

Adult Sunday School Class “Our Christian Heritage” - Lesson 9

The Reformation Continues

As freedom loving Americans, it is hard for us to understand how that for many, many centuries, the Christian church and the state were fused. When we read the Book of Acts, we find that the church began on the Day of Pentecost in the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus had previously given His Great Commission to His followers saying, that *“repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem (Luke 24:47, NKJV).”* The Book of Acts church was not controlled by the government; it was a spiritual entity, something that transcended the governments of this world. To be a part of the “kingdom of God,” a person had to be born again as Jesus said, *“Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ (John 3:5-7).* During the days of the disciples and the decades following, there was one Church with local congregations (that met in houses). Sometimes the local churches went “underground” because of persecution from the state. Though the church was persecuted by the state, yet it thrived and remained true to the Scriptures for the most part.

In the 300’s, Roman Emperor Constantine embraced Christianity and made it the state religion. Now, instead of a person freely coming to God, repenting, submitting to water baptism, receiving God’s precious Holy Spirit, and living his life for God as a part of the church - now, a person was required to be a Christian because he was a Roman citizen. At this point, Christianity began to lose its meaning and power, which happens whenever the state and church are fused. It was also in the 300’s that the doctrines of the church began to seriously change from good Bible doctrines to man-made ones, many adopted from paganism or influenced by Greek philosophy.

So, for over a thousand years, there was one Christian church (the Catholic church) which was fused with the state. This period was called the Dark Ages (or the Middle Ages) because of the spiritual darkness of that time. The Word of God was kept from the people, and the iron fist of the law kept people from rebelling against the institutional church. Only God knows how many people lost their lives resisting the institutional church, paving the way for the Reformation.

The Protestant Reformation was the breaking away from the institutional church, and for the first time in history another branch of Christianity (Lutheranism) was established and sustained. It began in 1517 when Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the door of the Wittenberg church, challenging unbiblical doctrines of the institutional church, the main objection being to the sale of indulgences. Martin Luther introduced the doctrine of “justification by faith,” and he translated the New

Testament into German. Shortly after that, William Tyndale began translating the Scriptures into English. One great characteristic of the Protestant Reformation was the belief that the common person should have access to the Bible.

A Review of English Bible Translations

In our last lesson we studied how the Bible became available in the English language beginning in the 1300's with the great effort of the scholar John Wycliffe. Wycliffe said, "*Christ and his apostles taught the people in the tongue that was best known to them. Why should men not do so now?*" Remember, at that time, the institutional church forbade the common people to own a copy of the Bible, and the mass was held in the Latin language.

Wycliffe translated the Scriptures into English before the invention of the printing press, so all of his copies were hand written. Wycliffe suffered great persecution, but he did escape execution. But after his death, officials dug up his body and burned it.

In the 1500's, England broke away from the Catholic church (under King Henry VIII) and the king began the Church of England. William Tyndale led the movement to bring the Bible to the English speaking people. He translated the New Testament into English directly from Greek, and the Old Testament from Hebrew. His Bible was the first English Bible to be printed on a printing press.

During Tyndale's day, there was still a death sentence in England for anyone who possessed an unlicensed copy of the Scriptures. After hiding from English authorities in Europe he was eventually betrayed in Belgium, returned to England, and tried on a charge of heresy in 1536. He was martyred (strangled, then burned at the stake). His dying request was this: "*Lord, open the King of England's eyes.*" He wanted God to move upon the King of England to allow the Scriptures to be available to all Englishmen. Just two years later, God answered his prayer. King Henry VIII authorized the translation of the Great Bible.

Following the Great Bible, the Bishop's Bible was authorized, and then the King James Version in 1611. These Bibles were all authorized by the English monarchy for use in the Church of England.

During the 1500's, the Bible of choice for the common people for home use was the Geneva Bible. This was the first mechanically printed, mass-produced Bible that was made available to the general public for home use. It was the first Bible to have chapter and verse Scripture references. It also had notes in the margins with parallel verses and commentary. There were introductions to each book, maps, tables, indexes, etc. It was the world's first study Bible.

It was called The Geneva Bible because during the reign of Queen Mary I of England (1553-1558), who tried to bring Catholicism back to England, a number of Protestants fled from England to Geneva, Switzerland. There, a group of scholars supervised the translation. The first edition appeared in 1560. It was so popular, over 150 editions were printed.

The Anabaptists

Another major branch of Protestantism in the 1500's was the Anabaptist movement. Anabaptists became a separate group in Switzerland in 1525 when they began to baptize adults who had been previously baptized as infants. The movement soon spread all over Western Europe.

The Catholics, Lutherans, and another Protestant group called The Reformed (which we will study today) classified the Anabaptists as "heretics." The primary reason was their break with the historic church and their advocacy of separation of church and state. Of course, those who believed that the church and state should be unified could use the powers of the state against the "heretics."

At the beginning of the movement, the government of Zurich, Switzerland, arrested the leaders and pronounced the sentence of death by drowning upon all who insisted on re-baptism - a punishment deemed appropriate. The first execution of a Protestant by a Protestant was that of Feliz Manz, who was drowned in the river in 1527. Many Anabaptists were killed, and many others fled. When they entered Lutheran or Catholic lands, similar persecution awaited them. By 1530, two-thousand Anabaptists had been executed - so many that the movement didn't have a chance to grow. Many of them eventually established rural communities where they were tolerated - in Northern Germany, Holland, Russia, and America.

Menno Simons (1496-1561), a Dutch Catholic priest who converted to Anabaptism in 1536, became the most prominent leader of the movement. He rallied the disheartened Anabaptists and committed the group to nonviolence.

The Anabaptists wanted to get rid of as much tradition as possible (whereas the Lutherans wanted to keep as much tradition as possible). More than a reformation, the Anabaptists wanted a restoration of original Christianity. As part of this they advocated the total separation of church and state. This idea separated them from all other branches of Christianity in their day. They prefigured the modern era by advocating freedom of religion and conscience.

John 18:36 Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here."

Matthew 22:21 They said to Him, "Caesar's." And He said to them, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."

Anabaptists said that the church should not seek support from the state, nor should the state coerce people to join the church or obey its religious rules.

The Anabaptists received their name from others, meaning "rebaptizers," because they rejected infant baptism and advocated baptism of believers only. However, they did not consider that they were rebaptizing anyone: rather, they believed they were baptizing people for the first time. To them, infant baptism was not Scriptural, therefore it was invalid and no baptism at all.

The Anabaptists placed supreme emphasis on faith, repentance, and holiness. Consequently, they only baptized those who repented and confessed faith in Jesus Christ (called “believer’s baptism”). When they started rebaptizing people, the persecution began. The other churches invoked the Justinian Code of 529, which pronounced the death penalty for rebaptism.

Anabaptists taught that a person must repent of his sins, place his faith in Jesus Christ, and begin living a new life. The other branches of Christianity taught that a person was Christian because he was born in a Christian state, his family was Christian, and he was baptized as an infant. In contrast, the Anabaptists taught that becoming a Christian is an individual, personal decision and experience. They believed in a conversion experience, whereas other groups believed a person was a Christian from birth. They could identify a time when they turned away from sin and yielded themselves to God - a specific point of repentance and exercising faith in God. Unlike Apostolics, they did not see water baptism or Spirit baptism as a part of the conversion experience. Nevertheless, we know through their writings that many received the Holy Spirit with the sign of tongues as many do who seek after God and truth during times of spiritual revival.

The Anabaptists taught that church government was congregational - where each local congregation makes its own decisions rather than having its affairs controlled by the state or officials of a general church organization. The Anabaptists said that the body of Christ is composed of self-governing congregations that have fellowship with one another.

They conducted their worship services simply without many rituals or traditional forms. One historian wrote about the Anabaptist worship service: *“The congregation sometimes shouted and danced, and always sang hymns with great fervor. Preaching was even more important than in more conservative forms of Protestantism, and more emotionally charged with hopes of heaven and fears of hell.”*

The Anabaptists acknowledged the two Protestant sacraments - The Lord’s Supper, and baptism - and regarded both as symbolic only. They said Christ is not bodily present at the Lord’s Supper: it is simply a commemoration of what Jesus did for us by dying on the cross. In connection with the Lord’s Supper, the Anabaptists instituted the practice of foot washing. Although water baptism was the immediate cause of the Anabaptists becoming a separate movement, it was not the central part of their beliefs. They did not regard it as a part of the new birth, but as a symbol of God’s cleansing and an act of joining the church. Nevertheless, they taught that baptism of believers is still necessary - a command for everyone to obey.

Most Anabaptists accepted the traditional doctrine of the trinity, but some did not. One Anabaptist wrote a hymn affirming that God is one person, not three. There is also evidence that some Anabaptists baptized in the name of Jesus Christ instead of with the trinitarian titles.

Most Anabaptists today are Mennonites, followers of Menno Simons. They are most numerous in Germany, Holland, and the United States. They are characterized by pacifism, separation from the world, and simplicity of lifestyle. In recent years, it is estimated that about twenty-five percent of Mennonites have received the baptism of the Holy spirit, speaking in other tongues.

The Amish, originally led by Jacob Ammann, are a conservative split from the Mennonites, believing that the main body was becoming too worldly. They rejected modern inventions. In some ways they seem to have focused on legalistic details.

The restorationism of the Anabaptists was remarkable for the rapidity and scope of its development, especially when compared to the rest of Protestantism. The advances were so great that, within a few short years from the beginning of the Reformation, there emerged genuine Apostolic believers as defined by the experience of Acts 2:38.

The Reformed Movement and John Calvin

Along with the Lutherans and Anabaptists, another major branch of Protestantism emerged in Switzerland around 1523 with Ulrich Zwingli. This was the Reformed Movement, but it did not fully develop under Zwingli, but under John Calvin.

John Calvin was born in France in 1509. He was raised a Catholic and converted to Protestantism in 1532. At the age of twenty-six he wrote his major work, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. The Reformed leader in Geneva, Switzerland, was so impressed with his insights that when Calvin visited Geneva, he asked him to stay. Calvin was elected as pastor of that city and assumed the role of religious and political leader of that city-state. Calvin was such an instrumental writer in the Reformed movement that the followers of this movement are often called Calvinists.

Calvin taught that all human beings are born under sin and are completely bound by sin. He stated that humans are “totally depraved”, which means sin has corrupted every aspect of the human life and that a person never chooses to serve God of his own accord. This led to Calvin’s doctrine of predestination (unconditional election). He stated that if God ever gave humans a choice in regard to salvation, they would always choose wrong and so would never be saved. In his view, the only way God can save us in view of our sinfulness is by unconditional election.

Calvin defined predestination as God’s eternal decree by which He determined with Himself what He willed each person to become. According to him, a person is not saved because he makes a choice; God has determined his eternal destiny before that person is ever born. Some are predestined to election: God has chosen them to be saved. All others are predestined to reprobation: God has not elected them to salvation, so they are consigned to damnation. Human choice plays no role in either case.

The Bible does speak of predestination, but not in the sense that Calvin taught. According to Scripture, election to salvation is based on God's foreknowledge of human choice. God knows the future and acts accordingly. However, Calvin taught that God actually predetermines the eternal destiny of each individual apart from that person's will.

Those who opposed Calvin said that this doctrine makes God unjust. Calvin struggled with this problem of fairness and concluded that predestination is a mystery. He could not explain predestination to his own satisfaction or reconcile it with human freedom of choice, but said that we must affirm it because he thought it was a teaching of the Bible.

The doctrine of predestination did not begin with Calvin, the Catholic theologian, Augustine (354-430), taught this doctrine in Catholicism, and the Lutherans followed it as well. Calvin developed it, so this doctrine is often referred to as "Calvinistic" teaching today. This doctrine developed into the doctrine of "limited atonement," saying that Christ did not die for the whole world but only for the elect, those God had chosen in advance.

The doctrine of "once saved always saved," a common doctrine in the South, stems from predestination. According to this teaching, a person cannot resist God's saving grace if he is predestined to be saved. God molds the person's will so that he desires salvation and does not wish to resist. Those whom God has elected will endure to the end and be saved. They cannot fall from grace. This point is often called unconditional eternal security or, popularly, "once saved, always saved." God's choice alone determines salvation from start to finish, regardless of an individual's attitude, choices, or actions after conversion.

What does the Bible say? Was Calvary only for a select group?

Titus 2:1 For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men,

Acts 17:26 And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, **27** so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us . . . **30** Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, **31** because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead."

God knows all things, including the future, but His foreknowledge is not the same as predestination. Although he knows everything that will happen, He does not foreordain or cause everything to happen. Salvation is by the grace of God, but humans must accept God's plan of salvation and apply it for themselves.

Many passages of Scripture speak of salvation as something that people accept or reject. The call to salvation extends to everyone, or to "whosoever will," not just to the elect.

1John 3:16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

Revelation 22:17 . . . Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.

The Bible does speak of predestination in relation to the plan of God. For example, God predestined that Jesus would die on the cross, and He predestined that there would be a Church. However, people choose whether to be in the church or not. We can speak of unconditional election of the church as a whole, but not as individuals. For each one of us, we say that God's election is based on His foreknowledge of each person's choice.

Jesus truly died for the whole human race. The Atonement at Calvary makes provision for everyone to be saved, but each person must apply those benefits personally.

1 John 2:2 And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.

Other Teachings of Calvin

Calvin taught that the Gospel is a continuation of the Old Testament and there is a logical progression from one to the other. He identified portions of the Old Testament Law as ceremonial, such as the animal sacrifices, and said that these had been fulfilled in Christ and have no purpose today. Calvin said that the moral law is still in effect.

Because of this teaching that the moral law is still in effect, the Reformed movement placed more emphasis on right living than the Lutherans did. Calvinism in the early days underscored the importance of morality, ethics, holiness of life, and disciplined living.

One would think that the doctrine of predestination taught by Calvin would bring great assurance of salvation. In practice, however, many wrestled with a dreadful doubt: How can I be sure that I am one of the elect? The result was a powerful motivation for people to live according to the teachings of the church, for only then could they convince themselves and others that they were part of the elect. The irony was that a doctrine that in theory completely eliminated any human response as part of salvation, actually resulted in great emphasis on the need for godly living.

Calvin believed that the church should return to a more biblical pattern of church government. He taught that the New Testament church should be led by both ministers and the laity. This concept led to the presbyterian form of church government, named from the Greek word, *presbuteros*, meaning "elder." The Presbyterians, as the Reformed later became known (particularly in Scotland), ordained ministers who served as pastors and preachers, and they also ordained lay members as elders.

Calvin taught that water baptism is for the remission of original sin, past sin, and future sin. He held that baptism washes away a person's sins, so Calvin did not reduce water baptism to a mere symbol. Calvin strongly taught infant baptism

which fit well with his beliefs of predestination. He retained the trinitarian formula and said that sprinkling was acceptable, although he recognized immersion as the original form in the New Testament. Calvin taught that the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the miraculous gifts of the Spirit ceased in ancient times and were no longer available.

In Geneva, Calvin instituted what almost amounted to a theocracy in which the church ruled through the state. He was willing to use the power of the state to promote religious laws and doctrines, based on Old Testament precedent (he ordered the execution of “heretics”).

Calvin stressed the importance of godly living, including self-discipline, the work ethic, moderation, self-denial, and the avoidance of ornaments and luxuries. Under Calvin, the government of Geneva passed and enforced strict laws to regulate the lifestyle of all its citizens in accordance with his teachings. Dancing, gambling, drunkenness, going to taverns, profanity, luxury, excesses at public entertainments, extravagance and immodesty in dress, licentious or irreligious songs were all forbidden and punished by censure, fine or imprisonment. Even the number of dishes at meals was regulated. Any manifestation of Catholicism - such as carrying a rosary, cherishing a sacred relic, or observing a saint’s holy day - was subject to punishment. The renowned Swiss watchmaking industry got its start in Geneva when jewelers had to find new ways of making money after the Calvinists disapproved of the wearing of ornaments.

The Calvinists did not rely upon the Holy Spirit to instill holiness. Nor did they advocate freedom of religion. They employed torture, execution, and banishment to enforce their discipline. For example, from 1542 to 1546 in Geneva, there were fifty-eight judgments of death and seventy-six decrees of banishment. From 1558 to 1559, there were 414 cases of punishment meted out in a population of 20,000.

John Calvin, more than anyone else, defined Reformed theology, which is a major branch of Protestantism to this day, and he influenced the entire Protestant Reformation. The Reformed churches, the Presbyterians, the Puritans, and the Church of England, along with many Evangelicals today trace their roots to John Calvin.

Michael Servetus

One of the most amazing men of the Reformation was Michael Servetus. Only fourteen years after the beginning of the Reformation, he taught the doctrine of God, upholding the full deity and humanity of Jesus Christ. Michael Servetus is the Latin name of Miguel Serveto, a Spaniard who was born in 1511. While studying law in Toulouse, he saw a complete Bible for the first time. The Scriptures led him to a life-transforming experience.

At the age of twenty, Servetus published two books on the oneness of God. Forced to flee for his life because of his unorthodox views, Servetus went to France and became a prominent medical doctor, author, and editor under an assumed

name. The authorities in France arrested Servetus on charges of heresy. He managed to escape with the help of influential friends. The Protestant city council of Geneva condemned him to die on two counts: denying infant baptism and denying the trinity. On October 27, 1553, at age forty-two, he was burned at the stake. Amid smoke and flames, he cried out his last words: *“O Jesus, Son of the eternal God, have pity on me.”* He died after thirty minutes.

John Knox and the Presbyterians

In Scotland, John Knox became the outstanding Protestant leader. Under Bloody Mary’s reign, he fled to Geneva to avoid Catholic persecution, and became a devoted disciple of John Calvin. He returned to Scotland in 1559, and his preaching became an important factor in swaying the nation to Protestantism. In 1560, the Scottish Parliament officially adopted Protestant articles of faith written by Knox and others, and they banned the Catholic mass.

Under Knox, the Church of Scotland became strongly Calvinistic in doctrine (teaching predestination) and presbyterian in government, meaning the church should be governed by ordained ministers and ordained laymen together (the Greek word, *presbuteros*, means “elder”). The members of the Church of Scotland became known as Presbyterians.