

## The Reformation: Rediscovering the Good News

### What is 'Reformational' or 'Reformed' Theology?

- Definition: All of life lived according to the Word of God, by the grace of God, through faith in the Son of God, united by the Spirit of God, to magnify and enjoy God.
- Big Ideas: God rules and controls all things in creation, salvation, and history (*the sovereignty of God*)  
The Bible is a single, unfolding story of God's saving promises to man (*covenant theology*)

### Today

- What was the Protestant Reformation? What were the key events?
- What were the five key teachings (re)discovered during the Protestant Reformation?
- What are the "five points of Calvinism" associated with a later period of the Reformation?

### The Protestant Reformation

- The Protestant Reformation was a period of time (AD 1517-1618) in which foundational truths of the gospel of Jesus Christ were rediscovered, celebrated, and spread – beginning in Europe. These truths exposed many errors that had accumulated in the Roman Catholic Church.
- The early Reformers hoped that the Roman Catholic Church would repent of these errors and return to more biblical teachings. In the end, however, Protestants were forced to separate into new denominations.
- Although there are several famous leaders associated with the Reformation, the movement would have never succeeded apart from the many anonymous men and women whose lives were changed by the rediscovery of the good news of the gospel – and who consequently supported the leaders at great risk.

### Key Events of the Reformation<sup>1</sup>

- 1516 – Roman Catholic scholar, Desiderius Erasmus, publishes a Greek-Latin New Testament
- 1517 – Martin Luther nails his *Ninety-Five Theses* to the door of the Wittenberg Castle Church
- 1518 – Martin Bucer witnesses Martin Luther debate at Heidelberg, becomes a Reformer  
– Bucer later rediscovers the Bible's teaching that churches should be governed by elders
- 1534 – Martin Luther publishes the 1<sup>st</sup> complete German translation of the Bible  
– Luther's efforts pioneer the movement to produce 'vernacular' translations of the Bible
- 1539 – John Calvin moves to Strasbourg, studies and works with Martin Bucer  
– Calvin begins to gather, analyze, and write down Reformation teaching...
- 1541 – John Calvin returns to lead the Reformation movement in Geneva
- 1559-60 – John Calvin publishes the final editions of his book, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*
- 1560 – John Knox leads the Scottish Parliament to adopt the Reformational *Scots Confession*
- 1618-19 – Dutch church leaders publish the *Canons of Dort* (later called the "5 Points of Calvinism")
- 1646-47 – English & Scottish Puritans publish the *Westminster Confession* and *Catechisms*

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<sup>1</sup> There are several accessible biographies available of Martin Luther. The classic work is Roland Bainton, *Here I Stand*. A more modern treatment is Eric Metaxas, *Martin Luther*. The 2003 film, *Luther*, is also a good overview of his life. A good biography of John Calvin is Bruce Gordon, *Calvin*.

## What the Reformers Rediscovered – the Five Points of Protestantism<sup>2</sup>

- Although no single Reformer laid out all of these five points single-handedly, these five points are an accurate summary of the essence of what the Reformation rediscovered:
- Scripture Alone (*sola Scriptura*)
  - Because the Bible is the only book “breathed out by God” (2 Tim. 3:16), the Bible is the only 100% trustworthy source of information about God, man, Christ, and Christian experience.
  - By the time of Luther, Roman Catholicism had added many teachings not found in the Bible.
  - When ordered to repent of questioning these unbiblical traditions, Martin Luther famously replied:  
“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 I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. God help me. Amen. [Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise.]”
  - The Reformers were *not* against making use of earlier creeds or theological ideas, but they insisted that all such traditions *must* be judged and submitted to the Word of God.
- Grace Alone (*sola gratia*)
  - By the time of the Reformation, unbiblical traditions about purgatory and indulgences had created great confusion as to how people could be forgiven and accepted by God: are we saved 100% by the work of Jesus and the goodness of God, or do human beings make some contribution?
  - The Reformers rediscovered the truth that salvation is 100% the gift of God (Eph. 2:8-9) – and this must be the case because apart from God’s grace, human beings are 100% dead in sin (Eph. 2:1-3).
- Faith Alone (*sola fide*)
  - But how do we get God’s forgiveness and acceptance? Roman Catholicism taught (and still teaches) that it’s a process: God first *makes us right*, and after this we must *keep ourselves right*:  
Since the initiative belongs to God in the order of grace, no one can merit the initial grace of forgiveness and justification, at the beginning of conversion. Moved by the Holy Spirit and by charity, we can then merit for ourselves and for others the graces needed for our sanctification, for the increase of grace and charity, and for the attainment of eternal life.<sup>3</sup>
  - The Reformers rediscovered the truth that ‘justification’ (forgiveness and acceptance by God) is not earned by our works, but received through faith alone (Rom. 3:28, 4:5; Gal. 2:16, Eph. 2:8-9). God *declares us right once and for all* because we are covered by what Jesus had done (‘justification’), and then God *makes us right bit by bit* as the Holy Spirit lives in us (‘sanctification’).<sup>4</sup>
- Christ Alone (*solus Christus*)
  - Through an elaborate system of sacramental rituals and prayers to saints, Roman Catholicism taught people to trust the Roman Catholic Church for salvation – even teaching people that the Pope had the authority to reduce the amount of time that Christians spent in purgatory after death.
  - The Reformers rediscovered the truth that Jesus is the only high priest and mediator – person who stands between – God and man (1 Tim. 2:5).
- To the Glory of God Alone (*soli Deo gloria*)
  - Having rediscovered the God-centeredness of salvation, the Reformers reminded their congregations that God-centeredness was the purpose of all of life (Ps. 73:25-28, 1 Cor. 10:31, Rom. 11:36).
  - As the first Q&A of the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* later stated: “Man’s chief end [purpose] is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.”

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<sup>2</sup> For more information, see Keith Mathison, “The Five Solas,” <https://reformationbiblecollege.org/blog/the-five-solas>.

<sup>3</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed (Washington, DC: US Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2019), #2010.

<sup>4</sup> We will come back to this distinction next week!

### Digging Deeper – the Five Points of ‘Calvinism’ (TULIP)

- First published as the *Canons of Dort* by a Dutch church council held in the city of Dordrecht, these five teachings on sin and salvation were simplified and popularized as the “Five Points of Calvinism”:
- **T**otal Depravity/Inability
  - We are conceived in sin (Ps. 51:5), Sin infects every aspect of our being, from the subatomic particles of our physical bodies to the smallest desires of our hearts (Jer. 17:9) and the thoughts of our minds (Gen. 6:5).
  - This doesn’t mean we are as bad as we could be, but rather than no part of us is un-poisoned! Because of this, until God changes our hearts, human beings are spiritually dead (Eph. 2:1-3). As a friend of mine once put it, “All that a dead man can do... is stink.”
- **U**nconditional Election (‘Predestination’)
  - Unless God intervenes unilaterally, the entire human race will face death in this life and judgment forever. But the Bible teaches that God has chosen to save some (Rom. 8:28-30, Eph. 1:3-6).
  - This definitely raises some difficult questions, philosophically – as even the apostle Paul was willing to acknowledge (Rom. 9:6-24). But it is the clear teaching of the New Testament, going back to the Gospels themselves, where Jesus said, “All that the Father gives me will come to me... No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him... no one can come to me unless it is granted to him by the Father,” (Jn. 6:37, 44, 65).
- **L**imited Atonement
  - The work of Jesus is of *infinite value*, which is why he can give his life as a ransom for many (Mk. 10:45). However, it is of *limited application* – as Jesus himself said: “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him... I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word... I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours.” (Jn. 17:1-2, 6, 9).
  - Although controversial, this truth is important for honoring the character and justice of God. The Bible is very clear that Jesus died as a *substitute* for sinners (2 Cor. 5:21, 1 Pet. 3:18). If Jesus were the substitute for *all* men, but then some of those men still go to hell... then they would be repaying a debt that Jesus had already paid! That would not be justice! The logical conclusion we must draw is that Jesus did *not* die as a substitute for all men, but only for those whom the Father chose.
- **I**rresistible Grace
  - All those whom the Father chooses will come to Jesus (Jn. 6:37), because it is God himself who draws them to come (Jn. 6:44, 65). God calls us to faith (Gal. 1:15) by an act of spiritual resurrection – giving us new hearts that believe in Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:4-5; Titus 3:4-7).
- **P**erseverance of the Saints
  - Having done all this to save us, God is never going to let us fall away. Jesus said, “I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand,” (Jn. 10:28). Paul assures the Philippian Christians, “he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ,” (Phil. 1:6; see also Rom. 8:28-30). Peter also addresses believers as those “who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time,” (1 Pet. 1:5).
- Although listed as five points, these truths are really a pyramid: if **T** is true, **ULIP** must also be true!