

## The Restoration of the Worship of God

### *Prayer:*

Almighty and loving Father, we are debtors to your grace. You have been gracious to us in our personal lives and you have been gracious to your people in the history of your church the last 2,000 years. Help us to understand what a great act of mercy and deliverance you worked in behalf of your people more than 500 years ago at the time of the Reformation of your church. Show us your hand in history and continue to show us your hand of mercy and deliverance in our own lives, in our own church this day. In Jesus' precious name we pray.

If you lived out in the countryside in Europe in the early 1500's, and you went into town on market day, the first thing you would see if you came over a hill overlooking the town would have been a Roman Catholic church building in the center of town. It was no accident that the building was the key structure in the town. It represented the great sway that the Roman Catholic Church had over the lives of the people.

In those days the church's shadow was over your life from the cradle to the grave. Shortly after you were born you were baptized into the church. Later, the age varied, perhaps when you were about 8 years old, you went through the Confirmation ceremony in which a bishop prayed for you to receive the Holy Spirit. Also around that time you were allowed to celebrate Communion, also called the Eucharist, or the Mass for the first time. These were important ceremonies in the lives of RC people. When I taught 2<sup>nd</sup> grade here in Dallas some of my 8 year old RC students would take their first communion, and sometimes the little girls would come to school all dressed up for that occasion. And so you would be expected, required to attend the church service, the Mass, as it was and is called on Sunday – not to attend was a great sin. The word “Mass” comes from a word meaning “dismissal” – the end of the service.

And You had to go to confession regularly to confess your sins to the local priest. You had to go to the confession booth in the church building, and tell the priest whatever sins you were aware that you had committed. He would then pronounce forgiveness or may tell you what kind of ‘penance,’ some kind of action you had to do, to secure forgiveness.. Maybe he would prescribe that you say a hundred “Hail Mary’s”:

Hail Mary, full of grace,  
The Lord is with thee.  
Blessed art thou amongst women,  
And blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.  
Holy Mary, Mother of God,  
Pray for us sinners,  
Now and at the hour of our death.

You notice the focus here on Mary. She is the intercessor for God's people. Not Christ, but Mary. So we see the fact that Mary is given practically a divine status in RC'm. She

is called the co-redemptrix.

The number of Hail Mary's you said or other actions you might need to take, depended on what the priest determined was the seriousness of your sins. If you committed a mortal sin, such as murder, you would go to hell, unless you went to Confession and did whatever the priest prescribed. Other sins, called venial sins, were not considered to be as serious.

When you entered into adulthood you were married in the RCC (another sacrament) or perhaps you took "Orders" – you entered the monastery to begin training as a priest or a convent to begin training to become a nun.

But let me explain how the worship services, called the Eucharist, or the Mass, were conducted.

As you entered the church building and began to walk down the aisle, you would do a sign of the cross across your chest, and briefly bow toward the front of the building where there was a box that contained the communion bread. This was not mere bread in the RC teaching, but it was the actual body of Christ. It was "God in a box" – he was called the Host because you came into his building, you were a guest and he was the host – that is, Christ in the box. According to their teaching, this bread in the box looked like bread and tasted like bread, but it was really Christ's body – this was its real substance.

Actually, when the Mass was said, only the priests ate the bread, except once a year, when the people could eat it. And none of the people, only the priests, could drink the wine. It was taught that the wine, though it looked like wine and tasted like wine, its actual real substance was the blood of Christ. The Church could not afford to have the clumsy common folk drink the wine as they might accidentally spill the blood of Christ on the floor.

One of the other 7 sacraments of the church was called Extreme Unction. This was a person's final confession of his sins to a priest right before he died. The purpose here was to have no unconfessed sin in one's life that would cancel his hope of reaching heaven.

Eternal Life or eternal hell rested in the hands of the Church through the sacramental actions required of its people.

One of the great tragedies of the RC worship service was that it was all in Latin. The people did not understand Latin. Many of the priests did not understand Latin, so they just memorized the liturgy – the prayers, praises, etc. said in the service. The singing was in Latin by a choir. There was no preaching in the language of the people.

The people were required to attend these services every Sunday. Not to attend was a grave sin. Not to confess one's sin put you in danger of hell.

The great cause of this corrupted worship was that the Bible was hidden from the people. They did not know its content. They had no way to judge whether the Catholic Church was teaching the truths of the Word of God or not. Over the centuries the Church has developed various traditions and teachings that were contrary to the Word of God. The Bible was no longer the supreme authority in the Church – it was the decisions of councils, and bishops and popes that formed the doctrines that became supreme. These human groups and individuals were the supreme authority for determining what should be believed and practiced by the people.

The people's lives and eternal destinies were in captivity to the Church of Rome and its bishops and priests. Not to follow their rules and commands put one in danger of eternal hell. Fear and intimidation kept the population in submission to the Church at Rome.

The pure preaching of the gospel – the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ - as the only basis for the salvation of sinners was not heard.

The merciful sovereign grace of God that rescues undeserving sinners because of Christ's work on the cross was not a doctrine of the Church.

The RC church called the worship services "the Mass." It taught in fact that Christ was re-sacrificed for sinners every time the Mass is performed. The liturgy of the Mass concludes with the priest saying: "Pray, brethren, that my sacrifice and yours may be acceptable to God, the almighty Father." You see, it's the priest's sacrifice, not Jesus' sacrifice.

But this is a corruption of the clear teaching of the Word of God. How should the LS service be conducted? Listen to the Apostle Paul's instruction in 1 Cor. 11:23-26:

<sup>23</sup> For <sup>(Y)</sup>I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that <sup>(Z)</sup>the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread,<sup>24</sup> and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body, which is for<sup>[i]</sup> you. Do this in remembrance of me."<sup>[a]</sup> <sup>25</sup> In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."<sup>26</sup> For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death <sup>(AA)</sup>until he comes.

The purpose of the LS is to remember what Christ has done for us in dying for our sins and rising from the dead.

1 Cor. 10:16 says <sup>6</sup>The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?

This word "participation" can also be translated "communion" or "fellowship" so by partaking of the LS we not only remember Christ's sacrifice for us but we commune, fellowship with the risen Christ. This is the true meaning of the LS.

But the Mass in the RCC was a performance by the priests. The people only watched, they did not participate in any active or dynamic way in the sacrifice of the Mass. They, in fact, understood little of what was happening in the service because all the liturgy, all the words spoken by the priests in the service were in Latin, a foreign language to them.

This was the worship service of Roman Catholicism, and it continued to be performed in Latin until the council called Vatican II in the 1960's permitted the Mass to begin to be conducted in the languages of the people..

This captivity of the people of Europe and the world continued and would have gone on uninterrupted had not the Lord of the church intervened and restored to his Church the practice of the worship of God as set forth in the Old and New Testaments.

RC religion was marked by legalism: you follow these rules and practices and you might eventually get to heaven. Most people had to spend years in purgatory suffering for their sins until they had paid enough for their sins and could enter heaven.

Your only hope of salvation was to acceptably participate in the seven sacraments of the church as they might be appropriate for you. The Church, not Christ, held the keys to heaven.

But what does the Bible teach? The religion the Word of God is marked by the gracious saving power of God who awakens sinners from their spiritual death. God does this by bringing the Gospel message to them and enabling and causing them to believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. It is the Holy Spirit who comes and enters our lives that awakens us from our spiritual death.

Something vital and crucial was missing from the RC Mass. It was the reading of the Word of God and the clear preaching of the Gospel in the language of the people. They needed to understand that they were sinners and they needed to understand that the only way to heaven was through personal faith in Jesus Christ. Since they weren't taught how they could be saved, most were not. They participated in a religion but they did not have a personal experience of salvation; they did not know about the necessity of the new birth nor they had they experienced it.

So they didn't know the joy of the Lord, they didn't know about the assurance of sins forgiven and the free gift of eternal life. They saw Christ from afar but he was not close enough so they could reach out and embrace him by faith. They were kept in the chains of a legalistic religion that tantalized them with the hope of heaven but provided no certain road map as to how they might arrive in the heavenly city. They were like men dying of thirst in the desert and they saw ahead a mirage of an oasis in the distance but when they got there it was only an illusion, a fantasy, not a fact. There was no water to save them. They continued to die of thirst. So the RC people were dying spiritually, they were not drinking of the water of life, who is Jesus Christ.

But what do we see in the New Testament? We see a religion of peace and joy and love. Christ loved us first and calls us to himself. He grants us spiritual birth which is permanent entrance into the family of God.

Fear of hell, fear of rejection by God – is totally done away with. We enter into the freedom of the sons and daughters of God. We are free from the guilt and condemnation of our sins – Christ paid for them once for all on the cross. No further sacrifice is needed. Christ's death on Calvary's cross, his shed blood, washed away the sins of his people once and for all. More effective than bleach poured on a stained shirt is Jesus' blood to wash away completely and finally all the sins of his people.

The Bible was only read to the people in Latin in these services of worship, nor was there preaching and teaching from the Bible in their languages.. The people could not sing in their own language, only the choir sang. They could not partake of the Eucharist,

the Lord's Supper. There was no vital, heart changing, life-transforming experience of salvation.

The Christianity of that day needed a radical infusion of truth to deliver it from error. It needed a return to the Bible which had become incrustated with the traditions of men over the centuries. The good news of Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and ascension was not preached so the people could understand; therefore, they could not believe in Jesus and be saved. The real reason for worship – the free saving grace of God to lost sinners – was absent, so there was no rejoicing, no singing praises, no prayers of thanksgiving lifted up, no declarations of "glory to God in the highest."

What a change this was from the early days of the church some 15 centuries earlier. Oh, how far the church had drifted away from the teaching and pattern of the New Testament. So much had been lost. Could it ever be recovered? Could the high praises of God once more flow from the lips of God's people.

In his eternal counsels God had decided the centuries-long slide into false teaching and practice must stop. The error had to be exposed. The truth had to be brought out into the open. The time had come for renewal, for re-discovery, for restoration of the truth of the Word of God and the dynamic worship of the people of God.

The darkness of the 1,000 years of the Middle Ages was about to come to an end. The light of the everlasting Gospel was about to be re-kindled.

*This is what happened:* in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries there was a cultural and intellectual movement in Europe that stressed the study of classical Greek literature, and as a result the Greek New Testament was opened up and re-examined. A Roman Catholic Greek scholar named Erasmus published a fresh version of the Greek New Testament which spurred its study by various contemporary scholars around Europe. They discovered afresh the truth of the New Testament and saw how far the religion of the New Testament was very different from the brand of Christianity being taught and practiced by the Roman Catholic Church.

The RC church had hidden the way of salvation from the people; the NT opened up the clear way to be saved through faith in Christ.

The RC church tried to keep the Bible out of the hands of the people in the language they could understand. The Reformers sometimes sacrificed their lives by being burned at the stakes for their work in getting the Bible translated into the languages of the people and into their hands.

The RC church robbed the people of their ability to properly and joyfully worship God in the gathered congregation. The eucharist, the Lord's Supper, was not a thankful celebration of Christ's completed work on the cross to save his people, but it was a man-made contrivance drenched in error and deception which contradicted the plain statements of scripture. In their performance of the Mass week after week the Roman Catholic priests continually re-sacrificed Christ again and again in an "unbloody" manner. O such blasphemy! Such robbery of Christ's glory.

What does the scripture say? As Christ expired on the cross he cried out, “It is finished!” The work of bearing the wrath of God in behalf of his people was finished.

We read in Heb. 9:26 – “...he has appeared **once for all** at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.” Christ did all that was necessary to save his people from their sins. The RCC commandeered Christ’s great redemptive work and developed their own brand of sacrifices for sin. What arrogance, what error – that men would usurp to themselves through the sacrifice of the Mass the power to pay for the sins of God’s people. No wonder Martin Luther, the great German Reformer, railed against the Church and the pope....

My dear pope, I will kiss your feet and acknowledge you as supreme bishop if you will worship my Christ and grant that through His death and resurrection, not through keeping your traditions, we have forgiveness of sins and life eternal.

How did Luther come to hold such strong convictions regarding the errors in the RC system and such strong conviction regarding the truth and authority of God’s Word?

It came about because as a teacher of theology and a student of the Greek NT he came to see the great difference between what the RC church was teaching and what the bible was teaching.

The Church was teaching the people that it was through their adherence to the 7 sacraments they could possibly earn enough righteousness to be accepted by God.

Luther had tried that route and experienced dismal failure in trying to attain the righteousness that God requires. He learned that the only way to attain righteousness before the righteous God is to believe in his Son who born our sins and rose for our justification. He would have agreed with another Reformer, John Calvin’s description of saving faith:

Faith is like an empty, open hand stretched out towards God, with nothing to offer and everything to receive.

It was in the Bible, the Word of God, that Luther discovered the secret to ending his excruciating struggle to find acceptance with God.

He began to write and publish his beliefs that the Church and Pope and all the clergy could save no one, only Christ by his death and resurrection, and by the impartation of his Spirit into human hearts, could bring anyone out of the darkness of sin into the light of Christ’s kingdom.

His writings greatly upset the Pope and the RC leadership. The Pope said about Luther, “a wild boar has been let loose in the Lord’s vineyard” and he was put on trial at the Diet of Worms on April 17, 1521, and told to recant, deny his beliefs and writings. After thinking about it for a day he returned and declared to all the church and political figures gathered there:

“Unless I am convicted 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 and will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise. God help me. Amen.”

From there he had to go into hiding and he translated the NT into the German language, amazingly, in 11 weeks and had it published in September 1522.

By now the Reformation in Germany was well under way. Similar movements arose in Switzerland and England as Christian scholars translated the Bible into the languages of the people.

The Bible’s return to the forefront of Christianity in these Reformation movements around Europe had deposed from its throne the dictatorship of Popes and Councils who had hijacked the Biblical faith from the lives of the people. As Luther once said, “Peace if possible, truth at all costs.”

Indeed, several of the leading reformers were burned at the stake because they disobeyed laws which forbade the translating, reading, or teaching the Bible in the languages of the people. William Tyndale, who translated the Bible from the original Greek and Hebrew into English, was captured in Belgium by agents of the King of England, tied to a stake, strangled, and set on fire which ignited explosives that had been planted close to his body. But before he died, he had stated, “I will cause a boy who drives a plow to know more of the scriptures than the pope.”

The restoration of the sacred scriptures of the Old and New Testaments had volcanic repercussions in European Christianity. First of all, the power of granting or withholding salvation to the people was wrested from the hands of the RCC and placed back in the hands of Christ. In actuality, the institution of the Church had no power to save or

condemn anybody. But through their system they led people to believe they had that power.

The return to the Bible opened up the gates of heaven. Luther testified of his own conversion: “There I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous [person] lives by a gift of God, namely, by faith. ... the merciful God justifies us by faith. Here, I felt that I was altogether born again, and the very gates of paradise opened up before me.”

And so Luther and other Reformers such as Ulrich Zwingli in Switzerland and later John Calvin in Geneva, Switzerland, and William Tyndale in English were preaching salvation through faith in Christ alone. In fact, the entirety of the Word of God, without the trappings and errors of Roman Catholicism, began to be preached in those churches that had separated from the Roman Church. As the Gospel was now being preached clearly, people were coming to saving faith and growing as Christian disciples.

The Restoration of the Word of God as the supreme authority in those churches that were caught up in the Reformation was another simultaneous result or movement that naturally followed: **the Restoration of Biblical Worship.**

I want us to look at four of these leading Reformers and show how each one brought a particular element of Biblical worship back into the churches of God.

Luther's contributions were several. The foundational contribution was placing the scriptures in the German language in the hands of the people. This was an enormous change from the 100's of years of the Dark Ages when only a few in the RC clergy understood that language.

Along with the accessibility to the Bible, Luther's preaching opened up the Bible to the people's understanding. Now the saints of God were learning the Bible – learning of Christ, of his work of salvation, and learning how to grow spiritually as Christians.

Instead of going to Church observing the RC priest go through their ritual in an incomprehensible language, they were hearing the Bible read and preached in their own language. They were now learning the Word of God and growing as Christian disciples. It was a total transformation in their religious experience. Instead of deadness, there



was now life. Instead of ignorance of the Word of God, there was knowledge. Knowledge is power, and in this case knowledge of the scriptures is life-changing. It is power to know and love God, and kill sin, and send the devil to flight.

The RC liturgy in Latin was spiritually useless to the people because it was not understandable. It was a denial of the principal of edification. All things done in the Christian worship service should be understandable and edifying.

We see this in such a text as 1 Cor. 14:26:

<sup>26</sup> What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up.

Under the RC system the people were not built up – they were kept in the dark. They were left uninstructed in the true religion of the Bible.

As we sit in our service today we can hear everything in English, which is the first language, the heart language of most of us. Were we in Mexico or Venezuela the language used, of course, would be Spanish so the people could understand.

In the kind providence of God, we live after the Reformation in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. We hear and enjoy our worship service in our native language – a great benefit that people living before the Reformation did not have.

Martin Luther was not only a skilled translator and preacher, but he was an accomplished musician. Once he said this, “A person who...does not regard music as a marvelous creation of God, must be a clodhopper indeed and does not deserve to be called a human being; he should be permitted to hear nothing but the braying of asses and the grunting of hogs.”

Luther was given to strong statements and graphic language. But he spread the Reformation beliefs and doctrines through the hymns he wrote so the people learned the doctrine as they sang.

Today we sang one of Luther’s hymns at the Confession of Sins, called “Out of the Depths I Cry to You.” It is based on Psalm 130. It is a full of Biblical doctrine. Listen to the 3<sup>rd</sup> stanza:

It is in God that we shall hope, and not in our own merit. We rest our fears in his good Word  
 And trust his Holy Spirit. His promise keeps  
 us strong and sure; We trust the holy signature  
 Inscribed upon our temples.

In the RC church, it was mainly the choir that sang in Latin; in the Lutheran churches the people sang of their faith in their native tongues! They were implementing Ephesians 5:18-19:

Eph. 5:18-19 - ...be filled with the Spirit, <sup>19</sup> addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart....

This was Biblical singing and worship - worship as it was meant to be. The joy and praises of God had been returned to the people of God!

It has been said that the Reformation spread through Germany mainly by the singing of hymns. By singing, the Biblical doctrines such as justification by faith became embedded in the people's minds.

Another famous Reformer, born a generation after Luther, but who carried the Reformation forward in Geneva, Switzerland and beyond, was John Calvin. In the worship services of the Reformed Churches he stressed singing the Psalms and this tradition has continued to the present time where still there are a few Reformed churches who sing only the Psalms. The churches there were fulfilling Col. 3:16 -  
<sup>16</sup> Let <sup>(D)</sup>the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, <sup>(E)</sup>singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, <sup>(E)</sup>with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

Much of our worship practices today perhaps we take for granted, including what we call "expository preaching" – that is, going through a passage or book of the Bible verse by verse and opening up and explaining the meaning to the people.

One of the Reformers in Zurich, Switzerland, was Ulrich Zwingli. He had studied the Greek NT and began preaching to his people in the Book of Matthew verse by verse. Through this method he himself was converted. In his method of teaching his congregation he was fulfilling what Paul had told Timothy in 1 Tim. 4:13:

<sup>3</sup> Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching.

What we're talking about here is the Restoration of Biblical Worship that took place because of the Reformation's return to the Bible as the guidebook, the playbook, as to how we should worship God.

We are not left in the dark as to how God would have us worship him. We read, for example, in Acts 2:42 that the believers in Jerusalem after the Day of Pentecost "...devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers."

Here are some basic guidelines as to what we should do when we gather together. We devote ourselves to the Apostles' doctrine which comprise the New Testament, we break the bread of the Lord's Supper together, and we pray to God. We are devoted to the fellowship of the church – to supporting, encouraging, loving those in our church - they are our spiritual family – often closer to us than members of our own blood-related families.

The rediscovery of the Bible, the restoration of its authority over our lives and our churches, set the people of God free from the false teachings of Roman Catholicism and brought them into the light of the truth of God displayed in the Bible.

The Reformation of the Church in the 16<sup>th</sup> century was the re-birth of the true church after it had been kept in chains for centuries by the traditions and teachings of the RCC.

Jesus in his prayer to his Father, prayed for his disciples: <sup>17</sup> ***Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.***

***Thank God that the truth of the Bible was restored to the church at the Reformation. The Church in every generation must look afresh at the Bible and seek to follow and fulfill it in our lives and the worship of our churches.***

- 1. Give thanks for the reformation.***
- 2. Way of salvation restored.***
- 3. Way of worshipping God was restored.***
- 4. Let us continue to look to Word of God to instruct us in what to believe, how to come to Jesus, and who to worship him properly.***

***We do these things and we will not be unfruitful in our service to God.***

Prayer:

Thank you heavenly Father, that you did what was needed to restore your church to resting on the foundation of the Bible for all our belief and practice. As heirs of the Reformation, help us to be true to your Word in all we believe about you, about the way of salvation, and the way we should properly worship you. Thank you for all your mercies to us, a needy people. In Jesus' name we pray.

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