

Making Mud Pies in a Slum

Dewey Engelsma

Have you ever considered what the church world would look like today if Martin Luther had not been around to start the Protestant Reformation? What if this was the front page article of the *Wittenberg Times* in July 1505?

Promising Student Found Dead

“On Wednesday, July 2 a group of travelers making their way through a fearsome storm came across a young man who had been struck by lightning. Although they rendered what little aid they could they were not able to revive him and he died on the scene. The young man was Martin Luther of Eisleben, and according to his family he was preparing for a doctorate in law.”

When we consider the tremendous impact of the Reformation, we shudder to think of the condition of the church world today had Martin Luther not lived through that storm. As we celebrate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation this month, let us give thanks to God for his providential care in preserving the young man Luther! We ought to celebrate the Reformation and all that God restored to his church through that mighty work of the sixteenth century. However, we have to ask ourselves if we are using those good gifts that God gave us, or if, by their lack of use, we are thanking God for something in principle while despising it in practice. Of all the blessings of the Reformation, I intend to focus on one: the restoration of the Bible into the hands of the people and our use of that gift today.

One striking feature of the Roman Catholic Church is that you will not find Bibles in the pew racks. In Luther’s day, the Roman Catholic Church did all they could to keep the people from reading the Bible. Therefore, not only did the people not have Bibles in the pews, they did not have the Bible in their own language. As Luther saw it, the people’s “very lives” depended on their ability to read the Bible. So he determined to translate the Greek New Testament into the language of the people, and he did so in eleven weeks.

Luther was not the first person to translate the Bible into German, nor was he alone in the work of translating. However, as Aaron Clay Denlinger points out in his contribution to the book “The Legacy of Luther,” Luther’s work was head and shoulders above the rest. “Although Luther consulted the (Latin) Vulgate – his translation was ultimately based on the best available Greek and Hebrew texts of Scripture.” Most important however, were the “accuracy, readability, and—indeed—beauty in the German language.” According to Luther, the Bible was meant to be written in the kind of German that was spoken by “the mother in the home, the children on the street, [and] the common man in the marketplace.” Denlinger points out that Luther would no doubt have been most pleased with the criticism leveled by Johann Cochlaeus, one of Luther’s Roman Catholic opponents: “Even shoemakers and women and every kind of unlearned person, whoever of them . . . had somehow learned German letters, read it most eagerly as the font of all truth. And by reading and rereading it they committed it to memory and so carried the book around with them in their bosoms. Because of this, in a few months . . . they did not blush to dispute about the faith and the Gospel, not only with laypeople of the Catholic party, but also with priests and monks.”

Beacon Lights has had a series of articles on the dangers of technology and the risks that it poses to us as Christians, young and old. This is reinforced in a new book titled “Irresistible: The Rise of Addictive Technology and the Business of Keeping us Hooked” by Adam Alter. He makes the case that the danger most of us face is not being addicted to heroin or cocaine. The danger is much more mainstream. We are addicted to technology. The numbers he relays are indisputable, but so is the anecdotal evidence. Everywhere you go you see people of all ages with their heads down as they pore over their devices. Think you are immune? Download the app *Moments* and track your own phone usage. If you are average, you are using it for three hours a day and picking it up 39 times a day. Alter points out that this kind of “average” usage translates to a “staggering eleven years” of someone’s life!

So we must ask ourselves if we are we like the people of Luther’s day who “read (the Bible) most eagerly as the font of all truth” and “read and reread it and commit it to memory?” Or has something else taken its place? Do you think that the devil, having lost the battle in 1517, has conceded the war? We know how subtle the devil is, so we know better (Gen. 3:3). The devil tried to have an institution keep the Bible away from us in 1517. In

2017 he must be thrilled that we are doing that work for him. How long are we in our Bibles per day? 30 minutes? 10 minutes? Not at all? According to J.I Packer, this is exactly what the devil wants: “If I were the devil, one of my first aims would be to stop folks from digging into the Bible. Knowing that it is the Word of God, teaching men to know and love and serve the God of the Word, I should do all I could to surround it with the spiritual equivalent of pits, thorn hedges, and man traps, to frighten people off. At all costs I should want to keep them from using their minds in a disciplined way to get the measure of its message.” Consider your phone to be that pit, your tablet the thorn hedge, and social media your (wo)man trap. Have we been ignorant of the devil’s devices and allowed him to gain the advantage over us (2 Cor. 11)? Even worse, for those of us with children, have we cast our children into that pit, by giving them unfettered use of this technology?

In a sermon titled *The Weight of Glory*, C.S Lewis said that “it would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.” Ask yourself tonight when you pick up your phone or tablet, are you the ignorant child making mud pies in the slum when you could be picking up the Bible and experiencing infinite joy? When we are checking Facebook or reading meaningless Twitter messages, uploading a photo to Instagram and agonizing over how many “Likes” we get, we are that half-hearted creature fooling about with the vanities of this world.

Luther himself spoke to this idea in a sermon in 1522, “Beware! Satan has the intention of detaining you with unnecessary things and thus keeping you from those which are necessary.” Ask yourself, how much of the three hours you are on your device is spent on “unnecessary” things?

What is this joy, this blessing that is found in reading the Bible? It is a “lamp unto (your) feet, and a light unto (your) path (Ps. 119:105).” It provides a corrective for the sin you find in your heart and in your walk. When you pick up the Bible and read, you will find there a rebuke against your pride (Prov. 8:13) and a solution for your quick temper and sharp tongue (Eccl. 7:9, Prov. 17:27–28). Are you troubled by the circumstances of life? Be comforted for it is only “through much tribulation (that you) enter into the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22) and the day comes “that inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s suffering; that when his glory shall be revealed,

ye may be glad also with exceeding joy” (1 Pet. 4:13). Young person, do you find only mockery and contempt when walking in the ways of the Lord? Be reminded, “the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him (2 Chron. 16:9).” God himself is strong in your behalf! All of this is lost when we check our Twitter feed instead of our God feed.

But there is more, because to read and meditate on the Holy Scriptures is, as Luther pointed out, “rightly to learn to know Christ.” **The amount of time we spend in our Bible is directly related to the strength of our desire to know Christ.** Throughout the entire Bible you will find yourself pointed to the “way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6), a “lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Pet. 1:18–19), and the bread of life, so that those who come unto him “shall never hunger, and he that believeth on (him) shall never thirst” (John 6:35).

In God’s word you find the sinless one who “when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not” and “who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree” that we should “live unto righteousness” (1 Pet. 2:22–23). Young reader, Jesus knows what it is to experience mockery and contempt having endured it his life-long and he is your advocate (1 John 2:1).

Does all seem helpless? Do you have nowhere to turn? Then let the word lead you from an upper room to a garden. From that blood sprinkled garden enter into a palace and after you have meditated a while on the guilty verdict that was laid upon the only innocent man in the room, walk out of a gate to a small hill nearby. There on that hill you will find three crosses. You can hear the echoes of the mockery and scorn that was poured out on the men crucified and if you listen carefully enough you can hear the one whose agonies were so great, they wrenched out of him the agonized cry, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me” (Matt. 27:46). There is one place you cannot go, however. And that was because the man that hung in the middle went there in your place. He descended into the bowels of hell and suffered its terrible agonies, which is to say, the damning and dreadful judgment of his own Father. He went where you and I belonged and he did it out of his deep and abiding love for us.

But if you keep your Bible open and let the word of God lead you a little bit farther you will find a tomb. That tomb is now empty because even death itself could not hold back the one buried there. So now when we face

death, in ourselves or in a loved one, our victory cry is “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?” (1 Cor. 15:55).

This then is the infinite joy found in the reading of the word of God, which joy God through his champion Martin Luther restored to us 500 years ago: Jesus Christ himself, “in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col. 2:3). So put down your device, pick up your Bible, and learn of Christ, for as he himself taught us, “they are they which testify of me” (John 5:39).

*Dewey Engelsma is a member of Grandville Protestant Reformed Church in Grandville, MI.

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