



# The Christian Church Family Tree

A Study on the History of the Church by Dr. Harley Ihm

## Lesson 8: The Reformation Begins AD 1517-1558

**Opening:** How popular is the idea of change? What if change means to purify rather than just be different? How is there a difference in the church between changing traditions and changing truth?

Tonight we are going to explore the new awakening within Christianity. The idea is formed that it is time for a reformation, a reforming of the true faith of Christ.



**Erasmus** – We ended last month with the quote of Erasmus, “If elephants can be taught to dance...surely preachers can be taught to preach.” Erasmus was a great scholar but also a satirist. He hated the moral and ethical failure of the church leaders and the lack of knowledge among the priests. He wrote a tract *Julius Barred* that showed the great pope being turned away by St. Peter at the gates of Heaven. He and his followers made fun of the ignorance of the local clergy. They despised the superstition of relics, indulgences, pilgrimages, rejected the asceticism practiced for the last 100 years.

Their motto was, “Back to the sources.” They wanted to recover the faith of the Apostles. Erasmus published the west’s first Greek New Testament. Suddenly John the Baptist is calling people to ‘Repent’ instead of to ‘Do Penance’ as the Latin writers had corruptly added to the Scripture. Erasmus mission was to educate, making priests competent in the Word of God, people aware of truth and religion to be sensible once again. He dreamed of Bibles being read by farmers, tailors, masons, prostitutes, pimps, travelers and the Turks. Now the solid foundation is laid that would bring on the Reformation.



**AD 1517–1522 – Martin Luther** – “*The Christian is free. He has no master except Christ. A Christian is greater than the whole world.*” What do you think Luther meant by that very bold and risky statement?

The name *Friar* is derived from the French word *frère* ("brother" in English). Friars differ from monks in that they are called to live the evangelical counsels (vows of poverty, chastity and obedience) in service to a community, rather than through cloistered asceticism and devotion. Whereas monks live away from the world in a self-sufficient community, friars are supported by donations or other charitable support. A friar commits to a community spread across a wider geographical area (a province) and so a friar will typically move around spending time in different houses of the community within the province.

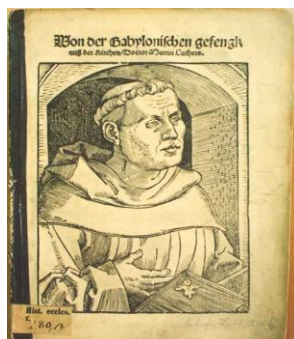
Martin Luther is an Augustinian friar teaching in Wittenberg, Germany, at Wittenberg University. Now remember that the Dominican Monks and Friars had pretty well sold out to Rome. In autumn of 1517 a Dominican friar is street preaching with a papal bull, which is an official document signed by the pope and had his medallion like emblem attached to it, beside him on a velvet cushion. He is selling indulgences, offering forgiveness of all sin for any who contribute to the St. Peter's building fund. The cost is 25 guilders for princes down to half a guilder for paupers. Luther made 5-6 guilders per year. The wages of sin is death, but the gift of life costs no more than one percent of annual income.

But there was more. These get-out-of-purgatory-free cards could also be purchased for your deceased loved ones at the same price. The Dominican friar cried out, "List! The wailing voices of your dead relatives and friends implore you, 'Have mercy, have mercy! We are in wretched agonies, and you can redeem us for a pittance, but you don't want to.'" Martin Luther was inflamed with anger and indignation at the scam that his own parishioners were being conned



with. He wrote 95 theses on the subject in Latin for a university debate and nailed them on the door of the church in Wittenberg. It was not Luther's intention, but he found himself a hero in a movement against the dominance of Rome in Christianity.

To the unbeliever the acts of Rome were superstition and a con game which only fueled unbelief in God. To Luther it was an assault on the grace of God and the souls of Christians, who thought they had bought with money what can only be obtained by faith. The pope was unable to arrest Luther, so he sends representatives to debate him. They attacked his 95 theses as heretical declaring no one can set themselves up against the pope who had authorized this blessing for the church and its people. Luther realized that the Pope and the council of Constance had denied the gospel that he read in scripture. The Bible had to overrule the church. The reformation was now a dominate force within Christianity.



**AD 1520** – At age 37 Luther was excommunicated and his writing were burned. In return Luther burned the bull or official document of excommunication along with books of canon law and medieval theology. He began to write and published three great books presenting his vision of true Christianity. One was called *The Babylonian Captivity*

*of the Church* and went straight for the jugular of Catholic spirituality. It went after the sacraments reducing them from seven to two. He excluded confirmation, marriage, ordination, extreme unction (the last sacrament, or anointing of the sick) and with limits the act of penance. He also attacked the idea that man needed a mediator other than Christ between him and God. He denied that Christ is re-sacrificed in the mass and that lay people can only receive the bread, not the wine.



**April 17, 1521** – Luther stands before the trial at the Basilica in Worms. The council tries to get him to understand that he cannot know more than all the great councils of men who have met together before him. He says, “Unless I am convinced by scripture and plain reason – I cannot accept the authority of popes and councils because they have contradicted each other – my conscience is captive to the word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is

neither right nor safe. Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me.”

Luther said he expected them to gather 50 doctors of divinity to refute a monk’s argument. But all they said was: “Are these books yours?” “Yes.” “Do you recant them?” “No.” “Then get out!”



Fredrick the Wise kidnapped him and hid him for a year in his castle at Wartburg. While there he wrote 12 books and translated the New Testament from Erasmus’ Greek into the common German language of the day. He did for Germany what the Authorized Version did for the English culture. Luther set the pattern for the Protestant Bible by removing all the “Aprocryphal” books.



He and his friends reformed the Wittenberg Church. Priests recited the mass in plain clothes and in German. They gave bread and wine to everybody in the mass and the priests began to marry. Luther preached in Wittenberg but also toured Germany encouraging churches to reform and be pure to the church of scripture. It spread across Germany and into Switzerland and appealed to the rising middle classes.

It's important to realize that no protestant at this time had any thoughts of leaving the Catholic Church and setting up a rival. They were trying to reform the Catholic Church and simply remove corruption and errors. They believed firmly there was only one world-wide church; it just needed a house cleaning. The great failure of the reformation is that the protestant church was born at all.



**AD 1522-1529 – Ulrich Zwingli** – On March 12, 1522, a printer ate sausage and egg in Zurich, Switzerland. That was during Lent. Here's the problem. During the early Middle Ages, meat, eggs and dairy products were generally forbidden to be eaten during the 40 days before Easter. It was a time of preparation. Thomas Aquinas argued that they afford greater pleasure as food [than fish], and greater nourishment to the human body, so that from their consumption there results the possibility of a greater incentive to lust.

However, dispensations for dairy products were given, frequently for a donation, from which several churches are believed to have been built, including the "Butter Tower" of the Rouen Cathedral. In Spain, the bull of the Holy Crusade (renewed periodically after 1492) allowed the consumption of dairy products and eggs during Lent in exchange for a contribution to the conflict. It was a matter of holiness, unless you had money to give to the church. Then it was not really that big a deal!

The reason this printer was so brazen in eating sausage and eggs was that his preacher was Ulrich Zwingli. Zwingli taught them that there is no law over Christians except the Bible and it places no restrictions on food because true religion is spiritual not fleshly. In fact, Zwingli had been there watching this printer eat the food.

The city council set up a debate between Zwingli and the bishop's deputy. Zwingli argued that God does not desire our decrees or doctrines unless He gave them. The council found in his favor and the Protest message gained control of Zurich away from the Catholic Church. Zwingli was even more radical than Martin Luther. He persuaded the council to strip the churches of all images. Zwingli was one of the first Protestants to abandon the use of instruments during worship services. In fact, Zwingli was so alarmed by the abuses to which music was put, in his view, that some of his services did not have any music whatsoever. He found instruments to be an offense, quoting ancient fathers for support. He was attempting to return to a practice followed in most of the Eastern Orthodox churches even to this day, but exceeded them in his distaste for music per se, regarding it as a distraction from single attention to the preaching of the word of God. Much of the Reformed movement fell into agreement with the banning of instruments, although none followed the elimination of music. The organ in particular was denounced by leaders of the Reformed churches, as being a prominent example of what they meant by the corruption allowed into worship by the Roman Catholic Church. Zwingli recommended that a better use for an organ would be to sell it and give the money to the poor. That is interesting since he was a trained musician.

Zwingli caused monasteries to be dissolved and the buildings used for teaching and relief of the poor. The major difference between Luther and Zwingli was in their attitudes toward the Bible. Zwingli saw it as a precise blueprint for church life. For Luther, what is not forbidden is permitted. There was an element of great grace and freedom. For Zwingli, what is not permitted



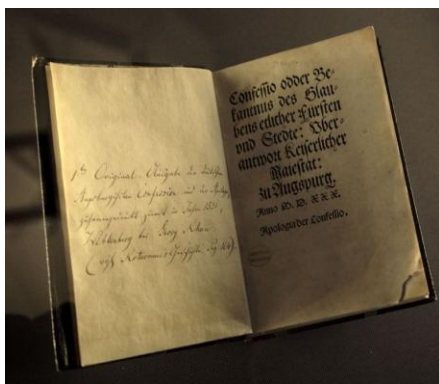
is forbidden. It was a very legalistic view. For instance, robes and rituals were harmless in Luther's eyes. Zwingli saw them as the invention of the anti-Christ. They were not taught so therefore they were forbidden. His ministry gave birth to the Reformed Movement. Preachers like R. C. Sproul are part of the Reformed Church today.



**AD 1525 – Anabaptists** - Conrad Grebel was a Zurich scholar and follower of Zwingli. He reasoned that if the sacraments were not mystical channels to God like the Catholic Church had taught, but rather an expression of our own faith, then baptism should be for adult believers only. You would have to be able to understand your faith in order to express it through baptism. He pointed out that Jesus' instructions were to believe and be baptized. He therefore pointed out that infant baptism disobeyed Scripture. Zwingli was shocked at his follower. All Europeans except Jews and Muslims were not being baptized into the church at birth. It was a logical conclusion of Zwingli's reasoning but Zwingli wouldn't agree with Grebel on this issue. He reasoned that would be like allowing people to decide if they wanted to be under the law of their country! An infant was baptized because all people must be under the law of God. It's not a choice. Grebel's followers were also the first to deny pre-destination. They pointed out God gave us all a free will to make choices.

Zurich outlawed the Anabaptists and in 1527 drowned Felix Mantz in the Limmat River for his beliefs. Just seven years after Luther had staked his life on the right of a Christian to interpret the Bible against the will of popes, the Protestants were killing those who read it differently from themselves.

**AD 1524-1525 - The Holy War** – Thousands of German peasants revolted against their lords, looting Catholic Churches and monasteries. The violence became so excessive Luther called upon it to be stopped by any means possible. The Christian nobility of the German nation rose up and 10,000 peasants were killed. The war left great divisions between the Catholics and Protestants. Military alliances were formed and wars were fought until they realized that Islam was at the door, so they called a temporary truce.



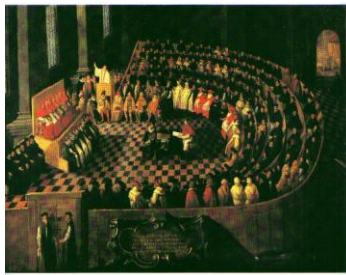
**AD 1530 – The Augsburg Confession** – Luther is still banished from the Catholic Church but still has hopes of reforming the church. He sends his right-hand man, Philip Melanchthon, who was a lot milder than Luther, with a prepared statement of Lutheran beliefs called the Augsburg Confession. They hoped to bring everyone back to the Bible together in faith. The confession went on to become the central document of what would become the Lutheran Church. To strive for agreement they skirted over issues like the papacy and purgatory. Melanchthon explained the positive distinctive of Protestantism, such as justification by faith and the importance of preaching. He shared that Lutherans are not anti-Catholics but instead were truly reformed Catholics. Many powerful people of authority joined the Reformation but an agreement could not be reached on any unification. The church simply could

not see this as a movement of reform, but only a rebellion against the true church.



**AD 1534 – John Calvin** – On October 18, 1534, the French king woke to find a poster nailed to his door violently attacking the concepts of the Catholic mass. The king led a band of men with torches and relics to purify the city and repent of France's toleration for such religious heresy. As many as 35 Protestants were burned alive in the retaliation. Among those who fled was a 25 year old lawyer named John Calvin who was a recent convert to the Protestant movement.

He took refuge in the city of Basel, Switzerland; where he wrote a primer on true Christianity known as *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. It was officially addressed to the king. One of its aims was to bring the Protestant religion out of the shadows of disgrace. It not only exposed some of the errors of Catholicism but also disassociated Protestant faith from Anabaptists and others they saw as dangerous anarchists. Calvin ended up in Geneva. His first proposals called for communion to be monthly instead of annual. District overseers, elders, would report those whose lives showed they did not belong to Jesus and they would be excluded from communion and ostracized. If pointed out by the overseers, anyone who would not sign a Reform creed would be excommunicated. Many people rebelled and they fired shots at his house. He simply declared he was like Jonah reluctantly preaching to a godless city. His teachings were rejected by the city and Calvin was expelled from Geneva in 1538 and moved to Strasbourg, France.



**AD 1545-1548 - The Council of Trent** – Trent was part of the Holy Roman Empire and is now located in what is part of Italy. The Catholic Church decided it must hold a council to define the fundamental differences between Catholics and Protestants once and for all. The first question to be addressed was about authority. For Protestants it was blasphemous for human ecclesiastical authorities to override what they read in the Bible; while for Catholics, to let every Bible reader overturn the doctrines and practices set by Christ's Church, past councils, was not only blasphemy but anarchy!

Trent denied that the Bible is the only source of Christian truth; the apostles did not write everything that Christ and the Holy Spirit taught them. Therefore, the church was the custodian of unwritten traditions that were also God-breathed and were Scripture. They forbid anyone to interpret the Bible in any way that disagrees with the understanding of holy mother Church, the only judge of its true meaning.

They condemned the idea of justification by faith alone. They affirmed original sin, which obviously then demanded infant baptism and a later confirmation of your faith at an age of accountability. However, the reformers of that day believed that original sin creates a conflict with free will so that we cannot accept God's call without God's help. This was a forerunner of predestination. God controls all the outcomes. Man's freewill is part of this pre-determined plan of God. They denied that belief. Obviously, the church will get you where you need to go. Both seemed off base.

Everything is falling apart now for the Protestant church. Geneva realizes they are lost without Calvin as the Catholics and Protestants clash and there are no great theologians to fight with words. He was asked to come back to Geneva in 1540, but he would not accept the offer until 18 months later. Calvin reorganized the church creating four roles as he saw them in the New Testament Church. Pastors have overall care of the flock; Elders oversaw discipline; teachers taught in church and in schools; and deacons dealt with charity. He demanded that clergy be appointed only by clergy. He had no use for bishops or archbishops. Churches were plain and simple; they sang biblical psalms, not man-made hymns, and they used both liturgy and unscripted prayer. Pubs were closed and dancing, theater and non-biblical names were forbidden. The church was a magnet for immigrants and religious refugees. For fifty years, Geneva did not have a single native minister. This new international religion was perfect for exporting around the world.