

Protestant Reformation

What Was the Reformers' Greatest Conviction?

By Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Part 4 of a series. [Read part 3.](#)

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The greatest thing that stands out about the Reformers, said Martyn Lloyd-Jones, is that they were men who went back to the Bible. They said, "Nothing matters but this."

"Men of Granite!"

As he continued his address, *Remembering the Reformation*,^[1] Martyn Lloyd-Jones remarked upon the character of the Protestant Reformers — and its source:

Here are men worthy of the name! Heroic, big men, men of granite!...In an age of pygmies such as this, it is a good thing to read about great men...here were giants in the land, able men, men of gigantic intellect, men on a big scale in the realm of mind and logic and reason. Then look at their zeal, look at their courage! I frankly am an admirer of a man who can make a queen tremble! [He refers, of course, to John Knox.]

These are the things that strike us at once about these men. But then I suppose that the most notable thing of all was the fact of the burning conviction that dwelt within them; this is what made them the men they were.

"Nothing Matters But This"

But then he went to the heart of the matter, the greatest of their convictions:

What were these convictions? We have already been referred to some of them; let me add some others. What did these men believe? What did they teach? What were their characteristics? Here is the first, obviously: their belief in the authority of this Book. The pre-Reformation church was moribund and asleep under a scholastic philosophy that displayed great cleverness, with intellectual and critical acumen. But it was all in the clouds and dealt with vague generalities and concepts, while the people were kept in utter ignorance. The men who did the teaching and the lecturing argued about philosophic concepts, comparing this view with that, and indulging in refinements and minutiae. But, in contrast, the great thing that stands out about the Reformers was that they were men who went back to the Bible. They said, nothing matters but this.

For this generation, in which the Evangelical church is falling into the grip of a strange mixture of postmodern intellectualism, secular humanism, medieval mysticism, and perspectivalist love of paradox, Dr. Lloyd-Jones' next words are a searing indictment of the church's departure from the Bible, and a call to "move forward by going back"

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This, they said, is the Word of God in the Old Testament and in the New Testament, this is not theory, supposition, or speculation, this, is the living God speaking to men: He gave His Word to the prophets, they wrote it; He gave it to the apostles, they recorded it; and here it is for us. Here we have something which is in a category of its own, the living Word of God speaking to men about Himself, about men, about the only way they can come together and live together. They stood for the authority of the Bible, not for scholastic philosophy.

You see, my friends, the importance of looking back at the Reformation. Is not this the greatest need at the present time, to come back to this Word of God? Is this authoritative or is it not? Am I in any position to stand above this Book, and

look down at it and say, That is not true, this or that must come out? Is my mind, is my twentieth-century knowledge the ultimate judge and decider as to the veracity of this teaching? It is since the time, [a hundred and fifty] years ago, when that notion began to creep in, that the church has been going down. But the Reformers based everything upon this Book as the Word of God to man, which they were not to judge but to preach.

And you and I have got to return to this. There can be no health, there can be no authority in the church, until she comes back to this basic authority. It is idle to talk about this as the Word of God in a sense which still allows you and me to decide that certain things in it are not true! The Book hangs together, the Lord Jesus Christ declared the Old Testament. After His resurrection, He took His disciples through the books of Moses and the Psalms and the prophets. He says, I am there, let Me show you Myself there. Read them, why have you not understood them? Why have you not believed all that the prophets have written? That was their trouble, it has always been the trouble of the church in periods of declension, and we must come back to the Protestant Reformers' position and recognize that we have no authority apart from the authority of this Word of God.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones next asked, "What is the greatest Reformational battle of our time?" — and we find that it was also one of the key battles of the 16th century Reformation. We shall take up this question in our next article.

Next: The Greatest Reformational Battle of Our Time

References:

1. Quotations in this article are from D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, "Remembering the Reformation" in *Knowing the Times: Addresses Delivered on Various Occasions, 1942-1977* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth. 1989).

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