

# THE GREAT REFORMATION TRUTHS OF GOD

## **Great truths, lost and found**

The history of God's people over the last four thousand years has been characterized by the 'loss' and 'rediscovery' of the great truths that define our human existence. Each rediscovery of them (sometimes called a reformation) has come from reading the testimony of God's prophets and apostles in the Scriptures. Later generations have also read the writings of previous Christians who themselves have been reawakened. So Luther and Calvin read Augustine; and Wesley and Whitefield and their friends read Luther and Calvin, and so on.

So what are these reformation truths, and what are the beliefs that have replaced them in our day?

## **Majestic mountains and mere molehills**

When I first flew to New Zealand I can remember sighting *The land of the long white cloud* out of the aeroplane window. Jutting up out of the long white cloud were majestic mountains. Coming from South Australia I was used to mere hills which passed almost imperceptibly under the aeroplane. But here were mountains that gripped you with their majesty.

The sharp and penetrating truths of God which have reformed the church and reshaped nations are like great spiritual mountains, arrestingly majestic in their moral beauty.

## **The loss of the Reformation truths**

In our day, however, these truths have been watered down and corrupted by a humanity hell-bent on tidying up God. Instead of the great Reformation truths these majestic mountains have been worn down until they are mere moral molehills that empty churches and leave nations unmoved.

Before we turn to the majestic mountains of God's reforming truth, let us first look at the molehills that often replace them:

1. God's love is His inclusive capacity to accept everyone and everything without damage to His holiness and purity. God's goodness is His tolerance of human 'diversity'.
2. Sin is not the eternal crisis of our rebellion against our Creator and the dark guilt of that rebellion. Rather, if it is necessary to speak of it at all, sin is the injustices of society of which we are all victims. All of us human beings are good at heart, and, given acceptance and encouragement can do well.
3. Jesus did not die for our sins because, quite frankly, we do not need saving. Jesus came to show us the way to live through his teaching and example. In this way he is comparable to other religious leaders, only he is better.
4. A Christian is someone who follows Jesus by seeking to live in the way that he lived.
5. The Christian hope is that by doing justice and liberating the oppressed we will improve the world and so bring the kingdom of God.

Some may protest, "What is wrong with that?", or "That is what I believe". The answer is that these moral molehills are simply not the great reforming truths testified to by God's holy prophets and apostles. They are not the truths that have reformed the church and renewed nations down through the centuries.

Let us turn, then, to the majestic mountains, asking God to open our blind eyes that we may see their grace and truth.

## **Five great truths of God**

### **1. The holy God's creating love**

The living, personal God, the Father who is Lord over all (Ephesians 4:6), is holy and pure in love. From Him come all light and life and love. With wonderful and careful love 'God created the heavens and the earth' (Genesis 1:1). We human beings were 'fearfully and wonderfully made' (Psalm 139:14). We were created in love in the image of God as conscious relational persons (Genesis 1:26,27). The creation was with a purpose in view—to bring many sons and daughters into the eternal glory (Hebrews 2:10) where righteousness dwells (2 Peter 3:13). To know the Father's holy love is the supremely majestic revelation to dawn upon the eyes of our human hearts.

### **2. Fallen humanity is dead and lost in sin**

Humanity has been lured into a grand rebellion against the Creator. To eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 3:1-7) means to reject God's authority which He has expressed in declaring what is good and evil. In rebellion humanity has established its own alternative system of good and evil. When the human race ate of that 'tree' it did indeed die to God and His holy love, and came alive to the guilt and impurity of sin, to the pride of self-righteousness, to anger and hatred towards God and others, and to the fear of death and judgement. In our rebellion against God we are dead to the depth, depravity and horror of sin. In insensitivity, presumption, and vain self-assurance we do not realize that, while dead in our trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1), we are under condemnation and destined to eternal destruction.

### **3. God's gracious redemption in Christ**

Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners (1 Timothy 1:15). It was while we were dead in our trespasses and sins that God made us alive with Christ (Ephesians 2:5) We were not loving God, but He loved us and gave His Son as a propitiation for our sins (1 John 4:10). In his death upon the cross Christ destroyed the power of evil by breaking the guilt-grip that the evil one had upon the human race (Colossians 2:13-15). In this way God dealt justly with sin and evil, and at the same time mercifully forgave sinners (Romans 3:23-26). The revelation of the sacrificial love of God for His enemies is the highest and most arresting mountain, majestic in its moral beauty.

### **4. The new birth in Christ**

The fallen human race was crucified with Christ (Galatians 2:20). In Jesus' human body on the cross God judged sin and put it to death (Romans 8:3). In his resurrection Jesus is the last and true Adam (1 Corinthians 15:45), or 'Adam at last'. Those who believe in him are born of God and know God (1 John 5:1). When anyone is in Christ he or she is a new creation, the old person of sin is put to death and everything is made new in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). In repentance and faith those who receive Christ receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, who dwells in them making their bodies temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19,20). The Holy Spirit bears the fruit of the life of God in the life of the believer (Galatians 5:22,23).

### **5. The hope of glory**

Though the Christian can still sin, he or she lives in hope. The Holy Spirit dwells in the believers as a pledge of their eternal inheritance (Ephesians 1:13,14). When Christ comes in his glory (Matthew 25:31), in the consummation of all things, the creation will be renewed (Romans 8:19-23), God's people will share in Christ's resurrection glory (Colossians 3:14), and God will dwell with them in a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells (2 Peter 3:13). Believers are thus born again to this living hope through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead (1 Peter 1:3). Like our redemption this hope rests, not on what we have to do, but on what God has promised that He will do.

### **The truth that sets us free**

Looking back in history, whenever the Reformation truths have been discarded, and replaced by benign and comfortable platitudes, the Christian church has declined and its renewing power in society has waned. By the mercy of God, when these great truths have been 'rediscovered', and fearlessly proclaimed, reformation and renewal has come to home, church and nation.

The Holy Father's creating love,  
 The depth, depravity and death of sin,  
 The wonderful grace of redemption,  
 The new birth of the believer in Christ,  
 The hope of Christ's coming in glory.

These are the divine truths that define humanity, revive the soul, reform the church, establish the family, and liberate the nation. Nothing else will do the job.

**So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." They answered him, "We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, "You will become free'?"**

**Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. John 8:31-36**

**Rod James**

March 2008

Permission is given to copy in this form. Bible quotations are from the English Standard Version