

## Return To Scripture to Find Spiritual Truth

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Many people crave an authentic relationship with God. They want some assurance that the pains and trials of this world have some larger purpose. They feel the hopelessness of this life. Something within their heart yearns for spiritual truth above this broken material existence.

Where do people go to find hope? Where do they turn to rise up out of the ashes of this world's suffering? Sadly, more and more people are looking for answers outside of the church. Why is this? The reasons are as varied as the people who hold them, but it might be helpful to consider just two of them here.

The church is abandoning the authority of the Bible. The Bible has always been criticized by those outside the fold, but when the leaders and teachers within the church no longer have confidence in its authority, the very foundation of organized religion begins to crumble. Why would leaders within the church abandon the authority of the Bible? Maybe the easiest answer is that the Bible contains many teachings that are very difficult to swallow. People often choose the path of least resistance. Rather than submit our thinking to that of the Bible, it is easier to simply believe what we want to believe. Church leaders know this. And they choose to teach things that people want to hear rather than the truth found on the pages of scripture. But over time, this watered-down, man-pleasing religion feels empty. The easier path truly leads nowhere. And those who have been sitting under such teaching do not even know what they have been missing. But they no longer believe that the church has real answers to their real problems.

Another reason why people no longer look to the church for answers to life's questions is that those in the church look too much like those outside the church. Religion does not seem to be helping all that much. Those in the church do not appear to be any happier. They go to church on Sunday (sometimes), but their lives are just as broken as those outside the church. What is the point?

These issues are not new. We may have more technology and gadgets. We may live at a faster pace. But essentially the struggle is the same. People oppose the Bible or they neglect it. But the authority of the Bible is not dependent upon the confidence of men. The Bible does give answers to the problems of life. And if the church will fully embrace those answers, true change will occur and believers will experience meaning and purpose in the midst of struggle.

This year marks the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. It was in 1517 that a Roman Catholic monk named Martin Luther nailed the 95 Theses on the door of the University of Wittenberg. The Reformation is known for its central doctrine

of justification. A sinner could be declared by God as "just" because the perfection of Jesus Christ was credited to them by faith alone. Those corrupted by sin could again experience peace with God.

But many fail to realize the foundation that made the Reformation possible. Martin Luther (and others) came to the truth of justification because they held firmly to another even more basic tenant. What was this belief? It was a conviction that if men were ever going to find truth, they must return to the sources. They must not accept religion as they currently found it. They must return to fountain of true religion: the Bible.

Most of the leaders of the Reformation could speak Latin. So, they used a Latin phrase to express their search for truth: Ad Fontes, "to the fountains." It was this return to the Bible that sparked a reformation of true religion 500 years ago. If we want a revival of the church, a revival of true religion, then we will follow Luther's example and return to the fountain. The answer is not to move away from scripture. It is to return to the authority of scripture.

The Roman Catholic Church had clouded the teachings of the Bible. And Luther, a Catholic monk, came to realize this because he was able to read for himself the pages of scripture. His passion was to give people the same access to the glorious truths of the Bible. It is the authority of scripture that is the fountain of all true religion. And only as people are brought face to face with the truth contained in its pages will men and women again know God truly.

When asked how the Reformation occurred, Luther pointed to the Word.

"Take me, for example. I opposed indulgences and all papists, but never by force. I simply taught, preached, wrote God's Word: otherwise I did nothing. And then, while I slept or drank Wittenberg beer with my Philip of Amsdorf the Word so greatly weakened the papacy that never a prince or emperor did such damage to it. I did nothing: the Word did it all. Had I wanted to start trouble ... I could have started such a little game at Worms that even the emperor wouldn't have been safe. But what would it have been? A mug's game. I did nothing: I left it to the Word." (Luther's Works)

The church needs men with the conviction and courage of Martin Luther. We must return to our confidence in the word of God. And we must devote ourselves to preach and teach the word, and nothing but the word. God will surely do the work of bringing hope to a people who desperately need it.