

Luther: How a Transformed Sinner Took a Stand that Transformed the World  
500<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Reformation  
Romans 1:14-16  
10-29-17

Rev. Michael King, a Baptist minister from Georgia, made a life changing trip in 1934. First, he sailed to the Holy Land and toured its wonders. Afterward, he traveled to Berlin for an international conference of Baptist pastors. While in Germany, Pastor King learned about the brave reformer Martin Luther. So impressed with the life of Luther that he decided to change his own name from Michael King to Martin Luther King. But he didn't stop there. He also changed the name of his five-year-old son, also named Michael. That is how Michael King Jr. became Martin Luther King, Jr., and ultimately leader of the Civil Rights movement and a great reformer in his own right.<sup>1</sup>

What was it about Martin Luther, a monk who lived 500 years ago, that impressed this pastor so much that he would take such a dramatic step as changing his own name and that of his son? Well before we can get to that, let's read the verses that God used to transform Martin Luther into such a compelling person and then tell his story:

## I. LUTHER'S BEGINNINGS

Born at the eleventh hour on November 10, 1483, Martin was the eldest son in the eventual family of nine and named for the Saint on whose day he was baptized. His father, who was a successful miner, had great expectations for the brilliant young Martin. Indeed, he father paid dearly for Martin to go to school to become a lawyer, and he was doing well in his studies. However, two near death experiences, the latter of which was a violent thunderstorm with lightning strikes all around, prompted him to plead with St. Anne, which Catholic tradition names the mother of Mary and the patron saint of miners, and promise the saint that he would become a monk instead of a lawyer in 1507.<sup>2</sup> As a result, Luther and his father had a falling out.

But even worse, Luther had a falling out with Father God. In the monastery at Erfurt and then at Wittenberg, in what is now Germany, he slavishly worked to achieve eternal life and got nowhere. Luther was utterly frustrated by the impossibility of pleasing a Holy God. Luther scholar Roland Bainton describes his miserable existence: "He fasted, sometimes for days on end without a crumb...He laid upon himself vigils and prayers in excess of those stipulated by the rule. He cast off blankets permitted him and well-nigh froze himself to death. At times he was proud of his sanctity and would say: "I have done nothing wrong today." Then misgivings would arise. "Have you fasted enough? Are you poor enough?"<sup>3</sup>

Martin's superior and confessor, Fr. Johannes von Staupitz, wearied at his endless confessions and self-condemnation. Eventually, Staupitz, who saw Luther's brilliance, helped him advance through his theological studies, and sent him to Rome in 1510 as a change of scenery, hoping that a pilgrimage would help him with his spiritual depression. But it did not. His spiritual sensibilities were assaulted with the naked greed, the crass cynicism, and open debauchery in this supposedly holy place. At every turn, there were relics of the Savior, the blessed Mother, the Apostles and the Saints, which could be viewed for a price. Then there were the indulgences,

which could be bought to reduce the sufferings of purgatory for yourself or for your loved ones. The Church had become a house of merchandise.<sup>4</sup>

Everywhere Luther looked, he was appalled. Later he referred to “the chaos, the filth, and the practice of locals who urinated in public and openly patronized prostitutes.” Consequently, Luther returned to Wittenberg even more jaded about the Church and more miserable as a monk. Luther was a living example of monastic piety, much as Saul of Tarsus was an example of Pharisaic piety, yet it got him no closer to God. If anything, Luther felt he was even more distant and it led to severe depression.

In Luther’s preface to his collected Latin works, written a year before his death, he admits that he had come to despise God:

“Though I lived as a monk without reproach, I felt that I was a sinner before God with an extremely disturbed conscience. I could not believe that he was placated by my satisfaction. I did not love... yes, I hated the righteous God who punishes sinners, and secretly, if not blasphemously, certainly murmuring greatly, I was angry with God... Thus, I raged with a fierce and troubled conscience...”<sup>5</sup>

## II. LUTHER’S CONVERSION

So Luther turned to the Scriptures, seeking to find hope from the writings of Paul. He poured over his Latin Vulgate hoping for light, hoping for truth, hoping for hope. Ultimately, Luther’s dark cell was flooded with divine light. For when Luther read and pondered Romans 1:16-17, the Spirit of God gave him a *durchbruch* or “breakthrough,” as he called it. Here is how Luther describes it:

“At last, by the mercy of God, meditating day and night, I gave heed to the context of the words, namely, ‘In it the righteousness of God is revealed,’ as it is written, ‘He who through faith is righteous shall live.’ There 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 born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates. Thus a totally other face of the entire Scripture showed itself to me. Hereupon I ran through the Scriptures from memory. I also found in other terms an analogy, as the work of God, that is, what God does in us, the power of God, with which he makes us strong, the wisdom of God, with which he makes us wise, the strength of God, the salvation of God, the glory of God. And I extolled my sweetest word with a love as great as the hatred with which I had before hated the word “Righteousness of God.” Thus that place in Paul was for me truly the gate to paradise.”<sup>6</sup>

Luther’s view of God completely changed: “If you have a true faith that Christ is your Saviour, then at once you have a gracious God, for faith leads you in and opens up God’s heart and will, that you should see pure grace and overflowing love. This it is to behold God in faith that you should look upon his fatherly, friendly heart, in which there is no anger nor ungraciousness.”<sup>7</sup>

Luther found out that God is not angry or vengeful, but has a heart full of love for us. He found out that it is by grace alone through faith alone in the person of Christ alone - in His sacrificial death on the cross - that God honors when he declares sinners “righteous.” Not by our sacrifices or offerings, our works or our goodness. But by our faith in Christ. So Luther, haunted by his sin and hounded by his guilt, stopped trying and started trusting. He raised the white flag of surrender and basically said: "Lord, I come as a repentant sinner, and by faith I throw myself on your mercy and receive your grace and trust in Jesus Christ alone." And he was set free!

In fact, Luther reflected that his salvation experience brought him "relief," which he later humorously associated with an experience in the *cloaca*—the toilet in the tower where he resided in the Wittenberg monastery.<sup>8</sup> Luther used humor sometimes to communicate the most serious of truths, and it was no different when it came to his own conversion. In a 1532 Table Talk with his students, Luther quipped: “Diese Kunst hat mir der Spiritus Sanctus auf diss Cloaca eingeben.” Translation: “The Holy Spirit gave me this insight upon the toilet.” He added: “If our Lord God in this life-*in das Scheishaus*-in the “crapper” has given us such noble gifts, what will happen in that eternal life, where everything will be perfect and delightful?”<sup>9</sup> By jesting that his conversion happened in that most humbling and humiliating of places—“upon the toilet”—Luther made it an illustration of his theological foundation.

In the incarnation, Holy God did not descend from the sinless perfection of heaven’s glory on a golden cloud. No, he came down to this sinful “crap house” of a world through the agonizing screams and bloody birth of a virgin, placed in a dirty feeding trough, and breathed in the stench of animal dung in a stable. It shows just how much God loves us and desired to save us that He humbled himself and became one of us in the person of Jesus, yet without our sin. For Luther, this transformed his view of God, his condescending grace, and his salvation of sinners who find themselves in a cesspool of sin.

Well Luther was gloriously saved, set free, and transformed. No more wallowing in guilt. No more rote rituals. No more white-knuckled anxiety about death or purgatory. No more unhealthy fear of a distant, vengeful God. Now he experienced God’s grace and forgiveness. He experienced freedom. Yes, even joy! And once he had a taste of this Good News, it was too good to keep to himself. He had to share it! And this intense, fearless, man of God took a bold stand for the Gospel. This monk, no longer miserable, now became determined to be used of God to set others free. Through a biblical lens, Luther increasingly saw the Church in need of correction, and he began to protest.

### III. LUTHER’S REFORM EFFORTS

First in Luther’s sights for reform was this extra-biblical Church practice of indulgences. The whole idea behind indulgences, selling and buying the remission of punishment and release from purgatory for one’s self or loved ones but in reality it was a bait and switch to raise money for the Church, became revolting to Luther.

A. Tetsel’s Tour: Add to that, the Archbishop appointed a Dominican monk named Johannes Tetzel to sell indulgences to help build St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome.<sup>10</sup> Tetzel traveled with great

pomp and circumstance throughout Germany. He was quite the orator, painting people as hopelessly sinful, God as fearfully wrathful, and purgatory as absolutely unbearable, so you had better buy an indulgence from the Church or else! He played upon the common people's fears of death and sympathies for departed relatives and friends whom they might release from their sufferings in purgatory. Slick salesman that he was, he promised: "As soon as the coin in the chest clings, the soul from purgatory springs."<sup>11</sup> Hearing about this latest con, Luther reached the boiling point.

B. Luther's List: According to Philip Melanchthon, it was on October 31, 1517 that Luther took a hammer and nailed his list of 95 Theses or truth propositions to the wooden doors of the Schlosskirche or Castle Church at Wittenberg, a day before the crowds would fill the church in observance of All Saints Day. He titled of the Latin document: "Disputation to explain the Virtue of Indulgences." He had invited debate among his colleagues in Wittenberg, but no one accepted the challenge.

Yet also on that date, Luther also mailed a copy of the 95 Theses to Archbishop Albrecht in Mainz.<sup>12</sup> He opened it on November 17 and sent it to the faculty for their review and rebuttal. They came back with a recommendation that the Archbishop appeal to Rome. Meanwhile Luther also mailed copies to Johannes Lang in Erfurt and some others. The incendiary document was seen by a printer in Nuremberg named Christopher Scheurl who was impressed and made copies and forwarded them to others. Thus it spread. Editions were printed in Leipzig and Basel, where it was formatted in pamphlet form, making it more accessible. It then spread beyond the academic community when it was translated in German in January of 1518, thus reaching Saxony and Germany and beyond. Even the celebrated Erasmus got a copy and then forwarded one to Thomas More in England where he shared it with King Henry VIII.<sup>13</sup> A panicked Luther wrote Scheurl the original printer that he never had intended the document for public consumption.<sup>14</sup> But it was too late now. Kind of like a hastily written private email that gets forwarded to the press or a candid hot mic conversation that gets world-wide play by the media.

Talk about the "shot heard 'round the world," this was the "hammer blow heard 'round the world," or maybe better described as the "document read 'round the world." For in a matter of months, word of Luther's protest against the Church "spread as on angels' wings,"<sup>15</sup> and the battle was engaged for the true essence of the Gospel and the Christian faith.

At first, the Pope ignored the battle, he called it a contemptible monkish squabble. When the battle began to spread across Germany, he said: "It is a drunken German who wrote the theses, when sober he will change his mind."<sup>16</sup> But Luther was neither drunk nor ready to change his mind. In fact, Luther offered to defend his beliefs in public debate with anyone. And debate he did.

C. Escalating Examination: Luther debated at Heidelberg on April 26, 1518 with members of his own Augustinian order. The Heidelberg 28 Theses were at the heart of the disputation, representing Luther's expanded thought from the 95 Theses regarding indulgences to a more complete theology. He contrasted divine love and human love, and defended the doctrine of human depravity and the bondage of the will. This disputation also led to Johannes Eck's challenging Martin Luther to the Leipzig Disputation in 1519.

Eck had been a friend of Luther's but now felt he must defend the Church against Luther. He had invited Luther's colleagues to participate in a debate in Leipzig in June 1519. Ultimately Luther showed up in July. To accommodate, Eck expanded the terms of the debate to include doctrines such as the existence of purgatory, the sale of indulgences, the need for and methods of penance, and the legitimacy of papal authority. A skilled debater, Eck pressed Luther until he declared that Scripture alone was basis of doctrine. Therefore, the Pope had no power since the office is not mentioned in the Bible. Luther also condemned the sale of indulgences to the laity to reduce time in purgatory, since there is no mention of purgatory in the Bible. Charges of heresy flew.

D. Pope's Pronouncement: The results of this debate reached Pope Leo X, who issued a Papal Bull on June 15, 1520 titled: "Exsurge Domine" (Latin for "Arise O Lord"). In it, Pope Leo censured 41 propositions extracted from Luther's 95 Theses and subsequent writings, and threatened him with excommunication unless he recanted within a 60 day period commencing upon the publication of this Bull in Saxony and the neighboring regions. Well Luther refused to recant and responded instead by printing polemical tracts that took aim at the papacy. Further, on December 10, 1520, he publicly burned the Papal Bull in defiance. Luther's humble and earnest efforts to reform the Church had now become something else entirely. Reformation became revolution.

Philip Schaff, a careful historian and solid source for information about Luther, described Luther's combative personality like this: "Luther is a man of war...[his] writings smell of powder; his words are battles; he overwhelms his opponents with a roaring cannonade of argument, eloquence, passion, and abuse."<sup>17</sup> Schaff said he heaped such vulgarity on one man that he couldn't translate its meaning into descent and presentable English.

Luther thrived on anger. He said: "I never work better than when I am inspired of anger, when I am angry, I can write well, pray well, and preach well. For then my whole temperament is quickened, my understanding is sharpened, and my mundane vexations and temptations depart from me."<sup>18</sup> One contemporary said of him: Some are interpreters, some are logicians, some are orators, but Luther--he is all. He was a man of passion and he caused quite a scandal when he, as a monk, took a wife.

E. Strongminded Stand: Martin Luther started a revolution he never planned or expected. On April 18, 1521, Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor, and the Catholic Church demanded that he recant his heresies or face a fiery death. Luther famously replied:

"Unless I am refuted and convicted by testimonies of the Scriptures or by clear arguments (since I believe neither the Pope nor the Councils alone; it being evident that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am conquered by the Holy Scriptures quoted by me, and my conscience is bound in the word of God: I can not and will not recant any thing, since it is unsafe and dangerous to do any thing against the conscience..."<sup>19</sup>

In the growing clamor, with his critics hurling accusations of heresy, Luther declared in German: "Here I stand, I can not do otherwise. So help me God. Amen!"<sup>20</sup> For this stand, Luther was

excommunicated from the Catholic Church, condemned as a heretic, and lived out much of his life in hiding.

#### IV. LUTHER'S ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Yet his accomplishments are numerous. Two are primary:

A. German Language Bible: Foremost among them was his translation of the Greek New Testament into the German language for his people in 1522. Amazingly, it only took the brilliant Luther a few months to complete while in Wartburg Castle.<sup>21</sup> With the help of others, the Old Testament translation from Hebrew was finished in 1534 and a complete Bible was printed.<sup>22</sup> Finally, they would be able to read the Bible for themselves and not be completely dependent on or slavishly deceived by the Church. The German Bible was a game changer.

Some people after reading it fomented revolt and revolution, which was not Luther's intention, but it inspired the quest for freedom from tyranny in both Church and State that had a far-reaching impact. Regarding government, Luther taught that the civil magistrate's job is to protect life and property and keep the civil peace. As to our responsibility as citizens, Luther stated:

“We are to be subject to the governmental power to do what it bids, as long as it does not bind our conscience but legislates only concerning outward matters...But if it invades the spiritual domain and constrains the conscience, over which God only must preside and rule, we should not obey it at all...”<sup>18</sup>

His teaching opened the door to rebelling against civil or church authorities who are acting outside of God's proscribed role as set forth in Romans 13. The Bible suddenly had renewed application to all of life, even to our role as citizens.

B. German Congregational Hymns: Luther didn't stop with the Bible. He knew the power of music to teach truths. Singing was limited to the chanting of priests and choirs, but Luther wrote hymns for the people. It became his passion to have songs written in the language of his people so they could sing their faith. So Luther introduced congregational singing and contemporary Christian music to the church, himself writing some 37 hymns, including the most famous of all: “A Mighty Fortress is Our God” based on Psalm 46. It is the victory anthem of the Reformation, declaring God as an unassailable refuge. The fiery darts and arrows of demons and of men may fly without, doubts and discouragements may rage within, but God's strength is sure, and Christ is our champion:

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 power 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.<sup>23</sup>

Eventually, the hymn, next to the Bible and the sermon, became the most powerful missionary of the Reformation doctrines. These hymns were scattered far and wide, sung in the house and in the church and on the street. A contemporary said: "One cannot go into the fields without finding the plow at his hallelujahs and the mower at his hymns." So to Luther belongs the merit of giving his people a Bible and a hymnbook in their language. He was indeed a revolutionary.

## V. LUTHER'S LEGACY

But the flame from Luther's torch passed from one to another until it impacted the world. Ulrich Zwingli lit his torch off Luther's and carried the message over into Zurich, Switzerland. He, Balthazar Hubmaier, and others took things a step further and said that only believers ought to be baptized and receive communion. Luther's torch also touched young Philip Melancthon, the scholar who helped articulate and spread Luther's message more effectively. And it was Melancthon who lit the torch of John Calvin, who arguably became the chief theologian of the Reformation. Calvin took the message back to Geneva, Switzerland and then on to France. Then came John Knox of Scotland, who was as passionate and powerful a preacher as any of these men. He challenged Church and State with Reformation teaching. Queen Mary once said: "I fear his pulpit more than I fear the armies of England."

This torch of truth was passed from person to person, village to village, nation to nation in the Old World, and ultimately across the Atlantic to the New World. The Reformation flame was carried in the hearts of our Pilgrim and Puritan forefathers, and ultimately lifted high again by Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield in the Great Awakening. And in the fires of that Great Awakening was forged the Reformation faith of nearly all our Founding Fathers. But it was Martin Luther who was used of God to brandish the flame of the Reformation and that torch of truth touches our lives even to this day.

Now the torch has been passed and flame of the Reformation has been entrusted to us. We must do as Luther did and stand resolutely for the Gospel. In particular, we must hold tenaciously to these Reformation truths:

**Sola Scriptura:** Scripture alone. God's word is final authority for the Christian (2 Tim. 3:14-17). No edict by the Church has the same force. Where tradition, teaching or our experience and the Bible differ, Scripture is supreme.

**Sola Fide:** Faith alone. Only by placing our trust in Christ can we be made right with God. It is "not a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Eph. 2:9). Faith alone is our response to the grace of God mediated through Christ.

**Sola Gratia:** Grace alone. All are fallen sinners by nature and choice and are under God's wrath (Rom. 3:23; 6:23). Yet Holy God responds with grace to the undeserving sinner because of Christ's atoning sacrifice. Our works of righteousness have no effect. We are saved by God's grace alone (Eph. 2:8).

**Solus Christus:** Christ alone. As the "one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all" (1 Tim. 2:5-6), only he could take our place and punishment. Our right standing with God depends on the merit of Christ's sacrificial death on the cross. Christ alone saves us.

**Soli Deo Gloria:** Glory to God alone. Since our chief end is to glorify God, whatever we do, we should "do all for the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31).

## CONCLUSION

A story has been passed down through the ages about Luther's conversion experience, whether fanciful or true, I don't know. But we're told that when God revealed this great truth to Luther that we're saved by grace through faith in Christ apart from works, he was literally staggered under the blow of it. He stepped out of his cell in monastery tower the middle of the night, his eyes blinded by darkness and by tears of joy. And all of the sudden, he nearly fell. Instinctively, he reached out and tried grab hold of something to support himself, and when he did, he grabbed a rope, and that rope led to the belfry, and he rang the bells in the middle of the night, as if to say to the world: "The righteous shall live by faith! The righteous shall live by faith!" The righteous shall live by faith!" And this Bible truth revealed in a dark monastery became a shining light to all the world.

And it is within our hearts that the flame of the Reformation burns on. The righteous shall live *by faith*. That is the Gospel. Now it is our turn, in our generation to nurture and guard this flame, to feed and brandish it, to lift the torch of truth high and then pass it on to the generations to come, for Jesus' sake.

Bow: Are you struggling with a burden of guilt like Luther? Feeling like there is no way God could accept you, let alone love you? Why not leave all those feelings at the cross of Christ because He has already paid the debt for your sin, and you can experience the freedom Luther did by putting your faith in Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord. You can know the love and acceptance of God when you turn from your sin and trust Jesus.



Many others have already experienced that freedom, and you need to be a torch bearer like Luther. Could it be that God has chosen you to be a part of this great story? To stand alone for Jesus Christ against the conventional wisdom or even the abuses of the modern church. Could it be that the torch is being passed to you? Will you take hold of it? Will you lift it high? Will you pass it on? With God as my helper, I am ready. Are you?

In an old Lutheran Service Book and Hymnal, there is a Reformation Day Prayer that I have updated...will you pray it with me?

Prayer: "Almighty God, who through the preaching of your servants, the courageous Reformers, has caused the light of the Gospel to shine forth: Grant us Father, that knowing its saving power, we may faithfully guard and defend it against all enemies, and joyfully proclaim it, to the salvation of souls and the glory of your Holy Name; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever. Amen."<sup>24</sup>

- END

Dr. Kenyn Cureton, a former pastor and Vice President for Convention Relations for the Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention, currently serves as Vice President for Church Ministries with Family Research Council.

---

<sup>1</sup> Eric Metaxas, *Martin Luther: The Man Who Rediscovered God and Changed the World* (New York: Viking, 2017), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 8 vols., (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910), 7:112.

<sup>3</sup> Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther*, (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1950), 45.

<sup>4</sup> Metaxas, 61. Eric Metaxas describes Luther's experience at one of Rome's iconic spiritual spots: "While in Rome, Luther climbed the fabled Scala Sancta (Holy Stairs) that were purported to be the marble stairs of Pilate's first-century palace in Jerusalem, which stairs Jesus himself had mounted and at the top of which he heard his fate from the assembled rabble: "Crucify him!" It is believed that Saint Helen, the mother of the fourth-century emperor Constantine, had brought them back from the Holy Land on a relic-hunting trip in which she also somehow managed to locate and bring back the "True Cross." Although the purportedly Tyrian marble of the Scala Sancta is now protected with a wood overlay, pilgrims can still today climb them on their knees, praying all the while, just as Luther did five hundred years ago. It was stipulated in Luther's time that the pilgrim ascending these stairs must upon each step recite the Pater Noster (Our Father). Doing this would count toward decreasing the suffering of any deceased relatives in purgatory, and at the time Luther seriously lamented that his parents were still alive. What a terrible conundrum it presented! How he dearly wished his time in Rome might count toward relieving the suffering in purgatory that likely yawned ahead of them, but the fact that they yet breathed terrestrial air cut off any hope of his helping them. But happily, Luther's grandpa Heine had departed this world in time to benefit from his grandson's ardent piety. Luther earnestly said the Pater Noster twenty-eight times, but when at last he reached the top of this holy ziggurat, a terrible thought entered his mind. Years later, he said that as he knelt at the top of those twenty-eight steps, with his knees still registering the coolness of their marble, he suddenly wondered whether all he had just done so obediently would have the effect that the church so authoritatively and specifically and confidently said it would."

<sup>5</sup> Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehman, eds., *Luther's Works*, American Edition, 55 vols., (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1955-86), 34:336-37.

<sup>6</sup> *Luther's Works*, 34:337.

<sup>7</sup> Bainton, 65.

<sup>8</sup> Metaxas, 93-99.

<sup>9</sup> Metaxas, 93.

---

<sup>10</sup> Metaxas, 108 records how a contemporary of Luther's named Myconius recounted the following hilarious incident regarding Tetzel: "After Tetzel had received a substantial amount of money at Leipzig, a nobleman asked him if it were possible to receive a letter of indulgence for a future sin. Tetzel quickly answered in the affirmative, insisting, however, that the payment had to be made at once. This the nobleman did, receiving thereupon letter and seal from Tetzel. When Tetzel left Leipzig the nobleman attacked him along the way, gave him a thorough beating, and sent him back empty-handed to Leipzig with the comment that this was the future sin which he had in mind. Duke George at first was quite furious about this incident, but when he heard the whole story he let it go without punishing the nobleman."

<sup>11</sup> Schaff, *History*, 7:128. In German: "Sobald der Pfennig im Kasten klinget, Die Seele aus dem Fegfeuer springt."

<sup>12</sup> *Luther's Works* 48:45-47: "Most Reverend Father in Christ, Most Illustrious Sovereign: Forgive me that I, the least of all men, have the temerity to consider writing to Your Highness. The Lord Jesus is my witness that I have long hesitated doing this on account of my insignificance and unworthiness, of which I am well aware. I do it now impudently, and I am motivated solely by the obligation of my loyalty, which I know I owe you, Most Reverend Father in Christ. May Your Highness therefore deign to glance at what is but a grain of dust, and for the sake of your episcopal kindness, listen to my request.

Under your most distinguished name, papal indulgences are offered all across the land for the construction of St. Peter. Now, I do not so much complain about the quacking of the preachers, which I haven't heard; \* but I bewail the gross misunderstanding among the people which comes from these preachers and which they spread everywhere among common men. Evidently the poor souls believe that when they have bought indulgence letters they are then assured of their salvation. They are likewise convinced that souls escape from purgatory as soon as they have placed a contribution into the chest.

Further, they assume that the grace obtained through these indulgences is so completely effective that there is no sin of such magnitude that it cannot be forgiven—even if (as they say) someone should rape the mother of God, were this possible. Finally they also believe that man is free from every penalty and guilt by these indulgences. O great God! The souls committed to your care, excellent Father, are thus directed to death. For all these souls you have the heaviest and a constantly increasing responsibility.

Therefore I can no longer be silent on this subject. No man can be assured of his salvation by any episcopal function. He is not even assured of his salvation by the infusion of God's grace, because the Apostle [Paul] orders us to work out our salvation constantly "in fear and trembling." . . .

How can the [indulgence agents] then make the people feel secure and without fear [concerning salvation] by means of those false stories and promises of pardon? After all, the indulgences contribute absolutely nothing to the salvation and holiness of souls; they only compensate for the external punishment which—on the basis of Canon Law—once used to be imposed."

<sup>13</sup> Metaxas 123-24.

<sup>14</sup> Smith, *Life and Letters of Martin Luther*, 43-44.

<sup>15</sup> Schaff, *History*, 7:130.

<sup>16</sup> Schaff, *History*, 7:143.

<sup>17</sup> Schaff, *History*, 7:159.

<sup>18</sup> William Hazlitt, ed. and trans., *Table Talks of Martin Luther* (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 2004), 206.

<sup>19</sup> Schaff, *History*, 7:245.

<sup>20</sup> Schaff, *History*, 7:245.

<sup>21</sup> Schaff, *History*, 7:276. Philip Melancthon, who was Luther's superior with Greek, helped edit.

<sup>22</sup> Schaff, *History*, 7:277: "He at once proceeded to the more difficult task of translating the Old Testament, and published it in parts as they were ready. The Pentateuch appeared in 1523; the Psalter, 1524. In the progress of the work he founded a Collegium Biblicum, or Bible club, consisting of his colleagues Melancthon, Bugenhagen (Pommer), Cruciger, Justus Jonas, and Aurogallus. They met once a week in his house, several hours before supper. Deacon Georg Rörer (Rorarius), the first clergyman ordained by Luther, and his proof-reader, was also present; occasionally foreign scholars were admitted; and Jewish rabbis were freely consulted. Each member of the company contributed to the work

---

from his special knowledge and preparation. Melancthon brought with him the Greek Bible, Cruciger the Hebrew and Chaldee, Bugenhagen the Vulgate, others the old commentators; Luther had always with him the Latin and the German versions besides the Hebrew. Sometimes they scarcely mastered three lines of the Book of Job in four days, and hunted two, three, and four weeks for a single word. No record exists of the discussions of this remarkable company, but Mathesius says that "wonderfully beautiful and instructive speeches were made." At last the whole Bible, including the Apocrypha as "books not equal to the Holy Scriptures, yet useful and good to read," was completed in 1534, and printed with numerous woodcuts."

<sup>18</sup> Luther in his *Epistel A. Petri Gepredigt und Ausgelegt*, as cited in Ewald M. Plass, ed. *What Luther Says: An Anthology* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1959), 601.

<sup>23</sup> Frederick H. Hedge, trans. "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God," in *Hymns for the Family of God* (Nashville, Tenn.: Paragon Associates, 1976), no. 118.

<sup>24</sup> Stephen J. Nichols, *The Reformation: How a Monk and a Mallet Changed the World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 8. Here is the prayer as originally printed: "Almighty God, who through the preaching of thy servants, the blessed reformers, hast caused the light of the Gospel to shine forth: Grant, we beseech thee, that knowing its saving power, we may faithfully guard and defend it against all enemies, and joyfully proclaim it, to the salvation of souls and the glory of thy Holy Name; through thy Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, world without end. Amen." The phrase "world without end" is a rendering of "saecula saeculorum," usually rendered "ages of ages," but is the calque of what was probably a Semitic idiom, via Koine Greek, meaning "forever." We got "world without end" in English from King James I's Authorized Version of the Bible in Ephesians 3:21 and Isaiah 45:17. So the original prayer's ending of "world without end" is simply an unfortunate rendering by the KJV of the Latin, thus the change in wording from the original.