

## Great Controversy Series

### 14 The Reform in Switzerland

Matthew 4:19 Then He said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men."

This call from Jesus was not given to the rich, educated and important people. The leaders who were used to praise and honor were proud and their self-confidence was high. Such people could not sympathize with their fellow human beings and could not cooperate with Christ.

This call was given to uneducated, ordinary people, even to fishermen. These were people who could be taught. As in Jesus' time, so it was also in the time of Reform. In the same way that God chose Martin Luther who came from a humble background, to forward the work of Reform in Switzerland, He again chose a man who lived a humble life. His name was Ulric Zwingli.

1 Corinthians 1:26 For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, *are called*.<sup>27</sup> But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty;

This is God's plan. God chooses the weak things of this world to shame the proud.

Yes brother or sister, as we have seen before in the great controversy between Christ and Satan, we will see the large in number, those who have many, the esteemed and powerful against the poor, weak and small in number. Which side was the Lord on? Many people say, as they did in Jesus' time:

John 7:48 "Have any of the rulers or the Pharisees believed in Him?"

In general the people rejected Jesus because He was humble and the number of His followers was few. If the leaders don't accept something, most of the time the people don't accept it. But the leaders were wrong. The people were wrong too because they looked to the leaders to learn the truth. The people did not want to use their own reasoning powers. It was easier to follow their leaders.

Zwingli was the son of a shepherd in the Alps Mountains. He grew up listening to the stories of the heroes of the Alps and a few of the stories that his grandmother could remember from the Bible. Zwingli's father wanted an education for his child. But the child was very intelligent and it was hard to find someone who could teach him. Thus he sent his child from the mountain to the city of Bern. Switzerland's best school was there.

In school there was a danger awaiting Zwingli. The monks tried with all their efforts to draw him to the monastery. The Dominican and Franciscan monks were in competition to win popular favor. They endeavored to do this with showy adornment of the churches, magnificent ceremonies and famous relics and enchanting miraculous icons.

If the Dominicans could win this extremely talented young scholar, it would mean money and honor. This was because people would come to listen to him and give offerings. When his father learned of the plan he understood the danger. He didn't want his child to be left in the empty life of the monks and he called his child home. But Zwingli didn't stay in his father's home very long. Zwingli, who went to Basel, became a student of Wittenbach. Wittenbach, while studying the ancient languages of Hebrew and Greek was directed to the Scriptures. In the Scriptures he learned the truth and he introduced Jesus to the students as the only ransom for sin. In this way Zwingli heard the gospel and his eyes were opened.

After school, Zwingli was called to be a priest in a church not far from his home in the Alps. To be a good pastor he read the Bible with his whole heart. As he studied the Bible he understood how large a difference there was between the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church and the truth. Zwingli saw the Bible as the sufficient and unerring rule. He understood that the Bible should interpret itself. He worked and prayed to understand its complete and true meaning.

Zwingli was Luther's contemporary and the doctrine that he taught was like Luther's. But Zwingli did not learn the doctrine that he taught from Luther. Two people, without contact with one another, if they study the Bible under the direction of the Holy Spirit will arrive to the same truth because the Holy Spirit and are in harmony with each other.

In the year 1516 Zwingli became the preacher at a monastery in the city of Einsiedeln. There he could see the errors of Rome more clearly. At Einsiedeln there was a statue of the Virgin Mary and the people believed that the statue could work miracles. There was a sign at the entrance to the monastery: "Here a plenary remission of sins may be obtained." Pilgrims always went there but in the festival of consecration they came from all over Switzerland, even from France and Germany in great numbers. When Zwingli saw this he was greatly distressed and he found opportunity to begin to preach the truth to them.

"Do not imagine," he said, "that God is in this temple more than in any other part of creation. Whatever be the country in which you dwell, God is around you, and hears you. . . . Can unprofitable works, long pilgrimages, offerings, images, the invocation of the Virgin or of the saints, secure for you the grace of God? . . . What avails the multitude of words with which we embody our prayers? What efficacy has a glossy cowl, a smooth-shorn head, a long and flowing robe, or gold-embroidered slippers? . . . God looks at the heart, and our hearts are far from Him." "Christ," he said, "who was once offered upon the cross, is the sacrifice and victim, that had made satisfaction for the sins of believers to all eternity."—Merle D'Aubine, *The History of the Reformation in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century* book 8, ch. 5.

Many people, when they heard this message were disappointed and unhappy. They didn't want to feel their pilgrimage was in vain. They didn't comprehend the forgiveness offered by Jesus Christ. They were satisfied with the road to heaven as taught by Rome. They did not want to devote themselves to find something better. For them it was easier to trust the pope or the priest for their salvation than to search for purity of heart.

But some people had not found peace for their souls in the ceremonies of Rome. They accepted joyfully the news of salvation in Jesus Christ and when they returned to their homes they spread the light that they had. Thus the gospel went everywhere and the number of pilgrims to the shrine of the Virgin Mary dropped off.

Less money was coming into the monastery. Zwingli's salary diminished but he was happy because people were finding eternal life in Christ. But the papacy was not happy. Rome, which was offering the forgiveness of sins for money increased their efforts in this regard. Every sin had its price. Every evil could be accepted as long as money was coming into the church. In this way there were two movements, one, forgiveness of sins for free in Jesus Christ, the other by giving money to Rome.

In 1519 the Black Plague took many lives. When the people came face to face with death, the forgiveness of sins that they bought with money did not seem so trustworthy. They began to search for a more solid assurance. Zwingli opened the truth to his hearers slowly. He did not immediately introduce shocking subjects. He was careful not to arouse their prejudices. First, he explained Jesus and His incomparable love. Thus Zwingli tried to undermine error and superstition. But he always taught that the grace of Jesus Christ was not a license to sin.

Later, Zwingli was called Zurich, one of the most important cities in Switzerland. The church leaders there knew what Zwingli was doing but they were still trying to win him back. The leaders charged him to do what was necessary especially to make money for the church. But Zwingli was teaching the people to trust in Jesus for the forgiveness of sins.

The more the Reform spread, Satan did not stand idle. Zwingli suffered attacks. In some places those who accepted the truth were executed. But the papists were not satisfied with this. They wanted to silence the teacher of the reform message. The Bishop of Constance sent three representatives to the Council of Zurich. They accused Zwingli of teaching people to disregard the rules of the church and thus putting the peace and order of society into danger. The bishop put forward the idea that if church authority were cast aside it would create a widespread anarchy.

In Jesus' time the same accusation was used. The Jews, when they came against Jesus, could not go to the Roman authorities and say, "We are losing our prestige because this man is teaching truth, so we need to stop him." The authorities would laugh at them. To kill Jesus they needed another excuse.

John 19:12 From then on Pilate sought to release Him, but the Jews cried out, saying, "If you let this Man go, you are not Caesar's friend. Whoever makes himself a king speaks against Caesar."

After Jesus went to heaven the disciples face the same accusation.

Acts 17:6 But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some brethren to the rulers of the city, crying out, "These who have turned the world upside down have come here too." Jason has harbored them, and these are all acting contrary to the decrees of

Caesar, saying there is another king -- Jesus." <sup>8</sup> And they troubled the crowd and the rulers of the city when they heard these things.

And if you declare Jesus Christ to be the savior of the world, sooner or later you will come across this accusation. "These people are harming society" they will say. But they are not coming against you but God.

What was Zwingli's answer to this? For four years he was teaching the gospel and in Zurich there was a peaceful and calm environment. Zwingli's defense was the positive results of the gospel.

The representatives of the bishop said there was no salvation outside of the church. Zwingli said, "Do not let this accusation disturb you. In every nation, all who believe in Jesus with their whole heart are accepted of God. It is this church that no one can be saved outside of." Thus Zwingli spoke and one of the representatives of the bishop was won to the truth.

Because persecution had not been that successful in Germany in coming against the Reform, the papists tried to have a debate with Zwingli. The papists would choose the place and the judges. By doing this they hoped to condemn Zwingli. The debate would be in the city of Baden but Zwingli did not come. His friends said to him that his going to Baden would end in certain death. They sent Oecolampadius and Haller in his place.

At the meeting, the papists selected the secretaries. No one else was permitted to take notes. A student however, during the 18 day meetings would write in the evenings what transpired and send this to Zwingli.

The Roman group came with the most expensive robes inlaid with jewels. They ate luxuriously and they had the most expensive delicacies and the best wines. The church representatives lightened their load with joy and entertainments. The reformers formed a contrast. Their clothes were humble. Outside of the meetings they read and prayed.

Eck who was the papal representative at the conference spoke from a decorated pulpit but Oecolampadius was given a crude stool. Thus Rome was trying to remove the people far from the truth. People are influenced by power, money and show. But the Lord is not like that. Friends, do not be deceived on this point.

Oecolampadius said, "I do not recognize any other standard of judgment than the word of God." The papists however appealed to church tradition and authority. Oecolampadius said, "There is no place in Switzerland for traditions outside the constitution. And on the subject of faith our constitution is the Bible."

At the end of the conference the papists declared victory. Most of the representatives took sides with Rome and the Council declared that the Reformers had lost and that together with their leader Zwingli they were to be removed from the church. But the fruit of the conference revealed who had the advantage. The contest gave energy to the cause of Protestantism and in a short time the cities of Bern and Basel were won to the Reform.

The Reform, as in Germany suffered much. In many cantons the Reform was accepted but in others they remained steadfast to Rome. Persecution led to civil war. Zwingli and many reformers died. But the Lord called others to take their place and the Reform continued.

The reformers embrace the truth at the cost of their lives. Are you ready to make the same sacrifice for the truth?