

Reformation Day 2025

October 31 is typically celebrated in America as Halloween. American will spend an estimated \$115 per person on Halloween candy, costumes and decorations. According to the National Retail Federation, that will be just over \$13 BILLION this year. The NRF also expects 73% of Americans to celebrate the holiday. For comparison, the US Census Bureau estimated 63% of eligible voters voted in the 2024 presidential election, the third highest turnout in 34 years. While eating candy and having fun might have clear preference advantages to our current political climate, we Americans are spending a lot and participating intensely in Halloween, often without any consideration of why the holiday exists or how it started.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

Like most cultural celebrations, the roots of Halloween can be traced to the Christian church. The early Christian church was founded in an environment of hostility and hatred. Of the original twelve disciples of Jesus, only the Apostle John is believed to have died a natural death of old age. With Judas committing suicide, the other ten Apostles were all murdered for their faith while on their fields of ministry. With their passing, other early leaders of Christianity were likewise targeted for their faith. The word 'martyr' is almost directly from the Greek and means 'witness.' Being a witness to your faith was often fatal in the early church. This persecution persisted until 313, when Constantine, then emperor of the Roman Empire and a recent convert to Christianity, issued the Edict of Milan granting official tolerance to Christians throughout the empire. The empire at that time encompassed the Mediterranean, most of Europe, Western Asia, and North Africa. The Christian faith for the first time was decriminalized, and in 380, Christianity was declared the official religion of the Roman Empire. You might think that becoming the official church of the Roman Empire would have brought an end to persecution of Christians, and it is true martyrdom was less likely, but believers dying for their Christian witness continued, and still continues to this day.

So, what does this brief history of the Christian church have to do with Halloween? Reflecting on all of those who had been killed for holding to their faith, the now official church of the Roman Empire wanted to commemorate these martyrs. About the year 800, a day of commemoration was declared—All

Saints Day—to be recognized every November 1. In medieval England, the day is called ‘All Hallows’ to remember the hallowed or those made holy by their faith. The English also expanded the commemoration to include the night before, October 31, and the day after, November 2. So this became a three-day observation—October 31 (All Hallow’s Eve), November 1 (All Saints Day), and November 2 (All Soul’s Day). It’s not a long trip from ‘All Hallow’s Eve’ to ‘Halloween’, and it’s just as quick for an unbelieving culture to forget the emphasis on remembering the sacrifice of martyrs for their faith and transform it into an excuse for spooky emphasis on ghosts and ghouls. I won’t even get started on Mardi Gras/Lent, or Easter bunnies/Resurrection Sunday.

And all of this is just the background for the real reason that All Hallow’s Eve is also known as **Reformation Day**.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF REFORMATION DAY

On a Saturday, October 31, 1517, a priest in the college town of Wittenberg in what is now Germany posted a notice of some complaints he had with the church. The local priest was outraged that representatives of the Pope in Rome had arrived in his region on a fund-raising tour. What they offered, for a significant contribution, was a document signed by then Pope Leo X forgiving any and all past, present, or future sins. The documents, called Papal Indulgences, were not only being sold to parishioners, but people were encouraged to buy them on behalf of the deceased. The church representative selling these indulgences is credited with saying ‘As soon as the silver in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs’. It was an official church ‘Get out of Hell’ card.

This outraged the priest in Wittenberg, who argued against the selling of indulgences. He said ‘You can’t buy God’s forgiveness, because He has already paid the price that no one can pay’.

Contrary to the broader church teachings of his time, this priest believed and preached that a sinner is justified by faith alone through God’s grace. That salvation or redemption is a gift of God’s grace attainable only through faith in Jesus as the Messiah. Even the faith to confess Jesus as Lord was a gift from God. The priest described his personal experience of being justified by faith ‘as though I had been born again’. The priest’s name was Martin Luther, the list of complaints about church teachings he posted on his university church parish door came to be

known as the 95 Theses. And his actions helped changed the direction of the faithful. Just how an unknown local priest, posting his list of complaints in Latin on a church door came to be potentially the first viral moment hundreds of years before the founding of this country is worth some exploration. Just like the internet revolutionized access to data, so Martin Luther's lonely little posting of the 95 Theses went viral because of a new technology for it's time that revolutionized access to information.

The movable-type printing press was invented about 1440 in Mainz, Germany by Johannes Gutenberg. Its invention radically increased the capacity to print large quantities, and lowered the cost of buying and using printed material. Prior to its invention, hand-copying could produce a few pages per day, and wood block hand-printing could produce perhaps 40 pages per day. A single movable-type press could produce NINETY TIMES more, or 3600 pages per day. Work that had taken a year to produce could be done in days, then hours. The cost of owning books dropped significantly. One of the first things Guttenberg began to print was the bible. The original Guttenberg Bible printing was from a translation called the 'Vulgate', with the Old Testament in Hebrew and the New Testament in Greek.

In just a few decades, the movable-type press had spread to over 200 cities across Europe. By 1500, they had collectively produced over 20 million volumes. As the number of printing presses continued to expand in the 1600's, the printed volume increased another TEN TIMES to 200 million volumes. This led to two important changes in culture. For the first time, the Bible could be printed in large quantities and kept in people's homes. And also for the first time, Bibles could be translated into the locally spoken language. This moved the Bible from the realm of elite church-trained clerics who told people what it said, into the hands of people who could read what it said for themselves.

And so it is into this environment on October 31, 1517, when a list of concerns about church teachings and practices is nailed to a church door, that someone takes the list, translates it from Latin into the local language, German, prints copies on a printing press, and sends it across Europe. From the concerns of this single pastor, believers across Europe are challenged to read Scripture for themselves. The printing press makes it possible for them to do so for the first time in their native language. The Reformation is born.

THE BIRTH OF THE PROTESTANT REFORMATION

These early protesters of Catholic doctrine came to be called 'Protestants'. While early Protestant doctrines focused on different theological interpretations, they coalesced behind five key principles. The original terms were written in Latin—

SOLA SCRIPTURA—SCRIPTURE ALONE, maintains that the Bible is the highest source of authority in a Christian's life.

2 Timothy 3:16-17

¹⁶ All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that the servant of God^[a] may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

2 Peter 1:20-21

²⁰ Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things. ²¹ For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

1 Corinthians 4:6

⁶ Now, brothers and sisters, I have applied these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, so that you may learn from us the meaning of the saying, "Do not go beyond what is written." Then you will not be puffed up in being a follower of one of us over against the other.

SOLA FIDE—FAITH ALONE— affirms that justification—being made right with God—comes only through faith in Jesus.

Ephesians 2:8-9

⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— ⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.

Galatians 2:16

¹⁶ know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified.

Romans 4:5-8

⁵ However, to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness. ⁶ David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the one to whom God credits righteousness apart from works:

⁷ “Blessed are those whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.

⁸ Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord will never count against them.”

SOLA GRATIA—GRACE ALONE—says sinners are saved as an unearned gift of God’s grace.

Ephesians 2:8-9

⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— ⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.

Titus 2:11-13

¹¹ For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. ¹² It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, ¹³ while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ,

Acts 20:32

³² “Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

SOLA CHRISTO—CHRIST ALONE— emphasizes the exclusivity of Jesus’ role in salvation.

Acts 4:11-13

¹¹ Jesus is the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone.’

¹² Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.”

John 14:6

⁶ Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Colossians 1:18

¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.

SOLI DEO GLORIA—TO THE GLORY OF GOD ALONE—says that the purpose of creation, salvation, and everything—including our goal as Christians—is the glory of God.

Philippians 2:9-11

⁹ Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name,

¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

¹¹ and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Romans 6:4

⁴ We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

1 Corinthians 10:31

³¹ So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

The reformers sought to return believers to the roots of their faith, instead of listening to what someone told them the bible taught. As they were able to read the Bible in their own languages, they found gaps between Scripture and what the church was teaching, just as Martin Luther had done to compose the Ninety-five Theses. It is important for every generation of believers to measure what they hear preached and taught in their churches against the Word of God as revealed in Scripture and affirmed by the Holy Spirit. Knowing what God's Word says is essential to keeping our sinful selves, culture, and, country from deferring to our human nature.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE BAPTISTS

Most church historians agree the first Baptist church was established about 1609 in Amsterdam. That church was led by an Englishman-in-exile, Thomas Helwys. Helwys reading of Scripture led him to reject the Catholic Church's practice of infant baptism resulting in salvation. Helwys believed and preached the Scripture taught baptism only for believers, separation of church and state to allow for freedom of religious conscience, and moral responsibility instead of predestination. In 1613 Helwys and twelve other Baptists returned to England and founded the first Baptist congregation in east London, England. They delivered a copy of one of Helwys' books to King James, with a handwritten inscription arguing for liberty of conscience. "The King", Helwys wrote, "is a mortal man, and not God, therefore he hath no power over the mortal soul of his subjects to make laws and ordinances for them and to set spiritual Lords over them." This was in contradiction to the practices and teachings of the Anglican Church, the official Church of England, of which King James was also the religious head. King James had Helwys and other Baptists thrown into Newgate Prison, where Helwys died in 1616. He was 40 years old.

BAPTIST INFLUENCES ON THE AMERICAN EXPERIMENT

Thomas Helwys significantly influenced the American Constitution through his advocacy for religious freedom. As a key figure in the early Baptist movement, Helwys' writings emphasized the importance of individual liberty and the separation of church and state. His 1612 work, "A Declaration of Faith," argued for the right of individuals to worship freely without government interference, laying foundational ideas that would later be reflected in the First Amendment to our Constitution.

Key Contributions

- **Religious Liberty:** Helwys was one of the first to advocate for complete religious freedom, arguing that faith should be a personal choice.
- **Separation of Church and State:** His ideas contributed to the understanding that government should not impose religious beliefs on individuals.
- **Influence on Founding Fathers:** Helwys' principles resonated with key figures like Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, who incorporated these ideas into the Constitution.

Everyday Christian Fellowship continues in the footsteps of the early reformers. Every Sunday Pastor John asks who brought their bible to church, because it is vitally import to your Christian walk that you read the Scripture for yourself and not just believe what a preacher says from the pulpit. Pastor John's sermons are based on Scripture, so you can look it up and read it for yourself. We offer a study bible to everyone who completes the New Member Course. We have distributed over three hundred study bibles since I became your Discipleship Pastor. Each generation of believers needs to read God's Word, let God's Holy Spirit speak to you about what He has to say, and then be courageous enough to do what God is calling you to do and to be.

1 Peter 2:9-10

⁹ But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

So as you decide what you are going to do this Halloween, let me encourage you to consider finding a way to honor those giants of the faith that set examples for us. Read the bible every day. Participate in a bible-based study. Reacquaint yourselves and your children with the Christian roots of the celebration, and encourage your children to emulate some real heroes of the faith, not in what they put on, but in how they live their lives.

Small Group Reflection—

How could this study change how you observe Halloween?

What prevents you from making that change?

What are some ways you can integrate the Five Solas into your Christian walk?

- Scripture Alone
- Faith Alone
- Grace Alone
- Christ Alone
- To God's Glory Alone