



NEW LIFE

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“For the Word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Rev 1:9)

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The Biblical Precepts and Repercussions of the Protestant Reformation Today

By Rev Jack Sin, Pastor of Maranatha B-P Church, Singapore

Introduction

The date 31 Oct 1517 has a special place in the history of the Christian Church. This year is the 492nd year of the commemoration of the 16th protestant reformation. **It is a lamentable fact that many Protestants today are ignorant of or are indifferent to its doctrinal significance and the rich protestant heritage and many have celebrated a diabolical holiday, Halloween instead.** Not many churches commemorate this event any more in their annual calendar. We do well to commemorate and recollect the spiritual lessons of this God ordained life-changing event of the 16th century. These last perilous days with all its falsehood and deceptive ploys warrant a vigilant and knowledgeable Christendom. We shall consider the doctrinal meaning and implications of this great historic revival of all time.

The Matter of Indulgence

The chief precipitating factor for the Reformation was the matter of indulgence. This was the very reason that prompted Martin Luther, a former Augustinian monk and lecturer in Wittenberg University to write and nail the 95 theses on the castle door of Wittenberg. What is an indulgence? An indulgence is a piece of paper which the church sold to the people for the remission of their sins. In other words, if you buy them, your sins will be forgiven, personally or in proxy i.e. on behalf of your loved ones who may have perished and are supposed to be in purgatory. So the theory goes that Christ had given the church a treasury of merits. These were the merits that are achieved by some saints of the past who had done more than God required of them. These merits then accrue to the church and can apply to a sinner’s account (at a price, of course.) The benefit of this indulgence is that he will escape punishment in this life or in the next, in purgatory. One could buy them for their departed loved ones too so that their torment in purgatory will be either shortened or totally eradicated. Rome had appointed a super-salesman in the person of a Dominican friar named Johann Tetzel. While peddling his wares in Germany, he came to Wittenberg, the place where Martin Luther laboured. Luther, who was regenerated by the mercies of God by then contended with this obnoxious doctrine that was contrary to the Scriptures. His response was the famed 95 theses put up on the eve of All Saints’ Day, 31 Oct 1517 on the Wittenburg church. Luther set forth the truth concerning the pardon of sins through faith in Jesus Christ alone and not of works (Rom 1:17; Eph 2:8, 9). This ignited the fire of revival in Germany and later Europe.

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The Reformation originated with a fundamental question. How can a sinner be made right with God? The doctrine of indulgences was the answer of the Roman church. The church said that we must pay for the pardon of God. You have to work and earn that righteousness. The Reformation took issue with this basic doctrine and gave a radically different answer. The response is from Rom 1:17 *“For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written: The just shall live by faith.”* Rom 3:28 *“Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.”* **The Reformers stood for 3 things namely, justification by faith, the universal priesthood of believers and the sole authority, perspicuity and sufficiency of the Scriptures.**

Justification by Faith

Justification by faith alone is the truth that Christ Jesus accomplished through His suffering and death on the cross all that is necessary for salvation. He is the propitiation for our sins and he satisfied fully all the righteous demands of God. Man has no part in his redemption for Christ has paid it all. Closely related to this doctrine of justification is also the doctrine of the total depravity of men. According to the Reformers like Luther, Zwingli, Calvin and Knox, man is totally depraved and had no ability at all to do good works unto his own salvation. After the fall of Adam, all men, are born in sin and is dead in sin and trespasses (Eph 2:1). In 1525, Luther set forth this in his book, “The Bondage of the Will”. Luther maintained that an unregenerate man is a slave to sin and has no free will of his own. He is a captive prisoner and bondslave to the will of Satan until he is redeemed by the Blood of Christ. **The Reformation also stood for the sovereignty of God, that God alone, presided and foreordained all things that has come to pass including man’s salvation.** In conjunction with this truth, the Reformation confessed the sovereign gracious election of God which is commonly called the doctrine of predestination by John Calvin. In Eph 1:4, 5 it is said, *“According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.”* **The doctrine of election totally demolished every human or institutional efforts by the church to save men or her members by man’s puny efforts. It exalts God’s sovereignty as the eternal fountain of salvation by grace alone.** It sounded the death knell for indulgences and good works. This was a radical doctrine in the 16th century and it revived the controversy between Augustine and Pelagius in the 4th century. Is man capable of saving himself? Can a sinful man do anything at all to save himself before a thrice holy God? According to Augustine of Hippo, it is absolutely no but the British monk, Pelagius said otherwise and his teaching were later found to be heretical. The Reformers took the side of truth and of Augustine and this was an important turning point for the church.

Authority, Perspicuity & Sufficiency of Scripture

The second important doctrine of the church was the sole and absolute authority perspicuity and sufficiency of the canonical Scriptures. The Reformers asserted that the Bible alone not the church has authority over believers. This runs contrary to the teachings of the Roman church tradition, the authority of councils & Synods of the past and of Rome and of the apocrypha. The Reformation recognised and upheld the infallible, inerrant and inspired Word of God as the only standard and rule of faith and practice. This shook Rome who held its members captive by its anathemas, cyclical and papal bulls. The second aspect of the Word was its sufficiency which was affirmed by the Reformers. In other words, the Word of God alone and nothing else would govern the life of believers and the church. The Romish church had apocryphal writings of their church Fathers and past edicts of church councils added to the Scriptures. This was firmly exposed as non canonical by the Reformers.

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Before the Reformation, the church had strictly forbidden the lay people to read and study the Scriptures on their own. The church will teach the Word through its priests and bishops in the services and mass because the people could not understand it as it was not clear it was claimed. In any case, the Scripture was in Latin and not in the vernacular language which the people could understand. So the church had the monopoly of the Word of God and the people were deprived and forfeited of this means of grace for centuries. The Reformation broke this tradition when Luther translated the NT into German in 1525. Later William Tyndale translated it into English in 1536 for England. **That ended the medieval church long sole proprietorship of God's Word for many centuries. The ordinary ploughman could now read and understand the Holy Scriptures in his own language for the first time. The foundation and basis of our Christian faith that was hidden from God's people was now given freely to sinners and saints. The word of truth and life gave hope and joy and everlasting life to seeking souls again.**

Universal Priesthood of Believers

The third important doctrine was the universal priesthood of believers. This is the biblical doctrine that Christ being our mediator (1Tim 2;5) has reconciled us to God and we do not need any human mediator (or mediatrix) to intercede for us or to present us before God on our behalf. Before the Reformation, the church has its intercessors in the form of living priests and dead canonised saints and the Virgin Mary. The Reformation demolished the teaching of auricular confession and ecclesiastical intermediaries by the scriptural teaching in Rom 5:2 *"By whom we also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God."* Christ alone is sufficient and we have the privilege of a direct access to the very mercy seat (1 Tim 2:2-5). What it meant essentially is the end of the confessional box, penance, worship of the saints and mary and the need for an interceding priest. All believers have direct access to God and are priests themselves according to 1 Pet 2:9 *"But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light."*

Effects of the Reformation

What were the repercussions of the Reformation? They are enumerated below:

1. The Scriptures was made available in the vernacular languages of the common people through the newly invented printing press.
2. Justification by faith alone led to a de-emphasis of external rituals and focused on the inner spiritual life in Christ.
3. Authority of Scripture replaced the authority of the pope and medieval traditions and man written encyclicals.
4. The Scripture alone is sufficient as the rule of faith and practice for all believers and not tradition or the apocrypha.
5. Preaching of the word became important and central in the worship service.
6. Monasticism as the ideal of holiness was replaced by the universal priesthood of all believers. Each person's calling was considered an area of divine service.
7. The significance of the sacraments was re-evaluated, and the sacraments were now considered only two: baptism and the Lord's Supper and not 7.
8. The liturgy of worship was redesigned to accord with the Holy Scriptures with congregational singing and the public reading of the Word.
9. The family began to be seen as a household of faith. Celibacy as a means of piety and good works was questioned and rejected. (1Tim 4:1-3) Martin and Katherine Luther became an example of the Protestant home with many who followed in their footsteps.

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The Application of the Reformed doctrines to the believer

Some are calling the Reformation a mistake or an accident. What the Protestant Reformation stood for 492 years ago is still true, relevant, and as vital today as it was then. Justification by faith alone as the basis of salvation and the absolute authority of the unchanging Scripture as God's inspired and providentially kept pure through the ages as the Westminster Confession of faith properly stated. The gospel of Christ is sovereignly preserved by God and does not change from age to age; it will never be surpassed nor out-dated, nor there be a new message that outstrips the gospel in importance. **The Reformation is no historical curiosity or anachronism but a living, on-going reality, because of the unadulterated gospel of grace it preached**, as compared to the false and truncated gospels of our times (i.e. the 'Passion of the Christ', the 'Alpha Course' the health and wealth gospel and the subtle half truths and lies of the Da Vinci Code) which is often ecumenical in nature and that is devoid of true evangelical repentance required of our Lord. (Acts 20;21)

What practical, urgent and relevant conclusions for the church and for the believers, can we come to, from this understanding of the Reformation?

The first is that the Roman Church has not changed at all in its doctrinal beliefs from the time in the 16th Century of Luther and the Reformation. The Reformation was about salvation by God's grace in Jesus Christ alone! It was about Scripture, as the only authority in the church. **The second is that the spiritual condition of so-called Protestantism is to a large extent deplorable.** Much of Protestantism is silent concerning the truths of the Reformation in its preaching and confession, and some even opposes and denies these biblical truths.

1. **Much of Protestantism today is still ignorant of the Scriptures as the Roman church was at the time of the Reformation.** It implicitly sets aside Scripture as the basis of our faith and life by its acceptance of evolution or theistic evolution and its teaching of secular psychology and the approval of it renders its judgment on the ethical questions of our day suspect, e.g. capital punishment, civil disobedience, abortion, and sexual immorality, cloning and euthanasia relying instead on science, prevailing social opinions, and man's reason rather than the veritable and indestructible word of God. **Knowledge of God and his word is important and this is where we are to make a conscious effort to meditate on the Word and do it and to teach it as well** (Ezra 7:10).
2. Much of Protestantism is one with Rome (and other faiths) in making salvation dependent upon man today. It boldly proclaims the free will of man and not the total dependence on God in salvation. It thereby denies total depravity, gracious election, and the efficacy and sufficiency of Christ's work. In *The Bondage of the Will*, Luther wrote that the issue of the enslaved human will was the fundamental issue of the Reformation..."
3. **Much of Protestantism no longer bothers to preach and teach the pure gospel and the sole authority, inerrancy, sufficiency and perspicuity of the Scriptures at all.** Many church sermons focus on some experiential themes or some favourite or pet man centred topics pandering to the likes and fancies of man. The heart of the Reformation and the 95 theses was expressed in Thesis 62: "The true treasure of the Church is the holy Gospel of the glory and grace of God." We need to bring the gospel to the people and **the Reformation stands for biblical evangelism and gospel missions to a lost and fallen world.** John Calvin sent out a mission team to Spain in the mid 16th Century although it did not bear forth much discernible fruit. Nonetheless, it showed the missionary zeal and heart beat of the reformers in the saving of souls and the zeal for gospel missions.

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Current Trends and Concerns

Christianity today is quite similar to the Pre-Reformation times. There is still profound ignorance of the scriptures, superstition, spiritual idolatry, (i.e. worship of self, money, work, leisure, man-made images and icons) and the obsession with the terror of man rather than the fear of God is still prevalent today.

But what must our response be to the Reformation, who loves the truths of the God's word taught during and after the Reformation? There ought to be a personal response. The Reformation concerned the individual in a most direct and practical way. Its truth was personal; it had to do with the question each asked for himself: How can a depraved and guilty sinner be declared righteous before a thrice holy God? **The Reformation arose in a personal way, as Luther himself struggled with utmost anxiety over that question. The Reformation intended to give peace that only the gospel of grace can give to every repentant sinner. The Reformation does concern every man and the question, "How can I a sinner be righteous before God?" being the most pressing one. Have you answered this honestly before God? The Heart of the Reformation is the reformation of the heart.**

Conclusion

God has his sovereign timing for all things which he brings to pass. When the voice of gospel truth of Martin Luther thundered throughout the German empire, it found an echo in many hearts that were utterly weary of the whole bankrupt ecclesiastical system. The protest of these Reformers against the abuses and spiritual corruption in the church were articulated in the Augsburg Confession of 1530. The Reformation of which many had desired or yearned for, had at last come, and was manifestly the mighty work of God. The Reformation was a work of divine grace for which we can never be sufficiently thankful. It gave to us an **open Bible and restored to us the blessed biblical doctrine of justification by faith alone through grace alone and through Christ alone.** The Word of God was restored as the authoritative and sufficient rule of faith and practice for the believer and the church and it should be no different today. **These are momentous days as we witnessed great calamities and natural disasters and there are precious truths which we must declare and defend with missionary zeal. The Truth of God cannot be bartered for peace or compromise with man. On these we must stand and not waver.**

Dr Jack Sin

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www.maranatha-bpc.com

(For deeper research and studies, see T M Lindsay, The Reformation Handbook, Banner of Truth Trust, 2006)

WELCOME TO NEW LIFE B-P CHURCH LONDON

Our worship services begin promptly at **11.00 am and 4.00 pm.**

Please stay back for Bible Study and fellowship lunch after the morning worship and for tea after the evening service. Do invite your friends to come to Church.

Worship Services			WELCOME
Morning	<i>Today: 25/10/2009</i>	<i>Next Week: 01/11/2009</i>	We extend a warm welcome to all worshippers this Lord's Day. We like to welcome Isha to our worship services last Lord's Day.
<i>Chairman:</i>	Jonathan Kim	Joey Seow	
<i>Preacher:</i>	Eld George Chew	Rev Timothy Ki	
<i>Message:</i>	Who is God?	Christian Faith is True	
<i>Text:</i>	Isaiah 43:1-3; 55:6-9	Acts 28:23-24	NEWS/ANNOUNCEMENTS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reformation Sunday: Today, we commemorate the 492nd anniversary of the Reformation. • Church Resident Minister: Pray for journey mercies for Pastor Ki as he flies over to minister to us for the next 2 Lord's Days. Also, continue to pray for Pastor and Mrs Ki's preparation to return to London in December. • DHW Bible Study: Today, we will cover Lesson 23 (Gen 30). Please spend the upcoming week preparing for Lesson 24 (Gen 31). • Pray for those who are sick: - Yetta's mum (recovery from cancer), Constance (flu & ankle), Douglas (knee pain), Barbara (Alzheimer's), Prema (thyroid & skin condition), Eld Jack Ford (old age and knees), Margaret (asthma), Brian (wisdom tooth extraction – 28/10), Mrs Ki's father (lung cancer), John (ankle, wisdom tooth check-up appointment), Eld Chew (recovery from shoulder operation), Sophia (cough) • Pray for those who are away or on travel: Pastor Ki (London – 30/10), Mrs Ki (Australia), Nicolas (Belgium) • Pray for those seeking employment: Joy, Brian • Pray for the Church repair works needed: Electrics (26/10), roof, taps and notice boards. • Pray for the students that they may settle down as they begin their new semester.
<i>Organist:</i>	Grace	Anthony	
Evening			
<i>Chairman:</i>	Jonathan Kim	Joey Seow	
<i>Preacher:</i>	Eld George Chew	Rev Timothy Ki	
<i>Message:</i>	Three in One	Faith in Good Report	
<i>Text:</i>	1 Peter 1:1-2	Hebrews 11:2	
<i>Pianist:</i>	Anthony	Grace	
Other Duties			
	<i>Today: 25/10/2009</i>	<i>Next Week: 01/11/2009</i>	
<i>Ushers:</i>	John / Joy	Jonathan / Daniel	
<i>Lunch:</i>	Maureen	Constance	
<i>Washing-up:</i>	Volunteers	Volunteers	
<i>PA Crew:</i>	Joshua	Joshua	
<i>DHW Class:</i>	Lesson 23 (Gen 30)	Lesson 24 (Gen 31)	
Appointments of the Week			
Fri 30 Oct	7:30pm	Young Adults Fellowship: Old Testament Messages	
Sat 31 Oct	4:00pm	Prayer Meeting & Bible Study: Led by John	
Worship Service Collections			
Offering: £361.20		Lunch: £34.00	
<u>Not Claiming Our Privileges</u>			
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Adapted from "In Green Pastures" by J.R. Miller, D.D.</i></p> <p>Are not many of us conscious that we are living far below our privileges? Do we not understand that we are not as good Christians, as rich in character, as fruitful in life, as we might be? Do we not know that there is a possible fullness of spiritual blessedness which we have not yet attained? Why is it? Is there any want in God, from whom all good gifts come? Is not the reason in ourselves? Is it not because we cling to other things, earthly things, which fill our hearts and leave but small room for Christ? We have not the hunger for righteousness, for holiness, and though there is abundance of provision close before us, yet our souls are starving. If we would have the abundant life which Christ wants to give us, we must empty out of our hearts the perishing trifles that fill them, and make room for the Holy Spirit. We must pray for spiritual hunger; for only to those who hunger comes the promise of filling and satisfying.</p>			