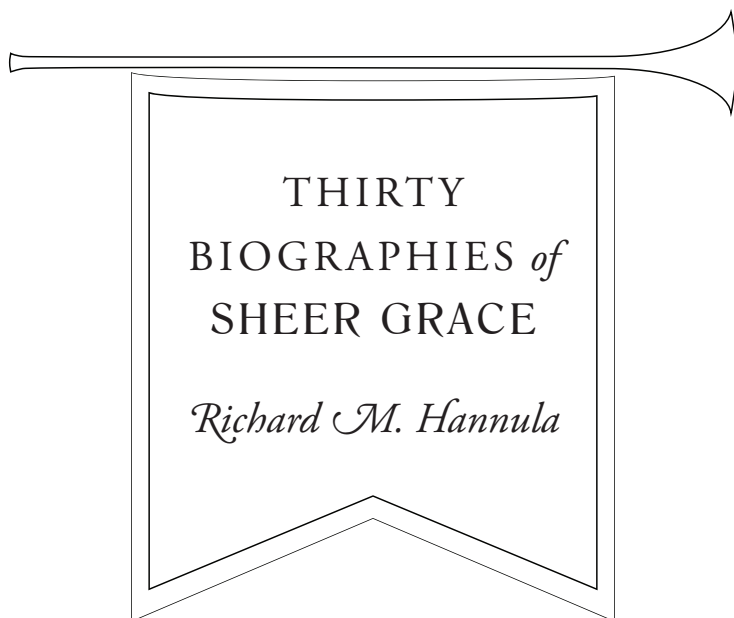


# HERALDS *of the* REFORMATION



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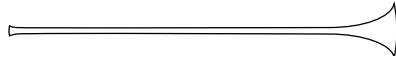




*With love to my grandchildren.*



# CONTENTS



<i>Introduction</i> .....	1
<i>Overview &amp; Timeline (1516–1598)</i> .....	5

## PART ONE

FORERUNNERS OF THE REFORMATION	17
Chapter 1: The Waldensians .....	19
Chapter 2: John Wyclif and the Lollards .....	26
REFORMATION BASICS 1 .....	33
Chapter 3: John Huss .....	34
Chapter 4: Girolamo Savonarola .....	40
COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS .....	47

## PART TWO

### THE REFORMATION IN GERMANY, SWEDEN, AND THE NETHERLANDS 49

Chapter 5: Martin Luther . . . . .	52
Chapter 6: Hendrich Voes and Johann Esch . . . . .	60
Chapter 7: Philip Melanchthon . . . . .	66
REFORMATION BASICS 2 . . . . .	72
Chapter 8: Martin Bucer . . . . .	74
Chapter 9: Katherine Zell . . . . .	82
Chapter 10: Olaf Petri . . . . .	89
REFORMATION BASICS 3 . . . . .	96
Chapter 11: Casper Olevianus . . . . .	98
Chapter 12: William the Silent, Prince of Orange . . . . .	106
COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS . . . . .	114

## PART THREE

### THE REFORMATION IN FRANCE, SWITZERLAND, AND ITALY 115

Chapter 13: Jacques Lefevre . . . . .	117
Chapter 14: Ulrich Zwingli . . . . .	124
REFORMATION BASICS 4 . . . . .	132
Chapter 15: Johann Oecolampadius . . . . .	134
Chapter 16: William Farel . . . . .	140
Chapter 17: John Calvin . . . . .	147
Chapter 18: Gaspard de Coligny . . . . .	155
Chapter 19: Renée, Duchess of Ferrara . . . . .	163

REFORMATION BASICS 5. . . . .	170
Chapter 20: Fanino Fanini . . . . .	172
COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS. . . . .	178

## PART FOUR

### THE REFORMATION IN ENGLAND 179

Chapter 21: Thomas Bilney. . . . .	179
Chapter 22: William Tyndale . . . . .	189
REFORMATION BASICS 6. . . . .	196
Chapter 23: John Frith . . . . .	198
Chapter 24: Hugh Latimer . . . . .	205
Chapter 25: Thomas Cranmer. . . . .	212
Chapter 26: John Bradford . . . . .	220
COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS. . . . .	227

## PART FIVE

### THE REFORMATION IN SCOTLAND 229

Chapter 27: Patrick Hamilton. . . . .	231
Chapter 28: George Wishart . . . . .	238
REFORMATION BASICS 7. . . . .	244
Chapter 29: Walter Mill . . . . .	246
Chapter 30: John Knox. . . . .	251
COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS. . . . .	259
<i>For Further Reading</i> . . . . .	260
<i>Answers for Comprehension Questions</i> . . . . .	264





## **EPHESIANS 2:8–9**

For by grace you have been saved through faith.  
And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,  
not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

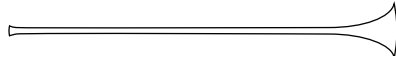
## **HEIDELBERG CATECHISM QUESTION 60**

*Question:* How are you right with God?

*Answer:* Only by true faith in Jesus Christ. Even though my conscience accuses me of having grievously sinned against all God's commandments and of never having kept any of them, and even though I am still inclined toward all evil, nevertheless, without my deserving it at all, out of sheer grace, God grants and credits to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ, as if I had never sinned nor been a sinner, as if I had been as perfectly obedient as Christ was obedient for me. All I need to do is to accept this gift of God with a believing heart.



# INTRODUCTION



The Protestant Reformation was a great spiritual awakening of faith in Christ that swept across Europe in the 1500s. The Spirit of God stirred the hearts and minds of Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, John Calvin and countless others to rediscover the Christ of the Scriptures and the message that sinners are saved by God's grace when they trust in Christ's sacrifice for their sins.

However, for centuries the good news of Christ had been distorted and overlaid with layers of unbiblical teaching and false practices. The Church of Rome taught that salvation came by believing in Christ and earning merit with God through good works. It declared that Christ's death on the cross did not fully pay the penalty for His people's sin, but that believers must still be purged of their sins after death by a long period of punishment in a place called purgatory to be made fit for heaven. Although the Scriptures clearly teach that "There is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5), the

Roman church taught the people to pray to Mary and the saints in heaven to intercede for them with God. Most medieval parishioners offered more prayers to Mary and the saints than to the Lord God Himself, and they believed the church's teaching that God's blessing came to those who venerated relics, adorned images and made pilgrimages to holy shrines. "As often as I read the Bible," one German bishop said, "I find in it a different religion from that which we are taught."

When the congregation came to church, they watched an elaborate ritual that the priest performed in Latin—a language they did not understand. Most parishioners did not hear sermons that explained to them the truths of the Word of God. In fact, in many regions the Church of Rome barred the common people from reading the Scriptures in their own language. The church instructed the people that salvation and grace came to them through the sacraments, and therefore their spiritual lives depended on the priests who alone could administer the sacraments. God had granted the pope and his ministers the keys to the gates of heaven, the church taught. To challenge their authority was to challenge God.

By the sixteenth century, greed and corruption had choked the spiritual life out of many clergymen. The pope and most bishops lived lives of luxury in regal palaces and showed little concern for the poor. When Leo X became pope in 1513, he declared, "Now that we have attained the papacy, let us enjoy it!" Church offices were sold to the highest bidder. Indulgence salesmen—endorsed by church officials—told anxious crowds that they could relieve the sufferings of their departed loved ones in purgatory by buying indulgences. Money-grubbing and immoral priests and monks set a terrible example for the flock. Bishops imposed heavy ministry taxes on the people, and priests demanded fees for everything.

Through the years, when brave critics pointed out the unbiblical beliefs and practices of the church, church authorities accused them of heresy, and many of the accused suffered imprisonment, torture and even death by burning.

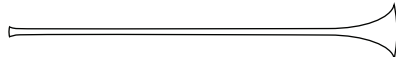
But at a time when the church had drifted farthest from the teachings and practices of the New Testament, a revival of classical learning and the wide-spread use of the printing press prepared the way for reform. The Renaissance and its appreciation for the art and literature of ancient Greece and Rome had begun to transform university education in Europe. Scholars sought knowledge from original sources. Instead of relying on the teachings of medieval theologians to understand the Scriptures, they studied the New Testament in its original Greek and sought out the straightforward meaning of biblical texts. Many—like Thomas Bilney in Cambridge, England—discovered a welcoming Savior, not an aloof judge. “At last I heard Jesus,” Bilney said. “Christ alone saves His people from their sins. I came to Christ, and my despairing heart leapt for joy.”

In 1517, when Martin Luther nailed his Ninety-five Theses against indulgences on a church door in Wittenberg, Germany, he expected a scholarly discussion among the churchmen of Wittenberg. Instead, printers published his theses and within weeks monks, noblemen and peasants hotly debated the theses throughout Europe. At about the same time that Luther understood the doctrine of justification by faith taught in the Scriptures, reformers in France, Switzerland, England and elsewhere also found the Bible’s message of forgiveness in Christ alone. These reformers did not claim to have discovered something new. On the contrary, they made it clear that they simply believed the gospel of Jesus Christ as it is revealed in the Scriptures. The Protestant reformers tried to call the church back to the biblical Christianity of the New Testament

church. But officials of the Church of Rome rejected the call and fiercely persecuted the courageous heralds of the Reformation who risked their lives to proclaim the good news of Christ. By God's grace, they led millions of people to a living faith in Jesus Christ and restored the churches of many lands to the Scriptures and to biblical worship.

The following sketches simply scratch the surface of these reformers' lives. Effort was made to honestly depict them in the midst of their unique time and circumstances. However, it was not possible within a few pages to thoroughly explore their teachings and their strengths and weaknesses. To learn much more about these reformers see "For Further Reading" at the end of the book. It is my hope that the reader—boy or girl, man or woman—will be inspired, by the grace of God, to follow in their steps as they followed in Christ's.

# OVERVIEW AND TIMELINE



## SIXTEENTH CENTURY DIVISIONS OF THE WESTERN CHURCH

**Roman Catholics—members of the Church of Rome**—recognized the bishop of Rome, the pope, as the supreme head of the church, the leader of a hierarchy of bishops and priests. Although the church accepted the Scriptures as the divinely inspired Word of God, it placed church tradition on an equal footing with the Scriptures. Among the church's central teachings were:

- Sinners achieve salvation through faith in Christ and by earning merit with God through good works.
- Believers must still be purged from their sins after they die by suffering punishment for their sins in a place called purgatory to make them fit for heaven.
- God's grace is bestowed on believers by priests through the seven sacraments.

- The worship service—the mass—is to be conducted in Latin and is a ritual offering of Christ as a sacrifice to God the Father and includes the celebration of the Eucharist where the bread and wine are transformed into the physical body and blood of Christ.
- The faithful should venerate and pray to Mary and the saints, seeking their intercession for God’s blessing.
- The church controls the Treasury of Merit, the store of merits earned by the extraordinary good works of Christ and the saints which can be applied to believers through indulgences.

**Protestants or Evangelicals** accepted the Scriptures alone as the supreme authority for Christian doctrine and life. They rejected the pope as the head of the church and Roman church tradition that was contrary to the Scriptures. In the early decades of the Reformation, the supporters of reform were called “Evangelicals.” They earned the nickname because they lived to spread the good news of the gospel—called the *evangelium* in the Latin Bible. In 1529, at an imperial assembly of the Holy Roman Empire, the emperor’s government tried to stop the spread of the Reformation by insisting that the Evangelical princes return the churches in their lands to the authority of the Church of Rome. The Evangelical German princes lodged a formal protest against the decree. Afterward, the supporters of the Reformation were often called Protestants. Among the Evangelicals’ central teachings were:

- Salvation is entirely God’s work by grace alone. God declares believers in Christ forgiven and righteous in His sight based only on the perfect obedience and sacrifice of Jesus Christ in their place—believers cannot contribute to it by their own good works.



- Prayer and adoration are to be given to God alone.
- All believers have direct access to God through Christ. They do not need a priest as a mediator of God's grace.
- The Scriptures should be widely available to the people in their own language.
- Worship services should be conducted in the language of the people and ordered according to the Scriptures.
- Christ instituted only two sacraments: baptism and the Lord's Supper.

The Evangelicals disagreed with one another on the precise meaning of the Lord's Supper and on church government. They also lived in distinct geographic regions under different political leaders and forms of government. Consequently, three main branches of Protestantism developed during the Reformation: Lutheranism in Germany and Scandinavia; Reformed in Switzerland, France, the Netherlands, Scotland and parts of Germany; and Anglicanism in England.

## THE MONARCHS

### *The Holy Roman Empire, Spain and the Netherlands*

**Charles V** (King of Spain, emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, ruler of the Netherlands, 1516–1556), a devout follower of the Church of Rome who brutally suppressed Protestants in Spain, Italy and the Netherlands. He declared Martin Luther an outlaw and demanded that German Protestants return to the Church of Rome. But Charles had his hands full with wars with France and with the Muslim armies of the Ottoman Turks who overran large swathes of eastern and central Europe. Therefore, he made





# PART ONE

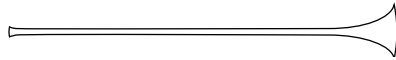
FORERUNNERS  
OF THE  
REFORMATION

The Reformation did not burst upon Europe like a bolt out of the blue. Just as a thunderstorm warns of its coming with dark clouds in the distance, so, too, long before Martin Luther ignited the Reformation by posting his Ninety-five Theses, brave men and women protested corruptions and false teachings in the Church of Rome and strove to bring her back to the Scriptures.

The Waldensians, living in the mountain valleys of the Alps, read the Bible in their own language and rejected the unbiblical beliefs and practices present in so much of the medieval church. Despite centuries of harsh persecution, they worshiped God and served Him according to the light of Scripture truth. Reformers before the Reformation—like Wyclif, Huss and Savonarola—sought to lead their flocks away from reliance on rituals, saints and good works and back to Christ. They called the church to return to the Word of God as the supreme authority for faith and practice—far above the pronouncements of popes and councils. And for their labors, they suffered excommunication, the confiscation of their homes and property, torture and even death by burning. But they planted the seeds that would one day spring up into the great harvest of souls for Jesus Christ known as the Protestant Reformation.

# CHAPTER 1 : THE WALDENSIANS

*Preservers of the True Spirit of Christianity  
(1100s to the present)*



Centuries before the Protestant Reformation erupted in Europe in 1517, faithful believers, living around the southern end of the Alps, clung to the Scriptures in their own language, believed its promises and sought to follow its teaching. They simply called themselves Christians, but to outsiders they were known as Waldensians—after Peter Waldo, one of their early leaders. The Waldensians loved the Word of God and memorized large portions of it, even though church leaders in their region had forbade Scripture translations in the language of the people. Believing the Bible alone was God’s guide for His people; they rejected the Roman church’s teachings on indulgences, purgatory, prayer to saints and other unbiblical beliefs.

The pope demanded that they stop reading or teaching the Scripture in their language and threatened them with death for heresy if they did not submit to all of the teachings of the Church of Rome. When they refused, church officials demanded that kings and princes drive them out of their lands. Through the years, the authorities burned hundreds of Waldensians at the stake along with their copies of the Scriptures. When violently driven from one place, the Waldensians quietly moved to another. Wherever they settled, they supported themselves through manual labor and farming, paid their taxes and sought to love their neighbors—earning a reputation for honesty and upright living. The Waldensians found the greatest freedom to practice their faith in remote areas, especially in the alpine valleys and mountain slopes of southeastern France and northern Italy. But even there, they were not left unmolested for long.

Their ministers taught the absolute authority and inspiration of the Bible, the sinfulness of man and the free gift of forgiveness of sins through faith in Jesus Christ. Each pastor, in his turn, served as a missionary. They went out in twos, an experienced pastor with a younger man. Clad in plain robes, they preached to the poor and read from copies of the New Testament in French or Italian. To provide for their wants and as a way to spread the gospel, the missionaries became traveling peddlers, gaining entry into cottages and castles to sell jewelry, silks and other goods. After showing their wares, customers would often ask them, “Have you nothing more to sell?”

“Yes,” the Waldensians would answer, “we have jewels still more precious than anything you have seen; we would be glad to show them also. We have a precious stone, the Word of God. It is so brilliant that by its light a man may see God.”

They told them about Christ’s love for sinners, often leaving behind a handwritten copy of some portion of Scripture. In their

wake, small pockets of believers sprang up in France, Spain, Germany, Italy, Bohemia and Poland. When church authorities discovered their activities, the missionaries often faced death by fire.

In Grenoble in 1393, one hundred fifty Waldensians—men, women and children—were burned alive together for their faith. On Christmas Day in 1400, the Waldensians in the Pragel Valley in northwestern Italy rested comfortably in their cottages, certain that the deep snow would keep their persecutors away through the winter. Suddenly, the cry, “Soldiers are coming!” shattered their peace. Grabbing their coats and hats, families fled to the mountains, carrying infants and the sick with them. Well-armed troops fell upon them and slew all who didn’t make it out of the village in time. The soldiers left a few days later, after stealing valuables and supplies. Survivors found the dead lying on the ice and snow—including nearly eighty children.

In 1487, Pope Innocent VIII, determined to wipe out the Waldensians once and for all, unleashed a persecution that crashed like an avalanche upon the Waldensians living in the mountain valleys of the French and Italian Alps. The pope rallied the king of France and the dukes of Piedmont and Savoy in a crusade against them. The pope pledged to pardon anyone who waged war on the heretics for any sins they might commit during the campaign, and he promised that any man who killed a heretic would be absolved of all his past sins. Any Waldensians willing to forsake their faith and return to the Church of Rome were spared. Some gave into the pressure and declared their allegiance to the Roman church, but most remained true to Christ and His Word.

With the pope’s blessing ringing in their ears, the French troops attacked the western slopes of the Alps and the forces of Piedmont and Savoy rampaged from the east. Between them, they planned to annihilate the Waldensians.

In spring 1489, French soldiers climbed the foothills and entered the Valley of Loyse, a deep gorge surrounded by towering peaks. When the people of the valley saw the great enemy host, they knew that it would be futile to stand and fight. They quickly gathered supplies and loaded them with the children and old folks into horse-drawn wagons. Climbing the steep path of the mountain slope, they sang psalms and prayed as they slogged upward. Hours later, they reached a great cave. The massive cavern formed a cathedral-size space in the side of the mountain. The men placed the women, children and the infirm in an inner hollow. Then they barricaded the cave entrance with boulders stacked chest high and stood guard.

When the soldiers arrived, they drove the defenders from the mouth of the cave. Instead of scrambling into the cavern and fighting hand-to-hand, the troops filled the entrance with twigs and branches and set it ablaze. A thick, black cloud of smoke poured into the cave. Some of the coughing Waldensians tried to fight their way out and immediately fell under the soldiers' swords. Most of the people rushed to the far end of the cave in a vain attempt to find breathable air. Afterwards, when the smoke cleared, the triumphant soldiers found the entire population of the valley—more than three thousand people—suffocated on the cave's stone floor. Never again would the praises of the Waldensians echo across the Valley of Loyse.

On the other side of the Alps, a large force of soldiers from Piedmont and Savoy under the leadership of Cataneo, the pope's representative, arrived at the foot of the mountain valleys of northwestern Italy. The Waldensians sent two representatives to plead for peace. "Do not condemn us without hearing us," they said to Cataneo. "We are Christians and faithful subjects. Our pastors are prepared



to prove to you that our teachings are true to the Word of God. Beware—by persecuting us you may draw down upon yourselves the wrath of God. Remember, that if God so wills, all the forces you have assembled against us will come to nothing.”

Cataneo dismissed them with a sneer, telling them that they had two choices: convert to the Roman church or die. Armed with trust in God and an intimate knowledge of the land, the Waldensians decided to fight for their lives. They abandoned dozens of their villages, hastily packed some meager supplies and hiked into the Valley of Angrogna in the heart of the mountains. Further in, where the valley narrows, the Waldensians prepared to defend themselves. After they moved the women and children to the rear of the valley, the men sharpened their pikes, spears and arrows.

When the soldiers arrived, they rained a torrent of arrows on the Waldensians who covered themselves with their shields made of deer-skin and tree bark. The Waldensians cried out in prayer, “O God of our fathers, help us! O God, deliver us!” The lead captain heard their prayer, raised the visor of his metal helmet and shouted back, “My warriors will give you God’s answer!” No sooner had the words left his mouth, when an arrow struck him between the eyes, and he fell down dead. The loss of their leader caused the soldiers to hesitate, and some started to fall back. Then the Waldensians fired a burst of arrows and charged. They chased the army back down the valley and cut down many of them. By nightfall, the men had returned to the women and children, and they celebrated the victory with songs of praise to their Savior. The next morning, they braced for a second attack that they knew would be more determined than the first.

Cataneo, embarrassed and enraged that his men had been driven off by herdsmen and farmers, regrouped his forces and marched back up the valley. When they reached the place of the previous

battle, their prey was nowhere to be found. They pressed forward through the narrowing canyon until they reached a long gorge. The only way through was a cramped rocky ledge with a mountain wall on one side and a sheer cliff—falling hundreds of meters to the canyon floor—on the other. Carefully placing their steps, the soldiers advanced. Suddenly, a heavy fog like a great black robe dropped from the peaks above and cloaked the gorge in darkness. Cataneo's soldiers could barely see the man in front of them—unable to advance or retreat.

Just then, the Waldensian fighters, hiding on a ridge above the soldiers, sprang into action. They rolled down boulders and hurled stones upon their enemy, crushing some and sweeping others off the cliff. A detachment of Waldensians with swords drawn attacked the soldiers from the front. Overcome with fear and confusion, the troops turned to flee. As they struggled to retreat, they jostled one another off the edge. Far more perished in their desperate attempt to escape than fell under the blows of the Waldensians. Few of the invaders made it out of the valley alive.

Not long after, fresh troops arrived and intermittently attacked the Waldensians for nearly a year. The troops slaughtered any Waldensians they captured. They stole what they could carry and torched everything else—homes, churches, barns and fields. But hundreds of soldiers perished at the hands of the Waldensians. Finally, the young Duke of Savoy called for a truce and a meeting with Waldensian leaders. The duke had reluctantly lent his support to the pope's crusade against them. When he met with the representatives of the mountain people, he marveled at their sturdy faith and righteous lives. "I did not know," he said, "that I had so virtuous, so faithful and so obedient subjects as the Waldensians. I had been told that you were one-eyed monsters with four rows of sharp black teeth."

The duke apologized for the suffering inflicted upon them by his men, and pledged that from that day forward, they could live in their mountain valleys in peace. And so the Waldensians enjoyed a reprieve from persecution for a time.

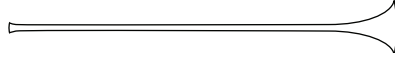
About forty years later, when the Reformation took root in Germany and Switzerland, the Waldensians heard that tens of thousands of people trusted in God's grace in Christ and looked to the Scriptures as their only rule of faith and life. They sent a delegation of pastors to see for themselves. In 1530, some went to Neuchâtel and met with William Farel, and others traveled to Strasbourg to confer with Martin Bucer. Two went to Basel and explained to Oecolampadius their teachings and practices. "Sir," they said, "tell us if you approve of our beliefs. And if you discover any errors, teach us the right way from the Word of God."

Oecolampadius embraced these believers who had preserved so much of the true faith in Christ despite generations of persecution. "We give thanks to our most gracious Father," Oecolampadius told them, "that He has called you to such marvelous light, during ages when thick darkness covered almost the whole world under the empire of the Antichrist. We love you as brothers!"

The Swiss reformers sent Christian books and Bibles to the Waldensians. Their ministers conferred together and prayed for one another. After living for so long in isolation, the Christians of the Alps rejoiced to be a part of the rapidly-growing and renewed Church of Jesus Christ. One church historian summed up the centuries-long experience of the Waldensians, saying, "They always carried along with them the true spirit of Christianity."

CHAPTER 2 :  
JOHN WYCLIF  
AND THE LOLLARDS

*The Evangelical Doctor and the Poor Preachers*  
(Wyclif c.1330–1384, Lollards 1370s–mid 1500s)



For years, John Wyclif, the leading theologian of Oxford University, had rankled the pope and the bishops of England. Wyclif's teachings came out of his study of the Bible. He taught that sinners are forgiven only through the grace of God by believing in Christ. Indulgences, masses and pilgrimages do not add to salvation, he said—only faith in Christ saves. “There is no merit in us,” Wyclif preached. “For according to God’s teaching, we are all sinners from our birth so that we cannot so much as think a good thought or perform a good work unless Jesus sends it. His mercy comes to us, follows us, helps us and keeps us in grace. So then it is

not good for us to trust in our merits, in our virtues or in our righteousness. It is only good to trust in God.”

Wyclif argued that the bread and wine of the Lord’s Supper are not the physical body and blood of Jesus as the Roman church taught, but are signs and seals of Christ’s spiritual presence with His children. Wyclif’s advice to the English king and Parliament not to pay papal taxes angered church leaders for it would deprive the Church of Rome treasure that they had bilked from England for hundreds of years. “God entrusted the flock to the pope to feed and not to fleece,” Wyclif said.

He taught that the Bible alone is sufficient to guide the church, not the teachings of popes, councils or kings that are contrary to Scripture. And he believed that God meant the Scriptures for everyone. “Jesus taught the people simply and in their own language,” Wyclif said. “At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit gave the apostles the gift of tongues so that everyone could hear the good news in his own language.”

Enraged by Wyclif’s ideas, Pope Gregory XI demanded that the king of England and the archbishop of Canterbury do something about him. “John Wyclif,” the pope wrote, “is vomiting out of the filthy dungeon of his heart most wicked and damnable heresies. He hopes to deceive the faithful and lead them to the edge of destruction.” The pope insisted that Wyclif be tried for heresy and burned to death. But when Pope Gregory died suddenly, a great struggle ensued over who should be his successor—a struggle which enabled Wyclif to continue preaching, teaching, writing and training young men to preach the Word of God. Students came to Oxford from all over Europe to learn from Wyclif, the “Evangelical doctor,” as students called him. Many returned to their homelands to preach about Jesus Christ to their countrymen.

Wyclif made translating the Scriptures into English his highest priority. The short and frail Wyclif, with the help of two trusted

co-workers, toiled day and night to translate the Bible. “Press on in this work,” he told his helpers, “for if the people of England will read the Scriptures for themselves it will be the surest road for them to follow Christ and come to heaven.” After eleven years of labor, they translated into English all of the Old and New Testaments. In those days before the printing press, Wyclif recruited scores of Oxford students to make handwritten copies of the Scriptures.

At that time in England, church officials banned translating and distributing the Scriptures in the common language of the people. They did not want the people studying the Bible for themselves for fear that the clergy would lose influence and the unity of the Church of Rome would be broken. Violating unbiblical church laws did not trouble Wyclif. “The pope’s words should be followed only so far as he follows the words of Christ,” he said. “I am ready to follow the teachings of Scripture even unto death if necessary.”

Wyclif sent out hundreds of young men that he called “poor preachers” dressed in simple brown robes with handwritten copies of the English Bible. They traveled across Britain proclaiming the good news of Christ and singing songs of praise. “After your sermon is ended,” Wyclif told his traveling preachers, “visit the sick, the aged, the poor, the blind, and the lame and help them as you are able.”

Village by village they preached and read from the Scriptures in churchyards, cottages, town squares and fields. The Lollards, the name given to Wyclif’s followers, led thousands of men, women and children to faith in Jesus Christ, and these new believers began to learn the Word of God for the first time in their lives.

The archbishop of Canterbury ordered English churchmen to stop the Lollards, and he urged the king to root them out of the land. “If we permit these heretics to continue,” he told the king, “our destruction is inevitable. We must silence these Lollards—these psalm-singers.”

Local priests harassed the evangelists and fell upon them when they entered a town. But the people often sided with the preachers, forming a strong ring around them to protect them from harm.

In 1382, the archbishop convened a church court at Oxford and summoned Wyclif, whose health was failing, to stand before it. Wyclif faced his accusers, rebuking them for not following the Word of God and for using church office for selfish gain. The court banished Wyclif from Oxford University. They wanted to have him burned for heresy, but some of his supporters in Parliament prevented it. So he returned to his parish church in Lutterworth and labored on. "I intend with my whole heart," he said, "by the grace of God, to be a true Christian and as long as breath remains in me to proclaim and defend the law of Christ."

Two years later, Wyclif died of a stroke, but his followers carried on the work. Church leaders, determined to crush the Lollards, ordered all copies of the English Bible and the writings of Wyclif burned. People faced fines, imprisonment and even execution for sharing Wyclif's ideas or owning his writings. Many Lollards met a fiery death for spreading the good news of full forgiveness in Christ and for reading the Scriptures in English. Some died in the flames with scraps of English Scripture tied to their necks by their tormentors.

This fierce persecution failed to snuff out the Lollard's gospel light. So many people accepted Wyclif's teachings that one English churchman complained, "If you meet two people on the road, you can be sure that one is a disciple of Wyclif."

John Oldcastle, an outspoken Lollard and a prominent nobleman and member of the House of Lords, came to a living faith in Christ through the preaching of John Wyclif. He used his wealth to pay for hand-copying of Wyclif's writings and the Scriptures in English. Oldcastle supported many preachers who traveled the country proclaiming Christ and giving away portions of the Scriptures.

Oldcastle's activities inflamed the wrath of church leaders who warned the king, "Oldcastle is a heretic, a troubler of the peace and an enemy of the realm." They hauled him before a church court held in a monastery near St. Paul's Cathedral in London. Churchmen and the common people turned out to see the trial of the famous nobleman. "Heretic," a priest said, "do you believe in the pronouncements of the church?"

"I believe in the Scriptures and all that is found in them," Oldcastle answered, "but not in your idle pronouncements."

"You follow that heretic Wyclif!" one churchman shouted.

"Before I knew Wyclif," Oldcastle replied, "I never tried to resist sin. But after I knew that virtuous man whom you disdain, I learned to fear my Lord God, and I saw my errors and turned away from them. I never knew that I could find so much grace when I followed your instructions."

At times, the crowd had difficulty hearing Oldcastle over the jeers of the priests and friars. The churchmen demanded that he recant his errors and yield to the authority of the church. "My belief is that all the Scriptures of the sacred book are true. All that is grounded upon them, I believe thoroughly, for I know it is God's pleasure that I should do so. But in your laws and idle determinations, I have no belief. For your deeds show that you stand against Christ and are obstinately set against His holy law and will."

They threatened to condemn him to death as a heretic if he did not recant. "My faith is fixed," he said, "do with me what you please."

After the death sentence was pronounced, Oldcastle said, "You may condemn my body, but my soul you cannot hurt."

Oldcastle turned to the assembled crowd and told them, "Good people, I am not condemned for breaking God's commandments. It is to protect their own laws and traditions that I and other men are so cruelly treated."



Guards cast him into the Tower of London. He escaped for a time, and tried to organize a revolt against the king's government. In 1417, he was captured. An executioner hung him upon the gallows with a chain and lit a fire under him where he slowly roasted to death. Spectators reported that he cheerfully accepted his death and prayed that God would forgive his persecutors.

Anne of Bohemia\*, the wife of King Richard II, embraced Wyclif's teachings. When she died in 1394, the Bohemian members of her court returned home and brought Wyclif's writings with them. His ideas found fertile ground among the Czech people. The Czech preachers, John Huss and Jerome of Prague, suffered death by burning for preaching the truths of Scripture and exposing the false teachings of the Church of Rome. Czech missionaries went out to preach the good news throughout Europe. In 1433, a Czech named Paul Craw was burned at the stake in St. Andrews, Scotland, for teaching the ideas of Wyclif and Huss. The authorities so feared his preaching that they ordered a brass ball stuffed into his mouth to prevent him from speaking at the stake.

Many Lollard women paid the ultimate price for their faith. Joan Brownton, an eighty-year-old grandmother, died at the stake when she would not renounce her Lollard faith. A woman from Leith, Scotland, suffered imprisonment when she prayed to Christ for help during the pains of childbirth instead of the Virgin Mary. In 1519, the authorities in Coventry, England, arrested Mrs. Smith\*, a widowed mother who worshiped secretly with other Lollards in the city, for reading to her children from the Gospel of Luke and teaching them to recite the Lord's Prayer and the Ten Commandments in English. "If you recant," the bishop of Coventry told her, "you may

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\* Read about Anne of Bohemia, Mrs. Smith, and other Christian heroines in Richard M. Hannula's *Radiant: Fifty Remarkable Women in Church History* (2015).

return home.” She refused. A few days later, guards led Mrs. Smith and six Lollard fathers to an open space in the center of Coventry. They tied them to a stake and burned them to death for the crime of teaching their children the Scriptures in English.

When the Protestant Reformation swept across Europe in the first half of the sixteenth century, the Lollards rejoiced that the Word of God was being restored to its proper place in many parts of the Christian church.

## REFORMATION BASICS 1

*Solo Christo* (“*Through Christ Alone*”)

The Scriptures make clear that salvation is through Christ alone (*solo Christo* in Latin). “For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 2:5).

But the Roman church taught the people to pray to Mary and the saints in heaven to seek their intercession with God. By the late Middle Ages, most churchgoers prayed more to Mary and the saints than they did to God. As the reformers read the Scriptures, they did not find prayer to saints or Mary. They learned that it is only through faith in Christ and His death on the cross that sinners find forgiveness and are restored to a right relationship with God. So the reformers called their hearers to look to Christ as their only mediator before God. When asked if Christians should pray to saints, Olaf Petri the Swedish reformer answered, “Do not put your trust in any human being, such as the Virgin Mary or any other saint, but trust in God alone.”

John Calvin wrote, “In regard to the saints...the Scripture calls us away from all others to Christ alone, since our heavenly Father is pleased to gather together all things in him, it were the extreme of stupidity, not to say madness, to attempt to obtain access by means of others, so as to be drawn away from him without whom access [to God] cannot be obtained.”