

GENERAL AND BAPTISTIC LESSONS from the REFORMATION

A. General Lessons.

1. The Reformation assumed biblical authority.

The Bible was not subject to liberal criticism; it was accepted in its entirety as the word of God. But there were two problems that restricted its influence. One, the *primary authority* of the Church, especially in interpretation and distribution of the truth, and the *added authority* of tradition and the Apocrypha.

2. The Reformation reestablished expository biblical preaching.

It is significant that by October 31, 1517, Martin Luther had commenced lectures at the University of Wittenberg on Psalms in 1513, Romans in 1515, and Galatians in 1516, after which the gospel illumines his soul. This expository method then found its master to be John Calvin.

3. The Reformation was aided by the printed page.

It is significant that the first printed Hebrew Bible was in 1488, while the first printed Greek New Testament was in 1514. Luther's German New Testament came in 1522. Thus providence wedded the volcanic Luther with the eruption of printing that enabled the truth to reach the common man.

4. The Reformation was inaugural.

It was an awakening that had far reaching consequences down the centuries, including the fragmentation of Europe, the abolition of slavery, the Puritan influence, the expansion of America, the missionary movement, the promotion of individualism, the spread of nonconformity, the advance of scientific enquiry, indeed western society.

5. The Reformation became overly scholastic.

Following the death of Luther, creeping scholasticism and formal confessionism led to a cooling of earlier fervor. The Pietistic Movement arose in reaction to dead orthodoxy that was void of vital orthopraxy through regeneration and the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Refer to Heik, *A History of Christian Thought*, II, pp. 21-22.

6. The Reformation did not revive all biblical doctrine.

While justification by faith alone was recovered, yet other doctrines such as biblical ecclesiology did not come to the fore within the major sacralist movements, merging state and church, at least for fifty years when nonconformity became more prominent.

However emphasis upon the Word being accessible to the common people inevitably led to the discovery of greater biblical definition concerning the doctrine of ecclesiology.

7. The Reformation established the priority of the Gospel.

In spite of a lack of emphasis on the recovery of the biblical doctrine of the church, yet the recovered gospel indicates how God will bless on this primary ground even when our ecclesiology is not what it should be. Yet recovery of the gospel must lead to the spread of overall biblical truth. However, should the gospel not be recovered, then blessing is withheld whatever else is recovered.

B. Baptist Lessons.

1. The Reformation maintained church/state relationships.

In all of the main European centers, Germany, England, France, Scandinavia, Switzerland, Holland, the church and state were wedded while nonconformity was spurned. Lloyd-Jones, *Knowing the Times*, p. 194. Carson, "From Constantine to Sacralism Today", *Baptist Reformation Review*, pp. 3, 4-5.

2. The Reformation did not revive biblical ecclesiology.

The commencement of this recovery of ecclesiology must be attributed to the Anabaptists fifty years after the start of the Reformation, yet it followed an earlier lineage, the Waldenses in France, the Lollards in England, the Hussites in Czechoslovakia, the Huguenots in France, Savonarola in Italy, the Brethren of the Common Life in Germany. Leonard Verduin, *The Anatomy of a Hybrid*, pp. 159-60.

3. The Reformation scorned the Anabaptists.

While elements of radicalism followed emancipation from Rome, the treatment of the Anabaptists was a shame in which Christian killed Christian. Leonard Verduin, *The Anatomy of a Hybrid*, pp. 155-59.

4. The Reformation provided a right gospel legacy.

Even nonconformity has always acknowledged its gospel roots to be derived from Luther and Calvin, whatever the ecclesiological failings of these leaders may have been. However nonconformity is to be commended for its real desire for ongoing reformation.

5. The Reformation encouraged creedal/confessional churches.

Sacralism, the union of church and state, found a unifying friend in paedobaptism which in turn stimulated the filling of churches with unregenerate members. Baptism upon profession of faith made a clear distinction within society.

6. The Reformation maintained paedobaptism.

All of the major European entities, excluding the Anabaptists, maintained paedobaptism which militated against the initial *sola fide* emphasis of Luther. The subsequent history of Christianity in Europe in general, the ensuing sacralism, has left a poor testimony concerning biblical conversion while fostering dead, formal religion.

7. The Reformation did not emphasize soul-liberty, that is in societal government.

Sacralism inevitably lead to tyranny over the human conscience, as John Bunyan well discovered; it attempted to legislate faith through laws of conformity that the state attempted to enforce. Hence freedom of conscience was stifled. If we do not learn from Scripture, and the blessings and failings of Reformation history, we will inevitably revert back to human bondage.