

The Beauty and Glory of the Reformation

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Edited by
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The Beauty and Glory of the Reformation
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With heartfelt appreciation for

Randall Kirkland

a faithful Barnabas (encourager),
a kind friend and “fellow soldier” (Philemon 2)
in Christ, and
a loyal attendee and supporter
of PRTS’s annual conferences.

—JRB

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Preface

This past year marked the five-hundredth anniversary of Martin Luther's affixing his Ninety-Five Theses of protest against the Roman Catholic Church to the church door in Wittenberg, Germany. Through Luther's bold words, the Holy Spirit blew into flame the smoldering coals of other movements across Europe, and the land which lay in darkness for so long began to grow bright under the uncovered beauty of God's Word.

The reforming work begun by John Wycliffe, Jan Hus, and others was now vigorously promoted and furthered by scores of Reformers who fully embraced Luther's breakthrough doctrine of justification by faith alone. The hearts of many were turned to the Lord. The enabling Spirit promised to the church by Jesus Christ in John 14 made the Reformers effective witnesses of Jesus Christ to the nations.

The Reformation possessed as its heartbeat a devotion to the pure truth of the Holy Scriptures, especially manifest in the passionate exposition of the biblical doctrines of salvation by grace, true worship, and the pursuit of holiness. The Word of God preached was properly held to be the central engine for the breaking down of Satan's realm and the upbuilding of God's kingdom.

Some five hundred of us gathered this past August in Grand Rapids to drink in teaching flowing from this wonderful reformation. The stated purpose of the conference was to teach how to grow as faithful sons and daughters of the Reformation.

The conference highlighted several important Reformers. Michael Haykin painted the beautiful picture of William Tyndale's irrepressible desire that the Word of God would reach the common people, and then spoke also of the Reformation's emphasis on the primacy of preaching through the history of Hugh Latimer. "Take

away preaching,” Latimer had said, “and take away salvation.” Elias Medeiros laid before us John Calvin’s intensely practical concern for missionary work and the spread of the gospel through all the nations. William VanDoodewaard described for us the “company of pastors” in Geneva, emphasizing God’s use of the epigones of the Reformation to carefully build up His church.

Two talks from Ian Hamilton drew us into the experiential heart-beat of the Reformation. The first brought to our attention the deep and abiding importance of proper worship of our glorious and triune God. The second stirred us to a deeper admiration and love for Christ by proving from Scripture that only the eternal Son of God is the way, the truth, and the life.

Multiple sessions also brought to our attention practical lessons from the Reformation’s people, teaching, and work. In two addresses Carl Trueman highlighted Augustine’s remarkable insights into human nature and Luther’s biblical theology of preaching. Joel Beeke provided contemporary applications from the life and work of William Perkins, warming our hearts to this man who in forty-four short years accomplished an incredible amount of God-honoring work as so-called “father of the Puritans.” Rebecca VanDoodewaard presented the moving stories of five noteworthy women of the Reformation, giving stimulating insights into how women build up the kingdom of God. Stephen Myers clearly expounded to us the Christology of the Reformation, lifting up before us a sin-atoning, righteousness-imputing Christ who is wondrously both fully God and fully man. The practical talks of the conference concluded with Elias Medeiros’s colorful and inspiring contemporary applications from the Reformation’s work in world missions.

Those of us who attended last year’s Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary conference were grateful for the God-honoring, passionate, and clear teaching of the speakers under whom we sat. We hope also that you will consider joining us for this coming conference in August 2018—not only for the excellent teaching on “The Beauty and Glory of the Last Things,” but also for the warm fellowship (www.puritanseminary.org). Please also pray for the work of the seminary, that God’s Spirit would fill the faculty, staff, and students with love, faithfulness to the Scriptures, holiness of life, and Spirit-worked power for ministry.

Many thanks go to Rod MacQuarrie for his assistance in editing this manuscript, Gary den Hollander for proofing it, Lois Haley for transcribing a few of these addresses, Linda den Hollander for typesetting, and Amy Zevenbergen for the cover design.

We pray that the Lord will use this book to move us to a deeper appreciation for the rich Reformation heritage that has been entrusted to us, so that we will praise Him from whom all blessings flow.

BRIGHT LIGHTS IN THE HISTORY OF THE REFORMATION





CHAPTER 1

William Tyndale and *Sola Scriptura*

Michael Haykin

In 1994 the British Library paid the equivalent of well over two million dollars for a book which Dr. Brian Lang, the chief executive of the Library at the time, described as “certainly the most important acquisition in our 240-year history.” The book? A copy of the New Testament. Of course, it was not just any copy. In fact, at the time there was only one other known New Testament like this one in existence, and that one, which is in the library of St. Paul’s Cathedral, London, is lacking seventy-one of its pages. The New Testament that the British Museum purchased was lodged for many years in the library of the oldest Baptist seminary in the world, Bristol Baptist College, Bristol, England. It had been bequeathed to the College by Andrew Gifford (1700–1784), a London Baptist minister. It was printed in the German town of Worms (pronounced “warms”) on the press of Peter Schöffer the younger in 1526 and is known as the Tyndale New Testament. The first printed New Testament to be translated into English out of the original Greek, it is indeed an invaluable book. Its translator, after whom it is named, was William Tyndale.

Of his overall significance in the history of the Church, the article on him in the famous eleventh edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* rightly states that he was “one of the greatest forces of the English Reformation,” a man whose writings “helped to shape the thought of the Puritan party in England.”¹ There is a portrait of Tyndale that hangs in the dining-hall of Hertford College, Oxford. His right hand in the painting is pointing to what appears to be a Bible, under which there is a Latin couplet, of which the translation runs thus:

1. *The Encyclopædia Britannica*, 11th ed. (New York: Encyclopædia Britannica, 1911), 27:499.

To scatter Roman darkness by this light
The loss of land and life I'll reckon slight.²

This painting accurately captures Tyndale's view of God's Word. As he wrote in 1530 in his "Prologue" to his translation of Genesis:

The Scripture is a light, and sheweth us the true way, both what to do and what to hope for; and a defence from all error, and a comfort in adversity that we despair not, and feareth us in prosperity that we sin not.

And if need be, Tyndale was willing to give his life so that his countrymen might have this treasure.

The Years of Preparation

Though we know the general area in which Tyndale was born—the county of Gloucestershire next to Wales—we have no idea of the exact town or village in which he first saw the light of day. David Daniell, his most recent biographer, suggests that the "most likely region of his origin is within a few miles of Dursley, between Bristol and Gloucester."³ Nor do we know the exact date of his birth—the usually cited date of 1494 is most probable, though not altogether certain. Nor is the identity of his parents known, although it is evident that he came from a family that "included reasonably wealthy merchants and landowners."⁴ Indeed, the details of his early life are also shrouded in obscurity. Our first solid evidence of him is in the first decade of the sixteenth century when he was a student at Oxford University—he obtained his B.A. there in 1512—and then later studying at Cambridge.⁵

It was at Cambridge that he would have definitely encountered the works of Erasmus (1466–1536), the foremost scholar of his day in western Europe and a satirical critic of the morals and lifestyle of the clergy and leadership of the Roman Catholic Church. Early 16th-century Europe was undergoing a series of massive transformations during the life-time of Tyndale—social, political, religious, and intellectual—and Erasmus proved to be a prime catalyst in the

2. See David Daniell, *William Tyndale. A Biography* (New Haven, CT/London: Yale University Press, 1994), photograph 4, between pages 214 and 215.

3. Daniell, *William Tyndale*, 9.

4. Daniell, *William Tyndale*, 10–11.

5. Daniell, *William Tyndale*, 9.

process of change. In the hope of recovering the life and experience of the Early Church, Erasmus had printed, for the first time ever, a copy of the New Testament in Greek in 1516. Prior to this point in time, the New Testament was only generally available in western Europe in a Latin translation dating from the end of the fourth century, a translation that by the late Middle Ages definitely obscured a number of key areas of Christian doctrine. Erasmus openly expressed the desire that his Greek New Testament would be read by many of the working-class in Europe and that it would reveal the vast difference between the simplicity of New Testament Christianity and the degenerate state in which the Roman Church found itself at the beginning of the sixteenth century.

Erasmus, it should be noted, was content to critique the morals of the Roman Church. Its doctrine, in many areas just as aberrant as its morals, he did not really view as a problem. But those who read his Greek New Testament, men like Martin Luther (1483–1546) as well as Tyndale himself, came to the realization that nothing was going to change with regard to the morals of Rome until there was a return to New Testament doctrine. This is one of the most decisive differences between the Reformers and various critics of the morality of the Roman church like Erasmus. The former found the ground of the Roman Church's corruption in her doctrinal errors, while the latter were content to criticize the moral failings of the Roman Church and recommended a return to the simplicity of life in the New Testament church. For critics like Erasmus, doctrine was not an issue. J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnston, in their introduction to their translation of Luther's *The Bondage of the Will*, compare Erasmus's program of church renewal to a person going on a diet: the problem was simply the removal of some surplus pounds or excess fat. To the Reformers, including Tyndale, however, doctrine was foundational to restoring biblical Christianity, because true religion is first and foremost a matter of faith, and faith is inextricable from truth and doctrine.

It was probably during his time at Cambridge, around 1520, that Tyndale came to evangelical convictions. In 1521 he left Cambridge University to become chaplain and private tutor in the home of Sir John Walsh at Little Sodbury Manor, a Cotswold house twelve or so miles south of Stinchcombe, just off the M5. It was while in Walsh's employ that Tyndale came to another firm conviction. He came to see

that the printing of the New Testament in Greek was merely the first step in reforming the church. Since it was in Greek it still remained a closed book to all who were not scholars and who could not read that language. Tyndale therefore determined to translate God's Word into English.

Nothing better reveals Tyndale's determination to translate God's Word than the story of what took place one evening during his time in Sir John Walsh's household. Walsh was an extremely hospitable man, and it often transpired that there were guests for dinner. On this occasion, according to Richard Webb of Chipping Sodbury, who was a servant of Hugh Latimer (c. 1490–1555), a high-ranking cleric was present and Tyndale was outlining the problems of the Church of Rome in the light of God's Word. The cleric responded by saying that he would rather have the Pope's laws than those of the Word of God. His response and general tone of his conversation revealed a profound ignorance of God's Word and its preciousness. Tyndale, amazed by the man's words and his disdain for the Scriptures, replied, "I defy the Pope and all his laws,... if God spare my life, ere many years I will cause a boy that driveth the plough shall know more of the scripture than thou dost."⁶

In England, however, it was illegal to translate the Scriptures into English, let alone for a ploughboy to read them in his own native tongue. A law actually forbidding such a translation had been passed in 1408 after John Wycliffe (c. 1330–1384), the so-called "morning star of the Reformation," had translated the Old and New Testaments from Latin into Middle English in the hope of bringing about a reform of the Church. To stifle the aims of Wycliffe and his followers, known as the Lollards, it had been made illegal to put the Scriptures into English, to have such a translation in one's possession, or even to read such a translation without express permission of a bishop. But Tyndale was not to be deterred from the pursuit of what he was coming to regard as God's calling for his life.

Initially he sought for a wealthy and powerful patron who would support him in his translation work. He approached the Bishop of London, Cuthbert Tunstall (1474–1559), reputedly a friend of Erasmus, for such patronage, but to no avail. Soon Tyndale came to the conviction that he would have to go abroad to the Continent to

6. Daniell, *William Tyndale*, 79.

undertake such a translation. So, in the spring of 1524, he sailed from England for the port of Hamburg, Germany, little knowing that he would never see his native land again.

Translating the New Testament

He spent a year or so in Wittenberg, where he met the great German Reformer Martin Luther. He could have stayed in Wittenberg, and translated the Scriptures in relative security and with all of the scholarly aids that he needed. Instead he chose to go to Cologne, one of the three great trading ports of northeast Europe. The major reason for the move undoubtedly has to do with the fact that Cologne was on the Rhine River that flowed out into the North Sea and boats would come there on trading trips from England. And Tyndale wanted his translated Scriptures to be taken to England where they could be read. An English translation would do very little good in the heart of Germany.

In Cologne he finished his translation of the New Testament from the Greek. Accompanying it were marginal notes, many of which he took from Martin Luther's translation of the Scriptures into German—an indication of his use of Luther's German New Testament, which had appeared in 1522.⁷ All that has survived, however, is a manuscript down to Matthew 22, since, just as he was about to print it, he was betrayed to Roman Catholic authorities. Tyndale managed to escape with his translation and made his way up the Rhine to Worms.

In Worms, on the printing press of Peter Schöffer the younger (his father, Peter Schöffer the elder [c. 1425–c. 1503], had been an apprentice of Johann Gutenberg), three or six thousand copies⁸ of the first printed New Testament to be translated into English out of the original Greek were run off. It was a small octavo, that is, it was made by folding each sheet three times to form a quire of eight leaves. Unlike the Cologne translation, there were no marginal notes, though there would be such notes in his definitive 1534 edition. Nor

7. Heinz Bluhm, "Martin Luther and the English Bible: Tyndale and Coverdale" in Gerhard Dünhaupt, ed., *The Martin Luther Quincentennial* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1984), 112–25.

8. It is not clear how large the print run exactly was. See Daniell, *William Tyndale*, 134.

was there a prologue. The title-page, which is missing from two of the copies that have survived (a more recently discovered copy in 1996 by Eberhard Zwink⁹ does have the title page), did not contain Tyndale's name. It reads thus:

The new Testament as it was written and caused to be written by them which heard it. To whom also our Saviour Christ Jesus commanded that they should preach it unto all creatures.

There were no verse divisions, which did not come into vogue until the 1550s, only simple chapter breaks. Also, it is noteworthy that in the 1526 edition, Tyndale followed Luther's arrangement of the New Testament in his 1523 translation, in which Hebrews, James, and Jude as well as Revelation were placed at the end of the Bible.

The Tyndale New Testaments were then smuggled back into England on boats, hidden in bales of cloth and other innocent looking containers, and Tyndale's dream of giving the common person the Word of God started to become a reality. By early 1526 they were being sold openly in England. Price: a week's wages for a laborer like a mason.

Response from church authorities, however, was not slow in coming. When word of Tyndale's translation reached the ears of Cuthbert Tunstall, the Bishop of London began to scour the boats coming into English harbours and ports for the precious books. Many of the New Testaments were seized or even bought, and Tunstall had them publicly burned in the heart of London in 1530. He described the Tyndale New Testament as a "pestiferous and pernicious poison." Ironically, the money that was paid for the copies eventually found its way back to Tyndale, who simply used it to finance another edition!

A Literary Master

There is little doubt that Tyndale had a solid handle on the Greek language, its idioms, shades of meaning, and idiosyncrasies. It is now recognized that Tyndale was a brilliant Greek scholar. In fact, he had remarkable linguistic skills, being the master of at least eight languages, including Greek.

9. See Eberhard Zwink, "Confusion about Tyndale: The Stuttgart Copy of the 1526 New Testament in English" (http://www.wlb-stuttgart.de/fileadmin/user_upload/sammlungen/bibeln/Tyndale_1526_NT_English.pdf; accessed February 1, 2017).

Equally important was his impressive grasp of the words and rhythms of the spoken English of his day. He knew how to render the Scriptures into the English vernacular so that they spoke with force and power. In fact, as Daniell notes, “what still strikes a late-twentieth-century reader is how modern” Tyndale’s translation actually is.¹⁰ The reasons for this are twofold. First, in translating the New Testament, Tyndale aimed to reproduce “clear, everyday, spoken English.” Second, Tyndale aimed to impact the heart of his readers.

In fact, many of his words and phrases became part of everyday English—words and phrases such as “under the sun,” “signs of the times,” “let there be light,” “my brother’s keeper,” “lick the dust,” “fall flat on his face,” “the land of the living,” “pour out one’s heart,” “the apple of his eye,” “go the extra mile,” “the parting of the ways,” “peacemaker,” “longsuffering,” the “salt of the earth,” “fight the good fight,” “God forbid,” “the spirit is willing,” “there were shepherds abiding in the fields,” and “this thy brother was dead, and is alive again: and was lost, and is found.”¹¹

So good in fact was Tyndale’s translation of the New Testament that, when the King James Version (KJV) translators came to fashion a new translation at the start of the seventeenth century, they went back to Tyndale’s work and used no less than ninety per cent of it,¹² which also speaks volumes for his grasp of Greek.

Translating the Old Testament

After completing the translation of the New Testament, Tyndale turned his attention to the Old Testament. His translation of Genesis, which appeared in 1530, was the first English translation ever made from a Hebrew text. Only a tiny handful of Oxford and Cambridge scholars, if any at all, knew this language. In fact, most of the ordinary population would have been astonished to discover that Hebrew had anything to do with the Bible. For them, all of their religion was wrapped up in Latin.¹³ Translations of a number of other books of the Old Testament followed: including the rest of the Pentateuch in 1530 and Jonah in 1531.

10. Daniell, *William Tyndale*, 135.

11. Melvyn Bragg, *William Tyndale. A very brief history* (London: SPCK, 2017), 87.

12. Daniell, *William Tyndale*, 1.

13. Daniell, *William Tyndale*, 287.

Where Tyndale learned Hebrew we have no idea. It is quite unlikely he learned it in England, since so little Hebrew was known there in the 1520s. Hebrew studies only began to take root in England during the reigns of Elizabeth I and James I. He had to have learned it, therefore, on the Continent, probably in Germany—David Daniell suggests that Tyndale may have studied Hebrew at Wittenberg when he was there in the mid-1520s.¹⁴ As with the Greek New Testament, Tyndale displays a wonderful facility for rendering the Hebrew Scriptures—a linguistic world utterly unlike any other in Europe at that time—into English. And coinages that he made, like “Jehovah,” “Passover,” “scapegoat,” “shewbread,” and “mercy seat” have become a part of standard English.

Jonah incidentally was an important book for the Reformers. Luther, for instance, translated it separately in 1526. At its heart is the account of the preaching of repentance to a terribly sinful nation—the powerful message of repentance despite the weakness of the preacher. Just as God’s Word had been preached to the Ninevites with the threat of judgment if repentance was not forthcoming, so God’s Word had to be preached to the English. Thus, Tyndale can say in his introduction to this translation of Jonah:

The Pope sanctifieth us with holy oil, holy bread, holy salt, holy candles, holy dumb ceremonies and holy dumb blessings, and with whatsoever holiness thou wilt—save with the holiness of God’s word which only speaketh unto the heart and sheweth the soul her filthiness and uncleanness of sin, and leadeth her by the way of repentance unto the fountain of Christ’s blood to wash it away through faith...[and] if thou confess with a repenting heart and acknowledge and surely believe that Jesus is Lord over all sin, thou art safe. Beware of the leaven that saith we have power in our freewill before the preaching of the Gospel—to deserve grace, to keep the law....

Neither can actual sin be washed away with our works—but with Christ’s blood: neither can there be any other sacrifice or satisfaction to Godward for them—save Christ’s blood. For as much as we can do no works unto God—but receive only of his mercy with our repenting faith—through Jesus Christ our Lord and only Savior: unto whom and unto God our Father through

14. Daniell, *William Tyndale*, 291, 299.

him, and unto his Holy Spirit—that only purgeth, sanctifieth & washeth us in the innocent blood of our redemption—be praise for ever.¹⁵

“Lord! open the King of England’s eyes”

By the early 1530s Tyndale was living in Antwerp, from whence the smuggling of the Scriptures across to England could be easily carried out. In 1535, he was hard at work on translating the books of Joshua to 2 Chronicles, as well as making some minor revisions to his 1534 New Testament. The translation had not yet progressed beyond the manuscript stage when he was arrested on May 21 of that year. Tyndale was betrayed into the hands of Roman Catholic authorities by a certain Henry Phillips, an appalling and perfidious individual who was probably acting under orders from John Stokesley, the Bishop of London at the time.¹⁶ He was imprisoned in the infamous prison of Vilvoorde, six miles north of Brussels. There he was put on trial for heresy—specifically for being a Lutheran—found guilty and condemned to be burned to death. Two word-pictures from the last year of his life reveal the character of the man.

The first comes from a letter that he wrote in the Vilvorde prison in the autumn of 1535. It was found during the last century and is the only surviving example of his handwriting. Writing to the governor of the prison, the Marquis of Bergen, Tyndale requested

a lamp in the evening; it is indeed wearisome sitting alone in the dark. But most of all I beg and beseech your clemency to... permit me to have the Hebrew Bible, Hebrew grammar, and Hebrew dictionary, that I may pass the time in that study.¹⁷

To the end Tyndale was intent on the study and translation of God’s Word—that precious book that Tyndale knew God the Holy Spirit would use to shed the light of God’s salvation throughout benighted Europe. It is unlikely his petition was granted.

The other word-picture comes from the day of his death, traditionally October 6, 1536. The executioner, in an act of mercy to Tyndale, strangled him before he lit the wood piled around him. According to

15. William Tyndale, “Unto the Christian Reader” to his trans., *The Prophete Jonas* (Antwerp: M. de Keyser, 1531).

16. Daniell, *William Tyndale*, 367–68.

17. Daniell, *William Tyndale*, 379.

the martyrologist John Foxe, the last words that Tyndale was heard to utter were, "Lord! open the King of England's eyes."

Up until this point the king, Henry VIII, had been firmly opposed to the free circulation of Tyndale's translation, despite his break with Rome over his desire to get a divorce from his first wife, Katherine of Aragon.¹⁸ Yet, within a year of Tyndale's death his New Testament was being openly published in England, though not under his name. That Tyndale was not recognized as the translator would not have bothered him at all.

"I did my duty"

A few years before his martyrdom Tyndale had written the following in the preface to his book *The Parable of the Wicked Mammon* (1528) regarding his translation of the New Testament:

Some man will ask, peradventure, Why I take the labour to make this work, inasmuch as they will burn it, seeing they burnt the gospel? I answer, In burning the New Testament they did none other thing than what I looked for: no more shall they do, if they burn me also, if it be God's will it shall so be.

Nevertheless, in translating the New Testament I did my duty.

What a glorious duty that was! Enshrined in the King James Version, his New Testament lived on for centuries after his death. As David Daniell has recently noted in what is the definitive biography of Tyndale, it was Tyndale that made the English people a "people of the Book."¹⁹

Conclusion

Nearly thirty years after the appearance of the first edition of his New Testament, an English Protestant named John Rogers (d. 1555) was on trial for his Christian faith. Rogers, who had been converted through Tyndale's witness, was told by Stephen Gardiner, the Lord Chancellor of Mary I and the man who was judging his case, that

18. On the influence of Anne Boleyn for good, see "The Royal Household of Henry VIII. Part One: A Changed Ann Boleyn," *The Sword and the Trowel* (1997, no. 2): 12–14.

19. Daniell, *William Tyndale*, 3; Iain Murray, "William Tyndale" (address at the Free Reformed Church of Dundas, Dundas, Ontario, October 24, 1994).

“thou canst prove nothing by the Scripture, the Scripture is dead: it must have a lively [i.e. living] expositor.”

“No,” Rogers replied, “the Scriptures are alive.” Rogers’s conviction in this regard was in part shaped by the achievement of Tyndale, whom God had used to make the Scriptures live forever in the hearts and minds of a multitude of English men and women.