

THE “FIVE SOLAS” OF OUR FAITH

WEDNESDAYS, SEPT. 13 – NOV. 8, 7-8:30 PM

Session One: The Lead-Up to the Reformation **- An Introduction to Martin Luther**

- ≈ 4 BC - 30 AD - Jesus is born, grows, ministers, is crucified, dies, is resurrected
- ≈ 30 - Jesus ascends to heaven; Holy Spirit active in the early church; conversions begin; Peter in charge
- 30 - 40 - Church centred in Jerusalem, with minor outreach into surrounding communities; Jesus’ brother James the head of the Jerusalem church
- 40 - 50 - Saul the Persecutor becomes Paul the Christian; Barnabas and Paul bring Christianity to Antioch; Jerusalem experiences famine
- 50 - 60 - Paul plants churches in Greece and Turkey; non-Jews become Christians in increasing numbers; Peter makes his way to Rome; is crucified upside-down;
- 60 - 70 - anti-Christian sentiment grows strong in various cities; Nero blames the burning of Rome on the Christians; zealots in Jerusalem revolt against Rome; Paul ends up in Rome, and is beheaded;
- 70 - 80 - Jerusalem is destroyed by the Romans, the Jerusalem Christians scatter. The Apostle John makes Ephesus his base; Thomas brings the Gospel to India; Mark brings the Gospel to Egypt (Alexandria) anti-Christian persecution becomes pronounced
- 80 - 100 - Roman Emperor Domitian persecutions cause a wide-spread growth in the faith. The Roman church grows stronger, the Eastern churches become mature and established. The three branches of the church – Roman, Greek, Egyptian / Middle Eastern - are distinct
- 100 - 300 - Christianity flourishes among the lower classes in particular; the theology of the church is articulated by “Fathers;” Rome becomes the Mother City of the Church, with the Bishop of Rome generally the most influential church leader; Alexandria experiences brutal anti-Christian persecution under Diocletian, with 1000s martyred in a single decade – often entire villages (280)
- 300 - 400 – Constantine becomes sole Roman emperor, and in the Edict of Milan (313), Christianity is declared a “tolerated religion.” Constantine moves the Capital of the Empire east to Constantinople. The Eastern church becomes quite powerful, but does not completely replace Rome. Constantine establishes the Council of Nicaea (325) and commissions the production of complete Bibles, with Testaments Old and New.

- 380 - Under Emperor Theodosius, Christianity becomes the “official religion” of the Roman Empire (380). The church is reorganised under a military model, with increasing powers to the top. There is increasing separation between the East and the West politically and ecclesiastically.
- 400 - 600 - Rome is sacked. The so-called “Dark Ages” begin. Christianity makes great inroads northwards throughout Europe, the British Isles. Much of early Christian literature and teaching is preserved through the work of the newly-established Monasteries.
- 600-1000 - Islam, established in the 600s, becomes militarily active, and is a threat to Spain and Europe. Crusades are established to free the Holy Land from the Moslem rulers. The rise of the Holy Roman Empire under Charlemagne brings increasing European military and political power to the Papacy. Scandinavia and Russia become Christianized.
- 1000 - 1100 - The split between East and West becomes formal. The Bishop of Rome, or “Pope,” is now far more powerful both ecclesiastically and politically than the Eastern Patriarch, as the Byzantine Empire declines.
- 1100 - 1400 - Under powerful Italian family control (Medici, Borgia) the Papacy becomes as much a military/political organisation as an ecclesiastical one. Rome is deteriorating, and is in constant danger of being sacked. For a time, there are as many as three competing Popes. The Papacy, fearing the instability in Rome, moves to France (Avignon), but eventually returns.
- 1400 - 1500 - Europe experiences a Renaissance based largely upon the destruction of the Eastern Christian empire and the flow of intellectual property to the European universities. Efforts to recapture the “ancient glories” of Rome result in major rebuilding programs, including a new St. Peter’s. Christians throughout Europe are heavily taxed to pay for the expense of the largely Italian Renaissance. The Moslem armies are dangerously close to entering Europe from the East
- 1500 - 1520 - Many European nations, particularly Germany and England, begin to react against the drain of wealth southward to Italy. The increasingly corrupt clergy and wealthy monastic orders breed resentment among the populace. Powerful local kings, princes and “electors” of the Holy Roman Emperor long for autonomy. Luther nails his 95 Theses, critical of abuse of ecclesiastical authority and power, to the Wittenberg Castle-Church door. History begins to turn!

The European Church In The Middle Ages

- Most European people in the Middle Ages were very religious. The church had great influence on the lives of people through public rituals and ceremonies.
- The Pope had considerable power at his disposal and the ability to appoint abbots, bishops, archbishops and other clerical offices. Church positions were essentially up for sale, with potentially vast profits to the recipients.

- The Pope had authority to reserve or forgive sins and to threaten excommunication to anyone who resisted the many taxes and fees that were levied upon clergy and church activities. Heavily in debt, the Curia needed a great deal of cash flow.
- The Bible was in Latin as the words themselves were regarded as powerful and had to be preserved in their original (already translated!) form
- The Latin liturgy was considered to possess the same power as the Bible. The words were understood as having come from God and conveyed power to those who used them even if they were not understood. The great majority of Europeans no longer understood Latin.

‘This disparity between a desire for genuine religious life on the part of the simple people, and the decaying political games of the church hierarchy, became a source of great stress. The church was not providing what people anxious for salvation wanted.’
(*The essence of the reformation*)

Martin Luther – A Brief Biography (Christian History)

Into this setting of religious life, Martin Luther was born at Eisleben (about 120 miles southwest of modern Berlin) to Margaret and Hans Luder (as it was locally pronounced). He was raised in Mansfeld, where his father worked at the local copper mines.

Hans sent Martin to Latin school and then, when Martin was only 13 years old, to the University of Erfurt to study law. There Martin earned both his baccalaureate and master’s degrees in the shortest time allowed by university statutes. He proved so adept at public debates that he earned the nickname “The Philosopher.”

Then in 1505 his life took a dramatic turn. As the 21-year-old Luther fought his way through a severe thunderstorm on the road to Erfurt, a bolt of lightning struck the ground near him. “Help me, St. Anne!” Luther screamed. “I will become a monk!” The scrupulous Luther fulfilled his vow: he gave away all his possessions and entered the monastic life.

As a monk, he plunged into prayer, fasting, and ascetic practices—going without sleep, enduring bone-chilling cold without a blanket, and punishing himself physically. As he later commented, “If anyone could have earned heaven by the life of a monk, it was I.”

Though he sought by these means to love God fully, he found no consolation. He was increasingly terrified of the wrath of God: “When it is touched by this passing inundation of the eternal, the soul feels and drinks nothing but eternal punishment.”

During his early years, whenever Luther read what would become the famous “Reformation text”—Romans 1:17—his eyes were drawn not to the word faith, but to

the word righteous. Who, after all, could “live by faith” but those who were already righteous? The text was clear on the matter: “the righteous shall live by faith.”

Luther remarked, “I hated that word, ‘the righteousness of God,’ by which I had been taught according to the custom and use of all teachers ... [that] God is righteous and punishes the unrighteous sinner.” The young Luther could not live by faith because he was not righteous—and he knew it.

Meanwhile, he was ordered to take his doctorate in the Bible and become a professor at Wittenberg University. During lectures on the Psalms (in 1513 and 1514) and a study of the Book of Romans, he began to see a way through his dilemma. “At last meditating day and night, by the mercy of God, I ... began to understand that the righteousness of God is that through which the righteous live by a gift of God, namely by faith... Here I felt as if I were entirely born again and had entered paradise itself through the gates that had been flung open.”

On the heels of this new understanding came others. To Luther the church was no longer the institution defined by apostolic succession; instead it was the community of those who had been given faith. Salvation came not by the sacraments as such but by faith. The idea that human beings could, through their own goodness, earn their way to God, was not a foundation of theology but was taught only by “fools.” Humility was no longer a virtue that earned grace but a necessary response to the gift of grace. Faith no longer consisted of assenting to the church’s teachings but of trusting the promises of God and the merits of Christ.

It wasn’t long before the revolution in Luther’s heart and mind played itself out in all of Europe. It started on All Saints’ Eve, 1517, when Luther publicly objected to the way preacher Johann Tetzel was selling indulgences. These were documents prepared by the church and bought by individuals either for themselves or on behalf of the dead that would release them from punishment due to their sins. As Tetzel preached, “Once the coin into the coffer clings, a soul from purgatory heavenward springs!”

Luther questioned the church’s trafficking in indulgences and called for a public debate of 95 theses he had written. Instead, his 95 Theses spread across Germany as a call to reform, and the issue quickly became not indulgences but the authority of the church: Did the pope have the right to issue indulgences?

Events quickly accelerated. Luther was threatened with excommunication when at a public debate in Leipzig in 1519, Luther declared that “a simple layman armed with the Scriptures” was superior to both pope and councils without them.

Luther replied to the threat with his three most important treatises: The Address to the Christian Nobility, The Babylonian Captivity of the Church, and On the Freedom of a Christian. In the first, he argued that all Christians were priests, and he urged rulers to take up the cause of church reform. In the second, he reduced the seven sacraments to two (baptism and the Lord’s Supper). In the third, he told Christians they were free from the law (especially church laws) but bound in love to their neighbors.

In 1521 he was called to an assembly at Worms, Germany, to appear before Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor, the political ruler of Europe. Luther arrived prepared for another debate; he quickly discovered it was a trial at which he was asked to recant his views.

Luther replied, “Unless I can be instructed and convinced with evidence from the Holy Scriptures or with open, clear, and distinct grounds of reasoning ... then I cannot and will not recant, because it is neither safe nor wise to act against conscience.” Then he added, “Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me! Amen.”

By the time an imperial edict calling Luther “a convicted heretic” was issued, he had escaped to Wartburg Castle, where he hid for ten months.

In early spring of 1522, he was able to return to Wittenberg to lead, with the help of men like Philip Melanchthon, the fledgling reform movement. “Protestantism” was born.

Over the next years, Luther entered into more disputes, many of which divided friends and enemies. When unrest resulted in the Peasants’ War of 1524–1525, fearful of widespread chaos, he condemned the peasants and exhorted the princes to crush the revolt.

Following the example of other Reformers, who declared marriage to be a state ordained by God, and open to clergy as well, Luther married a runaway nun, Katharina von Bora, which scandalized many. (For Luther, the shock was waking up in the morning with “pigtails on the pillow next to me.”)

Sadly, the older he became, suffering from kidney disease and other ailments, as his physical state began to impact his mental state, he became more and more extreme in his views. In his later years, he said some nasty things about, among others, Jews (reversing his earlier openness) and popes and theological enemies, with words that are not fit to print.

Nonetheless, his lasting accomplishments also mounted: the translation of the Bible into German (which remains a literary and biblical hallmark); the writing of the hymn “A Mighty Fortress is Our God”; and publishing his Larger and Smaller Catechism, which have guided not just Lutherans but many others since.

His later years were spent often in both illness and furious activity (in 1531, though he was sick for six months and suffered from exhaustion, he preached 180 sermons, wrote 15 tracts, worked on his Old Testament translation, and took a number of trips). But in 1546, he finally wore out.

Luther’s legacy is immense and cannot be adequately summarized. Every Protestant Reformer—like Calvin, Zwingli, Knox, and Cranmer—and every Protestant stream—Lutheran, Reformed, Anglican, and Anabaptist—were inspired by Luther in one way or another. On a larger canvas, his reform unleashed forces that ended the Middle Ages and ushered in the modern era.

“Luther - The Film” A Synopsis

While a young law student, Luther abruptly changes course and joins the Augustinian order of monks when he believes his life is spared during a violent lightning storm. His ambitious father is infuriated, and thus Luther turns to a spiritual mentor, Father Johann von Staupitz. Luther proves an eager, apt disciple and Staupitz selects Luther to join the monastery’s contingent of monks leaving for Rome on church business. He enters the city with the wide-eyed ideals of a young man--only to have them shattered. Depravity is everywhere.

Here, Luther learns about “indulgences.” With these Vatican sponsored certificates, people may buy salvation for a fee and free themselves or deceased relatives from eternal damnation. The young friar brands this the highest form of cynicism and profiteering and asks, “Is not salvation accessible to all?”

Luther is sent to study at the new university in Wittenberg and later becomes a professor of theology. Among his staunch supporters is Prince Frederick the Wise, who admires Luther’s courage of conviction--even though the monk’s vociferous opinions are beginning to cause ripples.

In Rome, the new pope, Leo X, has mandated that funds be raised to rebuild St. Peter’s Basilica. The huge financial undertaking is to be financed by the sales of indulgences. The premiere “marketer” of indulgences, Brother John Tetzel, preaches to a large German crowd about the hell fire awaiting their wretched souls should they forego this new “special indulgence.”

Luther is incensed at such naked manipulation, inspiring him to write his 95 Theses, an essay he nails to the local church’s door. His writing is reproduced via the new Guttenberg printing press and, within weeks, his criticism of the Church is being read throughout Europe.

The Pope reacts angrily. Luther is to recant his heretical writings or face excommunication, trial by Inquisition and, likely, death. As David before Goliath, he refuses to recant. While his works are inciting popular support among the masses, the Church moves to silence him, permanently. He takes refuge with Prince Frederick, and thus becomes an outlaw for the remainder of his life.

The stage is set for an unprecedented confrontation as Luther is increasingly seen as a popular icon. A schism rips at the heart of the Church as the new “Protestant” movement surges among the populace. Soon, hundreds of thousands pay the price of their rebellion with their lives. Ultimately, Luther’s followers break with Rome, and its hold over the social, political and religious lives of all Europe is vulnerable for the first time in its history.

From this point, Western Civilisation develops new attitudes about religion and social order that eventually change the world forever