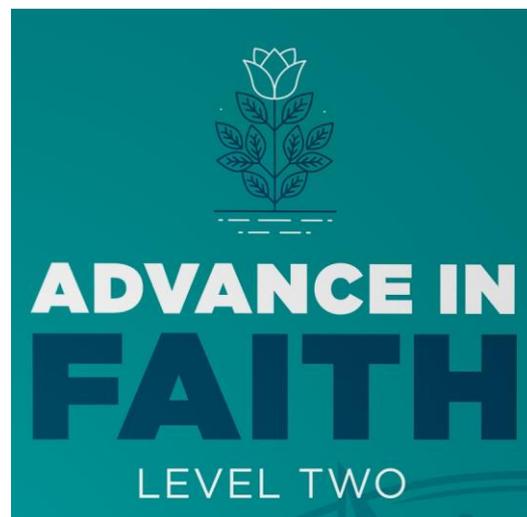


# Reformation – a move to Grace

Church History Part 2 – Week 2



## Introduction

In the 1500 it was still possible to speak of Christendom instead of Europe. Europe was still a unity under the Roman Catholic Church.

But within 50 years the Protestant Reformation had shattered this unity. The Roman Catholic church survived only by becoming a different organisation from what it had been in the Middle Ages.

Two changes in thought, at the end of the Middle Ages, laid the foundation for what was to follow;

- 1/ the gradual awakening to cultural thought and piety
- 2/ the increasing distortions of the Bible by the church

## The Lutheran Reformation

On October 31, 1517 a German professor of theology named Martin Luther (1483-1546) posted a sheet of paper containing 95 propositions, or thesis, on the door of the castle Church of Wittenburg, arguing against, among other things, the use of indulgences.

Luther's 'evangelical discovery' was that a person is not justified by works but by faith alone in the finished work of Jesus.

"If you have faith that Christ is your saviour, then at once you have a gracious God, for faith leads you in and opens up Gods heart and will, that you should see pure and overflowing love"

Luther's discovery of justification by faith alone and its companion doctrine, the priesthood of all believers, was quite revolutionary.

After 1525 the evangelical movement depended even more on the rulers, who became the critical factor in carrying out the Reformation in Germany. They even gave the name of 'Protestantism' to the new movement when they protested against the action taken by the Catholic dominated Diet of Speyer in 1529, which discriminated against the adherents of the evangelical faith.

## Reforming the Reformation

Three different movements happened during and after Luther's time. These three reformations were the beginning of the modern church

and to an extent the beginning of the development of the western world as we know it today.

### ***The Anabaptists***

Growing from a group of Christians in Zurich, Switzerland this loosely tied group of people held the following views;

- A conviction that Christians were called to discipleship. The Christian's experience must go beyond the inner experience and the acceptance of doctrines, and touch how a person lives.
- They saw the expression of love for all as important to the outward signs of Christian faith.
- All members were to be believers baptized voluntarily upon confession of a personal faith in Christ.
- A strong insistence on the separation of church and state.

Because of ongoing persecution from both Catholics and other Protestants, the Anabaptists were forced to move around and in doing this, sowed seeds for the spread of their ideas throughout Europe and eventually into the New World.

### ***Calvinism***

Developed by John Calvin this line of thought came to dominate a significant part of Europe and to be the main church in Scotland. Calvin's central belief was in the absolute sovereignty of God. He believed and taught that the Bible teaches God's particular direction in individual lives.

The consequence of faith to Calvin was a strenuous effort to introduce the kingdom of God on earth. It made character a fundamental test of genuine religious life and explains Calvinism's dynamic, social activism.

### ***England's Reformations***

England had 2 reformations, a constitutional one under Henry 8th and a theological one, under the Puritans, 100 years later.

As a nation, England was ripe for reformation. The work of Wycliffe and his followers, the Lollards, had prepared the way. The writings of Luther circulated through the land. In addition, William Tyndale (1494–1536) and Miles Coverdale (1488–1568) had each produced highly accurate translations of the Bible that were widely

available. But the catalyst for the break with Rome came with the marital problems of the English king, Henry VIII.<sup>1</sup>

The sole religious issue in the first English reformation was the doctrine of papal supremacy brought about by the crisis of a lack of a male heir to the throne.

### ***The Catholic Reformation***

By the 1540's Roman Catholicism seemed to be a dying faith. But because of the Catholic Reformation this did not happen. Instead the renewal, spearheaded by a regenerated papacy, placed a greater stress on spiritual leadership and several new religious orders and enabled the church of Rome to meet the Protestant challenge.

The most important new organisation was the Jesuits, the Society of Jesus, founded by Ignatius of Loyola in 1540. They placed heavy emphasis on education and missionary work as the means to strengthen and propagate the Catholic faith. The church also clarified and redefined its teachings. This doctrinal clarification took place at the Council of Trent, which met between 1545 and 1563.

The many changes of the sixteenth century made the RC church a more disciplined and tightly governed institution. The Council of Trent showed that this was truly a reformation that changed the very fibre of Catholicism and made it into a modern institution. It was now ready to do battle with the Protestant forces in the religious wars.

### ***Religious Conflicts Plague Europe***

The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were a period marked by intense ideological turmoil. Europe had always been subjected to wars but the inclusion of the fighting between different faiths added an intensity and bitterness to the fight.

The monarchy eventually grew weary of the conflicts and tried a number of methods to stop these religious struggles. Four possible actions were available to them;

- Partition - Different groups of believers were sent to different geographical areas.

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<sup>1</sup> James P. Eckman, Exploring Church History (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2002), 54.

- Compromise - This was where the state worked out a compromise that would satisfy most of the people.
- Suppression - A state chose one side of the dispute and set out to eliminate or exile any adherents of the other side.
- Toleration - William of Orange was one of the few monarchs in Europe at this time that believed that the state should allow different faiths to co-exist in freedom within its boundaries.

## The Changing Face of Culture

At its core the Reformation was the removing of the theological distortions which had entered the church. Infiltration occurred in numerous ways;

1. the authority of the church was made equal to that of the Bible
2. a strong element of human work was added to the work of salvation done by Jesus.
3. after Aquinas there came an increasing synthesis between biblical thought and pagan thought.

The Reformation was centred in the infinite personal God who had spoken in the Bible. The problem of meaning for the 'particulars' or the 'universals' did not exist for the Reformers because the Bible gives them unity by;

- the Bible tells true things about God therefore we can know truth
- the Bible tells us true things about man and nature

The Reformation gained 2 important things for the Christian church;

- it had no 'particulars-verse-universals' problem
- it gave science and art freedom to operate within the boundaries of scripture.