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Christian History Made Easy (Rose Bible Basics)

21. The Reformation: Building Something Better

This chapter tells the story of the sixteenth-century Reformation through the people who drove it. Corruption, indulgence-selling, and tradition displacing Scripture made reform inevitable, and reform brought division. The author frames the whole movement around one idea: division is never desirable, but sometimes it is necessary to build something better.

Key takeaways

- Martin Luther found peace when he realized 'righteousness' is God's gift, given to sinners by faith in Christ, not earned by works. His 95 Theses (1517) attacked Tetzels indulgence sales and shook the church. At the Diet of Worms he refused to recant.
- Luther and Zwingli both rejected transubstantiation but split over the Lord's Supper: Luther held Christ's body is truly present with the elements (consubstantiation); Zwingli said the bread only symbolizes Christ's body. They never reconciled at Marburg.

- John Calvin wrote the first systematic Protestant theology (Institutes) and led Geneva's reform. His theology centered on the knowledge of God's sovereign grace, not merely predestination.
- The Anabaptists ('Again-Baptizers') taught believers' baptism and that no government should enforce religious belief. They were fiercely persecuted; Felix Manz was the first Protestant-martyred non-Catholic. Menno Simons rescued the movement (Mennonites; later the Amish).
- William Tyndale translated the New Testament into plain English so common people could read it, and was strangled and burned for it. His work became the basis of later authorized English Bibles.
- England's Reformation began with Henry VIII's desire for a male heir and an annulment. He declared himself head of the English church. After 'Bloody Mary,' Elizabeth I set a 'middle way' that still shapes the Anglican Church.
- The Roman Catholic Church responded with its own reform: the Jesuits (Loyola) and the Council of Trent (1545-1563), which ended abuses but affirmed Scripture-plus-tradition and faith-plus-works.

Passages worth keeping

“My conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. God, help me.”

Luther's stand at the Diet of Worms — the courage that defined the Reformation.

“If God spares my life, I will cause the plow-boy to know more about Scripture than you do!”

Tyndale's vow that drove him to put the Bible in ordinary people's hands.

How it connects

The chapter's key concept ties every story together: 'Division is never desirable, but sometimes it is necessary.' The reformers' shared foundation was returning to Scripture's authority and salvation by grace through faith.

Scripture referenced

- **Romans 1:17** -- 'The righteous will live by faith' — the verse that unlocked Luther's understanding of salvation by grace through faith.
- **Matthew 5:33-39** -- Cited for the Anabaptist refusal to swear oaths or fight.
- **Acts 16:30-33; Colossians 2:11-12** -- Given for the study question on believers' vs. infant baptism.