

A Biblical Perspective on Church History, #1

Church History

By Don Green

sermonaudio.com

Preached on: Tuesday, September 5, 2017

Truth Community Church

4183 Mt. Carmel Tobasco Road
Cincinnati, OH 45255

Website: truthcommunitychurch.org

Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/tcomm

Most of you know that October 31st will mark the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. It was on October 31, 1517 that a monk named Martin Luther nailed a document known as the 95 Theses to the door of Castle Church in Wittenburg, Germany. He was inviting debate in accordance with the practice of the time over the existing practices of indulgences in the Catholic Church. With the blessing of Pope Leo X, the Catholic Church was promising the forgiveness of sin – past, present and future sins – in exchange for contributions to the church. Salvation, forgiveness of sin, was available for money. You could buy your salvation, the forgiveness of your sins, by clinking the coins into the box. Well, Martin Luther posted his 95 Theses, which are a wonderful read even to this day, hoping to start a debate over the problem of buying salvation. He didn't fully realize at the time that he was launching a juggernaut. He was redirecting the course of human history with that act. As history unfolded, many abandoned the Catholic Church and returned to a biblical doctrine of salvation.

Well, the coming weeks in our day and age, are surely going to bring a lot of attention to the Reformation in Christian and even in secular media circles. It's just inevitable when there's a big anniversary that stories are written to commemorate it and what I wanted to do for us as a church tonight was to get a little bit ahead of that media curve with a series here that we're starting this evening. Some of the coming reports will, no doubt, be helpful as men who are experts in evangelical interpretation of church history write articles and give us perspective on it. Others will argue that, not evangelicals, not those that are entitled to the name of evangelical anyway, others will argue that we should get past the Reformation. With varying degrees of sophistication, the argument will be something like this: we should now get along with Catholics. There is already enough division in the world. We should get along with them because we all love Jesus, after all, as if the truth about salvation was simply an intramural debate with very little real consequence. Well, at Truth Community Church, we gladly identify with the Reformation, with Reformation theology, with the heroes of the Reformation, and what I want to do in the coming weeks on Tuesday evenings is to have a series to defend the Reformation in our 21st century. Roman Catholicism is not the only hostile force, the only battle that we engage for the sake of truth, but it is a very important one, especially in this region in Cincinnati where Catholicism has had such a long and deep and profound history; I know that many in our church have past Catholic ties. So between now and October 31st, what I want to do is to give you some perspective on church history tonight

and also next week, and then further on looking further into it, the biblical reasons for rejecting Catholicism as it exists today. If everything goes, Lord willing, according to plan, we'll complete this series on October 31, 2017 and we'll celebrate the anniversary together in that manner.

It's a huge topic and so our treatment will necessarily be selective and what I want to say and just to reemphasize for those that ignored my first email or perhaps didn't receive my first email, you should buy and read, don't just buy it, you should read a book titled "The Reformation: How a Monk and a Mallet Changed the World" by modern church historian, Stephen Nichols. It's a wonderful book. It gives you a nice overview. It's a very readable and enjoyable book and I would encourage you to buy that and to read it for the sense of history surrounding the Reformation. The Reformation is a very multifaceted event in human history taking place over many many years.

For those of you that find a 150 page book with no pictures a little bit too much, hey, I'm there sometimes, there is a smaller book on church history that you can read in about an hour called "Church History 101" written by Sinclair Ferguson and other men, that is a nice little overview of 20 centuries of church history and you can read through this and get a broad sweep of church history. If you've never read it, I would encourage you to do, if you have never read on church history at all, I would encourage you to buy that book because I find it helpful just to get the broad sweep in mind. You know, you could start with Schaff's eight volume history of the Christian church but that's a pretty tough place to start. That's like learning to swim by being cast into the middle of the ocean. I like to encourage people to start with something that they can digest and then you go from milk to meat as Scripture says in another context. So if you have no acquaintance with church history, that little book is a good resource for you. There are other books by Christopher Catherwood or by Bruce Shelley that are also worth your time that are somewhat longer treatments that are also covering the whole sweep of church history, not just the Reformation.

So church history is a vast topic and as I wanted to say, I cannot command you to read any of those books. I would greatly encourage you to do so. If you haven't read on church history or the Reformation, it will be very good for you to do that, and so I am not commanding you. These are just pastoral recommendations out of my loving heart for you, okay? So let's take this all in the right spirit.

Church history can be intimidating because we are not only reading about the past and reading about men that are unfamiliar with us, it can also be confusing and it can be confusing because history, church history, Christian history, so-called Christian history broadly defined, is filled with things that are done and taught in the name of Jesus Christ that have absolutely nothing to do with the kingdom of God and that presents a challenge as you read on church history because modern authors sometimes just lump all of these things together. So the Catholic Church is freely referred and often pictured as the movement of the church of Christ going forward from the 5th century into the time of the Reformation but for a biblical Christian, we can never be comfortable with that designation or with that understanding of the church. How could an institution that is

teaching falsehood about how a man can have his sins forgiven be considered the church of Christ? So what we need is some perspective and so tonight and for next week, I'm going to do a little two-part series that I have simply entitled "A Biblical Perspective on Church History." A biblical perspective on church history and I intend this to be a very modest guide to discernment as we contemplate the issues that come up in church history, and then beyond that, we will take a five-part look at the Catholic Church that I'm very excited. I started this four or five years ago and never did finish it and I've had this sense of unfinished business that I have carried around with me and I'm going to finish that business, Lord willing, over the next couple of months with you.

Now, here's the fundamental point and in some ways this is all so simple and so basic that in one sense that there is nothing new here this evening. The primary premise of this two-week series is this: is that you and I cannot read about church history apart from our biblical convictions. Our biblical worldview is not only the way that we process our thinking about life and about Scripture and theology, but it is also the prism through which we should assess what we are told about church history. If we read history with discernment, we can see where Christ was truly at work in building his church, and we can see where a satanic counterfeit was also hindering or was perhaps and often simultaneously hindering the progress of the church.

So how can we discern these things? The challenge is that many modern authors will not make that discernment for you. Modern history has a goal of what they consider to be objectivity and so they want to simply report the facts of what happened; maybe they'll interpret things for you in terms of a human historical perspective but many authors will deliberately avoid giving any biblical evaluation to the events that they are describing. Well, you and I as biblical Christians when we read about church history, we cannot be satisfied with that approach. We have to read with discernment. We have to know what the truth of the matter is, where Christ truly was at work to be able to understand what the real work of God was and what is broadly described as church history. So what I want to do tonight is introduce this with three points, three points of discernment that you can read church history with that will be nothing new in your thinking at all in what I say but I want to lay out three points this evening, illustrate it a little bit, and then we'll move on and finish with a few more points next week.

What should be on our minds as we are reading church history? First of all I would say that this point with everything in life, remember the priority of Scripture. Remember the priority of Scripture. As I said, one of the challenges in reading church history is that modern authors will report the facts but not interpret them biblically and this is done in the name of so-called academic historical objectivity but, beloved, you must understand, you must remember that that has the effect of mixing true Christians with false Christians, mixing true doctrine with false doctrine, with mixing that which was the work of the Holy Spirit with that which was the work of Satan. So we have to think with discernment and not simply read a modern author uncritically and just accept everything that he attributes to the church as though that were actually part of the church. And let me just remind you with a simple Scripture reference here: as biblical Christians, we compare everything to the inerrant standard of God's word, the infallible standard of

God's word. We compare everything with the teaching of the Bible and that means that we do not – this is so important, this is so very important – we do not accept truth claims uncritically.

1 John 4 says to test the spirits. In fact, let's turn there, 1 John 4, just after Hebrews and 1 and 2 Peter. 1 John 4. We think about this often in terms of modern teaching but certainly it applies as we try to evaluate the teaching of the church over a period of 2,000 years. The Apostle John says in 1 John 4:1, he says,

1 Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. 2 By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; 3 and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world.

Skip down to verse 6,

6 We are from God [this is John speaking as from the circle of the apostles]; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

So John tells us very plainly that there is truth and there is error. What is very encouraging to me is that he tells us that Scripture equips us to know the difference; that Christ, in other words, in his love and care for the church, has not left us defenseless, he has not left his children to be tossed about by every wave of doctrine, by every crazy movement that moves in church history and to wonder if this is true or this is not. The Apostle John says, "Test the spirits, the Holy Spirit is within you, the Scripture is true. You have everything that is needed in order to properly discern what is true and what is false." We consider that to be a sacred obligation, a sacred privilege, a sacred prerogative for us to be able to discern these things because we love our Christ because he first loved us. Christ saved us. He came to earth in order to give his life on a cross to turn away the wrath of God from our sins. He worked in our hearts at a point in time in order to turn our hearts so that we would repent and believe in him and we have been rescued from our sin, we have been liberated from the bonds of sin in our mind and in our hearts. We've been delivered from the kingdom of Satan. We've been delivered from hell and damnation and we are in this great place of blessing. So what we want to do is we gladly respond to what the Lord said: the greatest commandment is to love the Lord your God with all of your heart, soul, strength and mind. And so we just take all of those broad general principles and we carry them right over as we read on church history. We don't check those things at the door. These convictions and these priorities inform everything that we do.

Now, turn over to Acts 17, if you would, for another illustration of this, another biblical principle of this in Acts 17 and in verse 10 it says,

10 The brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. 11 Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so.

So they had the Apostle Paul in their midst teaching them. They were glad to receive his word, they were glad to receive it as the very word of God as he taught them, and yet they still compared what he was teaching them with what we now know as the Old Testament Scriptures that they had. So they said, "Paul, I hear you. I receive your teaching with eagerness. Let me see how this compares with the Old Testament. Ah, this matches up. Your teaching is affirmed by prior Scripture." Well, in the same way, friends, when we read on church history, we constantly have in our minds as we are reading, "Is what I'm being told consistent with what Scripture would teach?" In some books, the discernment is difficult, in some it's easy to realize that what you're being told is a bunch of – if I can use a technical theological term with you – it's a bunch of hooey. It's a bunch of hooey. As you read church history, you should continually ask, "This was done in the name of Christ but is it true? Was it true? Was this really from Christ or not?"

One book that I recently read designated a 14th century poem called "The Divine Comedy" by an author named Dante Alighieri, this 14th century poem was designated as one of the 100 most important events in church history. If you've never heard of it, don't feel bad, but it describes various circles in hell and purgatory and in heaven and from a human level was apparently a brilliant piece of poetic work. The content of the poem itself is not my purpose here this evening, I'm more concerned about what the modern author said about that poem. Listen as I quote, it tells the poem in part as follows, it says that, "They journey up a nine-tiered mountain upon which the saved souls work off their sins before entering into paradise." And after that description, the book's authors go on to say and I quote, "The poem is perfectly orthodox theologically." This poem which describes men as working off their sins is described by the modern author as perfectly orthodox; this is biblical truth being taught and conveyed by a poem that says men are working off their sins before they can enter into heaven. Now, that is just nonsense to go back, that is hooey. You say, "What?" I couldn't believe that I was reading this. If they had been with me, I would have laughed at them and said, "You're kidding, right? You call that orthodox theology that you just described? What about Ephesians 2:9 that says salvation is not a result of works lest any man should boast?" This is insanity.

My point here for you tonight is certainly not "The Divine Comedy" and it's certainly not as much the book that I am alluding to but simply for you to see this: that as you are reading about church history, to realize that the authors who are interpreting it to you may not be using a biblical standard at all with what they say. You cannot take these authors at face value. You need to reserve the discernment and the conclusion, "Is this true and biblical?" You don't let an author decide that for you without thinking independently and according to Scripture yourself. The Bereans' example, examine the Scriptures daily to see whether these things are so.

And just as a word of encouragement to you, kind of stepping out of church history, that pattern of the Bereans is a great reminder for us as well. We need the word of God on a daily basis. Let me encourage you if you're not reading Scripture daily, to renew your commitment to that. We need the constant input of God's word. We need it renewing our mind that we might know what the will of God is; that we might always remember our hope; that we would never lose sight of our sweet friend, the Lord Jesus, who loves us and keeps us and says, "Nothing can pluck you out of my hand." God's word is the only source that draws us back to that again and again and again. So as you're sitting here in Christ and perhaps having drifted a bit, I'd just remind you of the importance of the daily intake of God's word. It doesn't do to say, "Do you know what? I'm just too busy for that." It doesn't do to say, "Do you know what? I'm not a reader." That's like saying, you know, a Christian saying that is like saying, "Do you know what? I'm not a breather. You know, I don't have time to breathe." No, let's not go there. Let's remember the priority of Scripture in our own personal life and as we assess church history and God will bless us as we do.

Now, secondly, and I like this next point as well. We remember the priority of Scripture in assessing the things that we read about but as you're reading about the details of church history, there is a second principle for you to remember and it is this: you need to remember the principle of Providence. The principle of Providence, Providence being the idea that God is continually at work in everything that happens; that he directs all events and people to fulfill his purpose in the world. Providence teaches us that we should seek to discern the hand of God in everything.

Look at Proverbs 16 for just a moment. This is not a verse about understanding history, but simply the hand of God. Proverbs 16. We allude to Providence often at Truth Community. We have alluded to it often, we are alluding to it now, we will allude to it often in the future as well. That's God's providential plan for our church and for all of his people, to be mindful that his hand is always at work even when we don't understand it in the moment.

Proverbs 16:4, I just wanted to give you a couple of verses to stimulate your thinking about Providence before we apply it to church history. In verse 4, it says, Proverbs 16:4,

4 The LORD has made everything for its own purpose, Even the wicked for the day of evil.

That good and evil are under the hand of God and God has made everything to accomplish the purpose that he has for it. That's infinitely broad and includes the whole matter of what unfolded in what we read about in church history.

Down in verse 9, Proverbs 16:9,

9 The mind of man plans his way, But the LORD directs his steps.

Man contemplates, man establishes his intentions and his purposes, and God through that process is directing his steps even when the man is unaware that God is at work to accomplish what God has already determined to happen.

Now, here's what I want you to think about in this matter, as we read about church history – oh, this is just so very important – when you read about church history, you are reading much more than an unfolding contest over the development of doctrine over the course of the years. There were political and spiritual and secular and economic and even medical consequences and factors that were all involved in shaping what happened in the course of human events as church history unfolded. So for example, if I asked you if you had read the book of Acts and you see the progress of the preaching through Peter and through Paul and how the Gospel spread and I would ask you by what power, how did that happen, well, you would rightly respond and say this was a manifestation of the power of the Gospel; that the Holy Spirit was at work in the proclamation of Christ crucified, resurrected and ascended, and the Spirit worked in order to bring men to Christ in saving faith, and this was a revolutionary time in the history of the world there in the first century and you would be absolutely correct. That would be absolutely right. But beloved, that's only, at the risk of being misunderstood here, that's only part of the story of the work of God. That's not subject to being misunderstood. That's only part of the story of the work of God. Here's what you would want to think about from the realm of Providence in this: there was a very clear human element that contributed to the spread of the Gospel in the first century in a way that would not have happened 500 years earlier.

Let me just explain what I mean. The apostles went out in the first century at the height of the Roman Empire. That meant that they were going out in the midst of a stable society. The Roman army was a force that guaranteed peace and stability in society. Not only that, the Romans by the first century had established a sophisticated system of roads that made travel easy compared to what it had been centuries earlier. Not only that, 300 years prior to that, the Greek conqueror, Alexander the Great, had spread the Greek language throughout the known world through his conquests. So notice what's going on here. This is all related to God, by the way. We're describing human elements, recognizing that Providence is over all things. In the Providence of God in the timing of God, the Gospel went forth at a time when travel was easier than it had been, when there was a common language for people to communicate with one another, and at a time where there was peace and stability in society. The apostles could go and they could preach under a general world that was stable and all of those factors contributed to the rapid spread of the Gospel. Yes, it was the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes, but the reason that they were able to so quickly go to so many different points throughout the known world at the time was because of providential human factors that facilitated the travel and the speaking and the hearing and the understanding of what they had to say.

Christopher Catherwood writes this in his book, "A Crash Course for the Curious," on church history, speaking about these different elements he says and I quote, "To secular historians, all this is helpful coincidence but I do not think we can see it like that. Surely these two extraordinary conjunctions, the size and stability of the Roman Empire and the

multinational use of Greek as a second language, cannot just be accidents. So helpful were they to the easy spreading of the Gospel and making Christianity a global faith so early on, that they must be seen as part of the Providence of God."

Do you know what that means? You look at this, you read the exhilarating accounts of the spread of the Gospel in the book of Acts, we rejoice in the power of God and the Gospel, what I want you to see is to maybe expand your vision about these things a little further even than maybe you've thought about them in the past. The power of God is seen in the proclamation of the Gospel and the conversion of sinners to Christ. Absolutely. But his power was also manifested in the providential circumstances in which the Gospel was going forth; that at just the right time the rise of the Roman Empire was in place to establish a worldwide system that facilitated the spread of the Gospel that would not have been true centuries earlier. His arrangement of history, his arrangement of transportation and language, was all involved in the successful spread of the Gospel. These are not mere incidents, these are not accidents of history, this was all part of the glorious Providence of God, and as you read church history from that perspective, you see that it is even more magnificent than what someone who denies the sovereignty of God could ever see. We can read these things and see the greatness of God in the Gospel and in the Providence that facilitated the spread of the Gospel and so it draws us to an even deeper sense of worship.

We said that we don't accept uncritically a modern author's interpretation of theology for us. They are often not very reliable on that, are they? But there's another aspect of it as you are reading church history, as you are contemplating this, as you're reading reports in the coming weeks in advance of the 500th anniversary is this – oh, it's this, it is this – that we do not limit ourselves to their truncated interpretations of what they're talking about either. We see the glorious hand of the power of God in the very circumstances that made things possible, that men rose at just the right time in the plan of God and other things happened at just the right time in the plan of God, and we see his hand in that just as you should see in your own personal life even if you can't understand it, that you should have an ever-growing and deepening sense that whatever is happening in your life at any particular point of time, whatever has happened in the past, whatever will happen in the future, is somehow what God has given to you. This is the life, these are the experiences that God has given to you from his providential hand and he intends it for your good. He will bring good out of every circumstance and he has consistently been loving and faithful to you personally in everything in your life.

You say, "Well, that's kind of hard to accept. Life is really hard right now." Well, we don't interpret whether something is good or whether it's from God simply by the present feelings it engenders in our heart, we interpret it by the priority of Scripture and Scripture says that God has made everything for its purpose, that he causes all things to work together for good to those who love God and are called according to his purpose. So beloved, we walk by faith. We believe what we are told in this 66 part book and we believe and we interpret life through the perspective given to us from Scripture rather than what we feel in our hearts at any particular time. Your feelings will betray you. Your feelings will lead you astray. They will cause you to question God, as I know from sad

personal experience in years gone by. When you interpret life by your circumstances, beloved, things are going to be confused and murky and discouraging. Not so for the biblical Christian. Not so for the one who believes what Scripture teaches about the Providence of God, that God's hand is at work in everything and therefore we have a confident expectation of goodness from everything that comes to us, even if we don't understand how that can be. So we take all of that and apply it to our understanding of church history as well.

Now finally for this evening, I said to remember the priority of Scripture, remember the principle of Providence, and finally as you are reading church history, you must remember the preeminence of Christ. The preeminence of Christ. What does true church history teach us over time? What do we get as we read about the advance of the Gospel over the course of the past 20 centuries since Christ was here on earth? Church history, true church history is telling us the work of God over a broad sweep of time and as you read, as you read church history even in the most basic rudimentary forms, you find that Christians just like you and me were facing opposition and difficulties that came in many different forms. In the first 300 years of the church, it was persecution at the hands of the Roman Empire. Starting with Nero in A.D. 64 and the burning of the city of Rome as he crucified and burned Christians publicly, wrapped them in skins and fed them to wild animals in order to satisfy the lustful violence of audiences, sweeping through 10 waves of persecution culminating in about the year 312 or 313 when finally an end was put to that, they faced opposition in the form of violent persecution, often running for their lives, so to speak. But that wasn't all. Yes, that severe persecution decimated the church at times but their opposition came in other forms as well, just like it does for us today, coming in the form of false doctrine, coming in the form of a man named Arius teaching that Christ was not truly equal with God, saying blasphemous things as such that there was a time when Christ was not, denying his eternal existence. That just being one illustration among others. So you see the force of persecution rising up against the church. You see the force of false doctrine seeking to dilute and obscure the doctrine so that the glory of Christ and the Gospel would be lost in the sight of men because, look, believing in a false Christ gives you what? A false salvation, no salvation at all.

Now as you read these things unfolding, here's what you should see, here's the biblical perspective on that: through it all you should see that there was an inevitable triumph of Christ coming through all of these things. Look at Matthew 16. As we read church history, this is one of the most fundamental principles that should ever be in our mind. Matthew 16, beginning in verse 13, it says,

13 Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He was asking His disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" 14 And they said, "Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets." 15 He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" 16 Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." 17 And Jesus said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father

who is in heaven. 18 I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.

This is magnificent. This is a declaration of the eternal Son of God with full omnipotence in his right hand, so to speak, saying that, "I am going to build my church in the years to come and nothing can stop it. Nothing can hinder me. The greatest powers of Satan, the gates of hell itself, cannot hinder me from accomplishing the purpose that I have in mind." This is tremendous. This is the Lord asserting his lordship, asserting his sovereignty and saying, "There is a coming development of my people that I will most certainly carry out and nothing can stop my hand."

Incidentally, we'll cover this more in coming weeks, the rock to which Christ referred was not Peter himself. Jesus had to rebuke Peter saying, "Get behind me, Satan." Peter denied him three times at his trial. Peter had to be corrected by the Apostle Paul in Galatians 2 for straying from fundamental principles of the Gospel. Do you think that Christ was going to build his church infallibly on a weak sinful man like that? No. No. The rock was not Peter, the rock was Peter's confession of Christ, "You are the Christ." Jesus says, "That's right, Peter, heaven revealed this to you and it is on that true confession that I am the Messiah, I am the one that the Old Testament Scriptures have pointed to, on that confession I will build my church." And what does that mean? Think about the Reformation. Think about 1,000 years of the Dark Ages of Catholicism just obscuring truth more and more. So much to say about that that we'll save for coming weeks.

What does that mean? Well, it means that inevitably when the church needs a Luther, Christ will raise him up. When the church needs an Athanasius to stand against the world, to stand alone, Christ will raise him up. You hear people saying the most foolish things in our day and age. You know, the church is going to pass away and go into extinction if it doesn't adapt to the new ways of thinking, if it doesn't cater more directly to what young people are thinking today. The church is going to drift off into obscurity if it doesn't open itself up to the homosexual-ism agenda. These people have never read the Bible. They have never understood the Bible if they are saying things like that. Those things are designed to intimidate people like us from speaking the truth and trying to get us to go along with the modern agenda. It has nothing to do with reality. What Christ says is the reality and what Christ says is, "I will build my church," and he will build his church as his Scripture, as his word is faithfully taught, and as his word is taught, the Spirit will work through the power of the word in order to always bring sinners to himself, always to advance the work of the church. It may be hidden, it may seem small and flickering at times, but listen, beloved, because Christ is building the church, that candle will never go out. Not ever.

So as you're reading about church history, when you see the candle flickering in the wind, so to speak, when the Roman authorities are bringing the worst of their persecution down upon it, upon our earlier brothers and sisters in Christ, and we see that the blood of the martyrs was not the end of the church, it was the seed of the church, you step back and say, "Oh, I see what's going on here. I see the Lord building his church in a way that

assures that he gets the glory because there is no human explanation that people in power, the power of the Roman Empire seeking to exterminate the people of God, there is no human explanation that the church would survive and even flourish in response to that." When we see and we read about men like Athanasius standing against the heresy of Arius and triumphing even though at times he was standing alone, we say, "Ah, there's the mighty hand of Christ doing what he promised to do, building his church." You see Christ as supernaturally the Lord over all of these things and Christ will supernaturally add to his church in the way that he deems best, and at times when it seems like the church is weak, the power of Christ is utterly unhindered, utterly undiminished.

So as we read the sweep of church history over time, we should see the preeminence of Christ and we should see the fulfillment of his purposes and just to kind of come back full circle, when a massive empire like the Roman Catholic Church with all of its political and spiritual dominance at the time when Luther stood at that door, as it were, and nailed his theses, when a simple monk can publish what now can be written out in four pages and you can read it today and that becomes the spark that lights the kindling that had been developing over centuries, when that happens, we don't simply look at that as a historical coincidence, we step back in wonder and awe and say, "We have lived to see the power of Christ manifesting himself. He said, 'I will build my church,' and he'll do it even if he does it through a lowly monk in Germany 500 years ago."

Do you know why we here at Truth Community just want to teach God's word and we really don't care what people think about that one way or the other? I want to be on the winning side, don't you? I want to be aligned with the purposes of Christ. I don't want to go with the spirit of the age. I want to go with the Spirit of Christ preaching that same glorious Gospel, "If you believe you will be saved from all of your sins." I want to tell sinners like you that the love of Christ is presented to you in the Gospel and he invites you to come and if you come to him in faith, he will save you no matter how bad your sins have been. I want to tell Christians like you that have struggled with sin and discouragement year after year after year and it seems like progress is so slow, you are discouraged by the recurring fears that have dominated you, the recurring problems, the relationship problems that just never seem to go away and the burden of life would almost crush you under its load, I want to tell Christians like you, look to Christ and trust him. Have your faith in him. Put your faith in him because he does not abandon his people. He will never leave us. He will never forsake us. We will see him in the end. We will see him in glory. We will see him in victory. Why? Because he builds his church.

So beloved, Christ has made a perfect blood atonement for sinners just like you. If you have believed him, you are a part of this glorious work that he is doing in building his church and as we as a local church look forward, we are just going to renew our commitment in the coming weeks to these very things that men have stood for throughout millennia. We're not trying to be new. We're not trying to be cute. We're not trying to be cool. If it was about cuteness and coolness, someone else would have to be up here. We just want to come under the authority of Christ, under the authority of his word, and simply say, "This is what the Bible means by what it says." And we're going to trust God that in this little corner of the world that he has given and placed us in, that somehow he

will use that to advance these purposes which we will be celebrating a 500th anniversary of in just a short time. I'm really glad that you're here with us to go for the ride.

Let's bow together in prayer.

Father, what a great blessing is ours to be under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, to be under the one who loved us and gave himself up for us, to be under the Lord of the church who will build his people and even a supernatural foe like Satan is helpless to stop the advance. We thank you for giving us a sure foundation in Scripture, a sure salvation that all of our sins have been forgiven, covered by the blood of Christ, covered by his righteousness, never to be charged to our account again, that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. That is just infinite unspeakable blessing that you have given to us, Father. We thank you for your grace, not of our works, not of what we've done in our hands, not with anything that we've said, done, rituals, nothing like that, O God, but simply by the grace of Christ we have been brought into your kingdom. You said believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, Father, we believed and here we are saved as a result, never to be lost again. What a security. What a blessing. What a love has enveloped our lives. And God, we just ask you for the grace to persevere, to continue and to be faithful to the Scriptures, to be faithful to those true Christians, those noble men and women who went before us. Father, to take the baton, as it were, in our weak and feeble and trembling hands, and carry our leg of the race and pass it off, Father, to someone else that you'll raise up that will continue on after we're gone. That's what we want, Lord. It's the only thing that matters to us. It's why we do what we do. We ask, Father, therefore because we seek your glory in this, because we believe in Christ, because we believe your word, because we trust you implicitly, because we are your servants, O God, because of all of that, all to your glory, O God, we simply ask you to bless your word, bless this church, bless these individual Christians who are seeking you and living for Christ. Bless us according to your most perfect holy will and whether that is measured in small amounts by human standards or large amounts, Father, is a matter of indifference to us. We just want to be found pleasing in your sight as our reasonable service of worship in response to the greatness of the gift of salvation that you have given. So Father, with that joyful thought in mind, we commit these loved ones to you, we pray for your grace in the various joys and struggles of life that they face, and we pray that you would send us out with your blessing renewed and restored again by the wonder of your love for us, your eternal, saving, sanctifying keeping love that will never let us go. In our Savior's name we pray. Amen.