

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics

## The Reformation and the Men Behind It

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The Protestant Reformation stands as the most far-reaching, world-changing display of God's grace since the birth and early expansion of the church. It was not a single act, nor was it led by one man. This history-altering movement played out on different stages over many decades. Its cumulative impact, however, was enormous. Philip Schaff, a noted church historian, writes: "The Reformation of the sixteenth century is, next to the introduction of Christianity, the greatest event in history. It marks the end of the Middle Ages and the

beginning of modern times. Starting from religion, it gave, directly or indirectly, a mighty impulse to every forward movement, and made Protestantism the chief propelling force in the history of modern civilization." The Reformation was, at its heart, a recovery of the true gospel of Jesus Christ, and this restoration had an unparalleled influence on churches, nations, and the flow of Western civilization.

Under the guiding hand of God, the world scene had been uniquely prepared for the Reformation. The church was greatly in need of reform. Spiritual darkness personified the Roman Catholic Church. The Bible was a closed book. Spiritual ignorance ruled the minds of the people. The gospel was perverted. Church tradition trumped divine truth. Personal holiness was abandoned. The rotten stench of manmade traditions covered pope and priest. The corruption of ungodliness contaminated both dogma and practice.

On the other hand, a new day was dawning. Feudal states were giving way to nation-states. Exploration was expanding. Christopher Columbus discovered the New World in 1492. Trade routes were opening. A middle class was rising. Opportunities for learning were increasing. Knowledge was multiplying. Johannes Gutenberg's invention of the printing press (1454) had vastly improved the dissemination of ideas. Under all of these influences, the Renaissance was at high noon. Moreover, a further alteration in the world scene was soon to be ushered in by the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century, bringing great changes especially in the church of Jesus Christ.

In light of such dramatic upheaval, certain questions beg to be asked: What factors led to the Protestant Reformation? Where was the Reformation born? How did this powerful movement come about? Where did it spread? Who were the key leaders who stoked its

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics

flames? What biblical truths were unleashed on the world at this time? To begin to answer these questions, we must focus in on those giants of the faith who led the Reformation.

## The Magisterial Reformers

At the beginning of the sixteenth century, God began to raise up a series of strong-willed figures known to history as the Reformers. There had been earlier reformers in the church, but those who came to prominence in this period were the best educated, most godly, and most faithful reform leaders the church had ever seen. These men were steeped in Scripture and marked by audacious courage in the face of opposition. They were emboldened by deep convictions as to the truth and a love for Christ's church that drove them to attempt to bring it back to its timeless standard. In the simplest terms, they longed to see God's people worship Him according to Scripture. These men were shining lights in a dark day.

"The Reformers did not see themselves as inventors, discoverers, or creators," according to historian Stephen Nichols. "Instead, they saw their efforts as rediscovery. They weren't making something from scratch but were reviving what had become dead. They looked back to the Bible and to the apostolic era, as well as to early church fathers such as Augustine (354–430) for the mold by which they could shape the church and re-form it. The Reformers had a saying, 'Ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda,' meaning 'the church reformed, always reforming.'"

The Magisterial Reformers are so called because their reform efforts were supported by at least some ruling authorities, or magistrates, and because they believed the civil magistrates ought to enforce the true faith. This term is used to distinguish them from the radical reformers (Anabaptists), whose efforts had no magisterial support. The Reformers are also called "magisterial" because the word magister can mean "teacher," and the Magisterial Reformation strongly emphasized the authority of teachers.

## Scripture Alone

In time, the message of the Reformers became encapsulated in five slogans known as the solas of the Reformation: sola Scriptura ("Scripture alone"), solus Christus ("Christ alone"), sola gratia ("grace alone"), sola fide ("faith alone"), and soli Deo gloria ("the glory of God alone"). The first of these, sola Scriptura, was the defining benchmark of the movement.

There are only three possible forms of spiritual authority. First, there is the authority of the Lord and His written revelation. Second, there is the authority of the church and its leaders. Third, there is the authority of human reason. When the Reformers cried

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics

"Scripture alone," they were expressing their commitment to the authority of God as expressed through the Bible. James Montgomery Boice states their core belief: "The Bible alone is our ultimate authority—not the pope, not the church, not the traditions of the church or church councils, still less personal intimations or subjective feelings, but Scripture only." The Reformation was essentially a crisis over which authority should have primacy. Rome claimed the church's authority lay with Scripture and tradition, Scripture and the pope, Scripture and church councils. But the Reformers believed that the authority belonged to Scripture alone.

Schaff writes: "While the Humanists went back to the ancient classics and revived the spirit of Greek and Roman paganism, the Reformers went back to the sacred Scriptures in the original languages and revived the spirit of apostolic Christianity. They were fired by an enthusiasm for the gospel, such as had never been known since the days of Paul. Christ rose from the tomb of human traditions and preached again His words of life and power. The Bible, heretofore a book of priests only, was now translated anew and better than ever into the vernacular tongues of Europe, and made a book of the people. Every Christian man could henceforth go to the fountain-head of inspiration, and sit at the feet of the Divine Teacher, without priestly permission and intervention."

## The Fountain of Sovereign Grace

This commitment to Scripture alone led to the rediscovery of the doctrines of grace. Any return to the Bible inevitably leads to the truth of God's sovereignty in saving grace. The other four solas—solus Christus, sola gratia, sola fide, and soli Deo gloria—flow from sola Scriptura.

The first Reformer was an Augustinian monk who nailed Ninety-five Theses against the Roman Catholic practice of selling indulgences to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany, on October 31, 1517. His name was Martin Luther (1483–1546). This bold act by a monk with a mallet launched the Reformation. Other Reformers would follow, such as Ulrich Zwingli (1484–1531), Hugh Latimer (1487–1555), Martin Bucer (1491–1551), William Tyndale (ca. 1494–1536), Philip Melancthon (1497–1560), John Rogers (1500–1555), Heinrich Bullinger (1504–1575), and John Calvin (1509–1564). To a man, they were firmly committed to the truths of Scripture and sovereign grace.

- The Reformation and the Men Behind It
- [Fortress for Truth: Martin Luther](#)
- [Zurich Revolutionary: Ulrich Zwingli](#)

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics

- [Prince of Translators: William Tyndale](#)
- [Covenant Theologian: Heinrich Bullinger](#)
- [Theologian for the Ages: John Calvin](#)

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