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Christian History Made Easy (Rose Bible Basics)

23. It Takes More Than Change: Post-Reformation Conflicts and the New World

This chapter surveys the messy century after the Reformation. Change came, but so did war, division, and cruelty. It tracks theological fights among Protestants, the collision of church authority with new science, the birth of the Puritans and Baptists, and the exploitation of the Americas — ending with the lesson that change alone fixes nothing.

Key takeaways

- Post-Reformation Europe was violent: the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre killed 10,000 French Protestants (1572); Protestantism was only legalized in France by the Edict of Nantes (1598).
- The predestination debate split Calvinists. Arminius' followers issued the Remonstrance (five points on free choice); the Synod of Dort (1618) answered with the five points of Calvinism, remembered by the acronym TULIP.
- Copernicus and Galileo showed the earth orbits the sun. The church condemned Galileo, and its grip on how people understood the physical world began to slip.

- The Thirty Years' War (1618-1648), sparked by the Defenestration of Prague, killed millions and ended with the Peace of Westphalia — where the pope no longer presided, marking the decline of Catholic political power.
- Puritans wanted to purify the Church of England by Scripture alone. Their movement produced the King James Bible (1611), the Pilgrims, and — through John Smyth's self-baptism (1609) — the first Baptists.
- John Bunyan, a jailed Baptist preacher, wrote *Pilgrim's Progress*. The 1688 Glorious Revolution and Toleration Act finally allowed non-Anglican worship.
- In the Americas, Europeans used Scripture to justify conquest, the encomienda system, and African slavery. Disease killed ~17 of 18 million natives in Mexico alone.
- A few Christians resisted: Bartolome de Las Casas fought for native rights, and Pedro Claver served slaves as 'a slave of the slaves' until his lonely death.
- Central lesson: change is not the same as solving a problem. Before changing things, ask what God may already be doing.

Passages worth keeping

“Change isn't necessarily bad, but change alone doesn't solve our problems.”

The chapter's thesis, restated as its 'key concept.'

“The Indians are our brothers; Christ has given his life for them. Why do we treat them with such inhuman savagery?”

Las Casas naming the contradiction at the heart of the 'evangelizing' conquest.

How it connects

The recurring warning is misused Scripture: Columbus (Isaiah 11:11-12), the conquistadors (Luke 14:23), and slaveholders (Genesis 9:25) all bent the Bible to serve power. The faithful figures — Las Casas, Claver, the Puritans, Bunyan — instead let Scripture reshape them, illustrating that real reform is a change of heart, not just of structures.

Scripture referenced

- **Romans 3:10-12; Ephesians 2:1-3** -- Cited by the Synod of Dort for Total Depravity.
- **John 6:44; Romans 9:10-16** -- Cited for Unconditional Election.
- **John 10:27-28; Romans 8:29-39** -- Cited for Perseverance of the Saints.
- **Joshua 10:12-13** -- Used against Galileo to argue the sun, not the earth, moves.
- **Luke 14:23** -- 'Compel them to come in' — twisted by Spanish soldiers to excuse killing natives.
- **Genesis 9:25** -- The 'curse of Canaan' misused to justify enslaving Africans.