

“Here I stand!”

A timely reminder of the truths
of Protestant Reformation
in its 500th Anniversary
1517-2017

*A message to both Protestants
& Roman Catholics*

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HERE I STAND!

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Contents

□ “Here I stand!”	...	5
□ Slogans of Reformation	...	13
1. Scripture alone!	...	16
2. Faith alone!	...	22
3. Grace alone!	...	29
4. Christ alone!	...	36
5. Glory of God alone!	...	44
□ Conclusion	...	50

God’s Promise
to those who long to see the Church
come back to where it should be:

*“Those from among you shall raise up
the **foundations** of many generations;
and you shall be called
the Repairer of the Breach,
the Restorer of Streets to dwell in.”*

(Isaiah 58:12)

“Here I stand!”

The year 2017 marks the 500th Anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. It was on the 31st of October 1517 that Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses, against unbiblical beliefs and practices, on the main door of the All Saints Cathedral in Wittenberg, Germany.

Reformation is to bring back the Church from where it is to where it should be. The Church that is, is not the Church that was. The Church that is, is not the Church that should be. Reformation includes Revival, Renewal and Restoration. Reformation in general means correction of error, or abolition of abuses and malpractices.

■ The Bible abounds with stories of Reformation. Here are some examples —

God raised **Judges** to restore the spiritual condition of His people. The summary of the story of the Judges runs like this: “When the Lord raised up Judges for His people, He was with the Judge and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the Judge; for the Lord was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who oppressed them and harassed them. And it came to pass, when the Judge was dead, that they reverted and behaved more corruptly than their fathers, by following other gods ... They did not cease from their stubborn way” (Judges 2:18,19).

Then there was restoration under godly **Kings**. Hezekiah was 25 years old when he became King. “He removed the high places and broke the sacred pillars, cut down the wooden images and broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made; because until those days the children of Israel burned incense to it. He called it Nehushtan (= just a piece of bronze)” (2 Kings 18:3-7). Another King used by God for Reformation was Josiah. He came to the throne as early as when he was eight years old. We read about him in 2 Kings 22. His very first work was the repairing of the House of the Lord. There’s a striking statement in verse 8:

The High Priest said to the Scribe, I have “found” the Book of the Law in the House of the Lord! Think of the Bible lost in the Church! When the Book was read before King Josiah, he tore his clothes (v11). He called people to come “back to the Bible!” (v13).

Then came **Reformers** like Ezra and Nehemiah. Ezra was used by God in the rebuilding of the Temple, and Nehemiah in the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem. The study of God’s Word played a vital role in this Reformation (Ezra 7:10; Nehemiah 9:3). Prayer and confession followed. Against all odds and threats of the enemies, Nehemiah shouted, “I cannot come down!” (Nehemiah 6:3).

Then the Lord sent **Prophets**. The repeated words in their messages were Repent, Return and Reform. For example, look at Hosea 6:1-3, “Come, let us return to the Lord ... He will heal us ... bandage us up ... revive us ... raise us up, that we may live in His sight ... He will come to us like the rain, like the latter and former rain!”

Several of God’s men and women continue to carry His burden in their hearts concerning His people, and Christ’s love for His Church. They keep lamenting in secret before God like

Prophet Jeremiah. To them comes God’s promise: Isaiah 58:12, “Those from among you shall raise up the **foundations** of many generations; and you shall be called the Repairer of the Breach, the Restorer of Streets to dwell in.”

In spite of the Reformations that God brought about through Judges, Kings, Reformers and Prophets, there was frequent backsliding among God’s people, especially among the leaders. This is why John the Baptist had to address the Pharisees and Sadducees as a “generation of vipers” (Matthew 3:7). Jesus pronounced repeated “woes” on Scribes and Pharisees who were hypocrites (Matthew 23). Apostle Paul predicted that “wolves” would come to devour God’s people after his death (Acts 20:29-32). Apostle Peter called the false prophets and false teachers as “dogs” and “pigs” (2 Peter 2:1,2,22).

■ This brings us to look into the Church History. The years from the first century to this day may be divided into eight periods —

- 1) *The Apostolic Church* (AD 30 to AD 100)
This is the period of the early apostles, extending from the Day of Pentecost to the death of Apostle John.

2) *The Persecuted Church*

(AD 100 to AD 313)

King Constantine of Rome was “converted” to Christianity in AD 312. Christianity became the State religion of the Roman Empire. Christians who were only 4% suddenly swelled up to 80%, but with no conversion! A man of God calls this “the worst disaster since Noah!” Imagine how the percentage of Christians would have shot up in India if Mahatma Gandhi or Dr. Ambedkar had become Christians! Nominalism and formalism in Indian Churches would have reached Mount Everest!

3) *The Imperial Church* (AD 313 to AD 476)

The Apostles Creed, the Athanasian Creed and the Nicene Creed were written during this period.

4) *The Medieval Church*

(AD 476 to AD 1517)

The Church entered Dark Ages in AD 476.

5) *The Reformation Church*

(AD 1517 to AD 1648)

This period began on 31st October 1517 when Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses on the Church door in Wittenberg, Germany. It significantly affected the moral and political climate of entire Europe.

6) *The Enlightenment Church*

(AD 1648 to AD 1789)

This was the age of reason. God used men like John Wesley, George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards and George Fox to explain the faith of the Gospel.

7) *The Modern Church* (AD 1789 to AD 1970)

The ministries of men like C.H. Spurgeon, D.L. Moody and Billy Graham impacted this period. The famous Welsh Revival was born in 1904.

8) *The Post-modern Church*

(AD 1970 to present)

We know what it is!

- When we talk about the Protestant Reformation, we must gratefully remember certain individuals outstandingly used by God —

1) *John Huss* (1369-1415)

He was one of the earliest Reformers. He was burnt alive for his faith.

2) *Martin Luther* (1483-1546)

He was the most well-known Reformer. He was a monk and a professor of theology. He raised his voice against the Roman Catholic doctrine of Indulgences

(i.e. forgiveness of sins through the purchase of tickets). His theme text was, “*The just shall live by faith!*” (Romans 1:16,17). His arguments were presented as 95 Theses which were copied and widely distributed around the world. During his defence he said, “**Here I stand!** God help me! I can do no other!”

3) *William Tyndale* (1484-1536)

He translated half of the Old Testament and the complete New Testament into English. The translation of the world-renowned King James Version used most of Tyndale’s translation. At the stake in 1536 he prayed, “Lord, Open the eyes of the King of England!” This martyrdom prayer was answered and the King ordered a translation!

4) *Thomas Cranmer* (1489-1556)

He influenced the Church of England to adopt the Reformation truths. He wrote the “*Common Book of Prayer*” used mostly in Anglican Churches. (Under my mummy’s compulsion I memorized as a teenager a number of prayers, known as Collect, from this Book.)

5) *John Calvin* (1509-1564)

He wrote many Bible Commentaries. His theology gave rise to Calvinism.

Dear Reader, may be you can stand up where you are for a minute of silence to thank God for these and many such Reformers who refused to relent saying, “Here I stand!”



The Protestant Reformers

*Stand up, Stand up for Jesus!
Ye soldiers of the Cross;
Lift high His royal banner
It must not suffer loss.
From Vict'ry unto victory
His army shall He lead;
Till every foe is vanquished
And Christ is Lord indeed.*

The Slogans of Protestant Reformation

The summary of the Reformers' theological conviction is as follows, in Latin and in English —

1. "*Sola Scriptura*"
Scripture alone!
2. "*Sola Fide*"
Faith alone!
3. "*Sola Gratia*"
Grace alone!
4. "*Solo Christo*"
Christ alone!
5. "*Soli Deo Gloria*"
To the Glory of God alone!

Of the nearly 40 Calenders of 2017 I received from various Churches and Christian organisations in India, not one of them has made any reference to 2017 as the 500th Anniversary of Reformation. Even the Reformation Day, 31 October, is not specially marked. It may not be too much on my part to conclude that we have by and large forgotten the heritage and truths of Reformation. No wonder the present generation has no idea whatsoever about the roots of Reformation. The only Calendar that has carried the theme of Reformation this year (2017) is that of the ministry of "Back to the Bible," known also as Good News Broadcasting Society. Congratulations to this ministry for living up to its name! Their Calendar is titled as "*Defining Moments of our Faith*," with these five slogans printed on page one. Each month's page features the places or Church buildings the Reformers were associated with.

Following the Reformation, several denominations were born. Lutheran, Presbyterian, Congregationalists, Methodists and Baptists are some of them. Pentecostals came later. Each denomination has its strengths and weaknesses. No single denomination has the full understanding of

all the Biblical truths. There's therefore no place for boasting. Among these denominations, there may be minor differences, but the fundamental truths are stated by these five *solas*.

In the forthcoming pages, let's look at these 5 slogans of Protestant Reformation in the Biblical light and study their practical implications and relevance in the lives of Christians and the Churches.



Martin Luther nailing his 95 Theses on the door of the All Saints Church, Wittenberg, Germany, 31 October 1517

Slogan 1

“Scripture alone!”

(Sola Scriptura)

The Bible is the inspired Word of God; it's not born out of man's imagination. 2 Peter 1:20,21, “No prophesy of **Scripture** is of any private interpretation; because prophesy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.” Yes, the Bible is the result of Divine inspiration and not the product of human imagination. This is what we are to know “first!” (v20).

There are liberal theologians in our pulpits who say that the Bible just “contains” the Word of God. We totally reject this view and protest it. This Bible “is” the Word of God. It was God the Holy Spirit who inspired the Biblical writers to write down the

statements of godly men as well as ungodly people. The Holy Spirit is the Author of the Holy Scriptures, and therefore the Bible “is” the Word of God. I call upon believers in all denominations to chase liberals and modernists away from our pulpits.

The Bible is *inerrant*. Psalm 19:7, “The Law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul.” The Bible is *infallible*. John 10:35b, “The Scripture cannot be broken.” The Bible is *indestructible*. Mark 13:31, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but **My words** will by no means pass away.”

The Bible is *sufficient*. That’s why the Apostles firmly stated that we must not even think “beyond what’s **written**” (1 Corinthians 4:6). Apostle Paul presents himself and Apollos as patterns to confine ourselves within the Scriptures. Apostle John concludes the Book of Revelation with the words: “If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life” (Revelation 22:18,19). Though this passage applies specifically to the Book of Revelation, the principle holds good for the entire Bible.

Arguing in favour of extra-biblical revelations and experiences, some preachers quote John 20:30 that there are many acts of Jesus not recorded in the Gospels. But have you noticed in verse 31 that whatever is written is enough for our “eternal life?”

Several Churches keep traditions along with the Scriptures. Jesus in His time vehemently condemned this practice: Mark 7:9,13, “All too well you set aside the commandment of God that you may keep your tradition ... You have made the **Word of God** of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down. And many such things you do!” Man in his fallen nature always tends to cherish his own tradition over God’s revealed truth. What he thinks appears more important to him than what God says.

John Wesley, one of the Revivalists of the 17th Century, emphatically said, “The Church is to be judged by the Scriptures, not the Scriptures by the Church!” Beloved, in the beginning was the Word, not the Church!

What about *Apocrypha*? The word “apocrypha” means “hidden.” The Apocryphal books were produced between 200 BC and AD 100. They were not accepted by anyone

as Scripture. But in reaction to the Protestant Reformers, in order to support their practices of praying for the dead (in purgatory), forgiveness of sins through good deeds, etc., the Roman Catholics added these books to the Bible in 1546. So they have 46 Books in the Old Testament instead of 39. But the New Testament never quotes from *Apocrypha* which the Roman Catholic Church later adopted.

Can we then quote from the sayings of non-Christian poets and dramatists? Whatever may be the moral content of these sayings, they can only impart “knowledge,” and not “wisdom” unto soul salvation like the Bible (2 Timothy 3:15). Quoting from secular writers occasionally is not wrong. Apostle Paul, while addressing the idol-worshippers in Athens from Mars Hill, said, “Some of your own poets have said, We are also God’s offspring!” (Acts 17:28).

Our entire life must be characterised by “what the **Bible** says!” Look at these passages which emphasize this point: Matthew 21:42; John 7:38; Romans 4:3; 10:8; 11:2; Galatians 4:30; 1 Timothy 5:18; James 4:5). If our faith is not founded on Bible the Word of God, how do we know that Christ died

and rose again? Do we have any actual photograph of Christ’s crucifixion? There’s more than one empty tomb in Israel. Which one did Jesus occupy? Our belief in Crucifixion and Resurrection is solely based on what the Bible says. Apostle Paul rightly wrote to the Corinthian Christians, “Christ died for our sins **according to the Scriptures**, and was buried, and rose again the third day **according to the Scriptures**” (1 Corinthians 15:3,4). He says that this is the word by which they were “saved” and they were to “stand firm” on it (vv1,2). No wonder the primary attack of the devil is on God’s Word. He injected unbelief into Eve’s mind with the question, “Has God SAID?” (Genesis 3:1).

Very few Christians have read through the entire Bible atleast once. There’s no unnecessary or unimportant passage in any of the 66 Books of the Bible. There are truths to be learnt from genealogical passages too! Apostle Paul stressed to young Timothy, “**ALL Scripture** is profitable” (2 Timothy 3:16). Growth from childhood to manhood in Christian life is through the Scripture only (vv15,17). Neglecting any portion of the Bible will be to our disadvantage. God in His wisdom has revealed the truth to us in His Word both through “teaching” and “testi-

mony” (Isaiah 8:20). We need no other source to understand His mind (v19). Get hold of a reading plan to read thro’ the entire Bible. (My 60-page booklet, *Bible Calendar*, presents a plan to read through the Bible over a period of two years, and memorize 100 verses per year.)

However spiritual an experience may appear, we don’t arrive at truth based on it. It’s never experience to truth; it’s always Bible truth to test any experience. We are not obliged to endorse or embrace any experience that’s not confirmed by the plain teaching of the Scripture. *Sola Scriptura!*

Let’s remember here the nearly 200 Bibleless languages in India. The privilege of having the Bible in our mother tongue in so many versions, adds up our responsibility (Luke 12:48). Thank God for Martin Luther who translated the Bible from Latin into German for commoners to read and understand. He did it against all odds.

*Book of books, our people’s strength,
Stateman’s, teacher’s, hero’s treasure,
Bringing freedom, spreading truth,
Shedding light that none can measure!
Wisdom comes to those who know thee.
All the best we have we owe thee.*

—Percy Dearmer, 1867-1936

Slogan 2

“Faith alone!”

(Sola Fide)

The Scripture text that ignited the mind of Martin Luther was Romans 1:16,17, “The Gospel of Christ is the power of God to salvation for everyone who **believes** ... For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from **faith** to faith; as it is written, THE JUST SHALL LIVE BY FAITH.” This is not an isolated or obscure text from the Bible. This appears in 4 places: Habakkuk 2:4; Galatians 3:11; Romans 1:17; Hebrews 10:38. The message is that we are NOT saved by any works of religion but only by faith on Christ. Apostle Paul emphasizes it in Ephesians 2:8,9, “By grace you have been saved through **faith**, and that NOT of yourselves; it is the gift of God, NOT of works, lest anyone should boast.” Not of “yourselves” — our personality. Not of “works” — our performance.

Here lies the fundamental difference between the Old Testament and the New. The OT says, “It will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to OBSERVE all these commandments before the Lord our God, as He has commanded us” (Deuteronomy 6:25). On the other hand the NT declares, “**But now** the righteousness of God APART FROM THE LAW is revealed, even the righteousness of God which is through **faith** in Jesus Christ to all and on all who **believe**” (Romans 3:21,22).

Apostle Paul reiterates this truth in his Epistle to Galatians who were disturbed by the advocates of circumcision: “A man is NOT justified by the WORKS of the law BUT by **faith** in Christ, even we have **believed** in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by **faith** in Christ and NOT by the WORKS of the Law; because by the works of the Law no flesh shall be justified” (Galatians 2:16). You will be thrilled to observe the repeated mention of the word “faith” in this Epistle (Galatians 2:20; 3:2,5,6,7,8,9,11,12,14, 22,23,23,25, etc.).

Abraham was justified by faith 430 years BEFORE the Law was given (Galatians 3:17). The Law was a later addition and that too for a stipulated period only: “The Law was added

till the Seed (Christ) should come” (v19). Also, Abraham was justified “NOT while circumcised, but while uncircumcised” (Rom 4:9,10). Yes, Abraham was justified by **faith**, and not by Circumcision or the Law. What does this teach us today? Water baptism, infant or adult, sprinkling or immersion, does not save us. You become a child of God the moment you personally believe on the Lord Jesus Christ as your Saviour (John 1:12; Romans 10:9-11). Then follows baptism as the first step of obedience (Acts 8:36-38; 10:47,48; 16:30-33).

The one and only condition for salvation is **faith** on Christ. Here are two classic examples: (1) Evangelist Philip preached Jesus to the Ethiopian official in the Gaza desert. On seeing some water, the official asked Philip, “See, here is water, what hinders me from being baptized?” (Acts 8:35,36). Note carefully the instant answer: “If you **believe** with all your heart, you may” (v37). (2) The Philippian Jailor asked Paul and Silas, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” The instant answer was, “**Believe** on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your family” (Acts 16:30,31). He believed on Christ with his family and they were all baptized “the same hour of the night” (v33). In both these instances the inquirer was not prescribed

seven steps to salvation! By climbing seven steps you will not be saved, you will only become tired!

Beware of “discipleship” salvation. It teaches that you must reach a certain level of spirituality in order to be baptized. The word “disciple” simply means “student.” Whether in kindergarten or postgraduate class, you are a student. It is AFTER enrolling as a student, you grow in knowledge. Similarly the moment you wholeheartedly believe on Jesus you are enrolled as a disciple (Matthew 28:19). Then follows growth through regular teaching (v20). It is not by self-efforts like “ascending” or “descending” that we get saved, but only by mouth confession and heart **belief** (Romans 10:4-10). (Read my 128-page book, *Faith Life*, available in English and Tamil.) A Church-planting missionary organisation in India lost a tribal group when its missionaries insisted that the tribeswomen must break their bangles before baptism. Oh, how much we have failed to understand the New Testament truths! (Acts 15:28,29).

Everything in Christian life is of **faith**. Our leader is the “Author and Finisher of Faith” (Hebrews 12:1,2). Our community the Church is a “Household of Faith” (Galatians 6:10). Our very life is the “Spirit of Faith”

(2 Corinthians 4:13). Our message is the “Word of Faith” (Romans 10:8). Our prayer is the “Prayer of Faith” (James 5:15). The fruits of our evangelistic labour are the “Children of Faith” (1 Timothy 1:2). Our warfare is a “Fight of Faith” (1 Timothy 6:12). You will be thrilled to see how many times the word “believe” or “believers” occurs in the Acts of the Apostles which is the history book of the early Church.

It looks simple, but we need to “fight” to keep this virgin faith. Here’s Apostle Paul’s testimony: “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the **faith**” (2 Tim 4:7). Apostle Jude calls us to “contend earnestly (boldly) for the **faith** which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). We are to hold the shield of **faith** “above all” (Ephesians 6:16). During their follow-up missionary tour Apostles Paul and Barnabas exhorted the new believers “to continue in the **faith**,” and added, “We must through many tribulations enter the Kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22). Yes, Christian life means swimming against the tide to sustain faith! Our faith which is more precious than gold gets tested by fiery trials (1 Peter 1:6,7). According to Jesus, it’s going to be tough to maintain faith as we approach the end (Luke 18:8b).

Then arises a question: “What about the statement that faith without works is dead?” (Js 2:17). Apostle James in this passage deals essentially with the works of charity (vv14-16). He does not speak about works as a condition for salvation, but rather an evidence of salvation. This is clarified by Apostle Paul in Ephesians 2:9,10, “We are saved not BY works, but FOR works!” Salvation is to be understood in three tenses: (a) Salvation past — “When we first **believed**” (Romans 13:11) — Deliverance from the *penalty* of sin. (b) Salvation present — “Now salvation is nearer” (Romans 13:11) — Deliverance from the *power* of sin. It’s here we are to work out our salvation with fear and trembling (Phil 2:12). That is, we must endeavour to live as the “children of God” for His glory (v15). (c) Salvation future — “To those who eagerly wait for Him (in **faith**) He will appear a second time, without sin, for salvation” (Hebrews 9:28) — Deliverance from the very *presence* of sin. This will include the redemption of our bodies also (Romans 8:23).

While talking about faith we must make a reference to parental responsibility. Christian parents and grandparents should be strong in faith and communicate it to their children and grandchildren. Timothy’s grandmother Lois and mother Eunice were noteworthy examples (2 Timothy 1:5). Unfortunately our children have more faith

in computers than on Christ! This was the specific warning of Paul to Timothy lest he made a shipwreck of his faith (1 Timothy 6:20).

Sing —

*Rock of ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee;
Let the water and the blood,
From Thy wounded side which flowed,
Be of sin the double cure;
Save from wrath and make me pure.*

*Not the labours of my hands
Can fulfil Thy law’s demands;
Could my zeal no respite know,
Could my tears forever flow,
All for sin could not atone;
Thou must save, and Thou alone!*

*Nothing in my hand I bring;
Simply to Thy Cross I cling;
Naked, come to Thee for dress;
Helpless, look to Thee for grace;
Foul, I to the fountain fly,
Wash me, Saviour, or I die.*

*While I draw this fleeting breath,
When mine eyelids close in death,
When I soar to worlds unknown,
See Thee on Thy judgment-throne,
Rock of ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee.*

(A.M. Toplady, 1740-1778)

Slogan 3

“Grace alone!”

(Sola Gratia)

Under the previous slogan, we studied “works vs. faith.” Now we look at “law vs. grace.”

The Bible clearly contrasts these two: Law and Grace. Let’s begin with John 1:17, “The Law was given through Moses, but **grace** and truth came through Jesus Christ.” This is implied in the call of Jesus to Jews who were under the bondage of the Law: Matthew 11:28-30, “Come to Me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke on you and learn from Me, because I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. Because My yoke is easy and My burden is light.” Obviously Jesus here was not referring to

the weight of sin, but the “yoke” of the Law. He contrasts His yoke with the burden of the Law. The words “yoke” and “burden” are used only in this sense in the New Testament (Luke 11:46; Acts 15:10; Galatians 5:1).

On our side, justification is all by faith; and on God’s side it’s only through His grace. Romans 3:23,24, “All have sinned and fall short of glory of God, being justified freely by His **grace** through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.” Salvation is God’s “gift” through grace (Eph 2:8,9). It’s not an award or a reward or a prize, but a gift. A gift cannot be earned or merited. C.H. Spurgeon, known as the Prince of Preachers, said, “Salvation is all of the grace of God; damnation is all of the will of man!” Only the will of man which refuses to believe will lead him to eternal hell.

Forgiveness of sins is according to the “riches of God’s **grace**” (Ephesians 1:7). Sins may be “innumerable” but the “riches” of God’s grace will overwhelm them! This is what Martin Luther emphasized. He stood against the Pope’s promise of forgiveness through the purchase of tickets to raise money for Church construction. Apostle Paul celebrated God’s grace when he said, “I am the **chief** of all sinners, but the **grace** of God towards me

was **abundant!**" (1 Timothy 1:14,15). Paul's timeless confession lifts our spirits: "I am what I am by the **grace** of God" (1 Corinthians 15:10a). Therefore dear believer friend, never ever despise the unsaved. Pointing at a drunkard dragged by policemen along the streets, John Wesley told his associate evangelists, "There goes John Wesley but for the grace of God!" For us who are under the Covenant of Grace there's no "generational sin" (Ezekiel 18:1-4; Mark 10:13,14).

Not only our life but also our ministry must be characterised by the grace of God. Comparing his ministry to a race, Apostle Paul calls his message as the "**grace** of God" (Acts 20:24). He claimed, "I laboured more abundantly than all the apostles." But he also added, "Yet not I, but the **grace** of God which was with me" (1 Corinthians 15:10b). No place for boasting! He calls God's enablements for ministry as "gifts of **grace**" (Romans 12:6). The task before Zerubbabel was mountainous. No doubt he was an expert builder. The plumbline in his hands pleased the eyes of God. But the completion of the work was to be purely through the grace of God: "Zerubbabel shall bring forth the capstone with shouts of '**Grace, Grace** to it'" (Zechariah 4:7).

Someone is said to have asked Evangelist Billy Graham why God has used him more than any other in Crusade Evangelism. His answer: "This is the first question I would ask God when I meet Him in Heaven. For now, I know it's the **grace** of God!"

Sadly an alarming movement has come in Christendom which promotes "hyper-grace." This teaching more or less says, "Live as you like; God's grace will take care!" Youngsters find this doctrine quite appealing and they flock in large numbers in Churches and meetings which promote this. The city of Chennai is one of the worst affected by this doctrine in India. Hyper-grace teaching has been forewarned against by Apostle Paul in his time itself. Look at this passage in the Book of Romans which served as a textbook during Reformation: Romans 5:20 to 6:2, "Where sin abounded, **grace** abounded much more ... What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that **grace** may abound? Certainly not! (God forbid!) How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?"

Grace is not a licence to sin. It's actually God's inner enablement to us to overcome sin. This is clear from Romans 6:14, "Sin

shall not have dominion over you, because you are not under law but under **grace!**" This is the promise of the New Covenant: Jeremiah 32:40, "I will put My fear in their hearts so that they will not depart from Me!" Hallelujah!

Grace is free, but not cheap. Apostle Jude, who contended for the faith, condemned the hyper-grace concept. He warned the saints against "ungodly men" who "creep in unnoticed and turn the **grace** of our God into licentiousness" (Jude 4).

At the same time, beloved, don't fall into the trap of legalism. "Stand firm in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage" (Galatians 5:1). Legalism will make you "fall from **grace**" (v4). Observance of days and dietary habits are left to the discretion of individuals (Romans 14:6). Beware of a religion which teaches, "Do not touch, Do not taste, Do not handle!" (Colossians 2:20-23).

God's free grace brings on us lots of responsibilities. God's sovereignty and man's responsibility must always be balanced lest

we miss the wholesome teaching of the Scriptures. For example, if we allow bitterness to take root in us against anyone, we may "fall short of the **grace** of God" (Hebrews 12:14,15). Grace of God here means His kindness which is opposed to bitterness. Similarly "the **grace** of God teaches us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and live soberly, righteously and godly in the present age" (Titus 2:11,12).

Beware of boasting of any spiritual exercise! We are called to pray without ceasing and not to lose heart in it. When God answers our prayers, we always have a tendency in our fallen nature to boast of our praying. But remember, if our faith is what carries our prayers to God, it is His grace which brings the answers! That's why His throne is called the "Throne of **Grace!**" (Hebrews 4:16).

Keep praising God for His daily grace. Lamentations 3:22,23, "It's because of the Lord's **mercies** we are not consumed; because His **compassions** fail not. They are new every morning; Great is Your **faithfulness.**" God's GRACE is the sum of His "mercies," "compassions" and "faithfulness!"

Sing —

*Amazing grace how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me
I once was lost, but now am found
Was blind but now I see.*

*'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear
And grace my fears relieved
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed.*

*Through many dangers, toils and snares
I have already come
'Twas grace that brought me safe thus far
And grace will take me home.*

*When we've been there 10,000 years
Bright shining as the sun
We've no less days to sing God's praise
Than when we first begun.*

— John Newton, 1725-1807

**God's
Riches
At
Christ's
Expense**

Slogan 4

“Christ alone!”

(Solo Christo)

Solo Christo! Christ alone! This slogan has at least 7 implications —

(1) Christ is the only Way for salvation.

Jesus claimed, “I am **THE way!**” He also added, “No one comes to the Father except through Me!” (John 14:6). We are in a pluralistic society. The argument is, “What you believe is right; what I believe is also right!” This is not the Bible. This is not Christianity. The Apostles in the first century thundered, “There’s no name other than that of **Jesus Christ** under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). In the name of religious tolerance we cannot move into religious compromise.

Look at these words of Christ: John 10:7-9, "Most assuredly, I say to you, I am THE **door** ... If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved." He called the false prophets who came before Him as "thieves and robbers." So also the "false Christs" who come after Him (Matthew 24:23-25). The possibility of "even the very elect" getting deceived is a grim warning. Jesus foretold that the false Christs would deceive people through "great" miracles. Today even without any miracle, folks are deceived! Apostle John's prediction about "many" Antichrists should not be taken lightly. The spirit of Antichrist is already at work in the world today (1 John 2:18; 4:3).

(2) Christ is the only Mediator.

The most clear passage that explains this truth is 1 Timothy 2:5,6, "There is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man **Christ Jesus**, who gave Himself a ransom for all." We read also in 2 Corinthians 5:18-21, "God has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ ... God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself ... God made Christ who knew no sin to be sin for us." Mother Mary no doubt was blessed among women,

but she cannot pray for us. The only recorded instance in which she approached Jesus for someone's need was in the wedding at Cana. See the instant and sharp reply of Jesus to her: "What does your concern have to do with Me?" (John 2:4). Jesus said, "Whatever you ask in **My** Name ... I will pray to the Father" (John 14:16). Its' not "whatever you ask in My mother's name!" Praying to the saints is also outrightly unscriptural. We dare not attempt to add anything to the finished work of Christ on the Cross!

(3) Christ is the only Priest for us before God.

"Because Jesus continues forever, He has an unchangeable priesthood. Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He ever lives to make intercession for them" (Hebrews 7:24,25). Christ the **High Priest** has made "all" His children "priests" unto God (1 Peter 2:5,9). Priests to praise God! Priests to proclaim His message! We are priests to God both before and after the Return of Christ (Revelation 1:6,7; 5:10; 20:6).

The "Priesthood of all believers" was one of the chief doctrines emphasized during

Reformation. Unfortunately today it is only on paper and not in practice. The clergy-laity divide is anathema in the New Testament. There's no laity; all of God's people are clergy (Gr. *klerios*). Beware of going crazy after clerical titles! (Matthew 23:8-10). Sin confession is to be made to God and not to any priest. God alone can forgive sins (Mark 2:7,10; 1 John 1:7-9). Until the doctrine of the "Priesthood of all believers" is restored in practice to the Church, the Church will only be a club of the unemployed, and the world will remain unevangelised.

(4) Christ is the only Foundation of the Church.

God gave Apostle Paul "abundance of revelations" especially concerning the Church. Without his Epistles in the New Testament we would have run short of material to understand the mystery and functioning of the Church. He wrote, "According to the grace of God given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the FOUNDATION ... Because no other FOUNDATION can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is **Jesus Christ**" (1 Corinthians 3:10,11). It is not Apostle Peter but the revelation that God the Father gave him which, according to Jesus, was the foundational truth on which He would build

His Church (Matthew 16:18,19). Yes, what we think about Jesus is the foundation for our personal life and Church life. The revelation God has given us through His "apostles and prophets" is the foundational truth on which we are built as "a holy temple in the Lord" (Ephesians 2:20-22). God used Apostle Peter as a "key" to open up the door of the Church for the Jews first and then the Gentiles (Matthew 16:19; Acts 2:40,41; 10:44-47). Peter himself ascertains that Christ is the only Foundation: "It is contained in the Scripture, behold, I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious, and he who believes in Him will by no means be put to shame" (1 Peter 2:6-8). This is a quote from Isaiah 28:16, "A tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure **Foundation.**"

Christ is not only the Foundation, He is also the **Head** of the Church; not the Pope or any Bishop! (Ephesians 1:22; 4:15; Colossians 1:18). False doctrines creep in when we don't "hold on to the Head" (Colossians 2:18-22).

*My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness;
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,
But wholly lean on Jesus' Name.*

*On Christ, the solid rock, I stand;
All other ground is sinking sand!*

(5) Christ is not to be compared with anyone.

We are well aware of the statement Peter made blunderingly on the Mount of Transfiguration. He kept Moses and Elijah in par with Jesus when he suggested to erect three Tabernacles, one for each on the Mount. Heaven could not endorse what Peter spoke “not knowing what to speak” (Mark 9:6). God’s displeasure on such a proposal is seen in the words, “while he was still speaking” a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came “suddenly” saying, “**This** is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. Hear **Him!**” (Matthew 17:5,6). Christ is unique and incomparable! India, and even the whole world, is known for god-men. Beware!

(6) All the blessings of God are through Christ only.

The Book of Ephesians is called the Alps of the New Testament. It speaks of our blessings with the exalted Christ. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with EVERY spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in **Christ**” (Ephesians 1:3). Even the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is because Christ was exalted and we believe in Christ (John 7:37-39). Peter in his Pentecostal sermon explains

this pointedly: Acts 2:33, “Being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, **Jesus** poured out this which you now see and hear.” When we have Christ we have everything. He has become everything to us: “Wisdom ... Righteousness ... Redemption” (1 Corinthians 1:31). We say that the Bible is Christocentric. Our life also must be Christocentric. “Not I but **Christ!**” (Gal 2:20).

(7) Christ is the only Lord.

In the Gospels, when the Law was still in the force, Christ was the Lord of the Sabbath also (Mark 2:28). In the Book of Acts He was the Lord of the Harvest (Mark 9:38; Acts 2:41; 4:4). In the Epistles He is the Lord of the Church (Ephesians 5:29). In the Book of Revelation He is the Lord of the Nations as the Lord of lords and the King of kings (Revelations 17:14; 19:16; 1 Timothy 6:15). Summarily, He is the Lord of all (Acts 10:36).

■ When we come together to break bread, it’s mainly to “remember” **Christ** with reference to His “death” and “return,” and to recognize the fellow members of the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 11:26). The doctrine of transubstantiation that the bread and the wine transform into the body and the blood

of Christ is unfounded in the Scripture. In the same way, the doctrine of consubstantiation that the body and the blood of Christ coexist with the bread and the wine is unscriptural. These are all idolatrous beliefs. The bread and the wine are not “sacraments” (sacred substances) but only “symbols” of our union with Christ (1 Corinthians 10:16). Breadbreaking should be a celebration, not a ceremony. What served as an occasion of daily collective rejoicing before God has become a weekly or monthly ritual (Acts 2:46).

Sing —

*The Church's one foundation
Is Jesus Christ her Lord:
She is His new creation
By water and the Word:
From heaven He came and sought her
To be His holy bride;
With His own blood He bought her,
And for her life He died.*

— S. J. Stone, 1839-1900

Slogan 5

“Glory of God alone!”

(Soli Deo Gloria)

“The chief end of man is to glorify God!” This is one of the profound theological statements. That’s why Apostle Paul admonished, “Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the **glory** of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31). If even eating is not excluded, we cannot do anything that does not glorify God.

The life of Christ is the perfect Example of bringing glory to God in everything. At His birth the heavenly host praised God saying, “**Glory** to God in the Highest!” (Luke 2:14). The end of the model prayer He taught His disciples is, “Yours in the Kingdom and the power and the **glory** forever. Amen!” (Matthew 6:13b). When a lawyer addressed Jesus as

“Good Teacher,” Jesus instantly replied, “Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, **God!**” (Matthew 19:16,17). See how He did not touch the glory that belonged to His Father! When Jesus healed a paralytic, “the multitudes marvelled and **glorified God**, who had given such power to men” (Matthew 9:8; Luke 7:16). When folks wanted to take Jesus by force to make Him king, on seeing how He multiplied five loaves and two fish to feed over five thousand people, “He departed to a mountain by Himself alone!” (John 6:15). His confession before the Father in His High Priestly prayer was, “I have **glorified** You on the earth” (John 17:4). The highest exaltation of Jesus for every knee to bow before Him and every tongue to confess His lordship is ultimately “to the **glory** of God the Father” (Philippians 2:9-11).

Beloved, we may have several plus points in our life, but we cannot boast of any of them. Thus says the Lord: “Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom; let not the mighty man glory in his might; nor let the rich man glory in his riches; but let him who glories **glory** in this, that he understands and knows ME, that I am the **Lord**” (Jeremiah 9:23,24). This is quoted in the New Testament with the command, “No flesh should glory in God’s

presence that He who glories, let him **glory** in the LORD” (1 Corinthians 1:29,31). Here’s a message to sportspersons: “It is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of GOD who shows mercy” (Romans 9:16). A similar message to able builders like Zerubbabel: “Not by might nor by power, but by MY SPIRIT, says the Lord of hosts” (Zechariah 4:6,9). Joseph of old was bestowed with the gift of interpreting dreams. When Pharaoh acknowledged it and requested interpretation for his dreams, Joseph said, “It is not in me, **God** will give answer” (Genesis 41:15,16).

No prayer can be more aromatic before God than that of the Psalmist in Psalm 115:1, “Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but to Your name give **glory!**” Look at these verses for a similar double emphasis: 1 Chronicles 16:28; Psalm 29:1; 96:7. Even if it is God who crowns us, our heads must be at His feet because He alone is worthy to receive **glory** and honour and power! (Revelation 4:4,10,11). The Apostles had this spirit overruling them even while they were writing. See how they broke forth into ascribing **glory** to God while writing their Epistles: Rom 11:36; Galatians 1:5; 2 Timothy 4:18; Hebrews 13:21; 1 Peter 5:11. Shouts of “Amen” before the Epistles end!

This truth must not be taken lightly because it deals with one of the basic characteristics of God, namely His “jealousy.” It begins with the Ten Commandments and runs through the Bible. Exodus 20:4,5, “You shall not make for yourself any carved image ... you shall not bow down to them ... For I, the Lord your God, am a JEALOUS God!” Read also Deuteronomy 4:23,24 and Nahum 1:2. God ascertains, “I will not give My **glory** to another” (Isaiah 48:11c). When the Babel-builders said, “Let US make a name for ourselves,” the Trinitarian God said, “Let US go down and confuse their language!” (Genesis 11:4,7). King Hezekiah broke into pieces the brazen serpent of Moses to which the people were burning incense (2 Kings 18:4). Beware of bowing before the Cross or the Crucifix! Beware of kissing statues! Don’t stir up God’s jealousy! Our God is a consuming fire (Deuteronomy 4:23,24). In the New Testament, God does not sanctify any place but only the people. The people of God are the “holy temple” (Ephesians 2:19-22).

The Apostles were extremely sensitive in this matter of giving glory to God. When the lame beggar was healed, people thronged the Apostles Peter and John. They chided the people saying, “Why look so intently at us,

as though by our own power or godliness we have made this man walk?” (Acts 3:12). Their explanation of this notable miracle was, “God **glorified** His servant Jesus!” (v13). This was in a crowd of Jews.

The Apostles reacted even more sharply in a crowd of non-Jews. It was in Lystra. Following the healing of a cripple, the locals shouted, “The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men” (Acts 14:11). They brought garlands and were about to sacrifice bulls for the Apostles. The Apostles tore their clothes and cried out, “Men, why are do doing such things?” (vv14,15). The Apostles ran away from garlands, but we preachers run after garlands! This explains why we don’t witness such notable miracles even in our highly advertised healing crusades. God does not entrust us with His miracle power because we have not learnt to handle people’s applause.

When we learn to give God all the glory, the rat race among Christian ministries will end. The Apostles were not Seminary-trained, but look at their superb missiological understanding: 1 Corinthians 3:6, “I (Paul) planted, Apollos watered, but **God** gave the increase!” Following an evangelistic message,

a man from the audience hugged Evangelist D.L. Moody with the words, “What a preacher!” These words drove the Evangelist to cry before God with tears and make a recommitment. The same man from the audience, after the next day’s sermon, exclaimed to Mr. Moody, “What a Saviour!” Before climbing the pulpit, let’s always pray, “Lord, let me never touch Your glory!” The jealous God didn’t spare even a non-Christian orator when he did not give God the glory as the audience applauded him (Acts 12:21-23).

Sing —

*Blessing and honour and glory be Thine,
And glory be Thine, and glory be Thine,
Blessing and honour and glory be Thine,
For Thou art on the Throne.*

*Praise Him, Praise Him,
All ye saints adore Him,
Praise Him, Praise Him,
For He is on the Throne — Hallelujah!*

Conclusion

The “Reformation is not complete yet. It’s always in stages. It will go on till the Second Coming of Christ —

Acts 3:19-21, “Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of **refreshing** may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send Jesus Christ ... whom heaven must receive until the times of **restoration** of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.” Christ cleansed the Temple during His First Coming (Matthew 21:12,13). He will continue cleansing His Church through the Scripture that He might present it to Himself “a glorious Church” (Ephesians 5:25-27).

On our part, we must keep on **protesting** the unscriptural and promoting the Scriptural! Everything that can be shaken must be shaken so that only that which cannot be shaken may remain (Hebrews 12:27).

“We can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth” (2 Corinthians 13:8). We may earn bitter enemies and even face martyrdom because of teaching the truth (Galatians 4:16; Mark 13:9). But only the truth can make people free (John 8:32). Let’s continue to love those who oppose us, but keep saying, **“Here I stand!”**

Let me close this write-up with a hymn composed by Martin Luther in German, based on Psalm 46, and later translated into English. This hymn became the great rallying cry of the Reformation —

1. *A mighty fortress is our God,
a bulwark never failing;
Our helper He, amid the flood
of mortal ills prevailing.
For still our ancient foe
doth seek to work us woe —
His craft and power are great,
and armed with cruel hate
On earth is not his equal.*

2. *Did we in our own strength confide,
our striving would be losing;
Were not the right Man on our side,
the Man of God’s own choosing.
Dost ask who that may be?
Christ Jesus; it is He;
Lord Saboath His Name,
from age to age the same,
And He must win the battle.*

3. *And though this world,
with devils filled,
Should threaten to undo us,
we will not fear, for God hath willed
His truth to triumph through us,
The prince of darkness grim,
We tremble not for him;
His rage we can endure,
For lo, his doom is sure;
One little Word shall fell him.*

4. *The Word above all earthly powers,
No thanks to them, abideth;
The Spirit and the gifts are ours
through Him who with us sideth.
Let goods and kindred go,
this mortal life also;
The body they may kill:
God’s truth abideth still;
His Kingdom is forever. Amen.*

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Studies on specific themes
and select books of the Bible
- ❑ **Doctrinal Essays**
Corrective Teaching to uphold
Sound Doctrines of the Bible
- ❑ **Youth Matters**
Practical Guidelines to Young Men
and Young Women for Successful Living
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on Christian Leadership
- ❑ **Missionary Challenge**
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the Great Commission of Christ
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