



# The Protestant Reformation

## Justification by Faith Alone



October 31, 1517



# Outline

- What is justification and why is it so important?
- Events in the life of Martin Luther that led to the Protestant Reformation and the recovery of the Biblical understanding of the doctrine.
- A closer look at the doctrine
- Discussion



# What is justification?

- Man's predicament is a lack of righteousness.
  - If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? (Ps. 130:3)
  - None is righteous, no not one. (Rom. 3:10)
  - For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight (Rom. 3:20)
- The problem is that the Lord does mark iniquities and will bring them into judgment. The only way an unjust person can escape the day of God's wrath is to be justified. Only the justified will stand in that day.
- The Greek word for "justification" is built on the word for "right" or "righteousness."
- Justification refers to a legal action by God in which he declares a person just (righteous) in his sight.

# Importance of Justification by Faith Alone

- Martin Luther wrote, "When the article of justification has fallen, everything has fallen. This is the chief article from which all other doctrines have flowed. It alone begets, nourishes, builds, preserves, and defends the church of God; and without it the church of God cannot exist for one hour."
- John Calvin called justification "the main hinge on which salvation turns."
- Stated fully, it is the doctrine of justification by faith alone, through grace alone, in Christ alone.
- This doctrine (*sola fide*) was the chief matter under dispute in the Reformation.



# Martin Luther



- He was born on November 10, 1483 in Eisleben in central Germany to Hans and Margarete Luder.
- While in school he started using Luther, the Latinized version of his name.
- He earned two degrees at the University of Erfurt where he excelled in his studies of law.
- However, his spiritual anxieties seemed to haunt him at every turn.

## Luther becomes a monk

- In 1505, as he was traveling back to Erfurt, a bolt of lightning in a violent thunderstorm knocked him off his feet. He took it to be the very judgment of God upon his soul and he vowed to become a monk.
- Luther entered the monastery and tortured himself with praying, fasting, vigils, reading and other labors. “If any monk ever got to heaven by monkery, then I should have made it.”
- But still there was no resolution to his spiritual crises.
- He was sent to the University of Wittenberg where he received a B.A. in Bible in 1509 and then returned to Erfurt to teach.



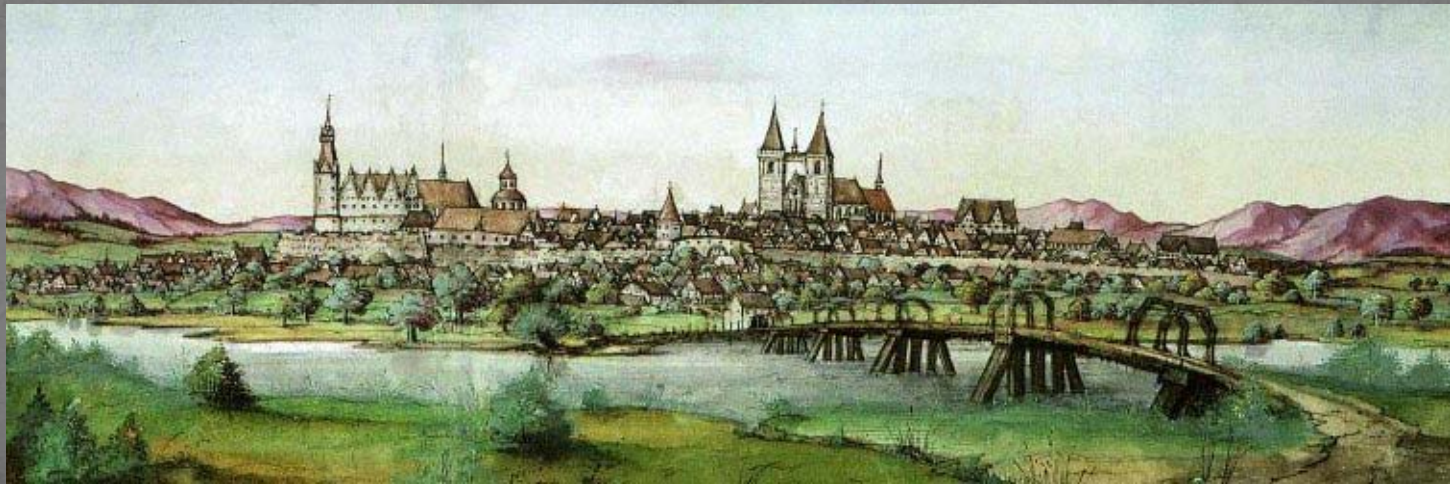
## Luther's transforming experience in Rome

- In 1510, he made a pilgrimage to Rome, but instead of finding a spiritual paradise, he was appalled at the “horrible sinfulness” rampant in the city.
- As he climbed the holy stairs (*Scala Sancta*), reciting the Lord's prayer on each step going up and down, his disillusionment increased. At the top he exclaimed, “Who knows if this true?”
- The trip to Rome had not quelled the storms of his soul.
- When asked why he could not comprehend God's love for him, Luther replied, “Love God? I can't love God, I hate him.”



## Luther the scholar

- In 1512, Luther received his doctorate in theology and was appointed to the faculty of theology at Wittenberg.
- In his studies, particularly on Romans, Galatians and Hebrews, he had difficulties reconciling what he read in Augustine and Paul's writings with the teachings of the church particularly in the areas of sin and salvation and his thinking began to depart from the church's .



## Posting of the *Ninety-Five Theses*

- It contained a series of short propositions concerning indulgences and particularly the sale of *indulgences* by the monk Johann Tetzel.
- Preface: “Out of love for the truth and the desire to bring it to light, the following propositions will be discussed at Wittenberg under the oversight of the Reverend Father Martin Luther.”
- The document was translated into German from Latin and copies were printed and distributed throughout Germany and beyond.
- This initial protest would soon expand to a much broader confrontation with Roman Catholic authorities on various points of theology.



## Roman Catholic doctrine

- At baptism, the righteousness of Christ is infused or “poured into” the soul of the person receiving baptism. The recipient is cleansed of original sin, sacramentally regenerated, and put into a state of grace.
- Infusion is the view that the righteousness of Christ is actually put into the believer so that the person is actually righteous. The righteousness of Christ is not simply credited to the person’s account (Protestant view); it actually becomes a person’s possession.
- Faith is a necessary condition of salvation. It is the foundational structure upon which justification is established.

## Roman Catholic doctrine - continued

- However, the grace infused at baptism can be lost by committing a “mortal” sin.
- A person committing such a sin does not have to be rebaptised. A different provision from baptism called “penance” is required to be restored to a state of justification for those who have “made shipwreck of their souls.”
- The sacrament of penance involved several elements, confession (an act of contrition), “works of satisfaction,” and priestly absolution,
- Luther’s objections focused on particular works of satisfaction called indulgences that he felt the church was misusing.

Source: R. C. Sproul, *Are We Together? A Protestant Analyzes Roman Catholicism*, Reformation Trust Publishing, 2012.



# Indulgences

- An indulgence is a work of satisfaction consisting of a transfer of merit aimed at restoring the righteousness lost by sinning.
- In order to gain heaven, a person must have sufficient merit (righteousness).
- If a person dies lacking sufficient merit to go directly to heaven, he goes to purgatory, a place where a person receives loving and sanctifying chastisement.
- By this chastisement, a person accrues merit to get into heaven. The length of time in purgatory depends on the amount of merit needed.
- The Roman Catholic Church came to believe it had the power to give merit to those who lacked it in order to shorten their time in purgatory.

# The Indulgence Controversy

- In 1517, Johann Tetzel seized upon the practice of penance to raise money for the rebuilding of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome.
- Tetzel reduced penance to the purchase of indulgences that would provide complete forgiveness of sins.
- This buying of salvation angered Luther and prompted the Ninety-Five Theses.





## Luther's breakthrough

- At this point, Luther hoped to reform the church from within and had no intention of breaking with it altogether.
- However, as his theological understanding developed, he soon realized the impossibility of that approach.
- After lecturing on Romans, Galatians and Hebrews and while giving a second series of lectures on the Psalms, he realized that faith meant coming to grips with the righteousness of God in Rom. 1:17:

For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."

## Entering paradise through open gates

- The resolution of his long-endured spiritual struggles came when “by the mercy of God” he finally realized that the righteousness God requires is not something we have to earn but something Christ accomplished for us. Luther was then able to exchange his anger toward God for a love of God.

“There I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous lives by a gift of God, namely by faith. ... Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates.”

*Martin Luther*





## Debates with Rome – Cardinal Cajetan

- He was summoned to Augsburg in October 1518 to debate Cajetan
- Luther stressed the authority of Scripture and salvation by faith.
- Cajetan was looking for Luther to recant his writings or to find evidence to condemn him as a heretic.
- The meeting was unsuccessful for both parties.



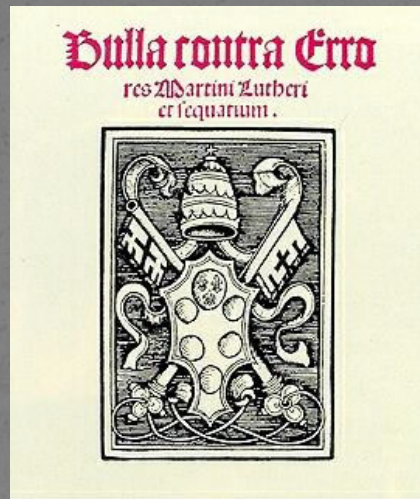
## Debates with Rome – Johann Eck



- In 1519, Luther met a more formidable opponent in a debate in Leipzig with Eck, a trained theologian.
- The debate provided Luther a platform to expound his doctrine of the authority of Scripture over the church fathers, church councils and even over the Pope himself.
- Eck aligned Luther with Wycliffe and Hus, who were both condemned as heretics.



# The wild boar in God's vineyard



- In 1520, Pope Leo X issued a papal bull entitled "*Exsurge, Domine*," "Arise, O Lord," that officially declared Luther an enemy of the church, of the apostles, and of Christ.
- Luther had 60 days after receiving the bull to recant or "his memory was to be completely obliterated from the fellowship of Christian believers."



## Luther's response



- At the end of 60 days, Luther burned the bull publicly in Wittenberg.
- The Pope then excommunicated him and called for his immediate delivery to Rome.



# Diet of Worms



- Luther was asked two questions:  
(1) Are these your writings? (2) Do you recant?



## Here I Stand



“Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason, for I do not trust in either the pope or in councils alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradict themselves, I am bound to the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not retract anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. I cannot do otherwise, here I stand. May God help me, Amen.”



## The unquenchable flame

- Luther sealed his fate as a heretic and lived the rest of his life under a sentence of death. The battle lines were drawn. The Reformation had begun.
- Frederick the Wise staged a kidnapping and hid Luther in his castle at Wartburg until he was able to return to Wittenberg in March 1522.
- Luther devoted much of his attention to church reforms – congregational singing, the use of German language with an emphasis on the sermon.
- In succeeding years, Reformation movements arose in other countries and produced other well-known and courageous leaders.

## The doctrine of justification – a closer look

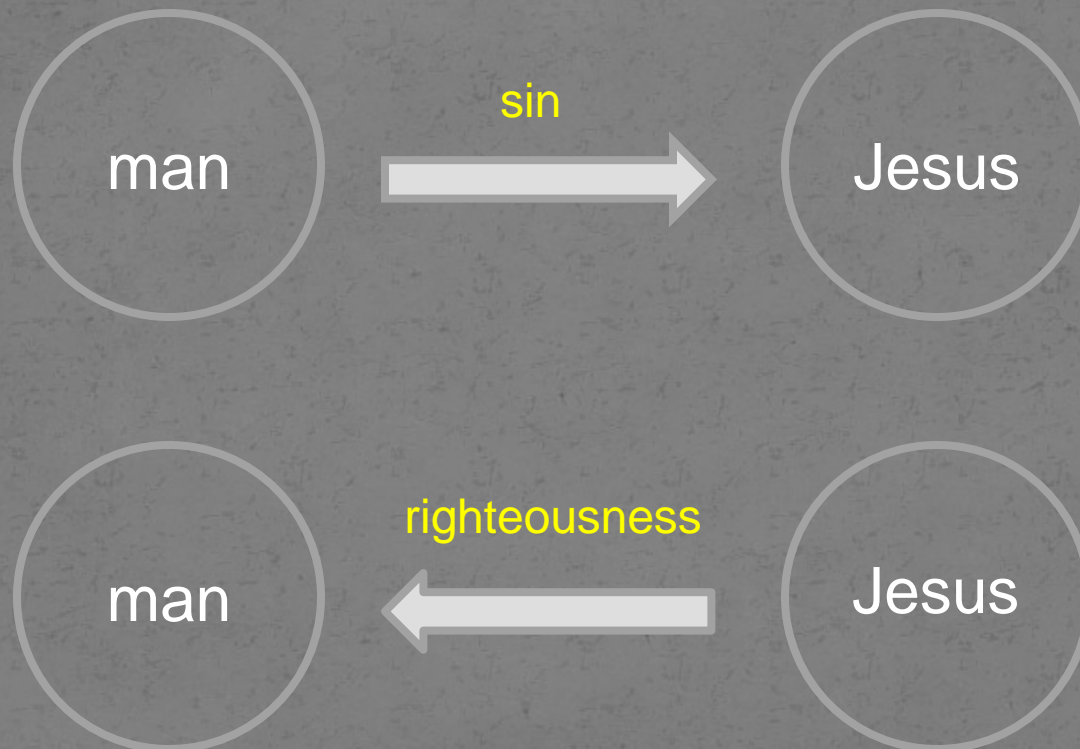
- The vocabulary of justification comes from the law court. The Greek verb *dikaioō*, which means “to justify” is essentially a forensic term that denotes the rendering of a favorable verdict, declaring a person to be in the right.
- The source of our justification is God’s free grace. We “are justified freely by his grace” according to Rom. 3:24.
- The means of justification is faith. (Rom. 5:1)
- How does God maintain his righteousness while at the same time justifying the ungodly?
  - This is explained by the doctrine of *imputation*.



# Imputation

- Imputation means a “crediting” to our account or regarding (or counting) something as belonging to the one to whom it is imputed (Rom 4:3 in the case of Abraham’s faith).
- If God merely declared us to be forgiven from our past sins, that would only make us morally neutral before God.
- We must have positive righteousness before God, the righteousness of a life of perfect obedience to him.
- Jesus lived the perfect righteous life that God requires. (1 Peter 2:22)
- When Jesus died on the cross he offered the perfect sacrifice to pay the penalty God’s holiness requires for our sins.
  - Our sins were imputed to Christ. (2 Cor. 5:21)
- When we receive Jesus by faith, his righteousness counts for us (is imputed to us). (2 Cor. 5:21)

# Imputation





# Discussion

