

The Liberation of the Church

Today we celebrate God's gracious and sovereign rule as it was expressed in the 16th Century Protestant Reformation. Others had sought to reclaim the church to its proper place and set forth the Word of God as the authority from God not from man. Reason came to be more and more the means of knowing truth in contrast to God's revelation. The papacy became dominated by the law experts assigning revelation and theology to more of a back seat.

The 16th Century Reformation was the crowning point of that movement. What happened had a huge effect on all of life; not just the church. In one sense the Reformation freed Christianity from the tyranny of the church. Not from the church but from its tyranny. We think of the Protestant Reformation as a movement committed to reforming the church, which it did, but how did it free us from the church's tyranny?

The church had been the predominant institution for centuries. It had become so powerful it even required submission from the civil

government. As the power and authority of the church began to grow, unrest also began to rise.

The church, which the Apostle Paul called the ground and pillar of truth, had become a place where men had positioned themselves to control. Beginning with Pope Innocent III in the early 13th century, France, the Roman Empire, and England began to bow to his authority. As the head of the church, that increased the power of the church in all areas of life. The three following centuries saw this increase in power until finally Martin Luther and later John Calvin came on the scene, challenging the church's control and power.

The issues centered around truth and authority, faith and reason, man's authority vs. God's. In a true sense, the church kept its people in darkness and away from the truth. When the Bible was used in the church, it was used only by those authorized to read and interpret it. The people were expected to blindly follow. They had no other recourse.

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tyranny of those religious leaders and rediscover the proper role of the church. Remember prior to that time the church displayed more of a sovereign role with authority over the home, the school, and the government.

What became clear was the church was not meant to be the all powerful institution that it had become. It had not been given complete control and authority over people's lives. It was not to be led by men who were not under the authority of God's Word.

As things moved away from God's creation design, other things began to follow and soon God was pushed to the side or almost out of the picture. Truth was determined by man. Salvation was by man's efforts. The church was whatever its leaders said it should be.

In the Reformation God used those reformers not only to protest, but to reform things according to His plan and design. The church for example is a major part of His plan but there are other areas as well; however, the way He designed things required all of His creation to function as He intended. For example: while the church was designed to disciple its covenant people, it was not given authority over the family, or the state, or the schools. Those were separate areas to be led by those disciplined by God through His church.

What the reformers began to see was the all-encompassing kingdom of God was bigger than any one area of life—including the church. Each area of life had its place and role in the kingdom, and the church had its role in the kingdom, but was not "the kingdom." God's intention was for the church to serve the kingdom by discipling and teaching the people God's truth in a way that transforms their lives. God's authority and power are broader than the church. *"In all things Christ preeminent.*

- Col. 1:18 Or, whether we eat or drink or whatever we do, we are to do all to the glory of God."

- 1 Cor. 10:31

The Spirit that led these reformers to free the people from the tyranny of the church is the same Spirit needed today. The church needs to be about its primary calling of making disciples, using the Word of God as the only rule of faith

and life. The church must teach the Word in such a manner that God's covenant people will know how to bring His truth to bear in all of life. Our challenge is to continue in the legacy of the Reformation by always seeking to be reformed by the Word of God. More than simply teaching us what to think, as the church teaches the truth, it must do so in a way that teaches us how to think biblically. In carrying out this role, the church fulfills God's intentional design. That's the spirit of the Reformation.

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