

We Are *Reformed* Catholics

Genesis 3

Why We're Protestant #1

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YOU know the story. On the Eve of All Saints' Day, October 31, 1517, Martin Luther walked up to Wittenberg University's bulletin board—the door of the Schlosskirche, the Castle Church—and nailed his *Ninety-Five Theses*. That was then, but this is now.

During October we're going to celebrate the 500th anniversary of that event and the Reformation it sparked. We're not just remembering the past but recommitting ourselves to who we are and praying for the Lord's reviving grace for the future. I want to proclaim a positive vision of **Why We're Protestant** not merely **Why We're *Not* Catholic**.

In fact, what I want you to begin to see today is that to say we're Protestant *is* to say we're Catholic—we're just not *Roman* Catholic. We're *Reformed* Catholics. What's the difference? The English theologian, William Perkins, said a "Reformed Catholic" is a person who believes the same fundamental articles of universal Christianity that the Roman Catholic Church professes to believe but without all the errors that have

corrupted them.¹ To be a Christian was to be a “Catholic,” which means to be part of the universal Christian Church. But over the course of history the Roman branch of the universal Catholic Church claimed to be the Church. Do you see the oxymoron here?² A local church – Rome claimed to be the Catholic or universal Church!²

Reformed Catholicism is not a new branch of Christianity, but a return to the true Catholic Church through the means of its renewal. “But,” Rome says, “your church started just five hundred years ago by men. Ours was founded two thousand years ago by Christ.” Here’s what Martin Luther said:

The first thing I ask is that people should not make use of my name, and should not call themselves Lutherans, but Christians. What is Luther? The teaching is not mine. Nor was I crucified for anyone. St. Paul, in 1 Cor. 3, would not tolerate Christians calling themselves Paul’s or Peter’s, but only Christians. How did I, poor stinking bag of maggots that I am, come to the point where people call the children of Christ by my evil name? Not so, dear friends, let us do away with party names, and be called Christians, for it is his teaching that we have.

I want to proclaim to you that we are *Reformed* Catholics because we believe what all God’s people have since the dawn of human history.

¹ *William Perkins*, ed. Ian Breward, Courtenay Library of Reformation Classics (Appelford, Abingdon, Berkshire, England: The Sutton Courtenay Press, 1970), 521

² Vermigli, 176.

Our Faith is That of Our First Parents

Rome says it's 2,000 years old, but we say *our faith is that of our first parents*. The LORD God planted a garden in Paradise land of Eden (Gen. 2:8). But it was lost. Instead of guarding its sanctity (Gen. 2:15), Adam allowed the insidious serpent to enter. Through it Satan twisted God's Word in the ears of Eve. She then ate of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. She then gave it to Adam who ate as well. Paradise would be lost by sin.

Nevertheless, when the LORD God entered the garden to execute his judgment as he had threatened (Gen. 2:17), he also spoke of word of justification. Even as the gavel of his law came hammering down upon the serpent, he spoke a word of gospel in the famous of Genesis 3:15: **"I will put enmity (or, "hostility;" *CSB*) between you and the woman, and between your offspring (or, "seed;" *NASB*) and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."** This is the "mother promise;" this is the "first gospel." Notice how this **enmity** or hostility between the two **offspring** or seed would begin immediately but have a future resolution. And notice how that future resolution would be of

Eve's seed bruising not the serpent's seed's head, but the serpent or Satan himself by means of Eve's seed bruising his heel. Hence this mother promise is of Eve's offspring's suffering and glory, tragedy and triumph, dying and destroying. Who is this **offspring**? Peter said the ancient prophets "search and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories" (1 Peter 1:10-11). Why did Peter use that language? Because Jesus did: before (Luke 24:7) and after his resurrection (Luke 24:26).

And notice that while this promise would have a future resolution it had present application and signification. After the LORD God speaks Adam proclaims that "his wife's name [was] Eve, because she was the mother of all living" (Gen. 3:20). Faith alone was the means Adam applied the gospel promise. Then the LORD God confirmed Adam's faith with a sacramental sign of the gospel: **And the LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them** (Gen. 3:21). Naked Adam and naked Eve stand spiritually naked and ashamed so the Lord not only covers their bodies but their sin and shame! How? Through sacrifice;

through substitution; through satisfaction. Is this not all this grace alone in providing Christ alone to be received by faith alone? Thus Heinrich Bullinger said, “The Christian Faith...has endured since the beginning of the world.”³

Our Faith is That of the Patriarchs

This faith of our first parents was passed down and thus *our faith is that of the patriarchs* as well. *Before the giving of the Law* Genesis 4 says Abel offered to God animal sacrifice and Hebrews 11 says he did this by faith. Genesis 6 9 chronicles the story of Noah, whom Hebrews 11 says built an ark by faith to save his family.

Then there’s a man named Abram in Genesis 12, who came from an idol worshipping family and whom the LORD in his grace alone called out to make a new nation that would bless all the nations of the earth. Later in Genesis 15 the Lord promises him a son in his old age and what do we read? “And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness” (Gen. 15:7). Whom did he believe? The Lord alone. Who is that Lord? Jesus said in John 8:56, “Your father Abraham rejoiced that he

³ *The Old Faith.*

would see my day. He saw it and was glad.” Christ alone. And what did Abraham do? He did nothing to cooperate, earn, or merit this calling of God; he believed the Lord by faith alone and was justified through it! Paul’s whole argument in Romans 3-4 is that Abraham was not justified by works but by faith! Therefore he is “the father of all who believe” (Rom. 4:11). I could go on about Abraham being promised *a* seed (singular) not seeds (plural) who is Jesus; how that promise was passed down from Isaac to Jacob, who wrestled with God and saw a ladder coming down from heaven, which Jesus said was him in John 1; and eventually Jacob’s son, Judah, was the family line from which came king Jesus (Gen. 49:10).

Before the giving of the Law the faith of the patriarchs was trusting in the Lord’s grace alone and later *under the Law* this was their same faith and it’s ours too. Why did God give Israel all his whether moral, ceremonial, or civil? Galatians 3:24 says the law was a tutor to lead sinners by the hand everyday to school so that they would learn to put their trust in Jesus Christ.

Our Faith is That of the Prophets

I gave this illustration a while back but let give it again. What if I told you that you were the heir of an ancient kingdom in the heart of Africa? That would be a stupendous claim! What if I then showed you your family tree, tracing it back, and then I showed you pictures and documents chronicling this kingdom and how it all led to you? The New Testament makes a stupendous claim about Jesus. But it's not make-believe for illustration only. He is traced from the faith of our first parents, through the patriarchs before the law and under the law, then through the ancient prophets who preached of a Savior to come (e.g., Rom. 1:2). Hebrews 1:1-2 says it like this: "Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son." Thus *our faith is that of the prophets*.

Did the prophets proclaim to wicked and wayward Israel before their exile, in their exile, and even after their exile that salvation was coming to all who cooperated with God's grace by their works in this life and who went through as many as millions of years in purgatory? Did they proclaim their chaotic lives would all be better one day because a Pope in Rome was coming? They preached that a Savior was coming! They

preached Christ alone! To David the Lord made a promise that he would have a son to sit on his throne forever (2 Sam. 7). Micah was told this king would be born in Bethlehem (Mic. 5:2). Isaiah was told he would be born of a virgin (Isa. 7:14). David, Isaiah, and Daniel preached that he would die by crucifixion (Ps. 22; Isa. 53; Dan. 9) yet be raised again (Ps. 22; Isa. 55).

Conclusion

This is the Christian Faith. The rediscovery of this was not an innovation but a Reformation of a church that had lost its way! We are *Reformed Catholics*. Rome objects that our faith is “new” and “novel.”

John Calvin once answered saying, “I do not at all doubt that it is new to them, since to them both Christ himself and his gospel are new.”⁴

The ancient theologian, Vincent of Lérins, said to be catholic was to believe what everyone, at all times, everywhere have believed. Our faith is the faith of Adam. I’m not sure how much further back you can go than that! I’m not sure how much more ancient and catholic you can get.⁵

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⁴ “Prefatory Address to King Francis I of France,” *Institutes*, 1:16.

⁵ Jeremiah Bastingius called this “the antiquitie of the doctrine of Christ.” 22 col. 1.