

STUDY PACK 3

THE REFORMATION

“The High Renaissance in the south and the reformation in the north must always be considered side by side. They dealt with the same basic problems, but they gave completely opposite answers and brought forth completely opposite results.” ~ Francis Schaeffer, *How Should We Then Live*, p. 79 ~

The Reformation was basically a _____.

The Reformation refers to the period of time in the sixteenth century when many Europeans broke from the Roman Catholic Church and formed new state churches. There had always been independent churches and regional groups of churches that had defied Roman Catholic control. But the Reformation saw new church organizations take the official role of the state church – a role formerly reserved for Roman Catholicism.

I. LUTHER’S BACKGROUND

The story of the Reformation is intertwined with the life of Martin Luther. As a young man, Luther lived a wild life – one that he knew was in rebellion against God. One day during a violent storm, Luther promised God that he would serve Him if He spared his life. After the storm, Luther began to study to be a monk.

Luther tried many ways within the Roman Catholic Church to serve God, but he constantly felt that he had failed to gain peace with God. He was eventually assigned to be a teacher in a small German town of Wittenburg. There he taught the book of Habakkuk. He was confused about the little phrase “the just shall live by faith” (2:4).

Since this phrase is quoted in three New Testament books, Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews, he began to study these books. He eventually came to understand the Biblical teaching of justification by faith and he trusted Christ as his personal Saviour. He began to teach justification by faith both in college classes and in the Wittenburg Church. Many came to hear this message.

II. THE INDULGENCE CONTROVERSY

The Roman Catholic Church taught that when people sinned, they needed to confess their sins and ask forgiveness from a priest. They had to perform a penance (a good work assigned by the priest). They were not supposed to be forgiven by God _____.

The popes began to claim that they had the power to cancel a person’s penance by selling the person an indulgence. This made it possible for a person to “buy his way out” of having to do good works. The popes began to use this as a major way to raise money. Salesmen began to bid for the job of selling indulgences and receiving a percentage of what they sold. This was so hypocritical that many people including priests, began to criticize the selling of indulgences.

During Luther’s time, the pope told people that they could buy indulgences for family members who had already passed away. According to Roman Catholicism, these people were in purgatory paying the penalty for any sins that _____. By purchasing an indulgence for them, family members could reduce their time in purgatory or

even eliminate it all together (if they paid enough). An indulgence salesman named Tetzel came to Wittenburg selling these indulgences.

Luther responded to this false teaching by writing out ninety-five points attacking indulgences and other church abuses and teaching justification by faith. Each point was called a thesis. On October 31, 1517 (often called the birthday of the Reformation), Luther nailed these points to the church door in Wittenburg.

Luther's 95 theses were copied by the thousands, using the newly invented printing press, and distributed throughout Germany. He quickly became a spokesman throughout Germany and then throughout Europe against indulgences and for justification by faith. At first Luther wanted to remain in the Roman Catholic Church, but he was eventually excommunicated by the pope. A friendly German prince hid him for his own safety. Because Luther believed that everyone should read and study the Bible for himself, _____.

A distinct evangelical church began to develop in Germany around the teaching of Martin Luther. Many German princes adopted Lutheranism as the state church for their region and replaced Roman Catholicism. Soon the strife between Lutherans and Roman Catholics was very great, often breaking out into violence.

While Luther understood many important Bible truths, he unfortunately maintained some heretical Catholic doctrine. He did not understand the Bible truth of the independent church any better than the Roman Catholics did. Independent, Bible believing churches were persecuted by both Lutheran and Catholic state churches. Soon all independent churches in Germany were called Anabaptist churches whether they were Baptist or not.

III. THE PEASANTS' REVOLT

Luther's original call to spiritual liberty and freedom from Catholicism met with a very receptive audience in Germany. Many Germans took his ideas even farther – to their logical conclusions - _____, complete religious liberty and even _____. In 1524, many German peasants, seeking to create a free nation, revolted against the royal princes and rulers.

Many thought that Luther would side with the Peasants' Revolt. However, he denounced it and sided with the princes. The lack of a single leader that was widely respected throughout Germany doomed the revolt to failure. By 1525, over 100,000 peasants had been killed. The rest were treated much worse than they had been before.

IV. THE PEACE OF AUGSBURG

From 1546 to 1555, there was so much fighting between Lutherans and Roman Catholics that Germany was in a virtual state of civil war. Finally, the Peace of Augsburg was reached. This agreement recognized the right of each German prince to decide whether his region would be Catholic or Lutheran. Eventually an agreement was reached allowing each German citizen to decide for himself whether to be a Lutheran or a Catholic. Germany developed the unique situation of having _____. Independent churches were still persecuted in most German states.

V. THE SPREAD OF LUTHERANISM

The Lutheran church officially spread into the Scandinavian countries. Denmark officially adopted Lutheranism as its state church. Denmark's influence over Norway led to the adoption of a Lutheran state church in Norway. Many of the people of Scandinavia were disillusioned with the Catholic church and the royal families found it in their interest to break with the Pope.

Soon there was a demand for change in Sweden. The Swedish king officially adopted Lutheranism and became an aggressive defender of Lutheranism and other Protestant movements throughout Europe. Finland eventually followed the rest of Scandinavia into the Lutheran fold.

VI. CALVINISM

The mountains of Switzerland had long been the home of many independent churches. Many different groups rebelled against Roman Catholic control. Ulrich Zwingli began to represent many groups who were willing to defy Catholicism and fight for independence. Several battles were fought and eventually the regions of Switzerland (called cantons) began to exercise more and more independence. As Zwingli helped form new governments, they established a new reformed state church. The new state church persecuted the independent churches even more viciously than the Roman Catholics had. Zwingli died in one of the last battles with the Catholic armies.

A French Bible teacher named John Calvin became very influential in Switzerland. He eventually became the leader of Geneva. Calvin was a brilliant thinker and writer. He weaved the ideas of justification by faith, the predestination of some people to Heaven and others to Hell and the idea of a Reformed state church into a harmonious system. His two volume *Institutes of the Christian Religion* became one of the most influential works ever written. Unfortunately, Calvin did nothing to stop the persecution of independent churches and preachers. All over Europe, his writings and teachings influenced Reformation groups.

In France, the Calvinists became the most influential non-Catholic (Protestant) group. There they were called Huguenots. They became an important part of political life in France. Sometimes they were persecuted, at other times they found favor with certain French kings.

In Holland, a strong Calvinist group developed. There were also a number of Baptist and Mennonite churches. The Arminian movement developed in Holland. Soon, non-Catholic and independents were in the majority in Holland. For decades, the people of Holland fought Catholic armies (primarily from Spain) for their freedom. Eventually under William the Silent, his son Maurice and his son William of Orange, they achieved independence. Even though the ruling family was Calvinist, the Dutch government did not persecute independent churches. Holland soon became the freest nation in Europe.

Calvinist and Lutheran groups became very strong in eastern European nations. However, Roman Catholicism soon reclaimed full control of these countries.

The political power of Roman Catholicism continued in Spain, Italy, Portugal, Belgium, and Luxembourg even though numbers of people rejected the church. Calvinists led by John Knox seized control of Scotland.

VII. THE LEGACY OF THE REFORMATION

- A. The Reformation was incomplete because it did not emphasize religious liberty.
- B. The Reformation taught men to depend _____ while the Enlightenment taught them to depend _____.
- C. The Reformation greatly weakened the _____.
- D. The Reformation emphasized the authority of scripture and the _____.
- E. The Reformation emphasized literacy as people were taught to read the Bible.
- F. The Reformation taught limits upon government as Catholic governments were overthrown and new governments were established.

John Major, a teacher of John Knox wrote:

“...all civil authority is derived from the will of the community as a whole...A king is merely a delegate and an agent...If a king go out of bounds or misuse his power and prove incorrigible, he may rightfully be deposed, and even put to death. The deposition of a king should, indeed, be brought about only by lawful authority and not by mere violence. But it may always be rightfully effected by the estates of the realm.”

Buchanan, tutor to James I, friend of Beza, and widely accounted the most learned man in Europe, expressed the almost identical doctrine: “The king is a delegate and an agent and is responsible to the community...Whatever powers have been given to the king may rightfully, for good cause, be taken from him and resumed by the people...The rights of the people are inalienable...A king who disregards the understanding on which he was created may be said to break an implied contract, becomes a tyrant, and forfeits all his rights.” Further: “It is clear that kings exist only for public purposes. They must, originally, have been established by an act of the people. Under the law of nature, no man may rightfully assume any authority over his fellows; but the people by giving authority to one of its own members could create a king.”

VIII. REFORMATION – MUSIC, ART and LITERATURE

Some of the greatest classical music developed as expressions of religious themes during the Reformation. Handel’s *Messiah*, the music of Johann Sebastian Bach, Hayden and others provided enduring music to the glory of God. Martin Luther introduced congregational singing to his congregation and wrote songs like “*A Mighty Fortress is Our God.*”

Painters like Rembrandt also reflected Reformation Christianity.

Samuel Rutherford’s, *Lex Rex* reflected the Reformed doctrine of government. Recognition of the sin nature required a system of checks and balances in government.