

REVIVING THE REFORMATION



By Andrew AUCAMP

HILLCREST
BAPTIST CHURCH
Where Truth Matters

FOREWORD

A few years ago, a pastor made an observation that the modern church was entering another “dark age,” and needed reformation, very similar to the Reformation of the sixteenth century. This comment may at first seem to be absurd. How can such a statement be true? There are plenty of Christian churches and bookshops in every major city; there is freedom of religion in most first world countries, and the average Christian family goes to church each with a Bible (in their own language) tucked under their arms. How can we be in danger of backsliding into a period similar to the dark ages?

This booklet is a serious challenge to pastors, elders and the modern church. It shows that the principles of the Reformation, which started over five hundred years ago, are being eroded in the church today. We need to understand the principles of the Reformation and how their neglect is undermining biblical Christianity and weakening the church.

The five main principles of the Reformation can be summarised as follows:

- Scripture alone (Sola Scriptura)
- By grace alone (Sola Gratia)
- Through Faith alone (Sola Fide)
- In Christ alone (Solus Christus)
- To God’s glory alone (Soli Deo Gloria)

Each of these principles will be explained, and their relevance for the modern church highlighted.

Copyright © 2017, CA Aucamp

Permission is granted for this book to be printed or copied, provided it is done in full, the author is acknowledged, and it is on a non- profit basis.

CONTENTS

Chapter 1: Are we Bible based?	1
Chapter 2: What does it mean to be dead in sin?	9
Chapter 3: What is faith?	13
Chapter 4: The supremacy and exclusivity of Christ	17
Chapter 5: To God be the glory	21

CHAPTER 1

ARE WE BIBLE BASED?

Reformation principle: Scripture alone

This first principle states that Scripture alone is the final authority of the church, upon which all doctrine and practice is to be derived and established.

To modern man, this principle may seem dubious. The Bible was written almost two thousand years ago. Since it was written, massive strides have been made in science, medicine and technology. There has been rapid growth of knowledge over the last few hundred years in every discipline of learning. Don't we live in a vastly different world as to when the Bible was written? How can the Bible still be relevant, and how can it still be the only final authority for the church?

The answer lies in the fact that the Bible is the very word of God. Second Timothy 3:16 indicates that Scripture is inspired, or, more literally, God-breathed. The picture is one of Scripture (the written word) coming directly out of the mouth of God. In other words, Scripture is the very word of God.

However, it is also clear that Scripture was the result of human activity. The authors of Scripture used their own styles and vocabulary when they wrote the various books and letters. These two activities, the human and the divine, came together to give us an understanding of how inspiration functioned. We are given a picture of how human and divine processes came together in 2 Peter 1:21:

For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

This verse tells us that "men spoke." In other words, human instruments were used for revelation. However, these men were carried along by the Holy Spirit. The picture is one of a ship being carried by the sea, hence these men

spoke from God. The result was that specific, chosen human instruments spoke the very word of God to the people. When these words were written down they became Scripture.

This process of inspiration has been termed “confluence”, whereby the writers of Scripture consciously wrote in their own styles and with their own vocabulary, yet at the same time God so influenced them by His Spirit that what they produced was the very word of God, the final and absolute inerrant truth. God positively guided their thoughts and hearts to record truth, and also kept them from error. The Scriptures of the Old and New Testament are therefore the very word of God, and this by definition means they carry divine authority for the church.

Two questions still remain, however.

Question one: The Bible is outdated, and so how can it possibly speak to the challenges the church and Christians face in the modern age?

Two responses can be given to this objection. Firstly, Scripture claims to be completely sufficient for the task of equipping the man of God with everything he needs for every good work (2 Tim. 3:15-16). It does so by giving specific instructions, but also by giving general principles that can be applied to any situation that may arise in any age.

Secondly, God’s clear intention was for His word to be written down for future generations (e.g. Deut. 17:19-20, Rom. 15:4), indicating the abiding relevance of the word of God. Even the apostles anticipated that their writings would remain relevant and sufficient for the church after their departure (2 Pet. 1:15-20). God is all wise, and when he breathed out the Scriptures, He knew what He was doing!

It needs to be noted, however, that the sufficiency of Scripture only relates to its main purpose: to reveal God, His eternal plan of redemption and His will for His people. Scripture was not intended to be a scientific textbook, nor a manual of business economics or computer science. In this sense the sufficiency of Scripture must be qualified or restricted to the main purpose

for which Scripture was given. Yet this qualification must be properly understood and not restricted too narrowly. The Scriptures still provide the spiritual, moral and ethical principles from which we can engage in every human endeavour, including commerce, science and business. It is therefore completely sufficient for all believers in every age to live a godly life and to know God's will.

Question two: The Bible is a difficult book to understand, and so does the church not need someone in authority (such as a Pope, church council or “anointed” Pastor) to interpret the Bible for Christians and local churches?

While it is true that Scripture itself admits that some things are hard to understand (2 Pet. 3:16), the Bible is given to make the simple wise (Ps. 19:7; Ps. 119:130). Moreover, the basic truths of the Bible can be understood by children (2 Tim. 3:15). All Israel was to teach the Scriptures to their children (Deut. 6:6-8), implying that all parents could understand and teach the Bible and that even children could grasp the truths therein.

If the church was reliant on specially appointed people to interpret the Bible for the average Christian, those specially appointed people would in practice become the authority of the Church. But God, in His wisdom, has made His word to be clear in its main teachings, and also given believers His Holy Spirit to rightly understand the Bible (1 Cor. 2:12-13).

Worrying trends in the modern church

There are some worrying trends in the modern church that undermine the sufficiency and authority of the Bible.

Trend 1: The claim of continued, direct divine revelation

The existence of continued, direct revelation (such as tongues and prophecy) must undermine the sufficiency of Scripture. Firstly, it means that what God said in the Bible is “not enough” for the church, because additional revelation is required. In other words, the Bible is not sufficient. Secondly, generally speaking, churches that practice tongues and prophecy practically

end up giving much more attention to the “new” revelation than to what the Bible says. This must be so, because the “new” prophecy must be more relevant for the church than something that is two thousand years old (or else why is it being given?). The Bible then tends to be neglected. This is not always the case, but certainly very common.

The only way to try to harmonise continued revelation with a final and authoritative Bible is to change the definition of New Testament prophecy in the Bible. For example, Wayne Grudem, in his Systematic Theology, contends that New Testament congregational prophecy will continue for the entire church age, but distinguishes this prophecy from the infallible Old Testament prophecies, or New Testament “apostolic-prophecy”. Grudem defines New Testament prophecy as:

*“telling something that God has spontaneously
brought to mind”*

According to Grudem, this New Testament prophecy is said to be fallible, and therefore not as authoritative as Scripture. In other words, Grudem wants to say that Scripture is infallible, completely authoritative and sufficient, and at the same time that the church can have prophecy today, because that prophecy is fallible and of a different quality to that of Scripture.

The following can be said in response to this position. Firstly, it is claimed that there is evidence that New Testament prophecy was fallible. For instance, Agabus, a New Testament prophet who is said to have uttered prophecy that was not one hundred percent accurate, is often cited. However, a “pedantic” precision seems to be imposed on Agabus that is not imposed on the Old Testament prophets or Christ Himself. It has been well said that if one’s judgement is rigid enough, similar errors in Old Testament prophecy could be cited. It is true that in 1 Corinthians 14:29 prophecy had to be weighed, but the Bereans were commended for “weighing” Paul’s gospel (Acts 17:11). Was Paul’s gospel therefore fallible? Clearly not.

Secondly, it is contended that the New Testament counterparts of the Old Testament prophets are apostles, not New Testament prophets. Even if this were so, it does not of necessity make New Testament prophets to be

less inspired. For example, the fact that the revelation given to Moses was clearer than the other prophets at the time did not lessen the authority or infallibility of the other prophets (Num. 12:6-8). Why would the presence of the apostles therefore lessen the authority of New Testament prophets?

In addition, it is very problematic to have someone saying that they have a valid message from God, but there could be any number of errors or inaccuracies in the message.

Firstly, the New Testament and Paul warns of false prophets (Mk. 13:22; 1 Jn. 4:1). The question is how to distinguish a false prophet from the true? If both deliver messages containing error, there is no way to identify a false prophet, as the true prophet could also have a message with error in it. This is clearly problematic for people who believe that any true prophecy could have error in it.

Secondly, of what value is a “message” from God if any portion of the message could be wrong? As someone has pointed out, a simple message “John should marry Anne” would be difficult to evaluate. Is it true, or did the “prophet” leave out the word “not.” Or should it be “Don” that must marry Ann? Perhaps the prophet made a mistake, because “Don” sounds very much like “John?” Such a gift would be practically useless! It cannot be objected that this argument is of no value because the fact is that preaching could have error, but is still admittedly of value. Firstly, no preacher would exegetically be able to get a specialised message such as, “John must marry Anne” from a text in Scripture. Yet the prophecy today is said to be of value because it can give specific guidance on such issues. Secondly, preaching with its application can be assessed by its faithfulness to Scripture. By what criteria does one even begin to assess a “word from the Lord” that says “John must marry Anne?”

The New Testament paints a different picture to what is practiced by much of the modern church. For example, Ephesians 2:20 indicates that the entire church is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, pointing to their completely authoritative writings, judgements and utterances. Anything less cannot serve as a solid foundation. The gift of prophecy in the New Testament is expressly identified as the same gift as in the Old

Testament (Joel 2:28 with Acts 2:14-17). Agabus, a New Testament prophet, used the equivalent expression to that of the Old Testament prophets when they prophesied, namely “this is what the Holy Spirit says...” (Acts 21:11 with Exod. 16:32).

If there are genuine prophets today, then the Bible is not a closed book, and these prophecies are the very word of God, and must be added to Scripture. The fact that none of the churches practicing modern prophecy does this is an indication that they have changed the definition of Biblical prophecy.

Trend 2: Believers getting their guidance for life mainly from a “word from the Lord.”

It is also common today for Christians to say “God told me...” or to rely on “promptings of the Spirit” to determine what they should do. We believe the Holy Spirit can prompt believers to do certain things, such as an act of kindness, or to witness to someone specific. A number of cautions need to be noted, however.

Firstly, there is no real way to differentiate such promptings from our own thoughts and ideas, hence the believer should never rely on them as a foundation for Christian living. Such promptings are certainly not infallible or authoritative.

Secondly, the believers in the Bible who are said to bear fruit and to prosper in the work of the Lord, are always those who meditate on *Scripture* (or delight in it), and therefore have their thoughts permeated with Scripture (see for example, Psalm 1, and many sections of Psalm 119). *Understanding and applying Scripture is the basis for sanctified living and decision making.*

Thirdly, “promptings” must always be subject to the general principles of God’s word. The Holy Spirit will never prompt people to sin, nor to short-circuit the instructions of Scripture. For example, the Bible gives principles on what type of a person a Christian should marry. A “prompting” to marry someone specific can never mean that a Christian can then neglect to assess a potential spouse according to these Biblical principles. Unfortunately, because “promptings” are deemed by many to be authoritative, and because

of fear of “grieving the Spirit,” the Biblical principles are forsaken and people follow the promptings without consideration of what the Bible says.

It is extremely disturbing to see believers being largely ignorant of Scripture, and seeking a “word from the Lord” for guidance instead of studying and understanding the principles of Scripture. The almost complete reliance on direct promptings of the Spirit for guidance in the face of extremely poor knowledge of God’s word is a serious deviation from the principle of Scripture alone.

It is this factor that makes the statement that the modern church is in danger of entering a period similar to the dark ages valid and compelling. It is not the mere presence of a Bible on the bookshelf or under the arm that the Reformers were concerned about. The Bible needs to be studied, understood and applied by ordinary Christians and pastors as the only sufficient and infallible source of doctrine, wisdom and guidance for daily life.

Trend 3: Pastors basing their interpretation and application of Scripture on a “word from the Lord” instead of on sound principles of interpretation.

It is very common for teachers and preachers today to use a text from Scripture, but then to say that God told them to teach the following truths and application from it. This makes it then difficult to question the relevant teacher or pastor, as it is tantamount to contradicting or disobeying God.

The principle of Scripture alone means that any teaching or preaching must show that what is being taught is directly from God’s word, based on the clearly established rules and language, meaning and interpretation.

Concluding thoughts

The mere presence of Bibles in our homes and churches does not at all mean that churches and believers are Bible based. If churches and Christians are predominantly looking for new words of revelation or prompting for the basis of their ministry and lives, and consequently remain largely ignorant of what the Bible teaches, then there is reason to be concerned. A church that predominantly relies on new revelation from God, or “a word from the Lord”, for teaching and guidance fundamentally undermines the sufficiency and authority of Scripture. A church needs to be thoroughly and unashamedly Bible based! After all, it is the Holy Spirit Who authored the Scriptures for the church. It is certainly not “anti-Spirit” to emphasise the Bible as the only sure source of divine truth.

One of the marks of a healthy church is expository preaching based on the Scriptures, using the clearly established rules of interpretation. Believers who are fruitful are those who study and apply the Bible to their daily lives. Their thoughts are permeated with Scripture. When faced with decisions or temptations, they respond as their Saviour did with “It is written...” (Matt. 4:1-4).

CHAPTER 2

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE DEAD IN SIN?

Reformation principle: by grace alone

A superficial analysis of the modern church may conclude that there is surely no problem with acknowledging God's grace in salvation. The gospel is all about a Saviour who died for sinners, and this by definition means that every church that holds to the gospel acknowledges that salvation is by grace alone.

It may surprise many Christians today to know that the Reformers had a totally different understanding of the nature and depth of grace in salvation when compared to the modern church.

Icebergs and a modern view of grace

After the sinking of the Titanic, a new appreciation for icebergs swept the globe. Almost everyone now understands that only around one tenth of an iceberg juts out above the water, while most of it lurks underneath.

It is very common in the church today to portray the process of salvation as follows:

Someone hears the gospel. They decide, on the basis of their free will, whether to believe the gospel or not. Only once they have made a choice for Jesus does God's grace come into operation in their lives. They then receive the gift of salvation, which is by God's grace, through the death of Christ.

This is the common view of the extent and nature of grace in salvation.

The Reformers, as indicated before, had a different understanding of the concept of grace, and how it works in the life of a sinner. As they studied the

Scriptures, they saw that what the modern church now believes about God's grace was just the tip of the iceberg. God's grace is so much more.

The extent and nature of God's grace in salvation

The fall of man into sin had devastating consequences. All the parts of man's being became defiled:

- His heart and desires were corrupted: Ezekiel 36:26 and John 3:20.
- His mind and thoughts were perverted: Titus 1:15; Genesis 6:5.
- His will was impacted: John 5:40.

Passages such as Romans 3:10-18 vividly describe the different parts of man as wholly defiled. This serious spiritual condition must not be seen as merely a loss of innocence (so that man is now spiritually "neutral" toward God), but after the fall man has a positive bent toward evil and enmity to God (Rom. 8:7; Jn. 3:19). God's grace needs to enable man to overcome the consequences of the fall.

Taking Ephesians 2:1-3 seriously

Ephesians 2:1-3 describes man in his natural condition as being dead in sin. In other words, all people are born in this spiritual state. The language is very graphic and clear.

The state of death is one of total helplessness, inability and inactivity. Spiritual death therefore denotes a lack of all true spiritual life. Paul (and God who inspired him) could not have chosen a stronger word to describe man's desperate state. The picture is that of a spiritual corpse, very similar to a physical corpse. Just as a physical corpse cannot respond to the physical world in any sense at all, so a spiritual corpse cannot respond to true spiritual realities.

Being dead in sin, man therefore lives under the influence of the world (which is opposed to God; see 1 Jn. 2:15-16) and under the power of Satan (verse 2). In this state, man therefore fulfils his sinful desires, and is by nature a child of God's wrath (verse 3). A very tragic picture is painted of man. Man is not

basically good in his nature. He is dead in sin, and fulfils his sinful nature and is under the power of Satan.

The rest of scripture confirms and elaborates on this picture of spiritual death. First Corinthians 2:14 teaches that natural man cannot properly understand spiritual truth. It is foolishness to him. His faculties of understanding have been affected to such a degree that spiritual truth makes no sense to him. This defect is not as much intellectual as it is moral. Natural man is not spiritually neutral, but has a real bent towards sin and enmity to God, as noted above (Rom. 8:7). He cannot understand spiritual truth because he hates God and does not want to understand it. In the words of Romans 1:18-21, the truth that man knows about God from creation is deliberately suppressed and exchanged for a lie.

The consequences of spiritual death

From this state of spiritual “deadness” arises what the Reformers called “inability.” The Saviour Himself clearly taught the inability of man to repent and believe in and of himself. John 6 is most instructive and worthy of emphasis. In this passage the Lord Jesus is faced with unbelief (Jn. 6:36, 41-43). The Lord clearly spells out the inability of people by saying that they cannot come to Him unless it “has been given to them by the Father” (Jn. 6:44; 65). In other words, the Father’s intervention and drawing is required to enable people to come to Christ. God’s grace enables people to escape their spiritual blindness and slavery to sin, and to come to Christ. It can now be appreciated that God’s grace is far wider and deeper than just providing a sacrifice for sin through the crucifixion. It extends to opening the eyes of sinners so that they can believe and understand the gospel.

Does this mean that man does not make real decisions?

The fact that God must draw a sinner to Christ does not mean that unregenerated people are mere puppets or robots. Two important qualifications need to be made regarding this state of spiritual deadness and slavery. Firstly, man is still capable of civil or “relative” righteousness. Unbelievers can and do good things in the world. Yet, these acts cannot be

said to be truly spiritually good, as they are not done to God's glory out of love for Him.

Secondly, people have not lost their natural liberty to make choices. People can still make real choices based on their desires and will. The point, however, is that their desires are now sinful and evil, and so unregenerate people cannot choose that which is spiritually good unless God intervenes and grants them grace to do so.

Regeneration is therefore crucial in the whole process of salvation, as it effectually deals with man's spiritual deadness and enmity to the gospel. Regeneration can be described as receiving a spiritual ear and new disposition towards God. It is important to understand that regeneration precedes repentance and faith. This regeneration is described in Ezekiel 36:26-27 as receiving a new heart and spirit. The result of this new heart is a disposition of obedience and submission to God.

God must therefore initiate the process of salvation. He must open the heart of a person so that they can believe the gospel (see for example Acts 16:14). God must give a person a new heart so that they can respond to Christ's invitation. It is God that must grant a person repentance and faith (Philip. 1:29; 2 Tim. 2:25-26, Eph. 2:8-10).

The modern church and the world

The above discussion may seem foreign to many Christians today. How can it be that natural man cannot comprehend and choose spiritual good? Does man not have a completely free will to decide his fate for himself?

It is quite apparent that the modern church has unquestioningly accepted the world's view that man is the centre of the universe, and his will is sovereign. Any talk of mankind being enslaved and blinded by sin to the point that his will is defective is insulting and reprehensible to the pride of man. The church has unfortunately largely embraced the world's inflated view of man, rather than the Bible's truthful depiction of man as a lost, enslaved sinner who needs God's grace even to start the process of salvation. The modern church has certainly lost an appreciation for the depth and extent of God's grace in salvation.

CHAPTER 3

WHAT IS FAITH?

Reformation principle: by faith alone

The Reformers insisted that it is through faith alone that sinners can be justified before God. Our works do not justify us before God. The Reformers were equally insistent, however, on describing the type of faith that does save us.

Even a casual observer of the modern church will conclude that behaviours that would not have been tolerated in the church a few centuries or even decades ago are now widely accepted. This points to a fundamental misunderstanding that modern church has about the nature of faith. The issue is not so much that there is disagreement on the teaching that we are saved through faith alone, but rather a misunderstanding of what faith is.

Confirming the basics about justification

The dominant Old Testament and New Testament meaning of “justify” is to “declare someone righteous” in a legal sense. This is clearly evident in passages such as Deuteronomy 25:1, Proverbs 17:15, Luke 7:29, Romans 8:33. It is not possible to ascribe any other meaning to the word “justify” in these verses. Deuteronomy 25:1 is very clearly a judge issuing a judicial declaration as to the innocence or guilt of someone. In Proverbs 17:15, the abomination described is to declare a wicked person just. To make a wicked person just would be a noble act, not an abomination.

Justification has two parts to it, and can be defined as:

Justification is an instantaneous legal act of God in which He:

(i) thinks of our sins as forgiven and Christ’s righteousness belonging to us (i.e. we are constituted righteous)

(ii) declares us to be righteous in His sight.

The instrument of justification is emphasised in Romans 3:21-26. It is through faith in Christ, not by works (vs 22, 26). Faith itself is not the righteousness, as some have implied from Romans 4:3. Christ's righteousness is imputed through faith to a sinner. Paul specifically says that he received a righteousness from God. It did not come from himself, and was not man-made (Rom. 1:17; 3:24-26; Phil. 3:9).

James versus Paul?

It is important to understand that James 2:14-16 does not contradict the consistent New Testament teaching that we are justified by faith and not by works. Firstly, James uses the word justify in a slightly different sense to Paul. James uses the word justify in the sense of "demonstrating or showing someone to be righteous." James speaks of the fulfilment of Abraham's initial justification when he offered up Isaac.

Secondly, James is emphasising the type of faith that saves. It is not merely an intellectual assent to certain facts. James insists that faith is evidenced by subsequent works.

So where does repentance come in?

The New Testament also indicates that repentance is a condition of salvation. It is held out as a saving response to the gospel (Lk. 24:46-47; Acts 2:37-38; 2 Cor. 7:10).

Faith and repentance are two sides of the same coin. There is no priority between faith and repentance: we have a penitent faith and a believing repentance. It is impossible to separate the two. Repentance is essentially a turning from sin to God.

If you think about it, you cannot cast yourself upon Christ for salvation for the forgiveness of your sins without acknowledging and confessing that you are sinful and need to be saved! In the same way, you cannot repent of your sins unless you believe that God is holy and hates sin, and that Christ died to save you from your sin. Faith includes repentance, and repentance includes faith.

So what exactly is faith?

To have faith in someone essentially means to believe in them (Rom. 3:21-22). The New Testament uses a number of synonyms (or “actings” of faith) to help describe exactly what faith is. These words include

- “come” to Christ (Jn. 6:35)
- “receive” Christ (Jn. 1:12)
- “trust” in Christ (Eph. 1:12)

Trust seems the best synonym for faith. Faith obviously involves knowledge (of our sin and of Christ and His work on the cross), but until it moves to trust it is not Biblical faith. Nicodemus and King Agrippa “believed,” but were not saved (Jn. 3:2; Acts 26:27). Because faith is placed in someone (Christ), it involves abandoning reliance on self and trusting in another.

Faith is then such an appropriate instrument of salvation, because it by definition looks away from self (and any self-righteousness) to Christ and His work on the cross.

Faith and the modern church

Based on the above considerations, a few comments need to be made about the modern church.

Firstly, it is becoming increasingly common for churches to have very low expectations of professing Christians. For example, some churches have people who are professing to be Christians yet are openly unmarried and living together. Sinful behaviours are not confronted at all, and no challenge issued. Although Christians are not perfect, and do fall into sin, true faith includes repentance from sin and a turning away from previous patterns of ungodly living. The church must question someone’s “faith” if there is no evidence of a changed life and repentance.

Secondly, many churches have become so “seeker sensitive” and non-confrontational that they do not emphasise commitment to the local church, commitment to ministry and commitment to serving in God’s kingdom as a standard for Christians. Yet the very nature of faith is commitment to Christ

and His cause. People who have no interest in being involved in a local church, serving others and committing to obey Christ's commands in the Bible are demonstrating that their faith is questionable. James insists that true faith will always lead to works that glory God.

Thirdly, it is common today for many Christian churches to engage and cooperate with Roman Catholic Churches as if we all believe the same gospel. The Reformers split from the Roman Catholic Church because they denied the principle of by faith alone. To this day, the official doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church is that faith alone cannot save believers. It is essential for their members to take part in the sacraments, which is essentially a system of salvation by works. The fact that this paragraph may deeply disturb Christians and seem unloving shows how far the modern church has moved away from the principles of the Reformation.

Many today believe Vatican II was a step for Roman Catholicism towards becoming more Biblical. In terms of stated dogma, there has been little change in the Roman Catholic Church in the last century. Vatican II did not introduce any significant change in the official doctrines of the church. The dogma of Papal infallibility means that the Roman Catholic Church can never change previous dogma, or else it has to admit that previous Popes erred on matters of doctrine. This would cause their whole system of authority to fall down. The modern church needs to insist on adherence to orthodox, biblical doctrine. A gospel that denies "by faith alone" is simply a false gospel.

CHAPTER 4

THE SUPREMACY AND EXCLUSIVITY OF CHRIST

Reformation principle: in Christ alone

At the time of the Reformation, the Roman Catholic Church had obscured the supremacy and exclusivity of Christ. Mary was (and still is) held up to be a mediator between God and man, and the sacraments were insisted on as necessary for salvation. Indulgences were sold as a means to obtain the forgiveness of sins. The mass was (and still is) said to be a real “re-sacrificing” of the Son of God to atone for sins, obscuring and denying the single, once-for-all sacrifice of Christ on the cross.

Perhaps the greatest achievement of the Reformation was drawing attention to Christ, and insisting on His claims as the only and all-glorious Saviour. Sadly, the modern church is in danger of shifting away from this Christ-centred focus.

The Person and Work of Christ

Colossians 2:8-10 makes a strong connection between the person and work of Christ. This passage establishes the full and complete deity of Christ. Jesus is fully God. It is no surprise then for the apostle Paul to conclude that we are complete in Him. There is nothing that God lacks. To Him belongs all glory, power, majesty and wisdom. So when Christ offered Himself on the cross, He made a perfect, infinite and complete sacrifice for sin. If we are in Christ and have Him as our Saviour, there cannot possibly be anything we lack.

The book of Galatians therefore teaches that to add anything to the work of Christ as the basis for salvation is a false gospel (Gal. 1:6-8; 2:15-16).

The wonderful book of Hebrews!

The book of Hebrews captures the person and work of Christ in a very compelling way. Chapter one establishes the identity of the Son as none other than Yahweh, the only true and living God of the Old Testament. Christ is therefore supreme, and shares all the attributes and glory of God.

The book of Hebrews then goes on to stress the superiority of Christ over the angels, and the Old Testament priests and sacrifices. His sacrifice expiated sin and propitiated God (Heb. 2:17). He established the new covenant (Heb. 8:6ff; 10:15-18), and His sacrifice was substitutionary in nature (Heb. 6:20; 7:25 and 9:24).

The book emphasises the finality of the single sacrifice of Christ on the cross to remove sin and make us completely acceptable to God (Heb. 7:25-28; 10:11-17). Nothing more is needed, and no one else is needed in terms of our salvation. This is contrary to the doctrine of the mass, which teaches that each time the mass is held Christ is sacrificed again to atone for sin.

Christ alone and the modern church

There are some worrying trends in the modern church which detract from the principle of Christ alone. Firstly, many professing Christians rely on their daily horoscopes for wisdom and guidance, indicating that Christ and His word is not sufficient for them. Some are also members of secret societies such as Freemasonry, which require adherents to accept the spiritual light they receive from the Society. This clearly denies the exclusive claims of Christ. Still others worship their ancestors alongside Christ, showing that Christ alone is not sufficient for them. People in the church are becoming infatuated with angels to the point of relegating Christ to second place. All these practices indicate a lack of confidence in Christ alone as the only source of all spiritual blessing, wisdom and acceptance with God (Eph. 1:3). The church needs to be warning Christians about these popular but ungodly practices.

Secondly, some popular Christian leaders and authors are advocating ideas that people can get to God through sincerely following their own religions.

This completely contradicts the teachings of the Bible. Christ is the only way to God (Jn. 14:6; Acts 4:12). Unless people hear the gospel and place their faith in Christ alone, they cannot be saved (Rom. 10:13-17; Acts 4:12). It is not arrogant or narrow minded for the church to insist on these truths. They are simply following their Lord and Saviour who taught these very same truths!

CHAPTER 5

TO GOD BE THE GLORY

Reformation principle: to the glory of God alone

Each of the previous reformation principles contribute to this final principle.

Scripture alone teaches us that Christianity is God-revealed, not man-discovered. God has spoken to us in His word, and revealed Himself to us. He has told us about life, ethics, wise living, how we can be saved – all centred on the Person of Christ. The wisdom and knowledge that we do have comes from God (even our scientific and “secular” knowledge relies on using our God-given intellects and abilities). We would never have found our way back to heaven and God unless God had stooped to reveal to us the way through Christ. We ought to glorify God alone for our knowledge of Him.

By grace alone teaches us that as fallen, sinful people, nothing good comes from us. We are spiritually dead and morally corrupt. Everything good we have is by God’s grace. Hence we cannot boast in ourselves and our own efforts. We ought to give glory to God alone for our salvation.

Through faith alone in Christ alone teaches us that we are saved simply by trusting in our all-sufficient Saviour, Jesus Christ. He did all the work for us on the cross. We can add nothing to what He did, but receive a perfect righteousness from Him as a gift. We can take no credit for our salvation. We ought to give glory to God alone for our salvation.

The ultimate justification for what God does

The Bible teaches that God does all things for His glory. This is His ultimate goal. For example, God created the universe to declare His glory (Ps. 19:1; Rom. 1:20). God’s glory even provides an explanation for the difficult doctrines of God’s election of certain people to salvation. Election ensures that God’s purposes come to pass (Rom. 9:11), and that man has nothing to

boast about for his salvation (Rom. 9:14-16). God ordained evil, and allows and uses evil to reveal and glorify Himself (Rom. 9:17, 22-23). If people object to the fairness of God's dealings with them, the Bible simply responds by saying that God has the right and authority as the Creator to do as He pleases (Rom. 9:21-22). It is not that God will ever do anything morally wrong. The point is, however, that God's glory is ultimate, and He does not need to justify Himself to His creatures.

Both the Old Testament and New Testament teach that God is jealous and will not give His glory to another (Isa. 42:8; Acts 12:23).

Is God egotistical?

As we read Scripture, we are confronted with God's ego. Isaiah 46:5-11 gives us an insight into God's estimate of Himself, or into His "self-esteem." God says that when He considers Himself, and then looks over all creation, there is no one as great as He is. Nothing can even be remotely compared to Him.

Such egocentricity is the height of sin in the creature, and utterly repulsive. Scripture forbids us from singing our own praises (see example Prov. 27:2; Matt. 23:5-7). When we consider this attribute in God, some problems may seem to arise. Firstly, God judges and humbles His creatures when they seek to glorify themselves (Isa. 5:15; Matt. 23:12). Secondly, Scripture indicates that pride and self-glorification are sinful (Prov. 16:18; Hos. 5:5). Is God therefore not guilty of sin in singing His own praises? Is He then unjust in judging His creatures for attempting to glorify themselves, while He constantly and relentlessly glorifies His own name?

This problem vanishes when we consider the greatness of God. His divine attributes of infinity, omniscience, omnipotence, self-sufficiency, majesty and wisdom mean that He is worthy of praise and admiration, and that it is in fact altogether righteous and just that He should esteem Himself to be worthy of such praise.

There are many attitudes or actions that, while being sinful for the creature to perform, are entirely legitimate for God to perform. For example, while it is wrong for man to take revenge, God can legitimately take revenge on His enemies (Lev. 19:18; Rom. 12:19). It is the same with God's self-glorification.

It is sinful for man to parade himself and seek his own glory since he is a limited creature entirely dependent on his Creator. This is even truer after the fall. Man has in fact nothing to boast of within himself (Eph. 2:8-9). This is not true of God, however. He alone is self-sufficient and eternal. It would be wrong and unrighteous for God not to esteem Himself so highly, because he is worthy of that high estimation.

God's glory and the modern church

It is perhaps this last reformation principle that shines the spotlight on the departure of the modern church from biblical standards. The church has largely become man-centred, imbibing the philosophies of the world which places man at the centre of the universe as opposed to God.

Firstly, the doctrine of creation has been severely compromised in the church today. The theory of evolution has dominated the world's agenda as the leading theory of the origin of the universe. Many pastors and theologians accept this theory as opposed to the clear teaching of the first three chapters of Genesis.

The doctrine of creation is, however, of vital importance to Christianity and man. It is not something that is inconsequential or unimportant. Theistic creation is important for establishing:

- The identity of God. He often refers to himself as the Creator (Isa. 45:18).
- The glory of God. He created all things for His glory (Ps. 19:1).
- A defence of God's actions (as noted before from Rom. 9:20-21).
- The identity of man. Man is created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26).
- The meaning of life. Man is created to have a relationship with God (Gen. 3:8-9).
- Man's moral and ethical accountability to God.

To deny special, theistic creation is to strike at the heart of Christianity. It is a basic foundation for all Biblical truth. The theory of evolution is an attempt by man to escape his responsibility and accountability to God. The aim of

this theory is to make man autonomous. Man then becomes the standard of morality, master of his own universe, and subject to none. This exalts human pride, and relegates God to insignificance. Man then becomes his own ruler and determines his own destiny, robbing God of His glory as Creator.

Creation is therefore a key doctrine, not a secondary one. It is a test of orthodoxy. Any other theory about the origin of life and the universe is unacceptable and should be rejected by the church. We need to realise the importance of the doctrine of creation and insist on full compliance to it. Theologians and pastors who teach evolution have departed from the worldview of the Bible and should not be allowed to preach and teach in the church.

Secondly, the last decade has seen a proliferation of “seeker sensitive” thinking in the church. Worship, preaching and church services have largely been stripped of key Biblical concepts and norms to make people feel comfortable. In other words, the modern church has become thoroughly man-centred. Key doctrines such as sin and judgement have been largely ignored as they make people feel uncomfortable. The standard of appropriate worship is whether it makes people feel good, not whether it exalts God. This is a departure from this last reformation principle.

Thirdly, Christian counselling has become man-centred by largely embracing the idea that man’s basic problem is his low self-esteem. Non-Biblical frameworks from secular psychology are embraced, dressed in Christian terminology, and presented as Christian counselling. This contradicts the clear teaching of the Bible that man is fallen, needs to humble himself before his God, turn from sin and embrace the Saviour. It is through the forgiveness of sins that guilt can be effectively dealt with, and man can be restored to a life of joy and peace in Christ. This is not to say that Christians do not battle with emotional difficulties, but that ultimately their joy and peace is found in dealing with life’s trials through the wisdom of Scripture.

Concluding thought

A simple yet profound conclusion to the Reformation principles is found in 1 Corinthians 10:31: we should be doing everything to the glory of God!



Church Office: 031 765 3750 (Between 08:00 and 12:00)

Sunday Services: English - 08:00, 09:30 & 17:30, Afrikaans - 08:00

www.baptistchurchhillcrest.com

REVIVING THE REFORMATION



By Andrew AUCAMP

HILLCREST
BAPTIST CHURCH
Where Truth Matters