

Reformation Day

October 31

Renewal of the Biblical Worldview

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.
II Timothy 2:15

Introduction

Every year on October 31st, Biblical Christians have an opportunity to teach their children and others another monumental event in the advancement of liberty! Instead of celebrating the pagan Halloween, celebrate the day so significant to the protestant faith—Reformation Day. The Protestant Reformation was a time when the Biblical Christian worldview was restated and eventually revived. By placing the Bible into the hands of the common man the reformers began to restore man’s liberty of conscience.

The Roots of Our Republic

In order to understand American political or governmental thought, one must have an understanding of the Protestant Reformation. Interestingly, Alan Grimes begins his book *American Political Thought* with a chapter entitled, The Rise of Protestantism. These are his opening words:

Although American political thought begins with a study of Puritan thinking, an understanding of the Puritan in America requires at least a brief survey of the religious forces which brought forth Puritanism. Socially, politically and economically, colonial Puritan thinking reflected the heritage of late medieval Europe tempered somewhat by the humanism of the Renaissance and the nationalism of Elizabethan England. Fundamentally, however, Puritanism was another step in the march of the Protestant Reformation.¹

History of the Reformation

The Reformation must be understood in the context of medieval history and the powerful Roman Catholic Church. The Roman Catholic Church dominated the institutional aspect of the medieval period of history. These are some of the corruptions of this church during this time:

1. The reading of the Bible was prohibited.
2. Education for the common people was, for all practical purposes, non-existent. However, there was education for one profession, the clergy.
3. The people were to be kept ignorant. This way the theology and practices of the church would not be questioned.
4. Church offices were sold (practice of Simony).

5. Many of the clergy were immoral or incompetent.
6. Forgiveness for sins was sold through the purchase of indulgences.
7. Heretics were persecuted, tortured, and/or put to death. This was supported by St. Thomas Aquinas, a prominent theologian of the Catholic Church.

The power of the Catholic Church was based upon the degree to which it ascribed authority to itself. The church declared its teaching to be infallible, and that no man could be saved outside of this one true church. Even kings were to venerate the Pope. However, the reaction to this ecclesiastical tyranny was predictable, for the church leadership was not popular with most people. One reason for the unrest and waning support for the church was the amount of money that was extracted from the people to finance the incredible opulence of the church and its leadership. Durant explains:

Further complaints alleged the divorce of religion from morality, the emphasis placed on orthodox belief rather than on good conduct, the absorption of religion in ritual, the useless idleness and presumed sterility of monks, the exploitation of popular credulity through bogus relics and miracles, the abuse of excommunication and interdict, the censorship of publications by the clergy, the espionage and cruelty of the Inquisition, the misuse, for other purposes, of funds contributed for crusades against the Turks, and the claim of a deteriorated clergy to be the sole administrators of every sacrament except baptism.²

God used four university-level educators to bring about the Reformation—John Wycliffe, John Huss, William Tyndale and Martin Luther. Among other accomplishments, these men were used by God to challenge false doctrine and to spread Biblical literacy. These men and the other reformers were involved in promoting Christian education, and many of them started Christian schools.

Martin Luther and the Advent of the Reformation

The Reformation, begun in 1517, was one of the most important events in history, second only to the birth of Christ. The freedoms that many people of the world enjoy, and to a greater degree, we as Americans enjoy, can be traced back to the act of an obscure monk named Martin Luther. Luther, an Augustinian monk, the rector or President of Wittenberg University, challenged the intellectual community to a debate concerning one of the most grievous abuses of the Catholic Church, the sale of indulgences. His now famous *95 Theses* were 95 statements of opposition to the abuse of the sale of indulgences, or pardons from sin. The sale of indulgences was a clever scheme to finance the construction of church buildings.

The results of Luther's rebuke were predictable; the sales of indulgences decreased, and opposition to Luther by church authorities began in earnest. The story is an exciting one; it is a tale of one man's tenacious quest for truth against an all-powerful authority determined to stamp out that truth. The truth wins!

Although Luther did not realize the significance of the posting of these theses, scholars mark this date as the beginning of what has been termed the Protestant Reformation. Webster defines reform as, to change from worse to better; to amend; to correct; to restore to a former good state.³ Listed below are several areas of doctrine within the Roman Catholic Church that Luther and other reformers felt needed to be corrected and what the Bible teaches concerning them.

Roman Catholic Church of the 16th Century	Biblical Christian Worldview
Sovereignty The Roman Catholic Church, with the Pope as its head, claimed ultimate authority over all other spheres of life (Ecclesiastical Absolutism). This resulted in a monopoly on the flow of information and a monopoly on salvation. In many ways this was a monarchy, with the Pope, rather than the king, as head.	God Alone is Sovereign Because God is perfect, He exercises all power perfectly. Because of the sinful nature of man, God disperses authority to man over five spheres: the individual, the family, the church, voluntary associations and the civil government. (Psalm 46:10, 47:2; Deut. 4:39, 10:14,17) Liberty results when all five spheres of government are discharging their Biblical responsibilities and exercising only those powers that God has delegated to them.
Jurisdiction The all-powerful Roman Catholic Church subsumed all of life, including the civil realm. Catholic theologians have generally recognized the two kingdoms (church and state) and the distinct role played by each, but they have usually considered the Church to be the greater kingdom and the state to be the lesser, because the Church is eternal while the state is only temporary (Augustine's explanation), and because the Church must answer to God for the conduct of the state (the explanation of Gelasius I). Some have argued that the power of the keys given to Peter in Matthew 16:19 gave the Church the authority to control the state. Others saw the Church's authority in the two swords of Luke 22:38. One of these swords is the sword of the Church and the other is the sword of the state, to be given by the Church to the state.	Institutional Separation Institutional separation should exist between church and state in that they have different roles and jurisdictions. The state, though, should never be separated from scriptural morals and ethics. John Calvin (1509–1564) clearly articulated this concept in his famous <i>Institutes of the Christian Religion</i>. This explanation differs greatly from the modern view of “separation of church and state” that attempts to separate Christianity from the public sphere.

Roman Catholic Church of the 16th Century	Biblical Christian Worldview
Source of Truth According to the Dictionary of Christianity in America, <i>With the development of the Papacy, Catholicism also stressed the authority of church tradition as interpreted by the magisterium, or teaching office, of the church. The Pope, as the vicar of Christ, is the prime interpreter of scripture in the Church.</i>⁴ According to the Roman Catholic Church, there were three sources of truth: • Catholic tradition • Canon law, patterned after Roman law • Catholic Vulgate Bible (as interpreted by church authorities) Men were to obey, without question, the truth as interpreted by the church authorities.	Sola Scriptura: Scripture Alone One of the mottos of the reformers was, sola scriptura, in other words, the source of truth is the Scripture alone. Tradition was NOT equal with Scripture. Furthermore, church authorities and the Pope were not the only ones who could interpret Scripture; individual believers should read the Scriptures for themselves in their own language and, with the assistance of the Holy Spirit, be able to properly understand them. II Timothy 2:15 says that believers should <i>study . . . rightly dividing the Word of truth.</i> Luther said these two things about the importance of the Scriptures: <i>I would advise no one to place his child where the Scriptures do not reign paramount. Every institution in which men are not increasingly occupied with the Word of God must become corrupt.</i>⁵ <i>Unless I shall be convinced by proofs from Scripture or by evident reason—for I believe neither in popes nor councils, since they have frequently both erred and contradicted themselves—I cannot choose but adhere to the Word of God, which has possession of my conscience; nor can I possibly, nor will I make any recantation, since it is neither safe nor honest to act contrary to conscience! Here I stand; I cannot do otherwise, so help me God! Amen</i>⁶
Priesthood Priests were those who heard from God and interpreted what God said for the common people. Christians were dependent upon priests to interpret the Bible for them. Priests, saints and the Blessed Virgin Mary were necessary to intercede for the ordinary believer.⁷	Sola Christos: Christ Alone The Bible teaches that there is no mediation between, God and man other than Christ. I Timothy 2:5 says, “For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.” The Reformation restored the truth of “the priesthood of the believer”. Man is a prophet, priest and king, under a sovereign God. As I Peter 2:9 states, “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”

Roman Catholic Church of the 16th Century	Biblical Christian Worldview
Conscience Liberty of conscience was severely limited. The people were not allowed to exercise their internal judgment of right and wrong. Right was what the church said was right, and wrong was anything contrary to this. The conscience of the individual was controlled and directed by the church and its authorities.	Liberty of Conscience Webster teaches that “<i>conscience is internal or self knowledge, or judgment of right and wrong; or the faculty, power or principle within us, which decides on the lawfulness or unlawfulness of our own actions and affections, and instantly approves or condemns them.</i>”⁸ In the Westminster Confession of Faith we read, <i>God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men, which are in anything contrary to His Word; or beside it, if matters of faith or worship. So that, to believe such doctrines, or to obey such commands, out of conscience, is to betray true liberty of conscience: and the requiring of an implicit faith, and an absolute and blind obedience is to destroy liberty of conscience, and reason also.</i>⁹ The Bible is clear that men are to be free to exercise their God-given conscience. Their conscience is not to be directed by men, but only by God and His Word.
Nature of Salvation Medieval theology taught that a person gradually receives divine grace, eventually healing sin’s wounds. The works of man, including penance, were a necessary part of the process. It was God’s grace AND man’s works that made man righteous. In Luther’s day, the sale of indulgences had become popular as a means to finance the building of the basilica of Saint Peter. Through the purchase of an indulgence, forgiveness of sins for self and loved ones could be assured. In addition, indulgences could also assist loved ones who were in purgatory, shortening their stay or immediately releasing them to heaven.	Sola Gratia and Sola Fide The Bible teaches that faith in the finished work of Christ alone brings salvation. (Ephesians 2:8, 9) declares, “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.” The Westminster Confession of Faith puts it this way: <i>We cannot, by our best works, merit pardon of sin, or eternal life at the hand of God, by reason of the great disproportion that is between them and the glory to come; and the infinite distance that is between us and God, whom by them, we can neither profit, nor satisfy for the debt of our former sins, but when we have done all we can, we have done but our duty, and are unprofitable servants.</i>¹⁰ Regarding the role of our good works, Luther noted, “We do not become righteous by doing righteous deeds, but having been made righteous, we do righteous deeds.” Luther’s 95 Theses were a challenge to the abuses of indulgences. Number 32 stated, “Those who suppose that on account of their letters of indulgence they are sure of salvation will be eternally damned along with their teachers.”¹¹

Results of the Reformation

Consider the significance to the church, to true believers, and to the world of these ultimate results of the Reformation as stated by Dr. Paul Kienel, past President of the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI):

1. *The Reformation did not break the back of the Catholic Church as a church but it broke the back of the Catholic Church as the most powerful, longest sustained, wealthiest, and among the cruelest civil powers in history.*
2. *The Reformation broke the tightly controlled religious monopoly held in the Western world by the Catholic Church for 927 years from 590 to 1517.*
3. *The Reformation obliterated Catholicism's ban on the Bible.*
4. *The Reformation overturned Catholicism's restriction on literacy and learning for common people.*
5. *The Reformation opened the door for unfettered Christian school education, which existed continuously from the first century, but was suppressed by the Catholic Church.*
6. *The Reformation opened the door for women to be educated and to play a much larger role in society.*
7. *The Reformation paved the way for democratic forms of government and a free and open society.*
8. *The Reformation opened the world to the influence of Biblical principles upon which so many human freedoms are based.¹²*

Luther on Education

"If I had to give up preaching and my other duties, there is no office I would rather have than that of schoolteacher," wrote Martin Luther. Luther was an educational reformer as well as a church reformer. He advocated a Biblical philosophy of education saying, "When schools prosper, the Church remains righteous and her doctrine pure . . . Young pupils and students are the seed and source of the Church. If we were dead, whence would come our successors, if not from the schools? For the sake of the Church we must have and maintain Christian schools."¹³ In Luther's time, the main purpose of education was preparation for work in the church. As the institution of the Catholic Church weakened, parents did not have a reason to give their children an education. Luther had to convince people of the need for general education for all children. Because of the circumstances of the day and the problems that he faced, Luther was forced to advocate a compromise that ended up with education in his city being a partnership of the home, church and civil government. He was one of the first reformers to advocate compulsory attendance laws in response to parents' apathy toward educating their children.

There is no doubt that as a reformer, Luther considered his work to be the raising up of Christian teachers and schools as crucial for the perpetuation of Biblical truth. Martin Luther wrote more on education than any other reformer. His own education had a tremendous impact on his educational beliefs. His elementary education was in a strict Catholic school where he endured the customary cruelties. His secondary education was a better experience at one of the Brethren schools. This school was characterized by a gentler method of instruction, by direct exposure to the Scriptures, a Christ-centered orientation, a commitment to scholarship and by other educational innovations. At the university, Luther "accidentally" discovered a complete copy of the Bible, the first one that he had ever seen. When Luther read the Bible for himself, he began to see the great differences between the official teaching of the church and the Word of God.

Luther's ideas about education seem very modern, in the best sense of the word:

- Parents had a duty to educate their children, bringing up their children in the fear and love of God. Family government was extremely important, for it laid the foundation for all other governments.
- The Scriptures must have preeminence in the curriculum.
- Flogging should not be used as the primary means of motivation. Strict obedience was to be tempered by moderation and love.

- Catechisms should be used as a method of instruction in the home and the school.
- Instruction should be given in Latin since it was the universal language of the educated world, but Greek and Hebrew should be added in secondary school.
- History should have a central place in the curriculum.
- The natural sciences should be approached by a direct study and observation of God's creation.
- Libraries should not contain just a lot of books, but the best books.
- Education should center on reading, writing, thinking, and the study of Scripture.
- Education was for youth and adults as well, not just young children. All, including girls, should be given an education.
- The curriculum should consist of Bible, the catechism, languages, grammar, rhetoric, logic, literature, poetry, history, music, mathematics, gymnastics, and nature study. Luther was one of the first educators to place importance on the study of music.
- The profession of the teacher was very important and was honorable.
- In methodology, Luther believed in memorization but also comprehension. He advocated using imagery, illustration, and making learning interesting.

Those of us involved in education today need to realize that we stand on the shoulders of the reformers and others who labored to bring forth an application of the Bible to educational philosophy, curriculum and methodology.

Celebrate Reformation Day with Your Family!

- Watch the movie *Luther* (2003, starring Joseph Fiennes; review for suitability for your children).
- Have a Reformation Day party with family or your church.
- Promote Reformation Day as the Biblical alternative to the pagan Halloween.
- Sing Luther's hymns ("A Mighty Fortress Is Our God").
- Enjoy and perform the plays: "Martin Luther, Father of the Protestant Reformation" which begins on page 100, "John Hus, Bohemian Reformer" on page 109, and "John Wycliffe Morning Star of the Reformation" on page 113 of this book.

Sources for Further Study

Christian History Magazine—issues on Luther, Wycliffe, Calvin, Huss, Tyndale, Zwingli
 The Geneva Bible
Institutes of the Christian Religion by John Calvin
The Story of Liberty by Charles Coffin
Here I Stand, a biography of Luther by Roland Bainton
A Night of Reformation—Celebrating the Reformation with Family and Friends by Pam Forster

Endnotes

1. Alan Grimes, *American Political Thought* (Hinsdale, Illinois: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1955), 1
2. Paul A. Kienel, *A History of Christian School Education* (Colorado Springs, CO: The Association of Christian Schools International, 1998), 129
3. Noah Webster, *American Dictionary of the English Language* (San Francisco, CA: Foundation for American Christian Education, 1967)
4. *Dictionary of Christianity in America* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1990), 1062
5. William J. Federer, *America's God and Country* (Coppell, Texas: Fame Publishing, Inc., 1994), 404

6. Houston Peterson, editor, *A Treasury of the World's Greatest Speeches* (New York, NY: Grolier Inc., 1973), 89
7. *Dictionary of Christianity in America*, 939
8. Noah Webster, *American Dictionary of the English Language*
9. *Westminster Confession of Faith* (Glasgow: Bell and Bain, Ltd., 1646), Ch. 20
10. *Westminster Confession of Faith*, Ch. 16
11. Quoted in *Protestants's Most-Famous Document*, (Christian History Magazine, Issue 34, Vol. XI, No. 2), 21
12. Paul A. Kienel, *A History of Christian School Education*, 147
13. Paul A. Kienel, *A History of Christian School Education*, 167