

Luther and the Reformation II

Doctrine: The righteousness of God which is received by faith alone

Learning outcome: Be able to describe in broad strokes the beginning of the Reformation; be able to describe what Luther was arguing for and the doctrine he held dear (the *Solas*).

I. Diet of Worms (April 1521)

A. Triumphal entry. The Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V, had promised Luther safe passage to the Diet of Worms so that his case may be heard and decided. Frederick was also hopeful that the young emperor would be persuaded by Luther's argument.¹ But you'll remember that Pope Leo X had already excommunicated Luther. In all likelihood it was only left for the civil authorities—that being the Holy Roman Emperor and his princes and officials—to pass sentence on the heretic.

Despite the danger, Luther set his face toward Worms and began his journey—he was assured that his faithful God would do what was right. His friends were fearful that the same fate that had taken Jan Hus would likewise take Luther but he was resolved. He said, "If there are as many devils in Worms as tiles on the housetops I will still go there."²

The journey took a whole two weeks. As he rolled along in his wagon, crowds of people lined the roads and assembled in the villages to wish him well. As it turns out, Luther had massive public support. As he approached the city of Worms a group of 100 nobles rode out to meet him on horseback and escorted him into town. This popular opinion of the denounced heretic made the emperor and his princes rather uneasy—an uprising among the peasants seemed like a potential reality.³

The following day, April 17, Luther was appointed to appear before the Diet at 4 pm. As he pressed his way through the crowd he was met on the steps of the conference hall by

a valiant knight, a famous army commander, who said to him, 'My poor monk, my poor monk, you are on your way to make such a stand as I and many of my knights have never done in our toughest battles. If you are sure of the justice of your cause, then forward in the Name of God, and be of good courage—God will not forsake you'.⁴

With this encouragement and after waiting two hours to be called upon, he passed over the threshold and entered the hall.

B. The Setting. Woodbridge and James describe the scene as follows:

As he entered the great hall of the Bishop's palace, he found himself standing before more than two hundred of the most powerful men in Germany. Besides the young Emperor Charles V, there were six of the imperial electors, papal legates, [30] archbishops, bishops, dukes,

¹John D. Woodbridge and Frank A. James III, *Church History Volume Two: From Pre-Reformation to the Present Day* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2013), 124.

²S. M. Houghton, *Sketches from Church History* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2000), 88.

³Woodbridge and James, 125.

⁴Houghton, 88.

margraves, princes, counts, deputies, and various ambassadors from foreign courts. [In all there were 206 persons of rank.] Several hundred Spanish soldiers ringed the hall, and thousands of spectators filled the streets.”⁵

C. Two questions. After scanning the room, Luther directed his attention to the royal prosecutor who began to address him. The prosecutor, pointing to a table full of Luther’s writings, asked a question, “Are these works yours?”

Luther’s advocate—the Spanish, from whose nation the emperor came, were very litigious at the time—asked that the titles of the books be read. The condemning titles were read and then, with a growing degree of fear, Luther affirmed that he was indeed the author of these books.

After this, the imperial prosecutor asked him a second question, “Will you recant these writings?” In an instant, the blood in Luther’s veins turned to ice. Luther “had expected a hearing and not a summary condemnation. No doubt fearful and awed by the august assembly, Luther appealed to the emperor for additional time to think before answering the question.”⁶ Eventually, the emperor agreed to give Luther an additional twenty-four hours to ponder his recantation.

D. Here I stand. This surprising turn of events resulted in a rough night’s sleep for Luther. One of his friends recorded a sample of his prayer:

O God, my God, be with me and protect me against my enemies of the world. Thou must do it, Thou alone, for in me is no strength. It is thy cause, O God, not mine. On thee I rely, not on man, for that would be in vain. O God, dost Thou not hear? Do not hide thy face from me. Thou hast called me, now be my stay. I ask it in the Name of thy Son, Jesus Christ, my protector, my shield and my defence.⁷

The next day, Luther was admitted to the Diet for the second time. The man who had exited yesterday was visibly shaken—of pale face and downcast eyes—the man who entered today was resolved and emboldened.

After apologizing for his unfamiliarity with courtly etiquette, Luther explained, first in German and then in Latin, that his writings belonged to different categories.

First, some were devotional writings that were intended to be edifying for Christians—even his opponents would not want him to renounce these.

Second, there were some writings against the corruptions of the papacy. To renounce these would be tantamount to affirming wickedness, and that could not do.

Third, some of his works were directed against individuals who defended papal corruption. He confessed that he had at times used harsh words, but wickedness had to be dealt with, and therefore he would not retract them either.⁸

⁵Woodbridge and James, 125. Additional details in brackets draw from Houghton, 88.

⁶Woodbridge and James, 125.

⁷Houghton, 89.

⁸Woodbridge and James, 125. Emphasis added.

The royal prosecutors wanted a straight answer. They asked him again for a simple yes or no. Then Luther gave his famous reply in Latin:

Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scripture or by clear reason (for I do not trust either the pope or 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 wise to go against conscience.

Then he was reported to have concluded with these words in German: “Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise. God help me. Amen.”⁹

E. Luther escapes with his life. The courtroom erupted. Everyone was speaking simultaneously.¹⁰ The prosecutor shouted at Luther, “Abandon your conscience, Martin, for your conscience errs.”¹¹ The emperor, clearly fed up with the situation, got up and left the hall. The Spanish soldiers began to chant, “To the flames!”¹² It was clearly a scene of profound pandemonium.

Nevertheless, the emperor was noble minded and held true to his word. Despite Luther’s resolution to defy the pope and the emperor, he was allowed to leave unscathed. The next day the Diet was reconvened to discuss Luther’s fate. Frederick—the pirate prince—defended Luther before the assembly and on April 26, Luther was allowed to leave Worms. However, on May 25, Luther was declared to be an outlaw of the empire. This edict “not only proclaimed Luther a criminal, but also prohibited anyone from assisting him in any way on penalty of death. All his books were banned as well. **For the rest of his life, Luther was declared a heretic of the church and an outlaw of the state.**”¹³

Luther’s right of safe passage would expire after twenty-five days. After that, what would he do?

II. Junker George (May 1521-March 1522)

A. Yoink. As he was riding home, Luther was initially accosted by several Spaniards who intended to scare Luther by making scary animal noises at him.¹⁴ These men soon fell off and his wagon was alone. After they had driven for a while and once they were a considerable distance from Worms, “the path entered a glen, thickly forested even to the tops of the surrounding hills. Suddenly there emerged from the woods a company of horsemen, armed to the teeth.”¹⁵

A twinge of fear shot across Luther’s face as he glanced left to right at the gleaming armor and weapons of the men who surrounded him; but as quick as it

⁹Woodbridge and James, 126. This and the preceding paragraph.

¹⁰Houghton, 89.

¹¹Woodbridge and James, 126.

¹²Woodbridge and James, 126.

¹³Woodbridge and James, 127. Emphasis added.

¹⁴Houghton, 90.

¹⁵Houghton, 90.

came the fear dissipated. The men snatched Luther and, after giving him a horse to ride, took him to Wartburg castle, some eight miles away.

You see, before Luther had left Worms he had received a secret message that his return home would be interrupted and that he would be taken to a secret location for his own safety.¹⁶ All this had been arranged by Frederick and Luther's friends. "Frederick's bold act not only saved Luther's life; it also saved the Reformation movement."¹⁷

- B. An odd knight.** Luther was exiled in Wartburg castle for almost an entire year. He assumed a disguise, allowing his hair on his head and his face to grow out—losing his tonsure while simultaneously acquiring a sweet beard. He acquired the pseudonym of Junker, or knight, George. He was a rather odd knight though and spent most of his time in his study—sometimes even taking meals there.
- C. Prolific writing.** Although Luther was hidden, tucked away in a castle, he did not wholly isolate himself from the world. He often received letters and wrote just as often. He was intimately aware of the events in Wittenberg and attempted to shepherd his local flock and direct the budding Reformation movement from afar. Although it was good to be alive, Luther called this period his "Patmos" and he eagerly desired to return home.¹⁸
- D. German New Testament.** While Luther was holed up in the Wartburg he produced a considerable amount of writings but his most significant was his German translation of the New Testament. One of the most important items he took with him into this self-imposed captivity was his copy of the Greek New Testament. From this, in a matter of only three months, he translated the entire New Testament from its original Greek to German, bypassing the Latin Vulgate. His goal was to produce a copy of the Holy Scripture for the common person to read—he stressed clarity and sensitivity to the rhythms of everyday German.¹⁹
Luther's New Testament was probably published and was immensely popular. It has to go through several reprinting runs in its first few months to even begin to satisfy the demand of the public.²⁰

While Luther was in the Wartburg, what was happening at home?

III. Meanwhile in Wittenberg...

¹⁶Woodbridge and James, 127.

¹⁷Woodbridge and James, 127.

¹⁸Woodbridge and James, 128.

¹⁹Woodbridge and James, 128.

²⁰Woodbridge and James, 129.

A. Chaos. With Luther gone, the Reformation movement looked to two men to guide them: Philip Melancthon and Andreas Karlstadt. Both were professors at the University of Wittenberg and close friends of Luther.

Luther, it seems, had not yet thought through many of the ramifications of the split with the Roman Catholic Church and with their leader's absence, these men sought to fill in the gaps. Luther sought to designate Melancthon as the leader but this was not well received. Melancthon was young, only in his mid-twenties at the time and was of a timid disposition. Further, the people balked at him being the city preacher since he was a married man and, under Roman Catholicism, the clergy had remained unmarried for centuries.

Karlstadt therefore took matters into his own hands and began to make radical changes in Wittenberg.

Karlstadt took Luther's criticism of the Roman mass to heart and began to preach mandatory reforms. On Christ day in 1521, Karlstadt broke with tradition by celebrating mass without vestments, dressed as a layman, employing the German language, and most significantly, distributing the bread and the wine to the laity—something that had been prohibited since the twelfth century.²¹

These reforms caused a stir in the city and soon people began to take matters into their own hands. Disorderly excesses and violent reactions against Roman Catholics transpired in Wittenberg in addition to property damage. Karlstadt poured more fuel onto the fire by, having taken a vow of celibacy as a priest, decided to get married in January of 1522. This and other disturbances racked the town until Luther decided to return to Wittenberg, even at danger to his life. He wrote, "Satan has entered my sheepfold and committed ravages which I cannot repair by writing but only by my personal presence."²²

B. Dad's home (March 6, 1522). On March 6, 1522, Luther returned to Wittenberg. After almost a year of chaos, Dad was home and began to put the house in order. Luther walked back some of Karlstadt's reforms.

He retained the old forms of worship and wore the hooded cowl of the monk. However, he did change the wording of the mass to eliminate hints of repeated sacrifice or transubstantiation. He continued to give the bread and the wine to the laity. He was convinced that reform would come through the gospel and not through violence.²³

After all, did Karlstadt not know that "God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?" (Rom 2:4 ESV).

You might be wondering, "What is stopping Charles V from surrounding Wittenberg and destroying it and the Reformation movement?"

IV. Political Providence

²¹Woodbridge and James, 131.

²²Woodbridge and James, 132.

²³Woodbridge and James, 132.

A. Charles's problems.

1. **Princes wanted a greater degree of autonomy.** The princes wanted to maintain political power in their realms, no matter what the emperor said. Their desire for liberty provided safety for the Reformation.
2. **Papacy power struggles and shifting alliances.** In 1526, the papacy even joined forces with Francis I of France to wage war against Charles V. In response, Charles was ruthless in his exacting of vengeance. He defeated both of his opponents but required help from his Lutheran princes in order to do it. This gave those princes an even greater degree of leniency.
3. **Suleiman the Magnificent was attacking from the East.** In 1529, Suleiman laid siege to Vienna, the gateway to the Holy Roman Empire. This seriously redirected Charles's attention away from the Reformation.
 - a) These explain why Charles V failed to deal with Luther. He was, after all, only a stubborn monk from Saxony.²⁴

B. Diets of Speyer; Hooray for Protestantism. At the Diet of Speyer in 1526, it was decided that Charles V would allow each territorial prince to decide the religious issue of the Reformation on his own. This gave liberty to each prince to do what he wanted with the Reformation.

However, when Charles had won victory over his opponents in 1529, the Diet again met in Speyer and moved to nullify the agreement of 1526 that gave religious freedom to the princes. In their turn, the princes issued a *protestatio* (protestation) against this abrupt turn. Thus, they were called protestants. However, the emperor was unwilling to give the Reformation movement and its princes these freedoms.²⁵

C. Schmalkald League. In response, the protestant princes assembled the Schmalkald League, a defensive group to help protect their collective interests. Kinda like NATO and article V.

Meanwhile in Wittenberg, the Reformation was pressing on.

V. Reforming Marriage

A. Katharina von Bora. Katharina was born in 1499 to a semi-noble family near Leipzig Germany.

Following the customs of her time, the then ten-year-old daughter was placed in the Cistercian convent of Nimbschen. Katie appears to have accepted her life until she and several nuns secretly read Luther's *on Monastic Vows* in 1522. The nuns embraced Luther's rejection of clerical celibacy and decided to abandon the cloistered life. When family members refused to help the nuns, they turned to Luther himself, who was happy to help.²⁶

²⁴Woodbridge and James, 135-136.

²⁵Woodbridge and James, 136-138.

²⁶Woodbridge and James, 140.

Then, in a move straight out of a spy-movie plot, Luther contracted a local merchant who regularly made deliveries of herring to the nunnery to help the nuns escape in empty herring barrels. This was smashingly successful and after Luther had returned three of the nuns to their families, he swiftly found husbands for the other nine.

However, he had one problem. There was one none, Ms. Katharin Von Bora, who would not be received back by her family and also rejected the men that Luther would have set her up with for marriage. “Katie [as she went by] took matters into her own hands and specifically suggested two other prospects—Luther or his friend Nicolaus von Amsdorf.”²⁷

Luther was just beginning to feel the loneliness of bachelorhood and “expressed his willingness to ‘take pity’ on poor Katie and marry her.”²⁸ That said, it was Katie who really took pity on Martin. He was 41 years old and—as reported by Philip Melancthon—had been known to not make his bed for a whole year. In fact, it was mildewed with perspiration because he was too busy to take care of it. Luther remarked, “I was tired out and worked myself nearly to death, so that I fell into bed and knew nothing about it.”²⁹

Despite Luther stating that his reason for getting married was to “spite the pope” and that he did not “feel neither passionate love nor burning for [his] spouse”, he nonetheless had a beautiful marriage.

B. Artifacts of Affection. Luther grew to have deep affection for his wife Katie.

1. “Unlike other Reformers, Luther openly declared his love: “I love my Katie; yes, I love her more dearly than myself.”³⁰
2. Luther confided to Michael Stiefel on 11 August 1526: “My Katie is in all things so obliging and pleasing to me that I would not exchange my poverty for the riches of Croesus.”³¹
3. He described her as pious, faithful, devoted, always loving, worthy, and beautiful.³²
4. They also shared a sense of humor. Writing to her in 1546, more than twenty years after their marriage he addresses her in this way in a letter: “Martin Luther to my kind and dear Katie Luther, a brewer and a judge at the pig market at Wittenberg.”³³ Elsewhere he addresses her as “the holy lady” and signs himself as “Your Holiness’ willing servant”.³⁴

²⁷Woodbridge and James, 140.

²⁸Woodbridge and James, 140-141.

²⁹Houghton, 93.

³⁰Woodbridge and James, 141.

³¹Bainton, Mentor edition, 228; Schaff, “Luther’s Marriage. 1525.” Accessed from:

<https://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/hcc7.ii.v.ii.html>

³²Houghton, 93.

³³Michael A. G. Haykin and Victoria J. Haykin, *The Christian Lover: The Sweetness of Love and Marriage in the Letters of Believers* (Lake Mary, FL: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2009), 2–3.

³⁴Haykin, 4.

- a) It is clear that they shared deep affection for one another well into their marriage.

C. Marriage for Love.

“For centuries marriage had been entangled with dowries and social status. In fact, the essential criteria for a good marriage match had centered on the amount of the dowry and the enhanced social status of marrying into a socially prominent family. Luther’s marriage changed all that. He and Katie had no social status—he was a heretic and outlaw, and she was a runaway nun with no dowry at all. But Luther’s outspoken affection for his wife became the new criteria for a good marriage. Luther’s marriage reconfigured the reason for marriage from a consideration of dowry and social status to mutual affection. From that point on, social historians have noted that European cultures embrace love as the essential component for a happy marriage.”³⁵

VI. Aging Reformer

A. Flagrant writings.

1. Against fellow Reformers.
2. Against the Jews.

B. Health problems.

1. Kidney stones.
2. Anxiety.
3. Heart attacks.

- C. Death.** In February of 1546, Luther traveled to Eisleben with his three sons—he had six children in total—to mediate a dispute between two brothers who both were counts of Mansfeld. There, he suffered a heart attack, recovered sufficiently to settle the dispute, but later was stricken by more heart attacks. In the morning of February 18 his close friend Justus Jonas leaned over the barely conscious Luther and asked: “Reverend Father, are you ready to die trusting in your Lord Jesus Christ and to confess the doctrine that you have taught in his name?” Luther weakly but audibly replied “yes,” which was the last word he ever spoke.³⁶

VII. Luther’s Legacy

A. Luther never got over the fact that God had forgiven him.

1. Do you thank God for the fact that you are forgiven in the Lord Jesus Christ?

B. Luther clung to God—he was his hope, his refuge, his fortress.

1. Do you cling to God when you are cast into trials and tribulation? Do you become so gripped by your situation that you neglect him?

C. Luther clung to the gospel and loved his Savior.

1. Do you cling to the gospel and your Savior?
2. Do you put your hope in your good works instead of Christ?

³⁵Woodbridge and James, 141.

³⁶Woodbridge and James, 146.

D. "A Mighty Fortress"

1. 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
does seek to work us woe;
his craft and power are great,
and armed with cruel hate,
on earth is not his equal.
2. 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.
You 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.