four Books of Sentences*, which was the quintessential systematic and logical treatment of doctrine at the time being; from Augustine and his many writings, to finally Paul the Apostle. It was in the writings of Paul that Luther became so engrossed with the Bible. It was in Paul that Luther saw the glory of how beautiful Scripture truly was, and how magnificent God really was. It was in the poetry of the Psalms, and through the letters of Paul, that Luther changed his thinking and theology. The countless nights spent laboring over the text in exegetical work only strengthened his new found views on sin and baptism. Luther realized that sinners were not merely defected humans (as the Catholic Church taught) and that sacraments could fix the sinner, but that sinners were *morally and spiritually bankrupt* and dead. Sin

was the core problem, the weed in a person's life that had to be eradicated by the salvific death of Jesus Christ, and no amount of sacraments could bring life to a dead person.

Lombard's book became trash to Luther, and he never once lectured from it again due to how it misconstrued Scripture and doctrine. Luther chose the Bible as his textbook and became a master at lecturing from it. In his lectures to his students, he expounded on Scripture through a humanistic hermeneutic, not like modern secular humanism that we've grown accustomed to that's used by liberal theologians and atheists, but a humanism that attempted to reclaim and return to Greek and Roman cultures. In many ways, it was an attempt at understanding the context of Scripture more faithfully and removing the blinders of scholasticism that had become popular in the medieval tradition. Luther adopted the battle cry of humanism, "*Ad Fontes*", which means

"Ultimately it was during these years that Luther, the monk, started to see his known world crumble and realize that God did love him..."

"to the fount" or "to the source", and in doing so based all of his study and teaching of Scripture alone. He went beyond the obstruction of tradition and directly to the original biblical text. This decision was paramount to the development of Luther as both a scholar and a pastor, and ultimately it was the fuel that Luther needed to become the spark that would set the religious world on fire in months to come. It was during these precious years of careful study that Luther would formulate the groundwork of his theological understanding of *faith alone*, the rallying cry of the Reformation, and that his faith would truly take sight. Luther started to see salvation as what God did for mankind, not what mankind does to get to God. Ultimately it was during these years that Luther, the monk, started to see his known world crumble and realize that God did love him, and that righteousness was within reach, but it would take some time before he was "all in". One author explains:

"As for salvation, the key idea that Luther begins to explore concerns "alien righteousness." This term simply means that the righteousness that God requires as our righteous judge cannot be produced by us because we are sinners as the root. This righteousness must come from outside of us; consequently, it is alien to us and not inherent within us. It would be a few years until these ideas reached a full crescendo for Luther, but even as early as 1516 his thinking was headed toward the Reformation's great principle of sola fide, or justification by faith alone."

The Indulgence Controversy, the Ninety-Five Theses, and the First Flames of Reformation

The year is 1517 and no one in all of Christendom, much less Martin Luther, could ever imagine the changes that were about to occur in the known world. The Catholic Church had no idea just how offensive they were going to come across, and Martin had no idea how radical he was about to be painted. All this to say, 1517 was going to become a year worth remembering.

During the 1400's, 1500's, and well into the 1600's, the practice of selling indulgences was quite commonplace and thought to be a perfectly normal part of Catholic life even though the Church officially decried its practice at the Council of Trent from 1545-1564. Indulgences originated around the veneration of the saints and the idea of purgatory. In Catholic theology, it was believed that saints had amassed a surplus of merit through their exceptionally holy lives. This surplus could then be conferred upon both living and dead souls, so as to alleviate any time they've racked up on their purgatory sentence, the place in which they must be purged of any remaining unholiness and unrighteousness before entering the gates of Heaven.

Since this surplus of merit originated from the long-dead saints, it seemed reasonable to give this merit to those who venerate their relics, bones, homes, etc. These gifts of merit from the supposed saints' surplus were called indulgences, and more often than not they were instituted in the form of a payment that had to be made to venerate or pray to the relics of the saints. In truth, it was a horrible fund-raising scheme that Rome had put together to raise the funds to build St. Peter's Basilica and support other papal projects that the Church could not afford using their own funds. It's to this specific controversy and a certain Pope Leo X that we now turn.

Pope Leo X, like his predecessors Nicholas V and Julius II, wanted to make St. Peter's Basilica was the most glorious and spiritually inspiring building in all of Rome. His greed and desire to spend his—or the Church's—money, though in such a way to maintain his high society lifestyle and lifestyle of his family, would seemingly come to ruin the Catholic Church and stall the construction of St. Peter's indefinitely. Pope Leo X needed an exorbitant amount of money to continue to construction of the Basilica. He also needed capital and caches of money to support his own agenda and lifestyle. These circumstances all came to a head when Pope Leo decided to institute the sale of special indulgences to raise the money for the completion of St. Peter's Basilica, and in doing so empowered a certain Dominican friar, who would become the bane of Martin Luther's immediate existence.



Johann Tetzel was a seventy-three year old Dominican friar who just happened to be the Catholic Church's most prolific and successful seller of indulgences since the early 1500's. Tetzel began to work for Pope Leo X's initiative to raise money for St. Peter's Basilica in 1516 and was well taken care of in this venture. Tetzel would go into villages throughout Germany and professionally have people turn out their pockets to fill the coffers of Rome by promising them that "as soon as a coin in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs"; meaning that as soon as peo-

ple paid for an indulgence, either for themselves or a deceased love one, their soul in purgatory would immediately be transported to Heaven. **The more of these indulgences that Tetzel sold,**



the richer Rome got, and so this little jingle helped to sell more and acted as a way to guilt people into buying more indulgences. Tetzel played to people's sense of responsibility to do all they could to free their loved ones from the bonds of purgatory and see to it that their eternal destination was one of Heaven and not Hell. The richer Rome got, the richer Tetzel got, and so it was a mutually beneficial relationship that stemmed from greed and essentially a tax on the poorest of people who were looking for hope in all the wrong places. Thankfully, however, Martin Luther now enters the picture

and begins to truly see the Catholic Church as the greedy and selfish entity that it had become.

Tetzel made his way to Juterbog, a village near Wittenberg, where Luther was and was proselytizing the sale of indulgences and stealing the people's money out from under them. Luther heard word of this charlatan and what he was doing and became intensely enraged that an authorized emissary of Pope Leo X was going around telling people they could buy their way and deceased family members way to Heaven. This completely went against everything he was learning about justification by faith and the breakthroughs he was having in his own lectures to his students at Wittenberg. Therefore, Martin Luther took action into his own hands and, in essence, lit a flame or protest that has yet to be extinguished.

Martin Luther, in response to Johann Tetzel's peddling of indulgences that was authorized by Pope Leo X, on October 31st, 1517, posted a series of objections on the church door at Castle Church in Wittenberg. These objections, now known as the *Ninety-Five Theses*, clearly laid out how biblically wrong the selling of indulgences to free deceased people's souls and the still living from the bonds of purgatory. These objections took the form of a challenge to an academic disputation on the issue of indulgences consisting of ninety-five theses or topics of debate. In the posted *Theses*, Luther asked many questions directed to Pope Leo X, such as why the pope would not release all the souls from purgatory out of love, while instead charging insurmountable amounts for it. He publicly called those who sold them "hawkers of indulgences", and referenced them as being "lustful" for fortune at the expense of the poor and uneducated. At the core of the *Theses*, though, was that the practice of selling indulgences became superior to the true need for repentance of the heart and trust in the death of Jesus Christ to forgive all sins.

Luther insisted that through the practice of buying and selling indulgences people would no longer trust in God for salvation, or trust in the Scriptures, but trust in the act of paying for their own sins with money. This transaction obviously could never be authorized by God because of what Scrip-

ture clearly teaches regarding how the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life and how Jesus the Christ became sin so that in Him all of mankind might become the righteousness of God. At first, Luther was wanting to condemn Tetzel for what he was doing and expose him as a fraud and swindler. He stated, “Christians are to be taught that if the pope knew the exactions of the indulgence preachers, he would rather that St. Peter’s church should go to the ashes, than that it should be built up with the skin, flesh, and bones of his sheep.” But later on, after the posting of the *Theses*, Luther realized the papacy was in on the scheme too. Luther was only trying to point the Church back to Scripture and point out the egregious error of the Pope for what he had authorized, and have Tetzel held accountable for his usurping actions. He supported his argument by using the same text that the sacrament of penance was associated with from the Latin Vulgate, and found it to be a mistranslation. Luther went back to the Greek text and saw that Matthew 4:17 was in fact not saying *penitentiam agite* (do penance), how the Latin Vulgate translated it, but it was literally saying “change your mind”.

The clear notable difference was that it was an internal heart change and not something that was ever meant to justify an external action. Luther, wanting to free his fellow Germans from this mistranslation and unbiblical action, never saw how his nailing of his *Ninety-Five Theses* to the Castle Church door would begin to unravel the fabric of Catholic teaching and fan into flame what came to be known as the *Reformation*; but soon he realized it was more than about a mistranslation. He realized it was about church authority and what the people should trust: the Holy Scriptures or the papacy? He could never have foreseen the consequences of his actions that fateful All Saints’ Eve. And while he still had some ways to go before he finalized his theology on justification by faith alone, in Christ alone, which didn’t take place till the famous “tower experience” in 1519, Luther’s action was ordained by God at just the right time to help draw people back to God and the authority of the Bible.

Luther, a man originally bound for a career as a lawyer, who took on the tunic of a monk, at the same time became the most hated man in the Catholic Church and most beloved German citizen by the populace. He became a man of the people, a savior to end their plight, and a pestilence to the Catholic Church. The events happening soon after his nailing of the *Ninety-Five Theses*, propelled him into the spotlight where he had various debates with Catholic



scholars and theologians, his writings became published and mass distributed across the Holy Roman Empire and as far as Switzerland, England, and Rome.

Luther never had the support of Pope Leo X for what he had written and instead found himself staring down the road that would lead him completely away from Rome. In fact, one might argue that Luther “repented” from Rome, in a sense, when he changed his mind and realized what Scripture really taught. Luther had no intent to break completely from Rome; he only sought to reform the Catholic Church from within and persuade Pope Leo X to see the error he had made, but alas the Church did not wish to go along with Luther and eventually excommunicated him by papal bull in 1520.

Yet, in all this, the flame was lit. The light of the Reformation had been turned on, and where there is even a small glimmer of light flickering in the darkest of night, there is hope. The flame of truth would continue on. Luther was this first flame. He was the light shining in the darkness and was willing to stand up for truth and the authority of Scripture over man's life, even over Pope Leo X life.

Many men and women have been part of the Reformation. Many men died labeled as heretics for standing for the truth of Scripture, and that justification was had by faith alone in Christ alone. Many people helped fan the flames of Reformation even before Luther took center stage, but he was the man who caught the attention of the Church and turned it into a roaring blaze. Much more can be said about the man Martin Luther, and his extraordinary life, and how he continued to lead people to the brightest light of all—the glory of Christ crucified—but, I hope this brief addition to the volumes already written about Luther has whet your appetite and given you time to pause and thank God for this monk from Wittenberg.

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Soli Deo Gloria: To Glorify God Alone

By David Steele



It has been said that *Soli Deo Gloria* is “the glue that holds the *solas* together”; the way we view God influences everything about us. It influences how we parent our children. It influences our work ethic. Our view of God influences the way we relate to our spouse. It influences the way we worship. Indeed, the way we view God influences the way we live our daily lives.

Defining the Glory of God

Before we dig deeper into *Soli Deo Gloria*, we need to define the glory of God. The term *glory* means “heavy or weighty”. The term implies “honor, splendor, or reverence”. Wayne Grudem adds,

“The glory of God is not exactly an attribute of his being but rather describes the unmatched honor that should be given to God by everything else in the universe...In another sense, God’s glory means the bright light that surrounds God’s presence.” Since the Hebrew term translated *glory*, means “to be heavy”, it conveys the idea that the one possessing the glory is overflowing with riches (Genesis 1:31), power (Isaiah 8:7), and position (Genesis 45:13). Additionally, glory in the New Testament implies “brightness, shining, radiance, amazing might, or a demonstration of power, praise, or greatness.”

The Glory of God in the Book of Isaiah

Notice several aspects of God’s glory that emerge in the book of Isaiah.

- *God’s glory is related to His majesty.* “It shall blossom abundantly and rejoice with joy and singing. The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the majesty of Carmel and Sharon. They shall see the glory of the Lord, the majesty of our God” (Isaiah 35:2).
- *God’s glory is a canopy and provides a divine defense.* “Then the Lord will create over the whole site of Mount Zion and over her assemblies a cloud by day, and smoke and the shining of a flaming fire by night; for over all the glory there will be a canopy” (Isaiah 4:5).
- *God’s glory is capable of covering the whole earth.* “And one called to another and said: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory”” (Isaiah 6:3).
- *God has a passion for revealing His glory.* “And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken” (Isaiah 40:5).
- *God will not give His glory to another.* “I am the Lord; that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to carved idols” (Isaiah 42:8).
- *God expects His people to give glory to Him and praise His name.* “Let them give glory to the Lord, and declare his praise in the coastlands” (Isaiah 42:12).

Jonathan Edwards and God’s Glory

Jonathan Edwards beautifully summarizes God’s glory in his epic work, *A Dissertation Concerning the End for Which God Created the World*: “The great end of God’s works, which is so variously expressed in Scripture, is indeed ONE; and is most properly and comprehensively called, THE GLORY OF GOD.” This glory is all-consuming and soul-satisfying. This is exactly where we turn our attention to.

Describing the Glory of God

The Word of God clearly teaches that God created and chose Israel for His glory (Isaiah 43:6-7). Jonathan Edwards observes, “It is wholly a promise of a future, great and wonderful work of God’s power and grace, delivering his people from all misery, and making them exceedingly happy; and then the end of all, or the sum of God’s design in all, is declared to be God’s own glory.”

Additionally, *God sent the Messiah so that He would be glorified.* God sent the Messiah to be a light to the nations, open blind eyes, and bring prisoners from the dungeon: “I am the Lord; I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness” (Isaiah 42:6-7).

And *God sent the Messiah to extend salvation to the very ends of the earth.* John Piper reveals the depth of this stunning reality:

“It is our unspeakable privilege to be caught up with him in the greatest movement in history—the ingathering of the elect ‘from all tribes and tongues and peoples and nations’ until the full number of the Gentiles has come in, and all Israel is saved, and the Son of man de-

scends with power and great glory as King of kings and Lord of lords and the earth is full of the knowledge of his glory...Then the supremacy of Christ will be manifest to all and he will deliver the kingdom of God the Father, and God will be all in all."

God sent the Messiah to reveal the glory of God (Isaiah 40:5; John 1:14). Piper continues, "The exaltation of God's glory is the driving force of the gospel...And grace is the pleasure of God to magnify the worth of God by giving sinners the right and power to delight in God without obscuring the glory of God."

Finally, God's glory is revealed in the redemption of the elect. Notice the shift that takes place in Acts 13:46-48:

And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, "It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, "'I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.'" And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.

In Ephesians 1:3-6, Paul unfolds the plan that God has for His people, including both Jews and Greeks: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved." Now that we are armed with some basic knowledge concerning the glory of God, we can move forward with a three-fold challenge.

Realize God's Purpose in Creating the World

Our first challenge is to see God's purpose in creation, which is to make His glory known. Consider a few passages the point to the public display of God's glory:

- "But truly, as I live, and as all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord," (Numbers 14:21).
- "For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea." (Habakkuk 2:14).
- "And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!" (Isaiah 6:3).

Jonathan Edwards adds, "The work of God promised to be effected, is plainly an accomplishment of the joy, gladness, and happiness of God's people, instead of their mourning and sorrow; and the *end* in which God's design in this work is obtained and summed up, is his glory...And he expresses the way in which we are to make God our end, in making his glory our end." We not only realize God's purpose in creating the world; we recognize God as the Creator who formed us.

Recognize God as the Creator Who Formed Us

Four indisputable truths describe this powerful calling. First, *He calls us by name* (Isaiah 40:1). Jeremiah 30:22 affirms, "And you shall be my people, and I will be your God." Second, *He calls us His possession*. "The wild beasts will honor me, the jackals and the ostriches, for I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to my chosen people, the people whom I formed for myself that they might declare my praise" (Isaiah 43:20-21). Third, *He calls us out of darkness*. Peter writes, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous

light” (1st Peter 2:9). Fourth, *He created us for His glory*. “I will say to the north, Give up, and to the south, Do not withhold; 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). God’s purpose in creating the world was to showcase His glory. But the astounding thing is that God chooses to make known His glory through His people!

Respond Properly to God by Glorifying Him

How do we glorify God? The Bible calls us to spread a passion for the supremacy of God in every area of life (1st Peter 2:9). Additionally, we spread a passion for the great worthiness of His name. Isaiah 43:21 says, “The people who I formed for myself that they might declare my praise.” “In other words,” writes John Piper, “to extend the pleasure that God has shown in his own name he chooses a people to enjoy and praise and proclaim that name to all peoples.” The glory of God shined brightly during the days of the Protestant Reformation. In Nate Pickowicz’s excellent book, *Why We’re Protestant*, he demonstrates how the Reformers transformed marriage and family. They reformed education and society and government. “Over and above all else, the Reformation was an effort to move religion away from a man-centered scheme of self-justification and self-salvation to the God-glorifying, Christ-centered, Spirit-empowered religion of the Scriptures.” Calvin adds, “We never truly glory in God until we have utterly discarded our own glory...The elect are justified by the Lord that they may glory in him, and in none else.”

Applying Soli Deo Gloria in Our Day

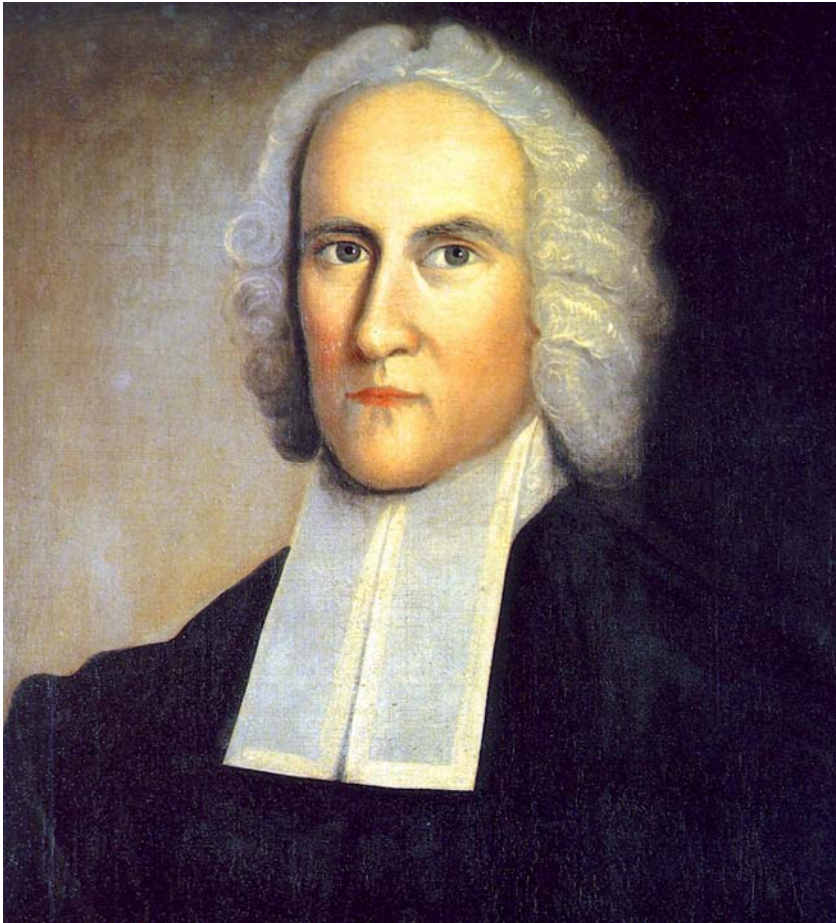
The glory of God impacts the way we live our lives. Every step, every word, every action, every decision, everything should be done for the glory of God. *The glory of God impacts the way we spend money.* When our focus is on God’s glory, His kingdom priorities extinguish the other things that have captured our attention. *The glory of God fills us with joy and hope.* “Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God” (Romans 5:1-2). *The glory of God motivates me to take the gospel to the nations.* “Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen” (Acts 28:28). The gospel reminds us that the glory of God and our everlasting joy are not at odds. John Piper observes, “The exhibition of God’s glory and the deepest joy of human souls are one thing.” May we strive with all our hearts to fulfill the purpose for which God created us, namely, to glorify God in all the earth. *Soli Deo Gloria!*

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Who is Jonathan Edwards?

By Obbie Tyler



In order to gather a sense of Jonathan Edwards' titanic legacy in American religious history, one needs only to survey the host of nicknames ascribed to him by various scholars through the years. In 1988, Robert Jenson pronounced Edwards "America's theologian". For the seemingly endless shadow he still casts upon American Protestantism, Richard Niebuhr boldly declared Edwards to be "the American Augustine" (1937). In an early eighteenth century, New England, dominated intellectually by English and Continental authors, it was a Congregationalist preacher's son from rural East Windsor, Connecticut who would become America's first dominant, trans-Atlantic theologian. However, he was also, in a very real sense, America's first original thinker.

According to Edwards' disciple Samuel Hopkins, Edwards "called no man father" (1765). Unafraid to pour modern wine into the old wineskins of Puritanism, Edwards renovated traditional Reformed doctrines, like original sin and the rebirth with newer metaphysical, philosophical, and psycho-

logical concepts. He was, in the words of Perry Miller, "the apotheosis of Puritanism" (1949).

Still, Edwards was more than a mind; he was also a pastor seeking to shepherd his Northampton congregation, as well as an entire generation. Therefore, perhaps more fitting is Sydney

Ahlstrom's characterization of Edwards as "America's and possibly the Church's greatest apostle to the Enlightenment" (1961).

For instance, Edwards co-opted John Locke's empiricism in order to redefine faith in terms of an "idea" in Christ. He adopted Locke's belief that "actions are to be ascribed to agents, and not properly to the powers of agents" in order to refute the Arminian notion of the self-determining will (1754). In an era that celebrated the autonomy and glory of humanity, it was Edwards who held the sovereignty of God and the freedom of depraved man in tension—a precarious balance that would later aid Edwardseans—William Carey, Andrew Fuller—and an entire missions movement built upon the dual notions of God's providence and man's natural ability.

If Jonathan Edwards cannot be properly contextualized without the Enlightenment, he cannot be adequately appreciated without the Great Awakening. Beginning in the winter of 1733 and extending to 1735, a "season of harvest" broke out in Edwards' Northampton parish. By 1739, Edwards' first masterpiece, *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God* (1736), went through three editions and twenty printings across the Atlantic.

The astonishing account served as inspiration for the Great Awakening of the 1740s, as well as for revivals in Scotland and England. In the aftermath of the Awakening's enthusiasm and hysteria,

many anti-revivalists sought to discredit the entire movement, but Edwards rightly defended the revival as a work of God. His manuscript, *Distinguishing Marks of the Work of the Spirit of God* (1741), delivered at the height of the revival, is a newer, more flexible take on the traditional Puritan notion of the *ordo salutis*, as well as his imprimatur for the spiritual legitimacy of the Awakening. However, the extreme aberrations and arrogant delusions of the revival were also discrediting the work of Christ. Therefore, Edwards responded to both sides, the rationalists and the enthusiasts.

"At every turn, Edwards was willing to package Scriptural truths in Enlightenment thought..."

His *Religious Affections* (1746), penned after the Awakening and constructed from the salient themes of his sermon "Divine and Supernatural Light" (1734), is a *via media* of sorts and a virtual summary of Edwards' conversion psychology. "True religion," Edwards insisted, "in great part, consists in holy affections."

At every turn, Edwards was willing to package Scriptural truths in Enlightenment thought in order to defend the authenticity of the Awakening and to demonstrate the "nature of true religion". For a nation in social, political, philosophical, and theological flux, Edwards was, as George Marsden has identified him, "both" a medieval and a modern (2003). For such a time in America, God delivered a mind and a soul as bold as an Edwards.

As a modern Reformed thinker, and as a pastor who was willing to risk (and ultimately lose) his pulpit for the sake of aligning his doctrine of salvation with his doctrine of the church, Edwards continues to speak practically to pastors and lay Christians alike. John Piper, for example, has boasted that his notion of "Christian Hedonism" is, in so many ways, simply a "recovery" of Edwards' teachings on God's sovereignty and the joy found in Christ (1986).

Unfortunately, while so much of Edwards lives on in evangelicalism today, most Americans know their "Augustine" simply for the imprecatory sermon he delivered at Enfield in 1741, entitled,

Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God. Too few Christians have ever read his first published work, *God Glorified in Man's Dependence* (1731), delivered when he was just 28 years old, or his work entitled, *The Nature of True Virtue* (1765), which, according to Edwards, "most essentially consists in a supreme love to God."

Too few have ever read *Heaven is a World of Love* (1738), wherein Edwards describes the "garden of pleasures" and the "perfect enjoyment" of the saints in the love of Jesus. It was Edwards who believed, like Augustine, that the Holy Spirit *was* love. And therefore, he was incapable of speaking about the Triune God without mentioning this monumental theme. Above all else, Edwards' central theme was love. Perhaps, instead of remembering him as a sullen, angry, monotone Puritan, without remorse or affection for his people, we would best remember Edwards by the nickname given by Joseph Haroutunian: "the theologian of the Great Commandment" (1944). By the grace of God, Edwards was a prolific writer who spent nearly 13 hours in his study each day. His writings are here for us to read. Today, Edwards continues to speak to the church, not simply a theologian, but as a pastor and sinner.

Reforming Mission: How the Reformation Informs the Task of Missions

By AJ Gibson



Over the past several decades there has been considerable debate among Christians regarding this question, “Should the term “mission” be used exclusively to refer to the task of evangelism and disciple-making, or can it be broadened to include socially-oriented activities?” Some missiologists, for example, see mission as “as everything God wills to do in the world, whether through the church or outside it.” It can include anything that people do that reflects God’s will for creation including “the pursuit of justice, the furthering of human dignity, the reconciliation of hostile groups, [and] the care of the environment.” Others nar-

row the definition considerably, insisting that mission must involve the proclamation of the Gospel, but calling for a “holistic” approach that also includes “the alleviation of human suffering and the elimination of injustice, exploitation, and deprivation.” In this view, the twin concerns of Gospel proclamation *and* social action work in equal partnership in mission like “two blades of a pair of scissors.” Others, however, have argued that while believers should not be indifferent to suffering in the world and that they should look for practical, creative ways to express the love and mercy of Christ to those around them, the specific mission of the church—the singular task which Jesus sends his church into the world to accomplish—is making disciples of the nations.

Reflecting on Mission through the Lenses of the Reformation

While the question of the Church’s mission is complex and must ultimately be answered through a careful exegesis of Scripture, it can be helpful to consider the issue through the lenses of the Reformers’ rediscovery of the fundamental truths of Christianity. The Reformation was, in essence, a recovery of the two most important truths of the Christian faith: the Gospel and the authority of Scripture. Matthew Barrett states: “At the center of the Reformation was a return to a gospel-centered,

Word-centered church. No question about it, this was the great need in the sixteenth-century church. In the twenty-first century, the church's need has not changed." Barrett is right. The meaning of the Gospel and the final authority of Scripture had been all but lost in the medieval Church, and nothing was more important for the life of the Church than their recovery. So although the Reformers didn't develop a theology of mission, *per se*, they did helpfully identify the core truths of the Christian message—the message that the Church is called to proclaim to the nations. Historically, the Reformers' emphasis on the centrality of the Word and the Gospel has been expressed in the so-called five "*Solas*" of the Reformation: *Sola Scriptura*, *Sola Fide*, *Solus Christus*, *Sola Gratia*, and *Soli Deo Gloria*. In the following paragraphs, we'll learn what these truths can teach us about the Church's mission in the world.

"This is precisely where *Sola Fide* speaks to the question of the Church's mission."

The Gospel Alone

The doctrine of *Sola Fide*, "by faith alone", responds to the question, "How can a person be right with God?" The answer is that God declares us righteous, not on the basis of any merit of our own, but solely through the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ which we receive by faith. The Reformers considered justification by faith alone to be *the* essential truth of the Gospel. Martin Luther saw justification as "the first and chief article of the Christian faith." John Calvin called it "the main hinge upon which religion turns" and the "sum of all piety." While one may disagree with Luther and Calvin about the relative priority of justification among other elements of the Gospel message, we cannot disagree with the assumption that lay behind their emphasis on justification, namely, that man's greatest need is to be reconciled to his Creator.

This is precisely where *Sola Fide* speaks to the question of the Church's mission. Unless we keep the salvation of man's soul in sharp focus as *the ultimate priority of the Church*, a myriad of other real and felt needs quickly blur our mission's focus. These needs may be important, but none of them is as pressing as man's need to be right with God. Michael Reeves and Tim Chester explain:

The biggest problem facing humanity is God's justice. God is committed to judging sin. And that means he is committed to judging my sin. This is our biggest problem because that means an eternity excluded from the glory of God...Christianity brings many blessings. It is right that Christians be involved in the pursuit of neighborhood renewal and social justice. But if one day God's righteous judgment will be revealed, if in the meantime we are storing up God's wrath against ourselves, if no one can be declared righteous through his or her own righteousness, then every person on earth faces a massive problem: God's judgment. And this problem dwarfs all the other problems we face. Nothing matters more than justification.

Sola Fide, then, helps us to keep God's reconciling work in Jesus front and center in our mission. It guards us against mission-drift that can very quickly distract us from what people need most. As D.A. Carson warns, "The relief of immediate suffering, as important as it is, may so command our focus that we fail to remind ourselves of Jesus's rhetorical question, 'What good will it be for you to gain the whole world yet forfeit your soul?'"

Solus Christus, "through Christ alone", points us in the same direction. By affirming that "there is salvation in no one else" (Acts 4:12), and that Jesus is the "one Mediator between God and man" (1st Timothy 2:5), it reminds us that what the Church offers people is Jesus and His saving rule

over their lives. *Solus Christus* teaches us that God's gifts and blessings for man are not given apart from the person and work of Jesus Christ. He alone is "full of grace and truth" (John 1:14), and it is only "from his fullness [that] we have all received, grace upon grace" (verse 16). God's grace comes to mankind only through Jesus, and therefore, like Paul, we proclaim nothing but "Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1st Corinthians 2:2).

Likewise, *Sola Gratia* teaches that the grace offered in the Gospel is, specifically, saving grace. This doesn't mean that grace doesn't express itself in acts of kindness, mercy, and justice. But it does mean that salvation of man's soul is its chief manifestation. God's grace in Jesus is ultimately a grace that opens blind eyes, softens hard hearts, and enables dead people to receive the Gospel message (Acts 16:14). All of this serves to remind us that there is ultimately no help or benefit that we can offer the world apart from Jesus Christ and the transforming righteousness that comes to us by grace through faith. As Andreas Köstenberger puts it, "There is no true lasting social transformation apart from personal conversion through repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ."

Some have insisted, based on passages like Luke 4:16-21, that the Church's mission of grace must include social action, specifically, as it is directed to the poor. As the argument goes, our mission is "to extend the kingdom by infiltrating all segments of society, with preference given to the poor, and allowing no dichotomy between evangelism and social transformation." But it is a mistake to think we're "extending" or ushering in the Kingdom of God without introducing people to the King. The blessings of Isaiah 61 mentioned by Jesus in Luke 4 are best understood as soteriological blessings. The Kingdom that Jesus is offering is a redemptive Kingdom, and the "poor" He speaks of are the poor in spirit—those who recognize their sinfulness and spiritual destitution before God. DeYoung and Gilbert helpfully explain: "Jesus's mission laid out in Luke 4 is not a mission of structural change and social transformation, but a mission to announce the good news of his saving power and merciful reign to all those brokenhearted—that is, poor—enough to believe."

Sola Fide, *Solus Christus*, and *Sola Gratia* center our Gospel message in God's transforming grace in people's lives. It is true that though Jesus God will someday redeem all of Creation and usher



in a new, fully restored earth that is free from injustice, poverty, and suffering. And it is also true that as believers we should take the opportunities that God gives us to minister the love and grace of Jesus to those around us. “True religion”, after all, expresses itself in tangible ways like visiting “orphans and widows in their affliction” (James 1:27). But the pursuit of justice, *shalom*, and social reform should not be understood as *the* mission of the Church. These things are good and are legitimate activities for individual believers, they’re just not the specific task that Jesus gave His disciples as He sent them to the nations. They are, in fact, the natural byproduct of changed lives. As lives are

“The Reformers, on the other hand, argued that Scripture *alone* is our final source of authority.”

transformed by the Gospel, injustice, poverty, and suffering *will be* addressed. Andreas Köstenberger helpfully summarizes: “The way the kingdom of God is extended in this world today is through regenerate believers acting out their Christian faith in their God-assigned spheres of life: the church, their families, their workplaces, the societies in which they live (Ephesians 5:18–6:9; 1st Peter 2:13–3:7).” As the gospel is lived out in the lives of Christ’s disciples, the other needs will be addressed.

Scripture Alone

The Reformers’ recovery of the final authority of Scripture also helps us sharpen our understanding of the church’s mission. *Sola Scriptura* was the Reformers’ answer to the medieval Church’s contention that the Bible *and* church tradition are how truth is known. The Roman Catholic Church asserted, and still teaches today, that Scripture *and tradition* stand together as “two distinct modes” of divine revelation that “are bound closely together and communicate with one another.” The Reformers, on the other hand, argued that Scripture *alone* is our final source of authority.

Sola Scriptura has important methodological implications for our mission. For the Reformers, *Sola Scriptura* was an immensely practical doctrine with far-reaching ministerial and pastoral implications. The Bible, they argued, must be the center of the life of the Church. This meant that true Christian ministry is Word-centered, grounded in the careful, systematic exposition of Scripture. Many of the Reformers practiced *Lectio Continua*, the systematic verse-by-verse preaching of the text of Scripture. This exposition of Scripture was not simply a ritual that replaced the rituals of the medieval Catholic Church. It was *the way* that Christian ministry was to be carried out. In other words, for them, the exposition of Scripture is *the primary means by which disciples are made*.

Sola Scriptura reminds us that mission is not just about securing the eternal salvation of the soul. It is also about teaching converts to observe all that Christ has commanded (Matthew 28:20). Teaching the “Word of Christ” (Colossians 3:16) as recorded Scripture is what mission is about. *Sola Scriptura* grounds our mission in the authority of the risen Christ (Matthew 28:18), centering the entire enterprise of disciple-making among the nations in the proclamation of his authoritative Word. If the nations’ great need is to hear God speak and to encounter Jesus, then the preaching of Scripture must be paramount in our mission. The Reformers believed that when the Word is proclaimed, God’s voice is heard and Christ is encountered. “Have we God’s word? At leastwise have we it preached purely?” Calvin asked. “Then is Jesus Christ as it were in the midst of us, and sheweth himself as it were hanging upon the Cross, witnessing what he did for us when he suffered death to reconcile us to God his Father.” For Calvin, this implied that the true pastor must be marked by *importunitas*, a “ruthless persistence” in his exposition of Scripture. The same is true for the Christian missionary.

The missionary must be doggedly persistent in the exposition of the text of Scripture in all areas of his/her mission. Regardless of his/her particular activity or mission strategy, unfolding Scripture must remain paramount. Why? Because according to Jesus, making disciples who obey everything that he has commanded is paramount. Carson concludes, “Ministers of the gospel ought so to be teaching the Bible in all its comprehensiveness that they will be raising up believers with many different avenues of service, but they themselves must not become so embroiled in such multiplying ministries that their ministries of evangelism, Bible teaching, making disciples, instructing, baptizing, and the like, somehow get squeezed to the periphery and take on a purely formal veneer.” *Sola Scriptura*, like *Sola Fide*, *Solus Christus*, and *Sola Gratia*, helps us to “keep the main thing the main thing.”

God’s Glory Alone

The Reformers understood that by centering the life of the Church in the authority of Scripture and in the true proclamation of the Gospel, they were giving to God the glory that He deserved. Word-centered, Gospel-centered churches exist *Soli Deo Gloria*—for God’s glory alone. The same is true in mission. How does mission achieve God’s maximum glory? By accomplishing that mission His way, through His gospel and the preaching of His Word. *Soli Deo Gloria!*

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Being John Calvin

By Michael A.G. Haykin



Born on July 10th, 1509, in Noyon, Picardy, in northern France, John Calvin was raised in a family of deeply committed Roman Catholics. Calvin would long remember his mother taking him on pilgrimages to see the relics of the saints, while his father, the financial administrator of the cathedral of Noyon, sought to arrange things so that John would become a priest like his older brother Charles (d.1537). At the age of fourteen, in 1523, Calvin went up to Paris to realize his father's dream. After initial study at the Collège de la Marche, Calvin went on to the formidable Collège de Montaigu. It is noteworthy that another key figure of this era, namely the Counter-Reformation leader, Ignatius Loyola (1491-1556), as equally renowned as Calvin for his disciplined life, also studied at this college, though just after the Frenchman.

The Road to Christ

The 1520s were a time of great religious turmoil in France. The evangelical teachings of Martin Luther (1483-1546), the German Reformer, were winning adherents throughout France, especially in Paris—but Calvin was too closely tied to the Roman Church to pay them any heed. His father, though, fell afoul of the church in Noyon and was excommunicated by the bishop, which

may well have led Calvin to begin to mentally question the practices of the Roman Church. Probably as a result of his quarrel, Calvin's father instructed John to go into law and move to Orléans to study at—what was then—the pre-eminent French university for legal studies. Calvin later described this sudden change in his life thus: "When he [Calvin's father] saw that the science of law made those who cultivate it wealthy, he was led to change his mind by the hope of material gain for me. So it happened that I was called back from the study of philosophy to learn law."

Calvin studied first at Orléans from 1528 to 1529 and then transferred to Bourges for two more years of legal studies from 1529 to 1531. It was probably two years after the end of these studies—although there is debate about the exact dating of Calvin’s conversion—that Calvin was converted and embraced the Reformed faith. Over the next three years, Calvin so matured in his faith that he began to teach others.

The Pathway to Ministry

In 1536 Calvin had published in Basle the first edition of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, which became an instant bestseller and would lead Luther’s co-worker, Phillip Melancthon (1497–1560), to dub Calvin “the theologian”. A second edition appeared in 1539, which was three times as large as the first edition, while the final edition (Geneva, 1559), which was the fifth edition, was almost five times larger than the first edition. This significant growth of this classic work of theology reveals an essential characteristic of Calvin the theologian: his profound teachability.

The same year in which this Christian classic appeared, Calvin was forced to leave France—he would never return—for the sake of the gospel. He was headed for Strasbourg, but had to go by way of Geneva, where he hoped to spend but one night. But God had different plans. Guillaume Farel (1489–1565), through whose ministry reformation had come to the church in Geneva, learned that Calvin was in town. He went to meet him, convinced that Calvin was the very sort of man to help him in Geneva, especially since Farel was more of a pioneer and evangelist than pastor and teacher. But Calvin rejected his appeals since he was determined to find a place of seclusion where he could devote himself to academic pursuits.

Failing to persuade Calvin to stay and help him, Farel, according to Calvin, “proceeded to utter an imprecation that God would curse [his] retirement, and the tranquility of the studies which [he] sought, if [he] should withdraw and refuse to give assistance.” Calvin said he was so stricken with terror that he felt ‘as if God had from heaven laid his mighty hand upon me to arrest me.’ So Calvin stayed in Geneva. It was certainly not the normal way God calls men to pastoral ministry!

Calvin stayed for two years and regularly preached in the church of St. Pierre. In 1538, though, opposition to the gospel in the town prevailed, and Calvin was expelled. He went to Strasbourg until 1541. During this three-year hiatus from Geneva, he served as a pastor to French refugees, a charge so tranquil that he was determined never to return to Geneva. But when the Council of Geneva requested that he return, he did so. He would remain in Geneva until his death on May 27th, 1564.

Calvin’s Preaching

Calvin regarded his life work in Geneva primarily, as “proclaiming the Word of God” and “instructing believers in wholesome doctrine”. He was, of course, involved in pastoral work, but the center of his ministry was the preaching of gospel. By this means, Calvin reiterated time and again, God reveals himself in judgement and mercy, turning hearts to obedience, confirming the faith of believers, building up and purifying the Church.

Until 1549 he preached twice a Sunday: one of the two services in the morning and one at 3 o’clock in the afternoon. He would also speak three times or so during the week. Calvin’s method was true expository preaching, the method of the Swiss Reformer, Huldreich Zwingli (1484–1531), and some of the Church Fathers. He preached steadily through book after book of the Bible. On Sundays, he always took the New Testament, except for a few Psalms on Sunday afternoons. During the week, it was nearly always the Old Testament. He began at the beginning of a book and expounded it passage by passage, clause by clause, week after week, until he came to the end. Then he started on another book. As a Calvin scholar, T.H.L. Parker has noted: “Those in Geneva who listened Sunday

after Sunday, day after day, and did not shut their ears, [they] received a training in Christianity such as had been given to few congregations in Europe since the days of the fathers.”

The sermons of Calvin that we have we owe to the labors of a French evangelical by the name of Denis Raguenier. Raguenier, following an elaborate system of stenography, devised by the pastors of the congregation, copied down all that Calvin preached. Initially, his sermons were copied into folio volumes and entrusted to the care of the deacons for anyone who wanted to read them. Later some of them were published, and many were translated, especially into English. A copy of Calvin’s sermons on Ephesians was later found at the bedside of John Knox (the Scottish Reformer) after the latter’s death in 1572.

As a result of Raguenier’s labors, there are now, in manuscript or in print, around 2,040 of Calvin’s sermons. An additional 263 sermons were preserved through other means. In them we hear the actual voice of the Reformer, speaking a plain, colloquial, but metropolitan French, and ranging over, as he spoke, the whole counsel of God, as well the major theological issues of his day.

Calvin and the Scriptures

Now, what was the reason for such monumental preaching? Well, first, Calvin viewed the Scriptures as “the pure Word of God”, “free from every stain or defect”, and “the certain and unerring rule”. As such, the Bible alone is a sure and certain guide for the believer’s life and thinking. Calvin thus was faithful to the Reformation re-discovery of that central biblical principle: *Sola Scriptura*. He assumed that Scripture, rightly interpreted, will not be found to make false assertions. This was the basic presupposition of all his exegesis and preaching.

Then, for Calvin, as for the other Reformers, hearing is the key sense of the Christian man and woman. Genuine faith, he once said, “cannot flow from a naked experience of things, but must have its origin in the Word of God.” Medieval Roman Catholicism had majored on symbols and images as the central means of teaching. The Reformation, coming as it did hard on the heels of the invention of the printing press, turned back to the biblical emphasis on “words”, both spoken and written, as the primary vehicle for cultivating faith and spirituality.

Geneva, as a missionary center, was not a large city. During Calvin’s lifetime, it reached a peak of slightly more than 21,000 by 1560 A.D., of whom a goodly number were religious refugees. Nevertheless, it became the missionary center of Europe in this period of the Reformation. Calvin sought to harness the energies and gifts of many of the religious refugees so as to make Geneva central to the expansion of Reformation thought and piety throughout Europe. This meant training and preparing many of these refugees to go back to their native lands as evangelists and reformers.

Understandably, Calvin was vitally concerned about the evangelization of his native land, France, and his countrymen. It has been estimated that by 1562 some 2,150 congregations had been established in France with around 2 million members, many of them converted through the witness of men trained in Geneva. But Calvin was concerned for, not only France, but also for the reformation of the Church in places like Scotland, England, Spain, Poland, Hungary, and the Netherlands.

To further this work of Reformation evangelism, there was also need for Christian literature and the Scriptures. In fact, by Calvin’s death, his interest in Christian publishing meant that there were no less than 34 printing-houses in Geneva. This included Bibles in various European languages, like the Geneva Bible, the bedrock of early English Puritanism. Calvin’s missionary vision for Europe thus had a deep impact on the European continent.

In the heart of his *Institutes*, Calvin defined Christian discipleship as essentially a life of good works marked by self-denial, the conviction that the Christian does not belong to him or herself, but belongs totally to God and is to live for God’s glory. In Calvin’s words:

“Even though the law of the Lord provides the finest and best-disposed method of ordering a man’s life, it seemed good to the Heavenly Teacher to shape his people by an even more explicit plan to that rule which he had set forth in the law. Here, then, is the beginning of this plan: the duty of believers is “to present their bodies to God as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to him.””

Where in the history of the Church is there such an example of devotion to

Christ? Though not a man without sins, Calvin well shows us what it means to be “consecrated and dedicated to God in order that we may hereafter think, speak, meditate, and do, nothing except to his glory.”

Why Christians Should Read the Dead Guys

By Jason M. Garwood



Thus says the LORD: “Stand by the roads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls.” But they said ‘We will not walk in it.’ (Jeremiah 6:16, ESV)

We are living in an unprecedented age of information. We used to say, “With just a click of a button you can get all the information you want on the internet.” We’ve taken even this incredible feature to the next level: *we carry it in our pockets*. Access to information is running on all cylinders and doesn’t appear to be slowing down anytime soon. The final word on whether this is a good or bad

thing is yet to be determined. Not only is the *availability* widespread, but *forgetfulness is also*. We have all the information our swollen brains could ever desire, and we *forget* about it. We're so used to having the Bible in our pockets that we forget to read it. And forgetfulness is no virtue.

As Christians, we affirm the doctrine of creation. What we often fail to recall is that in our affirmation of creation, we are *rejecting* chaos. To believe in the Creator God and His subsequent creation inherently requires us to reject all other non-Christian worldviews. And it just so happens that all other non-Christian worldviews find our origins as being *chaotic*. Evolution, unpredictability, and even a cyclical view of history all stem from an unbelieving worldview, built on the doctrine of chaos. Which means that we have a decision to make. Will we stand firm on the shoulders of the Reformers and uphold the Word of God in the face of paganism? What will we do with these warring worldviews? More to the point, what can we possibly do with history that gives us a firm foundation? My answer to this is a manifold answer, but being that it's the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, my suggestion is that we *read the dead guys*.

Five Reasons Why Christians Should Read the Work of Those Who Have Gone Before Them

Their work has been tested. One of the advantages of reading the dead guys is the fact that history has paid its toll on their work. Their work has been read, re-read, critiqued, and re-critiqued—over and over, time and time again. The arguments have been on the table for hundreds of years, and we now have the beauty of 20/20 hindsight to peer through all the fog. Because their work has been tested by time, it becomes tested by various readers of various backgrounds. This proves to be an invaluable feature of the dead guys.

"I have a King James Version of the Bible on my nightstand that I love to read from time to time."

Now, a word of caution is in order: just because it's old doesn't mean it is right. Don't swerve into the other ditch on this one! The *value* of something being tested by time is that, whether the work is good or bad, it's been handled *several times over*. Which means that if it's good work, like that of the Puritans, then the counter-arguments are all on the table. The same goes for the work that *isn't* good. Read the dead guys because their work has been tested—and tested well.

They help us slow down. I have a King James Version of the Bible on my nightstand that I love to read from time to time. I value the KJV because *it forces me to slow down*. The same goes for the dead guys. Old English can be very challenging. Guys like Jonathan Edwards can be very difficult to sift through. But that's all an argument for *why we should* do it, not why we shouldn't. Because our culture is bent on instant communication, we fail to take the time to read and explore with thoughtfulness. Because of our meme-obsessed internet world, careful thoughtfulness is at an all-time low, which also means that emotions run high. 140 characters or less is the communication *du jour*, but that's not always a good thing. Not when you have voluminous work after voluminous work on your hands. The same goes for books today. People love the less-than-100-page book. Most balk at the thought of reading a 1,000-page work. Why? Because we don't have the time. Read the dead guys

because they took the time to write—the same time you and I both have.

They challenge contemporary culture. Dead guys who have been tested are dead guys who were *worth the test*. When a theologian or pastor's work has lasted hundreds of years—and said work has been the subject of discussion for generations—you can bet that they were a challenge to thinking *then*, and they are a challenge to thinking *now*. Thought-provoking work from men like Thomas Watson and John Owen were just as brilliant in their day as they are in our day. That's because they challenged their culture. Now, admittedly, we live in different times. I'm in Michigan as I write this, and John Owen was from England. He didn't have Twitter; I do. But the problems are always the same: sin, rebellion, judgment, and striving. Men were just as sinful back in the early 17th Century as they are in the 21st Century. The reason the dead guys challenge contemporary culture is because contemporary culture, though looking quite different on the outside, still has the same internal problem: sin. Which also means the same solution applies: Jesus. Read the dead guys because they will challenge your thinking—*today*.

History is sovereignly orchestrated by God. As mentioned at the beginning, we affirm Creationism. Which also means we reject chaos. Our origins lie in the hands of the Triune God, not the natural selection theories of Darwin. Which means that, contrary to the prevailing views of pagan worldviews, history is *not* random, *not* governed by chaos, and decidedly *not* governed by fate. It is sovereignly orchestrated by God. Which means that when we approach history, and for our purposes, we're talking about reading dead theologians, we're talking about how God *worked in history*. We need to read the dead guys to see how God worked in history. We need to know the battles they waged and the solutions they proposed. We need to know what happened *then*, so we can know what will happen *now*. Read the dead guys because history is on our side, not Darwin's.

You can't talk back. The trouble with Twitter and instant social contact is that careful thoughtfulness takes a hit. We like to "tweet out" the gospel in 140 characters—a noble pursuit indeed—but we're immediately opening ourselves up to critique, something the dead guys had to wait years for. It took quite a bit of time for Luther's interlocutors to "talk back". Certainly, in Luther's day, his actions spread like wildfire, but in our day, communication is even quicker.

To state the obvious: you can't talk back to a dead guy. What I mean is, you can't emote in the immediate. You can't lament without careful critique; the guy is dead. You can't call him a ninny hammer and laugh; nor can you brush it off like most anti-intellectuals. *You have to deal with him*. You can debate him in your head all you want, but he ain't gonna talk back. So, neither should you. Critique his writings, critique his position; support or reject his theology. Just don't post an insensitive comment on his Facebook update—he *won't see it*.

So yes, you should read the dead guys. Read them with thoughtfulness; read them with great care. Be prepared to be challenged, and prepare to do the challenging. But don't flippantly dismiss them. They're dead. *Soli Deo Gloria!*

Is Calvinism Good for the Church?

By Dave Jenkins



It's an innocent question at first, "Is Calvinism good for the church?"

Some people will not be alarmed by that question in any way, shape, or form. Others will think that this question doesn't need to be asked at all. To them, Calvinism is a disease, a plague, a cancer that needs to be opposed with all their energy. Such people view Calvinism as opposed to the gospel, the

Church, the Great Commission, and Biblical Christianity. Entire movements in entire denominations are focused to this end, on destroying Calvinism. To them, the answer to the question, “Is Calvinism right for the church?” is a loud no.

In this issue of *Theology for Life*, we are exploring the Reformation through the lens of the *Five Solas*. Also, we’re exploring issues where there is a great need for Reformation in the Church. And at the heart of this question, “Is Calvinism good for the Church?” we must understand we, as those who are Reformed and are Reforming around historical Protestant theology as stated in the *Five Solas*, need to exercise great discernment and wisdom.

If we’re honest, as Reformed Christians we are not always known for using biblical wisdom. Instead, we are often the first to speak and the last to listen. So when people lash out against Calvinism, our response is to attack back; instead of listening, learning, and then responding.

The Need for True Humility

As a long-time Calvinist myself, I’ve seen a great deal that encourages me in the resurgence in the past decade of Calvinism. But I’ve also seen a lot that concerns me. And at the heart of that is understanding that Reformed theology is opposed to pride. As Reformed Christians, we believe that we are saved not by ourselves or by our efforts; instead, we are saved only by God’s grace. The general call of God goes out to all men through the preaching of the Word on the Lord’s Day. The particular call of God is applied by the Holy Spirit, whereby sinners are irresistibly drawn by the grace of God to salvation, thus enabling them to respond to the general call of the gospel. Only through responding to particular call can sinners be transferred from the Kingdom of Satan to the Kingdom of the Lord Jesus. All of this is only because of the greatness of the grace of God. God takes our hearts of stone and sovereignly replaces them with new hearts, with new desires and affections for Himself.

Augustine once said that the Christian life is humility, humility, humility; and John Calvin echoed those remarks. At the heart of what they both said was the biblical truth about humility. True humility is acknowledging that there is One greater than us who alone is worthy of our praise. False humility is when we say we are humble, but then demonstrate that there are still other lovers we are pursuing. False humility is shown when we say one thing as Christians then do another. Some may think they are humble, but if we are honest with ourselves, we are all prone to vainglory, which is vanity and grasping for the wind. True humility begins by looking away from ourselves to Jesus. True humility boasts not in our great accomplishment or what we are doing; instead, true humility is about acknowledging Jesus, looking to Him who is utterly perfect in every way and boasting in Him and His work.

As the Church, we are confronted on every side as the Church with challenges from homosexuality, transgenderism, and the sexual revolution. We are also faced with the challenge of platform building—which is good—a desire to steward the gifts the Lord has given us to spread the gospel among the nations. Sadly, a desire for a platform often leads many to

“When we understand that all ministry is a privilege, we will not think that it’s our great accomplishments that matter.”

boast more in themselves than in Jesus. For example, say someone got published at a popular website, or by a popular publisher, or, they were on several popular podcasts, had speaking opportunities, and the list goes on and on. When we understand that all ministry is a privilege, we will not think that it’s our great accomplishments that matter. Instead, it’s not about us at all, since we are

vessels—ambassadors of Jesus. We carry forth the great news: that through Christ, we are no longer enemies, but instead are now His friends. These truths we are exploring ought to cause us to be humble.

Church Membership in the Local Church

At the heart of the question, “Is Calvinism good for the church?” gets to the individual Christian dwelling corporately as a church member in the local church. Whether one goes to a church in the Reformed tradition or not, we all have an obligation act like Christians. We say we believe in Jesus. Then, our profession of faith should be tested by Scripture. Does our behavior then demonstrate that our profession is real? Do we truly desire for our lives to come in line with God’s Word?

Calvinism has a long and storied tradition in the Church. Not only from the Reformation, but going back to Augustine whom Luther and Calvin were profoundly influenced by. God used Augustine to impact the world for Jesus Christ. Even there, we need to understand that the Apostle Paul influenced Augustine. God used the Apostle Paul to influence Augustine, and thus Calvin, Luther, and a whole host of other significant theologians in the Church. And really what I’m saying is this, since we can track Luther and Calvin’s theology back to Augustine and Augustine’s back to the Apostle Paul, we can trace the Apostle Paul who was converted on the road to Damascus to the Lord Jesus Himself.

It’s not ultimately what Calvin, Luther, Owen, Spurgeon, Augustine, or a whole host of other significant theologians have said that matters the most. Yes, their thought is important, but it is not ultimate. Calvin, Luther, and Spurgeon were primarily pastors. They preached the whole counsel of God to the people of God. They wanted people to know the God of the Bible, and so they did all that they did to that end. Calvin was once forced out of his pulpit in Geneva. He returned picking up from where he left in his sermon series.

The Word of God and Calvinism

We need to understand that Calvinism is good for the Church, but it is only if it is grounded in the Word of God. The Reformation was a movement rooted in the local church. It was a movement that sought reform the Church around the Word of God. It is the same today. After all, as Protestants, we are supposed to be protesting. Sadly, in many cases, we’re not protesting against the current onslaught of denial of essential and critical doctrines that are under assault from inside and outside the church.

For example, you have people who say they are Christians in the Church, and yet deny that Jesus died in the place and for their sin. You have “Christians” who say they believe in the truthfulness of Scripture, and yet think it’s a book of myths and fairy tales. You have people who say they are preaching the gospel, but they are sending people to hell by fleecing the local congregation. You have individuals who say they can be wealthy, healthy, and happy but such preachers never talk about hell, the justice of God, or a whole host of other critical doctrines related to a biblical understanding of the gospel. Furthermore, you have many so-called Christians today who would rather do life outside of the local church; even though the New Testament epistles were written to Christians doing life under qualified male godly leadership.

On every side, as Christians, we are faced with challenges. The question, “Is Calvinism good for the Church?” is not an idle question. Instead, it’s a vital issue. As we celebrate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, we must respond that it was a significant movement with major theologians

“...You have so-called Christians today who would rather do life outside the local church; even though the New Testament epistles were written to Christians doing life under qualified male godly leadership.”

that the Lord used in a momentous way to impact thousands of generations. With that said, in our day, we must recognize we have great need of Reformation, renewal, and revival. We also need to continue to be always reforming around the Word of God.

The Word of God is not the word of man, and as such is not to be trifled with. Obedience to the commands of Jesus Christ is possible, but only because of Christ Himself. We must call men and women everywhere to believe on the name of the Lord Jesus and be saved. And because they are saved, we must call them to obey the Lord Jesus Christ. Not to say a prayer and walk down an aisle. We must call professing Christians to obedience to the Lordship of Jesus. We must call the apathetic and disobedient to repentance. Jesus' death in our place and for our sin is not a cheap death. Instead, it is a costly grace because it cost Jesus everything.

How Reformed Theology Strengthens Local Churches

Reformed theology rightly emphasizes as the Bible does the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. JC Ryle once said that the gospel is the ABC's of Christianity. In this present age, Dr. Tim Keller is well-known for stating that the Gospel is the A-to-Z of Christianity. The gospel not only saves us, but sustains us. As John Piper has said, we would not remain a Christian one second without the gospel. Our need is great, but our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is able to rise to meet our great need. After all, He not only presently intercedes for His people, but He ever lives to plead the treasure trove of His blood before the Father as our Advocate. He is also their sympathetic High Priest and the Mediator of the New Covenant.

Reformed theology helps renew the church in its preaching of the Word of God and its declaration of the gospel of grace to the people of God. Not only is the above true in that the gospel sustains us, but it also strengthens our faith. In the midst of the difficulty of life, we can look to Christ and know that since He died for us, we too can endure difficulty, since we have One who understands, sees, knows, and loves us. Whether it's in the midst of suffering, difficulty, challenging times, from every angle we could consider, Reformed theology helps us to trust and rest in the capable hands of a sovereign God.

Trust in the Sovereignty of God

Reformed theology emphasizes a right understanding of God as the Bible does. Calvin, in fact, opens his *Institutes* with a statement about the knowledge of God and ourselves. If we are to trust a sovereign God, we must know Him as He has revealed Himself in Scripture. Since we are to believe His promises, then we must know Him from the Scriptures.

In seasons of little sleep, for example, we can rest our heads on our pillows and go to sleep knowing that God is good and He has pre-determined all of our days. When we awake, we can thank God because He is good and His mercies are new each day. Reformed theology, by placing a proper emphasis where the Bible does on God and trusting in His sovereignty, helps us to have a strong sense of optimism about the future, which in turn informs our understanding of life. How we view God shapes our lives and our worldview. The Word of God is to inform all of our lives, and so a trust in the sovereignty of God, not only helps us have a biblical view of sleep, but also of trials, challenges, difficult people, and more.

Prayer

Thus far very briefly we've considered how the gospel strengthens and sustains our faith and our trust in the sovereignty of God. Not only are those points true, but so is the following namely that they all inform a biblical view of prayer. After all, it's through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ that we have now been united to Christ by faith in Him. Presently, we are children of

God, invited before the throne of God's grace to commune with Him because of our union with Christ.

A right and biblical view of God will not diminish our prayer lives, but increase and strengthen it. It will cause us to realize we are not our own sovereign's since there is only One who is sovereign in the Lord. And since we commune with the Lord, we say we love; we must grow in our prayer lives. One way to do this is when you get up to thank the Lord for another day. Ask Him for His help today to be a light and a witness at your job, in your home, and wherever you go. We have a great need of prayer not only to lay our petitions before the Throne of God's grace, but also to pray for others.

Reformed theology, when correctly understood, should inform our prayer lives. Accurately ordered under the Cross, the gospel should inflame our prayer lives. The God of all grace has saved us, is sanctifying us, and will one day glorify us. Since all of this is true; we should pray. We should make our petitions, we should pray for one another, we should pray for our country, we should pray for wisdom, and we should simply fall in love with prayer. After all, we are the Beloved of God. When we pray, we are coming before the face of One who fully accepts us, fully loves us, and who tells us we are His treasure, joy, and crown. In every way, Reformed theology helps us understand a biblical view of strengthening our faith through the gospel, trusting in the sovereignty of God, and growing in our prayer lives for His glory.

Last Thoughts

Calvinism is good for the church since historical Reformed theology is grounded in the Word of God. The local church is to be rooted in the authority of the Word of God. We are men and women, as Christians, who are under His authority. We are, after all, doubly owned by the Lord Jesus. So the answer to the question, "Is Calvinism good for the church?" is *yes*. It is absolutely good for the church, but only in so much as it is grounded in the Word of God; proclaiming forth the glories of the gospel from the Word, and seeking to apply biblical truth to the life of the people in the local church. That is, after all, what the Protestant Reformation was all about. Reformation today must be about that as well. If not, we have not learned the lessons of the past. Instead, we are capitulating to the culture and have failed to understand that at the heart of the Protestant Reformation was a desire to reform the church always around the Word of God, for the glory of God and the joy of mankind.

What is Revival and Where Do We Find It?

By John Piper



The idea of revival originates in the reality that, on the one hand, God is the decisive giver of all spiritual life and, on the other hand, humans, even those who are born again and part of God's covenant family, from time to time drift into a kind of lifelessness and lethargy and backsliding and indifference and weakness. And when you put those two together — God as the giver of life and man as ever drifting towards lifelessness — what you get is the need for the hope of reviving, coming back to life — a fresh outpouring of God's live-giving Spirit on his people. That is what

revival is.

“God is the decisive giver of all spiritual life, so ask for a fresh outpouring of his live-giving Spirit.” So, for example, we read a prayer to God in Psalm 85:6, “Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you?” Or, Habakkuk 3:2, “O Lord, I have heard the report of you, and your work, O Lord, do I fear. In the midst of the years revive it; in the midst of the years make it known; in wrath remember mercy.” Or, Psalm 80:18, “Give us life, and we will call upon your name!” Or, Isaiah 57:15, “Thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: ‘I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite.’”

And alongside those passages about reviving, you read the history of Israel — and it is just one up-and-down after the other. One king is wicked and God withholds his blessing or sends judgment. Another king recovers godliness and there is a reviving and an awakening of true worship for a season. And up and down it goes. And when you turn to the New Testament, even though the period of time is really short between Jesus’s resurrection and the close of the New Testament — maybe forty years or so — we do get glimpses already of churches that were in need of reviving.

I think the book of Hebrews was written to a church like that. You hear it in Hebrews 5:12, “Though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God.” Or, Hebrews 12:12, “Lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint.” So, this is a church that is already drooping. It is already dragging. It has gotten tired already and needs reviving.

Then, when you read the prayers of Paul, this is where I feel it. When you read the prayers of Paul in his letters, they read just like prayers that would be made for churches that are drifting into lifelessness. There are few prayers in the Bible that have had a reviving, challenging, awakening, renewing effect on me like Ephesians 3, where Paul prays like this:

“[I pray] that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God” (Ephesians 3:16–19).

Over the years in my pastoral ministry, that prayer to have power to comprehend the height and depth and length and breadth and to be filled with all the fullness of God was a heart cry because of how short I knew I fell of being filled with all the fullness of God.

In the history of the church, the term *revival* in its most biblical sense has meant a sovereign work of God in which the whole region of many churches, many Christians has been lifted out of spiritual indifference and worldliness into conviction of sin, earnest desires for more of Christ and his word, boldness in witness, purity of life, lots of conversions, joyful worship, renewed commitment to missions. You feel God has moved here. And basically revival, then, is God doing among many Christians at the same time or in the same region, usually, what he is doing all the time in individual Christian’s lives as people get saved and individually renewed around the world. And I will just say, if anybody wants to go further, Martyn Lloyd-Jones’s book *Revival* would be a great read.

Being John Owen

By Michael A.G. Haykin

John Owen was born in 1616

A.D., the same year that William Shakespeare died. He grew up in a Christian home in a small village now known as Stadthampton, about five miles south-east of Oxford. His father, Henry Owen, was the minister of the parish church there and a Puritan. The names of three of his brothers have also come down to us: William, who became the Puritan minister at Remenham, just north of Henley-on-Thames; Henry who fought as a major in Oliver Cromwell's (1599–1658) New Model Army; and Philemon, who was killed fighting under Cromwell in Ireland in 1649.

Of Owen's childhood years only one reference has been recorded. **"I was bred up from my infancy,"** he remarked in 1657, "under the care of my father, who was a non-conformist all his days, and a painful laborer [that is, diligent worker] in the vineyard of the Lord." If we take as our cue the way that other Puritans raised their children, we can presume that as a small boy Owen, along with his siblings, would have been taught to pray, to read the Bible and obey its Commandments. At least once a day there would have been time set aside for family worship when he would have listened to his father explain a portion of God's Word and pray for their nation, his parishioners, and for each of them individually.

At twelve years of age, Owen was sent by his father to Queen's College, the University of Oxford. Here he obtained his B.A. on June 11th, 1632, when he was 16. He went on to study for the M.A., which he was awarded on April 27th, 1635. Everything seemed to be set for Owen to pursue an academic career. It was not, however, a good time to launch out into world of academia. The Archbishop of Canterbury, William Laud (1573–1645), had set out to suppress the Puritan movement, and to that end had begun a purge of the churches and universities. By 1637 Owen had no alternative but to



leave Oxford and to become, along with many other Puritans who refused to conform to the Established Church, a private chaplain. He eventually found employment in the house of Lord Lovelace, a nobleman sympathetic to the Puritan cause. However, when the English Civil War broke out in 1642, and Lord Lovelace decided to support the King, Owen left his service and moved to London.

A Clear Shining from God

The move to London was providential in a couple of ways. First of all, it brought him into contact with some of the leading defenders of the Parliamentary Cause, Puritan preachers who viewed the struggle between the King and Parliament in terms of the struggle between Christ and anti-Christian forces. Moreover, it was during these initial days in London that he had an experience he would never forget. By 1642 Owen was convinced that the final source of authority in religion was the Holy Scriptures and moreover, that the doctrines of orthodox Calvinism were biblical Christianity. But he had yet to personally experience the Holy Spirit bearing witness to his spirit and giving him the assurance that he was a child of God.

Owen found this assurance one Sunday when he decided to go with a cousin to hear Edmund Calamy the Elder (1600–1666), a famous Presbyterian preacher, at St. Mary's Church, in Aldermanbury. On arriving at this church, they were informed that the well-known Presbyterian was not going to preach that morning. Instead, a country preacher (whose name Owen never did discover) was going

“In 1643, Owen was offered the pastorate in the village of Fordham...”

to fill in for the Presbyterian divine. His cousin urged him to go with him to hear Arthur Jackson (c.1593–1666), another notable Puritan preacher, at nearby St. Michael's. But Owen decided to remain at St. Mary's. The preacher took as his text that morning Matthew 8:26: “Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?” It proved to be a message that Owen needed to hear and embrace. Through the words of a preacher whose identity is unknown, God spoke to Owen and removed once and for all his doubts and fears as to whether he was truly regenerate or not. He now knew himself to be born of the Spirit.

The impact of this spiritual experience cannot be over-estimated. It gave to Owen the deep, inner conviction that he was indeed a child of God and chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, that God loved him and had a loving purpose for his life, and that this God was the true and living God. In practical terms, it meant a life-long interest in the work of God the Holy Spirit that would issue thirty years later in his monumental study of the Holy Spirit, *A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*. As he later wrote: “Clear shining from God must be at the bottom of deep labouring with God.”

Life and Ministry during the Civil Wars

In 1643, Owen was offered the pastorate in the village of Fordham, six miles or so north-west of Colchester in Essex. Owen was here till 1646 when he became the minister of the church at the market town of Coggeshall, some five miles to the south. Here, as many as two thousand people would crowd into the church each Lord's Day to hear Owen preach. It is also noteworthy that this change in pastorate was also accompanied by an ecclesiological shift to Congregationalism. Up until this point, Owen had been decidedly Presbyterian in his understanding of church government. His reading of *The Keyes of the Kingdom of Heaven* by John Cotton (1584–1652), which had been published in 1644, was decisive in changing his mind in this area of theology. It was also at Coggeshall that he wrote the classic work on particular redemption, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* (1647). The backdrop for these early years of Owen's pastoral ministry was the English Civil War,

when England knew the horrors of bloody fields of battle, and father was ranged against son and neighbor against neighbor on the battlefield. Well has this period been described as “the world turned upside down”.

During these tumultuous days, Owen clearly identified himself with the Parliamentary cause. He developed a friendship with the rising military figure Oliver Cromwell, and was frequently invited to preach before Parliament. By late 1648 some of the Parliamentary army officers had begun to urge that Charles be brought to trial on charges of treason since he had fought against his own people and Parliament. Charles was accordingly put on trial in January 1649, and by the end of that month a small group of powerful Puritan leaders had found him guilty and sentenced their king to death. On January 31st, the day following the public execution of the king, Owen was asked to preach before Parliament.

Owen used the occasion to urge upon the members of Parliament that for them, now the rulers of England, to obtain God’s favor in the future they must remove from the nation all traces of false worship and superstition and wholeheartedly establish a religion based on Scripture alone. Owen based his sermon on Jeremiah 15. He made no direct reference to the events of the previous day, nor did he mention, at least in the version of his sermon that has come down to us, the name of the king. Nevertheless, his hearers, and later readers, would have been easily able to deduce from his use of the Old Testament how he viewed the religious policy and end of Charles. From the story of the wicked king Manasseh that is recorded in 2nd Kings 21, and with cross-references to Jeremiah 15, he argued that the leading cause for God’s judgments upon the Jewish people had been such abominations as idolatry and superstition, tyranny and cruelty. He then pointed to various similarities between the conditions of ancient Judah and the England of his day. At the heart of the sermon was a call to Parliament to establish a reformed style of worship, to disseminate biblical Christianity, to uphold national righteousness and to avoid oppression. He assured the Puritan leaders who heard him that day that God’s promise of protection to Jeremiah was also applicable to all who in every age stood firmly for justice and mercy.

By the early 1650s, Owen had become one of Cromwell’s leading advisors, especially in national affairs to do with the church. There is little doubt that Owen was a firm supporter of Cromwell in this period. As Owen told him, on one occasion in 1654, for example: “The series and chain of eminent providences whereby you have been carried on and protected in all the hazardous work of your generation, which your God hath called you unto, is evident to all.” Two years later, though, when Cromwell was urged to become the monarch of England, Owen was among those who opposed this move. As it turned out, Cromwell did not accept the crown. But Owen’s friendship with Cromwell had been damaged, and the two men were nowhere near as close as they had been. This would have distressed Owen since he had viewed Cromwell with enormous admiration.

Cromwell had appointed Owen to the oversight of Oxford University in 1652 as its Vice-Chancellor. From this position, Owen helped to re-assemble the faculty, who had been dispersed by the war, and to put the university back on its feet. He also had numerous opportunities to preach to the students at Oxford. Two important works on holiness came out of his preaching during this period. *Of Temptation*, first published in 1658, is essentially an exposition of Matthew 26:4. It analyzes the way in which believers fall into sin. Central among the remedies to temptation that Owen recommends is prayer. His pithy remark in this regard is typically Puritan: “If we do not abide in prayer, we shall abide in cursed temptations.”

A second work, *The Mortification of Sin in Believers* (1656), is in some ways the richest of all of Owen’s treatises on this subject. It is based on Romans 8:13 and lays out a strategy for fighting in-

dwelling sin and warding off temptation. Owen emphasizes that in the fight against sin the Holy Spirit employs all of our human powers. In sanctifying us, Owen insists, the Spirit works:

In us and upon us, as we are fit to be wrought in and upon; that is, so as to preserve our own liberty and free obedience. He works upon our understandings, wills, consciences, and affections, agreeably to their own natures; he works in us and with us, not against us or without us; so that his assistance is an encouragement as to the facilitating of the work, and no occasion of neglect as to the work itself.

Not without reason does Owen lovingly describe the Spirit in another place as “the great beautifier of souls”.

The Church in a Storm: Owen's Leadership in Persecution

Oliver Cromwell died in September of 1658 and the “rule of the saints”, as some called it, began to fall apart. In the autumn of that year, Owen, now a key leader among the Congregationalists, played a vital role in drawing up what is known as the Savoy Declaration, which would give the Congregationalist churches ballast for the difficult days ahead. Only a few days after Cromwell’s death, Owen met with around 200 other Congregationalist leaders, including men like Thomas Goodwin (1600–1680), Philip Nye (c.1596–1672), and William Bridge (c.1600–1671), in the chapel of the old Savoy Palace in London. One of the outcomes of this synod was a recommendation to revise the Westminster Confession of Faith for the Congregationalist churches. Traditionally Owen has been credited with writing the lengthy preface that came before the Savoy Declaration. In it he rightly argued, anticipating an issue that would be central to the rest of his life:

The Spirit of Christ is in himself too free, great and generous a Spirit, to suffer himself to be used by any human arm, to whip men into belief; he drives not, but gently leads into all truth, and persuades men to dwell in the tents of like precious faith; which would lose of its preciousness and value, if that sparkle of freeness shone not in it.

The following year Owen preached again before Parliament. But the times they were a-changing, and this proved to be the last of such occasions. In 1660 a number of Cromwell’s fellow Puritan leaders, fearful that Britain was slipping into full-fledged anarchy, asked Charles II, then living in exile on the continent, to return to England as her monarch. Those who came to power with Charles were determined that the Puritans would never again hold the reins of political authority. During Charles’ reign and that of his brother James II (r.1685–1688), the Puritan cause was thus savagely persecuted. After the Act of Uniformity in 1662, which required all religious worship to be according to the letter of The Book of Common Prayer, and various other pieces of legislation enacted during the 1660s, all other forms of worship were illegal.

A number of Owen’s close friends, including John Bunyan, suffered fines and imprisonment for not heeding these laws. Although Owen was shielded from actual imprisonment by some powerful friends like Lord Philip Wharton (1613–1696), he led (at best) a precarious existence till his death. He was once nearly attacked by a mob, which surrounded his carriage. Between 1663 and 1666 he was tempted to accept the offer of a safe haven in America when the Puritan leaders in Massachusetts offered him the presidency of Harvard. Owen, though, recognized where he was needed most, and he wrote prodigiously in defense of nonconformity. This polemical defense, though, took its toll. In 1672, he told the New England Puritan, John Eliot (1604–1690), that “there is scarce anyone alive in the world that hath more reproaches cast upon him than I have” and that, as he was experiencing “a dry and barren spirit”, he begged Eliot to pray for him that God would “water me from above”. Two years later, in a letter to Charles Fleetwood (c. 1618–1692), one of Cromwell’s sons-in-law, he described himself as a “poor withering soul”, and he expressed his fear that:

“We shall die in the wilderness; yet ought we to labour and pray continually that the heavens would drop down from above, and the skies pour down righteousness—that the earth may open and bring forth salvation, and that righteousness may spring up together [see Psalms 85:10–11] ...I beseech you to contend yet more earnestly than ever I have done, with God, with my own heart, with the church, to labour after spiritual revivals.”

Owen was not the only Puritan leader urging prayer for revival in the 1670s. Four years after Owen wrote this letter, John Howe (1630–1705) preached a series of sermons based on Ezekiel 39:29 in which he dealt with the subject of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. In one of these sermons he told his audience:

When the Spirit shall be poured forth plentifully I believe you will hear much other kind of sermons, or they will, who shall live to such a time, than you are wont to do now-a-days...It is plain, too sadly plain, there is a great retraction of the Spirit of God even from us; we not know how to speak living sense [i.e. felt reality] unto souls, how to get within you; our words die in our mouths, or drop and die between you and us. We even faint, when we speak; long experienced unsuccessfulness makes us despond; we speak not as persons that hope to prevail... When such an effusion of the Spirit shall be as is here signified... [ministers] shall know how to speak to better purpose, with more compassion and sense, with more seriousness, with more authority and allurements, than we now find we can.

Owen’s fears were not unfounded—he would die without seeing any turning of the tide for the non-conformists, and the spiritual state of England would continue to decline until the revivals of the mid-1730s.

Owen’s first wife, Mary, died in 1676. When Owen remarried the following year, his second wife, Dorothy D’Oyley, was the widow of a wealthy Oxfordshire landowner, whom Owen would have known from his connections to his home village of Stadhampton. Added to the toil and anxieties of these years were physical challenges, especially asthma and kidney stones. But these years were also ones of prodigious literary fruitfulness. His exhaustive commentary on Hebrews appeared between 1668 and 1684, which he regarded in many ways as his magnum opus. *A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit* came out in 1674, and an influential work on justification, *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith*, in 1677. Owen’s *Meditations and Discourses on the Glory of Christ*, what Robert Oliver has rightly termed “incomparable”, was written under the shadow of death in 1683 and represents Owen’s dying testimony to the unsurpassable value and joy of living a life for the glory of Christ. He fell asleep in Christ on August 24th, 1683. His final literary piece was a letter to his close friend, Charles Fleetwood, written two days before his death. “Dear Sir,” he wrote to his friend, “I am going to him whom my soul hath loved, or rather who hath loved me with an everlasting love; which is the whole ground of all my consolation. The passage is very irksome and wearysome through strong pains of various sorts which are all issued in an intermitting fever. All things were provided to carry me to London today attending to the advice of my physician, but we were all disappointed by my utter disability to undertake the journey. I am leaving the ship of the church in a storm, but whilst the great Pilot is in it the loss of a poore under-rower will be inconsiderable. Live and pray and hope and waite patiently and do not despair; the promise stands invincible that he will never leave thee nor forsake thee.”

He was buried on September 4th in Bunhill Fields, where the bodies of so many of his fellow Puritans were laid to rest until the tremendous day when they—and all the faithful in Christ—shall be raised to glory.

***Sola Scriptura*: Returning to the Fount of the Word**

By Dave Jenkins

One of the greatest truths rediscovered during the Reformation was *Sola Scriptura*. Men such as John Wycliffe and John Huss affirmed this doctrine and called people to return to the Bible. When challenged by hostile church officials, Huss repeatedly answered his opponents by declaring, “Show me from Scripture and I will repent and recant!” Huss’s devotion to Scripture



alone ultimately cost him his life, for this principle compelled him to attack both curialism (the principle on which papal authority stands) and conciliarism (the principle on which supreme authority rests in church tradition and in gathering of prelates).[\[i\]](#)

When the Reformers spoke of *Sola Scriptura*, what they had in mind was the authority of the Word, to include the infallibility, inerrancy, self-interpretation, and self-authentication of the Bible. First, the Reformers believed everything must be tested by Scripture. They believed that Scripture, not papal councils, were to rule the Church, for the Bible is the Word of God and the voice of God. Therefore, the authority of Scripture is absolute. John Calvin said that Scripture is as authoritative as if God Himself had “been giving utterance” [\[ii\]](#) The Christian submits to Scripture because it con-

tains the truth about God and is therefore binding on their lives. Those who adhere to orthodox views on the Bible believe that all Scripture is the Word of God, and therefore, they must strive to submit to it. Such Christians understand that we cannot pass judgment on Scripture; rather, Scripture passes judgment on us.

The Reformers taught that the Bible's infallibility is exhaustive, for every word of every sentence is the breath of the living God. To this end they honored and obeyed Paul's teaching in 2nd Timothy 3:16-17, "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work." Scripture alone is without error (inerrant). According to Fred Klooster, this view that Scripture is "alone and entire" (*Sola* and *Tota Scriptura*) is uniquely Reformed.^[iii] That led those who hold to Reformed theology to stress that Scripture alone can bind the consciences of believers (Westminster Confession 1.10, 20.2, 31:4).

"The doctrine of *Sola Scriptura* has been under attack for centuries."

Reformed theologians rightly stressed the harmony between Scripture and the Holy Spirit (*Spiritus cum verbo*). The Holy Spirit is the true expositor of the Bible, Ulrich Zwingli said, which enables the Church to recognize that Scripture interprets Scripture (Westminster Confession 1.6). The key to interpretation, therefore, belongs to the entire community of Christians. While tradition may aid interpretation, the true spiritual meaning of Scripture is its natural literal sense, not an allegorical one, unless the particular Scripture passage being studied is clearly allegorical. Calvin emphasized the self-authenticating character of the Bible. This teaching holds that the Bible's witness is confirmed by the internal testimony of the Spirit in the believer's heart (Institutes, 1.7.2-4; Westminster Confession 1:5). Calvin notes, "Let this stand as a fixed point, that those whom the Spirit has inwardly taught rest firmly upon Scripture, and that Scripture is self-authenticated, and that it is not right for it to be made to depend upon demonstration of reasoning, for it by the Spirit's witness that it gains in our minds the certainty that it merits."^[iv]

Why We Are, Where We Are, and Where We Go from Here

The doctrine of *Sola Scriptura* has been under attack for centuries. Many Protestants are aware of the Roman Catholic's rejection of this doctrine. Most Protestants are unaware, however, that most evangelicals have also rejected the doctrine of *Sola Scriptura* by completely altering its definition. The doctrine of Rome places final authority in the mind of the church, while evangelicalism places final authority in the mind of each individual. Both are declarations of autonomy. Only the doctrine of *Sola Scriptura* places the authority where it belongs—with God and His Word. It is this doctrine that must be reclaimed and proclaimed by the Church if she is to preach the gospel of Christ to a dying world.

Christians must return to the Bible. After all, we are to be a people of the Book—God's Word. To do this, we need to understand that the Bible is not to be treated as if it is a self-help book. We also need to understand the Bible is not a genie in a bottle, whereby if we open it, we will "magically" have an answer. This Russian roulette approach will never work, and yet, many Christians treat the Bible in this way. In contrast to all of these incorrect views is the correct view the Church has espoused for millennia—*Sola Scriptura*.

What is needed today is a return to the Bible that men like Augustine, John Calvin, Martin

Luther, Charles Spurgeon, John Owen, John Knox, Jonathan Edwards, as well as what modern preachers like Kevin DeYoung, John Piper, and Matt Chandler preach. The Bible contains one unified message that Jesus has come to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10) through His Son who bled, died, rose and ascended. Jesus is now our victorious, triumphant, and exalted High Priest, Intercessor, Mediator, and Advocate before the Father.

Men like Owen, Spurgeon, Calvin, and many others not only taught the Word, but proclaimed it as the authority that is binding on the consciences and lives of those who hear it. By having a right (biblical) view of Scripture, God's people will be fed from the streams of living water. The promise of Jesus is still the same as it always was—that living water would stream out of His people and into the lives of others (John 4:14, 7:38). The only reason God's people can store up God's Word in one's heart (Psalm 119:11) is that God's Word is true and authoritative.

The Bible is the only Book that is binding because it is the only Book that is inspired, inerrant, sufficient, and authoritative for faith, practice, and all of life. We need a return to the Bible, which accompanies a return to biblical preaching that honors God, who has come to save, is sanctifying, and will one day glorify His beloved, the Church.

This is why a return to *Sola Scriptura* will not only mean health to individual Christian lives, but also a return to biblical orthodoxy for those local churches who have lifted high the banner of theological liberalism for decades. Such a return is costly, but nevertheless important since the Bible is God's love-letter to man. May the Church preach *Sola Scriptura* so that the fame of God may be spread among the nations, for His glory.

References:

[i] Joel Beeke, *Living for God's Glory An Introduction to Calvinism* (Florida, Reformation Trust, 2008), 132-133.

[ii] Inst., 1.7.1.

[iii] Fred Klooster, "The Uniqueness of Reformed Theology: A Preliminary Attempt at Description" (Grand Rapids: The Reformed Ecumenical Synod, 1979), 1.

[iv] Inst., 1.7.5.

Four Convictions for Boldness From John Knox

By Jason M. Garwood

John Knox was born in Haddington in 1514, though admittedly there is some debate on the exact date. We do know that Knox was born into a poorer family with not a lot of resources. Upon completion (another point of historical contention) of University in 1536, Knox was ordained as a priest. By 1543 he was converted to Christ after a couple of years working as a tutor and notary. While not much is known regarding the context of his conversion, so began the journey of the man who would thunder the gospel in a dark Scotland.

As a pastor, I am intrigued by the life of John Knox and taken back by the trials he persevered through. For example, in 1546, the French took the castle at St. Andrews and the aftermath led to Knox's enslavement for 19 months. Yet Knox persevered. Eventually, he went back to England to preach the gospel during one of the more difficult times of English history.

While history is undoubtedly under the control of the sovereignty of God, Knox would contend with both the religious establishment (fighting against Anglican formalism in worship and Roman Catholicism) as well as the civil establishment. The latter contention would escalate when in 1553, Mary Tudor ("Blood Mary") would rise to power after King Edward VI died. Knox lived in a time of political uncertainty—something we can learn from indeed.

As God would have it, Knox fled to Geneva in 1554 where he developed a friendship with



John Calvin. Knox would visit Geneva several times, but in 1559 returned to Scotland to pastor at St. Giles, Edinburgh. From there Knox wrote, taught, preached, and fought for the gospel, eventually dying in 1572. You can find his grave underneath a parking lot at St. Giles Church today.

Power of Prayer

It is said that Mary, Queen of the Scots, feared the prayers of John Knox more than the assembled armies of Europe. Though weak in stature, the Reformer was a man broken before the Lord. He was a humble man who trusted not in himself but in the greatness of God. Prayer is a sure and steady sign that reads, “God is really great and powerful, I am not.” Knox was this type of man.

From his rough childhood—run-ins with various Cardinals and Bishops—to his time in captivity and on the run, Knox knew that in the midst of all these circumstances that he had to commit himself to the Lord. And what better way is there to do so than through communion with him in prayer? A humbled soul is a prayerful soul.

Perhaps one of the most telling aspects of Knox’s prayer life was his ability to pray in defense of the gospel and pray for his enemies. A prayer for Queen Mary is worth noting:

Behold our troubles and apparent destruction, and stay the sword of the thy vengeance before it devour us. Place above us, O Lord, for thy great mercies’ sake, such a head, with such rulers and magistrates, as fear thy name, and will the glory of Christ Jesus to spread. Take not from us the light of thy Evangel, and suffer no papistry to prevail in this realm. Illuminate the heart of our sovereign lady, Queen Mary, with pregnant gifts of thy Holy Ghost, and inflame the

hearts of her counsel with thy true fear and love.^[1]

“Perhaps one of my favorite pictures in history is a painting of John Knox preaching before Queen Mary...”

The prayers of John Knox were answered no different than our prayers today. In some circumstances, the Lord grants our requests according to his sovereign will. In other cases, the prayer is not answered. Either way, our God is the Lord and He knows what is best.

The power of prayer lies not within the sinner but the Savior. Getting this order right for discipleship is crucial. A disciple of Jesus is to be a man committed solely to the glory of God through a prayer life marked by a humble posture and persevering spirit. Such was the great Scottish Reformer.

Necessity of Conviction

John Knox was man with conviction running through his veins. Much like the Apostle Paul who “[proclaimed] the kingdom of God and [taught] about the Lord Jesus Christ *with all boldness and without hindrance*,”^[2] Knox believed in both the grace and severity of God. His prayers, preaching, writing, and actions all aligned in such a way as to demonstrate the reality that *conviction* is necessary if reformation is desired.

Perhaps one of my favorite pictures in history is a painting of John Knox preaching before Queen Mary and her council that was drafted in such a way as to demonstrate the conviction that poured through the life of Knox. Towering in the pulpit above the crowd, Knox thundered the gospel to the magistrates present. As D. Martin Lloyd-Jones has pointed out, Knox was a man with “astounding energy”, “shrewdness”, and “courage”.^[3] His ability to discern, press on, and courageously preach the gospel was rooted in his conviction that Jesus Christ is Lord, and that His *crown rights* must be acknowledged by all nations, especially His beloved Scotland.

Knox saw compromise and darkness in his homeland. It was in poor condition and immersed

in moral decadence. What is someone to do in a situation like this? *Have conviction*. The world could use more conviction. For disciples of Jesus, conviction is a prerequisite, which is why Paul told Titus that an elder “must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it” (Titus 1:9). Disciples who make disciples must be men and women who are committed to standing on the truth of God’s Word *convicted to the deepest parts of our souls* that Christ is King and that His gospel is sufficient. Nothing short of all-out commitment to raising the banner of Christ would suffice.

Priority of Preaching

At one point in Knox’s young life, he didn’t want to preach. In fact, when he was confronted about this issue, it is said that he left the room in tears, buckling under the weight of the task. For Knox, preaching was an incredibly large task, not because the preacher was anything special, but because the message was so precious.

During Knox’s young life, preaching wasn’t the focus in the Roman Catholic Church. After his conversion, his chaplaincy at St. Andrew’s proved an opportunity for him to teach. Knox feared the pulpit, but not because the message wasn’t powerful to transform, or because he could never do it—no, the fear was the weight of its importance. It was *of utmost importance*, which meant it must be done *soberly*.

His zeal for the gospel led to his power in the pulpit. Like a man wielding a sword in battle, so was Knox in the pulpit with the Bible. He didn’t shy away from cutting through the stone hearts of people with the truth of the sinfulness of man and the holiness of God, and offering those same sinners hope in the gospel. Christ was the focus of his preaching because Christ was the focus of his life.

“When Knox stepped into the pulpit to preach the Word of God, he opened with a half hour of calm exposition of the text before him. Thereafter, he became more vigorous.”^[4] The Bible was a priority for Knox because the gospel was *the* priority of the church. It was this prioritizing of the gospel that fueled the fire that came from Knox. That fire led to the Spirit of God working in the lives of many people.

As disciples, we must commit ourselves to preaching. Like Knox, we must see it as the priority because God uses the foolishness of ourselves and the cross as the means by which He saves sinners. Knox’s example here is worth our consideration. Do we truly value preaching? Are we humble in our approach to this daunting task? Do we really believe that the preaching of God’s word is *enough*?

Need for Perseverance

We are in desperate need of perseverance. Some say desperate times call for desperate measures—we might say desperate times call for faithful measures. Without perseverance, which is a repeated theme throughout Scripture, discipleship falls flat. The life of John Knox briefly outlined above demonstrates quite clearly that (1) Most of us haven’t walked through the things he did, and (2) We have no excuse for choosing to abandon the mission of God. Knox trusted in the sovereignty of God believing that God writes the story of history and He does so with us as His characters. He had a big God and big theology to boot. No doubt there were times of deep sorrow for the great Reformer—indeed there are plenty of times of sorrow for each of us!—but let us learn this last thing from Knox: Perseverance is water we drink during the times of seemingly unending fiery trials.

Hebrews 12:1-2 states, “Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the

race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.”

Jesus endured for us, so we, in turn, endure because of and for Him. He gives strength. He gives wisdom. He gives conviction. He gives courage. He gives righteousness. *Christ gives hope*. Oh, how prone we are to wander! God, grant your servants an unending supply of perseverance!

Follow Knox As He Follows Christ

Knox is a man worth emulating. While no stranger to controversy, Knox was committed to the Kingdom of God first and foremost. Like today’s culture, Scotland was a religious wasteland. Everyone did whatever was right in his own eyes. Knox reformed Scotland because the gospel light was dim. Though several hundreds years from our context, we can learn a lot from Knox. Knox had a sense of urgency—to make the gospel known *everywhere*. That, after all, is the heart of a disciple.

We don’t look to John Knox because he was great in and of himself. We don’t look to John Knox; we look to Jesus Christ, the King who John Knox served. We learn from this humble servant of history how to follow someone who is following Christ (1st Corinthians 11:1). May the Church in America *never* lose hope, but instead cling so dearly to the gospel of King Jesus that John Knox so fervently clung to.

References:

[1] John Knox, *The Select Practical Writings of John Knox* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2011), 25.

[2] [Acts 28:31](#), emphasis mine.

[3] See D. M. Lloyd-Jones and Iain H. Murray, *John Knox and the Reformation* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2011).

[4] Douglas Bond, *The Mighty Weakness of John Knox* (Sanford: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2011), 55.

The *Five Solas* of the Reformation and Their Importance Today

By Dave Jenkins



The Reformation in the 16th century is long known as a religious renewal movement, which we refer to today as the Protestant Reformation. This movement is known to have changed the course of Western civilization, but what is often not understood about this event is that no one single man caused it. For example, it didn't begin with Martin Luther (1483-1546) when he posted his *Ninety-Five Theses* on the church doors of Wittenberg on October 31st, 1517.

Luther's "Tower Experience" is said to be where he came to grasp the definitive doctrine of the Reformation: *justification by faith alone*. It's also important to note that the Reformation grew out of earlier attempts for renewal, the most notable of which was led by Peter Waldo (1140-1217) and his followers in the Alpine regions—i.e. John Wycliffe (1324—1384), etc.

Along with these two men, the Lollards in England (those without an academic background), and John Huss (1372-1415), and his followers in Bohemia are also significant figures in the Reformation. All of these men and many more are called forerunners of the Reformation—rather than Reformers—since, although they anticipated many of the emphasis of the Reformation, they lacked a complete understanding of the critical doctrine of justification by faith alone. While the intent of Lu-

ther's Reformation was originally to purge the Roman Catholic Church of its abuses, the Lord expanded this Reformation reach and influence into other regions and throughout the coming centuries. And it's five core teachings are as valuable today as they were in the 16th century.

The Five Solas

The Reformers taught what is known as the "*Five Solas*": Scripture alone (*Sola Scriptura*), faith alone (*Sola Fide*), grace alone (*Sola Gratia*), Christ alone (*Solus Christus*), and glory to God alone (*Soli Deo Gloria*). Dr. Joel Beeke notes, "The first of these battle cries deals with the fundamental issue of authority, the middle three deal with the basics of salvation, and the final one addresses worship." [i]

The Importance of the Five Solas for Today

In the past few years, researchers have been hard at work studying problems in the American Church. One study done by sociologist Christian Smith, and his fellow researchers with the National Study of Youth and Religion, came to conclude that American's youth believe in a philosophy called "moral therapeutic deism". Smith and his research team define this in the following ways:

- "A god exists who created and ordered the world and watches over human life on earth."
- "God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions."
- "The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself."
- "God does not need to be particularly involved in one's life except when God is needed to resolve a problem."
- "Good people go to heaven when they die."

This definition is significant for several reasons. The decline of mainstream American denominations came about as a denial of the *authority* of the Bible. When the authority of the Bible is diminished, there is no standard for faith and practice. Thus, a return to the first *Sola*—*Sola Scriptura*—should be our battle cry. The Scriptures are the inspired, inerrant, authoritative, and sufficient Word of God. When the Bible speaks, God's people should hear, heed, and obey the Word by His grace. Not only this—the Bible proclaims the Truth of the other *Solas*, namely that salvation is by grace alone through faith in Christ. Man has not been saved for his own purposes, but for God's purpose and glory. Thus man's greatest need is indeed Christ. As Charles Spurgeon said, "I have a great need for Christ, I have a great Christ for my need."

The greatest need of the Church has always been reformation around the Word of God. Thus, undergirding these *Five Solas* is *Ecclesia Semper Reformanda est*, which means, "**the church (is) always to be reformed**". The Word of God stands over us—individually and collectively. This is why the Church must always be a listening to the Word. Romans 10:17 states, "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ." Michael Horton notes:

"Personally and corporately, the church comes into being and is kept alive by hearing the gospel. The church is always on the receiving end of God's good gifts as well as His correction. The Spirit does not lead us apart from the Word but directs us back to Christ as He is revealed in Scripture. We always need to return to the voice of our Shepherd. The same gospel that creates the church sustains and renews it."[ii]

Rather than being restrictive, *Ecclesia Semper reformanda est* undergirds the *Five Solas* by providing a foundation on which they can stand. The Church exists because of Christ, is in Christ, and is for the spread of the glory of Christ. As Horton further notes:

"When we invoke the whole phrase — 'the church Reformed and always being reformed according to the Word of God' — we confess that we belong to the church and not simply to ourselves and that this church is always created and renewed by the Word of God rather than by the spirit of the age."^[iii]

The *Five Solas* provide the foundation for a robust and genuine evangelical faith and practice. My prayer is that the Lord would daily renew in His people a love for what He loves—a love of His grace, proclaimed in His power from every pulpit throughout the land, and from every mouth and tongue of His beloved for His glory.

References:

[i] Joel Beeke, *Living For God's Glory An Introduction To Calvinism* (Lake Mary, FL, Reformation Trust, 2008), 6.

[ii] Michael Horton "Semper Reformanda," October 1st, 2009, Table Talk Magazine, accessed 4 November 2014. <http://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/semper-reformanda/>

[iii] Ibid. <http://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/semper-reformanda/>

Does the Reformation Still Matter?

By Stephen Nichols



The things that matter most to us all center on the Gospel. The Church simply can't afford to forget the lesson of the Reformation about the utter supremacy of the gospel in everything the church does. Elie Wiesel, Nobel Prize winner and Holocaust survivor, has dedicated his life to bearing witness to the unimaginable horrors and atrocities of the Holocaust. He speaks of the unspeakable. And he does so because humanity cannot afford to forget the lesson of the Holocaust. It is far too

easy to forget, especially when forgetting eases our conscience. History, however, compels us to remember. In studying the Reformation, we remember what the Church is all about, and we remember how easy it is for the church to lose its grip on the gospel.

If he said it once, Martin Luther said it a hundred times: “The church’s true treasure is the gospel.” Luther lived during a time when this true treasure had been traded for something worth far less. As a monk, he stood in a long line of succession that stretched back through centuries of theologians and churchmen who had heaped up layer upon layer of extra-biblical teaching and practice, obscuring the church’s true treasure of the gospel. Like scaffolding that surrounds and hides the beauty of a building, these layers needed to be torn down so the object that mattered could be seen without hindrance and without obstruction. Luther, with a little help from his friends, tore down the scaffolding, revealing the beauty and wonder of the gospel for the church once again. Luther called his own (re)discovery of the gospel a “breakthrough” (*durchbruch* in German).

The Five Solas of the Reformation

In the process, he brought about an entire revolution of church life, practice, and doctrine. Many of the doctrines that we Protestants take for granted find their crystallized expression in the thought of the Reformers. Theologians speak of the *Solas*, from the Latin word *sola*, meaning “alone”. Usually, we list *Five Solas*:

- #1: *Sola Scriptura*, meaning “Scripture alone”:** The Bible is the sole and final authority in all matters of life and godliness. The church looks to the Bible as its ultimate authority.
- #2 and #3: *Sola Gratia*, meaning “grace alone,” and *Sola Fide*, meaning “faith alone”:** Salvation is by grace alone through faith alone. It is not by works; we come to Christ empty-handed. This is the great doctrine of justification by faith alone, the cornerstone of the Reformation.
- #4: *Solus Christus*, meaning “Christ alone”:** There is no other mediator between God and sinful humanity than Christ. He alone, based on his work on the cross, grants access to the Father.
- #5: *Soli Deo Gloria*, meaning “the glory of God alone”:** All of life can be lived for the glory of God; everything we do can and should be done for his glory. The Reformers called this the doctrine of *vocation*, viewing our work and all the roles we play in life as a calling.

These doctrines form the bedrock of all that we believe, and the Reformers gave these doctrines their finest expression. In addition to the doctrines we routinely believe, the Reformers also laid out for us many of the practices of the church that we take for granted. The Church had lost sight of the sermon, celebrating the Mass instead. The Reformers returned the sermon to the church service. In the case of the Puritans in England, they returned it with a vengeance.

Congregations didn’t sing in the centuries leading up to the Reformation. In fact, Jan Hus, one of the pre-Reformation reformers, was condemned as a heretic for, among other things, having his congregation sing. Luther and the other Reformers restored congregational singing to the church. Knowing this should humble us every time we sing in church. We should offer our heartfelt thanks to Luther, and we should remember what Hus gave for the privilege.

The Reformers also revolutionized daily life outside the church. They gave new meaning to work and to various roles—spouses, parents, and children; employees and employers; civic rulers

and citizens. Prior to the Reformation, the only work that really mattered was church work. The rest of life was simply viewed as putting in time. Prior to the Reformation, the only work that really mattered was church work. The rest of life was simply viewed as putting in time.

Do We Still Need the Reformation?

So far we have been assuming that the Reformation matters because it serves the Church and because it was a most valuable time in the Church's life when so many had lost their way. Some, however, have a different opinion of the Reformation's value.

The dean of American church historians, Mark Noll, has published a book with a rather provocative title, *Is the Reformation Over?* [1] Noll and co-author Carolyn Nystrom offer an answer that is hotly debated. They say, yes, the Reformation is over. This book represents one particular viewpoint that stretches back to another hotly debated document entitled "Evangelicals and Catholics Together" (ECT). This document speaks of the newfound unity between Roman Catholics and Evangelicals "nearly five hundred years after the divisions of the Reformation era." [2]

This approach views the Reformation as a necessary and most help-ful corrective of a medieval Roman Catholic Church gone quite bad and adrift from the gospel and the authority of Scripture. But times have changed, some argue. Consequently, the Reformation is over. Instead of trumping the Catholic/Protestant distinction, we should seek unity within the church, a unity that attempts to bridge the Protestant/Roman Catholic divide.

In other circles, such as recent movements within the Anglican Church, the Reformation is seen much more negatively. It is seen as the source of division and strife, an unfortunate occurrence in the life of the church, and a sin of the past that must be atoned for. This views the Reformation not as a breakthrough but as a breakdown of the unity of the Church, a failure to live up to Christ's command that the Church be one (John 17:23). [3]

Luther and the other Reformers cast their vote for unity, but not for unity at all costs. The ecumenical spirit of our contemporary age neglects the caution of the Reformers, establishing a Christian unity that is built on the flimsiest theological foundations. Against the current drive for ecumenicism and even for pluralism, the Reformers remind us that unity apart from a solid biblical and theological base builds a grand castle on mere sand.

There are also those within Evangelicalism or Protestantism who look askance at the Reformation. They see the Reformation as causing too many divisions, too many denominations. They don't seek unity across the Roman Catholic/Protestant divide, but they do seek unity within Protestantism. They see the Reformers as classic theological nitpickers, too concerned over minutiae, who unnecessarily split the church. They cringe to think of all the denominations left to us by the Reformation and cry out for unity.

What Was At Stake

Against all of these challenges to the Reformation, we need to real-ize that the Reformers saw nothing less than the gospel at stake. We sometimes forget what Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, and others risked in taking a stand for the gospel. They risked their very lives. Regarding the Reformers' work as nothing more than sowing seeds of unfortunate division shows both little knowledge of and little respect for what they did. They were human, and they had their faults and shortcomings. They sinned, sometimes greatly. But they also, like the imperfect characters of the Bible, were used greatly by God. In other words, the Church should be grateful for the Reformation. And in this age of religious pluralism, theo-logical laxity, and biblical illiteracy, perhaps the Reformation is needed more than ever before.

Prior to the Reformation, there were various attempts to reform the Church. Some movements addressed issues of church leadership and government, trying to wrest control from the papacy. Other groups tried to reform the extravagance of the Church and its pursuit of wealth. Others addressed the lackluster spirituality that was all too prevalent. These movements could put their finger on the problem—they just couldn't arrive at a solution. All of these movements failed where the Reformation succeeded. The reason? The Reformation got to the heart of the matter: right theology. The Reformers rightly diagnosed the disease, and they rightly administered the necessary cure.

Today we can fall into the same trap as those failed movements that attempted reform. We can put our trust in programs. We can rely on new leadership or the application of innovative management techniques. We can count on moral reform. The Reformation sounds a clarion call of caution to all such attempts. If we as a church don't get it right on the doctrines of the Bible, Christ, and salvation, we'll never head in the right direction, no matter how innovative or energetic or zealous we may be.

Learning from the Reformation

We study the Reformation because of what we can learn. We learn of the treasure of the gospel. We learn how easy it can be for the Church to lose sight of its value. We learn of the origin of most of the practices of church life that we simply take for granted. We learn what doctrines should matter most. We learn how to proclaim those doctrines in the world in which we live. And we learn about real people, gifted and talented, who also possessed the flaws and limitations of humanity.

Above all, we learn from them that our faith and trust lie not ultimately in their lives and in their examples, but in the God-man, Jesus Christ. They all point us beyond themselves to him. Luther said it best: "We are beggars."

This article is adapted from [*The Reformation: How a Monk and a Mallet Changed the World*](#) by Stephen J. Nichols.

References:

- [1] Mark A. Noll and Carolyn Nystrom, *Is The Reformation Over? An Evangelical Assessment of Contemporary Roman Catholicism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005).
- [2] "Evangelicals and Catholics Together," *First Things* 43 (May 1994), 15-22.
- [3] See various documents related to the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC), such as "The Agreed Statement on Eucharistic Doctrine" and "Agreed Statements on Authority in the Church," available online at www.prounione.urbe.it.

A Book Review:

Why the Reformation Still Matters

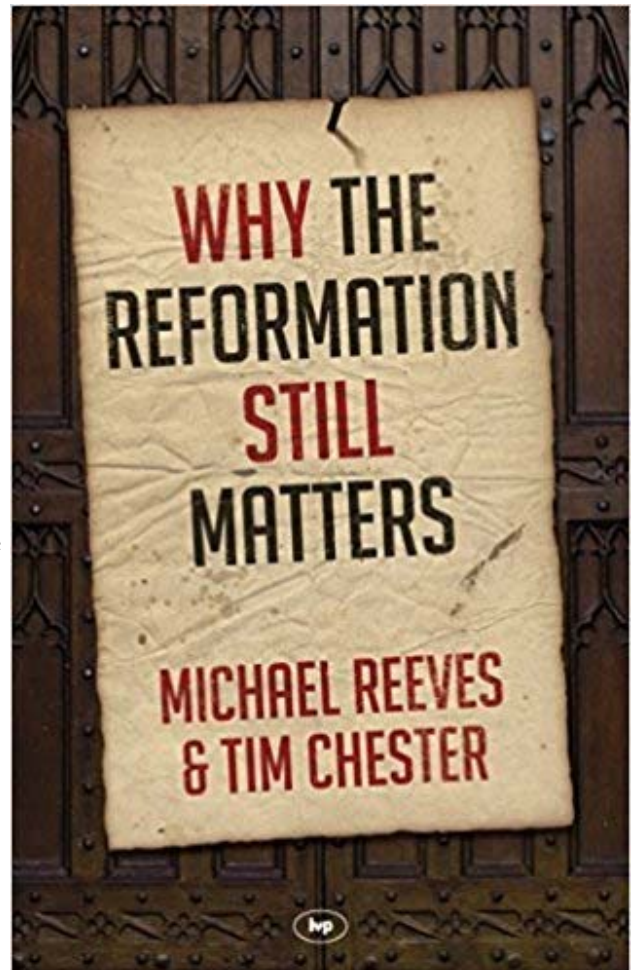
By David Steele

October 31st, 2017, marks the 500 Year Anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. This quin-centennial celebration is remarkable in many ways, as Protestants around the world will remember the accomplishments of the Reformers, most notably the bold move by Martin Luther in nailing the *Ninety-Five Theses* to the castle door at Wittenberg.

Despite the widespread celebration of many who take delight in the rediscovery of the gospel, and the great doctrine of justification by faith alone, there is an ongoing debate concerning the relevance of the Reformation for our time. Michael Reeves and Tim Chester address this specific matter in their new book, *Why the Reformation Still Matters*.

After a brief introduction to the history and theology of the Reformation, Reeves and Chester waste no time in an initial answer to the question: “We need a stronger, not a weaker focus on Reformation theology.” They describe the Reformation as “a continual movement back to God’s Word”. Thus, the stage is set for the remainder of the book which will argue in no uncertain terms that the Reformation still matters.

Reeves and Chester undergird their stance by pointing readers to key doctrines that were rediscovered during the days of the Protestant Reformation. They showcase the gospel systematically as they unfold the biblical reality of sovereign grace. Indeed, we are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, on the Word



alone, to the glory of God alone.

Each doctrine is unveiled and contrasted with the historic Roman Catholic position, which gives readers an opportunity to interact with two competing systems of thought. The authors are charitable and gracious, but never compromise the truth. Reeves and Chester boldly present the core elements of Reformed theology; doctrines that magnify the Savior and humble sinners.

Why the Reformation Still Matters is an outstanding summary of this important topic. People from all stripes, from beginning to advanced, will benefit from reading this book. There is enough information to keep seasoned theologians and students of church history on their toes. Yet, the material is not too advanced for anyone just getting started in the field of church history.

The balance here is rare and should be well received by readers.

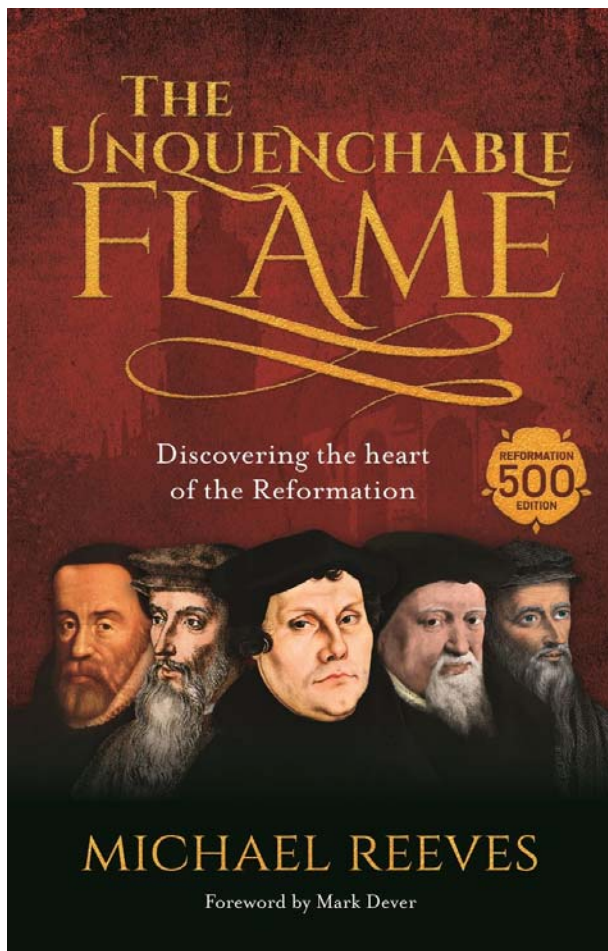
“Through these truths,” write Reeves and Chester, “lives can still blossom under the joy-giving light of God’s glory.”

Why the Reformation Still Matters succeeds by making a positive case for the gospel-saturated truths that flowed from the Reformation and continue to impact lives in our generation. Yet, theology is more than an end in itself. “Through these truths,” write Reeves and Chester, “lives can still blossom under the joy-giving light of God’s glory.” In other words, the Reformation makes a practical difference in the lives of people. It did 500 years ago and will continue to impact lives as we await the return of our Sovereign King.

A Book Review:

The Unquenchable Flame: Discovering the Heart of the Reformation

By James Forbis



The Unquenchable Flame: Discovering the Heart of the Reformation, by Michael

Reeves, may be the most important book you can read this year in preparation for (or in celebration of) the 500th anniversary of the Reformation on October 31st. Although this book was published and released in 2010, it is important for pastors, lay leaders, and Christians of all stripes to be familiar with, and understand why, the Reformation still matters and must continue on.

Reeves does a masterful job weaving the narrative of Martin Luther's defense before the imperial council at Worms, to Ulrich Zwingli and the Radical Reformers, to the man who all Calvinist look to as their patriarch, John Calvin. In addition, the author looks at the Reformation of Great Britain and the English royalty. What Reeves does is blend history with the flair of a modern day TV drama that has plot twists and cliffhangers galore to keep the reader on the edge of his/her seat throughout the entire book.

This book is critical for pastors to read because it gives them a very good swath of church history, which is important for understanding why Protestants believe the things they do, and how to correct false teaching that comes from the Roman Catholic Church to this day. Pastors will be wise to take careful notes of chapters one and two, because it is here that Reeves sets the proverbial stage for his narrative. It is also where he explains the key reasons for the Reformation occurring. From the teaching of indulgences, purgatory, the ne-

cessity of Catholic Mass for salvation, Reeves covers it all succinctly.

This will give pastors and lay-leaders a strong historical-theological background for the birth of the *Five Solas*, along with the importance to keep teaching these core doctrines of the Protestant faith. Without the Reformation occurring and men like John Calvin, Martin Luther, and William Tyndale, who risked their lives and reputations for the Word of God, we would still be under the auspi-

“Like Luther before the imperial council and the Emperor Charles V of the Holy Roman Empire, we must boldly proclaim our faith...”

cious ruling of the Roman Catholic Church.

Without Tyndale giving his life for translating much of the Bible into English in 1526, it’s safe to say that the Reformation in England wouldn’t have occurred when it did. Tyndale laid the foundation of reform that people like Thomas Cranmer, John Dudley, and the most famous English Protestant—Queen Elizabeth I—built off of.

One of the best hidden gems of this book is the timeline in the back that gives a quick overview of the most important dates and events that occurred during the Reformation. It really speaks volumes of the grace of God during these times.

The Reformation is not over. We should constantly be reforming and refining our theological convictions and positions to be more in-step with the Bible. This book offers a charge in the last chapter to do just that, to keep learning and teaching sound doctrine. All Scripture is profitable for teaching, correction, reproof, and the very divine Word of God speaking to us.

It’s important that we thank God for where our faith originated, who fought and gave their lives to defend the faith, delivered once for all the saints. Finally, it’s important to continue this legacy so that we can fight heresy and false teaching before it creeps over the thresholds of our churches and into the heart and souls of our congregants. Like Luther before the imperial council and the Emperor Charles V of the Holy Roman Empire, we must boldly proclaim our faith, contend for the faith, and should the Lord tarry till long after you or I are dead, this should be our testimony and our confession:

“I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not retract anything since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. I cannot do otherwise, here I stand, may God help me, Amen!”

– Martin Luther, April 16th, 1521, Worms, Germany.

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Recommended Reading on The *Five Solas*, Church History, and Reformed Theology

This season at Servants of Grace, we've been considering the *Five Solas* and how we need Reformation inside the local Church. In our day, many believe that truth is all about how we feel, or dismiss the place of doctrine in the Christian Life. And yet some even believe they can live the Christian life without being part of the Church. With this issue of *Theology of Life*, we hope that readers grew to love the *Five Solas* and learn the need for Reformation in the Church. If you've found this subject interesting and want to study the issue further, please check out the recommended reading list below. These books are at the top of this genre in both excellence and readability.

The *Five Solas*:

- *Whatever Happened to the Gospel of Grace?: Rediscovering the Doctrines that Shook the World* by James Montgomery Boice
- *After Darkness Light: Distinctives of Reformed Theology* by R.C. Sproul Jr.

***Sola Scriptura* (Scripture Alone):**

- *Sola Scriptura: The Protestant Position on the Bible* (Various Authors)
- *The Shape of Sola Scriptura* by Keith A. Mathison
- *Scripture Alone: Exploring the Bible's Accuracy, Authority and Authenticity* by James R. White
- [21 Questions on The Doctrine of Scripture \(Free eBook\)](#) by Francis Turretin

***Solus Christus* (Christ Alone):**

- *The Glory of Christ: His Office and Grace* by John Owen
- [Christ, the Believer's Wisdom, Righteousness, Sanctification and Redemption](#) (eBook) (Various Authors)
- *Salvation Accomplished by the Son* by Robert Peterson
- *Our Sufficiency in Christ* by John MacArthur
- *Christ Alone: The Uniqueness of Jesus as Savior* by Stephen Wellum

***Sola Gratia* (Grace Alone):**

- *By Grace Alone: How the Grace of God Amazes Me* by Sinclair Ferguson
- *Bondage of the Will* by Martin Luther
- *Saved by Grace* by Herman Bavinck
- [All of Grace](#) (Click here for the [free eBook](#)) by C. H. Spurgeon
- [The Plan of Salvation](#) (download the free eBook [here](#)) by B. B. Warfield
- [The Silver Thread: Augustine vs. Pelagius in Church History \(eBook\)](#) by Augustine and John

Calvin

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

Sola Fide (Faith Alone):

- *Studies on Saving Faith* by W. Pink
- [*The Doctrine of Justification*](#) (get the free eBook [here](#)) by James Buchanan
- *Justification: Understanding the Classic Reformed Doctrine* by JV Fesko
- *Faith Alone: The Evangelical Doctrine of Justification* by RC Sproul

Solis Deo Gloria (To God Alone be the Glory):

- *God's Glory Alone—The Majestic Heart of Christian Faith and Life: What the Reformers Taught and Why It Still Matters* by David VanDrunen
- *The Pleasures of God* by John Piper
- *The Glory of God* by Robert Peterson
- *Living for God's Glory* by Joel Beeke

Reformed Theology:

- *The Unquenchable Flame* by Michael Reeves
- *The Reformation* by Stephen Nichols
- *Church History in Plain Language* by Bruce Shelley
- *2000 Years of Christ's Power* by Nick Needham
- *Meet the Puritans* by Joel Beeke & Randall Pederson
- *What Is Reformed Theology?* by R.C. Sproul – This is a classic.
- *Five Points* by John Piper
- *Killing Calvinism* by Greg Dutcher.
- *Foundation of Grace* by Steve Lawson
- *Institutes of the Christian Religion* by John Calvin

Historical Theology:

- *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine* by Allison, Gregg R.
- *The History of Christian Doctrines* by Berkhof, Louis
- *Heresies: Heresy and Orthodoxy in the History of the Church* by Brown, Harold O. J.
- *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine* (5 volumes) by Pelikan, Jaroslav

For more information on this subject, you can also check out <http://servantsofgrace.org> to view our many articles.

In Christ Alone,

Dave Jenkins
Executive Editor of *Theology for Life Magazine*

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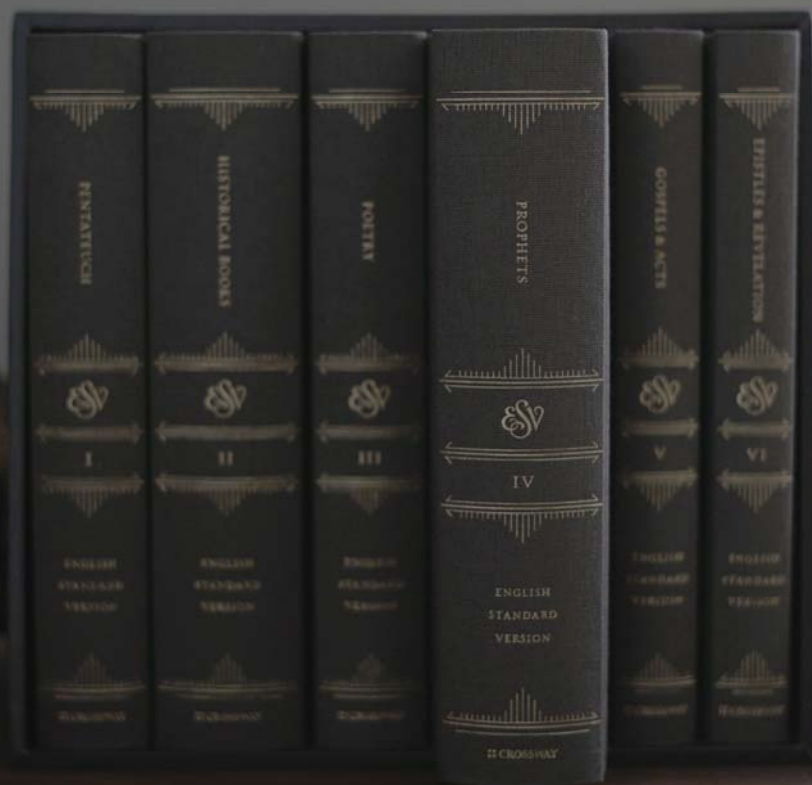
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