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word faith life

Season 4

The Doctrine of the Church
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Acknowledgements

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Episode 7 – Church History

The Age of the Reformation (1517-1648)

The Protestant Reformation was a widespread theological revolt in Europe against the abuses, excesses, and totalitarian control of the Roman Catholic Church. Reformers such as Martin Luther (1483-1546) in Germany, Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531) in Switzerland, and John Calvin (1509-1564) in France and William Tyndale (1494-1536) in England, and John Knox (1514-1572) in Scotland, protested various unbiblical practices of the Catholic Church and promoted a return to sound biblical doctrine. The starting point of the Protestant Reformation is generally considered to be Luther's nailing of his 95 Theses, a document listing various oppressive and unbiblical practices of the Catholic Church, including the sale of indulgences, on the door of the Wittenberg Chapel on the 31st October 1517. But the seeds of the Reformation had already been sown by men like John Wycliffe and John Hus, a hundred years earlier.

In order to fully appreciate the history of Protestantism and the Reformation, it is important to understand the Catholic claim in the doctrine of apostolic succession. This doctrine teaches that the line of Roman Catholic popes extends through the centuries all the way from the apostle Peter to the current pope. This “unbroken” chain of authority makes the Roman Catholic Church the only true church and gives the pope pre-eminence over all churches everywhere. Because of this belief in apostolic succession and the infallibility of the pope, when speaking *ex-cathedra*, the Catholic Church teaches that Holy Tradition, Holy Scripture (including the Apocrypha), and Papal Decree carry equal weight in the formulation of Church doctrine. This is one of the major differences between Roman Catholics and Protestants and was one of the foundational issues leading to the Protestant Reformation. Another major issue that the Reformers were unanimous around was that the Bible should be made available in every person's spoken language, instead of it being exclusively in Latin. For this conviction alone, many paid with their very lives.

Prior to the Reformation, there were pockets of resistance to some of the unbiblical practices of the Catholic Church, but they were relatively small and isolated. The Lollards, the followers of John Wycliffe, the earlier Waldensians, Anabaptists, and others, all took a stand against many Catholic doctrines especially clerical celibacy, transubstantiation, prayers for the dead, purgatory, confession and apostolic succession. They were also vociferously against the corruption, wealth and opulent excesses of the Catholic Church, and for that they were brutally persecuted by the Inquisitors of their day. Before Luther ever picked up a hammer and headed to the Wittenberg Chapel, there were men and women who had stood up for reform and the preaching of the true gospel. Among them were John Wycliffe, an English theologian and Oxford professor who was condemned as a heretic in 1415; John Hus, a priest from Bohemia who was burned at the stake in 1415 for his opposition to the Church of Rome; and Girolamo Savonarola, an Italian friar who was hanged and burned in 1498.

The opposition to the false teaching of the Catholic Church came to a head in the sixteenth century when Luther, a Roman Catholic monk, challenged the authority of the pope and, in particular, the selling of indulgences. Rather than heed the call to reform, the Roman Catholic Church fought back and sought to silence the Reformers. Eventually, new churches emerged from the Reformation, forming four major divisions of Protestantism: Luther's followers started the Lutheran Church, Calvin's followers started the Reformed Church, John Knox's followers started the Presbyterian Church in Scotland, using Calvinist doctrine, and later, Reformers in England started the Anglican Church after Henry VIII severed ties with the pope over his divorce.

There were many streams coming out of the Reformation, but we will just mention three of them, the Anabaptists from Europe, the Puritans from England, and the French



Huguenots.

The Anabaptists - The consistent testimony of the church for the first 400 years of its history was to administer baptism only to those who had first made a profession of faith in Christ. Starting in AD 401, with the fifth Council of Carthage, the churches under the rule of Rome began teaching and practicing infant baptism. With the advent of infant baptism, the separatist churches began re-baptising those who made professions of faith after having been baptised as infants in the official church. At this time, the Roman Empire encouraged their bishops to actively oppose the dissenting churches, and even passed laws condemning them to death. The re-baptisers became known as Anabaptists.

These Anabaptist congregations grew and prospered throughout the Roman Empire, even though they were almost universally persecuted by the Catholic Church. By the time of the Reformation, Martin Luther's assistants complained that the Baptists in Bohemia and Moravia were so prevalent, they were like weeds. When John Calvin's teachings became commonly known, many of the Waldenses united with the Reformed Church. From this point on, the various Anabaptist churches gradually lost their ancient names and many assumed the name Baptist, though they retained their historic independence and self-rule.

The most identifiable are the Hutterites, Mennonites, and Amish, though many modern-day Baptist churches would also identify themselves as the heirs of the Anabaptist traditions. The Hutterites, or the Hutterian Brethren, trace their history to 1528, when a group of Anabaptists fled persecution for their refusal to pay war taxes and formed a communal society in Austerlitz. Jakob Hutter, one of their first elders, was martyred in 1536.

The Puritans - The English Puritans believed that the English Reformation had not gone far enough and that the Church of England was still tolerating too many practices that were associated with the Catholic Church; hierarchical leadership, clerical vestments, and the various rituals of the church. Many Puritans advocated separation from all other Christian groups, but most were "non-separating" and desired to bring cleansing and change to the church from within. Holding a high view of Scripture, and deeming it as the only true law of God, Puritans believed that each individual, as well as each congregation, was directly responsible to God, rather going through a mediator such as a priest, bishop, or pope.

Throughout their history, the Puritans were viewed and treated in a variety of ways by both civil and church authorities. Often, they were grudgingly tolerated, and at other times they were severely persecuted. Charles I of England made efforts to purge all Puritan influences from England, which resulted in the Great Migration to Europe and the American Colonies. The Pilgrims who formed the Massachusetts Bay Colony were separatist Puritans who had been forced out of England and Holland. Non-separatist Puritans who remained in England responded to this persecution with the English Civil War (1641-51), which led to the execution of Charles I, the exile of his son, Charles II, and the rise of Oliver Cromwell.

Most Congregational Churches today are descendants of the early Puritans, and any group that advocates congregational church government and individual piety has been impacted in some way by Puritan teaching.

The Huguenots - Huguenots were French Protestants who held to the Reformed, or Calvinist, tradition of Protestantism. They were persecuted by the Catholic Church aligned French kings and in 1536 a general edict which encouraged the extermination of the Huguenots was issued. In 1562 some 1200 Huguenots were slain at Vassy, this event ignited the Wars of Religion which would divide, devastate, and bankrupt France for the next three decades. During the infamous St Bartholomew Massacre of 1572 more than 8000 Huguenots, including Admiral Gaspard de Coligny, Governor of Picardy and a leader of the Huguenots, were murdered in Paris. The wars ended with the Edict of Nantes in 1598 which granted the Huguenots religious, political and military autonomy. The persecution however, continued. Huguenot rebellions in the 1620s resulted in the abolition of their political and military



privileges. They retained the religious provisions of the Edict of Nantes until the rule of Louis XIV, who gradually increased persecution of Protestantism until he issued the Edict of Fontainebleau in 1685 which ended legal recognition of Protestantism in France and the Huguenots were forced to either convert to Catholicism or flee as refugees. Many came to the Dutch Cape Colony in South Africa.

The remaining Huguenots faced continued persecution under Louis XV. By the time of his death in 1774, Calvinism was almost entirely eliminated from France.

At the heart of the Protestant Reformation lay four basic questions: How is a person saved? Where does religious authority lie? What is the church? What is the essence of Christian living? In answering these questions, Protestant Reformers developed what would be known as the "Five Solas", sola being the Latin word for "alone". These five essential points of biblical doctrine clearly separate Protestantism from Roman Catholicism. The Reformers resisted the demands placed on them to recant these doctrines, even to the point of death. These five essential doctrines of the Protestant Reformation are as follows:

Sola Scriptura - "Scripture Alone." The Bible alone is the sole authority for all matters of faith and practice. Scripture and Scripture alone is the standard by which all teachings and traditions of the church must be measured. As Martin Luther so eloquently stated when told to recant his teachings, "Unless I am convinced by Scripture and plain reason, I do not accept the authority of the popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other, my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. God help me. Amen."

Sola Gratia - "Salvation by Grace Alone" Salvation is proof of God's undeserved favor; we are rescued from God's wrath by His grace alone, not by any work we do. God's blessing in Christ is the sole efficient cause of salvation. This grace is the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit who brings us to Christ by releasing us from our bondage to sin and raising us from spiritual death to spiritual life.

Sola Fide - "Salvation by Faith Alone" We are justified by faith in Christ alone, not by the works of the Law. It is by faith in Christ that His righteousness is imputed to us as the only possible satisfaction of God's perfect standard.

Solus Christus - "In Christ Alone" Salvation is found in Jesus Christ alone; no one and nothing else can save. Jesus' substitutionary death on the cross is sufficient for our justification and reconciliation to God the Father. The gospel has not been preached if Christ's redemption is not declared and if faith in His resurrection is not solicited.

Soli Deo Gloria - "For the Glory of God Alone" Salvation is of God and has been accomplished by God for His glory alone. As Christians we must magnify Him always and live our lives in His presence, under His authority, and for His glory.

These five important doctrines are the reason for the Protestant Reformation. They are at the heart of the Reformers' call for the church to return to biblical teaching. The Five Solas are just as important today in evaluating a church and its teachings as they were in the 16th century.

Calvinism and Arminianism

Calvinism began with the Protestant Reformation in Switzerland where Ulrich Zwingli originally taught what became the first version of the Reformed doctrine in Zürich in 1519. John Calvin's "Institutes of the Christian Religion" was one of the most influential theological works of the Reformation age.



Calvin's writings impressed Guillaume Farel, the Reformer of Geneva, so much that Farel begged Calvin to come and help the Genevan reform. Geneva was to be Calvin's home until he died in 1564. He did not live to see the foundation of his work grow into an international movement, but his death allowed his ideas to break out of their city of origin, and to spread far and wide.

Calvin believed that salvation is only possible through the grace of God. Even before creation, God chose some people to be saved. This is the bone of contention for some; the doctrine of predestination. But this wasn't a uniquely Calvinist idea. Augustine taught it centuries earlier, and Luther believed it, as did most of the other Reformers. Calvin stated it so clearly and forcefully that the teaching is forever attributed to him. Calvin simply said that it was clearly taught in the Bible.

For Calvin, God was above all else, sovereign. Like all the Reformers, he hated the way Catholicism had degenerated into a religion of salvation by works. So Calvin's constantly repeated theme was this, "You cannot manipulate God, nor put Him in your debt. If you are saved, it is His doing, not your own."

Calvinism refers particularly to Soteriology or the Doctrine of Salvation by emphasizing the sovereignty of God, predestination and election. Calvin died in 1564 at the age of 54. While he gave the main starting point to his ideas in his "Institutes", his theology has been developed by many who followed him.

Arminianism is a system of belief that attempts to explain the relationship between God's sovereignty and mankind's free will, especially in relation to salvation. Arminianism is named after Jacobus Arminius, (1560-1609) a Dutch theologian. While Calvinism emphasises the sovereignty of God, Arminianism emphasises the responsibility of man.

Calvin's successors took his theology further than he did. Jacobus Arminius began to have concerns that taking Calvin's thoughts and logic to the extreme would have very dangerous consequences for the church. He studied under the Calvinist Theodore Beza in Geneva and became professor of theology at the University of Leyden in 1603; he died 6 years later. In 1610, his followers drew up their creed and laid it before the Dutch authorities under the title, the Remonstrance, which was signed by 46 ministers. The Calvinists responded with a Counter Remonstrance made official at the Synod of Dort, (1618-1619) which was convened to consider the Five Articles of the Arminians. The Synod wrote what was to become known as the Canons of Dort which form the basis of reformed theology today. They state the Five Points of Calvinism in response to the Five Articles of the Arminian Remonstrants.

The Five Articles of Arminian Remonstrance

Partial Depravity – Humanity is depraved but still able to seek God. We are fallen and tainted by sin but not to the extent that we cannot choose to come to God and accept salvation, with the help of prevenient grace from God. Given such grace, human will is free and has the power to yield to the influence of the Spirit. Many Arminians today reject partial depravity and hold a view very close to Calvinistic total depravity.

Conditional Election – Asserts that God only "chooses" those whom He knows will choose to believe. No one is predetermined for either heaven or hell.

Unlimited Atonement – Asserts that Jesus died for everyone, even those who are not chosen and will not believe. Jesus' death was for all of humanity, and anyone can be saved by belief in Him.

Resistible Grace – Asserts that God's call to be saved can be resisted and/or rejected. We can resist God's pull toward salvation if we choose to.



Conditional Salvation – Asserts that Christians can lose their salvation if they actively reject the Holy Spirit's influence in their lives. The maintenance of salvation is required for a Christian to retain it. Many Arminians today deny "conditional salvation" and instead hold to "eternal security."

The Five Points of Calvinism (TULIP)

Total Depravity - Asserts that as a consequence of the fall of man into sin, every person is enslaved to sin. People are not by nature inclined to love God, but rather to serve their own interests and to reject the rule of God.

Unconditional Election - Asserts that God has chosen from eternity those whom He will bring to Himself not based on foreseen virtue, merit, or faith in those people; rather, His choice is unconditionally grounded in His mercy alone. God has chosen from eternity to extend mercy to those He has chosen and to withhold mercy from those not chosen.

Limited Atonement - Asserts that Jesus's substitutionary atonement was definite and certain in its purpose and in what it accomplished. This implies that only the sins of the elect were atoned for by Jesus's death.

Irresistible Grace - Asserts that the saving grace of God is effectually applied to those whom He has determined to save, the elect, and overcomes their resistance to obeying the call of the gospel, bringing them to a saving faith. This means that when God sovereignly purposes to save someone, that individual certainly will be saved.

Perseverance of the Saints - Asserts that since God is sovereign and His will cannot be frustrated by humans or anything else, those whom God has called into communion with Himself will continue in faith until the end.

Famous Calvinist Thinkers

John Calvin, John Knox, John Foxe, Jonathan Edwards, William Wilberforce, George Mueller, John Newton, Charles Spurgeon, John Murray, Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Karl Barth, Francis Schaeffer, RC Sproul, JI Packer, Timothy Keller, John Piper

Famous Arminian Thinkers

John Wesley, Charles Wesley, Charles Finney, (first to use the term "altar call") Andrew Murray, CS Lewis, Oswald Chambers, DL Moody, Adam Clarke, Billy Graham, AW Tozer, Chuck Smith, Clark Pinnock, Keith Greene, James Dobson,

