

THE BIBLE

AND THE PROTESTANT

REFORMATION



A. Stoutjesdyk

THE BIBLE

AND THE PROTESTANT

REFORMATION



Trinitarian Bible Society

The Bible and the Protestant Reformation

Product Code: A129

ISBN: 978 1 86228 068 7

©2017



Trinitarian Bible Society

William Tyndale House, 29 Deer Park Road

London SW19 3NN, England

Registered Charity Number: 233082 (England) SC038379 (Scotland)

Copyright is held by the Incorporated Trinitarian Bible Society Trust
on behalf of the Trinitarian Bible Society

Table of Contents

	Some comments to the reader	2
1	Commemoration commanded	3
2	Growing up in a dark place and a dark time	5
3	Seeking in the darkness	6
4	Brought to the light	9
5	Helping the light shine forth	10
6	The Bible and the Wartburg	16
7	'The entrance of thy words giveth light'	17
8	Commemoration and lamentation	19
9	Appendix A: The 'wild boar in the vineyard'	22
10	Appendix B: Luther and the Peasants' War	23

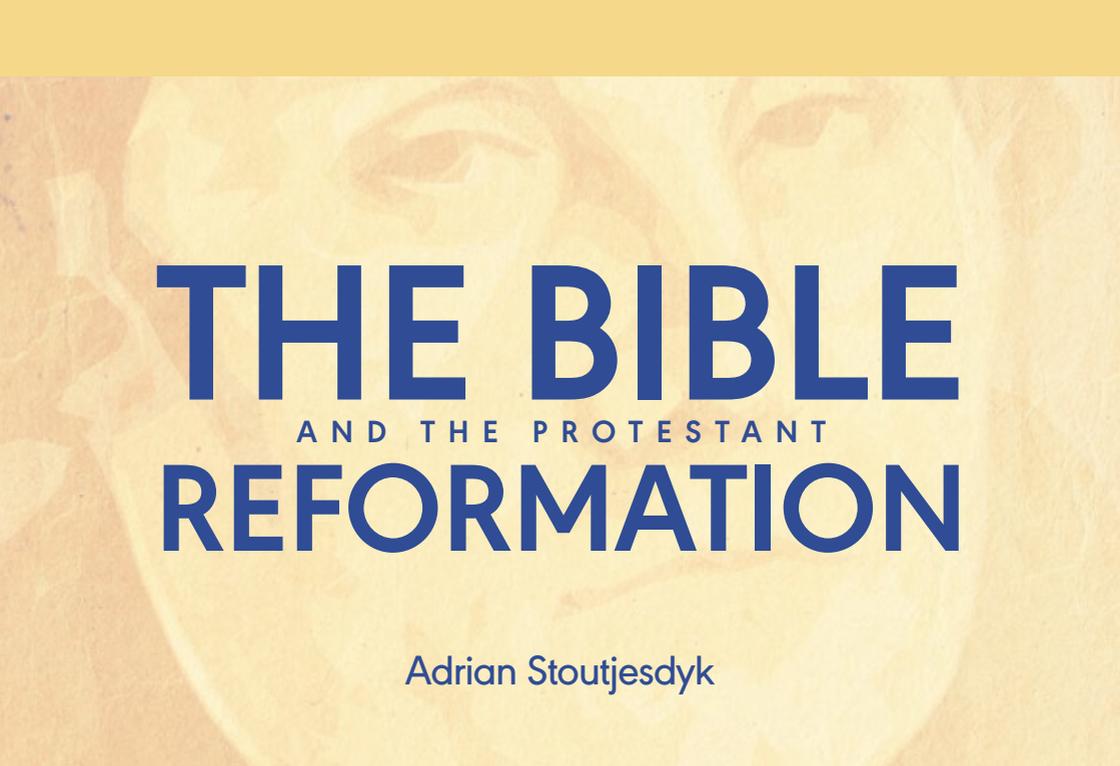
Some comments to the reader

It's impossible for a simple booklet to cover all aspects of the Reformation. This booklet is about the way in which the early Reformation restored the Bible to its rightful place in church worship, family devotions—indeed, in ‘all things that *pertain* unto life and godliness’ (2 Peter 1.3). The main text tells us that story.

In order to increase the ease of reading and understanding, additional related material has been placed outside of the main text in either textboxes or the two appendices. While this additional material fleshes out the theme and contains a few of the answers to the Society's Reformation Puzzles, reading only the main text will give you an understanding of the topic.

While reading this pamphlet may whet your appetite for learning more about the Reformation, I hope above all that it will increase your awe for the wonderful way in which the Lord delivered His church from the house of bondage and returned His Word to its place on the candlestick of truth. If that hope is fulfilled, the Reformation will not just be an historic event from the distant past but a living legacy for the present.

Adrian Stoutjesdyk
General Secretary, TBS (Canada)
Rosedale, BC, Canada



THE BIBLE

AND THE PROTESTANT

REFORMATION

Adrian Stoutjesdyk

1 Commemoration Commanded

A few candles on a child's birthday cake give both light and warmth. Imagine how much light five hundred candles would give!

No, I'm not suggesting we make a giant birthday cake with five hundred candles to commemorate the Reformation's quincentennial. Still, the birthday cake and candles imagery has some value. Did not the start of the Reformation, which is often dated from 31 October 1517, shine a bright light into dark places and darkened hearts? Even a child can blow out the candles on his cake; but despite all his huffing and puffing Satan has not been able to blow out the light ignited by the Reformation. In His providence, the Lord used the reformers to again set His holy Word, that 'more sure word of prophecy' of which Peter writes, as 'a light that shineth in a dark place' (2 Peter 1.19).

But do we really have to commemorate something from five hundred years ago? Yes, especially because the Lord in His Word commands His people to mark

The Bible...

signal deliverances. In Joshua 4 twelve men are told to take twelve large stones from the middle of the River Jordan, carry them to the shore, and stack them to make a memorial cairn. Why did the Lord tell Joshua to do this? The Lord gives the reason: ‘That this may be a sign among you, *that* when your children ask *their fathers* in time to come, saying, What *mean* ye by these stones? Then shall ye answer them, That the waters of Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD; when it passed over Jordan, the waters of Jordan were cut off: and these stones shall be for a memorial unto the children of Israel for ever’ (Joshua 4.6–7).

During the sixteenth century the Lord led His church back to the Holy Bible. His Scriptures, showing the way by which the chief of sinners can be saved, showed them the right way to worship and the way to live their daily lives. His Word shaped the laws of nations, and established the sanctity of marriage and the importance of the family. His Word stressed the need for basic education, and gave guidelines for virtually every human activity. Let’s adapt a short line from Joshua 4: What mean you by commemorating the Reformation five hundred years after Luther posted the Ninety-five Theses? We hope that this booklet will help you answer the question so that you can join in with the parents of Joshua’s day: ‘that all the people of the earth might know the hand of the LORD, that it *is* mighty: that ye might fear the LORD your God for ever’ (Joshua 4.24).

Did Martin Luther start the Reformation? No, the Lord did. Earlier reformers such as John Wycliffe and John Huss had blazed across the sky of the church like bright but short-lived comets. But now the Lord’s appointed time had come, and in His inscrutable counsel He further prospered the work of Luther and the reformers of his generation.

However, this booklet is not about the importance of Luther (although we will see how the Lord greatly used him). Rather, it’s about the Lord’s work in returning the Holy Scriptures to their rightful place in divine worship; it’s about the Lord’s grace in showing His people the way of salvation only by true faith in His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord worked the Reformation. It was His gift to a people that walked in darkness. Surely it is an event worth remembering!

2 Growing up in a dark place and a dark time

A peasant's son

Martin Luther was the son of Hans and Margaretha Luther. He was born on 10 November 1483 in the small village of Eisleben. The family soon moved to Mansfeld. Father Hans Luther was a copper miner. His son Martin readily admitted his humble beginnings: 'I am a peasant's son; my grandfather and my great-grandfather were genuine peasants'. Luther knew his parents loved him but their harsh discipline left a painful impression that affected him throughout his life.

His parents could afford to send him to school. Father Hans wanted his son to study law because that would help his son find a high position working for one of the rulers of Germany.

1497 – Starts school in Magdeburg

1498 – Goes to school in Eisenach

1501 – Enrols at University of Erfurt

Nothing in Luther's parentage, youth, or education set him off from his contemporaries or explains why he later revolted against much of the accepted forms of medieval religion.



We have Bibles in our homes. Luther did not. He grew up in a home full of superstitious beliefs. His parents could afford to send him to school and religion was doubtless involved, but the teachings of the Bible were not a part of his education.

Why did few homes have a Bible during the Middle Ages? First, few people outside of the monasteries could read. Second, before the invention of the printing press Bibles were scarce and expensive because all copies had to be handwritten. Third, while the local priests did read small portions of the Bible during church services, they read from a Latin version of the Bible; few people would have been able to understand the priest's reading.

The most important reason is that the Church of Rome did not want the ordinary people to have access to a Bible, especially to one in their own language. The church taught that the common people could not understand the Bible. Of course, the church leaders knew that a Bible-reading people would see through the errors, superstitions, and corruptions of the Roman Catholic church. Giving the people the Bible would endanger the power, wealth and prestige of the priests, bishops, cardinals and popes. So how

The Bible...

did medieval people worship? Not by studying the Bible or listening to Bible-true sermons but by participating in many duties and rites invented by men.

In 1504, when Luther was twenty years old, he found a Latin translation of the Bible in the library of the University of Erfurt. Yes, Luther saw religiosity everywhere: he saw church spires stretching toward the sky, heard church bells pealing at set times, and smelled the incense wafting upward from the censers. But he had never seen a whole Bible. And he was twenty-years old!

Luther often returned to that Bible on the dusty library shelves. He found so many pages, so many chapters, so many Bible books that he had not met during the first twenty years of his life. Did reading in the Latin Vulgate Bible work a change in Luther? We don't know. Perhaps he read it only with his head and not with his heart, just as we often do. The Bible is very, very important but Luther and all men need the Holy Spirit to teach us how to read God's Word—and how to be read by that Word!

3 Seeking in the darkness

A thunderstorm completely changed Luther's life. One day while walking home from a visit to his parents, he saw black clouds gathering overhead. Soon it began to thunder and lightning in an awful way. Then a lightning bolt fell at his feet and the air pressure hurled him to the ground.

Terrified that he was about to die, Luther cried out, 'St Anne, save me and I will enter a monastery!'

Is this the outcry of the great reformer?

He calls to St Anne. The Bible tells us

that neither St Anne nor any other person—or even 'saint'—can hear Luther; they can't help him. Praying to the saints is a form of idolatry. Notice, too, his belief in monasticism, that there is eternal value in living an ascetic life in a monastery. No, at this point in time Luther is not at all reformed; he does not yet understand the doctrine of *solus Christus*. Just like his peers he prayed to the Virgin Mary and other so-called saints rather than praying directly to God.

Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching *for* doctrines the commandments of men.

Mark 7.7

His vow to St Anne and anxiety about his soul brought him to the door of the Augustinian monastery in Erfurt. Here his days were filled with religious exercises designed to bring peace to the soul. Luther fully believed that obeying the monastery rules carefully and performing his religious duties seriously would please God and bring salvation to his soul by satisfying the demands of God's just law. He lived his monastic life with an intensity that went far beyond the strict requirements, and wore himself out with prayer and fasting. He also wore his superiors out with his long and frequent confessions. Luther knew he was a sinner but could find neither forgiveness nor peace anywhere. Of this time He wrote:



Luther at the door of Erfurt monastery

I was a good monk, and I kept the rule of my order so strictly that I may say that if ever a monk got to heaven by his monkery, it was I. All my brothers in the monastery who knew me will bear me out. If I had kept on any longer, I would have killed myself with vigils, prayers, reading, and other work.¹

However, walking the road of duties and self-improvement brought Luther no peace. He looked like a corpse: his eyes sunken in, his bones sticking out, his body bowed down to the earth, his tears watering the ground, and his groans annoying his easy-going brother monks who understood little of spiritual troubles.

Yes, Luther read and re-read the Bible in the monastery library. He could not leave it alone, even though reading it brought him no peace. Because his understanding had not yet been enlightened, he did not understand the Word rightly. Indeed, he found only condemnation.

The church of his time taught that salvation was partly by the finished work of Christ and partly by man's good works. In other words, Luther thought he had to earn a part of his righteousness before God. However, he soon learned that his works could not satisfy the justice of God.

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. Nevertheless, I beat importunately upon Paul at that place (Romans 1.17) most ardently desiring to know what St. Paul wanted.²

1510: The trip to Rome

In order to resolve an administrative dispute in the Augustinian order, in 1510 Staupitz sent Luther and another monk to Rome. Luther took little interest in the art treasures of the papal city. Instead, he used his spare time to confess to local priests, celebrate mass, visit the catacombs and venerate the bones and shrines of the saints.

He also climbed Pilate's stairs on his knees and said a prayer on each step because it was thought that this would release a soul from purgatory. At the top of the stairs, he exclaimed, 'Who knows whether it is so?' Doubt in the saving power of Romanist rituals had entered his mind.

The ignorance, incompetence and levity of the priests and monks in Rome shocked him and moved him further toward the truth.

knew that studying the Bible thoroughly as he prepared his lessons would help Luther. In the providence of God, by compelling his younger colleague to study and teach Bible Staupitz forced Luther to turn to Scripture to look for an answer for his problems.

Luther knew he was a sinner; he knew about the severity of God's justice but he had no understanding of true salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. Indeed, he thought it most unfair of God to require from him a righteousness which he could never attain.

Happily, the Lord provided Luther with a man who could guide him to the truth. Johann von Staupitz was the head of the Augustinian order of monks to which Luther belonged. His first efforts to guide and console Luther failed. However, he did recognise that Luther was a man with unusual gifts.

In 1513 Staupitz took Luther aside and ordered him to teach Bible at the new University of Wittenberg, just recently founded by Frederick the Wise, the Elector of Saxony. Luther protested vehemently. But Staupitz insisted; he

4 Brought to the light

Luther first lectured on the Psalms. When he reached Psalm 31, he could get no further than the first verse: ‘deliver me in thy righteousness’. What does that word righteousness really mean? Does this word mean that the sinner has to be righteous? Luther had already learned that this was impossible. He searched and studied other Bible texts that included the word righteousness.

Then, as he agonized over Romans 1.17—‘For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith’, the Lord lifted the veil from his eyes. Now he saw that righteousness in the New Testament was not the punitive righteousness of God. Instead the Scriptures teach that substitutionary and forgiving mercy is merited by the suffering of Christ and Christ’s righteousness is imputed to the repentant sinner. Later Luther wrote, ‘When I realized this, I felt myself absolutely born again. The gates of paradise had been flung open and I had entered. There and then the whole of Scripture took on another look to me.’³ *Sola fide* (by faith alone) and *sola gratia* (by grace alone) are two of the most important and living legacies of the Reformation. Justification is not something man has to earn; it is a divine gift by which God declares the unrighteous righteous through Christ.

Luther summed up his breakthrough into the light in a little poem.

Lord Jesus,
 Thou art my righteousness,
 I am thy sin.
 Thou tookest upon Thee what was mine;
 yet set on me what was Thine.
 Thou becamest what Thou wert not,
 that I might become what I was not.⁴

This poem captures the essence of the Gospel and this moment marks the beginning of the Reformation. For over a thousand years the church had been growing farther and farther away from the Gospel. Indeed, the church hardly understood the Gospel any more. Now the whole of Scripture took on a new

meaning for Luther. Paul's words in Romans 1 became the gate to heaven. Now Luther understood that the suffering of Christ on the cross made it possible for righteousness and peace to kiss each other. It was at this moment that the Bible began to return to its rightful place, giving light as on a candlestick.

Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Romans 5.1

What would Luther think of modern English translations of Revelation 19.8? Here the Word of God tells us that the saints will 'be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: **for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints**'. Now compare the phrase in bold with the wording found in

many modern Bible versions used today. According to these, fine linen is (or stands for) the '**righteous acts**' of the saints.

Luther would have objected strenuously to such a translation. The Lord had taught him that he had no righteous acts to commend him to God's favour; his own righteousness was no more than filthy rags. Luther needed to have Christ's righteousness wrapped about him just as a fine linen garment is wrapped around the shoulders of a human body, as the prophet Isaiah so aptly describes it (61.10). Christ's imputed righteousness is the only justifying righteousness of the saints.

5 Helping the light shine forth

Of course, Luther's experience changed his university lectures and his parish sermons. Now that he knew the only way of salvation he could not keep it to himself. Could he allow his people to continue on the way of deceitful error?

His messages reflected his own spiritual experiences. Students crowded into his lecture room and even fellow professors came to sit at his feet. His animated preaching and the majesty of the truths he proclaimed in a church in Wittenberg captivated the hearts and awed the consciences of his hearers. Now he proclaimed pardon and heaven, not as indirect compensation administered through the priests for good works, but as a direct gift from God. Clearly, Luther's words had their birthplace not on his lips but in his soul.⁵

Luther was also a parish priest. He was responsible for the spiritual welfare of his people. Most of them were being led astray. Luther had learned from experience that the superstitious rites of Rome could not save his soul. Could he then allow his people to be deceived by those rites?

The Roman Catholic Church taught that even those who lived most strictly would have to spend some time in a place of cleansing by fire. This place was called

The Solas of the Reformation

The key teachings of Luther and the other reformers are often summarised in five points.

Sola Scriptura:	only the Bible
Sola Fide:	only by faith
Sola Gratia:	only by grace
Solus Christus:	only by Christ
Soli Deo Gloria:	only to God's glory

purgatory. Hell was reserved for the damned; but purgatory would be the temporary after-death destination for almost everyone, and in the Middle Ages people feared purgatory more than they feared hell. Medieval man was terrified of the sufferings of purgatory which might last for thousands of years. However, the church had found a way to shorten the stay in that dismal abode, and the people grasped at any way of shortening their time in torment. A troubled medieval person could buy an indulgence to shorten his stay in purgatory.

In overly simplified terms, an indulgence is an official statement purchased from the church which was supposed to reduce time in purgatory. You could buy indulgences for yourself, and also for relatives and friends who had already died and gone into purgatory. Selling indulgences was a profitable business, and was a huge source of income to the church. At the time both the pope and a German archbishop badly needed money, and to raise this money they approved the sale of indulgences in some parts of Germany.

An eloquent monk and high pressure salesman named Tetzel peddled indulgences in a shameless manner. He would sketch before his audience the agonies of purgatory and assure them of the effectiveness of an indulgence. His language really played on people's emotions.

Listen to the voices of your dear dead relatives and friends, beseeching you and saying, 'Pity us, pity us. We are in dire torment from which you can redeem us for a pittance'. Do you not wish to? Open your ears! Hear the father saying to his son, the mother to her daughter, 'We bore you, nourished you, brought you up, left you our fortunes, and you are so cruel and hard that now you are not willing for so little to set us free. Will you let us lie here in flames? Will you delay our promised glory?'⁶

Tetzel even used a clever little commercial jingle.

As soon as the coin in the coffer rings,
The soul from purgatory springs.

Many believed this carefully orchestrated sales pitch. Although the Elector Frederick forbade Tetzel from entering his territory, the indulgence hawker visited neighbouring towns. Some of the people from Wittenberg travelled to these places and bought indulgences. But what could Luther do about it?

In 1516 Luther did not yet have a clear and full understanding of Biblical theology. However, he did have serious misgivings about indulgences and spoke out against them in two of his sermons. He feared that buying indulgence letters gave people a false sense of security and made them think lightly of sin. Indeed, many saw an indulgence certificate as a blank cheque to do what they pleased without troubling their conscience. Indulgences would make true repentance unnecessary.

During 1517 Luther became convinced that he, a pastor and professor, must not allow his people to be misled; he had to speak out against this misleading abuse. He wrote his concerns about indulgences and some other abuses of the church on a large sheet of stiff paper in ninety-five statements or theses. Then he took a mallet and some tacks and nailed his placard to the door of the church. Those hammer taps were like a seismic shock that shook the whole world of medieval Catholicism. Within weeks translated and printed copies of the Ninety-five Theses reached nearly every part of western Europe. Soon like-minded men in England, Scotland, France, Switzerland and the Netherlands began to speak out against the abuses and errors of the church.

A few of the Ninety-five Theses

1. When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, 'Repent', He willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.

27. They preach only human doctrines who say that as soon as the money clinks in the money chest, the soul flies from purgatory.

32. Those who believe that they can be certain of their salvation because they have indulgence letters will be eternally damned, together with their teachers.

62. The true treasure of the church is the most holy gospel of the glory and grace of God.

Luther wanted to keep wrong and deceiving teachings away from his people. The Lord gave him the courage to speak out. While he knew that many would disagree with him, he could not restrain himself; he could not allow his people to be led astray on their journey to eternity.

Is this not relevant for us today? Are there not many like Tetzel whose emotional sales pitch leads multitudes astray? How few there are with the courage to speak up, to defend the teachings of God's Word! On a personal level, do we have the courage to speak out when we see others being led astray by teachings contrary to the Bible? Do we remember the importance of the Bible? Do we feel the need to distribute

Luther's Ninety-five Theses on the Wittenberg Church door



The Bible...

sound translations of the Word of God; to encourage diligent and prayerful reading of that Word?

At first, the pope dismissed Luther's Theses as 'the ramblings of a drunken German'.⁷ Soon the Roman Catholic Church tried several ways to persuade Luther to change his mind. But he continued to use the weapons of pen and pulpit to express clearly the true teachings of the Bible. The pope excommunicated him—excluded him from the Roman church—in 1520 but the German princes took no action against Luther. Frederick, the Elector of Saxony, was Luther's prince. This man did much to protect Luther throughout this stressful time.

In March 1521 the new emperor, Charles V, summoned Luther to a legal assembly to be held in the city of Worms—a meeting called the Diet of Worms—to appear before all the notables of the empire. Luther would be called upon to take back or recant everything that he had written or said against Romanism. His friends warned him not to go to the city; it would be too dangerous. However, the Lord gave him the courage to testify to the truth: 'Even if there were as many devils in Worms as there are tiles on the roofs, I would enter anyway'.⁸

Luther at Worms



Sola Scriptura

The great Protestant reformers shared Luther's Scriptural principle: to re-establish the Bible at the very centre of doctrine and lifestyle. They all wanted the Bible to be in the vernacular, the native language of the common people.

1523: Jacques Lefèvre translated the Greek New Testament into French and read from it during church services. Later French Bible translators such as Pierre Olivétan followed in his footsteps.

1526: William Tyndale published the first edition of the English New Testament translated directly from the Greek. His translation underlies the English Authorised (King James) Version. Because of his translation work, he was martyred in 1536.

1540: Thomas Cranmer, the Reformation Archbishop of England, persuaded Henry VIII to place a Great Bible in every church in England. In the Book of Common Prayer, Cranmer provided a calendar for daily reading of the Scriptures. He died at the stake in 1555.

1586: Gáspar Kàroli, a Hungarian Calvinist, translated the entire Bible into Hungarian.

On the dais sat young Charles V, the most powerful ruler in Europe. All around the room were the notables of the empire: bishops, abbots, princes, dukes, generals. In front of this impressive assembly stood a simple monk, a miner's son, with nothing to sustain him but his faith in God and the truths of the Bible. The emperor didn't want Luther to defend himself. He wanted Luther to state, 'I've been wrong and I recant.' The room waited; everyone strained to hear what Luther would say.

Then Luther confessed his steadfast faith in God's Word and his trust in God's care.

Unless I am convicted by Scripture and plain reason—I do not accept the authority of popes and councils, for 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. May God help me. Amen.⁹

Surely this scene in Worms is a relevant legacy of the Reformation to our situation today! An obscure monk from a Saxon backwater confronted the might of the empire. Today we're so often defeatist about the future of the church; we're so often afraid to stand up for our Christian beliefs and principles. Despite his fears, Luther did not waver. He was fighting for the Lord's truth as given to him—and to us—in His Word; Luther's conscience was captive to the Word.

The Bible and the Wartburg

The Emperor Charles V honoured the safe conduct he had promised Luther. However, in order to make sure Luther would come to no harm the Elector Frederick the Wise decided to take him to a safe place. While Luther and a few friends travelled through the woods near Eisenach, some armed and masked horsemen fell upon the travellers. As one of the attackers dragged him from the cart, Luther grabbed hold of his Hebrew Old Testament and Greek New Testament. One of the abductors lifted him into the saddle of his own horse and carried him off into the forest. Luther had been forewarned that this might happen, but his uninformed travelling companions were dismayed. What would the kidnappers do? Were they enemies sent to imprison or kill Luther?

But Luther was safe, and had been abducted for his own protection. Late that evening the kidnappers and their exhausted victim reached the Wartburg Castle. His protectors forced him to change his monk's cowl for a knight's clothing and ordered him not to leave his rooms until his hair and beard had grown.

In that dank and almost uninhabited castle owls and bats wheeled about in the darkness; there the prince of darkness undoubtedly plagued Luther with many doubts. In addition, Luther was emotionally exhausted and suffered from various ailments. Still, there in that seemingly forced idleness, Luther was not idle. Despite the dark winter days, dim light and poor health, he began to translate the Greek New Testament into German. It took him about four months! Day after day, week after week, he laboured at this monumental task. Not only was Luther a God-taught theologian, he was also a powerful wordsmith and a dedicated, diligent servant of God.

He finished his translation of the New Testament in 1522, and the German language he used became the foundation of modern German. To find the right words, 'he listened to the speech of the mother at home, the children in the street, the men and women in the market, the butcher and various tradesmen in their shops.'¹⁰ The German people welcomed this book into their churches, schools and homes. Now the Bible was not a book in a foreign tongue but in the everyday language: homely, clear and dear to people.

This portrayal of Luther in the Wartburg is a living legacy that is especially relevant to the Trinitarian Bible Society. The Society echoes it in our striving to translate the Word of God soundly and accurately into the native language of those who do not yet have good translations. Think of the obstacles and hardships that faced Luther. Many longed to see him put to death. The challenges and obstacles confronting the Society are many, but is our situation today worse than that of Luther or Tyndale or Olivétan or the other Reformation translators? Does not Luther's faith and zeal remind us of Paul's admonition in Hebrews 13.7: 'Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of *their* conversation.'

Although the Elector Frederick urged him to stay within the safe walls of the Wartburg, troubles in Wittenberg made Luther decide to return to the university. Despite the danger, he felt that he was 'repairing to Wittenberg under a protection more powerful than that of an elector'.¹¹ Upon his return after ten months in the protective custody of the Wartburg, he faced the challenge of quieting the discord in Wittenberg. His work there is worthy of attention but exceeds the scope of this booklet.

7 'The entrance of thy words giveth light' (Psalm 119.130)

Martin Luther and the other reformers returned the Bible to its rightful place not only in the church but also in matters regarding marriage, family and daily life. The Roman Catholic Church taught that the unmarried state pleased God more than being married. The church required priests, monks and nuns to take a vow of chastity. In addition, the church also encouraged men and women to shelter themselves from the world in monasteries and convents.

Some of Luther's writings were smuggled into the convent at Nimbschen. Reading them enlightened the consciences of several nuns and made them unwilling to live in a convent any longer. Leonard Koppe, a

...some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and the doctrines of devils...forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats... 1 Timothy 4.1, 3

The Bible...

merchant who sometimes visited the convent, took their appeal for help to Luther. With Luther's permission, Koppe helped the nuns to escape from the convent in 1523 on the evening before what is commonly known as Easter Day.

Since Luther had helped them escape, he also felt responsible for their welfare. Some of the nuns returned to their families while others married. Soon only one, Katherine von Bora, was left. Katherine fell in love with a young man but his family objected to his marriage with a runaway nun. When encouraged to marry a pastor in Wittenberg, Katherine refused. Jokingly she said that she would marry only Luther or his friend Nikolaus von Amsdorf.

By this time Luther had agreed that the married state is honorable in all. He now asked Katherine to marry him. She accepted. They married on 13 June 1525, very soon after Martin had proposed!

Luther's enemies attacked him about his marriage and some of his friends had many doubts. Convinced that he was acting Scripturally, Luther ignored both the attacks and criticism. His thoughts on marriage remain relevant today.

Whoever intends to enter married life should do so in faith and in God's name. He should pray to God that it may prosper according to His will and that marriage may not be treated as a matter of fun and folly. It is no small gift from God to find a wife who is pious and easy to get along with. It is the highest grace of God when love continues to flourish in married life. The first love is ardent, is an intoxicating love, so that we are blinded and are drawn to marriage. After we have slept off our intoxication, sincere love remains in the married life of the godly; but the godless are sorry they ever married.¹²

Katherine and Luther were blessed with six children. Despite his heavy workload, he spent as much time as possible with them. For many years, he enjoyed the comforts of home life.

Since the reformers believed that the Bible was the Word of God that gave guidelines for all parts of life, they wanted everyone to be able to read the Bible in



Martin and Katherine Luther

their own language. As a result, most towns and even villages soon had schools in which the children learned the basic skills of reading, writing and mathematics. In those schools they read the Bible and studied the catechisms written by people like Luther. In other words, the reformers' belief in *sola scriptura* profoundly affected the education of children.

8 Commemoration and lamentation

The Reformation is more than a fascinating history. The lives and teachings of the reformers are like signposts marking the way we should walk.

In the first place, Luther and his fellow reformers take us back to the core question of human existence: 'How can I, a sinner, be reconciled with God?' Staupitz pointed Luther to the answer and the Word of God still points to the same and only answer: only by faith in the crucified Christ 'who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption' (1 Corinthians 1.30) and that merely of grace: 'For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves:

The Bible...

it is the gift of God (Ephesians 2.8). Today many recognise Christ as a great teacher. However, for Luther Christ was not primarily an example but a gift, a present from God to His church, the only mediator between God and men (see 1 Timothy 2.5).

Second, the reformers restored the Bible to its rightful place for both divine worship and daily living. They knew everyone should be able to read the Word of God in

One thing, and one thing alone, is necessary for life, justification, and Christian liberty, and that is the most holy Word of God, the Gospel of Christ.

From Luther's *On Christian Liberty*

his own language. For centuries the church had minimised the importance of the Bible. Many today do the same thing. But Luther and Tyndale and the other reformers speak to us in a clear voice: 'To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word,

it is because there is no light in them' (Isaiah 8.20). Those who followed in Luther's footsteps risked their lives to read the Bible in secret, perhaps by the light of a smoking candle. Surely *sola scriptura* remains relevant to us!

Third, let's notice the amazing heroism and courage of the reformers. In their time the teachings and practices of the church were corrupt, the people were ignorant, and church leaders sought their deaths. We, too, live in a world filled with open hostility against the Bible. So did Luther. We live in a world that has banished the Bible from public schools, government, and morals. So did Luther. We live in a world in which our leaders make laws directly contrary to the Word. So did Luther. Yet he did not flinch; he did not hide himself behind the walls of a monastery. No, he and the later reformers did not despair; they did not shrug their shoulders and write off their world. They spoke up. They proclaimed the truth, the importance of the Word of God, and the need for personal conversion and repentance. We also need such faith-inspired courage, hope, and faith.

Let's not forget their influence on education. All the reformers wanted the people to read the Bible in their own language. As a result most towns and villages soon had schools in which the children learned the basics by reading the Bible and studying the catechisms written by people like Luther and Calvin. Must we not strive to give sound translations of the Bible so people can read the Word of God in their own language?

Family devotions

Luther urged parents to involve themselves in family devotions. He wanted parents to check up on their children and servants at least once a week to make sure they were reading the Bible and studying the *Shorter Catechism*. He also commended family singing, and sang with his children.

Finally, the reformers restored marriage and the family to the position given them in the Bible. The Church of Rome still teaches that the unmarried state is more pleasing to God than marriage and family life. Additionally, today many couples live together without being legally married. Luther, Calvin, Cranmer, Knox—all of them married. By doing so they showed the people of

their century and ours that marriage is a God-ordained institution. The paintings that depict Luther, his wife Katherine, and their children singing hymns together remind us of the importance of family devotions, of family life.

Sadly, 2017 is not only a year of **commemoration**, it's also a year of **lamentation**. Where are the churches founded in Reformation times? Most churches founded on Reformation truths have gone astray; sound Biblical doctrines are no longer proclaimed from their pulpits and some include unbiblical worship practices in their services. Governments in the countries most affected by the Reformation have led the way in abandoning the truths of God's Word and enacting legislation directly contrary to it.

How is it in our churches and homes and hearts? Are we not also in a lamentable state? We study the Bible; we defend and promote sound translations of the Word of God. And yet with all this, are we not often still strangers to the Truth? All of us need a personal reformation. We need to be born again, to receive divinely-worked heart knowledge, a making alive which God works in us without our aid. We need to pray with Jeremiah, 'turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou *art* the LORD my God' (Jeremiah 31.18). May it please the Lord to work such a true reformation in our hearts.

9 Appendix A: The 'wild boar in the vineyard' (Psalm 81.13)

While Pope Leo at first dismissed the Ninety-five Theses as the 'brawling of a drunken German', soon the Romanist church took this German monk more seriously. Just a few months later Leo summoned Luther to Rome, but by the grace

Opposition from Rome

October 1517	Luther posts his theses
August 1518	Pope summons him to Rome
October 1518	Luther meets with Cajetan
July 1519	Luther debates with Eck
June 1520	Pope issues his bull
November 1520	Church burns Luther's books
December 1520	Luther burns the papal bull
March 1521	Luther summoned to Worms

of God the Elector Frederick persuaded the pope to cancel his summons.

During the following few years several church scholars met with Luther. By this time Luther had a much clearer understanding of the doctrine of the Bible; the indulgences were no longer the main issue.

The Romanist church wanted Luther to recant and admit that the pope is the infallible leader of the church. Instead, the pressure from Luther's opponents drove him to use the weapons of pen and pulpit. In several books he expressed the true teachings of the Bible with ever-increasing clarity.

In 1520 a papal bull described Luther as a wild boar let loose upon the church. He was ordered to submit or be excommunicated. A little later church authorities burned copies of Luther's books in various cities of Germany. Luther responded dramatically. He showed his rejection of the pope's authority by burning the papal document in front of his students and fellow professors! All attempts to silence the reformer had failed. Now



Luther burning the papal bull

the pope turned to the emperor for help. This led to the Diet of Worms described in Section 5. Throughout this stressful time, Elector Frederick continued to protect Luther against any attempts to silence him by force.

10 Appendix B: Martin Luther and the Peasants' War

During 1524 and 1525 many German peasants rebelled against the harsh way they were treated by those who owned the land: the upper nobility and the monasteries. During this time the peasants destroyed some monasteries and castles. In the end the nobles crushed the rebellion with great brutality and bloodshed.

Martin Luther was vilified for his role in the Peasants' War. On the one hand the Romanists claimed that his teachings encouraged the peasants to rebel. On the other hand the peasants blamed him for not defending them. So just what was Luther's part in this sad event?

First, the Peasants' War had no immediate connection with the religious issues of the sixteenth century. There is no doubt that the landowners harshly oppressed the peasants who worked on their lands. Peasant unrest had been brewing for more than a century before Luther's time. Indeed, Luther, in his *Admonition to Peace*, had warned the ruling class against their oppressive behaviour: 'You do nothing but cheat and rob the people so that you may lead a life of luxury and extravagance. The poor people cannot bear it any longer'. But Luther certainly did not encourage the peasants to rebel.

Second, the peasants at first had no thought of violence. Early in 1524 they issued a statement of grievances called *The Twelve Articles*. In this they asked for a number of oppressive measures to be changed. These articles did not attack any form of government and Luther told the princes that many of the peasant demands were fair and just.

Luther's concern had always been for religious reform and a turning back to the way of salvation taught in the Bible. However, the peasantry took his call for Christian freedom to include freedom from oppression, injustice and poverty.

The Bible...

Many of the peasants believed that Luther was with them; they counted on him for sympathy and support.

Then the situation grew out of hand. First the landowners ignored the complaints of the peasants; instead they responded with harshness and cruelty. Because of this the peasants became more revolutionary in their demands and eager for revenge. Then came Thomas Müntzer. At first this man had been a follower of Martin Luther, but Müntzer's teachings soon became more radical. His fiery preaching stirred up the peasantry to violent actions.

While Luther did not agree with the harsh way in which the nobility treated the peasants, he felt it was even worse for the peasants to take to the sword. While he recognised the justness of their complaints, he did not believe they had the

Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God.

Romans 13.1-2

right to use violent means to seek redress. In Luther's mind Christianity is about spiritual matters and not about temporal affairs.

The unrest continued. Sadly, in his pamphlet *Against the Murderous and Thieving Mobs of the Peasants* Luther used harsh and intemperate language to condemn the peasants. While it's true that crude language was more

acceptable in the sixteenth century, Luther's regrettable harshness encouraged the nobles to continue their harsh repression of the uprising. Luther had little interest in social reform and did not fully understand the peasants' grievances.

What was the outcome? The princes soon crushed the rebellion but many on both sides continued to blame Luther for the whole uprising. The peasants felt that Luther had betrayed them and favoured the higher classes of society. Some turned to Anabaptism; in Bavaria and Austria many returned to the Romanist church. Luther lost much of his popularity, especially among the peasant class.

Although Martin Luther was a great reformer and is now rejoicing in heaven, he was very much a person of his day and not a perfect man. In his response to the

Peasants' War, he did not use Biblical tact and ignored Bible verses such as James 5.1–6. Despite this sad page in his story, it behoves us to honour him as a great reformer whom the Lord used as an instrument in His hand.

Endnotes:

1. Cited in Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand, A Life of Martin Luther* (New York, NY, USA: Pierce and Smith, 1950), p. 34.
2. Cited in Stephen J. Nichols, *The Reformation* (Wheaton, IL, USA: Crossway, 2007), pp. 30–31.
3. Bainton, pp. 49–50.
4. J. H. Merle d'Aubigne, *History of the Reformation in the Sixteenth Century* (Grand Rapids, MI, USA: Baker Book House, 1976), p. 76.
5. Melancthon, cited in J. A. Wylie, *The History of Protestantism*, 3 vols. (London, England: Cassell Petter & Galpin, 1878; reprint Mournie Missionary Trust 1985), 1.245.
6. Bainton, p. 59.
7. Nichols, pp. 29–30]
8. Arthur C. McGiffert, *Martin Luther, The Man and His Work* (Neerlandia, Alberta, Canada: Inheritance Publications, 2017), p. 238.
9. Nichols, p. 32.
10. McGiffert, p. 269.
11. Cited in Bainton, p. 164.
12. 'Christian History Sampler: Martin Luther on Marriage', *Christianity Today*, christianitytoday.com/history/issues/issue-26/christian-history-sampler-martin-luther-on-marriage.html, accessed 7 July 2017.

The Aims of the Society

To publish and distribute the Holy Scriptures throughout the world in many languages.

To promote Bible translations which are accurate and trustworthy, conforming to the Hebrew Masoretic Text of the Old Testament, and the Greek Textus Receptus of the New Testament, upon which texts the English Authorised Version is based.

To be instrumental in bringing light and life, through the Gospel of Christ, to those who are lost in sin and in the darkness of false religion and unbelief.

To uphold the doctrines of reformed Christianity, bearing witness to the equal and eternal deity of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, One God in three Persons.

To uphold the Bible as the inspired, inerrant Word of God.

For the Glory of God and the Increase of His Kingdom through the circulation of Protestant or uncorrupted versions of the Word of God.



Trinitarian Bible Society

William Tyndale House
29 Deer Park Road
London SW19 3NN, England

email: contact@tbsbibles.org

www: www.tbsbibles.org

Product Code: A129

ISBN 978 1 86228 068 7



9 781862 280687