Battle Creek church of Christ

THE
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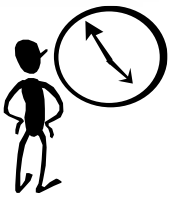
Time of Assembly



Sunday:

Bible Study	9:00 a.m.
Worship	10:00 a.m.
Worship	5:00 p.m.

(every other week)

Wednesday:

Bible Study	6:30 p. m.

The Reformation Movement

By Andy Sochor

In terms of general "church" history, it is difficult to overstate the importance of the Reformation Movement. As we have already studied, the Roman Catholic Church dominated the world – religiously and politically. As "Christianity" became the official religion of the Roman Empire, those who would not conform to the "official" doctrines and practices of "the church" would often face the threat of persecution. However, because "the church" continued to slide further and further into apostasy, those who were faithful New Testament Christians were among those whom the authorities could target for their supposed "heretical" teachings. The political power of the Roman Catholic Church also meant that civil rulers needed to submit to the will of the pope.

The Roman Catholic Church still exerts a strong influence in the world today, but not nearly to the extent it did for centuries after the fall of the Roman Empire. In the sixteenth century, there would be a movement that would wrest power away from the Roman Catholic Church – religiously and politically – and completely change the religious landscape of the "Christian" world. This movement became known as the Reformation Movement because it sought to correct the corruption and abuses of the Roman Catholic Church. In the previous lesson, we learned about some early reformers. These individuals and groups also saw the problems in the Roman Catholic Church and stood against them, yet they were dealt with swiftly and severely. However, their efforts helped pave the way for the Reformation Movement, which would make a much broader and lasting impact.

One note before we begin… Later in this series, we will discuss the Restoration Movement of the nineteenth century. This would be similar in some ways to the Reformation

Movement of the sixteenth century. Both movements were made up of people who saw problems in the current state of the religious world and wanted to correct them. Yet they differed fundamentally in their approach. The Reformation Movement set about to reform the church that grew out of the apostasy that the apostle Paul warned about – the Roman Catholic Church. The Restoration Movement sought to restore the Lord's church by returning to the New Testament and uniting upon the doctrines and practices found there. In a future article, we will discuss the Restoration Movement in more detail.

What Set the Stage for the Reformation

In addition to the efforts of the early reformers we discussed in the previous article, a few other factors helped make the Reformation Movement successful.

First, there was an "awakening" in Europe. This brought a new interest in literature, art, and science. This also led people to think differently and independently, so they were comfortable questioning what they previously believed and arriving at conclusions different from what "the church" wanted them to believe. As this continued, people would be exposed to new ideas from others who were also rethinking things.

Second, Gutenberg invented the printing press in 1455. Prior to this, producing books and other printed materials was a slow and laborious process. Yet this new invention made it possible to disseminate books and information more quickly, leading to revolutionary change. Notably, the first book printed was the Bible.

Third, there was a growing spirit of nationalism. Today, nationalism often has a negative connotation, yet it led to a positive outcome in this case. In his book, Church History, John D. Cox notes that this "growing spirit of nationalism…fed the desire for greater freedom in religion. Patriotism caused many to resent the idea of submitting to foreign rule over their own national churches. They disliked the idea of the pope, in another land, appointing their church officers" (p. 54). The conditions were right for a movement to launch. All it needed was someone to put it in motion.

Martin Luther

Martin Luther (1483-1546) was credited with starting the Reformation Movement. Of course, we have already discussed others who made similar attempts before Luther. And as we will notice in a moment, others championed the cause of the Reformation. Yet Martin Luther played a pivotal role in his attempt to reform the Catholic church.

Martin Luther was born in Eisleben, Germany, on November 10, 1483. Initially, he intended to study law but changed his mind and entered a monastery when he was twenty-one years old. By 1508, he was preaching in Wittenberg and teaching in the University.

In 1510, Martin Luther visited the court of Pope Leo X in Rome. This was the beginning of his disillusionment with the Roman Catholic Church, as he observed how

irreligious and corrupt the priests and leaders were. This led him to lose respect for the pope, which would undoubtedly embolden him later when he took a public stand against him.

Pope Leo X had plans to complete the Cathedral of St. Peter in Rome. However, this was a costly endeavor, and funds were lacking. So, the pope authorized several agents to go out and sell "indulgences" to raise money for the project. These were pieces of paper that could be used like money to buy the forgiveness of sins – either sins that had been previously committed or ones that might be committed in the future. They could even be used to help a deceased loved one escape from Purgatory (we discussed this error in the previous article).

John Tetzel came to Wittenberg to sell these indulgences on behalf of the pope. Luther vehemently opposed this, and in October of 1517, he posted his famous ninety-five theses to the door of the church in Wittenberg. In these propositions, he condemned the sale of indulgences and issued a challenge for a debate. These ninety-five theses were condemned as heresy and burned. The controversy over these matters continued, and Luther's views spread to others. He was later excommunicated.

Luther's attitude was commendable. He rejected the illegitimate authority of the pope and attempted to take his stand on the Scriptures. When he was called to retract his teaching at the Diet of Worms in 1521, he said, "Unless I am persuaded by means of the passages which I have quoted, and unless they thus render my conscience bound by the word of God — I cannot and will not retract . . . Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise so help me God." As we will notice in the next article of this series, Luther and his followers may not have perfectly put this into practice, but the sentiment is commendable.

Other Notable Reformers

Martin Luther played a chief role in the Reformation Movement. Yet others helped further the cause as well.

William Tyndale (1484-1536)

Tyndale was from England and aimed to make the Bible available to the common people in their own language. He labored to translate the Bible into English in the face of suffering and persecution. He succeeded in doing this but was eventually betrayed by a friend. He was strangled and burned at the stake on October 6, 1536.

Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1564)

Zwingli was a reformer from Switzerland. His approach to Scripture differed from Luther's. Luther's philosophy was that anything not explicitly prohibited in Scripture was permitted. Zwingli believed anything that could not be proven from the Scriptures was prohibited. Several New Testament passages could be used to commend Zwingli's approach (Matthew 7:21-23; Colossians 3:17; Hebrews 7:12-14).

John Calvin (1509-1564)

Calvin was born in France. While studying law in Paris, he learned of Luther's

teachings, deserted Catholicism, and fled to Geneva in Switzerland. He developed the system of "Calvinism" that continues to influence the religious world today heavily. This can be summarized by the "T.U.L.I.P." acronym – total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, and the perseverance of the saints. Much more could be said about these doctrines, but we do not have space in this article to do so.

Summary

The Reformation Movement forever changed the religious landscape of the world. One of the positive outcomes of this was that it weakened the influence of the Roman Catholic Church and led people to question the errors they had been taught throughout their lives. Men like Martin Luther endeavored to take their stand on the word of God. This is truly a noble aim! Unfortunately, this movement failed to return to the doctrine and practices of the New Testament church. Rather than people uniting upon the words of Jesus and His apostles, they were fractured into many different denominations.

Does God Give Us a Pattern to Follow?

By Terry Wane Benton

The total evidence of scripture is that God is a God of order and expects us to follow the pattern of sound words in everything we do (II Timothy 1:13; Colossians 3:17; I Corinthians 14:33ff).

God's Patterns

Noah had a pattern to follow in building the ark (Genesis 6:22). He had to operate within what the pattern authorized. He was not free to make alterations according to his own will. If God gave no pattern, then Noah could do whatever he wanted. He could use whatever wood he wanted and build it as large or small as he wanted. He had to follow the pattern God gave him. He could not deviate from the pattern.

Moses had a pattern (Exodus 25:8-9,40; 26:30; 27:8; cf. Acts 7:41, 44; Leviticus 10:1-2; I Samuel 15) on building and furnishing the tabernacle. He had to build the tabernacle within the bounds of what the pattern authorized. He was not free to make alterations, changes, additions, or subtractions from the pattern. He had to do everything according to the pattern because the earthly structure and furnishings had to reflect or foreshadow the spiritual things to come properly. The spiritual things had a pattern that had to be precisely foreshadowed by that earthly tabernacle.

New Testament Patterns (II Timothy 1:13; 2:5; 3:16-17)

For gospel obedience

How do we come into Christ for salvation (Romans 6:17-18; I Timothy 1:16)?

If there is no pattern of properly coming to salvation in Christ, then you cannot demand belief, what to believe, repentance, confession, and you cannot bind

baptism. We can expect people to comply only if there is a pattern of sound words on these matters.

If there is no pattern for proper gospel obedience, then you cannot forbid infant baptism, appealing to Mary, counting beads, or doing cartwheels for salvation.

If there is no proper order, then there is no disorder. Anything we want to do or believe would be acceptable to God. There is a pattern of sound words on how to come into Christ for salvation (Galatians 3:26-27).

For collective worship
(Colossians 3:16-17; I Corinthians 11:17ff; 14:1-34)

If there is no orderly pattern for how to worship God in spirit and truth (John 4:21-24), you can make a meal out of the Lord's Supper and have butterbeans and deviled eggs with tea and banana pudding in memorial to Jesus and call it the Lord's Supper.

If there is no pattern to follow, we can have animal sacrifices, restore the Old Testament's Tabernacle and priesthood system with burning incense, a table of shewbread, and pray to Mary or Buddha.

If no order is given in the New Testament, then there can be no disorder. Everything goes, including Rock bands, strobe lights, and everyone speaking gibberish (pretending to speak in tongues simultaneously with no interpreter). There can be no disorder if no pattern shows proper order. But there is order in the New Testament's assembled worship, and therefore a pattern to follow.

For the organization of the church
(Acts 14:23; Tit. 1:5; 1 Pet. 5:2)

If there is no pattern on how the church should be organized, then we can have popes, cardinals, synods, clubs, district associations, and state and federal organizations that rule the smaller clubs or churches.

If there is no pattern of church organization seen in the New Testament, then we can accept the priestly caste of Catholics and the anti-priestly caste of the Protestants at the same time.

If there is no order, there is no disorder.

Is there a pattern for the above things? Can we see only disorder and everyone doing as they please in the New Testament? Can we find all the things of Catholicism and, at the same time, all the things of the Protestant churches all used and celebrated in the New Testament? Was Paul a Roman Catholic while Peter was a Lutheran, John a Methodist, and Andrew a Baptist? Or were they all doing the same things, teaching the same things in every church (I Corinthians 4:17; 1:10-13), or were they doing all the random things reflected in Roman Catholicism and Protestantism?

Suppose we see order in the New Testament, no Roman Catholicism, and no various Protestant denominations. In that case, we must go back to the pattern of sound

words and be ordered according to the pattern of sound words so that none of these things not seen in the Bible are in play and are not supported and encouraged by us. If there is a pattern of sound words that shows what a church should teach and practice, then that is the will of God for us to teach and practice. No more and no less than what is presented to us in the scriptures that "*completely furnish the man of God*" (II Timothy 3:16-17). If the Scriptures "completely" furnish us but do not furnish us with how to be Roman Catholics or Protestant denominations and only how to be Christians, then that is the pattern of sound words to follow. We cannot be more or less than Christians following the pattern of sound words. They did that then, and it can and must be done now. There is a pattern of sound words in these matters, and we are not free to ignore or alter them.

God bless all who are determined to abide by the pattern of sound words.

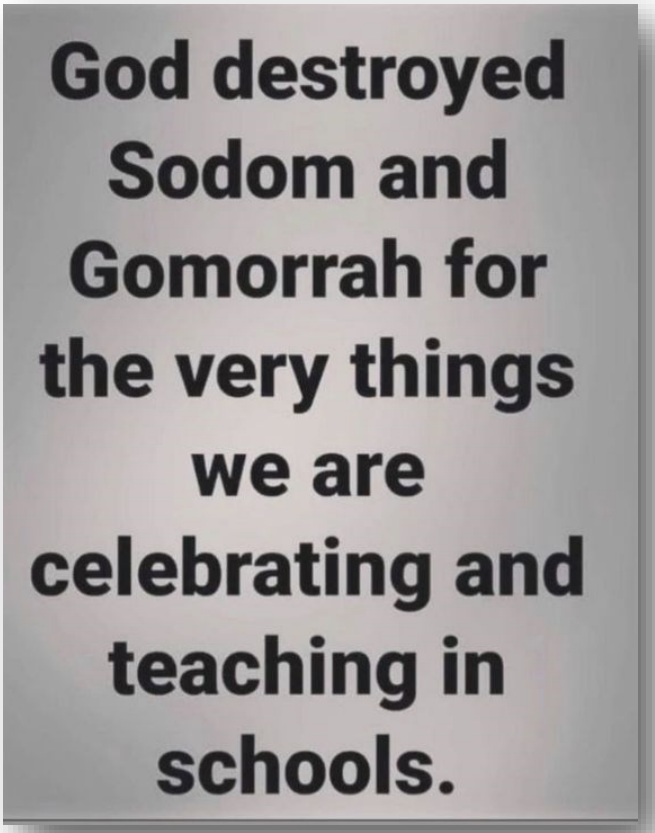
One Reason Congregations Fail

By Perry Hall

Why are congregations failing? If one answer can be given, groups rely on man's wisdom rather than God's. An example of this faulty thinking is found in the eldership.

A common model for choosing elders and how these elders "rule" is the business model. The misaligned thinking is if they are successful in business, they will be successful in the "business" of the Lord. Businesses are not the biblical model, or else the man who parabolically wanted to build bigger barns would have been lauded!

What, then, is the model? The family. This is seen in his relationships with his family, such as being a "one-woman man" and ruling his household (I Timothy 3; Titus 1). Then, after discussing these qualities, calling the church "the household of God" (I Timothy 3:15) emphasizes that point again.

What qualities do a good father and husband have? Faithful, strong, dependable, communication, sacrifice, love, trustworthy, and more.

Want healthy congregations? It starts with the overseers treating the congregation as a family.