

before any other problem can be successfully handled. We have noticed that to him the Bible was the sole source of authority in religious matters. While looking at these two great emphases, we observed how they were united in the central Biblical teaching of salvation by faith alone. Only through this could sin be removed and man reconciled to God. Only through recognition of the authority of God's Word could salvation by faith be known.

Luther did not originate the idea of salvation by faith. It was been one of the central features of Christianity from its very inception. During the Middle Ages this doctrine came to be largely hidden behind complicated dogma and involved ceremonials. To a great extent ideas of salvation by works displaced it. Yet all through the Middle Ages there were little groups of people in every part of Europe who understood this doctrine and enjoyed the blessings of justification by faith in the marvelous grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. Salvation by faith was not a new idea, but no one since the time of the Apostles has been able to express it more clearly and effectively than Martin Luther. Luther's clear understanding and firm hold on this precious doctrine introduced a ferment into European life that ultimately led to the formation of all our great Protestant denominations.

It was through Luther's devotion to this vital doctrine that the Reformation began. In 1517 Luther began to hear disquieting news. A monk named Tetzel was traveling through Germany using all the clever devices of the huckster to sell indulgences by which he claimed to provide forgiveness for all sins, past, present, or future, without any requirement of personal faith or repentance. Frederick the Wise, the ruler of the section of Germany where Luther lived, forbade the selling of such indulgences in his territory. The border between Frederick's territory and that of his cousin, Duke George, had existed for only a few decades, and many families included people on both sides, so they were constantly crossing this minor political division. After working the larger towns of George's territory, Tetzel went to the villages neighboring the border in order to catch much of the trade from electoral Saxony. Soon Luther began to see the results of Tetzel's work in his own church in Wittenberg. People whom he had been urging to repent and turn away from their sins, and to seek salvation through simple faith in Christ, showed him certificates that promised them, in the Pope's name, complete forgiveness for all sins, past, present and future.

Filled with righteous indignation, Luther determined that something must be done about this wicked practice. He would not believe that the pope, whom he considered as a great spiritual leader, would have a part in such an action. The whole thing must surely be a fraud. Since there were various views regarding the theory of indulgences, Luther felt that careful discussion and debate by scholars would clarify the matter and result in ending such abominations as those involved in Tetzel's commercial undertaking. Luther said: "If the pope had the power to free people from the results of their sins, why wouldn't he just give it to everybody? Why should

see that the Bible is the only infallible rule of faith and practice. He came to see that God's Word is the only real authority in religious matters. When he found that church authorities of his day were taking positions contrary to what is clearly taught in the Scripture, he strongly took the stand that nothing else can compare in authority with the Bible.

Some writers in these days try to select a sentence or two out of context from the writings of Luther or Calvin, and from it make it look as if these great reformers did not hold solidly to the complete inspiration and inerrancy of the Word of God. All such efforts overlook the attitude that was constantly shown by these two great men. To each of them a clear teaching of God's Word was sufficient to decide any question, not only in religion, but also in all other areas.

One has only to look at some of the outstanding events in Luther's life to see his attitude toward the Bible. Let us jump forward for a moment in our survey of Luther's life, and turn our attention to the critical situation when he stood before the emperor at the Diet of Worms. The emperor's chancellor pointed to a table on which Luther's books were spread out. He said, "Did you write these books?" Luther admitted that he had done so. Then he was asked, "Are you willing to recant the teachings of these books?" Luther answered that every statement in his books belonged in one of three categories. He spoke somewhat as follows: "There are doubtless statements in them that are contrary to clear teachings of the Bible. Wherever I can be shown by clear and convincing evidence or argument that one of my statements is contrary to something in God's Word I shall be very glad to withdraw it. There are other statements in my books that deal with matters not directly handled in the Word of God. Such statements represent only my own fallible human judgment, and I shall gladly defer to the emperor's wishes as to giving up any statement of this type. However, there is a third type of material in these books. They contain many statements that express ideas clearly taught in the Bible. In every such case it would be impossible for me to recant without being disloyal to God. Here I stand. I cannot do otherwise."

Thus, in one of the most crucial situations in his whole life Luther took the position that God's Word is inerrant and infallible, and that he was ready to bow to its authority in any matter whatever, if only he could be shown by clear and reasonable discussion exactly what the Bible teaches.

Not long after Luther stood before the emperor at Worms he began one of the major activities of his life. This was the attempt to translate the Bible into German. There had been various attempts before, but never one to which anywhere near as much effort was given as Luther gave to making his great translation of the Bible into his mother tongue. Luther desired that the Bible should be available to all who knew German. The Germans spoke many different dialects. Luther had a wide acquaintance with these dialects.