

Early Reformers

Multiple Choices

Read the following statements. Which choice best describes you?

1. If I disagree with someone, I usually
 - a. keep quiet.
 - b. let the person know how I feel.
 - c. find someone else who agrees with me.
2. If forced to defend my ideas, I usually
 - a. confidently present the facts supporting my view.
 - b. shrug my shoulders.
 - c. change the topic of discussion.
3. When facing danger, I
 - a. look around for someone to support me.
 - b. run!
 - c. fight against it!

In today's lesson, you will discover the courageous choices early reformers were forced to make. See what effect their choices had on the false doctrines and corruption in the church.

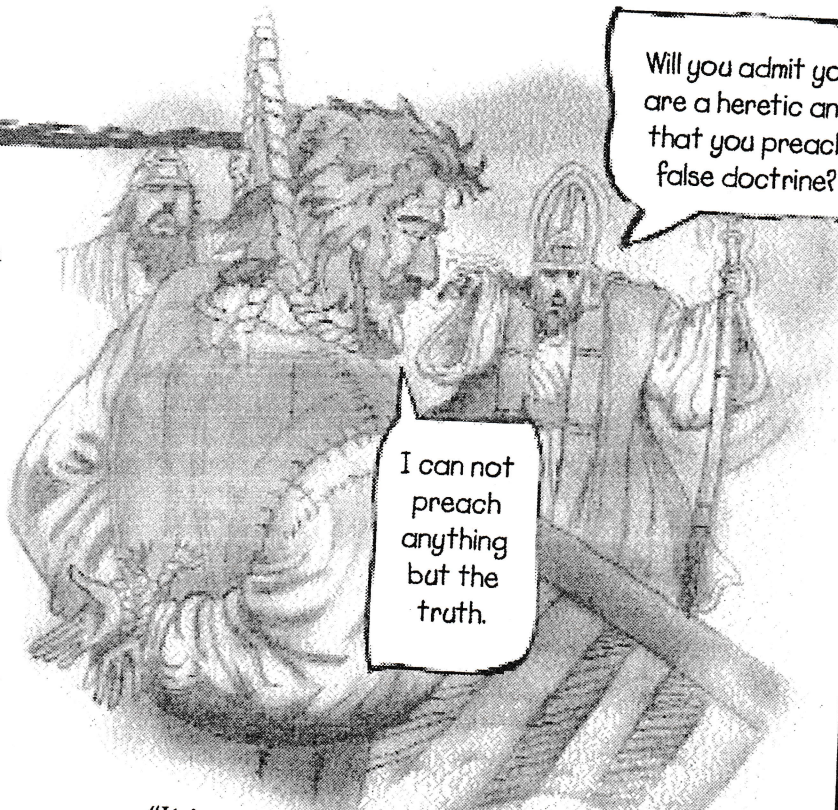
John Wycliffe (1329-84)

The Holy Spirit encouraged John Wycliffe, a professor at the University of Oxford, to question and expose the false teachings or doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church.

"It is not right," Wycliffe wrote, "that the people starve and die in their ignorance while the priests get fat and the pope lives like a king.

"It is not right that the church holds heaven as a reward that can only be earned by the good works prescribed by the priests. God gives salvation. He presents the gift. He does not need clergy to tell Him how to do it.

"It is not right to claim that the bread and wine turn into the body and blood of Christ and then to worship those objects: we should worship God, not things. True, Christ comes to us in the Sacrament—but we have neither the wisdom nor the right to try and tell God how that happens.



"It is not right that the church is ruled by power instead of love, and that people can't read the Scriptures for themselves."

Wycliffe and his students translated the Bible into English. Many of Wycliffe's followers, called Lollards, roamed the countryside, preaching and explaining the Word of God to the people. Wycliffe stated openly that Christ is the head of the church. He even pronounced the pope to be the Antichrist.

Pope Gregory XI was furious! He called Wycliffe before several church courts, but was unable to silence him because many people followed his teaching, especially those in the English government. Followers of John Wycliffe were often put into prison, tortured, and killed for speaking against the pope and the false teaching of the Roman Catholic Church.

Wycliffe's translation of the Bible helped others to produce even better translations. God used Wycliffe's preaching of the Gospel to inspire others to continue the fight for reform.

John Hus (1371-1415)

As a student and then professor at the University of Prague, John Hus learned the

ideas of John Wycliffe. Hus also took the vows of a priest and became known as a talented and popular speaker. People listened intently as Hus spoke against the relic superstitions, pilgrimages, and fraudulent practices of the church.

Hus attacked the corruption within the priesthood—especially the practice of charging fees for performing Baptisms, hearing confessions, administering the Lord's Supper, and conducting funerals. For this reason, many priests hated Hus.

In 1408, Hus was forbidden to preach or perform other priestly duties. The archbishop condemned everything Hus had written and ordered that these writings be destroyed.

Hus continued to preach as before. He taught that Christ, not the pope, is the head of the church; that indulgences are useless; and that the Bible is the highest religious authority.

In 1415, Hus was invited to present his views at the Council of Constance. Upon arriving at the large gathering, Hus was immediately arrested. Church leaders demanded that Hus take back everything he had taught and written. He refused to do so and was imprisoned. During his time in the dungeon, Hus wrote letters of encouragement to his followers. After long months in prison, Hus was declared guilty of heresy and burned at the stake. He died singing the liturgical prayer "Kyrie eleison" ("Lord, have mercy").

Girolamo Savonarola (1452–98)

Savonarola, a powerful speaker, preached mainly in the city of Florence, Italy. Savonarola spoke against the heathen practices and immorality of church members and leaders.

Many people in Florence listened to Savonarola and changed their ways, even burning many of their worldly possessions in "bonfires of vanities." This gave the fiery speaker confidence to denounce Pope Alexander VI for his corrupt court. The pope

thought he could silence Savonarola by promoting him to cardinal. Savonarola's answer to the offer was this: "I desire no other red hat than the hat of the martyr, dyed with my own blood."

It did not take long for Savonarola to get his wish. Upon orders from the pope, Savonarola was imprisoned, tortured, and killed by hanging; his body was burned. Before his death, Savonarola said, "The reformation of the church will come soon; already the light begins to dawn."

Ready for Reform

1. The early reformers denounced many of the practices and doctrines of the church. Name some.

[Possibilities include salvation through works, prayers to Mary and the saints instead of to God, and the placing of trust in the authority of church leaders over and above God's Word.]

2. Why was it important to the Reformation that the common people have the Scriptures in their own language?

[God gives His gift of faith as His Spirit works through His Word.]

3. List some persecutions Christians face today.

[Accept reasonable responses.]

4. Read 1 Peter 1:3–7. How do these verses comfort and encourage Christians who face suffering and persecution?

[In Christ we are never without comfort or hope.]

To Review and Remember

Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. *2 Timothy 4:2*