

Reformation Background

This morning is more of a history lesson than the traditional sermon. I make no apologies for as Edmund Burke said, “**Those who don't know history are doomed to repeat it.**” We observe the Hebrews of the Old Testament repeating the same mistakes over and over. Why? Because it is our human tendency to set aside what God teaches and let our desires and pursuit of our own selfish ambitions take us over. Of course the history of people breaking from God’s teachings did not stop with the Jewish people, history is replete with people seeking power and control over others causing strife and war and famine and suffering. The history of the Church is no exception. This is the reason each generation must seek to reform itself to the scriptures.

Canyon Bible Church, along with thousands of other churches in the Protestant tradition is celebrating the 500-year anniversary of the Reformation. We celebrate the work of the Protestant reformers of the 1500’s who realized that the Catholic Church had strayed from the true Gospel of Christ and had begun abusing it’s power to control and exploit those it was called to serve and protect.

What is the Reformation? The term Reformation comes from Latin word “*reformatio*”, literally meaning to restore or renew and refers to the Protestant Reformation. The Reformation was the breaking from the Roman Catholic Church initiated by Martin Luther and continued by others including John Calvin. Many brave men known as Protestant Reformers of the 16th century turned Europe from being dominated by the power of the Catholic Church and made possible for Protestant churches to be established. It is usually considered to have started with the publication of the Ninety-five Theses by the priest Martin Luther and when on October 31, 1517 he nailed them to the door of the old church in Wittenberg,

Germany. The Reformation lasted 131 years until the end of the Thirty Years' War and with the Peace of Westphalia signed in 1648. The peace treaties brought to an end wars between Germany, Italy, Spain, Sweden, Dutch, Denmark and France, and between the Catholic and Protestant armed forces. Hundreds of thousands died during the battles and wars initiated by political leaders of Europe and the Catholic Church against those seeking to return to the Bible as the source of spiritual life.

Pre Reformation

Although there had been significant earlier attempts to reform the Roman Catholic Church before Luther – by men such as priests Jan Hus, Peter Waldo and John Wycliffe, it was Martin Luther who is widely acknowledged to have started the Reformation. Luther with his Ninety-Five Theses criticized the sale of indulgences, insisting that the Pope had no authority over purgatory and that the Catholic doctrine of the merits of the saints had no foundation in the gospel. The Protestant Reformation position, however, incorporated doctrinal changes such as a complete reliance on Scripture as a source of proper belief known as ***Sola Scriptura*** and the belief that only faith and not good deeds brings salvation or ***Sola Fide***. The core motivation behind these changes was the theology that the Bible is the source for living out one's faith - not the traditions of man. There were other factors that also played a part, such as the corruption of the Roman Catholic Church's authority and the pope's abuse of power and control over people's lives. At the same time as the Reformation created turmoil in Europe the Renaissance was 200 years old and also questioned much of traditional thought and power base of the both pope and Roman Catholic Church.

Prior to Luther's bold action in Wittenberg other priests had called for the Roman Catholic Church to return to the pure teaching of the Bible. Let me give you a

brief history of a few of these brave men who stood up to the power of the Roman Catholic Church that controlled not only the spiritual life of almost all who lived in Europe but also controlled most of the political leaders as well. In the 18th century the Irish statesman, Edmund Burke said, “**The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.**” It was the bold efforts of a few good men that eventually lead to the Word of God becoming the centerpiece of spiritual life for the reformers, many saints in Europe and lead to changing the world.

Peter Waldo was born in 1140 in Lyon, France, and died in 1205. As a priest Waldo rejected the doctrine of transubstantiation and preached against it even though doing so was a capital crime. The Catholic Church taught then and teaches today that the consecrated bread and wine of the Lord’s Supper actually becomes the body and blood of Christ based on Paul’s writing and the recorded words of Jesus found in 1 Corinthians 11:23-25. “**For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread,**
²⁴ **and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, ‘This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’** ”
²⁵ **In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.’ ”** Jesus said, “**This is my body**” in verse 24 therefore the bread must literally be his body. In verse 25 Jesus said, “**in my blood**” so the wine is literally his blood. The elements of bread and wine, when blessed by the priest, are no longer symbolic but become the actual body and blood of Christ. Waldo rejected this stance and declared it to be heretical. He was also frustrated with the wealth of the clergy and the abuse of the poor. In 1160 he gave his wife some of his property so she would be cared for and then gave the rest to the poor. He began living a simple life of serving others and sharing the gospel of Christ.

Some of you might be asking, “I thought priests did not marry?” The answer to your question is that the Catholic Church was a thousand years old before it took a stand in favor of celibacy in the twelfth century at the Second Lateran Council held in 1139, where a rule was approved forbidding priests to marry. This is why 20 years later Waldo gave his property to his wife. The order of celibacy meant that when a priest inherited property it would come to the church upon his death.

Waldo condemned what he considered as papal excesses and the Catholic dogmas, including the doctrine of purgatory, which could not be supported by the scriptures. Waldo called the doctrines of purgatory and transubstantiation “**the great harlot**” found in the Book of Revelation. “... Salvation and glory and power belong to our God; ² BECAUSE HIS JUDGMENTS ARE TRUE AND RIGHTEOUS; for He has judged **the great harlot** who was corrupting the earth with her immorality, and HE HAS AVENGED THE BLOOD OF HIS BOND-SERVANTS ON HER.” (Revelation 19:1-2) Waldo is also credited with providing to Europe the first translation of the Bible in the common language outside of Latin. Pope Lucius III excommunicated Waldo during the synod of 1184.

John Wycliffe was born in the 1320s and died in December 1384. Wycliffe was an English theologian, Bible translator and seminary professor at Oxford. As a Catholic priest and professor he was broadly influential, especially in England. He railed against the privileged status of the clergy who had gained wealth and power in England. Wycliffe attacked the luxury of the clergy, their parishes and pomp of their ceremonies at the expense of the poor.

Wycliffe was also an advocate for translation of the Bible into the common language. He completed a translation directly from the Vulgate into English in 1382, today known as Wycliffe’s Bible. From 1380 onwards, Wycliffe devoted himself to writings that argued his rejection of transubstantiation. In the years

before his death in 1384 he argued for Scriptures as the authoritative center of Christianity, that the claims of the papacy were unhistorical and that the moral unworthiness of priests invalidated their office and sacraments. The Council of Constance declared Wycliffe a heretic on 4 May 1415, and banned his writings, effectively both excommunicating him retroactively and making him an early forerunner of Protestantism. The Council decreed that Wycliffe's works should be burned and his remains destroyed. This order, confirmed by Pope Martin V, was carried out 44 years after his death in 1428. Wycliffe's corpse was exhumed and burned and the ashes cast into the River Swift.

Jan Hus lived from 1369 to July 1415. He was a Czech priest, philosopher, dean and president at Charles University in Prague. He was a church reformer, and a central figure in the Bohemian Reformation in present day Czech Republic, which was the predecessor of the Protestant Reformation.

After John Wycliffe, Hus is considered the first Church reformer, as he lived before Luther, Calvin and many other great and brave men of the Reformation. His teachings had a strong influence on Western Europe and more than a century later, on Martin Luther. He was burned at the stake for heresy against the doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church. After Hus was executed in 1415, the followers of his religious teachings rebelled against their Roman Catholic rulers and defeated five consecutive papal crusades between 1420 and 1431. A century later, as many as 90% of inhabitants of the Czech lands were Protestant.

On 20 December 1409, Alexander V issued a papal bull or decree that empowered the Archbishop to proceed against Wycliffism in Prague. All copies of Wycliffe's writings were to be surrendered and his doctrines repudiated and free preaching discontinued. The Wycliffe books and valuable manuscripts were burned, and Hus and his followers were excommunicate.

On the 18th of October 1412 during his trial, Hus appealed to Jesus Christ as the supreme judge. He appealed directly to the highest Christian authority and in doing so, he bypassed the laws and structures of the Roman Catholic Church. For the Bohemian Reformation this step was as significant as the 95 Theses nailed to the door of the Wittenberg church by Martin Luther in 1517.

An Italian archbishop pronounced the sentence of condemnation upon Hus and his writings. He fell upon his knees and asked God with a soft voice to forgive all his enemies. The sentence of the Church was pronounced, stripping him of all rights. He was lead through town and a tall paper hat was put upon his head, with the inscription “the leader of a heretical movement.”

At the place of execution, he knelt down and prayed aloud. The executioner tied his hands behind his back with ropes, and bound his neck with a chain to a stake around which wood and straw had been piled up so that it covered him to the neck. At the last moment, the imperial marshal, asked Hus to recant and thus save his own life. Hus declined, responding, “God is my witness that the things charged against me I never preached. In the same truth of the Gospel, which I have written, taught, and preached, drawing upon the sayings and positions of the holy doctors, I am ready to die today. . . . *Christ, son of the Living God, have mercy on us!*” Hus’ ashes were later thrown into the Rhine River.

Girolamo Savonarola was born in 1452 and died in 1498. He was an Italian Dominican friar and preacher. He was known for his calls for Christian renewal. He denounced clerical corruption, the Church’s tyrannical rule and the exploitation of the poor.

In 1495 when Florence refused to join Pope Alexander VI’s Holy League to protect Italy from French domination the Vatican summoned Savonarola to Rome. He disobeyed and further defied the pope by preaching under a papal ban. In

retaliation, the Pope excommunicated him in May 1497 and threatened to place Florence under a papal ban also. Savonarola defied the pope, continued to preach the gospel and felt he was on a divine mission.

Savonarola hinted that he had performed miracles thus proving his divine mission. A rival Franciscan friar proposed to test Savonarola's mission by walking through fire. It would be the first trial by fire in Florence in over four hundred years and was set for April 7. A crowd filled the central square and eager to see if God would intervene. A sudden rain drenched the spectators and government officials cancelled the proceedings. The crowd disbanded angrily. Savonarola and two of his supporting friars were imprisoned. On 23 May 1498, Church and civil authorities condemned, hanged, and burned the three friars in the main square of Florence.

These are just a few of the brave men, from France, Czech, England and Italy, who stood for the Word of God and against the Catholic Church's abuse of God's Word designed to increase control politically of its leaders and the power to abuse the common people they were suppose to serve.

Reformation Ignites

The fires of Reformation had been smoldering for 350 years and with Luther's bold nailing of the 95 Theses to the church door in 1517 the flames of the Reformation burst forth. This humble priest and professor of theology came to believe the words of God found in the Bible over the corrupt doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church. Luther's focus in his 95 Theses was that of indulgences. An indulgence is remission of part or all of the temporal and especially purgatorial punishment, according to Roman Catholicism, that is due for sins whose eternal punishment has been remitted and whose guilt the Church for payment by the sinner has pardoned. Indulgences purchase for

the sinner less time in Purgatory. What is Purgatory? The name Purgatory comes from the Latin word meaning to make clean or to purify. It is the place in accordance with Catholic doctrine of temporal or time-based punishment for those who, departing this life in God's grace, are saved but not entirely forgiven, and are not free from forgivable sins and have not fully paid satisfaction due to God for their sins.

There are some copies of Luther's 95 Theses in the back for those who are interested. Luther's 95 Theses' primary focus was indulgences and Purgatory. His refusal to renounce all of his writings at the demand of Pope Leo X in 1520 and the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V lead to the Diet of Worms in 1521. An imperial "diet" is an assemble of the leaders of the Holy Roman Empire and the assembly was held in Worms, Germany to address Martin Luther. The Diet of Worms resulted in Luther's excommunication from the Roman Catholic Church and being declared an outlaw with a price on his head by the Emperor.

Despite the agreement that he could return home safely, it was privately understood among the Catholic leaders that Luther would soon be arrested and be put to death. To protect him from this fate, Prince Fredrick of Saxony seized Luther on his way home and hid him. It was during his time in hiding at Wartburg that Luther began his German translation of the Bible.

This Bible translation had a tremendous impact on both the German Church and culture. It fostered the development of a standard version of the German language and influenced the writing of an English translation, the Tyndale Bible. His hymns influenced the development of singing in Protestant churches and his marriage to Katharina von Bora, former nun, set a model for the practice of allowing Protestant clergy to marry.

Post Reformation

The Reformation begun in the 1500s has never ended. A tradition of questioning tradition and of examining the teachings of the Scriptures for oneself emerged as new form of Christianity, distinct from the Catholic traditions that had dominated the religion for nearly 1500 years.

The key motto that emerged out of the Reformation was the phrase, “Reformed and reforming.” Meaning that the Christian Church was always meant to be undergoing Spirit-led, Scripturally based reformation, harkening to the eternal voice of God and holding fast to the Scripture as the world moves forward in history.

Yet today, I want to suggest, the tradition that prided itself on always reforming has itself grown stale and corrupt. It has fallen out of step with the Spirit and the Bible. It itself is in need of reformation. This statement is not so much a condemnation of our tradition as Protestants, but a reminder to us to never let the ways of the world invade the church. We are never to grow content with things the way that they are with this world. Rather, we are called always to be heeding the voice of the Spirit of God, seeking through the Bible how God is calling us into ministry and how we are to share the eternal gospel with others and how we are to serve others as Christ’s ambassadors.

Just as in the days of Martin Luther and John Calvin, our churches have ceased to understand the fullness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We have failed to live in the power of the Holy Spirit that resides within each and every one of us. We have grown enamored with our positions of power and privilege in American society compared to the world and in so doing, have forsaken those whom Christ himself has called us to honor the most.

My beloved, today, as we celebrate the reformation that began 500 years ago, I also want to suggest that we, of all people, are in need of reformation. The Christian tradition at its core is one of reformation. Reformation didn't begin with Luther and his 95 theses in Wittenberg. It began with God's appointed prophets of the Old Testament calling people back to worshipping the One and only True God. It continued with a Jewish teacher and prophet who more importantly was the only Son of God and the long awaited Messiah named Jesus coming to the earth and calling people back to God the Father and confronting the religious traditions that had taken people's focus off of God.

He healed the sick on the Sabbath, in direct violation of the man's laws that had been added to God's. He touched the unclean and unworthy and extended forgiveness to violators of God's law who repented. He overturned tables and spoke truth to the religious powers of his day, which ultimately cost him his life.

My beloved, when we say that we follow Christ, we are saying that we are followers of the greatest reformer that ever lived. When we say we follow Jesus, we are committing ourselves to be a people that are always harkening back to the eternal truth of God's Word, submitting to His Spirit and modeling our lives after Christ's.

The truth of God is unchanging even as the world is ever changing. When churches and Christians begin traditions that affect God's Word, the Bible in a negative way this takes us back to the very reason the reformers challenged the Roman Catholic Church and the heresies against God's Word. We, as followers of Christ, are people of reformation. Always called to be living the pure Word of God and standing against those who think they have the right to change what God has given us as the way of life until Christ's return.

Canyon Bible Church is a reformed and reforming church that desires to actively live the Word of God. Today I want you to take away the 5 core truths that came from the Reformation of the 1500s. I challenge each of us to commit the Five Solas to memory. “Sola” is Latin meaning “alone”, these Five Solas stand-alone and need no tradition of man. They are printed in your bulletin – take them home, look up the scriptures and discuss their meaning.

Five Solas

Sola Scriptura – The Scripture Alone is the Standard

II Timothy 3:14-17 You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned *them*,¹⁵ and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.¹⁶ All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;¹⁷ so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work

Soli Deo Gloria – For the Glory of God Alone

1 Peter 4:11 Whoever speaks, *is to do so* as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves *is to do so* as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Solo Christo – By Christ’s Work Alone are We Saved

Colossians 1:13-16 For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son,¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.¹⁶ For by Him all things were created, *both* in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him.

Sola Gratia – Salvation by Grace Alone

Ephesians 1:3-8 Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ,⁴ just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love⁵ He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will,⁶ to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.⁷ In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace⁸ which He lavished on us. In all wisdom and insight.

Sola Fide – Justification by Faith Alone

Galatians 3:6-11 Even so Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.
⁷ Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham. ⁸ The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, *saying*, “All the nations will be blessed in you.” ⁹ So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer. ¹⁰ For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse; for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, to perform them.” ¹¹ Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for, “The righteous man shall live by faith.”

If we take to heart these Five Solas and live them - we will fulfill the 2 great commandments of the New Testament. Reading from the Gospel According to Mark, the very words of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, “‘YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH.’” ³¹ The second is this, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” (Mark 12:30-31)

Amen and amen!