

The Fruit of the Reformation

Some of you may have seen the sermon title on the screen and silently said, “If it’s not fruit I can eat, I’m not interested.”

“I get it. THE REFORMATION, blah, blah, blah. Big deal; it happened 500 years ago. Let’s move on.”

NOT SO FAST MY FRIEND

You may, or may not, realize it, but the issues of the reformation live on today, and unlike most of the issues that are trending on Twitter, Yahoo, Facebook, or BuzzFeed, the issues at stake have foundational and eternal consequences for our lives.

Bob Borger has brought us a few messages related to the Reformation “Sola” themes. As a group of related theological topics, those “Sola” slogans rocked the world – **Scripture Alone, Grace Alone, Christ Alone, Faith Alone, the Glory of God Alone**. Those slogans are at the heart of the Reformation issue of Justification by Grace.

Those principles changed the way people understood the person of God, the core of salvation and the way in which we are to live our lives as believers.

It is hard for us to grasp the significance of the Reformation because we live 500 years on this side of it. It is like the wallpaper – we’ve gotten used to it and we take it for granted.

I’ll leave it to Bob to finish the series on the 5 Sola’s of the Reformation. Today I want to speak on what some have called **The Fruit of the Reformation – the Evangelical Church**.

This is not the “evangelical” church we hear about today when pollster and pundits predict who the evangelicals will support in the next election.

Rather I’m referring to the evangelical, or “gospel/good news” church that grew up as a result of the Rediscovery of the Gospel of Grace.

In 1517, the church of the day, and there was only one- -the Roman Catholic- church had managed to obscure the clear and simple light of the Good News behind a system of rituals, relics, penance, indulgences, Papal pronouncements, a Latin only worship service, and a bible that was kept from the people of the congregation.

Corruption and superstition were rampant. One of the issues that moved Luther to post the 95 Theses was the sale of indulgences.

What is an indulgence, you ask? Hold on, because this is where it gets a bit wonky.

An indulgence was a payment to the Catholic Church that purchased an exemption from punishment (penance) for some types of sins.

The payment could be money, or performing some act of piety.

You could not get an indulgence to excuse a murder, but you could get one to excuse many lesser sins, such as thinking lustful thoughts about someone who was not your spouse. The customers for indulgences were Catholic believers who feared that if one of their sins went unnoticed or unconfessed, they would spend extra time in purgatory before reaching heaven or worse, wind up in hell for failing to repent....Church leaders justified it by arguing that they had inherited an unlimited

amount of good works (the Treasury of Merit) from Jesus, and the credit for these good works could be sold to believers in the form of indulgences. In other words, **indulgences functioned like "confession insurance" against eternal damnation** because, if you purchased an indulgence, then you wouldn't go to hell if you died suddenly or forgot to confess something.

This was the central issue that Luther addressed with the 95 Theses – posted on Oct 31, 1517

"They preach man-made doctrines who say that so soon as the coin jingles into the money-box, the soul flies out of purgatory." Theses #27 That was one aspect of the theology and practice that Luther sought to Reform. As things unfolded, it became clear that there was a whole system of doctrine and practice that was in opposition to the Gospel of Christ.

In this context the Reformers sought to bring the church back to the clarity of the Gospel
As D.T. Niles put it, **"the Gospel is the proclamation of an event and the invitation to an encounter."**
Both had been lost or hidden under the faulty theology and practice of the Medieval Church.

As the rituals, superstitions and Biblical illiteracy gave way to the proclamation of salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, the fruit was the Evangelical Church.

The very nature of church life changed because of the Reformation. The focus moved from the "needs" those who had died, and were perhaps in Purgatory to those who were alive, fighting the good fight of faith. Instead of focusing time, energy and money on what to do for the departed souls who are gone and invisible, there arose a fellowship of living saints who sought to encourage one another through the Spirit wrought Word and sacraments.

The impact of the Reformation took several forms: Wm Childs Robinson gives some great insights in his book, *The Reformation: A Rediscovery of Grace*

One thing that changed was the Pastoral Need, in and for an Evangelical fellowship. **Much of church life had been spent on manipulations for the dead rather than on the communion of the living saints.** Wm Childs Robinson

EX: Martin Luther went to Rome 1510 and rushed around to every place where merit was offered.

One such place was the Scala Sancta – the Holy Stairs

According to [Roman Catholic](#) tradition, the Holy Stairs are the steps that led up to the [praetorium](#) of [Pontius Pilate](#) in [Jerusalem](#) on which [Jesus Christ](#) stepped on his way to [trial](#) during his [Passion](#).^[2] The Stairs reputedly were brought to [Rome](#) by [St. Helena](#) in the fourth century. For centuries, the Scala Sancta has attracted Christian pilgrims who wish to honor the Passion of [Jesus Christ](#).

[Martin Luther](#) climbed these steps on his knees in 1510. As he did so, he repeated the Our Father on each step. It was said, by doing this work one could "redeem a soul from purgatory." But when Luther arrived at the top he could not suppress his doubt, "Who knows whether this is true?"^[8]

Lest we think that indulgences were simply an issue 500 years ago, we should note that [Pope St. Pius X](#), on 26 February 1908, conceded a [plenary indulgence](#) as often as the Stairs are devoutly ascended after Confession and Holy Communion. (A plenary indulgence remits all temporal "punishment" required to cleanse the soul from attachment to anything but God)

ANYBODY here thankful for the Reformation???

In 1516 Luther preached against the indulgence system. His teaching to the church was that “Christians who give to the living poor are better than those who buy indulgences for the departed.”

Luther brought the focus of the Evangelical fellowship from gaining heaven for the dead to encouraging gospel faith in the hearts of those who were living on earth.

A SECOND area of impact came in the area of the **Worship of the Evangelical Church**-

The ritualistic Latin Mass shrouded in the mystery of a language that most people did not speak, was transformed into a service where the central purpose was to introduce god to man and to lead men and women to God, as He made Himself known through Jesus Christ. In addition, the Bible was being translated into the language of the people.

Wm. C. Robinson – “In the man Christ Jesus the high and holy became the meek and lowly. Through Christ we poor sinners find access to the throne of grace and receive mercy for every time of need. “

The Christ ALONE aspect of Reformed worship put Jesus at the center of the prayer and hymns of the evangelical worship. Songs and hymns in the common language were being composed by Reformed leaders such as Luther and Calvin. (Calvin – Geneva Psalter for singing the Psalms)

The reading and preaching of the Word was given prominence because the evangelical church understood that Christ is revealed through the Scriptures. For Luther, the Word of God is equivalent to the grace of God because the Word brings to us the consolation of God and leads to the miracle of meeting God in a personal way.

A distinguishing mark of the evangelical congregation was the preaching of the gospel of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

Calvin taught that the removal of the Word signifies the departure of the Lord (Inst II, v,13).

“When the church recedes from the truth of God as her rule for worship, she ceases to be the wife of Christ and becomes an adulteress” – Calvin Tracts I,103.

Luther understood that one thing was crucial for a life of faith, freedom and righteousness, and that one thing was the holy Word of God, the gospel of Christ. He observed that “there is no more terrible disaster with which the wrath of god can afflict man than a famine of the hearing of His Word.” But “there is no greater mercy than when God sends forth His Word.” (note – importance of the Gideon Bible Society).

You can live under wrath or mercy depending on how you relate to God’s Word.

We see the problem today as churches move away from the preaching of the Word and move toward preaching headlines, sociology, psychology, and the latest trendy cultural view that is out there.

The Reformers also encouraged the use of the Lord’s Prayer, the Ten Commandments and the Apostle’s Creed in catechetical work and in worship. They were not used to replace the preaching of the Word but were teaching aids for teaching Biblical truth. These were helpful ways of engaging the people in the prayers and liturgy of the church, rather than having everything led by the priest.

ANYBODY HERE THANKFUL FOR THE REFORMATION?

The final impact to consider this morning is one that many of you will have heard of –

The Priesthood of All Believers

“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” (v. 9)
- 1 Peter 2:9–10

If that idea is new to you, then let me explain what it is NOT. This is not a view that says that all believers must quit their jobs and become priests or pastors.

Nor is it a view that taught the priesthood of the believer, i.e. that each person can exercise his or her own autonomous private judgment about the things of god and the teaching of scripture.

Rather, it is an understanding of the role and standing of all Christians that rocked the world of the Reformers.

Timothy George

In his *Address to the Nobility of the German Nation (1520)*, Luther criticized the traditional distinction between the “temporal” and “spiritual” orders—the laity and the clergy—arguing that all who belong to Christ through faith, baptism, and the Gospel shared in the priesthood of Jesus Christ and belonged “truly to the spiritual estate”:

The idea that is so easy to fall into is that the clergy (priests, nuns, etc) are the spiritual people and all others are only engaged in temporal or secular work. The priests were the designated “holy” people and were dressed in a way that distinguished them from all others.

Luther and the Reformers challenged that view through the teaching of scripture.

“For whoever comes out of the water of baptism can boast that he is already a consecrated priest, bishop, and pope, although of course it is not seemly that just anybody shall exercise such office.” All baptized believers are called to be priests, Luther said, but not all are called to be pastors.

It became common in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries to speak of the “priesthood of the believer.” The reformers, however, spoke instead of the “priesthood of all believers” (plural). For them it was never a matter of a lonely, isolated seeker of truth, but rather of a band of faithful believers united in a common confession as a local, visible “holy congregation.”

Paul Althaus, the great interpreter of Luther’s theology, explains the original Reformation meaning of this term:

Luther never understands the priesthood of all believers merely in the sense of the Christian’s freedom to stand in a direct relationship to God without a human mediator. Rather, he constantly emphasizes the Christian’s evangelical authority to come before God on behalf of the brethren and also of the world. **The universal priesthood expresses not religious individualism but its exact opposite, the reality of the congregation as a community.**

For Luther, the priesthood of all believers did not mean, “I am my own priest.” It meant rather: In the community of saints, God has so wired the body that we are all priests to each other. Each believer has gifts for the benefit of the whole body. We engage in ONE ANOTHERING as a community of priests. We stand before God and intercede for one another, we proclaim God’s Word to one another and we celebrate his presence among us in worship, praise, and fellowship. Moreover, our priestly ministry does not lead to Christian navel gazing. It propels us into the world in service and witness.

John Calvin interpreted the priesthood of all believers in terms of the church's participation in the threefold office of Christ as Prophet, King, and Priest. Specifically, every Christian is mandated to be a representative of Christ in his redemptive outreach to the world: "All believers ... should seek to bring others into the church, and should strive to lead the wanderers back to the road, should stretch forth a hand to the fallen and should win over the outsiders."

In other words, the priesthood of believers is not a privilege on which we can rest; it is a calling which sends us forth into the world to exercise a priestly ministry, not for ourselves, but for others—"the outsiders"—not instead of Christ, to be sure, but for the sake of Christ as His ambassadors.

For Calvin, the priesthood of all believers was not only a spiritual privilege but a moral obligation and a personal vocation.

This teaching filled the common workers with a deep sense of dignity and enabled them to approach their work "as unto the Lord."

Luther's view could be expressed by the idea that "The Christian shoemaker does his duty not by putting little crosses on the shoes, but by making good shoes, because it is work done in the service of your neighbor to the glory of God."

What this means is that your vocation, as long as it is not immoral or illegal, is a way to serve your neighbor and honor God. As a believer, YOU represent Christ as his ambassador wherever you go.

Timothy George - The priesthood of all believers is a call to ministry and service; it is a barometer of the quality of the life of God's people in the body of Christ and of the coherence of our witness in the world, the world for which Christ died. This teaching is a summons to faithfulness on the part of all Christians, Protestants and Catholics alike.

The Reformation may be 500 years old, but the church is only one generation from being captive again to rituals, superstitions, ignorance and unbelief.

The Reformation is something that we must keep alive so that we, the priesthood of believers, might be faithful to clearly proclaim the clear Gospel message of salvation by Grace alone, by faith alone, through Christ alone.

I HOPE THESE REMINDERS WILL MAKE YOU MORE THANKFUL FOR THE REFORMATION
AMEN

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