

The Standard Bearer

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Reformation issue

The Heritage of
the Reformation (1)

God's plan of reformation:
the historical context of
the sixteenth-century
Reformation

Prof. Russell Dykstra

Justification by faith alone:
the article of the standing or
falling church

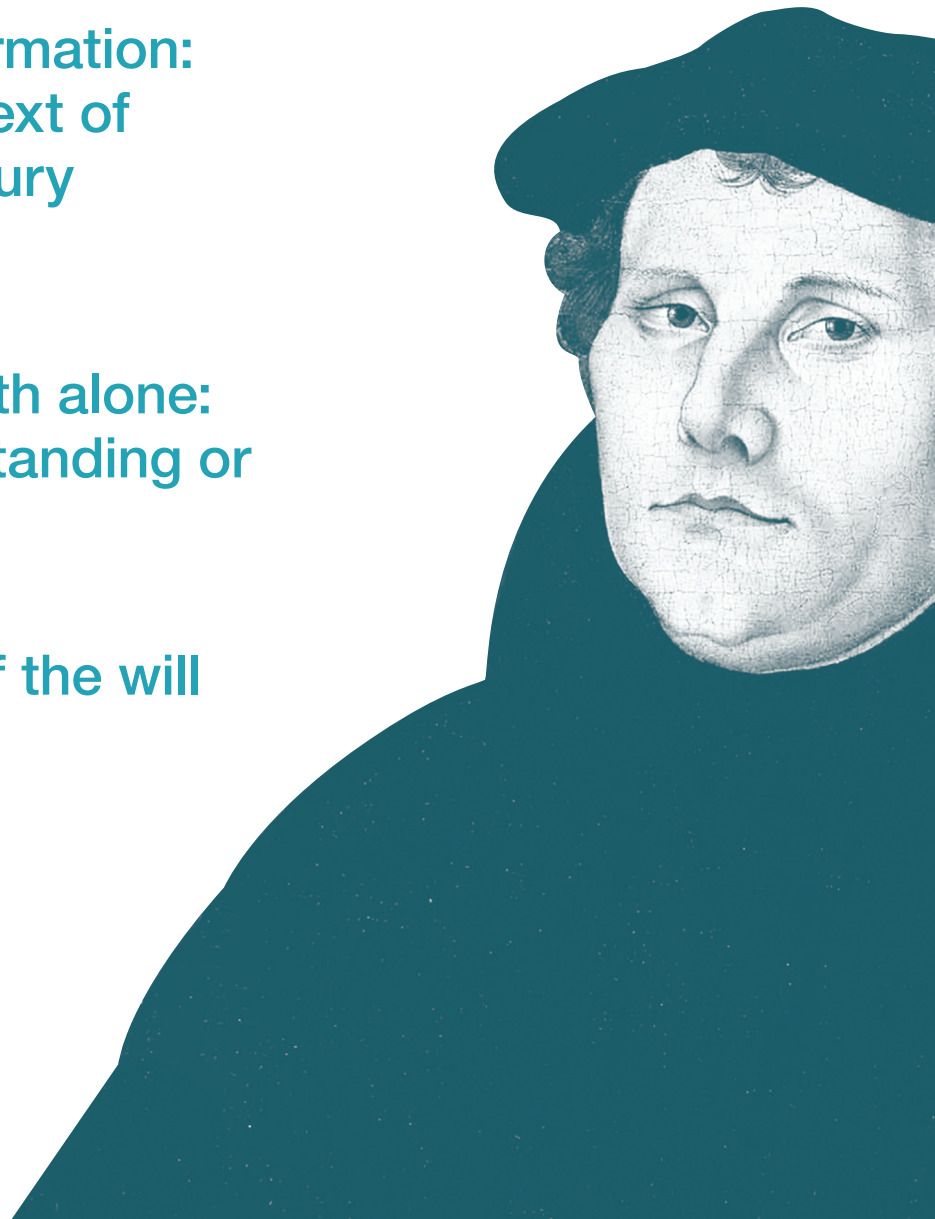
Rev. Mark Shand

On the bondage of the will

Prof. David Engelsma

“This is my body”

Rev. Nathan Langerak



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Luther's sermon on John 6:63: "Christ does not bind you to anything but His mouth and His Word"

The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.

This means that the words were spoken by the Holy Spirit.

Christ does not want to give you the right to run to and fro in search of the Spirit, to lose yourself in reverie and say: "I have this by inspiration of the Holy Spirit." Actually, it may be the devil who inspired you! Thus they alleged in the edict issued at the Diet of Augsburg: "The church is holy; therefore it follows that its proclamations are holy and given by inspiration of the Holy Spirit." Christ does not recognize such inspiration. He binds us solely to His Word. He does not want to see the Holy Spirit divorced from His Word. Whenever you hear anyone boast that he has something by inspiration of the Holy Spirit and it has no basis in God's Word, no matter what it may be, tell him that this is the work of the devil. Christ does not bind you to anything but His mouth and His Word. He does not want to leave you wandering aimlessly about; He wants you to hear His Word. He declares: "The words which I speak are spiritual. Therefore if you want to obtain the Holy Spirit, you must adhere to My words; for they are spirit and life."

These words enjoining us to hear and heed God's Word are worth much gold. Failure to do this has always given rise in the world to great and terrible errors, idolatries, and schisms—for instance, the Franciscan and Dominican orders, the ordinances of the fathers, Masses, pilgrimages, etc. Whatever ideas occurred to some fool, whatever he dreamed up, or whatever appealed to his fancy, was called an inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Everyone held his own thoughts to be the Holy Spirit and revelation. Thus the Holy Spirit, of course, also had to have His hand in motivating pilgrimages to Grym Valley! And the pope confirmed such inspirations and errors. All this, however, is devoid of God's Word; therefore it is of the devil.

God has so ordered it that the Holy Spirit ordinarily comes through the Word. Christ Himself states this

here. Therefore whenever you are faced by anything, even though it appears so attractive and holy that you imagine it to be an angelic being, take it, and hold it in the light of God's Word. Examine it to see whether it is founded on Holy Writ, whether or not God has commanded and ordered it. If it is a mere fancy, a token of particular zeal, or a pious thought, but lacks God's Word, spit on it. Unless it happens that God chooses to enlighten you particularly, as He did Moses, beware! Since God has confirmed the ministry of preaching, be on your guard against any such devotion or fancies as the devil may well suggest to you, even though they are sweet enough to induce you to weep large troughs full of tears.

You must be informed with regard to the type of zeal which is evil and that which is good, natural, or spiritual; for on the surface all are almost alike. The books of the monks abounded with spiritual devotion, and many a person was deceived thereby. People could not distinguish between true and false devotion, since they did not have the Word of God. They were told that it was not permissible to resist the Holy Spirit. But I declare that I will resist Him if they do not have the Word of God. For John commands us (I John 4:1) to test all the spirits to ascertain who is preaching and what is being preached.

But if I am to test a spirit, I must have the Word of God. The latter is to be the rule or touchstone or Lydian stone by which I can tell black from white and evil from good. It illumines everything, just as the sun does. Wherever this light does not shine, you must say: "I gladly concede that it may appear beautiful before the world, that it may glisten and seem like something precious. But I will never agree that it helps me to God or delivers me from death, no matter how much it may glitter, if it is not in agreement with the Word of God. If such zeal affects my soul's welfare and salvation, I will spit on it and tread it underfoot. I will refuse to tolerate, hear, or see it; for it is not God's Word."

The core of Christ's sermon is this, that He proclaims that His words and speeches are life and spirit. That is, they are really spiritual and transcend reason by far; they are far more sublime; yes, they are heavenly. Now if we want to find spirit and life, we, too, must become spiritual and hear the Word of God. This excels reason and rises higher than reason can rise. Any understanding of these words that I hear must be wrought in me by the Holy Spirit. He makes me spiritual too. The Word is spiritual, and I also become spiritual; for He inscribes it in my heart, and then, in brief, all is spirit.

Mark Christ's words well: "It is the Spirit that gives life," for these words leave us neither in doubt nor in error. Shortly after uttering these words He explains the meaning of the word "spirit." He says: "The words that I have spoken to you are spirit." This He does that we might beware of being misled by the treacherous preachers who come and boast about the Spirit, claiming to feel the compulsion of love and the spirit to preach. Indeed, they still say today: "I mean well with you; I am sincere when I say this; God in heaven knows that I would be willing to give my soul to save you." But tell them: "Go preach to the geese. You are a devil. Don't molest and confuse me with your spirit. Christ does not want me to listen to you." He declares: "It is the Spirit that gives life." Where do you and I come in? "The words that I have spoken to you," Christ says, "are spirit. If you take hold of My words, you have it."

Perhaps you are tempted to ask: "Where does the Spirit give life? Or by what means? Where will I find the Spirit?" The reply is: "Hold to My words and speech. If you do that, you have the Spirit." Thus the

words are spirit in him who preaches and teaches, and also in him who hears and believes. A man is spirit in proportion to how much he adheres to the Word. On the other hand, he is flesh in proportion to his flesh and unbelief.

Flesh and spirit contend against each other. I would fain believe with all my heart and be filled with spirit, but I do not succeed. The flesh and that old Sir Adam, who dwells in my skin, come along and frighten the spirit, play me a nasty trick, and intone the old refrain into my ear night and day: "Well, surely good works are worth something too." Such thoughts are obnoxious; they are accursed; they stand condemned and are pernicious. But still they haunt me, and I must constantly war against them and say: "I will not yield and put my trust in works. I am well aware that the Ten Commandments have been enjoined. But what of it? First of all, I want to learn and believe this doctrine, that my salvation and life depend on the flesh and blood of Christ. Then hand me the Ten Commandments, and I shall not refuse them obedience. If the heart is rooted in this doctrine, then good works will also follow, but for a different reason."

So that is the Christian doctrine. These words are spirit; they are not profound, wise, reasonable words; they are spirit. And you must enroll your heart in the school of the Holy Spirit. Otherwise you can accomplish nothing. Life and spirit will pass you by, and you will remain in death.

Luther's works: Sermons on the Gospel of St. John: Chapters 6-8. (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald, & H. T. Lehmann, Eds.) (23: 173-176). Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959 (www.cph.org).

Editor's notes

Prof. Russell Dykstra

In this issue, we celebrate the 500th anniversary of the great Reformation begun in 1517. We acknowledge that we must not be guilty of garnishing the sepulchers of the prophets, while despising the Word of God that they brought. We must not arrogantly imagine that we are the only ones who rightly celebrate the Reformation. May God preserve us from both evils. Yet celebrate, we must! We commemorate *God's work* of reformation. Five hundred years ago God delivered His beloved bride from chains of error, hierarchy, and false worship. He lifted her to new heights of understanding in His truth. We join with all churches who love the Reformation truths to praise God for this wonder.

Regular readers know that this is an annual

celebration for the *Standard Bearer*. This year, we determined to focus on some of the main issues of the Reformation. However, the selection proved a very difficult task. We simply *could not* reduce the topics to but seven or eight. So, we decided to print *two* Reformation issues! The narrowing-down process was still painful, and in this issue the excerpt from Luther's sermon serves the double function of a meditation and a statement on the Reformation principle of Scripture alone. But, the hard decisions were made, the articles assigned, and in your hands (or on your screen) is the first of two Reformation issues. May God bless this effort to highlight some aspects of His saving work, for the glory of His name and the edification of His church.



Prof. Russell Dykstra, professor of Church History and New Testament in the Protestant Reformed Seminary.

God's plan of reformation: the historical context of the sixteenth-century Reformation

The sixteenth-century Reformation is one of the most significant events in the history of the world. Its far-reaching impact was manifest not only in the church, but on nations, cultures, governments, and economies. The world changed in 1517. These broad changes make it important to investigate the context of a movement that could have such drastic effects. Obviously, a brief article on this topic cannot be exhaustive. It can only skim the surface of this fascinating topic.

The purpose of the article is not merely to list historical facts and circumstances. Rather, we desire to set forth God's sovereign control and direction in the Reformation. The Reformed believer bows in grateful worship of the God who powerfully directed all people and events, both in the church and in the nations, to lift His church from apostasy to a new and higher level of purity.

Too far gone

The church on earth is never perfect. Composed of sinners with a depraved nature and an imperfect understanding, the church in this world will always contain seeds of error. The sad situation of the church just prior to the Reformation was due to seeds of error from the ancient church (AD 0-500) that were allowed to grow in the medieval church (500-1517), and that were, in fact, deliberately cultivated. The result was disastrous! The weeds of error and corruption choked out truth and righteousness. The church apostatized to the point that she became the false church. She still confessed Christ in word, but she rejected His rule, denied His saving work, and totally corrupted His worship. Many were the cries for "reform." But history would demonstrate that the church was too far gone to be brought back. Let us briefly consider her sad state of apostasy at the turn of the sixteenth century.

Salvation—by works

The errors concerning fallen man and his salvation had

previously arisen in the ancient church. Pelagius (c. 400) taught that every man was born in the same state as Adam, namely, neither good nor evil, but neutral—able to do good or evil. This, he claimed, was every man's state for his entire life. He always can do good, even to the point of living in perfection. However, following the clear biblical leading of Augustine, the church officially rejected the errors of Pelagius. Augustine proved that fallen man can only sin. Grace alone saves a man and makes him able to do good.

But the victory of Augustine was short-lived. The church slipped into a modified form of Pelagianism, allowing that man is born not dead in sin but with a deadly spiritual sickness. He will perish without the saving assistance of the Good Physician. Fallen man is able to use the grace God gives him, though that grace is resistible.

In the height of the medieval scholastic theology, this error developed more completely. The word to the unbelieving sinner was: "Do what is in you." That is, make an effort to obey God—you have it in you to try. If you try, God will reward you with saving grace.

The church preached that salvation is earned. Man can merit with God. And from that developed the full-blown system of works-righteousness that Martin Luther attempted to follow. How can man escape hell and be right with God? He must earn it through penance and good works, through self-denial and personal sacrifice. The cross was made of none effect.

Worship—externalism

The ancient and medieval church had fallen into the serious error of making accommodations in worship for pagan people they sought to bring into the church. The pagans had their idol gods, feast days, and ceremonies. The missionaries were specifically instructed to turn the pagan feasts into Christian celebrations for various saints. The worship of saints flourished, and images of Jesus, Mary and the saints were substituted for the pagan gods. Worship was not a matter of the heart, but

purely external. At the center of the worship was the mass—a dramatic production performed by the priest. When he spoke, it was in a tongue unknown to the people—Latin. The people came to watch, not worship.

And the church conferred grace—in things. In the wafer of communion, in the bone of an ancient martyr, the hair of Mark, or the cross of Peter. Make a pilgrimage! Go to the relics! The cross of Christ was buried under layers of man-made ceremonies and rituals. Worship became an abominable idolatry.

Church rule—by man

The rule of Christ was subverted by the hierarchy established in the medieval church. It began innocently enough—the church encouraged believers to have respect for the special offices in the church. Before long, however, the officebearer, especially the preacher, was lifted up above the ordinary believer. He was called a priest, because he offered a sacrifice (the mass) for the people and interceded on their behalf. The priest would be better than the people, denying himself marriage. He drank the wine of communion.

And then the levels of church office developed—priests and bishops, archbishops and cardinals...all the way to the pope, arrogantly claiming to be the Vicar of Christ. The pope, not Christ was the head of the church on earth. The rule of Christ was effectively denied.

Lifestyle—corruption

The history of the church in the Middle Ages is a concrete demonstration of the Bible's warning—*The love of money is the root of all evil*. The clergy became rich, and they could not get enough. They squeezed the life out of the peasants to supply luxuries for the clergy. Covetous men, beholding this luxury, sought the offices of the church for filthy lucre. Offices were sold to the highest bidder. They were mad for money, pleasure, and power. The same spiritual malady infected the monasteries—they became rich, and avarice took control. This transformed what began as an effort to live a separate and holy life, into a life of ease and pleasure-seeking. Far too many monasteries became dens of iniquity.

The vile iniquity of the clergy was reflected in the people. They were, generally, ignorant of the Bible, superstitious in the extreme, and lived, in the words of Luther, like animals. Their life was all of the earth. They scarcely raised their heads, or hearts, heavenward.

Knowledge level—abysmal

As a rule, the people of the Middle Ages could not

read or write. This gave the church an excuse to fill the cathedrals with images and painting of saints as “books to the laity.” In many areas of Europe, the clergy, particularly the priests, were an ignorant lot. Preaching was abominable. Virtually no priest knew the original languages of the Bible, Greek and Hebrew. The very real problem of illiterate priests is evident from the printing of a picture-book Bible for priests, so that they could have at least some knowledge of Bible stories to bring into the pulpit!

The schools were largely church-controlled—monasteries and cathedral schools. The education, such as it was, promoted the errors of the church.

The state of the church by 1517, was beyond dire. It was hopeless. The “Christian” church denied Christ as Head and Savior and posited salvation of man by works. She was as defiled and corrupt as any earthy kingdom at its worst, steeped in ignorance, and having scarcely any preaching or knowledge of Scripture. She was too far gone, too far departed.

And yet...

God was in full control. In accordance with His perfect plan, the theology, worship, government, and lifestyle of the church on earth had descended to this unimaginably vile pit. God determined to demonstrate the serious consequences of departure from the truth of His Word. He would manifest again the depravity of man. He would hammer home the truth that man cannot save himself. He could demonstrate the marvelous power of His grace that alone *does* save. He would raise up the church with Christ as Head and Savior, established once again on the foundation of truth. The glory of Christ and His true church would shine brilliantly against the dark depravity of the whore of Babylon.

God would reform His church—forming her anew, forming her back to the standard of His Word.

And, therefore, God was carefully preparing all the circumstances and determining the events that were necessary for the great Reformation.

God changed the political landscape that had previously enabled the pope to impose his will on kings and nations. The feudal system was breaking up. In addition, the people were increasingly more supportive of their king rather than the corrupt pope, when the two conflicted. And, in the providence of God, the new emperor was a nineteen-year-old Spaniard elected by seven German princes, the head of which was elector Frederick III. These changes made it possible for a ruler (Frederick III) to protect Luther and the Reformation.

God had also prepared Islam for the future

“protection” of the Reformation. The Ottoman Turks took over Constantinople in 1453 and continued the spread into Europe. By 1512, they overcame Hungary, and in 1529, they besieged Vienna. Emperor Charles V, virulently anti-reformation, was frequently forced to deal with the real threat of Islam, preventing him from delivering the crushing blow to the cause of the Reformation.

God prepared the way for the Reformation through education. Universities were established in the Middle Ages. By the time of the Reformation, many were providing quality education...in order that the Reformers could be well educated men. And, the Renaissance and the rise of humanism resulted in a return to the classics—Hebrew, Greek, and church fathers like Augustine! The Reformers could work with the Scripture in the original languages. They could read and quote Augustine in defense of the doctrines of grace.

New inventions were directed by God for the good of the Reformation. The “discovery” (from China) of paper and printing with movable type, was perfected

in the West in time to serve the Reformation—Bibles, pamphlets, and books could be mass produced.

That is not all. The all-encompassing direction of God is seen in that, with a view to the spread of the Reformation, God determined the discovery of new worlds. Persecuted saints would have an escape! The church would be preserved!

So much more could be brought forward to demonstrate God’s sovereign preparations. But space prevents it.

All the above is plain from the perspective of 2017. The people living in Germany in 1517 could not have put all these factors together. They saw a church hopelessly corrupt, with no possibility of change. Man could not know the purposes of God and that He deliberately brought the church of Christ on earth to that abominable condition. Nor could anyone imagine, least of all Luther, that that God was carefully making preparation for the most significant event in the history of the church of the new dispensation—the great Reformation of Christ’s church! *Soli Deo Gloria!*



Rev. Brian Huizinga, pastor of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Redlands, California.

In praise of a well-built confessional house

Our house

We love our house. Our house is the collection of confessions in which we live. Confessions or creeds are the church’s officially adopted statements of faith summarizing the essential teachings of Scripture. Our confessions are our statements concerning what God says about Himself and His works. Our collection consists of the Ecumenical Creeds: the Apostles’ Creed, the Nicene Creed, the Athanasian Creed, and the Creed of Chalcedon; as well as the Three Forms of Unity: the Belgic Confession, Heidelberg Catechism and Canons of Dordt.

As a house affords protection from outside danger, so in our life as a church our confessions keep us safe from doctrinal errors. As a house provides a place for warm fellowship, so our confessions are the inviting theological home in which we enjoy rich communion

with God and our spiritual family. And even as a custom-designed house with so many personal touches can identify the inhabitants and tell you something about them, so our creeds identify us before the whole world and tell others exactly who we are.

Some churches claim the confessions as their home but they do not want to live under their roof and within their walls. For the sincere Reformed Christian, there is no place like home in the creeds. Commemorating 500 years of Reformation history causes our hearts to expand with gratitude for our house, because the great Reformation that commenced in 1517 was the primary period in history in which our house was built.

The building of our house

On the timeline of 2,000 years of New Testament history, the periods of time devoted to the construction of our

house constitute two relatively small slivers. There was a flurry of activity in the fourth and fifth centuries as the Ecumenical creeds portion of our house was built. Then, after a quiet millennium on the construction site, the Three Forms of Unity were erected during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

The Ecumenical creeds are the deep footings and thick foundational walls of our house—the basement, or perhaps what Jesus calls “this rock” (Matt. 16:18). This rock foundation is essentially the simple but deep and all-encompassing confession JESUS CHRIST IS LORD (Acts 16:31; Rom. 10:9; I Cor. 8:6, 12:3). This is the church’s first and principal confession, and it will be mankind’s last (Phil. 2:11) to the glory of God the Father. The main contribution of the Ecumenical creeds was to begin unpacking the glorious theology contained in the words, “Jesus Christ is Lord.”

First, the Ecumenical creeds had to express with precise terminology the full deity of Jesus (who is “Jehovah salvation”). Then the church had to determine how it would say that Jesus is both God and man. Moreover, if Jesus on earth is God and the Father in heaven is God, then do we have multiple Gods? The Ecumenical creeds spelled out the biblical truth that in the person of our Savior are perfectly united two distinct natures—the human nature and the divine nature. And because Jesus is God (and later in the history of doctrine, agreement was reached on the deity of the Holy Spirit), a Trinitarian confession of one God existing as three distinct persons, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, was adopted. The identity of our Savior Jesus and our triune God is the supremely important foundation for our confessional house.

After a thousand-plus dark years on the job site a lovely home was erected upon that foundation, allowing the church institute to upgrade from suitable basement-living to more pleasant main-floor home life. Under God’s direction, a couple of significant factors ignited a creedal construction boom in the sixteenth century. On the one hand, the Holy Spirit used all of the doctrinal ignorance and deviation, worship abuses, and open immorality in the church to awaken the godly to holy horror and energize a never-before-seen Reformation in which the true doctrine of Scripture was restored to prominence in carefully articulated, written statements. On the other hand, the political and ecclesiastical spheres overlapped, so that the civil magistrate had a vested interest in theology for the unification and stability of his kingdom. I do not foresee a U.S. President convening a special meeting of Congress to pen and adopt a creedal statement on double predestination or the presence of Christ in Holy Communion for the unification of

Americans in biblical truth, but that is the way it was as the time of the Reformation. Creeds were deemed urgent for healing the fractures caused by theological squabbles after the Reformation began. Out of this era not only came scores of confessional statements—many of which are unused today—but particularly the Three Forms of Unity as our confessional house.

A well-built house

The Reformation gave us an amazingly well built house. The Reformation did not merely give us an attractive front façade (justification by faith alone or creation), a load-bearing interior wall (original sin or the necessity of divine satisfaction), roof trusses and a roof over us (Scripture or double predestination), a cozy fireplace (providence or prayer), a spacious utilitarian kitchen (the means of grace or good works), or a private bedroom (assurance of our election or hope for the second coming). The Reformation era gave us a complete house of all the essential doctrines of Scripture.

Evidence of the indispensable work of the Spirit of truth is the fact that our house sits perfectly on the basement foundation that had been laid a millennium prior. The house of the Three Forms of Unity not only sits squarely on the foundation of the Ecumenical creeds, but, to employ another figure, it is the massive oak arising out of the acorn “Jesus Christ is Lord” and the little sapling of the Ecumenical creeds. Jesus Christ is the revelation of God. Therefore, if we take the confession “Jesus Christ is Lord” and open up each one of those words and the whole statement in the light of Scripture, we not only arrive at the narrower theology of the Ecumenical creeds, but the broader and more comprehensive theology of our Reformed creeds.

For example, “Jesus” means “Jehovah salvation” or “He shall save his people from their sins,” (Matt. 1:21). To understand that one word “Jesus” we must ask the Bible: What is sin? What is the origin of sin? Who is a sinner? What is salvation? Who is Jesus? How does Jesus save? Whom does Jesus save? Why does Jesus save? Unto what does Jesus save? Work it all out according to Scripture and you end up with the truth concerning Jesus summarized by the Canons of Dort with its five heads of doctrine. The same can be said of “Christ,” that is, “God’s anointed Prophet, Priest, and King” and “Lord.” Some professing Christians denounce creeds in opposition to the confession “Jesus Christ is Lord,” but creeds only take that simple confession and reveal the comprehensive theology contained in it. What a massive, structurally sound, tidy, spacious, comfortable, and even luxurious house is our confessional house, covering all the doctrines from theology to eschatology!

Remodels or additions?

Since the Synod of Dordt in 1618-1619, at which the Canons were written and adopted, and at which the Heidelberg Catechism and the Belgic Confession (with its inclusion of the Ecumenical creeds) were adopted as the official statements of the Reformed faith, the house has stood fast. Are we due for a remodel or an addition today?

Although no creedal construction actually occurred, those opposed to the doctrine of the unconditional covenant established with the elect alone charged the Protestant Reformed Churches synod of 1951 with “extra-confessional binding” in putting on an ugly and unnecessary addition to the Reformed house with the adoption of the “Declaration of Principles.” However, not only is the “Declaration” not a fourth creed, it does not even pretend to be one, as it consists mostly of quotations from the Three Forms demonstrating what the covenant doctrine of our house actually is.

In the last few years two proposed changes to the house have received attention in the Reformed community. First, the Christian Reformed Church has been discussing the merits of a huge addition—a fourth Reformed confession on racial unity and justice called the Belhar Confession. Just this summer the addition was rejected.¹ Second, an overture to Synod 2016 of the Canadian Reformed Churches recommended adding statements to Article 14 of the Belgic Confession (BC) to make more explicit the Reformed faith’s intolerance of theistic evolution. With the next Synod not meeting until 2019, this project appears temporarily stalled because Synod 2016 ruled that Classis erred in forwarding the overture to Synod in the manner that it did.²

We may remodel or add on to our house. The creeds are not on par with Scripture, which, if a church should alter, she will be plagued by God (Rev. 22:18).

There have been changes made to our house since it

was built, though most of them were made early on and were minor cosmetic touch-ups with only a few more significant structural repairs.³

Admittedly, our confessions were written in and reflect a particular historical context, and they do not say everything they possibly could say on every fine point of doctrine. Nevertheless, this house as built continues to prove it is lovely for fellowship with God and each other and capable of withstanding any attack. If the church’s concern is racism, then preach Heidelberg Catechism (HC) LD 21 on the holy catholic church. If the concern is theistic evolution then teach BC, Articles 3-7 on Scripture and BC, Article 14 and HC, LD 3 on man’s creation, while also demonstrating from the gospel summarized in the confessions that tampering with the Adam of the creeds is tampering with Christ, the very foundation and strength of the whole house. The present need is not structural repair of the house or additions, but guards at the door ready to keep out the racist or evolutionist who are on the outside, and ready to discipline the racist or evolutionist within by putting him out.

In praise of our well-built house

Thanks be to the God of the Reformation for what has been from every point of view a magnificent home for generations of believers. God dwells in this house. So do we.

I hope you love your house. Let it not be a vacation cottage you visit every Sunday morning for a Catechism sermon. Live in it! Walk through all the rooms...with your children! Appreciate the structural soundness and striking beauty of the house when your pastor preaches from the Catechism. When was the last time you read through the Canons? Remember Head 5? Read it tonight and you will say, “Why don’t I spend more time in this room!” Read through the Belgic Confession as part of your family worship. Let your soul say, and teach your children to say, “Bless the Lord O my soul, and forget not all His benefits—benefits like the Reformation and our confessional house!”

1 The Belhar originated in South Africa during the Apartheid era and addresses individual, racial and social segregation by calling for unity, reconciliation and justice. Synod 2017 of the CRC decided against a fourth confession and approved a recommendation to “place the Belhar Confession in the newly defined category of contemporary testimony. Adherence to the Belhar Confession shall not be included in the Covenant for Officebearers.” (Article 71 of the 2017 *Acts of Synod*, 707, https://www.crcna.org/sites/default/files/2017_acts.pdf, accessed September 11, 2017).

2 The proposal for changing BC, Art. 14 can be found here: <https://creationwithoutcompromise.com/belgic-confession-article-14-proposal-materials>. The synod’s treatment can be found in Art. 94 of the 2016 CanRC *Acts*, accessed here: <http://www.canrc.org/?assembly=247>.

3 For example, the Belgic Confession, the most comprehensive of our confessions, has seen a few changes since it was written in 1561. In addition to the well-known footnote of Article 36, the body of the text has undergone a few minor changes. For some examples, an interested reader could consult: Nicolaas H. Gootjes, *The Belgic Confession, Its History and Sources* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic 2007), 117-159. One example can be found in Article 15 on original sin and is the italicized phrase added in 1566 at the Synod of Antwerp, “Nor is it by any means done away by baptism, *since sin always issues forth from this woeful source, as water from a fountain.*”



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The five solas of the Reformation

Introduction

In the end, one little word divided the churches of the Reformation and the Roman Catholic of the sixteenth century. To borrow Luther's language in his great Reformation hymn, "one little word felled" the corrupt Roman Catholic institute of his day. That one little word was "only," or as it is in Latin, *sola*. The Reformers said "only" or "alone," while Rome consistently said "and." The Reformers included the word "only" in especially five important doctrines that they taught. These five statements gradually became known as the "five *solas*."

The Reformers said that the authority in the church is *sola Scriptura*, that is, Scripture *alone*. Rome said that the authority in the church is Scripture *and* tradition. The Reformers said that Christ is our *only* Mediator, *solus Christus*. Rome said that men have many mediators: Christ *and* angels, saints, and the Virgin Mary. The Reformers said that we are saved by grace *alone*, *sola gratia*. Rome said that we are saved by grace *and* on account of human merit. The Reformers said that we are saved by faith *only*, *sola fide*. Rome said that we are saved by faith *and* by our own works and free will. The Reformers said *solus Deo gloria*, to God alone be the glory. Rome said, in effect, that the glory for salvation is partly due to the grace of God *and* partly due to the sinner. Throughout, Rome insisted not on "only" or "alone," but on "and."

Still today, this is the one little word that distinguishes the churches that are faithful to the Reformation from the Roman Catholic Church. At the same time, this is an indicator that a church has departed, as well as the degree to which it has departed, from the Reformed faith. Is it maintaining the word "only" in the same areas and with the same tenacity as the Reformers did? If not, it has not only departed from its Reformation heritage, but it is on the slippery slope that leads back to Rome. So serious a matter are the five *solas*!

The five *solas* encapsulate the Reformation. They demonstrate what the Reformation was about and why the Reformation was necessary. From five points of view, they summarize the gospel that was restored to

the church through the Reformation. And they provide the rationale for the Reformation. They account for the tremendous sacrifices that Reformed believers then and now are willing to make, even "letting goods and kindred go, this mortal life also." So highly did the Reformers and the churches of the Reformation value these five doctrines and the pivotal place they occupied in the life of the church. Do we value them as highly as they did?

Sola Scriptura

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works (II Tim. 3:16, 17).

The first of the five *solas* is *sola Scriptura*, Scripture alone. The Reformers taught that Scripture alone is the final authority. No one and nothing are above Scripture, nor may be placed as an authority alongside of Scripture. Scripture is the authority for the individual believer, as well as for the church as a whole. It is the authority over faith, what we believe, and it is the authority over practice, how we live our daily lives. Scripture is also determinative for the worship of the church, so that every element of worship is to be derived from Scripture.

The Reformers rejected Rome's elevation of other authorities alongside the authority of Holy Scripture. Rome taught that the Bible is *an* authority in the church, in fact, a very important authority in the church. But the Bible is not the *only* authority. The authority in the church is the Bible *and* tradition, which tradition includes the writings of the church fathers, the decisions of the churches councils, the decrees of the pope, and the writings that the Roman Catholic Church added to the Bible known as the Apocrypha.

When the Reformers insisted that the Bible *alone* is the final authority in the church, they did not reject tradition altogether. In fact, the Reformers had the highest regard for church tradition, as well as for the decisions of many past church councils, like Nicea and

Chalcedon. But they honored tradition only in so far as tradition agreed with Scripture.

The Reformers honored Scripture as the highest authority because they believed the Bible to be the divinely inspired Word of God. Scripture is the authority in the church *because* Scripture alone is the very Word of God. Thus, it is capable of functioning as the supreme authority in the church.

Sola Scriptura is the first *sola* for good reason. All the other *solas* depend on the first *sola*. They are all derived from *sola Scriptura*. Scripture teaches that Christ is the only Savior. Scripture teaches that salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone. And Scripture teaches that to God alone must be all the glory. If Scripture is not the only authority, the other four *solas* fall to the ground.

I am bound by the Scriptures 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. I cannot do otherwise, here I stand, may God help me. Amen. (Martin Luther, “Luther at the Diet of Worms,” in *Luther’s Works: The Career of the Reformer*, 32:112-3.)

Solus Christus

For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus (I Tim. 2:5).

The Reformers insisted that Scripture proclaims Christ as the *only* Savior of sinners. As one with the Father, the very Son of God, He does everything that is necessary for our salvation. Jesus leaves nothing undone or partially done, so that we need other saviors and additional mediators alongside of Him. Christ’s saving work was complete and effectual. He accomplished everything on account of which He had been sent into the world by the Father.

Because Jesus is the only Savior, who has fully accomplished all of our salvation, the Reformers objected to the Roman Catholic doctrine of the mass as a perpetual re-sacrificing of Jesus, and the doctrine of transubstantiation, which was necessary for the re-sacrificing of the body and blood of Jesus. Such a sacrifice is not only unnecessary, but is a blasphemous denial of the finished work of Christ and an accursed idolatry. Thus the Reformers swept away not only the mass, but the whole Romish priesthood, which priesthood was necessary for the re-sacrificing of the body and blood of Jesus. The finished work of Christ, our great and only High Priest, fulfilled all the sacrifices of the Old Testament and eliminated any further need for a priesthood. Rome’s priesthood, with its sacrifice

of the mass, is a perpetual and public denial that Christ alone is our Savior.

Jesus’ merits are the only propitiatory merits that take away both the guilt and the punishment of our sins. Rome taught that the merits of the saints, and especially the merits of the Virgin Mary—merits that had accumulated through their works of supererogation—are merits that are at the disposal of the church. The church distributes these merits through the purchase of indulgences. Or there were indulgences to be earned simply by paying to observe all kinds of relics of the saints, collections of which could be found in every major city throughout Europe in the sixteenth century. The Reformation demolished the whole system of indulgences on the basis of the truth that Jesus is the only Savior. His merits alone, no other merits, are the basis for our salvation.

In short, whoever wraps up two kinds of righteousness [Christ’s and our own] in order that miserable souls may not repose wholly in God’s mere mercy, crowns Christ in mockery with a wreath of thorns. (John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. by John T. McNeill, 3.11.13; 1:743.)

Sola gratia

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast (Eph. 2:8, 9).

The Reformation, like the gospel, proclaimed the grace of God. Salvation is by grace, has its source in grace, and is the ultimate expression of God’s grace. God saves those who are undeserving of salvation and unable to accomplish their salvation. Salvation is from beginning to end the work of God alone. Sinners *are* saved, are the passive recipients of salvation, and receive salvation from God. Salvation is not earned, but is a gift of God that is freely given.

That salvation is by grace is due to the fact that the source of salvation is in the eternal will of God. Not the free will of the sinner, but the sovereign will of God is the cause of salvation. That is the ultimate reason on account of which salvation is by grace. The Reformers taught the truth of predestination—double predestination, both election and reprobation. Although a number of early church fathers taught predestination, over time prominent Roman Catholic theologians had buried the doctrine; some even openly opposed it. Luther, Calvin, and the other Reformers restored to the church the truth of sovereign predestination. Because salvation has its source in God’s everlasting counsel, salvation is clearly gracious.

Over against the teaching of *sola gratia*, Rome taught that the salvation of sinners is due, at least in part, to merit. We are saved by grace, but not by grace *alone*. The grace of God cooperates with man, so that salvation is due partly to the grace of God and partly to human merit. That may be the sinner's own merit or the merits of the saints, which merits are available through purchase from the church. The Reformers rejected this teaching. They asserted that salvation is monergistic, not synergistic; it is the work of God *alone*, not God and man.

They who assert free will are denying Christ. For if it is by my own effort that I obtain the grace of God, what need have I of the grace of Christ in order to receive it? Or what do I lack when I have the grace of God? (Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, in *Luther's Works: The Career of the Reformer*, 33:279.)

Sola fide

Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law (Rom. 3:28).

Salvation is by grace alone, *through faith alone*. Faith is the instrument, the “alone instrument,” to use the language of the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF, 11.2). The righteousness on account of which we are righteous before God is not an innate righteousness. The righteousness on account of which we are righteous before God is not an acquired righteousness. But the righteousness on account of which we are righteous before God is the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ. That righteousness is ours by faith and by faith *alone*.

Rome taught that we are righteous before God partly by faith. Righteousness is ours by faith *and* by the works of faith. Faith and the good works that faith produces together constitute our righteousness before God. The Reformers rejected Rome's teaching about faith and insisted that we are righteous by faith *alone*. Well known is the controversy that Luther raised when his German translation of the Bible appeared in print. Luther translated Romans 3:28 by adding an “alone” that is not in the original text. His translation was: “Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith *alone*, without the deeds of the law.” Luther knew very well that “alone” was not found in the original and that his insertion could not be justified by an appeal to the text. At the same time, although he had transgressed the boundaries of a faithful Bible translator, there is good reason for Luther's insertion because of the sense of the passage. As Luther pointed out, by contrasting as he does faith and the deeds of the law, and by insisting that we are righteous by faith and not by the deeds of the law, Paul is teaching justification by faith *alone*.

What underscores the truth that we are righteous by faith *alone* and not by our own works is the truth that even the faith by means of which we are justified is the gift of God. He gives and He works faith in the elect. That is grace!

You farther see how faith and the merits of works are contrasted, as things altogether contrary to each other. As then trust in works is the chief hindrance, by which our way to obtain righteousness is closed up, it is necessary that we should wholly renounce it, in order that we may depend on God's goodness alone. (John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*. Comments on Romans 9:32.)

Soli Deo gloria!

For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory forever. Amen. (Rom. 11:36)

The Reformers taught Scripture *alone*, Christ *alone*, grace *alone*, and faith *alone* because they had a zeal for the glory of God *alone*—*soli Deo gloria!* They understood this to be the overarching teaching of Scripture. They saw this to be the great goal of the saving work of Christ. And they were convinced that this was the purpose of salvation by grace and through faith, that God, and not any man, must be glorified—God *alone!*

For this reason they objected to Rome's teaching of merit and works-righteousness. It gave the glory for salvation, at least in part, to the sinner himself. For this reason, they objected to the papacy. Not so much that it introduced hierarchy into the church, although it did. But more seriously, the papacy attributed to man the glory that is due to God alone.

God is to be glorified for salvation, not only by performing certain rituals and rites, but by an entire life lived to the glory of God. The apostle says in II Corinthians 10:31, “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.” That is the Christian life and the Reformed view of the Christian life: *soli Deo gloria!*

The Gospel proclaims the glory of God alone. It follows that we are foolish and lost sinners, because the glory of God is not set forth unless we ourselves are confounded. The papists do not want this confounding, yea, they ascribe a part of righteousness to their own glory, and therefore they cannot bear the Gospel. It is the office of an evangelical preacher to proclaim the glory of God alone. (Martin Luther, “Lecture on Isaiah 49:3,” in *Luther's Works: Lectures on Isaiah Chapters 40-66*, 17:172.)



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Justification by faith alone: the article of the standing or falling church

Q. 70 What is justification?

A. Justification is an act of God's free grace unto sinners, in which He pardons all their sins, accepts and accounts their persons righteous in His sight; not for any thing wrought in them, or done by them, but only for the perfect obedience and full satisfaction of Christ, by God imputed to them, and received by faith alone.

Q. 71 How is justification an act of His free grace?

A. Although Christ, by His obedience and death, did make a proper, real, and full satisfaction to God's justice in the behalf of them that are justified; yet inasmuch as God accepts the satisfaction from a surety, which He might have demanded of them, and did provide this surety, His own only Son, imputing His righteousness to them, and requiring nothing of them for their justification but faith, which also is His gift, their justification is to them of free grace.

Q. 72 What is justifying faith?

A. Justifying faith is a saving grace, wrought in the heart of a sinner by the Spirit and word of God, whereby he, being convinced of his sin and misery, and of the disability in himself and all other creatures to recover him out of his lost condition, not only assents to the truth of the promise of the gospel, but receives and rests upon Christ and His righteousness, therein held forth, for pardon of sin, and for the accepting and accounting of his person righteous in the sight of God for salvation.

Q. 73 How doth faith justify a sinner in the sight of God?

A. Faith justifies a sinner in the sight of God, not because of those other graces which do always accompany it, or of good works that are the fruits of it, nor as if the grace of faith, or any act thereof, were imputed to him for his justification; but only as it is an instrument by which he receives and applies Christ and His righteousness.¹

Five hundred years! On the 31st October 1517, in an attempt to have the issue of indulgences openly debated, Martin Luther nailed ninety-five theses or propositions to the church door in Wittenberg, Germany, under the title "Disputation to Explain the Virtue of Indulgences." According to the Church of Rome, the church and specifically the pope had the power to dispense forgiveness or pardon from the punishment of sin. Such forgiveness was made available to sinners by way of the sale of indulgences. The purchase of indulgences was said to enable sinners to buy their way out of purgatory into heaven. It was not so much the concept of indulgences that initially agitated Luther, but it was the abuse of indulgences that led Luther to act in October 1517. Though it was not his intention, Luther's ninety-five theses set in motion the sixteenth-century Reformation. However, it ought to be noted that the issue of indulgences was not the central issue of the Reformation. Underlying and connected to the issue of indulgences was the more fundamental and, ultimately, more distinguishing doctrinal issue of the Reformation, namely, justification by faith alone.

Indisputably, justification by faith alone was the fundamental doctrine of the Reformation. It was this doctrine that led to the fragmentation of the Christian church as it then existed; a fragmentation that not only has continued, but which has expanded in the intervening years. Why such a serious fragmentation? Because what was and what is at stake is the gospel itself! At issue in the doctrine of justification by faith alone is the very basis of our salvation.

Justification by faith alone was a doctrine that Luther himself had already embraced prior to the events in Wittenberg in October 1517. It was a truth that Luther came to after a bitter internal struggle. Initially, Luther was of the view that he could earn his salvation through the keeping of the law of God. However, try as he might, he found no peace in his many pious exercises. In fact, the more he strove to keep the law of God, the greater he felt the weight of his sin. He could not escape

¹ Westminster Larger Catechism, Q/As 70-73.

altogether his anger, his envy, his hatred, and his pride. Luther identified with Paul's words, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Rom. 7:24). At that time, he had yet to learn to add with Paul, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 7:25).

In particular, Luther struggled to make sense of Paul's words in Romans 1:17, "For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith." Here is Luther's own description of his struggle:

Though I lived as a monk without reproach, I felt that I was a sinner before God with an extremely disturbed conscience. I could not believe that He was placated by my satisfaction. I did not love, yes, I hated the righteous God who punishes sinners, and secretly, if not blasphemously, certainly murmuring greatly, I was angry with God, and said, "As if indeed, it is not enough, that miserable sinners, eternally lost through original sin, are crushed by every kind of calamity by the law of the decalogue, without having God add pain to pain by the gospel and also by the gospel threatening us with His righteousness and wrath!" Thus I raged with a fierce and troubled conscience. Nevertheless, I beat importunately on Paul at that place, most ardently desiring to know what St. Paul wanted.²

Luther had thought that "the righteousness of God" referred to the righteous demands that the law of God imposed upon sinners. By the grace of God, he came to realize that by the phrase "the righteousness of God" Paul was not referring to the righteous demands of the law, but to the righteousness that God had provided. To Luther's relief, he discovered that "the righteousness of God" referred to the righteousness that God had freely and graciously provided in His Son! It was not a righteousness that any man could attain to by means of his own exertion and merit, but it was a righteousness that God freely granted to sinners on the basis of Christ's merits and that sinners received by means of faith. Luther wrote,

I grasped the truth that the righteousness of God is that righteousness whereby, through grace and sheer mercy, He justifies us by faith. Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise. The whole of Scripture took on a new meaning, and whereas before 'the righteousness of

God' had filled me with hate, now it became to me inexpressibly sweet in greater love.

In grasping the truth of justification by faith alone, Luther was delivered from the bondage of self-inflicted penance and enabled to drink in the fresh air of the grace of God. The doctrine of justification by faith alone was for Luther the sum and substance of the gospel, the core of his theology, the central truth of Christianity, the article of the standing or falling church, a truth never to "be given up or compromised, even if heaven and earth and things temporal should be destroyed."³

Luther was not alone in his unswerving advocacy of justification by faith alone. In fact, there was no significant difference among the leading sixteenth-century Reformers as to the essential understanding of this doctrine. Like Luther, John Calvin maintained the centrality and importance of justification by faith alone. Calvin described the doctrine as "the main hinge on which religion turns."

Why was this doctrine so important to Luther, Calvin, and the other Reformers? Why was it so central to the Reformation? Why ought it to be of the utmost interest to the church today? Because this doctrine deals with how the guilt of our sins can be removed and how we can receive the forgiveness of God. This doctrine reveals the only way that sinners can be reconciled to God and how we can be viewed as righteous in His sight. These issues are intensely personal and go to the heart of our salvation. It should be appreciated that the controversy of the sixteenth-century Reformation over justification by faith alone concerned such fundamental and eternally important questions as: How can I be saved? How can I, as a sinner, possibly be reconciled to a holy and righteous God? How can I be declared righteous before God? On what basis will God pardon or declare a sinner such as me to be righteous in His sight?

This doctrine was central to the Reformation not only because of the fundamental importance of the subject, but also because of the sharp difference of views between the Reformers and the Church of Rome. In many respects, the difference of views was encapsulated in two different words, infusion and imputation.⁴

The essence of the charge that the Reformers levelled against the Church of Rome was that while she

3 Luther, *Smalcald Articles* (Part 2, Art. 1), in the Book of Concord: *The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, ed. and trans. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 292.

4 R. C. Sproul, *Truths We Confess: A Layman's Guide to the Westminster Confession of Faith*, (P & R Publishing, Phillipsburg, New Jersey, 2007), 2:41.

2 *Luther's Works*, ed. Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Muhlenburg Press, 1960), 34:336, 337.

proclaimed accurately who Jesus Christ was and what He had accomplished with respect to the salvation of sinners, nonetheless she perverted the grace of God by maintaining erroneous views of the grounds on which and the process through which the blessings that Jesus Christ procured on the cross were conveyed to sinners. At issue was whether justification was wholly attributable to the grace of God and to the work of Jesus Christ, or whether it was proper to ascribe to men and to their endeavours an active and contributory role in salvation.

For the Church of Rome, the meaning of justification was bound up in the Latin root of the word. The word “justification” comes from the Latin verb, *justificare*. *Justificare* itself is derived from two other Latin words, *justus* meaning “justice” or “righteousness” and *ficare* meaning “to make” or “to do.” So *justificare* means literally “to make just” or “to make righteous.”⁵ Influenced by the etymology of the word, the Church of Rome viewed justification as the act of making a person to be just. Hence, the justification of a sinner was declared by Council of Trent (1543-1563) to be “not only the remission of sin, but also sanctification and renewal of the inward man, through the voluntary reception of the grace and gifts whereby an unjust man becomes just and from being an enemy becomes a friend that he may be an heir according to hope of everlasting life.”⁶

This view led that same Council to enact, among other things, the following canons:

If any one says that the sinner is justified by faith alone, meaning that nothing else is required to cooperate in order to obtain the grace of justification, and that it is not in any way necessary that he be prepared and disposed by the action of his own will, let him be anathema.

If anyone says that men are justified either by the sole imputation of the justice of Christ or by the sole remission of sins, to the exclusion of the grace and the charity which is poured forth in their hearts by the Holy Ghost, and remains in them, or also that the grace by which we are justified is only the good will of God, let him be anathema.⁷

These statements and declarations remain the position of the Church of Rome today.

The Church of Rome views justification as requiring

an unjust person to be changed and to be made righteous. Rome acknowledges that men are fallen, and that they do not have the power within themselves to attain unto righteousness. In order for that to happen, Rome contends that men must be the recipients of grace, grace that they receive through the sacrament of baptism.

R. C. Sproul helpfully outlines Rome’s view:

In baptism, the grace of justification, sometimes called the grace of the righteousness of Christ, is poured into the soul. This is called infusion. Without the assistance of the grace of justification, a person cannot be saved. Roman Catholicism teaches that you need to have the righteousness of Christ infused into your soul in order to be saved.⁸

Furthermore, as Sproul goes on to note,

...[I]n order to be saved, several things have to happen. First, you must cooperate with and assent to this grace to such a degree that righteousness truly inheres within you. This grace is necessary, but its presence alone is not enough for salvation. You must cooperate with it, agree to it, and work with it to such a degree that righteousness is truly in you. When that happens, you are placed in a state of justification before God. You remain in that state as long as you do not commit mortal sin.⁹

Luther, Calvin, and the other Reformers repudiated Rome’s view of justification, identifying it as essentially the false doctrine of justification by the works of the law that Paul anathematized in Galatians 3-5. The Reformers viewed justification as a man’s legal or forensic state before God. It was to be declared righteous in the sight of God. They rejected Rome’s teaching of an *infused* righteousness and of grace working in the sinner in order that the sinner may attain unto justification. For the Reformers, justification was not an act of God that made the sinner to be holy. It was not concerned with the change of the sinner’s actual spiritual condition. Rather, it involved the righteousness of Christ being *imputed* to the sinner, Christ’s perfect righteousness being put to the sinner’s account. The righteousness by which a man is justified, as Luther put it, was a *foreign* righteousness. It was not his own righteousness; rather, it was the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

This is the view that is found in all the major Protestant Creeds. One may consult the Augsburg Confession, 1530, Article IV; the French Confession, 1559, Article XVIII; the Belgic Confession, 1561, Articles XXII & XXIII; the Heidelberg Catechism, 1563, Q & A, 60, 61;

5 Sproul, *Truths We Confess*, 41.

6 John H. Leith ed., *Creeds of the Churches* (John Knox Press, Louisville, 1982), 411.

7 Leith, *Creeds*, Canon 9 and 11, 421.

8 Sproul, 42.

9 Sproul, 42.

the Second Helvetic Confession, 1566, chapter XV; and the Westminster Confession of Faith, 1643, chapter XI. John Murray rightly declares,

Justification by faith alone is the jubilee trumpet of the gospel because it proclaims the gospel to the poor and destitute whose only door of hope is to roll themselves in total helplessness upon the grace and power and righteousness of the Redeemer of the lost.¹⁰

Too many churches that once stood squarely on the truth of justification by faith alone have fallen or are falling away from this fundamental doctrine of the Word of God. The front on which the warfare over

10 *Collected Writings of John Murray* (Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1977), 2:217.

this doctrine is being fought is expanding. No longer is the battle only against Rome's false conception of justification by faith, but now the battle extends to those who propound the error of the Federal Vision.

Five hundred years on there remains a desperate need for Reformed believers to know the Scriptures and their confessional standards in order that they may defend this doctrine. The relevance and urgency of this doctrine cannot be overstated. Justification by faith alone must be confessed. Luther declared that justification by faith was, "the article by which the church stands or falls." It is also true to say that justification by faith alone is the doctrine by which all shall personally stand or fall before the judgment seat of Christ.



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On the bondage of the will

In the Reformation's recovery of the gospel of grace, the truth of the bondage of the will was fundamental. "Fundamental" means that without the confession of this bondage, the gospel of grace could not be proclaimed. "Fundamental" means also that the Reformation proclaimed the gospel only by a confession of the bondage of the will. Without the doctrine of the bondage of the will, there had been no Reformation of the church.

Accordingly, loss or denial of the bondage of the will by the churches today is the loss or denial of the gospel. Denial of the bondage of the will is the betrayal of the Reformation of 1517, regardless that these churches and their theologians engage in a showy and noisy celebration of the anniversary of the Reformation, deceiving others and perhaps themselves.

The truth of the bondage of the will is that the will of every unbeliever is enslaved to sin, so that the unbeliever is unable to desire or choose Jesus Christ and

His salvation; is unable to choose, much less do, what is good and right; and is, therefore, unable to "accept" Jesus and salvation when supposedly they are "offered" to him. The sinner in his bondage, or slavery, is unable to perform any work that is pleasing to God, and good. Concerning this last, a work that is pleasing to God, and good, is necessarily a work that is performed with a will that is good, a will that wills God. But the will of the natural, that is, unbelieving human is enslaved to sin. It cannot, therefore, choose God and the good. It can only hate God and reject Him.

This truth is fundamental to the gospel of grace, first, in that it denies that the salvation of the unbelieving sinner is his own work in any respect and that salvation depends upon him in any respect, specifically, upon his choice of or decision for, Jesus Christ.

It is fundamental to the gospel, second, in that it affirms that the salvation of the sinner is solely and wholly the work of God in Christ and that salvation

depends entirely and only on the will of God. This will is eternal election, appointing the sinner to salvation; giving Jesus Christ to the cross for the sinner; and giving the elect sinner faith in Jesus.

In short, the bondage of the will repudiates and condemns the doctrine of salvation by the (alleged) free will of the sinner as wicked perversion of the gospel, a heresy that robs God of His glory as the Savior of sinners and that bestows this glory upon the sinner himself. Salvation is “not of him that willeth” (Rom. 9:16a). The truth of the bondage of the will glorifies God regarding His greatest work: “...but of God that showeth mercy” (Rom. 9:16b).

Both Martin Luther and John Calvin, the leading Reformers, taught the bondage of the will, and taught it as fundamental to the gospel of grace. Both taught and defended the doctrine of the bondage of the will in full-length, classic books devoted specifically to the doctrine. Luther’s is titled, *The Bondage of the Will* (tr. J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnston, James Clarke: London, 1957). Calvin’s work has the title, *The Bondage and Liberation of the Will* (ed. A. N. S. Lane, tr. G. I. Davies, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996). All quotations of Luther and Calvin in this article are taken from these two books.

Both Reformers clearly identify the false doctrine that they, with the entire Reformation, condemn. For Luther, basically accepting the definition of the Roman Catholic humanist Erasmus, free will is “a power of the human will by which a man may apply himself to those things that lead to eternal salvation” (137). This power to choose, and thus obtain, salvation may be helped by God’s grace, but in any case salvation depends upon the sinner’s will or choice.

For Calvin, the heretical doctrine of man’s free will is the teaching that “the will...has both good and evil within its power, so that it can by its own strength choose either one of them” (68). In his controversy over the issue of the free or bound will with the Roman Catholic theologian Pighius, Calvin makes plain that the “good” that the advocates of free will have especially in mind is salvation in Christ. The free will is supposed to be able to choose salvation, as also to reject it. Upon this choice the salvation of the sinner depends.

Both Luther and Calvin expressed the seriousness of

the heresy of free will. To Erasmus, who had attacked the Reformation’s doctrine of the bondage of the will while defending free will, Luther wrote:

Let me tell you, therefore—and I beg you to let this sink deep into your mind—I hold that a solemn and vital truth, of eternal consequence, is at stake in this discussion; one so crucial and fundamental that it ought to be maintained and defended even at the cost of life, though as a result the whole world should be, not just thrown into turmoil and uproar, but shattered in chaos and reduced to nothingness (90).

Calvin charged the heresy of free will with “raising man to partnership with God, to cast him down more heavily from a greater height.... In the most excellent work of all, that is, in the soul’s resurrection, man has an equal part with God” (208).

Where, in Protestantism, indeed in the sphere of Reformed Christianity, is there today this estimation of the seriousness of the issue of the bondage of the will?

Both Luther and Calvin confessed the truth concerning the will of the natural man, that is, that the will is in bondage to sin and Satan. According to Luther, the will of the

natural, unsaved, man is “not free at all, but is the permanent prisoner and bondsman of evil, since it cannot turn itself to good” (104). Such is the total control of the will of the sinner by Satan that it is comparable to a horse being ridden by the devil: “If Satan rides, it [the will] wills and goes where Satan wills” (103, 104). “‘Free-will’ is nothing at all” (142), that is, free will does not exist.

Calvin taught that the will of the natural man “is so overwhelmed by wickedness and so pervaded by vice and corruption that it cannot in any way escape to honorable exertion or devote itself to righteousness” (77). Calvin’s “honorable exertion” and “devotion to righteousness” include making a “decision for Christ” and “accepting an offer of salvation.” “A bound will,” which is the will of every human by nature, “is one which because of its corruptness is held captive under the authority of evil desires, so that it can choose nothing but evil, even if it does so of its own accord and gladly” (Calvin, 69).

The truth of the bondage of the will, including its being fundamental to the gospel of grace, has its urgent

In short, the bondage of the will repudiates and condemns the doctrine of salvation by the (alleged) free will of the sinner as wicked perversion of the gospel, a heresy that robs God of His glory as the Savior of sinners and that bestows this glory upon the sinner himself.... The truth of the bondage of the will glorifies God regarding His greatest work: “...but of God that showeth mercy” (Rom. 9:16b).

application to churches and professing Christians in AD 2017, the 500th anniversary of the Reformation of 1517. The doctrine is not a petrified mummy safely sealed up in an ancient ecclesiastical museum. It is not a truth to which hypocritical ministers and church members can pay lip service when this is convenient for them (as in the 500th anniversary year of the Reformation, although even then the bondage is usually not one of the topics of their celebrations), while effectively denying it in their synodical decisions, in their preaching, in their writings, by their church membership, and by their ostracism and slander of churches and theologians whose only offence is an uncompromising confession of the bondage of the will.

First, applied to the heart of the elect believer, this truth assures him of his salvation in that his willing of God and the good by a true faith carries with itself the assurance that he is saved. His will is free, and it is free because it has been freed by the grace of God in Jesus Christ. Therefore, he will glorify God on account of his salvation.

Second, confession of the bondage of the will is a fundamental mark of a true church. Confession of the bondage of the will is an essential element of the proclamation of the gospel of grace, and the true church proclaims, confesses, *and defends* the gospel of grace—the gospel of salvation by grace *alone*, without the will and works of the saved sinner.

Third, confession and defense of the alleged free will of the natural, unsaved man, which purportedly cooperates with grace and upon which grace depends, are the mark of an apostate, false church. In our ecumenical age, God's people need to know this, and to act accordingly.

The Roman Catholic Church is as committed to the heresy of free will as it was in the time of the Reformation. It is as fierce a foe of the bondage of the will as were Erasmus and Pighius. This alone makes all ecumenical relations with Rome on the part of Protestant churches illicit.

Many nominally Protestant churches show themselves as proclaiming a false gospel by their open, frank confession of free will. These are the vast majority of Protestant churches today. For their theology is Arminian, and basic to Arminianism is the heresy of free will: the unsaved sinner has the ability to choose, or “make a decision for,” Jesus. Upon this decision of the free will the sinner's salvation depends. According to these apostate churches, salvation is of him that willeth, rather than of God's showing mercy (see Rom. 9:16).

But the deadly threat of a gospel and a theology that deny the bondage of the will is now widespread in Presbyterian, Reformed, and “Calvinistic” churches. Bold, truthful, uncompromising confession of the bondage of the will by Reformed churches and Christians is today as rare as once it was when Luther alone stood for the bondage of the will against the entire vast, impressive, instituted church and against all its learned, degreed, esteemed theologians. All the churches that confess a “well-meant” offer of salvation to all hearers of the gospel are, in fact, teaching the heresy of free will. They do not frankly confess this, or admit to it. This is deception, certainly of others, perhaps, of themselves. But the heresy of free will it is.

If God loves all humans alike, in His saving love in Jesus Christ; sincerely desires or wills the salvation of all alike; and in this love and desire offers salvation to all alike in the gospel, the clear, necessary, and inescapable implication is that the salvation of a sinner depends upon his acceptance of the offer by his own will, or decision, or choice. His will, therefore, must be free, that is, able of itself, or with the help of grace, to choose

Christ and salvation, or to reject Christ.

According to the theory of the well-meant offer, the explanation why some believe and others do not cannot be God's elective, sovereign will, for God (supposedly) loves all alike

and desires (wills) the salvation of all alike.

If the explanation is not the will of God (and the doctrine of the well-meant offer *denies* that the explanation is the will of God), the only explanation can be the (free) will of the sinner. This is certainly the definite impression that is given by the practitioners of the offer: “God loves all of you; God desires the salvation of all of you; He graciously is now offering Jesus to all of you; won't you accept Him now?”

In the words of Calvin, the doctrine of the well-meant offer is that “all are equally able to receive grace because it is offered indiscriminately to all.” And this, Calvin goes on to say, is “Pelagius's blasphemy” (188).

There will be many gatherings this anniversary year ostentatiously celebrating the Reformation. Most will be hypocrisy.

For most will mask the repudiation of the bondage of the will.

Their theologians and ministers are not the spiritual and theological heirs of the Reformation, but contemporary spokesmen for Erasmus and Pighius.

...applied to the heart of the elect believer, this truth assures him of his salvation in that his willing of God and the good by a true faith carries with itself the assurance that he is saved.



Rev. Nathan Langerak, pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church in Crete, Illinois.

“This is my body”: Luther and Calvin on the Lord’s supper

There are two men to whom Reformed churches and believers owe gratitude for their doctrine of the sacraments: Martin Luther and John Calvin. The debt of gratitude owed to Calvin is obvious. It is not so clear that Luther must be thanked. There cannot be serious thanks given for the Reformation’s recovery of the gospel of the sacraments, however, without noticing Calvin *and* Luther.¹

This is especially true with regard to the contentious doctrine of the Lord’s supper. The controversy rocked the European continent during the Reformation. Furious exchanges of tracts, treatises, and letters, and intense face-to-face discussions did not resolve the issue. In the middle of—and driving—the doctrinal maelstrom was Martin Luther.

Luther wrote voluminously on the Lord’s supper—twelve major works from 1519 to 1544—in addition to preaching many sermons on the subject.

In his first extended treatment of the sacraments in 1520, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, he criticized the Roman Catholic sacramental system of grace dispensed through sacraments that covered a man’s life from cradle to grave. Luther rejected Rome’s seven sacraments and taught that Christ instituted only two sacraments, the Lord’s supper and baptism. All of the Reformers agreed. They also agreed with his rejection of the mass as a sacrifice, private masses for the living and the dead, and the mass as a meritorious work. Luther objected, as did the other Reformers, to the doctrine of transubstantiation, which teaches that the priest turns the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. But Luther did not and never would reject the idea, taught in one form by Rome, that Christ was physically present and eaten in the Lord’s supper.

He defended his position in a book whose title

captures his essential doctrine, “*That These Words of Christ: This is My Body, etc. Stand Firm Against the Fanatics*, 1527. He based his doctrine on the words of institution:

Now, to come to grips with the subject, let us take up the saying of Christ...“he took bread, and gave thanks, and broke it, and gave it to his disciples and said, ‘Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you’” (Robinson, 183).

Luther insisted that the words of institution—this is my body—mean exactly what they say: “Now, here stands the text, stating clearly and lucidly, that Christ gives his body to us when he distributes the bread” (Robinson, 183). From this Luther insisted on the physical presence and physical eating of Christ: “On this we take our stand, and we believe and teach that in the Supper we eat and take to ourselves Christ’s body truly and physically” (Robinson, 183).

Luther did not deny a spiritual partaking of Christ or its necessity in order to partake of Christ. Rather, he taught that both were necessary. This arose out of his insistence that the believer needs the flesh of Christ for salvation.

His flesh is...a food of an entirely different kind from perishable food. Perishable food is transformed into the body of the one who eats it; this food, however, transforms the one who eats it into what it is itself, and makes that person like itself, spiritual, alive, and eternal; as Christ says, “this is the bread from heaven, which gives life to the world” (Robinson, 240).

His insistence on the physical presence and physical eating of Christ precipitated conflict with the Swiss Reformers, notably Zwingli and Oecolampadius. The conflict was largely unfruitful between them, mainly because the Swiss did not address with any great skill the real issues that Luther raised: what is the correct meaning of the words of institution; how is Christ present; and how do believers eat the proper and natural body of Christ unto eternal life?

There were also serious problems with the Swiss theologians’ doctrine of the supper, which Luther

1 The works cited in the article are Martin Luther, *The Annotated Luther, Church and Sacraments*, vol. 3, ed., Paul W. Robinson (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016); Hermann Sasse, *This Is My Body* (Adelaide: Lutheran Publishing House, 1977); John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed., John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960).

characterized this way: “our opponents say that mere bread and wine are present, not the body and blood of the Lord” (Robinson, 180). For Luther, that theology came out of their misinterpretation of the words of institution:

They say, “the word ‘is’ must mean the same as the word, ‘signifies,’” as Zwingli writes; and the expression “my body” must mean the same as the expression “sign of my body,” as Oecolampadius writes (Robinson, 184).

What particularly incensed Luther were the repeated appeals by Zwingli and Oecolampadius to John 6:63 against his view: “Now their second chief argument is the saying of John 6:63, ‘flesh is of no avail,’ which Oecolampadius boasts of as his iron wall” (Robinson, 222).

Oecolampadius’ argument was simple: flesh in this text refers to Christ’s flesh, and since Christ said that flesh does not avail, we must be content with eating Him spiritually in the supper. That argument rankled Luther because it showed that, whenever they talked about spiritual eating, it did not include the flesh of Christ, and for Luther that was the fundamental point.

The controversy came to a head in 1529 at the Colloquy of Marburg, a meeting of the German and Swiss Reformers called to hammer out an agreement on the doctrine of the Lord’s supper. Luther’s argument for his doctrine at the colloquy was brutally simple, “God said, ‘This is my body.’ God is omnipotent. Consequently, the body is in the bread” (Sasse, 181). Luther laconically summed up his opposition to the other Reformers at Marburg: “I abide by my text” (Sasse, 191). He summarized their differences thus:

Your argument implies this idea: Since we have the spiritual eating, there is no need of a bodily eating. To this I reply: We do not deny the spiritual eating; on the contrary, we teach and believe it to be necessary.

But from this it does not follow that the bodily eating is either useless or unnecessary.... We have the command “Take, eat; this is my body”...Christ gives himself to us... in the Sacrament as often as the body of Christ is eaten, because he himself commands us to do so. If he ordered me to eat dung, I would do it. Let not the servant inquire about the will of the Lord (Sasse, 191).

After a last-ditch effort to salvage the meeting, Luther himself suggested a formulation that all the Reformers could sign:

In his writings Luther often beautifully expressed his real contribution to the doctrine of the Lord’s supper: Christ is really present. His flesh and blood are present. It is a real supper of Christ’s flesh and blood. In the supper believers really eat His flesh and blood unto eternal life.

We confess that, by virtue of the words, “This is my body, this is my blood,” the body and blood are truly (*wahrhaftiglich*)—that is: substantively and essentially, not quantitatively or qualitatively or locally—present and distributed in the Lord’s Supper (Sasse, 213).

In this same document the Lutherans admitted the following:

Since we so far have held the opinion that our dear sirs and brethren, Oecolampadius, Zwingli, and their adherents, totally reject the Real Presence of this body and blood, but now in friendly colloquy have found it to be otherwise, we now declare and state that the arguments and reasons found in our books concerning the Sacrament are not directed against and do not apply to Oecolampadius, Zwingli, and their adherents, but against those who totally reject the presence of the body in the Supper (Sasse, 215).

That was a massive admission. Luther left out anything about physical eating and tipped his hand that his real issue was the presence of Christ and the truth of His words. In his writings Luther often beautifully expressed his real contribution to the doctrine of the Lord’s supper: Christ is really present. His flesh and blood are present. It is a real supper of Christ’s flesh and blood. In the supper believers really eat His flesh and blood unto eternal life.

This is the truth Rome denied by making the sacrament a meritorious work or the source of grace to perform meritorious works; Zwingli eviscerated by emptying the sacraments of Christ altogether; Oecolampadius badly muddled or totally missed; Bucer probably saw, but was too busy crying “peace, peace,” to develop; and that Calvin would hone to a razor’s edge. Luther, as usual, did battle where the truth was at stake. Luther erred by explaining Christ’s presence as physical.

Recognizing Luther’s insights and both avoiding and rightly criticizing his error, Calvin continued Luther’s work and advanced his doctrine in a way that those who slavishly followed Luther did not. Calvin subjected Luther’s teaching to a thorough critique. He had to contend with Luther. The result of that engagement with Luther was a great advance in the doctrine of the Lord’s supper.

With his customary clarity, Calvin came to the heart of the issue: that Christ is the bread of life to believers “none but the utterly irreligious deny...but there is no

unanimity as to the mode of partaking of him” (McNeill, 4.17.5). Calvin rejected as emphatically as Luther the position of those who teach that Christ is not present: “unless a man means to call God a deceiver, he would never dare assert that an empty symbol is set forth by him” (McNeill, 4.17.10). Calvin concluded:

I freely accept whatever can be made to express the true and substantial partaking of the body and blood of the Lord...and so to express it that they may be understood not to receive it solely by imagination or understanding of the mind, but to enjoy the thing itself as nourishment to eternal life (McNeill, 4.17.19).

Here Calvin conceded Luther’s main point: the sacrament is a supper of Christ’s flesh and blood.

The tangled question remained about the manner of the believer’s partaking of Christ’s flesh and blood. Calvin sliced the Gordian knot by a single stroke:

Even though it seems unbelievable that Christ’s flesh, separated from us by such great distance, penetrates to us so that it becomes our food, let us remember how far the secret power of the Holy Spirit towers above all our senses (McNeill, 4.17.10).

Calvin summarized his doctrine this way: “We say

Christ descends to us both by the outward symbol and by his Spirit, that he may truly quicken our souls by the substance of his flesh and of his blood” (McNeill, 4.17.24). The Spirit is the way Christ communicates His proper and natural body to us in the sacrament.

Calvin advanced the doctrine of the Lord’s supper not only by explaining the role of the Spirit, but also in his understanding of the believers’ partaking by faith. Everyone agreed that faith is the instrument for spiritually eating Christ: “We admit indeed, meanwhile, that there is no other eating than that of faith.” But Calvin carefully distinguished his position from the others’:

Here is the difference between my words and theirs: for them to eat is only to believe; I say that we eat Christ’s flesh in believing, because it is made ours by faith, and that this eating is the result and effect of faith; or if you want it said more clearly, for them eating is faith: for me it seems rather to follow from faith.

Calvin recognized that this is “no slight” difference. By distinguishing between faith and the eating of Christ Calvin taught that by faith the soul becomes partaker of Christ “truly and deeply...that it may be quickened to spiritual life by his power” (McNeill, 4.17.5).

In turn, Calvin explained why this real spiritual eating of the real flesh and blood of Christ is the only eating of him:

Paul, in the eighth chapter of Romans, states that Christ dwells in us only through his Spirit. Yet he does not take away that communion of his flesh and blood, which we are now discussing, but teaches that the Spirit alone causes us to possess Christ completely and have him dwelling in us (McNeill, 4.17.12).

Because of this, the physical eating of Christ’s flesh is unnecessary, impossible, and implies serious false doctrine. Calvin pointed out that it denied Christ’s real body and the ascension, assaulted the glory of God and Christ, and introduced general, ineffectual grace.

Martin Luther erred seriously in his doctrine of the Lord’s supper; yet his dogged and oftentimes violent defense of certain crucial points and his insistence that the matter be settled, drove the controversy toward a

solution. It is measure of the other Reformers’ towering respect for Martin Luther as the instrument of God to deliver them from the Roman lie that they endured—not without comment, complaint, and sometimes disgust—the personal abuse that Luther often heaped on them in order to deal with what he said about the Lord’s supper and to resolve the issues he raised.

In his doctrine of the Lord’s supper, Calvin was truly a disciple of Luther. Calvin did justice to all of

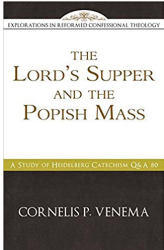
Luther’s concerns. He corrected Luther’s errors. He advanced his insights. In the process, he explained the doctrine of the Lord’s supper in a way that did justice to the words of Christ, to the glory of God and the salvation of sinners by sovereign grace. Calvin’s gift to us from Luther is the Reformed doctrine of the Lord’s Supper found in the Reformed creeds. Reformed believers owe a debt of gratitude to both men, and to God for them.

Martin Luther erred seriously in his doctrine of the Lord’s supper; yet his dogged and oftentimes violent defense of certain crucial points and his insistence that the matter be settled, drove the controversy toward a solution. It is measure of the other Reformers’ towering respect for Martin Luther as the instrument of God to deliver them from the Roman lie that they endured—not without comment, complaint, and sometimes disgust—the personal abuse that Luther often heaped on them in order to deal with what he said about the Lord’s supper and to resolve the issues he raised.



Bring the books...

Mr. Charles Terpstra, a member of Faith Protestant Reformed Church in Jenison, Michigan and full-time librarian/registrar at the Protestant Reformed Seminary.



***The Lord's Supper and the "Popish Mass": A Study of Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 80*, Cornelis P. Venema, Grand Rapids MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2015, 96 pages. [Reviewed by Peter VanDerSchaaf.]**

Dr. Venema set himself to the task of answering an important question. The question is this, "Should Q&A 80 of the Heidelberg Catechism be retained in the creed?" The question comes up because many, also in the Reformed church world, find the language of Q&A 80 abrasive and inconsistent with the pastoral tone of the Catechism. Q&A 80 calls the Romish eucharist "the popish mass," which is "nothing else than a denial of the one sacrifice and sufferings of Jesus Christ, and an accursed idolatry." The synods of the Reformed Church in America and of the Christian Reformed Church have both gone so far as to reduce Q&A 80 from creedal status.

Dr. Venema approaches the issue through five questions. First, how did Q&A 80 come to be included in the Heidelberg Catechism in the first place? Second, was Q&A 80 a fitting response to the Roman Catholic teaching on the mass at the time the Catechism was written? Third, did the synod of the Christian Reformed Church have good reasons to reduce Q&A 80 to a footnote within the Catechism? Fourth, does Q&A 80 remain a valid response to contemporary teaching on the mass by the Roman Catholic Church? And finally, does it remain important for the instruction of God's people and the witness of Reformed churches to retain Q&A 80 in the Catechism?

The author is honest and thorough with the historical records, with the teaching of the Roman Catholic

Church on the mass—both during the Reformation period and today, with the decisions of the synods of the Christian Reformed Church, and with the Heidelberg Catechism itself as he answers those questions. His conclusion is well founded and clear. Q&A 80 was an accurate reaction to Roman Catholic teaching when it was written, and remains so today. It is consistent with, and strengthens the teaching of, the Catechism on the nature of the union of Christ with His people and the true nature of the sacrament. It remains an important guide for the preaching of Reformed churches, a sound means of instructing the youth of Reformed churches, and an important part of the witness of the Reformed faith as Reformed churches seek unity in the truth. In other words, Q&A 80 continues to serve the purpose for which the Catechism itself was written.

The Lord's Supper and the "Popish Mass" is part of series of studies entitled "Explorations in Reformed Confessional Theology" edited by Daniel R. Hyde and Mark Jones.

The Lord's Supper and the "Popish Mass" is a small book, and short—96 pages. Its style is fact-based and irenic. It includes a bibliography of studies of the Heidelberg Catechism and of the nature of the Lord's Supper. The book will help Reformed officebearers teach their flocks why the biblical understanding of the sacrament has such an important place within the Reformed faith. It will help Reformed people witness to their Catholic neighbors, and to their doctrinally adrift, Protestant neighbors who may be tempted by Catholicism, with its "denial of the one sacrifice and sufferings of Jesus Christ, and...accursed idolatry."

Mr. VanDerSchaaf is a member of and an elder in Faith Protestant Reformed Church in Jenison, Michigan.

Reports—Classis East

Gary Boverhof

September 13, 2017 – Grandville PRC
Classis East met in regular session on the morning of Wednesday, September 13, 2017. The churches were each represented by two delegates. Rev. J. Mahtani was the chairman for this session.

Rev. W. Langerak was appointed as the moderator of Byron Center PRC in their vacancy. Holland PRC, Southwest PRC, and Zion PRC were granted classical pulpit supply for evening services during their vacancies.

Most of the morning was spent on an appeal by a brother against his consistory. This was appointed to a pre-advice committee for recommendations. After thorough deliberations Classis declared that this appeal

was illegally before Classis on the basis that his work was not finished with his consistory.

The Classical Committee of Classis East has scheduled a special meeting of Classis East in order to examine Pastors-elect J. Smidstra (First PRC, Holland) and J. Holstege (Zion PRC) at Georgetown PRC on Wednesday, October 18, 2017. Rev. Overway will preside by rotation.

Classis approved the expenses for its meeting of \$788.65. The next regular meeting of Classis East will be at Hudsonville PRC on January 10, 2018 at 8:00 A.M., Lord willing.

Respectfully submitted,

Gary Boverhof, Stated Clerk

Announcements

Wedding anniversary

“Entreat me not to leave thee or to return from following after thee: for wither thou goest, I will go, and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people and thy God, my God” (Ruth 1:16). How true the words spoken by our parents on their wedding day have proved. On June 17, 2017 we celebrated with our parents, **Rev. Wilbur and Mary Bruinsma**, 40 years of marriage. We are so grateful to God for the journey on which He has led our family and the blessing of the covenant He has given us.

Brad and Trisha Bruinsma

Kari, Skyler, Emma, August

Heather Mowery

Tori, Ian, Trenton, Anthony, Hunter, Kurtis
Ed and Mandy Tolsma

Luke, Andrew, Michael, Jason, Allison,
Daniel, Daisy, Thomas

Pete and Megan Cnossen

Ginelle, Clara, Tyler, David, Maryelis

Derek and Lydia Kuiper

Hailey, Cody

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Wedding anniversary

With gratitude to our heavenly Father, we celebrate the 30th wedding anniversary of our parents, **Timothy and Brenda Bomers**, who were married on October 16, 1987. We are thankful for their godly example to us, and it is our prayer that the Lord will continue in His faithfulness to bless their marriage for many more years.

“Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever” (Psalm 23:6).

Luke and Sydney Bomers

Lewis

Alex and Jeanine Bomers

Caleb, Evan, Grant

Cody, Jesse, Samuel, Roseanna, Josiah, Jonathan
Byron Center, Michigan

Notice

The congregation of the Wingham PRC would like to congratulate **Rev. Martin VanderWal** on 20 years of faithful service in the ministry, on September 21, 2017.

May the Lord continue to bless him with wisdom and strength in the years ahead as he continues in the work of the church of Christ.

“O come let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the LORD our maker” (Psalm 95:6).

the REFORMATION 500TH ANNIVERSARY

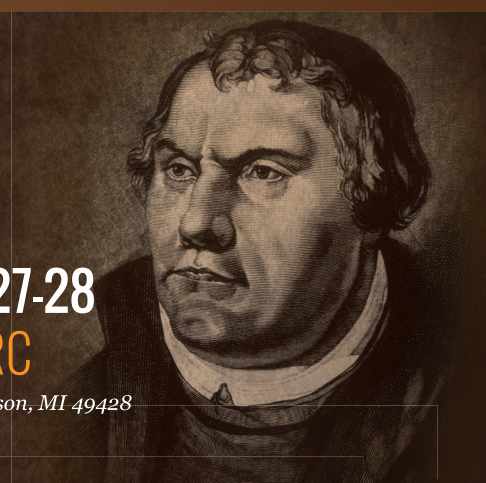
A 2-day conference

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FRIDAY

4:00PM What was the Reformation?

Prof. Ronald Cammenga

7:00PM The Reformation's Return to Sola Scriptura

Rev. David Torlach

8:15PM The Reformation's Restoration of the Office of Believer

Prof. Barrett Gritters

SATURDAY

8:30AM The Reformation's Recovery of Right Worship

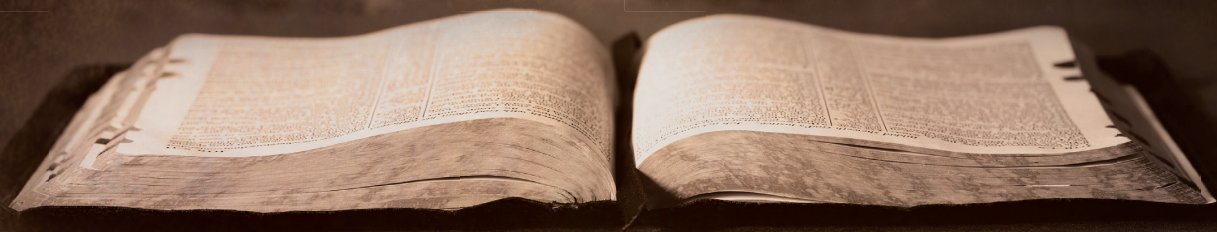
Rev. Martyn McGeown

10:00AM The Reformation's Response to the 'Radical Reformation'

Prof. Russell Dykstra

11:15AM The Reformation's Progress in the Lowlands

Rev. Steven Key



Join us at Faith Protestant Reformed Church

Visit our website and listen live at www.500thReformation.com

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Bound volumes

The September 15th issue of the *Standard Bearer* completed volume 93. If you would like your own issues bound, please deliver them to the RFPA office before the end of October. For additional orders, call Paula at (616) 457-5970.

Index

The *Standard Bearer* digital index (Volumes 1-93) is now available for purchase. The cost is \$10.00. To order, visit www.rfpa.org.