

When I was first approached about speak with you today, my mind darted at light speed to the painfully obvious: an Orthodox perspective on the Reformation. But other than as a matter or academic interest and/or satisfying simple curiosity, why should a room full of Reformed folk give two hoots about what I think about the Reformation? Were I to point out some major error in Reformation theology, are you all going to stampede out of here and join the nearest Orthodox parish? Not likely. Yes, the Reformation is a watershed event in Christian history, and deserves serious examination by every Christian. The issues which the Reformation confronted continue to challenge all of us to re-examine with a more critical eye our all-too-comfortable assumptions and presuppositions.

But what weighs on my heart today is what I perceive to be the need for all who name the name of Christ to join in a new Reformation, not just of the Church but of our whole society, starting with giving our collective head a shake and ***recovering a personal passion for truth***. Even the pagan philosophers posited and valued objective truth. And in the first four centuries of the Church's life, most believers enjoyed a personal concern for and personal investment in the truth which saves and makes whole. All too soon, however, caring about that truth became the preserve of clergy and university, excluding the ordinary believer, whose lot was to "pray, pay, obey---and shut up." Then came the Reformation, when ordinary men and women started to ask questions, use the brains God gave them, study the Scriptures God inspired for them, and seek to know the truth the saves and makes whole. Was it messy? Yes. Did it look like a wreck? Yes---the wreck of a bursting seed bringing forth new life.

And God knows we need that again. You and I live in a post-modernist fog in which we and more especially our children get too easily lost in the absurd notion, "Your truth is your truth, and my truth is my truth." Really? Do we apply that standard to anything in life about which we actually care? My truth may be that I've got enough in my chequing account to pay for a brand-new Lexus; my bank's truth is that any such cheque will bounce higher than the international space station. My truth is that I'm in shape (because round is a shape); my doctor's truth is...oh, never mind.

Well, what applies in finance and health, applies to everything: a thing is either so or it is not so. God either exists, or He does not. Jesus is either fully God and fully human, or He is not. Jesus Christ is either speaking the bald truth in John 14:6 when He says, "*I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me,*" a truth with eternal consequences for every person on this planet; or He's a babbling nutbar or a blatant liar. Schrödinger's cat notwithstanding, a thing is either so, or it is not so; and opinions and feelings have nothing to do with it. The same goes for objective good and objective evil; they're not just "differing opinions." Isaiah 5:20 warns, "*Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil,*" because moral relativism results in personal and societal corruption. And I'm not talking here about moralism, about arbitrary laws, rules, and regulations, or social or cultural constructs; but about those fundamental dynamics which either build up or tear down human relationship with God and with one another. Consider today's sacred word, "tolerance." The word means that for the sake of social harmony I put up with something with which makes me grind my teeth down to the gum line; but the word has been hijacked to mean that I must accept and approve that with which I fiercely

disagree. We call lust “love;” use “pro-choice” to camouflage the taking of human life; reduce crimes to “mistakes,” and sins to “misunderstandings.” As a society we seem unwilling to **distinguish** between true and false, right and wrong, good and evil, because in the name of “freedom” and “tolerance” we don’t want to have to **choose** between true and false, right and wrong, good and evil. But 1 John 4:6 tells us we must distinguish clearly between “*the spirit of truth and the spirit of error;*” otherwise we end up living and raising children in a spiritually psychotic world.

Flowing from that personal passion for truth, the new Reformation must **recover respect for and obedience to the authority of Scripture---in the Church**. When I was young, Protestants, Catholics, and Orthodox argued fiercely about the proper interpretation of Scripture; it was Bibles at 20 paces. Today? The embrace of the radical higher critical school in the mainline seminaries has slithered down from pulpit to pew to street, and for most in our society the Bible is just dusty old book. Even some Christians buy into it: “Well, the Bible was written a long time ago; and social conditions were different; and blah, blah, blah.” But is it or is it not true that, as Hebrews 1:1-2 insists, “*God, Who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, **has** in these last days spoken to us by His Son*”? Is it or is it not true that the New Testament in particular contains the written record of **what** God has spoken to us by His Son and the written **explanation** and general **application** of what God has spoken to us by His Son? We can argue till the cows come home about the relationship between Scripture and capital-T Tradition; and if it keeps preachers off the streets and out of the pool halls, that’s a good thing. But if the Scriptures are indeed the written Word of God testifying to and containing the truth proclaimed by the Incarnate Word of God, then we had better, as one Anglican prayer puts it, “*hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them,*” that we may wholeheartedly obey and live them.

Thirdly, please let’s **recover the proclamation of the Gospel of grace!** We Christians preach grace but still tend to live law. When I was young, a “Christian” was a guy who didn’t smoke, dance, drink or chew, or ever date girls that do; and not much has changed. And the popular pseudo-spirituality in our society, the Gospel according to Oprah, preaches salvation by being a “good person.” But something then gnaws at the human heart: the truth that our “good” can never be good enough for God. That’s why people try to escape that hard truth through sex, drugs, alcohol, prosperity, material things, “success,” self-worship and/or a pseudo-Christian legalism about externals; they don’t know what else to do with their moral predicament and inflamed conscience but to try to drown it. But God has a different answer, doesn’t He? “*Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and He was buried, and He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures...By grace are you saved, through faith...God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us...if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us of all unrighteousness.*” Even to believers (or this believer, anyway) sometimes it seems too good and too wondrous to be true; but it **is** true. And it’s the key to liberating all us hamsters from running and running and running, around and around and around, and getting absolutely nowhere.

One last point: the need to **recover reverence for God and to center worship on God.** Ever hear the phrase “seeker-sensitive service”? But have we considered how only too easily that can center the service on the seeker, not on the Sought, making it yet again all about me, not all about God; and it uses a worship service as a tool rather than as the lifting up of ourselves to God in self-surrendered praise and celebration of the worth-ship of God. Look: Isaiah 6:1 shows us the true and living God “*sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filling the temple,*” not “the big warm Fuzzy in the sky.” And Jesus as my Buddy essentially makes Him my equal, giving me no reason at all to worship Him and/or to surrender to His lordship in my life. Proverbs 14:27 nails it: “*The fear of [respectful reverence for] the LORD is a fountain of life,*” because only when we have the fear of the LORD do we realise and admit our need for and seek after and open ourselves to the life that only He can give.