

The Lutheran Tradition

Garth M. Rosell, PhD

*Experience: Professor of Church History
and Director Emeritus, Ockenga Institute
at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary*



Lecture 2—The Lutheran Tradition. Greetings once again in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and let me invite you at the beginning of this class to join me in prayer. Let us pray. Eternal God, we give you thanks for the privilege that we have to study your ways and your works in this world. We ask that you might be with us as we study, guiding us by your Spirit. Help us to be open to what you have to teach us through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Protestant Reformation, that great religious revolution of the sixteenth and into the seventeenth centuries, began symbolically, at least, on the eve of All Soul's Day, October 31, 1517, when Martin Luther, then a professor of biblical studies at the newly founded university of Wittenberg in Germany, posted his now famous Ninety-Five Theses on the door of the castle church. Luther could not possibly have known at that time the enormous repercussions that that simple act would have had, for within weeks, virtually every university and religious center in Europe was alive with discussions and debates.

I want to explore with you today not only the beginnings of what we have come now to call the Great Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century, but in particular to look at the life and work of the first great Protestant Reformer, Martin Luther, whose dates are 1483–1546. Luther was born in Eisleben in Saxony in 1483. His father was a miner, and as most of you are aware, his father wanted him to be a lawyer. He went to the city schools in nearby Mansfield. He then continued his preparatory training in Eisenach and then went to the University of Erfurt, arriving there in 1501. The following year he received his bachelor of arts degree and in 1505 received his master of arts degree. At that time he entered the chapter house of the Hermits of St. Augustine in Erfurt. He did this due to the vow which he had made in a moment of terror when he was thrown to the ground by a bolt of lightning during a thunderstorm, and in that moment of fear he vowed to serve God as a monk. And this brought him then into this particular chapter

house.

He was ordained a priest in 1507. Then he was transferred to the University of Wittenberg in 1508. While he was there at Wittenberg, he began to lecture on moral theology and the Bible. He earned his ThD degree, his doctor of theology, in 1512 and received also a permanent appointment to a chair as a lecturer in Scripture at the University of Wittenberg.

In 1510, he visited Rome. This was an important event in his life, as we will see, and he later wrote, "I would not have missed seeing Rome for 100,000 Florences, for then I might have been afraid of being unjust to the pope." And then, in 1517, going through this brief chronology, he posts his famous theses on the castle door. This was a very common and normal activity. People who wanted to debate certain issues often would put those on the door, hoping to create the atmosphere in which genuine discussion and interaction on themes, particularly theological themes, might be pursued. What prompted the theses in this case, most immediately at least, was the abuse which Luther felt was taking place in the sale of indulgences. The use of indulgences had grown during this period of time, and many had come to see it as a major scandal in the life of the church. Luther at this time didn't oppose indulgences in their original sense. They had been established as merciful releases of a penitent sinner from a penance imposed by a priest.

What he did oppose were the additions to and perversions in the use of indulgences. Medieval folk had a dread of the period of punishment in purgatory, which the church portrayed often in very vivid detail. The idea of purgatory itself was based upon a text in 2 Maccabees 12:39–45. This appears as part of the Roman Catholic Scriptures, but not for the Protestants. In that text, Judas Maccabeus made a propitiation for them that had died that they might be released from their sins. That interesting phrase was picked up and in the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 was established as an official sacrament of the life of the church, and this was further reinforced at the Council of Lyon, 1274, and the Council of Florence in 1439.

It was a great dread of purgatory's pains, for the church taught that before the believers could reach heaven, they had to be cleansed of every sin committed in their mortal lives. It became generally believed that an indulgence assured the shortening of the punishments of the faithful in purgatory. For example, if one

were to visit the castle church there at Wittenberg, the relics that could be seen were reckoned to earn a remission for pilgrims of 1,902,202 years and 270 days in purgatory. Well worth the visit. Luther came to see, however, that the holy trade in indulgences, especially that which was being practiced by Johann Tetzel, this Dominican friar who was selling indulgences at nearby Jüterbog just outside of Saxony, that that practice had become a perversion in church life and was contrary to what Christ would have taught us to do.

Fundamentally, the problem was that it was unwarranted in Scripture. It encouraged a person to remain in their sins. It often tended to turn a person's mind away from Christ and Christ's forgiveness. It tended to promote disregard for God's law and, in fact, in some cases, it had become so perverse that people were buying indulgences, that is, release from any penance requirements for sinfulness for sins that they had not yet committed but were anticipating committing. It's not difficult to imagine how that might have gotten the ire of a good monk like Luther raised, and, in fact, it did.

The Ninety-Five Theses then were fundamentally focused on indulgences, though they touched on many other subjects as well. There is, however, no mention in the Ninety-Five Theses of justification by faith directly. There's no intention there clearly to break with the pope or the church. What Luther was interested in was to see the church reforming itself, to get rid of these excesses and problems which he thought were bringing a disgrace upon the faith. The basic teachings of the Ninety-Five Theses are that penance implies true repentance. What is really important is whether the person is truly repentant for their sins, that mortification of the flesh is useless, in fact, unless accompanied by inward repentance, and that the merits of Christ, not the treasury of the saints, could avail for the forgiveness of sins. The real treasure of the church is the gospel, the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

This raised enormous discussions for many different reasons and a whole series of what were then called "disputations." These were both informal and formal, and Luther was caught up in many of them at Heidelberg and Augsburg in 1518 and at Leipzig with Eck in 1519. Ultimately these led to the papal bull, *Exsurge Domine*, in 1520. This was promulgated by Leo X, who listed forty-one separate errors of Luther. This was an instrument of excommunication and when handed to Luther, he burned it.

The Diet of Worms the following year in 1521 was requested originally by Frederick the Wise, the ruler of Saxony, and called by Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor, who was only twenty-one years of age at the time. That diet, that exposure which Luther had to the larger public for the eyes of the world was now on this whole process, fired the imaginations of literally thousands of Christians. Luther's courageous stand that April 17, 1521, brought many who had been outside of this debate into the heart of the debate, and people began thinking and talking and interacting about the true nature of the faith and the application of the Christian gospel to life and church activity.

Luther was outlawed at the Diet of Worms. By prearrangement with Frederick the Wise, the elector of Saxony, Luther was kidnapped on the road back, kept secluded at the castle at Wartburg, and it's there that he wore secular clothing, he went at that time under the name Sir George, he translated the Scripture into German. This is the time when he threw the inkpot at the devil, as you will remember. And basically what he was doing there was checking tradition, the practice of the church against the Scripture. We've talked already about the enormous importance in church history of doing that again and again and again. It's the heart of any genuine reform. It's the heart of any lively faith in the church, which flows out of a deep commitment to Christ and a deep reliance upon His Word.

Between 1521 and 1529, in this fascinating decade of the twenties, between the Diet of Worms and the Diet of Speyer, Lutheranism grew very rapidly. Scores of churches were organized. Luther himself, growing out of his testing of the Scripture, began to speak out more and more vigorously against the church, against the pope, against the ecclesiastical establishment. It was in this period also, at the middle part of this decade, that the Peasants' Revolt took place. This is one of the remarkable but rather sad chapters in early Lutheran history. Occurring in 1524–1525, it was an uprising known as the *Bundschuh*, known from the leather shoe which was worn by the peasants and became a kind of symbol of this cause. These folk picked up on Luther's call for Christian liberty, and the peasants attacked government and church alike. They had fomented for years over taxes and civil infringements on their way of life. They had risen up many times before. We have examples of this in 1493, 1502, 1513, and 1517, but it was 1524 that comes especially to our attention in connection with Luther in the development of Lutheranism.

When as a result of the Edict of Worms, Lutheran ministers were arrested, the Bund, as it was called, moved to their defense. Luther had already cautioned against violence and the use of violence, but the peasants continued to plunder churches and monasteries. Church-state relations, you see, and particularly attitudes toward the use of force, had divided the church over its history into the three major groupings. Those of you who were a part of the first half of this two-part course will remember the divisions into nonviolent, just war, and crusading attitudes toward war. It's important to remember that Luther and, in fact, the whole Lutheran movement, lined up very quickly and clearly in the camp of the just war forces. This is a position that was articulated earliest and most fully by Saint Augustine, but it was essentially a commitment to defensive war. But it was a joining of forces between church and state for the purpose of defending the structures of the state that had initiated this particular position, and Luther himself picks this up. It is clearly articulated in the most classic statement of all the Lutheran confessions, that is, the great Augsburg Confession, penned by Philip Melanchthon in 1530. And I want to read just a brief section of that from the John H. Leith volume, *Creeds of the Churches*, this John Knox Press paperback which was published in 1973 and is a useful collection of creeds and confessions in the life of the church.

On page 73 it reads, "The Gospel does not overthrow civil authority, the state, and marriage, but requires that all of these be kept as true orders of God and that everyone, each according to his own calling, manifests Christian love and genuine good works in his station of life. Accordingly, Christians are obliged to be subjected to civil authority and to obey its commands and laws in all that can be done without sin." What Luther is arguing for here through the pen of Melanchthon and his other colleagues is a position of just war, connection of church and state, which rules against any kind of unbridled, fomented response of people like these peasants. Luther wrote a tract against them, growing out of that theory of just war, and he titled his tract "Against the Murderous and Thieving Hordes of Peasants." He denounced the *Bundschuh* in no uncertain terms. He called upon princes to stop them. "Let everyone who can smite, slay, stab, secretly or opening, remembering that nothing can be more poisonous, hurtful, or devilish than a rebel." This is a dark period in Lutheran history, and it's one that a good many have studied and restudied and there's material available for those of you who may want to pursue that more deeply. But that came right at the heart of this period of enormous Lutheran growth, a time when Luther himself

was determining his own attitudes not only toward the church but also toward the state, and increasingly these are going to become solidified around a church-state collegiality, a linking of the two. It's part of why Lutheranism becomes identified with the so-called Magisterial Reformation, which we'll talk about later on, those who saw church and state as integrally part of one another. This is opposed to the Anabaptists or the left-wing Reformers who renounce any connection between church and state and who, in fact, take up a position of nonviolence with regard to the use of force.

Another very important event took place in Luther's life in this decade of the 1520s. He married an escaped nun in 1525 named Katharina von Bora. The marriage was a very happy one, and Luther often talked about Katie as his rib. In fact, there's even a study of the marriage of Martin Luther and Katharina called *Katie, My Rib*. "I would not exchange Katie for France or for Venice," Martin remarked, "because God has given her to me. And besides, other women have worse faults." Luther is fun to read because he is so outspoken and on occasion so witty.

He invited one of his friends to his wedding, and his invitation read, "I am to be married on Thursday. My lord, Katie and I, invite you to send a barrel of the best Torgan beer and if it isn't good, you'll have to drink it all yourself." A banquet was held in the Augustinian cloister, which followed the ceremony in the parish church in Wittenberg. Then there was a dance in the town hall, followed by another dinner.

If you think of it, the Luther family formed the very first Protestant parsonage, and their home was filled with hospitality, with laughter, with mutual consolation, with serious storytelling. There were six children—four orphans who lived with them. Luther often played and sang with his children, telling them fairy stories which he'd make up, or writing them when he was away from home, or composing little songs for them to sing. Some of the wonderful Christmas carols we have are written by Luther. "Ah dearest Jesus, Holy Child," is one of his.

The home was filled with continual guests; sometimes twenty-five at a time ate and slept there in a single day. After his death, his students issued a volume entitled *Table Talk*, containing all of the recollections of conversations around that big Luther family table. It included subjects like dogs, the pope, the end of the world, Noah, politics, pregnancy, printing, and so on.

Luther loved his beer. He had a large mug with three rings around it representing, he said, “the Ten Commandments, the Apostles’ Creed, and the Lord’s Prayer,” and he bragged that he could drain it through the Lord’s Prayer in a single chug.

His smaller catechism was written in 1529 for his children, and he drilled them in this, requiring that they be able to answer around the table as he trained them in the faith through the use of the catechisms which he had written. These are available for us, and I want to read just a section of that, again from the John Leith volume, *Creeds of the Churches*. In part, I read this because it seems so important in our day to remind ourselves of the enormous importance of parents training their children in the faith, and here you have one who is caught up in all of the activities, the busyness, the twists and turns of a very difficult and very powerful movement, house filled with guests, and yet he puts as one of his highest priorities the training of his own children in the faith, and he writes his catechisms for that very purpose. They’ve been used by young people in the church ever since. But this which appears on [page] 113 of our Leith collection picks up on the Ten Commandments, and it says, “In the plain form in which the head of the family shall teach it to his household,” and then it starts out with the first, and you can almost hear Luther at the dining room table turning to one of his kids and asking him, “You shall have no other gods. What does this mean?” And the child would have to answer, “We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things.” And then he would turn to the next. “You shall not take the name of the Lord, your God, in vain. What does this mean?” And they would in fear and trembling answer, “We should fear and love God and so we should not use His name to curse, swear, practice magic, lie, or deceive, but in every call of need, turn to Him, pray to Him, praise Him, and give Him thanks.” He turned to a third, “Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy. What does this mean?” Answer: “We should fear and love God and so we should not despise His Word and the preaching of it, but deem it holy and gladly hear and learn it.” And a fourth, “Honor your father and mother. What does this mean?” “We should fear and love God and so we should not despise our parents and superiors, nor provoke them to anger, but honor, serve, obey, love, and esteem them.” And it went right down the list of the commandments.

And then he’d turn to the creed. “Again in the plain form in which the head of the family shall teach it to his household—the first article creation. I believe in God the Father, Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth,” and do you remember those words? They come

from the Apostles' Creed which is a kind of incorporation of many of those early creedal formulations of the church, which probably emerge out of the baptismal service of the church in the first few centuries. "What does this mean?" Luther would ask another of his children, and the answer would have to come, "I believe that God has created me and all that exists. That He's given me and still sustains my body and soul. All my limbs, my senses, my reason, all the faculties of my mind, together with food and clothing, house and home, family and property. That He provides me daily and abundantly with all the necessities of life, protects me from all danger, preserves me from all evil. All this He does out of His pure, fatherly, and divine goodness and mercy without any merit or worthiness on my part. For all of this I am bound to thank, praise, serve, and obey Him. This is most certainly true."

Then he'd go on to the Lord's Prayer. "Again in the plain form in which the head of the family shall teach it to his household, Our Father who art in heaven, what does this mean?" And another would have to answer. "Here God would encourage us to believe that He is truly our Father and that we are truly His children, in order that we may approach Him boldly and confidently in prayer, even as beloved children approach their dear father." And then he'd go on to "Hallowed be Thy name, what does this mean? and Thy kingdom come, what does this mean." Isn't it fascinating to see in the busyness of his schedule how much time and effort Luther gave to training his own children in the faith and to making sure that they understood the faith through this very concrete day-by-day activity which he undertook around the table?

I think we can learn a lot from the Luther family and from its practices in the home. It was a happy, joyful, encouraging home, and people were drawn to it like a magnet. Wouldn't it be wonderful if all of our parsonages and manses, all of our Christian lay homes, could be typified in the same way?

The decade ended with the 1529 Diet of Speyer. It had been a period of great growth with the turmoil and the struggle of the Peasants' Revolt, the happiness of his marriage and the development of his family, but this period of growth comes to an end with the Diet of Speyer in the year 1529, one of four parliamentary meetings which were held in that city, which is on the Rhine in Bavaria. The 1526 diet there at Speyer had produced the following resolution: each prince is to rule and act as he hopes to answer to God in his imperial majesty. This had opened the door to enormous growth by Lutherans because it opened up regionalism as a possibility

with each prince deciding how that area under his jurisdiction would go in terms of its religious affiliation. Some remained Catholic; others became Lutheran.

Germany at that time was not a very solid political unit. It was united with the Holy Roman Empire, but there was no real central authority at that time. It was a weak reality. The imperial crown had become almost hereditary. It started at the time of Charlemagne in 800. The House of Habsburg had been led by Emperor Maximilian I from 1493 to 1519, and then Emperor Charles V, who took over in 1519. Charles V was a young, small, somewhat reserved man—hostile to Lutheranism; very favorable toward the pope but not very powerful. Germany, for all intents and purposes, was ruled by princes in separate territories. The seven most important of these, those who formed the College of Electors to choose the emperor, were three bishops in Cologne, Mainz, Trier, and four secular rulers in Bohemia, Saxony, Brandenburg, and the Palatinate. There were also imperial cities directly under the emperor at eighty-five of these. These were, however, largely independent such as in Nuremberg. They were controlled basically by the guilds or the trade unions within those towns, whichever ones dominated.

In 1529, Charles wished to overturn the 1526 decision to enforce the Edict of Worms which had come out of the early part of that decade. Most complied, but fourteen of the free cities drew up a strong protest against the Holy Roman Emperor at that time. The signatories came to be known as Protestants, and all who eventually left the Roman Catholic Church were then given that name or identification. Needing the aid of the Lutheran princes, and himself not being all that strong, Charles V ultimately softened his stand at the third and the fourth Diets of Speyer in 1542 and 1544, and ultimately granted Lutherans recognition at the Peace of Augsburg in 1555. The terms of the Peace of Augsburg are interesting. Each prince was to determine the religion of his own domain (that's like the 1526 determination). Second, these areas, despite their religion, are to enjoy the protection of the Holy Roman Emperor, even those Lutheran areas, and the third, the peace [extends] only to Roman Catholics and Protestants adhering to the Augsburg Confession. I read a part of that to you a moment ago. That was the major doctrinal statement of the Lutherans. But excluded were Calvinists or Reformed and Anabaptists.

So here you have in 1555 the openness once again to determination in each of the regions overseen by a prince of what particular religious practice would be a part of that jurisdiction. This didn't

end the hostility, of course. Rules like this seldom do. And the Thirty Years' War put Roman Catholic against Protestant again and again in bitter rivalry in this period and time.

With that brief background on Martin Luther's life and work, let me focus with you for a few moments on what are the three great theological principles that emerge out of the period of Reformation. And I want to talk about these in terms of justification by faith, the authority of the Bible, and the priesthood of all believers. These, I think, form the very heart of Reformed thought in the sixteenth century. No matter what group or whatever wing of the Protestant Reformation we explore, these three emerge again and again as central tenets, and we'll be talking later about the various divisions among Protestants. But one of the elements that tied them all together, and it grew very vividly out of the work of Luther, are these three theological affirmations, which I would suggest are very central for our own life and work today, and which might well be picked up by preachers and teachers of the faith today as central elements that we need to recapture.

Let's begin with the principle of justification by faith. Certainly no theological affirmation is more central to the Protestant Reformation in the popular mind than this principle of justification by faith, and rightly so. The principle itself grows out of Luther's own experience, and it comes out of his problem with his sense of sinfulness. This is different from Saint Augustine, who we had a chance to look at in our last course, whose struggle was with his sensual appetites. For Luther, the problem was not so much sensual appetites as it was the sensitivity of his own conscience, his own awareness of his own sinfulness—both what he did and what he failed to do.

The church had a way of handling that kind of sinfulness, and that way had been built up around the principle of penance, of meritorious obedience, the fact that the church was to prescribe for those who fell into sin the way in which they might appropriately respond to it, and that could include fasting, it could include special work on behalf of the church, it could include pilgrimages—any number of things that were part of that penitent system, and in fact, they had established certain church officers to oversee the work of penance within the life of the church.

That had developed as an enormous superstructure for the church over the years, but for Luther, it was insufficient to deal with the basic problem which he felt that he had with his own sinfulness.

He describes this in terms of his life in the monastery. “When I was a monk,” he wrote, “I tried with all diligence to live according to the rule and I used to be contrite, to confess, to assiduously perform my allotted penance, and yet my conscience would never give me certainty. I always doubted and said, ‘You didn’t do that correctly, Martin. You were not contrite enough. You left that out of your confession.’ The more I tried to remedy an uncertain, weak and afflicted conscience with the traditions of men, the more each day I found it more uncertain, weaker, and more troubled.”

Luther, you see, was caught in what we might call a circle of despair. To be absolved from sin one needed to love God above all else, but to love God above all else, Martin felt that he needed to know that his sins were forgiven; otherwise he would only fear a wrathful God. He wouldn’t love a merciful Father. But to love God he needed to know his sins were forgiven, and to do that he needed to be absolved from sin, which he felt he wasn’t yet, and to do that he needed to love God above all else, and around and around this circle he went, never able to feel satisfied that his sins had been forgiven and that he stood in righteousness before God. He always feared that he omitted something or that his obedience wasn’t full enough. The conditions for pardon never could be fully enough met, and Luther struggled for years and years. He sought help. He got advice. He talked to colleagues. They all assured him that he’s a good monk, that anybody looking at him would have to recognize that he was doing what God would want him to do, but he could not feel that in his heart. He was afraid that it wasn’t genuine, that it wasn’t motivated out of love but out of fear for a wrathful God.

It’s in the midst of that dilemma that Luther made the great discovery of the Reformation, the discovery of God’s mercy and grace, that God meets us in our need right where we are in our sinfulness, and frees us of our sin without condition, so that we can then respond in repentance, faith, and obedience. He describes this breakthrough in his autobiographical fragment written in March 1545. Let me read a section of that to you. “I had been seized with a wondrous eagerness to understand Paul in the Epistle to the Romans, but hitherto I had been held up not by a lack of heat in my heart’s blood, but by one word only in chapter 1: the righteous or just, and it’s justice of God is revealed in the Gospel. For I hated this word *righteousness of God*, which by the customary use of all of the doctrines I had been taught to understand philosophically is what they call the formal or act of righteousness, whereby God is just and punishes unjust sinners.

For my case was this, however irreproachable my life was as a monk, I felt myself in the presence of God to be a sinner with a most unquiet conscience. Nor could I believe Him to be appeased by the satisfaction I could offer. I did not love, nay, I hated this just God who punishes sinners, and if not with silent blasphemy, at least with huge murmurings I was indignant against God, as if it were really not enough that miserable sinners eternally ruined by original sin should be crushed with every kind of calamity through the law of the Ten Commandments, but that God through the Gospel must add sorrow to sorrow, and even though the Gospel brings righteousness and wrath to bear on us, so I raged with a savage and confounded conscience, yet I knocked importunately at Paul in this place with a parched and burning desire to know what he could mean.

“At last, as I meditated day and night, God showed mercy and I turned my attention to the connection of the words; namely, the righteousness of God as revealed as it is written, ‘The righteous or just shall live by faith,’ and there I began to understand that the righteousness of God is the righteousness in which a just man lives by the gift of God; in other words, by faith, and that what Paul means is this: the righteousness of God revealed in the Gospel is passive. In other words, that by which the merciful God justifies us through faith, as it is written, ‘The righteous shall live by faith.’ At this, I felt myself straightway born afresh and to have entered through the opened gates into paradise itself. There and then, the whole face of Scripture was changed.”

In order to be sure that his interpretation was right, he went back immediately to Saint Augustine, and he found in the Spirit in the letter that wonder of wonders, Augustine said exactly the same thing. Augustine was a great theologian of grace also.

Here we are at the very heart of Reformation theology which grows out of Luther’s own personal struggle, an enormous struggle about sin, and the fact that he discovered God’s grace frees us from our predicament, from our jail, our bondage to sin, and allows us in repentance to exhibit faith and obedience in the church. That is the heart of Reformation theology, and, in fact, it’s the heart of all biblical theology. The just shall live by faith; justification by faith through grace.

This allows us to move then in the scheme of God’s theological work from the old age to the new age, from the creation and fall in the first Adam which so damaged us and placed us in a predicament

where we could not help ourselves. In the creation we exhibited *posse peccare/posse non peccare*—ability to sin; ability to refrain from sin—but in Adam’s fall, we found ourselves only able to sin (*posse peccare*). The only remedy was the coming of grace which could release us from that bondage in sin and set us as free men and women once again in the new age, what is already and not yet, the redemption and restoration, which is come in Jesus Christ, restoring us once again to that freedom of *posse peccare/posse non peccare*—ability to sin; ability by the power of the Spirit not to sin and to live lives of holiness.

If you want to see that spelled out in more detail, go back to read the Augsburg Confession, which I referred to earlier. Start on pages 68 and 69 of the little Leith collection if you have access to that.

Justification by faith, the great heart of the Reformation, but there’s more. There is the authority of the Scripture. During the Middle Ages, the Bible had come to be the special province increasingly of the church and of the clergy in particular. Only they could read it. Only the church could properly interpret it. In effect, the Bible was taken out of the hands of the believers. Luther, like all of the Reformers, believed that God had spoken to His creation and acted on their behalf in history. The account of that activity was in Scripture, and God today continues to speak through His Word. One of the great contributions of the Reformation, then, was it put that Bible back in the hands of the believer, the common lay folk, and it did so in their own language, so that they, along with others, could study the Scripture. It was the church then that was to gather together in its entirety—clergy and laity together—to study the Bible, the test practices of the church, such as the use of holy water or shrines or celibacy or wonder-working images or rosaries or candles or anything else. To test the whole of the tradition against the teachings of the Bible, and that becomes, then, a great hallmark of the Reformation as well—the Bible in the hands of the believers.

But the third great principle needs to be mentioned also, and that is the priesthood of all believers. The Reformers argued that there is no precedent in the early church for the priest as a mediator between God and man. There’s no longer two levels of Christians—spiritual—clergy, secular—laity. There’s one gospel, one justification by faith, one status before God for everyone—men and women, clergy, laity, missionary, shopkeepers, cobblers, no matter what. Out of this grew the great idea of Christian

vocation. It's recaptured from those early centuries of the church, that God calls all of us to various occupations, He gifts us for those occupations, whether father or farmer or scholar or pastor or servant or soldier, we are all called to serve God, to be ministers together in the family of faith. We must all, therefore, read, study, and obey the Scriptures, and we must use them to work for honor to God and to service of one another.

Here then are the great principles of the Protestant Reformation, which we need to affirm and preach and teach in our day. They grow directly out of the teachings and life and experience of Martin Luther, and yet they apply to not only all of the other Reformers but to all of us: Justification by faith. The authority of the Bible. The priesthood of all believers. These run through the Protestant Reformation, and they need to run through our ministry as well.