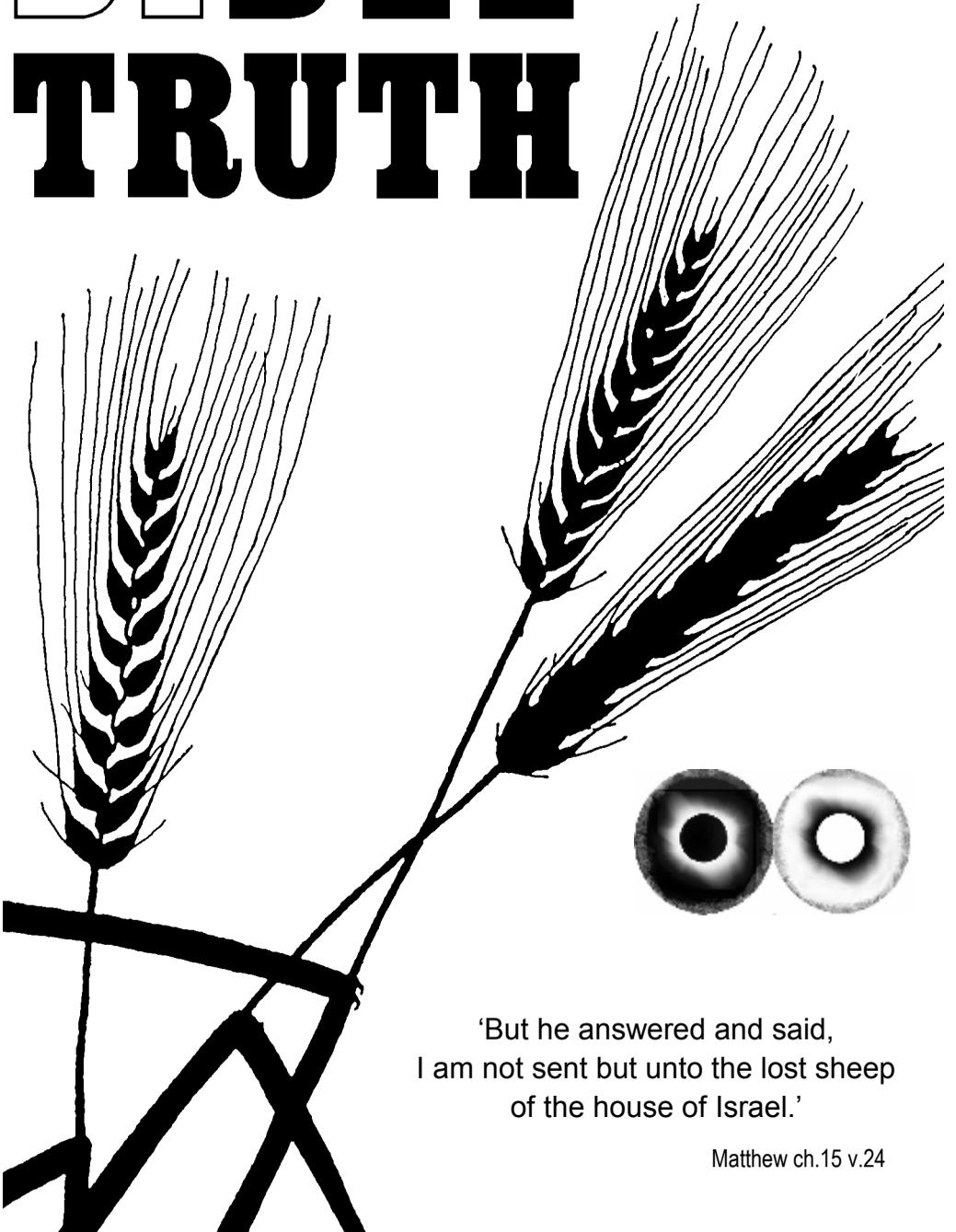


# BIBLE TRUTH

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'But he answered and said,  
I am not sent but unto the lost sheep  
of the house of Israel.'

Matthew ch.15 v.24



# The Reformation, a Spiritual Revolution

by the late Jon Ellis

For more than two hundred years before the Reformation God was preparing the ground in England by raising up men such as John Wycliffe.

Far from being a mere political movement as some may suppose, the Reformation was very much a spiritual revolution, when the truth of the Gospel was being revealed once again. The Holy Spirit began to move upon the heart of man, starting with one man on the Continent, Martin Luther, whose eyes were suddenly opened to the glorious truth that man did not have to earn salvation by his own efforts and merit, as taught by the Church of Rome.

It was in 1519 God revealed to Luther through the Scriptures that he could be eternally saved from the guilt and consequences of sin. When the light dawned on Luther's soul he put his entire trust in becoming a new creature in Christ Jesus. Realising he was God's son and filled with His Holy Spirit, his life was now transformed. This was a truly revolutionary experience for Luther! Right at its heart was the basic Christian teaching which had led to his conversion – the doctrine of justification by faith in Jesus Christ, and only in Jesus Christ.

'... a man is not justified by the works of the law, ... for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.'

Galatians ch.2 v.16

In 1507 Martin Luther had become a priest and was sent to Rome by his monastic leaders, but Luther was disenchanted with the rituals and dead faith he found in the papal city. There was nothing in Rome to mend his despairing spirit or settle his restless soul that felt so cut off from God, and nowhere could he find relief. At the time he wrote the following.

'My situation was that, although an impeccable monk, I stood before God as a sinner troubled in conscience, and I had no confidence that my merit would assuage him. Night and day I pondered until I saw the connection between the justice of God and the statement, *the just shall live by faith*. Then I grasped that

the justice of God is that righteousness by which through grace and sheer mercy God justifies us through faith. Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise. The whole of Scripture took on a new meaning ... This passage of the apostle Paul became to me a gate to heaven.'

Luther saw the corruption of the Church by greed and false teaching. The glorious truth of justification by faith alone had become hidden. What distressed him the most was the practice of indulgences involving the certificates the church provided, for a fee, supposedly to shorten one's stay in Purgatory. The Pope encouraged the sale of indulgences, planning to use the money to help pay for the building of St Peter's Basilica in Rome.

It was 1517, in the little town of Wittenberg, Germany, that no one seemed to notice the priest nailing his challenge to debate on the church door; but within the week, copies of his theses would be discussed throughout the surrounding regions. In less than a decade, Europe itself would be shaken by his simple act. Later generations would mark Martin Luther's nailing of '95 theses' on the church door as the beginning of the Protestant Reformation. This movement from Wittenburg, spread to Geneva and then took root in Scotland and England.

### **The Reformation reaches England**

In Henry VIII's reign the average Englishman held with great affection their Welsh and Celtic Christian ancestors and there was resistance to the Pope's interference in their affairs. They came to understand what many English had appreciated long before – that if England was to exist as a nation she must protect both spiritual and temporal jurisdiction from being manipulated from outside. Henry decided the time had come when England would no longer submit to rule by a religious authority, or any other that sits hundreds of miles away from our island shores, and judges English matters by French, Spanish or Italian standards. Likewise these are the very issues that have to be decided by our nation's leaders today.

Measured steps were taken, by Henry until England was entirely independent of every kind of administration from Rome. (Is there a comparison with Brussels and Rome today?). A Bill was finally passed through Parliament that abolished all papal authority in England. One month later a letter was written to the Pope by the King who described his position as Sovereign, recognising that there is no superior on earth, but only God, who is not subject to the law of any

earthly creature. The break with Rome was complete. The Church in England was now free to develop as it should have done at the time of the Synod of Whitby.

The Reformation Parliament in 1529 acquired a continuity of personal experience among its members which helped build up the tradition of the present House of Commons as a great instrument of government. To quote G.M. Trevelyan,

'If English history had remained a branch of European history instead of going off on a course of its own, that decline would have continued until the English Parliament had followed into oblivion the medieval Estates of France and Spain'.

These were political manoeuvres, but God used them, choosing the most unlikely persons to serve his purpose. At this stage the English Reformation ushered in the Protestant religion.

King Henry as Supreme Head of the Church proceeded to reform the religion of his subjects. All over the country 'relics' were being destroyed including 'miracle-working' images, with their crudity imposed on the people, and all structures that had been set up by the Church of Rome were removed. He ordered the clergy to recite the Lord's Prayer to congregations, and for fathers to teach their children the Commandments, and Articles of Faith in English.

At this time the darkness in England was intense. However, once again God raised up a faithful servant in William Tyndale who being aware of the spiritual darkness which gripped his beloved country, also knew that the availability of God's Word brings light into mankind's heart. Up to now Scripture, which was written in Latin, had been denied to all but the priests.

Tyndale put all his effort into printing the Bible in English, but he was hounded and persecuted as he strove to complete this task and eventually was driven to the Continent, from where he shipped copies into England. This zeal cost him his life but just before this martyrdom for his endeavours he uttered this heart rendering prayer.

'Lord, open the King of England's eyes.'

The efforts of God's servant were not thwarted, the prayer was answered by Henry VIII who commanded that a Bible be chained to every church lectern and encouraged the people to read it. Tyndale's prayer is inscribed on his statue which stands on the Thames Embankment, London. This noble scholar and martyr's work was continued by Miles Coverdale.

The link in the Reformation with Geneva, Scotland and England was John Knox (1505-1572), a priest in the Roman Catholic Church in Scotland, at the time when John Calvin began the Reformation of Geneva. The flames of the Reformation began to be kindled in Scotland in the heart and mind of Knox's close friend George Wiseheart. Wiseheart was chosen by King Henry VIII to go to Scotland and intercede for the hand in marriage of Mary Stuart, the infant 'Queen of Scots'. Wiseheart was an unwilling tool of Henry in this matter, which set Catholic Scotland against him. When Wiseheart was burned at the stake, the fires that consumed his body fired the heart of John Knox. From that hour he was the enemy of the Roman Catholic Church.

With a group of followers he accused the Catholic clergy in Scotland of being 'gluttons, wantons and licentious revellers'. Then he travelled to Geneva to study under Calvin who had a high regard for this young Scotsman.

When Mary Queen of Scots landed on Scottish soil, Knox sought a personal interview with her, 'with intent to bring her heart to Jesus'. Mary, in turn tried to convert Knox back to Roman Catholicism - or the 'Mother Church' - with bribes of political power. In response to his prayers, Mary Queen of Scots is reputed to have said,

'I fear the prayers of John Knox more than all the assembled armies of Europe'.

Mary fled Scotland and Knox was survived by the Scottish Covenanters, who drew up a compact in 1638 asserting their right, under God, to national sovereignty.