

Protesting the Protestants

We have seen the early development of the Protestant Reformation in Germany, Switzerland, and England under Luther, Calvin/Zwingli, and Henry VIII respectively. In each of these lands the distinctive elements of church government and worship gave shape to the denominations that grew in them. We will now survey the various forms of church government as well as the issues surrounding both polity and worship that gave rise to further denominational division within Protestantism.

I. Three Forms of Church Government

A. Monarchial

The church is governed by a single ruler. Examples of this are seen in the Roman Catholic and Episcopal (Anglican or Church of England) churches.

B. Presbyterian

The church is governed by a body of elders (presbyters) inside and outside the assembly. Examples of this are seen in the Presbyterian and Reformed churches.

C. Congregational

The church is governed by the membership. Examples of this are found in the Baptist and other independent churches.

II. The Significance of Sacraments

We have seen that the Roman Catholic sacramental system is one whereby the individual works for his salvation. The Reformers such as Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli were all former Roman Catholics who had to struggle with the relationship of the sacraments to their view of *sola fide* ("faith alone").

A. Luther

1. Communion involves "consubstantiation"
2. Baptism has a mystical power (baptismal regeneration)

B. Calvin

1. Communion involves the 'spiritual presence' of Christ
2. Baptism enters one into the 'covenant community'

C. Zwingli

1. Communion is a memorial only
2. Baptism enters one into the 'covenant community'

III. Reform within the Anglican/Episcopal Church (Church of England)

Henry VIII can hardly be mentioned as a "reformer" in the same sense as Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli. The church he began and ruled differed with Roman Catholicism primarily in terms of the individual in whom the government of the church rested (the king rather than the pope). Nevertheless, he did start a new Protestant denomination that would spawn others in the years to come.

A. Puritans within the Church of England

The Puritans contended that too many "rags of popery" were still in the Anglican church [the Church of England]; and they wanted to "purify" the Anglican church in accordance with the Bible, which they accepted as the infallible rule of faith and life. This desire led to their being nicknamed Puritans after 1560. (Cairns, p. 335)

B. Separatists and the Church of England

The major point of difference between the...Puritans and the [Separatists] was the idea of the church covenant by which the Separatists bound themselves in loyalty to Christ and one another apart from a state church. (Ibid., p. 337)

William Bradford (1590-1657)...became a member of this group [Separatists]. It was members of this group who finally migrated to American in 1620 on the Mayflower. (Ibid., p. 338)

C. Methodists and the Church of England

John Wesley (1703-1791) was an ordained Anglican minister who encouraged individual devotion and piety in contrast to what he saw as the dead formalism of the Church of England.

Wesley did not want to break with the Anglican church...Not until after Wesley's death in 1791 were the Methodists of England organized into a Methodist church separate from the Anglican church. The Anglican influence in the Methodist church was demonstrated by Episcopal polity and the reception of Communion while kneeling at the altar rail. (Ibid., p. 384)

Wesley maintained both communion and baptism as sacraments rather than ordinances of the church. He was also *Arminian* (see excursus below) in his view of salvation.

Excursus: Can Salvation Be Lost?

Arminianism (named after 16th century theologian James Arminius) denies eternal security – i.e. it teaches that one can lose his salvation. While Arminius was a Protestant who believed in salvation by faith alone, he and his followers teach that one's salvation is conditional.

Arminians cite the many passages in Scripture that indicate the necessity of persevering in obedience (James 2:14-26; 1 John 2:3-6; etc.). In addition, they cite instances of supposed believers who lost their salvation – e.g. Judas Iscariot and Hebrews 6:4-6. However, two things must be noted about these arguments: 1) Perseverance *demonstrates* the reality of our profession and, 2) there is no unambiguous instance in Scripture of one losing his salvation. Judas was not saved. Jesus called him a 'devil' in John 6:70 and indicated in John 13:18 that Judas was not "chosen". And, although the people mentioned in Hebrews 6:4-6 certainly enjoyed many spiritual benefits, the passages does not say they were born again believers.

On the other hand, the Bible clearly teaches two things, one of which an Arminian is forced to deny:

- 1) Eternal life is a present possession
- 2) Eternal life is forever

If both of these are true (and they are – see John 3:16; 5:24, etc.) then one simply CANNOT lose his salvation. Although it is possible for one to be a false professor, such people are not children of God and therefore never had salvation to lose. Jesus said, "*Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I **never** knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!*" (Mathew 7:21-23)

This issue is of vital importance for it goes to one of the crucial issues of the Reformation, *sola fide* (faith alone). The Arminian (often unwittingly) *must* add the necessity of works to salvation and thereby deny one of the cardinal doctrines of the Reformation and, more importantly, Scripture.