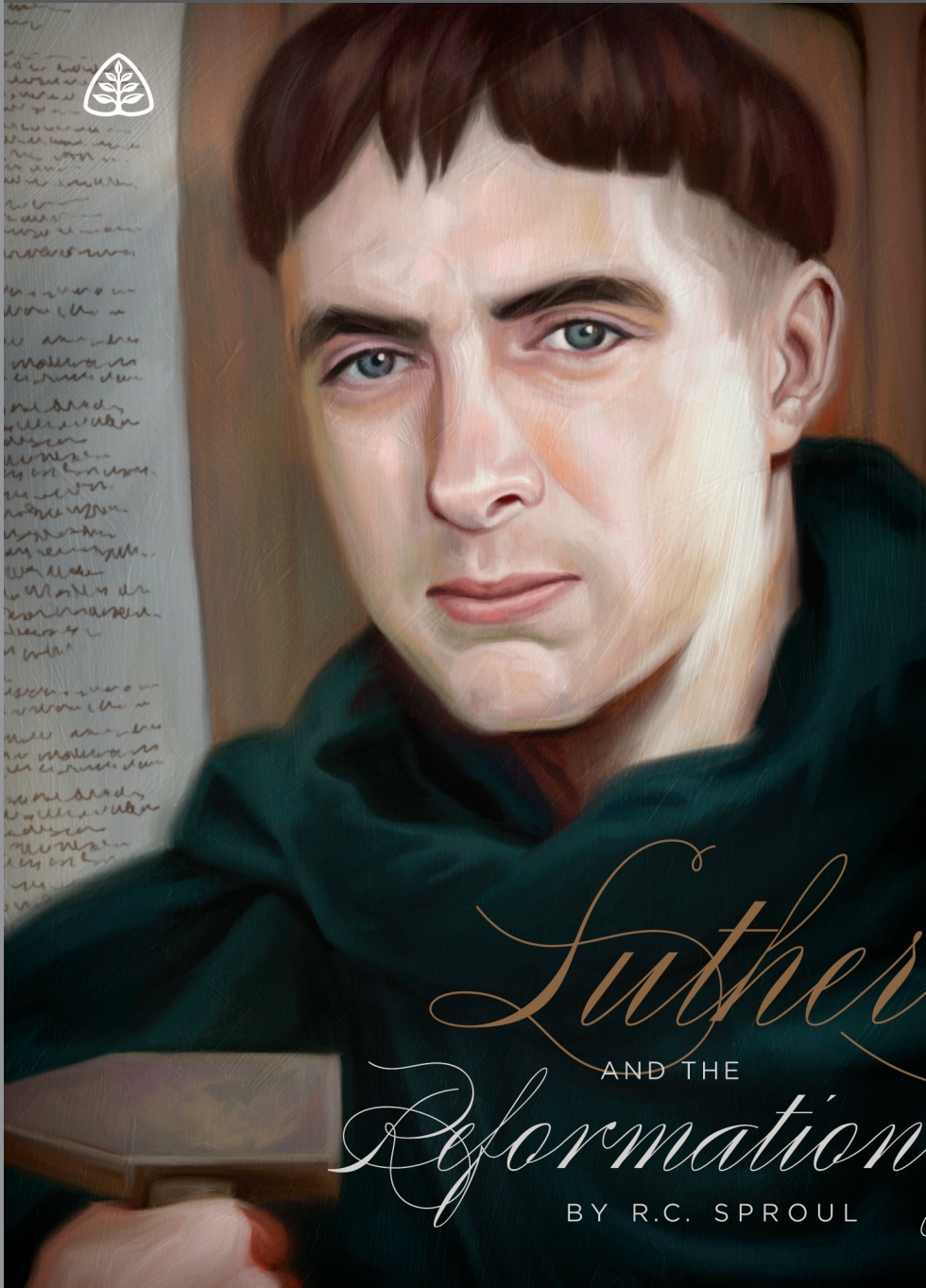


S T U D Y G U I D E



Luther
AND THE
Reformation
BY R.C. SPROUL

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R.C. Sproul



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From Luther to the Lightning Bolt

MESSAGE INTRODUCTION

Protestants around the world today celebrate their distinction from the Roman Catholic Church proudly and regularly. Yet, how many actually know the history behind their separation? The old adage “you can’t know where you are going until you know from where you came” may not ring true in every situation, but the sorrowful state of biblical orthodoxy in Protestant churches today demonstrates the value of this old proverb. The events culminating in the Reformation of the sixteenth century occurred in response to the dilapidated treatment and understanding of God’s Word extant in the Roman Catholic Church, and in the first lecture of this series, Dr. Sproul introduces the man who challenged the errant status quo and sparked a flame of change that still burns today: Martin Luther.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Leviticus 19:1–4; Psalm 14:1–3; Romans 3:9–20; Ephesians 2:8–10

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

To become familiar with the personal events leading up to Luther’s transition into the monastery, particularly his astute grasp of the nature of law and its application in his monastic life.

QUOTATION

For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.

—Romans 7:18–19

LECTURE OUTLINE

I. The Roots of the Reformation

- a. The Latin phrase *post tenebras, lux* (“after darkness, light”) comprises the motto of the 16th century Reformation. This “darkness” refers to the church’s understanding of biblical Christianity that had gradually developed during the dark ages through the Medieval era and into the time of the Reformation.
- b. The theology of sacerdotalism dominated the church. Sacerdotalism proposes that salvation occurs chiefly through the ministrations of the church, through the priesthood, and particularly through the administration of the sacraments.
- c. The Reformers responded to this system most emphatically in the 16th century. Nonetheless, they viewed their reaction not as revolutionary, but as a work of reformation, calling the church back to the original forms and theology of the apostolic church.

II. The Roots of Martin Luther

- a. Luther was born in 1483 in Eisleben, Germany, to Hans and Magarethe, former peasants. Hans’ industrious nature led the family from poverty into wealth, and he aspired for his son, Martin, to become a prominent, wealthy lawyer.
- b. From his youth, Luther displayed an aptitude for learning, and he received a Master of Arts degree from the University of Erfurt and enrolled in the law program at the same university. His classical education (in which he learned Latin) as well as his legal studies would assist him mightily for the remainder of his life.
- c. In July of 1505, a lightning bolt nearly struck Luther as he walked home from the university. He cried out, “Help me Saint Anne; I will become a monk.” Interpreting this crisis as a sign from God and wishing to honor his vow, Luther entered the local, rigorous Augustinian monastery, much to his father’s chagrin.
- d. Luther fully committed himself to his monastic duties, seeking to gain passage into heaven through right and rigid monkery. Nonetheless, despite the perpetual exercise of spiritual disciplines, Luther could not ease the guilt he constantly experienced. His legal mind applied the commandments of God meticulously to himself, and he longed to experience real and lasting forgiveness from his ever-present sin. The monastery could offer nothing to assuage his conscience.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. The Latin phrase *post tenebras, lux* that comprises the motto of the Reformation literally means _____.
 - a. “Light overcomes shadows.”
 - b. “After darkness, light”
 - c. “A return to the truth”
 - d. “The gospel is the light.”

2. The Reformers of the 16th century organized together to revolt against the church and historic Christianity.
 - a. True
 - b. False

3. After Luther finished his classical education and a Master of Arts, he enrolled at the university of Erfurt to study _____.
 - a. Philosophy
 - b. Engineering
 - c. Mathematics
 - d. Law

4. Luther responded to the routine question “What do you seek?” administered upon entrance into the monastery with _____.
 - a. “Food and water”
 - b. “God’s grace and mercy”
 - c. “Absolution”
 - d. “Entrance into heaven”

5. Which Czechoslovakian martyr predicted the imminence of a reformer that the Roman Catholic Church could not silence?
 - a. John Wycliffe
 - b. Hugh Latimer
 - c. Nicholas Ridley
 - d. John Hus

6. Luther found lasting solace and comfort in the confessional.
 - a. True
 - b. False

BIBLE STUDY AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What darkness does the Reformer's motto *post tenebras, lux* have in view?
2. Explain sacerdotalism. How does Scripture handle this theological position? Consult specific biblical texts.
3. How could the 16th century Reformers understand their resistance to the Roman Catholic Church as reformation and not revolution?
4. Read Romans 3:20. What does Paul say about the use of the law in the justification of sinners?
5. In light of the above discussion in question four, why did Luther struggle under the Roman Catholic, monastic understanding of sin and forgiveness?

SUGGESTED READING FOR FURTHER STUDY

Bainton, Roland H. *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther*

Godfrey, Robert. *Reformation Sketches*

Nichols, Stephen J. *Martin Luther: A Guided Tour of His Life and Thought*
and *The Reformation: How a Monk and a Mallet Changed the World*.

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