

WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR US TO LIVE IN THE BENEFITS OF THE REFORMATION

We've heard much about the heroes of the Reformation. Martin Luther, the hero of Wittenberg, who boldly challenged the authority of the corrupt priests, cardinals, and the pope himself. John Calvin, the hero of Geneva, who wrote the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Ulrich Zwingli, the hero of Zurich, who outdebated the city's Catholic leaders and persuaded the people to join the Reformation.

But if you know history well enough you may balk at that word *hero*. The Reformers were not only courageous men and women who recovered the gospel, but also inconsistent men and women whose lives often betrayed the gospel. Looking at their personal life, one might begin to wonder if we should celebrate these men and women at all. Why are we still celebrating/observing the events that occurred 500 years ago?

However, in Hebrews 11, the author celebrates a band of believers just as flawed as our Reformers. Therefore the right kind of celebration is to process their failures and praise their victories. To live in the benefits of the Reformation we should try to understand their context, learn from their mistakes, and celebrate their faith.

We should try to learn and understand the historical context and situations that provoked their sinful responses. As we do so, we are not looking to minimize, excuse, or explain away their sin; instead, we're placing ourselves alongside them as fellow sinners and seeking to understand why it happened. It's often easy to cast stones across the centuries before we've tried to travel there ourselves.

On the other hand, if we try to whitewash Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, and others, we hide and miss a lesson all of us need to hear; namely, that Satan and our own hearts can deceive us so thoroughly that we cannot even see the ways our lives contradict our message. Even more importantly, when we downplay the Reformers' flaws, we are not doing justice to the heart and soul of the Reformation itself. Even at their best, the Reformers were object lessons for the gospel they preached: Jesus came for failing, broken people. God does not search for righteous people to save; instead, he searches for broken people to make beautiful through his Son, Jesus Christ. What a comfort it is for a sinner like me today.

If the gospel is only for the righteous, or only for saints who leap from peak to peak on their way to glory, then the gospel isn't for you and me. A gospel that promises instant and total transformation is a sentimental lie, and it's no gospel at all.

Our celebration of The Reformation was never about promoting holy human characters, but instead about one holy Christ, the Son of God, whose suffering and resurrection fully cover his people's sins — including the sins they commit when they should certainly know better. The ultimate goal for event like this today is not to celebrate some denomination and denounce other. Jesus has washed our Reformers white with his own precious blood. Likewise, He is continuing to wash sinners today. We should celebrate that. Reformation was not only a movement that moved away from the Catholic Church and its corruption; it was a movement that moved towards the gospel. And that is precisely what preserves the validity of the Reformation for today. As a program to move closer to the gospel, it cannot be finished.

We should celebrate these Reformers with our eyes wide open. We may have to denounce Luther's runaway tongue. We may have to lament Calvin's and Zwingli's complicity with the state. But once we've done so, we can step back and recognize that these tangled men also modelled lives of spectacular faithfulness. And along with the author of Hebrews, we can celebrate the faith of God's flawed heroes.

We can celebrate Luther's faith in God's word as he stood before the imperial assembly of the Holy Roman Empire and said, "My conscience is captive to the word of God. Thus I cannot and will not recant, because acting against one's conscience is neither safe nor sound. God help me. Amen."

We can celebrate Calvin's faith in God's providence when he wrote in his *Institutes*, "When we are unjustly wounded by men, let us overlook their wickedness . . . remember to mount up to God, and learn to believe for certain that whatever our enemy has wickedly committed against us was permitted and sent by God's just dispensation" (1.17.8).

We can celebrate Zwingli's faith in God's power when he wrote in his "Sixty-Seven Articles," "[Christ] is an eternal salvation and head of all believers, who are his body, but which is dead and can do nothing without him."

Through these Reformers, God opposed proud rulers, unmasked depraved priests, and recovered for the world the happy news that God justifies sinners by grace alone, on the basis of Christ's righteousness alone, through faith alone, for the glory of God alone, as taught with decisive authority in Scripture alone.

We should celebrate these Reformers for their love of the Scripture. The scripture is our ultimate and trustworthy authority for faith and practice. This doesn't mean that the Bible is the only place where truth is found, but it does mean that everything else we learn about God and his World, and all other authorities, should be interpreted in the light of the Scripture. In [Acts 17:10-11](#) the Berean Jews were commended because, after they heard the teachings of Paul and Silas, they "examined the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so." Every Great Reformation in the Bible begins with the Word of God. Someone once said, "Revival is *re-Bible*". Jesus began His ministry by reading of the Scripture (Luke 4:17-21). On the day of Pentecost, 3000 were saved as Peter stood up and explained the Scripture (Acts 2). Josiah's religious reforms took place at the reading of the book of the Law (2 kings 22-23).

Like the Reformers of the 16th century, Ezra was a Reformer of his time. He was a skilled scribe in the Law of Moses.

"For Ezra had set his heart *to study* the law of the LORD, and *to do it*, and *to teach* the statutes and ordinances in Israel." (Ezra 7:10)

The gracious hand of God was on him *for/because* Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach the statutes and ordinances in Israel. God's favour will be upon those who study God's Law and practiced it and teach to others. C.S Lewis beautifully said, "When we come to the Scripture it's not a "question of learning a subject but of steeping ourselves in a Personality." In other words, our primary purpose for meditating of the Bible should be to meet Christ, to hear his voice, and to see him more clearly that we might love him more passionately.

Ezra was passionate about God and His Word. He was a man of principle – he lived what he preached. He was a model reformer of his time. What he taught he had first lived, and what he lived he had first made sure of in the scripture.

Paul correctly pointed out that "You and I are letters written in our hearts known and read by all men. It is not written with ink but by the spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart. We are ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit, for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life (2 Cor 3:1-6).

If our life does not reflect Christ after studying of the Scripture, our learning is in vain. A celebration like this should make us passionate about God's word.

In Nehemiah 8, Ezra reads the Law aloud in the presence of the people from daybreak till noon giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was being read. This goes on for days. This results in confession and in worshipping the Lord their God. This should be the goal of every one of us who call ourselves the student of the Bible. Our study, practice and teaching should lead people to confession and worship.

Conclusion/Application:

Let us thank God for the great men like Martin Luther, John Calvin and Zwingli. It is because of their courage and sacrifices we have free access to the Bible today and enjoy much freedom in worship. However, let us not be satisfied with what they have achieved and have not. Reformation is not only about the past event but it is about how much we have come closer to the gospel. It is not about the glory of the Reformers but it is about the glory of God. Setting the doctrines right is not the ultimate goal of the Reformation. Our journey as a Christian is a lifelong race that moves forward. Unfortunately, most churches today are too comfortable. They are too satisfied with the achievements of the past. Their concern is with the building and activities within the church. The size of the building determines the success of the Church. But spiritually, they have lost our first love like the Ephesian church. In this generation of tolerance and pluralism many churches had compromised their faith like the church of Pergamos. Like the Church in Thyatira, corruption and immorality is rampant inside the church. Some churches are dead like Sardis others have become lukewarm like the Laodicians church. Paul said in Hebrews 5:12, “we ought to be teachers by now” but unfortunately, 2000 years later, many are still surviving with milk rather than solid food.

Let us not be satisfied just because we are no more under the Roman Catholic Church. Instead let us celebrate for we are no more under the bondage of sin. Let us celebrate the freedom and free access to God and to His Word. The standard of our faith is not based on the solas’ of the Reformation alone but on the Word of God.

Finally, *Soli Deo Gloria* meaning “Glory to God alone” was one of the Solas of the Reformation. God’s glory is the central motivation for salvation. The goal of all life is to give glory to God alone (1 Cor 10:31). May our learning, teaching and ministering bring glory to His name. Amen.

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