

FBC POWELL, 9-24-17 AM NOTES

“Reformation Then and Now”

Various Scriptures

“Here We Stand—Lessons from the Protestant Reformation”

1 Kings 19:10 “He [Elijah] said, ‘I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the sons of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars and killed Your prophets with the sword. And I alone am left; and they seek my life, to take it away.’”

1 Kings 19:18 “Yet I will leave 7,000 in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal and every mouth that has not kissed him.”

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Revelation 2:4-5 “But I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand [their right to be His church] out of its place—unless you repent.”

Pragmatism is the philosophy that says, “Whatever works is right.” When pragmatism rules, God is marginalized and the church begins to look just like the world.

I. The Desperate Need for Reformation

“The Protestant Reformation stands as the most far-reaching, world-changing display of God’s grace since the birth and early expansion of the church. It was not a single act, nor was it led by one man. This history-altering movement played out on different stages over many decades. Its cumulative impact, however, was enormous...The Reformation was, at its heart, a recovery of the true Gospel of Jesus Christ, and this restoration had an unparalleled influence on churches, nations, and the flow of Western civilization.”
—Steven Lawson

Matthew 15:3 “Why do you yourselves transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?”

2 Corinthians 5:8b “To be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord.”

II. The Doctrinal Emphasis of the Reformation

Acts 4:12 “And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.”

“When the reformers spoke about ‘grace alone,’ they were saying that sinners have no claim upon God, none at all; that God owes them nothing but punishment for their sins; and that if He saves them in spite of their sins, which He does in the case of those who are being saved, it is only because it pleases Him to do it and for no other reason...”
—James Boice

Ephesians 2:8a “For by grace you have been saved...”

Ephesians 2:8-9 “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.”

Chapter 1: Reformation Then and Now

Series: Here We Stand – Lessons from the Protestant Reformation

Various Scriptures

October 31, 2017 marks the 500th anniversary of what is called “The Protestant Reformation.” Why was October 31, 1517 selected as the beginning of the reformation? The Protestant Reformation was not an organized movement that can actually be traced back to a specific date. Most church historians accept October 31, 1517 as its beginning because that was when a German monk named Martin Luther who was frustrated with the abuses in the church leadership wrote and posted his ninety-five assertions, on the door of the Wittenberg church, to be debated with his theological colleagues at the University of Wittenberg in modern day Germany. The church door functioned as an academic bulletin board. Luther wasn’t looking for trouble or trying to start a revolution. He was deeply troubled with the crass pragmatism of the church and felt that the people were being abused and deceived by the church, especially in the area of what was called “indulgences.” *The 95 Theses* (as they came to be called) were translated from the academic language of Latin to the language of the people and were widely distributed (Luther actually had nothing to do with that). There was a resulting groundswell of support for Luther. A call for reformation in the church started and grew like a snowball going down a steep hill.

If all that we did was treat the Reformation as an important part of church history, it would be worth taking these six weeks to focus on. What we will learn is that the reformation is much more than just a period in history. The Protestant Reformation brought the church back to its roots. The church had drifted into sin and was so conformed to the world that the church and the world system were almost impossible to separate.

The church in 1517 bore little, if any, similarity to the church that we see in the book of Acts. However, God has, even in the darkest days, His people who are loyal to Him. We see this truth illustrated in the Old Testament in the life of the prophet Elijah. He became discouraged and had a “pity party” and felt that he was the only one serving and obeying God in that time of apostasy (falling away from God). We see his self-pity filled conversation with God in 1 Kings 19:10: “He [Elijah] said, ‘I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the sons of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars and killed Your prophets with the sword. And I alone am left; and they seek my life, to take it away.’” God set Elijah straight in 1 Kings 19:18: “Yet I will leave 7,000 in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal and every mouth that has not kissed him.”

The days preceding the Protestant Reformation were so bleak that it seemed to many that there were almost none who still believed the Scriptures. As in Elijah’s day, even so in 1517, there were many who had not bowed to the Popes and corrupt church leaders.

After this message that focuses on the need for the Reformation and how similar our times are to those times 500 years ago, we are going to look at the five biblical doctrines that formed the emphasis of the Reformation. We will take one week on each of these five doctrines and see the desperate need in our day for another reformation. These five doctrines turned into a sort of battle cry.

Here are the five doctrines in Latin as they were communicated in the 1500’s:

Sola Scriptura – **Scripture Alone**, the authority of Scripture;
Solus Christus – **Christ Alone**, the uniqueness of Jesus as the only Savior;
Sola Gratia – **Grace Alone**, salvation is a gift from God;
Sola Fide – **Faith Alone**, works have no part in obtaining salvation;
Sola Deo Gloria – **God’s Glory Alone**, all that God does is for His glory.

From the Scriptures and church history we learn that the sad pattern of God’s people is to grow cold in their walk with God, drift away from His truth, and then see His guidance and His blessing withdrawn. In the misery of fruitlessness, there is a call to repent and restore their walk with Him. A great example of that in Scripture is the book of Judges. In that book we see seven cycles of Israel growing cold in their walk with God, disobeying His word and then acting just like the world around them. God would then raise up a Judge to call the people back to God, and the next cycle would start. In the New Testament we see the “on fire” church at Ephesus that left their first love. The Lord had these sharp words for this church in Revelation 2:4-5: “But I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand [their right to be His church] out of its place—unless you repent.”

We see this tendency to drift not only in the Old Testament and the New Testament, but also in church history. In church history, we see a cycle of the church going from being on fire for the Lord, obeying the Word of God, being distinct from the world’s values and ways, but then comes the drifting, the compromise with the world’s values, the growing spiritually cold, the resulting loss of the power of God, and then pragmatism begins to rule. Pragmatism is the philosophy that says, “Whatever works is right.” When pragmatism rules, God is marginalized and the church begins to look just like the world. Today, most evangelical churches are dead or dying when it comes to being a Heaven energized force to make true disciples and push back the darkness. We see pragmatism at work when we observe the church seemingly more interested in building an earthly kingdom with the world’s tools instead of doing God’s work in God’s way. As God did with the Judges in the Old Testament, He raises up leaders to call the church back to the Scriptures and to trust God to work instead of trusting worldly pragmatism.

When we examine church history, the “drift” that was the longest and the most damaging was through the time often called the Middle Ages (AD 600-1500). Even going into the Middle Ages from the Early Church Age (AD 60-600), we see the church beginning to drift away from New Testament Christianity toward ritualism and the traditions of man. When we look at the Middle Ages (also called “Medieval Times” and the “Dark Ages”), we see the depths to which the visible church on earth can slide into. As we examine the reformation, you are going to sadly see multitudes of parallels to 2017. If we do not learn from history, we are doomed to repeat it. Join me as we look at reformation then and now.

I. The Desperate Need for Reformation

Allow me to give you a quote that gives a good summary of the effect of the Protestant Reformation. “The Protestant Reformation stands as the most far-reaching, world-changing display of God’s grace since the birth and early expansion of the church. It was not a single act, nor was it led by one man. This history-altering movement played out on different stages over many decades. Its cumulative impact, however, was enormous... The Reformation was, at its heart, a recovery of the true Gospel of Jesus Christ, and this restoration had an unparalleled

influence on churches, nations, and the flow of Western civilization.” [Steven Lawson, *The Reformation and the Men Behind It*, Blog 9-04-17]

By the late 1400's the organized church could best be described by Matthew 15:3: “Why do you yourselves transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?” When we come to 1517, the “church” had indeed “transgressed the commandments of God for the sake of tradition.” There was an empty, vain ritualistic church that left hearts cold and more importantly unconverted. The Gospel was almost never heard. Christianity had been perverted into meaningless rituals and formulas resulting in a perverted “salvation” that had to be earned by keeping the rituals.

Over the centuries, the Bishop of Rome had taken on more and more power. He came to be known as the Pope. The Roman Church (and for that matter the Eastern Church – now called the Orthodox Church that had split from the Roman Church in 1054 AD) had degenerated into a vain, empty, works based, ritualistic approach to Christianity that left the heart cold and unconverted. The church leaders had refused to listen to men like Tyndale, Wycliffe, Huss, and a host of others. Not only had the church neglected and perverted the Gospel, it was corrupted to the core. Places of leadership were bought and sold. Immorality was rife among the Priests.

Perhaps the proverbial “straw that broke the camel's back” for the reformers was the issue of indulgences. Indulgences were pieces of paper with the Pope's insignia that shortened a person's time in Purgatory. To understand why this is such a big deal, we need to understand what was taught in the church about Purgatory. Let me be clear that there is no such place as Purgatory! The church in the 16th century found their support for this false doctrine, not in any of the sixty-six books of the Bible that give evidence of being inspired by God (the canonical Scriptures), but in what is called the “Apocrypha” which does not meet the tests that would allow it to be considered being inspired by the Holy Spirit.

In the church prior to the Reformation (and in the Roman Catholic Church today) purgatory is where the souls of believers go to be further purified from post baptismal sins until they are ready to go to Heaven. Time in Purgatory is suffering offered to God in substitute for the punishment of sin that believers should have received at the time the sin was committed. In the days of the Reformation, the unofficial teaching was that there would be seven years of purifying in Purgatory for every mortal sin. Let me be clear, that doctrine is not taught in the inspired Scriptures. That false doctrine cheapens the work of Christ on the cross and teaches that the cross and the blood of Christ shed there was not sufficient to completely forgive sin! The Bible is crystal clear in 2 Corinthians 5:8b: “to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord.”

In 1460 Pope Sixtus IV decided that the buying of indulgences not only was good for the sinner in this life, but could be applied to deceased family members in Purgatory as well. This had a powerful emotional appeal. Sinners were given the opportunity to reduce or even end the suffering, pain, and punishment of beloved family members.

In 1507, Pope Julius II permitted the sale of indulgences to raise money to build St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. Pope Leo X renewed approval in 1513. In fact, Pope Leo later made a deal with Albert of Brandenburg, archbishop of Mainz (Germany): If Archbishop Albert would agree to allow the sale of indulgences, Leo agreed to split the profits with him.

The person hired to travel all over Germany to sell indulgences was Johan Tetzel. There was something especially crass about Tetzel, whose sales pitch was, “Once a coin into the coffer clings, a soul from purgatory springs.” Martin Luther was deeply concerned with Tetzel’s crass abuse of a papal indulgence. And he was also concerned about the economic exploitation. He explicitly mentions “money” or “wealth” in nine of the theses he nailed to the church door.

We will see more about the repercussions Luther received for standing for the truth of inspired Scripture, later in this series, but in this message, I simply want you to see the desperate condition of the Church and the greed and evil that was attached to the Church.

II. The Doctrinal Emphasis of the Reformation

This point is actually just a preview of what we are going to go deeper into over the next five sermons. As I shared in the introduction to this message, the emphasis of the Reformation was the doctrine of salvation.

The message of the reformation was summarized by five Latin phrases:

Sola Scriptura — **Scripture Alone**, the authority of Scripture;
Solus Christus — **Christ Alone**, the uniqueness of Jesus as the only Savior;
Sola Gratia — **Grace Alone**, salvation is a gift from God;
Sola Fide — **Faith Alone**, works have no part in obtaining salvation;
Sola Deo Gloria — **God’s Glory Alone**, all that God does is for His glory. In reality the reformation was mostly about “Scripture Alone.”

The other four “solas” flow out of the absolute authority of Scripture.

When we hear about things such as indulgences, purgatory, the immorality of the priesthood, and other blatantly unscriptural teachings and practices that the reformers rose against, we might wonder, “How could the people in the 16th century have been so gullible?” The problem is not that they were mentally slow; the problem was that they had no access to the Word of God. The Church, under the guise that the common people, was not capable of interpreting or applying the Scriptures, said that only the theologically trained, the priests and monks, who were capable of properly interpreting and applying the Scriptures. The Scriptures were in Hebrew, Greek and Latin, and it was a capital offense to make available to the common people the Bible in their own language.

I think about last week when we had so many guests on “Invite Your One” day, and I was able to stand in the pulpit and say, if you don’t have a Bible please feel free to take one home and read it. I think about our mission teams that go to East Asia and pass out tens of thousands of New Testaments to people who don’t have access to the Scriptures. Oh how blessed we are to have access to the Word of God in our own language. The Reformers said, “No, the Scriptures are not for the educated few, the Scriptures are for the masses. Isn’t it an amazing “coincidence” that the mid 1400’s just before the Reformation, Joannes Guttenberg invented the movable type printing press, and for the first time the Bible could be mass produced in the language of the people. Something that we will delve into next week is the dual source of authority that the church was operating under at the time of the Reformation. The church officially claimed that the Bible was the source of authority, but there were also the traditions of the church, church councils, and the infallible declarations of the various Popes when they spoke “*ex cathedra*” which is literally

“from the chair,” meaning the chair of Peter, who they claimed to have a direct line of authority from. Here was the problem with this dual source of authority: the traditions of the church often conflicted with the Scriptures. When that happened, the traditions including the dictates of the Pope took precedence over the Scriptures. The real authority in the Roman church (both in the 16th century and still today) is its councils, traditions and papal dictates.

The Reformation was primarily, but not only about Sola Scriptura – Scripture alone, it was also about Solus Christus – Christ alone. The visible church in the 16th Century had perverted the doctrine of salvation by teaching that salvation came through Christ in partnership with our works. The Reformers said, “no, the Scriptures clearly teach that salvation is through Christ Alone.” Acts 4:12 is speaking of Jesus when it says, “And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.”

The third cry of the Reformation was Sola Gratia – Grace alone. James Boice speaks clearly about this core truth of the Reformation. “When the reformers spoke about ‘grace alone’, they were saying that sinners have no claim upon God, none at all; that God owes them nothing but punishment for their sins; and that if He saves them in spite of their sins, which He does in the case of those who are being saved, it is only because it pleases Him to do it and for no other reason...” [James Boice, *Whatever Happened to the Gospel of Grace*, page 107]

It is purely by grace! Ephesians 2:8a: “For by grace you have been saved...”

The fourth emphasis of the Reformation was Sola Fide – Faith alone. The apostate church of the 16th century taught that salvation is dependent on faith and works. The reformers said “no. it is faith alone. When we get to this emphasis of the Reformation, we will see that it is all about justification. We will see that the corrupt church taught that justification comes by works and the Bible teaches that justification is by faith alone and not works. Ephesians 2:8-9: “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.”

The final emphasis of the Reformation is Soli Deo Gloria – the glory of God alone. If man’s works have any part in salvation, then to at least some extent some portion of the glory – even if it was one millionth of the glory – goes to man. God will not share His glory because all the glory and honor go to Him because He alone deserves it.

Conclusion

This series is not just a church history lesson. Just as a reformation was needed in the 16th Century, even so a reformation is needed in 21st Century. This generation must be lovingly confronted with the truth of the authority and the sufficiency of Scripture. The Scriptures are not only authoritative in every area of life, they are sufficient. That means they are sufficient to counsel, direct, and guide us to the joy we are seeking in all the wrong places. The Scriptures are our authoritative guide in doing church – we don’t need a pragmatic switch to the business model, the latest trend in church growth or the latest program. We need reformation! May God grant it.