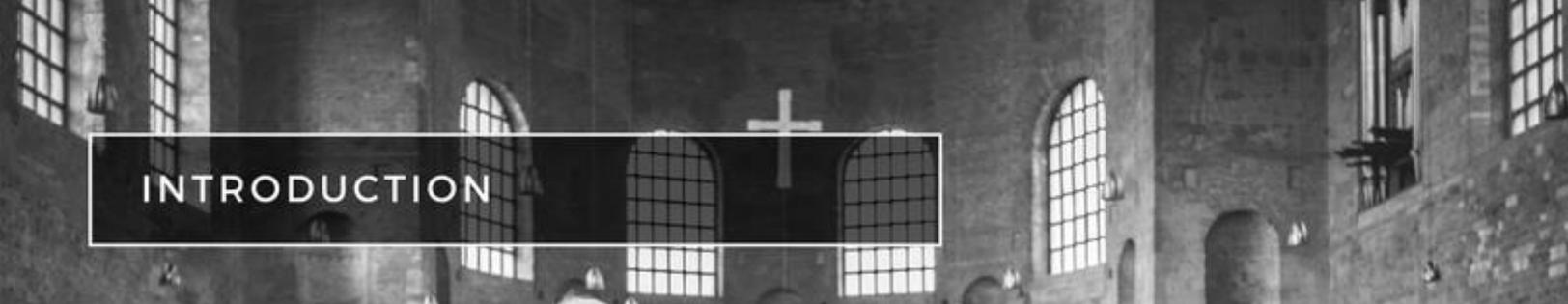


Here We Stand



STUDY GUIDE



INTRODUCTION

October 31. For many the day simply marks Halloween each year. It wasn't until I was in my twenties that I learned that something of great historical significance had occurred on that day in history. In fact, what had occurred had changed my life in ways that I was not even aware of. The world that we know today would simply not exist if not for what happened in Germany on October 31, 1517. On that day, a German monk named Martin Luther (1483-1546) nailed his controversial *Ninety-five Theses* to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany.

What started as Luther's "protest" against the selling of indulgences (a certificate which one could buy which would limit time in Purgatory) by the Roman Catholic Church ushered in a whole new way of viewing the Church and the world.

When historians and theologians talk about the Reformation, the controversy is almost always boiled down to two massively important points of controversy: the *formal cause* and the *material cause*. The *formal cause* of the Reformation refers to the disagreement the Protestants had with Catholics over the nature of authority. In Roman Catholic dogma, the two sources of ultimate authority are the Church with its pope and councils and the Word of God. The Protestants questioned this doctrine, arguing that the only ultimate authority is the Word of God. The Word of God is inerrant and testifies of itself to its complete authority in life and doctrine. On the other hand, the Reformers pointed out that church councils and popes had often erred and fallen into corruption. The claim to ultimate authority along with the Word of God was not legitimate. Rather, the Church was to submit to the Word of God, because it was the Word and Spirit, which created the Church and it is through the Word and Spirit, that Christ rules His Church.

This disagreement came to a point of friction over the debate of the *material cause* of the Reformation, which was the debate over the doctrine of justification. Fundamental to this debate was the question: how can a sinful person be righteous before a holy God? The Protestants argued that Faith = Justification + Works. Catholics argued that Faith + Works = Justification.

It was through Luther's wrestling before God and while studying Romans 1:17, that Luther realized that it was not through our own righteousness that sinful men and women are made righteous and are justified before God, but through a righteousness that is outside of ourselves.

Romans 1:17 reads: "For in [the gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, 'The righteous shall live by faith.'"

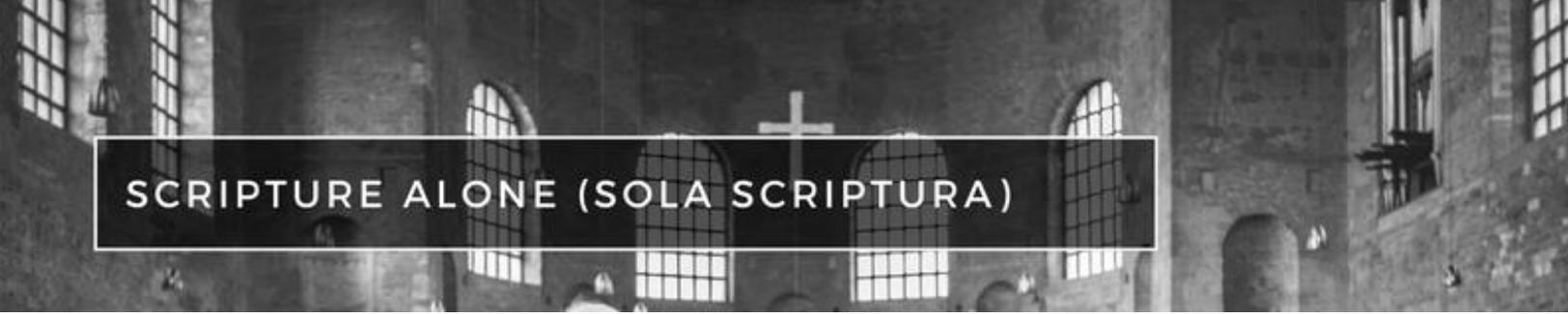
Before, Luther had understood this "righteousness" to be something that we willed through our own efforts and good deeds. He thought that if he could just be good enough, he could be considered righteous before God. Luther realized in Romans 1:17 that this righteousness was in fact credited to him through faith. That this righteousness was not his own but was given to

him as a *gift* from God. Such a glorious truth transformed the way Luther viewed the world. He no longer needed to base his standing before God on his actions of the previous twenty-four hours or his sins of the past week. Rather, he could look to the cross and understand that Christ had already accomplished this “righteousness”, and that it was his own through faith. This simple truth is the most profound reality in the universe. There are other important truths of the Reformation, which will be discussed, but none is more profound and important than this one. For the gospel brings to us the most important promise in the world: that we are God's own righteous children in faith.

I will end this introduction with a short definition of the Reformation that I have found to be helpful and then a short explanation. The definition comes from Reformation scholar Carl Trueman:

The Reformation represents a move to place God as he has revealed himself in Christ at the center of the church's life and thought.

Central to this definition is an awakening to God Himself—a movement to place God in the center of our lives. The Reformation was and is a movement to champion the good news of the gospel and the power of the Word of God to continually transform us. In this way, the Reformation continues on because our own lives and church need to be continually reformed to God's Word and the good news of the gospel. May the Lord bless you richly through this study. *Soli Deo Gloria!*



SCRIPTURE ALONE (SOLA SCRIPTURA)

INTRODUCTION

In Luther's day, the Roman Catholic church claimed that God revealed himself through Scripture *and* through the traditions of the church. Scripture and tradition were equally valid means of interpreting God's revelation of himself. When Martin Luther claimed that Scripture alone had that role, he dealt a serious blow to the authority of the pope and church councils.

MAIN POINT

Because Scripture contains God's own words, it is the highest authority we possess.

REFLECT

In 1521 in the city of Worms, Germany, Martin Luther was put on trial and asked to recant his views which had been spreading throughout Europe. "Unless I am convicted by Scripture and plain reason," he responded, "I do not accept the authority of popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other – my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand. I cannot do other. God help me. Amen."

Luther was claiming that it was possible for him to obey the Bible while rejecting the pope and the traditions of the church. For Luther and the Reformers, divine revelation comes from Scripture *alone*, and popes and councils sit under its authority. While the Reformers recognized the usefulness of traditions, councils, reason, and the works of famous theologians, when push comes to shove, Scripture overrules them.

The Reformers came to this conviction of *Sola Scriptura* by looking at what the Bible claims to be. The words in our Bibles are *inspired*, that is, they have been "breathed out by God" (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:20-21). Though written down by human authors with their own distinctive writing styles and personalities, God is the source of everything we read in the Bible. To read the Bible, then, is to hear God speaking to us.

Additionally, if God speaks to us through Scripture, and if God never lies (Num. 23:19), then every word we read is true and free from error. *Infallible* and *inerrant* are two closely-related words used to describe this ("infallible" meaning that the Bible *can't* be wrong since it's God's word, "inerrant" meaning it *doesn't*).

But if the Bible contains the true words of God himself, then it alone has ultimate authority in our lives since no one is a higher authority than God. This was Luther's whole point in his final defense at Worms, and it was a major driving force behind getting the Bible translated into the everyday language of the people. Since the Bible is how the God who made us and loves us speaks to us, we ought to read it, believe it, obey it, and teach it to others.

Sola Scriptura was a rejection of anything that claimed authority equal to or above the authority of Scripture. For the Reformers, this meant a rejection of the pope and of the church councils. In our own lives, we might substitute pope and councils for any number of things. Popular opinion, for example. When popular opinion on an issue breaks from the Bible's stance on it, *Sola Scriptura* is a call to remain faithful to God's Word despite the cost.

Or take experience. Sometimes we might reject or question something the Bible says because it seems to be at odds with our own life experiences. *Sola Scriptura* is a call to let Scripture explain those experiences instead of the reverse. Understanding our experiences in light of Scripture won't always be easy, but at the very least we know that the Bible contains the words of the God who made us, loves us, and wants us to flourish.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Read Psalm 73. What was Asaph complaining about? How did what he knew of God clash with his life experiences (vv. 1-15)? What does he do in response (vv. 16-28)?

Just because documents like The Apostles Creed or the Westminster Shorter Catechism aren't on the same level as Scripture doesn't mean they're unhelpful. What are some benefits of reading ancient creeds and catechisms? What dangers do they protect us from?

What other authorities in your life are you tempted to put on equal or greater footing as Scripture?

MEMORIZE

2 Timothy 3:16-17 – *“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.”*



GRACE ALONE (SOLA GRATIA)

INTRODUCTION

Martin Luther and the Roman Catholic church agreed that we are sinners in need of salvation and that grace is necessary for salvation to occur. But with different understandings of sin and, by extension, grace, very different views arose between them about how we are made right with God.

MAIN POINT

Because of our sinful condition, our acceptance with God is by his grace alone and nothing in us.

REFLECT

The Reformation involved numerous individuals discussing and debating a vast range of issues. But for Martin Luther, one issue stood as “the hinge on which all turns” in his debate with the Roman Catholic church: sin. Just how bad are we, exactly?

The scholar Desiderius Erasmus debated Luther on this point. He agreed with Luther that we are sinners in need of grace. But whereas Luther saw sin as something that affected us to the core of our being and enslaved us, Erasmus took a more moderate approach. Sure, nobody’s perfect, but if everyone were as bad as Luther was saying, then *no one* could possibly be saved, right?

Erasmus eventually grew tired of the debate, believing that he and Luther were getting into a technical theological debate far removed from everyday life. But for Luther, the gospel was at stake. After all, to effectively cure a sickness we first need to properly diagnose it. In the same way, if we misdiagnose just how much sin affects us, we will pursue a cure other than the one God offers and miss out on eternal life with him.

So how bad is our sin problem? According to Paul, “no one seeks for God” (Rom. 3:11), and by nature we are all “hostile to God”, completely unable to submit to him or please him (Rom. 8:6-8). We are slaves to sin (John 8:34) and can’t understand “the things of the Spirit of God” (1 Cor. 2:14). Apart God’s grace, we lie “dead in...sins” and are “children of wrath” (Eph. 2:1, 3). In other words, our problem isn’t only that we do sinful things. Our problem is that at our core, we don’t love God. We hate him. And no amount of good deeds we do can change that fact or make up for the sin we’ve already committed.

That there’s a cure for such a bleak condition is truly good news, and it came in the form of Jesus. Because of Jesus’ death and resurrection on our behalf, God has wiped away our entire record of sin (Rom. 8:1). But he has also addressed our most foundational problem by giving

us new desires. We now love him and *want* to obey him (Ezek. 36:24-27; Rom. 6:17-18). We obey not to *gain* God's favor but because we already have it.

There's another implication here that John Bunyan and Charles Wesley both described as being set free from chains. If our sin problem is as bad as Scripture says and we contribute nothing to our salvation, then we must ascribe our salvation to God's grace *alone*. And this means that our acceptance with God isn't in jeopardy when we sin nor are we somehow more accepted when we obey. Our status as God's children never changes, because Jesus never changes (Heb. 13:8).

This keeps us humble when we're tempted to feel more righteous than others. And it is incredibly life-giving to us when we're tempted to despair because of our sin. It means that we can have assurance of God's love not by looking back at our past week and recalling how many good things we've done, but by looking outside of ourselves to Jesus and the fact that God now credits his righteousness to us.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

How do you think God feels about you right now? How much does your answer to that question depend on you and your performance?

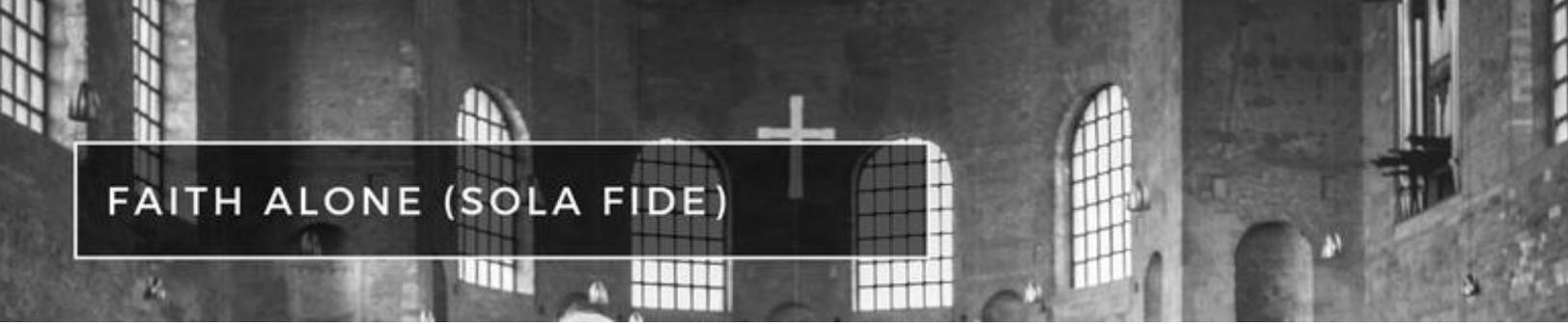
How does "Grace Alone" keep us humble instead of proud? How does it encourage us when we're tempted to wallow in self-pity because of our failings?

Many people today would agree with Erasmus that nobody's perfect while avoiding describing our sin problem in the way that Luther did. What are some common views in our culture today about what is wrong with us?

MEMORIZE

Romans 3:23-24 – *"for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus"*

Hebrews 4:16 – *"Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."*



FAITH ALONE (SOLA FIDE)

INTRODUCTION

The Catholic Church taught and teaches that justification before God is through both faith and works. In their teaching, Faith + Works = Justification. The Protestants challenged this teaching, arguing from the New Testament that Faith = Justification + Works. Our good works are in no way the ground for our standing before God, but flow out of the Christian's life who has been born again and justified.

MAIN POINT

The instrument through which we receive Christ's benefits is through simple, child-like faith. Adding works to faith shows that we do not understand the essence of true saving faith. We are saved by faith alone, but saving faith is never alone. It always produces good works in our lives.

REFLECT

In 1516, Desiderius Erasmus published his first edition of the Greek New Testament. He brilliantly assembled the text using several Greek manuscripts and some Latin manuscripts which he translated into Greek. Erasmus sent a copy to the pope and even dedicated it to him. Initially, the pope approved of the edition. But what Erasmus did not know was that his new translation would ignite a firestorm which would change the course of history forever. In his Greek New Testament, Erasmus showed that the Greek word which the Latin Vulgate had translated as '*do penance*' was actually the Greek word *metanoia* which means to '*repent*.' This is significant because the Catholic Church had taught for hundreds of years that salvation was through faith (given through grace at baptism) and ongoing good works and acts of penance for sin. It is important to note here that the Catholic Church has never taught salvation strictly by works. They taught and teach salvation by faith and grace-fueled works.

However, Martin Luther and the other Bible scholars discovered in Erasmus's Greek New Testament that when Peter said in Acts 3:19, "Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out..." Peter was not establishing a continual penance. Rather, repentance was a simple turning from sin to Christ that is simultaneous with saving faith. The implications of this truth are enormous. If our justification before God does not hinge on ongoing works of penance but on a single act of repentance and faith, then everything changes.

Of course, there were other New Testament texts as well. For example, in Galatians 3 Paul adamantly denies that works can in any way justify us before God. Paul's argument is against those who said that one must have faith in Christ and be circumcised according to the law. Their formula was Faith + Works = Justification. Paul points out in Galatians 3 that Abraham was justified by faith in God's promise before he was circumcised and hundreds of years

before the law was even given to Moses. Paul couldn't be clearer on this point. Read Galatians 3:10-14:

“For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, ‘Cursed by everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.’ Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for ‘The righteous shall live by faith.’ But the law is not of faith, rather ‘The one who does them shall live by them.’ Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree’—so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.”

Clearly, trying to add works to faith is a failing venture. For no one besides Christ can keep or has kept the law perfectly. Paul states the same thing in Ephesians 2:8-9. We are saved by grace alone, by faith, apart from works of the law. Even faith is described as a “gift” from God so that we cannot boast.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Describe the moment you came to saving faith in Jesus Christ.

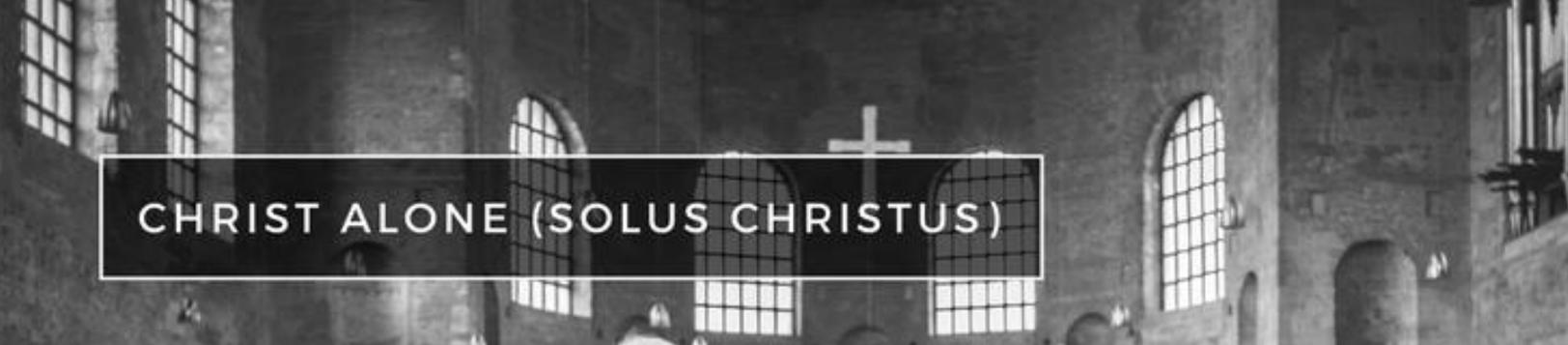
Why can true faith not be accompanied by works? What is it about true faith that nullifies works as part of our justification before God?

How does the doctrine of “Faith Alone” make Christianity different from every other religion?

What does the New Testament say that we are to have faith in exactly? Does it matter who or what our faith is in?

MEMORIZE

Ephesians 2:8-10 - *“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”*



CHRIST ALONE (SOLUS CHRISTUS)

INTRODUCTION

The Reformers contested the teaching of the Catholic Church that the grounds for being justified before God were both faith and works. While the Catholic Church taught and still teaches that the works which justify are grace-fueled works, they are *our* works nonetheless. The Reformers asserted against the Catholic Church that man could never achieve enough merit before God. Instead, we must be saved by a merit that is not our own but Christ's.

MAIN POINT

We are saved by the righteousness of Christ and Christ alone.

REFLECT

The Catholic Church taught and still teaches what is called a *Treasury of Merit*. The treasury is inexhaustibly filled with not only the “merit of Christ,” but also the “blessed virgin Mary.” Following Christ and Mary, the treasury also contains the merit of other saints whose lives earned excess merit because of their good deeds. In the Catholic Church, not everyone is considered a saint, but only those whose lives are extraordinarily pious. This extra merit from Christ and the saints can be dispensed by the Church to believers whose lives do not measure up—who need the extra merit to supplement their own.

The Church has the capacity through the “keys” granted to them by Christ himself (Matt. 16:18) to dispense this merit to Christians who are deficient. On the other hand, the Reformers countered that no person could ever earn God's favor by their own righteousness. In actuality, the New Testament says quite the opposite. In Romans 3:10, Paul (quoting Psalm 14) says, “None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.” He then says a few verses later in Romans 3:20, “For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.” Paul's point could not be clearer. No one, not even Mary, the apostles, or the great heroes of the church could earn the righteousness required to stand before God.

However, Jesus did in fact live a perfect and truly righteous life. A life completely devoted to the glory of the Father. Once, Jesus was accused by the Pharisees of having a demon. In response, Jesus looked them in the eye and made an incredibly profound statement. He said, “I do not have a demon, but I honor my Father...” (John 8:49). Upon reflection, the statement is even more profound, for Jesus was and is the only person who can say that he honored God perfectly. Paul describes Jesus's ministry as “one act of righteousness” (Rom. 5:18). The writer of Hebrews reflects in Hebrews 5:9, “And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him...” He truly lived a perfect life. And it is only through

his propitiation of sins on the cross on our behalf and the imputation of his righteousness to us that we may be saved.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Luther once remarked that we must constantly remind ourselves that we stand on Christ's merit and not our own in terms of our standing before God. How do you revert back to trying to earn God's favor through your own works and righteousness?

Jesus did not just die for you. He lived for you. His righteous life is now yours in faith. When you think about Jesus's earthly ministry, what immediately strikes you as righteous? Obviously every second was righteous, but what do you immediately think about?

How do you feel when you revert back to standing on your own merit before God?

What is the significance of Christ's perfect life and death for the exclusivity of Christ and Christianity?

MEMORIZE

2 Corinthians 5:21 - *"For our sake he made him to be sin, who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."*



GLORY TO GOD ALONE (SOLI DEO GLORIA)

INTRODUCTION

In the Roman Catholic church, there were two classes of people: the clergy and the laity, and the clergy was considered superior. To be a priest, for example, was believed to be a more noble and religious duty than being a baker. The reformation abolished this distinction between clergy and laity and breathed significance into tasks once thought inferior.

MAIN POINT

Everything we do out of love for God and others is important.

REFLECT

Because of our sinful condition, there is absolutely nothing in us that we can point to as the reason that God saved us. God didn't love us because we were attractive; we're attractive because he loves us (see Deut. 7:7). All the credit and praise for our salvation then goes to God, not to us. This is why the Reformers championed the phrase *Soli Deo Gloria*, "Glory to God alone!"

But *Soli Deo Gloria* also speaks to the lifestyle Christians are to have in this world. If we are made right with God by grace alone, through faith alone, and in Christ alone, then good works become something we do to serve others out of love for God (Matt. 22:37-40) instead of a means of self-salvation or a way to ease our own consciences. What is important to God is not necessarily *what* we do but *why* we do it: faith.

This meant that good works that glorify and please God could be done outside of the church building just as well as inside it. The Reformers insisted that if faith is what God is looking for, then *anything* can be done to his glory. No job, task, or life stage was inherently holier than another. The Reformers saw that something as "menial" as changing a diaper could be just as spiritual an act as serving in the church.

Tearing down of the divide between "sacred" and "secular" drastically transformed society. Not only did it breathe tremendous significance into small, everyday tasks, it reoriented the way people thought about their roles in society. The baker who might have thought his role as less important than a priest's now saw himself as being God's means of answering people's prayers for their daily bread (Matt. 6:11). He was partnering with God in his work.

People began to see marriage and parenting in the same way. From the beginning, God told humanity to fill the earth (Gen. 1:28). But as we see from Genesis 1-2, the way God intended this to happen was through marriage, sex, and childrearing. In a day when celibacy was glorified and sex even within marriage was considered evil, marriage, sex, and parenting were now seen to be good gifts given by God and ways in which we can glorify him.

This all fell under what Martin Luther and the Reformers called a Christian's "vocation" or "calling", terms referring not just to one's job but to what we might call their life stage. Whatever context we find ourselves in has been given to us by God as a way to serve him and others. This means that you don't have to quit your job as an accountant and work at a church to serve God. (You *can*, but you don't *have* to. See 1 Corinthians 7:17-24).

The *Westminster Shorter Catechism* (1646) states that our "chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever", a good summary of *Soli Deo Gloria*. Because we've been saved by grace through faith, we can enjoy God. He's our Father, not a disapproving judge constantly reminding us of how we've disappointed him. And we can glorify him in *every* aspect of our lives, because no action done in faith is menial or insignificant.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Do you see any examples of the sacred/secular divide today, whether in your own life or in society at large? (For example, are you tempted to think that working at a church is holier than working at a bank?)

What aspects of your day-to-day life feel menial or "unspiritual"?

How does the gospel infuse those aspects with significance? How are you – like the baker in the example above – a partner with God in his work?

MEMORIZE

Colossians 3:17 – "*And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*"



ALWAYS REFORMING (SEMPER REFORMANDA)

INTRODUCTION

The Reformers were gripped by the deep conviction that the Church of Christ must always seek to reform its doctrine and practice according to the Word of God. As an imperfect bride, following Christ, we often slip into sin and false teaching and ideologies. We must constantly strive to bring every facet of our life and thought into conformity with the Word of God.

MAIN POINT

We must always seek to reform our church and our lives according to the gospel and the Word of God.

REFLECT

Luther, Calvin, and the other magisterial Reformers were principally concerned that the Church of Christ, his bride, worship Christ rightly and truly. That was what the Reformation was all about: that God would be glorified. And this principally happened through the advance of the gospel. The Reformation was not just about *forms* of worship. It was about the gospel itself. It was about the believing evangelical church and a false church which the Reformers believed was hiding and suppressing the gospel.

The Reformers understood the gospel to teach three great truths: 1) God is holy and should be honored and glorified (Isa. 6; 1 Sam. 2:30; 1 Cor. 10:31); 2) Man is sinful and does not honor God as he should and cannot attain a righteous standing before God on his own (Rom. 3:23); and 3) God loved us and sent Christ to die for us so that all who believe in him may have eternal life (Rom. 5:8). These truths are simply stated, but they have massive implications. They teach us that God's standard as revealed in Scripture is perfect. They teach us that we are naturally rebels and law-breakers. They teach us that our only hope is found in the gospel itself. Outside of God's free gift to us in Christ, there simply is no hope in the universe for re-establishing relationship with him.

The Reformers also understood that we are quick to forget these simple truths. Even in Galatians, Paul had to rebuke Jewish believers who were teaching that circumcision must be added to faith for someone to be truly justified (Gal. 3). We are so quick to nullify the gospel by attempting to add to it. But in adding to it, we lose the gospel entirely. Therefore, we are to stand watch and constantly seek to reform our churches and lives to the true gospel in the Word of God. The Reformers had a phrase which was often repeated: *ecclesia reformata semper reformanda est*—"the reformed church is always in need of reforming."

Carl Trueman explains the phrase this way: "The point is simple: reformation is not something which happens at one point in time and then ceases. Indeed, as soon as we rest content with our outward forms, as soon as we stop asking ourselves the question whether the way we do

things is honoring to God and truly reflects God's grace, then we have failed as Reformers. Reformation is an ongoing, critical exercise which must in its very essence avoid any complacency which rests content with the status quo. It starts in the hearts of men and women, boys and girls, and works itself out in the practices and testimony of the church as a whole" (*Reformation: Yesterday, Today & Tomorrow*).

In short, we are never to think we or our church has completely arrived this side of Heaven. Because of indwelling sin, there are always areas of life that we must seek to reform to the gospel and the Word of God.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

How do you need to reform your own life according to the gospel and the Word of God?

How does your family life need to be more reformed to the gospel and the Word of God?

How should we at Providence seek to be more conformed to the gospel and the Word of God?

In what ways does the American church need to seek repentance and reformation?

MEMORIZE

Hebrews 4:12 - "*For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.*"