

Our Reformation Heritage

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I would invite your attention to the reading of the Word of God from the 44th Psalm. It is not my intention to expound this psalm tonight, though that would be a great delight for me to do so. But I read this psalm because in a very real sense it sets the biblical framework or sphere of reference for that which we are about to do this evening as we engage our minds in looking back to an epoch in the history of the Church in which God came forth with mighty power to vindicate his truth and to gather many of his elect to himself, that great period of the Protestant Reformation. And this 44th Psalm is a wonderful psalm in which the principles which will undergird our study tonight are so patently set forth.

I shall read the first eight verses of Psalm 44.

We have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us, what work thou didst in their days, in the times of old. How thou didst drive out the heathen with thy hand, and plantedst them; how thou didst afflict the people, and cast them out. For they got not the land in possession by their own sword, neither did their own arm save them: but thy right hand, and thine arm, and the light of thy countenance, because thou hadst a favour unto them. Thou art my King, O God: command deliverances for Jacob. Through thee will we push down our enemies: through thy name will we tread them under that rise up against us. For I will not trust in my bow, neither shall my sword save me. But thou hast saved us from our enemies, and hast put them to shame that hated us. In God we boast all the day long, and praise thy name for ever.¹

Allow your minds to drift back with me at least 450 years to the year 1517. The precise date was probably October 31st or possibly November 1st. The place was Wittenberg, Germany. And allow your mind to think with me as we try to picture what it must have been like if we were just a common inhabitant of that town. And on that particular day we saw a young man dressed in the habit of an Augustinian monk move with resolute step to the door of the castle church. And with a look that probably was a mingling of holy anger and resolute conviction, he nailed some written propositions to the church door.

¹ Psalm 44:1-8.

His purpose for doing so is written in Latin and translated it would be rendered something like this. "Out of love and zeal for truth and the desire to bring it to light, the follow theses will be publicly discussed at Wittenberg under the chairmanship of the reverend father Martin Luther, master of arts and sacred theology and regularly appointed lecturer on these subjects at that place. He requests that those who cannot be present to debate on with us will do so by letter," end quote.

And so what was intended to be an announcement in Latin concerning some issues for debate among the theological faculty and among the theologians of that day, in a very real sense, became the womb out of which came forth the greatest movement of the Spirit of God since the days of the apostles. The hammer that nailed those 95 Theses to the church door in Wittenberg was, in reality, a hammer that announced the dawning of a new day in the history of the Church of Jesus Christ.

And it is the day of the nailing of those theses which has been traditionally entitled and celebrated as Reformation Day in the history of the Church of Jesus Christ.

Now in celebrating that day and that specific event, no one who has any understanding of that day or that event or the events which followed is suggesting that the Reformation, as it were, dropped out of heaven the moment Luther's hammer sang against the nails that put the theses upon the door of the castle church. There were many things that were, in a very real sense, harbingers of the Reformation, seeds that had been sown in the marvelous providence of God. And to study the history of the light and ministry of men like Wycliffe who was called the morning star of the Reformation, Huss and Erasmus and the invention and use of the printing press is to study a marvelous record of the providence of God which is at work preparing men and preparing the world for that hour when Luther, under the impulse of the truth of God in his own heart would nail his theses to the church door in that city in Germany.

And also, as with human birth, there is not only the period of conception and gestation and then birth, but the early development and maturation, so the Reformation moved and, in a sense, continues to be with us to this day. But for very wise reasons it is good for the people of God to come back to that specific event which, in a very real sense, was the watershed of all that preceded and the womb out of which all that followed, in a very real sense, came.

Now why go back some answer or ask. Why should we concern ourselves with an event that has at least 450 years behind it? Some would say that this is an irresponsible flight into nostalgia. There are other people who say that everything that transpired was sort of an unnecessary tempest in a theological and ecclesiological teapot. And there are actually people who celebrate Reformation Day by having ecumenical services of reconciliation and you will have a Protestant minister and a Catholic priest and a Jewish rabbi sitting on a platform on Reformation Day to declare to the world that all of those theological and doctrinal issues which were brought into sharp focus in the Reformation

are matters that ought to be put behind us and we ought to have a togetherness orgy and just all get together and convince one another that everything is well.

Well, we don't think that way. This is why we are having a Reformation meeting. And I want to state at the outset what my purpose is in seeking to engage your mind concerning this subject tonight.

Negatively, my purpose is not to deify the human instruments. God always uses men. When he would deliver his ancient people Israel by mighty power, he prepares and lays his hand upon a man named Moses. When he would bring his favored people into the Promised Land he lays his hand upon a man named Joshua. When he would send the gospel to the Roman world, the Gentile world, he prepares and lays his hand upon a man, Saul of Tarsus, and transforms him into Paul the apostle. And God's method has always been to prepare and mold and shape and then anoint and thrust forth men through whom he accomplishes his mighty work.

But we read in 1 Corinthians 3:21, "Let no man glory in men."²

And so it is not my purpose tonight to set up, as it were, a de facto worship of evangelical or Protestant patron saints so that we will be tempted to cross ourselves when we hear the name of Luther or the name of Melancthon or the name of Zwingli or Calvin or Basil or any of the other great reformers. No, it is not my purpose in any way to promote a cult of idolatrous hero worship.

In the second place it is not my purpose to vilify Roman Catholics or Roman Catholicism. I will be saying some very sharp things concerning the Roman Church tonight. But it is not my purpose in any way to develop a hate Catholic mentality. I trust you love Roman Catholics. I trust you have a compassion for Roman Catholic neighbors and friends and relatives and that you seek to bear witness to them concerning the gospel of the grace of God.

And so it is not my purpose on the one hand to deify the human instruments of the Reformation, nor to vilify Roman Catholics, nor is it merely to improve your knowledge of the history of the Reformation. But my purpose can be positively stated in three simple words. The first word is appreciation. If I accomplish anything of my goal in addressing you tonight, I trust it will be one in which your appreciation of your Reformation heritage is deepened and expanded. We are able to sit here tonight without fear of ecclesiastical powers joined to the civil authority coming and confiscating our Bibles or committing us to prison and to torture. We are sitting here this night in the enjoyment of these liberties in a very real sense because of that hammer that pounded those nails and caused those 95 Theses to be fixed to that church door in Wittenberg in 1517.

And we, as the people of God, need to cultivate a deeper appreciation of the tremendous legacy of privilege that is ours because of the Protestant Reformation. Ignorance of our

² 1 Corinthians 3:21.

heritage leads to indifference to that heritage and indifference to our heritage is the mother of relinquishment of that heritage. Ignorance begets indifference. Indifference begets a relinquishment of that heritage.

And I trust tonight there will be borne in each of our hearts, no matter how well schooled we may be in the great pivotal issues of the Reformation, a new appreciation that will cause us to say in the language of that Psalm, “We have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us, what work thou didst in their days,”³ and that we revel in the mighty work of God which has been accomplished in days past because we in this very hour are the recipients of privileges dearly bought because of that work of the Spirit of God.

And then, in the second place, what I hope to accomplish is embodied in the word “aspiration.” I hope what we hear tonight concerning the work of God in the Reformation will beget in us holy longings, spiritual aspirations that we in our own generation might be the worthy heirs and sons and daughters of the Reformation.

Men and women, girls, kitchen maids and plow boys were willing to risk life and limb to stand for the principles that we so glibly parrot and for which we are often so unwilling to pay any price. Heads rolled and bodies were wracked with the most unimaginable kinds of torture and families were decimated because some people took the truth of God seriously. And I hope our study tonight will cause some holy aspirations to be borne in our hearts that in our generation we will say with the psalmist, “Thou art my King, O God: command deliverances for Jacob.”⁴

Now, you see, the psalmist was not content simply to look back and say, “Our fathers told us what mighty works you did in their day.” He looks out and says, “But, oh God, here are the enemies that we face in our day. And if you, the God of our fathers, are our God, Lord, come and bare your arm in this generation.”

So my second purpose is that of aspiration.

And then, thirdly, it is a purpose that can be embodied in the word “direction.” Not only do I trust that we shall receive new appreciation, fresh aspiration, but that we will receive some clear direction.

As you read the rest of the 44th psalm you realize that the psalmist extracts principles from God’s dealings with the past which lay, as it were, tracks upon which he seeks to move in confronting the enemies and the necessities of his own generation. And the only true heirs of the Reformation are those who take the principles of the reformation and seek to carry them out in the context of our own living situation.

You see, we are not the true heirs of the Reformation if we simply look back and enshrine a Reformed tradition. The church that is truly reformed is continually reforming. The church that grasps something of the genius, the spiritual genius of Luther and of Calvin

³ Psalm 44:1.

⁴ Psalm 44:4.

and those mighty men is the church that is continually bringing the entirety of its life to the scrutiny of the Word of God. It is bringing all of society under the scrutiny of the Word of God.

And I trust that as a result of our study together there will be the realization of that goal of direction.

All right. Having mapped out the field that is before us, now I want to address myself, first of all, to the great spiritual issues which constituted the life blood of the Reformation, the great spiritual issues which constituted the life blood of the Reformation.

Now, no one that one who is wholly blinded by undisciplined enthusiasm would say that everyone in the Reformation was spiritual. No, there were political issues. There were personality issues. But no one except the most prejudiced person would say that it was not primarily and essentially a mighty work of the Spirit of God bringing home the truth of God to the hearts of men and women with power.

And I am sure that many of you have often heard, some of you perhaps only infrequently, that as theologians have looked back and have sought to interpret the work of the Spirit of God in the Protestant Reformation, they have embodied the life blood of Reformation thought in this three Latin phrases—in this context, perhaps you feel they ought to be in Dutch, but I shall stick with the historical perspective and give them in Latin, not only because I could not give them to you in Dutch, but because I want these words to be household words with you if they are not already.

The three Latin phrases, of course, are *Sola Scriptura*, the Scriptures alone, *Sola Gratia*, by grace alone and *Sola Fide*, that is, by faith alone.

Now if you have some at least elementary grasp upon the significance of those three Latin phrases, you are, as it were, looking at the very life blood of the Reformation.

When we, as it were, pulled away the external phenomena of the men and movements and the involvement of princes and great leaders and all of the rest and we ask ourselves what was the driving force behind this great movement of the Spirit of God? When you get it down to its distilled essence, you will find these three tremendous principles that leaped from the Word of God, were burnt into the fleshly tables of the hearts of men and women until they became a consuming passion.

Sola Scriptural, *Sola Gratia*, and *Sola Fide*.

Now let me just pause to spend a few minutes in definition in each of them and then we shall move on.

First of all, then, *Sola Scriptura*. This is often called the regulative principle of the Reformation and the other two the formal principles.

Now how did this thing become a burning issue in the Reformation? Did you have a bunch of theologians sitting around saying, “Well, shall we regulate by the Scriptures alone or shall we be regulated by the Scripture plus Church tradition?” How did this issue become a burning issue to the Reformation?

And this is very important. If you miss this, you have missed the whole genius of the Reformation. This matter did not come to the fore as a matter of theological speculation.

There was a man named Martin Luther who had spent hours and days locked up in his monkish cell and his conscience was rubbed raw with this burning question. How shall I, a sinful man, find acceptance with a holy and a just God? And as he sought to find an answer to that question, he knew very well the teaching of the Church of Rome. As he looked for an authority to resolve that issue, Rome said the authority resides in the Church as the only true interpreter of the Scriptures so that you did not have a self interpreting revelation from God within the pages of the Bible. But you had a Church which stood over the Bible and regulated what the common man should know of the Bible and determined for the average man what the Bible would teach.

So, you see, this whole question of authority in religious matters. Where should I look for an answer to the ultimate questions of life? Who am I? If I am a sinner—and my conscience affirms it—how can my sin be blotted out? Who in the universe can give me an answer that I know will stand the test of the last day?

And there stood Rome saying, “We, this church, we are the guardian of truth. And in the statements of our councils and our bishops and in the pronouncements of our popes, we are the official mouthpiece of truth.”

But Luther, being a scholastic theologian, he saw that none of the fathers agreed. And this talk about the unanimous consent of the fathers was a misnomer. There was no unanimous consent and the fathers disagreed among themselves and the church could not speak with a voice that was clear.

And so it was out of that burning religious wrestling that Luther came to this conviction that it was the Scriptures and the Scriptures alone to which a man must look in answer for the great and ultimate questions of life. And that dramatic moment that is so vividly portrayed in the film *Martin Luther*—if you have never seen that, please do something to see it somewhere, somehow. When Luther is at the Diet of Worms and he is being questioned and you remember Eck the great proponent of Rome and her teaching addresses Martin Luther and he says, “Martin, you have not sufficiently distinguished your works. The earlier were bad and the latter worse. You plea to be heard from Scripture, but,” he says, “so do all the heretics. You do nothing but renew the errors of Wycliffe and Huss.” And then he goes on to say, “How will the Jews and the Turks in the world do anything but blaspheme if they hear everyone speaking with a different voice? Martin Luther, why not with us? The church has spoken. The church is the great

guardian and exponent of truth. Line up with us. We can't deny that that which is in your books is truth."

And, of course, Luther's answer was this. "Since your majesty and your lordships desire a simple reply I will answer without horns and without teeth. Unless I am convinced by Scripture and plain reason, I do not accept the authority of popes and councils for they have contradicted each other. My conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot deny, will not recant anything. For to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. God help me. Here I stand. I can do no otherwise."

Now do you notice the language? He did not point to a Bible and say, "I believe that book is the Word of God." He said, "My conscience is held captive by the Word of God."

That is religious language, dear people. Do you see the difference?

It is theological jargon to point to a book and say, "That book is the Word of God."

It is quite another thing for the deepest recesses of your heart and life to be under its power. That is your conscience.

Luther's confession was, "My conscience is held captive by the Word of God."

And so the great cry then of the Reformation in its practical outworking was *Sola Scriptura*. And Luther's great and monumental work was to get the Scriptures into the language of the common people of Germany. And those who are linguists say that he worked with almost something akin to inspiration. He invented words and, in a sense, the entire modern German language was framed by Luther's translation of the Scriptures into the German tongue.

And then he made his catechisms until they said it was embarrassing that a plow boy with his catechism could put to shame bishops and archbishops in theological debate. Why? Because, you see, *Sola Scriptura* was not some kind of an abstract Protestant confession. It was a matter of the deepest and most burning religious conviction that now the conscience was free from all of the chains of human opinion. The conscience was free from all the trappings of man's contradictory statements. The pure fountain of proof had been discovered and so the cry was *Sola Scriptura*. Not the Scriptures plus the councils, not the Scriptures plus the bishops, not the Scriptures plus the pope, the Scriptures alone.

Well, then, what about that next Latin phrase, *Sola Gratia*, by grace alone?

Well, you see, the moment you begin to take the Bible seriously you get into trouble because this book is not very flattering. It begins with the wonderful account of man made in the image of God and man is elevated to that high place of an image bearer of God. But in chapter three there is the tragic record of man's defection from the womb of God and he has fallen into sin. Until you come to chapter six and you have that graphic heart breaking picture, to me one of the most pathetic passages in all of the Bible where it

says, “GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.”⁵

And it pained God in his heart.

And then you remember the history. God blots out the entire human race except for one family and begins through that one family to populate the world again and then this book with an honesty and a transparency that at time borders on being shocking. It gives the picture of what man is.

You see, the word “depravity” to Luther and to those of his generation, the words “sin, guilt, judgment, damnation, divine anger,” those were not just words. They were burning issues. And when they looked to the Church of Rome and said, “How shall we find peace for our sins [?]?”

The answer of Rome was indulgences, penance, rituals, sacraments. You had to be in the right place doing the right thing, having the hands of the right man upon you. There was no proclamation that God in grace came to the sinner and that the sinner in the nakedness of his need could embrace the Savior in all the plenitude of his grace. There was no understanding of that difficult concept.

And so you had a salvation, if you could even call it that, that was human merit, human effort, human works, human endeavor. And when all was said and one there was no assurance. You had to plunk your money into the coffers and hope that there would be enough prayers that would somehow prevail to get you out of that intermediate state of purgatory. And so the whole system of indulgences, as you know, under Tetzl had become almost ludicrous if it were not so tragic. And into that situation you remember the incident when Luther teaching through the book of Romans kept wrestling with this question.

What is the righteousness of God of which Paul speaks in Romans? What is that righteousness?

And the Spirit of God caused the truth to open up before him.

“The just shall live by faith.”⁶

And he came to understand that the righteousness of God was that righteousness which God himself provides in the doings and the dying of another and that that righteousness was not attained by human merit and human effort climbing upwards until we were able to take hold of it as our attainment. But it was graciously conferred upon the sinner who in all of his sin cried out for mercy and by faith laid hold of the offered Savior. And so it was no longer Christ plus the sacraments or Christ through the sacraments, Christ plus penance, Christ plus... No. It was now Christ alone.

⁵ Genesis 6:5.

⁶ Habakkuk 2:4; Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; Hebrews 10:38.

And so the great watchword then in terms of the Latin phrase, *Sola Gratia*, by grace alone.

And, you see, with Luther and the other reformers it was not only grace alone as the ground of our salvation, but grace alone as the very means of our attaining that salvation.

Luther wrote a treatise called *The Bondage of the Will* and he entered into debate with Erasmus on this whole subject of how much does man need God's grace. Does he need grace just to make the provision and then he has the ability to lay hold of it? Or is man so bad that he not only needs a provision all of grace, objectively, but a provision of grace subjectively in order to lay hold of God's offered salvation?

Well, Luther thought this was the whole crux of his theology. And so, Luther says, writing to Erasmus these very words. "You, Erasmus, have attacked the real thing. That is the essential issue. You have not worried me with these extraneous issues about the papacy and purgatory and indulgences and such like, mere trifles rather than issues in respect of which almost all to date have sought my blood. You and you alone have seen the hinge on which everything turns and aimed for the vital spot. For that I heartily thank you. For it is more gratifying to me to deal with this issue."

Do you see what Luther is saying? Luther says to him the whole hinge of grace is the understanding that man in his state of sin is rendered so helpless that not only is he unable to make a remedy, he is unable to even get to the remedy apart from the grace of God.

And so grace not only provides a Savior, but it provides the ability to lay hold of the offered Savior. In the language of John 1:12 and 13:

But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.⁷

Sola Gratia, by grace alone.

And, then, of course, *Sola Fide*, by faith alone.

In Luther's day the church taught that the treasury of grace was open to the sinner by various means: prayers, fastings, pilgrimage, particularly this matter of indulgences to which we have already alluded. And, because as we have already hinted, Luther's tormented conscience found no peace in doing all that his church told him to do, it was not until he came in the naked hand of faith, laying hold of the offered Savior that he found peace of conscience.

And so the great emphasis was upon faith alone.

⁷ John 1:12-13.

Romans 1:16 and 17, then, became to Luther what it was to Paul, a distillation of the gospel.

“It is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.”⁸

Now those three little phrases—*Sola Scriptura*, *Sola Gratia*, *Sola Fide*—embody the heart, the life stream of the Reformation.

Now in conclusion let’s ask the question. What relevance does all of this have for us today? Here we sit in this lovely building in 1978, more than 450 years removed from that might movement of the Spirit of God. Does that say something to you and to me?

Well, my thesis tonight, my brothers and sisters, and friends visiting here is simply this, that those three issues are as burning in their relevance in this present hour as the leaves that are falling right now from the trees in your backyard. They are as relevant as the issues that appear on the headlines of the newspaper. For in this hour in which we live and in which we are called upon to bear witness to the truth of God, there needs once more to be that burning, inward religious conviction concerning these fundamental issues.

For too long we have been willing to be content and look back and say, “Yes, isn’t that wonderful? I could anticipate what the preacher was going to say. *Sola Scriptura*, *Sola Gratia*, *Sola Fide*. Wonderful. Reformation heritage. Sons and daughters of the Reformation.”

My friends, let’s not look back. Are you looking out into the eyes of your own generation and in terms of the situation of your generation? Are you a true son or daughter of the Reformation? Are you confessing the implications of these things in the circumstances of our own day?

Let me underscore several areas in which I am convinced if we are to be true sons and daughters of the Reformation we must.

We must dare to stand for the principle of *Sola Scriptura*. This is still the great divide between Evangelicalism and Romanism. What authority shall bind the conscience?

In a very penetrating article Stuart Garber said, “The battle was joined then where it is still joined. Shall the church through its infallible teaching office and endless traditions exercise sovereign control over men’s souls and consciences or shall the Bible?”

Here is the great divide, the wall of separation between Catholicism and historic Protestantism.

⁸ Romans 1:16-17.

Ah, but some would object. “Pastor Martin, Rome is different now. They have Bible studies and they have gatherings where the Bible is read.”

Yes, Rome is, indeed, different than it was in Luther’s day. Since Luther’s day she has decreed the infallibility of the pope, the perpetual virginity of Mary, her assumption into heaven, the equal authority of human tradition, anathemas on every cardinal doctrine of salvation. And that official teaching of Rome has never been rescinded.

In 1968 Pope Paul VI issued a 3000 word credo of the people of God in which he stated as the official updated Roman Catholic Doctrine—and now I quote, “Faith in the concept of original sin is common to all men, the virginity of Mary and her role in the church’s moral life...” Then he goes on to say in this credo, “The infallibility of the pope and of bishops as a body under the pontiff, the mass as a real reenactment of Christ’s death, the eucharist as the true body and blood of Jesus Christ, the existence of paradise, purgatory and hell.” Extolling papal infallibility as a cornerstone of the church, the pope said, “We believe in the infallibility enjoyed by the successor of Peter when he teaches *ex cathedra* as pastor and teacher of all the faithful,” end quote.

Granted, liberalism has made tremendous inroads into Rome. Neo orthodoxy, political radicalism, but the official teaching of the Church of Rome to this hour is as much opposed to this concept as it was in Luther’s day. *Sola Scriptura* is the teaching of the Scriptures. The Scriptures alone must bind the conscience. Rome continues to assert the Scriptures plus the pronouncement of the pope and the counsels of the bishops.

And we need to recognize, my friends, that a harlot is all the more a threat when she doesn’t look like a dirty, filthy slut, but like a proper cultured, educated, refined upper middle class woman. And Rome is more dangerous now than she ever was. The harlot has become respectable. But she is the harlot still.

The blasphemy of the mass has been changed from Latin to English. But it is blasphemy to say that my Lord is offered up on Romish altars across the world.

My Bible says, “For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.”⁹

Blasphemy in English is as much blasphemy as blasphemy in Latin.

“Oh,” but you say, “Pastor Martin, you are not with it. Don’t you know that thousands of Catholics have big conferences with the Charismatics and they sing, ‘Jesus is Lord’?”

Yes. I am fully aware of it. I follow the movement very closely. And I commend for your reading a book called *A Christian’s Guide to Today’s Catholic-Charismatic Movement*, by James Nehir. And he quote all original sources, Roman Catholic authorities and periodicals. These are not Protestant sources. They are readers in the Roman Catholic Charismatic movement in which page after page he documents their

⁹ Hebrews 10:14.

statements that their so called baptism in the spirit has made Mary more precious, the mass more precious, the sacraments more precious as a means of grace and salvation. There has been no movement away from the heresy of the Scriptures plus church tradition.

We need, as the heirs of the Reformation, to stand with discernment, not with an anti Catholic hatred which is sin, but with broken hearts and compassion that is willing to tell the truth, to tell our Catholic friends who gloats when he tells you about his wonderful baptism in the spirit and how Jesus is so near. Stop and ask him, “Sir, what Jesus? Where do you find that Jesus? In some mystical experience or in the pages of the book? And if the Jesus you find in that book is your Jesus, then he said, ‘My sheep hear my voice and they follow me and the voice of a stranger they will not follow.’ And that Jesus doesn’t lead you deeper into the blasphemies and heresies of Rome. He leads you away into the green pastures of *Sola Scriptura*.”

But, my friends, the issue must not only be engaged continually with Rome, but there is, on the other flank a decadent Protestant rationalism, a dead humanistic liberalism that puts at the supreme place of authority human wisdom and human thought and human psychology ala Norman Vincent Peale and sprinkles it with a verse here or there and calls it Christianity when it is sheer eastern religion, self help psychology dressed up with Christian jargon and terminology. It is not a setting forth of the truth of Scripture that man is guilty, man is undone. Man is dead. Man is a [?]. Man must repent. Man must flee to Christ.

But there is another front and this is the front that, perhaps, is most dangerous to the circles in which you and I move. It is a front which claiming allegiance to the Reformation heritage has moved away from *Sola Scriptura*. And we are told by these people, “Well, you simple people have been reading the Bible too simplistically. You have got to understand that so much of the Bible is couched in cultural things that don’t really allow us to let the Bible say what it seems to say. Now you poor people, you pick up your Bible and read Genesis one to 11. You really think that is history. Well, that is all right for simple minded people. But we experts. We know better. We have the new hermeneutic. We have the ne insight as to how to interpret the first 11 chapters of Genesis.”

What has happened? No longer is the Bible a self interpreting book. The experts have to tell us how to handle it. You see, we read the opening chapters of Genesis and we say, “That looks like history.”

There was a man name Adam and God took a rib and from that rib he made a woman and brought the woman to the man. We read it as history and then we turn to the New Testament and we see our Lord Jesus saying, “In the beginning he who made them made them male and female.”

And we say, “Oh, Jesus read it as history. He believed it as history.”

And humble saints who have through the centuries said, “*Sola Scriptura*,” they didn’t need an expert looking over their shoulder saying, “Well, look, that is a bit of a cultural myth.”

And when they read in their Bibles, “I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man,”¹⁰ they said the office of a ruling, teaching position was not open to the woman. Not because she is less made in the image of God, not because she is a less dignified creature, but because God has an order in creation and in that order he has given the place of leadership to the male and not to the female. And when they read in their Bibles “As in all the churches I suffer the women not to speak, but to be silent,” along come the experts now and they tell us, “Well, that is what it seems to say, but...” And so they have to put out their big reports to tell us the Bible really doesn’t mean what it says.

You see, this is the tyranny of the experts. It is going back to the mentality of Rome. It is taking the Bible out of the hands of the common man saying, “You are not fit to really understand it. We experts, we have [?].”

My dear sons and daughters of the Reformation, we need to stand and be willing to pay a price and say, “*Sola Scriptura*.”

We will stand by this Word that lives and abides forever.

Do you know one of the most devastating, wicked books has come off the press and is being gobbled up by so called sons and daughters of the Reformation? And in that book they tell us that everyone up till now has read Romans one and when they read it they get the idea that Bible says that homosexuality is sin and is never justifiable conduct. They read in Genesis about the sin of Sodom and the church from the humblest believers to the most astute linguists and scholars have understood through the centuries that God judged that city because it had degenerated to blatant aggressive homosexual conduct.

And they tell us, “No, no. You don’t understand it.”

And do you know that they have explained away every single portion in the Word of God that speaks to the issue of homosexuality. Do you know what they say in their book?

“Since the Bible is silent on this matter of homosexuality, we must look to experience and to the experts for some idea as to how to react to it.” And they say, “Since the experts tell us it is behavior pattern that can’t be helped and since we know so many lovely Christians who are lesbians and homosexuals, therefore, the church must now change its whole stance and welcome homosexuals as bona fide expressions of Christian lifestyle.”

And, my friends, these people are being invited to speak in churches that are heirs of the Reformation.

¹⁰ 1 Timothy 2:12.

You say, “You are just a heresy hunter.”

No, I am not a heresy hunter. I am seeking to be true to my reformation heritage.

Sola Scriptura. Who cares what the sociologist says about homosexuality when God says, “Leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another.”¹¹

Does that mean we throw stones at homosexuals? No. We bring the gospel of deliverance to them. We have in our own assembly men and women who have been transformed from patterns of lesbianism and homosexuality and they are loved and received as full class citizens in the Church of Christ, but upon the basis of repentance and a transformation of the grace of God.

Well, dear people, you see, it is easy to look back and say, “Isn’t that great? Oh, Luther stood up in his day. Give it to the pope. Take a poke at the pope and take a poke at indulgences.”

Are you prepared to stand and face your generation?

What about you women? Are you prepared to be considered an odd ball and not with it and say, “I do believe my role is fixed by Scripture. And when the Bible says, ‘Wives be subject to your husbands,’ all this talk about egalitarian marriage is rubbish. It is sheer rubbish”?

And the Bible says, “Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the Church and gave himself for it.”¹²

I have a responsibility as the head to love with a sensitive, tender love as Christ loves the Church. And my wife has a responsibility to submit in a trusting, loving submission as the Church is subject to Christ.

Are you women real daughters of the Reformation or are you swallowing all of this garbage of present sociological junk? Dare you stand by the Word of God?

You men who are on consistories, are you waffling or dare you stand when these issues are discussed in consistory and say, “Thus saith the Lord”?

Sola Scriptura.

“The Word of God liveth and abideth forever.”¹³

Well, what about *Sola Gratia*? Are we prepared to say to our generation, “Salvation is by grace alone?” Not only in the face of Rome, but in the face of an Evangelicalism that has

¹¹ Romans 1:27.

¹² Ephesians 5:25.

¹³ 1 Peter 1:23.

developed salvation by human manipulation, salvation by decisions that are cranked out of people with the sales techniques of Madison Avenue? Are we prepared to say, “Salvation by grace alone?” Grace that operates through the proclamation of the Word, grace that turns men from their sins unto righteousness.

Are we prepared to stand against every form of sacramentalism the sacramentalism of good relationships? Are you pressing upon your children the necessity of conversion, not a conversion experience now, but the necessity of conversion? Are you assuming they are in the kingdom until they turn their back upon God and his truth and his Word and his Church?

Is the richest vein of reformation teaching not to assume or presume that our children are in a state of grace until they manifest the positive evidences of grace. And that is not a Baptist dogma. That is the teaching of the richest vein of Reformed theological instruction and I could quote the standard authors one by one.

Now, I know they weren't all on that side, but many of them were.

Do we give our children the impression, well, salvation is by grace alone for that dog down the street who doesn't have covenant parents, but for him as a covenant child it is grace plus genes? Do we give our children that impression or do we say to our children, “You must be born again”?

Do we press upon them the necessity of the new birth? Has that been pressed upon you? There may be some of you here with white hairs who drifted along for years in a reformed church thinking all must be well. You were baptized and catechized and everything else, but do you know anything of the pangs of the new birth? Have you ever felt your sins to the point where your heart was broken? Have you cried to God to have mercy upon you for the sake of his own dear Son?

Oh, if I have any preacher friends here, my friends, preach *Sola Gratia* the way Luther did, out of the burning awareness that for him, a sinner, there was no hope, but grace.

And then, *Sola Fide*, by faith alone. Oh, what a wonderful thing it is to tell the vilest of sinners upon the face of the earth that the moment he touches the hem of the garment of Jesus by faith he is whole. What a gospel to preach.

To say to the vilest of sinners, “Christ Jesus came into the world to save the likes of you. If you will but lay hold upon him by faith, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved,” then they are not going to go running around looking for a coat of many colors experience and some kind of a second and third work and [?] and all the rest. No, no. A sinner whose conscience has been smitten with the awareness of his guilt and who has come to the wonderful discovery that by faith and faith alone the Savior is his and he is the Savior's. He has come to the most wonderful, wonderful satisfying awareness possible to any mortal man this side of heaven.

And we need, to our generation, to herald that message.

Are these things burning issues to you, my friends? The Scriptures alone. Are we prepared not just to point to the book and say it is the Word of God, but to have our consciences captive to it?

How can our conscience be captive to it when many of you sitting here tonight spend more hours every week watching your TV than you do reading your Bible?

If you think that is an unfair accusation, may I give you a challenge? Take a little three by five card next week and every time you sit down to the TV write the time and every time you get up write the time. Total it up at the end of the week. Have another column. Every time you sit down to read your Bible, rise up, total it up. See what is getting more time, your Bible or your TV? Your Bible or your newspaper? Your Bible or your *Woman's Day*? Your Bible or your *Bazaar* magazine? Your Bible or the *Home Journal*? Your Bible or something else?

You see, we take for granted this heritage and we despise what has come to us without Christ. Oh, let us not despise it. God may take the privilege from us.

Sola Scriptura means that if we believe within the page of this book is all we need for life, for faith, for practice, then we should seek to study it, imbibe its teaching and breathe its thoughts.

Sola Gratia, the man or woman who lives consciously aware that he is saved by grace alone. He has a heart that beats with the longing to share that grace with others.

And the one who stands by faith alone can look the accuser in the eye and tell him, "Christ has died." He can face the grave in that awesome day of judgment and say that, "By faith I am in Christ and being in Christ there is no condemnation."

Oh, may these great watchwords be more than slogans upon our lips. May they be the embodiment of the burning conviction of our hearts.

Sola Scriptura, the Scriptures alone.

Sola Gratia, grace alone.

Sola Fide, faith alone.

And to Jesus Christ, the object of that faith, be the praise, the honor and the glory. Amen.