

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

The Verse of the Reformation

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Many people have images of this angry monk named *Luther* making his way to the castle door in Wittenberg on October 31, 1517, to nail the *95 Theses* as an open rebuke and challenge to the Roman Catholic Church. That's not exactly how it all happened. The wheels were starting to turn in the mind of Luther regarding the problems of the Roman Catholic Church, but if you read his *95 Theses*, you will not see the five solas of the Reformation mentioned. In Luther's mind, the Roman Catholic Church needed to be fixed, but he wasn't opposed to everything.



1

It would take two years before this dedicated monk would finally have, what some refer to as the "tower experience." It was while studying the Bible in the monastery that Luther finally understood Romans 1:17. Before, Luther's view of God was that of an angry and judgmental God. He viewed his salvation as coming through self depreciating and accusatory statements of self. If self-love was the sin, the only way to be saved was through self-hatred. Therefore, in Luther's view, the way to God was by accepting His judgments. Michael Reeves summarizes Luther's view by writing, "This gloomy idea that the only solution for self-love is self-hatred and self accusation was built upon a frightening view of God. Luther could only see that God was all Judge and no love, his righteousness being all about punishing sinners, his 'gospel' just the promise of judgment. Here was a God he could only ever cower before."¹

It was while sitting in his cell and reading the Bible that Romans 1:17 and God's righteousness came to a soul shaking reality. It was possible to receive forgiveness through the promise of God alone, by [faith alone](#), in Christ alone rather than through the judgments of God. No longer was God a gloomy Judge. The dark clouds of false theology were moved back and for the first time Luther could see the pure rays of gospel light shining upon his face. Luther recalls this moment:

Though I lived as a monk without reproach, I felt that I was a sinner before God with an extremely disturbed conscience. I could not believe that he was placated by my satisfaction. I did not love, yes, I hated the righteousness God who punishes sinners, and secretly, if not blasphemously,

¹ Michael Reeves, *The Unquenchable Flame*, 2009, 46.

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certainly murmuring greatly, I was angry with God, and said, 'As if, indeed, it is not enough, that miserable sinners, eternally lost through original sin, are crushed by every kind of calamity by the law of the decalogue, without having God add pain to pain by the gospel and also by the gospel threatening us with his righteousness and wrath!' Thus I raged with a fierce and troubled conscience. Nevertheless, I beat importunately upon Paul at that place, most ardently desiring to know what St. Paul wanted.

2

At last, by the mercy of God, meditating day and night, I gave heed to the context of the words, namely, 'In it the righteousness of God is revealed, as it is written, "He who through faith is righteous shall live."' There I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous lives by a gift of God, namely by faith. And this is the meaning: the righteousness of God is revealed by the gospel, namely, the passive righteousness with which merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written, 'He who through faith is righteous shall live.' Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates.

This whole scene happened two years after Luther had nailed the 95 *Theses* to the castle door. What was a spark in 1517 was now a blaze in 1519. Luther would spend his next year writing with a ferocious tenacity. The Reformation was now starting to explode. The verse of the Reformation was Romans 1:17. As you consider the historical [significance of October 31st](#), we can be assured of this fact, Rome has long regretted sending this budding monk to Wittenberg to study the Bible. If the Roman Catholic Church had a desire to control the Bible and keep the truths bottled up in Latin – the language of academia, they would contradict themselves by putting an open Bible in the hands of Martin Luther. They had a desire to see him teach theology and to cure his spiritual anxiety, so they sent him to Wittenberg. God took Romans 1:17 and pierced the bowels of the Roman Catholic Church.

If Luther was “God’s Volcano” as Michael Reeves suggests, it was Romans 1:17 that caused him to erupt. The lava of the Reformation consumed the false salvation practices of the pope and the Roman Catholic Church. Luther made it abundantly clear, God is not for sale. R. C. Sproul concludes, “The Reformation was not merely a Great Awakening; it was the Greatest Awakening to the true Gospel since the Apostolic Age.”²

Romans 1:17 – For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “**The righteous shall live by faith.**”

² R. C. Sproul and Archie Parrish, *The Spirit of Revival*, 2000, 17.

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