

Introducing the Reformation

Our Sufficiency in Christ

By Steve Viars

Bible Text: Galatians 3:1-14

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- In his marvelous new book *Rescuing the Gospel – The Story and Significance of the Reformation*, the long time pastor of Moody Church in Chicago Erwin Lutzer wrote – Someone has said that for many Christians, church history began with the first Billy Graham crusade. They think that as long as we derive our beliefs from the Bible, we can ignore the two-thousand-year history of God’s people. Church history, they reason, is really only of benefit to scholars and historians. What possible relevance could the past have for the present?

How easy it is to forget that we are heirs of a rich history that began with the New Testament and continues on to this present day. To study church history is to study the ways of God; it is to appreciate His providential guidance of His people. We forget that the better we understand yesterday, the better we will understand today.

“The Reformation” refers to a spiritual rebirth that took place in Europe back in the sixteenth century. Many of us believe that it is, by all accounts, the most important recovery of the gospel since the days of the New Testament. When the Reformers were forced to define their faith in the crucible of controversy and hot debate, their conclusions had ramifications that shook their world—and we can still feel their influence. Look around the evangelical world today and you’ll agree that we have to rediscover these same truths if we want our own churches to be all they can be for the glory of God.

Many people ignore the fundamental beliefs of the Reformation, thinking that there might be a better way to rescue our nation from the assault of secularism, pagan spirituality, and the proliferation of false religions. Others are unaware of what the fundamental issues of the Reformation really were, much less appreciate their relevance for today’s world. The doctrinal apathy among many Christians in our nation is deserving of tears.

Church growth experts tell us that most people seeking a new church care little about its doctrine. Their mostly interested in the facilities of the church, its nursery, and opportunities for friendship. In fact, we are told that doctrinal teaching in new members’ classes will actually turn people away rather than encourage them to join the church. The experts tell us that today’s church members will switch churches at a moment’s notice if they think that their personal and relational needs will be better met elsewhere—even if the doctrine taught is, at best, suspect. Thus some will opt for better facilities and architecture even at the expense of jeopardizing their own soul.

As long as indulgences are no longer for sale in a town square, and as long as the pope is no longer squandering the coffers of the church to finance unrestrained sensuality, then, as many believe, the issues of the Reformation are no longer relevant. How wrong! Nearly all of the conflicts of the Reformation are still ongoing today, albeit with different players and in a different context. Woody Allen was right: “History repeats itself. It has to—nobody listens the first time around.” (Erwin Lutzer, *Rescuing the Gospel*, pp. x111-xv).

- we explained at the beginning of this year that this is the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation...
- that's why we've selected the annual theme of **In Christ Alone**...because those words summarize the five solas of the reformation, that salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, according to the Scriptures alone, to the glory of God alone...
- this morning, we'd like to...**Introducing the Reformation**...and to do that, I'd like to invite you to open your Bible to Galatians chapter 3...page 148 of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you...
- now, while you're turning there – a few introductory ideas to this introduction of the reformation...
 1. I realize that you might say – hey, I thought we were studying verse by verse through the book of Colossians...
 - and the answer to that is – yes, we are...but if you check out the preaching schedule you'll see we have planned pit-stops throughout the year...and this is one of those Sundays...
 - so Lord willing next Sunday we'll be back in Colossians and we're going to move into chapter 2...
 2. I probably need to point out somewhere along the way that saying this is the 500 year anniversary of the reformation has to be taken with at least a grain of salt...
 - October 31st, 1517 is the date Martin Luther nailed his famous 95 theses on the door of the Wittenberg Church...we'll learn at another time that this was a fairly common practice by a professor or a religious teacher of some kind – sort of an invitation to a debate...or announcement of a discussion...
 - and what those 95 theses contained set off a firestorm for sure...
 - but on the one hand, it's not like Luther wrote at the bottom of the document – with these words I today launch the protestant reformation...
 - on the other hand we're going to see this morning that there were other people working on reforming what they believed were abuses of the established church long before Luther --- and some like John Hus were burned at the stake for their efforts...
 - so church historians around the world are talking about this important 500th anniversary this year...but we want to be sure we're being clear what that date is and what it's not...
 3. When I say we're introducing the reformation this am, that really is true...
 - we could go into much greater depth on all of these points than we're going to today...
 - in some cases we'll have entire messages or even series later this year on a point that we just mention in passing today...so we're not trying to be comprehensive...
 - we're also hoping that this will correspond to the individual study that many of our church members are doing this year by reading at least one book of this period of time this year...
 4. I should also point out that the reason we're going to the book of Galatians this morning is because this is the passage God used to open Martin Luther's eyes to the nature and centrality of the gospel...
 - so we'll talk about a bit about Galatians in its original context, and Galatians as it impacted Luther, and lastly – what that means for each of us...
 5. That brings us to this idea – the reformation brought with it incredible privileges and freedoms for the average follower of Jesus Christ...
 - but as is always the case...with privilege and freedom comes responsibility...and we hope to try to point some of that out along the way...
- with that in mind – let's read Galatians 3:1-14 – **READ**

- so we're talking this morning about **Introducing the Reformation** and with the time we have remaining, let's think about **3 primary emphases of the Protestant Reformation**

1. If You Are In Christ Alone, You Have Direct Access to the Throne of God

- the book of Galatians is perhaps the earliest book of the NT to be written...
- and if you've studied it, you know that it's not particularly pleasant...
- Paul is concerned for these young followers of Jesus Christ because apparently they have come under false teaching that suggested that salvation by grace alone was not enough...and that the shed blood of Christ had to be mixed with their own human effort – their works – their adherence to certain man made rules...in order to secure a relationship with God and a home in heaven...
- **Galatians 1:6 - I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel;**
- **Galatians 3:1 - You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified?**
- the point was, and is, that these biblical truths have to be clearly understood and carefully protected...
- that was certainly and amazingly true 500 plus years ago...because the notion that a person could be positionally washed in the blood of the lamb and therefore have direct access to the throne of God had been completely obscured by layers of church tradition...
- so this emphasis was...

A. Instead of...

1. human religious leaders to whom you confess your sin.

- in the Roman Catholic church, you had to go to a human priest...who stood before you and God...and heard your confession...and determined your consequence or punishment...
- and of course you can't find anything like that in the Word of God...but that will be an important emphasis all year as well...
- at that time there was a dual authority – the Bible and church tradition...
- John Piper illustrated that in a talk he gave at one of their conferences entitled "**Martin Luther: Lessons from His Life and Labor**" – where one of the scholars wrote in response to Luther's 95 theses – "**He who does not accept the doctrine of the Church of Rome and the pontiff of Rome as an infallible rule of faith, from which the Holy Scriptures, too, draw their strength and authority, is a heretic.**"
- what that means is – if the church taught that you had to confess your sins to a human priest...even if you could not find any evidence of that in the Scripture, that was supposed to be acceptable...in other words – it's true because I say it's true...so against that was the insistence that Christians have direct access to God instead of...

2. human religious leaders who live by a different set of rules.

- it's well said that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely...
- Lutzer – "**By any estimation, at the close of the fifteenth century and the beginning of the sixteenth, the Catholic Church was in desperate need of reformation. Many of the church leaders were living in shameless decadence that bred cynicism among the common worshippers**" (Lutzer, pp. 1-2).
- and I realize from our frame of reference, we might say – but wait, wouldn't that have been a clear violation of the Word of God...well, remember, they didn't have access to the Word of God...and they were being told that there was a layer of human authority between them and the Lord...

- so it wasn't just – trust me on this because I have access to revelation from God and you don't...but also – God's rules apply to you but they don't apply to me...do as I say and not as I do...
- and those same persons had power of your salvation...
- they could miraculously transform the bread and the cup into the literal body and blood of Christ...
- they drank from the cup but you didn't...
- you can see why historically the church was ripe for a reformation of ideas that were completely contrary to Scripture...

3. human religious leaders who determine the conditions and nature of your salvation.

- that brings us to the issues of indulgences and purgatory...
- the belief was that salvation was a mixture of God's grace and human effort...
- and when you sinned...even after contrition, and confession, and forgiveness...there was still the matter of the consequence of that sin...
- that could either be additional good works on your behalf...or the purchase of an indulgence...a payment of money in exchange for the consequence of your sin...
- lest that sound impossible for anyone to believe today – this is directly from the 1995 edition of the Catechism of the Catholic Church – which defines an indulgence as **“a remission before God of the temporal punishment due to sins whose guilt has already been forgiven...An indulgence is partial or plenary according as it removes either part or all of the temporal punishment due to sin. Indulgences may be applied to the living or the dead” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1995 edition).**
- now you might say – what do you mean – “or the dead...”
- that's the other important piece of this...the popes decided that after a Christian dies, he/she must first go to purgatory and face punishment for their sins...in other words, if you didn't amass enough human effort in this life...you had a debt to pay before you could enter heaven...
- imagine the horror of someone thinking about a deceased relative or friend suffering in the flames of purgatory...
- and now the church was offering a way out...buying an indulgence...
- because the view was the Jesus and Mary and many of the saints actually had excess righteousness that could be purchased...either for yourself or for someone you loved...
- and of course you don't get that directly from God – you get that from a human mediator – you buy that from the church...
- there's so much more that could be said about that...but hopefully that's enough to explain...

B. The importance of the amazing doctrine of the priesthood of the believer.

- Luther and the other leaders of the reformation condemned all of that as the errant invention of human beings in contradiction to truths like...
- **1 Peter 2:9–10 - But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.**
- **1 Timothy 2:5 - For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,**
- **1 John 1:9 - If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.**
- **Hebrews 4:16 - Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.**

- and what all of this means is – if you are in Christ alone, you have direct access to the throne of God...without the need for any human mediator at all...and please think about some of the implications of that...

C. So that...

1. Your path to salvation is intended to remove your burden, not add to it.

- the reason Peter could talk about people like you and me being believer priests is because of what our high priest has already done on our behalf...
- **1 Peter 1:18–19 - knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, *the blood* of Christ.**
- this is why Jesus could say -- **Matthew 11:28–30 - Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.**
- [develop the gospel]...

2. You can be secure in your salvation.

- that's why Paul was so forceful in the book of Galatians...because adding works to salvation may be a great money making tool for the church...but it is an offense to sufficiency of the blood of Christ...and it robs people of hope...so Paul says things to them like...
- **Galatians 3:24–26 - Therefore the Law has become our tutor *to lead us* to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.**

3. You can pray directly to God for forgiveness, and direction, and help

- **Matthew 6:9 - Pray, then, in this way: Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name.**
- now, why is this so amazing?...because of the holiness of God...and the sinfulness of man...the fact that God made a way for us to come directly into His presence is a marvelous and liberating truth...
- but...that leads to a very important question, doesn't it...friend, are you taking advantage of this privilege?...
- would the number of times you specifically confess your sin at His throne give evidence that you appreciate this position and provision?...
- would the number of times you go to Him for help, and strength, and guidance, and sustenance?...
- it's one thing to say that I don't need any human mediator between me and my heavenly Father...it's something else to take advantage of that opportunity is a way that shows how much we value what was required to make it possible...

- a second key emphasis of the reformation was that...

II. If You Are In Christ Alone, You Can Understand and Apply God's Word

- I mentioned earlier that there were reformers who preceded Martin Luther...

A. Two early reformers

John Wycliffe – 1330-1384

John Hus – 1369 – 1415

- both of these men were condemned by the Roman Catholic Church as heretics and both would have been burned at the stake had not Wycliffe cheated the church out of the opportunity by dying first before the church could kill him...
- that incensed them so much by the way that 30 years later, the church decided to dig up his bones and then burn them...

- John Hus was not so fortunate and because he refused to recant his position that the church was corrupt because its views contradicted Scripture – he was delivered to executioners who disrobed him, bound his neck to the stake with a rusty chain, and then lit the fire around him...
- what these two men were known for was their desire to place the Word of God in the hands of common people in their own language...
- and this was before the invention of the printing press...so it would take a scribe 10 months to make one copy of the Bible...
- amazingly, that desire caught fire with so many people that there are actually 170 copies of Wycliffe's Bibles known to be existence today...
- their faithfulness had a profound effect on Martin Luther...who was writing as the printing press was being developed which completely changed the ability to place God's Word in the hands of common people in their own language...

B. Martin Luther

- we'll have a much fuller discussion of Luther later this year...but what marked his ministry was his belief in Sola Scriptura – the Scriptures alone...
- that's why eventually when Luther was tried as a heretic...he said this – **“Since then your serene majesty and your lordships seek a simple answer, I will give it in this manner, neither horned nor toothed: Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason (for I do not trust either in the Pope or in Councils alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted, and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not retract anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. Here I stand, I can do no other. May God help me!”** (Timothy George, *Theology of the Reformers*, p. 328).

- why was that so important?...

C. Because of the unique position of God's Word

- **2 Timothy 3:16–17 - All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.**
- the rallying cry of the reformation was that no other book or human document could ever be held equal or in addition to the Word of God...which is why Luther said...
- **“What is asserted without the Scriptures or proven revelation may be held as an opinion but need not be believed”** (Martin Luther – *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, cited in George, *The Theology of the Reformation*, pp. 81-82).

- you can imagine the liberating aspect of this notion on the hearts of lives of those who had been enslaved by layer upon layer of man-made tradition...

D. Because of the unique provision of the Holy Spirit to each believer.

- **1 John 2:26–27 - These things I have written to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you. As for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him.**
- if this is true, we can understand what men like John Wycliffe and John Hus would give their very lives so that God's people could have his Word in their own hands in their own language...

E. Should be balanced by other passages.

- if time allowed we could talk about how and why gives pastors – Scripture says a lot about that too...

- and please keep in mind the unity principle [explain]...

- but the fact remains, this should be....

F. To be celebrated and exercised today.

- what we're talking about right now eventually came to be known as Individual Soul Liberty...[define]...

- well, that takes us back to the same point we made a few moments ago...

- this is both a privilege/freedom – but also a responsibility...to be men and women who love the Word of God and who have accepted the responsibility to study it and understand it and apply it...

- please think about different ways that is happening across our campuses...

1. FW – international students seeking to learn English by reading the Word of God

2. FW – college students who are now “on their own – away from their parents’ direct oversight” – yet wanting God’s Word to guide the way they function as college students...

3. HH – where Bible studies are being held for urban young people

4. HH – where biblical counseling is now being offered

5. FE – our Christian School can teach the Word of God every day

6. FE – VOH

7. Bethany Farms

III. If You Are In Christ Alone, You Have the Marvelous Gift of the Righteousness of God.

- I know we've talked about a lot of important concepts already...but I think it is fair to say that this is really the key to understanding the protestant reformation...

- it is when Martin Luther went from understanding that the righteousness of God is not simply a standard to be attained, but a gift to be received...

- now please chew on that very carefully...

- the gospel message is not that it is possible for you to earn righteousness from God by your own merit...or purchase it from the church for yourself or someone who already died...or suffer in purgatory until you've been punished enough to meet the standard...

- when you admit your sin and place your faith and trust in Christ...your sin is forgiven by the power of His blood and His righteousness is now placed on your account...positionally...as a free and complete gift of grace...

- the righteousness of God is not simply a standard to be attained, but a gift to be received...

- **2 Corinthians 5:21 - He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.**

- when Luther came to this understanding, key passages of Scripture finally made sense to him...

- **Romans 1:16–17 - For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it *the* righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “But the righteous *man* shall live by faith.”**

- Galatians 3:11 - Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for, **“The righteous man shall live by faith.”**
- Luther was studying this issue and he later recounted it like this... **“Here I was in my tower, reading and praying. I labored diligently and anxiously to understand these words of Paul, ‘the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel.’ I sought long and knocked anxiously, for the expression, ‘the righteousness of God,’ blocked my way. As often as I read this expression, I wished that God had not made the gospel known at all. But then one day when I was meditating in the tower, I saw the difference between law and gospel for the first time in my life. The light broke through, as I formerly hated the expression, ‘the righteousness of God,’ I now regarded it as the most comforting word in all the Bible. In very truth, this language of St. Paul was to me the true gate to Paradise. Then I grasped that the justice of God is that righteousness by which through grace and sheer mercy God justifies us through faith.”**
- think about some of the powerful implications of this...
 1. We are seeing record attendances so far this year...
 - and I know that on the part of some it’s a matter of coming back to church after what they would say was a period of time of drifting spiritually or being away from the Lord...
 - or those who would say that they have never had a place in their life for a relationship with God...
 - well, how should such persons come into the Lord’s house?...slinking around in shame and guilt hoping no one finds out what’s really been occurring?...
 - absolutely not – because if you trust Christ as Lord and Savior, or if you have trusted Christ as Lord and Savior...you have the marvelous gift of the righteousness of God, not as a standard, but as a gift...
 2. How does that fuel our outreach...[brief update on NCC] – discuss the impact of this on community outreach...[cf. – not sure those people can ever attain our standard of righteousness – listen – they can do a whole lot better than that]