

Gradual Reformation Intolerable:

*A Brief Inquiry into the Actions of Luther and
the Writings of Calvin in Reforming the Church Against False Worship*

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Edited, Updated and Revised by C. Matthew McMahon
A Puritan's Mind, Inc. ©April 2004

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Changes made to this edition do not affect the overall language of the document, nor do they change the writer's intention. Spelling, grammar and formatting changes have been made, and modernized wording is used in specific cases to help today's reader more fully grasp the intention of the author.

The European Reformation embodies the biblical guide to the nature of true reform and the convictions needful towards an authentic transformation of a corrupt church into a holy body. This will be proven in a moment. The notion, then, of a *gradual* Reformation is at best intolerable. Martin Luther and John Calvin vigorously contended for the *Reformation* of the church, not a gradual accommodation in hopes of reform. It is true that the Reformers did not desire schism from the corrupt church. Rather, they desired to instill truth into it and recapture the virtue that had been lost under a cloak of spiritual degeneracy. Yet, after biblical reforms had begun the Roman Catholic Church could not accept such changes since they undermined their authority and power over men's conscience. The reformers knew that such changes would ultimately force the Protestants to break from the Roman Catholic Church in order to reestablish the virtues of biblical Christianity. In this way, it is impossible to deny that after the biblical Gospel settled in the hands of converted reformers, pastors and theologians of that day (as in previous biblical days) that true Reformation progressed through impositions upon certain immediate and necessary obligations in relation to ecclesiology (the regulative principle of worship and church discipline) and Sacramentology (the right administration of the sacraments).

Gradual reformation is not the matrix in which the church has functioned since its inception in the Garden of Eden. Yet, various New Testament epistles embrace a tenderness in which reformation should be accomplished, and in some instances, elementary doctrines should be taught again (e.g. Hebrews 5:12-14). It is a tragedy that

churches, at various points in their spirituality, cannot bear to hear certain doctrines or ideas lest they become overwhelmed because of their inadequacy in understanding the Bible. Nonetheless, in beginning to teach elementary doctrines again, this does not infer that the foundations of basic principles be abandoned in order to accommodate the people of God in their waywardness. It is the opinion of the reformers that a context for teaching biblically sound doctrine is only found in a church that desires to lay the principles of a biblical reformation down first, and then advance in biblical teaching from those basic fundamental maxims.

“Reformation” is defined by Webster’s Dictionary as “a 16th century religious movement marked ultimately by *rejection* or *modification* of some Roman Catholic *doctrine* and practice and *establishment* of the Protestant churches.”¹ It is the state of being “reformed.” To be “reformed” or to “reform” means, “1a) *to put or change into an improved form or condition* 1b) to amend or improve by *change* of form or *removal* of faults or abuses 2) to *put an end* to an evil by *enforcing* or introducing a *better* method or course of action, 3) to *induce* or cause to *abandon* evil ways.”² Reformation, then, confronts and changes the *status quo* in order to improve, amend, and introduce a better method of procedure. It removes, puts and end to, and abandons false or evil ways that hinder that which should already be in place. In terms of the Reformation, it is abandonment and repudiation of evil or wicked devices of men instituted in the church through false doctrines, and to establish, change and amend those ways by immediate

¹ Emphasis mine.

² Emphasis mine.

interposition of improved change to the foundations of ecclesiastical truth found in Scripture. It is a formal return to sound doctrine and truth previously eclipsed.

In considering the biblical actions of Martin Luther in Germany, we find an instantaneous imposition of reform once Luther embraces the truth of the Word of God. Luther was converted, became a priest, went to Rome, and upon his return within 2 years, set the *95 Theses* in motion. Yet, even before this, being a learned Doctor of Theology, his fame was spreading through Europe attracting students from every nearby country. Scholastic philosophy and theological methods had been undermined, and a *via moderna* of yet another sort stood in its place. Just as Jesus began his public ministry with the expulsion of the profane traffickers from the court of the temple (John 2:14ff), so Luther began his ministry by preaching and lecturing against relics and indulgences – a desire to rid the Roman Church of its abuses against the people of God. The official statement to this did not come long afterwards, but relatively quickly in the *95 Theses*. The Reformation *began* with a public protest against the traffic of indulgences that profaned and degraded the Christian religion.³ Schaff says, “After serious deliberation, without consulting any of his colleagues or friends, but following an *irresistible impulse*, Luther resolved upon a public act of unforeseen consequences.”⁴ Luther’s desire was not to break off from the church under these reforms, but to debate in the accepted manner of scholasticism on the questions raised by his *95 Theses* against indulgences. At first, Pope Leo X did not bother with the *Theses* believing it was simply the ravings of a drunken monk whose influence would soon dissipate. But when Luther’s “reforms” began to

³ Phillip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, Volume 7, Grand Rapids, MI, 1994. Page 118.

⁴ Martin Luther’s *95 Thesis*, Ages Software, 2000.

reach into the pocket of the Pope, Leo wanted him silenced. The fact that such a document was made public, and pinned on a church door, attests that this crucial move was not one done in secret. There were no pretences in Luther's actions at all.

What was Luther's response to Rome's desire for him to stop preaching the truth after the *Theses* was published? With the "stroke of an axe" the Reformation began, but was there a lapse in its continuation? Luther's mind was bound to the Word of God and unless one could convince him of his errors by its authority, he would not change his course. Even the *Theses* read, "I implore all men, by the faith of Christ, either to point out to me a better way, if such a way has been divinely revealed to any, or at least to submit their opinion to the judgment of God and of the Church."⁵ In attempting to silence Luther, Pope Leo had Prierias write a "crushing blow" against the *Theses* in Latin. Luther replied, and then Prierias replied back again. The correspondence simply widened the breach already begun by Luther. Yet, even while this correspondence was occurring, Rome had already decided to brand Luther as a heretic, and commanded him to appear in Rome within sixty days to recant his heresies. Luther met with the cardinal Cajetan three times. Cajetan attempted to dissuade Luther, through a cordial friendship, and demanded of him strict allegiance to the Pope and a retraction of his errors. Upon his last meeting, Cajetan threatened him with excommunication having already the papal mandate in his hand, and dismissed him with the words, "Revoke, or do not come again into my

⁵ Phillip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, Volume 7, Grand Rapids, MI, 1994. Page 32.

presence.”⁶ Luther did not bend. Rather, he escaped that night and rode back to Wittenberg. Is this the ploy of gradual Reformation?

Before being called to the Diet of Worms, another attempt was made to silence Luther when Pope Leo sent Karl von Miltitz to meet with him in order to, affably, aid him in recanting his heresy. After the meeting Miltitz seemed to believe he made headway with Luther, yet Luther would not think of recanting his ideas. Luther did write a humble letter to the Pope expressing his desire to reform the church, but not to recant his ideas. At the same time, Pope Leo had a papal bull drawn up which demanded his recantation, or his excommunication and death. Luther’s response to this was a public gathering of students and faculty at Wittenberg to witness the burning of the papal bull, upon reception of it. The implementations of these acts do not lend itself to a gradual reformation, but a Reformation that imposed restriction and reaction against false doctrine. In no way, and at no time, could Luther go back to the false doctrine that he had been raised upon as a monk just to appease the consciences of men. Gradual Reformation in any way is intolerable to the truth, as it was to Luther who stood upon the Word. The doctrines of grace and justification were planted in the heart of the Reformer and could not be removed. Reformation was based on these convictions brought about by the Word of God. Miller says, “Henceforth the doctrine of justification by faith alone was for him to the end of life the sum and substance of the gospel, the heart of theology, the central truth of Christianity, the article of the standing or falling church.”⁷

⁶ Schaff, Page 35.

⁷ Arthur Miller, *Miller’s Church History*, Ages software, 2000. Page 104.

Knowing Luther had not yet recanted, a Diet was called by Charles V (where Pope Leo X was represented) where Luther was summoned to Wittenberg. He was asked two questions in which he would reply in German and Latin – 1) Are these your writings? and, 2) Will you recant them? Luther asked for time in which to gather his thoughts and give a reply. Some would say this desire is exemplary of a “gradual reformation,” however, the night was spent in prayer in order to answer them in a manner in which would be glorifying to God.⁸ Luther had no intentions of recanting. Schaff says, “On the same evening Luther recollected himself, and wrote to a friend: I shall not retract one iota, so Christ help me.”⁹ Upon the next day these questions were placed on him again. His answer is the epitome of a rejection of gradual reformation, “Unless I am refuted and convicted by testimonies of the Scriptures or by clear arguments (since I believe neither the Pope nor the Councils alone; it being evident that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am conquered by the Holy Scriptures quoted by me, and my conscience is bound to the word of God: I can not and will not recant any thing, since it is unsafe and dangerous to do any thing against the conscience.” If Luther really desired to “win their affections” and appease their consciences, he could have thrown aside the Scriptures and simply bowed down to Emperor Charles V. Instead his recapitulation of Christ’s words, “If I have spoken evil, bear witness of me,” testifies to his solidity toward reforming the church through the washing of the Word of God.

After the doctrinal break made with Rome the German Reformation could not be stopped. It was excessive in terms of those “being reformed” but its excessive character

⁸ See d’Aubigne’s *History of the Reformation in the 16th Century* for Luther’s prayer that night.

⁹ Schaff, Page 53.

is not surprising. Staupitz, Luther's father of monkery, held fast to the unity of the Catholic Church and was intimidated and repelled by the *excesses* of the Reformation.¹⁰ The Pope issued a papal bull against Luther. Delegates were sent to him in order to silence him. His former mentors were encouraged to dissuade him. John Eck, the renowned Roman Catholic theologian debated his "heresies." A Diet led by the Emperor called him to recant. In all this Luther remained steadfast upon the Word of God. At this point, the Reformation for Luther did not slow down, but increased. He debated the Swiss reformers on the Lord's Supper, completed a New Testament translation in German, wrote vehemently against the abuses of the Catholic Church, and wrote voluminously for the edification of the Protestant Church. Luther's Reformation was anything but gradual. Many of his reforms were reactionary and instilled overnight. It is historically impossible to call the reforms of the German church throughout Luther's day anything but "excessive," and the opposite of a "gradual and subtle Reformation."

In the Swiss Reformation the writings of John Calvin are preeminent, and the work of Calvin in his tract *The Necessity of Reforming the Church* is the best treatment explaining his rejection of a gradual reformation over an actual biblical Reformation. His work is readily accessible, and clearly articulates the grievances of overthrowing or hindering an *actual* Reformation from taking place.

Calvin's work in Geneva is exemplary of biblical Reformation. Certainly there were extremes that should be avoided (such as the State's physical persecution of the Anabaptists, the consent to the burning of Servetus, and the abusive imprisonments

¹⁰ Schaff, Page 102.

against the Genevans themselves). Yet, even in avoiding the extremes, the Genevan model of Reformation coincides with the same foundation as the German Reformation did for Luther –once the Word of God is implemented change is inevitable.

The Necessity of Reforming the Church is a polemic written by Calvin that answers this following inquiry, “The question is not, whether the Church labors under diseases both numerous and grievous, (this is admitted even by all moderate judges,) but whether the diseases are of a kind the cure of which admits not of longer delay, and as to which, therefore, it is neither useful nor becoming to await the result of slow remedies. We are accused of rash and impious innovation, for having ventured to propose any change at all on the former state of the Church.”¹¹ Calvin wrote this tract while a diet was taking place in Spires, and desired to present it at the Diet in hopes of further reformation. The work covers three aspects of Reformation, 1) the evils which compelled the reformers to seek for remedies. 2) That the particular remedies which the Reformers employed were apt and salutary. 3) That the reformers were not at liberty any longer to delay putting forth our hand, in as much as the matter demanded instant amendment.¹² Calvin and the other Swiss reformers had been branded as working too quickly for Reformation. But Calvin replies in saying that they had not done anything too hastily, or rashly, desiring to show the necessity of their reforms over and against the intolerableness of a gradual reformation. Beza says of the work, “I know not if any writing on the subject, more nervous or solid, has been published in our age.”¹³

¹¹ John Calvin, *The Necessity of Reforming the Church*, Protestant Heritage Press, (Dallas, 1995), Page 13.

¹² Calvin, *Necessity*, 14.

¹³ Theodore Beza. *The Life of Calvin*, Page 30.

The matters which Calvin disputed in this tract are 1) the cloak of evil hiding the head doctrines of the Christian faith, 2) the neglect of the pure worship of God, 3) the sacraments being polluted and administered amiss, and 4) the government of the church being corrupted by “insufferable tyranny.”¹⁴ The biblical foundations of Christianity are overthrown when these areas of sacred doctrine are neglected, overshadowed or compromised. In reaction to this, *actual* reformation must take place.

The subtitle of the work is, “*Seriously To Undertake The Task Of Restoring The Church*, and it is dedicated, “*In The Name Of All Who Wish Christ To Reign.*” Calvin desired to repair the improper worship of God, and bring the church back to a pure worship that honors Christ. Calvin was not willing to simply “undertake” reformation, but “seriously to undertake the task” of restoring the biblical Gospel to the worship and life of the Church. In adhering to the regulative principles found in the Word of God, these principles not only regulate the worship of the church, but also “all the actions of our lives.”¹⁵ The Scriptural rule of worship should be accurate as stated and exemplified in the Word of God. This rule, or principle, distinguishes between pure worship that is of universal application by God’s command, and human folly that changes worship into “will-worship,” or the worship of “the self” instead of God. We should, as Calvin says, “strictly enjoin what he wishes us to do,” as well as “at once” reject every human invention that does not line up with the Word of God. Calvin presses the immediate need for reformation in worship that does not strictly adhere to the commandment of the Word.

¹⁴ Calvin, *Necessity* 14.

¹⁵ Calvin, 16.

Modern Evangelical Church liturgy often rejects the Regulative Principle. Calvin says such churches are seeking God in pretence¹⁶ because they do not adhere to Regulative Principle that guides the church based on the Word of God. Oftentimes novel modes of worship are invented and followed. In Calvin's day the entire church and its worship was "but mere corruption."¹⁷ Though they seem to have a show of wisdom and attract men, they are, in the end, folly. Calvin then lays forth the first principle: any worship that is not sanctioned by the Word of God should be rejected. This is the Regulative Principle stated succinctly. Immediate reform would be necessary on such issues in *any* church at *any* time.

Why is Calvin so adamant to press immediate reform instead of gradual reform? Every area of worship that is overthrown by the devices of men becomes void of worship to God's holy commandments. For instance, the Lord's Supper had been violently corrupted by the mass in Calvin's day, and turned into a "theatrical exhibition."¹⁸ It resembled more by magical arts (sacerdotalism), rather than testifying to the significance and truth of the Supper. It ceased to be worship, and became an exercise in futility.

What are the remedies to overthrow sin within the church? According to Calvin, there must be an immediate return to the legitimate worship of God and the ground of salvation. In Calvin's day this would mean the expulsion of everything in "worship" not prescribed in the Bible by good and necessary inference or by the direct institution of God – no idolatry, prayers to the saints, transubstantiation, vestments, and the like. The

¹⁶ Calvin, 19.

¹⁷ Calvin, 23.

¹⁸ Calvin, 29.

Word of God should regulate worship, the sacraments were to be administered rightly, and the government of the church should be set in order.

After setting forth the evils and the remedies to those evils concerning false worship, Calvin then pleads for “Reformation required without delay.”¹⁹ Though many would have desired to see Calvin silenced on these issues since they were creating a tumultuous season for the church, Calvin defends himself by demonstrating that such a peace devoid of reform is really a false peace, and a cloak that covers evil. And to rail against Calvin and the other reformers such as Luther (whom Calvin mentions in the work), is really to rail against God himself since these reformers were simply following the Scriptures and the warrants set therein. Calvin says, “In a corruption of sound doctrine so extreme, in a pollution of the sacraments so nefarious, in a condition of the Church so deplorable, those who maintain that we ought not to have felt so strongly, would have been satisfied with nothing less than a *perfidious tolerance*, by which we should have *betrayed* the worship of God, the glory of Christ, the salvation of men, the entire administration of the sacraments, and the government of the Church. There is something specious in the name of moderation, and tolerance is a quality which has a fair appearance, and seems worthy of praise; but the rule which we must observe at all hazards is, never to endure patiently that the sacred name of God should be assailed with impious blasphemy — that his eternal truth should be suppressed by the devil’s lies — that Christ should be insulted, his holy mysteries polluted, unhappy souls cruelly murdered, and the Church left to writhe in extremity under the effect of a deadly wound.

¹⁹ Calvin, 88.

*This would be not meekness, but indifference about things to which all others ought to be postponed.*²⁰ Such deceitful and disloyalty to the Word of God, and subsequently God himself, cannot be tolerated. Exacting the rightful administration of church discipline upon matters that deviate from the Word of God is most necessary. To have right worship prescribed by the Word, a right administration of the sacraments, and a right exercise of church discipline, are, as this tract vividly portrays, the marks of a true church.

In demonstrating the intentions behind Calvin's Genevan reforms and the necessity of their instantaneous administration, as well as seeing, by example, the actions of Martin Luther filled with doctrinal zeal, can Christians imitate these men on sure ground that they acted biblically? Christian practices should consistently be guided by the principles of the Word of God. Is there evidence in the Word of God for laying an immediate foundation of biblical principles in the church as opposed to a long gradual reform? Did Luther and Calvin follow the Bible on this? To answer this question the following biblical texts speak to the issue: Lev. 10:3; 1 Samuel 15:22, Matthew 15:9, Col. 2:23; 2 Chron. 14:4 (cf. 1 Kings 15:3); 2 Chron. 29:1; 2 Kings 22:1ff; John 2:12ff.

Lev. 10:3, 1 Samuel 15:22 and Matthew 15:9 set the standard and basis for the Regulative Principle of worship defined by Calvin above. Calvin goes to great lengths to prove this. Luther contested for the Word in this manner and the direction of the Word in every area of the church – which is why the Pope, Cardinals, and theologians of the Catholic Church were so irate with him (he placed the Word above everything and

²⁰ Calvin, 107-108.

subsequently removed their power). Leviticus 10:3 demonstrates the sanctity of God's mind in worship, "And Moses said to Aaron, "This is what the LORD spoke, saying: 'By those who come near Me I must be regarded as holy; And before all the people I must be glorified.' " So Aaron held his peace." Here we see that the worshipper will sanctify the Lord in his worship to Him, or God will sanctify Himself in judgment against the worshipper (as Nadab and Abihu had been killed by God for offering strange fire). 1 Samuel 15:22 says, "Then Samuel said: "Has the LORD *as great* delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, As in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, *And* to heed than the fat of rams." In this instance Saul had taken it upon himself to do what he wanted in worshipping God without the sanction of God or the help of Samuel, and so the rebuke is given – God disdains self-imposed worship offered up by selfish hearts. And Matthew 15:9 states, "And in vain they worship Me, Teaching *as* doctrines the commandments of men." Here the Lord Jesus explains that men will replace the true worship of the church with that which is expedient or satisfying for themselves. Jesus teaches that such worship leads to vanity, i.e. it is waste of time, and brings condemnation. God must be sanctified in worship (set apart and regarded as holy, honored with a right heart and right sacrifices, and worshipped in the context of His prescriptions of worship) not the vain self-flattery of a man made will worship.

Calvin spent some time working through Colossians 2:23a, "Which things have indeed a shew of wisdom in will worship..." Will worship is that which is fabricated and implemented in the stead of true worship. It is devised by men, and hinders communion with God. It may have a show of wisdom, i.e. people participating in it may think it is

quite good and helpful, but in the end it simply tears people away from Christ and leads them astray. It is false worship, and causes a rift between the worshipper and the Lord. Experience does not dictate worship, or the forms of worship. Rather, the Word of God is the only rule by which worship is defined by what God commands and sanctions. Any attempt at addition or subtraction to His Word is done at the peril of men's souls.

Luther's mind was set ablaze when he understood the grace of God. He could not contain himself. He was thrust forth over a series of providences that pressed him ever forward towards the Reformation of the church. Calvin's defense of his actions, or all the actions of the Reformers, is based on the urgency of adhering to the Scriptural warrants for worship. If anything else is substituted or taken away, then true worship cannot be obtained. In this respect, the question must be asked of today's theologians, pastors and laymen, "Do the Scriptures warrant an immediate change or a gradual change in the Reformation of the church?" Calvin and Luther opted for an immediate change. Though the Scriptures command reform, and constitute that which is right for worship, do they also demonstrate the time in which reformation should take place? The answer is a resounding "yes." The Old Testament and the New Testament abound with examples of instant reform in the church bringing the people back to a right worship of God.

Most of the kings of Israel and Judah (God's "anointed" leaders) did not follow His Word. They implemented false worship to foreign gods for personal or national expediency. Some kings brought the people back to biblical worship. Time could be spent with the partial reform of Asa (though partial reform, even if it is enacted

immediately, is *never* ultimately beneficial. (cf. 2 Chron. 14:4)). Better lessons can be gleaned from the complete reforms of Hezekiah and Josiah.

Hezekiah and Josiah demonstrated an immediate and complete reform over degenerated worship. Concerning Hezekiah, 2 Chronicles 29:2-3 says, “And he did *that which was* right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that David his father had done. He in the first year of his reign, in the first month, opened the doors of the house of the LORD, and repaired them.” He continued to restore true worship, which would degenerate after his death in the reign of Manasseh, one of the most wicked and ruthless kings of Israel. In verses 35-36 it says, “So the service of the house of the LORD was set in order. And Hezekiah rejoiced, and all the people, that God had prepared the people: for the thing was *done* suddenly.” The Hebrew *~AtPi* (*pithowm*) for “done suddenly” means “suddenly *or surprisingly*.” This cleansing of the temple and restoration of true worship was done “at once.” It was “unexpected” by the people, so to speak. It is clear that Hezekiah had the complete restoration of worship in mind, not by gradual means, but with immediacy, and according to the Word of God.

Josiah’s account in the Biblical record gleams with fervency in his restoration and reformation of worship. Israel’s history here mirrors the darkness of the Roman Catholic reign and the rise of the Reformers. Manasseh and Amon had plunged the people into false worship, *again*. They were burning their children in the hands of Molech, and worshipping on the high places. Manasseh has the longest reign of any king, and he was the most wicked of them all. During his reign Baal was a household name. Amon was as wicked as Manasseh, his father, and the people of God continued to have a famine from

the truth of the Word. Under their reigns, the Law of God was lost. After the death of Amon, Josiah rose to the throne and began to reign at 8 years old. Once he attained a mature age (eighteen) he reigned powerfully. He began a restoration of worship even before he had received the book of the Law that would have been discovered some 7 years later. After finding and reading the Law, 2 Kings 23:3-4 records the following, “And the king stood by a pillar, and made a covenant before the LORD, to walk after the LORD, and to keep his commandments and his testimonies and his statutes with all *their* heart and all *their* soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book. And all the people stood to the covenant. And the king commanded Hilkiah the high priest, and the priests of the second order, and the keepers of the door, to bring forth out of the temple of the LORD all the vessels that were made for Baal, and for the grove, and for all the host of heaven: and he burned them without Jerusalem in the fields of Kidron, and carried the ashes of them unto Bethel.” The King had torn his robes and reinstated worship based on the book of the Law. He wasted no time and immediately restored the worship of God. He burned everything that desecrated the house of the Lord down at the river Kidron, and killed all the idolatrous priests who offered up worship to false gods. He crushed the statues of Molech, burned the chariots of the Sun, smashed every graven image into dust and destroyed all the altars that Ahaz had set up years earlier. He even burned the bones of dead men in the sepulchers because the people were worshipping them. Then, 2 Kings 23:22 records these words, “And the king commanded all the people, saying, Keep the Passover unto the LORD your God, as *it is* written in the book of this covenant.” The key here is “as it is written in the book of the covenant.”

Josiah immediately and with resolve restored worship to its biblical paradigm. This is what Luther had done, and what Calvin had contended for in his polemic.

Jesus was no less zealous for the institution of God's true worship in His house than these righteous kings were - He was more so. As noted briefly at the beginning, Jesus began His public ministry by cleansing the temple. In John 2:14-17 we have this account, "And He found in the temple those who sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the moneychangers doing business. When He had made a whip of cords, He drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changers' money and overturned the tables. And He said to those who sold doves, "Take these things away! Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise!" Then His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up." The modern evangelical church would never have succumbed to this. They would have set up a booth next to the other vendors, become their friends, and would have attempted to win them to the "truth" over a course of time by *identification*. Jesus, on the other hand, drove these men out with a whip. Why the contrast? Christ had an unmitigated zeal for the truth of the Word and a desire to see true worship instituted (cf. John 4:24). Immediately Christ overturned the "accepted" manner of worship and merchandising in the temple, to demonstrate the zeal, or fervor of spirit, for the worship of God. Reformation for Christ was immediate, and used a strategy to overthrow the *status quo* by building a new church through his apostles alongside of the corrupt church. In the cleansing of the temple, we see a departure from the false status of worship, to a recreation of the full reality of worship in the church that Christ came to build. Jesus had no time to waste, and in the course of

three years taught his disciples to turn the world upside down, as Acts 17:6 says, “These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also.”

For the modern church, there are many lessons to heed both from the Scriptures and the Reformers who implemented the Scriptures. First, though more knowledge may flame more zeal and reform over time (as in the case with Luther) this does not mean the *current* evangelical knowledge obtained should lie dormant. Luther’s Reformation was made up of a number of short bursts, or “little” reformations surrounding knowledge gained as he continued to study. As truths were made evident, they were implemented at any cost – even to his the peril of his own excommunication and death. To understand the truth surrounding any theological maxim, and to neglect imposing it in the life of the people is sin (Rom. 14:23b; James 4:17). It should be agreed that prudence in implementation is necessary. But when the fundamentals of the faith are overthrown, and reformation surrounding those fundamentals are neglected though they be known by the Elders of the church, this is *intolerable*. If right worship, the right administration of the sacraments, and the exercise of biblical church discipline, are not set in the context of congregational life, it would be sin for the Elders to acquiesce to the congregations theological ignorance. Implementation should be immediate.

Second, the Word of God is the only rule for faith and practice in the church where Jesus Christ is Head. *The Westminster Confession of Faith* says, “But the acceptable way of worshiping the true God is instituted by himself, and so limited by his own revealed will, that he may not be worshiped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation, or any other

way not prescribed in the Holy Scripture.”²¹ This parallels Calvin’s argument throughout the *Necessity of Reforming the Church*. To add or take away from prescribed worship is sin. Ministers who compromise this principle to uphold a traditional aspect of worship would compromise the integrity of the Word and his own convictions.

Thirdly, ministers who fail to reform their church by implementing the Scriptures upon the life of the congregation compromise his own beliefs. Worship then becomes man-centered rather than Christ-centered. If they truly believed the Word of God, then right worship would necessarily be implemented by compulsion to obey God rather than please men.

Fourthly, ministers cannot be ministers by way of pretence. If Calvin had gone to Geneva to slowly reform the church, reform would have never taken place. His preaching, teaching, and catechistical instruction would have been hindered at every turn. He would not have been able to speak plainly and openly about the truth. Ministers must clearly and precisely make their theological convictions known to a church before they enter into it. The church should know precisely what changes will occur the moment the pastor enters the church. Anything less than this would be sin, and the pastor would be there in pretence. He would be a liar. He would lie to God, for not believing His Word enough to instigate it. He would lie to himself, for thinking that he believed a set of theological truths, when in fact, he really does not – for belief constitutes implementation and trust in those truths. He would be lying to the congregation by facade demonstrating a fabrication of false intentions in order to gradually win them over to the “truth” later on.

²¹ *Westminster Confession of Faith* 21:1.

It is forgotten by many that the father of lies is the devil. Such a position in terms of gradual reformation, is nothing but devilish wiles. If the Reformers had taken this position the Reformation would have never occurred. The Reformers would have died before they could have made any real implementations to the truth.

Fifthly, prudent reform takes place without the fear of men, and usually in the midst of contention. Luther and Calvin were consistently in the midst of conflict and difficulties due to the position they held to the truth. Recanting on revealed truth was not an option. Whenever sinful people are faced with the truth, disputation results. Such strife is impossible to avoid unless one *compromises* the truth. It may be after a long while that a congregation would mature in the truth, and such changes or implementations would be made more easily, but the historical record of the bible and the Reformation do not support this. Sinful people hate godly change. Calvin and Farel were expelled from Geneva for preaching their convictions and standing on the Word of God! Likewise, the moneychangers in the temple were not happy that Jesus overturned their tables. The religious leaders sought to kill Christ at every turn! Instead, theological compromise hopes that “later on” the church will understand the foundations of the faith so that the basics of worship, the sacraments, and discipline may be enacted successfully.

It would be wise imitating Hezekiah, Josiah, Luther, Calvin and the Lord Jesus Christ in the achievement of immediate reformation. Compromise is a lie. Gradual reformation in this regard is intolerable; both for the people of God who are deceived as to what real reformation and truth are about, and to the minister who compromises his beliefs, and neglects the honor of God’s desire in true spiritual worship.