

*For Harvest Bible Church—
Praise God for your fellowship, love,
and hunger for the Truth*

Preface to the New Edition

I minister at a small, rural church in northern New England—the hotbed of theological liberalism and post-Christian dead orthodoxy. For those seeking to find a home church, the search is often difficult and disappointing. Most New England towns have at best a church or two, but it's often a roll of the dice when you walk in the door as to what you will find. Will you find the gospel? Will there be spiritual encouragement? Will there even be Christians in attendance, or is it simply a social club?

A few years ago, in conjunction with the Protestant celebration of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, I published a shorter version of the book you now hold in your hands. As I considered the distinguishing markers of the Christian faith, it struck me that so few Protestants I knew were confident understanding or explaining the core tenets of the Protestant faith. I wanted to offer some help. The result was *Why We're Protestant: An Introduction to the Five Solas of the Reformation*.

In the kindness of God, the book was well-received. Suddenly, I was getting emails and letters from people around the world sharing the impact the book had had on them. Some gave copies away to unsaved family and friends. Others used it as an apologetic

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tool. While others simply read it to help them further understand what they believe.

Since its release, however, I have felt like I wanted to say a bit more. When Christian Focus approached me with the prospect of publishing with them, I leapt at the opportunity to release a more definitive edition of *Why We're Protestant*. This new volume has not only been revised from the original, but I have added three appendices that are designed to expand on some key Protestant themes: the priesthood of all believers, the theology of the cross, and *simul justus et peccator*. It's my hope that this book will serve as a helpful introductory resource for believers everywhere to be able to give a defense of biblical Christianity and the Protestant position. May the Lord bring glory to Himself and edify His church through this work.

Nate Pickowicz
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Introduction

The Protestant Crisis

We are currently in the midst of a crisis. On the surface, it appears to be a Protestant crisis but, in truth, it's more of a *Christianity* crisis. The tenets of the Christian faith are under attack by the very same people who claim to be upholding them. Sadly, many people who regularly sit in 'Christian' churches believe they are going to heaven, but they are being taught a message that will surely not lead them there. While Jesus said, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, through Me' (John 14:6), scores of churchgoers are being told that eternal life is attained by other means. Therefore, this is most certainly a *gospel* crisis. And for five hundred years, it has been clear that Protestants and Catholics have two different understandings of: what is the gospel, how a person gets right with God, and how to get to heaven.

Recently, however, the Protestant Church has been drifting back toward Rome. In earlier years, the Roman Catholic Church made no bones about the division between the two groups, but since Vatican II (1962–1965), the world has believed it was seeing a 'kinder, gentler' Catholic Church. In 1994, a number of prominent Protestant and Catholic leaders signed an ecumenical document called *Evangelicals and Catholics Together* (ECT). While this

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effort was met with much resistance on both sides, it was a sign that the times were changing. Even today, many Protestants have linked arms with Roman Catholics, thus presenting to the world a unified religious front.

However, Protestantism and Roman Catholicism are two completely opposing religious systems. While they use much of the same theological language, their understanding of the person of God, the nature of sin, the work of Jesus Christ, the gospel, the doctrines of justification and sanctification, the church, the content and authority of the Scriptures, and the Christian mission is completely different. Yet there are Protestants who muddy the waters by pretending that no such distinction exists.

WHY IS THIS HAPPENING?

The problem is multi-faceted. The spirit of our present age is one of so-called 'tolerance'—a blind acceptance of all worldviews and religions (except for biblical Christianity!), regardless of the validity of their truth-claims. Liberalism is surging, and ecumenism is on the rise. Many Christians seem to believe that since both Catholics and Protestants use much of the same language ('God,' 'Jesus,' 'Church,' 'Bible,' etc.), the two groups are 'close enough' and everyone who claims the name of Christ should set aside their differences and accept one another in faith. But this attitude is both careless and intellectually dishonest.

Further compounding the problem, biblical and theological literacy is at a new low.¹ Frankly, many Protestants don't know what the Bible says, nor what they should believe. Modern-day mysticism has swept professing Christians into the belief that if something feels right, then it is. Therefore, they maintain that the rejection

1. Many recent studies have shown this fact to be true. One of the more helpful articles to address the phenomenon is Chris Larson, 'The State of Theology: New Findings on America's Theological Health,' <http://www.ligonier.org/blog/state-theology-new-findings-americas-theological-health/> (accessed July 21, 2017).

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of Roman Catholic dogma is wrong, simply because it feels like it should be wrong.

Beyond this, Protestants are growing increasingly ignorant of the gospel. Because of their lack of biblical knowledge, mixed with lowest-common-denominator credos like, ‘Just love Jesus,’ etc., they are largely ignorant of what it actually means to be a Christian—namely, the belief in the saving gospel of Jesus Christ laid out in the Scriptures. This sort of minimalist-Christianity is eating Protestantism like cancer. In short, Protestants don’t know why they’re Protestants.

Making matters worse, much of mainstream Protestantism has been held captive to sensationalism and easy-believism. The popularity of the seeker church movement has effectively created a shallow faith experience for many believers. Growing tired of being shown ‘what’s new,’ this generation of Christians has found themselves untethered to anything resembling an historic Christianity. The veneer is starting to peel off, and Christians are looking to fall back toward a more seemingly traditional faith. Out of discontent and fatigue, many disenfranchised Protestants are wandering off the megachurch reservation, and crossing the Tiber into the arms of Mother Mary.

These, and other reasons, are why a re-examination of the core of Protestant Christianity is desperately needed.

WHY THE REFORMATION HAPPENED

At the height of Rome’s corruption, a movement took shape in the sixteenth century to reform the Church. Men like Martin Luther, Philip Melancthon, Ulrich Zwingli, John Calvin, John Knox, William Tyndale, and others, were used by God to recapture what had been lost for a thousand years—the essentials of biblical Christianity. Like Moses, David, and Paul, these men were far from perfect: Luther was known for his ungracious attitude toward non-believers, Zwingli was enamored with nationalistic zeal (he died on the battlefield, sword-in-hand!), and Calvin has been deemed

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guilty-by-association in the death of Michael Servetus. But despite having feet of clay, God used these men to bring about a worldwide Reformation, and open the doors for the gospel to be spread to all corners of the earth.

What was the message of the Reformation? In essence, the main question asked and answered was: *How does a person get right with God?* This was the central issue. For Rome, sinners are saved by faithfully adhering to the dogma of the Catholic Church. But when the Reformers began to examine the Bible, they saw that salvation came by God Himself through the gospel of Jesus Christ. And while the totality of Reformation doctrine was vast (see John Calvin's *magnum opus Institutes of the Christian Religion*), the spirit of the Reformation comes to us through five credos known as, 'The Five Solas'—*sola Scriptura, sola gratia, sola fide, solus Christus*, and *soli Deo gloria*.

THE CONTENT AND AIM OF THIS BOOK

In the spring of 2017, I had the privilege of teaching through *The Five Solas* at Harvest Bible Church in Gilmanton Iron Works, New Hampshire. Very quickly, I realized that my six-week series could have easily been a sixty-week series, as the material was so dense and wondrously rich! Admittedly, my contribution will, at best, serve as a mere introduction to a broader field of Reformation theology and literature. In fact, I would encourage the reader to access the Bibliography at the end of this book to find further resources for study.

But in approaching the topic of the Protestant Reformation in this book, we will examine the question: *How does a person get right with God?* In the end, my hope for this book is that it would help re-drive the nail into Wittenberg's door. May this serve as a reminder to those who have forgotten and an apologetic to those who are unconvinced. Above all, may Jesus Christ be exalted and the Lord God be glorified!

Soli Deo Gloria!

*... the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith: as it is
written, 'The righteous shall live by faith.'
(Romans 1:17)*