

Church History
Lesson 27 - Lesson 27 - The Beginning of the Reformation
Erasmus and Luther to the Diet of Worms

1. Introduction - Forerunner to the Reformation

- 1.1. As we have seen, many people recognized the need for reform in the church during the later middle ages. The papacy and priesthood had grown increasingly corrupt, the papacy was faced with schisms and rival claimants to the papal seat, the church hierarchy often seemed more interested in temporal affairs than heavenly ones, the church was consistently embroiled in power struggles with various rulers and kingdoms.
- 1.2. Throughout the history of the church there had been various reform movements, especially with monasticism. During the end of the Babylonian Captivity of the Papacy, the conciliar movement had arisen to try and address these many problems through church councils. However, this movement broke down because there arose rival councils setting in rival popes!
- 1.3. At the same time, major movements led by Peter Waldo, John Wycliffe, and Jan Hus arose protesting both doctrinal errors and wrong practices within the Church. Many of the beliefs and practices of these groups were the same as those addressed by the Reformers of the 16th century, and these groups had a lasting power that previous groups did not display. However, ultimately they were localized movements that did not spread throughout Europe - but they did lay the groundwork for the Reformation.
- 1.4. How did the Reformation of the 16th century finally arise?

2. The Deep Problems of the Church Leadership at the Dawn of the 16th century

- 2.1. Continuing problems with the behavior of priests, bishops and popes
 - 2.1.1. Despite attempts at reform within the church, there were still great problems with the behavior and practices of the clergy of the church, from the local parish priest to the bishops up to the Popes themselves. In particular, greed and lavish lifestyles, quests for political power, and gross sexual immorality plagued the leadership of the church.
 - 2.1.1.1. The dissolution is such, that the souls entrusted to the clergy receive great damage, for we are told that the majority of the clergy are living in open concubinage, and that if our justice intervenes in order to punish them, they revolt and create a scandal, and that they despise our justice to the point that they arm themselves against it. ISABELLA OF CASTILE, ON NOVEMBER 20, 1500 - Gonzales, location 218
 - 2.1.1.2. One of the reasons for such failure was that several of the bishops sitting in the councils were themselves among those who profited from the existing corruption. Thus, while the hopeful conciliarist reformers issued anathemas and decrees against absenteeism, pluralism, and simony—the practice of buying and selling ecclesiastical positions—many who sat on the councils were guilty of such practices, and were not ready to give them up. - Gonzales, location 233

2.1.1.3. While clerical celibacy was the law of the church, there were many who broke it openly; and bishops and local priests alike—and even some popes—flaunted their illegitimate children. - Gonzales, location 237

2.1.2. This came to the head beginning in 1492 when Rodrigo Borgia simply bribed his way to becoming Pope. As Pope Alexander VI, the papacy sank to a new low. He openly had multiple children by his concubine, and was rumored to even have had one by his own daughter Lucrezia. He is remembered for the habit of throwing orgies at the Vatican, and for poisoning Cardinals. He was followed by Julius II, who also sired children and was more known for his desire for war than being a pastor. Finally, Leo X, who had been ordained at the age of 7 and was far more interested in art than faith, became Pope. He was the Pope when Martin Luther began the Reformation. (Michael Reeves, *The Unquenchable Flame*, 28).

2.2. Though people still had faith in the Church, these outrageous behaviors could not help but lead the more educated people of Europe to question how the Church could be Reformed.

3. The Social Situation

3.1. The world of the 15th century saw incredible change which helped prepare the way for the Reformation. The world seemed to be changing and growing, and new tools allowed ideas to expand rapidly and broadly in a way never before possible.

3.2. First, around 1450 Gutenberg perfected moveable type and thus created the first successful printing press. This meant that documents would no longer have to be copied by hand. Instead, they could be printed in many copies at a time. This greatly reduced the cost of books and documents, and allowed the rapid and broad dissemination of ideas in a manner never before possible.

3.3. In 1453 Constantinople and the Byzantine Empire (the ancient Roman Empire relocated in the East) finally fell to the Muslims. This created a shock throughout Europe. The Byzantine Empire had stood for over 1,000 years, built on the 1,000 year history of Rome before it. It seemed the world was shaking.

3.4. Furthermore, with the fall of the Byzantine Empire, there was a flood of scholars coming to the West. These men brought the knowledge of Greek and Hebrew - almost completely unknown in the West - along with Greek manuscripts of the New Testament and Hebrew of the Old Testament. This opened the way for scholars in the West to look at the Bible in its original Greek and Hebrew for the first time in almost 1,000 years.

3.5. When Columbus discovered the New World in 1492, the entire earth seemed to be growing. There were new worlds to be discovered, and the Old World seemed to be on the verge of radical change.

3.6. Finally, when Copernicus began in 1514 to publish ideas that the Sun, not the earth, was the center of the solar system, the entire universe seemed to be undergoing a shift. The time indeed seemed ripe for major change.

4. The Renaissance Humanists & Erasmus

4.1. The word renaissance means rebirth. The Renaissance is the name given to movement of the 14th and 15th centuries. The movement is often thought of as

beginning with the work of Petrarch. Under his leadership the humanists (as they came to be known) called for a return to the glories of antiquity and an end to what they called the 'Dark' or 'Middle' Ages. Their battle cry was *ad fontes* - 'To the sources'. They advocated a return to the literature and culture of classical antiquity. This led to a revival of studying the language, art, literature, and ideas of antiquity, and the attempt to imitate them in their own day.

4.2. The Renaissance humanists also began to examine some of the claims and documents of the Church. Perhaps most important was the proof given by Lorenzo Valla in 1440 that the famous Donation of Constantine was a forgery. The *Donation* was purported to be a document from the Emperor Constantine stating that as he moved the seat of Empire from Rome to the East, the Bishop of Rome was to become the political leader of the West. This document had been used for centuries to shore up the political power of the Papacy. Valla proved that the document was a forgery written in the 8th century. He did this by proving the Latin of the document contained terms and style that did not exist in the time of Constantine but were rather indicative of the 8th century. The proof Valla provided became fairly widely known, but was heavily rejected by the Church. Interestingly, it was not printed for general distribution until 1517.

4.2.1. In *On the Falsely Believed and Lying Donation of Constantine*, Valla, deftly using his textual-critical skills, argued that the Donation of Constantine — which upheld the temporal authority of the papacy over the world — was in fact a “ridiculous forgery.” The forger had given himself away by including a Byzantine expression like satraps or the anachronistic word Huns in the piece. - Woodbridge, location 1798

4.3. However, the most important Renaissance humanist was Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam. Erasmus was a scholar of incredible intellect and skill. He had studied some scholastic theology, but soon came to despise its subtleties. Eventually he turned to a study of Greek and set out to provide a fresh translation of the Scriptures from Greek into Latin.

4.3.1. Long before the Protestant Reformation broke out, there was a large network of humanists who carried a vast correspondence among themselves and who hoped that their work would result in the reformation of the church. Their acknowledged leader, respected by many and known as the Prince of Humanists, was Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam. - Gonzales, location 337

4.3.2. He studied some scholastic theology, but soon came to despise its excessive subtlety and seemingly idle curiosity. He then decided to turn his attention to classical literature, which was enjoying a revival of interest. In a later visit to England, he became part of a circle of humanists interested in the reformation of the church, and these introduced him to the study of Scripture and of early Christian literature, which he saw as captive to the scholastics. It was at that time that he decided to perfect his rudimentary knowledge of Greek, which he soon mastered. - Gonzales, location 341

4.4. In 1516, Erasmus published the first Greek edition of the New Testament, which he called *Novum Instrumentum omne* (All of the New Teaching). This document was essential in blazing the path for three reasons. First, it gave a parallel copy of the Greek text and a Latin translation of the New Testament. This allowed Latin scholars to begin to see the Latin and the Greek together. Second, the Latin translation was not the official Vulgate of Jerome, but a fresh translation, that

corrected many errors in the Vulgate. This began to open the eyes of people to errors in the Vulgate which had effected practices in the Church. (For example, the mistranslation of the Greek word metanoia as 'do penance' rather than 'repent - change your mind.' Finally, it gave the growing number of scholars knowing or desiring to learn Greek a copy of the Greek New Testament from which to do their own translations. This final reason was really the most important as it allowed Luther, Tyndale, and others to give translations in German, English, and other languages directly from the Greek.

- 4.4.1.** Erasmus carefully constructed a much-improved edition of the Greek New Testament — the *Novum Instrumentum* (March 1516). - Woodbridge, location 2005
- 4.4.2.** 'I have taken what they call the New Testament and revised it, with all the diligence I could muster and all the accuracy that was appropriate, checking it in the first instance against the true Greek text. For that is, as it were, the fountain-head to which we are not only encouraged to have recourse in any difficulty by the example of eminent divines, but frequently advised to do so by Jerome and Augustine, and so instructed by the actual decrees of the Roman pontiffs. Second, I checked it against the tradition of very ancient copies of the Latin version.' - Erasmus - Woodbridge, location 2007
- 4.4.3.** Erasmus hoped his text would become the basis for more accurate translations of the New Testament into vernacular languages. - Woodbridge, location 2011
- 4.4.4.** Luther used Erasmus's edition as the basis for his translation of the New Testament into German. - Woodbridge, location 2016
- 4.4.5.** William Tyndale (c. 1494–1536), an admirer of Wycliffe, Erasmus, and Luther, created the first printed English translation of the New Testament (1525–26) and portions of the Old Testament. For his efforts, Tyndale was betrayed, imprisoned, strangled, and burned at the stake. - Woodbridge, location 2013
- 4.5.** Erasmus also longed to see reforms within the church. He called Christians to a learned piety, following the ethical teachings of Jesus, and Christ's example of self-sacrifice. He thus rejected much of the pomp of the Church, and called for a return to simplicity. He also rejected the monastic ideal, saying that all Christians were called to full obedience.
 - 4.5.1.** He called Christians to a "learned piety"—that is, "scriptural, practical, and theologically serious" (per historian Philip Benedict's description). In living out their faith, believers were to emulate the "philosophy of Jesus"—that is, Christ's ethical teachings and example of self-sacrifice. - Woodbridge, location 2001
 - 4.5.2.** Now, combining the humanist spirit to that devotion, he came to describe Christianity as above all a decent, moderate, and balanced life. - Gonzales, location 352
 - 4.5.3.** The monastic withdraws from the common life of the world; the true "soldier of Christ" trains for practical and daily life in the midst of human affairs. What the church needs, in order to be reformed, is for Christians to practice this discipline, and to abandon the vices of the pagans. - Gonzales, location 354
 - 4.5.4.** He therefore rejected the pomp and the quest for earthly glories that characterized much of the life of the church in his time, and called for a lifestyle of greater simplicity. - Gonzales, location 358

- 4.5.5. But he also rejected the monastic ideal as based on the unacceptable distinction between the precepts of Jesus, which all must obey, and his “counsels of perfection,” addressed to monastics in particular. Such distinction, while encouraging some to radical obedience, implied that common Christians were somehow not also “soldiers of Christ,” called to complete obedience. - Gonzales, location 360
- 4.6. For all of these reasons, and especially the publication of the Greek New Testament, the saying “Erasmus laid the egg that Luther hatched” has come to describe the beginning of the Reformation.

5. Martin Luther - The Early Years

- 5.1. Martin Luther was born on November 10, 1483 in Eisleben, Saxony (part of modern Germany) as the oldest son of Hans and Margarethe Luther. He was baptized as a Roman Catholic the next morning. His family moved to Mansfeld in 1484 where his father was a lease holder of copper mines and smelters. His family were hard working Germans of the middle or trading class. Hans recognized Martin’s sharp intellect and desired for his son to become a lawyer, and sent him to Latin schools in Mansfeld and then Magdeburg beginning in 1497.
- 5.2. In 1501, Martin entered the University of Erfurt, receiving his Masters degree in 1505. He then enrolled in the Law school at Erfurt, preparing to become a lawyer.
- 5.3. However, Luther’s life was changed on July 2, 1505. While returning to the university on horseback he was caught in a terrible thunderstorm and a lightning bolt struck near him. Fearing for his life, Luther cried out "Help, Saint Anne! I will become a monk!" When he returned to the school safely, he left the study of law, sold his books, and entered the Augustinian monastery in Erfurt on July 17, 1505. This move infuriated his father, who viewed it as a waste of Martin’s education, and a move against the family’s future prosperity.
- 5.4. Luther threw himself into his new monastic vocation with gusto. He devoted himself to fasting, long hours of prayer, and increasingly meticulous confession. Years later, Luther recalled this period saying, “I kept the rule so strictly, that I may say that if ever a monk got to heaven by his sheer monkery, it was I. If I had kept on any longer, I should have killed myself with vigils, prayers, reading, and other work.”
- 5.5. In 1507 Luther was ordained to the priesthood. However, he continued to be driven by a profound sense of his own sinfulness and of God’s unutterable majesty. In the midst of saying his first Mass, said Luther, “I was utterly stupefied and terrorstricken. I thought to myself, ‘Who am I that I should lift up mine eyes or raise my hands to the divine majesty? For I am dust and ashes and full of sin, and I am speaking to the living, eternal and true God.’” This feeling of his depravity, and his fear of God as an unforgiving Judge dogged Luther throughout these years.
- 5.6. During this time Luther was also sent on a pilgrimage to Rome to carry out business of the Augustinian order. He and another monk went to Rome in 1511. During their trek they stayed in a variety of monasteries, and Luther became increasingly distressed at the luxurious living, loose morals, and lack of interest in spiritual things he observed among his host monks. However, he thought surely he would be spiritually enraptured in Rome itself. When the papal capitol first came into view he shouted, “Hail, holy Rome!” He went to climb the holy stairs said to be from Pilate’s judgment hall that Christ had ascended and which still had traces of his blood. Luther climbed the stairs on his knees, saying prayers, but found the experience

utterly unfulfilling. The more Luther saw of Rome, the more he grew to loathe it. The city, which he had greeted as holy, was a sink of iniquity; its very priests were openly infidel, and scoffed at the services they performed; the papal courtiers were men of the most shameless lives; he was accustomed to repeat the Italian proverb, "If there is a hell, Rome is built over it." (T. M. Lindsay, *Luther and the German Reformation*, 44).

- 5.7. In 1508 Luther was called by Johann von Staupitz to teach theology at the newly founded University of Wittenberg. He continued his studies, receiving a bachelors degree in biblical studies on March 9, 1508, and a Doctor of Theology on October 19, 1512. He was then received into the senate of the theological faculty of the University of Wittenberg, and succeeded Staupitz as the chair of theology.
- 5.8. During these years Luther was under Staupitz as a spiritual father. Staupitz saw Luther's great potential, but was also worried by his bouts of depression and inability to find peace in God. Staupitz first assigned for Luther to read the mystics, and for a time this brought Luther peace - as had the monastery at first. Over time, however the old fears returned. The mystics taught a contemplative life filled with the love of God, but Luther found Himself fearing God. If God was like his own earthly father and teachers - who had often beaten Luther severely - how could he trust and love God. Thus when Staupitz asked him "Martin, don't you love God?", Luther replied "Love God? I hate Him!" The mystics had thus proved another blind alley.
- 5.9. Staupitz then took the bold move of making Luther a pastor and teacher of the Scripture. Forced to study the Bible for himself, a new light began to dawn for Luther. In 1513 he began to lecture of the Psalms, where Luther saw that Christ had gone through trials similar to his own. This was the beginning of his discovery of the Gospel, that in Christ God was for him rather than against him. By 1515 he was lecturing on Romans, and it was here that the clouds began to fully roll back. In particular as Luther studied Romans 1:17 the light eventually broke through. While pondering St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans Luther came upon the words: "For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith" (1:17, KJV). Here was his key to spiritual certainty: "Night and day I pondered," Luther later recalled, "until I saw the connection between the justice of God and the statement that 'the just shall live by his faith.' Then I grasped that the justice of God is that righteousness by which through grace and sheer mercy God justifies us through faith. Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise."
- 5.10. While Luther's theology would continue to develop and mature, many of his key ideas were formed during this period, including the "alien righteousness" of Christ, "faith alone justifies," and we are "at the same time sinners, yet non-sinners." All of this militated against and undermined the current Roman Catholic sacramental system which stressed salvation by faith and a series of works sustained by the sacraments of the church. Luther did not realize the implications fully at this point, but the groundwork was certainly laid - justification was a work of God's grace, received by faith alone, not by our faith plus our works, or things like indulgences.
- 5.11. Luther had already criticized the selling of indulgences as early as 1515, but this came to a head in 1517. In order to finance adding the Archbishopric of Mainz to his roles, Albert who was already Archbishop of Magdeburg) needed to raise money. To do this, the sale of indulgences was authorized, and the Dominican monk Johan Tetzel was sent throughout Germany to sell the indulgences.

- 5.12.** Frederick the Elector, the ruler of Saxony and patron of the University of Wittenberg would not allow Tetzal into his territories. (Frederick did this, not because he doubted the doctrine of indulgences, but because he did not want to see money leaving Saxony for other regions of Germany and to Rome.) However, Tetzal set up shop right across the border, and people from Saxony flocked to purchase indulgences from him. Tetzal was especially crass in his sale of indulgences. He and his preachers were heard announcing that the indulgences that they sold made the sinner “cleaner than when coming out of baptism,” and “cleaner than Adam before the Fall,” and that “the cross of the seller of indulgences has as much power as the cross of Christ.” Finally, he promised “Once a coin into the coffer clings, a soul from purgatory springs.” This could not help but gall Luther.
- 5.13.** During this time, Luther had written a set of 95 theses in Latin to start debate in the academy. These theses attacked a number of tenets of scholasticism. However, the theses fell flat and no debate occurred within the academy at all.
- 5.14.** Then, on October 31, 1517, Luther posted another set of 95 theses on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg. This was an accepted practice to generate academic debate among scholars, and the theses were written in latin, and Luther sent a copy to Albert of Mainz. Luther had probably picked All Hallows Eve because Frederick put portions of his massive collection of relics on display on All Saints Day (November 1), and pilgrims could receive forgiveness of sins by viewing the relics.) But all in all, there was no reason to expect this set of 95 theses to cause any more stir than the previous set had caused. Furthermore, church historian John Woodbridge notes “Despite Luther’s boldness, there was nothing in the Ninety-five Theses that rejected traditional Catholic doctrine. The posting of the theses was not an act of rebellion against the church, but the work of a responsible church theologian who was seeking to address what he perceived to be distortions of Catholic teaching.” - Woodbridge, location 2317
- 5.15.** However, some unknown persons took the theses, translated them into German, and had them printed and distributed both the Latin and German versions throughout Germany. A firestorm soon erupted as many Germans began to speak in favor of Luther and against Tetzal and ultimately the Pope.
- 5.16.** Luther sent a copy to Albert of Brandenburg personally, with a very respectful cover letter. Albert sent both the theses and the letter to Rome, asking Pope Leo to intervene. Emperor Maximilian was enraged at the impertinence of the upstart friar, and he too asked Leo to silence Luther. Meanwhile, Luther published an extensive explanation of the theses, clarifying what he had meant in those very brief propositions, but sharpening his attack on indulgences, and expounding on parts of the theological stance on which he based his protest. The pope’s response was to ask the Augustinian Order to deal with the matter, for Luther was one of its members. - Gonzales, location 555
- 5.17.** However, many Augustinians supported Luther, either because they agreed with him doctrinally, or because they viewed it as part of the larger years long struggle between the Augustinian order and the Dominican order. In any event, the Augustinians did not bring Luther to heel.
- 5.18.** In April 1518, Luther was sent as a delegate to the triennial meeting of the Augustinian Hermits in Heidelberg. Staupitz gave him the opportunity to articulate and defend his views in the customary disputation. Luther proposed forty theses... Heidelberg provides an early glimpse into what was important to Luther immediately

after the indulgences controversy. Remarkably, the topic of indulgences was not addressed. Rather, Luther was much more concerned to address the larger theological doctrines that underlay his deepest convictions, such as original sin, free will, law-gospel distinction, and grace.... In general, two things were very clear. First, Luther had embraced an intensively Augustinian reading of the apostle Paul... Second, the forty theses manifest Luther's white-hot anti-Scholastic and anti-Aristotelian sentiments... Luther had reached the conclusion that Scholasticism and Aristotle could not coexist with Paul and Augustine. [Some were not convinced] But others embraced Luther with enthusiasm. Martin Bucer, a Dominican monk who attended the disputation, was captivated by Luther and paid him the highest compliment he could: "I have just seen the next Erasmus." At this point, no one realized where Luther would lead. - Woodbridge, location 2332-2349

- 5.19. Meanwhile, a Papal court theologian named Sylvester (Mazzolini) Prierias drafted a theological critique of Luther's 95 theses and attached a letter summoning him to Rome, thinking this would put the matter to rest. However, Luther did not come to Rome, instead writing a reply to Prierias' critique.
- 5.20. Pope Leo lost patience and on August 7 ordered Luther to appear in Rome within sixty days to recant his heresies. Further, the pope demanded that Elector Frederick should arrest and deliver this "child of the devil" to the papal legate. Frederick did not arrest Luther, but he did arrange a meeting with the papal legate — another Dominican, Cardinal Cajetan (Thomas de Vio)—at the upcoming Diet of Augsburg in October. - Woodbridge, location 2358
- 5.21. Leo sent Cardinal Cajetan, a man of vast erudition whose main task was to convince the German princes to undertake a crusade against the Turks, who were threatening Western Europe, and to agree to a tax for the support of that enterprise... As a secondary task, Cajetan was also instructed to meet with Luther and force him to recant. If the friar proved obstinate, he was to be sent as a prisoner to Rome. - Gonzales, location 566-569
- 5.22. The monk and the cardinal met three times in Augsburg (October 12–14). The cardinal was courteous, but insisted on a retraction and submission to papal authority. However, Luther stubbornly refused to recant his opinions. He asserted that Scripture has ultimate authority, to which Cajetan thundered in response, "The pope is above the council and also above the Holy Scripture. Recant!" - Woodbridge, location 2361
- 5.23. When Luther learned that Cajetan did not have to debate the issues at stake, because he was armed with the pope's authority to arrest him, Luther secretly left Augsburg at night and returned to Wittenberg, where he issued an appeal to a general council. - Gonzales, location 574
- 5.24. Cajetan then pressed Staupitz to put pressure on Luther to recant. Instead, Staupitz secretly released Luther from his monastic obedience so that he no longer represented the Augustinian order. Furthermore, Frederick felt compelled to protect Luther, not because he was convinced of the truth of the friar's teachings, but simply because justice demanded that he be given a hearing and a fair trial.
- 5.25. At this point international politics also began to intervene. The Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, Maximilian, was planning on his successor. The two most powerful and likely candidates were Charles I of Spain, and Francis I of France. Pope Leo X thought both of these were already too powerful, and so he threw his support behind Frederick the Elector, the Ruler of Saxony. Of course, this made the situation with

Luther even more delicate. Consequently, Leo followed a policy of postponing the condemnation of Luther and seeking better relations both with the Reformer and with his protector. He therefore sent a Papal nuncio (representative) named Miltitz to meet with Luther. Instead of confrontation, Miltitz employed a circuitous strategy. At their meeting on January 6, 1519, the papal nuncio expressed sympathy toward Luther and laid blame for the indulgences controversy at the feet of Tetzel, but he also implored Luther not to destroy the unity of the church. This seemed to work for a period, and In a letter of March 3, 1519, Luther humbly acknowledged the authority of the papacy and affirmed that he had never sought to undermine the Roman Church, although he still expressed concerns over the sale of indulgences.

- 5.26.** The peace was short lived, however, for Dr. Johann Eck (Johann Maier of Eck), one of the leading theologians at the University of Ingolstadt, sought a public debate with Luther and published twelve (later thirteen) theses against Luther and his fellow reformer Carlstadt in December 1518. When these reached Luther, he immediately replied with thirteen countertheses. This led to the famous Leipzig Disputation between Carlstadt/Luther and Eck. The debate began between Carlstadt and Eck in June, and then Luther arrived in July and the debate moved to one between Eck and Luther. It was clear that the former had greater knowledge of Scripture, whereas the latter was more at home in canon law and medieval theology On July 5 Eck accused Luther of being dangerously close to the “Bohemian heresy” (of Jan Hus). Initially Luther rejected the association, but later reversed himself, declaring, “Among the articles of Jan Hus, I find many that are plainly Christian and evangelical.” The more Luther was provoked, the more defiant he became. On July 7 he argued that church councils could err. Eck seized on this as undeniable heresy: “If you believe that a council, legitimately called, has erred and can err, be then to me as a Gentile and a publican. I do not have to explain further what a heretic is.”
- 5.27.** Around the same time, Charles I of Spain had been elected emperor, and was known thereafter as Charles V. Although Charles owed a debt of gratitude to Frederick the Wise for having supported his candidacy, he was a strictly orthodox man who would not countenance heresy in his lands, and therefore his election bode ill for Luther. - Gonzales, location 628
- 5.28.** During the course of 1520 Luther released three of his most important writings, appealing directly to the German nobility and people, and further defining his views. These writings were The Address to the German Nobility (August 1520); On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church (September 1520); The Freedom of the Christian Man (November 1520). The Freedom of the Christian Man actually included a cover letter to Pope Leo in which Luther stated that he did not believe Leo was personally responsible for the problems within the church, and appealed to him to stand for truth against those surrounding him. However, the content of these writings utterly undermined the entire system of the Roman Catholic church, and showed that ultimately Luther’s understanding of the Christian faith and that of the roman Catholic Church as then stood could not exist within the same Church. Furthermore, all of these were either written in or translated into the German vernacular, thus ensuring very wide circulation in Germany. Thus, unless something unexpected were to happen, either a split - or more likely the death of Luther - seemed inevitable.
- 5.28.1.**The Address to the German Nobility -

- 5.28.1.1. In this address Luther argued that the church was corrupt and unable to reform itself and therefore it was the German nobles who must take up the task of reformation. - Woodbridge, location 2428
- 5.28.1.2. The first wall attacked by Luther was the idea that popes, bishops, monks, and priests are spiritually superior to laity... This was an early version of what came to be known as the “priesthood of all believers. - Woodbridge, location 2432-4
- 5.28.1.3. Luther demolished the second wall when he rejected the Roman assertion that only the pope has the right to interpret Scriptures. Luther strongly emphasized that laypeople have the right to read and interpret the Scripture for themselves. - Woodbridge, location 2435
- 5.28.1.4. The third wall torn down was the claim that only the pope could summon church councils. - Woodbridge, location 2437
- 5.28.1.5. Luther added insult to injury in the remainder of the book by chastising the worldly pomp and greed of the pope and his cardinals. - Woodbridge, location 2439
- 5.28.2. On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church
 - 5.28.2.1. In Luther’s most defiant work, published in 1520, his attack penetrated to the very heart of the Roman Church, namely, its sacramental system. - Woodbridge, location 2444
 - 5.28.2.2. He identified three errors of the sacrament by which the papacy held the church captive. The first eucharistic error was the practice of withholding the cup from the laity. - Woodbridge, location 2449
 - 5.28.2.3. Second, Luther believed that something profoundly mystical is present with the bread and wine, but he rejected the medieval theory of “transubstantiation” to explain this mystery.... One might affirm this theory without forfeiting salvation, but Luther much preferred another theory in which Christ is “really present” in, with, and under the elements yet without a miraculous change in the elements themselves. Some have called this view “consubstantiation,” although Luther himself never used this term to describe his personal view. - Woodbridge, location 2452-57
 - 5.28.2.4. The third error for Luther was the church’s teaching of the sacrifice of the mass. The Roman Catholic Church taught that every time the Lord’s Supper is celebrated, Christ is actually resacrificed. For Luther, this was the most abominable bondage of all. - Woodbridge, location 2461
 - 5.28.2.5. As for the remaining traditional sacraments (confirmation, marriage, penance, ordination, and extreme unction), Luther rejected all as without a divine promise or an external sign.... In the final analysis, Luther upheld only two of the traditional seven sacraments: baptism and the Lord’s Supper. - Woodbridge, location 2474
- 5.28.3. The Freedom of the Christian Man
 - 5.28.3.1. In a last-ditch effort at reconciliation, the papal nuncio Miltitz persuaded Luther to make a conciliatory gesture. Luther complied in what is considered one of his best writings (October 1520). The

Freedom of the Christian Man is a popular and irenic summary of the Christian life. - Woodbridge, location 2477

- 5.28.3.2.** The Christian is the lord of all, and subject to none, because of faith; he is the servant of all, and subject to everyone, because of love. Faith and love are, for Luther, the two governing principles for the Christian life. Faith expresses the Christian's relationship to God, love the relationship to humanity. - Woodbridge, location 2480
- 5.29.** With the new Emperor in place (and not to his liking), Pope Leo had no reason to delay acting against Luther any longer. In June 1520 he released the papal bull *Exsurge Domine*, in which Leo declared that a wild boar had entered the Lord's vineyard, ordered all books by Martin Luther to be burned; and he gave the rebellious friar, under the threat of the penalty of excommunication and the declaration of anathema, sixty days to submit to Roman authority. Luther's books began to be burned in a number of locations. However, it also became apparent that the popularity of Luther was immense, especially within parts of Germany, where the bull was met with derision. At Erfurt students tossed copies of the bull into the river and tore down posted copies. At times Eck and Cardinal Aleandro, who were tasked with distributing the bull, felt their very lives were endangered. Eck, with secret Papal authority, had also attached the names of other German Humanists to the bull. This angered many humanists, and the entire affair drew the ire of Erasmus who declared "The inclemency of the bull ill comports with the moderation of Leo" and also that "Papal bulls are weighty, but scholars attach much more weight to books with good arguments drawn from the testimony of divine Scripture, which does not coerce but instructs." When the bull finally reached Luther in December 1520, he burned it publicly, along with a few other books he deemed to be the worst proponents of "popish doctrines." The Rubicon had been crossed, the breach was final. Reconciliation appeared impossible at this point (although Luther continued to hope for it into the 1530's.)
- 5.30.** At this point, it was expected that Emperor Charles V (the former Charles I of Spain) would move to have Luther take to Rome. However, King Francis began a series of wars with Charles V (mainly in Italy), and the Ottoman Empire under Suleiman the Magnificent was threatening the eastern borders of the Empire. Consequently, Charles had to let Luther move to the back burner.
- 5.31.** Throughout all of this Frederick the Elector resisted any attempts to have Luther handed over to Rome. He argued that Luther should be heard within Germany. Eventually it was decided that Luther would be heard at the Diet of Worms in April 1521. At this gathering of the various princes and kings of Germany and the Holy Roman Emperor, officials of the Roman church would be present, and Luther would come. To encourage Luther to come, he was granted safe conduct (a guarantee of safety) by the Emperor. (of course, the same thing had been given to Huss a century earlier and had been violated.)
- 5.32.** It took Luther two full weeks to travel from Wittenberg to Worms, and every mile along the way revealed immense popular support. Word of this triumphant procession created enormous anxiety among the imperial dignitaries in Worms. - Woodbridge, location 2513
- 5.33.** The man in charge (Dr. Johann von der Eck - not Johann Eck who debated Luther at Leipzig), showed Luther a number of books and asked Luther if he had indeed

- written them. The titles were then read to Luther, and Luther acknowledged authorship of the books.
- 5.34. The prosecutor then asked Luther to recant the books. This caught Luther off guard, since he thought there was to be a discussion of Luther's ideas. Luther appealed to the emperor for additional time to think before answering the question. Luther was granted 24 hours.
 - 5.35. Luther spent a sleepless night consulting with friends, wrestling in prayer, and regaining his composure. During the evening he wrote a friend "I will not retract one iota, so Christ help me."
 - 5.36. Once again, Luther was asked to recant. In the midst of a great hush, the friar answered that much of what he had written was basic Christian doctrine, held by both him and his opponents, and that therefore no one should expect him to repudiate such teaching. At some other points, he continued, his works dealt with the tyranny and injustice that the German people suffered. This too he could not recant, for such was not the purpose of the Diet, and in any case to withdraw such words would result in greater injustice. Third, in his works there were attacks against certain individuals, and points of doctrine that were at issue between him and his opponents. Perhaps, he confessed, some of these things had been said too harshly. But their truth he could not deny, unless someone could convince him that he was in error. - Gonzales, location 650
 - 5.37. The imperial princes felt Luther had evaded the question. They had asked for a simple yes or no, but he had offered qualifications and explanations. They again asked for an unequivocal statement. Luther then gave his famous reply in Latin: Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason (for I do not trust either in the pope or in 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." - Woodbridge, location 2535
 - 5.38. Luther then gave a sign of victory and left the hall to return to his quarters amidst shouts for him to be sent to the flames. However, Charles V - who was only 21 at the time - kept his composure and his word and allowed Luther to leave.
 - 5.39. The following day, Charles called the diet back into session to discuss its response. Frederick the Wise defended Luther. Complicating the decision was the fact that the German people were solidly behind Luther. Popular support became evident that evening when a placard appeared, declaring that four hundred nobles and eight thousand soldiers were prepared to defend Luther against the emperor. The placard carried the dreaded word "Bundschuh" (that is, a tied shoe of the German peasants) —which was the ominous sign of rebel peasants. The last thing the new emperor needed was civil war in Germany. - Woodbridge, location 2545
 - 5.40. Over the next few days a series of imperial and ecclesiastical emissaries met with Luther, desperately seeking some kind of compromise. Various concessions and modifications were offered if only Luther would recant. Luther steadfastly rejected every proposal. - Woodbridge, location 2551
 - 5.41. On April 26 Luther was finally permitted to leave Worms with only the emperor's promise of protection for twenty-five days... Danger was still in the air as Luther departed on April 26. As his wagon neared the small town of Moehra, on the evening

of May 4, five soldiers intercepted the wagon and kidnapped Luther. When news reached the artist and Lutheran sympathizer Albrecht Dürer, he lamented, “O God, Luther is dead. Now who will preach the holy gospel to us so clearly?” - Woodbridge, location 2553, 2559

- 5.42. The diet continued to discuss Luther’s fate for nearly a month. Finally, Elector Frederick left on May 23 before any decision was rendered. Two days later, the emperor made the inevitable decision and issued an imperial edict declaring Luther an outlaw of the empire. - Woodbridge, location 2554
- 5.43. Charles V was not impressed. He declared Luther an outlaw. “This devil in the habit of a monk,” his pronouncement said, “has brought together ancient errors into one stinking puddle, and has invented new ones.” - Shelley, location 4495
- 5.44. The Edict of Worms was severe. It 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. - Woodbridge, location 2556
- 5.45. As it turned out, this kidnapping was part of an elaborate plan to save Luther’s life. Before Luther left Worms, a clandestine message from Elector Frederick was conveyed to Luther that his journey home would be interrupted and he would be taken to a secret location for his own safety. After running alongside the elector’s soldiers for a short distance, Luther mounted a waiting horse, which took him to the Wartburg Castle in the Thuringian forest. Elector Frederick’s bold act not only saved Luther’s life; it also saved the Reformation movement. - Woodbridge, location 2562

Next Class: Luther’s Later Life - From the Wartburg Castle Until His Death

Reading: Chapter 2 - Martin Luther: Pilgrimage to Reformation; Luther’s 95 Theses

Optional Reading: Roland Bainton “Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther”

Date: April 22