

THE REFORMERS AND THE ORIGINAL LANGUAGES: CALVIN AND LUTHER ON THE IMPORTANCE OF GREEK AND HEBREW IN THEOLOGY AND MINISTRY

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The Reformation stands in history as a pivotal time in the church's past. The Reformation saw such heroes as Luther and Calvin redirect people back to Scripture as the primary authority for life. One of the key components of the Reformation, which is especially evident in Luther and Calvin, was a dependence upon the original languages. It remains vital today for the church to continue in the spirit of the Reformation and train the next generation of church leaders to be competent in Greek and Hebrew.

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Introduction

This year marks the five-hundredth anniversary of the beginning of the Reformation (1517). In a society inundated with the idea that something is only as good as it is new, it is important to be reminded that just because something is old does not mean it is inferior or useless. In fact, the church can learn many important lessons from the Reformers since we continue to deal with many of the same issues. After all, the wise man learns from history and avoids repeating the mistakes of the past.

Without a doubt, the Reformation is one of the highlights in church history. It was the battleground of definition and clarification for key doctrines of the Christian faith. Although evangelicals affirm and celebrate these great doctrines today, there is often a simultaneous neglect of a foundational component of the Reformation—an emphasis on the original languages. The Reformers themselves prized the original languages, and this attention to the original languages provided the foundation for the sound theology of the Reformation.

In contrast to the Reformers, many seminaries have begun to devalue the priority placed on the original languages and have lessened the original language requirements in their curriculum. The purpose of this article is to draw attention to the fact that an emphasis on the original languages was essential both in theory and practice

for two key Reformers, Martin Luther and John Calvin. After we examine the lives of Luther and Calvin, this article will call for evangelical institutions to continue in the Reformed tradition and put a high priority on the original languages so that the benefits of the Reformation can continue.

A Personal Anecdote

When I first went to seminary I had no idea what to expect. I had no previous theological or language training, and I was quickly overwhelmed by the workload. To adjust I became adept at asking other students for advice concerning how best to handle assignments. However, in rubbing shoulders with some of my fellow classmates I was surprised to hear some significant objections about the usefulness of the language courses. I had always assumed that everyone would want to read the Bible in the original languages, but now in seminary I was running into some students who wished for less focus on language classes. Among this group there was even an expressed joy at being done with the required “torture” of the core language classes. That was certainly a surprise to me at that time.

As it turns out, however, many seminary students think of language proficiency as unimportant to real ministry. Scott Hafemann, NT Professor at Gordon-Conwell Seminary, related a study where students ranked abilities needed in the ministry. In the study, students listed proficiency in Greek and Hebrew as eleventh most important out of thirteen qualities. The only things less important, according to the students surveyed, was knowing adult life cycles and themes in Christian education.¹ To say the least, language learning is not a priority for many students.

Although experiencing a reduced value in many seminaries today, the Reformers understood the importance of the original languages. Indeed, to the Reformers, if the pastors and Christian leaders were incompetent in Greek and Hebrew, this would inevitably lead to errant doctrine, which in turn would lead to errant churches. The Reformers thus preached the need to know the original languages for usefulness in ministry. In order to see this we turn now to the lives of Luther and Calvin.

Martin Luther

In the providence of God, no man ever exists in a vacuum. He exists in a complex set of circumstances and culture. Before talking directly about Luther, it is important to set the stage for Luther’s impact.

¹ Scott J. Hafemann, “Is it genuinely important to use the biblical languages in preaching, especially since there are many excellent commentaries and pastors will never attain the expertise of scholars?” “The SBJT Forum: Profiles of Expository Preaching,” *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 3:2 (1999): 88. cf. R. G. Watson, “Secularists Did Not Steal the Colleges,” *Presbyterian Journal* (1986): 8–10: “Some seminary students spend a tremendous amount of time studying Hebrew, but in a small survey of pastors who have been in the ministry for ten years or more, not one still used Hebrew. Most of them reported that they gave it up immediately after completing the last required course. This is not a new discovery but has been a source of jokes among pastors for years. Why, then, have seminaries not changed the Hebrew program to make it useful or otherwise eliminate it entirely?”

An important character on this stage is John Wyclif. Born in the fourteenth century, Wyclif lived at a time when Latin had passed from common use but was still the language for the church service as well as the Scripture readings. People were discouraged by the church from having a translated copy of God's Word for their own personal use. The authority of the church was viewed as preeminent during Wyclif's day. The power of the pope and the authority of the church's interpretation were viewed as supreme.

Wyclif was strongly motivated to write against papal authority, indulgences, and idolatry in the church. In addition, he supervised a translation of Scripture into English that the common people could understand.² Although the Catholic Church ultimately condemned Wyclif as a heretic, his influence spread beyond the shores of England to much of Europe, due partially to the papal schism which weakened the unquestioned authority of the Catholic Church.³ People began to question papal authority and move toward the authority of Scripture. It was Wyclif's belief in Scripture as the final authority of the church that laid the groundwork for the Reformation cry of *sola scriptura*.⁴

This is why Wyclif is known as the "Morning Star of the Reformation"—he questioned the pope's authority and began to persuade others that only the Bible ought to be given authority for the church.⁵ Wyclif's work set the stage for Martin Luther.

Born one hundred years after the death of Wyclif, Martin Luther (1483–1546) is perhaps the most well-known character of the Reformation and is the one to whom the beginning of the Reformation is credited. In October 1517, Luther posted 95 theses which challenged the idea of indulgences and absolute papal authority. After being given time to recant, Luther held fast to his points of opposition to the pope and the absolute authority of the church. His opponents engaged Luther at the Diet of Worms where Luther famously responded that he would not recant his writings without Scripture giving him reason to do so.⁶ Ultimately, Luther was excommunicated by Rome in 1521.

Like Wyclif, Luther knew the importance of understanding God's Word and embracing it as the ultimate authority for the church. Luther also knew how important

² Christopher K. Lensch, "The Morningstar of the Reformation: John Wycliffe," *WRS Journal* 3, no. 2 (August 1996): 17–18.

³ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁴ Matthew Spinka, "Advocates of Reform from Wyclif to Erasmus," in *Library of Christian Classics*, eds. J. Baille, J.T. McNeill and H.P. Van Dusen (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1953) 15:26. "The basic principle upon which he [Wyclif] sought to ground his reform was the supreme authority of the Scriptures. This doctrine, which more than anything else links him with the reformation, was carefully worked out in *De veritate sacrae Scripturae* (On the Truth of the Holy Scriptures), published in the very year in which the schism broke out. Wyclif asserts and defends therein the absolute superiority of the Scriptural doctrine over scholastic theology or the current assertion of papal supremacy in all matters of faith and practice. For him, 'Holy Scripture is the highest authority for every Christian and the standard of faith and of all human perfection.'"

⁵ John Stacey, *John Wyclif and Reform* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1964), 87.

⁶ Hans Joachim Hillerbrand, ed., *The Reformation: A Narrative History Related by Contemporary Observers and Participants*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 88.

it was for the people to understand God’s Word. Immediately following his excommunication, Luther translated the New Testament into German.⁷ This work later extended to the whole Bible so that the common people could have God’s Word in their own language.

Luther was passionate about Scripture being the authority for the church. Although this belief made Luther work hard to give the people a translation in their everyday language, he also actively promoted the value of knowing Greek and Hebrew. Because Scripture was written in Hebrew and Greek, Luther considered it essential for ministers to know these languages. He stated this clearly when he said,

Though the faith and the Gospel may be proclaimed by simple preachers without the languages, such preaching is flat and tame, men grow at last wearied and disgusted and it falls to the ground. But when the preacher is versed in the languages, his discourse has freshness and force, the whole of Scripture is treated, and faith finds itself constantly renewed by a continual variety of words and works.⁸

Indeed, for Luther, knowledge of Greek and Hebrew ensured a proper preservation of the gospel itself. He notes this passionately:

And let us be sure of this we will not long preserve the gospel without the languages. The languages are the sheath in which this sword of the Spirit is contained; they are the casket in which this jewel is enshrined; they are the vessel in which this wine is held; they are the larder in which this food is stored; and, as the gospel itself points out, they are the baskets in which are kept these loaves and fishes. . . .

For this reason even the apostles themselves considered it necessary to set down the New Testament and hold it fast in the Greek language, doubtless in order to preserve it for us there safe and sound as in a sacred ark. For they foresaw all that was to come, and now has come to pass; they knew that if it was left exclusively to men’s memory, wild and fearful disorder and confusion and a host of varied interpretations, fancies, and doctrines would arise in the Christian church, and that this could not be prevented and the simple folk protected unless the New Testament were set down with certainty in written language. Hence, it is inevitable that unless the languages remain, the gospel must finally perish.⁹

⁷ Erasmus’s publication of his Greek New Testament (1516) was very useful in this endeavor. For Erasmus’s impact on Luther and the other Reformers, see Peter J. Goeman, “The Impact and Influence of Erasmus’s Greek New Testament,” *Unio Cum Christo* 2, no. 1 (April 2016): 76–81.

⁸ Hugh Thomson Kerr, ed., *A Compend of Luther’s Theology* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1943), 148.

⁹ Martin Luther, “To the Councilmen of All Cities in Germany That They Establish and Maintain Christian Schools,” in *The Christian in Society II*, ed. Walther I. Brandt, trans. Albert T. W. Steinhäuser and rev. Walther I. Brandt; *Luther’s Works* 45; (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1962), 360.

Not only did Luther believe the languages were a safeguard for the truth, but Luther also stressed that history has shown that when the biblical languages decline, Christianity itself loses its doctrinal integrity.¹⁰ It is no surprise then that Luther viewed the biblical languages as the most effective tool in fighting false teaching and attacking the heresies of the Catholic Church. On this point, Luther gave personal testimony by saying,

If the languages had not made me positive as to the true meaning of the Word, I might have still remained a chained monk, engaged in quietly preaching Romish errors in the obscurity of a cloister; the pope, the sophists, and their anti-Christian empire would have remained unshaken.¹¹

Clearly Luther believed knowledge of the original languages gave him an important understanding of God's Word which resulted in a boldness to confront error. Elsewhere, Luther noted the integral role of the biblical languages to help start the Reformation when he said,

I know full well that while it is the Spirit alone who accomplishes everything, I would surely have never flushed a covey if the languages had not helped me and given me a sure and certain knowledge of Scripture. I too could have lived uprightly and preached the truth in seclusion; but then I should have left undisturbed the pope, the sophists, and the whole anti-Christian regime.¹²

Luther's day was not so different from our own. Some in Luther's time did not value the biblical languages like he did. These men emphasized Christian living and piety. Such a group in Luther's day was the Waldensian Brethren who, although siding with the Reformers, could not be commended by Luther. Of these well-meaning brothers Luther said:

So I can by no means commend the Waldensian Brethren for their neglect of the languages. For even though they may teach the truth, they inevitably often miss the true meaning of the text, and thus are neither equipped nor fit for defending the faith against error. Moreover, their teaching is so obscure and couched in such peculiar terms, differing from the language of Scripture, that I fear it is not or will not remain pure. For there is great danger in speaking of things of God in a different manner and in different terms than God himself

¹⁰ Ibid. Luther goes on to say, "Experience too has proved this and still gives evidence of it. For as soon as the languages declined to the vanishing point, after the apostolic age, the gospel and faith and Christianity itself declined more and more until under the pope they disappeared entirely. After the decline of the languages Christianity witnessed little that was worth anything; instead, a great many dreadful abominations arose because of ignorance of the languages."

¹¹ Quoted in W. Carlos Martyn, *The Life and Times of Martin Luther* (New York: American Tract Society), 474.

¹² Martin Luther, "To the Councilmen of All Cities in Germany That They Establish and Maintain Christian Schools," 366.

employs. In short, they may lead saintly lives and teach sacred things among themselves, but so long as they remain without the languages they cannot but lack what all the rest lack, namely, the ability to treat Scripture with certainty and thoroughness and to be useful to other nations. Because they could do this, but will not, they have to figure out for themselves how they will answer for it to God.¹³

According to Luther, this neglect of the original languages by the Waldensian Brethren resulted in the inability to defend the truth from error, and an ambiguous meaning for Scripture due to the lack of clear and biblical terminology.

In summary, Luther emphasizes that the church must prize Greek and Hebrew because those languages are the means by which God revealed His truth to mankind. The minister ought to be proficient in the languages in order to understand God's Word with clarity and be able to proclaim that truth to others while defending the church from errant doctrine.¹⁴

John Calvin

John Calvin's name is virtually synonymous with the Reformation to many students of church history. Born in 1509, originally training for a profession in law, Calvin was converted and focused on training for ministry, which included intense study of Greek and Hebrew.¹⁵

Calvin's ministry led him to Geneva in the middle of the sixteenth century. Calvin became renowned for his academic teaching and preaching ability. It is estimated that Calvin preached over four thousand sermons from both Old and New Testaments.¹⁶ Calvin's preaching style was to translate directly from the Greek or Hebrew. He preached extemporaneously and without notes, relying on his previous study of the passage in the original languages.¹⁷

Calvin's preaching focused on getting to the literal meaning of the text, and avoiding any allegorical interpretations that were popular in his day. In his commentary on 2 Corinthians Calvin wrote:

This error [of allegory] has been the source of many evils. Not only did it open the way for the adulteration of the natural meaning of Scripture but also set up

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ We are reminded again of Luther's words quoted earlier, "Though the faith and the Gospel may be proclaimed by simple preachers without the languages, such preaching is flat and tame, men grow at last wearied and disgusted and it falls to the ground. But when the preacher is versed in the languages, his discourse has freshness and force, the whole of Scripture is treated, and faith finds itself constantly renewed by a continual variety of words and works." Kerr, *A Compend of Luther's Theology*, 148.

¹⁵ John D. Currid, *Calvin and the Biblical Languages* (Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2006; Mentor, 2007), 14–20.

¹⁶ Ibid., 22.

¹⁷ Ibid., 24–25.

boldness in allegorizing as the chief exegetical virtue. Thus many of the ancients without any restraint played all sorts of games with the sacred Word of God, as if they were tossing a ball to and fro. It also gave heretics a chance to throw the Church into turmoil, for when it is accepted practice for anybody to interpret any passage in any way he desired, any mad idea, however absurd or monstrous, could be introduced under the pretext of allegory. Even good men were carried away by their mistaken fondness for allegories into formulating a great number of perverse opinions.¹⁸

This desire to interpret Scripture with a literal-grammatical approach was what gave Calvin such clarity as a preacher. In addition to Calvin being a renowned preacher, he was also a famed teacher in the academic setting. He had a passion for training both lay-Christians as well as ministers in academics.

In 1541 Calvin published a work entitled, *The Ecclesiastical Ordinances of 1541*. John Currid observes that this work reveals two important characteristics of Calvin's educational philosophy. First, Calvin wanted a place of education that could train all children to become godly citizens no matter their vocation. Second, Calvin based the core of the curriculum around language development and the humanities.¹⁹ Calvin's students were expected to be proficient in Hebrew, Greek, and also Latin. And those languages made up much of the day's work for the students. It is clear Calvin held the biblical languages in high regard and considered them essential to proper education.

Calvin's academy was tremendously successful and it attracted many students from all around Europe. Students came from France, England, Scotland, the Netherlands, Germany, Italy, and Switzerland—drawn by the passion and academic excellence of the graduates.²⁰ The success of the Geneva Academy led to many universities modeling their education systems after the Geneva Academy.²¹ The academy itself is noted to have produced some of the leading scholars of the biblical languages of that time.²²

Like Luther, Calvin recognized that false teachers in the church wanted to keep the biblical languages hidden, keeping the meaning of Scripture hidden. In describing those who downplay the original languages and teach error, Calvin labeled such men

¹⁸ John Calvin, "Commentary on 2 Corinthians 3:6," *Corpus Reformatorum*, 50.40–41, quoted in David Puckett, *John Calvin's Exegesis of the Old Testament* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 107. Elsewhere Calvin wrote, "We must, however, entirely reject the allegories of Origen, and of others like him, which Satan, with the deepest subtlety, has endeavored to introduce into the Church, for the purpose of rendering the doctrine of Scripture ambiguous and destitute of all certainty and firmness," John Calvin, *Genesis*, Crossway Classic Commentaries (1847; repr., Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), 33.

¹⁹ Currid, *Calvin and the Biblical Languages*, 53.

²⁰ Williston Walker, *John Calvin: Organiser of Reformed Protestantism (1509–1564)* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 366–67.

²¹ Currid, *Calvin and the Biblical Languages*, 61–62.

²² G. Lloyd Jones, *The Discovery of Hebrew in Tudor England: A Third Language* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1983), 79; Currid, *Calvin and the Biblical Languages*, 62.

as “oxen [that] usurp the reigns” and “asses [that usurp] the lyre.” Calvin also pointed out that the goal of such men was to “make all revere a Scripture hidden in darkness like the mysteries of Ceres, and let none presume to aspire to the understanding of it.”²³

Calvin recognized that error was common where there was a misunderstanding of the original languages. One such example pointed out by Calvin was the church’s teaching that marriage was a sacrament. The basis for this teaching was the Latin word *sacramentum*, which was the translation for the Greek word *μυστήριον*. Calvin noted that the difference between the Latin and the Greek words inexcusably resulted in errant teaching by the church. Calvin blamed this mistake on the lack of Greek facility when he said, “But, was it right that the whole Church should be punished for the ignorance of these men? . . . Let them go now and clamour [sic] against skill in languages, their ignorance of which leads them most shamefully astray in a matter easy and obvious to everyone.”²⁴

Like his fellow Reformers, Calvin advocated strongly for an intense study of the original languages. He was competent in the languages himself, and he also required those he trained to be thoroughly equipped in them. As is evidenced by his writings, Calvin’s inclination toward the biblical languages was motivated by his belief that Scripture ought to be the sole authority for the church. Like Luther, Calvin desired to accurately interpret God’s Word, declare its truth to others, and be able to refute the errors of his day.

A Call to Continue an Emphasis on Original Languages

To both Calvin and Luther the biblical languages were nonnegotiable. Proficiency in Greek and Hebrew was viewed as completely essential for the minister. Although this article has focused on Calvin and Luther, this mindset is present in the other Reformers as well. For example, Zwingli was said to be able to preach in Greek, Latin, and Hebrew as easily as his native language.²⁵

Today some Christians do not see the need for continued proficiency in the languages. One common argument against the need for competency in the biblical languages is that with as many good commentaries as there are now, one does not need to be as gifted in the languages as in past times. Addressing this attitude, Luther wrote:

²³ John Calvin, “Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent, with the Antidote,” in *Tracts and Letters*, Selected Works of John Calvin, ed. and trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), 3:75.

²⁴ John Calvin and Henry Beveridge, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Edinburgh: The Calvin Translation Society, 1845), 3:515.

²⁵ Jerome Friedman, *The Most Ancient Testimony: Sixteenth-Century Christian-Hebraica in the Age of Renaissance Nostalgia* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1983), 257. Melancthon also is quoted as saying, “Only if we have clearly understood the language will we clearly understand the content. All the dry glossaries, concordances, disconcordances and the like, which have been manufactured without number, are only hindrances for the spirit. If we put our minds to the sources, we will begin to understand Christ rightly.” Quoted in Hans Joachim Hillerbrand, ed., *The Reformation: A Narrative History Related by Contemporary Observers and Participants*, new ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 60.

It is also a stupid undertaking to attempt to gain an understanding of Scripture by laboring through the commentaries of the fathers and a multitude of books and glosses. Instead of this, men should have devoted themselves to the languages. Because they were ignorant of languages, the dear fathers at times expended many words in dealing with a text. Yet when they were all done they had scarcely taken its measure; they were half right and half wrong. Still, you continue to pore over them with immense labor even though, if you knew the languages, you could get further with the passage than they whom you are following. As sunshine is to shadow, so is the language itself compared to all the glosses of the fathers.”²⁶

Some may take issue with Luther's comments by thinking that today we have far better information available than what Luther had access to. Although that is true, Hafemann perceptively notes, “It is precisely because there are so many excellent commentaries available today that the use of the biblical languages in preaching becomes more important, not less.”²⁷

This becomes clear when one thinks through the options available for a minister not versed in the original languages. When ministers are inadequately prepared in the original languages they are given only three options.²⁸ First, they can become experts in note taking and cataloging the opinions of others, relying upon their favorite commentators or siding with whatever position is expedient to them. Second, they can refuse to make a decision and simply present all the options without taking a stand. Or, finally, ministers without proficiency in the original languages can just ignore the difficult issues in a text. Obviously none of these options is acceptable for a minister who is teaching people the very Word of God.

If seminaries are training ministers to understand God's Word and accurately teach it to others, then the only course of action is to teach students the Biblical languages in order that they might walk the steps of the commentators and translators so as to appropriately evaluate their work. This gives the students freedom from being enslaved to the opinions of others and puts them in a position to wrestle directly with the text of Scripture through the aid of the Holy Spirit.

²⁶ Martin Luther, “To the Councilmen of All Cities in Germany That They Establish and Maintain Christian Schools,” 364.

²⁷ Hafemann, “Is it genuinely important to use the biblical languages in preaching, especially since there are many excellent commentaries and pastors will never attain the expertise of scholars?” 86. Hafemann goes on to say that knowing the original languages allows a pastor to trace the argument of an author in a way a commentary cannot readily do.

²⁸ This is a summary of the point made by Hafemann, “Is it genuinely important to use the biblical languages in preaching, especially since there are many excellent commentaries and pastors will never attain the expertise of scholars?” 87–88.

Conclusion

This article is not arguing that every Christian needs to be an expert in Greek and Hebrew, nor is it suggesting preachers and teachers should flaunt biblical languages over laypeople.²⁹ The main point is this: contrary to the viewpoint of many in the Christian community (including some seminaries), institutions that are training men to teach God's Word must put significant emphasis on the original languages. Seminaries do students and ministers more harm than good when they allow them to buy in to the idea that the languages are a luxury and not a necessity for effective ministry.

In reading an older edition of the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, my attention was drawn to a sad event in the life of J. Gresham Machen.³⁰ In 1909 there was a student rebellion of sorts at Princeton Seminary where Machen was then teaching. The students complained about the amount of language courses they were required to take, and requested fewer exegetical courses, and more courses in practical matters.

Although rejecting the student demands in 1909, it was only a matter of time until the administration reduced the Hebrew and Greek requirements, resulting in the eventual resignation of Machen and his colleagues: Robert Dick Wilson, Oswald T. Allis, and Cornelius Van Til.³¹

In the providence of God, these circumstances led to the founding of Westminster Theological Seminary. Although God used this situation for good, the founding of a Bible-centered seminary, at the same time this narrative also displays the sad tale of what happens when careful fidelity to God's Word is neglected through the original languages.

During that troublesome time when students were complaining about the language requirements, Machen wrote a letter to his parents. He wrote this:

The students are exhibiting a spirit of dissatisfaction with the instruction that is offered them. What they want is apparently a little course in the English Bible, about on a level with White's Bible School. They want to be pumped full of material, which without any real assimilation or any intellectual work of any kind they can pump out again upon their unfortunate congregations. I sometimes feel that we are like a monastery in the Middle Ages. We are able to do little for our own generation, and can only hope to conserve a spark of learning for some future awakening in the Church's intellectual life. Other seminaries have yielded to the incessant clamor for the "practical," and we are being assailed both from within and from without. I only hope the authorities will have the courage to keep our standard high, not bother about losses of students, and

²⁹ Luther himself advised pastors against using Greek and Hebrew words in their sermons.

³⁰ Wayne G. Strickland, "Seminary Education: A Philosophical Paradigm Shift in Process," *JETS* 32, no. 2 (June 1989): 232–34.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 234.

wait for better times. It is the only course of action that can be successful in the long run.³²

Unfortunately, Princeton did eventually yield. With the forgoing of the biblical languages, what followed was a lack of devotion and fidelity to God's Word. Princeton Seminary soon slipped from being a seminary marked by faithfulness to God's Word.³³

Having looked at the lives of Luther and Calvin, we observe that attention to the original languages marked them both. Their facility with the original languages allowed them to teach God's Word clearly and fight the prevalent false teaching of their day. As Currid notes,

When we consider the Reformation, it is usually characterized by the Latin expressions *sola scriptura*, *sola gratia*, and *sola fides*. And, indeed, these are principal teachings of the reformers and truths that we ought to hold to dearly. Yet, I would argue that the commitment of the reformers to the study of the original languages of the Bible was one of the hallmarks or emblems of the Reformation. It was the Reformation that gave the study of the biblical languages their true significance with a definite goal: to obtain a serious and impartial understanding of the Scriptures freed from the medieval hermeneutic. The church for centuries had been enslaved by the hermeneutic of allegory and church tradition. But the interpretive method of the Reformation was a single meaning to a text, and that meaning was the one intended by the author. In order to glean that sense, the student of the Bible must use a historical-grammatical approach to the Scriptures. An essential part of that task is to read and study the Word in its original tongues.³⁴

The future of a doctrinally sound church lies in being faithful and attentive to God's Word. It is not enough to train church leaders to be dependent upon commentators or English translations (although thankfully we have many good ones). If we want to continue to train the next generation to value the great doctrines of the Reformation (which were birthed out of a refocused attention to the detail of God's Word),

³² Ned B. Stonehouse, *J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir* (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1954), 150–51.

³³ Strickland, "Seminary Education," 235. Strickland writes, "The lesson of Princeton Seminary shows that Biblical orthodoxy depends upon men and women who are firmly grounded in exegetical skills such as those provided in a seminary curriculum that adequately stresses the knowledge of Greek and Hebrew. The most capable practitioner in pastoral ministry is the one who not only excels in the practical areas but, more importantly, as the foundation to his ministry has a knowledge of Greek and Hebrew that will enable practical theology to be harmonious with an accurate understanding of Scripture."

³⁴ Currid, *Calvin and the Biblical Languages*, 69–70.

then we must train our pastors and church leaders to carefully read God's Word with competency in the original languages.³⁵

³⁵ Although space limits the ability to include many other reasons for studying the original languages, the reader can pursue the topic further in Jason DeRouchie, "The Profit of Employing the Biblical Languages: Scriptural and Historical Reflections," *Themelios* 37, no. 1 (April 2012): 32–50.