

**Acts 17: 1-12; "Are You a Reformed Christian?" (Part 1) A Sermon  
for Reformation Sunday, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall  
on October 26th, 2008,  
in the Morning Worship Service.**

We are living in a time when the term "reformed" is not well understood. There are many churches in existence today who have taken the name "reformed" who use it in a non-Biblical sense. This has happened, largely because most Christians do not understand the word very well. It is important from the standpoint of the progress of the gospel and God Himself being honored and glorified, that we understand the term. It is a term which grew out of the Reformation time period which took place in the time of Martin Luther when he nailed the 95 theses on the door of Wittenberg Chapel in 1517. This document was a protest specifically against the sale of indulgences to the people by Roman Catholic priests and representatives. The forgiveness of various sins could supposedly be purchased through this means. Christ's death supposedly was not sufficient to pay for all sins. Indulgences were also sold to poor deceived people who were told that they could supposedly buy their dead relatives and friends out of purgatory. Purgatory is the supposed place where people go after death; who do have enough merit, and have not done well enough, to have their sins forgiven, and enter heaven. In other words, under the Roman Catholic system, a person must add his own merits to Christ's merits to enter heaven. Their eternal salvation is thereby suspended upon whether they can find enough merit to escape these purgatorial punishments and to eventually enter heaven. When a person supposedly went to purgatory, which was not God's decision, but rather the church's, they hopefully could be retrieved, eventually brought from that middle place between heaven and hell by those kind hearted people still alive here upon the earth who would say prayers for them and pay for their release by buying indulgences. If they paid, and often they kept on paying, they would receive an official document from the Papal representative saying the their relative had been brought out because of their kind generosity. The 95 theses Luther were also a protest against the many false doctrines concocted by the Popes in regard to the doctrine of Repentance, or what the Roman Catholic church calls "penance". Martin Luther clearly saw that the ability to repent of our sins was all of God's grace through Jesus Christ our Lord.

You must understand that there were other men who were also moving in a most definite fashion to confront the Roman Catholic church with the errors in their doctrine and their abuse of Scriptural authority as leaders in the church. John Wycliffe, John Hus, Jerome of Prague, Ulrich Zwingli, and others were actually ahead of Luther in their protests. But it was Luther's confrontation of the Pope, from a lowly position within His own Church, that proved to be the catalyst to what we now know as the Reformation. To "reform" means to make better, to "improve by removing faults and abuses". This is what Martin Luther wanted to do. His original intention was not to go against the Papal authority or to leave the Roman Catholic

Church. His purpose was to reform it and to stay within it. It was only later that he came to realize that this would not be possible. The only way to improve the Roman Catholic church would be to separate in his protest, and to re-form the church by learning to please God rather than man. It is this kind of reformation that I would like to speak to you about this morning. What were the major principles of Truth that led to the formation of the Protestant Churches? And what are the major principles of Truth that continue this reform, even within the Protestant Churches, to this very day? I would like to assert to you that the principles of truth which led to the Reformation have been with the true Church of Jesus Christ from the beginning. They are found in the teaching of the Bible. They are well illustrated in the life and practice of the Apostle Paul here in this text. I will give you three this morning from the first 12 verses of Acts 17. And, then, I will give you 2 this afternoon from verses 13-34. The Apostle Paul was a reformer in the sense that he would have all people around him change their thinking and their religious practices to have them conform to the word of God. And he would have you and I to be Reformed in this same sense, in order that we might glorify God. To be reformed in your thinking you must hold to these 3 principles of truth. 1st - The person who is reformed believes in reasoning with people from the Scriptures. 2nd - The person who is reformed believes that the truths of grace will turn the world upside down. And 3rd- The person who is reformed believes that all men should search the Scriptures to see whether these things are true.

**1st of all - The person who is reformed believes in reasoning with people from the Scriptures.** (Verses 1-4)

Verse 2 says, "Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead." It is interesting to note that from the very beginning of the New Testament church that the Scriptures are set forth, in connection with the preaching of them, as the primary means which God uses to save the soul of a person. And they are the primary means that God uses to build His church. The Scriptures are very important and very necessary in becoming a Christian and living the Christian life. Here in verse 2, Paul's preaching to them is spoken of as his "reasoning" with his listeners. The truth of the Scriptures is reasonable. God created us as thinking, reasoning creatures and there are very compelling reasons why you must hear the truths of the gospel preached. Your mind and your heart must be reasoned with, in regard to the absolute necessity of your believing in Jesus Christ for salvation. This was not something that Paul did occasionally. It was his custom. He regularly did this with people who were generally religious, or with anyone who seemed interested at all. He "explained and demonstrated that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead." And then He would declare to his listeners, "This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ." Verse 4 says, "And some of them were persuaded." Verse 17 shows us that Paul did the same thing in Athens. "Therefore he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and with the Gentile worshipers, and in the marketplace daily with those who happened

to be there." God has given to Christians the Scriptures so that they would be persuaded of the truth. He has given them the Scriptures to persuade others also, that they are the truth from God; His revelation of Himself to men. He would have you to give reasons to others as to why they should believe.

One of the watchwords of the Reformation was "Sola Scriptura". It is by the Scripture alone that we are able to be saved from our sins. It is by the Scripture alone that a Christian learns how to look at all things and judge all things. Without the Scripture people are adrift on a sea of relativism. They worship God and live their lives based on the doctrines and teachings of men. They have no word of authority to command them, no word of promise to appeal to them, no word of comfort from God to assure them that "this is the way, walk ye in it." One of the great objections that our Lord Jesus had to the religion of the Pharisees of His day was in relation to this very thing. They had taken the Scriptures which had been given to Israel by God Himself, and they added to them the teachings of men. Matthew 15: 8 - "This people draw near to Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men." This happens in our day as well. The hearts of many professed Christians are far from God but they do not know it. Many churches which call themselves Christian add things to the word of God, and as a result, God is not being honored and glorified by the conversion of people, nor is there a strong Biblical faith at work in their lives. Preaching and reasoning from the Scriptures is dying out in many churches in this country. Will you not take your stand most definitely for this? Stand up for the preaching of God's Word. Take your stand against an entertainment oriented, man-pleasing worship. Stand up for the preaching of Jesus Christ.

Turn over to Matthew 22: 24. We also find a similar problem in Jesus' day with the Sadducees. You find this same moral and spiritual relativism entering in to their views of life, death, and the resurrection. They come to Jesus with a trick question to try to establish their own spiritual point that there supposedly is no resurrection of the dead. Jesus was able to use the Scriptures as they should be used. He used them as an authority for all matters related to this life and the next. They had asked Him, "Teacher, Moses said that if a man dies, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife and raise up offspring for his brother." "Likewise the second also, and the third, even to the seventh." "Last of all the woman died also." "Therefore, in the resurrection, whose wife of the seven will she be?" "For they all had her." "Jesus answered and said to them, 'You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God.' "For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels of God in heaven." "But concerning the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God, saying, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'?" "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living." You see, these men had a preconceived notion about the resurrection. It was that there was none. But Jesus showed them and convinced them from the Scriptures that this was wrong. There is no marriage in the resurrection; in the eternal state. But that the dead are raised, He says; there is no doubt of it because

God in the Scriptures says that He is, presently, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Their spirits now are present with Him. He is the God of those who are living presently, and who will be given their glorified body back in the day of the resurrection. To the Lord Jesus, preaching included not only the declaration of the truth, but also asking questions of the listener and then answering them for him in a way that showed that He truly cared for their souls. "Have you not read" is a direct assertion that the Bible is the authority of truth. "God is not the God of the dead", shows that God's power to convince men of the truth is right there with His word. Here; the Lord Jesus has given to all Christians the pattern for the advancement, and the building, of His kingdom. It is built by the preaching of the Scriptures the Word of Truth. It will be established and advanced by reasoning with people over the truth of them, as Jesus did here. Will you not ask God to give you the grace to be able to reason with unbelieving people concerning the Scriptures? Show them that God is real, that Christ is risen from the dead, by your thoughtful words to them about these subjects. Show them by the way that you think and how you live.

Now, I am trying to convey to you, that it was because this was **not** done, by either pastor or people, that the Church of Jesus Christ fell into such great darkness for a thousand years in the time period before the Reformation. This was why the Reformation became so necessary in God's mind. It was that men in the visible church, men who were leaders in the visible church, did not understand the Scriptures or the power of God. God would have every Christian to develop a good understanding of the Scriptures. He would have them to experience His power in relation to them. This is how the Apostle Paul used them. He showed them how necessary it was that Christ suffer and die and rise again from the dead. He would demonstrate to them that this Jesus was, and is, the Christ. But what happened in the thousand years before the Reformation was that the Scriptures, and the power of them, were largely lost to the common man. The Scriptures came to be seen as a book which the masses could not understand and should not try to understand. They should leave it to the priests, the cardinals, the Bishops, and the Pope to interpret them and even add to them if they thought that it was necessary. Reasoning with them about the Scriptures became a form of rebellion. When the Roman Empire came to an end, the Scriptures which were in Latin were not translated into the various languages of the countries of the 10 kingdoms of Europe. So all the worship services were still being conducted by the priests in Latin. The doctrine of a sacramental salvation through baptism and the taking of the Mass was substituted for the doctrine of justification by faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ. A long succession of Popes changed the simplicity and purity of the gospel into a system of religious works. The Pope became known as the Vicar of Christ; the visible head of the Church here on the earth. He assumed the titles of deity and assumed authority over kingdoms and peoples which was never given to him by God. Why did all this happen? It happened because there was a loss of the ability of the common man to have the Scriptures and for the common Christian to exercise the priesthood of the believer that the New Testament Scriptures clearly teach that he

should. You should prize the Scriptures and read them often. It is a great privilege which has been granted to you by God. It could be taken away from you by men if you do not make use of it.

I am saying, here, that there is something that you and I who know Jesus Christ can do. Develop a Biblical mindset. Develop a mindset of true spirituality. True Spirituality does not come by becoming followers of men, unless they are imitating Christ. And to know how to follow Christ, and to know what kind of men you should have to lead you and guide you into the truth, you must learn to be "reasoned to" by good preachers and teachers who hold fast to the word of God. Why did the church fall into such darkness before the reformation? Because they became too impressed with the supposed spirituality of the priests, the bishops, and the popes. Remember this; a man or woman is not spiritual unless what they say, and write, and do, is plainly Biblical. True Spirituality is reasonable and practical, not mystical. There is mystery to our faith. But that mystery is not our wonder and awe over men. That mystery is our wonder and our awe over God and Christ, and how they can work through weak and sinful men in connection with the truth of the Scriptures. These leaders of the Catholic church abandoned preaching and reasoning with people in favor of a sacramental ministry and false doctrine. It was much easier and convenient, and it satisfied everyone's sense of being religious. Unsaved and unregenerate men must add to the Scriptures and add to what Christ has done to make up a religion which will please them. But in adding, and making the additions; the primary thing, the real truth of the Scriptures was lost. People thought that going to Mass was receiving Christ. People thought that doing penance was the way to have their sins forgiven. People thought that purchasing indulgences was releasing their loved ones from purgatory. But in the process, the real and true definitions of sin and righteousness were lost. The real understanding of the way of salvation was lost. The true Biblical view of scriptural authority in the Church was lost. And people's souls were lost. In Biblical Reformation, these things are all gained back again. Let me ask you, do you see these connections? If you do, what are you doing to promote Scripture knowledge? Promote it first in your own life by regular Bible reading and prayer. Promote it in your family devotions and worship. You are the priest before God, through Jesus Christ your Lord, offering up spiritual sacrifices of prayer and giving to the Lord's true work. There is one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; not Mary and the saints. Promote this knowledge with other people by letting your speech be seasoned with the salt of the Scriptures, and then God will be glorified. Do not simply boast in the spirituality of other men who received what they have from God and Christ. Boast in the Lord who has given you free grace through Christ, and who has given you all the faithful teachers of the word that you have ever met and known. You pursue Christ in the Scriptures. It is Christ who is your Life.

**Then 2ndly - The person who is reformed believes that the truths of Christ and His grace will turn the world upside down.** (verses 5-9)

This is the beauty of true Biblical Reformation. It will always cause a fuss and stir among men. It always upsets the status quo of keeping religion in its place. When it has become nothing other than form or ritual, then the one who is reformed and who is filled with the Holy Spirit comes and speaks and upsets the apple-cart. Paul and Silas had been preaching in the synagogue for three Sabbaths, reasoning with them from the Scriptures. And it says in verse 4, "And some of them were persuaded...." The truth of the word of God turned these people's world upside down. Things with them would no longer be the same. Jesus is raised from the dead. I, in believing in Him, have been spiritually raised from my death in sins. I have been given the gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ my Lord. My view of religion and life has been totally turned on its head. I thought that religion was simply going to church and enduring my time there. Now I find the God is meeting with my soul and my soul is being fed, and I am not interested in the things of false religion or the world's approval. I am ashamed of the lusts and desires of the flesh that I used to pursue and to become holy is my greatest desire. Synagogue, as usual, has come to an end. Where do I find a Biblical New Testament church? It says, "a great multitude of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women, joined Paul and Silas." Ah, my beloved brethren, learn to expect great things from God working through the preaching of His blessed word. God is well able to turn the world of people upside down. If the church that you attend is small and there does not seem to be much power in the preaching of the word, will you not pray that the Holy Spirit would come and move and bless? Reformation truths of the doctrines of grace must be accompanied by the power of the Holy Spirit to see lasting and good results take place in the lives of people around us. Too often I have seen it, brethren; men who are convinced of the doctrines of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and convinced of the doctrines of grace who are only interested in arguing people to their own position, proving their point with other people, instead of wanting to introduce them to the power and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. True Reformed Churches are not built by doctrine, alone, without Christ. Christ must have the glory of all the doctrine that is preached. Sometimes the love of the doctrines overshadows the love of Christ Himself, and the pre-eminent position that He should have in all of our preaching. The doctrine is supposed to not only lead people to Christ, it is also to keep people following Jesus Christ.

This is the life of true Christianity. This is what saves men and keeps them. This is what leads them to love the doctrines of grace. Never forget it. Paul never forgot it. He lifted up Christ in his heart and gave Him the pre-eminent place in his mind, as he was preaching, because he knew that all the doctrines of grace pointed to Him. Those who preach and share Christ should remember this if they want to see God turn the world upside down with Reformational truth. Remember Charles Spurgeon and his ministry. He said, "I do not hesitate to take the name of Baptist; "I am not ashamed to be called a Calvinist; but if I am asked what I will preach, it will be Jesus Christ and Him crucified." He put Jesus Christ and the doctrines of grace together. He didn't leave the Lord Jesus behind in the preaching of Bible doctrine. He knew

that the Lord Jesus Christ is the source of all life and blessing in the relation to the truth of the Scriptures and so He preached Him. This is the same reason that "a great multitude of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women joined Paul and Silas. They were convinced that the Jesus whom Paul preached was the only true and living Savior and Lord, the One who is worthy of all our life and strength, worthy of our following after Him in all humility. Reformational truths of the doctrines of Grace, preached in the power of the Spirit, giving the glory to Christ, will turn the world upside down for good for many people.

But, we must also realize that the same preaching and reasoning will also be opposed by some. Verse 5 says, "But the Jews who were not persuaded, becoming envious, took some of the vile men from the marketplace, and gathering a mob, set all the city in an uproar and attacked the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out the people." "But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some brethren to the rulers of the city, crying out, "These who have turned the world upside down have come here too." "Jason has harbored them, and these are all acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king--Jesus." A reformed Christian believes that the doctrines that he preaches and holds to are all related to a basic and fundamental loyalty to Christ and His Kingdom, Christ and His government ruling over our lives and all men's lives, through the preaching and teaching of His Word. Christ's kingdom is not of this world. But the kingdoms of this world are becoming the kingdoms of our God and of His Christ. It is a spiritual and everlasting kingdom. Those who are unwilling to believe in God's Son do understand this is an issue of fundamental loyalty, and they use it in attempts to turn others away from the truth. A religious unbeliever's basic loyalty is either political, or personal, or both. He is loyal to himself. And he is loyal to the state if the state promotes his personal interests. Christ seems to interfere with both. So He will try to pit loyalty to Christ against loyalty to the state. In this case, it was the unbelieving Jews who were not persuaded, who became envious of the following that Paul and Silas now had, who determined to start an uproar by gathering a mob of evil men from the marketplace and going after those who were the main supporters of Paul and Silas.

A Reformed Christian is a peace-maker in his heart. But he is also wise enough to know that Biblical truth has many enemies. Christ and His Kingdom and His word have many enemies. Even those who sometimes pose as Christ's friends. Those professed Christians who do not believe in the inerrancy and infallibility of the word of God, the Scriptures, are really enemies and not friends of Christ. They are often more interested in the issues of the rights of sinful men being established in the church than they are in worshipping God in spirit and in truth. They are more interested in the rights of women to preach and to exercise authority in church and state, the rights of homosexuals to minister in the church and to have rights in society, the rights of children to not listen to their parents, or to honor them or obey them and submit to them; these are what they are interested in. They are interested in establishing the rights of unrepentant people to have all the choicest blessings of

God. Thus they would force God, if they could, to accept their sinful lifestyle or false doctrines or both. They see faithful Bible-believing and reforming Christians to be the problem. Their agenda to have all men accepted by God, and by the State, in spite of their sinfulness is hindered by those who are reformed. All men are created equal and they think that this equality is to be found in sinners everywhere being entitled to have salvation without repentance; salvation without submission to God and to His word. Their agenda to see the religion of their own making established in the sight of others is threatened by those who faithfully proclaim the truth of the gospel and the word of God. Their world is turned upside down if the gospel of Christ makes progress. The reformed Christian is not afraid of this. He would rather have them stridently oppose him, than that they should perish in their sins or that the truth of God and Christ found in His word, be lost. Is this how you think my friend? If this is the way that you think you are Biblical, and you are reformed.

**Then 3rdly- The person who is reformed believes that all men should search the Scriptures to see whether these things are true.** (verses 10-12)

"Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea." "When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews." "These were more fair-minded (more noble-minded) than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were true." As I come to the close of this sermon, let me ask you whether you are a Reformed Christian? Are these things that I am mentioning this morning characteristic of your life and your response to God's having given you an understanding of the Scriptures? Are you noble-minded enough to look into the word of God to see if what a preacher, or anyone who is telling you anything from the word of God, is telling you the truth? The person who is simple, the person who is naïve is one who believes whatever he hears or reads without testing it. I must warn you, that if you listen to lies long enough and believe them, that they will become truth to you. But that is relativism. But the spiritual and eternal truth is not something which you think up or make up on your own, based upon your observations or the observations of what some other man or woman that you think is wise has said or written. The real question and test of truth is whether you are willing to compare what everyone around you says is true, with what the eternal word of God has said is true. God's truth stands forever. All men will be judged by the word of God at the last day. The Lord Jesus said in John 12: 48, "He who rejects me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him--the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day." "For I have not spoken on My own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak." And I know that His command is everlasting life." There it is; the word of God and everlasting life directly linked. The words of Jesus are the words of God. In closing, I would like to give you the words of Luther when he first came into conflict with Rome over this issue of Indulgences. D'Aubigne in his History of the Reformation says this:

On Friday (14th October), Luther returned to the cardinal, accompanied by the elector's councilors. The Italians crowded around him as usual, and were present at the conference in great numbers. Luther advanced and presented his protest to the cardinal. His courtiers regarded this paper with astonishment — a paper so presumptuous in their eyes. This is what the Wittenberg doctor declared to their master: — “You attack me on two points. First, you oppose to me the constitution of Pope Clement VI, in which it is said that the treasure of indulgences is the merit of the Lord Jesus Christ and of the saints — which I deny in my theses. “Panormitanus declares in his first book, that in whatever concerns the holy faith, not only a general council, but still further, each believer, is above the pope, if he can bring forward the declarations of Scripture and allege better reasons than the pope. The voice of our Lord Jesus Christ is far above the voice of all men, whatever be the names they bear. “My greatest cause of grief and of serious reflection is, that this constitution contains doctrines entirely at variance with the truth. It declares that the merits of the saints are a treasure, while the whole of Scripture bears witness that God rewards us far more richly than we deserve. The prophet exclaims: Enter not into judgment with thy servant, O Lord, for in thy sight shall no man living be justified! ‘Woe be to men, however honorable and however praiseworthy their lives may have been,’ says Augustine, ‘if a judgment from which mercy was excluded should be pronounced upon them!’ “Thus the saints are not saved by their merits, but solely by God’s mercy, as I have declared. I maintain this, and in it I stand fast. The words of Holy Scripture, which declare that the saints have not merit enough, must be set above the words of men, which affirm that they have an excess. For the pope is not above the words of men, which affirm that they have an excess. For the pope is not above the Word of God, but below it.”

Luther does not stop here: he shows that if indulgences cannot be the merits of the saints, they cannot any the more be the merits of Christ. He proves that indulgences are barren and fruitless, since their only effect is to exempt men from performing good works, such as prayer and alms-giving.

“No,” exclaims he, “the merits of Jesus Christ are not a treasure of indulgence exempting man from good works, but a treasure of grace which quickens. The merits of Christ are applied to the believer without indulgences, without the keys, by the Holy Ghost alone, and not by the pope. If any one has an opinion better founded than mine,” adds he, terminating what referred to this first point, “let him make it known to me, and then will I retract.” “I affirm,” said he, coming to the second article, “that no man can be justified before God if he has not faith; so that it is necessary for a man to believe with a perfect assurance that he has obtained grace. To doubt of this grace is to reject it. The faith of the righteous is his righteousness and his life.”

So there you see it; 3 of the great principles of the Reformation. Sola Christu; salvation is all of Christ and only by Christ. Sola Scriptura; salvation comes only when we hear and receive the word of God to our souls. And Sola Fide; salvation comes to us only by faith, when we receive Christ by means of believing in God's word to the salvation of our soul. Are you are reformed Christian? I hope that you will become one if you presently are not. These are the 3 principles of truth that led to the Reformation. This afternoon I will give you two more which led to the further stages of the Reformation of the Church which followed up on Luther's good start.