

Bible Study No.1 **TheBig 4 Reformation Statements**

'BIBLE ALONE'

4 studies by Roger Green

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*" 'Bible Alone' was a key principle of the Protestant Reformation and remains one of the most striking differences between Protestants & Catholics; that the final authority in all matters of faith and morals is found **only** in the written word of God. Other authorities and sources of knowledge will have their place – such as reasoning, our experience of the world, and the traditions and teachings of other Christians. But the final and overruling authority belongs to God, as he speaks to us through the Scriptures. The Protestant Reformers also saw that if the Bible is God's own inspired word, and the supreme authority, then two other things about Scripture are also true about the Scriptures. Firstly the Scriptures are **sufficient** – that is, the Bible contains all we need to be saved and to live a godly life. Roman Catholicism accepts that the Bible has authority, but claims that it is not sufficient – that God had additional authoritative revelation to pass on, and that came through the oral unwritten traditions passed down and authorised by the Roman Catholic Church". "In Roman Catholicism there are two places where special information about God can be found –the Bible and the traditions of the church. While there are two sources of special revelation, there remains only one authority: the Church of Rome itself. The Church of Rome claims the God-given authority to determine how to interpret the Bible and which traditions are truly apostolic and how they should be understood."*

"The word of God comes to us from outside, and stands as God's gracious gift to us, to teach, encourage, correct and train us. We should humbly and gladly accept the gracious word that comes to us from God, and submit to it – not attempt to add our own traditions and teachings to it."

(from 'Nothing in My Hand I Bring' Ray Galea p57,50-51,74)

- 1. What are some of the differences (in teaching and practise) that you have observed between Roman Catholic and Protestant churches?**

2. The Question of Authority;-

- (i) What was Jesus' view of the Old Testament? (Pick any 3 of these references)**

Matthew 4:4 & 10, 5:17-22, 11:10, 12:3, 19:1-6, 19:18,19, 21:42-44, 22:29-32, 22:37-40, 23:2,3

Mark 7:1-13, & 12:36 Luke 4:21, 16:29-31, 24:25-27, 24:44-47 John 5:39-47 & 10:35

- (ii) What was Jesus' view of his own teaching? (Pick 3 of these references)**

John 5:24, 6:63, 7:15-17, 8:26-28, 8:43-47, 12:48-50, 14:10, 15:3,7,26, 17:6-8, 18:37

(iii) What was Jesus' view of the apostles' authority? (Pick 3 of these references)

Matthew 10:17-20, 10:40-42, 16:13-20 (cf. Lk 11:52), 28:16-20 Luke 24:45-49

John 14:25-26, 15:15-16, 15:26-27, 16:12-15, 17:13-18, 20:21-23 Acts 1:1-8

3. What does 2 Timothy 3:14-17 teach us about:

(i) The authority of Scripture?

(ii) The purpose of the Scriptures?

(iii) The sufficiency of the Scriptures?

4. Read psalm 19:7-11

(i) What are the characteristics of the Word of the Lord?

(ii) What does following the Word of the Lord lead to?

5. How would you respond to the following statements;-

(i) 'I believe the Bible is the Word of God, but I am not convinced that it is always right on some historical and scientific details.'

(ii) 'It is more important to have a genuine relationship with God than it is to have a thorough understanding of the Bible.'

6. Compare and contrast the two quotes below. Do you think the difference is significant? Why? What implications flow from holding each view?

The following quote is taken from the 39 Articles of Religion (found in the back of the Anglican prayer book) date back to 1562. They still remain an important reference point for Anglicans in matters of doctrine.

"Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary for salvation; so whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of the Faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation." (Article vi)

"The Romish doctrine concerning Purgatory, Pardons, Worshipping & Adoration, as well as Images & Reliques, and also invocation of the Saints, is a fond thing vainly invented, and grounded upon no warrant of Scripture, but rather repugnant to the Word of God." (Article xii)

"Bishops, Priests & Deacons, are not commanded by God's Law, either to vow the estate of single life, or to abstain from marriage: therefore it is lawful for them, as for all other Christian men, to marry at their own discretion, as they shall judge the same to serve better to godliness." (Article xxxii)

The following quote is taken from the Catechism of the Catholic Church based on the 2nd Vatican Council.

82 the Church, to whom the transmission and interpretation of Revelation is entrusted, "does not derive her certainty about all revealed truths from the holy Scriptures alone. Both Scripture and Tradition must be accepted and honored with equal sentiments of devotion and reverence." ⁴⁴

85 "The task of giving an authentic interpretation of the Word of God, whether in its written form or in the form of Tradition, has been entrusted to the living teaching office of the Church alone. Its authority in this matter is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ." This means that the task of interpretation has been entrusted to the bishops in communion with the successor of Peter, the Bishop of Rome.

- 7. Think it through... Where do you struggle with the authority of scripture in your life? What steps can you take to make the Bible a bigger part of your life and your relationships?**

Bible Study No.2 **The Big 4 Reformation Statements**

'CHRIST ALONE'

'Christ Alone'- not Christ plus human priests and the sacrifice of the Mass.

The following quotes are taken from 'Nothing in My Hand I Bring' Ray Galea p35,44-45 & 94). They provide helpful background to this study

Priests "By setting aside a special class of people to be 'co-priests with Christ, the Roman Catholic Church dramatically upgrade the status and nature of Christian ministers, and just as dramatically downgrade the unique and priestly work of Jesus. If Christ has done everything necessary as our great high priest to wash away our sins, cleanse our consciences and bring us to God, why do we need an additional human priest to be inserted into the process – unless there is something unfinished or inadequate about Christ's priesthood?"

The Mass "Roman Catholicism stresses that the mass is the same sacrifice as that of the cross, because in both we have the same victim and the same offerer ... 'For the same Christ, who was once offered a bleeding victim to his heavenly Father on the cross, continues to offer himself in an unbloody manner, by the hands of his priests on our altars'. The Roman Catholic Church formally denies that the Mass repeats the 'once for all' sacrifice of the cross. Rather it is a 'renewing' or 'making present' of the same eternal offering which in essence occurs outside of time and space. However, it is very hard to see how something can be continually renewed if it was finally and definitively finished in space and time. And the New Testament is in no doubt about this – the sacrifice of Christ on the cross for our sins happened once for all, at a particular time and place in human history. The work of atonement is not ongoing. It is done and completed. And its benefits are only received by faith, not by participating in a sacramental ritual."

Mary "Growing up, like so many Catholics I was told that we present our requests to God through Mary in the same way as we ask our earthly mothers to present our requests to our fathers, who can be rather stern and distant. I am now astonished that I did not see the implications of speaking in these terms – because it surely both dishonours God the Father who loved us so much that he gave his one and only son for us, and undermines Christ, who enables us to draw near to the throne of God's grace with boldness. There is no escaping this: to insert someone else in the role of mediator says either that God the Father is still angry, or that God the Son is inadequate."

1. **From your observations how does the gospel message get diluted, distorted or deleted in our world today?**

2. **How do you respond to the person who says Christianity is arrogant, exclusive and intolerant of other views & beliefs?**

3. Read Hebrews 9:1-10. Describe the Old Testament sacrifice? What are the problems with this system?

4. Read Hebrew 9:11-28.

(i) How does Jesus' sacrifice supersede the old system of sacrifice?

(ii) List the benefits we enjoy as Christians and the ways these relate to what Christ has done for us.

| | Benefit | Christ's work for us |
|----------------|----------------|-----------------------------|
| 9:11-14 | | |
| 9:15 | | |
| 9:23-24 | | |
| 9:26-28 | | |

5. Christianity is Christ. Jesus is the perfect sacrifice for our sin & he is our great high priest . Read Hebrew 4:14-16 & Hebrews 10:19-25. How are we to respond?

- 6. Why do you think Thomas Cranmer (16th Century English reformer) inserted the following prayer right at the centre of the Anglican Communion service?**

“Almighty God, Our heavenly Father, which of thy tender mercy didst give thine only son Jesus Christ, to suffer death upon the cross for our redemption, who made there (by his one oblation[act of offering] of himself once offered) a full, perfect & sufficient sacrifice for the sins of the whole world, and who did institute & in his holy gospel command us to continue a perpetual memory of that precious death until he comes again.”

- 7. Read 1 Timothy 2:5-6. Is there any place for praying to saints, Mary, ancestors etc.?**

- 8. Are you confident in the completed work of Christ? How does this show/not show in your attitudes and actions?**

- 9. What are some of the dangers & distractions for us that may take the focus off Christ and his sacrificial death for us? If Christ is central in our lives and in our church what will that look like in practice?**

Bible Study No.3 **The Big 4 Reformation Statements**

'GRACE ALONE'

The following quotes are taken from 'Nothing in My Hand I Bring' Ray Galea p73,77-7). They provide helpful background reading.

"Salvation within Christianity is a work of God not man from beginning to end, and is given freely and undeservedly through Christ. Grace is generosity. It's when something is given purely out of the goodness and kindness of the giver, regardless of the worthiness of the recipient – indeed despite the unworthiness of the recipient."

"According to Roman Catholicism, 'grace' is not only God's free favour and generosity: it is also a kind of power or assistance which God gives to help us. The initial grace of forgiveness and cleansing that God grants us, and which for Catholics occurs at baptism, cannot be earned or merited. But the graces God supplies throughout the rest of the Christian life can be merited."

"In Protestantism justification happens once. It is a once-for-all declaration by God of 'not guilty' on the sinner, because of the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ. In Catholicism justification is a process which happens over time, involving the imparting of righteousness by God in co-operation with the believer."

"For Protestantism, man is spiritually dead and salvation is all through God's unmerited favour (his grace); for Catholicism, man is spiritually weak and fallen, but with some assistance from God (some special power or 'grace') is capable of co-operating with God's call, and meriting further 'grace' through good works."

"Roman Catholicism is a sacramental religion. The sacraments (Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Penance, Anointing of the Sick, Holy Orders & Matrimony) are the chief means by which the 'graces' of God are imparted to the believer so that the process of justification can continue. By duly and worthily participating in the sacraments, the believer receives grace, and so grows in sanctification and righteousness, in the hope that he or she will be justified at the last."

Introduction . . . Describe a time when you were completely surprised by a gift?

1. Read Ephesians 2:1-10.

(i) What contrasts can you find in this passage?

(ii) What does God do?

(iii) What is the relationship between grace and the good things we do as believers?

2. Read Titus 2:11-3:8

- (i) What are the implications of 3:3 for how we understand grace?**

- (ii) What's the relationship between 'grace' and the coming of Christ?**

- (iii) What are the benefits of Christ's grace for believers?**

- (iv) What is the relationship between grace and the good things we do as believers?**

3. How would explain the concept of grace in the Bible? Can you think of an illustration that helps to explain grace? Where would you turn in the bible to explain God's grace? (Hint: If you are stuck for where to look read some of Jesus parables in Luke.)

4. From the quotes above what is the key differences between Protestant & Catholic understanding of grace?

5. Read Romans 6:1-4

- (i) What temptation is Paul imagining in v1? How does he respond to it?**

- (ii) How does grace motivate us to live righteously?**

6. Spend time . . .

- . . . praising God for His grace and thanking Him for all His grace means to you.**
- . . . praying for people you know who don't understand or who don't accept Christ's grace..**
- . . praying for yourselves, that you would live remembering grace and responding to it rightly.**

Bible Study No.4 **The Big 4 Reformation Statements**

'FAITH ALONE'

The following quotes are taken from 'Nothing in My Hand I Bring' Ray Galea p69,62. They provide helpful background reading.

"Faith is a personal attitude of trust and dependency. In fact, the word 'trust' is a good everyday replacement for 'faith' in most places where you meet the word in the Bible. Faith is by no means just an intellectual assent that something is true. It is a personal trust that something is true. But trust in what? Trust in the Bible is trust in God, and especially in the promises of God – such as those promises that come to us in the gospel. Faith is an open hand ready to receive what God promises to give us in Christ. By its nature, faith offers nothing and contributes nothing. It simply trusts in Another, and receives salvation from Him as a free gift."

"Put simply, the Catholic view is that justification by faith is a process, beginning with baptism and continuing throughout our lives, by which God acts to forgive us and then with our co-operation change us by his Spirit to become more righteous and acceptable to himself. He makes us righteous, infusing justice and righteousness into us over time, with our own efforts and good works, and the sacraments of the church, playing key roles in how this happens. Thus, when we arrive at Judgement Day, the basis on which God will judge us is in part what Christ did on our behalf to take away our sins, but also whether we have become sufficiently righteous in our own character to be worthy of salvation."

By contrast, Protestants point to what the Bible says very clearly in numerous places about justification by faith – that justification is an event not a process. It's a one-off declaration by God that the sinner is cleared of all guilt, and is thus completely blameless and righteous in his sight because of – and only because of – the sacrifice of Christ on his behalf. According to the Bible, when God justifies us, he doesn't do it gradually by infusing righteousness into us; he declares us righteous when we put our faith in Jesus Christ.

Justification, then, refers to what God does for us once and for all, not what he does in us gradually over time."

Read Romans 3:20-26

1. What 'law' does Paul have in mind here? What is the purpose of the law? Why can no one be justified by keeping the law? (See Romans 3:9-20)

2. What is the 'righteousness from God'? How does it become ours?

3. What is the basis of faith? (In what are we to put our faith?)

Read James 2:14-26.

4. Paul says we are justified by faith not by works. James says we are justified by faith AND works. Both are answering pastoral issues: Paul is confronting the notion that faith is largely irrelevant to the person who believes their good works will justify them before God. This is a type of UNDER-realised faith – “my works will justify me, why do I need faith?” So, he is arguing for the need for faith. James is confronting the notion that good deeds are largely irrelevant for the person who has faith. This is a type of OVER-realised faith – “I have faith, works are now of no consequence”. So James is arguing that good works are not irrelevant for they are the ‘fruit’ of faith.

(i) What is the relationship between faith and our actions (good deeds)?

(ii) Since Paul (Romans 4:1-3, 18-25) and James both quote Abraham as their example, where do you see in Abraham’s life both these sides: raw faith in the promise of God (Paul’s point) and obedience that comes from faith (James’ point)?

5. ‘...by penance we make satisfaction for our sins ...’ (Lenten Penance, Cardinal George Pell, St. Mary’s Cathedral Sydney Jan. 2007). If we are able to do something to contribute to our salvation, how does this affect the role of Jesus’ death?

6. Are you 100% certain that if you died tonight that you would go to heaven? Why or why not?

Great Thoughts on Faith . . .

“Though he slay me, yet will I trust in Him.” Job 13:15

“Oh, it is a living, energetic, active, mighty thing, this faith! It cannot but do good unceasingly. There is no question asked whether good works are to be done, but before the question is asked the works have been done, and there is a continuous doing of them . . . Faith is a living daring confidence in the grace of God, of such assurance that it would risk a thousand deaths.” Martin Luther, Preface to the Epistle to the Romans

“Now we shall possess a right definition of faith if we call it a firm and certain knowledge of God’s benevolence towards us founded on the truth of the freely given promise in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit.” John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion

“Faith is the conviction, whatever happens around you, that the face of your heavenly Father is turned in love toward you.” Archbishop Peter Jensen, Lectures on the Christian Life

“We are not called to have a great faith in God, but to have faith in a great God.” Unknown.