

# Reformation today: what does it mean?

Brief introduction of the speaker – Explanation of what ‘reformation’ means – Introduction of our topics – [1] What is our authority? The Word vs the world? – [2] Truth vs Lies – [3] Freedom vs Slavery

## Introduction of the speaker

### Reformation today: what does this mean?

**What it means - ‘reformation’?** Wrong ideas: changing with times, progress, revolution. (E.g. I’m like Luther.) Correct understanding: proper/ideal state, deformation and reformation as restoration. Jesus the Reformer.

**What to reform?** First, we need diagnoses, we need to know what is deformed.

Overview of Luther’s Small Catechism. [1] The Commandments = Diagnoses [2] The Creed = Doctor [3] The Lord’s Prayer = Asking for help [4] Sacraments = Medicine [5] Vocations = New healthy life... somethings is still wrong!

10C show our sin. **What is sin?** Corruption/deformation. Where does it begin? Heart/will/desires (Mk 7:21-23) – thoughts – words – actions.

**What needs to be reformed?** Everything from the inside out. Who can do it? The Holy Spirit. How? Through the Word. Once you change the heart/will, you can change thoughts and then also words and deeds will change.

Today we will focus on heart/thoughts, meditating of the passage for the Reformation Sunday from John 8:31-32. **Jesus said to the Jews who had believed 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.”**

Important themes are [1] the Word of God, [2] Truth, and [3] Freedom.

## **Narratives.**

What shapes our understanding? Different narratives which we hear. Today we'll focus on three of them, even as there are many more others.

[1] Narrative of progress [authority]. The humanity is progressing and we all are getting smarter and smarter. Therefore everything that is new is better than what was before and we can ignore the old stuff.

[2] Narrative of many truths. The very idea of one truth is narrow and oppressive, as there are different perspectives and multiple truths.

[3] Narrative of freedom. We can't be happy unless we are totally free to choose who we are and how we want to live.

For each of these narratives we'll look at two main things: how they have shaped, deformed our thinking (in society and in the Church) and how we should reform our thinking. Along the way, we'll look at different important topics.

## **“If you remain in my words.” What is our authority – the Word or the world?**

### **Deformation.**

*Narrative of progress.* The humanity is progressing and we all are getting smarter and smarter. Therefore, everything that is new is better than what was before and we can ignore the old stuff.

What are the Church's alternatives? We know better than those before us. Everything new must be good, because it is new. We understand the Bible better, for we have the science. We understand things better even without the Bible, because we are smarter. We need to move with the time. Etc.

- Today we don't trust the Word, instead we trust the world, and if we are not shaped by the Word and the Spirit, we'll be shaped by the world and Zeitgeist without even noticing it. (Rom 12:2) Here are a few influential examples.
  - The two truth idea. We know it as separation between private and public, between faith and life, facts and values. Where the Bible fits in? "Keep your faith private." "Don't impose your religion on me!"
    - For Christians - separation between Sunday and Monday, between relationships with God and the rest of our lives. We live compartmentalized lives.
  - Spirituality vs organized religion. We are spiritual, but not religious. What does it mean? It simply means that I choose what I want to believe.
    - Therapeutic Christianity. Feeling good Christianity. Don't judge, don't offend Christianity. (E.g. GP says: "This is not healthy, this will do harm".) It is not anymore about justification and forgiveness, but about my feelings and self-esteem.
    - Feeling Christianity, not thinking Christianity.
  - The most obvious example: changes in our understanding about marriage. Salami tactics. Love separated from marriage, sex from procreation, sex from marriage, roles of husbands and wives redefined, living together from marriage, children from marriage, marriage redefined, it is about me and as long as I want it. (E.g. Spiritual warfare – Africa).
- If we don't believe that the Bible is God's Word and the source of ultimate wisdom, then as a result we are lazy to listen to the Word (read, study, meditate) – we think that we already know everything:
  - Luther's quote from the Large Catechism the 3<sup>rd</sup> Commandment.

“This Commandment is also violated by that other crowd who listen to God’s Word as they would to any other entertainment, who only from force of habit go to hear the sermon and leave again with as little knowledge at the end of the year as at the beginning. [...]

Remember, then, that you must be concerned not only about hearing the Word, but also about learning it and retaining it. Do not think that it is up to your discretion or that it is an unimportant matter. It is the commandment of God, who will require of you an accounting of how you have heard, learned, and honoured his Word. In the same way those conceited spirits should also be punished who, after they have heard a sermon or two, become sick and tired of it and feel that they know it all and need no more instructors. This is precisely the sin that used to be numbered among the mortal sins and was called *acidia*—that is, laziness or weariness—a malignant, pernicious plague with which the devil bewitches and deceives many hearts so that he may take us by surprise and stealthily take the Word of God away again.”

- Misuse of Bible studies – how do you feel about this passage? How do you understand it?
- We are also lazy to come where the Lord invites us – to the Divine Service, for we believe that we can worship wherever we choose to.
  - Where do people search for God? Inside us. In nature. Why? For then we don’t need to listen to God. We are in control. We are spiritual.
  - What do people expect from the Divine Service? Something new. Entertaining. Feelings and experiences.

### **Reformation: back to Christ and the Word.**

- What is the foundation and only norm for our faith, doctrine and life?

“We believe, teach, and confess that the only rule and guiding principle according to which all teachings and teachers are to be evaluated and judged are the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments alone, as it is written, “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Ps. 119:105), and Saint

Paul: "If . . . an angel from heaven should proclaim to you something contrary, . . . let that one be accursed!" (Gal 1:8)

- It means the Word is the norm for everything, for all our vocations.
- **Excursus on vocation.** What is it? What are they?
- Where do we have access to God? Luther: "I don't know any other God, but this man Jesus Christ." The Triune God reveals who He is and what is His attitude towards us. (Ex 34:6-7, John 1:18)
  - **Excursus on God:** God Hidden and God Revealed.
- **Luther (Kolb): God is God who speaks, God is God of [1] Conversation and [2] Community;**
- **[1] God of Conversation:** The Triune God does everything by His word. Creates (Gen 1), saves (John 20:21-23), restores.
  - **Excursus on the Word:** four forms [1] Logos/Jesus [2] spoken word [3] written word/the Bible [4] Sacramental Word.
- Gen 3. Comes and talks. Speaks through prophets, apostles and the Son (Heb. 1, Eph. 2:20). Today in His Word, the Bible (1 The. 2:13, 2 Pet 1:21). Faith is created and we are saved through the Word (Rom 10:17) Through the Word we learn the truth.
  - **Excursus:** What is this world about? Narrative – 4 Big events.
  - **Excursus:** Who are we? Image and Likeness, 2KR, 10C, 2C.
- How does God speak to us today? In His Word. Through the office of public ministry. Absolution. Law and Gospel. Sacraments. Blessing. When He speaks, His Spirit changes our hearts. (John 6:63, John 20:31)
- What happens when God speaks to us?
  - Our sickness is revealed.
  - Treatment is prescribed and given (Word and Sacraments).
  - Healthy way of life is shown.
  - Our worldviews and lives are conformed to the Word of God.

- [2] **God of Community:** Gen 3, Rev 21, Ex 29:45-46). Today the Triune God comes to us to bless us (Ex 20:24b) in the Divine Service, in His live-giving Word and Sacraments.
  - o **Excursus on worship:** Where can we meet God and know His attitude towards us? Where can we access the gracious God? In the Divine Service. (Ex 20:18, 29:45-46, Rom 9:4).
- If you abide in His word, you are true disciples, you are children and heir of God's Kingdom. (John 8:31, Rom 8:15F, Gal 4:6).

## **“You will know the truth.” Truth vs Lies, Falsehood**

*Narrative on truth:* The very idea of one truth is narrow and oppressive, as there are different perspectives and multiple truths. One ‘truth’ is not better than other. Your ‘truth’ is no better than mine. (Relativism, multiculturalism.)

What are the Church's alternatives? Don't be so narrow! You think that you are the only ones who know and understand. You are trying to put God in a box. God is much greater than your ideas. We can't presume that we know better. Don't think that your interpretation is better than mine. Etc.

- o **Excursus on ways of thinking:** Modern mind (belief in reason/all true answers); postmodern mind – there is no the truth, only perspectives. Christian (critical realism) – Dr Paul Hiebert).

### **Deformation.**

- We live in the world where the father of lies rules (John 8:44, Eph. 2:1-3), even if the creation is good, very good (Gen 1:31).
- There are lies all over the place:
  - o Lies about the world, what this world is about and where we are heading; denial of the Creation and denial of the Last Day.

- **Excursus:** the last day. Judgment as restoration and cleansing. (E.g. Orchard. We are trees.) Day of joy and celebration.
- Lies about God: who the true God is and what He is like:
  - We may teach about “nice Jesus” instead of Biblical Jesus (John 2, Mt 23);
  - We may neglect teaching the Trinity and focus only on one article. If we lose the Biblical narrative it leads to antinomianism; we lose our understanding about what the Law is and what the Gospel is in 4 Big.
- Lies about us, about who we are (created to live with God and in community – 2KR), what is wrong with us (when we don’t recognize how serious our sin is).
  - **Excursus on sin # 1.** Not knowing God. Not knowing ourselves. Rebellion. Self centeredness. Foolishness. Slavery. Stockholm syndrome. Evil desires. Etc.
  - **Excursus on sin # 2.** Progression [1] heart/ thoughts/ emotions/ desires [2] words and [3] deeds/ actions.
  - **Excursus on good people.** Law in heart + parents + state + rewards.
- Lies about the Church:
  - When we give in to the lies that the Church is about me, my needs, for my pleasure/happiness, feeling good and fun, or that it is simply a community of loving, welcoming people. Then being a Christian = being nice a person.
  - But what is the Church? Metaphor of body (1 Cor. 12:12, Rom 12:5, Eph. 1:23, 4:15, Col); Why is she here? Metaphor of battle (Acts. 26:18, Col 1:13, Eph. 6.)

- There are different levels for lies:
  - o When we lie and are conscious about it (we know when we do it)
  - o Language – when we allow the world to define/change the meaning of words (e.g. love – feeling/desire/coveting, tolerance – person vs behaviour/respects vs obedience, equality - sameness, freedom – from responsibility/for my desires vs to be who we are created to be, discrimination – because of unimportant characteristics vs denying differences (Christians is Sydney University)).
  - o Ideologies/narratives (e.g. human autonomy (all what we have is given to us) sexual freedom and nature of sexuality (Kinsley/UN), radical feminism (we are the same), evolutionary thinking, etc.

## **Excursus on Cultural Marxists, or what is wrong with the West?**

### **This is very important!**

For Marx – class struggle was in economic terms; the rich vs the poor. The rich – oppressors, the poor – oppressed. Means to the end – revolution. It didn't work well.

Cultural Marxists transferred class struggle in cultural terms. They realized that if they want to destroy the West, they need to destroy its Christian culture/framework. They have been targeting Biblical model for marriage and family using victims/oppressors framework. How does it work?

You call one group 'victims' and other group 'oppressors'. Everyone naturally sympathizes with victims and wants to help them. No one wants to stand with oppressors. If one group are victims, they need to have all rights, oppressors, on the other hand, have no rights whatsoever. They shouldn't be even listened to.



This dualism has been applied to race (white/non-white), culture (West/non-West), religion (Christianity/others), authority (parent/children), gender (male/female), sexuality (hetero/homo), human identity (biology/transgender). The worst oppressor is white, male, married, father, Christian, heterosexual, who identifies as heterosexual.

CM have targeted authority, the office of parents (e.g. changes in education and parenting), roles of men and women (radical feminism – “roles are just social constructs”), sexuality (sexual revolution, Alfred Kinley “all kinds of sex are natural” homosexual agenda, transgender agenda – “I determine reality”).

Every time the same model is used. One group is portrayed as victims, other as oppressors. They are labelled as unloving, as haters, bigots, enemies of progress, etc. And if there is no clear picture how things should be (the Word gives it), then this framework works wonderfully. This explains why we can't discuss these issues. (E.g. Man at home, wife at work. Harvard – Summers. Marriage. Women's Ordination.)

There is one correct narrative - all forms of sexual activities are natural and good, chastity is bad, authority is bad, either is family or in education, patriarchy is very bad, there are no differences between men and women, we all are the same, homosexuality is natural and needs promotion, traditional marriage is bad and needs to go, and we can determine what gender we have regardless of biological realities of our bodies.

If you speak according to this narrative you are progressive and loving and you are right. For you stand with the oppressed. If you dare to speak against this narrative then you are politically incorrect, you are oppressor and enemy of progress and you don't have any rights to promote your hateful position. Welcome to the free West! Free from freedom.

If there is no truth, only perspectives, then those in power determine what the correct narrative will be. Opposite views are not allowed.

Also, if there is no truth, then there is no need for thinking what is truthful and what is not. Then we need to rely on feelings. What feels good, should be good. This is, why we have stopped thinking using our reason and now think using feeling. So, how do you feel about that?

### **Reformation: against lies.**

- Jesus Himself is the truth, the way and the live (John 14:6), it is not something abstract, He is a person who comes to you and speaks to you;
  - o **Excursus:** Resurrection and its meaning.  
Christianity as the most exclusive and the most inclusive worldview. Only through Jesus, and everyone is welcome, no merits required. It is a test to all worldviews.
- God's Word is a light (Ps 119:105, John 17:17, Eph. 5:8) that shines in darkness and reveals us the truth (about us, about God, about the world, about the Church); (John 8:32) truth sets us free. Makes wise. Sheds light.
- As we abide in His Word, His Spirit gradually reveals us all falsehood around us, helps to see the truth and makes us wise for this life and for salvation; (John 15:4-5, 1 Cor 1:30, 2.Tim 3:14-17, John 20:31).
- Jesus Christ suffered and died and so exposed the true face of lies and falsehood; they want nothing else but the death of the One who is the truth and His followers.
  - o Lies are like leaven (Mt 16:11-12).
  - o Metaphor of gangrene. (E.g. Guy who died.)
  - o Teaching as body. Corpus-articulus-doctrinae.  
Reformation's understanding.
- Jesus rouse again so that we can be assured that His Word is the truth. That the Bible is the truth and so that we can learn from it.

### [3] “The truth will set you free.” Freedom vs Slavery

*Narrative of freedom.* We can't be happy unless we are totally free to choose who we are and how we want to live. We are entitled to choose our ID.

What are the Church's alternatives? We are free to worship the way we want, the way we feel the best. We can read the Scriptures the way we want, we can have our interpretation. (It is not anymore about what God says to us, but what we feel/think.) The Gospel has freed us from the Law so there are no need for God's law for Christians, we are free to live as it pleases us. Etc.

#### **Deformation:**

- We want to be free, but we don't know what true freedom is.
- We desire to be free (and this is how we understand it):
  - o Free to do what we want (myth of autonomy, my choices, my rights)
  - o To be free from all authorities and responsibilities (anti-authority and anti-responsibility, only what I choose/want)
  - o To define who we are, what is good and what is evil (Gen 3)
    - **Excursus:** what is our ID, and what is not? (Derogation of our uniqueness / Image and Likeness).
  - o To re-define the reality around us (Gnosticism – disconnect from reality; spiritual is important – material is not, reality is not real, only what I think is real, e.g. sexuality.)
- BUT - We don't realize that this is our slavery to sin, that makes us to rebel against God's will/design for our lives;
  - o Sin / hearts-wills-desires / thoughts / words / deeds.
- The most serious is our slavery to self-centredness, 'self' is our greatest idol.

- **Excursus:** Luther on idolatry. The Idol of self. Idols as substitutes for the Triune God. How does it work?
- **Excursus:** Idols in our lives... what are they...

## **Reformation:**

- Jesus delivered Himself into captivity and then into death, so that we can be set free (Mt 20:28, Mark 10:45). When we learn about His love and mercy, we are made free from the idol of self.
- Jesus gives us two freedoms:
  - freedom *from* – from falsehood, from slavery to self and our idols and sins;
  - freedom *for* – to live the life for which we are created, receiving everything from God and serving with everything our neighbours (2KR);
- This is the true freedom, when transformed by the Holy Spirit, we can rejoice living as we ought to live, it is God's gift to us (remember 4 big events)
- God's 'open secret' for true freedom and happiness is not found in pursuits of freedom and happiness focusing on ourselves, but in life where we receive everything from the Triune God and serve with it our neighbours (2KR, Image and Likeness.)

## **Discipleship: following Jesus vs culture/myself.**

Cultural narrative: [feeling good/happiness/therapeutic] The purpose of my life is to pursue my own happiness, to do whatever it takes to care for myself. It all about doing something that makes me feel good. How I feel about something is a measure of all things. I am a measure of all things.

What are our problems? [The Law – shows our sin]

- This is not what Christian discipleship is about. We don't want to be Jesus disciples ("deny yourself, take your cross and follow me"), or want to be only by name (cultural Christians);
  - o Moral therapeutic deism.
    - There is a god.
    - He wants me to feel happy
    - He is not very involved, unless I need His help
    - All good people go to heaven. May be not Hitler.
- We don't want to take on the commitment to abide in His words – this is about listening, meditation, learning, growing in God's wisdom....
- We don't want to make commitments that true discipleship implies, we don't want to obey, don't like discipline, we want to be like gods ourselves.
  - o That is, we build our own worldviews... we are smarter... independent...

**What is God's answer?** [The Gospel – shows our Saviour]

- We can't become Jesus' disciples on our own, that is a gift/work of the Holy Spirit, and the Father gives His Spirit abundantly to everyone who asks for it;
- As the Holy Spirit enables us to trust the Lord and to respond to His calling, we have the privilege to live and His children already now;
- Because of Jesus' cross we are reconciled with God, and have a new identity, we can enjoy living as Jesus' disciples – our life flows out from Jesus' cross and resurrection;
- Being Jesus' disciple doesn't necessarily spare us of all difficulties, but we know that when we follow Him, He is always with us;
- As we follow Jesus, we receive hundredfold already in this life and eternal life in the age to come.

## God given identity vs Self-made identity

Cultural narrative: You can choose to be whoever you want, and no one can tell you who you should be.

What are our problems? [The Law – shows our sin]

- The world lies that we can define who we are or who we want to be (Gnosticism);
- When we try to live according to this world's standards, it never leads to peace and joy; success leads to pride, failure into despair;
- We accept worldly criteria that determines our identity, dignity and value – and become enslaved to them;
- Because our hearts are in rebellion to God, we don't even know who we are created to be, what our true identity is;
- Even when we learn it, we don't trust that God's design for our lives is what brings ultimate fulfilment, we want to be in control ourselves.

What is God's answer? [The Gospel – shows our Saviour]

- Jesus Christ reveals what it means to be truly human: to live trusting in God and loving our neighbours as ourselves;
- The Triune God gives us our ID, we are created in His image and likeness;
- Jesus Christ gives us ultimate worth and dignity. Everything is as valuable as anyone is ready to pay for it, Jesus gave His life in exchange for yours;
- In our Baptism Jesus Christ gives us a new identity – a child of God and an heir of God's eternal Kingdom, this is who you are;
- The Holy Spirit through the Word in the Bible and the Divine Service restores God's image in us and enables us to live as God's children in fellowship with Him;
- No one will take this new ID from us, it will remain for the age to come.