

Andrew Cook:

We come now to the next part of the church history series in which we're focusing on the Reformation as this year, 2017, marks its 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

Having looked at the Reformation's origins and key doctrines, we began last time to look at some of its effects. The Reformation saw a return to the simplicity of New Testament church order. Church leaders were no longer called 'priests', in fact all true believers were now seen as priests, having direct access to God through Christ. Another effect was a simpler approach to Christian worship: church buildings became plainer and the pulpit more central. These were, and should still be seen as, great gifts from God.

To continue this overview of the Reformation's lasting effect on the church, we're joined again by Philip Parsons and Derek French.

Derek French:

[...] Well what comes next?

Philip Parsons:

The third point I'd like make is the recovery of the dominance of biblical expository preaching.

Derek:

That's so vital, isn't it, so important. [...]

Philip:

It is [a] very important point. In the days of Christ and the early church, it was preaching which turned the world upside down. We can see that in Matthew chapter 3, and verses 1 and 2, if you'd read that for us, Derek?

Derek:

Yes and we read, *'In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the desert of Judea, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near!"'*

Philip:

And then if you turn over to chapter 4, and verse 17 there's a very similar verse, if you'd like to read that please?

Derek:

Yes, this is concerning the Saviour himself, *'From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."'* This is the promise he was preaching isn't it? It's so obvious when you read these verses. But it's sad the church at that time had gone away from it but lovely that it was coming back.

Philip:

Yes. In times of revival it is preaching which comes once more to the fore. In times of spiritual decline it is preaching that becomes marginalized.

At the time of the Reformation the same principle applied. There was some preaching in the medieval church, but it was often allegorical or a kind of moralistic harangue. Truly Biblical preaching was almost unknown, with the exception of Wycliffe in 14<sup>th</sup> Century England and Jan Huss and Jerome in 15<sup>th</sup> Century Prague.

Nowadays, some evangelical churches have begun to drift away from their Reformation moorings and back to a more medieval kind of approach. The introduction of more music and drama are marginalizing preaching. At all costs, in this day and age we need to guard the heritage of truth worship with a dominance of preaching which has been preserved for us.

In the Reformed churches the sacraments were always subservient to the Word, as opposed to what had been true in medieval times. If we denigrate and marginalize preaching then it won't be long before we lose it and the sacraments begin to dominate again. Preachers are a great gift to the church. If we despise the gift, then God could well withdraw it from us.

Derek:

Yes we need to take that to heart, don't we?

Philip:

We do.

Derek:

What about the influence of the Reformation on prayer?

Philip:

Obviously, with all of God's work really there is prayer involved but particularly the prayer meeting, which seems to be a fruit of the Reformation? Within the orbit of the medieval church the concept of corporate extempore prayer was virtually unknown. There may have been some exceptions, but the rule was that it was the priests and the monks, the 'professionals', who did all the praying.

This shows the low level of true living faith of those times, for where there is true faith then there is going to be a desire to pray together, and so the prayer meeting has become part of our heritage. Let us guard it and hold on to it. It has been rightly said that the state of the prayer meeting is a measure of the spiritual health of a church.

Derek:

Yes, I think that's so true isn't it?

Philip:

It is.

Derek:

Yes, if a church doesn't have a prayer meeting there's something drastically wrong with it really[...].

Philip:

Yes.

Derek:

I think in Colossians 4 where Paul speaks about devoting ourselves to prayer. I remember reading a commentary that a prayer-less Christian in a prayer-less church has been overcome by a huge catastrophe.

Philip:

Yes.

Derek:

I think that's quite telling, isn't it?

Well then, Philip what did the Reformation do with regard to the relationship between the church and the state at that time?

Philip:

Well it brought about that [which] you might call a proper division between church and state. The roles of church and state and their relative positions can be summed up by the words of our Lord Jesus Christ where he says, '*Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's.*'

In many countries today the state interferes with the affairs of the church. The problem in medieval times was almost the opposite, was that the church was dominant and interfered with the state. Rulers felt they had to get permission from the Pope before they acted, although in England following the Norman Conquest there was an increasing independence from Rome. Following the Reformation the distinct roles of church and state began to be redefined.

These things took some time, and different countries moved forward at different rates. In England the Reformation was curtailed by the premature death of Edward 6<sup>th</sup>, the son of Henry the eighth, and the Church of England has never become completely disentangled from the state.

This principle is really one of authority. If the rightful authority of Scripture was established, then neither church nor state would dominate, each has its own distinct sphere.

Andrew:

The Reformation did have a profound effect on the life of the church as it rediscovered the teaching of the Scriptures. But the effects of the Reformation didn't stop there and Philip Parsons will outline for us how wider society was affected by this movement of God. That's next time here on *Serving Today*.