

In England the reformers were called Puritans. They soon found their new emphasis was opposed by Queen Elizabeth and the two monarchs who followed her – James I and Charles I. Eventually this led to war. It started in Scotland where Charles tried to force the Church of England ritual and doctrines on the Presbyterians led by John Knox.

England suffered for nine years under Oliver Cromwell. After his death Charles II took the throne. The Puritans in England submitted, but not the Scots. They carried on an underground warfare until Charles' brother James, a Roman Catholic, took the throne. "The Covenanters," as they were called forced James off the throne.

#### **TALK ABOUT**

1. Why was Luther summoned to Rome? 2. What did Luther accept as the final authority for our actions? 3. Who was the great reformer in Scotland? 4. In England, what were the reformers called? 5. Who opposed the reformation in England? Why?

#### **THE REFORMED TRADITION**

The Reformed Movement has had its ups and downs, but its overall influence in the world has been very positive. In the seventeen and eighteen hundreds, it sparked a revival of the evangelical faith on all continents and in many countries – South Korea, Holland, Switzerland, India and East Africa. We could safely say that the Reformation has touched and changed every aspect of modern life.

What began in Scotland under the puritans spread to England and joined with the evangelical revival under George Whitefield. At the same time Jonathan Edwards was preaching in the Great Awakening that took place in the American colonies.

In all these manifestation of the Holy Spirit's work, the theology set out by Calvin had a tremendous influence. Change also came in the form of the industrial revolution and, in America, the abolition of slavery. Leading all these undercurrents of change were men of strong Calvinistic persuasion.

#### **AN EMPHASIS ON EDUCATION**

The Reformed tradition has always been strong on education and Christian denominations started many of the great universities of our land such as Yale and Harvard. This emphasis was not just in America and England, but has become a missionary movement to the rest of the world.

#### **TALK ABOUT**

1. How did the teachings of John Calvin influence the laws of England? 2. What other emphasis did the Reformation bring to society?

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*The Meaning of . . .*

# The Reformation



**Written by  
Fred Morris**

**To the Reader:** All we can do in a small book like this is to explain some of the conditions that led up to the Protestant Reformation and point to some of the Bible truths that were embraced by Protestant churches as essential to the survival and growth of the Christian Church worldwide.

Read the verses from the Bible first. If you don't have a Bible, study the words quoted from the Bible. Try to answer the questions in the TALK ABOUT sections. Ask a friend to study with you. You will be able to talk about the questions and both of you will learn about the Bible. And you will be blessed.

## JESUS PREACHED THE GOSPEL

When Jesus told people about the Kingdom of God, many believed. Paul said the common men and women of His day heard the message of the Kingdom of God gladly (Acts 17:11). They had joy and peace in their hearts. Joy and peace comes to our hearts when we know our sins are forgiven. The Holy Spirit gives us this joy as He fills us with His presence (Eph 1:13).

The Jewish leaders did not believe the good news. They rejected the Messiah-Christ (John 1:11). Jesus said to them, "O Jerusalem... how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate" (Matt 23:37-38).

### TALK ABOUT

1. Are all men and women, boys and girls sinners (Rom 3:23)? 2. Can the good deeds we do earn God's favor? 3. What message did Jesus preach when He was on this earth (Mark 1:15)? 4. How can sinners be made right with God (Acts 16:31)? 5. How can we have peace in our hearts (John 14:27)? 6. Can those who don't have God's peace in their hearts bring peace to this world?

## CHRISTIAN WRITINGS

For two or three centuries after Jesus Christ died on the cross, the Christian Church flourished. Church congregations in Asia Minor were loosely organized with overseers and deacons in charge (1 Tim 3:1-13). The churches had copies of the Old Testament books translated into Greek (the Septuagint), and maybe some of the Gospels. These would have been scrolls written and copied very carefully by hand.

Then Paul wrote his epistles or letters to the churches in Asia Minor. Only a few copies existed. Every new scroll had to be copied by hand, so every copy was very costly. The Letters of Paul were passed from church to church and read to the people who came to worship.

At that time, the Roman Empire dominated the known world. Roman Emperors and the laws of Rome had a powerful influence on the early Christian Church. Emperors demanded worship; a demand rejected by the Christians who believed they should worship God only (Deut 6:5). That was the first command of the Ten Commandments God gave to Moses at Mount Sinai (Ex 20:3-4). So Christians refused to say "Caesar is lord," and many died violent deaths for their faith.

In the fourth century, the Roman Empire was divided. The eastern branch was headed by Constantinople who decreed that the East would be Christian.

influence. His book *Institutes* went through five editions and grew from six chapters to seventy nine (1559).

## MARTIN LUTHER

Martin Luther (1483-1546) led the reformed movement in Germany. He became a monk and lived in a monastery where he beat his body to save his soul. No matter how much he tortured his body, he could not find peace or feel accepted by a holy God.

At the request of his order, Luther went to Rome. While there, he was shocked by the conduct of the clergy and their careless indifference to religious matters.

At that time, Luther saw God as an angry judge who demanded that sinners earn their own righteousness. At last, by studying the Scriptures, Luther came to see that justification is by faith alone and nothing he could do would earn him favor with God. God declares the sinner righteous because of the atonement Jesus made for us when He died on the cross. There is no other way to have our sins forgiven and be accepted by a holy God. (Eph 2:4-10)

### TALK ABOUT

1. Name some of the early reformers? 2. Who was Martin Luther? 3. What did he do to make himself acceptable to God? 4. Who made atonement for man sins?

## LUTHER AND THE ROMAN CHURCH

Luther's new teaching of justification by faith alone was not readily accepted by the church in Rome. The Roman church said a person had to do as it [the church] directed or they would not reach heaven.

Yet the Bible is quite clear: For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: 'the just shall live by faith'." (Romans 1:17).

In 1518 Luther was summoned to Rome to answer charges of heresy. His trial was moved to Germany. In hearings in 1519 Luther questioned the authority of the papacy and insisted on the Bible being the only rule of faith and practice. In 1520 he wrote three booklets that outlived him by many years and influenced more people for Christ than he had done in his lifetime. One had the title *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*. In it he attacked the entire Roman church system. For this, the papacy never forgave him.

John Knox (1514-1572) was one of the foremost reformers in the United Kingdom. He became pastor of an English congregation (1549-1554) but was forced to flee to Europe where he settled in Geneva.

## IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

Knox was a Protestant preacher who believed the Bible was "the only authority on which Christian doctrine can be founded." His *Book of Discipline* provided the church with directions for worship and for the social life of the Church universal and for the nation. They adopted the Scottish confession (1560), the Westminster standards (1647). These were rejected by the Church of England.

According to the *Book of Discipline*, written by Knox, the marks of a true church were the proper preaching of God's word, the proper administration of baptism and the Lord's Supper and the proper use of discipline.

Paul wrote the letter that we have in our New Testament to correct this error. He used strong words: "If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned" (Gal 1:9).

### **TALK ABOUT:**

1. What does the word 'reformed' mean? 2. Why did Paul write the letter to the churches in Galatia? 3. Did the Jewish leaders accept Jesus or the message He preached (John 1:11)?

## **THE TRUTH NEVER CHANGES**

Because the truth never changes, the gospel never changes. When Jesus cried from the cross, "It is finished," nothing more needed to be done. Indeed there was nothing a person could do to win God's favor. The early Church knew this truth well, but the common people did not have a Bible of their own in their language. So a priest or someone without any Bible knowledge at all often led an assembly.

Those who were trained in the Greek language had the Old Testament, which had been translated from the Hebrew in Alexandria, Egypt. And they had a Greek New Testament.

However, the Roman church said that the common people were not to own a Bible; only the clergy could own a Bible and explain what the Scriptures said.

Without a good understanding of Bible truth, the church slowly drifted into what is called the "Dark Ages."

## **THE DARK AGES**

For hundreds of years during the Dark Ages the Roman church dominated both the political and the religious life of Europe.

The priests turned the worshipping congregations into commercial enterprises. They sold indulgences which were said to get people out of hell, and collected money for all the services they performed.

## **THE PROTESTANT REFORMATION**

In the sixteenth century, God began to awaken men of faith in different parts of Europe. Trade between city states, urban growth and new technologies all played a part in bringing about a renewed interest in the Bible. The technology of printing and the first printing presses made copies of the Bible. And Erasmus pioneered the way for individuals to study the Bible with his Greek New Testament published in 1516.

Common people got copies of the Bible and read them with a great desire to know more of God. And scholars expounded Bible truth to hungry congregations. Christians everywhere felt a change in the air and became more vocal.

John Calvin (1509-1564) is thought of as the Father of Reformed and Presbyterian theology. He received a good education for boys of his day.

He published *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* in 1536. After wandering around France, he decided to go to Strasbourg, a Protestant city. When he passed through Geneva, he was stopped by William Farel, who had championed the Protestant movement there.

Calvin wrote commentaries on 23 of the Old Testament books and on all the New Testament except for The Revelation. These writings had a tremendous

In the city of Rome the popes began to have greater power. The Pope proclaimed himself head of the Christian Church. Pope Leo I declared that the apostle Peter "speaks to the whole Church through the bishop of Rome."

### **TALK ABOUT**

1. Many men of faith shared in writing the Old Testament \_\_\_ True \_\_\_ False? Can you name some of them? 2. How did Christians know what was in the Books of the Bible? 3. How did people make copies of the Bible before printing was invented? 4. Christians refused to worship the E.....of R ..... Why?

## **SATAN FIGHTS AGAINST THE TRUTH**

Satan fought hard to destroy the Christian Church. When persecution failed to stop the gospel of Christ from spreading, Satan tried false teaching. Various heresies quickly followed in the footsteps of the gospel. And false teachers rose up inside the churches. All false doctrines tell men and women they must obey a set of do's and don'ts before they can go to heaven. Man has a great desire to prove himself; to earn God's favor by doing good works.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is the good news that He has done everything that needed to be done to make a sinner acceptable to God. In His prayer, Jesus said to God the Father, "I have brought glory to You on earth by completing the work You gave Me to do" (John 17:4).

## **FALSE TEACHERS IN THE CHURCH**

Arian was a priest probably born in Libya. He was made Bishop of Alexandria (300-311), but lost that position. He questioned the deity of Christ.

Constantine called together the Council of Nicaea. Two hundred and twenty bishops met in 325 AD in the city of Nicaea in Anatolia. They met to confront this false teaching that Jesus Christ was a created being like the angels and not the Son of God. Finally the Arian heresy was put to rest.

The Bible tells us that Jesus Christ was one with the Father before the world began (John 1:1-3). He told Philip, "Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father... I and the Father are one" (John 9-10).

The Council of Nicaea also established an official creed for the Christian faith and agreed on a date to celebrate Easter.

A Second Council of Nicaea was called in 787 AD. The emperor Leo III and his son Constantine V had tried to end the worship of images, especially that of the virgin Mary. Image worship had been growing in the Roman church for several centuries. The Council tried, but failed to halt this image worship. This matter was not resolved until the Reformation.

### **TALK ABOUT**

1. How did we get the Bible? 2. God is the author of all Scripture \_\_\_ True \_\_\_ False? 3. Does God still speaking to us? How (Heb 1:1)? 4. Is Jesus Christ equal with God the Father (John 14:9)? 5. God is three persons, but one God. Who is the third person of the trinity? 6. What work does the Holy Spirit do (John 16:8-9)? 7. Do you have the Holy Spirit to teach you?

## GNOSTICS AND THE EARLY CHURCH

False teaching called “Gnosticism” was a problem in the early churches. The Gnostics taught a strange mixture of Greek philosophy and mysticism. Paul met the false teachers in the churches and wrote some of his Epistles (letters) to counter their false teaching. He said they taught “a different gospel – which is really no gospel at all” (Gal 1:6-7).

The Gnostics wrote many books and a large library of their writings was found in Egypt at Nag Hammadi. The Gnostics came in many shades:

Ebionites taught that Jesus Christ was just a man, a prophet from Nazareth, but no more. They held to the Law of Moses and lived by its regulations.

Docetists taught that Jesus was not really flesh and blood, but an alien spirit. They said the sufferings of Christ recorded in the Gospels was only imagined. That Jesus did not really die; He only appeared to die.

Adoptionists thought Jesus was born a man but later became divine by adoption. This idea continued to be taught long after the early apostles and theologians refuted it.

Deceiving spirits caused new believers to doubt the gospel message. The apostle John wrote, “Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of anti-Christ...” (1 John 4:1-3).

### TALK ABOUT

1. How did false teaching come into the Christian churches? 2. What did the Gnostics teach? 3. John wrote to believers, “Test the spirits to see that they are from God...” (1 John 4:1,3). What did he mean? 4. Are there false teachers in our churches today?

### SALVATION THROUGH THE CHURCH

The Roman church taught that eternal life was mediated through the sacraments, administered by the priest or other authority in the Roman church to whom homage and obedience was due.

Christ words to Peter, “On this rock I will build My church...” (Matt 16:18) are misinterpreted to make Peter the foundation stone of the Church and the popes his successors.

Paul states the truth in his letter to the church in Corinth: “For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation (by preaching the gospel), using gold, silver, costly stones, wood hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day (of Judgment) will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test each man’s work” (1 Cor 3:12-13). The man may be saved, but his work will perish.

### WHY THE REFORMATION ?

Many Christians talk about ‘Reformed Theology,’ but few know what the words mean. The word reformed means ‘to make better.’ or ‘to put an end to an evil’ practice. ‘Theology’ means a system of explaining the truth as we have it in the

Bible.

The Reformation took place because Roman priests were not preaching the truth as it is found in the Bible. Many were preaching and teaching a doctrine of their own invention. Roman priest sold indulgences which they said would assure the sinner of God’s forgiveness. They said there was a store of merits, put there by Jesus, the saints and martyrs and available to the church. The pope and priests could make these merits available to the people through indulgences. To the Reformers it was nothing less than buying your way into heaven. This had been going on for hundreds of years before the Reformation took place.

In celebrating the Lord’s Supper (called the Mass) the priest is said to take part in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross. The bread and wine become the actual body and blood of Jesus.

## THE LORD’S SUPPER

### Read: Luke 22:7-22

Luke wrote of the last meal Jesus ate with His disciples. When Jesus took the cup and gave thanks He said, “Take this... I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the Kingdom of God comes” (Luke 22:17-18). When He said, “This cup is the New Covenant in My blood, which is poured out for you,” we believe He was using the cup to represent His blood that would be poured out at Calvary. His words “the fruit of the vine” point us to the juice squeezed from grapes, which Jesus used as a symbol of His blood.

In the same way, Jesus took the common loaf of bread and broke it and said, “This is My body given for you...” He said this while He was still with them. Before He had been hung on the cross to die. So the bread was a symbol of what would happen to Jesus the next day.

Roman Catholics worship Mary, the mother of Jesus. They say she “was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory.” There is nothing in the Bible to support this idea. Jesus is the only person who was ever raised from the dead and ascended to heaven. Others had been raised from the dead but they all died again.

Alongside Mary icons other religious images are worshipped. The leaders of the Reformation swept all such idolatry away on the basis of the commandment: “You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in the heaven above or on the earth beneath... You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God...” (Ex 20:4-5).

## PAUL’S LETTER TO THE GALATIANS

### Read: Galatians 1:4-9

Paul the apostle wrote a letter to the Christians in the Galatian churches. They were listening to wrong teaching and not following the gospel as it had been preached to them at the beginning. They had started out well, believing the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

A man is saved by faith in Jesus Christ alone. But Judaizers had come from Jerusalem and said “No, that is not enough! You must also obey the law of Moses and be circumcised.”