

Church History, Lesson 8: The Reformation Church, Part 1 (1517 – 1648): Lutheran Reformation

23. Importance of the Reformation: The importance of the Reformation cannot be overstated. Listen to Philip Schaff, who spent his career studying and writing on church history: “The Reformation of the sixteenth century is, next to the introduction of Christianity, the greatest event in history.”⁴¹

He goes on to say that “the religious leaders of the Reformation, while not free from faults, were men of the purest motives and highest aims, and there is no nation which has not been benefited by the change they introduced.”⁴²

24. Overview of the Reformation: Several ways to look at the Reformation.

a. Geographically

- i. Germany and Scandinavia
- ii. Switzerland (Geneva, Zurich)
- iii. Rest of Continental Europe (Netherlands, France, Eastern Europe)
- iv. England and Scotland

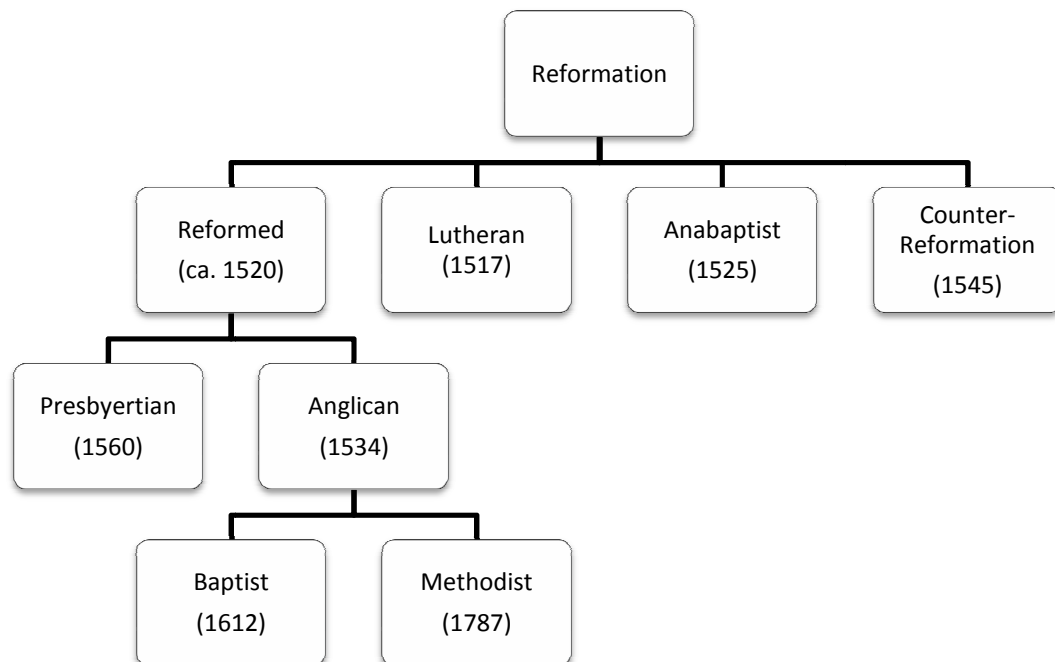
b. Theologically

- i. Lutheran
- ii. Reformed
- iii. Anglican
- iv. Anabaptist
- v. Roman Catholic (Counter-Reformation)
- vi. Family tree⁴³

⁴¹ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church, vol. 7, Modern Christianity: The German Reformation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1910), 1.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 14.

⁴³ Adapted from: Walton, *Chronological and Background Charts of Church History*, chart 73. Used with permission.



25. Causes of the Reformation: “The causes of the Reformation were not simple and single but were complex and multiple. The Reformation was both derivative and determinative in its causation.”⁴⁴

- a. Political: Rise of “nation-states” and the conflict between the state rulers and popes.
- b. Economic: Rise of the middle class and the dislike of money going to Rome.
- c. Ecclesiastical:
 - i. Decline of the papacy: Babylonian Captivity and Papal Schism.
 - ii. Conciliar movement failed.
 - iii. Moral failure and corruption:
 1. Simony: buying and selling of religious offices.
 2. Nepotism: religious clergy favoring family and friends for religious office.

⁴⁴ Cairns, *Christianity Through The Centuries*, 272.

3. Celibacy, concubines, and illegitimate children.
- iv. Errant doctrine and teaching:
 1. Purgatory.
 2. Transubstantiation.
 3. Sacraments.
- v. Empty religious practices:
 1. Little preaching from the Bible.
 2. Saint-worship and image-worship.
 3. Sale of indulgences.
- vi. Mysticism and a thirst for a direct contact with God.
- vii. Forerunners of the Reformation.
- d. Cultural
 - i. Renaissance and Humanism (*ad fontes*).
 - ii. Education of the laity.
 - iii. Printing press, which enabled Reformation ideas to spread.

26. Lutheran Reformation

- a. Luther before 1517: Formative years
 - i. Born on November 10, 1483.
 - ii. Received his B.A. in 1502; M.A. in 1505.
 - iii. In 1505 he entered law school.
 - iv. July 1505 he vowed to St. Anne to become a monk.

- v. Luther joined the Augustinian order. The Augustinian order was considered the strictest in Germany. Historians believe he chose the strictest order so that he could get closest to God.
 - vi. Ordained in 1508.
 - vii. During a visit to Rome in 1510 he was discouraged by some of the practices he saw in the Roman church.
 - viii. Received doctorate in 1512.
 - ix. Taught at the University of Wittenberg.
 - x. Luther is converted sometime between 1515 to 1518. Through a study of Romans 1:17 in the Greek language using Erasmus' text, he came to salvation. Romans 1:17 "For in it [gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'But the righteous man shall live by faith.'" Luther, speaking of his conversion, writes: "The righteousness of God is that righteousness by which through grace and mercy God justifies us by faith. I felt myself reborn! . . . Works do not make one righteous. Righteousness creates good works."⁴⁵
- b. Luther from 1517 to 1521: Break with Rome
- i. *Ninety-Five Theses* (1517)
 - 1. Background:
 - a. Indulgences: the Church sold indulgences to raise funds for St. Peter's basilica construction.
 - b. Sacrament of penance:
 - i. Penance = punishment. Church believed that sin required temporal punishment.
 - ii. Three parts to penance:
 - 1. Contrition: sorry for sins.
 - 2. Confession: to a priest.

⁴⁵ Jones, *Church History Made Easy*, 107.

3. Satisfaction: work removed sins.

- c. Treasury of Merit: a heavenly bank account of excess good works from Christ, martyrs, and saints.
- d. So Indulgences were acquired from the Treasury of Merit through the exchange of money in order to be applied to the person in need of satisfaction.

2. *Ninety-Five Theses*

- a. Luther responds to the sale of Indulgences with the *Ninety-Five Theses*, nailing them to the Castle Church door at Wittenberg on October 31, 1517.
- b. The *Theses* were written for discussion and debate; it was not an act of rebellion against the Church.
- c. They were written in Latin and translated into German, and disbursed throughout the country.
- d. Note: *Ninety-Five Theses* do not deny papal power; does not deny the sacrament of penance; does not deny the validity of Indulgences. Luther was concerned with the *abuse* of Indulgences.

ii. Diet of Worms (1521)

1. Background:

- a. Summer of 1520 a papal bull from Pope Leo X was issued to Luther. The bull began, taken from Psalm 74:22: "Arise, O Lord, and judge Thy cause. A wild boar has invaded Thy vineyard."⁴⁶ It gave Luther sixty days to recant his writings and teachings.
- b. Luther threw a party and burned the papal bull. "They have burned my books," Luther said, "I burn theirs."⁴⁷
- c. In January 1521 Luther was excommunicated from the Church.

⁴⁶ Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language*, 247.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

2. Trial:

- a. Summoned to appear before a secular court on April 17 1521.
- b. At the trial, Luther asked for postponement. The question that plagued Luther was: “Am I alone wise.”
- c. The next day Luther was given a chance to recant but gave his famous “Here I Stand” speech:

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 cannot and will not recant anything, since it is unsafe and dangerous to do anything against the conscience. . . . Here I stand. (I cannot do otherwise.) God help me! Amen.⁴⁸

- d. Schaff states the significance of Luther’s speech well:

The Reformation was a grand act of emancipation from spiritual tyranny, and a vindication of the sacred rights of conscience in matters of religious belief. Luther’s bold stand at the Diet of Worms, in the face of the pope and the emperor, is one of the sublimest events in the history of liberty, and the eloquence of his testimony rings through the centuries.⁴⁹

- e. I think it can be said, historically speaking, that while the *Ninety-Five Theses* started Reformation, the Diet of Worms made it official.

3. After-math:

- a. Luther was given 21 days of safe passage.
- b. Frederick the Wise, a friend of Luther, and the prince (i.e., mayor) of Luther’s territory, and the one who had the Diet

⁴⁸ Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 7, 304-305.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 50.

of Worms take place on German soil, sent soldiers to capture Luther.

- c. While at Wartburg Castle, Luther translated the New Testament into German. Luther's translation is significant not only because the Bible was translated into the vernacular, but Luther's translation set standards for the German language.
- d. Luther returns to Wittenberg in 1522 when he takes leadership of the Reformation. At this time the Reformation really gets going in Germany.

iii. Luther from 1522 to 1530: Reformation in Germany

- 1. In 1524 Luther wrote his famous *The Bondage of the Will* in response to Erasmus' *The Freedom of the Will*. Luther argued that the human will is bound by sin.

2. Marriage (1525)

- a. Marries Katherine Von Bora (1499 – 1550) June 13, 1525.
- b. Significance of his marriage:
 - i. The norm for 1,000 years was celibacy. Luther is breaking the 1,000 year tradition.
 - ii. Katherine was a nun.
 - iii. Other reformers, such as Melanchthon, opposed his marriage, thinking it would bring a negative impact to the Reformation.
 - iv. Interestingly, up to the 1940s, Roman Catholics thought Luther brought about Reformation just to get married.
 - v. Luther's marriage affected the overhaul of marriage and family life.
- c. Six biological children.

3. Philip Melancthon (1497 – 1560), Luther’s right-hand man and eventual successor, and great organizer of Lutheran theology, drew up the Augsburg Confession and presented it at the Diet of Augsburg in 1530.
 4. Note: other German Reformers contributed to the Reformation in Germany (both Lutheran and Reformed) but we don’t have time to discuss. See Walton, *Chronological and Background Charts of Church History*, chart 56.
- iv. From 1531 – 1555: German religious wars and national churches
1. In 1531 a coalition of Lutheran princes formed known as the Schmalkaldic League. These men would fight for each other if one was attacked.
 2. 1546 Luther dies.
 3. Charles V (1500 – 1558), Holy Roman Emperor, went to war with the Schmalkaldic League from 1546 to 1552 (“Smalcald War”). Fighting ended with the Peace of Augsburg in 1555. The significance is three-fold:
 - a. First time that Roman Catholics and Lutherans recognized the legitimacy of each other.
 - b. Lutheranism is given full legal status.
 - c. The ruler of a region determines the religion of that region, and thus territorial churches are born.
- v. From 1555 to 1580: Lutheranism
1. During this time, Lutherans defined who they were through the process of discussion and debate.
 2. Formula of Concord (1577) published as the Book of Concord (1580) became the standard expression of Lutheranism.
- vi. Note: the Scandinavian Reformation, which was predominately Lutheran, happened simultaneously as the German Reformation.