



# Lively Stones

I PETER 2:5

*Holding forth the word of life*

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## The Reformation at its Heart

*Dear Readers,*

In month of October, our church commemorates the Reformation. Do you know what is the significance of the Reformation?

For a long time, the Reformation was just the day (31 October 1517) Martin Luther nailed the 95 theses on a church door. A significant date to remember to answer history test questions. Having been born again, this date now bears special meaning.

I hope by reading Rev Jack's article, you would appreciate the event in history better and be encouraged to attend the Reformation lectures and seminars organised by our church.

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### Introduction

**T**here is one historic event in human history that ought to be indelibly marked in the hearts of men especially redeemed men. After the 13<sup>th</sup> century Renaissance (temporally and not substantively) that brought about intellectual revival, one of the greatest upheavals in the history of Europe is the 16th century Protestant Reformation, **a religious awakening that profoundly alter the course of European history and the direction of the church today.** It stemmed out of was a passionate cry for spiritual reforms from the depth of the souls of men that was long overdue. 1000 years of superstition, spiritual darkness and ignorance was a long wait and was put to an end, finally by the Almighty triune God.

The medieval church was powerless and spiritually bankrupt and was in desperate need of a spiritual overhaul. Ecclesiastical bureaucracy at the highest level had been exposed to be morally and ethically corrupt, doctrinally deficient (if not defective), spiritually wanting and inept. Scandalous deeds had plagued the church and it has lost its spiritual vitality and moral strength. The people were craving for spiritual realities to satisfy their souls' hunger but the church in the middle ages was unable to supply that.

There was a pressing call to recapture the freshness and vitality of the Christian faith in all its fullness and wealth. To many sincere seekers of true religion, they want a

reformation of doctrine based on the infallible truths in the Scriptures. The medieval church had lost their intellectual, spiritual and moral zest and the biblical principles that once governed the NT church. **There was a God given burden to rediscover distinctive religious concepts taken directly from holy Scripture** and not from lifeless church traditions, synods and councils made by men.

### A Brief Word on Pre-Reformers

**I**t is noteworthy that the Reformation did not just happen with any significance in the 16th century. By the sovereign hand of God, it was brewing slowly over the past 2 centuries before even Martin Luther came on the scene. For instance, the English Reformation has its roots in John Wycliffe's reforming work and his followers, the Lollards. The English Bible for the first time was translated and disseminated in England in the 14<sup>th</sup> century and many ordinary Englishmen read it and were revived. They were forerunners of the Reformation in returning to the Scriptures and exposing the errors of the existing church, in indulgences (which are forgiveness tickets supposed to take the payee to heaven directly with his sins forgiven by the human head of the church) required of the people, the mass with the teaching of transubstantiation, relics worship, the abuses and corruption of the

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clergy in the Roman Catholic church. John Hus of Bohemia at the same time was relentlessly preaching the gospel and warning the people against serious erroneous practices and abuses in the existing church, and the true nature of the church in the light of Scripture. He was martyred in 1415 at the kangaroo court in the Council of Constance and this fuelled the flames of revival and reformation in the present Czech Republic even further.

The Bible-centred Waldenses started by Peter Waldo in the 12th century in the Alps believed in obeying Christ and the Scriptures alone and not the authority of a man nor the traditions of a church. They provided a strong impetus and prelude to the 16th century awakening in Europe where it finally erupted. Others like Jerome of Prague and Savonarola of Florence stood against the excesses of the spiritually beleaguered church in moral reforms and were martyred in the 15th century. The Brethren of the Common Life despite intense persecution from the church contributed in their own ways to spiritual and moral transformation outside the established church and revived the people with the word and sound morals. Cataclysmic religious changes came upon Europe in an unprecedented way and it was convulsed with religious vigour in a life transforming proportion. **The Reformation had begun and was unstoppable as ordained in God's sovereignty and own timing.**

## Concepts & Precepts of the Reformers

**T**he fundamental convictions that motivated the magisterial reformers was that true Christianity could best be restored and revived by returning to the scriptural beliefs and practices of the early church like the prophets of old. This means a challenge to the whole super structure of the bureaucratic and lifeless Roman Catholic Church with its rituals, ceremonies, man-made rules and practices. At the heart of this great spiritual concern was this question:

**How can a sinful man be declared righteous,**

**and made acceptable in the sight of a holy, righteous, just and angry God?** Martin Luther, a regenerated German monk rediscovered 4 important precepts of the Holy Scripture: -

1. The Righteousness of God
2. The Total Depravity and Wretchedness of Man
3. The Redemption Through Christ Alone
4. Justification by Faith

The first is a basic concept of biblical Soteriology that resonated throughout the old and new testaments. Christ is the only hope and source of salvation and not man, nor his works and nor that of others. The second concept was something that Luther had to grapple with in his soul's struggle. He realised that he is incapable of meeting the pre-requisite that God has set for everyone. The idea of the Righteousness of God and the depravity and sinfulness of man mean certain condemnation and punishment and this disturbed the German reformer's soul greatly. He had no satisfactory answer from the established Roman church when he consulted his vicar of the monastery, Johann Staupitz.

It must be stated that Luther was not involved in an intellectual exercise for a theological journal but searching for the answers from Scriptures with a deep sense of personal struggle in the inner most being of his own soul. **The heart of the reformation was literally the reformation of the heart.** In 1519, Luther shared that initially he "hated" the phrase "the Righteousness of God" which means that if God is righteous He must punish unrighteous sinners and one has to be found to live a sinless and perfect life to escape this but he failed. Finally the answer came in a clear statement by the Apostle Paul in Rom 1:17 *"For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith."* Peace and comfort flooded his soul and grace triumphed in his life from henceforth. **The depraved soul has hope finally in salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone by the imputed Righteousness of Christ upon him.**

It suddenly dawned upon the learned Professor at Wittenberg that there was a solution to the

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problem provided by God through the Word. The pre-condition required of thrice holy and righteous triune God is already satisfied by someone else, the eternal Son of God, Jesus Christ who is God Himself. For the first time in his life, Luther understood that now if a man had faith in Christ alone, through his redemptive work at Calvary; which is essentially a work of grace, undeserving sinners can now have that Righteousness of God imputed to them by Jesus Christ the Lord (2 Cor 5:21) if they humbly confess and repent of their sins and acknowledge Christ as Lord and God (Rom 10:9,10). It has nothing to do with papal indulgences, church penances, sacraments, rituals and ceremonials of the established church at all. This was an extraordinary rediscovery in those momentous days but yet the truth of justification by faith is as old as the OT and NT of Holy Scriptures (Hab 1:17, Gal 3:11 and Heb 10:38) hidden from the people for 1000 years.

**The concept of forensic justification by faith alone is finally apprehended by the Wittenberg Augustinian monk**, who could contain it no longer and shared it with the whole world. This exploded in the Germany with the drafting of the 95 theses (against the indulgences of the day) being posted on the door of the Wittenberg Church on 31 October 1517 and other writings of the Reformers and the eyes of the common people were opened to the truth of God's Holy Word concerning true salvation by faith alone and not by man's works or forgiveness tickets sanctioned by the church. The almost 1000 years of spiritual bondage and darkness was finally over and spiritual change was inevitable.

## The Place of Scripture in the Reformation

**T**he place of the Word of God is relegated to a low or non-existent place in the life of the medieval church. Hardly any priest would preach from it, let alone expound it. Some priests know more of the church fathers and their homilies than the

writings of Christ and the Apostles. The Bible was virtually lost from the church. **The reformers in a sense rediscover the wealth and vitality of the Holy Scriptures that is able to make man wise unto salvation (2 Tim 3:15) and made it relevant and applicable to the people.**

A Latin (the language of Rome) Bible is of no use to the German, English and Swiss and other non-Latin speaking people because they cannot understand it. The concept of giving the Bible in the vernacular language of the people is the heart of the Reformation. Tyndale, Wycliffe, Luther and Layfayette did the same for their own countrymen and the result was life changing. For the first time, a commoner could hold a Bible, read, understand and relish it in a manner that he could apply in his life. It transformed and reformed the church drastically and that was the beginning of a great spiritual awakening to come, reverberating all over continental Europe and forever transformed the eternal destiny of some people in the western world as God wills. **The Bible became the sole and sufficient authority for the life of the church and the believer. The authority, sufficiency, and perspicuity of the Bible were established during the Reformation.**

There is no need to consult church traditions, and past decrees of Synods, Councils and papal encyclicals. No more auricular confessions to the priests, the mass, relics worship and praying to the saints or a mediatrix. Every born again believer is a priest himself (1 Pet 2:9) and can come directly and confidently before God because of Christ without any human intermediary. Sola Scriptura is the answer. The reformers decided that the Word of God alone provides the right direction and infallible guidance for the true churches of Jesus Christ.

Today we have the precious Bible in our hands and in our own language. We have the privilege to read, relish it and apply it to our lives without hindrance (not for all countries though). May we never take this prerogative for granted. This was the wish of one who perished in the flames in 1536 (and he is eternally secured in heaven today) for the faith (ie Tyndale) and the Lord answered the prayers of a valiant godly men.

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**The battle for the sufficiency, canonicity, authority and providential preservation of the Bible continues today relentlessly** as some claimed to have special revelations from God hence bypassing the need to consult and rely on holy scriptures that is totally complete for us today. Others have claimed that the NT is not as inspired as the OT and hence undermining the canonicity of the scripture sanctioned by God Himself (1 Pet 3:15). Age-old heretical beliefs are revived in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Some from within the church have denied the deity of Christ openly and the doctrine of the blessed Trinity and the canonicity and authority of the whole Bible, serious heretical views that the church have to deal with the first 4 centuries and will have to faithfully continue to deal with today (Acts 20:28, 1 Tim 1:20, Tit 3:9-11, Rom 16:17). Inaccurate translations and versions of the Bible based on unsound manuscripts, translational techniques and theology have contributed to a myriad of different versions today that have undermined the absolute reliability and total trustworthiness of the Bible and have not helped in the accurate and proper understanding, application and interpretation of the scriptures to say the least. (2 Tim 3:16,17, 2 Pet 1:20,21, Isa 40:8)

## Conclusion

**T**he Reformation still has a relevant place today after almost 5 centuries. The medieval church is still the same, the doctrines have not changed but sadly some Protestants have given in slowly and surely to the demands for theological compromise in exchange for peace and unity in the ecclesiastical world. The tide is very strong. **These last days of our decadent age will witness greater ecclesiastical downslide and ecumenical compromise in the churches. The seductions of ecumenism, new age, (ie yoga, feng shui, reiki, crystals, spell casting, wizardry, etc) occultism, (ie Harry Potter, etc) the signs and wonders movement, tongue speaking, healing and prophecies (the latest being dreams and**

**dance), the alpha course, have contributed to the on going worldwide process of uniting different religions into one world religious order.** As the followers of Christ, one follows in the footsteps of the 16th century Reformers in this unswerving stand and stands against all theses and valiantly fights for the faith in these perilous seasons. (Jude 3,4)

The true Churches of Christ is linked to the 16th century Reformation movement through its forefathers and the contention for the faith against the ecumenical, charismatic, the cultic and occultic, New Age and Psycho heresy movements of today. **Biblical separation based on reformation truths, the advancement of the pure and unadulterated gospel should be the continued thrust and emphasis of every Bible-believing, God honouring church.**

May the Lord inspire and strengthen us in the crucial battle for the faith and the truth in these final momentous days and not compromised but be steadfast for Christ and His glory and preach only the pure and unadulterated gospel (Rom 1:17, Gal 1:6-7, 2 Thess 2:15).

**Rev Jack Sin,  
Pastor**

## Announcements

There will be NO Sunday School next Lord's Day in lieu of our Church's 55th Anniversary.

The Editorial team welcomes contribution from the congregation. Please send contributions to [kohjulia@starhub.net.sg](mailto:kohjulia@starhub.net.sg). The editorial team reserves the right to edit any articles to be published.

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