

## HHT 3.4



### The German Reformation Part 2

#### I. Discussion

##### A. Martin Luther (1483-1546)

*"Without Martin Luther, the Reformation as it took place in the sixteenth century cannot be understood. The movement began with him, and as it developed it swirled around him."* --James Payton Jr

**(points 1-3 see German Reformation Part 1)**

#### 4. Reformation Day

-In 1515, just 2 years after Luther's breakthrough on the Righteousness of God, pope Leo X authorized the sale of a special set of indulgences in Germany through the preaching of a Dominican friar named Johann Teztel.

-An indulgence was *"a certificate or pardon issued by the papacy, by which the merits of the saints in heaven were transferred to a sinner, releasing him from the 'temporal penalties' of sin; the pope could even extend these pardons to souls in purgatory, hastening their passage to heaven."* --N.R. Needham

-This sale of indulgences in Germany was the result of two things:

a) pope Leo X needed money

-His extravagant tastes in art and his most recent building project in Rome (St. Peter's Basilica), had all but bankrupted the Church. Leo was therefore desperate to create new revenue streams for the Vatican. The answer did not initially come in the form of indulgences, but rather the selling of a third bishopric to the German prince, Albert of Mainz. Bishoprics gave to those possessing them a similar power to that of the pope in both ecclesiastical and secular matters over the area for which it was issued.

b) Albert of Mainz needed to pay back a loan

-The price of a third bishopric was more than Albert could afford. He was however willing to take out a loan, if Leo would allow for the repayment of it through the sale of indulgences in Germany—including lower Saxony—the home of Luther. Pope Leo agreed as long as half the monies were given to Rome.

-And to ensure that the indulgences did sell, pope Leo agreed to extend their effectual nature to even those in purgatory—as well as the covering of all sin, both temporal and eternal. As was mentioned earlier, in past indulgences, their value in relation to sin extended only to what the Roman Church considered “temporal” or “venial” sins. Anything beyond that were sins that only the work of Christ could cover (eternal sins = mortal sins). These therefore were “super indulgences” able to relieve the penalty for any and all forms of sin which a human being might commit.

-Johann Tetzel, a Dominican monk, was the perfect man for the job, being both gifted in his presentation and his ability to emotionally manipulate the people. He made the most of the indulgences supposed power, exploiting it through various rhymes and promises to the people of Germany.

*“the Dominican promised his hearers that as soon as they bought one of his indulgences on behalf of a dead relative, God would instantly set the relative’s poor suffering soul free from purgatory and admit it to the bliss of heaven. Tetzel used a little rhyme—‘As soon as the coin in the coffer rings, the soul in purgatory sings!’ If a person bought an indulgence for himself, Tetzel claimed, it would automatically wash away the foulest of sins, even supposing the sinner had raped the Virgin Mary. Tetzel’s publicity campaign was crude, tasteless, vulgar, sensational, and contrary even to the official theology of indulgences which taught that to be effective they had to be accompanied by repentance.” –N.R. Needham*

-By April of 1517, Tetzel was selling such indulgences in the area around Wittenberg and had garnered the attention of Luther himself who was deeply horrified and disgusted that many people were purchasing them (even those within the Church where he preached and served as parish priest).

-As a result, on October 31<sup>st</sup> (All Hallows Eve), Luther arranged for academic debate at Wittenberg University over the issue of indulgences by announcing it in the form of 95 theses (i.e. propositions) and nailing it to the door of Wittenberg’s castle church: the place where all public announcements were made. The document was formally titled, *95 Theses on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences*.

- Ironically, though the 95 theses is considered the point at which the Reformation began, neither Rome’s view on indulgences nor their view on justification were the target of Luther’s criticism. Rather it was concerned with what Luther perceived to be a perversion of Rome’s authority in indulgences as expressed through the actions of Tetzel (i.e. his silence on the need for repentance, his statements regarding ringing money and singing souls, raping Mary would be pardoned). Luther also took minor issue with the pope who claimed out of love, should simply pardon all souls without the sale of indulgences.

-Within only months of this document being posted, all of Germany was made aware of Luther’s criticisms and supporting him in protest. This was due not to Luther’s own devices or desire, but rather the anonymous work of several within Wittenberg who translated it from Latin into German and printed thousands of copies which were then distributed throughout the general population.

-Hence, the Reformation and the day on which it started were both entirely unintentional and accidental from the standpoint of Luther though completely ordained and providential from the standpoint of God.

*“This seemingly insignificant event (of Luther posting his 95 theses) in a small city in a swampy area of Saxony—an action by a young professor at one of the fledgling universities only recently founded in Germany—set in motion a movement beyond what that monk-professor intended or understood... This movement would change the course of the church and Western civilization.” –James Payton Jr.*

## 5. Break with Rome

*“Luther (originally) had no thought of breaking with the papacy.” –N.R. Needham*

-It was never Luther’s intention or conception that his 95 theses would cause such national and ecclesial controversy, even a formal break with Rome, yet that is where the next 5 years would end. During those years several important events and people came into Luther’s life which would further shape his thinking:

### a) The Heidelberg disputation

-Though most of Germany’s common folk were supportive of Luther’s actions, not all felt that way. Among those were Albert of Mainz —the one most responsible for the sale of the indulgences—as well as the one who had the most to gain (or lose) financially. As stated earlier, he was dependent upon the revenues from their sale as repayment for the loan he had used to secure his third bishopric.

-Albert therefore (along with the Dominicans), pleaded their case with Rome and pope Leo X. Perceiving it to be nothing more than another trivial quarrel between competing monasteries (Augustinian v. Dominican), Leo instructed the head of Luther’s order, Gabriel del Volta to settle the dispute.

-On April, 1518, Luther was summoned before the governing body of the Augustinians in Heidelberg, Germany.

-Luther presented his “Heidelberg disputation”, a document developing and defending his position regarding grace as the key to man’s salvation versus merit (or human achievement). His presentation of the material won to his side a monk who would soon become a leading Reformer in the German city of Strasbourg: Martin Bucer.

*“Another who embraced Luther’s teachings was Martin Bucer, the Dominican friar who first encountered Luther at the Heidelberg Disputation in 1518... The Dominican friar took up correspondence with Luther and came over to the Reformation movement. Bucer soon enough sought and received dispensation to leave the Dominican order. Eventually he became the leading pastor and Reformer in the major imperial city of Strasbourg.” --James Payton Jr*

### b) Andreas Carlstadt and Philip Melancthon

-Co-workers with Luther at Wittenberg University, these two men also became supporters and contributors to Luther’s cause and the Reformation that would follow—though not all in a positive way:

-Carlstadt was Wittenberg's senior professor who was "*a high-minded idealist singularly lacking in common sense*" (N.R. Needham). As an initial supporter of Luther's idea, Carlstadt contributed through his teaching at the University and with his presence at debates in Leipzig, Germany. Later however, he would determine that Luther had not gone far enough in his reform and attempt to enforce his own measures of "radical reform"\*. These "radical reforms" would cause Luther to distance himself from him.

\*The details of Carlstadt's radical reforms will be discussed under the Radical Reformation.

-Philip Melancthon was also a lecturing professor at Wittenberg. He was actually the youngest (began teaching at the University at the age of 21). This however did not take away from his abilities as a theologian and sound exegete of the Scriptures. He was actually one of the strongest among the faculty, and possibly her most brilliant. As a matter of fact, by the time he reached Wittenberg, he had already published 30 books including a Greek grammar for the New Testament. He would later be hailed as the "teacher of Germany". Melancthon remained a good friend and close confidant of Luther until his death, even preaching his funeral. Melancthon also contributed to Luther's thinking and theology in ways no-one else in his day did. For instance, it was Melancthon who helped Luther to see that the Greek word for "righteous" (dikaioo), was not referring to the act by which someone is made righteous, but rather a declaration of righteous. These two distinctions were at the heart of Luther's battle over justification with the Roman Church, who saw it as the former.

#### c) Augsburg and Cardinal Cajetan

-As more of Luther's thinking and teaching became popular within mainstream society, new summons from Rome were issued. The next was in Augsburg, Germany with the Italian theologian Thomas de Vio, otherwise known as Cardinal Cajetan. The issues discussed were "the treasury of merits" and the absolute authority of the pope in the interpretation of the Scripture. To the dismay of Cajetan, Luther rejected both, claiming that popes could be wrong in their interpretation (and therefore should not be listened to unquestionably) and, only Christ's merit was effectual for removing sin and granting righteousness to human beings. However, at this point, Luther still believed the pope to be the spiritual head of the Church.

#### d) Leipzig debates

-In June and July of 1519, Luther along with Melancthon accompanied Carlstadt to Leipzig, Germany to take part in debates with the great debater and professor of Ingolstadt University, Johann Eck. The subject again became the absolute/final authority of the papacy in interpretation—something Luther took the lead position in negating from both the Scriptures and the writings of the early Church fathers. Eck however cornered Luther into admitting that his position was similar to John Huss, a former priest who had been condemned and burnt at the stake for teaching such things. Luther in turn condemned the Church's judgment in doing so, also claiming that the Council which determined such things was in error—a position also not tenable to the Roman Church (all official Church Councils are infallible). More novel than Luther's expressed position on popes and councils, was his view on Scripture as it related to the Church fathers.

-Whereas Rome gave a position of authority to the Church fathers over the Scripture, Luther saw it exactly opposite. It was not the Church fathers who were to stand in judgment of Scripture, but the Scripture in judgment of them. Luther's convictions on this issue (like his new view on justification) was also directly due to the changes which came in his theological thinking during the time of study for his doctorate and his early years teaching at Wittenberg (see German Reformation Part 1, Breakthrough At Wittenberg). However, as was mentioned in a previous study, this did not mean Luther (as well as the other Reformers) saw either the writings of the Church fathers or the rulings of ecumenical (Church) councils as without import or authority. Instead they were seen---along with the teaching ministry of the Church in the present--- as invaluable resources.

*"The Protestant Reformers also granted a subordinate authority to (the Church fathers, the present ministry of the Church and) the creeds of the ecumenical Councils...these they maintained were providential landmarks in the life history of God's people, and had to be reckoned with seriously as digests of biblical truth." --N.R. Needham*

-Note of further interest: it was in Leipzig that the term "Lutheran" was first used by Eck. Not however, as a respectful description of Luther or his teachings, but rather as a derogatory term.

*"The name 'Lutheran' originated as a derogatory term used against Luther by Johann Eck during the Leipzig Debate in July 1519. Eck and other Roman Catholics followed the traditional practice of naming a heresy after its leader, thus labeling all who identified with the theology of Martin Luther as Lutherans."*  
-Orlando O. Espin, William Geoffrey

e) The threat of excommunication

-Though Luther's views had been outside the boundaries of the Roman Church for several years at this point, the debates at Leipzig marked the point at which Rome was no longer willing to tolerate it—or Luther as one of their own---concluding that the only recourse was to issue a warning of excommunication. The warning (or papal bull) was issued on June 15<sup>th</sup>, 1520 and gave Luther 60 days to recant, or be burned at the stake like John Huss. Luther on his part was not deterred, embracing with more certainty not only his new convictions, but also those of John Huss on the congregation's participation in the Lord's Table. Huss believed all Christians had a right to partake of the wine (versus the Roman view, just the priests). Luther was also becoming convinced that the papacy was the Antichrist of 2 Thessalonians 2.

-Interestingly enough, the one teaching not mentioned in the papal bull was his view of justification! Instead it focused on his rejection of papal authority.

-Luther as well as most of Germany publicly burned the documents which were sent to every major city.

-Luther also took to writing three treatise: Address to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation, The Babylonian Captivity of the Church and The Freedom of the Christian.

-Each discussed different teachings of Luther, yet all were vehement attacks against the Roman Church especially in the areas of papal infallibility (as discussed already), Rome's view of the Mass (as transubstantiation v. consubstantiation) and the doctrine of the clergy as superior to the laity (as the only ones who could baptize, pronounce sins forgiven and celebrate/administer the Lord's Table v. all Christians ).

#### f) The Diet (assembly) of Worms

-By the time this council met, Luther's 60 days were done and he had officially been excommunicated from the Roman Church. However, it was now up to the Holy Roman Emperor (Charles V) to declare his fate at the stake as a heretic. This then was the purpose of this meeting which took place on April 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>, 1521.

-Luther, under the safeguard of his prince, Fredrick the Wise, was placed before a table containing his writings and was given another chance to recant of his teaching proclaiming them to be heretical. Luther asked for an additional day to think about it, but returned the next day with these (now famous) words, *"Unless I am refuted and convicted by the testimonies of Scripture or by clear reason—since I believe neither the popes nor the councils by themselves, for it is clear that they have often erred and contradicted themselves—I am conquered by the holy Scriptures I have quoted, and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not withdraw anything, since it is neither safe nor right to do anything against one's conscience. Here I stand. God help me. Amen"*

-Luther then walked out of the assembly to the cheers of many who had come in support of him—and also—to make sure no harm came his way.

-On May 26<sup>th</sup>, the Diet officially deemed him a heretic and outlaw and placed him under the ban of the Holy Roman Empire. This meant if anybody attempted to protect Luther, they were committing a crime.

-Fredrick the Wise, however ignored such threats and issued a band of knights to put Luther in hiding at Wartburg castle in Eisenach.

#### g) Wartburg castle

-Luther remained in hiding at the castle for 11 months. During that time he grew long hair and a beard, got rid of his friar clothes and went by the name of "Sir George". He even mingled with the people of the city asking whether anyone had discovered Luther's location!

-His stay at the castle, however, was not one of rest and relaxation. Instead, Luther spent those months interpreting the entire New Testament from its original Greek into German. Other German Bibles were available at this time, but none translated from the Greek, only the Latin Vulgate. He finished this monumental task in February, 1522.

-In 1534, he added to this feat by translating also the Old Testament from Hebrew to German. Luther's German Bible is still used today and considered one of the best translations from the original languages.

-This along with the accomplishment of his good friend, Philip Melancthon, who during the time he was translating the New Testament produced Germany's first systematic theology (*Chief Points of Theological Matters*), ensured that the German Reformation was on its way to creating an alternative Church within Western Christendom.

## **B. Luther's Lutheranism\* in perspective**

\* see A5e of this study for the origin of this term.

-Luther would live another 12 years after finishing the entire Bible, continuing to write and teach, dying at the age of 63 of natural causes, never the victim of torture or other forms of persecution.

-And though there are other facts about his life which could be discussed (Ex. he married a nun and had six children; she brewed beer and Luther loved dogs); the conclusion of our study will focus on those theological elements which cannot be placed into any one historical event, but nonetheless are key to understanding Luther and the German Reformation. These will, at the same time give both contextual perspective to some of the Luther's more controversial teachings/beliefs as well as the origin to some of the beliefs popular among Christians today:

### **1. Luther did not coin the term Lutheran, nor would he approve of their views**

*Martin Luther always disliked the term (Lutheran), preferring instead to describe the reform movement with the term "Evangelical", which was derived from euangelion, a Greek word meaning 'good news', i.e. 'Gospel.'<sup>[2]</sup> Lutherans themselves began to use the term in the middle of the 16th century in order to identify themselves from other groups, such as Calvinists. In 1597, theologians in Wittenberg used the title 'Lutheran' to describe their church." –wikipedia*

-If Luther were alive today, there would be more than just the name that he would reject, he would also reject the Semi-Pelagian\* position of the Lutheran Church!

\* This view holds that God's grace is extended to all for salvation but not effectual unto salvation without the free and willful choice of man, who can therefore also reject such grace. This grace is seen as that which actually releases men enough from their sin, that they now can make such a choice. Salvation is then, synergistic versus monergistic. This view was condemned as heresy at the Council of Orange in 529 AD.

-Luther, in agreement with Augustine who believed that salvation is purely a monergistic work of God was (and would still be) completely against any form of Pelagianism (full or semi). His book, *Bondage of the Will*, written in 1525 against Erasmus who, like the Roman Church of his day and even now, held to a Semi-Pelagian view. Luther's main premise in the book is that man's will is so enslaved to sin and Satan that it is impossible for him to choose/follow God unless God first releases him through the new birth.

-This is also one of the reasons for the Roman's Church excommunication of Luther: his view that mankind lost free-will after the Fall.

### **2. Luther made everything about justification by faith alone, to a deadly fault.**

-So strong was Luther in playing this one note of theology, that he essentially ended up playing to the tune of “easy-believism”. So passionate was Luther about God’s sovereign grace in salvation; that he ended up peddling a form of “cheap grace”.

*“Indeed, it would not be too much to state that Luther detected a threat to justification by faith alone behind every blade of grass and under every rock in the landscape...It is worth noting though, that it introduced a particular limitation in the way he allowed that believers should be directed as they sought to live before God. Luther considered it a corruption of the Christian message to teach that the law directs believers in this regard. Luther allowed for two uses of the law but repudiated the third. The first use of the law was its general one to structure society and declare what must be done if society is to continue to flourish; this was the law as it related human beings to each other. The second use of the law was to condemn sinners and bring them to an awareness of their sin before God; this was the law as it related human beings to God. Luther repudiated what came to be called the third use of the law, which some (alleged) showed believers how God wants them to live for Him. Luther bristled at this notion. He had learned by brutal experience that the law offered no comfort to human beings and only drove them to despair before God. To reintroduce the law as a guideline for Christian living must eventually lead, according to Luther, to a reversion to works-righteousness. Rather, Christians live by love—for God and for others. Again, justification by faith alone dominated Luther’s view... some Reformers differed with him on this.” --James Payton Jr*

-This was why Luther essentially condemned the book of James calling it an “epistle of straw”.

### **3. Luther changed the liturgy of the Church, but not until he was certain his views on justification had taken root.**

-During his time at Wartburg castle, Dr. Carlstadt decided it was time to begin reforming the liturgy of the church which including smashing the icons and destroying stain glass windows. When Luther returned he was outraged, fearing that such actions would cause people to think their salvation was dependent upon such reforms rather than simple faith in Christ.

-He therefore put a stop to Carlstadt’s actions, even publicly rebuking him. This however, did not mean Luther was against reforming the liturgy of the church. It just wasn’t time. Luther felt that his views on justification must first be established in the hearts of the German people before other reforms took place. This again was done as a safeguard from falling back into thinking which allowed for any form of human works in the work of Justification.

*“Did Luther oppose these changes Karlstadt had introduced? Rather, Luther’s overpowering concern was doctrinal: he feared that adopting these changes before the doctrine of justification by faith alone was fully understood and grasped by the people would result in their thinking that by making these changes they were doing good works which would please God—and thus introduce the reliance on self and works which Luther had learned to loathe as a perversion of the Christian message.” --James Payton Jr*

Once the liturgy was changed, it was distinguished by the following:

-Corporate singing in the German tongue (versus Latin by the priests only).

-Extending the chalice of wine to the congregation. For Luther this was as much about justification as anything else since this served to communicate their commitment to the One in whom they found justification.

-Observing only three sacraments (versus seven in the Roman Church): baptism (though infant), penance (confession to a clergyman who grants forgiveness) and the Lord's Table. Luther defined sacraments as those signs given by God which communicate His forgiveness to us. For Luther, confirmation, ordination, marriage, extreme unction (the remaining sacraments of Rome) did not communicate this.

-Teaching the priesthood (or sacred calling) of all believers.

*"In Luther's day, (the term 'calling') applied only to church work. Monks, nuns, and priest had a calling, a special task. Others simply worked. Luther applied 'calling' to all professions and to all the various roles we play. Being a husband, son, or father or wife or daughter or mother was a calling. So too was being a farmer or a miner or a stonemason. All life should and could be lived for the glory of God alone (Solo De Gloria)." --Stephen J Nichols*

#### **4. Luther loved and supported the institutional Church as a necessary part of every Christian's life, even though his soteriology and "Dangerous Idea" denied it.**

-Luther did hold the institutional Church in high regard, truly believing it to be a necessary and important part of a Christian's life. However, because he did view justification as only forensic (meaning only seen in the initial act of faith in Christ), whether a person was a part of the institutional Church or not, would not determine/nor negate his standing with God. This was further supported by what has been discussed in the previous study as his "Dangerous idea"-- the belief that Christians do not need the Church for either salvation or understanding of the Scriptures. And though it does not change the end result, what must be considered when assessing Luther's view on this issue, is the sacerdotal system of the Roman Church\*, since part of Luther's statements against the institutional Church were no doubt directed at this.

\*sacerdotalism = sacrificing priesthood. The Roman Church believes that only the Church possesses and dispenses God's grace and therefore for individuals to receive it, they must submit to the Church.

#### **5. Luther's popularity was largely in part because of his ability to write and his ability to attract the younger crowd.**

-In relation to his ability to write, Luther was among the best popular writers of his day.

*"Luther was an electrifying writer who produced gripping works written in a way that the average literate German citizen could read and understand. His writings became instant bestsellers and publishers had a hard time keeping up with the demand. He communicated with memorable slogans, a*

*populist writing style and a winsome call for change in the way things were done in the church.” --James Payton Jr*

-In relation to Luther’s ability to attract the younger crowd, historian Lewis Spitz has pointed out that the all of those who chose to follow Luther were under thirty years old when they did so; and in equivalent contrast, all of those over thirty chose to stay in the Roman Church.

-Luther’s appeal to the younger generation may have been due to his crude humor (Ex. He claimed that flatulence problem was actually a gift given to keep the devil away!)

## **6. Luther’s convictions evolved over time; though questions about their validity-- almost immediately.**

*“A common way of (getting the Reformation wrong) is the assumption that Luther came to his insights and almost immediately recognized and articulated their implications, and that people responded to his clear declarations...As with others who hit on a life-changing insight, so it was with Luther: it took a while before he intuited the connections between his discovery and many other concerns” --James Payton Jr.*

*“Luther sometimes urged views which he would later significantly modify. Similarly, he sometimes only later discerned implications which had eluded him in earlier comments.” --James Payton Jr*

*“Opinions have often differed as to the wisdom of the way Luther expressed his views and the correctness of those views. This difference of assessment began already during the Reformation and has continued to the present day.” --James Payton Jr*

## **II. Questions**

**1. Many of the great men in Church History including some of the Reformers have stated that there is no salvation outside the Church. Does that mean the Church IS the possessor and dispenser of God's grace? Was Luther therefore wrong in his view? In your consideration of this question, please consider also Mathew 16:19, 18:18. If she is not those things, then what is her role in relation to those things?**

**2. Was Luther right or wrong in his view on the third use of the law, why or why not? Give biblical support. How has Luther's view on the law affected/infected evangelical Christianity today? What are some things people say which reflect Luther's thinking on the law and the law for the Christian? Give biblical support for your answers.**

**3. Can the Christian do good works and please God? Are we to ever look to ourselves and what we do as important to our overall standing with God? If so, why isn't this (as Luther believed) works-righteousness? Give biblical support for your answers.**

**4. Do you agree with Luther's number in relation to the sacraments, why or why not? What about his view regarding who can administer the sacraments? Give biblical support for your answers.**

**5. Luther saw Church History and its teachers as a valuable resource and authority in biblical interpretation; yet uninspired and completely subordinate to the final authority of Scripture. How can this view help us as we consider the beliefs/teachings of Luther and those within Reformation Church History?**