

BLOOD FOR CLARITY

PART 4 - Clarity Killed the Reformers

Two considerations from the 16th century to strengthen our confidence in the clarity of Scripture:

1. The context in which the Reformation occurred

a. *The English Bible was inaccessible*

b. *The Greek New Testament was published*

- “If we do not stop this leak,’ said he [Edward Lee], when he heard of the New Testament, ‘it will sink the ship.’ Nothing terrifies the defenders of human traditions so much as the word of God.”¹

c. *Bible reading was considered dangerous*

d. *Clear Scripture was being subjected to human interpreters*

- “The Samaritan woman was clever enough to say to Christ (John 4): ‘I know that Messias cometh, which is called Christ: when he cometh, he will tell us all things.’ And our theologians have not yet learned that lesson. Ask them if they understand the words: Christ is *caput ecclesiae*, that is Christ is head of the congregation or church which is his body. They will answer: Yes, they understand them very well, but they may not do so apart from the official pronouncements of men. What poor creatures! Rather than allow themselves to be vanquished by the truth, they deny that they are men, as if they had no ordinary intelligence and did not know the meaning of *caput*. And all that in order to subject the truth to the Caiaphas’s and and Annas’s, its official interpreters.”
— Ulrich Zwingli²

¹ J. H. Merle d’Aubigné, *The Reformation in England* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2015), 137.

² Ulrich Zwingli, *Zwingli and Bullinger* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1953), 79.

- **Council of Trent.** "Furthermore, in order to restrain petulant spirits, It decrees, that no one, relying on his own skill, shall, in matters of faith, and of morals pertaining to the edification of Christian doctrine, wresting the sacred Scripture to his own senses, dare to interpret the said sacred Scripture contrary to that sense which holy mother Church, whose it is to judge of the true sense and interpretation of the holy Scriptures, hath held and doth hold; or even contrary to the unanimous consent of the Fathers; "even though suchlike interpretations were never [intended] to be at anytime published. They who shall contravene shall be made known by their ordinaries, and be punished with the penalties by law established."³

e. *The way of salvation was unknown.*

- "Illustration: A man is longing for his soul's salvation, and he asks a Carthusian: Dear brother, what must I do to be saved? And the answer will undoubtedly be this: Enter our order, and you will assuredly be saved, for it is the most rigorous. But ask a Benedictine and he replies: It is worth noting that salvation is easiest in our order, for it is the most ancient. But if you ask a Dominican he will answer: In our order salvation is certain, for it was given from heaven by our Lady. And if you ask a Franciscan, he will say: Our order is the greatest and most famous of all; consider then whether you will find salvation more easily in any other. And if you ask the Pope he will say: It is easiest with an indulgence. And if you ask those of Compostella they will say: If you come here to St. James you will never be lost and you will never be poor. You see, they all show you some different way, and they all contend fiercely that their way is the right one. But the seeking soul cries out: Alas! Who shall I follow? They all argue so persuasively that I am at a loss what to do. And finally it can only run to God and earnestly pray to him, saying: Oh God, show me which order or which way is the most certain. [Then Zwingli adds this counsel] You fool, you go to God simply that he may distinguish between men, and you do not ask him to show you that way of salvation which is pleasing to him and which he himself regards as sure and certain. Note that you are merely asking God to confirm something which men have told you. But why do you not say: Oh God, they all disagree amongst themselves; but you are the only, unconcealed good; show me the way of salvation? And the Gospel gives us a sure message, or answer, or assurance." — Ulrich Zwingli⁴

³ Theodore, Alois Buckley, trans., *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent* (London: George Routledge and Co., 1851), 19.

⁴ Zwingli, *Zwingli and Bullinger*, 83-84.

2. The convictions for which the Reformers suffered.

a. *The Scriptures are objectively clear.*

- “I know that to many people a great deal remains obscure; but that is due, not to any lack of clarity in Scripture, but to their own blindness and dullness, in that they make no effort to see truth which, in itself, could not be plainer... They are like men who cover their eyes, or go from daylight into darkness, and hide there, and then blame the sun, or the darkness of the day, for their inability to see. So let wretched men abjure that blasphemous perversity which would blame the darkness of their own hearts on to the plain Scriptures of God!” — Martin Luther⁵

b. *The Scriptures are clear enough to convert those who read them.*

c. *The Scriptures must be translated into the vulgar tongue (common language)*

- “A thousand books had they lever to be put forth against their abominable doings and doctrine, than that the scripture should come to light. For as long as they may keep that down, they will so darken the right way with the mist of their sophistry, and so tangle them that either rebuke or despise their abominations, with arguments of philosophy and with worldly similitudes and apparent reasons of natural wisdom, and with wresting the scripture unto their own purpose, clean contrary unto the process, order, and meaning of the text; and so delude them in descanting upon it with allegories, and amaze them, expounding it in many senses before the unlearned lay-people, (when it hath but one simple literal sense, whose light the owls cannot abide,) that, though thou feel in thine heart, and art sure, how that all is false that they say, yet couldst thou not solve their subtle riddles.

Which thing only moved me to translate the new Testament. Because I had perceived by experience, how that it was impossible to establish the lay-people in any truth, except the scripture were plainly laid before their eyes in their mother-tongue, that they might see the process, order, and meaning of the text” — William Tyndale⁶

⁵ Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will* (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell, 1957), 72.

⁶ William Tyndale, *Works of William Tyndale, Volume I* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2010), 393-394.