

## Part 3: The Reformation Church (1500-1600)

### Week 7: Martin Luther (1483-1546)

What was the Reformation?

Was the Reformation the golden age in the church?

#### **Life of Martin Luther (1483-1546)**

1505 - M.A.; entered law school at his father's request but wanted to become a monk instead as he had listened carefully to the advice of the medieval church: the best place to work out your salvation was in a monastery. While traveling he prayed the typical "fox-hole" prayer when he was nearly struck by a bolt of lightning, promising to do something for God if he survived.

July 1505 - joins the Augustinian Hermits Order, a very serious-minded order. Johann Staupitz was his father confessor.

May 1507 - ordained to the priesthood.

1508 - sent as instructor to the new university in Wittenberg. Given oath at Wittenberg when he became doctor of Bible to preserve and teach faithfully the Scriptures. It was one of the rare oaths that didn't involve obedience to ecclesiastical superiors. Luther looked back to that oath and stood on it! He never saw himself as a rebel, or as one who left the church, but who only did what the church had asked him to do in this oath.

Luther began a series of lectures on books of the Bible. Luther lectured on the Psalms, then Romans (1515-16), Galatians, and Hebrews. Also had responsibilities over eleven monasteries as a District Vicar. By 1516, he was the "people's priest" with preaching responsibilities.

September 1517 - Luther became increasingly skeptical of the Aristotelian influence in theology as he was becoming Augustinian. He wrote 97 theses against scholasticism for debate.

Thesis 4: Man, being a bad tree, can only will and do evil.

Thesis 17: Man is by nature unable to want God to be God; he wants to be God himself!

Thesis 29: The best and infallible preparation for grace (Pelagian theme)...and the sole disposition toward grace...is the eternal predestination and election of God.

Thesis 40: We do not become righteous by doing righteous deeds, but having been made righteous we do righteous deeds. This is an Augustinian theme. Not necessarily a Protestant statement. Not a statement of the imputation of righteousness, rather the infusion of righteousness.

Thesis 50: The whole Aristotle is to theology as darkness is to light! Reason tells us nothing about God, not a reliable guide to God. It has other purposes, however.

October 31, 1517 - The famous 95 theses

Not the work of a revolutionary. The door in Wittenberg was a common place to hang notices and invite public debates, fostering thought. They were written in Latin, which most people couldn't read. What made the action the beginning of the Reformation- was that someone

translated them into German and published them, spreading them far and wide. Much attention was attracted, and they become a point of focus for much discontent. Many heard a voice of spirituality and concern. Some key points:

1. Repentance characterizes the whole life, not one sacramental life.
2. Penitence should produce outward signs.
3. The pope cannot remit guilt but only declare and confirm that God has remitted it.
4. No divine support for the "clinging coffer" slogan.
5. Luther doesn't question the propriety of indulgences in the church, only the abuse of them. His document is conservative and medieval, Roman Catholic.
6. Theses 81 & 82 note the difficulty in defending the pope, in view of these abuses and corruption.

April 1518 -- Luther went to Heidelberg to defend some of his theses, including the one that distinguishes the theology of glory from the theology of the cross.

July 1518 -- Luther summoned to Rome to explain his theology, knowing that many who took such action never returned! Appealed to Frederick for protection as German citizen, who ruled after his arrest that he could only be tried on German soil.

July 1519 - Invited to Leipzig to debate Johannes Eck, leading Roman Catholic theologian. Initially, Karlstadt (Luther's superior) was invited. Basically a debate about authority in the church. Eck was big and boisterous, not terribly clever but had a good memory. History of church clearly revealed authority in both tradition and Scripture, so he claimed. Luther intended to argue that history supported his interpretation--not so much "sola scriptura" position at this point. But he found that Eck was winning in his appeal to tradition (better church historian). Luther painted into a corner; came to a point where he realized that Scripture alone is our authority, no matter how much tradition you can quote! Major breakthrough here. Eck was delighted and immediately proclaimed that Luther had shown himself to be a "new Hus." Leipzig not a good environment for a Hussite! Hus was considered a clearly condemned heretic. Eck thought he had won the day. But...popes and councils can err, as Luther noted.

Meanwhile, John Teztel was dying; Luther sought to minister the gospel to him.

1520 – Produced 3 of his basic writings:

1. *Address to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation* - one of his most powerful works. The question of how is the church to be reformed? The pope and bishops can't do the job. The nobility must act as "emergency bishops," and a free ecumenical Christian council (on German soil) is needed--free of papal control, making judgments according to Scripture. Appeal to future council, against a pope, was considered a heretical act--but Luther made his appeal anyway.
2. *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* - concerning the sacraments. Analyzes seven sacraments; pope used to deprive church of the gospel. Luther argues for 3 sacraments -- baptism, Supper, penance. By end of the treatise, only baptism and the Supper remains!
3. *The Freedom of the Christian* - Luther wanted to write a great treatise on justification but he never did. This paper comes closest. Not technical theological work, but looks at basic outline of how believer sees himself in relationship to God. Luther argues that we live out our lives in two contexts:

(1) *Coram Deo* (before God), we are free lords of all, subject to none. We live before God by faith, in reliance on His Word.

(2) *Coram hominibus* (before man). We are bondservants, subject to all.

Luther loves paradox! Two kingdom perspective. In the kingdom of God, the believer is free. In the kingdom of this world, he lives by love, living out concern for his neighbor and denying himself. Most theological confusion comes from failure to distinguish these two. If you live in kingdom of God by love, you become a legalist and you fail. If you try to live by faith in kingdom of world, you become anarchist and self-centered.

1525 – Married Katherine von Bora, a former nun.

1546 – died. Last words: "We are beggars, this is true."

June 1520 - Papal Bull, *Exsurge, Domini* ("Rise up O Lord, and vindicate Your cause"). Luther was given 60 days to recant or suffer excommunication. His response, in December 1520, was to organize a bonfire and burn a number of written works.

January 1521 - bull of excommunication issued against him. Elector Frederick protected Luther despite pressures on emperor to take action against Luther. Frederick pressed for a hearing.

April 1521 - Luther was called to the Diet of Worms. Luther was given safe conduct to Worms, but knowing the fate of Hus! Luther had become a hero with a wide following -- German hero against Italian oppressors. Great crowd cheered him in Worms! Luther appeared before Charles, Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire. The church had planned it all out, warning Charles that Luther would confuse him so he shouldn't be allowed to speak. There was a table covered with his writings. Luther was asked to recant of the "errors" in his writings. No chance to defend his views. Asked for a list of his errors, but request was denied. Granted 24 hours to think it over. Spent the time in prayer, study, and conversation with supporters. Haunted by the question: "Am I alone wise?" Dominant theology of church for a few hundred years stood against him, although not all ancient church councils; Luther was genuinely medieval man (no rugged individualist), so he struggled. Who decides what the Bible says? Luther concluded that the trial wasn't really about his own wisdom. He was driven by the Word of God to his position. He remembered the vow, to teach faithfully the Scripture and responded:

*Since then Your Majesty and your lordships desire a simple reply, I will answer without horns and without teeth. Unless I am convinced by Scripture and plain reason - I do not accept the authority of the 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, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. God help me. Amen.*

Luther was then "kidnapped" by Frederick's soldiers who took him to Wartburg Castle. Luther was not idle while in hiding -- translated the Bible into German.

### **Other Important Themes in Luther**

Hidden God/Revealed God (*Deus absconditus, Deus revelatus*)

God in Himself is hidden and known only by revelation. God reveals Himself through masks and covers. God in Himself is too great and glorious; we would be consumed! Jesus is God revealed in the flesh, but also a cover for God. The gospel is ministered through voices and sacraments--revelatory but kind of a mask. "He who seeks God outside of Jesus finds the devil."

Theology of glory/Theology of the cross (*theologia gloriae, theologia crucis*)

Theology of glory finds God in creation. Theology of cross finds Him in His suffering on the cross. The first leads to a confidence in my mind and work; analyzing splendor of

God's work leads to analyzing of my mind. Theology of cross drives us to rely on God's mercy alone, rejecting reliance on our own works. No one would expect the glorious Creator on a cross, or in a lowly manger. God always does the unexpected. Faith is avoiding the visible, the wise--relying on God's revelation of Himself on the cross.

#### Law/Gospel

Law and Gospel: The law = what God demands; it convicts us of sin. The gospel = what God's promises; no demand. Luther says both law and gospel must be preached in every sermon. God's righteous requirements must be held before us, primarily to humble us with recognition of our sinfulness, but also a standard for our sanctification.