

Reformation Day

The date was October 31st, 1517. The place, Wittenberg, Germany.

In one hand, Martin Luther grasped a hammer. In the other, a long piece of paper covered with his writing. Luther walked out into the street and straight over to the castle church. There, he nailed the paper to the door.

Community messages were often posted on the doors of the church. So Luther's actions would not have seemed strange to anyone watching. The message on that paper, however, would change the world.

A monk and a professor of theology, Luther spent much time studying the Bible. The more he studied, the more he disagreed with the doctrine of the Medieval Catholic church. The paper he nailed to the door of the Castle church listed 95 points of disagreement.

Now, Luther had no plans of leaving the church. Nor was he trying to start a public dispute with the church. He never dreamed those 95 points, called the *95 Theses*, would spawn a revolution of thinking in Germany and across Europe. Luther simply wanted to express his newly-discovered views of the Bible. He wanted to discuss them with other church leaders.

Without Luther's knowledge, someone printed copies of his message on the newly-invented Gutenberg press. Those copies were distributed all over Germany. Within weeks, Luther found that he was the subject of everyone's thoughts. From the cathedrals and great stone castles of his homeland to the pubs and peasants' cottages, everyone was talking about Luther's views. The Protestant Reformation had begun!

Just what was the Protestant Reformation all about? What did Luther and others protest?

The chief debate was the matter of salvation – how man could have his sins forgiven and be restored to a right relationship with his Creator-God.



MARTIN LUTHER.

The church taught that people could buy forgiveness for their sins. Luther's *95 Theses* protested this teaching. Luther and other reformers taught that God alone could grant forgiveness. The reformers also taught that religion and good deeds could not save people. They taught that salvation came only through faith in God's Son, Jesus Christ.

"Through faith alone in Christ alone" began to be heard all over Europe. The reformers urged people to transfer their confidence for salvation from the church and its religious traditions to Christ alone. They encouraged people to read the Bible. They also preached that the Bible should serve as the Christian's final authority.

The world has been feeling the effects of the Protestant Reformation ever since. The Reformation not only gave birth to Protestantism, but also brought about social, political, and economic changes.

*"Through faith alone
in Christ alone ..."*

Common people learned to read so that they could read the Bible for themselves. As more people learned to read, more people also began to write in common languages. And as literature increased, public education followed. Primary schools began offering basic education in reading, writing, math, and religion.

Educated people began to pursue careers outside the church. Protestantism taught that work was a gift of God. So people worked hard. This work ethic led to scientific discovery, inventions, and wealth.

Politically, the religious debate spurred the Eighty Years War and the Thirty Years War. It also influenced the English Civil War. These conflicts forever changed the face of Europe.

Reformation Day commemorates Luther's posting of the *95 Theses*. It also celebrates the changes brought about by the Reformation.

Reformation Day is celebrated as a national holiday in Slovenia. It is a state holiday in five German states. It is also celebrated in some Protestant churches. Lutheran churches traditionally celebrated the Festival of the Reformation on October 31st, but now celebrate it on the Sunday on or before October 31st.

Much of this article was adapted with permission from a Reformation Day article written by Jim Elliff (© 2002). The original article is available in its entirety at <http://www.bulletininserts.org:80/luther.html>.