

Reformation -1-



Why did
Luther have a
problem?

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Why are Protestants making such a great fuss about the Reformation? Just what was the problem Luther had? Does his problem really have relevance to today?

At first glance, it seems that Luther was paranoid. He was worried and obsessed by fears that seem extra-ordinary. Surely he was mentally deranged?

Or could it be that the modern world is in denial. That Luther's obsession with his problem was the courageous facing of reality coupled with a determination to find the answer?

Luther changed the world. To understand how, we do well to understand the problem he faced. Perhaps it is also our problem, that we have not yet faced?

Did you know that Luther was an Augustinian Priest? That means, you can blame a spiritual descendant of Tunisia for the Reformation!

Brief history of the Church, until the time of Luther

Luther was a monk, in the “Medieval Roman Church” which was totally different to the church in the first century. The early Christians were not involved in politics. They followed the teaching of Jesus which said, “**My kingdom is not of this world**”. (John 18:36)

By the year 313, Christians were numerous – both real Christians and Christians by name only. Constantine legalised Christianity and made it the religion of the Empire. No one is born a real Christian. Everyone has to make their own personal choice. But it is possible to be born a cultural Christian, and for culture to dominate.

Over time, the official Church split into two directions: Roman Catholicism, and Eastern Orthodox, each with their head, called a Pope or a Patriarch. The division and the reasons for it are rooted in history. Our concern is with Europe and North Africa, which was dominated by the official Church in Rome – the Medieval Roman Church. Religion was unintelligible, in Latin. There was a vast structure of monks and priests. There was a complicated system of works, good deeds, and payments made to the church, to somehow earn and buy a place in heaven.

In summary, politics, power, and corruption, dominated.

And there was always a shortage of money. The problem was solved by selling ‘indulgences’ which shortened the time of punishment in between earth and heaven known as purgatory. The idea was that some saints had been so good, that they had entered heaven directly AND they had merit to share, which could be obtained by purchasing an indulgence.

By the 15th century, there was a long way from the Bible. They had fabricated their own system through which people could approach God and obtain grace. And it was all controlled by the church.

Brief biography of Luther

In November 1483 Luther was born in Eisleben, central Germany. It was obvious to his father that Luther was clever, so his father insisted Luther study Law, a career that could be quite lucrative, and he was enrolled in the University of Erfurt. The trouble was, Luther, from an early age, was quite serious about religion. When Martin was 21, in 1504, while walking back to University, he was caught in a frightening thunderstorm. A bolt of lightning was so close to Martin it knocked him to the ground. There was no chance to make a final confession of sin to a priest, and the prospect of agonising punishment after death was too terrible to consider. So Martin cried out: Saint Anne, help me! I will become a monk!

The vow once made could not be revoked. His father was furious – this was no bolt of thunder from heaven – it was the devil’s work.

But, Martin kept his vow.

To enter a monastery was to enter a world of rules. There were rules for how to walk, how to talk, where to look and when, even rules on how to hold a spoon! Every few hours there were prayers to be said. Life was dedicated to climbing the steep ladder to heaven. There was special underwear that was uncomfortable and scratched the skin. Luther often took no bread or water for three days at a time. All this was considered pleasing to God. But all such drastic methods led to no sense of inner tranquillity. The purpose of his striving was to compensate for his sins, but he could never feel the scales were tipped in his favour. The problem was, the standard was too high, and Luther could not meet it: he could not satisfy God at every point.

All those prayers in chapel for example: they had to be meant from the heart. Had he really meant them enough? And if he missed, for whatever legitimate reason, there was catchup needed. Then there were all the other problems – letting your eyes wander, laughing, poor singing. Luther was not going to cut corners – his eternal salvation was at stake. In ‘confession’ he would exhaust his confessors by taking over six hours to catalogue his most recent sins, and in doing so missing at least one time of ritual chanting and prayer, therefore adding yet more to his catch-up list. At the end of confession the priest declared Luther to be forgiven. But, forgiveness depended on true contrition of heart (as well as the penance). For Luther, who took this seriously, it meant ever deeper introspection as he analysed his motivation in confession. Was he truly repentant? Did he only want to avoid punishment from God?

How could a man live in the presence of God, unless that man was holy? Luther was thorough in seeking to confess all known sin. But Luther knew how unreliable memory can be and was never quite sure he had confessed everything.

Such thinking led Luther into seasons of torment. **His logic was impeccable:**

1. Sins, in order for them to be forgiven, must be confessed
2. To be confessed they must be recognised and remembered
3. If they are not recognised and remembered, they cannot be confessed
4. If they are not confessed, they cannot be forgiven.

The only way out of this is to deny the premise, ie to deny the starting point, but the scripture will not let us do that. Trying to hide sin from God, is that possible? Is God blind? The other route, taken by Luther, was self condemnation. You can just imagine the question: Are you totally submitted to God? Totally? All the time? Without resentment? Always with good intentions?

Later, in thinking back about his life, Luther wrote:

I was a good monk and kept my rule so strictly that I could say that if ever a monk could get into heaven through monastic discipline, I was that monk.... And yet my conscience would not give me any certainty, but I always doubted and said, ‘You didn’t do that right. You weren’t contrite enough. You left that out of your confession.’...Although I lived a blameless life as a monk, I felt that I was a sinner with an uneasy conscience before God. I also could not believe that I had pleased him with my works. Far from loving that righteous God who punished sinners, I actually hated him.... I was in desperation.....

In 1510 his well meaning leaders sent him to Rome. Luther rejoiced! In Rome's sanctuaries he would be closer to the apostles and to the saints. For instance, Rome was full of 'relics', and the mere sight of one of them conferred merit. Luther made the most of it, dashing from one holy site to another, amassing merit. It was there, in Rome, that the first seeds of doubt were sown. He noticed that Relics, Holy Sites, the Mass, had become an industry.

Then Luther decided to climb the 'Scala Sancta'. This was the staircase that Jesus was supposed to have climbed in order to appear before Pontius Pilate. The staircase had supposedly been transported to Rome. By climbing it, kissing each step and repeating the Lord's prayer on each step on reaching the top you could free one soul of your choice from purgatory. But Luther thought, who knows if this official story is true?

On his return to Germany he was sent to a monastery in Wittenberg in 1511– in those days a small town, and a new University was just being started. His superior Staupitz thought Luther would make a good teacher of theology so he was allowed to study the Bible. Yes, at that time, even monks needed special permission to read the Bible, and they had to be good at languages because it had to be read in the official Latin translation, known nowadays as the Vulgate. The Vulgate was a very poor translation, but it was all the few authorised people had.

Luther's superior, Staupitz, was well aware of the struggles of Luther. He puzzled to help find a solution. He recognised that Luther had many gifts. Why his difficulties should be so enormous and so persistent was baffling. Argument and comfort did no good. So Luther was informed he should study for his doctorate, should undertake preaching, and become the professor of Bible in the university. Luther when he heard it gasped, as well he might! A young man on the verge of a nervous breakdown was commissioned as a teacher, preacher, and counsellor to sick souls.

Luther's continued struggles with his own sinfulness

Luther was still troubled by his own sinfulness. Luther had come to see that even our best is always tainted by selfishness and self-love, therefore, the only answer was self-condemnation.

This idea that the only cure for rottenness was self hatred and self accusation was built upon a frightening view of God. Luther only knew God as Judge, and Luther was terrified. How could you love a God who is angry, who judges and condemns everyone? Of what use is prayer if God remains angry? While struggling with these questions, and doing his job as a pastor, a man called Tetzel came to a nearby town.

Tetzel and the sale of indulgences

The Pope needed money for his projects in Rome especially money to rebuild St Peter's Basilica. A major way to do that was to sell indulgences. Johann Tetzel was particularly good at it. He travelled with his theatrical performance. He was direct., vividly describing the sufferings of those in purgatory. Indulgences were sold for money.

To Luther, **the real scandal was that nobody really needed to repent of their sins.** Luther wanted a full debate in the church. Therefore he wrote down his propositions for discussion in the famous 95 theses. To make sure they received wide publicity, he went public the day before a big festival, All Saints Day, 1 November 1517. The theses were written in anger against Tetzel.

The theses have three main points

1. Against the intention to use the money to build a shrine in Rome containing the bones of St Peter. Luther asks why the Pope could not use his own money instead of money from Germany. Many of his listeners would have exclaimed a deep, *Jawohl* to this.
2. Challenge to the power of the Pope over purgatory “If the Pope has the power to release someone from purgatory, why does he not do so free of charge?” Many other theologians at the time would have agreed with Luther on this point.
3. He who spends money on indulgences instead of helping the poor receives not the indulgence but the indignation of God.

The theses do not question the legitimacy of relics or indulgences. There is clear belief in purgatory and the authority of the Pope. All Luther did was to protest at the mis-use of indulgences. True, the theses did stir up discussion, but he was not the only one to have questioned indulgences. Luther was not expecting trouble. He sent a copy to Archbishop Albert of Mainz who in turn forwarded them to the Pope. If the Pope had reacted diplomatically, and had corrected the worst of the abuses, then the controversy might well have died down. Luther, once he had written the theses spent very little time on the subject. He was too busy preaching and teaching.

Escalation

But, Tetzel, and others did react. As such they escalated the debate.

In 1519 Luther debated with the theologian Yohann Eck at Leipzig, who sought to trick Luther by a trap question: Which had the final say, the Bible or the Pope? The official line was that the Holy Scriptures draw their power and authority from the Pope.

Luther walked into the ambush. Luther said he could understand Scripture without the Pope. Eck pounced, and accused Luther of being a disciple of the ‘damned and pestiferous’ heretics Wycliffe and Hus. Luther was horrified. During a pause in the debate, in order to defend himself he looked again at what Hus believed, and Luther found that he agreed with much of what Hus had said. When the debate resumed, Luther was honest enough to admit this. In this way, **Luther was following the evidence wherever it led**. But Luther had effectively pronounced his own death sentence. He had said enough to be convicted of heresy.

Eck, in effect, had pushed Luther. As a result, Luther’s doubts about the papacy grew. Over the next few months it became clear:

- If Rome held the Pope to be the authority above Holy Scripture
- Then Rome could never be reformed by appealing to the Holy Scriptures against the word of the Pope.
- The words of the Pope would always trump the words of God.
- To Luther, that made the Pope an ‘antichrist’, and the Medieval Roman Church a synagogue of Satan.

The ideas of Luther took time to develop. The real breakthrough for Luther happened in 1519. If we are to fully understand history, we need to grasp the viewpoint of Luther. We need to understand what were his priorities. Luther was not primarily concerned with changing the system, and challenging the Pope and the . The key question to Luther was, how could a sinful man or woman be forgiven by a Holy and Just God?

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And that question is still key today. Every other question is secondary.

The answer came in stages, in 1519

Stage 0: Luther had already recognised that there was nothing he could do to avoid God's punishment.

- ** **As it is written: "There is none righteous, no, not one".** (Romans 3:10). See also Psalm 14:3 and Psalm 53:3
- ** **All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God** (Romans 3:23)
- ** **If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.** (1 John 1:10)

Stage 1: God is judge AND God is love

Luther's first lectures were on the book of Psalms. Psalm 22 contains the verse quoted when Jesus was dying on the cross. "**My God, My God, why has thou forsaken me?**" Jesus obviously felt himself to be forsaken by God, abandoned, deserted. This meant that Christ had also suffered and felt the *Anfechtungen* – the utter desolation of being abandoned by God which Luther found the hardest to live with.

Luther saw that Jesus really had experienced what it felt like to be abandoned by God. Jesus therefore could and did love people. The problem is, why would Christ have felt this way? For Luther to feel it, was normal and natural. Luther was weak in the presence of the Almighty. Luther was impure in the presence of the Holy God. Luther had blasphemed against God in thinking angry hateful thoughts against Him. But Christ? Christ was not weak, Christ was not impure. Christ had never blasphemed. Why then should Christ have felt that God had deserted him?

Luther came to see that the only answer is that Christ on the cross was bearing the sins of others. Christ identified himself so much with us that he was willing to participate in our alienation, to feel what it was like to be estranged from God.

This for Luther was a new picture of Christ. As Luther thought about the Cross, he came to see that God was neither malicious nor capricious. God had provided the answer to the problem that Luther so acutely felt. But, how? How exactly did this work?

Stage 2: God always keeps His promises

Luther was thinking again about confession and repentance, it struck him that after 'confession' the priest would declare that the person was forgiven. The question now changed:

Wrong question: have I confessed enough and merited enough?

Right question: Can I believe that the words of God are true? The point is, when God declares someone to be forgiven, then the the struggles to merit forgiveness, are over.

But. There is another question. **Could God be relied upon?** Since God does as He pleases, therefore God is not bound by His promises.

Luther came to see that this is a totally false view of God.

We need to listen to what God says about Himself. God repeatedly tells us that He is a promise maker, and a promise keeper. God is so committed to His glory, His reputation, that He will Always keep His promises. In effect, God has said, if one word of his fails, he would no longer be God. Therefore, when God declares the sins of someone as forgiven, they are forgiven.

Stage 3: God had solved Luther's problem

Luther was studying the book of Romans in preparation to preaching on it. One day he read again Romans 1:17 '**the just shall live by faith**'.

The light dawned on Luther. He saw that **God had solved Luther's problem!!** Yes, Luther could never be perfect. But the solution was not more self examination, good works, and penance, and certainly not the purchase of indulgences. The solution was to accept the forgiveness of God as a personal gift. It was not by works, but to receive forgiveness as a gift, and was like a huge burden lifted.

Faith is not a work. Faith means that we take God at His word. God offers forgiveness, and we take it and trust his words. God is honoured and glorified when we take him at His word.

Luther realised that God had provided a solution to the problem that no one could be right before God. God had found a way to be totally just, and to justify the sinner at the same time.

God's forgiveness could never be merited. Forgiveness was offered as a free gift. Never merited, so **that no man could boast.**

Luther knew that "**the wages of sin is death**". Luther now understood the full verse: "**the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord**".

In Romans it says that even Abraham did NOT get to heaven because of his own works and merits.

For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." (Romans 4:2-3).

Belief means submitting to God, submitting to His Word and His Ways. God is implacably opposed to anyone who tries to gain favour by merit. God's way is higher and more profound than that.

Faith means unconditional surrender to God and His Ways. Taking forgiveness as a gift.

If merits were needed, to get to heaven, what do you think of this?

Jesus was crucified with two criminals. This was the punishment reserved for rebels, murderers, and those who had opposed the authority of Rome.

Then one of the criminals who were hanged blasphemed Him, saying, "If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us." But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, "Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong." Then he said to Jesus, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom." And Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise." (Luke 23:39-43).

There was no way that the second criminal could get merit, to arrive in heaven. All he did was to put his trust in Jesus.

In 1520 the Pope issued a bull

A bull was a decree authenticated by the personal seal of the Pope. The Pope ordered Luther to recant within 60 days. When Luther received the bull, he burned it. This was a man who at the age of 21 was terrified in a thunderstorm, and who had been terrified of the judgement of God. Now, he was boldly defying the wrath of the Pope, and faced the prospect of being burned alive as a heretic, then, if the Pope was right, facing terrible punishment in hell.

Luther was called to account. He was convoked, and ordered to stand trial at the city of Worms. Luther chose to go. Luther knew full well what had happened to Hus. Hus had attended a trial trusting in the promise of free conduct, that he would not be killed. That promise was not kept.

On Wednesday 16 April 1521 Luther entered the city of Worms. It looked like a triumphal entry, like the entry of Jesus to Jerusalem a week before his death. (See Matthew 21 and John 12). Luther was well aware of the comparison. When Luther entered Worms he fully expected it to end in a brutal execution. Luther though was determined to defend his discovery of peace with God through faith.

The next day the trial began. The emperor's spokesman pointed at a pile of Luther's books. Luther acknowledged they were all his. He was then told there was only one question:

These books contain heresies against our holy church. Do you recant of what you have written?

Luther admitted the books were his, then, to the amazement of all, asked for more time to decide whether he needed to recant or not. Grudgingly, he was given one more day.

There have been various interpretations of this. In the film you see Luther battling with himself, fearful, yet hating himself for his fear. But, Luther had not been expecting such a blunt question. Luther had come to the trial prepared to debate in detail some of the specific things he had written. The demand to reject everything demanded further consideration.

The next day, around six in the evening, the hall was packed. Everyone expected Luther to cave in, and fully apologise for heinous heresy.

Eck repeated his question: Would Luther recant?

Luther replied:

Most serene emperor, most illustrious princes, most clement lords, if I have not given some of you your proper titles I beg you to forgive me, for I am not a courtier but a simple monk. You asked me yesterday whether the books were mine and whether I would repudiate them. They are all mine, but as for the second question, they are not all of one sort.

(This was a skilful move. By differentiating his books Luther won for himself the opportunity to make a detailed speech instead of answering simply yes or no).

Some deal with faith and life so simply that even my enemies are compelled to regard them as worthy of Christian reading. Even the bull of the Pope itself does not treat all my books as all the same. If I should renounce these, I would be the only man on earth to damn the truth confessed alike by friends or foes.

A second class of my books protest against the damage done to the Christian world by the evil lives and teaching of the papists. Even the German nation was afflicted by this "incredible tyranny". Should I recant at this point I would then open the door to more tyranny.

(This was a shrewd appeal to German nationalism, which had a strong following in Worms).

A third class contains attacks on private individuals. I confess I have been more caustic than fits my profession. But the real problem you accuse me of concerns the teaching of Christ. I cannot renounce what I have written about Christ without increasing tyranny. When Christ stood before Annas, he said, 'produce witnesses'. If our Lord, who could not err, made a demand like this, why may not a worm like me ask to be convicted of error from the prophets and the gospels? If I am shown my error, I will be the first to throw my books into the fire.

Eck replied:

Martin, you have not sufficiently distinguished your works. The earlier were bad, and the latter worse. Your plea to be heard from scripture is one always made by heretics. You do nothing but renew the errors of Wycliffe and Hus.

How can you assume that you are the only one to understand the sense of scripture? Would you put your judgement above that of so many famous men and claim that you know more than they all do?

You have no right to call into question the most holy orthodox faith. This faith was instituted by Christ the perfect law-giver. It was proclaimed throughout the world by the apostles, sealed by the red blood of the martyrs, and confirmed by the sacred councils. We are forbidden by the Pope and the emperor to discuss this faith lest there be no end to debate. I ask you Martin, – answer candidly and without horns – do you or do you not repudiate your books and the errors they contain?

Luther replied:

Since then Your Majesty and your lordships desire a simple reply, I will answer without horns and without teeth. Unless I am convinced by Scriptures 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 I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise. God help me. Amen.

Luther had spoken. He threw up his arms in the gesture of a victorious knight, and slipped out of the court and went to his lodging. The reformation had begun.

A few days later he began his travels heading for Wittenberg. En route, he was kidnapped by friends and taken to a remote place: Wartburg castle. Luther stayed there secretly for the next ten months.

In less than eleven weeks he translated the entire New Testament, from the Greek, into German. Of course, it took time to check it, but Luther had produced a masterpiece. The language was punchy, colourful, related to street language, and it transformed the way people spoke German. In effect, Luther was one of the founders of the German language. The comparable figure in English was Tyndale.

In September 1522 the New Testament was published: at last, ordinary people could read and hear the Word of God in their own language.

Meantime, back in Wittenberg

In the absence of Luther, the leadership fell to Andreas Carlstadt. He pushed the reform forwards too quickly, without first teaching and preparing the people. This resulted in violence. So, Luther, at great risk to his own life, came out of hiding and called for peaceful reform. He preached a series of sermons in which he said that true reform comes from the conversion of hearts, not the change of external practices. The power to change hearts is from God. Hearts are NOT changed through force or the sword.

Tensions though continued, and exploded in the German Peasants' War of 1524-1525.

Assessment/commentary

Even today, many people falsely say that Luther caused war. The historical facts are that Luther opposed violence. It was other extremists who profited from the reformation and often tried to use it for their own political ends. It is true that later, Luther was in favour of the state punishing heretics. But this was to be by due legal process, and not by mob action.

Luther was a key figure in the recovery of basic freedoms. He did not go far enough. Later, the reformers came to see even more clearly that there needs to be a clear separation of the church and the state. The church could have internal discipline, such as expulsion from membership. But no one, church or state, had the right or duty to enforce the unenforceable – to compel belief.

Luther was still a child of his time. He began the reformation, but was not able to reform every aspect of Christian life. Luther had done well attacking indulgences and corruption in the church. Crucially, he had promoted the authority of Scripture, and the right of everyone to read it for themselves.

But, he did not go far enough. It was for others to take that step, and show that the Scriptures clearly teach a separation of church and state.

The rest of the story

In 1525 Luther made another break with Rome. He married. He went on to have several children, and a busy open house. The official church forbade marriage for its officials.

In 1530 Luther was once again called to account, in the “Diet of Augsburg”. It was too dangerous for Luther to go, and German nobles attended in his place and defended him.

In January 1546 Luther was 63. He travelled to Eisleben through the cold, to settle a small dispute. Over supper, perhaps sensing his death was near, the conversation turned to discussing the topic of the resurrection of the dead. Luther was certain we would recognise each other. In bed he prayed Psalm 31:5. “Into your hands I commit my spirit”. Someone asked him, Are you ready to die trusting your Lord Jesus Christ and to confess the doctrine you have taught in his name? A clear Yes was his answer. Soon after, he died. There was no priest present. The Mass was not said, there was no last confession. Instead, there was simple confidence before God.

Major achievements

Luther left it to others to fully develop the freedoms of the Reformation. Fundamentally, Luther re-discovered, and re-asserted:

1. The Scriptures are the final authority, not the Pope, and not the Church.
2. God is both totally just and loving. God keeps His promises.
3. God has provided a way so that sinful man can be reconciled to a Holy God and receive forgiveness and eternal life, without need for purgatory.
4. The way to heaven was through faith, through accepting the offer of eternal life that is offered by God. God will oppose and reject anyone who tries to get to heaven through their own strength or good deeds. John 5:24 **"Most assuredly, I [Jesus] say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life"**.

All the other concerns are minor, compared to this.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the “Mass”?

This was central to the It was celebrated on an altar, which was the central point of a church building. In the Mass, the body of Christ would be ‘sacrificed’ again. It was through this ‘unbloody’ sacrifice, repeated daily, that God’s anger at sin would be appeased. Each day, Christ would be offered to God as an atoning sacrifice, thus the sins of each day were dealt with. This was more than just symbolism.

Obviously the priest was only handling bread and wine! The had invented the doctrine of ‘transubstantiation’. According to Aristotle, each thing has its own substance (inner reality) and accidents (appearance). The substance of a chair for instance could be wood, while the colours could be its accidents. Transubstantiation imagines that in the Mass, the substance is changed into the body and blood of Christ, while the outward appearance of bread and wine remains.

We do not need to evaluate the doctrine. The fact is, that this is what the taught, and used in their control over people.

The moment of transformation happened when the priest repeated the words of Christ, ‘this is my body’ in Latin: *Hoc est corpus meum*. The irony is that most priests found it easier to learn the words by rote, and it often came out garbled, as ‘hocus pocus’

The early reformer Wycliffe had taught that transubstantiation was nonsense in that it denied the fact that Christ had died once and for all, that His sacrifice for sin was effective, and peace with God is possible without the need of a priest or the Mass. Luther too came to see the Mass as a contradiction. Therefore, to teach that in the Mass, sacrifices were repeated, was a blasphemy. It was a step backwards, and it denied that the sacrifice of Christ had been effective.

What about the words: You are Peter ...I will build my church?

Somehow, the had come to believe that the Pope was the natural successor of Peter, who in turn, was the natural successor of Jesus. Their main argument was based on:

Matthew 16:18 **“And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church”.**

The verse has been taken out of context. And one of the most important principles of interpretation of any quotation, is to look at it in context. The context says:

When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying,

"Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?"

So they said,

"Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

He said to them,

"But who do you say that I am?"

Simon Peter answered and said,

"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Jesus answered and said to him,

"Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

Then He commanded His disciples that they should tell no one that He was Jesus the Christ. (Matthew 16:13-20).

The topic being discussed is the identity of Jesus. The 'rock' does NOT refer to Peter. Look how Peter later went on to deny that he knew Jesus three times! The 'rock' is Christ, and specifically, the statement That Jesus is the Christ, ie the Messiah. Peter later confirms this interpretation in the first of his letters to the churches. He says, referring to Christ :

The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone, 1 Peter 2:7.

Was Luther a hater of Jews?

You may have heard that Luther was against the Jews. Certainly, the Nazis thought so. In 1523 Luther wrote a book called: That Jesus Christ was born a Jew. Luther recognised the Jewish origins of his faith. Luther dedicated the book to a converted Jew he had befriended, and later, Luther would support his son, at great personal cost financially. Over the years though he sensed what he saw as a hardness of heart in the unbelieving Jews in that they refused to acknowledge that their own scriptures, the Old Testament, pointed to Christ. Finally, in reply to some strong Jewish attacks, he wrote On the Jews and their lies.

- He argued that being children of Abraham was a spiritual matter, not a matter of genetics
- He went on to show from the Old Testament that Jesus must be the promised Messiah.
- Only then, he moved on to the notorious set of recommendations.
- He condemned personal acts of violence. Any action against them must be taken by the state.
- He said that the standard existing blasphemy laws should be applied to Jews, which meant their religion was criminal. Synagogues and houses should be destroyed, and the Jews expelled.

Luther's encouragement of violent state action against the Jews is offensive and regrettable. It was influenced by the prevailing contemporary point of view that the church could use the power of the state to force people to adopt certain beliefs and practices. Later reformers provided the corrective by insisting on the separation between church and state, giving citizens freedom of religious expression based on conscience. **Luther was far from perfect in his understanding of Biblical teaching, and yet his honest inquiry and courage to live according to his convictions still speak to us today.**

Reformation timeline

- ? - 1384 Wycliffe.
- 1369-1415 Hus.
- 1483 Luther born, in Germany.
- 1492 Columbus re-discovers America.
- 1505 Luther becomes a monk.
- 1509 John Calvin born, in France.
- 1516 Erasmus publishes his Greek New Testament.
- 1517 Luther nails his 95 theses to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, in protest against 'indulgences'.
- 1519 The debate with Eck pushes Luther to investigate the views of Hus, which he found he frequently agreed with, and this reinforces the viewpoint that Luther is now a Heretic.
- Luther finds peace with God.
- 1520 Luther publishes his three Reformation tracts, and burns the 'papal bull' .
- 1521 The Diet of Worms (Public trial). After this, friends kidnap him and keep him safe in Warburg Castle. Luther begins the translation of the New Testament into German.
- 1522 Luther finishes the German New Testament.
- 1524-25 Peasants' War in Germany.
- 1525 Luther marries Katherine von Bora.
- 1529 Turks lay siege to Vienna.
- 1530 Luther as an outlaw cannot attend the Diet of Augsburg. German nobles attend and defend him.
- 1534 Luther publishes his translation of the whole Bible into German.
- 1536 First edition of 'Calvin's Institutes (in French) published.
- 1536 William Tyndale executed. He had translated the New Testament and parts of the Old Testament into English.
- 1538 The reading of the Bible in English is made legal in Britain.
- 1546 Luther dies, age 62.

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