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### Quick Links to the Study

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In this second study of "Our Ancestors in Faith" in the Smyth-Helwys Formations Series of Sunday School lessons, the focus is on the sixteenth century reformer [Martin Luther](#) (November 10, 1483 – February 18, 1546). He stands as one of the pivotal figures moving Europe from the [middle ages](#) (ca. 500 - 1500 AD) into the [Enlightenment](#) (ca. 1500 - 1800), which begins the modern era of western culture. His primary contribution to this was the establishment of [Protestant Christianity](#) beginning with European [Lutheranism](#). But his impact was not limited to Christianity by any stretch of the imagination. Language, literature, the arts, politics -- just to name a few areas -- were and continue to be profoundly influenced by him. This continuing impact is more extensive in Europe than in North American, but exists on both sides of the Atlantic.



Baptist life stands under his influence in both positive and negative ways. Our roots reach back to the [Anabaptists](#) who formed a part of the so-called [Radical Reformation](#) in the 1500s, mostly in the German speaking regions of central Europe. These early reformers criticized Luther and others for not going far enough in breaking ties with the "corrupted" Roman Catholic Church. Luther, in turn, had nothing but disdain for these "Enthusiasts" whom he felt had abandoned scriptural principles for uncontrolled personal religious experience. Consequently, both his movement and the Roman Catholic Church often persecuted these "re-baptizers" now called Anabaptists. Yet, these forefathers of ours stood deeply indebted to Luther for creating an atmosphere where they could exist and thrive.

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## I Context

From [previous studies in Romans](#) the background material will be drawn for this study. New material will be added as it is relevant to our passage, [Rom. 1:16-17](#).

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### a Historical

**External History.** The writing of the letter to the communities of believers in the imperial capital of the world in the mid-first century is relatively easy to understand with the traditional reporter type questions: who? what? when? where? why? These have to do with the *external history* of this document. Since the beginning of the era of modern critical scholar-

ship in the 1700s, New Testament scholars in the western world have virtually universally acknowledged the role of Paul in the composition of this document, along with that of 1 & 2 Corinthians and Galatians. These are often labeled "the big four."

Thus what are the answers to these questions? Let's begin with the *when* and *where* questions. In

the [Chronology of Paul's Life and Ministry](#) page at Cranfordville.com, Romans will fall toward the end of the third missionary journey:

## II. Paul's middle period of ministry

### A. The second missionary journey (ca. AD 48-51), Acts 15:36-18:22

1. Ministry in Syria and Cilicia, Acts 15:41
2. Ministry in Galatia and Mysia, Acts 16:1-10; 1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:5-6; 1 Cor. 16:1
3. Ministry in Macedonia, Acts 16:11-17:14; Phil 4:15-16
  - a. Work in Philippi, Acts 16:12-40; Phil. 1:4-6; 1 Thess 2:2
  - b. Work in Thessalonica, Acts 17:1-9; 1 Thess 1:4-2:20; 2 Thess 2:6, 3:7-10
  - c. Work in Berea, Acts 17:10-14
4. Ministry in Achaia, Acts 17:15-18:17
  - a. Work in Athens, Acts 15:15-34; 1 Thess 3:1-5
  - b. Work in Corinth, Acts 18:1-17; 1 Thess 3:6-13; 1 Cor 2:1-5; 1:13-17; 2 Thess 3:1-5; 1 Cor 3:5-10; 11:2,23; 15:1; 2 Cor 11:7-9
5. Return back to Antioch, Acts 18:18-22

### B. The third missionary journey (ca AD 52-57), Acts 18:23-21:16

1. Ministry in Galatia-Phrygia (AD 52), Acts 18:23
2. Ministry in Asia (AD 52-55)4, Acts 19:1-20:1; 1 Cor 1:11-12; 4:11-13,17; 16:10-12,17-18; 2 Cor 1:8-11, 15-17 (plans), 23; 2 Cor 12:18; 15:32 3.
- 3. Ministry in Macedonia and Achaia (AD 55-57), Acts 20:1-3; 1 Cor 16:5-7 (plans); 2 Cor 2:12-13; 7:5-7,13-16; 8:1-7; 8:16-9:15 (plans); 13:1-3 (plans)**
4. Return to Jerusalem (AD 57), Acts 20:3-21:16; 1 Cor 16:3-4 (plans); Rom 16:31 (plans)

Thus when Paul was finishing up his ministry in Corinth at the turning-around point of the third missionary journey in AD 57, Romans was written as a letter of introduction of the apostle to a community of faith that he had not yet personally visited. Luke provides a brief description of this ministry in Corinth in [Acts 20:2-3](#) (NRSV):

1 After the uproar had ceased, Paul sent for the disciples; and after encouraging them and saying farewell, he left for Macedonia. 2 When he had gone through those regions and had given the believers much encouragement, **he came to Greece, 3 where he stayed for three months. He was about to set sail for Syria when a plot was made against him by the Jews,** ἤλθεν εἰς τὴν Ἑλλάδα ποιήσας τε μήνας τρεῖς· γενομένης ἐπιβουλῆς αὐτῷ ὑπὸ τῶν



Ἰουδαίων μέλλοντι ἀνάγεσθαι εἰς τὴν Συρίαν,] and so he decided to return through Macedonia. 4 He was accompanied by Sopater son of Pyrrhus from Beroea, by Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonica, by Gaius from Derbe, and by Timothy, as well as by Tychicus and Trophimus from Asia. 5 They went ahead and were waiting for us in Troas; 6 but we sailed from Philippi after the days of Unleavened Bread, and in five days we joined them in Troas, where we stayed for seven days.

From such a limited statement we can glean very few details of what took place during this three month stay in Corinth. The one thing Luke stresses is that Paul managed to upset the Jewish synagogue leaders enough for them to hatch a plot to get rid of him. Earlier in [1 Cor. 16:5-9](#) he had sketched out his plans to travel to Corinth from Ephesus (NRSV):

5 I will visit you after passing through Macedonia, for I intend to pass through Macedonia, 6 and perhaps I will stay with you or even spend the winter, so that you may send me on my way, wherever I go. 7 I do not want to see you now just in passing, for I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits. 8 But I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, 9 for a wide door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.

In [Rom. 15:22-29](#), Paul described his plans at the time of the writing to the Romans (NRSV):

22 This is the reason that I have so often been hindered from coming to you. 23 But now, with no further place for me in these regions, I desire, as I have for



many years, to come to you 24 when I go to Spain. For I do hope to see you on my journey and to be sent on by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a little while. 25 At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem in a ministry to the saints; 26 for Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to share their resources with the poor among the saints at Jerusalem. 27 They were pleased to do this, and indeed they owe it to them; for if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material things. 28 So, when I have completed this, and have delivered to them what has been collected, I will set out by way of you to Spain; 29 and I know that when I come to you, I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ.

When stitching the bits of information together along with several other pieces, the following picture emerges. Paul was at Corinth and was making plans for the future. These plans most immediately focused on taking the substantial “relief offering” to the Christians in Palestine who were suffering greatly. This offering had been collected from the churches in three Roman provinces: Asia (Ephesus), Macedonia (Philippi, Thessalonica, Borea) and Achaia (Athens, Corinth). As he mentions in verse 28, his plan was to come to Rome on his way to Spain in order to spend the rest of his career evangelizing the western side of the Mediterranean Sea, just as his first three missionary endeavors had focused on the eastern side of the Mediterranean Sea. Most take his words here and elsewhere to suggest that he had hoped that the church at Rome would become the launchpad for that ministry, just as Antioch in Syria had been for the first three missionary endeavors. Of course, God had other plans for Paul and it is doubtful that Paul ever visited Spain, although some early church traditions suggest that he did.

Another interesting insight about the composition of Romans comes from [Rom. 16:22](#) (NRSV): “22 I Tertius, the writer of this letter, greet you in the Lord” [ἀσπάζομαι ὑμᾶς ἐγὼ Τέρτιος ὁ γράψας τὴν ἐπιστολὴν ἐν κυρίῳ.] With this statement, we get a glance into the way the more formal ancient letters were written in the ancient world. The actual writer of this letter was [Tertius](#), not Paul. Most ancient letters of a formal nature were dictated by the sender of the letter (cf. [Rom. 1:1](#)) to a writing secretary (in this case Tertius). Usually, the broad outline of the contents of the body of the letter would be sketched out by the sender and the writing secretary would “flesh out” the outline in the writing of the letter, especially the body section. Once this -- usually after several revisions -- had been approved by the sender, the letter



would then be sent to its destination. Since this is the only place where Tertius’ name is mentioned in the New Testament, we don’t know any more about him than the one fact that he did the actual writing of the book of Romans.

The origins of the Christian community in Rome are hidden from our knowledge. Prof. Werner Kummel (*Introduction to the New Testament*, iPreach) has a helpful summation of the available information:

The earliest sure attestation of the existence of a Roman community is Rom itself, followed by Acts 28:15 with the report that Christians from there brought Paul to Rome. In Rom 15:22 f (cf. 1:13) Paul writes that he had for many years intended to come to the brethren in Rome, which implies that there must have been Christians in the capital of the Imperium Romanum as early as the fifties. Probably the remark of the Roman writer Suetonius in his *Life of Claudius*, 25 (ca. 120), leads still farther back: [Claudius] *Judaeos impulsore Chresto assidue tumultuantes Rom. expulit* (=Claudius expelled the Jews from Rome, since they had been continually causing disturbances at the instigation of a certain Chrestos<sup>2</sup>). Since Chrestos can be another way of writing Christos, so that the names are the same, Suetonius is likely concerned, not with a Jewish insurrectionist in Rome, by the name of Chrestos,<sup>2</sup> but with Jesus Christ, whose gospel had brought great unrest to the Jewish

community in Rome, thus providing the occasion for the Emperor Claudius to expel the Jews or a segment of them. The report, which is not quite clear, is based on inexact information of the Gentile writer. This information does not necessitate the inference that Christianity first reached Rom. shortly before the edict of Claudius, which occurred in the year 49 (see §13), but it had spread effectively among the Roman Jews by that time to the extent that fierce struggles arose between those who held to the old faith and those with faith in Christ.

In any case Peter was neither the founder of the Roman church nor had he been active in Rom. before Paul wrote Rom. Against the assumption that Peter had conducted a mission in Rom. before Paul<sup>3</sup> is the evidence of Gal 2:7; Rom 15:20; 2 Cor 10:15 f (Paul will not intrude on someone else's mission territory); and 1 Cor 9:5, where the itinerant missionary preaching of Peter is mentioned, but nothing is said of his settling down in a community founded by him.

Rom nowhere mentions any persons to whom the community is indebted for the gospel, even at those points where it might be expected: e.g., 1:8 ff; 15:14 ff. Probably Christianity entered the capital of the Empire, not through a particular apostle or missionary, but very early on the streams of world commerce through the instrumentality of the great Jewish Diaspora at Rome. A sign of the religious ties between the Roman Jews of the Diaspora and Jerusalem is perhaps the fact that there was in Jerusalem a

Synagogue of the Libertines (Acts 6:9) which is understood by many scholars to represent in the main the descendants of Jews who had been dragged off to Rom. as prisoners of war by Pompey in 61 B.C. Later they were released and formed a powerful element in the Roman Jewish community.<sup>4</sup> Christianity in Rom. had a stretch of history already behind it when Paul wrote his Letter to the Romans.

But by AD 57 it appears to have been a thriving Christian community made up of numerous house-church groups, as the long list of house-church leaders greeted in [chapter 16](#) indicates. Interestingly, about half of those leaders were women. These communities appear to have contained both Jewish and non-Jewish Christians, but in what mixture no one knows with certainty. The contents of Romans itself addresses issues related clearly to both ethnic groups.

**Internal History.** Time and place markers inside our passage are sparse and play little role in the interpretation of the passage. The primary time marker is the perfect tense form of the Greek verb ἀποκαλύπτεται ("stands revealed") and of γέγραπται ("stands written"). Both highlight past actions that contain impact continuing into the present time of the writing of the letter. The first underscores the life and ministry of Jesus, and the second reaches further back in time to the composition of the OT book Habakkuk several centuries earlier.

## b. Literary

**Genre.** The literary shape of this single Greek sentence is simple didactic declaration of theological principle. The first part of the compound-complex sentence (cf. [Greek Diagram](#)) has autobiographical tones with Paul's declaration of non-shame regarding the Gospel. The following two declarations, which buttress the first, stand as timeless spiritual principle.

**Literary Setting.** The literary context of this sentence is more involved. Paul followed ancient literary styles of [letter writing](#) with this NT document.

His prayer of praise in the [letter Proem](#), 1:8-15, is followed by 1:16-17. Our passage is linked back to 1:8-15, especially vv. 9-15, by "for" (γὰρ) setting vv. 16-17 up as a justifying statement for the preceding assertions. But also this Greek sentence serves as the summarizing header for the body section of the letter (1:16-17 ==> 1:18-15:13). As such the foundational theological principle of the bulk of the letter is set forth here. Consequently, it plays a crucial role for understanding the letter of Paul to the Romans.

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## II. Message

As was the case with the previous study centering on [Francis of Assisi and Matthew 10:5-25](#), this section of the study will be divided between a summary overview of the life and contributions of Martin Luther and Rom. 1:16-17.

This historical link between Luther and Romans is substantial. His study of Romans and Galatians played a powerful role in his conversion and growing rift with the Roman Catholic Church. From the impact of Romans on Luther has come a long-standing tradition of Protestant Christianity's emphasis on this document of the New Testament as a major center piece of doctrinal understanding.

The scripture study is limited to these two verses in Romans because of their literary function for the entire NT document, and because they put in sharp focus the heart of Luther's understanding of the Bible.



## a Martin Luther, the reformer

### Online Bibliographical Resources

[Martin Luther - Wikipedia](#). Although the Wikipedia site contains uneven material in scholarly quality, this URL serves as a helpful introduction to the life and works of Luther. Additionally hyperlinks inside the site link up additional sources of information.

[List of Books and Films about Martin Luther - Wikipedia](#). Not anywhere near exhaustive, this URL is a helpful bibliography of resources -- online, in print and film -- for additional study about Luther.

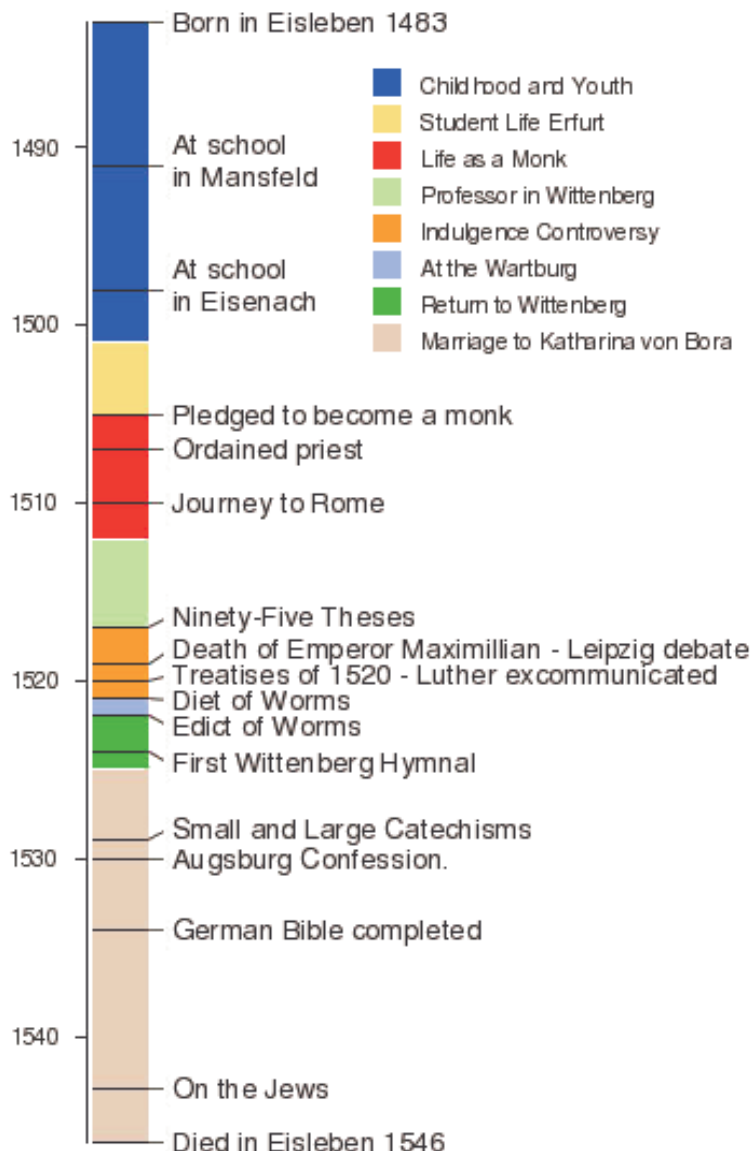
[Project Wittenberg - Lutheran Electronic Archive](#). [This URL](#) contains a growing number of the writings of Luther and about him available in electronic form. Some broken links exist in this site, but it is a gateway into the huge body of writings from Luther. The main weakness is that the links are to English translations and do not include the German originals of his writings: [Luther Werke](#).

[Some non-Lutheran perspectives](#) on Luther can be gleaned from a Roman Catholic view ("Martin Luther" - [New Advent](#)) and a Jewish view ("Martin Luther" - [Jewish Encyclopedia.com](#)).

### Overview of his life and legacy

Any number of approaches to summarizing Luther's life and works can be legitimately followed. I have chosen the threefold approach taken below as a way to highlight the spiritual crisis that brought about Luther's conversion and the powerful ramifications that this experience had upon his subsequent life and spiritual journey. In this way the role of scripture, and of Romans and Galatians in particular, can be brought to center stage for our closer examination.

### Timeline for Martin Luther 1483-1546



### 1) Moving toward spiritual crisis

Born Nov. 10, 1483, Luther grew up in a Roman Catholic home at [Eisleben](#) in the eastern part of modern Germany. His father intended Luther to become a lawyer. At seventeen Luther enrolled the University of [Erfurt](#) gaining his bachelor's degree after just one year in 1502. Three years later he gained a master's degree. Reluctantly he enrolled in the law school at his father's insistence.

In the summer of 1505 he was caught in a thunderstorm and a lightning bolt struck near him causing great fear. In a moment of terror he promised to



become a monk if his life were spared. So in July, 1506 he entered the Augustinian monastery at Erfurt to begin monastic training.

He applied himself vigorously to the disciplined life of a monk who also became a theology professor. The [Wikipedia article](#) based on other publications provides a brief summary of this period of Luther's life:

Luther dedicated himself to monastic life, devoting himself to fasts, long hours in prayer, pilgrimage, and frequent confession. Luther tried to please God through this dedication, but it only increased his awareness of his own sinfulness. He would later remark, "If anyone could have gained heaven as a monk, then I would indeed have been among them." Luther described this period of his life as one of deep spiritual despair. He said, "I lost hold of Christ the Savior and Comforter and made of him a stock-master and hangman over my poor soul."

Johann von Staupitz, Luther's superior, concluded that the young monk needed more work to distract him from excessive introspection and ordered him to pursue an academic career. In 1507 he was ordained to the priesthood, and in 1508 began teaching theology at the University of Wittenberg. He received a Bachelor's degree in Biblical studies on March 9, 1508,

and another Bachelor's degree in the Sentences by Peter Lombard in 1509. On October 19, 1512, he was awarded his Doctor of Theology and, on October 21, 1512, was received into the senate of the theological faculty of the University of Wittenberg, having been called to the position of Doctor in Bible. He spent the rest of his career in this position at the University of Wittenberg.

From 1510 to 1520, Luther lectured on the Psalms, the books of Hebrews, Romans and Galatians. As he studied these portions of the Bible, he came to understand terms such as penance and righteousness in new ways. He began to teach that salvation is a gift of God's grace in Christ received by faith alone. The first and chief article is this, Luther wrote, "Jesus Christ, our God and Lord, died for our sins and was raised again for our justification... therefore, it is clear and certain that this faith alone justifies us... nothing of this article can be yielded or surrendered, even though heaven, earth, and everything else falls."

This period of study, teaching, and reflection became the turning point of Luther's life. Growing disenchantment with the traditions of the Roman Catholic Church as he knew it led him to increasingly criticize it.

## 2) Absorbing conversion

The pinnacle of that protest came on Oct. 31, 1517 when he protested the sale of [Indulgences](#) by the Church as a fund-raising project for building St. Peter's in Rome. In a traditional manner, he posted his objections on the castle church door at [Wittenberg](#). The front door of churches in that era served somewhat as bulletin boards. These [95 Theses](#) would start Luther on a path on no-return to conflict the Roman Catholicism.

The hostile reaction of church officials eventually led to the

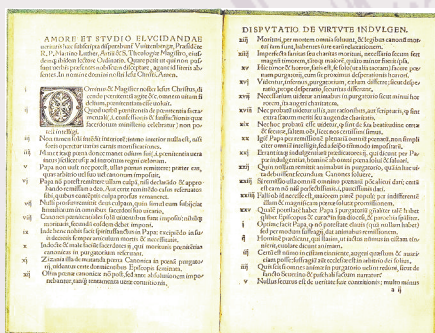
pope on June 15, 1520 issuing a public warning against Luther, in the papal bull [Exsurge Domine](#), to

cease his actions or else risk excommunication. During this time Luther had written extensively with stinging criticism of the Church. With the printing press now available, his writings were quickly and widely circulated over central Europe.

The climax of this intense hostility came to a head



in April of 1521 with the calling of an ecclesiastical court, the [Diet of Worms](#), at Worms Germany. On May 25, the court declared Luther an outlaw and banned his writings. But because [Frederick the Wise](#), prince over Saxony, had granted Luther safe conduct back to Wittenberg as a part of the agreement for Luther to travel to Worms, Luther was able to return back to Wittenberg. With the help of Frederick, masked horsemen "abducted" Luther on the return trip and whisked him off to [Wartburg Castle](#) at Eisenach. During the year that Luther was hiding out there posting as a knight under the name Junker Jörg (Knight George), he produced some of his most significant writings. He translated the New







Testament into German, reflecting an everyday form of spoken German. It sold over five thousand copies in the first two months after being published in September 1522. During this time he made a secret trip back to Wittenberg to preach a series of sermons cautioning the people to a careful process of reformation of their beliefs. A number of other publications came out of this year of concentrated study and writing. After a year in Eisenach he was able to return to Wittenberg where the volume of writings increased.

By the mid 1530s the shape of his movement was taking clear form. In 1534 his translation of the entire Bible was published. A decade earlier the first Wittenberg hymnal was published. Luther saw the importance of scripture translation and hymnody as primary vehicles to carry his ideas to the German people. Supplemented by a steady stream of writings both criticizing the pope and attempting to interpret the Bible, he was transforming religious life throughout central and northern Europe. A culmina-



tion of the essential doctrinal stance was achieved in 1530 when the German princes adopted the [Augsburg Confession](#) as their official stance and presented it to [Holy Roman Emperor Charles V](#). But it would not be until 1555 with the [Treaty of Augsburg](#) until relative political stability guaranteed the permanent success of Luther's movement.

Luther was able to successfully challenge the corruption of the Roman Catholic Church of this era. He didn't start out to create a competing church to Roman Catholicism, although this is what happened. Almost two centuries before, [John Wycliffe](#) had tried

something similar in Britain but failed and was executed. The difference between Wycliffe's failure and Luther's success was due to several factors. The European Enlightenment had begun, the printing press now existed, and the corruption and political intervention of the pope into central European affairs caused a political backlash among regional

German princes. By capitalizing on these factors and others Luther was able to neutralize the power of the pope in central Europe and give his movement time to establish itself so that it couldn't be crushed.

The last years of Luther's life were crammed with writing and lecturing at the Wittenberg university. During the last nine years he produced a total of 165 treatises and averaged about ten letters a day expressing his beliefs. He died in his home town of Eisleben on Feb. 18, 1546 after successfully negotiating an agreement to preserve his families ownership of copper mines in the area. He had earlier (in 1523) married Katharina von Bora who had given him six children.

### 3) Ongoing impact

Trying to measure the impact of Martin Luther on Christianity and western culture is virtually impossible because it is so massive. But his influence has focused on several aspects, mostly positive.

Historically, Luther opened the door for other reformers in the sixteenth century on the European continent, such as [John Calvin](#) and [Ulrich Zwingli](#) in Switzerland. His impact on the Englishman [William Tyndale](#) paved the way for Protestantism in England as well.

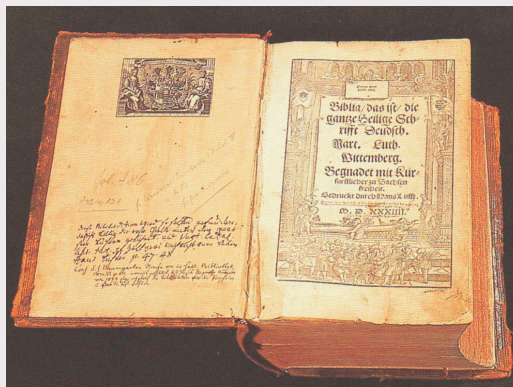
Central to his religious stance is the principle [sola scriptura](#), the sole authority of scripture to shape belief and practice for Christians. Virtually all of Protestant Christians stand with Luther at this point.

Coming out of this stance is the central doctrinal affirmation of "justification by faith alone" as the exclusive means of salvation. Luther rejected the Catholic Church as the channel through which salvation flows using the mass as the primary means of dispensing divine grace to believers. Instead, the

public proclamation of the gospel message of salvation through faith in Christ should stand as the center for spreading Christian salvation.

Baptists are deeply indebted to Luther for these basic principles. But with our Anabaptist forefathers we would continue to insist on a more personal faith experience of salvation in a conversion experience.

The dark side of Luther lies mostly in his anti-



semitism. To be fair, he came by this from his Catholic heritage and nothing in sixteenth century Europe would have discouraged such a stance. His tractate, *Von den Jüden und ihren Lügen* (*On the Jews and their Lies*), published in 1543 stands as a black mark against him. This writing would be extensively used by Hitler centuries later as a partial basis for his policies against Jewish people in Europe.

In spite of his weaknesses and limitations, Luther left a huge impact on western culture and Christianity that is overwhelmingly positive. We owe him much.

## b. Rom. 1:16-17: The Righteousness of God

### Greek NT

1:16 Οὐ γὰρ ἐπαισχύνομαι τὸ εὐαγγέλιον, δύναμις γὰρ θεοῦ ἐστὶν εἰς σωτηρίαν παντὶ τῷ πιστεύοντι, Ἰουδαίῳ τε πρῶτον καὶ Ἑλληνι. 1:17 δικαιοσύνη γὰρ θεοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ ἀποκαλύπτεται ἐκ πίστεως εἰς πίστιν, καθὼς γέγραπται, Ὁ δὲ δίκαιος ἐκ πίστεως ζήσεται.

### NASB

16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "BUT THE RIGHTEOUS man SHALL LIVE BY FAITH."

### NRSV

16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, "The one who is righteous will live by faith."

### NLT

16 For I am not ashamed of this Good News about Christ. It is the power of God at work, saving everyone who believes, Jews first and also Gentiles. 17 This Good News tells us how God makes us right in his sight. This is accomplished from start to finish by faith. As the Scriptures say, "It is through faith that a righteous person has life."

### Notes:

**Literary Structure.** As the [Block Diagram](#) of the Greek text illustrates, this single sentence is formed by three core expressions:

- 1) *For* I am not ashamed of the gospel,
- 2) *For* it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.
- 3) *For* in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, "The one who is righteous will live by faith."

The initial "for" (γὰρ) links this entire sentence back to 1:8-15 as a justifying declaration for vv. 8-15. The second and third "for" (γὰρ) provide a twofold justifying declaration for the first statement of non-shame.

The importance of these two verses has been long recognized by biblical scholars as Les Morris (*Pillar New Testament Commentaries*, Logos) notes:

These two verses have an importance out of all proportion to their length. The weighty matter they contain tells us much of what this epistle is about. Barrett can say, "Most commentators recognize in

them the 'text' of the epistle; it is not wrong to see in them a summary of Paul's theology as a whole." We have already noticed that the theme of Romans is God. This whole epistle is a book about God. But once that is recognized these verses may be held to give us the thesis of the epistle: they sum up for us what God has done to bring us salvation. Paul declares his adherence to the gospel (which he has already said is God's, v. 1) and points out that God's power is at work in it. It is a revelation of God's righteousness. Paul quotes from the prophet Habakkuk to show that it is no new-fangled fantasy, but God's way foretold from of old through God's prophets. All these are characteristic Pauline thoughts and will be developed as we go through the epistle.

Thus, correct understanding of this sentence will impact the direction of interpreting the rest of this document. We will examine the three core expressions of the sentence as follows:



1) *Non-shame over the gospel*: Οὐ γὰρ ἐπαισχύνομαι τὸ εὐαγγέλιον. The connecting link “for” pushes us first to the affirmations that this statement undergirds. The preceding two Greek sentences in vv. 13-15 especially depend on this non-shame declaration:

I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented), in order that I may reap some harvest among you as I have among the rest of the Gentiles. I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish, hence my eagerness to proclaim the gospel to you also who are in Rome.



Paul felt a deep sense of obligation out of divine calling to preach the gospel message to the entire world, to Greeks and barbarians, as he defines the world from a Greek perspective. This sense of duty implied that he had something worth sharing to that world, even to the highly intellectual Greek part of it. With Rome as the imperial capital of that world, to preach the gospel to Romans in their capital city was a part of Paul's sense of calling to all the world.

Thus his sense of pride in the importance and value of his message undergirded his feeling obligated to come to Rome. The sense of shame inherent in the meaning of the Greek verb ἐπαισχύνομαι is summarized well by Barclay Newman and Eugene Nida (*Translator's Handbook*, Logos Systems):

*I have complete confidence in* is literally “I am not ashamed of.” (The shame referred to is that which comes when one is disappointed by something he has trusted in.) Most translations render this literally, but Moffatt also transforms Paul's negative statement into a positive one: “I am proud of the Gospel.” *I have complete confidence in* may be rendered as “I trust completely in” or, idiomatically, as “I rest my whole weight on” or “I lean against completely.”

What can cause shame? In Rom. 6:21 -- the other use of this verb in Romans -- Paul alludes to the sinful past of the Roman Christians as a source of shame: “So what advantage did you then get from the things of which you now are ashamed? The end of those things is death.” A life of sinfulness can and will bring about shame, especially when standing before God

2) *The power of the gospel*: δύναμις γὰρ θεοῦ ἐστὶν εἰς σωτηρίαν παντὶ τῷ πιστεύοντι, Ἰουδαίῳ τε πρῶτον καὶ Ἑλληνι. The first basis for Paul's pride in the gospel is that it centers in God's power. To

in final judgment, but the Gospel will never cause such!

The denial of this negative experience in regard to the gospel is itself based on a strong foundation which is set forth in the two subsequent declarations.

But we must first ask ourselves the question: How do I feel toward the gospel and its message? Paul's world did not place much value on a message of salvation through the death and supposed resurrection of a Jewish carpenter's son. Was he not judged a criminal worthy of execution by Roman authorities themselves? How could anyone with sense not feel shame in the story about this Jesus of Nazareth?

Especially how could such a story be εὐαγγέλιον (good news)? Perhaps it could be ἀγγέλιον (news). The only good aspect of this message that another Jew has been put to death is just that. Those troublesome people in the Eastern Mediterranean deserve to all die since they constantly cause our government trouble with their constant rebellion. Besides they have strange ways of dressing and eating. And their religion is the strangest thing of all. Also, when we use the Greek word εὐαγγέλιον we signify the military triumph of one of our generals over some group of pagans. That's not what this Jewish tent maker wants to talk about.

Instead, he insists that this Jesus fellow is the source of salvation. And that salvation comes as the climax of what the Jews' God promised to one of their ancestors, a fellow named Abraham. But he claims that all of us need this salvation, not just the Jews. And he calls this gospel, εὐαγγέλιον, good news. Here he has the audacity to also say it is τὸ εὐαγγέλιον, the good news, as if nothing else could be called good news.

To us as modern Christians, this confession of Paul in the gospel comes as a challenge. Do we take pride in it? Not how well we preach or teach it? But in the message itself? It centers in death. A tragic unjust death more horrible than the massacre of the students at Virginia Tech University this week. For us to take pride in this message must mean that this message can make a difference, a really positive difference, in the lives of people. That's exactly what Paul goes on to point to in the next two declarations.

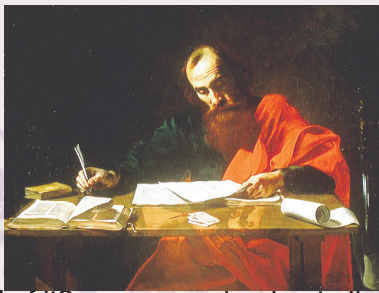
experience divine power is to experience the gospel. The explosive power of God comes through the gospel. Here is an enigma. The story of Jesus and his death is a story of weakness and passiveness -

- at least to outsiders. This Jesus refused to build an army; he did not even resist when the Jewish authorities came to arrest him that night in the garden.

How could this gospel be about divine power? Especially the power of a God who is supposed to be Creator of the world and who stands in control of it?

Paul affirms this divine power is for the purpose of granting “salvation” (εἰς σωτηρίαν). For most Romans “salvation” meant deliverance from defeat by their enemies on the battlefield. But for Paul and early Christians salvation was deliverance from sinfulness and the eternal consequences of that sinfulness. For Paul, particularly in Romans, ἁμαρτία (sin) is not just doing something bad every now and then. It is the supernatural evil force that has humanity enslaved in its grip and intends to destroy that humanity. Its power far exceeds that of humanity -- either individually or collectively -- to break that strangle hold. The only superior power is God's. And it is in the gospel that this divine power is experienced in liberation from sin's grip over our lives.

How can such a deliverance be experienced? What must we do? This was the unsettling question that the monk Luther posed in the early days of his priesthood. The answer provided him through his church was acts of penance growing out of prayers



of confession of sinful actions. But the harder Luther tried to follow this path the less deliverance he experienced. And the deeper into despair he fell. In Romans and Galatians he found the answer. The promised salvation in the gospel comes τῷ πιστεύοντι (to all who believe). Not

simple at all, and then? Believing as Paul defines it is ongoing, not just one time conversion believing. The present tense of the Greek participle πιστεύοντι underscores the continuous nature of believing. Thus salvation comes as we enter into a life long entrustment of our lives into the hands of this Jesus who died on the cross. Sin's tyrannical power over our lives is broken by the cross, but it continues to tempt and beguile. Our “believing,” not our “faith,” keeps sin at bay and us out of its reach.

Now in Paul's day particularly this message needed to be preached to Jews first and then to the non-Jewish world. In Acts we see this worked out in the three missionary journeys described by Luke in chapters 13-28. In Romans chaps. 9-11, Paul will elaborate on this in great detail.

No wonder Paul felt such pride in this gospel message. And he stood ready to preach that message boldly to a Roman audience. How ready are we?

**3) The righteousness of God:** δικαιοσύνη γὰρ θεοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ ἀποκαλύπτεται ἐκ πίστεως εἰς πίστιν, καθὼς γέγραπται, Ὁ δὲ δίκαιος ἐκ πίστεως ζήσεται. The second foundation for Paul's non-shame confession is more complex but stands all the richer in concept. In fact, it will take Paul the remainder of the letter to work through the implications of what he says in this short statement.

The core declaration is simply “God's righteousness is being revealed” (δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ ... ἀποκαλύπτεται). What does God's righteousness mean?

Classical German liberalism in the late 1800s and early 1900s defined it as God's demand for social justice. Interestingly, modern American liberalism is returning to this concept in the late 1900s and early 2000s. But without seeing the spiritual emptiness of the first movement that gutted Christianity of any spiritual power to redeem society through changed lives spiritually. All it succeeded in accomplishing was to lay the foundation for the Nazi movement in the 1920s after the destruction of the Sec-

ond Empire of the Bismarck era in WWI.

That God demands justice in society is unquestioned. But only a gospel centered on divine power bringing transformation of lives through liberation from sinfulness can effect that social change toward justice and fairness.

What is this divine power? It is δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ. Newman and Nida (*Translator's Handbook*, Logos Systems) summarize the issue quite well:

*How God puts men right with himself* represents the Greek phrase “the righteousness of God.” In this context, however, “the righteousness of God” does not refer to God's own righteous character, but to his saving activity whereby he puts men in the right (as a judge declares a man innocent), or whereby he puts men in a right relationship to himself. Both Goodspeed (“God's way of uprightness”) and the NEB (“God's way of right and wrong”) indicate that this is a description of God's activity rather than of his character, but both of these translations do so with a rendering that sounds too impersonal. The JB renders this phrase by “the justice of God,” but explains in a note: “the saving justice (cf. Isaiah 56.1) or God, 3.26,



who fulfills his promise to save by giving salvation as a free gift." See further the comments on the verb (generally rendered "justify") in 3.24 below.

Traditionally, this reference to "the righteousness of God" has been explained as "forensic righteousness," that is to say, "God declaring men right." Accordingly, some translations employ "the gospel reveals how God declares men straight" or "how men have a straight heart." However, the theological focus at this point seems not to be so much on God's declaration of man's imputed innocence as on the fact that he puts men in a new relationship to himself. It is man's confidence in God which puts men in a new relationship to himself. It is man's confidence in God which puts him in a new covenant relationship with God and thus establishes his "righteousness." The phrase in the TEV, *puts men right with*, seems to be particularly appropriate since it emphasizes this aspect of relation. It is not always easy to find a similar type of expression in other languages, and especially one which carries over a form such as *right* which has such a close relationship to "righteous" and "righteousness." In some instances translators use phrases such as "how God arranges people with himself as they should be," "how God brings men back to himself is the right way as they should be" or "how God makes men straight with himself."

Luther struggled with this concept and when he discovered the court room background of the term δικαιοσύνη and its cognates, he saw a way to distance the concept of Paul from the Roman Catholic excesses of his day. Thus the idea of God "declaring us righteous" through the cross on judgment day became a major cornerstone of his teaching.

What he missed in [this term](#) was the Pauline concept of the divine action of "making us right" with Himself through the cross that affirms God's character as just and his solution to the sinners guilt by the cross. Jesus' act of dying becomes God's act of justifying -- making righteous -- the sinner.

This righteousness of God is disclosed in the gospel, according to Paul. We don't see it any other way. Human intellect can't reason through to this discovery. Human actions of kindness and fairness can't define this righteousness of God. Comprehension of this divine nature and action is disclosed through the gospel itself.

This righteousness is ἐκ πίστεως εἰς πίστιν. This combination of prepositional phrases denoting the

full gamut of movement from point A (ἐκ πίστεως) to point B (εἰς πίστιν) has been understood several ways: "from faith to faith" (NASB); "through faith for faith" (NRSV); "from start to finish by faith" (NLT).

Two basic issues will determine the understanding and thus the translation: 1) is faith first God's faithfulness and human faith; 2) or, is faith human response to God's righteous action on Calvary from conversion to death? A slight variation of this is that out of faith comes encouragement to deeper faith.

The NASB follows a very literal translation pattern thus leaving the expression unclear. The NRSV follows the first understanding above while the NLT follows the second pattern. I tend to follow the latter view of the phrase especially in light of the obvious emphasis on human faith in the following quote from the OT book of Habakkuk.

As is Paul's frequent pattern, he asserts that this idea is not new and frivolous. Instead, it is grounded in OT principle. He appeals to Hab. 2:4 as the foundation: Ὁ δὲ δίκαιος ἐκ πίστεως ζήσεται ("The one who is righteous will live by faith"). To be sure, Paul slightly modifies the LXX text of Habakkuk, which reads Ὁ δὲ δίκαιος ἐκ πίστεώς μου ζήσεται ("The righteous man will live by faith in me"). Paul

also uses this text in Gal. 3:11, "Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law; for 'The one who is righteous will live by faith.'"

For Paul the response of faith to God's righteous action of the cross is the essential response. The gospel message declares it. His calling to Jew and non-Jew, i.e., to the entire world, was to preach this message. For those with Jewish background this was not an easy message to accept. Their religious heritage had declared emphatically that salvation belonged only to covenant Jews. Paul countered that mistaken notion repeatedly through the body of this letter. His opening shots come here in our passage. The scriptures of the Jews affirm the universal offer of salvation through faith alone. Jesus has opened the door to all on the cross. All of this represents God's righteous action setting the stage for putting the believer right with Himself.

When Luther grasped the essentials of this profound message, his life was transformed forever. Have ours been so changed? The gospel message is power, power to change because God is in it!

### Greek NT

1·16 Οὐ γὰρ ἐπαισχύνομαι τὸ εὐαγγέλιον, δύναμις γὰρ θεοῦ ἐστὶν εἰς σωτηρίαν παντὶ τῷ πιστεύοντι, Ἰουδαίῳ τε πρῶτον καὶ Ἑλληνι. 1·17 δικαιοσύνη γὰρ θεοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ ἀποκαλύπτεται ἐκ πίστεως εἰς πίστιν, καθὼς γέγραπται, Ὁ δὲ δίκαιος ἐκ πίστεως ζήσεται.

### NASB

16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "BUT THE RIGHTEOUS man SHALL LIVE BY FAITH."

### NRSV

16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, "The one who is righteous will live by faith."

### NLT

16 For I am not ashamed of this Good News about Christ. It is the power of God at work, saving everyone who believes, Jews first and also Gentiles. 17 This Good News tells us how God makes us right in his sight. This is accomplished from start to finish by faith. As the Scriptures say, "It is through faith that a righteous person has life."

### Luther Bibel (1904 ed.)

<sup>6</sup> Denn ich schäme mich des Evangeliums von Christo nicht; denn es ist eine Kraft Gottes, die da selig macht alle, die daran glauben, die Juden vornehmlich und auch die Griechen. <sup>17</sup> Sintemal darin offenbart wird die Gerechtigkeit, die vor Gott gilt, welche kommt aus Glauben in Glauben; wie denn geschrieben steht: "Der Gerechte wird seines Glaubens leben."

### Luther Bibel (1984 ed.)

<sup>16</sup> Denn ich schäme mich des Evangeliums nicht; denn es ist eine Kraft Gottes, die selig macht alle, die daran glauben, die Juden zuerst und ebenso die Griechen. <sup>17</sup> Denn darin wird offenbart die Gerechtigkeit, die vor Gott gilt, welche kommt aus Glauben in Glauben; wie geschrieben steht: »Der Gerechte wird aus Glauben leben.«



## Greek NT Diagrammed

<sup>16</sup>

γὰρ

1 Οὐ ἐπαισχύνομαι τὸ εὐαγγέλιον,

γὰρ

2 δύνάμις θεοῦ ἐστίν

εἰς σωτηρίαν

παντὶ τῷ πιστεύοντι,

Ἰουδαίῳ τε

πρῶτον

καὶ Ἕλληνι.

<sup>17</sup>

γὰρ

ἐν αὐτῷ

3 δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ... ἀποκαλύπτεται

ἐκ πίστεως

εἰς πίστιν,

καθὼς γέγραπται,

δὲ

ὁ δίκαιος ἐκ πίστεως ζήσεται.