

# MARTIN LUTHER

MODERN CHURCH HISTORY –SPRING 2024

## WHY STUDY CHURCH HISTORY

- History helps insulate us from false teaching.
- History informs our doctrine of the church.
- History explains and challenges the disunity that exists between Protestants.
- History addresses the confusion that exists concerning our mission in the world and our relationship with culture.
- History helps protect us from the temptation to adopt cultural values.
- History is a sub-category of providence.
  - Church history is the story of how God works through primary and secondary causes throughout human history. “The king’s heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will.” – Prov. 21:1

## PRELIMINARY FACTORS TO THE REFORMATION

- The Black Death (1347-1351) led to a serious decline in religious faith and practice among Europeans.
- The Great Schism (1378-1417) caused many Catholics to doubt the authority of the church.
- The deaths of John Wycliffe (1384) and Jan Hus (1415) backfired, making their ideas of reform more popular.
- The Printing Press (1440) helped spread ideas quickly and created a surge in literacy and education.
- The Fall of Constantinople (1453) and the Muslim threat further destabilized religious faith.
- Moral and economic corruption in the Catholic Church were rampant by the 1500s.
- Humanism set the stage for the Reformation (value of the individual, emphasis on human reason, education, and the study of classical literature).

## MARTIN LUTHER

- Luther was an anxious German monk, part of the Augustinian Order – the strictest monastery in Germany.
- Luther visited Rome in 1510 and was discouraged by some of the practices he witnessed.
- Luther determined to study the Bible and let the Bible shape his theology.
- His study of Romans and Galatians led to his conversion – “justification by faith”.
- Luther wrote *95 Theses* in 1517 and nailed them to the door of Castle Church in Wittenburg. In them, he addresses the Catholic practices of penance and the sale of indulgences, declaring them out of accord with the Word of God. The paper was published and distributed throughout Germany.

## THE DIET OF WORMS

- Pope Leo X excommunicated Luther in January 1521. Political pressure kept the pope from challenging Luther sooner.
- A month later, Luther was given an opportunity to publicly recant his views at the Diet of Worms and be welcomed back into the church. He refused.
- "Unless I am persuaded by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason, then I cannot and will not recant because it is neither safe nor wise to act against conscience. Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me. Amen."
- For political reasons, Luther was given safe passage from the trial and went into hiding for a year. During this time, he translated the Bible into German.

## PRESENT-DAY APPLICATIONS

- Today's Church is still adjusting to the Protestant Reformation. We are still arguing about many of the same issues 500 years later – the nature of salvation and Christian growth, the sacraments, church leadership, the relationship between church and state, etc.
- There are many parallels between the corruption of the medieval church and many contemporary churches.
  - Money is still a problem.
  - The personal piety of church leaders is still a problem.
  - An unhealthy relationship with politics is still a problem.
  - The tendency of Christians to trust the experts instead of reading God's Word is still a problem.