

*History of the Reformation of the 16th
Century*

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State of Europe before the Reformation

The history of the Reformation should be of interest not only to Christians, but to the whole world. For the Reformation of the 16th century was nothing less than the restoration and reestablishment of the gospel hope of primitive Christianity. The Reformation was a restoration of the gospel of grace, whereby men heard once again the good news that the Sovereign God saves by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. The message of the Reformation was recovered for a sinful and lost world to once again have hope in Christ alone. We should acknowledge that the Reformation happened through weak and sinful men who were seeking biblical truth in an age of spiritual degeneration, but we must remember that the Reformation was primarily a work of God's Sovereign providence over, upon and in history. The God of the Bible is a historical God who works in history through weak and sinful men to accomplish his purposes all to the praise of his glorious grace! The very incarnation of Christ is the greatest display of not only God's love for his people, but that He is a God that enters into history to save.

Three Kinds of Religion in the History of Mankind

When considering the history of the Reformation it is important to distinguish between primitive Christianity or Catholicism and the spiritually degenerate Popery or Roman Catholicism of the Medieval Period. The Reformation was essentially a restoration of Biblical, Apostolic, Catholic Christianity; the one true faith revealed in Scripture and entrusted to sinful and weak men to pass down and make known to the next

generation. In the history of man there have been at least three kinds of religions: (1) “Hierarchism” or “Religion of the Priest”; (2) “Rationalism” or “Religion of Man”; and (3) “Christianity” or “Religion of God”. Christianity begins and ends with the True and Sovereign God’s revelation to man in the Bible and in creation. “Hierarchism” and “Rationalism” are distortions of Christian truth, placing priests or men as mediators between people and God, and starting with man’s rational ability, seeking after God respectively; both are great errors. Christianity is a religion from God, because only mercy and grace can be offered by God and sinful men will never seek out and find God in the Adamic state in which they are born (Romans 3:9ff; John 6:44; Eph. 2:1-10). Although Christianity had devolved into both forms of Hierarchism and Rationalism, God in his grace, restored the gospel to its right place in the pulpit so that those who had ears to hear could once again find hope in a religion that was from God alone, and found in Christ alone through faith.

John 1:14 says “The Word became flesh and dwelt (or tabernacled) among us.” This is the great truth of the incarnation that occurred in real time and space during the Roman Empire when many false philosophies were believed and heinous immorality was practiced (Luke 2:1ff). What distinguished Christianity from the other religions of the ancient world had to do with two primary characteristics: (1) Ministers of its worship, and (2) Doctrinal distinctions. Jesus appointed weak and sinful men to be his ministers of worship. In contrast to many ancient religions of paganism where the priest was deified and was a mediator between the gods and man, Jesus Christ was the only Mediator

between God and man, and his ministers were called by him to make this known as Christ's servants. With regards to the distinctiveness or uniqueness of Christian doctrine, the hope or salvation of Christianity was based on grace alone. All of the world's religions before Christianity taught doctrinally that a person in essence worked their way to God; salvation was found in their merits. In contrast to this, Christianity taught that God sought man out in his sinfulness, and offered grace and mercy to those who believed in Jesus. The true religion of Christianity taught that salvation comes from God alone (Psalm 68:20; Jonah 2:9). The faith that Jesus Christ established in his time of ministry was a community of brethren who were shepherded by chosen overseers or ministers who ruled together as elders. As Acts 15:23 instructs us as to how the Apostles and elders communicated their decisions: "The apostles and elders and brethren send greeting unto the brethren." As elders over the people they were to rule equally as they serves the people by teaching them the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ from the Scriptures and the Apostle Peter emphasizes this as a "fellow elder" not one who is supreme over the other elders in the Church (1 Peter 5:1-6). Unfortunately, these two distinctives of Christianity, the ministry of the Church and the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ became increasingly less important as the Church gradually drifted from its ancient uniqueness and into what became known as the Roman Catholic Church of the Middle Ages. During the Medieval time, although the Church continued to be pure by God's grace in certain places and through certain people, overall the Church visible degenerated and succumbed to the wisdom of the age and ultimately lost its doctrinal distinctiveness.

How did the Church lose the distinctive of having elders shepherding the people, and eventually have one bishop ruling over all of Christendom? This is an important question to attempt to answer before beginning any study of the Reformation. The process of elders from among the brethren ruling over the Church ministerially from the Scriptures to the belief in and submission to a Roman Bishop or Pope ruling over the Church magisterially according to tradition, was a very gradual process. The process began because Rome was one of the greatest cities of the ancient world. By the end of the 1st century many of the Roman bishops considered it a right to have superiority over other churches (such as in other great cities like Antioch, Alexandria, and Jerusalem) because of the Roman bishop's ministry being in such an ancient and prominent city; but additionally, many of the churches freely yielded to the Bishop of Rome because of his preeminence in location and learning. Some would think: "If Rome is the queen of cities, why should not her pastor be the king of bishops?" When pagan Rome fell in the 5th century (ca. 476) under the strong opposition and force of the Goths and Vandals, the preeminent role of Emperor was practically inherited by the Bishop of Rome; the Bishop of Rome wielded both the spiritual sword of the Word of God, as well as the carnal sword of the State. Gradually, the Roman Bishop's teaching and advice to churches throughout the world were absolute commands from the mouth of the pontiff. Another aspect that must be understood as to how the one Roman Bishop succeeded in such power as supreme pontiff has to do with the doctrine of the visibility of the Church. The Bible teaches us that the Church is both visible and invisible. The invisible aspect of the Church is all of the elect who have ever lived and whose salvation has been secured by

the Person and Work of Jesus Christ. The visible Church is all professing believers and their children, and the external, visible unity of the Church became a necessity gradually. In the Scriptures, the Apostle Paul writes to “the Churches of Galatia, Macedonia, of Judea, all Churches of the saints” (1 Corinthians 16:1). The Church eventually came to focus too much in an imbalanced way upon the visible unity of the Church rather than seeing the Church unified in Christ and made up of great diversity in many different people, language, nations, etc. Whereas the true Church was once all those who were united to Jesus Christ by faith, during the Medieval Period this became expressed by an individual’s membership and connection to the Church and her ministries of bishops, archbishops, popes, canons, and ceremonies. Christ Jesus declared himself to be the sole Mediator between God and man (1 Tim. 2:5), but like ancient pagan religions, the priests of Roman Catholicism eventually became the mediators of grace to the people. The distinction between the people and the clergy became extremely separated. The importance of mere external unity in the Church continued to spread throughout the first few centuries of Christianity. The idea was that because Christ had said that he was building his Church upon St. Peter (Matt. 16:18), then this meant that there was always to be a successor to St. Peter. The thinking of the error of Roman Catholicism was that since St. Peter was in Rome when he was martyred and believed to be the city’s first bishop, and Rome was a great prominent city, then the Bishop of Rome could serve as the successor of the St. Peter and the Church could achieve visible, external unity through him. Unfortunately, this belief about St. Peter was a great and heinous fallacy and the teaching was arrived at through texts such as Matthew 16 that were wrongly interpreted.

During the time of Constantine in the early 4th century the State gave official sanction to Christianity as the religion of the Roman Empire, and even though many churches wanted freedom and independence from the Roman Bishop, the bishop of Rome was given spiritual authority as he supported the State and the purposes of the Emperor. In the 5th century, Emperors Theodosius II and Valentinian III proclaimed officially the Roman Bishop “rector of the whole Church.” As the Roman Empire fell in 476 under the last emperor, Romulus Augustulus when he bowed the knee to the Barbarian King Odoacer, the authority and right to rule was taken by the Bishop of Rome. In the 8th century, when Rome had been sacked by barbarians and other countries threatened the Bishop of Rome’s rule, the last remnants of Rome turned to the Frankish people for protection and help. Under the Frankish ruler Pepin the Great (Charlemagne’s father), the Papacy submitted his rule and was in turn declared to be the defender of the “Republic of God”; it is important to note that it was France that formally established the temporal power of the popes in the Middle Ages. On Christmas Day, in the year 800, the Pope of Rome placed the crown of Roman emperors on the head of Charlemagne (“Charles the Great”) and he was pronounced the *Imperator Augustus*; now the power to entrust worldly power was recognized and the Pope of Rome had ultimate power over the State. Although the Roman Bishop had succeeded in being the successor to the Roman Emperor, the papacy continued to grow in power and be degraded in sins and vices after the 9th and 10th centuries. At this time it was believed that to exalt the Pope was to exalt the Church and advance the religion of Christianity, and this thinking became embodied

in a man named Hildebrand. Hildebrand reigned as Gregory VII from 1073 and desired a visible theocracy of Jesus Christ over the world. Hildebrand was a shrewd, powerful and cunning political man who wished to restore to papal Rome all that the ancient Roman Empire had lost. Under his rule, the militia and powerful army of the Roman Catholic Church were organized. He declared the compulsory laws of celibacy for all clergy who had to vow to celibacy in order to serve in the Church. Hildebrand's chief goal was to liberate Rome from the subjection of the former Empires of Rome and France, and presently the German Empire, and rule in place of these earthly kings. He accomplished this by formally announcing that the Pope, or bishop who ruled in Rome would have supremacy and power over all bishops of the Church, and he became a universal monarch over the Church and eventually the State. He demonstrated his power against the emperors of the declining German Empire with Henry IV when he placed him under an interdict until he acknowledged Hildebrand's supremacy over him that the Pope alone would control the appointments of church officials (known historically as the "Investiture Controversy"). Hildebrand's plan for absolute papal power was not as successful for him personally, for eventually during his reign Rome was taken, and he was compelled to flee for his life and he died at Salerno in exile. The Popes after Hildebrand or Gregory VII instigated the Crusades against foreign religions such as Islam and Judaism, and at the Pope's command men marched off to fight a mere carnal and earthly war. Although a Bishop was to serve Christ and his people by preaching the Gospel, the powerful Bishop of Rome was now an absolute monarch who dictated salvation according to his own

terms. The Bishop of Rome, supposedly the successor of St. Peter, not only corrupted the ministry, but more importantly the gospel of grace.

Ultimately, there are two basic ways of salvation: there is salvation by works and salvation by grace. Salvation by grace is from God alone and it is based not on any merits of sinful man, but based on the merits of Jesus Christ alone. The gospel was the precious deposit in the Church's vault, the faith once and for all delivered to the saints so that man might have peace with God and be restored in Christ by his grace. Now this gospel was being undermined by another gospel, which is no gospel at all! (cf. Gal. 1:6-9). The teaching of salvation in the Middle Ages became essentially like any of the ancient pagan religions: a religion of works. Salvation was believed to be attained first by submission to the Pope and the Church, and grace was received as one was justified by God's grace and their works. This Semi-Pelagianism or synergistic understanding of salvation where man cooperates with God's grace placed a great value on external actions and behavior, observances of laws, and penitential works. The more a person would cooperate with the teaching of the visible Church, the more a person would become righteous, it was believed. The clergy and the monks became channels of grace in the Church where men would go through them as their mediators before God rather than through faith in Christ alone. It was believed that saints who had spiritually worked more than others to achieve their salvation had extra merits to offer others who perhaps were not as spiritual or able to be as righteous. Because of this teaching, saints began to be venerated for their good works, and prayer was offered up to them. Supposedly saints

had worked far beyond what God had required of them and so there was invented a “Treasury of Merit” where the Bishop of Rome could offer to each sinner both the merits of Jesus Christ and the saints to ensure that they would get to heaven. The false teaching of Penance which was offered through priestly absolution replaced true repentance and faith in Christ alone. The external manifestations of penance for sinful acts committed against God and man took the shape of fastings, tears, mortifications of the flesh, and flagellations; the breadth of this penance required by the clergy was according to the extent and nature of a person’s sin. Men wept in hopes of finding salvation in Christ, but most knew that this was a hopeless exercise that brought even more grief to the sinner. Indulgences were offered to lessen one’s temporal punishment in Purgatory. Clement VII declared Indulgences to be an article of the Roman Catholic faith, and Purgatory (“the final purification of the elect”), a doctrine articulated by Thomas Aquinas in his famous *Summa Theologiae*, was made an official doctrine of the Church. In place of the one true gospel of Jesus Christ there many additions to the truth that undermined the salvation that comes by grace alone from God alone, found only in Christ alone. This replacement and refocus upon other mediators and other gospels was the rotten fruit of Roman Catholicism and Popery. As historian D’Aubigne sums up: “Popery interposes the Church between God and man; Primitive Christianity and the Reformation bring God and man face to face; Popery separates them- -the gospel unites them” (Book I: 16).

Before the Reformation the 16th century the Church was greatly corrupted and had degenerated in doctrine and moral life. Many of the people were fearful of God’s wrath

and Christ was seen as the Judge of all men that we must appease through our works and cooperation with God's grace found only in the Church. The religion beginning with man did not bring hope to the people- -but rather, great servile fear before God. Rather than seeking grace alone in Christ alone through faith alone, people sought the comfort of their helpless souls in the intercession of saints, the performance of penance given by the clergy, and seeking papal indulgences to hopefully lessen their time in Purgatory. The Church was in a great state of confusion and the people were greatly superstitious and bewitched by the Roman Bishop who the people believed could not err in his judgment or teaching. Not only were essential Christian doctrines eclipsed by tradition and errors, there was gross immorality and moral corruption in the Church at this time. As faith had declined, so had morality; If salvation is taken away, then so is sanctification in Christ. Even those who were entrusted with the keys of Christ's Kingdom were dens of corruption. It was said by one historian of the 15th century: "All the clergy kept mistresses, and all the convents of the capital were houses of ill fame." The ministers of the churches were unqualified and were not teaching from Scripture the truths of the faith (cf. 2 Tim. 4:1-5); those who were called to minister had no knowledge of Scripture, nor of Hebrew and Greek, and so were not able to exegete and expound from the Word of God to teach the people (Eph. 4:11-16). It was a very bleak and sad time for the Christian Church, but as Christ had said that the gates of hell should not prevail against his Church, he began to intervene slowly and gradually into history to prepare the clergy and the people for a reformation.

The Political, Ecclesiastical, and Literary Preparation of the Reformation

In God's providence, the Reformation was prepared for in the three different spheres of politics, the ecclesiastical, and the literary. God prepared the world for the Reformation in the first sphere of the political realm. Because of the degeneration and tyranny of the papacy, the Bishop of Rome was losing some of his influence and power over the nations, particularly in Germany. In the German Empire there was a confederation of states with the emperor as the head. Each state possessed sovereignty over its own territories, and the emperor ratified the laws of the states, while the seven princes of the states had the privilege of conferring the crown upon the emperor. During this time, as Rome had lost some of her power and influence, Germany became the center of all of Christendom and enjoyed great political peace at this time due to Emperor Maximilian. In God's wisdom, it would be from Germany that the Reformation would outwardly expand and influence other countries with the gospel of grace. In Switzerland the people were courageous and loved independence and liberty and the way was prepared here for the restoration of the gospel of grace. Zurich was already known at this time of bravely resisting Rome's claims of supremacy over Switzerland. Italy at this time was faithful to their capital of Rome, but politically it was divided and broken to pieces. Spain and Portugal were both deeply involved in the new lands, frontiers, and great wealth of what would become America, the East Indies and Brazil. The Netherlands was one of the most flourishing countries in Europe and England was Queen of the Seas. All parts of the world including Scotland, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Russia, Poland and

Hungary were prepared in God's providence for the Reformation at the beginning of the 16th century.

In addition to the political sphere, the ecclesiastical sphere had been prepared by God for Reformation. There was great disorder and misunderstanding of biblical doctrine. The doctrines of the Medieval Schoolmen had endless theological subtleties and distinctions and caused great confusion in the learning of the Church. The important doctrines and distinctives of Christianity had been forgotten by many. Most importantly perhaps was the eclipse of the doctrine of justification by faith alone which was replaced with a man-centered, works theology of justification by faith and works. As Luther would say about justification by faith alone later in the Reformation: "This article of justification, is what creates the Church, nourishes, edifies it, preserves and defends it: no one can teach worthily in the Church, or oppose an adversary with success, if he does not adhere to this truth. This is the heel that shall bruise the head of the serpent."

Forerunners of the Reformation

Although theological thought was in disarray, and the heart of the gospel had been replaced by man's works, nevertheless there were many brave and intelligent men within the Church's bosom whom God raised up to serve as forerunners to prepare the Church for a Reformation. The essential doctrines of Christianity such as the atonement, the incarnation, Scripture as the only infallible rule of faith and life, and justification by faith alone had not been totally lost within the visible Church of Christ. In this time period

before the formal Reformation in Germany in the 16th century, there was a group of faithful believers known as the Waldenses who were faithful to teaching and passing down the truth of justification by faith alone. These Waldenses were disciples of Valdo who protested against the abuse and vices of Rome. Pierre Valdo (“Peter Waldo”) was from Lyons and sought to reestablish ancient biblical Christianity in the 12th century, and his followers sought to do the same by preaching from the Word of God (although this was perceived by the Papacy as subversive of their authority because they were not formally authorized by the Church). John Wycliffe in 1360 appealed to the Word of God over the Pope’s superstitions and tyranny. John Huss (d. 1450), the “John the Baptist” of the Reformation, preached the Word of God in Bohemia and was burned at the stake in 1415 for his stand upon the Word of God as supreme authority, but was condemned by the Councils of Constance and Basle in the 15th century. As Jesus had promised the gates of hell never prevailed against Christ’s Church and so even within the Roman Catholic communion of the time there were faithful witnesses and lights to God’s truth. In the Middle Ages, Anselm of Canterbury taught correctly the biblical doctrines of the atonement and the incarnation of the Christ. St. Bernard (“Bernard of Clairvaux”, d. 1153) understood the hope of the gospel when he said: “If my sin cometh from another, why should not my righteousness be granted to me in the same manner?” (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:21). Brother Martin, a Carthusian friar understood that salvation is not by the merits of men, but only by the meritorious work of Jesus Christ on our behalf; he wrote: “O merciful God! I know that I cannot be saved and satisfy thy righteousness otherwise than by the merits, by the most innocent passion, and by the death of thy dearly

loved Son....Holy Jesus! All my salvation is in your hands.” Although Brother Martin could not formally confess these truths before men in the Roman Catholic communion, he did place his confession in a wooden box and hid it in the walls of his room at the monastery where he served. Thomas Conecte, a Carmelite Friar wrote of the grossest abominations of the Roman Catholic Church and realized that reform was sorely needed, even if one had to be excommunicated or lose their life in order to reestablish biblical Christianity; he died at the stake in 1432. Cardinal Andrew, Archbishop of Crayn wrote against Rome’s blasphemies and the dire need of a reforming of the Church. He wrote: “The whole Church is shaken by divisions, heresies, sins, vices, unrighteousness, errors, and countless evils, so as to be nigh swallowed up by the devouring abyss of damnation”; Andrew was thrown into prison at Basle for his writings and died alone there. One of the greatest forerunners of the Reformation from within the Roman Catholic Church was Jerome Savonarola (d. 1498). Savonarola was a Dominican monk and preacher of Scripture and justification by faith alone. This courageous Dominican criticized the papacy for immoral behavior, especially the gross secularization of the papacy that was embodied in Pope Alexander VI, one of the spiritually degenerate and secular Borgia popes. He articulated both his love of God and his understanding of God’s grace found in Scripture but not in the papacy of the time: “Not unto us, O Lord! Not unto us; but to thy name be the glory! Therefore, O God, do I seek thy mercy, and I bring not unto thee my own righteousness; but when by thy grace thou justifiest me, then thy righteousness belongs unto me; for grace is the righteousness of God.” Savonarola died by execution on a “Bonfire of the Vanities” because Pope Alexander falsely charged he and his

followers with heresy. John Vitarius, a Franciscan monk vigorously attacked the doctrinal corruptions of the Church and wrote against prayers to the saints and Mary; he was commanded to recant his teachings as a monk, and unfortunately did so in 1498 out of fear. John Lallier, a Doctor of Divinity from the University of Paris wrote at the end of the 15th century concerning the Roman Church's supremacy over all other congregations: "All the clergy [of Rome] have received equal power from Christ. The Roman Church is not the head of other churches. You should keep the commandments of God and of the apostles; and as for the commandments of bishops and all the other lords of the Church, they are but straw." John of Wesalia, a Doctor of Divinity at Erfurt also attacked the errors of the Roman Catholic hierarchy and proclaimed the doctrine of scripture alone as the only infallible rule for faith and life. This eminent Doctor Wesalia of Erfurt was quoted as saying: "I despise the Pope, the Church and the Councils, and I give Christ the glory." John of Goch, a prior of Malines articulated a biblical doctrine of Christian liberty and charged the Roman Church with the sin of teaching the doctrines of Pelagianism and called Thomas Aquinas the chief architect of unbiblical error. He wrote: "The canonical scriptures alone are entitled to a sure confidence, and have an undeniable authority. The writings of the ancient Fathers have no authority, but so far as they are conformable to the truth." Dr. John Wessel (d. 1489, "Wessel Gansfort"), a famous and brilliant Doctor of Divinity at several great Medieval universities, was called "the light of the world" and because he articulated in his writings the criticism that would cause Luther to be later excommunicated from the Church of Rome. In fact, Luther wrote that if he had read Dr. Wessel's works sooner, his enemies would have thought they were of

one mind and that Wessel had influenced Luther's Reformation, because Wessel with Luther articulated the doctrine of justification by faith alone. Dr. Wessel, a few years before Luther, wrote on the importance of the freedom or liberty of the Christian, criticized biblically the superstitious use of the sacraments, the authority of the papacy and tradition, and the imbalanced semi-pelagianism with regard to man's will in salvation; before Luther, Wessel articulated the need for the people to question the tyranny and doctrinal corruptions of the papacy: "The people should follow the shepherd into the pastures; but when he ceases to lead them in the pastures, he is no longer a shepherd, and then, since he does not fulfill his duty, the flock is not bound to follow him. Nothing is more effectual to the destruction of the Church than a corrupted clergy. All Christians, even the humblest and most simple, are bound to resist those who are destroying the Church." Interestingly enough, two men Andrew Poles and John Hilten actually spoke of the need for God to eventually raise up a man like Luther, who was courageous and bold, and who would effect permanent change for better. Poles wrote: "But God will raise up a hero, who by his age, strength, talents, learning, genius, and eloquence, shall hold the foremost place. He will begin the Reformation; he will oppose error, and God will give him boldness to resist the mighty ones of the earth."

The preparation for the Reformation was political, ecclesiastical and literary. The literary sphere is another aspect of how God prepared the world for the Reformation. At this time period, humanism was at its height and influence. There was a love of learning and desire to return to the classic Greek and Roman authors and poets. Humanists had a

great love for antiquity in the writings, philosophies, and arts of the ancients. There was a desire to learn Latin, Greek and Hebrew to read ancient texts, including the Bible.

Against the Schoolmen theologians of the time, the humanists desired to place the bible and its interpretation above their confusion interpretations and traditions. John Reuchlin (d. 1522) is extremely significant for the literary preparation of the Reformation.

Reuchlin at the age of twenty taught philosophy, Greek and Latin at the University of Basle; with his intellectual gifts he compiled a Latin dictionary, wrote a Greek grammar, translated the Psalms, corrected the Vulgate translation, and was the first to publish in Germany a Hebrew grammar and dictionary. Martin Luther would later say of Reuchlin: “The Lord has been at work in you, that the light of Holy Scripture might begin to shine in that Germany where for so many ages, alas! It was not only stifled but entirely extinct.”

Erasmus of Rotterdam

As influential as John Reuchlin was in the literary preparation of the Reformation, the greatest of all scholars and the most important figure of the literary Reformation was Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam (d. 1536). Erasmus with biting irony and great sarcasm attacked the abuses and luxuries of Rome, attacked the doctrines of the Schoolmen and the convents. He started his adult life as a monk, but found himself eventually in the courts of princes, noblemen, and on the faculty of the great University of Paris. Erasmus was one of the most prominent and popular men of his time; he was known for his sheer genius and powerful ability to communicate through his teaching,

particularly his writings. Erasmus wrote the book *Praise of Folly* (1509) as an ironic satire exposing the sinful folly of the Roman Church. In the book Erasmus uses the character of “Moria” a daughter of Plutus, who is a personification of folly, to depict the folly and superstitions of the Church of Rome. Moria said concerning the bishops of the Church: “They run more after gold than after souls, and they think they have done enough for Jesus Christ, when they take their seats complacently and with theatrical pomp, like Holy Fathers to whom admiration belongs, and utter blessings or anathemas....Can there be any greater enemies to the Church than these unholy pontiffs, who by their silence allow Jesus Christ to be forgotten?” This book was extremely popular and went through twenty seven editions in Erasmus’ lifetime. Erasmus’ main point of criticism was that as the humanists went back to the sources to learn languages, culture and the arts, so the Church needed to return back to the sources of biblical Christianity found in the scriptures of the Hebrew and Greek Testaments. He advised the Church to study the Church Fathers and to study the Scriptures that the Father’s studied and interpreted. Erasmus published the first Greek text of the New Testament in 1516, and so he did for the New Testament what John Reuchlin had done for the Old Testament. In contrast to the Medieval Schoolmen, Erasmus sought truth in the Scriptures through exegetical labors; he wrote: “The most exalted aim in the revival of philosophical studies will be to obtain a knowledge of the pure and simple Christianity of the Bible.” Erasmus would not be God’s choice to begin the Reformation, but he prepared the way for Luther in many ways. Erasmus’ faith was in Christ alone, and he observed the errors within the Church correctly, but he enjoyed popularity too much to

cause great conflict, and so he was not courageous enough to bring about the change needed at this time. Luther said “Erasmus is very capable of exposing error, but he knows not how to teach the truth.” So God prepared the world for the Reformation through the three realms of the political, the ecclesiastical, and the literary, and the road had been paved for a miner’s son named Martin Luther who would become the hero that men had anticipated.

The Youth, Conversion, and Early Labors of Luther

What appears to be weak and insignificant to the world, is actually the power and strength of Almighty God. God chose a weak and insignificant instrument for Reformation in the person of Martin Luther. Luther was of humble origins, born the son of Thuringian peasants, John and Margaret (Lindemann), who moved to the little town of Eisleben in Saxony where their son Luther was born in 1483. John and Margaret were upright and righteous people, who devoted their lives to service and the discipline of their son. They desired for Luther to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord and to be a man of God. Luther’s father worked hard as a wood-cutter, and then became a miner after Luther was born. Luther’s parents committed what they had to Luther’s education. Luther grew up a happy young man who was disciplined when he did wrong, but he had a serious and attentive disposition that made him a good student. Luther learned from a very early age through catechism, in the memorization of the Ten Commandments, the Lord’s Prayer, and the Apostle’s Creed. It was John Luther’s priority and goal to make Luther a godly man, but also a scholar. When Luther was sent away to school which was

not an opportunity for everyone, he went to a fine school in Eisenach and learned literature, science, and the fine arts; Luther was especially a good musician who learned to play the flute and the lute, and had a fine alto voice. Luther recalled how his education was challenging at Eisenach and he and other students often had to beg for bread just to be able to eat as poor and hungry students. Luther continued to grow in his knowledge and made especially good progress in Latin, eloquence or rhetoric, and poetry.

Luther entered the university at Erfurt at eighteen years of age in 1501 and studied the philosophy of the Middle Ages such as the works of Occam, Scotus, Bonaventura, and Thomas Aquinas. He studied the classical writings of Aristotle, Cicero, Virgil and other classical authors of antiquity. While at university, it was obvious to Luther's professors that he had an excellent memory and already an ability to retain much information and understand all that he heard and read. Yet even in the midst of his studies, Luther did not forget the importance of his devotional life as he had been taught by his faithful parents. Luther was entirely dependent upon God as much as he was able during these years and said concerning study: "To pray well is the better half of study." At the university, Luther was able to read the Bible for the first time. This was a rare at this time period to find a copy of the Bible and to be able to read it for oneself. It was a Latin Bible in the university library, and Luther would repair himself to study it often, remembering fondly how it warmed his heart and mind as he read the words of the biblical page for the first time in his life. Up until this time, all Luther knew of what the Bible taught was from the

Scholastic theological schools and what he had heard at worship on Sunday. Luther's reading of the Bible at university was the germination of the Reformation.

Luther's study at university was successful and it was not long before he received his first degree of Bachelor. In 1505, Luther was admitted to an Master of Arts program and doctor of philosophy at the same university at Erfurt. During Luther's time of study, his realization of his sins before God continued to grow as he meditated upon the displeasure and wrath of God against sin; it was at university that Luther remembered seeking assurance in his standing before God. Luther visited nearby Mansfeldt in the summer of 1505, and on his return to Erfurt Luther was overwhelmed by a thunderstorm that caused him to go to his knees before God and vow that he would enter the cloister in hopes of finding the assurance he so desperately desired from God. Luther interpreted the storm through which he had passed as a message from God for him to commit his life entirely devoted to God. Luther thought at this time: "Can a man appear before the tribunal of a holy God with an impure heart? He must become holy." Luther's pursuit for the rest of his life would not merely be for knowledge, but now also for holiness before God. Luther's father had wanted his son to become a lawyer, but Luther would not become a monk; this displeased and disappointed his father greatly, but Luther did what he thought his Heavenly Father was calling him to do and later sought to reconcile himself to his earthly father over this disagreement. In August 1505, Luther entered the Augustinian Cloister and became one of the hermits of St. Augustine at twenty-one years old.

The immature Luther who entered the monastery to devote his life to God at twenty-one and the mature Luther that he would eventually become by God's grace is testimony to God's sovereign mercy and providence. When Luther entered the Augustinian Cloister he looked to himself for salvation; he believed that salvation was accomplished through human works and observances like many other devoted people of his age. At the monastery Luther was greatly humbled; although he was a doctor and a very educated man, he set about doing menial and humble tasks for God with a grateful heart. Luther began studying the works of Augustine and the fathers of the Church, and he found another Bible like the one at Erfurt to study the Word of God. Luther rejoiced when he found a chained bible in the convent and studied it diligently hoping to attain to the assurance that he so eagerly desired. At the same time, Luther gave himself to rigorous works such as fastings, prayers, fleshly mortifications, with hopes that he might achieve his right standing before God. It could have been said of Luther at this time that if ever a monk could obtain heaven by monkish works, he would certainly have been entitled to it. Luther had yet to understand the doctrine of justification by faith alone in Christ alone; but God is good and faithful and Dr. Luther would eventually understand and proclaim to many this comforting doctrine.

As Luther grew in his knowledge of God's Word and continued to seek assurance before God in his salvation, the holiness of God and his own sinfulness became more and more acute. Luther realized that the merits of man will never hold up at God's holy tribunal, and so his life was not one of peace but a great struggle of sorrow leading to

despair. Luther needed desperately a friend and teacher of the gospel and God in his providence and grace sent to him John Staupitz. Staupitz was a learned as well as a godly man who through the study of Augustine and the Bible came to a knowledge of his sinfulness and led him to Christ as his only hope and redeemer. When Frederick the Wise, prince-elect of Saxony built the University of Wittenberg, he made Staupitz the dean of the theological faculty. In addition to Staupitz' academic influence at the university, he was also the vicar-general of the Augustine monks in Germany. He realized as a man of God that the Church was in need of a reformation, but he did not think he was the one to seek to accomplish this task. Rather, he sought through reformation of the convent to return to biblical doctrines and to seek to live a holy and exemplary life before God. When Staupitz visited Luther's cloister he was very impressed with the young monk and learned of his great knowledge, but was also saddened by Luther's despair and despondency in finding hope in God. Staupitz sought to understand Luther, and he intimately told Luther of his own struggles to find assurance before God in Christ alone. Luther relayed to him the longings of his heart in seeking to find a right standing before God, and the fear he had that he would receive God's condemnation and wrath. Staupitz with great compassion and pastoral love said to Luther: "Why do you torment yourself with all these speculations and these high thoughts of your own works before God? Look at the wounds of Jesus Christ, to the blood that he has shed for you: it is here that the grace of God will appear to you. Instead of torturing yourself on account of your sins, throw yourself into the Redeemer's arms. Trust in him- -in the righteousness of his life- -in the atonement in his death." Staupitz was one of the

most influential people as an encouragement to young Dr. Luther during this time, and could be called Luther's spiritual father who clearly communicated the gospel to Luther for the first time. Staupitz encouraged Luther to give himself continually to the study of the Word of God so that he would not listen to his own thoughts, but hear the very thoughts of Christ His Great Shepherd who claimed him as his own. Staupitz told Luther to let the study of the Bible be his favorite occupation, and he gave Luther his first Bible as a precious gift. From this time, Luther studied the Apostle Paul and Augustine, and meditated on what the *Apostle's Creed* means when it says "I believe in the forgiveness of sins." After being encouraged by the gospel, and through increasing study of the Bible for himself, Luther came to a personal knowledge of his salvation. Luther realized that his hope before God is not in his works or merits, but his hope and assurance is found in the grace of God found in Christ alone. In May 1507 Luther is ordained as a priest, and even though he was realizing that salvation is found in Christ alone, Luther is still faithfully committed to the Roman Catholic Church.

In 1508, Luther is invited to become a professor at the University of Wittenberg by the Prince-electoral Frederick himself; Luther accepted the invitation and began to teach physics and dialectics. In March 1509, Luther was encouraged by Staupitz to give himself entirely to the study and teaching of biblical theology from the Scriptures. Luther began to lecture on the Bible and began a series of exegesis and exposition of the Psalms and Paul's Epistle to the Romans. Luther would recall later that it was through the study of Romans that the truth he had heard from Staupitz began to penetrate his heart

by the power of the Holy Spirit. In Romans 1:17: “The just shall live by faith” Luther found that the righteousness that God required, God had supplied in Jesus Christ to be received by faith and he understand faith as a gift from God for the first time. It was at this time that Luther started to preach from the Word of God. In the middle of the square in Wittenberg, Luther preached to all who came to hear from an old wooden chapel, and it was in this humble place that the influence of the Reformation gospel began to penetrate men’s hearts and to change the world. The people who heard Luther thought that he preached with authority and not like the teachers and preachers before him that thought that they had to amuse their audience, rather than to tell them what God says and demands of them, and what he gives to them by faith in Christ. Luther became the Pastor-Chaplain of Wittenberg, and took upon himself a special pastoral role to shepherd and guide the people to the Christ of the gospel. At this point in Luther’s life, he was realizing that the gospel is the most important priority for him as a teacher and preacher.

In contrast to Luther preaching the gospel in humble Wittenberg, Luther is invited to represent the Augustinian Cloister by going to Rome (ca. 1510-1512). As a dignitary to Rome, Luther crosses the Alps and begins to see the vice, luxurious living, and spiritual degeneration of the famed “Holy City”. At this time, Julius II was Pope in Rome (before Leo X) and Luther performed all the holy practices that were required of him by the papacy with the hope of obtaining a special promised indulgence. Luther’s visit to Rome was a stumbling block to him: the spiritual degeneration of the dignitaries of the papacy was abhorrent to him, and he was greatly grieved by the hypocrisy that he saw during his

visit. Luther remembered later that “the nearer we approach Rome, the greater number of bad Christians we meet with.” Although the gospel had penetrated Luther’s heart, there was still much to be fully understood by Luther, and through God’s grace he would change progressively in his convictions, so while Luther was there he repeated Mass several times in Rome, as well as climbed Pilate’s staircase. The practice of climbing Pilate’s staircase was a gross Roman superstition that taught that if one would climb upon one’s knees all twenty-eight of the steps he would be given a special indulgence. As Luther climbed the stairs he remembered the gospel truth of the “just shall live by faith”, he quickly stood up straight, wiped off his knees and fled from the folly of this superstitious exercise. As Luther was in Rome, the Holy Spirit allowed the truth of Romans 1:17 to fully regenerate him to life; Luther wrote: “Although I was a holy and blameless monk, my conscience was nevertheless troubled and in anguish. I could not endure these words: “the righteousness of God”. I had no love for that holy and just God who punishes sinners. I was filled with secret anger against him; I hated him, because, not content with frightening by the law and the miseries of life us wretched sinners, already ruined by original sin, he still further increased our tortures by the Gospel....But when, by the Spirit of God, I understood these words, - -when I learned how the justification of the sinner proceeds from the free mercy of our Lord through faith....then I felt born again like a new man; I entered through the open doors into the very paradise of God.” And so, Luther understood fully for the first time that the righteousness that God requires, he supplies by faith in Jesus, and he was assured before God and at peace finally within his soul. Luther, while in the City of Rome that had corrupted the gospel,

ironically and paradoxically by God's grace, came to understand the true gospel of justification by faith alone in Christ alone!

In the summer of 1512, Luther was made the Doctor of Divinity through the influence of Andrew Bodenstein of the City of Carlstadt ("Andrew Carlstadt"), who was the Dean of the Theological Faculty at the University of Wittenberg. Luther is now officially a teacher of the Bible as a Doctor of Divinity (D. D.), and he vows to uphold the truth of the Bible as the sole and infallible authority from God to his people. In his new position, Luther sought not merely the truth for himself alone, but also for the Church. He taught his students that Schoolmen (teachers of Medieval Scholastic Theology) were Pelagian in their theology and that they truly knew very little of the Word of God; he blamed the Schoolmen for speculative theology that had about as much authority as the philosophy of Aristotle than the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Luther accused the Schoolmen of undermining the true heart of the gospel in justification by faith alone with Pelagian heresies. He wrote: "The desire of self-justification is the cause of all the distresses of the heart. But he who receives Jesus Christ as Savior, enjoys peace; and not only peace, but purity of heart....It is not by empty speculations [of the Schoolmen] but by this practical method [of the gospel] that we can obtain a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ." Dr. Luther wrote and taught discourses on the Ten Commandments to exegete the law much like Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, to bring his congregation to a knowledge of their sins, so that they would run to the gospel found in Jesus as their only hope of salvation. It is in these lectures that he expounded on the importance of understanding

Christ alone for salvation, in contrast to the Schoolmen and the papal teaching of Christ plus works contributing to one's salvation. Through Luther's proclamation of the Word of God and specifically the good news of the gospel, many in Wittenberg experienced the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit. Luther sought prayerfully and diligently to calm anxious souls with the only peace that God has provided in the Person and Work of Jesus Christ; Luther brought the balm of Jesus' grace to heal the wounds that the law of God had inflicted on men's consciences. Luther encouraged meditation on the love of God found in Christ, and the peace of God that passes understanding that is found only in him. For Dr. Luther the greatest need for the people of God at this time included an understanding of the helplessness and sinfulness of man before God's holy law, and the omnipotence of God and his grace through Word and the Spirit- -the very power of God unto salvation for all who believe- -the righteousness of God in Christ alone. Luther's passion for God's Word eventually brought him to his first attack on the authority of the teaching of the papacy in 1516 in a disputation where Luther said against the prevailing Pelagian theology of the day: "A man who has no part in the grace of God, cannot keep the commandments of God, or prepare himself, either wholly or in part, to receive grace, but he rests of necessity under the power of sin. The will of man without grace is not free, but enslaved, and that too with its own consent." Luther continued to grow stronger in his convictions and his influence reached many hearts in the Church, particularly in the monasteries. God had raised up Luther to be a pastor, teacher, preacher and writer with many who were listening to him attentively.

The Indulgences and the 95 Theses

But there was to be trouble for Luther; he was not called by God to merely live a happy and fulfilling existence as a local pastor, teacher, preacher and writer. God had called Luther to be Reformer of his church, and Luther had yet to realize this. God in his providence used the selling of indulgences to infuriate Luther, and to have him broaden his influential teaching of the gospel throughout the world. At this time there were fairs of indulgences conducted by monks where papal indulgences were sold to secure salvation for the living and dead. When these hawkers of indulgences came to town to set up their fairs they would say: “The grace of God and of the Holy Father is at your gates.” The people truly believed superstitiously that these purchased indulgences could save them and their loved ones from temporal punishment from God in Purgatory. The greatest and most successful hawker or seller of these indulgences was John Diezel (or “Tetzel”) who had had great and successful experience in selling them since 1502. Tetzel was an immoral and avaricious man who was no more than a charlatan salesman who deceived the people in trusting something other than Christ for their salvation and hope and assurance before God. The people truly believed that when they gave their money to Tetzel they could be assured of their salvation before God and that they had a deliverance of their souls from Purgatory’s fires. Tetzel had the audacity to say idolatrously “Come and I will give you letters, all properly sealed, by which even the sins that you intend to commit may be pardoned.” Tetzel promised that indulgences availed not only for the living when purchased, but also for the dead, and this was summed up in a memorable phrase: “When the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from Purgatory springs” (or literally

“that the money rattles at the bottom of the chest, the soul escapes Purgatory and flies liberated to heaven”). Tetzl threatened anyone who disagreed with him that they would be excommunicated, and he had the help of avaricious bishops such as Albert the Archbishop of Mentz (or “Mainz”) who greedily promised four graces with the purchase of an indulgence: 1) Full pardon of all sins; 2) Absolution of all sin at death- -even the greatest crimes; 3) Participation in the blessings, works, and merits of the Church; and 4) Redemption of the souls of others who had died and were in Purgatory. As one historian noted: “Greater blessings could not be offered at a lower rate”! However, for some sins such as polygamy, perjury, murder, witchcraft, and infanticide, the price was a bit higher, but the forgiveness and pardon was the same. Not everyone was ripped off and taken by Tetzl’s false teaching; men such as Camerarius, Melancthon’s friend and later biographer criticized the selling of indulgences in his city of Leipzig. Myconius, who became a reformer and historian of the Reformation, at this early time period, was critical of this false gospel. In fact, Myconius, after hopelessly seeking after false hope and salvation in the purchasing of indulgences, by God’s grace, experienced the power of God in regeneration. Myconius wrote: “O God! Cried I, since these men have refused to remit my sins, because I lacked money to pay them, do thou, Lord, have pity on me, and pardon them of thy pure grace...I felt my nature changed, converted, and transformed by God.” The trafficking of indulgences, though accepted by some, made many indignant. People were divided over what to think about this, and some pondered the fact that if the Pope could offer the full remittance of sins through indulgences, why would he not freely offer this grace to all, in order that Purgatory might be emptied of all sinners.

In 1516, Luther heard about Tetzel and his ungodly audacity in the substance of his teaching and selling. Luther called this false gospel salesman a “master cheat of Rome” and said that “If God permits, I will make a hole in his drum.” At this point in Luther’s life, he is still dedicated to the Roman Catholic Church and particularly protective of the Papacy of Rome. On one particular day in Luther’s growing understanding of these abuses, Luther heard a confession from a sinner in the confessional booth. When Luther as a priest told the sinner upon confession to repent, the person in the booth extended to him an indulgence that he had purchased from Tetzel for past and future sins. Luther was outraged by this antinomian false confidence in a certificate that holds no authority from God’s Word. As a pastor this incident caused Luther to act on behalf of his flock. Luther did not intend to begin a reformation of the entire Church at this point, but he did take it upon himself as his pastoral duty to oppose Tetzel and his teachings. Luther began this opposition to Tetzel by preaching to the people against indulgences and encourages them all to find the hope of God and the forgiveness of sins through repentance and faith in Christ alone. Luther rightly saw that the selling of indulgences undermined the gospel of God’s free grace in Christ; in fact, this was a nullification of Christ’s work (cf. Gal. 2:21). Luther advised the people against purchasing the indulgences and in doing this he strikes deeply at the heart of Tetzel’s theology and finances. The Feast of All Saints was a time when many would be visiting Wittenberg, and so Luther decided that this would be a good time to post ninety-five theses he had written against the sell of indulgences. As a preacher he had warned from the pulpit, as a clergyman he now sought a discussion or

disputation concerning this practice. On October 31st 1517 at noon, on the day preceding the All Saints Festival, Luther posts his ninety-five theses or propositions against the doctrine of indulgences on the door of the Castle Church at Wittenberg. Luther's 95 Theses became the incident that formally began the Reformation, although it was not Luther's intention to do so. The reason was that embedded in the 95 Theses (that Luther thought later were too moderate and not strong enough) were the seeds of the doctrines of scripture alone, faith alone, and Christ alone for salvation. In thesis number one, Luther argued that repentance was a lifelong or perpetual repentance and characterized the believer's whole life. In thesis thirty-two, Luther courageously wrote that man should not trust in "salvation by indulgences" because salvation is by grace. In thesis or proposition thirty-six Luther declared scripturally that if there was true repentance in a person then there was no need of penance before God. In thesis number forty-three Luther said that it was better to give to the poor and lend to the needy than to purchase an indulgence, because these works will show that you already have experienced true repentance and saving faith. In proposition fifty, Luther revealed that he was still supportive of Pope Leo X at this point and he was charitable toward the pope's involvement in the selling of the indulgences. Luther writes innocently: "We should teach Christians that if the pope knew of the extortions of the preachers of indulgences, he would rather the mother-church of St. Peter were burned and reduced to ashes, than see it built up with the skin, the flesh, and the bones of his flock" (Thesis #50). Luther declared in thesis number fifty-three that the Word of God rather than indulgences must be preached for the people to have hope and assurance in Christ. Arguably the most

important thesis is number sixty-two that revealed the hope of the doctrine of justification by faith alone that Luther had already understood and the assurance before God that he had experienced. Luther wrote: “The true and precious treasury of the Church is the Holy Gospel of the glory and grace of God.” After Luther had posted his theses he rested peacefully back at the cloister realizing that he had stood for the truth of the Bible, and courageously had followed his convictions. But this was only the beginning for Luther, he had no idea that day what kind of opposition he would eventually experience because of this writing. He later wrote: “I entered into this controversy, without any definite plan, without knowledge or inclination; I was taken quite unawares, and I call God, the searcher of hearts, to witness.”

After his posting, Luther became sadly aware that the Archbishop of Mainz, Albert had allowed, prescribed and promoted the sale of indulgences, particularly choosing Tetzel for his gift of manipulating superstitious crowds and his reputation for raising a tremendous amount of money to fill their greedy pockets. Luther wrote Albert in a humble and gentle manner, speaking the truth in love, and told him that Tetzel was “hawking in his name” and he went on to passionately say to Albert that man is not saved by the work or the office of the bishop, but that Albert’s responsibility as bishop was to instruct the people in the gospel; Albert never replied to Luther’s letter. Luther’s Theses spread like a wildfire all the way to Rome and were translated into Dutch and Spanish. There was a great circulation of Luther’s Theses and many when they read them sympathized and rejoiced that someone had finally spoken up about this heinous practice

in the Church. John Reuchlin received them and remarked “Thanks be to God! At last they have found a man who will give them so much to do, that they will be compelled to let my old age end in peace.” Frederick the Wise, Prince-elect of Saxony was pleased with Luther’s theses and boldness and remarked that Luther had committed two unpardonable crimes against the papacy: “He has attacked the pope’s tiara and the monks’ bellies.” The Emperor Maximilian admired Luther’s courage and with an eye toward allying himself with Germany against Rome one day, wrote an amiable letter to Frederick telling him to take great care of his Luther. Pope Leo X when he received the humble doctor’s theses was amused in his luxury and pomp, and Myconius read Luther’s theses with the realization that his own father had taught him privately the same truths. The Bishop of Brandenburg advised Luther to use moderation in his teaching and to cease writing for peace’s sake, and Luther’s own Augustinian brethren in the cloister feared that their association with Luther would tarnish their own reputation. Unfortunately, many whom Luther respected surprisingly spoke out against him when they read his Theses, and thus doubts filled his anxious mind about what he had done. Luther despaired over some of the reactions and although he knew what he had done was right and according to conviction, he had not sought to cause unnecessary unrest and division in the Church. Luther was disappointed at the great reaction, but God provided him faithful friends to be comforts and encouragements to him in George Spalatin, Christopher Scheul, and the painter Albert Durer. These friends should be credited for helping Luther to keep his trust in God and to continue to stand firmly upon God’s Word alone.

But Tetzel struck back against Luther. Tetzel encouraged the brilliant and eloquent Conrad Wimpina to write “Anti-Theses” against Luther’s Ninety-Five Theses to defend indulgences and the authority of the pope. These “Anti-Theses” brought out the implications of Luther’s scriptural teaching with regard to the scriptures being the sole authority even over the pope and councils, justification by faith alone, and the importance of salvation in Christ alone apart from works. Wimpina’s writings struck to the heart of the issue by making Luther publicly guilty of undermining the authority of the Pope in making the Scriptures the supreme authority for faith and life. Tetzel became a doctor through Wimpina’s influence and Tetzel used his new title to pronounce that Luther must die. Now the focus of the debates changed from the doctrine of indulgences to the authority of the pope and this causes the Dominican Monks to speak out against Luther for articulating this doctrine. Pope Leo X in his dismissive and arrogant way still only perceived Luther’s teaching and this debate between he and Tetzel as a “monkish squabble”; he had no idea of the power in weakness that God had given this young man. On behalf of Leo X, Sylvester Mazzolini, a Dominican Monk from Prierio, wrote on behalf of the papacy to Luther in ridicule and insult, stooping as low as to call Luther the son of a dog. Mazzolini of Prierio touched on the heart of the matter by asking in his communication: “What is the sole infallible authority for Christians?” Prierio went on to declare against Luther that “Whoever relies not on the teaching of the Roman Church, and of the Roman pontiff, as the infallible rule of faith, from which the Holy Scriptures themselves derive their strength and their authority, is a heretic.” Luther courageously

replies to Prierio by quoting scripture from Galatians 1:6: “Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach another Gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.” Luther’s response to Prierio began with his foundation upon Scripture alone; Luther’s reply revealed the answer to his question of what is the sole infallible authority for Christians: the Word of God- -but would this be heeded by others? Luther continued in his response to Prierio by appealing to Augustine’s doctrine of Scripture and he declared the truth that Pope’s and councils of the Church have erred. Luther spoke respectfully of Leo X but said that with all the respect that he may have for him the only infallible rule for faith and life is found in the Word of God. This attack from Rome, proclaiming Luther as a heretic was not as painful as the next attack from Luther’s own dear friend Dr. Eck of Ingolstadt. Dr. Eck (D. D.) was a professor at the University of Ingolstadt and although a respected theological peer and close friend of Luther’s, Eck’s theology was more Scholastic than Biblical. Whereas Prierio argued for the infallibility of the papacy over Scripture, Eck argued for the importance of the biblical interpretation of the Scriptures according to the Scholastic Method over Luther’s interpretation of the Word of God. The main issue at the heart of Luther’s Ninety-Five Theses continued to reveal itself as how one understands the authority of the Bible over the Church.

And Luther put his belief in the Word of God into practice by his exegesis and exposition of the Word of God, and he became increasingly popular in his preaching and teaching. Luther expounded the Ten Commandments and published his sermons on the Ten Commandments for all to read and for all to know that our wisdom, righteousness,

sanctification, and redemption is found in Christ Jesus, not in the law of God that only serves as a guardian or tutor to bring us to Christ. Despite the criticisms Luther would receive, the crowds increased to hear him, and Luther continued to be faithful in teaching the Word of God. Three young men were powerfully influenced by Dr. Luther's teaching while he was teaching as a visitor in Heidelberg: Martin Bucer, John Brentz (or Brentius), and Ehrhard Snepf. All three of these men learned from the Word of God that man is not justified before God by the performance of works, but he who without works, has much faith in Jesus Christ is justified. These three men would continue the work of reformation in Heidelberg as Luther returns to Wittenberg to face greater criticism and more intense debates against the powers of the papacy of Rome.

Luther before the Legate

As Luther returned to Wittenberg, he desired to explain his Ninety-Five Theses more clearly by addressing directly the papacy of Rome. In order to achieve this greater clarity, Dr. Luther wrote his *Resolutions* to fellow countrymen in Germany and would eventually send a copy to Pope Leo X himself. In these *Resolutions* or Explanations of his Theses Luther articulated clearly the doctrine of scripture alone ("sola Scriptura"), affirming that the Holy Scriptures were the sole rule of faith, that was implicit in his Theses. Luther defined biblical repentance as primarily inward and a work of the Holy Spirit in contrast to the Roman Catholic doctrine of Penance. He articulated the doctrine of justification by faith alone by speaking of Christ's righteousness imputed to the

believer as taught in Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians (5:21). Luther boldly said in his *Resolutions* "I care not for what pleases or displeases the Pope. He is a man like other men...the Church needs a Reformation." In Luther's *Resolutions*, it is clearer that there will be a doctrinal clash between the authority of the Bible and the authority of the Pope of Rome. Dr. Luther's *Resolutions* are published on Saturday, May 22nd, 1518 (near the celebration of Pentecost), and Luther wrote to the Bishop of Brandenburg in Germany to seek his favor in his writing. Luther also sought the favor of Rome. At this time period, Luther realized that the Church needed reforming, and that the Pope was merely a man, but he still has great respect for the papacy, and thinks that Leo X will be reasonable and see these things taught in Scripture. Luther wrote to Leo: "I shall acknowledge your voice as the voice of Jesus Christ, who presides and speaks through you. If I have merited death, I shall not refuse to die..." Upon the publication of Luther's *Resolutions*, he continued his teachings at the university in the Bible, and as pastor, he continued to preach against excommunication especially since he thinks he could be excommunicated from the Church if everyone fails to understand his Biblical teaching. Luther was brave and courageous in the face of this awesome threat to his ministry.

Pope Leo X eventually called an ecclesiastical commission to try Luther with Sylvester Prierio as accuser and judge; this was the moment of truth where Luther was faced with possible execution for teaching the Bible. At this time, Luther needed the support of the German princes and powers, particularly Frederick "the Wise" of Saxony. Luther wrote to Spalatin, the secretary of Frederick, imploring him to speak a good word on his behalf.

Frederick showed interest in protecting Luther because as a German prince he did not like the idea of submitting to the commands of the Pope, but he also cherished Dr. Luther as a famous professor and drew to his University of Wittenberg. Pope Leo wrote to Frederick that if Luther would retract and recant his teachings, then he would not be excommunicated, but if he did not, Luther would be excommunicated and executed, and all those who aided and protected him would also be under a papal interdict. Leo X declared Luther a heretic before he even was able to try him; Luther stood accused and condemned before he was ever able to explain his teachings, even though he had tried to clarify his points in his *Resolutions*.

Dr. Luther experienced great turmoil and anguish during this time, but at the same time he was joyous and at peace in Christ. In God's grace and mercy, he sent Luther a friend; this friend was George Schwartzerd who had changed his name to 'Philip Melanchthon' and who would be a friend and lieutenant of Luther's for the remainder of his life. Melanchthon was a man of perfect integrity, and one of the finest Greek and Latin scholars in the world at that time, perhaps second only in greatness and academic ability to Erasmus of Rotterdam. Melanchthon studied under John Reuchlin and it was his teacher Reuchlin who presented him with his first Greek Grammar and Bible. Melanchthon spent much time in the study of the Scriptures, and particularly in the Greek New Testament. Melanchthon became a professor at the University of Wittenberg as Professor of Ancient Languages at mere twenty-one years of age. Melanchthon greatly loved his colleague and friend, he wrote: "If there is anyone whom I dearly love, and

whom I embrace with my whole heart, it is Martin Luther.” Melanchthon through his studies in Scripture (particularly the writings of the Apostle Paul) and his conversations with Luther came to understand and believe the gospel doctrine of justification by faith alone. At a time when it seemed the whole world was against Luther, as the enemies of God had been against Christ, God sent a healing balm of encouragement to him in the man Melanchthon.

Although Luther was eventually summoned to appear at Rome before an ecclesiastical commission, Elector-prince Frederick was able to have this location changed to Augsburg so as not to threaten Luther’s life and give him over to Rome by sending him out of Germany. Luther traveled to Augsburg expecting to die for the truth. When Luther arrived in Augsburg a few days later he met the extremely intimidating Thomas de Vio, or Cardinal Cajetan (d. 1534) who was an expert on Scholastic Theology and the doctrines of St. Thomas Aquinas, but who had not knowledge of the theology of the Bible. It should be remembered that Luther was already declared a heretic before a trial, and therefore this commission met not to hear Luther defend his position, but to have him retract and recant of his teachings. Before Luther appeared before Cardinal Cajetan he was counseled by an Italian courtier named Urban of Serra Longa that if he were to retract what he had written and taught then all would go well with him; he was assured that Cajetan only wanted to hear him retract so that he could be welcomed back into the communion of the Church. As Luther traveled to Augsburg, and as he mingled with the people there, he realized and was greatly encouraged to have so many German

supporters; there was great respect for the way Luther had stood up to the Roman papacy. Luther realized that after he appeared before Cajetan that if he did not retract his writings and teachings, that he would not be able to return to Wittenberg, so Luther wisely sought to attain a letter of safe-conduct back home before he met with Cajetan. When Luther was brought in before Cardinal Cajetan, Luther prostrated himself before him as was normal to do before a powerful papal prince such as this cardinal. Cajetan began in a mild and fatherly manner with Luther asking him to recant and retract what he had written. Cajetan promises Luther that upon three conditions, he can be returned to full communion in the Church: 1) Recant and retract your writings; 2) Do not write or preach anymore about these doctrines; and 3) Be moderate and do not upset the unity of the Church again. Dr. Luther stood before Cajetan and respectfully asked him how he had erred. Luther honestly wanted Cajetan to use Scripture as the guide for faith and life and to show how he had been inconsistent with Scripture, but Cajetan interpreted this as being impertinent in his presence. Cajetan quoting St. Thomas Aquinas and articulating the false and speculative doctrines of the Schoolmen, told Luther that he must retract his teaching on the Treasury of Indulgences being inefficacious, and that the Sacraments were ineffective to one's soul unless received by faith. Luther told Cajetan that faith in a man is given by God alone, not by the Pope and he declined any retraction of what he had taught and written unless Cajetan would prove it from scripture alone. Cajetan said to Luther: "The pope has power and authority over all things." Luther responds: "Except Scripture!" Whereas Cajetan snickered at what he perceived to be Luther's ignorance and impetuosity, and threatened to reject and condemn Luther's doctrines if he did not

retract. As Luther faced Cajetan, he thought to himself that if this was the best teacher that Rome had, and as a cardinal of the Church didn't know Scripture, then what should one think about all of the lesser teachers in the Church; Cajetan was supremely powerful and honored, yet he did not know Scripture at all, yet he was entrusted to teach the saints this very word. Luther would meet with Cajetan three times for discussions, but to no avail; neither of the men would budge in their positions and eventually Cajetan became extremely upset and angry with Luther's stubborn refusal to retract unless he was proven wrong from Scripture. The essential points of biblical doctrine that Dr. Luther made to Cardinal Cajetan was that he denied the authority of popes and councils to have authority over the Holy Scriptures (and others had denied this as well, including Panormitanus, d. 1445 who understood the doctrine of Scripture alone). Luther's emphasis in his teaching before Cajetan was on God's grace and mercy in Jesus Christ, not in works or in the purchase of indulgences. Luther over against the Papacy and the official teaching of the Medieval Roman Catholic Church emphasized the work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration and the merits of Christ being the only hope for a person being justified before God. The papal legate responded to Luther's teachings by calling them "idle words"; "useless verbiage"; "scripture quoted out of context", and Cajetan laughed haughtily at what he believed was Luther's presumption of knowing more about God and Scripture than the Church. In response, Luther very clearly said that Jesus is the Treasury of Merit- -in him we find our merits before God received by faith. After Luther's meeting, he needed safety in order to return home to Wittenberg, and because he was not able to secure a formal safe-conduct, Luther escaped Augsburg with the help of his

friends and the willing officials of the city. Cajetan was thunderstruck that Luther has escaped his jurisdiction and worried about his own fate with the pope because he was unable to convince this humble monk to retract or recant. Cajetan was relentless and appealed to Elector-prince Frederick to hand Luther over to Rome for judgment. Because of God's mercy and sovereign hand of guiding providence, Frederick protected Luther from Rome and wrote Cajetan directly to claim his support and protection. After Cajetan returned to Rome, he was counseled that he should have bribed Luther with a wealthy title and bishopric and perhaps a cardinal's hat rather than trying to reason with him. Rather than the Pope reforming the Doctrine of Indulgences in response to this debate between Cajetan and Luther, he made it a formal doctrine of the Church when he wrote his Bull of Indulgences that affirmed the points of the teaching precisely where Luther had biblically criticized them. Dr. Luther had stood for the truth of God's Word alone as the final and infallible authority of faith and life, and had articulated the heart of the gospel in the doctrine of justification by faith alone, but he was still in danger for his life, because now it was formally known by his enemies that he would not retract or recant unless proven wrong from Scripture.

The Leipzig Disputation of 1519

Dr. Luther was now in great danger from the Roman Church, although he was immensely popular with the people and was surprised himself with how many people supported him against the Pope; the majority of the people in Wittenberg was grateful Luther was alive after his trip to Augsburg. Elector-prince Frederick for political reasons

was on the verge of turning Luther over to the Pope, but in God's providence the Pope did not turn immediately to condemnation but allowed one more opportunity for Luther to recant because Emperor Maximilian of Germany had died and this would be another chance to curry favor with Frederick. Through the Pope's chamberlain, Charles of Miltitz ("Karl von Miltitz", d. 1529), the canon of Mentz, Treves, and Meissen, the Pope offered a truce to Luther. Through flattery and manipulation, Miltitz offered a truce of peace between he and Rome; the two had to agree on two things: 1) Both parties were forbidden to preach or write anything against one another; and 2) Luther would give time for the Pope to investigate his writings further and to point out the erroneous articles that Luther would be asked to retract. Luther made this truce, although later he thought himself a bit cowardly and he realized it hindered him from preaching the truth of the Gospel for a season in order to agree with a manipulative truce, but it is important to point out that Luther did not want to separate from the Roman Catholic Communion; Luther was perhaps unwise here, but he was definitely not a sectarian. It could be said that it was not Luther who eventually had to separate from the Church, but it was Rome that had ceased to be the true Church altogether. Luther's writings continued to be published and read, and many were convinced of his reformation arguments in France, Spain and all the way to England and Antwerp. What broke this truce that Luther had made unwisely with Miltitz was the challenge given to him by Dr. John Eck. Luther had kept his promise, but now Rome in the person of Dr. Eck would recommence the combat between Luther and Rome.

Dr. Eck of Ingolstadt (d. 1543) was a doctor of theology and initially he wanted an opportunity to debate and have a disputation with Carlstadt who had written a criticism of one of his books he had written entitled *Obelisks*, but Eck's desire to debate Carlstadt was merely a cover up and a larger attempt to get close to Luther and debate him formally. Dr. John Eck was worldly famous for his great academic reputation, and he was sincerely dedicated to the papacy. Dr. Eck was the master of the disputation, eloquent in Scholastic Theology, and he sought out Luther for a disputation that he believed would silence Luther once and for all because he believed Luther was no match for himself in argumentation. Luther once described Dr. Eck as "the most illustrious goosequill gladiator and braggadocio who like the Aristophanic Socrates despises even the gods themselves..." It was agreed that the debate or disputation would be in Leipzig, the region of Elector-prince Duke George who initially was concerned about the debate, but subsequently allowed it there. The main issue that Dr. Eck wanted to debate Luther was concerning the supreme authority of the papacy which he believed wholeheartedly. Luther had written theses against Eck's doctrine of papal supremacy earlier in the year, and had written faithfully to God's Word and Christian history: "It is by contemptible decretals of Roman pontiffs, composed within the last four centuries, that they would prove the primacy of the Church of Rome; but this primacy is opposed by all the credible history of eleven centuries, - by declarations of Holy Scripture, and by the resolutions of the Council of Nicea, the holiest of all councils." (Luther's Works, Vol. L, section 17, pg. 245). The subject of Luther's debate with the formidable Eck made some of Luther supporters such as Spalatin and Frederick "the Wise" nervous because it was an issue

having to do with the authority of the papacy which was not only a religious issue, but a political debate foundationally. Luther tried to calm Spalatin's worries by assuring him that "it is impossible to speak the truth of the Scriptures and of the Church without arousing the beast. Never expect to see me free from danger, unless I abandon the teaching of sound divinity.... Truth will stand alone, and will triumph by its own right hand, not by mine, nor yours, nor any other man's." During the time in June 1519, while the elector-princes met to choose the new Emperor, Carlstadt, Luther and Melancthon journeyed from Wittenberg to Leipzig to engage in this important debate. Once the three men arrived, Dr. Eck made it known to Duke George of Leipzig as well as to Luther that it was his intention to debate Luther primarily for the defense of Rome; this shrewd cunning of Eck took all men by surprise, and it made Duke George a bit nervous as to the outcome and what this would mean for him politically.

The Leipzig Disputation began on June 27th, 1519 and lasted 17 days. After the celebration of the Mass together at the Church of St. Thomas, the men went directly to the Ducal Palace Castle of Duke George to engage one another in the debate. Dr. Eck and Carlstadt began the debate and spoke to one another about the ability of man's will before conversion. Carlstadt nobly defended the Augustinian position on man's will being enslaved by sin, and pointed out that Aquinas was incorrect biblically to speak of man's will being able to merit salvation cooperating with grace. During the debate, Eck conceded that man is passive in conversion, but he believed that man still cooperated with God's grace in order for the conversion to actually occur. Carlstadt argued that God

must give man a new heart, giving the ability to believe in Christ, and that through the Gospel by the power of the Spirit, a person's will can be "free indeed" (quoting John 8:36).

On July 4th, Dr. Luther and Dr. Eck began their debate focused primarily on the primacy and authority of the papacy. During their debate Eck articulated the heart of his position by saying to Luther: "There is in the Church of God a primacy that comes from Christ himself. The Church militant was formed in the image of the Church triumphant. Now, the latter is a monarchy in which the hierarchy ascends step by step up to God, its sole chief. For this reason Christ has established a similar order upon earth. What a monster the Church would be if it were without a head." Luther responded with both wisdom and biblical knowledge by saying: "The head of the Church is Christ himself and not a man." During the debate Dr. Eck mostly quoted the traditional teachings of the Medieval Church while Luther showed great ability at interpreting the Scriptures and speaking from the Word of God. As the debate continued, Luther showed himself in the disputation not to only possess a mastery of the Scriptures, but also a vast knowledge of the Church Fathers. At one point, Luther reminded Dr. Eck that the Church Fathers did not believe in the primacy of the papacy, but actually taught that the Bishop of Rome was *primus inter pares* or first among equals because of his position in the great city of Rome, and nothing more. When Eck asserted that Jesus said he would build the Church upon Peter and claimed the Pope was the true successor to Peter, Luther responded by quoting the Church Fathers such as Saints Augustine and Ambrose, and their interpretation was

that the Church was found on the article of Peter's faith primarily. Eventually, Dr. Eck's pride wounded him and he realized that he was not fairing as well as he had expected against Luther, primarily because of his lack of knowledge of the Scriptures, and his misinterpretation of the Church Fathers. Rather than deciding to continue a respectable debate and lose courageously, Dr. Eck sought to have Luther admit he was essentially teaching what Jan Huss had taught before him and had died for as a heretic. Luther responded by admitting that the Bohemian Hussites were unfortunately schismatic, but that he could not disagree with what they had taught concerning the supremacy and primacy of the Scriptures over the papacy. Luther said: "Among the articles of faith held by John Huss and the Bohemians, there are some that are most Christian. This is a positive certainty. Here, for instance, is one: 'That there is but one universal Church'; and here is another: 'It is not necessary for salvation to believe the Roman Church superior to all others.' It is of little consequence to me whether these things were said by Wycliffe or by Huss....they are truth." Luther had implicitly lined himself up with those men the Roman Catholic Church had pronounced and condemned as heretics; Luther was honest, and Dr. Eck succeeded in getting this confession that he wanted so desperately to hopefully throw the focus away from the actual doctrinal matter. When Luther said this, the already nervous and anxious Duke George cried out: "He is carried away by rage" speaking of Dr. Luther. This confession of Luther was extremely important to the aftermath of this debate. The debate continued as Eck and Luther debated the doctrines of Purgatory, Indulgences, Repentance, Absolution of the Priest, and Satisfaction made for sin. The debate was over after twenty days and later Luther thought the disputation

had been a waste of twenty days. Privately, Dr. Eck confessed his defeat at certain points but publicly with head cocked and shoulders back, he vaunted the victory. Eck was supposed victorious by those who respected his academic credentials and great learning but he had not understood the real theological points that had been debated between he and Luther.

The Leipzig Disputation was extremely influential in several ways, causing some men who had been present to experience saving grace through Luther's teaching and influence, helping Luther to better understand and clarify his own doctrinal positions and argumentations against Rome, and pointing out the real issue or "material cause" of the Reformation which was the doctrine of Scripture alone as the sole and infallible authority for faith and life. Poliander who was Dr. Eck's secretary at the debate and who recorded the entire debate for posterity was won to the Reformation teaching of Luther and became a great preacher of the gospel in his home of Leipzig in 1522. Many students at the debate who had been regenerated through Luther's teaching of the gospel followed him back to Wittenberg and the school swarmed with new people hungry for Reformation theology. Another person who was won to the Reformation through the debate was Gaspard Cruciger, who became Luther's friend and eventually his assistant in the translation of the German bible. After the Leipzig Disputation, because Luther had greater clarity as to the unbelief in Rome and the problem he was facing, he had a holy indignation against the papacy now; "The pope is certainly the devil" Luther said. Dr. Eck who was feeling defeated and wounded after the debate sought to silence Luther and

the Reformation once and for all; Luther would pay for agreeing with the Hussites, who were sworn enemies of Roman Catholicism. Luther was not moved, and did not retreat, but actually advanced in writing one of his most biblically influential and profoundly personal *Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians*, teaching the doctrines of scripture alone and justification by faith alone. Luther would later say about Paul's Epistle to the Galatians: "This Epistle is my epistle; I am wedded to it." Through Dr. Eck's influence with powerful Rome, Luther was now proclaimed as an arch-heretic, and Eck sought to have Luther crushed once and for all.

The Papal Bull of 1520

The Emperor Maximilian was dead, and a new emperor was to be chosen by the Elector-princes of Germany to rule in his stead. Charles V was chosen and crowned emperor at Aix-la-Chapelle on October 22nd 1520. He was a highly intellectual man and began ruling the empire at a mere nineteen years of age. Dr. Luther immediately made an effort to humbly address the new emperor and wrote him a letter urging him to support and protect the gospel, but Charles did not reply to Luther's request. After Luther's Leipzig debate with the great Eck, the storms were gathering at Rome to take revenge upon Luther, and at this time there were various threats on the doctor's life. With Luther's friend faithfully by his side, Luther begins to formally articulate his denouncement of Rome realizing there was no hope for compromise. Because Luther's life was endangered by his stand for the gospel, God aided Luther in causing the hearts of some princes and many German knights to offer their powerful protection. Although

Luther's life was in danger, Luther was confident in God's word and wrote: "By the Word the earth has been subdued; by the word the Church has been saved; and by the Word also it shall be reestablished." Luther was encouraged and his faith was built up by his many friends and supporters who aided him in his struggle against the papacy. During this year, Luther would write what he later considered his "best book". Luther had preached a series of sermons on good works in the Christian life, and this was published and was dedicated to Duke John who was Elector-prince Frederick's brother. In this book Luther made known clearly the doctrine of justification by faith alone, and taught that we are not saved by any merits other than Christ's, but when a person is saved and justified before God because of Christ's merits, they will bear fruit in good works for God (cf. Eph. 2:10). Luther says in this book: "The first, the noblest, the sublimest of all works is faith in Jesus Christ."

Luther continued his prolific writing and publication with another book that aimed directly at undermining the false and unbiblical authority of the papacy. This book was entitled *To the German Nobility* (full title is *Appeal to his Imperial Majesty and to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation, on the Reformation of Christianity*). In the introduction, Luther wrote that "The time to be silent is past and the time to speak has come!" Luther believed this was the right time because in God's providence a new emperor had been crowned and raised up to rule and his hope and prayer was that the emperor would support the Reformation. In *An Appeal to the German Nobility* Luther argued to those powerful men of the German Empire that Rome had raised around herself

three walls that protected her from the Reformation; the papacy had claimed (1) That no earthly rulers had power over the papacy; (2) That the scriptures had no authority over the papacy; and (3) That councils had no authority over the papacy. In these three “walls” or declarations, Rome kept herself protected from change such as Reformation. In his address to the nobility, Luther articulated an Augustinian view of the city of man and the city of God, and how they must be kept distinct in contradistinction to Rome who mixed the Church and the State together in the papacy. Luther powerfully argued in this book appealing to the German pride against the tyranny and rule of the papacy as a foreign and oppressive rule that should not have authority over the German Empire. Luther quotes Jesus Christ before Pilate when he said my kingdom is not of this world, and he said that the pope yet thinks his kingdom *is* of this world, and therefore he must not be part of the same dominion and kingdom as Jesus Christ! Luther listed the sinful excesses and abuses of the pope particularly, and those that were threatening the morality of the Church generally, and argued biblically that ordained men ought to have wives (1 Tim. 3:2) and because Rome had forbidden the marriage of ordained clergy they have caused great and heinous sins that have tarnished the Church’s example before the world. Luther urged the nobility to seek to abolish all feast and celebration days except the Lord’s Day, encouraged them that heretics should be convinced by Scripture and not by fire, and that the pope should denounce his office and power. Dr. Luther’s bold book circulated rapidly and had a mixed reception; some of his friends even trembled with fear that it was too severe. The book *An Appeal to the German Nobility* was published on June 26th, 1520 and immediately became a bestseller. When the book reached Rome, Dr.

Eck who was still jealously furious over his defeat at Leipsig, sought to inspire the papacy to awake from their sinful slumbers and retaliate immediately against Luther; he believed that now was the time for Luther to die. Luther wrote: “Eck is stirring up the bottomless pit against me.” Cardinal Cajetan who Dr. Luther had opposed and defeated biblically in debate at Augsburg joined Eck in seeking immediate response and retaliation from Rome. On June 15th in response to the urgings of these two men, Pope Leo issued a papal bull condemning Luther and publicly denying against Luther’s teachings that sin remained in a child after baptism, that burning heretics is not the will of God, and that penance did not bring new life. The bull gave Luther sixty days to recant, and he was ordered to burn his writings, cease preaching, teaching and writing. Despite Leo’s bull, Luther continued to faithfully preach the Word of God (2 Tim. 4:1 ff), and desired prayerfully that God would provide more gospel preachers so that the Reformation would spread and continue regardless if he lived or not.

After the papal bull was issued by Leo X, Luther wrote another influential and courageous book entitled *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, and it was published on October 6th, 1520. In this book, Luther called the papacy the “Kingdom of Babylon” and he wrote against the Roman Catholic doctrines of sacraments, monastic vows, and many other ecclesiastical errors of the day. Luther reduced the sacraments from seven to three: baptism, penance and the Lord’s Supper. After the publication of *Babylonian Captivity* there was to be no reconciliation with Rome, and Luther continued his denouncing of papal power by writing a letter to Leo X. In this letter, Dr. Luther

affirmed his prayerful support for Leo, and honestly acknowledged his writings against papal doctrines, and said boldly that he would not repent for this because he sincerely believed he was upholding the Word of Truth. Luther said directly in the letter to Leo that he understood that he had attacked the papacy of Rome and that he would continue to oppose her abuses and unbiblical doctrines. Luther closes the letter with assurance, telling the pope that God would soon consume the papal court. In the letter, Luther requested that Leo would silence the enemies of the Church such as Miltitz, Eck and Cajetan because he would not retract his doctrines unless convinced by Holy Scripture. It should be stated that in the letter, as direct as Luther was, he still respected the papal chair or office; he greatly disrespected the deplorable state of the papacy, and had hopes that Leo would acknowledge these errors. Attached to this letter that Luther wrote to Leo was a small book entitled *On Christian Liberty* that Luther had written and dedicated to Leo X. Luther began this book by writing: “The Christian is free and master in all things. The Christian is in bondage and a servant in all and to all. He is free and a master by faith; he is a servant and slave by love.”

Pope Leo X responded by threatening Luther with excommunication. His Bull threatening Luther reached Germany through Dr. Eck proudly delivering it himself, but Eck found that he was in great danger because of Luther’s supporters there. The question and concern of the Elector-princes in Germany was whether Charles the new emperor would unify in power and alliance with Leo and officially declare an imperial edict over Luther’s life. When Luther read the bull he said that Christ is condemned in it, and he

hoped that Charles would stand and protect the gospel. On November 4th 1520, Luther wrote a tract *Against the Bull of the Anti-Christ*, and claimed in the tract that the pope was ignorant of Scriptures, was out of line doctrinally with the Apostle's Creed and he was worse than a Turk and infidel – he was the very Anti-Christ of Scripture! Luther's bold allegations caused him to trust to a greater degree in God's protection and help. The bull however was doing damage to Luther's work of Reformation. Some of his books were placed under seal at bookseller's shops, some were burned, and after Charles read the bull he claimed that he would be a supporter of the "old religion" rather than Luther. Luther wisely appealed to a General Council of the Church in order to undermine the authority of the Papacy. He addressed this appeal to the Emperor, German Elector-princes, and the nobility, and he formally divorced himself from the Roman Catholic Church by burning the papal bull publicly on December 10th. The burning of the bull was a declaration of war upon the papacy; Luther said the pope had three crowns: 1) A crown against God (as the Anti-Christ); 2) A crown against the emperor (because his power is greater than the emperor); and 3) a crown against society (because he undermined the family by condemning marriage). Luther said that poor peasants and simple children now understand Jesus Christ better than the pope, the bishops, and the doctors, and he clearly made known what he implied at Leipzig that when the papacy condemned John Huss, the pope condemned the gospel. At the same time Luther was appealing to the emperor and German princes and nobility, Alexander the papal nuncio or ambassador of Pope Leo sought to attain Emperor Charles' help in obtaining Luther, and an Imperial Edict is pronounced over Dr. Luther. Satisfied with obtaining this Imperial Edict,

Aleander then unwisely insisted upon Elector-prince Frederick to submit to it and give Luther over to Rome. Frederick was indignant at Aleander's boldness and lack of humility and he felt his rule undermined by an alliance of the emperor with the pope. Frederick realized Luther had been wronged and condemned without a hearing; Luther had not been refuted. Frederick sought counsel with Erasmus concerning what he believed he must do in protecting Luther and providing Luther a safe-conduct if he were to be summoned to appear before the emperor's court. Frederick decided to make sure that Luther was kept safe and that the gospel would continue to be made known. At this time, Luther and Melanchthon had 400-600 disciples in Wittenberg! Churches were overcrowded because people wanted to hear the truth of the gospel. No matter how powerful the emperor or the pope was, the Word of God was much more powerful and Luther continued to stand firm on the Word of God by his grace.

The Diet of Worms -1521

The first assembly in Emperor Charles V's reign was convoked at Worms on January 6th, 1521. A letter that was written from Rome at this time reveals the importance of this council or diet because it was to be decided whether the papacy or Luther would prevail. The letter stated that if their demands concerning Luther were not met that they intended to depose the emperor, absolve the people from their obedience to him, elect another emperor in his place that would suit Roman purposes, stir up civil war in Germany, and summon to the Roman alliance Kings of France, England, and other nations. These threats were consistent with the papacy's actions before in history. Rome no longer

threatened excommunication, but now officially issued a Bull of Excommunication against Luther, and Charles V was indifferent to religious issues, but did not want to politically break his alliance with the pope against the German powers. Emperor Charles was tempted by Pope Leo to make the bull an imperial edict, but he was concerned about the reaction of the German Elector-princes. At the beginning of this diet and before the august assembly Aleander the papal nuncio gives a speech encouraging them to uphold the honor and power of the papacy against Luther. Aleander used imagery of Luther at the stake and claimed that Luther had not merely attacked the pope, but also the very Church of Christ, and said that Luther was stubbornly unteachable. While some of the princes wanted to hand Luther over to Rome, some like Duke George of Saxony, although he didn't necessarily support Luther, he nevertheless did agree that the Roman Catholic Church needed much reforming, and that if he handed Luther over to the papacy, the reform would be stalled and then forgotten. Overall, the German princes appealed to Charles V for a general reformation of the Church. Charles V who was politically caught between Germany and Rome decided that it was imperative that Luther be summoned to appear before the Diet of Worms on March 6, 1521. Electors of Saxony, Duke George, and Philip, Landgrave of Hesse ensured that Luther would have a journey of safe-conduct to the council. Dr. Luther at thirty-eight years of age was summoned to appear before the most powerful men of his time in order to defend his doctrinal positions. At Wittenberg, Luther told all that he did not intend to retract anything he had written or said, and he put things in order by having his theological classes at the university taught by Bugenhagen in his absence who would continue to be

the pastor-preacher of Wittenberg for another thirty-six years. Luther's dear friend Melancthon wanted to join him on his journey, but both of them thought it best for him to stay in Wittenberg out of harm's way. On April 2nd, Luther bade farewell to his friends and home, not knowing if he would return alive. Luther told his friends to continue to labor in his stead to make the gospel known regardless of what happened to him.

Luther arrived at Worms on April 16th and found that 2000 people were thronged around his horse and cart - more people greeted Luther than Emperor Charles! On Wednesday, April 17th at 4 P.M. Luther was called to appear before the court for the first time. Dr. Luther was so extremely popular that soldiers had to make a way through the crowds from his hotel room to the assembly; all of the people wanted just a glimpse at this courageous man. When Luther arrived at the convocation, the assembly was made up of Emperor Charles V, Archduke Ferdinand, 6 Elector-princes of the Holy Roman Empire, 24 dukes, 8 margraves, 30 archbishops, bishops, and abbots, 7 ambassadors from France and England, deputies of 10 cities, princes, counts, barons, and papal nuncios - a total of 204 of the most important and powerful men in the world. Luther was asked two questions before the emperor's throne and by the emperor: 1) Do you acknowledge these books to have been written by you (about 20 volumes were on the table)? 2) Are you prepared to retract these books? Luther answers the first question in the affirmative and asks for reasonable time to answer the second question; the emperor grants him another day. That evening Luther prayed desperately for God's grace and strength to stand in his convictions. He prayed: "This is your work, O God...the cause is yours...stand at my

side for the sake of Christ...” Luther’s prayers to God bring him peace before the Father (Phil. 4:7) and Luther vows to God that he will remain faithful to God’s Word. When Luther entered the august assembly the next day he was described as “calm, free, and confident” which was an answer to his prayers. He was asked by the emperor again if he would defend his writings or retract them. Luther replied in a submissive and humble manner that he would defend them. Luther quoted John 18:23 where Christ stood before his accusers and said to them: If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil,” because Luther wanted Rome to prove him wrong from the Scriptures. He was asked again: “Will you, or will you not, recant?” by Emperor Charles. Luther replied without hesitation: “I cannot submit my faith either to the pope or to the councils, because it is clear as the day that they have frequently erred and contradicted each other. Unless therefore I am convinced by the testimony of Scripture, or by the clearest reasoning, - unless I am persuaded by means of the passages I have quoted, - and unless they thus render my conscience bound by the Word of God, I cannot and I will not retract, for it is unsafe for a Christian to speak against his conscience...Here I stand, I can do no other; may God help me. Amen!” The assembly was thunderstruck with his humility, yet eloquent boldness before God and man, and many admired Luther’s reasoning powers, humility and firmness. Frederick gained respect for Luther and was now determined to protect him more fully in the future at the same time that Charles formally condemned Luther for being unwilling to recant, and placed him under an imperial edict. Through Frederick’s influence and the other Elector-princes, Luther was to obtain safe-conduct and return to Wittenberg. It is probably that Charles spared Luther from Roman vengeance in order

that he might keep the pope in check in his power. Charles allowed Luther to depart under safe-conduct as long as he does not teach and preach on his way back to Wittenberg. Luther gratefully wrote to Emperor Charles to explain that he is his servant but when eternal matters are at stake, he must give them priority, and obey God rather than man. In the meantime, Charles signed the edict of the Pope against Luther that would go into effect after his safe-conduct had expired. After the expiration of his safe-conduct, Luther was not to be harbored, protected, but was to be seized and placed in custody; to disobey the edict read was to be under the ban of the empire. As Luther returned safely to Wittenberg, on the outskirts of the Thuringian Forest he was abducted by five horsemen who are masked and armed. The men seized Luther and placed a military cloak over him and set him on the lead horse. Many of his friends and supporters thought Luther had fallen into the hands of his enemies. Martin Luther was placed safely in the Castle Wartburg near the black forests that cover the mountains of Thuringia. During his time there, Luther wore a knight's uniform and sword and was kept imprisoned for safety. Luther's hair and beard grew long to disguise and he was give the alter ego "Knight George". As Luther was finally safe at the castle, the Reformation continued to grow and expand not merely in Germany, but also among the Swiss.

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