



Session 2: Martin Luther (1483-1546)

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written: ‘But the righteous man shall live by faith’.”
ROMANS 1:16-17

A. Luther’s Life

- Biographical Info – b. 1483 – Father wanted him to become a lawyer – in 1505 he was nearly struck by lightning and prayed for St. Anne to save him and he promised to become a monk
- He took vows and entered the strictest order he could find - Von Staupitz, was his confessor – he would confess for up to 6 hours at a time – Staupitz told him not to bring his “peccadilloes” but instead told him if he was going to sin to “sin boldly” – Luther feared the judgment and wrath of God
- (1509) Became U. of Wittenburg Prof & Bible teacher, began teaching Psalms, Galatians & Romans
- (1510) He went on a pilgrimage to Rome and became disillusioned with the immorality and frivolity of the Roman clergy
- (1515) Rom. 1:16-17 – he understood the doctrine of Justification by Faith – that the Grace of God to the sinner makes him righteous – he understood the righteousness of God as satisfied in Christ – Luther’s spiritual “lightning strike” – experiences spiritual rebirth – recovered Augustinian view of Salvation (Gonzales, p. 19-20)
- (October 31, 1517) 95 Theses – wrote against Tetzel and the sale of indulgences – did not intend to start a revolution but sought to reform the RCC from within at first.
- (1518) – Luther is summoned to Rome to recant but he is protected by Frederick the Wise and other German Nobles
- (1519) Debates with John Eck at Leipzig and he admitted to holding some of the views of John Huss, rejecting authority of the Pope to determine doctrine – Luther begins NT preaching series and heralds a new era of biblical preaching
- (1520) - Wrote three important works: *To the Christian Nobility*, *On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, and *The Freedom of a Christian*; burns papal bull and canon law
- (1521) Diet of Worms – He is ordered to recant and utters the now famous response – “Unless I am convinced by the Word of God and reason ... here I stand; I can do no other!” – he was willing to stand for the truth even at the cost of his own life – he was condemned by RCC but he is “kidnapped” into protective custody and held in the Wartburg Castle; Luther begins translation of the Bible into German (NT); Henry VIII speaks against Luther’s views of the sacraments and the King earns the Title “Defender of the Faith” from the Pope.
- (1524) – Peasant Wars break out in Germany, Luther first supports but later condemns them when excesses become apparent – Erasmus publishes his work “Freedom of the Will”
- (1525) - Luther m. Katherine VonBora (ex-nun); writes “Bondage of the Will” (vs. Erasmus).
- (1527) – Luther writes “A Mighty Fortress”
- (1529) – Marburg Colloquy – attempt to reach agreement on 15 major points of doctrine w/ Zwingli - unsuccessful
- (1530) - Augsburg Confession - Luther, as an outlaw cannot attend the Diet of Augsburg, an attempt to end religious division in the empire – he signs document; Phillip Melancthon presents a statement of Lutheran beliefs

- (1534) – Luther completes translation of the entire Bible into German.
- Luther's later years – his students wrote down many of his lectures which were later published as "Table Talks" – said the Lutheran Catechism was his most valuable work - he exhibited some anti-Semitism, became more irascible, his faults were more apparent – mantle of leadership of Lutheranism passed on to Bucer and Melancthon.
- (1546) – Luther dies, age 63.

B. Luther's Theology

- Doctrine of Justification by Faith alone - monergism, Pauline theology, vs. Pelagianism and Semi-Pelagianism of RCC - Attacked RCC view of Salvation by Works on biblical basis – recovered Augustine's view of soteriology
- Biblical View of Human Nature – depravity of man, the will is bound by sin until the grace of God sets it free – against Semi-Pelagianism of Erasmus' and Aquinas' view of the partial fallenness of the human heart and mind – held a generally pessimistic view of human freedom, progress and society
- Bible translation – because he held that the Bible is the ultimate authority for the church, not the Pope or any human council, he made this a top priority – any tradition is under Scripture
- Biblical preaching – vs. the Mass – RCC viewed the priest as an intermediary between the people and God – Luther stressed the priesthood of believers and that all could have direct access to God through the Word and prayer – God uses the means of preaching to save and edify, not the sacraments as Catholic tradition held – Christ's sacrifice was once for all, Mass repeated it daily
- Priesthood of believers – vs. clergy and monastics who were seen as uber Christians - hymns – Luther restored congregational singing to a place of prominence
- Lutheran Church – Infant baptism, Consubstantiation – still retained liturgy and clergy but they were modified from RCC model
- View of Church and State – considered them the "left and right hands of God" – state is to preserve order, punish evildoers and protect the churches to freely preach the gospel

C. Five Solas of the Reformation

1. Sola Scriptura 2. Sola Gratia 3. Sola Fide 4. Sola Christus 5. Soli Deo Gloria

- D. "3 Marks" of the True Church - Luther Held to only two of the original seven RCC sacraments as "ordinances": Baptism and the Lord's Table. In these, however, he modified the RCC position and held that they were not works by which we earn salvation. To these 2 he added biblical preaching to comprise the 3 Marks of the believing church

Conclusions:

Four major contributions of Luther, providentially used by God - w/o Luther we would all be RC today.

"Luther's greatest contribution to history...is religious. He took four basic Catholic concerns and offered invigorating new answers. To the question how is a person saved, Luther replied: not by works but by faith alone. To the question where does religious authority lie, he answered: not in the visible institution called the Roman church but in the Word of God found in the Bible. To the question – what is the church? – he responded: the whole community of Christian believers, since all are priests before God. And to the question – what is the essence of Christian living? – he replied: serving God in any useful calling, whether ordained or lay. To this day any classical description of Protestantism must echo these central truths."

Bruce Shelly, *Church History in Plain Language* p. 246

(This Week's Reading: Gonzales Ch. 1-4, 9, 19)