

Finding Your Spiritual Center of Gravity

Reformation Quincentenary 2017

Have you ever ridden on the back of an elephant? We have – twice.

The first time we took the girls to India, we decided to take a ride on a local pachyderm named Maria.

Here she is with her saddle.

And here we are mounting her from a ladder.



Now everything was just fine and dandy until, as the four of us were fully astride her and she was being led down the path, the saddle started slipping underneath us. You should have seen us four fools leaning in the opposite direction for all we were worth, just to keep from being dumped on the ground below and being trampled underfoot! Thankfully, we were able to right ourselves and the saddle remained cinched enough that we did not fall. That day we learned as a practical reality where our collective center of gravity lay.

The **center of gravity** is defined as:

The center of a body's mass, which is the point at which *all parts are in balance with one another*. It depends on factors that are both internal (anatomical structure) and external (the body's position relative to outside forces, like a lumbering elephant underneath).

From my illustration you can readily see the **importance of being able to find one's center of gravity**.

Having learned our lesson, the next time we rode an elephant, we were seated, not on a saddle, but on a bench that was perfectly positioned and secured.

Notice that our daughter and her husband are separated because I, as the heaviest passenger, had to sit in the middle so that the weight was evenly distributed around the bench's center of gravity. Notice also that my wife opted out this second time!



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Now think about a personal example of finding your center of gravity. For many of us, our most vivid experience in mastering balance was when we first learned to ride a bicycle. It was simple enough for Mom and Dad to show you where to sit on the seat, but they couldn't just tell you in words or even show you by example how to find your center of gravity: you had to learn it for yourself. And it was most definitely *not* self-evident! It might have even taken a few spills and a few more scrapes and bruises before you developed that inner sensibility and the personal self-confidence it would take to move ahead full speed without swerving off course (and downhill!).

The same applies to mankind generally in our quest to find the truth and learn how to live it: we know the answers are out there and we may have even seen people who were living life abundantly, but it's quite another matter to get there ourselves!

Today as we celebrate the five-hundredth anniversary – or quincentenary – of the Reformation, everyone is turning to the question of Luther's legacy: Just what did he actually accomplish?

Personally, I would argue that he set the world on a new course by

FINDING HIS SPIRITUAL CENTER OF GRAVITY.

Luther's stand could essentially be reduced to these two parts:

- Finding his *doctrinal* center of gravity; and
- Finding his *practical* center of gravity.

Allow me to elaborate on what I mean by this.

First, the Doctrine.

Doctrine is right believing. Doctrine is the foundation of all other instruction. Doctrine is based on a source of reference for truth outside the man seeking. What did Luther discover to be that indisputable truth? The **WORD OF GOD**.

Second, the Practice.

Practice is right believing applied. Practice is the foundation for living. Practice is based on a source of power outside the man seeking. What did Luther discover to be that indisputable truth? **BELIEVING**.

I have captured this notion of *Luther's Centers of Gravity for Doctrine and Practice* in the following chart. Taking my cue from Luther's defense at the Diet of Worms, I have entitled it "Here I Stand." Let's take a moment to review it.

"Here I Stand"

Luther's Centers of Gravity for Doctrine and Practice

	Pivot	Periphery	Reference Point
Stand (doctrine)	Word of God (Truth)	Tradition	Rom. 10:17
Walk (practice)	Faith (believing)	Works	Rom. 1:16-17

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First, we have the [Stand](#).

Our stand corresponds to the doctrine. Right believing is believing the truth – the Word of God. As believing believers, our foundation is truth, not tradition. Our source of reference for truth does not depend on experience, opinions or the doctrines and commandments of men. What did Luther discover to be that indisputable truth? The [WORD OF GOD](#).

Hear it in his own words:

Unless I am convicted by Scripture and plain reason – I do not accept the authority of popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other – my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. God help me. Amen.¹

Second, we have the [Walk](#).

Our walk corresponds to the practice. Walking with God is right believing applied. Believing the Word of God is the foundation for living. Our source of power for believing is outside the man seeking, for we have the faith of Jesus Christ. What did Luther discover to be that indisputable truth? [BELIEVING](#).

Hear it in his own words:

Night and day I pondered until I saw the connection between the justice of God and the statement that “the just shall live by his faith.” Then I grasped that the justice of God is that righteousness by which through grace and sheer mercy God justifies us through faith. Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise. The whole of Scripture took on a new meaning, and whereas before the “justice of God” had filled me with hate, now it became to me inexpressibly sweet in greater love. This passage of Paul became to me a gate to heaven...

If you have a true faith that Christ is your Savior, then at once you have a gracious God, for faith leads you in and opens up God’s heart and will, that you should see pure grace and overflowing love. This it is to behold God in faith that you should look upon his fatherly, friendly heart, in which there is no anger nor ungraciousness. He who sees God as angry does not see him rightly but looks only on a curtain, as if a dark cloud had been drawn across his face.²

Let’s read the Scripture to which Luther was referring:

Romans 1:16-17 [ESV]:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.”

Clearly Luther rediscovered the pillars of both our stand (the Word of God) and our walk (believing). How much we owe to the man who set us back on the road marked right!

In our own training in the Word of God, we have been able to continue to build on this same foundation:

¹Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1950, 1978), 182.

²Ibid., 51.

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- **WORD OF GOD:** We have made the Word of God our only rule of faith and practice. For us, the Word of God is the very will of God.
- **BELIEVING:** We are convinced that to receive anything from God, we must believe and act on the Word of God. Believing is the key to unlocking all the resources and the power of God in our lives.

We, too, can help to set the world on a new course by

FINDING OUR SPIRITUAL CENTER OF GRAVITY.

We will concern ourselves with two parts:

- Finding our *doctrinal* center of gravity (our **STAND**); and
- Finding our *practical* center of gravity (our **WALK**).

The following chart entitled “Here We Stand” details some spiritual centers of gravity for doctrine and practice to which we need to pay attention as we hold forth the Word of God today:

- Who is **GOD**?
- Who is **JESUS CHRIST**?
- Who or what is the **HOLY SPIRIT**?

Let’s take a moment to review it.

“Here We Stand” *Spiritual Centers of Gravity for Doctrine and Practice*

Primary (Pivot)	Secondary	Stand	Walk
God the Holy Spirit	Son of God	Col. 1:15-18 I Cor. 15:27-28	Col. 3:17
Christ the Head	Members of the body	Eph. 1:22-23	Eph. 4:15-16
Holy spirit the gift	Manifestations	I Cor. 12:7	I Cor. 12:8-11

This past month as we have approached the quincentenary of the posting of the 95 Theses on the door of Wittenberg Cathedral, I’ve been reading this new biography of Martin Luther by Eric Metaxas.

In closing today, I’d like to share a passage that encapsulates some of what we’ve reviewed today:

“Luther asserted the idea that only the Scriptures could be that inerrant standard to which everyone – including the church – must repair. Thus, if the Scriptures plainly said something different from what councils and popes said, it must be the councils and the popes who were in error and were obliged to change their views. There was no other recourse. And Luther, in saying that he could not go against conscience, was simply saying that if his own understanding, his own knowledge, as guided by plain logic and clear arguments, showed him that Scripture said one thing and anyone else – even the church – said another, he had no choice but to go with what the Scriptures said. The Word of God trumped all else. So it was not Luther’s conscience that trumped anything. It was the Word of God that trumped everything.”³

With that understanding and conviction, let’s go forth with a heart of believing conviction to herald forth that beloved and inalterable Word of God!

³Eric Metaxas, *Martin Luther: The Man Who Rediscovered God and Changed the World* (New York, NY: Viking, 2017), 219-220.