

## Why All the Fuss About the Lutheran Reformation?

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Why all the fuss about the Lutheran Reformation? Because it was a time when, by God's grace, essential teachings of the Bible were reasserted, returning Christianity to the doctrine that Christ taught.

### What are we celebrating when we celebrate the Lutheran Reformation?



The rediscovery of the Biblical Gospel: that a sinner is justified by grace through faith apart from the works of the Law (see Romans 3:21-28; Galatians 2:16-21; Ephesians 2:8-9). And, the relocation of the Gospel as the central focus of Christianity.

It is a 16th century event that took place, primarily during the life of Luther (especially 1517-1546). It was the reforming of the Church's doctrine and practice by this Gospel.

Thus, it was a reforming of doctrine more than a reforming of life; or it was a reforming of a corrupt doctrine more than a reforming of corrupt life.

It stressed the change of an outward situation more than the change of our inward condition. Through Christ our outward relationship with God is changed; though inward renewal follows to varying degrees, this is not the main emphasis. Later reforming and renewal movements put the emphasis on the inward change rather than the outward change, on man's vows, rededications, promises, rather than on God's promises and dedication in Christ. They stressed sanctification more than justification. And this as early as Andreas Karlstadt, the Anabaptists, the Spiritualists, and to a lesser extent Zwingli, Calvin, and Knox.

The Lutheran Reformation also involved a major shift in authority, from pope or councils to Scripture. Scripture went from being *an* authority in the Church to *the* authority. Scripture became the highest court of appeals, whereas the papacy (for most) and councils (for some) had been the highest authority. Leipzig debate, 1519. Councils, creeds, and church fathers, remained important for Luther, but only insofar as they agreed with the Gospel and Scripture. It was Luther's high view of Scripture that led him to translate the Bible into German.

The Biblical teaching of Jesus Christ was reasserted. Christ was once again emphasized as Savior not Law-Giver, as Savior, not Helper toward salvation, as Savior not Judge. The Biblical teaching of Jesus Christ's death was once again reasserted. Christ's death on the cross was presented by Luther and the Reformers as sufficient; sufficient to forgive ALL sin and ALL guilt, both original sin and actual sin, both eternal punishment and temporal punishment, both sins committed beforehand and sins not yet committed. Therefore no other helpers were needed: whether Mary or saint or relic or indulgence. Neither was purgatory needed anymore. What



need of a place of additional cleansing if Christ's death has cleansed those who believe in Him of ALL sins, guilt, and punishment?

The Biblical teaching of grace was reasserted. Grace was no longer presented as an infused quality or *habitus* (alla Aquinas from Aristotle) that enabled a person to work out their salvation within the Church's sacramental system. Grace was accurately presented as the undeserved favor of God. To say that we are saved by grace means that God offers salvation, justification, forgiveness, heaven, as a gift, paid for by the suffering and death of Jesus Christ. This left no room for man's works and achievements. God offers our salvation as a free gift. We cannot earn it by our works and achievements. Grace alone.

The Biblical teaching of faith was reasserted. No longer a virtue or work, faith became confidence in God's Gospel promise. Faith is not a work but the source of good works, though Luther could also speak of faith as the highest work (in the same sense of John 6). The Church of the Middle Ages had taught that faith saves only if it is made complete by good works. Luther reasserted the Biblical teaching of faith, that faith saves apart from good works. Faith is that which receives the offered gift of forgiveness through Jesus Christ. It is the empty hand that takes the gift. It is the confidence that says, "Yes, I believe that Jesus Christ suffered and died for me; therefore I believe the Gospel promise that I am completely forgiven and heaven is mine." Faith alone saves. Faith plus nothing saves.

## **The Lutheran Reformation, as it proclaimed the Gospel of Jesus Christ, moved people...**



From uncertainty and insecurity to certainty and security in Christ. The Christian was no longer intentionally strung out between hope and fear, but through faith in the Gospel now lived in hope and joy. The Christian was now certain that he would enter heaven when he died.

From a wholly self-centered, centrifugal life devoted to saving oneself by works to a holy other-centered, centripetal life devoted to saving and loving others. Prior to the Reformation, people put their energy into doing works in order to save themselves. Everything was done to benefit "me." Once it became clear that Christ had already done everything necessary to save them, and that they were saved, Christians were set free to do works to benefit others, not themselves.

From a self-worth based on achievement and social status to a self-worth based on identity, our new identity through Jesus Christ.

From a view of the sacraments (Baptism, Lord's Supper, and Absolution) which sees them as man's work for God, to a view which rightly sees them as God's work for man.

From a view of the Christian which sees him as sinner OR saint to a view of the Christian which sees him as sinner AND saint at the same time (*simul iustus et peccator*).

From a very negative view of marriage and the family to a very positive and Biblically based view.

## **The Lutheran Reformation also introduced:**



The distinction between the Law and Gospel as the most important tool in interpreting the Bible, and the most important tool in properly living, teaching and preserving the Gospel. Luther came



to see that one of the major reasons that the Gospel had been obscured in his day, was because many of the beautiful Gospel sections of Scripture had been interpreted as Law.

The distinction between what is essential (tied to the Gospel) and nonessential, the former being necessary and the latter being free. Christian freedom. The late medieval Church had turned every churchly decree into an essential doctrine necessary for salvation.

The Biblical teaching that all Christians are priests before God, i.e., the priesthood of all believers. At the time this was revolutionary, since those who served as priests in the church were viewed as forming a special caste, a "spiritual estate," high above that of the common man, who formed the "temporal estate." From this arose the corollary teaching that a Christian congregation has the right and authority to call a Pastor and govern itself.

The Biblical teaching of the pastoral office as a divine position. Martin Luther's pastoral concern for the souls of the people entrusted to him, along with his personal struggle, were what drove him into the Reformation. Unsurprisingly, then, the proper training of pastors was an important focus during the Reformation.

The theology of the cross instead the theology of glory. Theology of the cross means that God is found in Christ crucified, in suffering, and in weakness. The theology of the cross means that God is a God who has chosen to hide Himself in these things. The theology of glory wants to "see" God in glorious works, prosperity, and strength. The theology of glory busies itself with works in order to raise itself to God. The theology of the cross teaches that we, through the Law and suffering, must be made to be nothing, before God through Christ can become something in us.