

“MARTIN LUTHER”

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith."

(Romans 1:16-17 NKJV)

Martin Luther was born in Eisleben, Saxony November 10, 1483. Soon afterward the family moved to Mansfeld where his father was one of the owners of a copper mine and of a copper refining plant. His father became a town councilor in 1492. Martin began school in a Latin school in Mansfeld in 1488. In 1497 he was sent to nearby Magdeburg to a school operated by Brethren of the Common Life, a lay monastic order which emphasized personal piety. In 1501 he matriculated at the University of Erfurt, one of the most distinguished universities in Germany. He received a baccalaureate degree in 1502. Three years later he received a masters degree.

Luther was now eligible to pursue graduate studies in law, medicine, or theology. Obeying the wishes of his father he began studies in law. Six weeks later he was caught in a violent thunderstorm. He cried out, "Help, Saint Anna! I will become a monk." Three days later he entered the monastery of the Order of the Hermits of St. Augustine in Erfurt. In May of 1507 he was ordained to the priesthood. He received a doctorate in 1512 and became the professor of Biblical studies at the University of Wittenberg. He published a number of theological papers including the "95 Theses." These eventually resulted in his excommunication from the Roman Catholic Church.

Luther was protected by powerful princes and by his popularity with the people. In June 1525 he married a former nun, Katherine of Bora. The couple had five children, Johannes, Magdalene, Martin, Paul, and Margarete. Magdalene died at age 13 in her father's arms.

1.) Martin Luther's personal spiritual pilgrimage

Even as Luther was beginning the study of law, he was drawn to philosophy and theology seeking to find assurances about life. For him reason could question men and institutions, but not God. He believed we can only learn about God through divine revelation. Scripture therefore became increasingly important to him.

Beginning in 1510 or earlier, Martin had a deep inner struggle over how a person could be forgiven and find salvation with God. He dedicated himself to fasting, long hours of prayer, pilgrimage, and frequent confession. He was in deep spiritual despair. He said, "I lost touch with Christ the Savior and Comforter, and made of Him the jailer and hangman of my soul." His Superior pointed Luther away from reflecting on his sins and toward the merits of Christ. True repentance did not come from self-inflicted penances but from a change of heart.

That change of heart came about while he was meditating on (Romans 1:17) For in it [the Gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith." (NKJV) Luther experienced a kind of conversion. He described it, "It was as if the very gates of heaven had opened before me.

The Church was teaching that salvation is brought about by God and man working together. Humans had to will to do good works and in that manner please God. Then God would work for them His promise of forgiving grace. Luther saw through Scripture that humans can contribute nothing to their salvation. Salvation is fully and completely the working of God's grace.

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9 NKJV)

2. Luther's teaching that sparked the Reformation-

Johann Tetzel, a Dominican friar, was sent to Germany to sell indulgences. The proceeds of these sales were being equally divided by Pope Leo X for rebuilding St. Peter's Basilica and Albrecht, Archbishop of Mainz to pay toward his heavy indebtedness. Tetzel preached "As soon as the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from Purgatory into heaven springs." An indulgence for the living was adequate penance for a sin they had committed. Luther attacked this sale of indulgences from many aspects. Much of the "95 Theses" concerns the sale of indulgences. He pointed out that there is no Scriptural basis for Purgatory. Thesis 86 is- "Why does the Pope, whose wealth today is greater than the wealth of the richest Crassus, build the basilica of St. Peter with the money of poor believers rather than with his own money?"

As the debate between the Church and Luther and his supporters gained in momentum, Luther proposed more radical differences.

Salvation and eternal life are not earned by good deeds but are received only as the free gift of God's grace through the believer's faith in Jesus Christ as redeemer from sin.

The authority and office of the Pope were defied by Luther's teaching that the Bible is the only source of what God has revealed concerning Himself and what He requires of man.

Luther opposed the Church's teaching that only priests can act as mediators between God and man. He taught that all baptized Christians belong to a holy priesthood.

At the Diet of Worms Luther's writings were spread out on a table. He was asked to examine them and then to say whether they were his writings and whether he would recant of them. He replied, "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” The Edict of Worms declared Luther an outlaw, banned his literature, and required his arrest to be punished as a notorious heretic. It was a crime for anyone to give him food or shelter. It permitted anyone to kill Luther and not be punished for it.

3. Luther’s Legacy

Prince Frederick III had Luther intercepted on his way home to Wittenberg. He was taken to Wartburg Castle in Eisenach where he lived in seclusion for almost a year. During that time, he translated the New Testament from Greek into German. This Bible unified the German language from a lot of local dialects into a common language.

In later years Luther wrote a Larger Catechism and a Shorter Catechism. He wrote Psalms and Hymns for singing by congregations.

He reformed the concept of Holy Communion from the sacrifice of the Mass to the idea that it was a gift from Christ to be received with thanksgiving by all believers. Some of his views on the Lord’s Supper caused a rift in the Reformation. Most of the Reformers, including Calvin, taught that believers received the bread and wine by faith as Christ’s body and blood. Luther insisted that when the believer received the bread it became Christ’s body and that the wine became the blood of Christ.

Luther helped to organize the various congregations into a unified denomination with regulations and leaders. He did not want this denomination to be called “Lutheran.” He suggested that it be called Christian or Evangelical. All over Europe the name Evangelical is still used. The term Lutheran was first used in the United States.