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Beginnings of the Reformation, Martin Luther



Church History - Steve Gregg

In this presentation, Steve Gregg discusses the beginnings of the Reformation and the influential figure of Martin Luther. Gregg describes the political and social climate of Europe during Luther's time, where feudal lords controlled the land and the papacy ruled over an illiterate continent. Luther's study of the Bible led him to challenge the Catholic Church's teachings on indulgences, which ultimately led to his excommunication. Despite this, Luther continued to teach and his influence remained strong, leading to changes in church practices and a rise in congregational singing.

Transcript

Tonight, we finally come to the beginning of the Reformation period. The, I don't know how many sessions we've had so far. I think we've had probably about 17, 18 sessions getting up to this point.

And while I believe that many of those sessions were about interesting periods of time, I don't suppose any are as interesting as those that lie ahead of us now to study. And I think, at least for those gathered here, the time of the Reformation and the sequel to the Reformation would be that to which we would mostly relate better than to the Church in the Dark Ages, or even to a certain extent to the Church in the second and third centuries. Of course, the Reformation was something that I believe God caused to happen, and something that could have happened earlier with other leaders other than Martin Luther had certain conditions been ripe for it.

There were certain things that existed in Luther's day that caused his Reformation to succeed, for those of others who had attempted similar things before had failed. John Hus, a hundred years earlier, had been burned at the stake for having ideas like Luther's ideas. Very much like Luther's, not entirely like Luther's, but very close.

People like Wycliffe and Tyndale and Peter Waldo, in earlier centuries, had had many of the same ideas that Luther later had, and many of them were branded as heretics. Some died and some did not at the hands of their persecutors, but they nonetheless did not succeed in bringing about a total renovation of the religious scene in Europe as Luther

did. And that is partly, we could attribute that just to the sovereignty of God.

In fact, we should. I believe that in the sovereignty of God, it happened when it did, but through the sovereignty of God, certain circumstances had come into being that allowed the Reformation to succeed as it did, whereas earlier attempts had failed. And there are four sets of considerations that I'd like to look at before we talk about Martin Luther himself.

These are different factors that existed in Europe in the late 15th and early 16th century, before Luther really emerged as a leader. They are political, intellectual, religious and socioeconomic factors that existed in Europe. First of all, the political situation was somewhat different.

From the time of Christ, and actually before the time of Christ, Europe was largely united into one empire under the Caesars. And then, of course, when Rome had fallen and the Roman emperor was no longer a powerful figure as he'd once been, and the capital was moved over to Constantinople in the east, the Roman bishop in Rome became the strongest personality there, and just through a matter of time, the pope in Rome became more powerful even than the emperors. But still, the European continent was still largely united.

There was always an eastern branch of the empire and of the church and a western branch, and these were not fully united, but they did not identify themselves as separate churches or separate empires until the papal schism that we studied a few weeks ago, where there actually was a break, two different people contending for the role of head of the church, one in the east and one in the west, and this, of course, caused the beginning, or maybe it wasn't the beginning, but it was one of the factors in a dissolution of the unitedness of the European empire. Now, there was still the Holy Roman Empire in the days of Luther. There was still an emperor, but he was not anything like the emperors had been, the emperors of Rome in the days of Paul and the time thereafter.

The emperor of the Holy Roman Empire was a German, and the Holy Roman Empire was largely a German entity, not a Roman entity. It was not holy, it was not Roman, and it really wasn't an empire either, but it was nonetheless called the Holy Roman Empire. But at this time, there was a growing nationalism as different states were forming, and what was happening was through the dark ages, feudalism had been a social situation that had prevailed, where feudal lords had controlled areas of property and serfs and peasants served them, but this system was kind of breaking down about this time, and different states were beginning to assert themselves.

France and England and Portugal and Spain, these were beginning to have nationalistic feelings. The people of these areas weren't feeling like part of one great European empire anymore. The French were starting to feel more self-consciously French, and the English more self-consciously like Englishmen, and beginning to take on national

identities and a sense of nationalism, where they were proud of their nationality.

And this, of course, led to disintegration of the political situation that had existed under the emperors and under the popes earlier. The Holy Roman Empire was not all-powerful. It was largely a German entity, but the Holy Roman Emperor did not have unity among all the German states.

There were several hundred German states. Each one had its own prince or duke or somebody who was ruling it, and some of them were pretty loyal, more or less loyal to the Holy Roman Emperor. Some were not so loyal.

And there was a situation that arose in 1526, which was actually after the Reformation, but it was coming along in that direction during the time of the Reformation, where France made an alliance with the Ottoman Empire, which was Turkish, Muslims, to sort of counterbalance the power of the Holy Roman Empire. See, the Holy Roman Emperor had a war with France and had overtaken them and had territory surrounding France, and in order to kind of counterbalance that political power, the French made an alliance with the Ottoman Turks, and therefore it threatened the Holy Roman Emperor, and he needed the loyalty of all his German states. And you know what actually happened was that some of the German dukes and princes were loyal to Luther when he came up.

They thought he had a better idea, and therefore, although the Holy Roman Emperor, whose name was Charles V, did not agree with Luther, and he was a loyal Catholic himself, he could not attack Luther. He couldn't hurt Luther because so many of the German princes sided with Luther and protected him. One of the most powerful of those was Frederick the Wise, as he came to be called, Frederick of Saxony, and Saxony was the region that had the city of Wittenberg in it, where Luther was a professor.

And Frederick of Saxony liked Luther and protected Luther, and this was something that John Huss didn't have going for him. John Huss and some of these guys who had come earlier did not have a local ruler on his side who could hold off the Emperor or the Pope from interfering. And so that political situation existed in the time around the coming of the Reformation, and the time that Luther started to rise to prominence.

There are also intellectual factors, because the Renaissance had come in the previous century, and with the Renaissance came a whole new mentality about scholarship. People became more literate, they wanted to read, they wanted to think, they wanted to philosophize. The arts and music and so forth flourished during these times, and education in general.

And so, whereas the Popes had largely ruled over an illiterate continent, people who could not question what the Popes said about the Bible, because no one else could read it. And by the way, even if they could read it, Bibles weren't available, because until about this time there were no printing presses, so Bibles were laboriously copied out by

hand. They could not be mass-produced, so people couldn't get one, and if they could get one, they couldn't read it.

But with the coming of the Renaissance, not only did literacy rise and education in general, but people began to sort of cherish a democratic, free-thinking kind of an attitude, so that the idea of just following along whatever the boss in Rome said, was more or less repugnant to the masses. They were more interested in owning their own ideas and thinking for themselves and reaching their own conclusions. Scholars wishing to study the classics in their original languages during the Renaissance had put new emphasis on the study of ancient Greek and of Hebrew, as well as Latin and other ancient languages.

But because the classics in the Western world are so dependent on the Bible, I mean, the biblical ideas and biblical analogies and allusions are shot through the literature of the Western world, study of the Bible was an important part of scholarship in general. And more people were studying the Bible in its original Hebrew and Greek now, just ordinary laymen in many cases, who were not clergymen. They didn't have positions in the church, so it was possible for people to begin to see where the church was bluffing or lying or concealing things.

There were many literary humanists who included a lot of biblical study in their academic pursuits. These men included people like Zwingli, whom we will not talk about much this week. He was a reformer in Switzerland, contemporary with Luther.

Calvin, likewise, was a Swiss reformer, though a generation later. Melancthon, who was Luther's replacement after Luther aged and died. The Lutheran movement in Germany was taken over by Philip Melancthon, who had been his helper and assistant in the Reformation.

And Erasmus, who was a Catholic, but very moderate toward the Reformation. Erasmus is the one who gave us what we call the Textus Receptus of the New Testament, the manuscripts that the King James Version were later translated from. These men were what you'd call literary humanists.

They read the classics, studied the classics, and among their studies was the study of the Bible in its original languages. Individualism was a concept that also emerged during the Renaissance. That paved the way for the acceptance of Luther's teaching on the priesthood of all believers and the right of every person to study and interpret scriptures for himself.

No one had that concept before this time. The idea that an ordinary person could read the Bible and come up with his own conclusions and understand it for himself, and that his understanding was as valid as anyone else's understanding might be, as long as he did his reading carefully. That idea had no place before the Renaissance.

But the whole idea of individualism was strong in Europe in those days. Also, of course, as I mentioned, the invention of the movable-type printing press and the establishment of universities throughout Europe also served to advance the cause of the Reformers, because Luther's views began to be taught in universities and discussed in the universities. And Luther had a tremendous advantage that Huss never had, or Wycliffe, because he could write pamphlets and books and disseminate them through all of Europe because there were printing presses in his day, which had not been before.

So these intellectual developments also helped contribute to the climate that allowed the Reformation to take place in Luther's time. There were also religious developments and factors that had not really existed before. The power of the papal church had been greatly weakened by the papal schism, and the church's Babylonian captivity, which we talked about in previous talks, the power of the pope was pretty much weakened by bad morals, disunity, and just general disrespect for the pope and for his organization among the people, because there was so much corruption in the papacy at that time, and the clergy were corrupt and decadent, so there's little respect for them among the common people.

There were calls for reform from within the Catholic Church even before Luther, of course. We've talked about some of those. One movement that arose in the time of Wycliffe and Huss was called the Brethren of the Common Life, or the Brothers of the Common Life.

This group flourished in Holland, Belgium, northern France, and northern Germany during the 14th and 15th centuries, which are, of course, the centuries just before Luther's time. And after that, too, though they continued in the parish churches, that is in the Roman Catholic churches, and they never really tried any reforms, they didn't challenge Catholic doctrine. The Brethren of the Common Life nonetheless held all things in common.

They met in houses rather than in monasteries, they worked for a living rather than begging like monks sometimes did, and they emphasized Bible reading, meditation, and prayer, and personal piety in religious education. They actually established a lot of schools in Europe, especially in the Netherlands and Germany, and among their students were such men as Nicholas of Cusa, who is a very well-known of the period, a devotional writer, Erasmus, who I mentioned earlier, Thomas Akimpas, who wrote *Of the Imitation of Christ*. He studied in one of the schools of the Brethren of the Common Life.

Also, Luther studied under them in his early years. So this was a religious force within Europe that was very powerful. It was these people, as I say, the Brethren of the Common Life, did not try to change the Roman Catholic Church in the sense of challenging its organization or its leadership or its authority.

They just emphasized Bible study and personal piety, and that, of course, would

eventually undermine, or at least by the contrast with the corruption of the clergy, it would make the institutional church not look too good and give people more of a hunger for something more real, which Luther introduced to them. There were also socioeconomic factors. I mentioned that feudalism was on the decline as the rise of towns and nation states took its place.

In the towns, there was a new middle class. Under feudalism, there were just the rich and the dirt poor. There were no middle class people.

But as people were no longer all serfs or lords, there were people who were starting businesses and providing service and so forth that allowed them to rise above the level of serfdom, but never into the realm of the super wealthy. But a larger and larger number of people began to fill this middle class position, and they got a little uppity. They began to see new opportunities for social mobility, upward mobility, that hadn't existed for over a thousand years in Europe.

The rising middle class felt themselves more equal to the older aristocracy and began to seek social recognition and political influence. Now, this is important because much of Luther's support came from the common people, and had the common people remained continually serfs with no political influence or authority, it was a movement that could have been more easily crushed. But because these people were not totally non-influential next to slaves, they were free people.

They were people with some substance. It was a movement that had more... It was beefier. It was harder to just write it off or just trample under these people who were seeking themselves more social recognition and political influence.

The peasants who still existed were very restless and they were seeking some way of escaping from the socioeconomic oppression they'd always experienced. This later caused a problem in Luther's ministry because there was what was called the Peasants' Revolt, a very controversial thing and a very tragic thing. The peasants of Germany got very uppity because they'd read a book that Luther had written called *The Freedom of a Christian Man*.

And he was talking about the liberty in Christ not to be under the law, but they applied it to social and political things and they began to revolt against authority and it got to be a real bloody thing. Eventually over 100,000 peasants were slain by the nobles who were trying to put down the revolt. And many of the people blamed the revolt on Luther, although Luther didn't approve of the revolt.

Initially, we'll say more about this later, he was sympathetic toward the complaints of the peasants, but he eventually took a stand against their revolt because it became violent and bloody. There was a new lust for money that caused people to resent the church's attempts to drain the funds from their regions. People who were already dirt poor, I

guess it didn't matter to them if the church took everything they had, they didn't have anything already.

But when people began to become upwardly mobile, economically and socially, they began to get more, you know, covetous of their money and want to hold on to it. I mean, I know this phenomenon in my own life and I think our own society has seen much of that. The more you have, it's not the more generous you are, the more you have, the more covetous and insecure about it you can become if you don't guard against that.

And so when the church wanted to get, you know, wanted to build a new cathedral or get money to support some, you know, some crusade or something, and they'd come in and they'd levy heavy burdens of finances on the people, this got to be more and more resented by people who were starting to want to hang on to their money and start to feel a little bit more free because they had a little more money. And so there was resentment growing about the church's almost confiscation or manipulation of the people to give money to its causes. So these are some of the factors that existed in Europe that all of them had something, some contribution that they made to making Luther's Reformation more successful than it might otherwise have been.

Now when we talk about the Reformation, there are many important people we need to talk about. Luther is the only one we're going to talk about today, simply because he's a very important one, he's the first one, and we will spend additional time in other sessions on other men, men like Zwingli and Calvin in Switzerland, people like the Anabaptists, they were another aspect of the Reformation, usually called the Radical Reformation. But we'll talk about those in due time.

Today I just want to talk about Luther. Luther obviously is the one after whom the Lutheran Church is named, and at one time after the Reformation all the churches in Europe were either Catholic or Lutheran. Today still in Germany Lutheranism and Catholicism exist, but the general feeling of the German people, unless it's changed in the last ten years since I've been there, is that any group, any religious group that isn't Lutheran or isn't Catholic is a cult.

It can be a Baptist, it can be a Baptist or Pentecostal or Assembly of God. There's a lot of Baptists and a lot of Pentecostals in Germany, but they're still considered cultic, because they're not part of the state churches. And so what Luther caused to rise remained, even to this day, a very potent political force and religious movement in Europe, especially in Germany where he lived.

He was born November 10, 1483. His father was a miner who didn't have very much money, but he saved up because he wanted his son to get a good education. His father actually wanted Luther to become a lawyer, and so his father saved up so that he could study law.

In his early life, though, he studied under the Brethren of the Common Life. That was a good godly group, although Luther himself was not a godly man at this point in his life. He was just a young man in a quasi-religious society.

And I'm not sure what it was that made him curious about the Brethren of the Common Life, but he did no doubt take some influence in his thinking from them. Though his father wanted him to study law, or I should say because his father wanted him to study law, he enrolled in the University of Erfurt in 1501, when he was obviously about 15, 14, 15 years old, and he took his bachelor's and his master's degrees there at that school, graduating as the second in a class of 17 with his master's degree. So he was a pretty smart guy.

Now, he changed his vocation from a study in law to holy orders because of an experience he had. He was walking through the woods during a stormy night, and a bolt of lightning struck very close to him, and it actually knocked him over on the ground, and it terrified him, because he nearly was killed. And the first words out of his mouth were, Saint Anne, save my life, and I'll become a monk.

Now, Saint Anne was the patron saint of miners, and his father was a miner, so he knew very little of real religion, so he just called out to probably the patron saint that his father prayed to, or whatever. I mean, everyone was Catholic, including Luther in those days. And so he made a vow that he would become a monk if he would not die in that storm, and he kept his vow.

His father was displeased, because his father had other plans for his career, but two weeks after this event, he actually enrolled or joined in the Augustinian monastery near the university where he had been attending in Erfurt, and he did this in 1505. The German Augustinians, which is one of the orders of monks, were a pretty spiritually good group, for the most part. I mean, as Catholic monks go, some are better than others.

The German Augustinians laid emphasis on preaching, and they did have among them some known men of great spiritual experience, one of whom was a mentor to Martin Luther, Johann von Staupitz. Johann von Staupitz was a very godly man, and sort of the leader of the, he's the vicar general of the order there in Erfurt, and he kind of took Luther under his wing and tried to sort of pastor Luther. Luther had some serious problems in his soul.

He was tormented by a very profound sense of guilt, which he could not shake. More than most, I would imagine almost anyone who gets saved and has a testimony would later say, well, I really, you know, I came to realize I was a guilty sinner, I needed Jesus. Well, Luther's sense of guilt was apparently much more tormenting with him for an extended period of time, years.

He just felt like he could not get rid of his guilt. He felt like he was a grievous sinner, and

as such, that he could never seem to quite get peace with God. And he devoted himself to the kinds of things monks did to find peace with God.

He devoted himself to intense study and vigils without sleep. He went on fasts, frequent fasts. He sometimes would fast for three days, sleeping in the winter without a blanket.

These sort of self-torture kinds of things that Catholic monks felt somehow commended them to God. But he found no peace with God. And Johann von Staupitz, his mentor there, the vicar general, finding Luther in great anguish over the state of his soul, advised him to read the Bible and to meditate on the love of God and the love of Christ.

And so Luther began to study the Bible very hard there in the monastery and to look for, you know, the love of God through it. He still did not find peace, but no doubt it helped a little bit. He decided to make a visit to Rome, which was, of course, the holy capital of the continent.

He thought maybe that would, maybe he'd have an encounter with God there that would give him peace in his soul. But when he got to Rome, he was greatly disappointed because he found there was tremendous corruption in the clergy and worldliness and just opulence and affluence. It just wasn't a spiritual experience at all for him.

He just came back to Germany greatly disillusioned and realizing that Rome didn't have the answers for him. That was in 1510 and 1511 he made that trip to Rome. Then in 1512, the next year, at the invitation of Johann von Staupitz, he became a lecturer in biblical theology at the University of Wittenberg.

And he held that post until he died. Even though he became a reformer, Rex communicated from the Catholic Church, he still was a lecturer on biblical theology at the university there in Wittenberg. Wittenberg was in Saxony, which was under the rule of Frederick the Wise.

And as I said earlier, Frederick favored Luther. And even though Luther became very controversial, Frederick agreed with him. And that is something that Luther really had going for him, that he was in a region where no one could really get him, even though the Pope wanted to kill him eventually, not right away.

So he began to lecture at the University of Wittenberg. From 1513 through 1516, he lectured on five books of the Bible, Romans, Hebrews, Galatians, Titus, and Psalms. Now all of those books, if you've mirrored those books, would be death to Roman Catholic theology.

Of the Old Testament, there's hardly a book more unlegalistic than Psalms. I mean, Psalms is about the most grace-filled Old Testament book you'll ever find, unless maybe it's in competition with Isaiah. But David, who wrote, of course, at least half of the Psalms, was way ahead of his time.

He had revelations about the grace of God. I mean, he'd say things like, you know, sacrifices and offerings you don't desire, the sacrifice that God wants is a broken and contrite spirit. Imagine a man realizing that in a day where the only religion he had where there's revelation from God was the law of Moses about offering sacrifices and all those details about sacrifices.

But the Psalms are just full of insight about new covenant kind of stuff. Very non-legalistic. And the other books that he's saying, Romans and Galatians and Titus, very, very much grace-oriented books.

The book of Hebrews also is really hard on Roman Catholic theology, although of course it is directed against Judaistic theology. Anyone who would be a Roman Catholic reading the book of Hebrews could hardly not apply the principles that were debunking the legalism of Judaism in Hebrews, who could fail to see how that would apply to the legalism of Roman Catholicism if they were in it. So, these four years Luther lectured on these five books, from 1513 to 1516.

One of those years, 1515, as Luther was reading in Romans, he came across Romans 117. And Romans 17 says, for in it, that is in the gospel, the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith, even as it is written, the just shall live by faith. Now that line, the just shall live by faith, which Paul of course quoted frequently enough and comes from the Old Testament originally, from the book of Haggai, that word, that phrase just burned into Luther's mind and he got a revelation from God, from that verse, that a person is justified by faith.

Now, if you've never been a Roman Catholic, you probably need to be reminded of this, everyone in Europe was Roman Catholic at this time. And Roman Catholicism basically presented the suggestion, it didn't really say it outright maybe in its official theology, but certainly the impression was given to everyone that you were saved by being a loyal member of the institutional church, by keeping the Pope happy with you and not getting excommunicated, by making sure you buy enough indulgences or earn enough indulgences to keep you out of hell, and do all the rituals of the Catholic Church and get life by taking the Mass and so forth, all these things. And Luther, who was a Catholic monk, read in the scriptures the just shall live by his faith and it just came to him that we're not justified or saved or made right with God by any of these religious things, but simply by our relationship to God by faith.

Now, I've always considered that a marvel that he would get that out of that, because that verse, although I certainly agree with the doctor, I believe in the doctor of justification by faith and I believe Paul is using that verse to make that point, I've always thought that Paul must have been getting a revelation to get that out of that verse. I mean, the words, the just shall live by faith, to my mind, I mean my unenlightened mind, would not necessarily tell me about the justification by faith. I would have thought living

by faith would have something to do not with how I'd be justified, but how I would live my life, you know.

And yet Paul does use it, he quotes out of Haggai chapter 2 and he quotes it to make the point of justification by faith. That's the revelation Luther got from it too. And you know, it's interesting, when you study the lives of men who had a great impact on the church, I almost said great men, but not all these men were that great, it's just that in the sovereignty and providence of God some of these men ended up making a big impact.

It's really interesting to see the thing that really turned them around. And when you read about a man like Wesley, Wesley was in the Anglican church from the day of his birth and a religious man. In college he started a club with his brother and with George Whitefield called the Holy Club, where they read Puritans like William Law and tried to live holy lives.

And then Wesley and his brother went to America from England as missionaries, the Indians, and all that, and yet they never knew God. They never knew God and it was at a much later time when Wesley had come under the influence of a movement called the Moravians, whom we'll have something to say in a later lecture, that sitting in a meeting, as I believe the guy, I think it was Romans again in his case, was being preached or read, that he said he felt himself strangely warmed and he had an experience of regeneration. And it's a funny thing how these men who are raised in a religious environment, they have their turning point at some point, sometimes through something that you would never have guessed.

You'd think that it was through studying in the Holy Club or on a missionary experience in America that the Wesleys would have met God, but instead it was some other time listening to Romans. The book of Romans has obviously had a tremendous impact on the Protestant Church and rightly so. Anyway, it was that verse in Romans 117 that caused the light to go on in Luther's head and he found great peace with God for the first time and felt that the burden was removed like that of Pilgrim in the Pilgrim's Progress, where the burden rolled off his back when he came to the cross.

That's the experience that Luther had with his encounter with that verse in 1515. He continued to lecture at the University of Wittenberg and as he did, he was also the chapel priest of the University Chapel, or the parish priest there in that town, I guess. And through his preaching and teaching, and he apparently was a very powerful teacher, he influenced a great deal of people, got a lot of favor, he got a lot of support in that town, and his teachings were discussed outside that town too, but he never really became a threat to the Roman Catholic Church, or at least they didn't take that much notice of him, until 1517, which is considered to be the birth of the Reformation, the year 1517.

The thing that really got this started, I'm sure Luther didn't foresee that it would have

the impact it did, but Germany was visited by a Dominican monk named John Tetzl, and he came to sell indulgences in Germany. Now, indulgences were what the Catholic Church would offer if people would do a big favor for the church or give money to the church for some holy project, that people would be absolved, or they'd be set free from any temporal penalties for their sins. The church taught in those days that there was a treasury of merit that the church had, and that was basically based on the idea that Jesus and Mary and the apostles had much more merit when they died than they needed to get themselves to heaven, and so there was a surplus of merit vested in Mary and the apostles and Jesus, and this was called the church's treasury of merit, and the pope could dispense merit from this treasury if somebody met certain conditions.

Now, he would sometimes dispense this merit to somebody who would fight in the Crusades, or he would do it if someone made a major contribution. Well, the church eventually began to modify this to the point where they could get, even after you've died, you could get out of purgatory if someone bought an indulgence for you, and this John Tetzl, by all accounts, was a tremendous salesman, and he came selling indulgences because the pope at that time was trying to build St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, an expensive project and they needed money, so he sent out Tetzl and others to various regions to sell indulgences to try to get enough money to finance that project. Well, Tetzl, as I say, was quite a salesman.

He made up these little jingles and these little mottos, sort of like advertisers do. He had one, translated from German, it would be something like this, no sooner does the coin, no sooner in the coffer does the coin ring than the soul from purgatory does spring. It's hard to make it rhyme in English because it rhymed in German, but the idea was that as soon as you throw your coin in the coffer that this man was carrying around to take back to Rome, somebody who you were buying an indulgence for, their soul would spring from purgatory that very moment.

And Luther was aghast at this. He'd already come to reject the idea of indulgences, but this man was selling them in his neighborhood and he was very upset about this. And that led to him nailing the 95 Theses to the door of the castle church in Wittenberg where he was a professor.

Now, nailing something to the church door might seem to be sort of like getting in someone's face, to ask them, go nail something on the door of your complaints to the church. But actually the church door was sort of a bulletin board. It was commonly used for this kind of thing.

Luther didn't invent this idea of nailing things to the church door. It was a place where public notices would be nailed up. It was also a place where challenges to debate would be nailed up.

And the 95 Theses, a thesis actually meant points for discussion or points for debate.

And he had written up 95 different challenges to the whole idea of selling indulgences. He didn't believe that the Pope had the power to absolve sins, for one thing, or to dispense merit to people from the church's treasury of merit.

And he put these up as points for debate. He actually did not see himself as rebelling against the Pope at this point. He believed that Tetzel was doing this without the Pope's knowledge.

He believed that Tetzel was misrepresenting the Catholic position on these things. And so he wanted to debate it. But Luther didn't see himself as starting the Reformation at this point.

He felt that the Pope would agree with him, and that all good Catholics would agree with him. It never occurred to him to stop being a Roman Catholic. So he put up these 95 Theses for debate, and his friends and his students copied them out and distributed them all over Europe, so that news of it got back to Rome and other places.

And so Rome sent a man out to debate him. The man was named John Eck. And Luther and he met at Leipzig in Germany to debate for 18 days over these issues in 1519.

It's a long debate. And during that debate, John Eck was clever enough to draw Luther out to comment on things that Luther had never said publicly before. That would get him in trouble.

Luther had largely been lecturing simply on justification by faith, and he had taught against indulgences and things like that. But some of the things that were distinctive about Luther's later theology, he had been formulating in his mind, but he'd never really stated them publicly. And John Eck persuaded Luther to admit that Luther thought that only the Scripture had authority in the believer's life, not the Church and that the Popes didn't have authority.

This is what John Hus had taught, and John Hus had been burned as a heretic. And actually, John Eck, during that debate, said to Luther, then, would you say that you have the same position on this point about the authority of Scripture that the heretic John Hus had had? And Luther said yes. And that's the first time Luther had ever really admitted that to himself, but he had the same position that the heretic, as they called him, John Hus had held.

And then John Eck said, then, are you saying that the Church was wrong to condemn John Hus? And Luther said yes, the Popes and the Councils were wrong to do that. And so then, of course, Eck said, then, you're saying that the Pope and the Councils can make errors. And Luther said yes.

Now, he'd never really enunciated those convictions before, but when pressed in debate, he did say them out loud. And he also made this statement. He said, a Council may

sometimes err.

Neither the Pope nor the Church can establish articles of faith. These must come from Scripture. Now, that doesn't sound very controversial to us, but that was an incredibly controversial thing to say when no one had said that who had not been burned at the stake previously.

And Luther, however, was more popular and in a more protected position than Hus and others had been. But the Pope, getting wind of this, got very angry at Luther in 1520, actually sent out a papal bull condemning Luther's teachings. And Luther, in that same year, 1520, wrote his book, *The Freedom of a Christian Man*, where he taught that good works don't make a man righteous, that you're not justified by works.

Though he did teach that a good man will do good works because he's a good man, but good works won't make him good before God. Well, the Pope had Luther's books burned, and the Pope issued a papal bull against Luther, condemning his doctrines and saying that all his books had to be burned and so forth. Well, the bull took, I think it was three months in getting to Luther.

It was spread all over Europe. And before Luther ever saw it, he'd heard what its contents were. So when it arrived, he held a big burning, a big bonfire there in Wittenberg.

And he burned the Pope's bull. And he also burned several other books that he objected to. And that caused a big scene, of course.

And so on January 3rd, 1521, Pope Leo X excommunicated Luther and kicked him out of the church. Now, ordinarily, that would be the end of a man's credibility in his career in Europe, especially in the academic world. But that didn't stop Luther.

He was excommunicated from the church, but he kept teaching religion. He kept teaching Bible at the University of Wittenberg. So the Pope had this problem on his hands of a guy who was still influencing the religious thought of the nation, though the man was officially not part of the Roman Catholic Church anymore.

He had been excommunicated. And the Pope actually issued a statement that said, Lord, I forget the exact words. Lord, arise to vindicate your cause, because a wild boar has gotten loose in your vineyard.

And meaning that Luther was a wild boar, and they're tearing up God's vineyard, the church. But Luther did tear it up pretty good, though excommunicated. The same year that Luther was excommunicated, the Emperor Charles V, that would be, of course, the Holy Roman Emperor, who was a Catholic, and whose duty it was to maintain orthodoxy within his realm in loyalty to the Pope, he summoned Luther to attend an Imperial Diet at Worms to give account of his writings.

This was usually called the Diet of Worms. Unfortunately, for English pronunciations, it's spelled like a diet of worms. And that obviously has a totally different meaning in our language.

But a Diet was an imperial council to examine Luther's teachings, and Worms was the city where it was held. And so Luther was called to come to the Diet of Worms to give account of his writings, and he was safely able to do that because he traveled under imperial safe conduct. He wouldn't have gone otherwise.

And so he could not be arrested. Of course, Hus had gone to Rome under an imperial safe conduct too, but had been burned. He had not been protected because the church had decided that a promise made to a heretic doesn't have to be kept.

But anyway, Luther had powerful friends in the region so that this protection promise had to be kept to him. And he went to this Diet. And there, they showed Luther a pile of his books, and they said, did you write these books? He said, yes, I wrote these books.

And they said, we have declared that these books are heretical. The Pope has declared these books are heretical. Are you willing to retract and renounce the things you've said in these books? And Luther said, well, give me a day to think about it.

So they gave him overnight to think about it, and he came back the next day, and they said, have you considered it? He said, I have. They said, are you ready to retract what you've said in these books? He said, and here's the quote, it's a very famous quote of Luther's. He says, my conscience is captive to the word of God.

I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither safe nor open to us. Here I stand. I can do no otherwise.

God help me. Amen. And so he became firm in his position.

He would not renounce his teachings. And actually, the Emperor Charles was not pleased by this. But Luther, as he was on his way home, was actually kidnapped by some of his friends who knew that his life was going to be in danger and that there would be assassins out from the Pope, out to kill Luther.

So Frederick the Wise had some of his soldiers kidnap Luther on his way home to Wittenberg and whisk him off to the castle at Wartburg, where Luther spent a full year, almost 11 months, in disguise as a nobleman, or as a knight. And there he was kept under a false identity, and during that 11 months he translated the Bible, the New Testament, into German. And the Germans still have the Luther Bible.

It's their older Bible, like we have the King James Version. There are more modern versions in German, but the old classical German Bible is the Luther translation. And his making of that translation and of course publishing it only served to spread his ideas

more once the people of Germany began to be able to read it in their own language.

After he'd spent about 11 months there at the castle at Wartburg, a year later, in 1522, he returned to Wittenberg, and he began putting into effect the reforms that became a model for much of Germany. That is, spiritual reforms. He began to do things differently in the church there.

Now he was a parish priest, he'd been excommunicated by the Pope, but he was recognized in his region as a religious teacher and leader. And so he reformed the churches in that area, and Frederick and other German princes favored him and sponsored his changes in the churches. One thing he changed, the Roman Catholic Church had the habit of, during the Mass, which is what we call communion, they would let the people only have the wafer.

They would not let the people have access to the cup. Under Roman Catholic practice, only the priest drinks from the cup. The people can have the Mass, the wafer, but they can't have the cup.

Well, Hus had objected to that. Hus had denounced the Pope for withholding the cup from the common people during communion, and Luther agreed with Hus on this, and so in Germany, in the churches that Luther influenced, the people got the cup and the wafer. Also, Luther did not believe priests had any power.

He believed in the priesthood of all believers, so the churches began to be led not by men who were priests, but just men who were ministers, pastors. Luther didn't believe in the office of the bishop, such as the Roman Catholic Church had evolved it. He said the church doesn't need, what do you call it, elitists or whatever.

He said the church needs pastors. Also, all the clergymen in the Roman Church were single. They had to be celibate.

Luther didn't agree with that, and Luther himself got married eventually to a former nun, but he encouraged pastors to get married so that the pastors, instead of being unique people set off into a celibate holy orders, they were ordinary family men in the same kind of family situations that their parish persons might be in. So Luther changed a lot of those kinds of things. He married a former nun named Catherine Fonbora in 1525, and in that same year, one of the more tragic things in Luther's career happened, and that was the peasant revolt.

I mentioned earlier that the peasants kind of misread Luther's book, *The Freedom of a Christian Man*, to think that this liberty in Christ meant that they should not accept any authority over them in the social institutions of government or other situations. And they had a revolt, and they rose up, and they demanded that the aristocracy and the nobles stop oppressing them. They were actually oppressed.

I'm not sure of all the ways that they were oppressed, but they listed, I think it was, if I'm not mistaken, 12 complaints they had about how they were treated by the nobility, and insisted that that not be done anymore. Luther initially approved of this. He was sympathetic.

He knew the peasants had a valid complaint. But the peasant revolt grew, and it became very violent. So the peasants were destroying property and killing people, and it got to be a bloody mess.

So Luther changed his support of the revolt to being antagonistic against it. He actually wrote a tract to the nobles of Germany telling them to stamp out the peasant revolt. He used some unfortunate language.

He said, cast them down and stab them and trample them. He was always a colorful guy. He used a lot of colorful language.

But he actually advocated violent treatment of stamping down the peasant revolt. Now, it wasn't so much that Luther was against the peasants, he was against the peasant revolt. He was for the peasants.

And earlier, much of his support had come from the peasants. But after this occurred, the nobles rose up and quelled the rebellion and killed over 100,000 German peasants. And after that, Luther had no more support from the peasants.

They considered him to be a traitor and a false prophet. So that hurt his movement. Many of the peasants went back to Roman Catholicism, just because there weren't very many other options open to them.

And his movement was weakened somewhat. I hadn't mentioned earlier, though I should have, that in the early time of Luther's teaching in Wittenberg, before the Reformation actually got rolling, he had a lot of encouragement and help from this man, Philip Melanchthon, who was a Greek scholar who had come to teach at Wittenberg also. And Melanchthon and Luther were very different types of personalities.

Luther very much was a wild boar kind of a man. He was just a real headstrong, extreme kind of a guy. And Melanchthon was a real mild-mannered, quiet, retiring, kind of scholarly person.

But they did real well together. They got along well together. And eventually, when Luther's influence waned, Melanchthon rose and was the next generation leader of the Lutheran movement.

And his writings are... Well, actually, Melanchthon changed something. Some of the things Luther taught were changed by Melanchthon later. And modern Lutherans, as I understand... I've never been a Lutheran, but as I understand, modern Lutheranism

resembles more the teachings of Melanchthon than of Luther, because Luther was a little extreme in some areas.

And, of course, Luther didn't reform everything. Luther... even Melanchthon didn't. But Melanchthon took the thing a step further.

In Luther's later years, before his death, he had some changes in his personality. I don't know if he was embittered by the years of controversy. He was an outlaw.

From the time the Pope excommunicated him, he was technically in danger. Anyone could have assassinated him with the Pope's blessing. He never did die at the hands of any persecutors.

He could have, but he was protected. But living always under that gun, and then, I think, disillusioned by the Peasants' Revolt and other things like that, he began to wonder whether he'd done more harm than good. In his later years, he was very, very harsh with critics and with people who disagreed with him within the Reform movement.

Whereas, initially, he had not opposed the Anabaptists too strongly. We haven't talked about them yet, but they rose up in 1525, shortly after he nailed the 95 theses. Actually, around the same time that the Peasants' Revolt occurred, but the Anabaptists began in Holland at that time.

Luther, initially, wasn't very harsh on the Anabaptists, but eventually, as he got older, he wrote more vitriolic things against the Anabaptists. There was, sadly, an Anabaptist group that went off to Munster, Germany, and actually tried to overthrow the government and had some real excesses. We'll talk about them next time.

But Luther condemned them and apparently didn't see the difference in them and other Anabaptists. He also said some really harsh things against Jews. He believed that all the synagogues should be burned or torn down.

He believed all the Jews should be driven out of Europe. Of course, that doesn't make him very popular today with modern Christians who are very pro-Israel. Also, he seemed to approve the bigamous marriage of his supporter, Prince Philip of Hesse.

I don't know the details about that, but obviously that is construed by critics of Luther as him compromising his principles for the sake of the support of a political leader. Apparently, the man was not perfect. Even one of his biographers, Roland Bainton, who wrote probably some of the best-known biographical books about Luther and favored Luther, he made this statement about Luther that in his old age he was, quote, an irascible old man, petulant, peevish, unrestrained, and at times positively coarse, unquote.

And I've heard various quotes and things from things Luther said in his older age that

sounded a little coarse. Of course, he was a German, you know, and once he stopped being a monk and started to realize what he called the freedom of a Christian man, he may have swung, pendulum swung a little too far away from his former legalism or whatever. In any case, of course, the fact that a man has defects in his life does not take away from the greatness of what it was accomplished by him in his earlier life.

And he died in 1546 on February 18th, and Melancthon kind of took over the movement and led it after him. During this time, that is, during Luther's lifetime, some other very important things arose, one of which, as I said, was the Anabaptist movement, which we'll look at in a separate lecture. Another was the Reformation in Switzerland under Zwingli, and Zwingli actually became a much greater persecutor of the Anabaptists than Luther was.

I don't know that Luther ever, you know, ordered the Anabaptists to be killed. Zwingli did. But Zwingli and Luther were sort of parallel movement leaders in their respective countries.

But Zwingli, I think Zwingli was more worldly, actually, to tell you the truth. And they could not come to an agreement, although, I'm trying to remember now, I think Zwingli and Luther met once, and they desired to join their movements. They figured, why not? You know, we've got a Reformer in Germany, a Reformer in Switzerland.

They're teaching largely the same things, so they thought, they'd see about joining their movements together. But they couldn't agree about something, and that was about the nature of the Eucharist, or the nature of the Lord's Supper. Zwingli believed, as by the way I do, and many evangelicals do, that the bread and the wine were simply symbols, simply memorials of the body and blood of Jesus.

Luther, however, held on much more to some of the Catholic notion that there was something mystical, something that imparted actual grace from God in taking the sacrament. And although Luther did not accept the Catholic idea of transubstantiation, which teaches that the bread and the wine actually become the body and blood of Jesus, he believed in something called consubstantiation, which is that basically the body and blood of Jesus were actually around and through and very in the proximity of the body and of the drink and the bread. So actually his view is very hard to distinguish from the Catholic view, and in my opinion, Luther's view is wrong.

But it was as he and Zwingli were meeting together to discuss where they might join, that this issue came up. Both of them were headstrong, especially Luther, and they could not agree. And at one point, Luther actually, as I understood it, pounded on the table and said, But it says, this is my body and this is my blood.

And he wouldn't accept the idea that it was a memorial of the body and blood of Jesus. And because they couldn't come to agreement about that, they split and never met

again, I guess. And Zwingli later died in battle, in war against the Catholics.

He went out and led the reformed troops and he died in a battle. We'll talk about him separately sometime. But after Zwingli's time in Switzerland, John Calvin rose to be a major player in Geneva, and we consider him a second generation reformer.

He was not an original reformer. Also, I don't know, I think the next thing we need to take in our studies would be the Anabaptist movement. Now, when we do, we'll have occasion to discuss some of the ways that Luther's reformation was incomplete.

Luther stood for some basic things that he's remembered for. One is, in Latin, it's called sola fide, which means faith alone. That we're justified by faith alone, not by works.

Also, sola scriptura, which means scripture alone. Not the councils and the decrees of the popes and the bishops, but what the scriptures alone say are the basis of authority for the Christian. He also believed in the priesthood of all believers.

He also believed in something called the perspicuity of scripture, which is the idea that the common man could understand the scripture without the pope or the bishops interpreting it for him. That a man of ordinary intelligence could understand it for himself. That was against Catholic notions.

Also, Luther had, I could have mentioned this at an earlier point in time, but he had a tremendous influence in bringing congregational singing into the church. And his movement was a singing movement. Luther himself was a poet and a songwriter.

He didn't really write music much. He took popular songs. As I understand it, the songs that were sung in the pubs and in the beer houses.

And he would take their tunes and he would write theological lyrics to them. Probably the most well-known of his songs is The Mighty Fortress Is Our God, which is a theologically powerful song, but it's just written to a tune that was sung in the pubs by the German people. And it was his doing this that helped to popularize his theology.

I mean, people would be singing his theology in the pubs and in the churches. So his movement really took off through those means. But there were many Roman Catholic ideas that Luther either never thought to challenge and therefore retained in the Lutheran movement.

Or else maybe he thought about challenging it but didn't have the courage to do so. Or just didn't have the disposition to do so. Some of those things are things the Anabaptists brought up.

The Anabaptists came along about eight years after the Reformation had begun in Germany. And they did basically say to the Reformers, you have not followed your own

principles adequately. You say, sola scriptura, you say only the scripture will determine doctrine.

But there are still teachings that your movement has that are not found in scripture that come from church tradition. One of those was infant baptism. And the Anabaptists believed that there shouldn't be infant baptism, because you can't find it in scripture.

They also believed that you shouldn't have state churches. Eventually, because of Luther's influence in Germany, there was an agreement which was called the Peace of Augsburg. Which allowed each province under a Duke or a Prince to decide whether it would be Catholic or Lutheran.

It couldn't be anything else. You had to be either Lutheran or Catholic. It couldn't be Anabaptist, for example.

But in Germany, you could be either Lutheran or Catholic, but the whole province had to be one or the other. Whatever the Prince was. If they had a Catholic Prince, everyone had to be in that province Catholic.

If they had a Lutheran Prince, everyone in that province had to be Lutheran. There was no plurality. There was no pluralism, as we have it here.

It's hard for us to conceive of living in a place where just because you live in this town, you'd have to be a Methodist or Salvation Army or something like that, because the mayor is of that view. And yet, that's essentially what it was like in Germany. The Anabaptists came along with a third option, and Luther was as intolerant of them, and so was Zwingli, as the Papacy had been intolerant of their movement.

But one of the things the Anabaptists stood for was that there should be no mixture of church and state. It shouldn't be up to the government officials to decide what religious ideas people have. And the whole idea of the separation of church and state that we take for granted arose with the Anabaptists challenging some of these ideas that Luther didn't bother to challenge.

Luther still believed in state churches, and in Germany they still have state churches. Anyway, that's all we can really devote time to for Luther. We'll talk about the Anabaptists next time, and probably maybe Zwingli as well, if we have time.