

A Reformation of Faith and Hope – 2 Cor 5:16-21

Introduction - On October 31, 1517, Martin Luther nailed his Ninety-five Theses to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg. The Reformation of the 16th Century gave the church many gifts, not the least of which was the recovery of the doctrine of the Word of God and the power of that Word preached to the nations. It was a combination of Sola Scriptura, the declaration that the Scriptures are our only ultimate and infallible authority for faith and practice, the translation of the Scriptures into common languages and the recovery of a high view of the pulpit and the preached Word. While the world is still reeling from this reformation, we long for a greater Reformation and believe the Holy Spirit was just getting started. And we believe this will come because of what we are taught about the completed work of the reformation of humanity in and through Jesus Christ.

The Proclamation (2 Cor 5:16-17) – Because the One who created all things died for all and is risen from the dead, everything needs to be looked at differently. Something cosmic has changed; we no longer know Christ in the flesh and therefore we no longer regard anyone according to the flesh (v16, also Col 1:19-20). Calvin said, *"He is the first-born from the dead; for in the resurrection there is a restoration of all things, and in this manner the commencement of the second and new creation, for the former had fallen to pieces in the ruin of the first man."* Anyone now who finds himself in Christ is in this new creation, a new creation that in principle has been placed at the heart of the entire creation order (v17). Everything is new because of Jesus, and when we don't see this yet manifest, we are reminded, but *"we see Jesus"* (Heb 2:5-9). How we see all men reveals something of how we see Jesus; and when we see Jesus (in the proclamation) it changes the way we see the world.

All Things Are of God (vv18-19) – This work that is declared is Sola Christus and Sola Deo Gloria. It is all of Christ and it is all to the glory of God. And the work that God has done in Christ alone and to His own glory alone is that He *"was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself."* Jesus was brought into a world He created, a world fallen in Adam, to be the new Adam, and to reconcile the world through His work, a world He re-created. We do not invite Jesus into our lives; Jesus invites us into His life, and the whole world is invited, for the whole world has been reconciled.

We "reformers" love the doctrines of Sola Christus and the denial of any work of man in his salvation. But we are afraid to go as far as passages like these proclaim. Jesus Christ came to save the world – and He did (John 3:16-17). We need a reformation of faith in that which we cannot yet see but what is clearly proclaimed in the Scripture. We need a reformation of what it means that *"Jesus is Lord."*

The Appeal of the Preacher (vv20-21) – Preaching is the work of being an ambassador for Christ, *"as though God were pleading through us"* because He is. In Eph 2:17, it is Christ Who *"...came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near."* Peter instructs ministers to preach *"as the oracles of God"* (1 Pet 4:11). Christ is pleading with the world, beseeching the world, *"be reconciled with God."* Out of imperfect sermons preached from imperfect pulpits, God is perfectly declaring His perfect work and perfectly accomplishing what He wills (Isaiah 55:11). *"The cross was, and will always remain, a unique historical event of the past. And there it will remain, in the past, in the books, unless God Himself makes it real and relevant to men today. It is by preaching, in which He makes His appeal to men through men, that God accomplishes this miracle"* – John Stott.

The Victory of Faith – Here is where we need a reformation of faith and hope. Our fatalistic view of the world as it is causes us to declare to sinners that the world has not been reconciled to Christ and therefore they need to be saved out of it. But that is not what eyes of faith see. Eyes of faith see victory (1 John 5:4-5). The preacher must proclaim what cannot be seen. God *preached* and out of nothing everything was made (Gen 1). There was no nation, but God *preached* to Abram that there would be (12:2) and multitudes without number (15:5-6). There was no escape for the Hebrews and God told Moses to *preach* to Pharaoh, and the waters parted (Ex 1-15). When Israel was in spiritual ruin, God told Ezekiel to *preach* to dry bones and tell them to live – and they did (Ezek 37). Jesus told Lazarus to come out of the grave, and more importantly, Jesus came out of the grave. The atonement is fixed, and a representation of this is the sealing of 12,000 from every tribe in Rev 7:5-8. But a definite atonement never meant a tiny atonement, and so the majestic extent of the atonement is declared in Rev 7:9, *"a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues..."*

In Principle, A Whole New World – 2 Cor 5:16-21 declare that the world has been reconciled through Christ and in Christ to God. The invitation is not to be saved out of the world, but that the world has been reconciled and therefore you need to come quietly, surrendering to the invasion. This is the establishment of Christendom. This would be a reformation of faith and hope.