

**Hebrews 10:32- 39; "Why Remember the Reformation?", A Sermon for  
Reformation Sunday, October 29th, 2006, Delivered by  
Pastor Paul Rendall in the Morning Worship.**

It has been my custom for the past few years to give to you sermons on the subject of the Reformation on the day which is known as Reformation Sunday. This year I want to remind you of what things were like in past centuries in some of the lives of those who came to be reformed. I want to relate to you some of their sufferings, and the triumphs which they experienced for the sake of Christ and establishing the truth of His Word. The word "reformed" in our day and generation has come to be synonymous with holding to the doctrines of grace, the practice of a reverent worship, and striving to lead a holy life. This is good and true, and faithful, in a measure, to our godly heritage. But being "reformed" in past centuries; from the 12th to the 18th meant other important things as well; things which have well-nigh been forgotten. Things related to a living faith in Jesus Christ were recovered during the Reformation which had been buried in oblivion, or hidden in ancient valleys for centuries. The Light of truth came to men's minds with power, and the darkness of ignorance and false doctrine, which had prevailed for so long, now began to be dispelled and the truth of God's Word to be seen and understood and proclaimed.

The text which I read to you speaks of the people that Paul is writing to as undergoing a great struggle with sufferings. We forget in our day that so many Christian people in the past have suffered for their faith. He asks these people to "recall the former days in which they "were made a reproach and suffered tribulations." They were "made a spectacle" by these things and there were other "companions" in this tribulation. They had compassion on Paul while he was "in his chains". They "joyfully accepted the plundering of their goods," for they knew that they had "a better possession for themselves in heaven". He exhorts them "not to cast away their confidence, which has great reward". "They had need of endurance," he says, "so that after they had done the will of God, that they might receive the promise." This confidence in Christ would give them the endurance that they needed to face their trials and sufferings. The essence of this promise which their confidence is based on, is that Christ would come to their aid. "He who is coming will come and will not tarry." We must note here that Christ did not return physically in that generation. He did come in judgment upon the whole Jewish nation in judgment in 70 A.D by the instruments of Titus and the Roman armies. But for His beloved people he must have come spiritually to their souls in the time of their sufferings and he must have been near to them during their tribulations in their life and in their death. This is the confidence that "has great reward". Verse 38 is the verse which was so important to Luther at the time of the Reformation; "Now the just shall live by faith. But the verse goes on to say, in this place, "if anyone draws back My soul has no pleasure in him." "But we are not those that draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul."

This verse, "the just shall live by faith" is mentioned 3 times in the New Testament; here in Hebrews 10, in Galatians 3: 11, and Romans 1: 17. This verse is of immense significance to all Christians in every generation. It is originally found in the book of Habakkuk, Chapter 2, verse 4. "Behold the proud, his soul is not upright in him; but the just shall live by his faith." It is surely true that the doctrine of justification by faith

alone is found in this verse, but it is just as true that the righteous person lives his whole Christian life by his faith. Faith is the instrumental means of receiving many of God's blessings to us, both at the beginning when we are justified and then later as we grow and pursue holiness by keeping God's commandments. We will at times come into trials and conflicts and afflictions as a result of our living faith. The verse as it is found in Romans 1: 17 says this. "For in it (the gospel) the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith." We, my brethren, must grow stronger and more joyful in our faith in order that God might be glorified in us. We must come to realize the greatness of the grace of Christ and develop our personal relationship with Him. This is true Reformation in the sense that it was handed to us by our forefathers. What I want to do this morning is to relate to in brief compass, the trial of sufferings and the victorious faith of some of God's Elect people who lived in the days before the Reformation.

### **1st - The Waldenses and the Albigenses-**

I think that it is very hard for us today to conceive of just how great a strangle hold that the Roman Catholic Church had over not only individuals, but also whole states and nations in that day. The Roman Catholic church with the Pope as her head was a secular political power as well as a false church. She still is, although the world is generally deceived in this. Most of the world believes that she is a true church. The information that I will be giving you, this morning, is from John Gilles' book Accounts of Revival, Historical Collections related to remarkable periods of the success of the Gospel. (Originally published in 1754) Banner of Truth, 1981. I have also drawn from D'Aubigne's History of the Reformation, and S.M. Houghton's Sketches from Church History. Let's think about the entrance of the Waldenses into England. "In the year 1160 in the reign of King Henry the Second, there came above thirty of the Waldenses into England, one Gerard being their minister, acknowledged to be a learned man by the monk of Newbury, who writes the story: These people, laboring to win disciples to Christ, were quickly found out by the Popish clergy; and great complaints were made against them to the King, who assembled a council of bishops at Oxford, before whom these godly persons were convented, and Gerard, their minister spoke for them all, saying, We are Christians, holding and reverencing the doctrine of the Apostles. Being examined in order (the monk said) of the articles of the holy faith,...and being urged (with arguments against what they believed) they answered that they believed as they were taught by God's word. Being admonished to repent, and to return to the unity of the church, they despised that counsel; they scorned threats also, saying "Blessed are they which suffer persecution for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Then did the bishops excommunicate them, and so delivered them over to be corporally punished by the King, who caused the character of heretical infamy to be burned in their foreheads and Gerard, their minister, suffered the disgrace of double burning; then were their clothes cut off to their girdles; and they were publicly whipped through Oxford; they singing all the while, 'Blessed are ye when men hate you, and despitefully use you.' The King further commanded, that none should presume to receive them into their houses, nor to cherish them with any comfort, whereby they perished with hunger and cold. And three years after, in the council of Turon, or Tower, in France in 1163, Pope Alexander the Third, made a decree that these gospellers, and all their favorers should be excommunicated; and that none should sell them anything, or buy anything of them. But notwithstanding all these devises, they had goodly churches

in Bulgaria, Croatia, Dalmatia, and Hungary. Cesarius says, that this heresy (as he calls it) so increased, that in a short time it infected, a thousand cities. Parsons says, that they had an army of seventy thousand men to fight for them; yea, they were so spread in Germany, that they could travel from Collen to Milan in Italy, and every night lodge with hosts of their own profession. Between the years 1176 and 1226, there was so great havoc made of these poor Christians, that the archbishops of Aix, Arles, and Narbonne, being assembled, at the request of the inquisitors, to confer with them about various difficulties in the execution of their offices, had compassion of the great number that were accused and cast into prison, saying, "We hear that you have apprehended such a multitude of the Waldenses, that it is not only impossible to defray the charge of their food, but to provide lime and stone to build prisons for them; we therefore advise you to forbear this rigor till the pope be advertised, and direct what he will have done in this case. Notwithstanding all their sufferings, there was in Morrel, in his Memorials, a statement made saying that above 800,000 persons that made profession of the faith of the Waldenses."

I suppose that I could have given many other accounts of them but it would take too much time. "The Albigenses were the same with the Waldenses, differing only in name, from their habitation in the country of Albi. Divers of Waldo's disciples going into that country, and amongst them one Arnold (from whom they were called the Arnoldists) labored with so good success, that in a short time there was scarce any found that would go to mass. About the year 1210, the English who now possessed Guienne, which bordered upon the earldom of Toulouse, began to help the Albigenses, being stirred up thereto by Walter Lollard, a godly and learned man; who by his powerful preaching converted many to the truth, and defended the faith of the Albigenses: and for his learning, it is evident by his comment upon the Revelation, where he sets forth many things that are spoken of the Roman Antichrist. This worthy man was afterwards apprehended in Germany; and being delivered to the secular power, was burnt at Collen. Yet, notwithstanding all cruelties used against them, their enemies could never prevail to a total extirpation of them, but they still lay hid like sparks under the ashes, desiring and longing to see that, which now, through God's grace, their posterity do enjoy, the liberty to call upon God in purity of conscience, without being enforced to any superstition and idolatry; and so, instructing their children in the service of God, the Lord was pleased to preserve a church among them in the midst of the Romish corruptions, until the Gospel was dispersed in a more general and public way by the ministry of Luther and his fellow laborers." (End of quote) My brethren, this is living by faith in the confidence that Christ would sustain them, uphold them, help them in all of their trials for His Name's sake. Even in the greatest heat and pressure of trial they are speaking the truth and singing God's praises because Christ came to their souls. Their souls did not draw back, they did the will of God and they received the promise of Christ's coming to their souls with power to enable them to do His will. May it be so with you and I that we value with our lives, this precious faith that we have been given!

### **2nd- The Morning Star of the Reformation- John Wickliffe -**

I am told that John Wickliffe was reformed in his doctrine, but a Baptist also by conviction. He may have been one of the first of what we now call the Reformed Baptists. He was a man of the Bible, a man to promote the truth of God's precious Word in his time. He was a divinity-reader in Oxford, and also had a pastoral charge there, in which I am told "he took great pains." "He received his first knowledge of the truth from

one friar Lollard, who brought the doctrine of the Waldenses into England, and from whom his disciples were called Lollards. This is over one hundred years after Walter Lollard lived who I mentioned earlier in connection with the Albigenses. John Wickliffe was an eloquent man, and he was a great scholar. He was about 16 years old when he first came to Oxford. He remained in association with this great University for the rest of his life. He first became a fellow and then in 1361 he was appointed the Master of Balliol College. He became a Doctor of Theology there. Wickliffe was there when the great plague of 1349 came upon England. He mentions it often in his writings. It was called the Black Death and probably killed off one third or even half of the population. In West Riding county where Wickliffe lived more than 2/3rds of the people died. In 1366 Wickliffe came to the notice of King Edward III in connection with the refusal of the King to pay tribute to the Pope; he wrote a pamphlet containing the arguments which seven lords in Parliament used when the matter was debated. Wickliffe argued that the Pope had no right to require the King to collect money from the church in England to be sent to Rome. England had long before ceased to pay this tribute, but Pope Urban V had tried to re-establish it and impose it on the King. During the 1360's Edward consulted with Parliament with the result that the tribute was emphatically repudiated. In 1374 Wickliffe represented his country and king at a meeting with papal officers at Bruges, and further earned the king's gratitude. He was, in that same year, appointed to the Crown 'living' of Lutterworth in the county of Leicester. But he was not so popular with many of the clergy and the mendicant monks. They hated him bitterly and tried to bring about his downfall because he had sharply criticized the monks for their indolence, for their habit of begging, and for their perversion of religion. The worship of images and relics he called foolishness, and he denounced the sale of indulgences in no uncertain terms. He also spoke against masses for the dead, processions, and pilgrimages. The pope he denounced as Antichrist. He called him 'the proud, worldly priest of Rome, the most accursed of clippers and purse-curvers.' (He was calling him a robber and a thief.)

This strong language of Wickliffe greatly alarmed the bishops of the church of England. They summoned him to appear before the Convocation of the Church at St. Paul's, London, in the year 1377. When he appeared, he was savagely attacked by his opponents, but protected by the king's son John of Gaunt. D'Aubigne, in his history says, "On the 19th of February, 1377 an immense crowd, heated with fanaticism, thronged the approaches to the church and filled its aisles, while the citizens favorable to the reform remained concealed in their houses. Wickliffe moved forward, preceded by Lord Perry, marshal of England, and supported by the Duke of Lancaster, who defended him from purely political motives. He was followed by four bachelors of divinity, who were his counsel, and passed through the hostile multitude who looked upon Lancaster as the enemy of their liberties and upon himself as the enemy of the church. 'Let not the sight of these bishops make you shrink a hair's-breadth in your profession of faith,' said the prince to the doctor. 'They are unlearned; and as for this concourse of people, fear nothing, we are here to defend you.' A riot nearly ensued when they entered the Cathedral where they had been summoned. Words were exchanged between a priest named Courtenay and the Duke of Lancaster. Courtenay was the Bishop responsible for having charged Wickliffe with heresy. Those who were his supporters fell upon Lancaster and Percy, and even upon Wickliffe, who alone had

remained calm. They escaped with difficulty and the assembly broke up in great confusion. Wickliffe was dismissed with an injunction against preaching his doctrines.

But this decision of the priests was not ratified by the people of England, D'Aubigne says. Public opinion declared in favor of Wickliffe. "If he is guilty," said they, "why is he not punished?" "If he is innocent, why is he ordered to be silent?" "If he is the weakest in power, he is the strongest in truth!" And so indeed he was, and never had he spoken with such energy. He was soon to confess that Christ alone was king of the church. In that same year the Pope issued five Bulls or decrees against him, and condemned him on 19 different charges taken from his writings. In June of 1377 three letters from Gregory XI, addressed to the king, the bishop of Canterbury, and the university of Oxford, denounced Wickliffe as a heretic, and called upon them to proceed against him as against a common thief. On the appointed day, Wickliffe, unaccompanied by either Lancaster or Percy, proceeded to the chapel at Lambeth. "Men expected that he should be devoured," says an historian, "being brought into the lion's den." But the burgesses had taken the prince's place. The assault of Rome had aroused the friends of liberty and truth in England. "The pope's briefs," said they, "ought to have no effect in the realm without the king's consent." "Every man is master in his own house." When the archbishop opened the meeting, one of the nobility, Sir Louis Clifford entered the chapel, and forbade the court, on the part of the queen mother, to proceed against the reformer. The bishops were struck with a panic-fear: "they bent their heads," says a Roman Catholic historian, "like a reed before the wind." Wickliffe retired after handing in a protest. "In the first place," he said, "I resolve with my whole heart, and by the grace of God, to be a sincere Christian; and while my life shall last, to profess and defend the law of Christ so far as I have power."

Wickliffe went on to do great things for Christ and the reformed faith. A great change was taking place in him. He busied himself less about the kingdom of England and more about the kingdom of Christ. He thought about how the glad tidings of the gospel could be carried to the remotest hamlets in England. "If begging friars can stroll over the country, preaching the legends of sayings and the history of the Trojan war, we must do for God's glory what they do to fill their wallets, and form a vast itinerant evangelization to convert souls to Jesus Christ." He turned to the most pious of his disciples, and said to them: "God and preach, it is the sublimest work; but imitate not the priest whom we see after the sermon sitting in the ale-houses, or at the gaming table, or wasting their time in hunting." "After your sermon is ended, do you visit the sick, the aged, the poor, the blind, and the lame, and help them according to your ability." The clergy became alarmed at these new preachers. A law was passed commanding every king's officer to commit the preacher and their followers to prison. In consequence of this, as soon as the humble missionary began to preach, the monks set themselves in motion. They watched him from the window of their cells, at the street corners, or from behind a hedge, and then hastened off to procure assistance. But when the constables approached, a body of stout bold men stood forth, with hands on their arms, who surrounded the preacher, and zealously protected him against the attacks of the clergy. Carnal weapons were thus mingled with the preaching of the word of peace. The poor priests returned to their master: Wickliffe comforted them, advised with them, and then they departed once more. Every day this evangelization reached some new spot, and the light was thus penetrating into every corner of England. Notice, my brethren, how it does require faith to live in this way; to stick to the business of spreading the gospel

when you are surrounded by people who hate you and who think that your way is false. But the just shall live by his faith. Wickliffe's soul did not draw back in these difficulties.

And then, there was another great thing that John Wickliffe did for the Lord and for his country. There was no Bible in that time, that could be read by the common man. Jerome's Latin Vulgate translation is all that existed. Wickliffe knew nothing of Greek and Hebrew. But, he was a good Latin scholar, of sound understanding and great penetration but above all, he loved the Bible, he understood it, and desired to communicate this treasure to others. He began in 1365 and worked for 15 years until he finished in 1380. D'Aubigne says, "As soon as the labor of the copyists began, and the Bible was ere long widely circulated either wholly or in portions. The reception of the work surpassed Wickliffe's expectations. The Holy Scriptures exercised a reviving influence over men's hearts; minds were enlightened; and souls were converted. Citizens, soldiers, and the lower classes welcomed this new era with acclamations. One contemporary writer of the day said, "You could not meet two persons on the highway, but one of them was Wickliffe's disciple."

And yet, all in England did not equally rejoice: the lower clergy opposed this enthusiasm with complaints and maledictions. Here is a sample of what they said. "Master John Wickliffe, by translating the gospel into English," said the monks, "has rendered it more acceptable and more intelligible to laymen and even to women, than it had hitherto been to learned and intelligent clerks!" "The gospel pearl is everywhere cast out and trodden under foot of swine." Now, the reformer began to be spoken against. Wherever he bent his steps, he was violently attacked. "It is heresy," cried the monks, "to speak of the Holy Scripture in English." Wickliffe also began to speak out concerning the true doctrine that the Scriptures teach. He took aim at the false doctrine of Transubstantiation. "The Eucharist is naturally bread and wine," he taught at Oxford in 1381; but by virtue of the sacramental words, it contains in every part the real body and blood of Christ." But he did not stop here. "The consecrated wafer which we see on the altar," said he, "is not Christ, nor any part of him, but his efficient sign." He denied the sacrifice of the mass offered by the priest, because it was substituted for the sacrifice of the cross offered up by Jesus Christ; and he rejected transubstantiation, because it nullified the spiritual and living presence of the Lord.

When Wickliffe's enemies heard these propositions, they appeared horror-stricken, and yet in secret they were delighted at the prospect of destroying him. They met together, examined twelve theses he had published, and pronounced against him suspension from all teaching, and also the threat of imprisonment and excommunication. His friends became alarmed and their zeal cooled, and many of them forsook him. The storm soon burst upon him. One day while seated in his doctoral chair in the Augustine school, and calmly explaining the nature of the eucharist, a officer entered the hall, and read the sentence of condemnation. It was the design of his enemies to humble the professor in the eyes of his disciples. Attacked on every side, Wickliffe for a time remained silent. Shall he sacrifice the truth to save his reputation? Shall expediency get the better of faith? No: his courage was invincible. This is what he said. "Since the year 1000 all the doctors have been in error about the sacrament of the altar--except perhaps Berengarius. How canst thou, O priest, who art but a man, make thy Maker? What! The thing that growth in the fields--that ear which you pluck today, shall be God tomorrow!.... As you cannot make the works which he made, how shall ye make Him who made the works?" His ten propositions were

condemned as heretical, and the archbishop enjoined all persons to shun, as they would a venomous serpent, all who should preach those errors. But Wickliffe did not cease and desist. He went on to present a bold petition to the House of Commons in November of 1382. It read this way. "Since Jesus Christ shed his blood to free his church, I demand its freedom. I demand that everyone may leave those gloomy walls (the convents), within which a tyrannical law prevails, and embrace a simple and peaceful life under the open vault of the heaven." "I demand that the poor inhabitants of our towns and villages be not constrained to furnish a worldly priest, often a vicious man and a heretic, with the means of satisfying his ostentation, his gluttony, and his licentiousness--of buying a showy horse, costly saddles, bridles with tinkling bells, rich garments, and soft furs, while they see their wives, children, and neighbors, dying of hunger. When confronted by his enemies and surrounded by those who clamored for his imprisonment and death, he said, "The truth shall prevail!" He expected nothing but a dungeon or imprisonment and then martyrdom. "Why do you talk of seeking the crown of martyrdom afar?" asked he. "Preach the gospel of Christ to haughty prelates and martyrdom will not fail you." "What!" "I should live and be silent?".....never! "Let the blow fall, I await its coming." But the stroke was spared him. In December of 1384, as he was in his church at Lutterworth, in the midst of his flock, at the very moment that he stood before the altar, and was elevating the host with trembling hands, he fell upon the pavement struck with paralysis. He was carried to his house by the affectionate friends around him after lingering forty-eight hours resigned his soul to God on the last day of the year. John Wickliffe is the greatest English Reformer, says D'Aubigne. He was in truth the first reformer of Christendom. In many respects Wickliffe is the Luther of England; but the times of revival had not yet come, and the English reformer could not gain such striking victories over Rome as the German reformer. While Luther was surrounded by an every-increasing number of scholars and princes, who confessed the same faith as himself, Wickliffe shone almost alone in the firmament of the church. Let us learn from him this morning to live by faith, to not cast away our confidence which has great reward. This afternoon we will look at the life of George Wishart.