The Protestant Reformation - What was the protest?
Surely the most profound and tumultuous time in Church History was the period of the Protestant Reformation. After centuries of the rule of the Roman Church over Christianity, the cries of petition against the abuses of the Church broke loose into a full scale rebellion against the Roman Church. During the Pre-reformation period, 1215-1515 A.D., many foundational activities culminated in the actual Protestant Reformation. These foundational things that took place were mainly surrounding the efforts of certain men like John Wycliffe, Jon Hus and others who protested certain activities of the Papacy and Church. John Wycliffe, and later William Tyndale sought to translate the Bible into the language of the common people. During the Dark Ages, (the period between the fall of Rome in the 5th century and the Renaissance, 1415 A.D.), a time when the Bible was locked up in Latin by the Roman Church, there were very few literate people among the commons, and the only knowledge of Scripture that the common people held, was that which was learned from the priesthood in the Church. As the protest of these people grew stronger over time, it gave rise to several key events which eventually created a huge schism among Christians and spawned the Protestant Reformation, 1516-1563 A.D. Here is a brief timeline:

During this time several key men made public protests against the Pope and the Church which culminated in the spawning of several branches of Christianity such as the Lutheran, Anglican, Anabaptist and Reformed churches. These “branches” of Christianity were very focused on the biblical reform of Christianity and zealous to pattern the church after biblical directives such as a proper ordinance of the Lord’s Supper, Church Government, and the great doctrine of Justification by Faith. In summary, there were several different “branches” of Christianity that happened in several different places, led by several different men. However, these were all identified by the Roman Church as “Protestantism.” In the mind of the Roman Church, they were the rebels and protestors united against Papal control and Roman Church tradition. Here is a basic chart of the first “Protestant” branches of Christianity.

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Because of this protest many of them were persecuted and killed by the influence of the Roman Church and many other governmental powers of the day. Of course after all these profound happenings, the face of Christianity would never be the same. There were now Bibles being printed in the common language and many people coming to a personal knowledge of the Word of God, and the Gospel was being preached in all European languages and being sent out into the remotest regions of the world. The Word of God had broken free from the tight Latin grip of the Roman Church, and a new liberty was unleashed upon the nations of mankind like never before!

But in all of this controversy and struggle, what was at the heart of the protest was an error of essential nature to Historic Christian doctrine, and this could no longer be tolerated. The Gospel had been redefined over many years under Roman rule and the Reformers were not going to let it be undermined any longer. At the heart of many of the controversies that were being held out against the Church by the Reformers was a focus on the sufficiency of the atonement and the doctrine of Justification. And of course these are the essentials of the Gospel message.

The Gospel and the Roman Church
Over many years, even centuries, Roman Christianity had morphed and become something very different that its earlier origins of the Early Church. The institution of several new and unbiblical rituals, traditions and practices almost completely redefined the Church. These church traditions became the focus of the church as she turned eyes away from the simplicity of the person and work of Christ, to the Ivory Tower of the Roman Church. Gradually over time these began to severely undermine the sufficiency of the atonement and the doctrine of Justification by grace.
through faith in Christ. When all of these were added together, it made for a completely different form of Christianity than Jesus and the Apostles had taught. The focus had turned from the glorious good news of the person and work of Christ to the veneration of Popes and Saints, and the Church had become the richest institution on the earth off the back of the poor common people who were now to work their way to heaven through their own merit, or worse yet to purchase it through the sale of Indulgences.

A Brief Survey of Roman Rites and Traditions

Here is a brief survey of these rites and traditions, and a few words about how they ultimately deny essential Christian doctrine.

The Papacy – Who is the head of Christ’s church? Well that is an easy question if you read the Bible (Col 1:18, 2:19). It is Christ. But in the Roman Church, He has been usurped by an earthly head, the so called “vicar of Christ,” a man demanding to be called the Holy Father (Matt 23:9), dressed in very costly vestments and living in a palace of unimaginable majesty and pomp (Matt 8:20). Will a truly godly man actually accept the title of Holy Father? Much could be said to compare the Pope to the teaching of the Bible, but a simple glance shows him to be far from the model set by Christ and the Apostles. Further, this Papacy is nowhere found in Scripture, nor is it even hinted at, much less does it have any didactic passage in Scripture explaining its character and nature. As the Bible clearly teaches a government of local plural elders (as servants to the body), the Popery of Rome is a “Pontification” of the worst sorts. The very history of the Papacy itself is littered with corruption and immorality. How can this be overlooked by any serious student of the Bible?

The Priesthood and Monastic Societies – Here we have an entire hierarchy of men who claim to be mediators between people and God. They take vows of celibacy and wear very costly vestments. All the while the Bible says….

1 Timothy 2:5-6 - 5 For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, 6 who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony borne at the proper time. NASB

The Levitical Priesthood of the Old Testament was fulfilled by Christ and destroyed by God in 70 A.D. Jesus is lifted up to the right hand of God having accomplished our redemption once for all time, He is our great High Priest.

Hebrews 9:11-12 - 11 But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; 12 and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. NASB

The New Testament nowhere presents a special priesthood, here is another non-biblical concept of church government which by its very existence and definition undermines the work that Christ has accomplished as our “once for all time - High Priest.” More than this, believing Christians are robbed of understanding their true role to a lost world as now all Christians are seen as an holy nation of priests in the priesthood of all believers, with the “priestly duty of proclaiming the Gospel of God” (Rom 15:16).

1 Peter 2:4-5, 9-10 - 4 And coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected by men, but choice and precious in the sight of God, 5 you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ…. 9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; 10 for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God: you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. NASB

The Eucharist and Transubstantiation - In the Roman celebration of the Lord’s Supper, they have a unique teaching which suggests that the bread and wine actually become the Body and Blood of Jesus. This “Eucharist” is seen as a sacrifice of Christ which happens again and again to

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