



THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF REFORMATION AND REFORMATION FAITH JANUARY 15/16, 2025

- I. Why “Holy Heresies?”
 - a. The five core principles, or “solas,” of Reformation theology: *Sola Scriptura*, *Sola Fide*, *Sola Gratia*, *Solus Christus*, and *Soli Deo Gloria*.
 - b. On October 31, 1517, Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses to the church door in Wittenberg, sparking a movement that transformed Christianity.
 - c. The Reformation challenged the authority of the Catholic Church and reshaped theology, politics, and culture across Europe.

- II. The Historical Context of the Reformation
 - a. The Late Medieval Church
 - i. The Catholic Church wielded immense religious, political, and economic power.
 - ii. Practices like the selling of indulgences, corruption among clergy, and the lack of access to Scripture in the vernacular alienated many Christians.
 - b. Cultural and Political Factors
 - i. Rising nationalism in Europe created tensions between local rulers and the Church.
 - ii. Renaissance humanism encouraged critical thinking and a return to primary sources, including the Bible.
 - iii. Technology: The invention of the printing press (1440) enabled the rapid dissemination of ideas.

- III. Who were the “Holy Heretics?” Key Reformers and Their Contributions
 - a. John Wycliffe (1320s–1384)

- i. Known as the “Morning Star of the Reformation.”
 - ii. Advocated for the authority of Scripture over the Church.
 - iii. Translated the Bible into English, making it accessible to ordinary people.
 - iv. Challenged the doctrine of transubstantiation and the power of the pope.
- b. Jan Hus (1372–1415)
 - i. Bohemian (Czech) priest influenced by Wycliffe.
 - ii. Preached against corruption in the Church and called for reform.
 - iii. Executed for heresy, becoming a martyr and inspiring future reformers.
- c. Martin Luther (1483–1546)
 - i. German monk whose 95 Theses attacked the sale of indulgences and the Church’s authority.
 - ii. Emphasized salvation by faith alone (*Sola Fide*) and the authority of Scripture alone (*Sola Scriptura*).
 - iii. Translated the Bible into German, uniting theology with the language of the people.
- d. Ulrich Zwingli (1484–1531)
 - i. Swiss reformer who emphasized the centrality of Scripture in worship and theology.
 - ii. Rejected Catholic traditions like the veneration of saints and the Mass as a sacrifice.
 - iii. Played a key role in establishing Reformed theology in Zurich.
- e. John Calvin (1509–1564)
 - i. French theologian and pastor based in Geneva.
 - ii. Systematized Reformation theology in his work *Institutes of the Christian Religion*.
 - iii. Emphasized the sovereignty of God and salvation by grace alone (*Sola Gratia*).
 - iv. His teachings influenced Presbyterianism and Reformed churches worldwide.
- f. John Knox (1514–1572)
 - i. Scottish reformer and founder of the Presbyterian Church in Scotland.
 - ii. Influenced by Calvin, he emphasized the authority of Scripture and the sovereignty of God.
 - iii. Championed the idea of congregational leadership over hierarchical church structures.
- g. Thomas Cranmer (1489–1556)
 - i. Archbishop of Canterbury and a leader of the English Reformation.
 - ii. Played a significant role in shaping the Church of England’s doctrine and liturgy.
 - iii. Authored the Book of Common Prayer, which brought Reformation principles into worship.

IV. The Five *Solas*: Pillars of Reformation Theology

- a. *Sola Scriptura* (Scripture Alone) Psalm 119:160
 - i. The Bible is the ultimate authority in matters of faith and practice, not Church tradition or papal decrees.
 - ii. Reformers rejected the idea that the Church could add to God's Word.
 - b. *Sola Fide* (Faith Alone) John 3:16
 - i. Salvation comes through faith in Jesus Christ alone, not through good works or human effort.
 - ii. This principle directly opposed the Catholic teaching that salvation required both faith and works.
 - c. *Sola Gratia* (Grace Alone) Ephesians 2:10
 - i. Salvation is entirely a gift of God's grace, not something earned or deserved.
 - ii. God's grace transforms sinners and draws them into a relationship with Him.
 - d. *Solus Christus* (Christ Alone) John 14:1-7
 - i. Jesus Christ is the sole mediator between God and humanity.
 - ii. The Reformers rejected the necessity of saints, priests, or Mary as co-mediators.
 - e. *Soli Deo Gloria* (To the Glory of God Alone) Revelation 4:6-11
 - i. All of life is to be lived for the glory of God.
 - ii. This principle reflects the Reformers' belief that salvation and all creation exist to magnify God's greatness.
- V. The Legacy of the Reformation
- a. Transformation of Christianity: Protestantism emerged as a distinct branch of Christianity, with denominations like Lutheranism, Calvinism, Anglicanism, and Presbyterianism.
 - b. Cultural and Political Impact
 - i. Greater literacy and access to Scripture in vernacular languages.
 - ii. Shifts in power from the Church to local rulers and governments.
 - c. Continuing Relevance
 - i. The Five Solas remain foundational to Protestant theology today.
 - ii. The Reformation reminds us of the importance of returning to Scripture and seeking God's grace in all aspects of life.
- VI. Conclusion
- a. The Reformation was a profound movement of spiritual renewal and theological clarity.
 - b. The Five Solas summarize the core message of the Reformers: Salvation is through Christ alone, by grace alone, through faith alone, revealed in Scripture alone, to the glory of God alone.

- c. Personal Stories and Drama: As we reflect on the contributions of Wycliffe, Hus, Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, Knox, and Cranmer, we are reminded of their courage and the enduring power of God's Word.
- d. The Reformation teaches us that faith is not a human achievement but a divine gift—and that God's truth will always prevail.