

The Protestant Reformation

Listed Scriptures

Rom 2:1–16, 3, 5–8

Lesson Aim

- 1) Remind students to be diligent in keeping to the original teachings of Christ.
- 2) Show students that God has prepared a way for the true church to emerge at the right time.

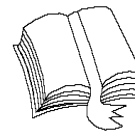
Memory Verse

“Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” (Rom 5:1,2)

Bible Reading For This Week (for students and teachers)

Ps 60, Rom 2–8

B I B L E B A C K G R O U N D



“Popular religion” refers to the religious beliefs of the ordinary men and women, who are also called “laymen”. During the Middle Ages, over 80% of these people were illiterate. It was therefore impossible for them to read the Bible that was printed in Latin. Even the few who were educated would not be able to read the Bible in Latin unless they were part of the clergy. The most important parts of the church services were also spoken in Latin, so most people would have no idea of what the priests were chanting.

Without any means of understanding the formal worship in the church, lay people turned to other ways to express their religious fervor. They turned to the saints, the

famous holy people who were reputed to have lived such pure and sacred lives that they had a special spiritual link with God. Of course, one could not become a saint while alive, so all saints were dead. Nevertheless, it was believed that they were such special people that even in death, they had great influence and power.

In fact, most ordinary Christians were pagan converts. They found it easy to transfer their pagan forms of worship to Christianity. The old pagan shrines transformed into shrines for worshipping the dead saints. Pagan festivals easily became Christian holy days, such as All Saints' Day, which we still have. In some communities, there were so many days to honor the numerous saints that the whole year was interrupted by festivals. There were saints who made the fields fertile, saints to bless the birth of a child, saints to ward against evil—the list was endless. The Virgin Mary grew rapidly in significance from the twelfth century onward. People would undertake pilgrimages to certain shrines built for her, reputed to have special powers such as healing. Catholics still make such pilgrimages today.

Relics were another popular thing. These were mementos supposedly belonging to certain powerful saints. It could be the bowl a saint used in his or her lifetime, a piece of fabric from a garment, even the saint's teeth, pieces of bone, a walking stick. People would pay vast amounts of money for relics because they believed these things had healing powers, power to protect against evil, or power to grant wishes. A growing market in relics resulted. Peasants bought drops of the Savior's bloody sweat and the Virgin's milk at local fairs. Cities cherished and stole from one another the bodies of famous saints. The church encouraged these superstitions because they brought in a lot of money. In fact, many relics were probably manufactured by the church.

One important sale item was indulgences. Christians at the time believed that when a person died, he would spend a period of time in purgatory. This was the place where the soul suffered for all the sins committed during life. The length of time spent in purgatory depended on how good a person had been in life. After an allotted time, people were released to heaven. Everyone went to heaven unless they had been excommunicated by the church. If that happened, they were condemned to eternal hell. This was why the threat of excommunication was so effective against rulers.

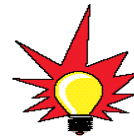
Initially, the church provided indulgences for the remission of punishment imposed by the church. The punishment would have been imposed on someone for a specific sin. The theory behind the indulgence was that no one could ever do enough to clean their "sinfulness" or take away their sin fully—whatever they have done. The

Roman Catholic Church had a system of penance, which was what an individual had to do to make up for or expiate a particular sin. Since no penance an individual could do would ever expiate the sin they committed, it was necessary to draw on a bank of "merits" to help them. The idea was a bit like this: if you owed someone a lot of money, far more than you could ever repay, you would go somewhere to borrow the amount. These "merits" were extra brownie points to help you pay off your penance for your sins.

How did this bank build up in points? Well, Christ, the Virgin Mary, and the saints contributed to it. They were so pure and holy that they were able to provide endless merits for sinners. The way to get these merits was through the pope. The pope gave out merits to sinners through indulgences. With your indulgence, your sin could be fully forgiven, your penance complete.

In the early days of the indulgence, you could get one for doing a great deed, such as fighting in the Crusades. Later on, you could buy these indulgences. The money the church received from selling indulgences financed new church buildings, monasteries, hospitals, and so on. Later on, indulgences were bought, not just for absolving one sin, but for all guilt you could possibly incur before God. This was the bone of contention that led to the Protestant Reformation.

W A R M U P



"2 Truths and a Lie"

You might need to prepare this beforehand. You could involve your students in the game eventually, but you will need to start them off. Be prepared to jump in if they're stuck.

You have to offer three statements from the Bible. Two of them are true, and one is not. They have to figure out which is not true. The three statements must be connected in some way, i.e. doctrinal statements, part of a parable or story, and so on. You could begin with something simple, for example:

1. Elizabeth was the mother of John the Baptist. (True)
2. Joseph was the husband of Mary. (True)
3. Jesus was born in Nazareth. (False, Jesus was born in Bethlehem.)

If you have time, you could give your students some time to prepare 3 statements each to ask each other. If not, you can prepare a few beforehand to ask them. You could even do this as a game. Divide

your class into two groups, and see which group wins when you ask them a series of “2 truths and a lie.”

At the end of the warm-up time, ask your students how they might find out whether a statement was true or not. Hopefully, they will answer: “Find out from the Bible,” or even “Ask a minister.” Tell them that during medieval times, the church had gone so far off the truth that they no longer knew what was true and what was not. They made the mistake of not constantly going back to the Bible to check the truth, so they wandered farther and farther away from God. This is something we must constantly guard against.

B I B L E S T U D Y



The Protestant Reformation



A. Sin

Read the following verses and discuss what each says about sin and being saved from sin:

- a. Rom 3:21–26 (we have all sinned before God, we are justified by His grace through Jesus Christ, the sins we have previously committed have been passed over)
- b. Rom 5:18–19 (our life is a gift, granted us by the actions of Jesus, we are made righteous by His act of obedience)
- c. Rom 6:7–14 (just as Christ has triumphed over death, we are also saved from death, made alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord, we must therefore not allow sin to be in our body, we must be instruments of righteousness to God, sin has no dominion over us because we are under grace)
- d. What is the main message in the above verses? (we are saved freely through grace, and must remain pure because we have been saved from the dominion of sin by Jesus Christ)

The medieval church did not preach this same message. Instead, they invented tickets called “indulgences” to salvation. The Catholic Church taught that when Christians died, they went to purgatory to “purge” all the sins they committed in life. If you were very good, the time you spent there would be shorter. After ‘serving time’ in purgatory, you then proceeded to heaven. Obviously, everyone would wish a very short time in purgatory. The church knew that, and that was how indulgences became popular. By buying indulgences, you could buy forgiveness for all your sins. This was possible because the indulgences were officially given by the pope, or the head of the church.



B. Martin Luther

Most ordinary Christians were so confused about their beliefs, and so superstitious in their daily lives, that they were easily deceived into believing that indulgences could actually save their souls from purgatory. What was more, you could also buy indulgences for deceased loved ones to shorten the length of their suffering in purgatory. The problem was, once people had a means of getting out of punishment, they no longer cared about their behavior. It was all right to commit any sin, because you could buy your way out of any punishment through indulgences. This was what one Augustinian monk realized.

Martin Luther was the son of a miner, born in 1483. He had an excellent education, and even received his B.A. and M.A. degrees from the University of Erfurt, Germany. He was so bright that his father urged him to enter law school, which he did. However, in July of 1505, he experienced a profound conversion experience that changed the course of his life. He ended up in a monastery belonging to the Augustinian order of monks. At the monastery, he came under the influence of a mentor, a leader of his order named Johann Von Staupitz. Von Staupitz encouraged Luther to think upon the love of God for the sinner, evidenced in Christ’s death. Luther studied the Bible very diligently. During 1513–1528, he lectured on Psalms, Romans, Galatians, Hebrews, and Titus. Around this period, he came to understand the doctrine of “justification by faith.”

It was the issue of indulgences that bothered Luther greatly because it promised full remission of sin and punishment in purgatory for living persons as well as dead. He observed the negative effect the sale of indulgences had on moral and ethical standards of believers. On October 31, 1517, he posted his Ninety-five Theses (topics for debate) on the door of Castle Church at Wittenberg, to protest against the sale of indulgences. He did not know that the sale of indulgences went

ahead with the blessings of the pope. He felt that the pope would surely put a stop to them once he knew what was happening. Luther was shocked to gradually learn that the sale of indulgences was approved at the highest level for money that the pope needed.

Luther was summoned to Rome to answer for his theses. It was here that he realized the extent of moral decline within the church. In fact, he was excommunicated eventually, and might even have burned at the stake if he had not been protected by the ruler of the area he came from. Frederic of Saxony had always forbidden the sale of indulgences in his domain. He therefore gave sanctuary to Luther. Amazingly, increasing masses of people came to support Luther. The real extent of disillusionment with the Roman Catholic Church was revealed when Luther finally parted company with Rome. While there were difficulties and drawbacks initially, the Lutheran Reformation gathered speed steadily until an alternative church was established. The ordinary people found in Luther's church the hope and faith that they could not find within Roman Catholicism. The Epistle to the Romans played a very important part in initially guiding Luther. Luther's studies of Romans led him to think about justification by faith.

The Lutheran Church contained several distinctive features:

- a. Justification by faith alone
- b. Salvation by grace alone
- c. The Bible alone as the authority for doctrine and practice
- d. The priesthood of the believer
- e. Promotion of congregational singing

After the Lutheran Reformation, there were further splits within the new church. The vast number of different denominations that we take for granted today began with Luther. If this had not taken place, the true church would not have emerged so easily. We would certainly have been considered heretics by the Roman Catholic Church, probably put through the Inquisition and perhaps burned at the stake!

CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING



1 What were indulgences?

2 Why was Luther so concerned about them?

3 Why do you think people were prepared to follow Luther and not the Catholic Church?

LIFE APPLICATION

A Leader of the Church



Share your journal entries: If I became a leader in the church, how would I lead my younger brothers and sisters? (See previous lesson Life Application section.) It would be good if the teacher also had something to share with the students regarding what good leadership is.

The students will need blank paper (larger than the usual letter size would be better), one per group, as well as some pens or markers for the scribe (the following information is not in the students' workbook).

Divide the class into groups of 3 or 4 (maximum). Each person within the group should have a role:

1. Reader: this student will read out what the group has written at the end of the discussion.
2. Encourager: this student should encourage everyone within the group to take part in the discussion.
3. Scribe: this student will write down all the main points for the group.
4. Time keeper: if you have groups of 4, this student will remind everyone of how much time they have to complete the task. If you have groups of 3, then the teacher will be the timekeeper.
5. The roles can be written on cards and students can pick a role randomly, or you can assign the roles.

Task:

1. Set a time for this task (around 10 minutes). Students may read their journal to others within the group, or they may offer opinions on what qualities a good leader should have, based on their journal entry. The scribe will write down the main points as the discussion moves along. At the end of the discussion, each group should have a list of qualities that they feel a good leader in the church should have.

2. The reader will then share with the rest of the class all the qualities the group has on paper. The sheet could be put up on the wall.
3. When every group has presented, discuss as a whole class the most common qualities everyone put down. Discuss why everyone thinks these qualities are so important. Perhaps mention examples of biblical characters who possess these qualities.

Remind students that these are the qualities that they feel are the most important in a leader. If we do not have some of these qualities, then we should ask God for them so that we may develop into good leaders for His church.

REFLECTION & PRAYER



We must remember that each of us has a responsibility to pass on the truth to the next generation of believers. In doing that, we must ensure that what we pass on is the original truth, not something that we invented for our convenience, or for gain. This is the mistake that the Roman Catholic Church made. It drew farther and farther away from God and the true gospel as each generation passed, until what they preached bore no resemblance to the teachings of Christ and the apostles. We must learn from their mistakes and always keep to the true teachings of the Bible. Let us ask God to grant us wisdom and to give us strength in our endeavors. Let us pray.

Lesson 9

Lutherans, Presbyterians, and Anglicans

Listed Scriptures

2 Kgs 11–12, 22–23:30; 2 Chron 19–20, 29–31

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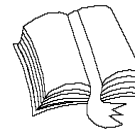
Memory Verse

“For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God.” (1 Cor 2:11)

Bible Reading For This Week (for students and teachers)

Deut 28–30; Ps 18:20–36; Mal 3–4

BIBLE BACKGROUND



Martin Luther was excommunicated by the pope in 1520 and outlawed by Emperor Charles V in 1521. However, his dramatic stand against pope and emperor fired the imagination of the people in Europe. Growing nationalistic feelings also helped him. Most people were tired of bowing to the whims of the Roman Catholic Church and the Emperor in Rome. People in Europe were beginning to gain a sense of belonging to their region or ruler. Frederick the Wise of Saxony, the most powerful ruler in Germany at the time, supported Luther and kept him safe. The people under Frederick also supported this decision.

Over the next twenty-five years, Luther wrote book after book. He wrote in German for ordinary people to read. The invention of the printing press about a century before assisted with the process of disseminating knowledge. Because of Luther’s