

A Great Doxology

Introduction

a. objectives

1. subject – Paul gives glory to God as able to do more than we ask or imagine
2. aim – to cause us to understand the tenets of the Reformation as they recapture the glory of God
3. passage – Ephesians 3:20-21

b. outline

1. The Reformation of the Glory of God
2. The Tenets of the Glory of God
3. The Place of the Glory of God (Ephesians 3:20-21)

c. opening

I. The Reformation of the Glory of God

Content

a. the *celebration* of Reformation Day

1. this year, 2017 = the 500th anniversary of the start of the Reformation
 - a. the radical schism within the western branch of Christendom that separated the church along doctrinal lines, and kicked open the door for the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, and the various forms of Protestantism that would come to reshape western civilization
2. it was on October 31, 1517 that Martin Luther posted his 95 Theses to the chapel door at Wittenberg, an event that (coupled with others) would launch the Reformation
3. now, the seeds of the Reformation had already been sown prior to Luther, but because of his radical conversion to justification by faith alone, along with the counter-reaction of the medieval church specifically to him, this date is often portrayed as the official “start” of the Reformation
4. the 95 Theses were specifically reactions by Luther to the practice of indulgences, but the controversy ignited by the document, along with Luther’s insistence on a very different view of justification from the medieval church, ultimately led to the Reformation

b. the *center* of Reformation Day

1. the central question posed against the medieval church was: how can sinful men stand justified before a holy God? on what basis is salvation granted to us, and upon what merit are we justified?
2. prior to 1517, Luther had had a great conversion in his understanding of justification, having discovered from **Romans 1:16-17** an entirely different view of the subject than was held by the medieval church
3. this altered view led him into seeing the church as deeply corrupted, certainly at its political and social levels, but (most importantly) at its doctrinal and dogmatic levels, which caused him to engage the church in the debate of a number of theological points (all of which were rejected)
4. thus, the primary matter of the Reformation was **doctrinal** – the central matter being the issue of justification, and was best summarized in the **Five Solas of the Reformation**

c. the *discussion* of Reformation Day

1. many aspects of the Reformation that we could discuss (e.g. historical, biographical, etc.)
2. however, it is the combination of two (2) specific things *in our context* that will lead our direction
 - a. our nature as an explicitly *reformed* church, and what *reformed* means over against the direction and understanding of the vast majority of contemporary Protestant churches today
 - b. our arrival at the great doxology of **Ephesians 3:20-21** in our systematic overview of the book
 - c. **IOW**: a perfect text to consider as a part of a larger discussion about the central tenets of reformed theology over against what both Rome and much of Protestantism teaches now, 500 years after a great doctrinal change swept over western Christianity

II. The Tenets of the Glory of God

Content

a. outlining the Five Solas

1. the Five Solas = five (5) Latin doctrinal assertions at the heart of Reformation soteriology
 - a. summary statements (or *tenets*) of how the doctrine of **justification** is rightly understood biblically
 - b. **i.e.** sola Scriptura, sola gratia, sola fide, solus Christus, and soli deo Gloria
 - c. or, summarized in English: the justification of a sinful man before a holy God is defined in Scripture alone, by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, to the glory of God alone
2. sola (alone) = the key component of reformed theology: that each of these matters stands *alone* in its own context, without the addition of man-made or man-centered components
 - a. **i.e.** to understand the doctrine of justification within the larger framework of a biblical soteriology is to recognize the God-centered nature of salvation in every aspect without the need for human decision, human intervention, or to a human end
3. a reformed believer should be able to give a reasonable **apologetic** (defense) of each of these tenets as the foundation of a larger theological framework (**i.e.** we should *know* them well!)

b. defining the Five Solas

1. **sola Scriptura** = that the Scriptures are the final authority of all matters of faith and practice – the divinely-inspired Bible stands *alone* as the device by which our understanding of soteriology comes
 - a. contra the teaching of Rome that our understanding of salvation can come from Scripture *plus* church tradition and magisterial authority (**i.e.** sola ecclesia)
 - b. contra the belief by many (illiterate) Baptists that an understanding of salvation is based on the word (and traditions) of their local church and pastor
2. **sola gratia** = that it is entirely and *only* by the grace of God that we are saved – the basis for our salvation is the radical choice of God himself *alone* that determines who is saved
 - a. contra the teaching of Rome that salvation is determined by grace, but that grace is *primarily* an enabler for us to choose to come to God through the systems wrought by the church
 - b. contra the belief by many (libertarian) Baptists that salvation is primarily a human decision to an “offer” made by God to us through Christ and the church
3. **sola fide** = that it is entirely and *only* by faith that we stand justified before God – the basis of our justification is faith *alone*, and never on the basis of anything else good in us
 - a. contra the teaching of Rome that justification is determined by both faith and good works, or by faith *in* the good works defined by the church as the means of justification (**i.e.** sacraments)
 1. **material principle** = the chief element of struggle between the reformers and the church
 - b. contra the belief by many (traditional) Baptists that faith is simply a profession of belief substantiated by specific examples of “faithfulness” (**i.e.** baptism, church attendance, etc.)
4. **solus Christus** = that it is entirely and *only the completed work of Christ* through which we stand justified before God – the basis of our justification is *Christ’s work*, not any cooperation on our part
 - a. contra the teaching of Rome that Christ’s work is never completed, and that faith is placed in the word of the church who “promises” on behalf of God to complete it in us (**i.e.** the Mass)
 - b. contra the belief by many (semi-Pelagian) Baptists that the work of Christ simply makes us “savable” and that our cooperation with Christ’s work is necessary to complete it
5. **soli deo Gloria** = that it is entirely and *only to the glory of God* that our justification has its purpose – that our justification is intended to bring glory only to God and not to us
 - a. contra the teaching of Rome that the glory of salvation is granted by God to the institutional church as the visible bride of Christ upon the earth – her glory is Christ’s glory
 - b. contra the belief by many (misinformed) Baptists that the purpose of salvation is not to “get us to heaven,” but to accomplish the glory of God through all that he has preordained to do

c. prioritizing the Five Solas

1. it is this last sola that becomes the driving **purpose** of the Reformation, reformed theology, and the church that prioritizes a reformed theology at its core

III. The Place of the Glory of God (Ephesians 3:20-21)

Content

a. the definition of this great doxology

1. doxology (*doxa* + *logos*) = to articulate praise to God; to give glory to God as a response to a deep and abiding understanding of things revealed; to break forth in reverential praise
2. here, Paul ends his discussion and prayer of the mystery being revealed to the Ephesians (*i.e.* the great cosmic drama of God's purposes being played out in time and space) with a great **shout of praise** to God for what he is accomplishing through it

b. the substance of this great doxology

1. "*able to do more than we can ask or imagine*" (v. 20) = that what God is doing (in his decree) is far greater than anything that we can truly imagine or even ask for God to do (in us or others)
 - a. because we do not naturally understand the revelation given to us in Scripture
 - b. because we do not naturally choose to seek out our Creator in our sinfully dead state
 - c. because we do not naturally have an ability to trust our Creator in eternal matters
 - d. because we do not naturally know all that Christ's life and death have actually accomplished
 - e. because the plans of God, his working in all of redemptive history to save a people, is beyond our comprehension
2. "*in the church*" and "*in Christ Jesus*" (v. 21) = that what the triune God is doing (in his decree) is glorifying himself through the church (as the instrument) and in Christ Jesus (as the object)
 - a. the glory of God is *ultimately* being given to the Son – he is the object of all glory
 - b. the glory of God is *primarily* being displayed by the church – it is the means of his glory

c. the value of this great doxology

1. the glory of God was the material purpose of the Reformation – the ultimate goal of God in leading a reformation of the church was to turn the church back to glorifying him rather than itself
2. the glory of God is the material purpose of reformed theology – the ultimate goal of our belief system should be to point away from ourselves to the glory of the triune God
3. the glory of God is the material purpose of reformed churches – the ultimate goal of our gathering is to point all men to the glory of Christ, to call them to a radical faith in him, and to live for his glory