

Reformation Day – Sunday School

A. Prayer

B. Opening

1. How might you describe this day to your independent, charismatic, Pentecostal friends?
2. Why do you suppose it is important for us to remember such a day as this?

C. The Reformation: a short history

1. R.C. Sproul said once concerning this subject, *“Think of the Reformation this way. If something needs to be ‘re-formed’, it is only because it had become ‘de-formed.’ And ‘re-formation’ after ‘de-formation’ presupposes an original ‘formation.’”*
2. **FORMATION-**
 - a. For several hundred years after Pentecost, Christianity was a minor but growing religion. Emperor Constantine, of the Roman Empire, changed that when in 313 A.D. he decreed Christianity to be the true church of the Roman Empire. The influence of the Church was so large that when the empire fell in the 5th Cent. It was the Church that took over as the shaping force in Western Society.
 - b. The classic understanding and confession for these first 5 centuries surrounded these points: the consensus of the five first centuries of the church:
 - (1) Classic theism: One omnipotent, benevolent God, distinct from creation.
 - (2) Nicene and Chalcedonian Trinitarianism: one God in three eternally existent persons, equal in power and glory.
 - (3) Christ, the God-Man, the one mediator between God & the human race, incarnate, crucified, resurrected, ascended, & coming again.
 - (4) Humanity created in the image of God, yet tragically fallen & profoundly in need of restoration to God through Christ.
 - (5) The Visible Church: the community of the redeemed, indwelt y the Holy Spirit; the mystical body of Christ on earth.
 - (6) The one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church.
 - (7) The Sacraments: visible signs and seals of the grace of God, ministering Christ’s love to us in our deep need.
 - (8) The Christian life: characterized by the prime theological virtues of faith, hope, and love.

- c. It would be correct to say that this is a statement of the Protestant faith more than it is a statement of the Reformed faith.
 - (1) From this list we see that Reformed Christians adhere to all the foundational beliefs taught in the Bible.
 - (2) These beliefs were the foundation of the early church and are based on the teachings of the Bible as interpreted by the apostles and early church fathers.
 - (3) Many of these beliefs were changed or lost as the Catholic Church grew in power and authority from the fifth century onwards.
 - (4) Throughout history there were pockets of non-Catholic believers who held to many or all of these points of doctrine, but they were largely lost until the time of the Reformation.
- d. So we can say, for sake of argument, that the “formation” period for the Church as we know it was from 30-500 AD....which leads to the “de-formation” of the Church 500-1500 A D.

3. DEFORMATION

- a. During these years tensions grew between the Eastern and Western parts of the Church. They disagreed on just about everything from: leadership structures, use of the sacraments, and the theological understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit as is evident from all the councils of that time.
- b. Eastern Christianity followed the “patriarchs” (apostles and church Fathers of the 1-3rd Centuries especially) as a continuation of the Apostolic line.
- c. In the West, the importance or infallibility of the Pope was emphasized, with his leadership describes as a direct succession from the Apostle Peter.
- d. In the East, the act of baptism allowed all Christian to participate in Holy Communion,
- e. In the West other sacraments (7 in all) were developed to mark different stages of life. Communion began to be used as a tool of discipline by the West as a rod of correction far beyond the Bibles use.
- f. In the West, the work of the Holy Spirit was limited to helping certain people understand the teachings of Jesus, while in the east there was a perspective that the Spirit continued to empower and excite (charismata) God’s people in many ways.
- g. Muslim incursions were influencing a reactive and protective fear in the Church at this time.
- h. Tensions between the East and West festers until 1054 when each side disowned the other.
 - (1) The growing power of Rome and its increasingly “strange” practices related to the Scriptures was alienating its eastern brothers.
 - (2) Which also led to wide-scale discontentment in Western Christianity which ultimately broke out as the Reformation.

4. RE-FORMATION

a. A flame had been brewing for close to 100 hundred years before this by earlier reformers like Jan Hus, John Wycliffe, etc.

- (1) Both of these men rejected the doctrine of indulgences and both taught justification by grace through faith alone.
- (2) Hus would be condemned as a heretic at the Council of Constance (1414-1417) and put to death by burning despite a promise of safe conduct.
- (3) John Wycliffe was posthumously condemned as a heretic by the Roman Catholic Church and his bones were dug up and burned in 1428.
- (4) Pope Sixtus IV established the practice of selling indulgences to be applied to the dead, prior to this indulgences were sold for the living as a *“way to reduce the amount of punishment one has to go through for sins....and it may reduce the amount of punishment for sin after death (as opposed to the eternal punishment merited by mortal sin).”* Catechism of the Catholic Church
- (5) Then there was a vast amount of papal corruption of church dogma...

- Pope Alexander VI father 7 children a couple of which became cardinals and bishops.
- A young bishop—too young by church laws—Albert of Mainz.
 - Not only was he bishop over two bishoprics, he desired an additional archbishopric over Mainz. This too was against church laws.
 - So Albert appealed to the Pope in Rome, Leo X. From the De Medici family, Leo X greedily allowed his tastes to exceed his financial resources. Enter the artists and sculptors, Raphael and Michelangelo.
- When Albert of Mainz appealed for a papal dispensation, Pope Leo X was ready to deal. Albert, with the papal blessing, would sell indulgences for past, present, and future sins. All of this sickened the monk, Martin Luther.

b. The big gun was fired on Oct. 31, 1517 by Martin Luther nailing up his 95 Theses.

- (1) But why October 31? November 1 held a special place in the church calendar as All Saints' Day.
 - And on this particular November 1, 1517, a massive exhibit of newly acquired relics would be on display at Wittenberg, Luther's home city.
 - Pilgrims would come from all over, genuflect before the relics, and take hundreds, if not thousands, of years off time in purgatory. Luther's soul grew even more vexed. None of this seemed right.

- (2) Martin Luther, a scholar, took quill in hand, dipped it in his inkwell and penned his 95 Theses on October 31, 1517.
 - These were intended to spark a debate, to stir some soul-searching among his fellow brothers in the church.
 - The 95 Theses sparked far more than a debate. The 95 Theses also revealed the church was far beyond rehabilitation. It needed a reformation. The church, and the world, would never be the same.
 - (3) One of Luther's 95 Theses simply declares, "The Church's true treasure is the gospel of Jesus Christ." That alone is the meaning of Reformation Day.
 - (4) All he really wanted was to reform the existing church by getting rid of unbiblical practices. He never intended to cause a schism that would change the face of the church. Luther's followers became Lutherans.
- c. The word "*protestatio*" was invoked in 1529, in reference to those princes that supported Martin Luther and spoke out against religious persecution. These royal supporters were eventually known as Protestants, a name that spread to the vast number of religious denominations that sprang from the beliefs associated with the Reformation.
- d. John Calvin was born into a Roman Catholic home, just like virtually everyone else at the time.
- (1) Basically he took Luther's reforming steps a bit further.
 - (2) It wasn't enough to simply renew or get rid of things that were unbiblical; Calvin insisted on recovering early Christian practices as the practices of the Church for all time.
 - (3) Calvin's followers in France were called "Huguenots", in the Low Countries "Reformed", in Scotland- Presbyterian... which was further modified and refined by John Knox.
- e. Biblical theology was promoted and catalogued around the 5 Solas of the Reformation indicating the Church's return to Biblical Christianity (while these weren't codified until many years later into this form):
- (1) Sola Scriptura- By Scripture alone...God is once and for all revealed to us in His Scripture. The Bible then is the supreme standard for life and practice since it is God actually speaking to us through His chosen men.
 - (2) Sola Gratia- By Grace alone...the true purpose of human life is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. This purpose can only be realized through God's own unmerited favor bestowed by God through Jesus Christ upon His children.
 - (3) Sola Fide- By Faith Alone- Faith is simply the sinner's personal reliance on Christ as Savior, God and King. Rom. 3:28 says, "*For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.*"

- (4) **Solo Christo- By Christ alone-** Christ is the only mediator between God the Father and man. *“For there is one God and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus...”*(I Tim. 2:5) *“And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”* (Acts 4:12)
 - (5) **Solo Deo Gloria- Glory to God Alone-** Since God alone is responsible for our being delivered from His wrath and we have been given the gift of salvation so...all glory, honor, praise and thanksgiving belongs to Him now and forevermore. William Tyndale (1494-1536...Reformation began in 1517, so he lived long enough to see the movement begin) wrote in his prologue to the Romans, *“We see that God only, Who, according to the Scripture, works all in all things, works a man’s justifying, salvation and health...God’s mercy in promising, and Truth in fulfilling His promises, saves us, and not we ourselves; and therefore is all laud, praise, and glory to be given unto God for His mercy and Truth, and not unto us for our merits and deservings.”*
- f. Again, these Solas form the basis for Protestantism as much as they do for the Reformed tradition. These are the principles that drove the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century and separated it from the Roman Catholic Church. These five points of doctrine are based entirely on the Bible and were the theological driving force behind the newly formed Protestant movement.
 - g. The Radical Reformation dealt mainly with the Anabaptist-Mennonites, Hutterites, Moravians, Amish, Brethren.
 - (1) They based their “theology” loosely on a literal interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount...
 - (2) Passive by nature politically and civilly...
 - (3) Believer’s baptism only...re-baptizers since they did not recognize any other but themselves as the true Church.
 - (4) The Reformed Church as well as the Lutherans and the Catholic determined that Anabaptism was heresy. The Anabaptist felt the same about anyone else.
 - h. Dissenters from the Anabaptists and Puritans came the Baptists...
 - (1) They were congregational in church government and credo Baptists=believer’s baptism.
 - (2) Mostly Calvinistic in theology but with a great emphasis on the New Testament. “The whole New Testament and nothing but the New Testament.”

- (3) It was this emphasis on the New Testament sometimes over the Old that has caused division ever since. Reformed/ Presbyterian, Lutheran and Anglican churches all sought to develop their doctrine from all the Scriptures...most other solely from the NT.
- i. There were Reformational efforts outside of the Protestants also for less than theological reasons:
 - (1) Henry the VIII was having trouble fathering a male heir...thinking it was the women instead of his own diseased body, he went from wife to wife...literally. When the Pope refused to grant him annulments from each of these wives, Henry declared, as king, that the Roman Catholic Church would no longer have authority in England and formed his own church the Church of England.
 - (2) During this time some didn't think that the reforms to the Church of England and these other movements went far enough...so Puritans and Separatist...early Congregationalists formed, "Non-conformists" they were called...they came out of Anglicanism...a democratic/congregational government in the church...they were Reformed in Theology but not necessarily in every practice. Then came Methodists and then Wesleyan/Holiness also arose out of Anglicanism.
 - (3) The Catholic Reformation brought about many changes in practices especially at the Council of Trent, which was not favorable to the Protestants but many of the reforms Luther wanted were addressed.
 - (4) The Revolutionary War in America transformed the Church of England into the Episcopal Church here in the states.

5. Reformation-TRANSFORMATION?

- a. With the coming of the printing press study of the Bible was renewed by the populace.
- b. Printing of sermons in the language of the people enabled them to be read by the people and other preacher/teachers allowing these sermons to be used as tools and for others to meditate on them afterwards. Printing of catechisms enabled people to grow in their understanding of the faith...training the next generation.
- c. The Protestant Reformation would not have been humanly possible without the sermon. Sermons brought the doctrines of the Scriptures directly to their followers in the language of the people. Luther stated and this was agreed upon by many of the Reformers, *"Even if they do read it, it is not as fruitful or powerful as it is through a public preacher whom God has ordained to say and preach this. The Word is the channel through which the Holy Spirit is given. This is a passage against those who hold the spoken Word in contempt. The lips are the*

public reservoir of the church. In them alone is kept the Word of God. You see, unless the Word is preached publicly, it slips away. The more it is preached, the more firmly it is retained. Reading it is not as profitable as hearing it, for the live voice teaches, exhorts, defends, and resists the spirit of error. Satan does not care a hoot for the written Word of God, but He flees at the speaking of the Word."

- d. Preaching styles changed from chants and monotonous to heralding types that were expositional to the growth of teacher/preachers...each seeking truth to biblical content, simplicity, and everyday application.
- e. Worship services in the language of the people enabled greater learning and more connectionalism among the people.
- f. The confessed distinctives of the Reformed faith can be summarized this way:
 - (1) Salvation: monergism not synergism. God alone saves. Such monergism implies T.U.L.I.P., the Five Points of Calvinism from the Synod of Dordt:
 - T = Total Depravity/ Inability
 - U = Unconditional Election
 - L = Limited Atonement, or, better, Particular Redemption
 - I = Irresistible Grace
 - P = Perseverance and Preservation of the Saints
 - These five distinct points of doctrine are also known as the five points of Calvinism as they were first articulated by John Calvin after the Reformation was in full-swing. They are based entirely on the Bible. When people speak of being Reformed these five points of doctrine are most often what they are referring to. Most evangelical (non-Reformed) churches do not hold to all of these points. Some hold to two or three (and occasionally even four), but most reject them in favor of Arminian theology.
 - (2) Universal Spread of the Gospel message
 - (3) The Regulative Principle of Worship
 - (4) Covenant theology (The Church is Israel)
 - (5) Life is religion (Christians have neither jobs nor careers; they have vocations (callings)).
- g. Based on all of this missionary zeal was re-ignited.