

Martin Luther

The Former Monk Whom God Used to Give Life and Power to the Protestant Faith

On the following day, he gave his answer in a memorable speech which ended with the following words: "Well then, if your Imperial Majesty and your graces require a plain answer, I will give you one of that kind without horns and teeth. It is this. Unless I am convinced by the testimony of The Scriptures or by clear reason (for I do not trust either in the pope or in councils alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. May God help me. Amen."

Upon hearing these words, Eck asked Luther if he meant that the general councils of the Roman Catholic Church had erred. Luther replied that he could prove where they had erred in many places. To this, the Emperor made a sign to end the matter, and Luther said: "Here I stand, I can do no other. God help me. Amen!"

Following his utterance of these words, a decree was fraudulently obtained placing Luther under the ban of the Empire. This made him an outcast in most of Europe. His old friend, Frederick (Elector of Saxony) protected him by getting him out of Worms and hiding him away in Wartburg Castle (above Eisenach). Luther made great use of this time of seclusion by translating the New Testament into German. His Bible was proclaimed to be "Luther's greatest gift to the German people".

In 1525, Luther married Katharina von Bora, a former nun who forsook the cloister for the new evangelical faith. He also continued to help consolidate the various reformed groups that sprang up across Europe. In 1530, he was a prime influence in drawing up the Augsburg Confession – a high point in the progress of the German Reformation.

Luther died at Eisleben, 18th February 1546, leaving his wife and four children. When dying, two friends asked him if he would die in Christ and the doctrine that he had preached. In a joyful, audible voice, he said: "yes". He then began to repeat the words of Jesus – "Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit" – and died peacefully.

Favourable appraisals of the life and work of Martin Luther have been given by many eminent scholars down through the centuries. Goethe, Germany's greatest writer, said: "(Through the life and ministry of Martin Luther) we have been freed from the shackles of spiritual bondage, and are enabled to return to the source, and grasp Christianity in its purity."

Have you, like Martin Luther, 'grasped Christianity in its purity'? If not, then we have good news for you. You can 'grasp Christianity in its purity' today by being saved.

You need to know this.....God is holy, but we're not. If that is all there was to it, He could solve it all very easily indeed and just send us all to Hell. Fortunately for us however, God is loving as well as holy. He loves us despite the fact that we are sinners. He wants us to go to Heaven, therefore He sent Jesus to take our sins away. Do you want this? It can be yours if you want it. How do you receive it? You must be saved. How do you get saved? You receive the Lord Jesus Christ as your personal, one and only Saviour - placing all of your trust in Him (and Him alone) for entry into Heaven. **For more information about how to make sure that you are going to Heaven - please visit www.Go2Heaven.cc**

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On a sultry day in July during the year 1505, a lonely traveller was trudging along a road on the outskirts of Stotterheim. He was a young man, short but sturdy, and wore the dress of a university student – his name was Martin Luther. The sky became overcast. Suddenly there was a shower, then a crashing storm. A bolt of lightning lit up the night and Luther fell to the ground. Terrified, he cried out, "St. Anne help me! I will become a monk!"

In a very definite sense therefore, it can be said that the Reformation began with 'an act of God'. Reflecting upon this, Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones (former Royal Surgeon and pastor of Westminster Chapel) remarked that – "the Reformation began with a lightning bolt". Historians present this event as a vitally important landmark in the life of Martin Luther, a man who - by his courage, learning and single-eyed devotion to Holy Scripture - withstood the might of the papacy in his quest for truth.

A quick and receptive student, he seemed bent on following other pursuits of a more lucrative nature. Furthermore, his father had hoped to see him become a successful lawyer, thus contributing to the upkeep of the family. However, this 'lightning bolt' experience marked a turning point in his life - he therefore became a monk of the Augustinian Order – one of the strictest and most exacting orders in the RC church. To this new calling, he devoted all of his effort and service, soon making his mark as a scholar and lecturer.

Just five years after that, this young, dynamic monk had another experience that would prove to be pivotal in church history. It occurred during his first trip to Rome. A dispute had arisen in the Augustinian Order calling for settlement by the pope and, in tribute to Luther's standing within his monastery, he was chosen as one of two brothers who would be sent to Rome in order to represent his chapter at Erfurt. In addition, he was also a lecturer at the nearby university. He was naturally thrilled at the prospect of visiting Rome and seeing everything regarding the RC church that could be viewed in that great city. What he saw shocked him, particularly the decadent lives of the priests, the carelessness of those administering the sacraments, and the total absence of any religious sense among the clergy or laity.

Like others before him, Luther climbed the 'Holy Stairs' on his hands and knees, repeating a prayer for each one and kissing each step for good measure in the hope of delivering a soul from purgatory. After doing so, Luther exclaimed: "Who knows whether it is so?"

This was the doubt that would inevitably lead to a mighty clash with the Vatican over: [1] the sufficiency and efficacy of the Scriptures; [2] the place of Scripture as the supreme rule of life and faith; and [3] the right of each individual to follow the dictates of their own conscience. It

was this turn of mind that led one solitary monk on a journey that would see him "shake the world" and establish a watershed in the quest for individual freedom.

It is almost certain that the great doubts in Luther's mind as he surveyed the stairs was prompted by the text, "The just shall live by faith". He later recalled that it was while in Rome that these words came to him and, upon returning to Germany and his study of the Bible, the evangelical meaning of these words came rushing into his mind. Luther had gone to Rome as a devout, medieval, Roman Catholic pilgrim - but returned as a firm, convinced Protestant.

Martin Luther was born in Eisleben, Saxony, 10th November 1483, into a humble (but religious) family. His father was a miner, a man of vigour and self-reliance which enabled him to win something more than average success. Luther's mother had a marked influence upon his life. With her large family, she faced the world with a simple faith, cheerfulness and optimistic outlook that her son found to be of invaluable aid in future days during "the dark hours of my soul". His parents believed in giving their children the best possible education - and to do this, they made great personal sacrifices. After attending school in Mansfeld, Magdeburg and Eisenach, Luther entered the University of Erfurt in 1501 and was known to be an earnest, music-loving and fun-loving student. He studied law for four years when, after his escape from death by lightning, he entered the Augustinian monastery.

His first years of monastic life were spent in fierce mental struggle. He had found a whole Bible and read it diligently, but it did not initially bring him peace. A feeling of his own sinfulness, and that of the entire human race, was burnt into him as he studied dogma and Scripture. He tried to remove this sense of his own sinfulness by living a very religious life, loaded with the severest discipline that he could imagine. In addition, he continually invented new forms of penance. However, despite all of this religious activity and supposed 'good works', he was never able to banish his sense of sin and unworthiness before God.

Nonetheless, he still continued to make considerable progress in his career as a monk within the Church of Rome. He became famous as a lecturer and, in 1509, his Biblical Studies lectures became something of a power within the university. His classroom was thronged, his fellow professors were students and his preaching attracted great crowds. Despite it all however, he was still unsaved - his sins were still were not washed away.

Luther Nails His Theses to the Church Door: 1517 is believed by many to be 'The Year of the Reformation'. Pope Leo X sent agents throughout Germany selling indulgences. He chose Tetzel, a Dominican monk, to work in Saxony. Luther knew that God's forgiveness could not be purchased with money and therefore denounced Tetzel from his pulpit in Wittenberg. He urged princes to refuse the pardon-seller a passage through their lands. When Tetzel got near Wittenberg, Luther wrote out 95 theses denouncing indulgences and (on the 31st October) nailed them to the door of the Castle church. As a result, 31st October became known as 'Reformation Day'. It is sad to note that, right across our western Protestant democracies, the 31st October is frequently used to celebrate Halloween, Satan's mythical birthday, rather than 'Reformation Day'.

Within a short period of time, all Germany was ablaze, Luther's public life had begun and the Reformation was on its way.

There were many other reasons which drove Luther to think as he did. For instance, he rejected the pope's claim to absolute authority. He also became alarmed at a number of other corrupt practices that had gradually crept into the church in addition to indulgences. For example, Luther rejected – as foreign to true Christianity – holy water, the worship of Mary, the veneration of saints, penance, purgatory, and salvation by works. Time and time again, the pope tried to get him back into line with the Roman Catholic Church, but the monk's conscience forbade him to accept anything that was contrary to the Scriptures and the teachings of Christ therein.

The Power of Luther's Pen: Luther continued preaching, lecturing and writing at Wittenberg with great success. Some of his finest work belongs to this period. His "Address to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation" created much excitement all over Europe - proclaiming as it did that secular power (not just spiritual power) is of God and has rule over everyone without exception (popes, bishops, monks, nuns and the RC Church included).

The most important work that he produced during this period of time was entitled "The Babylonian Captivity of the Church of God" - in which he boldly attacked the principles of the papacy. Luther contended that the church had been taken into bondage by the papacy in the same way that the Jews had been taken into bondage in Babylon. In the same way that the Jews needed to be freed from 'physical bondage' (i.e. literal Babylon) - so too, the church needed to be freed from 'spiritual bondage' (i.e. the spiritual Babylon of Roman Catholicism).

The result of Luther's bold stand against the errors of Romanism led to the pope issuing a Bull condemning him. On the memorable night of 10th December 1520, Luther responded in Wittenberg by leading a procession of students and university professors to a bonfire where they burned the Papal Bull. A copy of canon law was also flung into the flames, signifying that henceforth Germany would be ruled by the law of the land, and not the law of the pope.

Rome, having shot its bolt, determined to crush Luther via civil power. In consequence, the pope issued another Bull of Excommunication and interdict upon any place where Luther or his followers might reside (calling upon the help of secular authorities - which the new Emperor was only too happy to provide). The Emperor however, found it prudent not to condemn Luther unheard (as the papal nuncio had demanded), and therefore summoned him to appear before the diet at Worms in January 1521. Luther went to Worms, believing that he was going to his death. However, his journey there was more of a triumphal tour - crowds flocked to cheer him on his way as he passed through different villages, towns and cities.

On 15th April 1521, following his triumphal journey, Martin Luther appeared before the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V, the great Imperial Council and John Eck (the eminent Roman Catholic apologist and Orator of the Emperor).

His books were piled on the table and he was asked if he would retract what was written in them. Luther replied that, as the matter written concerned the highest of all subjects (namely the Word of God), he asked for time to consider before answering. He did this solely in order to convince his friends, as well as his foes, that he was not acting hastily at so decisive a moment. As for what answer he would give, Luther had already resolved what his course would be.