

Andrew Cook:

In October 1517, Martin Luther wrote a document which sparked off the Reformation. This is what we've been learning about, here on *Serving Today* with the help of Philip Parsons. He's shown us the importance of church history for believers.

Then he took us through the origins of The Reformation, and in the last few programmes Philip gave us an overview of the five key Reformation doctrines which are: Scripture Alone, Grace Alone, Faith Alone, Christ Alone and To the Glory of God Alone.

So what were the fruits of the Reformation? What impact did it have on spirituality and did the Reformation have any long-term effects on national and international life?

Well to answer these questions, I'll now hand over to Derek French and Philip Parsons.

Philip Parsons:

We saw that it was a mighty work of God, breathing new life into his church and bringing it back to its biblical roots.

We saw that God used even political events and modern technology to prosper the work. From the human point of view the Reformers carried out the work but behind the human effort was the divine impetus which carried them along.

As we saw in the case of Luther, the document which he intended merely as a discussion paper for academics became the spark which set the forest ablaze. These as well as other events demonstrate that it was all a work of God.

We've looked at these five undergirding principles of the Reformation: Scripture Alone, Grace Alone, Faith Alone, Christ Alone and To God Alone be the Glory, and in as much as any church departs from these principles, it's drifting away from its biblical roots.

This time, I want us to look at some of these fruits or effects of the Reformation.

Derek French:

So where do you want to begin?

Philip:

Well, first of all those things which directly affected church life.

Derek:

So what would be the first of these?

Philip:

Well, there was a return to the simplicity of New Testament church order. Before the Reformation, the clergy included the whole array of cardinals and bishops and priests and monks and nuns and friars, all headed up by the Pope.

All these offices had grown up over the centuries and we can find no support for them really in Scripture. The Reformers saw clearly that the majority of these so-called 'spiritual offices' were of human origin.

In much of Europe and in Scotland, where there was less interference from the state, the standing offices in the church were reduced to just elder and deacon. In England the situation was complicated by Henry 8<sup>th</sup> making himself head of the Church of England.

This prevented the Reformers from carrying out a more thorough Reformation, but much improvement was still achieved in the government of the state church. And in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, although the Puritans failed to achieve a more complete Reformation of the state church which they were aiming to do, they did leave us a spiritual legacy in their writings, which still continues with us to this day.

Derek:

Philip, how did the Reformation affect the way the Church worshipped?

Philip:

The form of worship which we have in our Non-Conformist churches today is very similar to that of the Reformed churches in Europe and in Scotland in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century. Even the design of buildings is

significant. The pulpit is central and dominant and this has a biblical basis. We find in Nehemiah chapter 8, verses 4 and 5 a justification for this really. If you'd like to read that for us, Derek, please?

Derek:

*'Ezra the Scribe stood on a high wooden platform built for the occasion. Beside him on his right stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah and Maaseiah; and on his left were Pedaiah, Mishael, Malkijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah and Meshullam.*

*Ezra opened the book. All the people could see him because he was standing above them; and as he opened it, the people all stood up. Ezra praised the Lord, the great God and all the people lifted their hands and responded, Amen and amen, then they bowed down and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground.'*

Philip:

Yes, I mean [...] the point I'm making there is that the whole concept of being in a place that you can be heard and seen for preaching is actually quite important in designing the churches. In the truly evangelical and reformed churches everything is plain and simple. There are no elaborate rituals or gorgeous vestments, we have no images or pictures of the 'saints'. This is no accident or minor issue, it is central to Reformation theology.

It was the simplicity of the eastern European Reformed Churches which surprised the Turkish armies when they spread westwards towards Vienna in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, and Protestant believers in Hungary and Transylvania fared much better under their Turkish overlords than they had previously done under the medieval church and state.

We owe the simplicity of our worship to the Reformation. Let us guard it jealously. In some places unfortunately other things are creeping back in to the worship of God. Even in evangelical churches, in some places which would regard themselves as evangelical, candles are being used to symbolize prayers, paintings and tapestries are reappearing depicting the person of Christ.

Many early Reformation congregations had no musical accompaniment at all and the Reformers would be amazed at what one can only describe as what is sometimes the worldliness which is creeping back into the worship in some evangelical churches. The simplicity of our worship is a great gift from God, let us not abandon it or despise it.