

## SESSION ONE

# MARTIN LUTHER

AND

— THE GERMAN REFORMATION —

In order to understand the genius and history of the German Reformation, we must trace its origin in the personal experience of the monk who shook the world from his lonely study in Wittenberg, and made pope and emperor tremble at the power of his word....Of all the Reformers Luther is the first. He is so closely identified with the German Reformation that the one would have no meaning without the other. His own history is the formative history of the church which is justly called by his name and which is the incarnation and perpetuation of his genius.<sup>1</sup>

PHILIP SCHAFF

### **CATHOLIC SON (1483-1506)**

### **BRILLIANT STUDENT (1498-1505)**

### **AUGUSTINIAN MONK (1505-1507)**

- Two weeks later, Luther made good on his vow. He entered the most rigorous and austere of the Augustinian monasteries. This he did in order to earn salvation from God. He confessed:

When I was a monk, I wearied myself greatly for almost fifteen years with the daily sacrifice, tortured myself with fastings, vigils, prayers, and other very rigorous works. I earnestly thought to acquire righteousness by my works."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church, Vol. VII* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1910), 105.

<sup>2</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 12*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (Saint Louis, Mo.: Concordia Publishing House, 1955), 273.

- Luther gave himself to self-denial in an effort to commend himself to God, far more than the other monks. He stated:

I tortured myself with prayer, fasting, vigils and freezing; the frost alone might have killed me....What else did I seek by doing this but God, who was supposed to note my strict observance of the monastic order and my austere life? I constantly walked in a dream and lived in real idolatry, for I did not believe in Christ: I regarded Him only as a severe and terrible Judge portrayed as seated on a rainbow.<sup>3</sup>

### **ORDAINED PRIEST (1507-1510)**

- Luther celebrated his first Mass as a priest, he was awestruck at the thought of transubstantiation, the Catholic teaching that the bread and wine become the very body and blood of Christ when they are blessed by a priest. Luther almost fainted with fear. He testified:

“I was utterly stupefied and terror-stricken. I thought to myself, ‘Who am I that I should lift up mine eyes or raise my hands to the divine majesty? For I am dust and ashes and full of sin, and I am speaking to the living, eternal and true God.’”<sup>4</sup>

- Luther crawled up these steps. But when he reached the top, he confessed he was none the better:<sup>5</sup>

At Rome I wished to liberate my grandfather from purgatory, and went up the staircase of Pilate, praying a *pater noster* on each step; for I was convinced that he who prayed thus could redeem his soul. But when I came to the top step, the thought kept coming to me, “Who knows whether this is true?”<sup>6</sup>

### **UNIVERSITY PROFESSOR (1511-1546)**

- During this intensified travail, Johann Tetzel (1469-1524) came to Germany, selling indulgences to pad the Catholic church’s coffers in Rome. Rudolph Heinze writes:

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<sup>3</sup> Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann, eds., *Luther’s Works*, vol. 24 (St. Louis: Concordia, 1955-1986). [LW 24:24].

<sup>4</sup> Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2011), 21.

<sup>5</sup> Rudolph W. Heinze, *Reform and Conflict* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), 75.

<sup>6</sup> S. M. Houghton, *Sketches From Church History* (Carlisle, PA/Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1980, 2001), 83-84.

Tetzel was a superb salesman and knew how to arouse public interest. He started by entering town in a solemn procession with the papal coat of arms and the bull of indulgence borne aloft on a gold-embroidered velvet cushion. A cross was set up in the marketplace, and Tetzel gave sermons on hell, purgatory, and heaven. He especially appealed to the consciences of his audience when he pointed out how they could aid their deceased parents in purgatory.<sup>7</sup>

- Attempting to bilk common people of their money, Tetzel announced:

Do not you hear the voice of your wailing dead parents and others who say, “Have mercy upon me, have mercy upon me, because we are in severe punishment and pain. From this you could redeem us with a small alms and yet you do not want to do so.” Open your ears as the father says to the son and the mother to the daughter....We created you, fed you, cared for you and left you our temporal goods. Why are you so cruel and harsh that you do not want to save us, though it only takes so little? You let us lie in flames so that only slowly do we come to the promised glory.<sup>8</sup>

- Tetzel’s most famous line was:

As soon as the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs.<sup>9</sup>

- In response, October 31, 1517, Luther posted Ninety-Five Theses to the church door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg. It was a call for public debate over these issues of concern in the church. Some of them read as follows:

#1. Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ, when He said repent, willed that the whole life of believers should be repentance.

#2. This word [repentance] cannot be understood to mean sacramental penance, i.e., confession and satisfaction, which is administered by the priests.

#21. Therefore those preachers of indulgences are in error, who say that by the pope’s indulgences a man is freed from every penalty, and saved.

#27. They preach man who say that so soon as the penny jingles into the money-box, the soul flies out [of purgatory].

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<sup>7</sup> Heinze, *Reform and Conflict*, 82.

<sup>8</sup> Heinze, *Reform and Conflict*, 82.

<sup>9</sup> John Tetzel as cited by Bruce L. Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language*, 2nd ed. (Dallas: Word, 1995), 240.

#32. They will be condemned eternally, together with their teachers, who believe themselves sure of their salvation because they have letters of pardon.

#36. Every truly repentant Christian has a right to full remission of penalty and guilt, even without letters of pardon.

#62. The true treasure of the Church is the Most Holy Gospel of the glory and the grace of God.

### **REGENERATED BELIEVER (1519)**

- In 1545, Luther stated that the experience occurred while he was giving his second lectures on the Psalms, which would place his conversion in 1519.

Meanwhile in that same year, 1519, I had begun interpreting the Psalms once again. I felt confident that I was now more experienced, since I had dealt in university courses with St. Paul's Letters to the Romans, to the Galatians, and the Letter to the Hebrews. I had conceived a burning desire to understand what Paul meant in his Letter to the Romans, but thus far there had stood in my way, not the cold blood around my heart, but that one word which is in chapter one: "The justice of God is revealed in it." I hated that word, "justice of God," which, by the use and custom of all my teachers, I had been taught to understand philosophically as referring to formal or active justice, as they call it, i.e., that justice by which God is just and by which he punishes sinners and the unjust.

But I, blameless monk that I was, felt that before God I was a sinner with an extremely troubled conscience. I couldn't be sure that God was appeased by my satisfaction. I did not love, no. Rather I hated the just God who punishes sinners. In silence, if I did not blaspheme, then certainly I grumbled vehemently and got angry at God. I said, "Isn't it enough that we miserable sinners, lost for all eternity because of original sin, are oppressed by every kind of calamity through the Gospel and through the Gospel threaten us with his justice and his wrath?" This was how I was raging with wild and disturbed conscience. I constantly badgered St. Paul about that spot in Romans I and anxiously wanted to know what he meant.

I meditated night and day on those words until at last, by the mercy of God, I paid attention to their context: "The justice of God is revealed in it, as it is written: 'The just person lives by faith.'" I began to understand that in this verse the justice of God is that by which the just person lives by a gift of God, that is by faith. I began to understand that this verse means that the justice of God is revealed through the Gospel, but it is a passive

justice, i.e. that by which the merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written: “The just person lives by faith.” All at once I felt that I had been born again and entered into paradise itself through open gates. Immediately I saw the whole of Scripture in a different light. I ran through the Scriptures from memory and found that other terms had analogous meanings, e.g., the work of God, that is, what God works in us; the power of God, by which he makes us powerful; the wisdom of God, by which he makes us wise; the strength of God, the glory of God.

I exalted this sweetest word of mine, “the justice of God,” with as much love as before I had hated it with hate. This phrase of Paul was for me the very gate of paradise.”<sup>10</sup>

- Luther expressed his new belief in his sermon on *Two Kinds of Righteousness* in 1519, which provides an essential key to understanding his Reformation breakthrough. In this sermon, he stated:

Through faith in Christ, therefore, Christ’s righteousness becomes our righteousness and all that he has becomes ours; rather, he himself becomes ours. Therefore the Apostle calls it “the righteousness of God” in Rom. 1: For in the gospel “the righteousness of God is revealed....as it is written ‘the righteous shall live by his faith.’” Finally in the same epistle, chapter 3, such a faith is called “the righteousness of God”....This is the righteousness given in place of the original righteousness lost in Adam.<sup>11</sup>

### **BOLD DEBATER (1519)**

- Luther stated that Rome’s teaching of the infallible authority of the pope was of recent origin, and contradicted Scripture, the Council of Nicaea, and church history. Luther said:

I assert that a council has sometimes erred and may sometimes err. Nor has a council authority to establish new articles of faith. A council cannot make divine right out of that which by nature is not divine right. Councils have contradicted each other....A simple layman armed with Scripture is to be believed above a pope or council without....Neither the Church nor

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<sup>10</sup> Luther’s Tower Experience: Martin Luther Discovers the True Meaning of Righteousness, An Excerpt from: Preface to the Complete Edition of Luther’s Latin Works (1545) by Dr. Martin Luther, 1483-1546. Translated by Bro. Andrew Thornton, OSB from the “Vorrede zu Band I der Opera Latina der Wittenberger Ausgabe, 1545” in vol. 4 of *Luthers Werke in Auswahl*, ed. Otto Clemen, 6<sup>th</sup> ed., (Berlin: de Gruyter. 1967). Pp. 421-428.

<sup>11</sup> John Dillenberger, *Martin Luther: Selections from His Writings* (New York: Doubleday, 1961), 87-88.

the pope can establish articles of faith. These must come from Scripture. For the sake of Scripture we should reject pope and council.<sup>12</sup>

### POLEMIC AUTHOR (1520)

- He argued that the pope and the priesthood built walls around themselves to protect them from any reform. He noted that, according to Rome, only the pope and priest had superior power and could alone interpret Scripture. Luther demolished these artificial walls, asserted the priesthood of *all* believers:

It is pure invention that pope, bishops, priests and monks are to be called the spiritual estate, while princes, lords, artisans, and farmers are called the temporal estate....all Christians are truly of the spiritual estate, and there is among them no difference except that of office....[the] “claim that only the pope may interpret Scripture is an outrageous fancied fable.”<sup>13</sup>

- Second, two months later, Luther wrote *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, which attacked the entire sacramental system of the Catholic church. He openly denied the sacrificial efficacy of the Mass.
- He insisted that both the bread and wine should not be given exclusively to the priests, but to the laity. At this time, Rome withheld the cup from the laity.

What is asserted without the Scriptures or proven revelation may be held as an opinion, but need not be believed.<sup>14</sup>

- Third, Luther wrote *Freedom of the Christian Man*, teaching the foundational doctrine of justification by faith alone.

Even Antichrist himself, if he should come, could think of nothing to add to its [the papacy's] wickedness....A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all....he needs no works to make him righteous and save him, since faith alone abundantly confers all those things....and all sin is swallowed up by the righteousness of Christ.<sup>15</sup>

- Luther was issued a Papal Bull, which was a papal edict sealed with a bulla or red seal. This official decree threatened Luther with excommunication from the Catholic church within sixty days if he did not repent. The bull began:

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<sup>12</sup> Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1950), 89. [Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 116-117.]

<sup>13</sup> Denis R. Janz, *A Reformation Reader* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1999). [Janz, *Reformation Reader*, 91] [Ibid, 91] [Ibid, 93].

<sup>14</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 36* (Philadelphia, PA: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), 29.

<sup>15</sup> Janz, *A Reformation Reader*, 100, 104.

Arise, O Lord, and judge Thy cause. A wild boar has invaded Thy vineyard.<sup>16</sup>

- In this papal bull, forty-one of Luther's beliefs were judged as:

heretical, or scandalous, or false, or offensive to pious ears, or seductive of simple minds, or repugnant to Catholic truth.<sup>17</sup>

- Without flinching, Luther chided:

This bull condemns Christ Himself.<sup>18</sup>

- In dramatic fashion, Luther took the bull and, in front of his students, publically burned it (June 15, 1520).

- Historian Thomas Lindsay writes:

It is scarcely possible for us in the twentieth century, to imagine the thrill that went through Germany, and indeed through all Europe, when the news spread that a poor monk had burnt the Pope's Bull.<sup>19</sup>

### **DEFIANT STALWART (1521)**

- Before the political and ecclesiastical powers of the day, including Charles V, the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, the Archbishop of Trier rebuked Luther for daring to stand in opposition to the beliefs of the Church:

Martin, how can you assume that you are the only one to understand the sense of Scripture? Would you put your judgment above that of so many famous men and claim that you know more than they all? You have no right to call into question the most holy orthodox faith instituted by Christ the perfect lawgiver, proclaimed throughout the world by the apostles, sealed by the red blood of the martyrs, confirmed by the sacred councils, defined by the Church in which all our fathers believed until death and gave to us as an inheritance, and which now we are forbidden by the pope and the emperor to discuss lest there be no end of debate.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Bruce L. Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982, 1995), 237.

<sup>17</sup> Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1950), 140.

<sup>18</sup> Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1950), 154.

<sup>19</sup> Thomas Lindsay, *Martin Luther: The Man Who Started the Reformation* (Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus, 1997, 2004), 91.

<sup>20</sup> Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2011), 181.

- Luther asked for the night to give his answer. The next day, April 18, 1521, he addressed the council and issued his now-famous declaration:

Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason (for I do not trust either in the pope or in councils alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am bound to the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not retract anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. I cannot do otherwise. Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me. Amen.<sup>21</sup>

### **BIBLE TRANSLATOR (1521-1522)**

- Never one to sit idly and realizing the central importance of the Scripture, Luther spent the time profitably, translating Erasmus' Greek New Testament, recently collected in 1516, into the German language (1521-1522).

I shall remain here in seclusion till Easter, and write postils, and translate the New Testament into German, which so many people are anxious to have....Would to God that every town had its interpreter, and that this book could be had in every language and dwell in the hearts and hands of all.<sup>22</sup>

- As this Protestant movement expanded, Luther was asked to explain how such a powerful, history-altering work had come about. Luther responded:

I simply taught, preached, wrote God's Word; otherwise I did nothing. And when, while I slept....the Word so greatly weakened the papacy that never a Prince or Emperor inflicted such damage upon it. I did nothing. The Word did it all.<sup>23</sup>

### **EXPOSITORY PREACHER**

- In his relentless drive as a preacher, Luther's principal commitment to the pulpit is clearly seen. On most Sundays, he preached twice and, by his own admission,

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<sup>21</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, Vol. 32, ed. George W. Forell (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1958), 113.

<sup>22</sup> Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann, eds., *Luther's Works*, Vol. 24 (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1955-1986), 98. [LW 48:356.]

<sup>23</sup> Ernest Gordon Rupp, *Luther's Progress to the Diet of Worms 1521* (London; SCM, 1951), 99.



Often I preached four sermons on one day.<sup>24</sup>

### REFORMED THEOLOGIAN (1524)

- On September 1, 1524, Erasmus—the leading humanist of the day, a Dutch humanist—published a polemic against Luther titled *Diatribes on the Freedom of the Will*. It was an attack on Luther’s position on the bondage of the human will, which denied man’s free will.
- Luther thanked Erasmus for going to “the root of the controversy,” instead of troubling him as others had done “about the papacy, purgatory, indulgences, and other fooleries.” He writes:

I give you hearty praise and commendation on this further account—that you alone, in contrast with all others, have attacked the real thing, that is, the essential issue.<sup>25</sup>

No man can be thoroughly humbled until he knows that his salvation is utterly beyond his own powers, devices, endeavors, will, and works, and depends entirely on the choice, will, and work of another, namely, of God alone. For as long as he is persuaded that he himself can do even the least thing toward his salvation, he retains some self-confidence and does not altogether despair of himself, and therefore he is not humbled before God, but presumes that there is—or at least hopes or desires that there may be—some place, time, and work for him, by which he may at length attain to salvation. But when a man has no doubt that everything depends on the will of God, then he completely despairs of himself and chooses nothing for himself, but waits for God to work; then he has come close to grace, and can be saved.<sup>26</sup>

- In this defining work, Luther affirmed the total depravity of man’s nature, and the absolute sovereignty of God’s grace. Unconverted man, he stated, cannot believe unless sovereign grace enables him to do so. Luther wrote:

[A] man without the Spirit of God does not do evil against his will, under pressure, as though he were taken by the scruff of the neck and dragged into it, like a thief....being dragged off against his will to punishment; but

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<sup>24</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 54: *Table Talk*, edited & translated by Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress Press, 1967), 282.

<sup>25</sup> Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, trans J.I. Packer and O. R. Johnston (Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1957), 319.

<sup>26</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 33, American Edition, eds. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann (St. Louis: Concordia, 2002), 62.

he does it spontaneously and voluntarily. And this willingness of volition is something which he cannot in his own strength eliminate, restrain or alter. He goes on willing and desiring to do evil; and if external pressure forces him to act otherwise, nevertheless his will within remains averse to so doing and chafes under such constraint and opposition.<sup>27</sup>

### **DEVOTED HUSBAND (1525)**

### **HYMN WRITER (1527)**

- In a letter to Philip Melanchthon, he wrote:

I spent more than a week in death and in hell. My entire body was in pain, and I still tremble. Completely abandoned by Christ, I labored under the vacillations and storms of desperation and blasphemy against God. But through the prayers of the saints God began to have mercy on me and pulled my soul from the inferno below.<sup>28</sup>

- In this soul-crushing experience, he wrote his most famous hymn, a work based on Psalm 46. We know this soul-strengthening song as: *A Mighty Fortress*.

A might fortress is our God  
A bulwark never failing;  
Our Helper He amid the flood  
Of mortal ills prevailing.  
For still our ancient foe  
Doth seek to work us woe  
His craft and pow'r are great,  
And, armed with cruel hate,  
On earth is not his equal.

### **PROTESTANT LEADER (1528-1529)**

- Luther wrote the *Small Catechism*, a concise doctrinal statement, for the laity, due to “the deplorable, miserable condition: of the German people doctrinally (1529). This was followed by the *Large Catechism* for the clergy.

The common people, especially in the villages, have no knowledge whatever of Christian doctrine, and, alas! Many pastors are altogether incapable and incompetent to teach....Nevertheless, all maintain they are

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<sup>27</sup> Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, 102.

<sup>28</sup> Kittelson, *Luther the Reformer*, 211.

Christians, have been baptized and receive the [common] holy Sacraments. Yet the....cannot....recite the Lord's Prayer, or the Creed, or the Ten Commandments: they live like dumb brutes and irrational hogs; and yet, now that the Gospel has come, they have nicely learned to abuse all liberty like experts.<sup>29</sup>

### **FAITHFUL WARRIOR (1546)**

- In Luther's final sermon, the great Reformer said:

In times past we would have run to the ends of the world if we had known of a place where we could have heard God speak. But now that we hear this every day in sermons....if you do not want God to speak to you every day at your home in your house and in your parish church, then be wise and look for something else: in Trier is our Lord God's coat, in Aachen are Joseph's pants and our blessed Lady's chemise [milk]; go there and squander your money, buy indulgence and the pope's secondhand junk; these are valuable things! You have to go far for these things and spend a lot of money; leave house and home standing idle! But aren't we stupid and crazy, yes, blinded and possessed by the devil?....But we should listen to God's Word, which tells us that He is our schoolmaster, and have nothing to do with Joseph's pants or the pope's juggling tricks.<sup>30</sup>

- Before Luther died, he wrote his last will and testament, which began with the words:

I am well known in heaven, on earth, and in hell.<sup>31</sup>

- In his last moments, Luther was asked by his friend Justus Jonas, "Do you want to die standing firm on Christ and the doctrine you have taught?" The answer was "Ja!" Luther's last words were:

We are beggars. This is true.<sup>32</sup>

- His wife Kathryn wrote:

For who would not be sad and afflicted at the loss of such a precious man as my dear lord was. He did great things not just for a city or a single land, but for the whole world.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> *Luther's Works*, 54:50.

<sup>30</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, Vol. 51 (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1959), 390-391.

<sup>31</sup> Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, Vol. VII, 821.

<sup>32</sup> As quoted by John Piper, *The Legacy of Sovereign Joy* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2000), 111. [Oberman, *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil*, p. 324.]

<sup>33</sup> Martin E. Marty, *Martin Luther: A Life* (New York: Penguin Group, 2008), 188.

## ENDURING FIGURE