

## 71. MARTIN LUTHER (6). THE CONTINUING STRUGGLE AND HIS DEATH.

Things are not going well in Wittenberg while Luther is absent.

Satan is raging! He is doing his utmost to destroy the work of the Reformation. Enemy attacks from inside the church as well as from outside try to extinguish the light of the Reformation.

The battle is severe, very severe!

Satan's power is enormous, and his tricks are countless.

If God did not protect His Church, the darkness would have quickly swallowed the light of the Reformation. The devil hates the light. He loves darkness because his works are dark.

### PHILIP MELANCHTHON

In 1519 a young professor called Philip Melanchthon is appointed to the university at Wittenberg. He came to teach Greek. He was born in 1497. His father was a famous weaponsmith; his mother was the daughter of a mayor. His parents were well-off so that Philip could study. He enjoyed and was good at it, for God had given him a clear intellect. Philip becomes a professor at Wittenberg at the age of 22. Martin and Philip quickly become friends.

The two men are vastly different. Luther is straight to the point and doesn't mince words. On the other hand, Melanchthon is more



Philip Melanchthon 1497-1560 Wikipedia



*'Martin and Philip quickly become friends.'*

*Painter: Lucas Cranach the Younger*

lenient and always tries to keep the peace. Sometimes he is *too* lenient, yet those two men support and assist each other in the severe struggle against the enemies of the Reformation. While Luther is in Worms and Wartburg, Melanchthon is in charge at Wittenberg.

During Luther's absence from Wittenberg, many errors are promoted. It would not have been so dangerous if Melanchthon had been as strong as Luther. But Melanchthon is too lenient, and so things go wrong. There is much confusion. What are these errors?

1. Fanatics come to Wittenberg, people who put themselves above Scripture. They think they receive messages directly from the Holy Spirit in dreams and visions. They are guided by their feelings instead of by God's Word. They *believe* it comes from God, but it comes from the devil.

There are still people like that today, more than you think! Please do not believe them.

Such fanatics also come to Wittenberg.

Do they study?

No, that is not necessary! God's Spirit is leading them.

Go to school?

No, according to them, schools can be closed. All that study and learning is unnecessary!

Such thinking is contrary to God's Word.

True, studying does not save us, but the Holy Spirit uses careful study of God's Word to reveal God's will for our lives. The Holy Spirit works through the Word. The Bible teaches us that

studying God's Word must go hand in hand with understanding the world we live in.  
 When God chose Moses to be the leader of Israel, He first had him *instructed* in the wisdom of the Egyptians.  
 Daniel was *instructed* in the wisdom of Babel before Nebuchadnezzar appointed him as chief of the wise men.  
 Luther and Calvin were men of great *learning*.



'Iconoclasm comes to Wittenberg.' Wikipedia

2. Iconoclasm comes to Wittenberg; that is, a belief that all images need to be removed and destroyed from the Roman Catholic Churches. True, it's wrong to serve images, but they may not ruin other people's property.
3. Too many people come to Holy Supper. On one Sunday, the Lord's Supper was served to over two thousand people in one service! This would have been nice if they were all true believers. However, there was no proper oversight, and anyone and everyone could participate.
4. People come who are opposed to infant baptism.
5. Others are against the offices in the church which the Lord had instituted.

I could mention many more wrong ideas.

No, things are not going well in Wittenberg.  
 If only Melancthon had strongly opposed those false teachings, he would have been able to curb some of these sad developments.  
 But he does not do that.  
 He is much too soft.  
 He gives in too much.  
 The devil makes good use of that.  
 It gets worse, for those erring spirits become more and more brazen.

When Luther hears that things are going downhill at Wittenberg, this worries him deeply. He *has* to go back!  
 He leaves Wartburg Castle on March 6, 1522, and unexpectedly arrives at Wittenberg. This is extremely dangerous as he is still an outlaw.  
 But Christ's church is in danger!  
 The first thing he does is to have a calm conversation with those erring people. He also preaches *every day* to instruct the people in the true doctrine. He does this unwaveringly, without hatred but compassionately and convincingly.  
 Soon peace is restored. God is pleased to bless Luther's work, and the devil must retreat.

### THE PEASANT WAR. THE REFORMATION UNDER THREAT.

War!  
 Again!  
 Terrible!  
 The fighting ravaged Central Germany. Blood and tears. Misery, sorrow, mourning! The fields are trampled, crops destroyed, houses and castles are turned into heaps of rubble; burned-out farmhouses are everywhere. Those are the horrible consequences of this civil war.

It was in the year 1525 that a terrible revolt erupted in Germany among the dissatisfied peasants. That was not surprising. They live in bitter poverty. Rulers, knights, and nobles oppress them, and treat them like slaves. For a long time, dissatisfaction lived in the hearts of the oppressed and downtrodden people. Of their little income, they must still pay high church taxes, and no money is left to buy the basics for themselves!



Peasant war 1524-1525 <http://epicworldhistory.blogspot.com/>



Eventually, this unfair treatment becomes too much for them.

They organise mass meetings and demand change!

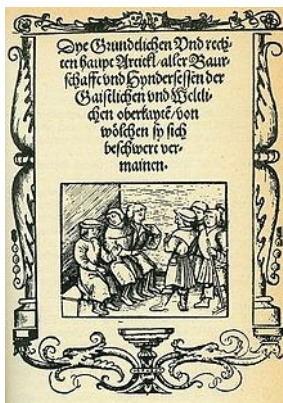
Complaining does not help; they have done *that* for a *long* time! The aristocracy meets their complaints with contempt.

At their wits end, the embittered peasants take up arms. Their commander is a man called Thomas Munzer. He is one of those fanatics we wrote about at the beginning of this chapter.

He cannot agree with Luther, so he joins the rebellious farmers instead.

At first, Luther sides with the peasants. He says their demands are mostly fair and appeal to the rulers, knights, and nobles' duty to treat the people justly. The abuse must stop! When the peasants notice their demands are ignored, they become angry and rebellious. They commit the most horrible atrocities. Murder, robberies, and arson are the order of the day. They destroy many castles and cruelly kill the owners without pity.

The rulers wonder how they can take revenge. They are frustrated with Luther for siding with the peasants. They blame *him* for all this misery! There is a real danger that the people will see the Reformation as a revolution, but that is not true. The Reformation is the work of the Spirit, and revolution is the work of the devil. Although the demands of the rebellious peasants were just,



Copy of the 12 articles, in which the peasants summarised their grievances and demands. Wikipedia

Luther disapproved of the atrocities they committed.

On the contrary, he admonishes the peasants to seek improvement differently. But the peasants, incited by the fanatical 'prophet' Thomas Munzer, have become unruly and no longer listen to reason. They reject Luther's well-meant counsel.

Luther now turns against the rebellious peasants. He sharply condemns the peasants' actions and advises the rulers to squash the rebellion. They do.

They assemble an army to fight the rebellious bands. The well-trained and well-armed soldiers soon defeat the untrained peasants. Thousands are killed, and they capture and behead the wicked commander, Thomas Munzer.



Thomas Munzer  
1489-1529 Wikipedia

Now the tables are turned: the rulers take bloody revenge on the peasants! That is equally wicked and sinful!

So now Luther writes to the *rulers* that they must treat the peasants fairly and justly! Now *both* parties are angry with Luther, but the basis of the Reformation is saved and kept pure. This outcome clearly shows that Reformation and revolution are two opposites.

Of course, Rome blames Luther for everything. He has 'misinformed' those 'stupid people'! But Rome's accusation is false.

The facts refute this.

The civil war rages most fiercely and cruelly in the Catholic electorates. The electorates sympathetic to the Reformation are hardly affected by the civil war.

Here Luther's work has already borne fruit, which proves that if Rome's accusations had been valid, it would have been the other way around. Do you see the great danger to which the Reformation was exposed?

Thankfully, Luther showed *both* parties how they must apply the Bible. Here too, God was looking after His people through the reformer's work.

### LUTHER'S FAMILY LIFE

In that same year, 1525, when the civil war was sweeping through Germany, Luther marries Catherine von Bora. Rome forbids priests to marry, but God's Word does not teach this.

Luther's wife, Catherine von Bora, came from a noble family. When she was ten, her stepmother placed her in a convent. She would have spent the rest of her life there if God hadn't planned it differently.

What happened?

People smuggled Luther's writings into the convent where Catherine lived. Catherine von Bora also eagerly reads those pamphlets, and the Lord blessed that. Luther's writings open her eyes to the errors of the Roman Catholic Church.

Convent life is one of those errors. Yes, she has vowed to spend her life as a nun. She has made this vow in ignorance, so she doesn't feel obliged to keep it.

In 1523 she escapes from the convent with eleven other nuns and travels to Wittenberg. Luther and Catherine von Bora get to know each other and are married in 1525.

This marriage makes a big impression and causes an uproar: the Roman Catholics ridicule, slander, and curse Luther for this. For marrying a 'runaway nun', Luther is called a villain, a scoundrel and much more.

A curse spoken without basis will not become a reality. Luther's marriage shows this, for God richly blesses them. They were happily married for 21 years. She is an incredibly supportive wife, often encouraging, comforting, and cheering him up when he is depressed. They receive five

children, three boys and two girls, whom they greatly love. He can be strict with his children when necessary, but he is usually cheerful and friendly. The children are even allowed to play in his study.

Luther knew happy and sad days. It was a very tragic day when their thirteen-year-old daughter dies. His wife Katy can hardly be comforted. Luther encourages her by pointing her to the great happiness their child now enjoys. That knowledge softens their sorrow.

It is not easy for Katy to manage the household. Besides her children, six nephews and nieces are always in the house. Also, they often have visitors and overnight guests.

Friends and acquaintances come to him for advice.

Clergymen and scholars often stay overnight.

Students are always welcome.

Orphans are temporarily and lovingly taken into the manse until a home is found.

Monks and nuns who have escaped from their monasteries and convents find protection and shelter there.

Even royals often stay in the hospitable home of Luther and his wife.

And Katy must ensure that everything runs smoothly, to see to it that there is enough food and that it all gets paid for!

Money worries often keep her awake at night.

Sometimes she sees no way out, and then she pours out her troubles before the Lord. In those days, she is often annoyed by the fact that Luther is so generous. When he sees a poor person, he feels he must give something. Sometimes he gives large sums of money away while his careful wife does not know how she will pay for everything! At times she is at her wit's end, grumbles about it, and scolds him. Luther jokes about it and laughs it off.

Luther is very industrious.

He teaches at the University of Wittenberg.

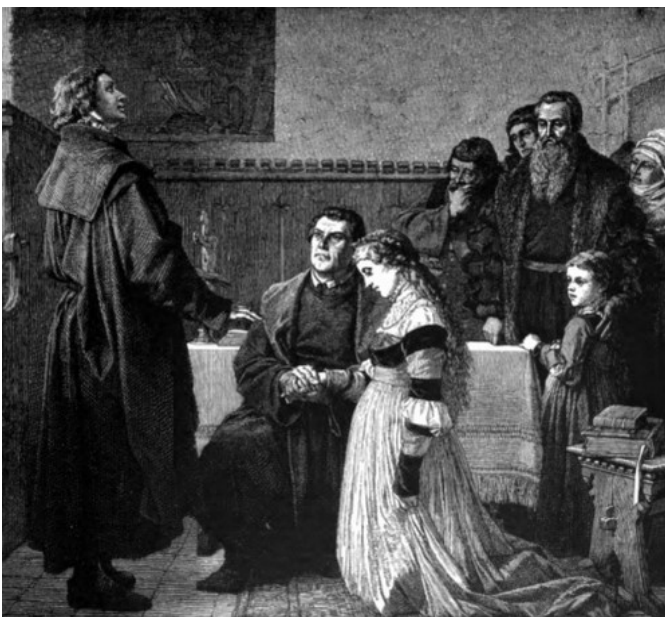
He writes many books and pamphlets, sold and read by the thousands.

He regularly receives visitors and advises those who have difficulties.

He tries to improve the singing in church.

He composes several hymns, the most famous of which is 'A mighty fortress is our God'.

Indeed, this man had a rich and blessed life.



*Marriage of Martin Luther & Catherine von Bora. 1525. Wikimedia*

Yet Luther also fails in some teachings. He was a man of his time.

His main error is called *consubstantiation*.

It's a big word but try to remember it. Rome teaches *transubstantiation*, another big word that means: the bread and the wine in the Lord's Supper change into the flesh and blood of the Lord Jesus. Luther said: "No, that is not true. The bread *remains* bread, and the wine *remains* wine, but..." and here it comes ... "since His ascension, the *body* of the Lord Jesus became omnipresent, therefore is *physically* present in the bread and wine'. Luther says that although we cannot comprehend this, that is what Christ meant when He said: "This is my body, and this is my blood". It is such a pity that this learned and God-fearing man taught this because this is *not* right! Christ's body did *not* become omnipresent at His



*Luther's family life. Painter: G.A. Spangenberg 1866.*

ascension. His body is in heaven, sitting at the right hand of God His Father as the catechism says: 'With respect to His human nature, He is no longer on earth, but with respect to His divinity, majesty, grace and Spirit, He is never absent from us.' (Q&A 47 HC). In Acts 1, we read about two angels telling the disciples:

"Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, Who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven".

This text clearly shows that Luther was wrong in teaching consubstantiation.

## THE DIET OF AUGSBURG

In the meantime, the struggle against the Reformation continues unabated. The "Edict of Worms" is still in full force (see ch 70), and the Reformation is still in great danger.

In 1530 Charles V summons another Diet, not in Worms this time but in Augsburg. *Now* they would destroy the Reformation! That religious bickering must come to an end! Charles V has no intention of tolerating that division and confusion anymore; it has lasted too long already! It is high time to take strong measures. This determination of Charles V puts the Protestant electors on guard. Luther hasn't been idle either. With his friend Melanchthon, he writes a confession of faith to submit to the Augsburg Diet to defend the Reformation.

Luther does not show up in Augsburg because that would have been too dangerous. He is still outlawed, after all! But while the Diet is in session, he is close by in the little town of Coburg. Melanchthon stays in Augsburg.

Luther and Melanchthon's confession of faith is read out at the Diet. The reading takes two hours. All present listen intently, and it leaves a deep impression. When the man finishes reading, it is dead quiet.

The Roman Catholic clergy had opposed the reading of that confession of faith.

Do you know why?

Rome is terrified of the light of the

Gospel!

Yet despite all their objections, the Roman Catholic clergy don't get their way. That document is read, and they realise they have heard the truth!

Finally, Dr Eck, the man who lost the debate with Luther at Leipzig, breaks the silence. He says:

"I cannot refute this confession of faith with the Bible, but I can with the many papal ex-cathedra declarations." In response, the Roman Catholic Duke of Bavaria declares:

"Then the protestants are *in* the Scriptures, and we are *out of it*."





*The Augsburg Confession read out. <https://www.1517.org/>*

Despite all this, Charles V remains hostile, demanding that everyone return to the Roman Catholic church within five months, or else...

No, the situation does not look rosy for the Reformation. When the Protestant electors leave the Diet, they look worried. They are anxious for the future. How will this end? They fear the worst!

#### **THE PROTESTANT ELECTORS MAKE A TREATY.**

A year after the Diet, in 1531, the Protestant electors make a treaty called the 'Schmalkaldic League'. They promise to support each other if one of them is attacked or gets into trouble. This treaty frightened Charles V because if he pursues his decision to force all the people to become Roman Catholic, it will result in a civil war. That will be disastrous! Just then, the Turkish army marched to invade Southern Germany, and Charles V could not stop them without the help and support of the Protestant electors!

Do you see the providential hand of the Lord in this? God uses the Turks (Muslims) to prevent Charles V from crushing the Reformation. This *keeps* on happening! Whenever the emperor tries to forcefully suppress the Reformation, something prevents him from carrying out his wicked plans.

God rules!

Many years later, a civil war broke out in 1546, but then Luther was no longer alive. I hope to tell you something about the Schmalkaldic war later.

#### **LUTHER'S DEATH**

Luther did not die in Wittenberg but in Eisleben, his birthplace. How come he was in Eisleben? A quarrel arose among a few Protestant electors. They ask Luther to mediate in this dispute. Luther is tired, and he dreads that journey but goes anyway. He manages to get those two electors to reconcile but is at the end of his strength. While preaching in the church of Eisleben, Luther becomes unwell in the pulpit. He has to shorten his sermon. Soon he is on his deathbed. His last words are: "Father, into Your hands I commit my spirit." Then he dies peacefully and enters eternal glory. Friends bring his body to Wittenberg, where they bury him. Luther was 63 years old when he died; his earthly task was finished.

God called His faithful servant to Himself. Of Luther, it may indeed be said, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord." However, the work of The Reformation continued since it was *God's* work!



*Luther's death (1483-1546) Painter: German School, 16<sup>th</sup> century.*

## QUESTIONS

1. How did Satan use the time of Luther's absence from Wittenberg?
2. Identify Philip Melanchthon.
3. Compare and contrast Luther and Melanchthon.
4. Which errors or wrong ideas did the religious fanatics introduce?
5. What sinful practices followed?
6. What effect did Luther's return have on Wittenberg?
7. Give the reasons for the peasants' revolt of 1525.
8. Why did Luther side with the peasants at first? Why did he refuse to support their cause later?
9. How did the Reformation differ from a revolution?
10. Why did Luther admonish the rulers when they took revenge?
11. Why did Rome blame Luther?
12. Identify Catherine von Bora.
13. Describe the home life of Luther and Catherine.
14. What is consubstantiation?
15. Prove that this error is not scriptural.

16. Why did Charles V summon the Augsburg Diet? Why did Luther send a Confession of Faith rather than appear in person?
17. What did the Duke of Bavaria mean when he said, "Then the protestants are in the Scriptures, and we are out of it"?
18. What was the League of Schmalkalden?
19. Why did Luther go to Eisleben? What occurred there?

## FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. In this chapter, Luther sometimes supported the peasants and sometimes didn't. When may a Christian support protest movements, and when must he refrain from supporting them?
2. Find a text in God's Word that condemns the Roman Catholic practice of forbidding the clergy to marry.
3. Why does the Lutheran Church have ministers rather than priests? (Hint: Consider the meaning of transubstantiation, which Luther rejected. What was the difference between transubstantiation and consubstantiation? Why would the office of priest be an impossibility?)