

The Francis Asbury Society

OCTOBER 31, 1517: REFORMATION DAY

Here I Still Stand!

I. Something's Not Right!

A. _____ Popes

The papacy during the century prior to Luther was _____ and _____. They were often best known for their taxes, luxury, wars, and immoral behavior.

B. _____ theology (scholasticism).

Scholasticism promoted a form of religion that was hard to understand and _____. It had little bearing on everyday life. It often seemed that Aristotle was more important than the Bible.

C. Biblical _____.

Two events in Luther's time proved to be of earthshaking importance:

1. Gutenberg's invention of moveable the _____ (c. 1439) in Germany.
2. Erasmus' publication of the _____ New Testament (1516).

D. No tolerance for _____.

These were the days of the Inquisition. When men spoke up to address the abuses in the church, they were forcibly silenced:

1. John Hus (1369–1415).
2. John Wycliffe (1328–1384).
3. Savonarola (1452–1498).

II. Martin Luther (1483–1546).

Though other names certainly are associated with the Reformation (Calvin, Zwingli, Cranmer, etc.), Luther is widely credited with creating the spark that ignited the powder keg. But before reform could come to the church, reform needed to come to the heart!

A. A troubled soul.

1. At first, Luther pursued a career in law, but at age 21 his life was dramatically changed when a _____ so frightened him that he made a vow: "Help me, Saint Anne; I will become a monk!"
2. But even joining the Augustinian order in Wittenberg did not bring peace to his _____ soul. He struggled with what he called *Anfechtungen* (anxiety, depression, lack of assurance, fear of eternity). The term referred to his recurring inner battle with himself and with the devil.
3. His spiritual struggle led him to discover the _____ of works of piety and scholastic theology to bring inner peace. Even a pilgrimage to Rome did nothing to calm his inner turmoil. In fact, it only augmented it!
4. Years later, Luther wrote of this period in his life: "Though I lived as a monk without reproach, I felt that I was a sinner before God with an extremely

disturbed conscience... I did not love [God], I _____ the righteous God who punishes sinners, and secretly... I was _____ with God..."

B. An earthshaking discovery: _____!

1. What did make a difference for Luther was _____. His first years in the monastery were spent studying Psalms, _____, and Galatians.
2. But in 1517 Luther had what has come to be called "the _____ experience." He spoke of a flash of insight that came to him "in the tower (cloaca)." "Cloaca" was a Latin term meaning "sewer" or "outhouse."
3. The breakthrough insight came from his study of _____, "For in [the gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, 'The righteous shall live by faith.'" Luther came to understand the preposition "of" to mean "_____." Paul was not describing so much God's righteousness (the righteousness of God) but that righteousness that comes from God—a _____ to those who have faith. Luther writes:

There [in the "tower"] I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous lives by a gift of God, namely by faith. And this is the meaning: the righteousness of God is revealed by the gospel, namely, the passive righteousness with which the merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written, "He who through faith is righteous shall live." Here I felt that I was altogether _____ and had entered paradise itself through open gates...

This was the insight that enabled Luther to have a _____ on which he could stand so that he could reform the church and change the world. By explaining that the momentous moment came to him while he was "on the toilet" is perhaps the _____ of what he had discovered: God enables humble sinners to become righteous through faith alone. Eric Metaxas says it well:

Luther saw in this the very essence of Christian theology. God reached down not halfway to meet us in our vileness but all the way down, to the foul dregs of our broken humanity.... We are not dusty and in need of a good dusting; we are fatally befouled with death and fatally toxic filth and require total redemption... God can reach us only if we are honest about our condition. So it fit well with Luther's thinking that if God were to bestow upon him—the unworthy sinner Luther—such a divine blessing, it must needs be done as he sat grunting in the "cloaca." This was the ultimate antithesis to the gold and bejeweled splendor of papal Rome. (97)

III. I Protest!

For Roman Catholics, Luther is a great _____ because he split the church. To Protestants, Luther is a great _____ because he split the church. One thing is sure: it is impossible to remain _____ about Martin Luther.

A. The 95 theses.

1. Rome taught that there was a “treasury of _____” stored in heaven based in the accumulated good deeds of the saints. Because Peter, believed to be the first pope, had been given “the _____ of the kingdom,” the church claimed the ability to make a withdrawal whenever she felt it necessary.
2. An _____ was a kind of merit point taken from the treasury in heaven. It could be _____ from the church which was seen as equivalent to doing a good work. The system was typically understood:
 - To shorten a loved one’s stay in _____. (“As soon as the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs.”)
 - To enable one to buy forgiveness _____ for a sin one hasn’t yet committed.¹
3. It was the preaching of indulgences that was the _____ that caused Luther to act. He was especially upset at the arrogance of the preacher Tetzel, using the sale of indulgences to raise money for the Pope’s building program in Rome, and the _____ and false doctrines involved in the process. To address the issue, he called for a scholarly debate (a disputation, as it was called) on the matter. He wrote 95 theses (in Latin) and posted them on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg on October 31, 1517. Though not yet ready to break with Rome, his words were strong:

#6. The pope himself cannot remit guilt but only declare and confirm that it has been remitted by God.

#32. All those who believe themselves certain of their own salvation by means of letters of indulgence will be eternally damned, together with their teachers.

#67. The indulgences, which the merchants extol as the greatest of favors, are seen to be, in fact, a favorite means for money-getting.

#82. Why does not the pope liberate everyone from purgatory for the sake of love and because of the supreme necessity of their souls?

#86. Since the pope’s income today is larger than that of the wealthiest of wealthy men, why does he not build this one church of St. Peter with his own money, rather than with the money of indigent believers?
4. The common people of Germany loved it! They had felt abused all along by Rome and the church. Now they had a _____.
5. Before laws of copyright and dangers of plagiarism, Luther’s theses were soon _____ in German—then other languages—and were read far and wide. Though Luther had not intended it, the Reformation had begun.

¹ A man in Leipzig asked the preacher Tetzel if it were possible to receive an indulgence for a future sin. “Yes,” said Tetzel, insisting that the payment must be made at once. The man paid the money and received the letter and seal validating his purchase. Later, the man attacked Tetzel, beat him, and robbed him explaining that this was the future sin he had in mind!

6. Karl Barth observed that when Luther posted these 95 theses, he was like a blind man climbing the stairs in a bell tower in a cathedral. He stumbled. As he fell, he grabbed the only thing he could find: a rope. But it was a rope to the bell. As he pulled it, he woke up the entire village.

B. The Diet (assembly) of Worms (1521).

Finally called to explain his actions and his writings, Luther is called before the Emperor (Charles V) and the leaders of the church. A table piled high with the books he had written (about 40 of them!), Luther was formally asked if we would recant anything that he had written. This was the _____. Most believed if Luther refused to recant he would be burned as a heretic.

Since then your serene majesties and your lordships seek a simple answer, I will give it in this manner, plain and unvarnished: Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or clear reason, for I do not trust in the Pope or in the councils alone, since it is well known that they often err and contradict themselves, I am bound to the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is _____ to the Word of God. I cannot and will not retract anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. I cannot do otherwise. _____. God help me. Amen.

IV. So, what's at stake?

Division is not always a bad thing. Jesus said: "I have not come to bring peace but a sword" (Matt 10:34). He _____ people! The Reformation tended to put foundational issues in terms of _____.

A. *Sola Scriptura*. _____.

1. Either we trust in the Bible alone as our authority OR we trust in the Bible plus something else, perhaps someone's _____.
2. The word " _____ " makes all the difference.

B. *Sola gratia* and *Sola fide*. _____.

1. Either we are saved by grace alone through faith alone OR we are saved by grace and faith plus something else (human merit, _____, orthodox theology, etc.). "Try harder."
2. Either the gospel is all about Christ and what he has done OR it is about ethics, social justice, pious actions, orthodox theology, worship, etc.
3. Again, the word " _____ " makes all the difference.
4. Luther called the doctrine of _____ the doctrine by which "the church either stands or falls."

C. How we understand the _____.

1. Either _____ believers are priests OR only the clergy are priests (a spiritual elite).
2. Either we _____ trust the church OR we work to correct it when it is wrong (*semper reformanda*).
3. Either the church stands _____ the Bible OR beside it (or perhaps over it).

4. Either the church is in the world OR the world is in the church (the _____ of the church).

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Can you identify personally with Luther's troubled conscience and inner anxiety? Have you ever "hated" God?
2. In your own words, describe the importance of the fact that Luther perhaps had his greatest and most momentous insight while sitting on the toilet.
3. Think about your own local church. Is there something happening there about which you want to say, "I protest"? Will you? Why or why not?
4. Describe the revolutionary nature of the concept of faith *alone*, of Scripture *alone*.
5. What is the difference in saying "trust the Bible" and "trust my interpretation of the Bible"? Why is this important?
6. When is division a good thing?

A Mighty Fortress Is Our God

Martin Luther (ca. 1529)

Translated by Frederick H. Hedge (1853)

*A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing;
Our helper He, amid the flood of mortal ills prevailing:
For still our ancient foe doth seek to work us woe;
His craft and pow'r are great, and, armed with cruel hate,
On earth is not his equal.*

*Did we in our own strength confide, our striving would be losing,
Were not the right Man on our side, the Man of God's own choosing:
Dost ask who that may be? Christ Jesus, it is He;
Lord Sabaoth, His Name, from age to age the same,
And He must win the battle.*

*And though this world, with devils filled, should threaten to undo us,
We will not fear, for God hath willed His truth to triumph through us;
The Prince of Darkness grim, we tremble not for him;
His rage we can endure, for lo, his doom is sure,
One little word shall fell him.*

*That word above all earthly pow'rs, no thanks to them, abideth;
The Spirit and the gifts are ours through Him who with us sideth;
Let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also;
The body they may kill: God's truth abideth still,
His kingdom is forever.*