

# (Christian History) 11. Foundations of the Reformation

by David Guzik

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*David Guzik's sermon explores the foundational figures of the Reformation, highlighting their contributions and the cultural context that shaped their movements.*

**Scripture:** Luke 15:11

**Topics:** "Church History", "Reformation Theology"

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## Description

In this video, the speaker begins by showing a woodcut from the 16th century that illustrates the principle of passing on the flame of knowledge. The woodcut depicts John Wycliffe, John Huss, Martin Luther, and Philip Melancthon, who played significant roles in the Reformation. The speaker then discusses the impact of the contrast between Jesus and the Pope on John Huss, who lived in Bohemia and preached in the language of the people at Bethlehem Chapel in Prague. The video also mentions John Wycliffe's translation of the Bible and highlights the differences in the English language between his time and the present.

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## Transcript

With this lecture, we want to cover the subject of some of the early reformers, because even though Martin Luther did an amazing work in the early part of the 16th century, he was very clearly preceded by some people who, in one way, laid the groundwork for what he did, but in another way, illustrated that they were not able to do what Martin Luther actually did, or, you know, we could say what God used Martin Luther to do, but for whatever reason, it just didn't happen with those men. It's helpful, as I've done often in the beginning here, to just sort of review where we've been. We're coming up now into our fourth period of church history, the Reformation.

We started with a look at the Apostolic Church, that was A.D. 33, approximately, to the year 100, approximately. Then the early church, from approximately 100 to about the year 312, the conversion of Constantine, and that radical change of status for the church in the Roman Empire. Then we talked about that very large period of time that we called the Christian Empire, from 312 to 1500.

Again, the 1500 date is approximate. If I wanted to be more exact, I would have put 1517, the year Martin Luther, well, the year most people attribute the Reformation to, had begun when he posted his 95 Theses. Then finally, we're getting now into the period of time known as the Reformation.

We list that from 1500. I give it a date, 1650, which sort of goes to the end of the Thirty Years' War, which we'll talk about that in a later time. We just remind ourselves of something that we looked at at a previous session, some of the important sort of cultural foundations for the Reformation.

We talked about the plague and the Black Death and how much that influenced things, everything from economy to spiritual outlook to government and politics. It had a huge impact. We talked, secondly, about the Muslim and Turkish threat to Europe, thirdly, about the Renaissance and the revival of learning, fourth, about the invention of the modern printing press and the media explosion that followed it, fifth, about the discovery of the New World, and sixth, about the spread of biblical knowledge.

There's something I want to show you up on our PowerPoint right now, and it's a woodcut from, oh, I suppose sometime in the 16th century, that I really like the way that this woodcut looks and how it illustrates a principle that we're going to emphasize in this session and in a few of our future lectures. First of all, you see on the far left here John Wycliffe, and he's sort of striking together some, you know, maybe a flint and a stone, you know, together there to make sparks. The flame is ignited by John Hus, who passes it on next, third in the line, to Martin Luther, who passes it on to Philip Melancthon, who actually was a successor of Martin Luther.

I like this woodcut for obvious reasons. It's because it really shows that though Luther was a very important man in what God did in the church at that time, he was actually, you know, one man in a chain of men that God was using to impact the church in an important way. And so I just sort of like that picture, and today we're going to talk about these three early Reformers that I think had a pretty important influence on what Luther was and what he did.

John Wycliffe, John Hus, and then a third one, Desiderius Erasmus. John Wycliffe is a great example of an early Reformer. He was an Englishman.

He was born in the year 1324, and he died approximately 1384, so he lived for 60 years. He lived through the turmoil of the Avignon Papacy. You remember that great schism where popes, rival popes, were excommunicating one another and all of that embarrassment that it was for Europe in general, and the Roman Catholic Church in specifics.

He lived also seeing firsthand the corruption of the institution of the papacy. Wycliffe was educated at Oxford, and then he began to teach there. He was supported by what's known as a benefice.

Do you remember what I was telling you about how each clerical office had an income appointed to it? Well, he actually received the income from a parish church, but then he would hire somebody for half of that income to actually pastor those people. In a sense, what he had was what you might call a church-sponsored scholarship so that he could pursue his career as a university professor and as a scholar. Wycliffe saw the problems in the church, and he began his protest against the church in what we might say was a political way.

He took the side of the King of England against the church in their many struggles regarding taxation of one another. Later in his life, he adopted more of a doctrinal and theological protest against the church, but to begin with, he sort of began his struggle with the church in this political way. Now, I described to you before how all throughout the Middle Ages, there was this very frequent tension between the kings and the popes, right? The popes always wanted to exert their authority over the kings, and the kings always wanted to exert their authority over the popes.

Well, Wycliffe sided with the King of England against the pope, and a lot of it was because he saw the papacy as an essentially corrupt institution. Wycliffe was heavily influenced by Augustine's teaching, and he believed very strongly in the doctrine of predestination. If you were to ask him who belongs to the church, he would say the elect do.

And if you were to ask him, well, who knows who the elect are, he would say only God does. Therefore, he would say, you cannot exactly locate the true church on earth. Now, again, this is a different idea from Roman Catholicism, right? Even though Roman Catholicism owed a great deal to Augustine, at the same time, with their very strong identification with the church as a visible sort of institution and organization on earth, they felt that there was no problem with identifying where the true church was on earth.

So Wycliffe emphasized salvation by God's election, and the church emphasized salvation by receiving the church's sacraments. So here we see sort of the growing division between Wycliffe and the Roman Catholic Church. And he also had a distinct philosophical outlook regarding the nature of reality.

It gets into some of these very complex arguments about the nature of reality that go all the way back to the time of Aristotle, but were picked up with great enthusiasm by medieval scholars. But because of his philosophical outlook regarding the nature of reality, Wycliffe had a great deal of trouble with the doctrine of transubstantiation, which of course says that the bread and wine of communion actually become the real body and blood of Jesus. Now, this doctrine had been around a long time in the medieval Roman Catholic Church, but it was concretely established in the year 1215 at the Fourth Lateran Council, and when it's established concretely by a council in that way, it just sort of ends all debate.

Wycliffe argued that the doctrine was unbiblical, and he argued that it was a historical novelty. In other words, that's not what they taught in the New Testament. You know, it all comes back in many ways to that Latin phrase.

Well, I shouldn't say the Latin phrase. You could take the English phrase as well. But it's the Latin phrase emphasized in the Roman Catholic Mass, and the phrase is, *hoc es corpus meum*, this is my body.

In the Roman Catholic Mass, that's one of the high points of the Mass, where the priest holds up the wafer, the communion wafer, and he says, *hoc es corpus meum*, this is my body. That statement, you could say, became the foundation for the Roman Catholic teaching of transubstantiation. The illiterate people, which was a great number of people in medieval times, when they saw the priest holding up the wafer, and when they heard him say, *hoc es corpus meum*, and they heard that that wafer was transformed into the actual body of Jesus Christ, they thought it all was magical.

And actually, the phrase we use in English to describe a magical incantation, *hocus pocus*, comes from that Latin phrase, *hoc es corpus meum*. It comes from that very phrase. Because of his devotion to scholarship and the lack of confidence in the church, Wycliffe promoted the idea of *sola scriptura*.

I mean, think about it, it's only logical. If you don't have confidence in the Pope, if you don't have confidence in the institution of the church, and if you don't have much confidence in church councils either, where are you going to put your confidence? Well, the logical answer is, of course, in the Word of God. And that's where Wycliffe put it.

He asserted the preeminence of the scriptures over the church, over the Pope, over the councils, and he argued for the right of every Christian to read and interpret the Bible for himself. You know, we discussed

this at the end of a lecture last time, about how the Roman Catholic Church was so afraid of this idea of putting the Bible into the hands of the common men, and one of the reasons why they were afraid of that was because they said, if you do that, everybody will read the Bible and interpret it for themselves, and you'll end up with a thousand different denominations. And we have to say that the fear of the Roman Catholic Church was not irrational, because that's exactly what happened.

When people were allowed to read the Bible for themselves and interpret it for themselves, instead of just receiving the official church interpretation of it, it's true, there was a great fragmentation in the body of Christ, but most of us, including myself, would say that the trade-off was worth it, that it was far worse to keep the Bible from the common man, and that, of course, would have been the opinion of John Wycliffe as well. You could say that Wycliffe's greatest work was his translation of the Bible into English. His followers read the Scriptures and memorized those passages of Scripture, and they recited them publicly throughout England.

His followers were known as the Lawlords. Now, before I tell you more about the Lawlords, doesn't this sound strangely familiar to the Valdenzes that we studied before? You know, whenever you see a great Reform Movement of the Church that really matters, that really lasts, whenever you see this, it's always people getting back to the Word of God and emphasizing that. Well, anyway, Wycliffe's followers, those that he sent out preaching, those who were so devoted to his ideals, were called Lawlords.

And the name Lawlord is thought to derive from the Old English words meaning either to mumble or to sing softly. It is thought that the Lawlords were given this name because they would constantly mutter or sing softly the Scriptures. There are some people who think that the name was a mocking name, a derisive term meaning lazy people, but that's probably not true.

It probably referred to the way that these people were always either singing softly the Scriptures or muttering them to themselves. You could say that while Lawlordly was great among the common people in the clergy, it also spread to some prominent people. It was not a movement restricted only to common people and people of lower classes.

In the year 1394, a group of Lawlords presented their criticisms of the Church to the political and religious leaders, but it didn't accomplish much. These were the main complaints of the Lawlords. Now again, remember the year, 1394, right? That's something like 120 years before Luther nailed the 95 Theses to the church door at Wittenberg.

But this is what they protested. First of all, they rejected transubstantiation. Secondly, they rejected celibacy among the clergy and religious orders.

Third, they rejected clergy who also held political office, which was a common thing in that day. Fourth, they rejected image worship as idolatry. And fifth, they rejected the necessity of the sacrament of confession.

The Lawlords traveled very freely among the common people, and they lived simply, and they often lived on the gifts that people gave them among the common people. It seems that the common people loved the Lawlords, and they did very much to spread the gospel and to prepare the ground for later work in England. At times, rulers and political institutions supported them because they were against the institutional church and for the common man.

But at other times, they faced severe persecution, with some even being martyred, and they were forced generally to be an underground movement. In the year 1401, William Sawtree, who was a Lawlord and a follower of Wycliffe, was burned at the stake at Smithfield, England. Smithfield ended up being a place of notable martyrdom for many people in England.

He was the first known Christian martyr in England since the days of the Roman Emperor Diocletian. That was about 300 A.D. Another man who was martyred, a Lawlord in those days in England, was a man named Thomas Bodley, a tailor of Evesham. This man was accused of denying transubstantiation, and after giving a very courageous defense of his belief before the Bishop of Worcester, he was tried in St. Paul's Church before the Archbishops of Canterbury and York and many of the clergy of nobility, and then he also was burnt to death at Smithfield.

There was another leader among the Lawlords who was named Sir John Oldcaster, and then another man, Lord Cobham, a distinguished soldier. His castle of Cowling was a very secure refuge for the traveling preachers, and meetings were held there in spite of their being forbidden under severe penalties. When Sir John was finally captured in Wales, he was burnt, being the first English nobleman to die as a martyr for his faith.

And so after the death of this English nobleman, Sir John Oldcaster, who was also Lord Cobham, a law was passed that whoever would read the Scriptures in English should therefore, from that point on, forfeit their land, their goods, and their life, and be condemned as a heretic to God, to be regarded as an enemy to the king, and a traitor to the kingdom, and that he should not have any benefit of sanctuary anywhere within England, and if he continued in his obstinacy, he should be hanged for treason against the king, and then burned for heresy against God. What was that the penalty for? For reading the Scriptures in English. One of the foreign students who listened to John Wycliffe in Oxford was named Jerome of Prague.

He returned to Prague and influenced a man that we're going to talk about a little bit later, named John Huss. Now, Wycliffe died a natural death. The church wanted to kill him, but he enjoyed political protection.

But in the year 1415, the Council of Constance condemned John Wycliffe as a heretic and demanded that his body be destroyed. That was finally fulfilled in the year 1428, 43 years after his death. They dug up his body and burnt the dead corpse in an after-the-fact martyrdom.

But his influence lived on. In the year 1476, King Edward IV demanded that all Wycliffe's works should be burnt. But 150 years after his birth, about 1534, an English writer declared that Wycliffe's works were being studied all throughout England and all throughout Germany.

You see, though his voice was silenced, his works spread, especially through his translation of the Bible into English. The entire scripture, some three-quarter of a million words, was translated from the Latin by Wycliffe and his Lawler disciples, and it was a very dangerous business to do it because it opened up, as it were, a direct pathway to God for the common people that would bypass the priests. And so it's an amazing thing that Wycliffe did.

Now, generally, how would we assess Wycliffe? We would talk about him as a man who had the right ideas, had some measure of political protection, but you know what he didn't have? He didn't really have the courage. He didn't have the courage that was necessary to go in your face against the Pope, against the whole Roman Catholic Church. He sort of hid behind his writings, hid behind his political protection,

and mostly let his legacy live on throughout the Lawlers.

That's why Wycliffe wasn't a Martin Luther. It wasn't that he didn't have the right ideas. He had basically the right theological ideas.

It wasn't that he didn't have some political protection. He did. But what he seemed to lack was the courage that Luther had to just stare this awesome machinery of the Roman Catholic Church and the emperor of the Holy Roman Empire in the face and oppose them.

Now, one closing comment on John Wycliffe would concern his translation of the Bible. I think it's very interesting to look at this and just to sort of get a feel of how different English was in his day than it is in our day. I mean, virtually, it's a whole other language.

This is from John Wycliffe's translation of the Bible and see if you can figure out what that passage is from. It says, And he said, A man had three sons, and the younger of them said to the father, Father, give me the procession of cattle that follow to me. And he departed to the cattle.

And not after many days when all the things were gathered together, the younger son went forth in pilgrimage to a fair country, and there he waited his goodness in long letters. And after that he had the end and he did all things. A strong hunger was made in that country and he began to have needy.

Of course, that's the beginning of the parable of the prodigal son, right? But isn't it sort of shocking to see how much the English language has changed? You and I look at that and we go, Man, that's tough reading. But listen, that was like manna from heaven for the people for whom that's how they spoke in Wycliffe's day. And it was a remarkable achievement that he made to translate the Bible into the common English language of his day.

The whole English speaking world owes a great debt to John Wycliffe and his work in England. Well, I said that indirectly through this gentleman that I mentioned before, Jerome of Prague, Wycliffe had an influence on the second reformer that we want to take a look at. And the second reformer, his name is John Hus.

You'll see his name represented different ways. Some people call him John Hus, J-A-N. Some people spell his name with two S's.

Some people spell his name with one S. It doesn't really matter. We all know who we're talking about. But he was born in the year 1372 and he died in the year 1415.

He lived in a different place than John Wycliffe and he lived a generation after John Wycliffe, but he carried on many of the same ideas and was rejected by the church just as strongly. Hus read Wycliffe's writings and was greatly influenced by him. Interestingly, early in his life, you'll never guess what had a huge impact on John Hus.

It was two cartoons that he saw. He saw two cartoons that had a huge impact on him when he was a young man. One cartoon showed in one panel a picture of Jesus wearing a crown of thorns.

And right next to Jesus in the other panel was a picture of the Pope wearing a crown of gold and expensive clothes. You know, you just look at that, right? You can just imagine a young man looking at that and going, this doesn't compute, right? Here's Jesus in a crown of thorns and here's the vicar of Christ

on earth, right? Because that's what he called himself, the Pope. Here's the vicar of Christ on earth with a golden crown and sumptuous robes.

You could see that that would make a big impact. Now the second cartoon he saw was a picture of Jesus saying to the sinful woman, you know, the woman taken in adultery, he said to her, your sins are forgiven you. That was one picture.

Right next to it was a cartoon of another picture. It was a picture of the Pope selling indulgences for forgiveness. Now again, what a contrast, right? Here's Jesus giving away forgiveness free and here's the Pope selling it.

The contrast between Jesus and the Pope illustrated by those cartoons made a huge impact on John Hus. Now, where did Hus live? Hus lived in Bohemia, specifically in the city of Prague. In that city there was a church called Bethlehem Chapel, which was specially set apart for preaching in the language of the people instead of preaching in Latin.

You need to understand that, you know, in the typical Roman Catholic Mass they have a segment of the Mass that is set aside for a sermon, a homily they call it, the preaching time. But oftentimes in the medieval world not only was the Mass itself held in Latin, which was not the tongue of the common people so they couldn't understand it, right? They thought hoc est corpus meum was hocus pocus. But not only was the whole Mass conducted in that, but even many times the sermon, the homily, was also preached in Latin because the priest thought, well that's the language of scholars and education and I need to show everybody that I'm a scholar.

Well, in Prague there was a specific church, Bethlehem Chapel, set aside and they said in this church we're going to preach sermons that people can actually understand. What a great concept. Well, here Hus preached and he made a huge impact on the city with his simple teaching of the Scriptures.

So here he is, he's a Roman Catholic priest, right? And he's teaching sermons as part of the Mass but he's sort of setting a commotion going in the city because he's bringing them the Word of God. Well, as he studied the Word more and taught the Word more, certain objections came to the mind of John Hus. First of all, he opposed the practice of keeping the cup from ordinary Christians.

Now, you should know in the Roman Catholic idea of communion, right? There's the bread and there's the cup and all the communicants, all the people taking communion come up to the front and they receive the bread, right? They receive the wafer of communion. But in those days in the Roman Catholic Church, and I should say, it is still this way in many parts of the world and it's only recently changed just about anywhere. But especially in medieval times, the cup that represented the blood of Christ, of course in Roman Catholic theology, it held the blood of Christ, right? The priest alone drank that.

In other words, when they took communion, none of the people got to drink from the cup. Only the priest took of the cup. Now, I myself was raised in a nominally Roman Catholic home.

I went to many, many Masses when I was a child. I had my first communion. I took communion in the Roman Catholic Church many times.

Never once was the cup ever offered to me. Never once. Now, I understand that in some Roman Catholic churches today they do offer the cup to people if they want to take it in communion.

But again, if it happens in some places, it's a very recent practice. The overwhelming tendency is to say the laity cannot have the cup. Now, why did they say this? Well, they did it for two reasons.

First, they had a theological answer. You would say, well, isn't it important for somebody to receive both the body and the blood of Jesus Christ? And the theological answer was, well, yes, but the blood is contained within the body, right? If you were to eat a portion of somebody's body, as kind of grotesque as that sounds, you would be eating their blood too, right? Because their blood courses through their body. So that was the theological excuse that they gave.

But then they had actually, the greater reason was simply a practical reason. The practical reason was, this was the very blood of Jesus Christ within that cup. And they could not risk the chance that one of the laity would spill the cup.

What a total outrage! If for some reason, for some purpose, the lay person would jiggle the cup or spit some of it out, and the precious blood of Jesus Christ would spill on the floor. You see what crazy extremes this doctrine of transubstantiation led people to. In any regard, they opposed that.

They said, why do we keep the cup for ordinary Christians? Secondly, he says, I think that the Bible is a greater authority than the Pope or any of the cardinals. You and I would regard that as a matter of fact. But again, it was revolutionary in his day.

Thirdly, he wasn't shy about condemning the corruptness of the clergy. And he freely criticized people for worshiping images and statues, for believing in contrived and faked miracles, and for having a superstitious spirit in the Christian life. He also condemned the sale of indulgences.

He thought that for, the thought of basically behind an indulgence, we'll talk about it more in one of our future lectures, but the basic thought behind an indulgence is that for a financial gift to the church, you can purchase time off of purgatory for either yourself or for someone else. And so John Hus protested these things, and he had an extremely effective ministry in Prague, but then also in all the surrounding area of Bohemia. Here's a couple quotes from John Hus.

He says, If he who is to be called Peter's vicar follows in the paths of virtue, we believe that he is his true vicar and the chief pontiff of the church over which he rules. But if he walks in the opposite paths, then he is a legate of antichrist at variance with Peter and Jesus Christ. I like this quote from Hus.

He basically looks at the Pope, and remember these were days of incredible corruption in the papacy, right? Popes had mistresses, Popes were drinkers, Popes were gamblers, Popes were politicians far before they were spiritual leaders. They were wonderful patrons of the arts, but they weren't spiritual leaders by any hand. What Hus is essentially saying is, you Popes say you're the vicar of Peter.

Well then fine, act like it. If you acted like Peter, we would respect you as the vicar of Peter. But if you don't act like Peter, if you don't actually represent Peter, then don't claim to be his representative.

I mean, it's a very logical, simple argument. Another great statement of Hus is that he says, The words which Christ said to Peter, Verily I say to you, whatsoever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven, because of misunderstanding, frighten many Christians so that they are filled with servile fear, while others are deceived by them and grow proud because of the witness of their supposed power. Therefore the following things are to be laid down.

First, that it is not possible for a priest to loose or bind anything unless such loosing and binding takes place in heaven. Second, that for the justification of the wicked man there is needed infinite power by God, which he cleanses from spot and stain and grants grace. You see, again, this is Hus just speaking very logically, very wonderfully about these ideas that it isn't up to the church.

It isn't up to the church that supposedly has this great power to excommunicate. Because he mentions this scripture about binding on earth and binding in heaven. Basically, the Roman Catholic Church took that to mean that they had the absolute power, specifically the Pope had the absolute power to excommunicate.

That's why they're always excommunicating people. And they believe that when the Pope excommunicates you, you're damned, that's it. You're going to hell.

Again, I just need to impress upon you, in the medieval world it meant a lot more than it would today. What would it mean to somebody today if the Pope excommunicated them? They'd yawn, right? Oh, so what, Pope? Who cares? I can have my own relationship with God. I don't need to go through you.

But that wasn't the medieval mindset at all. They felt that if the Pope excommunicated you, it mattered. Then for a third quote from John Hus, he says, No Pope is the manifest and true successor of Peter, the Prince of the Apostles, if in morals he lives at variance with the principles of Peter.

And if he is avaricious or greedy, then is the vicar of Judas who loved the reward of iniquity and sold Jesus Christ. Isn't that choice? You Popes! You say you're the vicar of Peter or much more the vicar of Christ. I'll tell you what you are.

You're the vicar of Judas because he's the one that you really represent. Well, of course, you can only imagine how the religious authorities objected when John Hus spoke out against church teachings and practices. They commanded that Hus' and Wycliffe's writings be burned and they had a big bonfire in the courtyard of the palace there in Prague.

They asked Hus if he was ready to obey the Pope's commands and stop preaching. He said, Yes, I will obey his commands so far as they agree with the doctrine of Christ. But when I see the contrary, I will not obey them even though you burn my body.

In the year 1409, the Pope issued an order that John Hus could no longer preach from his pulpit at Bethlehem Chapel. Hus and his friends refused to obey. After all, they felt Jesus Christ commissioned them to preach, not the Pope.

And so Hus was commanded to appear at a trial for heresy and insubordination at Rome. Instead of going himself, Hus set representatives. That didn't sit well with the Pope or his men in Rome.

And so Hus was excommunicated. But what was interesting is in Bohemia, in what is today the modern-day Czech Republic of Prague, the area of that, John Hus had a lot of support. The people, and I should say a lot of his politician friends, they loved him.

His friends rallied around him and made it possible for him to continue preaching. Hus was even elected to a prestigious post in a new university. But that didn't end his struggles with the Roman Catholic Church.

In the year 1411, Pope John XXIII called for a crusade against some of his political enemies in Naples. I just want you to think about this. Before that, they used to call crusades against the Muslims, right?

Against the unbelievers.

Now, Popes are calling crusades against their political enemies in Italy itself. And so to finance the expensive war, he authorized the wholesale selling of indulgences. To John Hus, that was an outrage.

The Pope was selling forgiveness for sins that weren't yet committed. He vigorously denounced the selling of indulgences, and the people of his city defended him, and three men were beheaded for opposing the papal doctrine of indulgences. The Pope declared the city of Prague, again, that's where John Hus lived and ministered, to be under a special curse from God.

When Hus saw that his youthfulness in the city of Prague was diminishing, he left the town and he started preaching and writing, traveling to various cities around southern Bohemia. But the Pope still wanted to put him on trial. So in the year 1414, easy to remember, right? 1414, the Holy Roman Emperor, Sigmund, invited Hus to a special council to consider the charges against him.

Now listen, this was... Why do you think that before, when John Hus was commanded to appear before the Pope in Rome, why didn't Hus do it? Well, I'll tell you why. Because he was afraid for his life. Right? He had friends in Bohemia, he had some political protection in Bohemia, you know, not enough as it'll turn out, but that's why he didn't go to Rome.

Now, they invited him to another council, a council much closer, actually in Constance, which is not far away from... Well, it's a lot closer than Rome is to Prague. And Hus agonized over the decision. He didn't want to go to this church council because he believed his life would be in danger if he did it.

But this is what the Emperor said. The Emperor said, I promise you, John Hus, that you will not be harmed. Even if we find you guilty, we'll let you go.

You know, this is just a trial to determine the validity of the charges against you. So Hus agonized over the decision to go or not. He would be leaving his safe home and entering into the territory of his avowed enemies.

But after all, the Emperor promised him that no harm would come to him, and Hus eventually decided to go. He thought, look, maybe at the trial I'll be allowed to clear my name and make a defense for the truth. Sadly, it didn't work out that way.

When John Hus appeared before the council, or actually, when he came into the city where the council was to take place, it wasn't long until he was very treacherously lured into a trap. And they imprisoned him in a dungeon close to the outlet of the city sewer before he ever appeared before the council. Then they held the trial.

And they held the trial with John Hus as a prisoner, not as a witness. I'm sure you know what the verdict was. The verdict was guilty on all counts.

And they even made up a few more counts that they hadn't thought of before. Before he was finally condemned for heresy, they allowed one public hearing where John Hus might be allowed to defend his case. But Hus was not allowed to defend or present his own views.

They misrepresented his teaching. They condemned him as guilty of heresy. And they refused to let him even clarify what he was taught.

When Hus was finally condemned, the officials at the council shouted, We commit thy soul to the devil. Hus cried out in reply, And I commit my soul to the Lord Jesus Christ. As they hurried him out of the council, they put a burning crown of blasphemy upon his head and falling to his knees, Hus said, Into thy hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit.

I am willing, patiently, and publicly to endure this dreadful, shameful, and cruel death for the sake of thy gospel and the preaching of thy word. On the 6th of June, he was condemned and burned at the stake, condemned by the same church that had promised him safe passage. When he arrived at the stake, they asked him once more to recant his views.

And this is what he said. He said, God is my witness that the evidence against me is false. I have never thought nor preached except with one intention of winning men, if possible, from their sins.

Today, I will gladly die. And that's exactly what they did to him. Now, think about John Hus compared to John Wycliffe.

John Hus, did he have the right theology? Did he have the right ideas? Yes, he did. John Hus, did he have the courage that was needed to make a stand like Luther? Yes, he did. Look at how courageously he died.

But the third question is, did he have the political protection he needed to guard him against Rome? That he did not have. So if you want to ask, why did not the Protestant Reformation start with John Hus? It didn't start with John Hus because he did not have the third of the three elements you need. I think you basically needed three elements.

Now, again, I'm speaking from sort of a technical, historical perspective. God, if it was God's will, if it was God's timing, you know, it would have worked out for John Hus or for John Wycliffe. Of course, I'm sort of detaching myself from the overall spiritual idea of it.

And instead, I'm looking very much at the idea that's contained, you know, in the historical perspective. But don't forget, you need the right doctrines, you need the courage, but you also needed the political protection. We're going to see how all these three things came together in the person of Martin Luther.

Now, one other thing I want to tell you about was the followers of Hus continued long after his death. As a matter of fact, the followers of Hus were displaced a few times and they ended up occupying an area not far from Bohemia called Moravia. And then they became known as the Moravian Brethren.

And when they were displaced again and brought into an area that today is eastern Germany, they became instrumental in a beautiful revival that God wrought about 200 years after the Reformation. But that's for a later lecture. Thirdly, in this lecture, we want to consider Desiderius Erasmus.

Desiderius Erasmus is connected with the idea of Christian humanism. You see, one of the big influences that led to the Reformation was the Renaissance in Europe that took place starting about 200 years before the time of Martin Luther. The Renaissance prepared the mind of Europe for the Reformation.

You see, out of the Renaissance came a way of thinking known as Christian humanism. These people were not so much interested in the reform of the Church, but in the changing of society. Now, since society was dominated by the Church, it was certainly related to Church reform.

But Christian humanism was an outgrowth of the Renaissance. It was an effort to reclaim classical culture over what medieval culture had become. You see, it was sort of these Renaissance people who started calling their own day, or actually it was a little bit later, but it has the same idea where they started calling this age the Dark Ages.

You've got to admit, that's a pretty judgmental term, isn't it? As we said, the Dark Ages weren't as dark as people may have think they were, but this was the judgment of Christian humanism. I have to say, in some historical perspective they weren't all wrong. But secondly, they also called them the Middle Ages.

You know, Middle isn't such a great place, right? It's kind of neither hot nor coralled. It's in the middle. It's sort of a transition thing.

But its character was also called, do you know what you call medieval architecture like in great cathedrals? We call it Gothic. Now, that was a phrase coined by later Renaissance people as a way to sort of mock that style of architecture. Classical architecture tends to be clean and strong and proportioned, you know, and all these different things.

Think of the way that, you know, ancient temples and the Parthenon and all these kinds of things of classical architecture. Well, Gothic is sort of ornate and, you know, on top of each other and all that kind of thing. Well, who were the Goths? The Goths were barbarians.

When these Renaissance people called a style Gothic, they weren't paying it a compliment. They were saying it was somewhat barbaric in their artistic opinion. But anyway, educationally, this whole movement, Christian humanism, had the impact of getting back to the original documents and looking at them carefully.

It had in mind that it wasn't good enough to say, this is what the church says. But you had to have evidence, and evidence from the original sources. It was a revival of scholarship with the motto, as I said before, that Latin phrase, *ad fontes*, back to the sources.

And a lot of this had to do with the work of a man named Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam. Erasmus was a brilliant scholar. He was born in 1466.

He died in 1536. So he lived during the time of Luther himself. Erasmus was a brilliant scholar.

He had the mind of a great reformer, but he didn't have the faith of a great reformer. He didn't have the heart of a great reformer. Again, born in Rotterdam in his early life, he was an orphan and lived a life that was a constant struggle against poverty.

But he was a brilliant young man, and that ability could not be hidden. And so he grew up into some prominence among circles of learning and intellect, and he really was promoted high as a scholar. His greatest work was the publication of the Greek New Testament with a new Latin translation accompanied by many notes and paraphrases.

Edition after edition was called for. In France alone, a hundred thousand copies of Erasmus' Greek New Testament were sold. Erasmus made two big contributions in the period right before Martin Luther's Reformation.

First, he spoke out very eloquently against corruption in the church, especially with his book *In Praise of Folly*. Secondly, he did much to make this new copy of the Greek New Testament available to everybody. It was available in huge terms, as I just said.

A hundred thousand of them were sold in France in a relatively short time. You see, when Martin Luther was born, man, or by the time Martin Luther was an adult, I should say, the printing presses were very active all over Europe, and oftentimes printing very helpful books for the Reformation. But again, Erasmus was a man who knew how to criticize.

He had what you might call a very acid tongue, and that's reflected in his book *In Praise of Folly*. Here he speaks about what it will be like for those wicked ministers of the Roman Catholic Church on the Day of Judgment. He says, It will be pretty to hear their pleas before the great tribunal.

One will brag how he mortified his carnal appetite by feeding only upon fish. Another will tell of how many days he fasted and what severe penance he imposed upon himself. Another will produce on his own behalf as many ceremonies as would load a fleet of merchantmen.

Another will plead that in threescore years he never so much as touched a piece of money except that he fingered it through a thick pair of gloves. Another will testify his humility by producing his sacred hood, so old and nasty that any seaman would rather stand bareheaded on the deck than put it on to defend his ears in the sharpest storms. Another will tell his judge he has lost his voice by singing holy hymns and anthems.

And still another that he has forgotten how to speak by having kept perpetual silence in obedience to the psalmist's injunctions to take heed lest he defend with his tongue. But the Savior will set aside their fine excuses by saying, Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Verily, I know you not. You see, he isn't this very interesting about Erasmus.

He had this ability to put things in a humorous but in a very pointed way. Nevertheless, I have to say this. Erasmus was not mainly interested in truth or in theology.

He was interested in morality. He saw dogma or theological truth as divisive. He looked at Jesus mostly as a moral teacher and as an example.

Much more than as someone who atoned for our sins. On a lot of issues, it was very hard to tell where Erasmus stood because he was a typical two-handed scholar. Do you know what I mean by a two-handed scholar? He'll say, Well, yes, this is how it is and this is my understanding of this.

But on the other hand, blah, blah, blah, blah, you know, always just sort of in the middle and qualifying everything. But the good thing about Erasmus is that he did have a high view of the Scriptures. In his preference to the addition of the Greek New Testament that he wrote, this is what he said, I wish that even the weakest woman should read the Gospels, should read the epistles of Paul, and I wish that they were translated into all languages so that the farmer should sing portions of them to himself as he follows the plow, and the weaver should hum them to the tune of his shuttle, that the traveler should beguile with their stories of the tedium of the journey, and all communication of the Christian should be of the Scriptures.

See, isn't that wonderful? Isn't that a beautiful way to state it? Now, this Christian humanism would lay the groundwork for the emergence, centuries later, mind you, but for the emergence centuries later, of what we call humanism, the basic optimism in human nature and in the potential of man. In secular humanism,

man becomes the measure, and God is understood in reference to man. That's a very dangerous reproach.

But the optimism in this nature of man was related to their view of free will. Martin Luther had very vigorous debates with Erasmus over the issue of free will. Generally, Erasmus had a high view of human ability and potential, Luther had a low view, and they argued the issue back and forth.

But this is why the humanists were so big on self-improvement in the form of education, moral reform, and exhortation to good living, because they believed that the most important thing was to help yourself. Now, again, what are our three criteria for really launching a successful reformation? You've got to have the theological truth, you've got to have the courage, and you've got to have political protection. Well, listen, Erasmus had the theological truth, though he didn't care much about it.

He didn't have the courage, and he didn't have the political protection. Nevertheless, he made a valuable contribution to this pre-Reformation period. Luther said of Erasmus this, he said, he has pointed out the evil, but he is unable to point out the good and lead into the promised land.

It's almost like Erasmus was a good critic of the Church, but he didn't have the answers for what he was criticizing the Church about. Another common saying is this, they say, Erasmus laid the egg, but Luther hatched it. And that's maybe a good way to talk about the Reformation.

Well, we've seen these three different characters again. We saw John Wycliffe, John Hus, and we ended with Desiderius Erasmus. But I just want you to see, of these three men that we talked about, how they preceded Martin Luther, and how they had a very instrumental way.

Luther really, in many ways, picked up the flame from these previous people, and advanced it under the special circumstances and setting that God had given him.

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