

Community of Constant Reformation

2 Timothy 3:14-17

Today is Reformation Sunday. Many churches and denominations commemorate the last Sunday of October as Reformation Sunday every year.

[Martin Luther \(1483-1546\)](#) nailed his 95 Theses to the door of [the Wittenberg Castle Church in Germany](#) on October 31, 1517, challenging the Catholic Church's practice of selling indulgences and calling for a debate on church practices. This act sparked widespread discussion and led to significant religious and cultural changes throughout Europe.

Since the Reformation in the 16th century, people have believed that churches need to be constantly re-formatted. This is because the church is not the Kingdom of God, but rather a shadow and forerunner of the Kingdom on earth. The church needs to be continually transformed so that it can be used by God to reveal the value and power of His Kingdom.

Let us think about Israel. When Israel had been enslaved in Egypt, they worshiped the idols in Egypt and did not repent and return to God.

“And I said to them, “Cast away the detestable things on which your eyes feast, every one of you, and do not defile yourselves with the idols of Egypt; I am the Lord your God.” But they rebelled against me and would not listen to me; not one of them cast away the detestable things on which their eyes feasted, nor did they forsake the idols of Egypt.” (Ezekiel 20:7-8 NRSV)

After 40 years of wilderness life, the Israelites were about to enter the promised land. But God told Moses about their betrayal despite experiencing God’s special grace of protection and provision in the wilderness.

“The Lord said to Moses, “Soon you will lie down with your ancestors. Then this people will begin to prostitute themselves to the foreign gods in their midst, the gods of the land into which they are going; they will forsake me, breaking my covenant that I have made with them. My anger will be kindled against them on that day. I will forsake them and hide my face from them; they will become easy prey, and many terrible troubles will come upon them. On that day they will say, ‘Have not these troubles come upon us because our God is not in our midst?’ On that day I will surely hide my face on account of all the evil they have done by turning to other gods.” (Deuteronomy 31:16-18 NRSV)

Their betrayal of God persisted relentlessly until the moment of their ultimate destruction.

“I brought you into a fertile land to eat its fruit and rich produce. But you came and defiled my land and made my inheritance detestable. The priests did not ask, ‘Where is the Lord?’ Those who deal with the law did not know me; the leaders rebelled against me. The prophets prophesied by Baal, following worthless idols.” (Jeremiah 2:7-8 NIV)

Further, in the New Testament, Jesus criticized the Pharisees and teachers of the law in Matthew 23, harshly reprimanding them seven times with the phrase, ‘Woe to you.’ He even said, “**And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?**” (Matthew 15:3 NRSV).

All these scriptures speak loudly to us that as God’s people, we need to check on our spiritual state and strive for constant transformation. Are you experiencing personal growth? Are you a better person than you were last year or two years ago? If you are growing in your faith, what are the reasons for this growth? If not, why do you think that is?

Martin Luther says, “**Now the Church is not wood and stone, but the company of believing people; one must hold to them, and see *how they believe, live and teach.***”

How can we continue the Reformation of the 16th century today? How can we, the community of God, be transformed so that we can exercise our influence on the world for its transformation?

First, we have to return to the Bible repeatedly.

Let us read the scripture on the screen together.

“**But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.**” (2 Timothy 3:14-17 NIV)

2 Timothy was written while the Apostle Paul was imprisoned in Rome for the second time before his execution. He seemed to be prepared for his imminent death and was sharing his last will with his spiritual son, Timothy. This was a time of increasing persecution for Christians. God’s message is straightforward.

“***Even while facing persecution, maintain a strong foundation in the Holy Scriptures. Prepare and equip others with the Holy Scriptures so that they can accomplish every good work.***” (The Holy Scriptures, Equipping people with the Scriptures, Good Work.)

In our Wesleyan church tradition, we have “[The Wesleyan Quadrilateral](#)”, a tool that helps us interpret or understand questions about Christian beliefs and practices. They are “Scripture,” “tradition,” “reason,” and “experience.” The Scripture holds supremacy over tradition, reason, and experience, meaning that the other parts of the quadrilateral must be guided by Scripture. Methodist theologian [Albert Outler](#) coined the phrase “[The Wesleyan Quadrilateral](#)” in 1964. However, he regretted making the phrase because he had noticed a tendency for people to try to equate the Scripture with tradition, reason, and experience.

One of the concepts of the Reformation in the 16th century was [Sola Scriptura](#), which means “[the Scripture only](#).” According to this concept, the Bible is the sole and ultimate authority for Christian faith and life above any traditions or teachings of the church or the world. It emphasizes that Scripture contains all knowledge necessary for salvation and holiness. So when we hold on to the teachings of the Scripture, we can be reformed.

Second, when we follow the grace of God, we can be in a state of reformation.

What is grace? “[Grace is God's presence and power to create, heal, forgive, reconcile, and transform human hearts, communities, and the entire creation. Wherever God is present, there is grace!](#)”

Based on the definition of grace, when we experience God’s grace, we can be healed, reconciled, and transformed, which means we can be reformed.

Last Sunday, we had time to think about the practice of our [Koinonia](#) (fellowship). John Wesley envisioned 'social holiness' as a natural outgrowth of the 'fellowship' of God's people, who encountered God’s divine presence and transformative power. He believed that when God's people follow God’s grace into the world and actively participate in His work, they can bring social holiness as a tangible reality to the world.

Lastly, as we focus on evangelistic ministry, we can be continually reformed.

Please join me in reading the Scripture on the screen. “[All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.](#)” (2 Timothy 3:16-17 NIV)

Why do we need to be trained with the Bible? When our service to others is grounded in the Bible, we can be transformed through our ministries and become God’s means of grace, allowing people to experience His grace through us. Let me quote Mark Knoll and Carolyn Nystrom on the Reformation.

“Unfortunately, historians can only look backward, and therefore it falls to practitioners by their actions to show if the Reformation is really over. Yet asking whether the Reformation is over may not even be the most pertinent question. It may be more to the point to ask other questions: *Is God truly going to draw people from every tribe and tongue and people and nation—and major Christian tradition—to worship together the Lamb who was slain? Can he really make of them—all these tongues and peoples and traditions—a single kingdom united in the body of his Son Jesus Christ? Should believers in an all-powerful, all-merciful God doubt that such signs and wonders might still take place?*”

(Mark Noll & Carolyn Nystrom, *Is the Reformation Over?* (2005), 251)

The answer is a big “yes.” As we continually examine our beliefs, lifestyle, and teaching by consistently referencing the Bible, and by embracing God's grace within our community and beyond, while prioritizing our evangelistic efforts, we can be transformed into a faithful community of God.

On April 23, 1968, Rev. Albert Outler gave a sermon at the ceremony that created The United Methodist Church. His sermon was titled “*Visions and Dreams-The Unfinished Business of an Unfinished Church.*” He expressed his hope for the new church in his sermon. “*We seek to be a church truly Catholic, truly evangelical, and truly reformed. This is not a proposal, not even indirectly, for any specific reform yours or mine or anybody else’s. It is, however, an open advocacy of the idea of reform and of “the Protestant principle” of *semper reformanda*, perennial Reformation (always reforming). This, then, is our birthday, a day to celebrate, a day to remember, a day for high hopes and renewed commitments.*”

We need to be a church that is constantly reforming together.