

Reformation Legacy

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[0 : 00] If you turn in your copy of God's Word to the Gospel of John, chapter 12. As you're turning there, I do want to bring greetings from your brothers and sisters at Grace Emanuel Reformed Baptist Church in Grand Rapids.

And this is a passage that God used in my conversion. And I just want to tell you briefly about that before making a sharp right turn and looking at some of the legacy of the Reformation that's relevant to this time of year.

John chapter 12, verse 36, says, While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.

When Jesus had said these things, he departed and hid himself from them. Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him. So that the word might be spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled.

Lord, who has believed what he heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? Therefore they could not believe.

[1 : 14] For again Isaiah said, He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, lest they see with their eyes and understand with their heart, and turn and I would heal them.

The Bible tells us that we're sinners through and through, and I knew that from an early age. My parents, before I was born, came out of the Methodist church.

That was simply at that time the local church that you would go to. You would have a good sermon one week and a bad sermon the next week, and there was very little discernment. But in the early 70s, my parents came to embrace the doctrines of grace, so that when I was born, a small church called Dewsbury Evangelical Church was growing, small but growing, with just a few families.

And so I believe from the first Sunday I was born, I was hearing the gospel, and I don't think my mother let me have more than two Sundays off in all those years up to being a late teenager, even if I was ill.

We go to church on Sunday. No negotiation. And so I always heard the gospel regularly, and I claimed to be converted at least twice before I really was.

[2 : 33] In the 80s, I was taken to a Billy Graham crusade and went forward onto the soccer field. That was, sadly, probably the main motivation for going forward, not because of any true repentance and faith.

But I was told on that soccer field that I was now a Christian because I'd prayed that prayer. Very, very dangerous thing to tell people, sinful thing to tell people, because there was no evidence in my life that I was truly saved.

And then there was a time, just a couple of years after that, where I did feel conviction for my sin, but conviction is not conversion. And it did not lead to true repentance and faith.

And it was the elders who realized that there was nothing in my profession of faith. It was more through peer pressure. A couple of friends of mine, close friends, had just been baptized.

And I was now out of the club. And it wasn't until I was age 17 that God did save me through a sermon on a passage like that.

[3 : 42] I can't quite remember which one it was. It may have been one in 1 Corinthians on the subject of hardening the heart and how God owes me nothing as a wretched sinner.

And yet, I sat there on a children's camp as a 17-year-old, looking around, thinking, I've only got one more year where I'm old enough to come to this, or the right age to come to this camp.

And I've heard the gospel thousands upon thousands of times and rejected it every single time. And so, with an attitude of fear, fear, I began to pray and pray and pray.

I'd been playing games in my mind with God, saying, well, okay, all those years ago, I did pray the prayer. It's like a cookie recipe.

You have to do this, this, this, and this. You have to include these items in the prayer, and you're done. And there was no heart engagement, though. But I reasoned with myself, depravity of my own heart, that when I get to judgment day, I can say, well, God, I prayed the prayer, and you didn't save me.

[4 : 51] Not my fault. It's ridiculous how we fool ourselves. But then, during that time on that camp, I was wrestling with my own sin.

The fact that I was a sinner was never in doubt. But growing up in a Christian home, and I never want to despise that, that is such a blessing. I really struggled with assurance for a long time.

I did repent. I did have faith. But I guess my difficulty was that my pattern of life simply did not change at all.

I still went to youth group on Friday evening. I still went to every church service there was. Still went to prayer meeting on a Wednesday evening. What actually changed?

And so I did struggle with assurance for quite some time. But God was gracious and did give me that assurance and showed me that I was battling against sin rather than being comfortable with it and other signs of faith.

[6 : 01] And over time, I would be asked to go and speak at the youth group and then eventually in the pulpit in a very small church there. And then I would start to be invited to different churches to preach.

We're talking 20-some years ago now. And then we moved to Sarah's parents' church and eventually I became an elder for two years working for a publisher called Evangelical Press in the UK.

Probably the most famous thing they did was an evangelistic booklet called Ultimate Questions that was available in multiple languages. And after four years there, they effectively ran out of money.

They're still going on a small basis. And I began seminary and started working for Reformation Heritage Books and for Dr. Joel Beakey.

And so we've been in Grand Rapids now for almost seven years. And I'm about to be nominated to be one of the pastors there, God willing, if everything goes to plan.

[7 : 08] But we've seen God working very clearly in our lives. And we continue to pray for our children and their salvation. But God is a gracious and a faithful God who has led us to this point.

And we pray that he would continue to lead us. I realize I've rushed through that. And we're about to take a sharp turn now to look at a subject which is pertinent to this period today.

We're between two dates here. Obviously, we just had October 31, which is the 501st anniversary of Martin Luther nailing his 95 theses to the Kastel Dor, the Schlosskircher Dor in Wittenberg, Germany.

And next week is the 400th anniversary of the beginning of the Synod of Dort, which is also a critical event in the life of the Protestant church, in the Reformed church.

And so maybe I assume you heard lots about the Reformation and its importance last year. Many conferences, many Sunday school meetings.

[8 : 23] Well, what I want to look at briefly this morning in this session is the legacy, the impact, what happened next, and why things like the Synod of Dort were so important.

And what we see in the Reformation is the working of God and the importance of the truths that were rediscovered and defended.

These aren't new truths. They were always there. There were always people who were defending them. The candle never went out. And we can see many different applications today from the Reformation.

We hear in Jeremiah 6, 16, where it says, Thus says the Lord, this is God speaking, Stand by the roads and look and ask for the ancient paths where the good way is and walk in it and find rest for your souls.

But they said, We will not walk in it. And Jeremiah here points his readers to their theological roots, to their history.

[9 : 38] Why? Why? So that they can walk in the right way themselves. It's wise advice for us today too. And we understand today better because we study and learn from the past.

We look at biblical history and we look at world history and we recognize with a Christian mindset, a Christian worldview that God is faithful.

God can be trusted. That he is always in sovereign control. And we see it elsewhere too in the Psalms. The people of God were called on to remember what they believe and why they believe it. They pass stories on to their children. And our hope for today and our hope for the future rests on what we learn from the past. Rests on observing and knowing that God continues to be faithful. So I want to look at what happened after the Reformation and look at some of the impact that it had on the world. And to do that, I want to look at the impact on the church by considering a couple of examples and then look at the impact on wider society.

[11:02] And I want this to be an encouragement and a motivation so that you will stand for the faith regardless of the cost, boldly, wherever you are.

The Reformation of the 16th century was the greatest recovery of truth or true Christianity since the close of Scripture.

We've been left a treasury. And the Reformation was many things. It was a recovery of biblical truth though in particular about worship and about salvation.

the recovery of the true meaning of the sacraments, what the true church is, and the recovery of biblical pastoral care all on the foundation of the absolute authority of Scripture.

That's what this flowed out of. Grasping that when someone read a passage of the Bible to you, you could legitimately declare this is the Word of God and bow under that authority.

[12:17] Whatever it says, whatever it teaches, that settles it. And the Reformation also recovered the centrality of preaching in the church.

Specifically, preaching the Word of God. The Word of God was now central, not the opinion of mere men, not formal sermons, that were often in Latin that not many people could understand.

Not the opinion of men or popes or church traditions not based on the Bible anymore. And we saw people raised up even before the Reformation to prepare the way.

People like Augustine of Hippo in 4th century North Africa. Bernard of Clairvaux in France in the 11th century. Peter Waldo in France in the 12th century.

John Wycliffe in England in the 14th century. John Huss in Bohemia in the 14th century. Guillermo Savonarola in the 15th century in Italy.

[13:20] There are others too and we can't say they got everything right. No way. In fact, we're troubled by some of what we see. But then we see God raising up after wave of these reformers in different countries.

They picked up the truths that were rediscovered and spread from Martin Luther and Ulrich Zwingli who were raised up independently. Didn't know of each other until after that date in 1517.

This isn't a one man thing. And the event grew and expanded within Europe very quickly. And today we can see the result.

The effects are all across the world even in nations where being a Christian isn't even allowed. It's not just a passing phase that died out.

The effects are still visible today. And God used this reformation to further his kingdom for his own glory. Above all.

[14:23] And he perfectly prepared everything and since has perfectly used this monumental event. That's the reason why you're here today. That's the reason why you've got a Bible in your hand this morning.

Let's look at what happened next. I want to look at two challenges and then one huge step forward.

And the first challenge was a man, a professor, Jacobus Arminius who lived from 1560 to 1609.

And he taught in opposition to reformed truth that you needed grace and what we would say is called cooperation with grace.

Grace plus something else. It's God and you working together for salvation. this is in the 17th century and he's taking us back to medieval times.

He's a professor at Leiden University and he questioned the teaching of John Calvin. And what happened was Arminius died in 1609 and his followers in 1610 almost emboldened.

[15:43] Now he's gone. We can present what we believe based on what he said. He's no longer around. They formulated five points promoting his formulation of theology that we somehow contribute to our own salvation even if just a little bit.

And these people were called the remonstrants. They were a Dutch group. And as a result we have the synod the meeting of Dort a small town in the Netherlands or Dortrecht often it's called.

And it's the 400th anniversary on November 13th next week. And so you may see some articles you may hear some radio or podcasts or things like that just in the next few days.

This is what Luther had rejected. This is what had been fought against by these reformers. And it began on November 13, 1618.

And it ended on May 9, 1619. 154 meetings they had in that small building in Dortrecht.

[16:59] They had the opening and closing ceremonies in the great church there at the canal side. Beautiful little town. And this Dutch group formulated these five points.

The first one was free will. Second one was conditional election. The third one was unlimited atonement. The fourth one was resistible grace.

And the fifth one was potential security. Now you may be hearing some bells ringing in your head here. Linked with points that we are familiar with.

You see each of these points tries to sneak in man's works in different ways and doubts the sovereignty of God.

John Calvin is long dead. He died in 1564 and Arminius had just died the previous year. So this is the next generation taking this dispute a step further.

[18:05] These Arminians these remonstrants taught election based on foreseen faith. The universal application of Christ's atonement available to all who freely choose to accept it.

They taught limited human depravity. They taught the resistibility of God's grace and the possibility of a fall from salvation.

You can lose your salvation. salvation. You see the Roman and the Arminian system is a joint effort. You do as much as you can and God will help with the rest.

But the Bible and by extension Calvinism flowing out of that sola scriptura full authority of the Bible foundation that we have tells us that you can't even get up the first step.

we are saved entirely by grace. We are elected. It's all of God. He's done all that is necessary to save. It's a gift.

[19:12] And John Calvin those years earlier saw free will as a denial of the sovereignty of God. And so this meeting in Dortrecht was called to address these points and come up with answers in 1618 and 1619.

And the Reformed churches got together. It was that important from multiple countries they traveled. The gospel was at stake. The right way of salvation was at stake.

This is not about what makes sense to you and I. This is not about what we would like to be in the Bible or following a man like John Calvin.

The key here is what is biblical. What do we find in scripture? And this was a reaction to those five points posited by others rather than an attempt to explain all that we need to know about Calvinism or biblical salvation.

It's what we call polemical. It's a response. It's a reaction. And therefore naturally it's got a much narrower scope than the confessions that we have which teach us a lot more broadly about what we need to know.

[20:28] It's a refutation of error. It's an attack. It's an opposition. This is what one historian said. The synod gave a very close examination to the five points which had been advanced by the remonstrance and compared the teaching in them with the testimony of scripture.

Failing to reconcile that teaching with the word of God they unanimously rejected them. They felt however that a mere rejection was not sufficient.

It remained for them to set forth the true Calvinistic teaching in relationship to those matters which had been called into question. This they proceeded to do embodying the Calvinistic position in five chapters which have ever since been known as the five points of Calvinism.

So you realize here that John Calvin never saw the five points of Calvinism. The canons of Dort the doctrines of grace the five points of Calvinism were the results.

The five points responding to their five points. So you'll recognize it as TULIP as an acronym. The doctrines of grace total depravity unconditional election limited atonement irresistible grace and perseverance of the saints.

[21:57] Let's just look at those. This is ridiculous to try and do in just a few minutes. You could do books and whole series on these. And there are multiple Bible references I can give you. But let me

give you the headlines for each so that we understand where we're coming from for each of those headings.

Total depravity because of the fall this is the bad news because of the fall man in his natural condition apart from any work of grace is guilty before God hostile to God and inclined only toward evil continually spiritually dead unable to save himself affecting every part of others our mind our will our emotions you cannot you will not by nature turn from sin and believe in Christ to be saved we're in rebellion unconditional election it refers to God's choosing of certain individuals to salvation before the foundation of the world no merit in any of us nothing that is attractive in any of us not based on any foreseen response in us but it rests completely on the sovereign wisdom the good pleasure of

God repentance and faith are the result of election not the cause of election and apart from grace none of us would seek after God limited atonement or definite or particular redemption That's looking this is the key question what is the extent of Christ's atoning work on the cross and it answers this core question for whom did Christ die for whom did Christ die and it grapples with the question of what Christ's death actually accomplished did it merely make salvation possible for those who might believe or did his death actually accomplish and secure the salvation of his elect it's the latter the scriptures teach that Christ's death actually achieved the salvation for those for whom he died it wasn't general it was particular it was definite in his aim for the elect for the bride for the church and his death actually accomplished all that was necessary for everlasting salvation and cancels our debt satisfied the wrath of

God wins for his people all the benefits of salvation irresistible grace because man is spiritually dead in sin we're not unwell we're spiritually dead only a sovereign work of God can overcome that rebellion and bring us to faith in Christ the special work of God and the Holy Spirit whereby we are made spiritually alive given the gifts of repentance and faith God's sovereign work of grace can and will overcome all resistance and then finally the perseverance of the saints or the preservation of the saints all those chosen by God before time redeemed by Christ are effectually called by God to faith in Christ they will be finally saved nobody drops out once saved always saved eternal security we are kept by Christ and for

Christ and we see the fruits of salvation the fruits of conversion will be evident in our lives though not without remaining sin the underlying point of all of those of tulip is the absolute sovereignty of God and our complete dependence on him for salvation and the doctrines affirmed were that predestination is not conditional on belief that Christ did not die for all it tells us of the total depravity of man the irresistible grace of God and the impossibility of falling from grace and yet we also have the free and open offer of the gospel to people found in scripture John 6 37 whoever comes to me in this manner will not be turned away you're told to come like this and you will be saved [26 : 57] Acts 2 21 everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved so many people stumble here but there's no need come like this and you will be saved simple as that that was the monumental event that is about to be commemorated 400 years ago next week the second challenge for the reformers and for those who followed was the council of Trent it's called the counter reformation this is the Roman Catholic side their response because the Catholic church hoped all of this would just disappear just a passing phase but it didn't and they tried many ways to keep this rebel group under control and they became more determined but it spread and they couldn't stop it and people all over Europe were having the hypocrisies of the Roman

Catholic church in their behavior and in doctrine pointed out to them and they felt they needed to respond and they met three times in a place called Trent in northern Italy between 1545 and 1563 and they attempted to clarify their beliefs they believed their doctrines were right though and so all they looked to change were some of the outward behaviors the bad behavior you remember the indulgences you can purchase salvation you can purchase forgiveness of sins but what they're not attacking is the very core of what they believe they stood firm there so that's no good because the problem was not their behavior but rather why they acted that way the root problem the heart they weren't Christians they hadn't been transformed by God and no amount of improving how you live can get them to heaven they needed those solas of the reformation

Christ alone by faith alone through grace alone but they weren't willing to budge that wasn't even under consideration at these meetings to them it was settled and the reformers had got it wrong we are the church and so another part of this was increased persecution on true Christians even those who read books by the reformers and then finally one huge step forward another few years later

what we saw was that these reformers grasped hold of the massive monumental biblical truths and defended them and then what we see are the Puritans of the following century asking the question okay we get this we understand these truths how does that or how should that impact the way we live every day how does this affect my work my family my marriage my health and it goes on and on bringing the application to each of our lives and the

Puritans wrote many books which are incredibly rich and helpful and I would encourage you to get hold of them now strictly when we're talking about the Puritans we're looking at a few thousand men pastors in England but there are similar groups in Scotland and the Netherlands and Germany and then of course a small group of them traveled across the ocean eventually and had a huge influence here back in England though they met together in the middle of that 17th century and wrote what are called the Westminster documents the Westminster standards and among other things it included the Westminster confession of faith and catechisms questions and answers about what they believed for adults and children and they too were persecuted they were Presbyterians and Congregationalists but by 1689 when the persecution lifted somewhat the Baptists had written their own confession of faith using the work that others had done at

Westminster to show solidarity they changed some parts about baptism and other things about how the church is structured but they were saying we're with you we're not crazy they were excluded from the Westminster assembly but then you start to see these groups being brought together around the pillars of the faith what do the Puritans teach well let me just give you a couple of headlines they wanted to integrate scripture into their entire lives holistically searching the scriptures and bringing all of life into submission to that authority that was their purpose and in their books and in their writings you see so much practical application they had a strong emphasis on the Trinity and how that should impact our theology theology they had a strong emphasis and stress on the significance of the church and particularly within that on corporate worship you remember back in the times before the Reformation that people would come to church because they felt it was doing something or they were told it was doing something for them they were achieving something earning something even if they didn't understand what they were hearing in a language that wasn't familiar to them they were even restricted from part of the

[33 : 04] Lord's Table in the Roman Catholic Church they were given the bread but not the wine because they couldn't be trusted not to spill it so there's all sorts of issues there well now the Puritans and before them the reformers were bringing people into church into the full experience of what it meant they moved the pulpit back into the center of the room because preaching was now central and it was plain it was earnest it was biblical based on scripture which is mind-blowing at the time they brought us they built on top of what Ulrich Zwingli gave us the regulative principle of worship we are our worship is regulated not by our own preferences but by what scripture tells us about how God wants to be worshipped he had a strong emphasis on spiritual brotherhood on simplicity and order for the government of the church all sorts of things relating to powers of authority and kings and things like that but they strove to live and do theology doesn't just stay in the head they had that head heart hand mentality there's a key word here called experiential where what you believe impacts your heart and moves you what you hear doesn't just leave you as you walk out those doors after you've heard it preached it impacts every area of your lives it's all in

Christianity so it affects your home your church your work how you interact with society they set up the right priorities for daily godly living they viewed this as a place of spiritual warfare as you may have heard already we don't live in a spiritual playground we live in a spiritual battlefield and that's what they saw and they saw that so clearly as I prepare a session like this I'm sitting in a comfortable office they preparing their sermons were under threat of death banished from their own pulpits often you better believe what you're preaching in order to stand up for it and risk your life they taught the realism and the optimism of the gospel they taught of the heinousness of sin and how we should be killing it in order to please our lord and savior seven days a week they taught on the importance of family worship and if you weren't as a father in the normal way of things working if you weren't doing family worship every day it was a cause of church discipline they taught biblical evangelism from the pulpit first but then disseminated amongst the members of the church it becomes a model for believers to evangelize unbelievers they taught how to live in two worlds at once always keeping eternity in view even as we engage with this evil world they reflected some of what John

Calvin said when you left Calvin seminary all those years earlier in Geneva and headed to France your graduation ceremony in the auditorium or in Saint Peter's church in Geneva was almost the start of a ticking clock and the average lifespan of somebody leaving that seminary and going back into France to preach the gospel was 13 months you knew exactly what you were getting into and after one of these graduates died his wife wrote to Calvin saying how sad she was and all the problems that she was having and Calvin wrote back to her and said that each of us needs to live life with an attitude of having one foot raised one of your heels lifted just ever so deftly off the floor ready to take that final step at any moment into eternity that's how we should be living one step away from eternity that affects your everyday life well what we also have is some other impacts on society wider than just the church this is effectively the beginning of the modern age and it had that significant impact on education on politics on economics the development of schools and universities the development of democracy the development of capitalism all linked in with this puritan and reformed truth what we learn about in the reformation and all those things that happen after it are of absolute importance they're about understanding truth why we live the way that we live it's a return to biblical

Christianity a purging of falsehood seeking purity and all those changes that happened but the main effects of course were religious they wanted to restore true religion of mind heart and hands and they gave us preaching they gave us the bible in our own language they gave us a true view of salvation from scripture a correct understanding of justification by faith alone this is new life through repentance and faith that when we look at ourselves by nature we are helpless and hopeless unwilling and unable before Christ saves us we are dead and not able to respond because salvation is all of God repentance is giving up and falling on Christ with your full weight nothing in my hands I bring simply to thy cross I cling but above all this was the ultimate purpose of the reformation the ultimate purpose of all of creation the glory of God and we need to step up in our generation too to believe these truths with all of our hearts we believe only scripture only Christ only grace only faith only to the glory of God these men and women gave up their lives their very blood for the gospel it's that important look at your life and compare who are we to complain today and so I encourage you to be a true son and daughter of the the reformation listen your life your life is so precious so precious but the reformation tells us that there are things that are worth giving your life for namely for the one who claims your life

[40 : 38] Jesus Christ and his word be willing to die for the authority of the word of God may that be burned into our souls let's pray our Lord God and Heavenly Father how we thank you that you demonstrate over and over that you are a faithful God Lord we thank you that you continue to work in our generation too we pray Lord that each of us will grasp hold of these truths their magnitude their importance Lord that we would never let go we thank you for salvation by grace alone we pray Heavenly Father for any here who have not experienced that that they would come to you seeking that salvation and as you promise you will save them bless us then now we pray in Jesus name

Amen Man!!