

Thoughts From Other Minds:

‘But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed’ (St Paul, Galatians 1:8-9).

In the West we live in pluralistic, multicultural societies. ... The society of Paul's day was also pluralistic and multicultural. If the Christians had only wanted to add Christ to the Roman pantheon, that would have been quite all right. But they were wanting to say that Christ is the Lord, and that there is only one ultimate truth. The gospel is not one way to God; it is the only way. ...

The issue is this: is Christ's work of atonement perfect and complete, or not? The Galatians, wittingly or unwittingly, were drifting towards the view that Christ's work of atonement needed some bolstering. It is like being offered a cool, refreshing drink that appears delightful in every way - except that there is a drop of poison in it. You might say, 'Surely, circumcision is not that significant?' No, not in itself, as Acts 16:3 makes clear. But circumcision for evangelism is one thing; circumcision for salvation is another. Salvation is not by Christ plus circumcision, or Christ plus anything. There is only one gospel, and it is not 'Christ Plus'.

This is not a trivial matter. Verse 8 begins with a resounding and adversative 'but' (Gk. *alla*). Paul is emphasizing his point in the strongest possible way. The apostle's language might sound a bit extreme, but certainly he did not think so, for he repeats himself in the next verse. Verse 8 was thus no slip of the pen. ...

No minister, no bishop, no synod, no pope, no angel has the authority to change this gospel one iota. Luther used to phrase things very bluntly: 'That which does not teach Christ is not apostolic, even if Peter and Paul be the teachers. On the other hand, that which does teach Christ is apostolic, even if Judas, Annas, Pilate or Herod should propound it.'

Luther had good reason to write this, because his Dominican opponent, Silvester Prierias, had sought to answer Luther's appeal to Scripture by asserting that 'He who does not accept the doctrine of the Church of Rome and pontiff of Rome as an infallible rule of faith, from which the Holy Scriptures, too, draw their strength and authority, is a heretic.' At times Calvin could be even fiercer than Luther: 'We may say that even if the Pope and all his stinking clergy had the angels on their side, this would be nothing compared to the Lord Jesus Christ.' Indeed, the renowned medieval doctor Thomas Aquinas got this right: 'I answer that nothing is to be taught except what is contained, either implicitly or explicitly, in the Gospels and epistles and Sacred Scripture.'

In summary, the message is more crucial than the messenger; content means more than credentials.

Peter Barnes, Galatians, pp. 57-61

Camperdown Noorat Terang Presbyterian Charge

9 October 2016

Sermon: “Patrick Hamilton, proto-martyr of the Reformation in Scotland”

Scripture: Galatians 1:1-24

Sermon Notes

Introduction: October marks the anniversary the beginning of the great 16th century revival of evangelical Christianity that we know as ‘The Reformation’. We mention it, not to stir up hostility or bitterness, but to celebrate it as a gift of God’s grace .

We remember the Reformation because the Roman Catholic Church holds today that there is no salvation apart from believing the teachings rejected by the Reformers as unbiblical as God’s truth.

We also remember the Reformation to increase our gratitude to God for the gospel blessings that have come to us through great suffering (cf. Col 1:24). In the 16th century many suffered for Christ and his gospel—and so we give thanks.

1. Who was Patrick Hamilton?

This year we remember how the Reformation came to Scotland, beginning with Patrick Hamilton, who was burned as a heretic at 23 years of age at St Andrews on the 29th of February 1528.

In 1407 John Resby, a English follower of John Wickliffe, was burned at Perth, for denying that the Pope was God’s vicar on earth. Paul Craw, a Bohemian doctor, was burned at St Andrews in 1433 for denying transubstantiation and purgatory and saying that the Bible should be available in the language of the people.

But Patrick Hamilton’s death is generally considered to mark the beginning of the Reformation in Scotland. He was born near Glasgow, abt. 1504, of royal blood. At the age of 14 he was made Abbot of Ferme, and the income enabled him to study abroad, where he came under Lutheran influence.

In 1524 he returned to Scotland to teach at St Andrews; in 1526 he began to openly teach ‘Lutheran’ doctrines and, summoned to be tried for heresy he fled to Europe, to study and Marburg and at Wittenberg under Luther, where he published his ‘Patrick’s Places’, the earliest doctrinal production of the Scottish Reformation.

In 1527 he returned to Scotland; as a Lutheran missionary and with royal blood he was regarded as a dangerous heretic; Archbishop James Beaton invited him to St Andrews for a conference on the condition of the Church; after a month he was arrested, tried and handed over to the secular power for punishment.

Afraid he might be rescued, they burned him that afternoon in front of St Salvatore’s College, where his initials, set in the pavement, mark the place. Offered his life he would recant, he refused, preferring to die for the faith than to die in hell; the wood was damp, and he died after terrible suffering, praying for Scotland.

2. Why did he die?

He was charged with many articles of 'heresy' as recorded by Foxe in his 'Book of Martyrs' - but the real reason he died was that he refused to accept the authority of the Church against the plain teaching of the Bible.

Accused of being a heretic for saying it is lawful for all people to read the Bible, he replied that it is lawful for all to read to amend their lives by faith and repentance and to come to the mercy of God in Christ Jesus.

Accused of being a heretic for saying it is not lawful to worship imagery, he replied that he said no more than what God told Moses 'Thou shalt not make any graven image; thou shalt not bow down to them to worship them' (Ex 20).

Accused of being a heretic for saying it is futile to pray to the saints, he said 'I say with Paul, 'There is no mediator betwixt God and man but Christ Jesus, His Son' ; and whatsoever they be who call or pray to any saint departed, they spoil Christ Jesus of His office.'

Accused of being a heretic for saying it is in vain to labour to release souls from purgatory, he replied that he had not read of such a place in the scriptures, and that on the blood of Christ, not masses, not gold or silver, can purge the souls of sinners.

Unable to convict of him of heresy from the scriptures, his judges condemned him for denying the institutions of the church and the authority of the Pope, and so he perished Today the Catholic Church maintains the same claim to be the final authority in matters of faith (Catechism of the Catholic Church Qs. 97, 100).

Salvation is by God's grace; he saves us by his grace through faith when we can do nothing to save ourselves (Eph 2:8). Hamilton refused to recant because the gospel of the Church was not the gospel of Christ but another gospel, no gospel at all (Gal 1:7). Salvation is by faith alone in Christ alone; as a gift, or not at all.

3. What was the result of his death?

Instead of being a set-back for the gospel, humanly speaking his death did more than any other event to make the Reformation in Scotland a movement of the people; many were indignant and outraged; interest in reformed doctrine increased a hundred-fold and 'his reek (smoke) infected as many as it blew upon'.

Patrick's influence is seen in place names to the north of St Andrews, including Luther's Torrent, where Henry Forrest, who called Patrick a martyr and read the New Testament, was also burned for the faith; and many others also came to this saving faith in Christ alone through Patrick's faithful testimony even unto death.

Today, like Abel (Heb 11:4) 'by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead'; by faith he held fast to the Lord Jesus through the worst the enemies of the gospel could do; by faith he endured fear and the flames and won the crown of life (Rev 2:10). But do we have the same saving faith he had? Will we follow in his steps?

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My Notes:

Questions for Reflection:

1. What are good reasons for remembering the Reformation of the 16th Century? What would be bad reasons for remembering it? Why might we as Presbyterians be especially familiar with the Reformation as it happened in Scotland?
2. The apostle Paul wrote 'Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church.' (Col 1:24). How might this encourage us to remember the suffering of the martyrs? How might it help us suffer for the gospel?
3. Why do we as Protestants set the authority of the scripture above the authority of the church? Where does the church get its authority? Where does the scripture get its authority? How did this play out in the martyrdom of Patrick Hamilton?
4. How does the apostle Paul's teaching in Galatians chapter one bear on the controversy between Rome and the Reformers, and on our differences with Roman Catholicism today? Why do differences in doctrine (teaching) matter? Why is 'another gospel' no gospel at all?