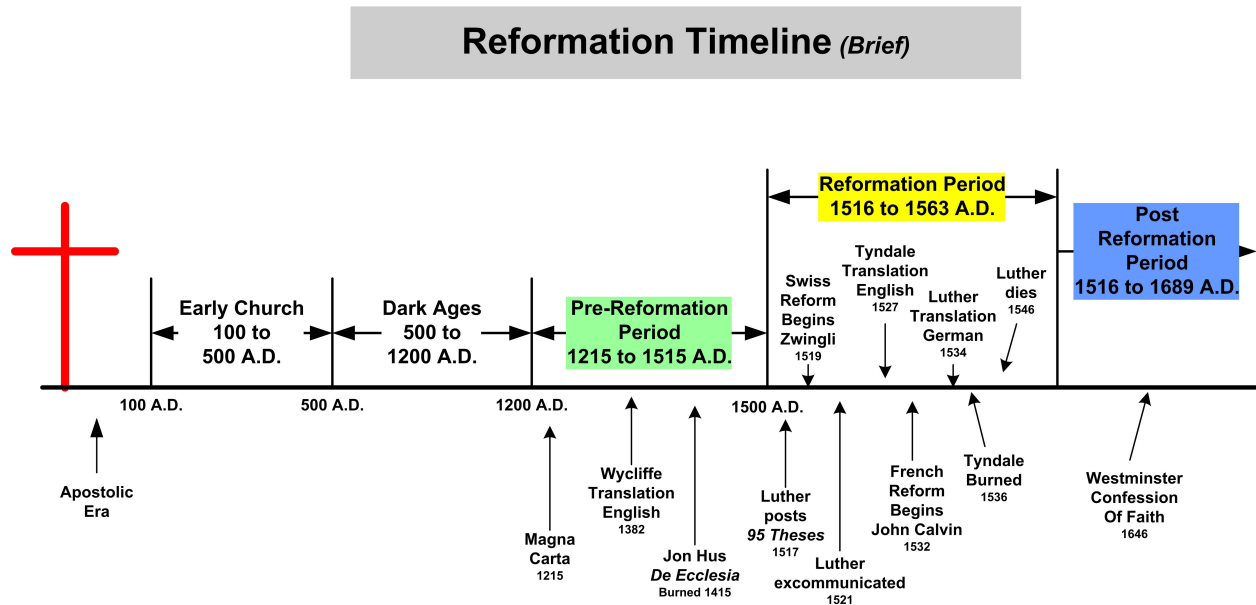


The Gospel – The Message of Jesus Christ

Justification by Faith – The Heart of the Gospel

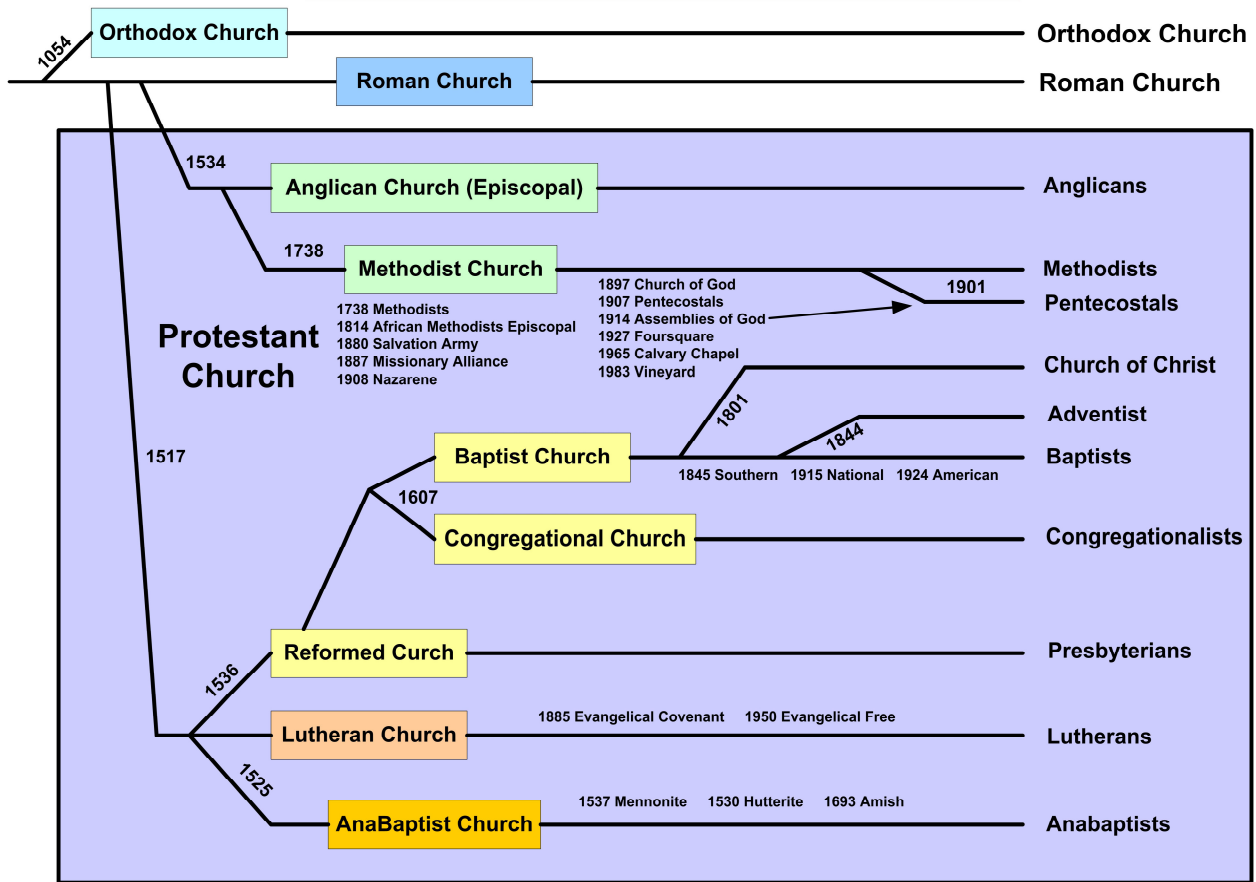
The Protestant Reformation - What was the protest?

Surely the most profound and tumultuous time in Church History was the period of the Protestant Reformation. After centuries of the rule of the Roman Church over Christianity, the cries of petition against the abuses of the Church broke loose into a full scale rebellion against the Roman Church. During the Pre-reformation period, 1215-1515 A.D., many foundational activities culminated in the actual **Protestant Reformation**. These foundational things that took place were mainly surrounding the efforts of certain men like and John Wycliffe, Jon Hus and others who protested certain activities of the Papacy and Church. John Wycliffe, and later William Tyndale sought to translate the Bible into the language of the common people. During the **Dark Ages**, (the period between the fall of Rome in the 5th century and the Renaissance, 1415 A.D.), a time when the Bible was locked up in Latin by the Roman Church, there were very few literate people among the commons, and the only knowledge of Scripture that the common people held, was that which was learned from the priesthood in the Church. As the protest of these people grew stronger over time, it gave rise to several key events which eventually created a huge schism among Christians and spawned the **Protestant Reformation**, 1516-1563 A.D. Here is a brief timeline;



During this time several key men made public protests against the Pope and the Church which culminated in the spawning of several branches of Christianity such as the Lutheran, Anglican, Anabaptist and Reformed churches. These “branches” of Christianity were very focused on the biblical reform of Christianity and zealous to pattern the church after biblical directives such as a proper ordinance of the Lord’s Supper, Church Government, and the great doctrine of Justification by Faith. In summary, there were several different “branches” of Christianity that happened in several different places, led by several different men. However, these were all identified by the Roman Church as “**Protestantism**.” In the mind of the Roman Church, they were the rebels and protestors united against Papal control and Roman Church tradition. Here is a basic chart of the first “**Protestant**” branches of Christianity.

The First Protestant Branches of Christianity



Because of this protest many of them were persecuted and killed by the influence of the Roman Church and many other governmental powers of the day. Of course after all these profound happenings, the face of Christianity would never be the same. There were now Bibles being printed in the common language and many people coming to a personal knowledge of the Word of God, and the Gospel was being preached in all European languages and being sent out into the remotest regions of the world. The Word of God had broken free from the tight Latin grip of the Roman Church, and a new liberty was unleashed upon the nations of mankind like never before! But in all of this controversy and struggle, what was at the heart of the protest was an error of essential nature to Historic Christian doctrine, and this could no longer be tolerated. The Gospel had been redefined over many years under Roman rule and the Reformers were not going to let it be undermined any longer. At the heart of many of the controversies that were being held out against the Church by the Reformers was a focus on the sufficiency of the atonement and the doctrine of Justification. And of course these are the essentials of the Gospel message.

The Gospel and the Roman Church

Over many years, even centuries, Roman Christianity had morphed and become something very different that its earlier origins of the Early Church. The institution of several new and unbiblical rituals, traditions and practices almost completely redefined the Church. These church traditions became the focus of the church as she turned eyes away from the simplicity of the person and work of Christ, to the Ivory Tower of the Roman Church. Gradually over time these began to severely undermine the sufficiency of the atonement and the doctrine of Justification by grace

through faith in Christ. When all of these were added together, it made for a completely different form of Christianity than Jesus and the Apostles had taught. The focus had turned from the glorious good news of the person and work of Christ to the veneration of Popes and Saints, and the Church had become the richest institution on the earth off the back of the poor common people who were now to work their way to heaven through their own merit, or worse yet to purchase it through the sale of Indulgences.

A Brief Survey of Roman Rites and Traditions

Here is a brief survey of these rites and traditions, and a few words about how they ultimately deny essential Christian doctrine.

The Papacy – Who is the head of Christ’s church? Well that is an easy question if you read the Bible (Col 1:18, 2:19). It is Christ. But in the Roman Church, He has been usurped by an earthly head, the so called “vicar of Christ,” a man demanding to be called the Holy Father (Matt 23:9), dressed in very costly vestments and living in a palace of unimaginable majesty and pomp (Matt 8:20). Will a truly godly man actually accept the title of Holy Father? Much could be said to compare the Pope to the teaching of the Bible, but a simple glance shows him to be far from the model set by Christ and the Apostles. Further, this Papacy is **nowhere found in Scripture**, nor is it even hinted at, much less does it have any didactic passage in Scripture explaining its character and nature. As the Bible clearly teaches a government of local plural elders(as servants to the body), the Popery of Rome is a “Pontification” of the worst sorts. The very history of the Papacy itself is littered with corruption and immorality. How can this be overlooked by any serious student of the Bible?

The Priesthood and Monastic Societies – Here we have an entire hierarchy of men who claim to be mediators between people and God. They take vows of celibacy and wear very costly vestments. All the while the Bible says....

1 Timothy 2:5-6 - 5 For there is one God, and **one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus**, 6 who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony borne at the proper time. NASB

The Levitical Priesthood of the Old Testament was fulfilled by Christ and destroyed by God in 70 A.D. Jesus is lifted up to the right hand of God having accomplished our redemption once for all time, He is our great High Priest.

Hebrews 9:11-12 - 11 But **when Christ appeared as a high priest** of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; 12 and not through the blood of goats and calves, **but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.** NASB

The New Testament nowhere presents a special priesthood, here is another non-biblical concept of church government which by its very existence and definition **undermines the work that Christ has accomplished** as our “*once for all time - High Priest.*” More than this, believing Christians are robbed of understanding their true role to a lost world as now all Christians are seen as an holy nation of priests in the priesthood of all believers, with the “*priestly duty of proclaiming the Gospel of God*” (Rom 15:16).

1 Peter 2:4-5, 9-10 - 4 And coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected by men, but choice and precious in the sight of God, 5 **you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.....** 9 But **you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood**, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; 10 **for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God;** you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. NASB

The Eucharist and Transubstantiation - In the Roman celebration of the Lord’s Supper, they have a unique teaching which suggests that the bread and wine actually become the Body and Blood of Jesus. This “Eucharist” is seen as a sacrifice of Christ which happens again and again to

cleansed those who draw near to worship. The issue here is that it is taught by Rome and suggests to the people of the church that sins that they have now committed have not yet been covered by the Blood of Christ until it is reapplied in the "Eucharist." Now this idea **severely undermines the work of Christ as our priest**, and violates the biblical teaching that Christ was offered "*once for all time*" and that in this He did in fact atone for all the sins of all of His people, and that through this "*one sacrifice*" has "*perfected forever*" those who trust Him by faith.

Hebrews 10:10-15 - 10 By this will we **have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all**. 11 And every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; 12 but He, **having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time**, sat down at the right hand of God, 13 waiting from that time onward until His enemies be made a footstool for His feet. 14 For **by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified**. NASB

But the Roman Church maintains that Christ must be "re-sacrificed" again and again in order for the sins of worshippers to be cleansed. This is why they hold the "Mass" daily. Again this **undermines the sufficiency of the atonement** which Christ has accomplished.

Hebrews 7:26-27 - 26 For it was fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens; 27 **who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins, and then for the sins of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself**. NASB

Hebrews 9:25-26 - 25 **nor was it that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the holy place year by year** with blood not his own. 26 Otherwise, He would have needed to suffer often since the foundation of the world; **but now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself**. NASB

Purgatory – The Roman Catechism states.... "*All who die in God's grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation; but after death they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven. The Church gives the name Purgatory to this final purification of the elect*".... (from the Roman Catechism [http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_P2N.HTM#\\$1BY](http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_P2N.HTM#$1BY)) Now consider what is being implied in this teaching. It surely says that it is possible for a Christian to die in a state "*imperfectly purified,*" and that they need to "*undergo purification in order to achieve the holiness necessary to enter heaven.*" Again we have a doctrine that **severely undermines the sufficiency of the atonement** that Christ has accomplished. The clear denial of the Gospel here is evident to all. Does the believer in Christ need to "achieve the holiness necessary" through the torment of flames, or has it been achieved by Christ already by His death on the Cross? Let us hear God's commentary on this matter....

Colossians 1:21-22 - 21 And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, 22 yet **He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach**. NASB

Hebrews 10:14 - 14 For **by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified**. NASB

1 Corinthians 1:30-31 - 30 But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, **who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption**, 31 that, just as it is written, "Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord." NASB

Ephesians 1:7 - 7 **In Him we have redemption through His blood**, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace, NASB

Consider how this **undermines the love and mercy of God held out in the Gospel**. Shall our loving heavenly Father call us to repentance and faith and then cast us into the flames of purification so that we can be adequately tormented for our sins?

Romans 5:8-10 - 8 But **God demonstrates His own love toward us**, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died **for us**. 9 Much more then, having now **been justified by His blood**, we shall be **saved from the wrath of God** through Him. 10 For if while **we were enemies, we were reconciled to God** through the death of His Son, much more, **having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life**. NASB

Further, how long is long enough in the fire to atone for sins? I tell you one sin is worthy of eternal fire with no hope of ever escaping, but Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the Law.

Romans 8:1-2 - 8:1 There is **therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus**. 2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. NASB

Indulgences - The Roman Catechism states... *“An indulgence is the remission before God of temporal punishment for sins whose guilt is already forgiven, which a properly disposed member of the Christian faithful gains under certain and defined conditions by the assistance of the Church which as minister of redemption dispenses and applies authoritatively the treasury of the satisfactions of Christ and the saints. Can. 993 An indulgence is partial or plenary insofar as it partially or totally frees from the temporal punishment due to sins”*.... Again we see the **sufficiency of the atonement severely undermined** as we still have “temporal punishment due to sins” to be paid. The obvious question here; Did Christ’s sacrifice put away sins once for all believers, or not? This is an obvious denial of essential Christian doctrine.

Hebrews 9:26 - 26 Otherwise, He would have needed to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now **once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself**. NASB

Do we have redemption through blood of Christ? Are our sins really covered or is there a further price to be paid? Shall we now buy the forgiveness of sins with money or suffering? This is exactly what the doctrine of indulgences teaches. More than this, the way in which this teaching was used to garner money from the poor peasants during the time of the Reformation was reprehensible. Consider a brief excerpt from a popular online encyclopedia.... *“The false doctrine and scandalous conduct of the “pardoners” were an immediate occasion of the Protestant Reformation. In 1517, Pope Leo X offered indulgences for those who gave alms to rebuild St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome. The aggressive marketing practices of Johann Tetzel in promoting this cause provoked Martin Luther to write his Ninety-Five Theses, protesting against what he saw as the purchase and sale of salvation. In Thesis 28 Luther objected to a saying attributed to Tetzel: “As soon as a coin in the coffer rings, a soul from purgatory springs”*....” Here we have the church selling forgiveness to common people in order to raise funds to build an earthly temple of astounding cost and grandeur for the great Pontif to inhabit. I will appeal to your conscience, is something wrong with this picture? What does the Scripture say?

1 Peter 1:18-21 - 18 knowing that **you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold** from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, 19 **but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ**. 20 For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you 21 who through Him are believers in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, **so that your faith and hope are in God**. NASB

We could go on for some time discussing the many ways in which the Roman Church has and is denying the sufficiency of the person and work of Christ to save us from sins and bring us to God. There are many more **fundamental denials of Christ’s work** in such doctrines as....

- Penance
- Veneration of Mary and the Saints and prayers being offered to them
- Confessional
- Relics

These and many more were the occasion of the Protest. This is what the **Protestants** have taken issue with the Roman Church over. It is no small matter. During the time of the **Reformation** all these things had culminated in a very grievous and unbiblical system of religion which sparked a rebellion against the Roman Church from which the Gospel has gone out as clearly and brightly as the noonday sun. This is because the central issues of the Gospel were at stake in the heart of the Reformation controversy. You see, most of these issues center around the issue of **Justification**. What is it that justifies us in the sight of God, and how is that justification applied to our life? In other words, how is a person saved from sins and reconciled to God? These matters are summed up biblically in the understanding of the doctrine of Justification. So what is it that the Reformers were saying in response to these matters? Let us consider this.

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