

Reformation 500: *Sola Scriptura*

Who was this Martin Luther guy, and what's this "Reformation" thing all about?

Martin Luther was born November 10, 1483, in the tiny German town of Eisleben. His father, Hans, later became a rather successful owner of copper mines. With that success came plans for Martin go to the University and become a lawyer. And, by 1505, Martin had earned his Master of Arts degree and was on his way to study law in the city of Erfurt.

Six months later (and one month into his law studies), Martin was walking back to the University Erfurt from a visit to his parents' home in Mansfeld. On the way, he was overtaken by a thunderstorm. Terrified as a bolt of lightning struck nearby, he shouted, "Help me, St Anne! I will become a monk!"

To Martin's greatly disappointed father, this must have seemed like a careless and foolish oath, a 'deal with God' made thoughtlessly in a moment of fear. Martin, however, may have been contemplating the course of his life for some time. And so, after further discussions with friends and colleagues, he gave away his personal property and entered the Augustinian monastery in Erfurt.

This was a very deliberate choice on his part. Martin could have joined the Benedictines, the Dominicans, the Franciscans, or any number of other monastic orders. The Black Cloister of the Augustinians was a particularly rigorous order of monks who focused on earning spiritual benefits for themselves and others. Martin devoted himself to these practices, and became a priest in 1507. Noticing his zeal and intellect, Martin's superiors ordered him to pursue the academic study of theology.

Yet through all this, and in spite of his "impeccable" life as a monk, Martin faced a deep and growing internal struggle: He was unsure about his own salvation. The Roman Church had showed him a righteous God whose wrath over man's sin had to be satisfied. Yet how could weak, sinful human beings ever be good enough to satisfy God? Martin knew his own life to be full of sin and corruption. How could he ever hope to satisfy God and enter into eternal life?

As he studied the theology of the Roman Catholic Church, Martin's struggle only deepened. The writings of Aquinas, Biel, and the other great 'theological authorities' did not give Martin a clear answer about how a person could be saved. Though outwardly successful as a monk, and about to become a professor and teacher of the church, inwardly he could find no peace.

Martin Luther continued his studies in theology and finally earned his doctorate at the University of Wittenberg in 1512. His specific task as a professor involved lecturing on the Bible, particularly the Old Testament. He began with the Psalms, then lectured on Romans and Galatians. And there, in the Scriptures, Martin found the peace he sought.

... to be continued!

Sola Scriptura means "Scripture Alone." The Holy Bible is the inspired, infallible, perfect Word of God, the only authority for our doctrine and life. We let Scripture interpret Scripture. Where Scripture speaks, we speak, and where it is silent, we remain silent. Martin Luther found these things the hard way, through much personal suffering and struggle. Today, we rejoice in the things God has taught us through Martin Luther's writings, and rest in the peace and power God gives us in His Word.