

## **Semper Reformanda**

Reformation Sunday 2017

10/29/17 - Stonebrook Community Church - Matt Heerema

**Topic:** Worship, **Key verse:** Jude 1:3-4

### **Summary:**

*500 years ago, the protestant reformation brought the light of the truth of scripture back to a church that had lost its way in the medieval period. The recaptured tenets of the reformation: Salvation by grace through faith alone, personal participation in worship, and scripture as the final authority for faith and practice, are still relevant and essential for us today.*

## **INTRO**

### **Jude 1:3-4:**

"Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ."

## **What's a Protestant?**

What does it mean to be protestant? Are we protestant? What are we protesting? As I was preparing for this message, I started wondering how many of us had a working definition of "Protestant". I actually started wondering if I had one. So just to get very clear quickly, a good way to summarize "Protestant" is one who protests against any teaching in the church that is different from "The faith once for all delivered to the saints" (as Jude puts it). And that faith being defined by "The 5 solas".

## **The Five Solas**

"The five solas" refer to five latin phrases: Sola Gratia, Sola Fide, Solus Christus, Sola Scriptura, and Soli Deo Gloria. Which mean "grace alone", "faith alone", "christ alone", "scripture alone", and "glory of God alone." These solas define the Biblical Gospel: That salvation is by grace alone, received through faith alone, faith in Christ alone, as described in scripture alone, and to the glory of God alone. These five solas are a summary of the bible's teaching, and they refute every false gospel, or anything that would add to the gospel of God's amazing Grace.

Protestants protest any other Gospel. And 500 years ago, the church had a big problem. The medieval, Roman church was teaching another Gospel. And that wasn't its only problem. The medieval church was actually in an extremely dark place, 500 years ago.

## PROBLEMS

**The Church was more of an empire** at the time. It crowned and deposed kings, it owned tons of land, it authorized military campaigns, had a massively corrupt clergy who were bent on money and power and the fame and sex that came with it. The church had abandoned its prophetic voice to the world, preaching the good news of Jesus, and was vastly more concerned with money and political power.

**Worship was more of a spectator sport**, and a mechanical transaction. It was something you showed up and observed. The common man watched as priests performed strange rituals and said strange things in Latin, a language that they did not understand. In fact, its possible that the very latin words of the Catholic mass, said during communion, quoting Jesus when he said "this is my body", in latin, "*hoc est corpus meum,*" is where we get our magic phrase "hocus pocus."

Not only was participation in the worship service withheld from people, **the Bible itself was withheld**. The scriptures, though originally written in koine greek, the common trade language of most of the world, translations were restricted to latin, the bible was actually illegal to own and read for the common man. And this is a law made by the church!

Most egregiously, however, is the actual false gospel that was preached, that **salvation was based on our performance**, our ability to obey God's law. Which of course, no one is able to do, so two other strange teachings popped up: the fact that some people do live such exemplary lives that they become "saints." (This neglects the fact that the word "saint" in the New Testament refers to every Christian!) and the idea of Purgatory, a place where people supposedly go to be purged of their sin so they can at last enter heaven. These two false teachings built on each other in a strange way to produce an even more bizarre false teaching, "The Treasury of Merit."

The church taught that the extra-good people, the "saints", had done more than enough good deeds to earn their way in to heaven. And so there was all this extra goodness ("**merits**") stored up that could be dispensed. The roman church believes that it holds the **keys** to this treasury and can dispense it out in the form of an **indulgence**, which grants you time off your sentence in purgatory.

You'd earn an indulgence for acts of penance, or other righteous deeds like pilgrimages to holy places, interacting with holy relics, and most importantly to our conversation, **though monetary donations**. You could even purchase indulgences on behalf of a dead loved one. One peddler of this false teaching, in Luther's day was known to say "as soon as the coin in the coffer rings, another soul from purgatory springs"

500 years ago, the church was in the midst of a massive fundraiser for St. Peter's Basilica in Rome through a serious push of these monetary donations for indulgences. This hellish teaching got the attention of a young Augustinian monk named **Martin Luther**. You might have heard of him. **He said enough.**

## **ENTER, LUTHER**

And 500 years ago this coming Tuesday, Martin Luther posted a document he had written, containing 95 theses (ideas for discussion and debate), to the door of All Saints Church in Wittenberg Germany. (Details around this event are a little blurry and have been somewhat romanticized, which I'm okay with.)

The 95 theses were 95 points for discussion, especially on the practice of indulgences. In fact, his posting of them was not a particularly unusual thing. He was following protocol for requesting an academic, in-house, discussion among scholars.

It was when some students copied the theses from Latin into German, and distributed them *en masse* to the public that things went crazy. Their effect was essentially to put a match to a powder keg of church who had had enough of the oppression of leaders peddling a false gospel.

As he continued to delve into study of the scripture for himself, he, and his successors after him, Zwingli, Calvin, Bucer, Cranmer, Knox, and many many others uncovered and spread the clear teaching of the Bible, and the knowledge that every believer should pursue it across the world, and changed the course of history.

It is not an exaggeration to say that much of our modern western culture as we know it, finds its roots primarily in the protestant reformation, and as such we could be here for weeks unpacking the relevance of the reformation for every single part of your life.

But today I want to focus on just a few of the key points that I think are important for us to cling on to, as they are utterly foundational to the true Christian faith.

These ideas have become so standard to us that we take them for granted. We forget that they are controversial. We forget that we are protesting! We have to remember that these ideas were entirely revolutionary at the time, and continue to be today.

The reason it is called the reformation, rather than the revolution, is because it was a recapturing of lost things, rather than the invention of new things. Things without which, the church ceases being the church, which was exactly the problem at the time. The prevailing institution that called itself “the church”, was not the church. So here are those things.

## **KEY POINTS OF THE REFORMATION**

### **Salvation is by grace alone**

through faith alone in Christ alone.

#### **Ephesians 2:8-9 (ESV)**

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Grace is relational: God personally forgives his beloved children as a response to their contrition and repentance. It is not mechanical: dispensed as a result of “levers pulled” by the worshipper (in terms of sacraments, penance, works, or anything else).

We continue to be in danger of losing this truth. Every generation of man has been prone to believe we must earn forgiveness or “do something” to appease God.

### **Worship is to be understandable**

and engaged in personally.

Not a set of rites performed by the professionals (priests) to be witnessed/observed in order to obtain favor from God. But rather the singing, praying, preaching, and the scriptures themselves ought to be done by the believers who are gathered together, and done in the common language understandable by all present, and if someone is not able to understand, they should have an interpreter.

#### **1 Corinthians 14:9 (ESV)**

So with yourselves, if with your tongue you utter speech that is not intelligible, how will anyone know what is said? For you will be speaking into the air.

Think of this. The disciples spoke and learned in Aramaic, wrote in greek, and then preached in latin (allegedly) when in Rome. The early church used latin because it was the prevailing language of the day. It was later codified as the only correct language because "dogma is unchanging so the language should be too" - contrary to the missionary heart of the disciples who changed language 3 times at least, based on their audience.

The reformers recaptured the biblical teaching that discipleship begins in the home, with the family - active participation in gathered worship, family worship, and personal study by all believers, not just the priestly class, once a week.

By the way, I believe that we are in danger in evangelicalism of going back to a place where worship is something performed by professionals that we attend/observe/witness. The question is whether music style/choices/etc encourage the congregation to sing, or subtly tells them to sit back and watch.

## **Scripture is the final authority**

in matters of faith and practice (2 Tim 3:16-17)

### **2 Timothy 3:16-17 (ESV)**

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

All other christian teaching is either commentary on scripture and up for testing, or apart from scripture and completely open to take or leave, according to the scripture's teaching, even if it is from religious authorities.

Every generation, and there is a recent resurgence of this, is in danger of finding spiritual "truth" in other sources (especially "looking inward" or "listening for the still small voice of God") apart from scripture.

## **Reformation is ongoing**

"Semper reformanda" (always being reformed) - by the word of God. The reformation was not a one-time event. It is not finished. It is ongoing. We still protest. The church is to be always diligent and wary of syncretism and to follow a biblical life in our day and age.

Because we have an enemy, the devil, constantly trying to knock us off track, and because we still have sinful flesh that we are dealing with ourselves, we must always be on the guard from the same sort of drift that led the medieval Roman church to think that making it illegal to own Bibles, and that selling “get out of hell free” cards was somehow a thing that they should do. We are in that same danger.

## **APPLICATION:**

### **An honest, personal, pastoral reflection.**

I’ll admit to at times being a little alarmist about trajectories that I see in the church, and the path that it is leading us down, so with that as a caveat, I want to say that I do see a **danger in the evangelical church** of moving toward a pre-reformation situation.

**Corrupt pastors** are wielding spiritual and seeking political power for personal gain. **Worship moving more and more toward a performance mentality** with congregations set up to be onlookers, seeking to please crowds who may or may not be believers, rather than being crafted as something that believers are an active part of to remind them of the Biblical truth.

I see **rising Biblical illiteracy** as we lose our taste for deep study and the hard work that goes along with it. Instead, we are seeking internal voices and more mystical experiences to guide us in truth. I see a lack of willingness to call out error where we see it, and lack of courage to call each other to continue the path of always being reformed back to the biblical sources.

Fortunately, the remedy is inherent in the tenets of the Reformation. So these are also our application! Let us follow in the proud tradition of our Protestant forbearers and celebrate what they recaptured!

### **Semper reformanda!**

Be on the lookout for each other, lest we stray away from Biblical truth. Be diligent in searching the source, The Bible, when it comes to our church's teaching and culture, and do not be afraid to challenge when you see something that seems off.

The problem that the medieval church had that got it to the dark place it was before the Reformation, was a constant progression, adding to the scripture. The solution that the reformation provided was not “regression,” but rather “reformation” back to the Word of God, rightly taught.

This is our task as well. Continually holding our beliefs, ideas, practices as a church, and our personal lives up to the Word of God, and reforming ourselves as we see any variance.

We must always be going **back to the Bible**. We must treasure the gift that the reformers gave us, of unlocking the scriptures from the ivory tower and placing it in our common language. We must honor the sacrifice they made, sometimes at the cost of their life, to allow us to read the very words of God in our own, everyday, language. Honor it by reading it regularly, become experts in it. And become expert doers of it.

The best way to learn to be an expert in understanding and doing the scriptures: **Personally participate and engage in worship** - together as a whole church, in small groups from house to house, at home as a family, and personally. This is the other part of the gift the reformers gave us: the unleashed word and the reminder of the early church's practice of gathering together in large and small groups around it.

And most importantly, the central tenet of the entire reformation: **Look to Christ alone.**

- Trust in his love and mercy and grace toward you
- Trust his finished work
- Don't trust your performance > face reality!
- Don't trust your conformity to the crowd
- Don't trust your track record
- Don't even trust in your ability to live by the tenets of the reformation successfully.
- Trust Jesus.
- Our hope is not found in our right understanding and performance of His teachings, our hope is found in Him and his right performance.

Let's Pray.

# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Discuss as a group

As a church, we don't spend a lot of time talking about these things, and previous opinions and perceptions can often affect our understanding of them. **How familiar are you with the events of the Protestant Reformation and the religious/cultural climate of the day? Was anything that was discussed in the sermon new or different information from what you've heard?**

The "four key points of the reformation" (though it was a summary of just a few key things the reformation recaptured) work together as a whole, pointing at mindset.

1. "Salvation is by grace alone, received through faith alone, in Christ's work alone." - Discuss the way you think and talk about salvation. Is there anything added to or missing from this "formula"?

2. "Worship should be understandable and engaged in personally." Do you come on Sunday expecting to engage, or to observe? Discuss that. How is "family worship" going? Do you regularly worship together as a household?

3. "Scripture is the final authority" for matters of faith and practice. Does this line up with how you seek direction from God? Are you looking for other channels of "input" from Him?

4. Reformation is an ongoing process. We are "always being reformed" by the word of God. Can you think of times when study in the word, either together as a church, or you personally, has led to change course about previously held ideas?

Pray together that we as a church, individually and as a group, would follow the reformers in constantly be seeking God in His word, with a heart for conforming/reforming to it.