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## Introduction



## Martin Luther and the Book of Romans

Five hundred years ago this month, Martin Luther nailed his 95 Beliefs to the church door at Wittenberg in Germany. At the time, Luther was only 33-years-old. He was a religion teacher. At first, Luther meant for his 95 Beliefs to be used only to prove it was wrong for the Catholic Church to “sell” freedom to sinners. The church sold this “freedom” to sinners to free them from the punishment of sin. Someone sold this “freedom” to the people in Luther’s own church. This “salesman” cheated the people in Luther’s church out of their money. Luther wanted to put a stop to the sales. So, he made his 95 Beliefs public. Luther refused to accept what the Catholic Church was doing. Luther’s refusal became the “spark” that started the Protestant Reformation. The Protestant Reformation began in the 1500s. It was a time when Christians began to “wake up” to Bible truths. These Christians wanted to change the Roman Catholic Church for the better. Later, the changes these Christians made led to the start of the Protestant churches. Luther led in the changes that started the Reformation. The Holy Spirit guided Luther in his important work. Luther brought to millions of people precious Bible truths that the Catholic Church had hidden. History never has been the same since.

Of course, a lot has changed since that day in 1517 when Luther nailed his 95 Beliefs to the church door. But Bible truths have not changed. These truths were at the heart of Luther’s teachings. They gave Luther the power to challenge Rome. Bible truths helped Luther give to many people the message that we are saved by faith alone.

The book of Romans is at the heart of Luther’s message. This book, or letter, is the topic of our study for this quarter. Here is what Luther has to say about Romans: “It is the clearest example of the Good News that we are saved by faith alone in Jesus. Every Christian should know the book of Romans word for word and by heart. And every Christian should let the message of this letter live in his heart every day. It is daily ‘bread’ for our spirits.”—Martin Luther, *Commentary [Explanation] on Romans*, translated by J. Theodore Mueller (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel Publications, 1976), page 8, adapted.

In the pages of Romans, Luther found the important truth of “justification by faith.” Justification by faith is the teaching that we are made right with God by faith in Jesus alone. This teaching is not just the most important truth in the New Testament. It is the most impor-

tant truth in the whole Bible. This truth deals with God's plan to save sinners. Paul tells us, "it was [God's] plan from the beginning that He would give us His loving-favor through [by] Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 1:9, NLV). Here, Paul teaches us that we are saved only by Jesus' righteousness. Jesus' righteousness is His power to make us holy and to give us victory over sin. God gives us this power by faith. We do not get this power from obeying the law. Paul makes this truth clear in Romans: "A man is made right with God by putting his trust in Christ. It is not by his doing what the Law says" (Romans 3:28, NLV).

In 1521, Luther appeared in the town of Worms, Germany, to defend this truth. He said, "I cannot and will not give up my beliefs. It is not safe for a Christian to go against what he believes is true. . . . Here I stand. I continue to believe in what I said. I can do nothing else.'" —J. H. Merle D'Aubigné, D. D., *History of the Reformation [Change for the Better] of the Sixteenth Century*, translated by H. White (New York: American Tract [Short Religious Book] Society [Company]), volume 2, page 249, adapted. Today, loyal Protestants also must refuse to give up Bible truth. They must refuse to accept any false teachings.

It is true that Christianity has moved forward in many ways since the time of Luther. As an example, Christianity has freed itself from hundreds of years of fear and false teachings. These false teachings tried to change the meaning of the truth and even tried to take its place.

But over the long years, the Reformation stopped moving forward. In some places, empty religion took the place of Bible truth. In other places, some people even turned back to the Catholic religion. Now, we live in a time of ecumenism. Ecumenism is the belief that all churches worldwide should join as one big church. We also live in a time of pluralism. Pluralism is the teaching that there are many different views about the truth. But often we find differences between these ideas. Because of ecumenism and pluralism, many of the Reformation's special truths have become unclear. In fact, many of the truths have been covered up by sneaky words and teachings. These sneaky words hide the differences between Protestants and Catholics. But these differences were real in Luther's day. And they are real in ours. We can read about them in Daniel 7:23–25; Daniel 8:9–12; Revelation 13, 14; and in the book of Romans. These messages from God show us why loyal Christians must firmly hold onto the truths that Luther and other Protestants defended. Some of those Protestants even lost their lives defending their beliefs.

We are Seventh-day Adventists. We believe firmly in the important rule of *sola Scriptura*. This rule means the Bible alone is the final judge of what truth is. So, in the end, we must reject anything that disagrees with the Bible. The Bible points us away from Rome and its teachings (Revelation 18:4). Instead, the Bible tells us to preach to everyone "the Good News that lasts forever" (Revelation 14:6, NLV). This same truth guided Luther and filled him with hope 500 years ago.

***Five hundred years ago this month, Martin Luther nailed his 95 Beliefs to the church door at Wittenberg in Germany.***