



Editorial

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The sixteenth-century Reformation in Zurich

The reformation of the church is God's work. God loves His church with an everlasting, unquenchable love. God's eternal counsel with regard to His church includes not only the selection of every member, but also the entire history of the church through time and eternity. That earthly history includes times of reformation in His church. In His perfect wisdom, God determines a process of apostasy, that is, that the church that once maintained the teaching and practices of the Bible, over a period of time, departs from biblical standards. Such departure always involves *doctrinal* apostasy, setting aside the truth for the lie. It spreads into *worship*, defiling the worship with idolatrous practices. The corruption spreads to the church's *government*, which often takes on the form of a hierarchy that oppresses those who criticize the church for her errors and godless living. And finally, the apostasy manifests itself in the *lives* of the members, who learn to transgress with the approval of the church.

When this happens, God does not forsake His beloved church. He reforms her. Reformation is a return to the Bible—its doctrine, worship, church government, and Christian life. Since true reformation is a genuine return to the Bible, it is a *spiritual* activity, and it begins in the hearts of believers. God raises up preachers convicted by the Spirit of sin and error first of all in themselves. With that conviction and the boldness of the Spirit, they begin to preach the word that is faithful to the Bible. The Spirit uses the preaching to work repentance and conversion in the hearts and lives of God's chosen people. God is reforming His church.

God uses different kinds of men, men eternally chosen and sovereignly formed by God for this work. The sixteenth-century Reformation of the church bears this out. God determined a Martin Luther, a spiritually minded man of tremendous strength of character and will. God prepared Luther to begin the process of reformation—the process of forming the church back to the Bible—after almost 1,000 years of the church departing. Luther would, by God's grace, bear the brunt of Rome's wrath and opposition. Luther's rediscovery, proclamation, and defense of the doctrine of justifica-

tion by faith alone tore down the whole corrupt structure of Rome's theology, worship, and church government. From Germany, the Reformation spread to the rest of Europe.

When Reformed people speak of *the Reformation*, they are usually thinking about Luther, his Ninety-Five Theses, and the events that followed.

However, God in His wisdom determined that the Reformation in the sixteenth century would have two related but distinct branches that would develop along different lines. The *Lutheran* churches developed their own confessions, liturgy, and church government. The other branch is the *Reformed* church. Why these two branches?

First, it should be clear that the Reformed branch was in harmony with the Lutheran on the essential issues, starting with the doctrines of sovereign grace, including justification by faith alone, the total depravity of man (with his bound will), and predestination. Reformed men like Calvin highly regarded Martin Luther and openly acknowledged their debt to him.

And yet, God determined that the Reformed branch would grow and develop separately.

Luther was God's instrument to bring down the whole system of Rome, as noted above. Luther then began to build the proper foundation with Jesus Christ as the Chief Cornerstone of the church. But his doctrine was primarily centered on soteriology (salvation), because that was the heart of Rome's error. God raised up John Calvin and many other Reformed men to build on Luther's foundation, but with doctrine that was more theological, that is, God-centered. That is the positive side of the purpose of God in separating the Reformed church from the Lutheran.

There is also a negative side. Lutheranism followed Luther in some of his weaknesses. His doctrine of the Lord's Supper, maintaining that Christ is physically in the bread and is chewed with the teeth, remains Lutheran teaching today. In addition, while Luther revered the Scripture and held it to be the only authority for faith and life, his view of the Bible's prescriptive authority in worship and church life was that, if the Bible did not

forbid something, then it was permissible. For example, since the Bible does not forbid images of Jesus, crucifixes in church may be allowed. Since the Bible does not forbid Christian rulers from exercising some rule in the church, it may be allowed.

The Reformed would take a different stance. Regarding worship and church practices, Zwingli maintained that if the Bible did not command it, the church was forbidden to practice it. For example, he removed choirs from worship and organs from the church buildings for that reason. This was the Reformed view of Scripture's authority followed also by John Calvin some years later. The Reformed churches would therefore develop in a different way than the Lutheran churches.

More significant is the error that crept into the Lutheran churches after Luther died. The issue of the Lord's supper remained a dividing line between the two branches of the Reformation, even thrusting them apart. But, in addition, the Lutheran churches became weak in the doctrine of salvation. Melancthon, Luther's bosom friend and comrade in arms in Wittenberg, had come to the position that fallen man's will had a small amount of power in it to will for good, and in salvation, to will in harmony with God's will. This is the error of synergism. To their credit, the early Lutherans did not budge on this, and their main confession, the Formula of Concord drawn up in 1577, maintains Luther's biblical position on the will of fallen man—it cannot and does not contribute anything in salvation. That is not to say that Melancthon did not have influence on some strains of Lutheranism.

Melancthon's influence *is* evident in the Formula of Concord in its weak, even contradictory, treatment of predestination. The Formula teaches election, though

it does not mention reprobation. But significantly, in this article on predestination, it affirms at least six times that God earnestly desires to save all men, and desires that all should be converted and believe in Christ.¹ By separating the Reformed branch from the Lutheran, God kept this grievous error, as well as synergism, out of Reformed doctrine, at least in its early development.

The significance of the Reformation in Zurich is set forth in the rest of this issue, including education for the children as well as an academy for an educated ministry; the emphasis on preaching; the doctrine of the covenant over against the Anabaptists; the Second Helvetic Confession; and Bullinger's influence in Reformed churches all over Europe, including England.

God raised up Zwingli, and Bullinger after him, for the reform of His church in Zurich. This was the start of the Reformation in Switzerland. Obedience to the Word of God was established as the foundation. After Zurich went for the Reformation, it spread to other major cities like Bern, Basel, and Schaffhausen, and then to many smaller bergs. And eventually, it came to Geneva (c. 1535). God raised up a host of extremely capable Reformed preachers to preach and to write throughout Switzerland, men such as Haller, Capito, Oecolampadius, Miconius, Hofmeister, Vermigli, Zanchi, Bucer, Farel, Viret, and Calvin, to name some of them. Any one of these Reformers is worth studying. But the point is, Reformed doctrine, church polity, worship, and walk of life was born and nurtured in Switzerland. And it began with Zwingli preaching the Bible in 1519 in Zurich.

1 Formula of Concord, Article 11—"The Eternal Predestination and Election of God," sections 7, 9, 11, and the negative (rejection) sections 1-3.