

What Does *Mary* Have to Do with the Protestant Reformation?

The Teaching of the Catholic Church

compared to

The Truth of the Holy Scripture



'Blessed is the womb that bore You! ...But Jesus said:

On the contrary, blessed are those who hear the Word of God, and observe it.' – Luke 11:27, 28

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[Good evening! Welcome to all of you on behalf of Messiah's Church; I'm Brian Coombs, its pastor. Tonight we're gathered to consider this question: 'What do Peter, Paul, and Mary have to do with the Protestant Reformation?'

(I should say that if you're here to learn about Peter Yarrow, Paul Stookey, and Mary Travers, or to hear 'Puff the Magic Dragon' sung in touching harmony, or any of the trio's 1960s folk songs, then I'm afraid you'll leave with more questions than this one we consider tonight.)

But our speakers tonight *will* show something of what the apostles Peter and Paul, and the virgin Mary, have to do with the Protestant Reformation of Jesus' Church – a reformation movement that began in the 14th and 15th centuries by a handful of teachers and preachers who protested various abuses in the Church. Being lit then, it exploded when Martin Luther posted his *95 Theses* on October 31, 1517. Tonight, because the 31st was on a Thursday, we remember 'Reformation Day' on Friday, 'All Saints Day'.

Rev. Aaron Goerner (minister at Christ Church in Whitesboro, NY) will present on the apostle Peter. Rev. Gerry Malkus (minister at Hope Orthodox Presbyterian Church on Onondaga Hill) will present on the apostle Paul. And I, your humble servant from Messiah's Church, will present on the virgin, Mary.

Each speaker has himself chosen how he will present his topic (either theologically, historically, biblically, or other). But each lecture will be 30-45 minutes in length, and depending on the time used, will allow for either brief Q/A or refreshments *or both* afterwards.

So without further delay, I welcome not only you, but now Pastor Aaron Goerner, to speak on what the apostle Peter has to do with the Protestant Reformation ...and Pastor Gerry Malkus to speak on the apostle Paul...]

This lecture is about what Mary, the mother of Jesus, has to do with the Protestant Reformation. I'll comment on several passages, but a main one is Luke 11:27-28. It reads:

While Jesus was saying these things, one of the women in the crowd raised her voice and said to Him, 'Blessed is the womb that bore You, and the breasts at which You nursed.' But He said, 'On the contrary, blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it.'

If you have ears to hear it, the woman in the crowd advocated a theology close to the Church of Rome. For she said to Jesus before the watching world: 'Blessed is the womb that bore You!' Like the Church of Rome, she is fixated on the person of Mary. And she was so in a very open way. To her, Mary was more prominent than Jesus; and Jesus, for all that He was, was somewhat incidental to Mary.

But Jesus distanced Himself from what she said. For sure, He was not dishonoring His mother, because His Spirit, through Gabriel, and then through Elizabeth, testifies to Mary's 'blessedness among women' (*Luke* 1:28. 42). But in fact, Jesus *contradicted* what the woman said. He opposed it; corrected it; redirected it. He said, '*On the contrary (menoun)* blessed are those who hear the Word of God and observe it.'

The woman advanced that day a theology now cherished by the Church of Rome. But Jesus advanced a theology that is at the heart of the Protestant Reformation and its 'Reformed faith'. (It's almost as if the incident happened that day for the Protestant cause of later centuries!) The one lifts up and praises *Jesus' mother*, but the other *God's Word*. The one considers *Mary apart from the Word*, but the other considers *the Word over Mary*. The contrast is striking.

And Jesus Himself struck it. He would not have a crowd of people *then*, nor some 1.2 billion people *today* admire His mother above God's Word. The issue is not the *bearer* of Jesus, but the *bearer* of Jesus; not who *bore* the Word *made flesh*, but who *bears* the Word *with faith*.

Yet the official teaching of the Church of Rome does not conclude as Jesus did; for it has dogmatized certain doctrines about Mary with binding authority, 'obliging the Christian people to an irrevocable adherence of faith'.¹ And these dogmas are Mary's Immaculate Conception, her Perpetual Virginity, her Bodily Assumption, and her Heavenly Mediation. But following Jesus' principle, we contend they come from an errant tradition and *not* Holy Scripture.

¹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC), 88-90, 95, with 491. See also the encyclical *Martaliun Animos* (1928) of Pius XI: '...all who are truly Christ's believe, for example, the Conception of the Mother of God without stain of original sin with the same faith as they believe the august Trinity and, likewise, the Incarnation of the Lord.'

I. Take *first* Mary's (alleged) IMMACULATE CONCEPTION.

The Church of Rome declared in 1854 in the papal Bull *Ineffabilis Deus* of Pius IX:

...the doctrine which holds the blessed Virgin Mary to have been, from the moment of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege of Almighty God, in view of the merits of Christ Jesus the Savior of mankind, preserved free from all stain of original sin, was revealed by God, and is therefore to be firmly and constantly believed by all the faithful. Therefore, if some would presume to think in their hearts otherwise than we have defined (which God forbid), they shall know and thoroughly understand that they are by their own judgment condemned, have made shipwreck concerning the faith, and fallen away from the unity of the Church; and, moreover, that they, by this very act, subject themselves to the penalties ordained by law, if, by word or writing, or any other external means, they dare to signify what they think in their hearts.

Here begins a pattern that will (hopefully) become more visible to you: *the Church of Rome blurs distinctions between Jesus and Mary, such that she is given, or shares in, what properly – and only – belongs to Him.* In this case, it's the Immaculate Conception.

The term 'immaculate conception' is fine. But it properly applies to *Jesus*, and *not* to Mary. Rome, however, applies it *first* to Mary, so that it *then* applies to Jesus.

Rome contends that Mary avoided Adam's guilt and the effects of his sin. They claim that 'from the moment of her conception' she was 'preserved free from *all* stain of original sin'. They believe Gabriel's greeting to Mary as 'favored one' or 'woman richly blessed' is best rendered as Mary 'full of grace'² (*Luke* 1:28). They understand the Greek verb³ as speaking to a state *in which Mary already is* when Gabriel appears to her. They connect this grace to Ephesians 1:6, which by the same verb⁴ references God's eternal choice 'which He freely bestowed on us (or, 'graced us with') in the Beloved.' Being so chosen for this state from eternity⁵, Mary was *thus* immaculately conceived, pure, and without sin. She could then faithfully assent to God's call to conceive and bear the sinless Son of God in her womb.⁶ In this light, she is given the title, 'All-Holy'.⁷

² Per Jerome's Latin Vulgate, '*gratia plena*', and despite some significant Catholic scholars (e.g., Fitzmyer, Brown) who reject Jerome's translation. Cf. Antoine Nachez, *Mary's Pope* (Franklin, WI: Sheed & Ward, 2000), 51-52.

³ *Kexaritomeneh*, a perfect passive participle

⁴ Though the verb is aorist active indicative.

⁵ CCC, 488

⁶ CCC, 490-494, 722

⁷ CCC, 493

But the Scripture does not so speak. They lead us differently. *First*, Ephesians 1:6 applies to *all* believers, and *not* just to Mary. Paul wrote to ‘the *saints* at Ephesus, *believers* in Jesus Christ’ (*Eph.* 1:2). He is not singling out Mary, but speaking of how God singled out all the elect in Christ from eternity. Nor was he specifying a particular grace that caused Mary’s sinless conception, but that God the Father has ‘graced’ *all* who believe with a common salvation in Christ.

Secondly, remember that Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David, too, ‘found favor’ in God’s eyes (*Gen.* 6:8; 18:3; *Exod.* 33:12-13, 16-17; *Acts* 7:46). Remember that Jael (who brought Sisera’s demise) is twice called (like Mary) ‘most blessed of women’ (*Judg.* 5:24). Remember that Gabriel’s words to Mary, ‘The Lord be with you,’ were also said by Saul to David, and David to Solomon, and Paul to the Thessalonians (*1 Sam.* 17:37; *1 Chr.* 22:16; *2 Thess.* 3:16 with *Luke* 1:28). These statements remind us that what was said to *Mary*, has also been said to *other* believers, whom like Mary, God used to do great things.

Thirdly (and to the heart of the matter), Jesus avoided a sinful nature *not* because of Mary, but because of the Holy Spirit. What did Gabriel say to Mary? ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and *for that reason*⁸ the *holy* Child shall be called the Son of God.’ (*Luke* 1:35) The reason is *not* Mary’s ‘immaculate conception’ but the Spirit’s almighty power and presence.

Finally, Mary’s joyful actions after Gabriel’s annunciation do not give any hint to the effect that she ‘now understood why she had been sinless all her life’. Thus, *in view of Jesus conceived* in her womb, she confessed God as her *Savior* (cf. *Luke* 1:47). And in that ‘Magnificat’ (as childbearing Hannah did long ago), Mary rendered Hannah’s words, ‘There is *no one* holy like the Lord,’ as ‘Holy is *His* name.’⁹ Mary did not see herself as ‘immaculately conceived’, but believed that Jesus would be – as a Savior – within her.

So, following Jesus’ principle, we contend that the Church of Rome’s dogma of Mary’s (alleged) Immaculate Conception comes not from Holy Scripture.

II. Take *second* Mary’s (alleged) PERPETUAL VIRGINITY.

This doctrine holds that Mary was not only a virgin when engaged to Joseph, and while pregnant with Jesus, but that she also *remained* a virgin thereafter. *Never* did she have

⁸ The Greek is *dio kai*.

⁹ See *Luke* 1:49 with *1 Sam.* 2:2. The ‘Immaculate Conception’ dogma suffers additionally, and especially, under the following texts: *Job* 14:4; 15:14; 25:4; *Prov.* 20:9; *Eccl.* 7:20; *Rom.* 3:23; 5:12-19; *1 Cor.* 15:22.

intercourse with Joseph during their marriage; and *never*, therefore, did she conceive, carry, or birth any more children after Jesus.

On this topic, however, the Roman Church has simply professed¹⁰ what was largely believed¹¹ even into the times of the Reformers and some Puritans. One Reformed confession, even, speaks of Mary as ‘ever-virgin Mary’.¹² This surprises many. But reasonable points *are* made in defense of Mary as ‘the ever-virgin’,¹³ such as 3rd century Chrysostom’s argument, that Jesus entrusted his mother to the care of no *son* – which would be expected, if she had them – but to the apostle *John* instead.

Maybe Chrysostom ‘has us’.

But maybe *not*. In response to Chrysostom, it could be that Jesus, as Mary’s first-born Son, simply ‘overruled’ the normal expectation, in that His brothers were ‘not (yet) believing in Him’ (*John* 7:5). For this reason, perhaps, He did not want to leave His believing mother in the care of unbelieving men, but instead in the care of the ‘disciple He loved’. Further, Jesus’ choice at least illustrates (as other passages do) the priority of spiritual, heavenly, and abiding relations over natural, earthly, and temporal ones. So there are *equally reasonable answers* to the dogma’s *reasonable supports*.

Yet there are *real problems* with the dogma’s *common responses*.

First, the Church of Rome is quick to say that Jesus’ alleged ‘brothers and sisters’ are really his ‘cousins’ or ‘relatives’ under the Old Testament societal term ‘brother’.¹⁴ (For example, Lot is properly Abraham’s ‘nephew’; and yet he is called ‘brother’.¹⁵) But when you come to the New Testament, even though this way of reference *is* still occasionally used, it cannot be so understood concerning Jesus’ family. The New Testament times *had* specific words for ‘cousin’ (*anepsios*) and ‘relative’ (*sungenes*), which *could* have been used in this case (as they properly *are* in others¹⁶). But they were *not* used. Instead, the inspired writers used the word ‘brother’ (and its feminine counterpart, ‘sister’) to speak, as the word itself does, of those ‘from the *same* womb’.¹⁷

¹⁰ CCC, 499-500, 510, 721,

¹¹ Tertullian (c. 160-225 AD) is often cited as an exception. Cf. *On Monogamy*, 8 and *Against Marcion*, 4.19

¹² *Second Helvetic Confession*, ch. 11, sec. 3

¹³ *Aei parthenos*

¹⁴ CCC, 500

¹⁵ *Gen.* 13:8; 14:16

¹⁶ See ‘cousin’ (*anepsios*) at *Col.* 4:10 and ‘relative’ (*sungenes*) at *Luke* 1:36, 58, 61; 2:44. It is very interesting, in this light, that Paul testifies, ‘I did not see any other of the apostles except James, the Lord’s *brother*.’ (*Gal.* 1:19 with *Matt.* 13:55)

¹⁷ Colin Brown, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, 1.254

Should we refer to Mary, Martha, and Lazarus as ‘cousins’? No, for the natural reading – *especially* when the word ‘sister’ appears alongside ‘brother’ – is to understand them as ‘from the same womb’. The several references to Jesus’ family, then, not merely by the term ‘brother’, but also by the added terms of ‘mother’ and ‘sister’,¹⁸ *necessarily* imply that Jesus *had* siblings through His mother Mary’s union with Joseph. (If we deny Jesus *literal* brothers and sisters, should we not also deny Him a *literal* mother? It is preposterous.) As Matthew wrote, Joseph ‘kept [Mary] a virgin *until* she gave birth to a Son’ (*Matt.* 1:25).¹⁹ And this is further confirmed by the messianic Psalm the apostle John so often applies to Jesus: ‘I have become estranged from My *brothers*, and an alien to My *mother’s sons*.’ (*Psa.* 69:8)²⁰ If we deny Jesus a *brother*, we must deny Him a *mother*.

The conclusion is inescapable: Jesus, after His birth, *had* brothers and sisters from Mary’s sexual union with Joseph. Mary was *not* a ‘perpetual virgin’.

It raises additional questions: If these were not Jesus’ siblings, but instead cousins, then why are they so often with *Mary*? Where is *their* mother? Why can’t *she* oversee them?²¹ Also, if Jesus’ ‘brothers and sisters’ are not *literally* so, then on what ground, and in what sense can it be *spiritually* so – that Jesus ‘not be ashamed to call *us* brethren?’ (*Heb.* 2:11) If the *natural* birth is in question (‘Your mother and brothers are outside to speak to You’), then so too is the *spiritual* corollary (‘Whoever does the will of My Father is My brother and sister and mother’), for Jesus Himself drew the analogy.²²

Another implication of the doctrine is whether God was treating Joseph or Mary, or both – or even marriage itself – wrongly. We are right to assume that both Joseph and Mary got engaged with the intention to be about a normal marriage *and* sexual intimacy. Remember that Joseph was ready to divorce Mary, given his assumption that, pregnant, she was so by another man. And note that the angel appeared to them each *after* their formal marriage engagement. Given that God’s will is that each spouse fulfill his or her duty toward the other, that each has authority over the other’s body, and that neither is to deprive each other (per *1 Cor.* 7:3-5), it is proper *both to assume* that Mary and Joseph anticipated sexual relations, *and to believe* that God would frown upon the idea of Mary’s ‘perpetual virginity’ in the married state – *as well as* Joseph’s likely ‘forlorn celibacy’.

¹⁸ Per *Matt.* 12:46-50; 13:54-56; *Mark* 3:20-21; 6:1-4; *Acts* 1:14

¹⁹ While it is true that the adverbial particle ‘until’ (*heos*) can be read as *not* pinpointing a terminus point (per *Matt.* 28:20; *1 Tim.* 4:13), but only a significant point along a continuum, it would be the natural way to understand Joseph’s (and Mary’s) natural, sexual intentions with marriage before the revelation of God’s purpose in Christ to them.

²⁰ See *John* 2:12, 17 (*Psa.* 69:9); 7:5 (*Psa.* 69:8); 15:26 (*Psa.* 69:4); 19:28 (*Psa.* 69:21).

²¹ The Church of Rome answers, though weakly, that this is another Mary, who was with Mary beneath the cross. See CCC, 500 with *Matt.* 27:56.

²² Per *Matt.* 12:46-50

Let it at least be seen that the dogma of Mary's 'perpetual virginity' is not easily drawn from Scripture, *if* it even is at all. We conclude that Jesus was the only-begotten Son of God according to His *divinity*, but *not* the only-begotten Son of Mary according to His *humanity*.²³

III. Take *third* Mary's (alleged) BODILY ASSUMPTION.²⁴

Pius XII defined this dogma in 1950 in *Munificentissimus Deus* with these words:

5. Now God has willed that *the Blessed Virgin Mary ... by an entirely unique privilege, completely overcame sin by her Immaculate Conception, and as a result she was not subject to the law of remaining in the corruption of the grave, and she did not have to wait until the end of time for the redemption of her body. ...*

40. Hence the revered Mother of God, from all eternity joined in a hidden way with Jesus Christ in one and the same decree of predestination, immaculate in her conception, a most perfect virgin in her divine motherhood, the noble associate of the divine Redeemer who has won a complete triumph over sin and its consequences, finally obtained, as the supreme culmination of her privileges, that she should be preserved free from the corruption of the tomb and that, like her own Son, having overcome death, she might be taken up body and soul to the glory of heaven where, as Queen, she sits in splendor at the right hand of her Son, the immortal King of the Ages. ... By the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, of the Blessed Apostles Peter and Paul, and by our own authority, we pronounce, declare, and define it to be a divinely revealed dogma: that *the Immaculate Mother of God, the ever Virgin Mary, having completed the course of her earthly life, was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory.*²⁵

So you see the pattern continuing: *the Church of Rome blurs distinctions between Jesus and Mary, such that she is given, or shares in, what properly – and only – belongs to Him.* In this case, it is her bodily assumption into Heaven. First Mary possessed a sinless nature, so that Jesus could. And since Mary's body (like Jesus') was *made* 'all holy', it was therefore *kept* 'all holy' by perpetual virginity. And just as Jesus was assumed bodily into heaven, so too was Mary. Again, *the Church of Rome blurs distinctions between Jesus and Mary, such that she is given, or shares in, what properly – and only – belongs to Him.*

²³ Another observation comes from Luke's statement, 'Mary gave birth to her *firstborn* son.' (*Luke* 2:7) This implies that other sons would (or at least could) be born of Mary after Jesus. And likewise, Jesus being the firstborn among others *is* true in the spiritual realm, per *Rom.* 8:29; *Col.* 1:15, 18; *Heb.* 12:23; *1 John* 5:1 with *John* 1:12-13.

²⁴ CCC, 966, 974

²⁵ The Apostolic Constitution itself admits in sections 6 and 8-10 that the doctrine's dogmatic status came about through the interest of the faithful and their petition of its highest officers. It also refers to the ancient liturgical feasts and comments spanning the late patristic to medieval eras (secs. 20-30) as grounds for defining the doctrine as it has.

The Roman Church, however, *does* look to Holy Scripture on this dogma. But they do so as a person who, too eager to get at the nut in a shell, ends up crushing the nut *and* the shell in the process! For example, to see Psalm 132, with the finding and bringing of the Ark of the Covenant into the temple, as speaking of Mary's bodily assumption into Heaven, is not only 'cracking the nut' but truly 'pushing the envelope'. Regrettably, this is the way the Church of Rome 'finds' the dogma in Scripture.

The Bible, however, is absolutely silent on Mary's life after Jesus' ascension to Heaven. We know *nothing* about her after that point. It is only from the writings of spurious sects that the notions of Mary's bodily assumption were ever discovered.

So 'blessed are those *who hear the Word of God*, and observe it.'

IV. Take *finally* Mary's (alleged) HEAVENLY MEDIATION.²⁶

The Church of Rome, given its view of Mary's 'Immaculate Conception', believes there is *causality* to Mary's state of grace. This means that Mary, at her 'immaculate conception', became not only a *recipient* of God's grace *for herself*, but a *repository* of God's grace *to others*. She was conceived without sin *for* Jesus, so that she could mediate grace *with* Jesus. Having in life suffered with her Son's sufferings (even beneath His cross), and having been bodily assumed likewise into heaven, she now has a mediatorial role alongside Christ. Thus the Church of Rome calls Mary by such titles as 'Queen of Heaven,'²⁷ 'Mother of Grace,'²⁸ 'Mother of the Church,'²⁹ 'Throne of Wisdom,'³⁰ 'Advocate, Helper, Benefactress, and Mediatrix'.³¹ As the Catholic Catechism summarizes the doctrine:

'This motherhood of Mary in the order of grace continues uninterruptedly from the consent which she loyally gave at the Annunciation and which she sustained without wavering beneath the cross, until the eternal fulfillment of all the elect. Taken up to heaven she did not lay aside this saving office but by her manifold intercession continues to bring us the gifts of eternal salvation.'³²

²⁶ CCC, 725-726, 968-971

²⁷ CCC, 966; *Munificentissimus Deus*, sec. 40. Ironically, this title is, biblically, used in reference to pagan deities, per *Jer.* 7:18; 44:17-19, 25 (cf. *Judg.* 2:13).

²⁸ CCC, 968-970

²⁹ CCC, 963, 975

³⁰ CCC, 721

³¹ CCC, 969

³² CCC, 969

You can see by these titles and this statement, again, that *the Church of Rome blurs distinctions between Jesus and Mary, such that she is given, or shares in, what properly – and only – belongs to Him.* They are zealous to maintain a union with Mary and Jesus *in the work of redemption.*³³ Thus they ascribe a ‘saving office’ to Mary alongside Jesus, such that she can ‘bring us the gifts of eternal salvation’.³⁴

But against this intolerable blasphemy, the Scripture will always remain clear that ‘There is *one* Mediator between God and men, the *man* Christ Jesus.’ (1 Tim. 2:5) Mary certainly suffered as a *mother*; but she never died as a *Savior*. She shed none of her blood as a sacrifice for sin. Nor did she have the capacity in a divine nature to sustain the human nature to endure the penalty of God’s wrath for the sins of God’s people. As a mere human, she has *neither* the infinite capacity to *bear* prayer *nor* the omnipotent power to *answer* it.

Furthermore, the Bible *never* ascribes redemptive and mediating titles to Mary. The only title Scripture uses for her is ‘mother of Jesus’.³⁵ And neither did Jesus speak of His mother with official titles.

But what is more, when she found Him that day in the temple in His 12th year, He had already learned the real distinction between His earthly parents and His heavenly Father. Mary’s words ‘Your father and I have been anxiously looking for You!’ were met with *this* response: ‘Why is it you were looking for Me? Did you not know that I had to be in My Father’s house?’ (Luke 2:48, 49) It should not go unnoticed, then, that Jesus, once He began His ministry, *always* recognized and reiterated this distinction. He *never* then addressed Mary as ‘mother’ but ‘woman’.³⁶

Why is this? Surely *not* because Jesus speaks ‘down’ to His mother!

The Church of Rome believes it is because He considered Mary in a mediatorial way, i.e., Mary as ‘the woman’, a ‘new Eve’, as the Church Fathers did.³⁷ But they take it further than they or the Scriptures do. They read *every* related NT instance of ‘woman’ as if Mary is *the* woman. And they do this to support their doctrine of Mary’s heavenly mediation.

³³ CCC, 964, ‘Mary’s role in the Church is inseparable from her union with Christ and flows directly from it.’

³⁴ It should be noted, however, that Mary is commonly placed *over* Jesus in the Church of Rome’s artwork.

³⁵ John 2:1, 3; Acts 1:14

³⁶ See John 2:4; 19:26.

³⁷ Per Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 3.22.4; CCC, 726, 968, 975. For sure, Mary is a sort-of new Eve on account that she, too, believed the promise of the coming Seed (cf. Gen. 3:15, 20; 4:1 with Luke 1:38, 45; 1 Tim. 2:14-15), and that the Seed came ‘in the fullness of time’ (Gen. 3:15; 4:1 with Gal. 4:4; 3:16). Humanity has known a new offspring through her.

In some ways this ‘woman’ Mary as a new Eve ‘works’. The similarities between the two women are striking. Mary is clearly a part of the fulfillment of the gospel’s promise announced in Eden, as Luke’s genealogy of Mary, reaching back to Adam, implies.

But in other ways this comparison *doesn’t* work, at least as the Church of Rome has tried to make it work so as to merit her being a heavenly ‘Mediatrice’ with Jesus. *First*, Mary is not the ‘woman clothed with the sun’ at Revelation 12:1. *That* is the Church. *Second*, Mary should not be considered ‘Mother of the Church’ because Paul, though recognizing Jesus as ‘born of a woman’ (*Gal.* 4:4), went on to imply *Sarah* and the true, heavenly *Church* as the spiritual ‘mother of us all’ (vv. 26, 31). Peter similarly recognized *Sarah* (and not Mary) as the origin and pattern for the faithful: ‘you have become *her* children, if you do what is right’ (*1 Pet.* 3:6). Mary is spiritual ‘mother’ and exemplar for God’s believing people even as *Sarah* was.

And this is a vital point, because to place Mary as a ‘Mother of the Church’ with a heavenly mediation is to blur the Bible’s emphasis on Christ, and to *give to Mary* so as to *detract from Christ*. The Bible specifically, emphatically, and meaningfully relates *Adam to Christ*.³⁸ But Rome more relates *Eve to Mary*. And even as Rome too closely puts *Christ to Mary*, the Bible is concerned to emphasize *Christ with His heavenly Father* and *not* His earthly mother. Just as the emphasis was not Jesus to His mother, brothers, and sisters *naturally*, it is to His Church *spiritually*.

Rome’s view of Mary (as we’ve said before) blurs all these things.

Perhaps, then, to avoid the very blasphemy of holding Mary in a high place or as a heavenly mediatrix with Jesus, *there is no mention of Mary after Jesus’ ascension*. The last time we see Mary is at the beginning of Acts *in the presence of the apostles* waiting for the promised Spirit to come on them as *they* would lead Jesus’ Church. With her were her other sons (probably James and Jude, now converted) and other disciples. Surprisingly, Mary is not mentioned in any epistle, nor in the classic chapter of the faithful at Hebrews 11.³⁹ These should be to us obvious ‘road closed ahead’ or ‘danger: bridge out’ signs!⁴⁰

So then, as Scripture says, Mary is ‘blessed *among* women’ (*Luke* 1:42) and not *over* women. As Peter said to *Cornelius* when he prostrated himself in reverence, ‘Stand up! I

³⁸ Per *Rom.* 5:12-19; *1 Cor.* 15:22, 45-47

³⁹ Though she would be among those women of v. 35, who ‘received back their dead by resurrection’.

⁴⁰ Additionally, if Mary is to be considered with special adoration from the beginning of Jesus’ conception, one wonders why she was not given religious homage at Jesus’ nativity. Instead we are told, ‘After coming into the house they saw the Child *with Mary His mother*, and they fell to the ground and worshiped *Him*. Then, opening their treasures, they presented *to Him* gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.’ (*Matt.* 2:11)

too am just a man!’ (*Acts* 10:26), so would Mary say to *us*: ‘Stand up! Do not come to me as a heavenly mediator! I too am just a woman.’ ‘Behold, the bonds slave of the Lord.’ (*Luke* 1:38)

Here then are four dogmas to show that the Church of Rome, like the woman in the crowd, has placed the person of Mary *over* the Word of God, or at least considered her *apart* from it. And though that woman *is* blessed who bore the Lord Jesus, ‘*On the contrary*, blessed are those who hear the Word of God, and observe it.’

Which leads us back to our question: ‘What then *does* Mary have to do with the Protestant Reformation?’

We’ve seen that Scripture does *not* support these Marian doctrines. Yet I *still* have not answered the question, ‘What *does* Mary have to do with the Protestant Reformation?’ Have I been buying time? No, I’ve been *taking* it!

One way Mary relates to the Protestant Reformation is that *she was wholeheartedly committed to both the Word of God and to the Son of God*. The Church of Rome is committed wholeheartedly to *neither*. But Mary was to *both*.

She was committed to the Word of God. Gabriel announces God’s plan that she bring the Messiah into the world. And despite her curiosity about how it could and would happen, she concludes: ‘May it be done to me *according to your word*.’ (*Luke* 1:38) To *Gabriel’s* word? Not so much as *God’s*, who sent Him.

She soon makes the involved trip to Elizabeth. And upon arrival, what does she hear from Elizabeth? ‘Blessed is she, who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her *by the Lord*.’ (*Luke* 1:45) *Mary was committed to the Word of God*.

Listen to her offer her ‘Magnificat’. What is it, but a woven tapestry of Scripture, each verse taken right out of the Psalter? And one *not read*, mind you, but *recited* from memory! The Word was in her *heart*. It was thus ready on her lips.

And how did she end her ‘Magnificat’? ‘As [God] *spoke* to our fathers’ (*Luke* 1:55). She knew what God had said from *ancient times through the prophets*, even as she knew what He *recently said through Gabriel*. Mary was committed to the Word of God. For that reason, we read when the shepherds came in from the field to behold Jesus’ birth, having told

Mary what the angels had said to them, ‘Mary *treasured* all these things, pondering them in her heart.’ (*Luke 2:19*)

There she is with Joseph at the temple the following week. She has named her Son as God told her husband to. She loves the Law of God, and is having it carried out toward her Son. She offers the appropriate sacrifice. She has Jesus circumcised according to the Law. She listens to Simeon and Anna prophesy about her Son. Indeed, as it says, they didn’t return to Galilee until ‘they had performed everything *according to the Law of the Lord*’ (*Luke 2:39*). *Mary was committed to the Word of God as it pertained to Jesus.*

And there she is 12 years later, her Son explaining to her that He had to be in His Father’s house. And even though she ‘did not understand the statement He had made’ it is followed up with this: ‘His mother *treasured all these things in her heart.*’ (*Luke 2:49-51*) *Mary was committed to the Word of God as it pertained to Jesus.*

And then 18 years after that, they run out of wine at a wedding in Cana. She interacts with Jesus. He speaks a veiled messianic word to her, such that her response to the servants is: ‘Whatever He *says* to you, *do it.*’ (*John 2:4-5*)

And there she was 3 years after that, at the foot of the cross. Her Son is now dying. People hurl insults at Him. And when at such a point it would have been painful to see the fulfillment of God’s word to her through Simeon 30 years prior, that a sword will pierce her heart, she *kept* the word, *even as a sword pierced her Son’s side.*

This is a woman who was committed to the *Word* of God in relation to the *Son* of God. Because she loved the one, she loved the other. Because she cherished the one, she treasured the other.

And in *this* – in all these many ways, over many years – she heartily lived by a vital principle of the Protestant Reformation: *wholehearted commitment to the Word of God as well as the Son of God*, especially in relation to the *cross*, before all other things.

Another way Mary relates to the Protestant Reformation is that she, being wholeheartedly committed to both the Word of God and the Son of God, *therefore offered heartfelt worship.*

Again, when she ‘magnified the Lord, and exalted in God her Savior,’ she did so with her *soul and spirit*, and *not* merely her mouth and lips. True worship was of the *heart*. Remember that she ‘treasured these things *in her heart*’. And because she carried God’s

Word and Son *within* her, true worship came out *from* her. It was all heartfelt, free, robust. We not only see her worshiping according to the *ordinances* God had commanded for the temple. But *with* those, she offered her *heart*.

We look at the Church of Rome and we see much vain repetition, familiar routine, and empty ritual. The Creed is mumbled. The pulpit is hardly occupied. The gathered parish is often dead.

But what shall we say of *ourselves*? Does these mark *us* in any way?

Or are we wholeheartedly committed to both the Word of God and the Son of God, *and therefore offer heartfelt worship*?

3) A *final* way Mary relates to the Protestant Reformation, is for *our correction and balance as Reformed Christians*.

It is generally true that Reformed Christians are too negative about Mary. Just as the Church of Rome goes too far to *promote* Mary, we, as Reformed Christians often go too far, and *demote* Mary. Seldom do we consider her positively in herself and in God's purpose as it relates to her Son. We consider her *mostly* for the purpose of combating false teaching and a false church. We often consider her for what she is *not*, and we often miss seeing her for who she *is*. For sure, we should be about the *study* of Mary without the *worship* of Mary – but never without seeing the *blessedness* of Mary.

There is no question that Mary is a blessed woman. The Spirit reiterates that. *Gabriel* greeted her as a woman, 'richly blessed' (*Luke* 1:28). *Elizabeth* greeted her with like words: 'Blessed are you among women!' 'Blessed is she who believed there would be a fulfillment of what the Lord spoke to her!' (*Luke* 1:41, 45) *Mary* herself said, 'From this time on, all generations shall call me blessed!' (*Luke* 1:48) Jewish girls each hoped throughout the ages that *they* would be the mother of David's messianic Son! And so the woman in the crowd, as misplaced as her zeal was, *did* know, 'Blessed is the womb' that bore Jesus (*Luke* 11:27).

What blessedness Mary had!

Think of it: many a *once-barren* woman has given birth to a son. Sarah had Isaac. Hannah had Samuel. Elizabeth had John.

But never – never, never, *never* – has a *virgin* given birth to a son – except Mary with Jesus. There is no other woman than Mary, who *at the same time* has been *both virgin and mother*. For, if a woman *is* a virgin, then she is *not* a mother. And if she *is* a mother, then she is *no longer* a virgin. But Mary was a mother *as* a virgin, and *as* a mother a virgin. She is truly blessed among women! And as Reformed Christians we should in no way come short of recognizing and confessing such blessedness. (Have we ever truly been struck with just what God *did* – and *brought* us – through Mary? This is yet another mighty work of God!) We should in no way be embarrassed to say: ‘Blessed is the virgin Mary, mother of Jesus, mother of God.’⁴¹

All this seems, then, to answer the question: ‘What does *Mary* have to do with the Protestant Reformation?’

The Church of Rome would say, ‘She has *nothing* to do with it!’ But if we follow Jesus’ words to the woman in the crowd that day, and Mary’s own example of Jesus’ words, we should conclude that she has *much* to do with the Protestant Reformation. It seems clear that she herself would have *embraced* it for the sake of her Son – just as she remained with the apostles’ ministry upon His ascension into heaven. Mary *does* relate to the Protestant Reformation. And she is blessed (like all believers) *because* she herself ‘heard the Word of God, and observed it’.

She believed its promises. She sang its praises. She treasured its statements. She kept its commands.

She was a woman who, in the 1st century, was in the very position to say again in the 15th or 16th century (were she alive), ‘May it be done according to *Your* word.’ (*Luke* 1:38) ‘Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment’ in her Son (*Luke* 1:45). ‘Whatever *He* says to you, do it.’ (*John* 2:5)

⁴¹ Mary is the ‘mother of God’ (*theotokos*, lit. ‘God-bearer’), as the ancient Councils of Ephesus (431 AD) and Chalcedon affirmed (451 AD), because she bore the human Child who *at the same time* is the divine Son of God. The term was used as a litmus test to show the colors of the Nestorian heresy, which taught that Jesus had 2 natures, *but as 2 persons*: the divine Logos and the human Jesus. The ancient Councils echoed the thoughts of Irenaeus (*Against Heresies*, 3.21.10; 5.19.1), Alexander of Alexandria’s *Letter to a Bishop*, and Ephraim’s *Songs of Praise*. But more, the Councils echo the Scripture that the one Son of God assumed a human nature at His conception in Mary’s womb. Thus Elizabeth professed Mary as ‘the mother of my Lord’ (*Luke* 1:43), for here in Mary’s womb, ‘the fullness of the Deity dwells in bodily form’ (*Col.* 2:9), and ‘for that reason, shall be called the Son of God’ (*Luke* 1:35). The Council addressed this central issue: If Mary is not the ‘mother of God’, *then whose child was she carrying?* Was it Joseph’s? *No*. Was it God’s? *Yes*. In *this* sense Mary is truly the ‘mother [bearer] of God’. She bore and brought *God’s* Son into the world. However, the Church of Rome has more emphasized the term in reference to *Mary* than its historical reference to *Jesus*; and this is counter to the early Church. Although the Reformers affirmed the term ‘mother of God’, they did so with cautious qualification.