

S T U D Y G U I D E



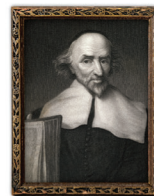
PART 3

ANNO DOMINI
1500-1620

A SURVEY OF

Church History

W. ROBERT GODFREY



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A Survey of Church History

Part 3, AD 1500–1620

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Printed in the United States of America.

Introduction to the Reformation

MESSAGE INTRODUCTION

As the year 1500 arrived, Europe was in the midst of profound changes. The conditions, attitudes, and institutions that had characterized the Middle Ages were gradually giving way to new movements and developments. The discovery of unknown lands across the Atlantic accompanied an explosion of exploration and trade. The emergence of powerful monarchies in Germany, France, and Spain introduced complex new dynamics to European politics. In the aftermath of the Renaissance, interest in learning and the study of ancient texts ran high, and the recent invention of Gutenberg's printing press facilitated the spread of ideas at an unprecedented rate. Amid this prevailing climate of change, a consensus was forming among many Europeans that certain beliefs and practices of the church were in dire need of reform.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Matthew 16:13–20; Colossians 1:24–29

TEACHING OBJECTIVES

1. To provide a historical framework for understanding the Protestant Reformation.
2. To describe the complex nature of the late medieval church.
3. To encourage Christians to assess the need for ongoing reformation in the church today.

QUOTATION

If you read all the annals of the past, you will find no century like this since the birth of Christ. Such building and planting, such good living and dressing, such enterprise

in commerce, such a stir in all the arts, has not been since Christ came into the world. And how numerous are the sharp and intelligent people who leave nothing hidden and unturned: even a boy of twenty years knows more nowadays than was known formerly by twenty doctors of divinity.

—Martin Luther

LECTURE OUTLINE

I. The Vast Scope of the Reformation

- A. The sixteenth-century Reformation was a comprehensive renewal of the theology and practices of the church.
 - i. The idea of ecclesiastical renewal was an ancient one, dating back to many reformations, or reform movements, within the medieval church.
 - ii. While similar in some ways to these earlier movements, the reformation of the sixteenth century—known as *the* Reformation, the Protestant Reformation, or the Great Reformation—brought about more dramatic, far-reaching, and permanent changes.
 - iii. Because of the complexity and variety of reform in the sixteenth century, it is more accurate to think of the Reformation as a series of smaller, related reformations than as a single monolithic movement.
- B. Significant political changes accompanied the Reformation.
 - i. During this time, nations like France shifted from a decentralized feudal system of government to a much more centralized system in which the monarch wielded absolute power over his realm.
 - ii. The ideal of a trans-European empire gave way to a heightened sense of national identity.
 - iii. The nature of the Reformation differed widely from one country to another, depending on how the government responded to it.
 - 1. In nations such as France, the Reformation failed because the government ardently opposed it.
 - 2. In nations like Scotland and the Netherlands, the Reformation mustered enough popular support to succeed in spite of government opposition.
 - 3. In regions like England and Scandinavia, the Reformation succeeded because the government supported it.
- C. The sixteenth century was also a time of dramatic economic transitions.
 - i. In the medieval era, economic activity had been highly agrarian and decentralized.
 - ii. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, towns and cities became important centers of commerce.
 - iii. Trade began to extend beyond local regions, taking on a more international character.

II. The Church before the Reformation

- A. In any era, the spiritual health of the church can be difficult to evaluate because a variety of factors determine its well-being.
 - i. For example, the church in the United States today demonstrates symptoms of both good and poor spiritual health.
 - ii. Similarly, the late medieval church displayed mixed symptoms.
 - 1. In terms of attendance, contributions, and building activity, the church displayed signs of vibrant vitality.
 - 2. Yet, much of the church's piety was external, and the teachings of Scripture were often neglected.
- B. Of the seven sacraments of the Roman Catholic Church, penance was one of the most elaborate.
 - i. In order to be forgiven for sins committed after the cleansing of baptism had taken place, a person must first experience genuine contrition, or remorse for sins.
 - ii. The contrite sinner would then confess his or her sins to a priest, who would grant instruction and absolution.
 - iii. Finally, a person would be expected to perform a specific task to demonstrate repentance and to pay the temporal penalties of his or her sin.
- C. By the late medieval era, the buying and selling of indulgences had become a common practice.
 - i. Through the purchase of an indulgence, a person was believed to be exempt from the duties associated with penance.
 - ii. Unfortunately, many people came to understand indulgences as a church-sanctioned means of purchasing forgiveness for one's sins.
 - iii. Eventually, indulgences came to be sold as an alleged means of releasing a deceased person's soul from purgatory into heaven.
- D. In the face of the growing corruption and commercialization of the church's practices, there was a growing awareness that the church was in dire need of reform.

STUDY QUESTIONS

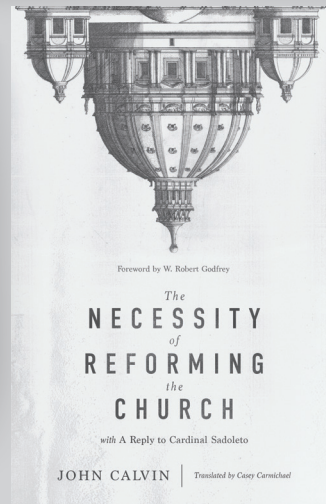
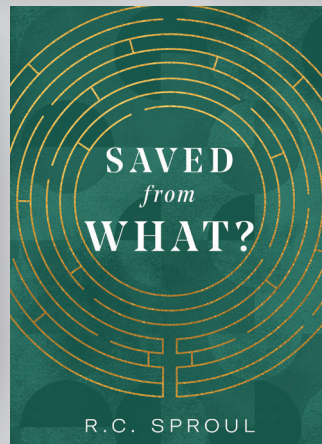
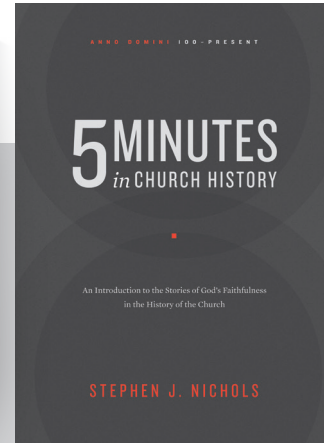
- 1. The idea of reforming the church was a familiar concept in medieval Christianity.
 - a. True
 - b. False
- 2. The Reformation took place at the same time as all of the following developments *except* _____.
 - a. The growth of absolutist governments
 - b. Increased concentration of commercial activity in cities and towns
 - c. An attempt to establish a Christian empire in Europe
 - d. The expansion of international trade

3. The Reformation was a purely spiritual movement which had little connection to political affairs.
 - a. True
 - b. False
4. In Luther's day, it was believed that a person could gain _____ by confessing his or her sins to a priest.
 - a. Absolution
 - b. Penance
 - c. An indulgence
 - d. Treasure in heaven
5. By the early 1500s, indulgences had become known as _____.
 - a. A favorable economic investment
 - b. A way to escape the agony of purgatory
 - c. One of the seven sacraments of the church
 - d. Simply a means of gaining exemption from certain pious acts

BIBLE STUDY AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What does it mean to reform the church? What are some of the different ways that reformation can take place?
2. In what ways is reformation a biblically sound and necessary practice? How is the task of reform best carried out within the church?
3. What were some of the main problems within late medieval Christianity? How are these problems still present in churches today?

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