

The Verse That Changed The World

What Is The Reformed Faith?

By W. J. Mencarow

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Bible Text: Romans 1:17; Ephesians 2:8-9

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Reformation Church

317 S. Sidney Baker, PMB 304
Kerrville, TX 78028

Website: www.reformationpres.com

Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/reformation

We are reading. Our passage is Romans chapter one beginning in verse 16.

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for 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.¹

Civilization as we know it began a few minutes before noon on October 31, 1517. Now that assertion is made by Dr. John Robbins in his work *Civilization and the Protestant Reformation* and it is true. On that day an obscure Catholic priest—that was all they had were Catholics, as you know—and obscure Catholic priest in the small town of Wittenberg, Germany by the name of Dr. Martin Luther posted 95 theological issues on the church door for debate. He wanted debate on these issues. These 95 issues are called the 95 theses, accused the Roman Catholic Church, basically of a variety of heresies although Luther, that was not Luther's intention to attack the church. He wanted to make the church more biblical.

That action turned the world upside down. Or I would contend it turned it right side up. It is no exaggeration to say that individual liberty, political freedom, constitutional representative government, free elections, the free market, protection of private property and many, many more things spring from what Martin Luther did on October 31, 1517.

Now what caused this priest Luther to do what he did was the way, particularly, the Vatican was raising money, especially to complete Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome. The pope and his representatives were telling people that the more money they gave, the more their sins would be forgiven both for themselves and for their dead loved ones who were suffering in purgatory.

As you know, Romanism teaches that when you die, as if you would die outside the Roman Catholic Church, you will go to hell. And they recently reaffirmed that in very nice language, but they reaffirmed that. And they say that if you die as a communicant in

¹ Romans 1:17-18.

the Roman Church you will not go to heaven immediately, you will go to a place called purgatory.

Now don't try to look in your concordance under purgatory. You won't find that word. The doctrine of purgatory, in fact, comes a book that is outside the Bible, an apocryphal book. And that is what they quote, Maccabees. But in any event they believe that you have to go to this place called purgatory to get your sins burned off of you. And despite what they say today, their writers have said for centuries that purgatory and hell are the same. The only difference is the extent of time that you spend there. But the flames that its famous quote... the flame that... by a Roman theologian, the flames of hell are no hotter than the flames of purgatory.

So what the church was doing is saying if you gave money, you can get your sins, many of your sins forgiven. You will spend less time in purgatory and if you give more money and say, "Well, I want my grandmother to get out of purgatory earlier," well, give some more money and we will... the pope will make sure that happens.

Those are called and still called by the Vatican indulgences. And when I was going to the Roman Catholic Church growing up and you could ... you were told that if you say so many prayers you will get so many indulgences, or if you do so many good works, you will get 500 days of indulgences or 200 days of indulgences or seven years of indulgences, whatever the amount maybe for the particular things.

The most infamous of the pope's fundraisers at the time of Martin Luther was a man by the name friar John Tetzel. His constant refrain was, quote, "As soon as a coin in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs."

He would shout to people, "Indulgences are the most precious and the most noble of God's gifts. Come and I will give you letters, all properly sealed by which even the sins that you intend to commit may be pardoned. But more than this, indulgences avail not only for the living, but for the dead. Priests, noble, merchant, wife, youth, maiden, do you not hear your parents and your other friends who are dead and who cry from the bottom of the abyss, 'We are suffering horrible torments.' A trifling alms will deliver us. You can give it and you will not'?"

Tetzel said that forgiveness for witchcraft would cost two ducats. For polygamy that would cost six ducats, for murder eight ducats, et cetera. And the pope and his representatives and other people, too, some members of the civil government, the emperors and such, raised untold sums by telling people that God's mercy could be bought.

And Martin Luther knew better. He knew that salvation is a free gift from God. You can't buy it with money and you can't buy it with good works. And his 95 propositions, his 95 theses—you ought to read them some time—questioned all this practice of indulgences, of selling God's favor for forgiveness of sins for money.

Well, the controversy that broke loose with the publication of his 95 theses placed even more pressure on Luther to study the Bible because the people in the Roman church were attacking him. The pope was attacking him and the cardinals and bishops and other priests and theologians were all attacking him.

He said, "Well, I better study the Bible more so I know how to answer their attacks, because they are making very... some of them are making very clever arguments."

So he studied the Bible. And that convinced him that the Roman faith had lost sight of several central truths, just not just indulgences. So to Luther the most important of these truths that he discovered in the Bible was the doctrine that brought him peace with God.

It wasn't just about indulgences after the 95 theses.

Luther came to this understanding that eventually brought him peace through tremendous agony of soul. He had been an obedient monk. He was faithful to Rome. He did good works to earn God's favor. You know, he helped other people. Yet peace with God had escaped him. He devoted himself to long fastings. He spent long hours in prayer. He went on these long difficult pilgrimages to holy places. He beat himself. He whipped himself trying to be more Christ like. Christ suffered, so I will suffer like Christ. And he was in constant confession of sins, both privately and going to a confessor, another priest and confessing sins and receiving absolution and receiving penances that he had to do to be absolved of his sins.

But the more he tried to do for God, he thought to himself the more aware he became of his sinfulness.

Isn't that true always? The more we study the Bible and realize how we are to live, the more we are aware of our sinfulness.

See, Luther was trying to answer for himself the question that people have struggled with since time began. How can I be right with God? I can see that I don't live perfectly. How can I be right with God? I am a sinner.

See, Luther was tormented by realizing he sinned all the time, that he could never live as he should, that is, perfectly as Christ commanded.

Please look at Matthew chapter five. In Matthew five begin in verse 43 Christ said:

Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye

love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same?²

And the verse I want to concentrate on here is:

“Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.”³

See, Luther would read that and say, “Well, how can I be perfect?”

And that is what we all do, of course. How can you be perfect and yet we are commanded by Christ to be perfect. He doesn't say, “Just do the best you can and that will be fine with God. You know, as long as you say to God when you die, ‘Well, I tried my best,’ God will let you into heaven.”

It doesn't say that. That is not the Bible. It is be perfect. Be perfect. And that is what we are commanded to be. We are commanded to be perfect.

And when Luther went to confession and received forgiveness from the priest, because that is a big belief that a priest can forgive you of your sin, Luther would be back in a few minutes into the confessional chamber and he would tell the priest, “Well, I had an impure thought when I left the church. So I came back to confess that.”

He was going crazy. He was in perpetual torment until he read in Romans 1:17:

“The just shall live by faith.”⁴

And that was... that became his life verse.

“The just shall live by faith.”⁵

And in Romans 3:28:

“... a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.”⁶

You are justified by faith apart from good works and apart from how much money you give to the church, et cetera.

See, Rome denied this, but Luther realized it was plain in the Bible. Remember I told you how Luther discovered the Bible. He discovered the Bible in the library of his monastery chained to the wall. There was one Bible and it was written in Latin so unless

² Matthew 5:43-46.

³ Mathew 5:48.

⁴ Romans 1:17.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Romans 3:28.

you studied Latin and very few, certainly no commoners ever studied Latin, nobody could read the Bible except a few people that might be interested that have been trained in Latin and were members of the church and there were very few of those and very few that were interested in reading the Bible. So that was chained to the wall.

But Luther read it and realized it was plain in the Bible that a man is justified by faith, not by works as Rome claimed.

Of course, Ephesians 2:8-9:

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.⁷

See, Luther knew that the Bible teaches that salvation comes through the righteousness of Christ alone, through faith in him alone. And if theologians said otherwise, if church counsels said otherwise, if popes said otherwise Luther said, "Well, they are in error. They are wrong."

Well, you didn't say that. You just didn't say that.

See, Luther knew that Rome by teaching salvation could be bought by money and by good works was sending people to hell. They weren't preaching faith in Christ alone. So Rome knew that if people believed Luther, their source of great wealth would dry up, wouldn't it?

So Luther was condemned. Luther was a Roman priest yet he was condemned.

Luther began to write books, to translate the Bible into the common language, German, for his country. And what happened? Rome and the civil government which was in the pocket of Rome, put him on trial and ordered him to retract his teachings.

Now Luther knew that refusing to retract he went to the trial, but he knew refusing to retract his teachings could mean his banishment. It could mean he would go to jail and it could possibly mean he would be executed. He knew that. But when they insisted he recant, what did he say? Famous words.

"Unless I am convinced by proofs from Scriptures or by plain and clear reasons and arguments. I can and will not retract for it is neither safe nor wise to do anything against conscience. Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me. Amen."

And he was let go, but still condemned and there is a long story about how he was protected by his ... the elector and protected and that is when he had the opportunity to do a lot of writing after that. They could never get him after that.

But by translating the Bible so anyone could read it, Luther freed the German people

⁷ Ephesians 2:8-9.

form the tyranny of Rome. They could now compare with priests said to what God said, the Bible and see how far Rome was from the truth of the Bible.

Now this idea that the Bible was the written constitution of the Church, limiting the power and authority of the leaders, that idea carried over into the idea that a nation could have a written constitution. They hadn't had one before. Limiting the power and authority of the nation's leaders.

See there is a direct connection of the Reformation principle of *sola Scriptura* the Scripture alone and the American idea of the written constitution as the supreme law of the nation. Just as the Bible is the supreme law of the Church, the national constitution is the supreme law, under God, of course, of the nation.

So Luther argued, that Christians were free from the arbitrary control of either the Church or the state when they acted against God's Word. When the state or the Church acts against God's Word, Christians were free from that control.

He wrote, quote, "It is with the Word that we must fight, by the Word must we overthrow and destroy what has been set up by violence. I will not make use of force against this superstitious and unbelieving. No one must be constrained. Liberty is they very essence of faith. I will preach, discuss and write, but I will constrain none for faith is a voluntary act. I have stood up against the pope, indulgences and papists, but without violence or tumult. I put forward God's Word. I preached and wrote. This was all I did. The Word alone did all. If I had wished to appeal the force, the whole of Germany would perhaps have been deluged with blood," unquote.

See, democracy, not democracy, representative government, constitutionalism and a republican government with a small R, a republic... we are a republic, not a democracy. Religious liberty, they were some of the social consequences as mentioned at the beginning. Political liberty, freedoms, private property, et cetera, they were not the only social consequences of the Reformation, of the Protestant Reformation. They were the beginning of a revolution that has implications for us 500 years later.

Harold Burman of Emory University has said, quote, or written, quote, "The key to the renewal of law in the west from the 16th century on was the Protestant concept of the power of the individual by God's grace to change nature and to change new social relations through the exercise of his will. The Protestant concept of the individual became central to the development of the modern law of property and contract."

What he is saying is that it is the Protestant idea from the Bible that the culture can be changed, whereas before people just were drones, believing whatever. They didn't have God's Word. They believed whatever the priest told them. They believed whatever the government said they had to do. And that all changed after the Reformation.

So this idea long with Luther's idea that all callings, all labor, not just the labor of monks and of nuns and priests could be done to the glory of God. All callings, all vocations, all

occupations could be done to the glory of God. That... Luther's... Luther made that very clear. That led to the development of the free market economy. A free society and a free market were the political and the economic expressions of the religious idea of the Reformation.

See, Capitalism was the economic practice, the outgrowth of which Christianity, biblical Christianity was the theory.

So John Calvin was younger than Luther, born later, not too much later, but a little bit later. And Calvin took Luther's concepts and he put them, systemized them. He wrote them up in a systematic way so people... and compared them Scripture and brought in Scripture to make the whole idea understandable. Luther was not as focused as Calvin was.

The 17th century Calvinists laid the foundations for both English and American civil rights and liberties, freedom of speech, freedom of press, freedom of religion, privilege against self incrimination, our principles of jurisprudence, the independence of juries, *habeas corpus*, all of these liberties.

The 19th century German historian Leopold Van Ranke referred to Calvin as, quote, "the virtual founder of America." He says, "If I were to be asked who is the founder of America, you know, many people say George Washington, Thomas Jefferson." He says, "I think John Calvin is the founder of America, the virtual founder of America."

Max Weber the German ... the famous German sociologist wrote a book in 1905 called *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, a very, very famous book. I studied it in college. In which he argued that Capitalism historically emerged in Protestant countries. If you look at that... look at the map of the world. If you know anything about their economies, which are the countries that had the most vigorous economy? What was their religion historically? It was Protestantism. The Catholic countries have moribund economies as a rule.

Well, Max Weber said, "Capitalism historically emerged in Protestant countries because Protestantism, if you call it for a short term, Biblicalism, inculcated those virtues that led to the development of Capitalism, hard work, honesty, frugality, thrift, punctuality. And these virtues, coupled with the idea that a calling is done to God's glory, let us work hardy as for God rather than for men, provided the impetus which ended serfdom, ended the feudal system and established a free political and economic order."

So the theology and values of the Bible rediscovered by the Protestant reformers in the 16th century had been the principle ideas creating what we know of as western civilization.

Now Luther did not go out and say, "I am going to start a new civilization." His point... what he wanted to do was to proclaim the righteousness of God in Jesus Christ. So his

life was dedicated to a far more important activity than building an earthly city. Western civilization was an unintended consequence, a byproduct of his faithfulness to the Bible.

The Reformation put the kingdom of God first, not the kingdom of man or the kingdom of the church. The results were just as Christ said they would be.

Would you turn to Matthew 25 please?

Beginning at verse six.

These are the results of the Protestant Reformation.

Matthew 25. Missed it. I am sorry. Matthew six. Well, I am going to read it to you. I don't have the bright sight, you know, but... Ok, just listen then. Don't pay attention to that.

These are the results of the Protestant Reformation. When Jesus said:

Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.⁸

And that is what Luther did. He sought first the kingdom of God.

Change of Voice:

It is 6:25.

Change of Voice:

Oh, there you go. Thank you.

⁸ Mathew 6:25-33.

“But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.”⁹

And that is what Luther did. He sought first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and what happened to our world? All these things were added unto it. All this economic and political freedom, western civilization was added to it because one man sought first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.

Justification by faith, the righteousness of God imputed to sinners, justification by faith is the only foundation of eternal salvation and the only self foundation of earthly, of biblical earthly civilization of western civilization.

The reformers sought first the kingdom of God and all these things, the things that we call today western civilization were added to them and to us.

Let's pray.

Father, indeed, we thank thee, Lord, for the blessings of what has come out of what Martin Luther did and what our forefathers did and the men before him, Father, the Wycliffe, John Wycliffe and Huss, Jerome of Prague and the Waldensians and all of the proto reformers, the pre reformers, Father, and those who came during Luther's time, Calvin and Zwingli and Bucer and, Father, and all the others who have come later to the Church. Father, thou hast kept the remnant alive. Thou hast grown thy Church and we thank thee today, Father, for we would not know what to do, Father, we could be living in feudalism were it not for the fact that thou brought these men and women to revive the teachings of the Scriptures. So we thank thee, Father, for such great salvation.

Our prayer requests, Father, are many this morning. Father, we continue to pray for [?] father that he might be... that thou would continue to cure him, Father, for Maria Jose and Sophie, for Rachel and Keith. We thank thee, Lord, for the joyous news. We thank thee, Father, for the joyous news of [?] and [?] as well, Father. We ask thy blessings upon this joyous news, for Frank's job interview, Lord. Father, please give Frank that job. Father, we pray for little Grace that she would continue in good health, Father. Lord, we continue to pray for Bernice Curtis and her health problems, Father, and particularly her faith, Father. Continue to strengthen it. For Benjamin and James and all of our troops, Father, in harm's way. For Julie's brother David, for his health problems, Father, would Nathan James that he would have increased faith, Father. We continue to pray for Mrs. Brown and her cancer, for ... we thank thee for Susan's healing, Father, and we ask continually that abundance of healing upon her foot. Again, Father, give Crystal more faith, Lord. We ask that... We pray, Father, we continue to pray for Jack and Elena Einstein that Elena's health problems would be lifted from her, Father, and that they could get to church on more of a regular basis, Father, even though they have been going quite regularly. And we ask, Father, that thou would sell their farm in Virginia. For Weldon Dearing in Newfoundland and his recovery. We thank thee, Lord, and continued prayer for the liver condition of his son's Tyson and Mason. For their

⁹ Matthew 6:33.

church, for Liberty and Grace Reformed Church, for East Texas Reformed Fellowship we continue to pray that they would be encouraged and not be discouraged at the small size of their congregation, Father, but focus on the growing in grace and knowledge of the Lord that thou hast given them. We pray for Jim's cousin Holly, for her kidney disease. We praise thee for Lynn Bennett and her free... her diagnosis that she is free from cancer, Father. For [?] in these Texas Reformed Fellowship for their increase and service to the Lord and for her auto dealership business, Father, please prosper it that she may be give even more glory to thee, Father. Again, for Maureen and Tom [?], for Phil Webb, Sr. and his cancer, Father, we continue to pray. Lord, we continue to... we also pray for Cliff who is the son of the woman who takes care of our meeting room here at the hotel, Father, that he would find a job that would be the right job for him, Father. Father, we thank thee for rains that thou hast given us. Continue to bless us with moisture, Father. And as we get together, Father, for fellowship and for learning we ask that thou would continue to bless us in this fellowship, Father. Knit our hearts together, Father. Give us more of a sense of unity and of purpose. We thank thee for bringing us together, Lord, and continue to bless us in our various callings because every one of our callings, whether it is inside the home or outside, is to be done to the glory of God. We are to work heartily as to the Lord rather than for men, Father. For it is in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Psalm 31e. We are going to [?].

Change of Voice:

Psalm 31 and tune E. This [?] the first eight verses of the psalm.

And a few comments from John Brown.

To the chief musician a psalm of David.

Observe here David's solemn professions of his dependence upon God and his prayers for support and deliverance.

While I sing let me be deeply affected with my sores, my maladies and troubles. And cast all my burdens on the Lord. In the assured faith that he is God, even my God, let me admire his gracious thoughts, words and deeds towards me and commit myself wholly to his care and protection.

Keith, may we have the tune?

[singing]

Thank you. Please rise. Three stanzas to God's glory.

[singing]

Change of Voice:

And receive the benediction.

And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it.¹⁰

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.

A brief announcement.

¹⁰ 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24.