

THE SOLA'S OF THE REFORMATION

iv. God's Word Alone

2 Peter 1:16-21, Luke 24:25-32

Martin Luther regarded the right understanding of Scripture as the essence of the Reformation. Even though many of the outward characteristics 500 years ago are different today, the basic principles remain the same. The first thing Luther did after being excommunicated from the Roman Catholic church in 1521 was to translate the New Testament into German in just eleven months. As such, the Reformation had radical ramifications. Up until this time the vast majority of the population was illiterate. With the advent printing and the rapid distribution of literature, the Bible became much more accessible to the needs of people's lives.

In our gospel reading Luke records an apparent stranger drawing alongside a couple walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus. Their body language is that of persons having succumbed to depression and despair. The text tells us they were prevented from recognising Jesus who had risen that very day. Recognition of Jesus requires more than human insight especially when one's mind is confused and one's emotions awry. They relate the facts of the past few days, just as they are, in response to Jesus' probing question 'What are you talking about?'. But facts alone are cold comfort if you don't have insight. So 'beginning with Moses and all the prophets', Jesus gives them a master-class of understanding the Bible.

Understanding Scripture is more than grasping information about God. Yes, we believe in the historicity of Scripture. God did not drop blocks of truth from heaven. He revealed himself through some forty authors in sixty-six books over fifteen hundred years. How is it possible then to understand a collection of books that seem so convoluted? Jesus reveals the key to understanding Scripture. The focus of Scripture is himself bringing about repentance and forgiveness of sins.

How can we as creatures understand the mind of the Creator unless he reveals himself to us? God speaks to us in words recorded in Scripture. God is a speaking God. Part of the essence of being created in the image of God is our ability to communicate in words. Without language we are lost. Spiritually speaking, we "see" with our ears, as God reveals himself to us through his Word. The first question in Scripture, posed by Satan, is "Did God really say?" The way in which we answer that question says more about us than about God. When Adam and Eve entertained that question it led to doubt, denial and spiritual death, the consequences of which we are still living with today.

We will only understand the heart and mind of God when we are submitted to his lordships. The way God woos and wins our hearts is through his Word and his Spirit. God changes our hearts through the washing and cleansing of the Holy Spirit by the Word of God. When Queen Elizabeth II was crowned by the Archbishop of Canterbury, she was handed a Bible by the Moderator of the Church of Scotland with these words, "the most valuable thing that this world affords. Here is wisdom, the royal law, the lively oracles of God". What a contrast between a priceless crown in human terms and receiving something valuable beyond words viz Scripture. Jesus says to us "Love me, love my Word".

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