

# The Bible and Reformation

by Christopher Lensch, Assoc. Prof. of OT at WRS

*“The entrance of Your words gives light;  
It gives understanding to the simple.”*—Psalm 119:30

Without the Bible, there never would have been a Protestant Reformation. Without the Protestant Reformation, the light of God’s Word would have been kept hidden “under a bushel basket.”

Without the clear revelation of Christ in the Scriptures, attempts at church reform would have been moralistic and cosmetic at best. From the beginning of the papal “pornocracy” in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, conscientious churchmen and academics had been attempting to fix a bloated church bureaucracy that was filled with avarice, arrogance, carnality, and a lust for power. These vices were so systematically entrenched in the Roman Catholic hierarchy that attempts to bring reform were easily crushed by the papal machine. True reformers like Wycliffe (d. 1384) were threatened and marginalized, and others like Hus (martyred in 1415) were murdered at the behest of a false church. Pious believers like the Waldenses were hunted down for non-conformity.

When God raised up Martin Luther, He gifted this simple man with a spirit of determination, reasonableness, and a thirst for wholeness and truth. But the greatest tool that God put into Luther’s hands was the powerful and soul-penetrating Word of God.

Luther taught that reformation would never come by one man (the pope at the top) or by men in agreement (councils or cardinals). Men left to themselves are sinful and self-indulgent. Rather, reformation would come from God on a divine time-table, and it would sweep over the spirits of those sleeping in the churches when the gospel was reintroduced. So convinced was Luther of the power of God in the gospel (Rom 1:16) that he staked his life on the promises of the Bible at his trial at the Diet of Worms in 1521. Listen to his final defense before the emperor:



*Luther Pours over God's Word*

“Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason (for I do not trust either the pope or in councils alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God!”

Martin Luther was “bound” by the consistent and self-authenticating Scriptures. He was slave to no man, but he was “captive to the Word.” After his escape from Worms, Luther immediately set himself to the task of translating the New Testament into the German language for use in the churches. It was not just the widespread distrust and dissatisfaction with the Roman church that sparked the Reformation—it was the power and universal relevance of the Scriptures. ***Sola Scriptura*** began to replace tradition, popes, and prelacy as the supreme authority in the church.

Other Reformers recognized God’s purpose of giving the Scriptures. As the Bible was faithfully translated into other European languages, the gospel message was made available to more countries. In the English-speaking world, the Geneva Bible was widely used by the Puritans to promote the English Reformation. This version was the Bible of Shakespeare, but in 1611 it was surpassed in scholarship and literary beauty by the King James Bible.

By God’s grace, the King James Bible has been in circulation for 400 years! Starting in the late 1800s, other English Bibles began to appear, building upon the tradition of William Tyndale’s translation first used in the Geneva Bible and then in the KJV. Faithful Bible translations must be seen as a lasting fruit of the Reformation!

While we have a growing plethora of English versions today that vary in degree of usefulness and biblical fidelity, we must be thankful for the availability of God’s Word. It is the power of God that saves the lost, comforts the bereaved, convicts the sinner, and edifies the saint. And we know that it is only God’s Word that reforms congregations and improves society. This is our Reformation confidence in ***Sola Scriptura***.

Luther himself reminds us of the inseparable connection between revival and the Word of God:

“I simply taught, preached, wrote God’s Word; otherwise I did nothing. And then, while I slept...the Word so greatly weakened the papacy that never a prince or emperor did such damage to it. I did nothing. The Word did it all.”

**SOLA SCRIPTURA**

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5 S. G Street Tacoma, WA 98405  
www.wrs.edu 253.272.0417