

WHERE DID THE REFORMATION FAIL?

Richard Oostra

After the emperor Constantine endorsed Christianity, a new period for the Christian church began. Persecutions ended, the church became institutionalized, and many unconverted now were eager to join the church.

Christianity in the early days had many segments and various views on Scripture, but within a while, the emperor called certain church leaders together and formulated a unified system of interpretation of Scripture. These interpretations became the standard of beliefs for the church, and other groups of thought were no longer tolerated. He re-instated the Old Testament priesthood system that Jesus had fully nullified. The Bible was only permitted in the Latin language and only available to the priests.

The church now became a system controlled by men and unified with the government of Rome. All those who had different views were declared heretics and were persecuted. For 1200 years, the church ruled with an iron fist in what we now call the Dark Ages!

In approximately 1500 A.D., various reformations took place, and this breaking away from the Church of Rome occurred in many countries, becoming not only a political movement but also a religious event. The Bible again became available in the language of the people, and salvation became a matter of faith. The church, however, still remained government-related. As a result, many precepts the former church had brought in were continued in Protestant churches then as well as even today. This connection of church and state hindered the church to the extent that she never became the New Testament church that Jesus intended her to be.

Let's look at a few of these errors.

Human Control (Ephesians 4:10-11)

It was Jesus' intent to build his church, giving His followers only the mandate to proclaim His Kingdom available to those who wanted to follow Him. His desire was to rule His church through godly elders who knew His Word and could hear His voice (John 10:3, 16, 17). His divine plan was to equip men for spiritual abilities (Ephesians 4:11) for the functioning of the church as a mystical body that would continue His ministry on earth. During the Dark Ages, however, with men controlling the church, the New Testament supernatural happenings began to cease, and because of a continual, unbiblical church system, we still do not see those happenings today.

Hierarchy and Clerical System (I Peter 2:9)

Jesus wanted enable His followers with supernatural, spiritual gifts to serve in His church. These various ministries were not a rank for control, but were gifts for service. Today having neglected Christ's control, we have also lost His enabling of people for divine service. Instead, we have developed our own system of theology and formed our own schools for training people ourselves for earthly church leadership.

By taking the Lord's matters into our own hands, we have lost the centrality of Christ in the church and established a division between clergy and laity. While the church was meant to be a kingdom of priests, all with different functions, we have now developed a spectator audience and deactivated over 90% of the body of believers.

The Message Preached (Luke 9:11)

The message Jesus instructed his servants to preach was the message of His offer of salvation and kingship. Today, most churches will proclaim a message about Jesus, but refrain from any harsh doctrines Jesus proclaimed.

Jesus wants full control over His church and also control in the lives of the believers. We have no business preaching a message on salvation while ignoring the preaching of obedience to our King. Easy believer-ism has in most cases removed Christ's message of discipleship, a message requiring holiness by obedience to his Word.

Jesus the Central Focus (Matthew 12:20)

Do you now see why most churches do not grow? It is not only because of the gross errors practised ever since the Dark Ages, but also a removing of the authority of Christ. Jesus promised that if He and His message are truly lifted up He will draw people to himself and put believers in harmony together.

On the other hand, He also warned us that those who do not gather with Him would soon scatter. Oh, yes, we may install legislation of church membership, or use fear if they depart, or a strong pulpit man to keep people together, but in the long run, these measures will not work. It is then that some will start another church that eventually will practice the same errors.

Christ's Governorship (Philippians 2:31)

Jesus instructed us to place our interests in his Kingdom (rulership) first, yet the world today is filled with religious groups masquerading as greedy ministers of Christ and competing against each other for people to join their group.

If all congregations were governed by Jesus Christ and not focussed on themselves, they would love each other and work together for a common goal. Jesus would be in their midst, and the church would become that mystical body Jesus intended her to be.

Church's Focus (Matt 6:19,20)

The pre-Reformation church became focussed on power and the storing up of wealth. Ironically, today's churches have not changed much in that respect.

The church that Jesus intended was to be a ministering body—not a body that spent its resources on buildings or a system of hirelings; instead, it was to be a body reaching out to the physical and spiritual needy. That church was to be a body building up believers in the faith, enabling them in various ways to be servants of Christ. Within that body, God's Word was to be obeyed, biblical eldership was to be practised, and the Lord's presence felt.

In most cases, these are practices that the Reformation has not accomplished, and for these errors, we must be willing to repent so that we will become an end-time church (big or small) that will be tribulation-proof when we know God's Spirit to be in our midst and guiding us in all things.

Note: This article is based on the book, *Church on the Rock(s)*. It can be obtained by contacting the author's website: www.RichardOostra.com