

The Protestant Reformation

What It is and Why it Matters

A Study

Part 7- The Re-Discovery of the Importance of Becoming and Remaining Biblical- “Semper Reformanda”

February 22, 2015

2 Timothy 3

1 But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come.

2 For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy,

3 unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good,

4 treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God,

5 holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; Avoid such men as these.

6 For among them are those who enter into households and captivate weak women weighed down with sins, led on by various impulses,

7 always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.

8 Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these *men* also oppose the truth, men of depraved mind, rejected in regard to the faith.

9 But they will not make further progress; for their folly will be obvious to all, just as Jannes's and Jambres's folly was also.

10 Now you followed my teaching, conduct, purpose, faith, patience, love, perseverance,

11 persecutions, *and* sufferings, such as happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium *and* at Lystra; what persecutions I endured, and out of them all the Lord rescued me!

12 Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

13 But evil men and impostors will proceed *from bad* to worse, deceiving and being deceived.

- 14** 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.

To the Glory of God

Now we have been going over the issues of the Protestant Reformation in this series to begin this New Year, and we have covered a lot of ground. And, so far- we have examined six very important issues that were brought about during that great revival that occurred 500 years ago. We have looked at:

1. The Sovereign Move of God that brought the Church out of the Darkness of ecclesiastical abuse and man-made teachings and into the Light of Divine Truth- *"Post Tennebras Lux"*
2. The Re-Discovery of the Beauty, Authority, and Sufficiency of the Word of God- *"Sola Scriptura"*
3. The Re-Discovery of the Biblical Gospel- *"Sola Fide"*
4. The Re-Discovery of the Majesty and Magnificence of Grace- *"Sola Gratia"*
5. The Re-Discovery of the Exclusivity of Jesus Christ- *"Solus Christus"*
6. The Re-Discovery of the Majesty of the Glory of God- *"Soli Deo Gloria"*

And in this series- we have explored profound theological issues such as:

- ✓ Sovereign Regeneration
- ✓ The Priesthood of the Believer
- ✓ Exegesis and Expository Preaching
- ✓ The Importance of Confessions, Catechisms, and Creeds

Now, by 1545- the visible Church was forced to deal with these issues and so they called a worldwide ecumenical Council in the city of Trent in northern Italy to examine the issues brought up by the "Reformers" and the "Protestors" to decide the matter. "The Council of Trent" became one of the most important Church Councils ever convened- both because of what it said and what it did *not* say. So the Council of Trent was the official and formal response to the Protestant Reformation- which created the Roman Church as you know it today. In other words- what you see and know and what you understand about the Roman Catholic Church today- came out of Trent.

The Council of Trent issued "Condemnations" (anathemas) of what it defined to be heresies committed by Protestantism, and in response to them key statements and clarifications of the Roman doctrine and teachings. These addressed a wide range of subjects, including what the Roman "church" believed and taught about:

- Scripture
- The Biblical Canon
- Sacred Tradition
- Original Sin
- Justification
- Salvation
- The Sacraments
- The Mass
- The Veneration of the Saints¹

The Council held twenty-five "sessions" between December 13, 1545, and December 4, 1563, all in Trento (then the capital of the Prince-Bishopric of Trent in the Holy Roman Empire)- except for the ninth to eleventh "sessions" which were held in the city of Bologna during 1547.²

Pope Paul III, who called the Council, presided over the three sessions in Bologna and the first eight sessions (1545–47) in Trent. The twelfth to sixteenth sessions (1551–52) were overseen by Pope Julius

¹ Wetterau, Bruce. *World History*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1994.

² "Trent, Council of" in Cross, F. L. (ed.) *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, Oxford University Press, 2005 (ISBN 978-0-19-280290-3).

III, and the seventeenth to the twenty-fifth sessions (1562–63) by Pope Pius IV.³

The consequences of the 18-year Council were also significant as regards the Church's liturgy and practices. During its deliberations, the Council made the Latin Vulgate the official example of their Canon, and commissioned the creation of a standard version- although this was not achieved until the 1590s.

In 1565, a year or so after the Council finished its work, Pius IV issued the Tridentine Creed (after Tridentum, Trento's Latin name) and his successor- Pius V- then first published "The Roman Catechism" and revisions of the Breviary and Missal in, respectively, 1566, 1568 and 1570. These, in turn, led to the *codification* of the "Tridentine Mass", which remained the Church's primary form of the Mass for the next four hundred years.

Now my purpose in bringing all of this to your attention is *not* to simply go through a history lesson. Neither is it to point out to you the many atrocities that were carried out on the Protestants by the Catholics. It is to show you that rather than repent of the evil of their doings- the visible Church of that day doubled down and condemned the Protestants, and at that moment- they became what we see and know today as the Roman Catholic Religious System.

Now at the conclusion of the Council of Trent- the Roman Church issued several "anathemas" which condemned certain beliefs and practices of the Protestants- including:

- **Re-Enforced the false teaching about infant baptism-** "If any one denies that infants, newly born from their mothers' wombs, even though they be sprung from baptized parents, are to be baptized... let him be anathema"
- **Re-Enforced the false teaching about Human Free Will---**Canon V. "If any one shall say, that, since Adam's sin, the free will of man is lost and extinguished; or, that it is a thing with a name only, yea, a title without a reality, a figment, in fine, brought into the Church by Satan; let him be anathema."
- **Re-Enforced the false teaching of Thomas Aquinas about "human goodness"---**Canon VII. "If any one shall say, that all works which are done before justification, in what manner soever they be done, are truly sins or deserve the hatred of God; or that, the more earnestly one strive to dispose

³ Ibid

himself for grace, so much the more grievously be sins; let him be anathema.”

- **Re-Enforced the false teaching that Justification comes by way of human works**---Canon XII. “If any one shall say, that justifying faith is nought else but confidence in the divine mercy which remits sins for Christ's sake; or that it is this confidence alone by which we are justified; let him be anathema.”
- **Rejected the Biblical Concept that Regeneration Precedes Justification**--Canon XV. “If any one shall say, that a man, who is born again and justified, is bound of faith to believe that he is assuredly in the number of the predestinated; let him be anathema.”
- **Re-enforced the Condemnation of Predestination**---Canon XVII. “If any one shall say, that the grace of justification only befalleth those who are predestined unto life; but that all others who are called, are called indeed, but receive not grace, as being, by the divine power, predestined unto evil; let him be anathema.”
- **Re-Enforced the false teaching about sin**---Canon XXX. “If anyone shall say, that, after the grace of justification received, unto every penitent sinner the guilt is so remitted, and the penalty of eternal punishment so blotted out, that there remains not any penalty of temporal punishment, to be discharged either in this world, or in the next in purgatory, before the entrance to the kingdom of heaven can be laid open; let him be anathema.”
- **Re-Enforced the false teaching that there are seven Sacraments rather than two.** ---Canon III. “If any one shall say, that these seven sacraments are equal to each other in such wise, as that one is not in any way more worthy than another; let him be anathema.”
- **Re-Enforced the false teaching about Sacramental Regeneration**- ---Canon IV. “If any one shall say, that the sacraments of the New Law are not necessary unto salvation, but superfluous, and that without them, and without the desire thereof, men, through faith alone, obtain of God the grace of justification; though all [the sacraments] be not necessary for every individual; let him be anathema.”
- **Rejected the Biblical Concept of “The Priesthood of the Believer”**---Canon X. “If any one shall say, that all Christians have power to administer the word, and all the sacraments; let him be anathema.”
- **Re-Enforced Baptismal Regeneration**- ---Canon V. “If any one shall say, that baptism is free, that is, not necessary unto salvation; let him be anathema.”

- **Re-Enforced the false teaching of Transubstantiation-** ---Canon I. “If any one shall deny, that, in the sacrament of the most holy Eucharist, are verily, really, and substantially contained the body and blood, together with the soul and divinity, of our Lord Jesus Christ, and consequently the whole Christ; but shall say that He is only therein as in a sign, or in figure, or virtue; let him be anathema”

But, the most grievous anathema- the most important condemnation that was given at Trent was set against the Biblical Concept of Sola Fide- which states that Justification is by Grace alone through Faith alone in the finished Work of Christ alone- absent any and all human or religious works when they said in Canon IX:

“If any one shall say, that by faith alone the impious is justified; so as to mean that nothing else is required to co-operate in order unto the obtaining the grace of justification, and that it is not in any respect necessary that he be prepared and disposed by the movement of his own will; let him be anathema.”

... and at that point- the Roman Church became an apostate religious system that has officially and formally pronounced an eternal damnation on the Biblical Gospel. So we are correct to say that while it may be possible for people who physically attend a Roman “church” to be saved- it is only because they either do not understand or because they do not agree with what Rome teaches about Salvation. So if a person *does* understand and if they do *agree* with what Rome teaches about Salvation- there is no way they can be saved.

Remember, dear friends, that the Bible teaches that we are saved because of what we believe, and what and Who we trust in- and *not* because of what we do for ourselves. Salvation is neither earned nor deserved, and God is not obligated to save a single soul. Therefore, when God *does* save an unworthy sinner- we marvel at His Grace and we rejoice in His Mercy- which is entirely free and unobligated.

Now according to what I understand- every year- the pope, the cardinals, the arch-bishops, and the bishops have to re-read the findings of Trent and they sign a document that says that they agree with Trent- including all the anathemas- especially the ones that attack Justification by Grace through Faith in Christ alone. And they have to

do this every year. Which is why- over the years- various popes have made these official and formal statements about the Roman "church":

- ✓ "Outside the Church there is no salvation" (extra ecclesiam nulla salus)
- ✓ "There is but one universal Church of the faithful, outside which no one at all is saved." (Pope Innocent III, Fourth Lateran Council)
- ✓ "We declare, say, define, and pronounce that it is absolutely necessary for the salvation of every human creature to be subject to the Roman Pontiff." (Pope Boniface VIII, the Bull Unam Sanctam)
- ✓ "The most Holy Roman Church firmly believes, professes and preaches that none of those existing outside the Catholic Church, not only pagans, but also Jews and heretics and schismatics, can have a share in life eternal; but that they will go into the eternal fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels, unless before death they are joined with Her; and that so important is the unity of this ecclesiastical body that only those remaining within this unity can profit by the sacraments of the Church unto salvation, and they alone can receive an eternal recompense for their fasts, their almsgivings, their other works of Christian piety and the duties of a Christian soldier. No one, let his almsgiving be as great as it may, no one, even if he pour out his blood for the Name of Christ, can be saved, unless he remain within the bosom and the unity of the Catholic Church." (Pope Eugene IV, the Bull Cantate Domino)

Recently the current pope (Frances) has said that there is only the Catholic Church and all others are only wannabes, and that Salvation is all about being a part of the Church rather than being born again. Now it fascinates me how angry that people become when I mention these things. Yet it is what the Roman "church" has believed and taught since Trent. I do not believe this- but they do. I do not teach these things- but they do. And so their anger should be directed at this apostate religious system for actually believing and teaching these things- and not at me for simply *saying* that they teach it.

Needless to say- the split caused by the Reformers, desiring to be wholly Biblical, and the Romans, desiring *not* to- was made, and this split is now going on 500 years. And yet if you listen to many of the

leading so-called Evangelicals of our day- from the late Chuck Colson to Rick Warren- you would think that one of two things was true:

- A. The Protestant Reformation was a rebellious fit thrown by adolescent Protestants who will eventually "get over it" and come home.
- B. The "Protest" of the Reformers was made and duly noted and sufficient changes have been made within the Roman "church" that should satisfy the issue.

Yet neither of these two statements are true. As I have told you repeatedly in this series- the Protestant Reformation was *not* simply a *misunderstanding* over issues that don't really matter. It was *not* a *political* argument over who was supposed to be the king. And it was *not* a dispute over personalities. And, therefore, the passing of time does not fix the problem. We must understand that Protestants and Catholics are *not* divided because of some ignorant bias or some prejudice or bigotry. We are divided over two main issues:

1. How lost people are forgiven and saved
2. Who or what has final Authority in the Church

And those are heady and weighty and eternal issues that *transcend* personalities and politics and time. And these two main issues lead to other secondary but equally important issues. And so when you hear people say today that it doesn't matter if a person is a Protestant or a Catholic, and that we are all on our way to Heaven together- then know that those statements are silly and trite because they are either *minimizing* the Biblical issues that brought about the great divide or they are *ignoring* them. But the Reformation itself was not silly, it was not trite- it was huge and massive, and it should matter to us today.

Now by God's Grace- as God began to lead me out of a very sincere but unbiblical understanding of Truth some 14 years ago and as I came to fully embrace Biblical Christianity- I basically *re-discovered* the Grace of God- which had been hidden and obscured from my eyes due to several unbiblical practices and teachings. And that *re-discovery* was- for me and this Church- a "mini-reformation".

And that is how you should look at the Protestant Reformation- it was a *re-discovery* of Biblical Truth that had become hidden and obscure through ecclesiastical mis-management and abuse and a whole host of man-made and false teaching. So here is what you should know. The Protestant Reformation was:

- ✓ A Reformation- not a Revolt
- ✓ A "re-discovery" of Biblical Truth- not the creation of a new religion
- ✓ A Return to Scriptural Authority not a Rebellion against Christ's Church
- ✓ A sincere Call to Repentance- not an angry diatribe

But, as I personally grew in *my own* re-discovered admiration and love for the majesty of God's Grace shown through Jesus Christ- I became greatly troubled to see just how few people today really understand *what* the Protestant Reformation of the 16th Century was really all about, and *why* it should matter to those of us who live and breathe today. I mean, after all, we live in a technologically advanced culture of the Internet and smart phones, and we are people of science, and so why should we care about what a bunch of men with beards and robes said 500 years ago- we surely have evolved way beyond all that, right?

But let me begin by saying that what was at stake 500 years ago with those men is the very *same thing* that is at stake this morning with us- which is the single greatest and most important question that anybody could ever ask or answer and that is:

How are we- who are patently sinful people going to
pass through God's Judgment on our lives?

... in other words- how are lost sinners made right with God? How does an infinitely Holy and magnificently Righteous God forgive and rescue unworthy sinners? How are human beings forgiven and justified before God? By what process? What are the elements that are, and that are *not*, included in that marvelous Act of Salvation?

And as we have discovered in this series- the Biblical formula for how lost people are justified by a Holy God looks like this. We are saved:

- ✓ By Grace alone
- ✓ Through Faith alone
- ✓ In the finished Work of Jesus Christ alone
- ✓ Absent human works

... and that is the Biblical Gospel. And I want you to try to understand how radical this was when it was first introduced by Jesus and the Apostles. And I want you to try to image the great hardship that the Apostles endured to preach and teach this. And I want you to try to appreciate the *exclusivity* of the Biblical Gospel, and how at odds with every other religion and human philosophy it is, and how out of sorts it is with everything that the Jews understand at that time.

The Biblical Gospel is *unique*- nothing else in all the world is like it. It runs counter-intuitive to the natural and normal impulse of fallen humanity to try to do something to earn God's Favor, and it confronts and rejects all efforts by every other religion to make people good enough to deserve Heaven. So the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ stands alone. It is taught *only* in the Christian Church and is believed *only* by Christians.

And not only have many thousands of godly people sacrificed their possessions and their standing in this life, and even their lives to give us the Bible in English and to give us a rich Christian heritage- we must understand that the Church of Jesus was bought and paid for by and through the life of the sinless Lamb of God- Jesus Christ- and, therefore, the Church does not belong to you or to me- the Church belongs to Jesus.

And Jesus alone is to have the pre-eminence in the Church that belongs to Him. And so all that is said and all that is done and all that is taught and all that is believed on in the Church is to be to the Glory and the Honor of the Lord Jesus Christ. And Jesus has already told us what to believe. And Jesus has already told us what to preach and what to teach and what to uphold and what to proclaim and what to herald to every man, woman, and child on the face of the earth.

And we are not to change that Message. And we are not to deviate from it or to modify it to suite lukewarm or unsaved people, and we are not to alter the Message or to hide the Message, and we are not to be ashamed of the Message- but we are to preach it loudly and proudly and unashamedly and without compromise- regardless of what the cost to us personally might be.

But the reasoning by many today is that because the two issues of the holocaust of abortion and the normalization of sexual perversion are so great and so pervasive, and because they impact civilization to such a degree- that we can no longer afford to be divided over theological issues and we must join hands with these other religious groups to combat these twin evils of our day. But that argument belies the fact that when you say that we are divided over Theological issues- we mean to say that we don't agree on what we believe and why we believe it. And that is huge.

Yet this is the logic that many use in our day, and it is the foundational argument that groups such as "Focus on the Family" and "The American Family Association" use to try to unite us together into a single voting block. You see, there are simply not enough Bible believing people left in America to have any political clout without uniting together with other religious people.

But the problem is that we don't agree with the Mormons or the Jehovah's Witnesses or the Catholics or the Jews about how lost people are saved. And so even though we are passionately interested in the social issues of our day- we are infinitely *more* concerned- and the primary focus of the Church of Jesus is- that the Gospel be preached and that lost people are saved- not that we simply rescue our culture.

And so even though I love these groups and I support them- in order to get their political agenda passed- these groups have to come up with strange sounding terms to try to define who we are- like "people of faith" (whatever that means) that is taking the place of terms like "born again believer"- to try to unite us behind these social issues. But the casualty of this effort is that the many great and profound distinctions between us are blurred until not only do many people think that Protestants and Catholics are the same- but that Mormonism and Jehovah's Witnesses looked at as simply being different denominations within Christianity, and that Jews are equally saved as Christians without believing in Jesus.

But we must know and we must say that while Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses might be against abortion- they are *not* born again. And while Romans and conservative Jews might be against sexual perversion being normalized- they aren't born again either. So while it may be true that we may well go to jail together with Mormons and Catholics as we are arrested for standing against the great social evils of our day- it is assured that we will not go to Heaven together.

Listen, I think abortion is a terrible evil. This Pastor and this Church has been at the forefront of fighting against abortion the whole time it has been active here on the Mississippi Gulf Coast, and was instrumental in being used by God to close down the only abortion clinic we had here in Gulfport, and make a way for the Baptist Church down the street to buy the building so they could send Bibles out to the whole world from the very place where they used to murder babies. I have called "Solemn Assemblies" where we gathered together to fast and pray all day long against the evils of abortion.

But I think being lost and going to hell is worse than abortion. So even if all these "people of faith" were successful in stopping abortion- they would still be lost.

I am totally against normalizing sexual perversity- I am going to call a Church Council here on the Gulf Coast to address this very issue at some point in the future. We have spent many a day here in this Church fasting and praying against this evil. I teach hard against the corruption of human sexuality by teaching men to love their wives, and to assume a place of godly leadership in the home and in the Church, and by teaching women to abandon the ungodly culture of feminism and to love their children and to respect their husbands.

But I am also against people trying to earn Salvation by doing religious things. So even if those efforts were successful- and we did rescue our culture- the people from all those various aberrant religious organizations would all still need to be saved.

I was asked to be a part of one of those unifying movements right after Hurricane Katrina and all the leaders of all the various religious organizations on the Coast gathered over in Biloxi, and the moderator spoke up and said, *"We are going out there to give a cup of water to people who are hurting because the Hurricane has made us all one."* And I raised my hand up and I said, *"I give a cup of water in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and so I conduct acts of mercy as a means of*

preaching the Gospel so that people can be saved- not simply to quench their thirst." And the moderator said, *"When you go out there under our banner- we do not want you to preach the Gospel- because the Gospel divides us."*

So I saw what was going on and I left. This was an effort to bring everybody together without Jesus. And as I was walking out- the man who invited me tried to stop me and said, *"Brother Blair- don't leave- this is a God thing- to bring us all together."* And I said, *"I will not be a part of something that Jesus cannot have top billing in."* And he said, *"Can't you leave Jesus outside the door just this once?"* And I said, *"Not even once."*

Now over the centuries- great efforts by very sincere and well-meaning people- (some of whom were and are very godly men) to reconcile Protestants and Catholics together have occurred. But to this date- the divide remains. Why? Isn't it wrong to be divided? Yes, unless one side refuses to address the two causes of the Reformation:

1. Sola Scriptura- The "Formal Cause" of the Reformation
2. Sola Fide- the "Material Cause" of the Reformation

So, until the Roman religious system repents and returns to the Authority of Scripture and Justification by Faith Alone- there will *never* be any meaningful reconciliation. So we remain divided. And because they will not agree with those two main points- we should not lose our "protest", and we must not attempt to reconcile absent those two points. So can we talk together? Sure. Can we agree about *anything*? Yes- we can agree about many things- most of which are superficial and unimportant. But until there is a formal and official repentance about both the formal and material causes of the original "Protest"- there will never be any meaningful unity between the heirs of the Reformation and Rome. And any attempt at unity without addressing these two main issues will only deceive one or both sides.

And that is sad- but that is true. We divided 500 years ago over very serious issues that have eternal ramifications, and we remain divided to this day because those issues are still eternal, and they are still unresolved.

So that is what God did 500 years ago to give us the "mechanism" that would allow us to *become* Biblical. The six "Solas" that we have

already studied are the keys for anybody to get on the path to becoming a Biblical people. They are what helped us to begin our journey here in this Church. So each one is vitally important and each one plays a role in our own journey toward pleasing God. And that is why I have begun this year by going over them with you.

Okay. But now what do we do to *remain* Biblical? How do we stay on track? How do we assure that the direction that we are going on is the correct direction? The Reformers came up with the concept that says in Latin:

Semper Reformanda- Always Reforming

... that being Reformed or being Biblical is more of a journey than it is a destination. And that doesn't mean that we cannot have real measurable victories along the way- we can and we have. You see, it is somewhat of an arrogant fallacy to assume that you have already arrived at being purely Reformed. A better way is to think that you are in the process of *becoming* Biblical. I think it is true we can become *more* Biblical- as time goes on and as God wills. But to assume that you have already arrived- is a bit presumptuous.

But now that we have these six keys- we at least have a way against which to measure if we are even *trying* to become Biblical. And with this last key- Semper Reformanda- we have a way to assure that we will *continue on* in our journey to being a Biblical people. And I think that Semper Reformanda is expressed best in three ways- two very positive and one very negative:

- I. Relentlessly seek to become biblical in every aspect of belief and life.
- II. Relentlessly trust in the Sovereign ability of God the Holy Spirit to keep us.
- III. Relentlessly resist anything that would hinder that effort.

And I predicate both the two positives and the one negative effort on one overriding thing being true:

Being Biblical is Pleasing to God

The only way we know if we are pleasing to God is if we are in alignment with Scripture. So, we could also say that living in accord with Scripture is also:

- Being Spiritual
- Walking in the Spirit
- Serving God
- Glorifying God
- Honoring Jesus Christ

And I define all of these things like this:

To continually struggle against the lusts of our flesh-
by the Power of the Holy Spirit-
to be found humbly and joyfully submitted
to the Authority of Scripture in our daily lives-
all to the Glory of God

We must understand that God has told us to love Him with all our minds as well as all our hearts. So we have come to understand that it is just as much a sin to “believe” wrongly as it is to “do” wrongly. We have also come to believe that “wrong living is the result of wrong believing”. And so the only reason why a saved person engages in a particular way of life is because they have come to believe that living like that is pleasing to God.

But we dare not arrive at a decision like that based on our own personal opinion or logic. We need an external, objective Source of Absolute Truth that is not motivated by any sin of the flesh, and that will not only bring to light *what* we are doing but has the power to unveil the motive *behind* the action.

And that one single Source that is external to the human being and that is objective rather than subjective, and the one single Source that contains Absolute Divine Truth- is not the opinion or thinking of the individual believer- but is the inspired, inerrant, infallible Word of the living God.

So if we come to understand that we are living in such a way that the Bible condemns- we have been deceived, and the only course of action is to repent and change and begin to do that which is pleasing to

the Lord- regardless of what that may cost us personally. That is being Biblical. That is being Reformed. And that is pleasing to God.

You see, I love Reformed Theology. I love its richness and its depth. I love its focus and I get so much from what it says. But I love the Bible more than I love Reformed Theology. And by that I do not mean that I see any discrepancies between being Biblical and Reformed Theology- I don't.

I think that there are many people who don't like Reformed Theology- for various reasons. But the only reason why Reformed Theology cannot be defeated by Scripture is because it is scripturally accurate. It is the correct exegesis of what God said in Holy Scripture.

So I don't say that I love the Bible more than I love Reformed Theology because I think the Bible teaches some things differently than what Reformed Theology says- because I don't think that. I say that so that my own heart can stay right.

If we learned anything from the Reformation, dear friends, it is that- in spite of how much we love and admire and respect the Reformers- we must be willing to depart from them if and when we sincerely think that they have departed from the Bible. And the only way to do that is to always hold what the Bible says higher than we hold them.

But to do that requires that we know two things:

- What the Bible actually says
- What the Reformers taught

If we do not know what the Scriptures actually teach about a particular subject- then we will only be guessing, and if we do not know what the Reformers taught about that subject- then we are only assuming. It takes knowledge of both to know if and when we are to depart, and I suggest to you that it is that effort- in and of itself- that will help keep us on the right track.

So to facilitate both of these aspects- we are engaged in an ongoing effort in this Church to read and study what the Bible says in four different ways:

- ✓ Daily Bible Reading Plan
- ✓ Weekly Catechism during Family Devotions

- ✓ Corporate Weekly Bible Study
- ✓ Corporate Prayer Meeting

And we are actively engaged in learning what the Reformers taught by engaging in our monthly “Puritan Reading Challenge”. And so we can use all of these “tools” to accomplish both goals of learning what the Bible says and what the Reformers taught.

In addition- myself and the other Elders of this Church are being led by the Holy Spirit to engage in a “stem to stern” examination of both the Doctrinal Statement and the By-Laws of this Church during the course of this year that will seek to make sure that what we believe and what we teach is Biblical, and that will hopefully clarify some issues that have been vague and uncertain. In addition- we will be adding an entire new section on “Human Sexuality and Marriage” to both the Doctrinal Statement and By-Laws.

The next phase in adhering to Semper Reformanda is that we must be just as relentless in resisting any teaching or any effort that would hinder or mitigate the first effort. And I see that as being manifested in two main ways. We must relentlessly:

1. Resist Elevating Personal Opinion as Divine Truth
2. Resist Accommodation with the unsaved World

In order to correctly apply the concept of Semper Reformanda- we must endeavor to resist the very popular notion that we can hear new Revelation directly from God- bypassing His Word. This effort has brought forth the most confused and worldly generation of believers that the Church has ever known, and is an unmitigated failure in producing any measurable degree of Holiness.

Secondly, we must relentlessly resist any accommodation with the lost, pagan, unsaved world- especially about any serious Scriptural issues- such as Creation, Sexual Purity, Marriage/Divorce/Re-Marriage, and Justification.

Because we have allowed the pagan world to define the discussion- there is a mad dash now for the modern Church to try to “fit in” and “be relevant” as it pertains to hot button issues like “homosexual marriage”, which is a contradiction in terms. But our mandate from God as His

Church is not to “fit in” or “be relevant”- but to “be faithful” to His Word, “be fruitful” in His Kingdom, and to “be busy” until His return.

People who are unfaithful to the clear teachings of Scripture simply because they have gone out of style with the lost people of this present evil world do not please God. But we have to know that people who are unfruitful in God’s Kingdom are not pleasing either. And neither are those who seek to simply glide through this life without doing the hard work of not only believing the Truth but living it out and proclaiming it to others. We must remember, dear friends, that God did not call us to be safe and secure in this life. God called us to be faithful, fruitful and busy- even if that means being persecuted or even losing our lives. And we must do so without wavering because we are given the Promise that Jesus Christ is building His Own Church and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.

So Semper Reformanda is not a fad or a part-time hobby. It is a full time calling, and it is real hard work. And so nobody will engage in it long term- unless they have judged God to be worthy of that effort. And nobody is going to see God as being worthy of this real hard life-long labor unless they have come to see the Glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ by, through, and in the Holy Bible.

Amen. Let’s pray

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.