

REFORMATION 500 WEEK 2: JOHN HUSS (1369-1415)

The views of John Wycliffe quickly traveled beyond England, crisscrossing Europe. Around 1400 his ideas began to take root in Bohemia (a region now known as the Czech Republic), where Wycliffe was called the fifth evangelist.

Roman Catholic bishops in Bohemia banned Wycliffe's writings. But John Huss (Jan Hus), a brilliant Bohemian professor and priest, had already embraced Wycliffe's ideas and was regarded as their chief defender. Through his preaching, Huss won almost the whole of Bohemia to his views.

Huss taught many ideas which later became the main teachings of the Reformers. He taught that the Holy Catholic (Universal) Church is the total number of the predestined; and Christ alone is the Head of the universal Church. He taught that one could be in the visible Church and yet not be a real member of it. Huss denied the sacerdotal power of the priesthood to open and shut the kingdom of heaven. The Church can exist without cardinals and a pope, and in fact for hundreds of years there were no cardinals; and before emperor Constantine, there was no pope. Through ignorance and the love of money the pope may err, and has erred. Therefore, the people should obey the church only when the church agreed with the Bible.

This was the time of the Great Schism, when there were two popes, John XXIII in Avignon, and Gregory XII in Rome. Pope John promised indulgences to all who would come to his aid against the king of Naples who was the protector of Pope Gregory. When Huss condemned the selling of indulgences, Pope John excommunicated him. Huss declared his excommunication null and void.

In 1415, an imperial herald asked Huss to defend himself at a church council (hoping to end the Schism) in the German city of Constance. The Holy Roman Emperor (Sigismund) promised to protect Huss on the way to and from the council. Huss accepted his offer, but a few weeks later he was put into prison by Pope John, who applied canon law that heretics have no rights; so, it is okay to deceive them.

Huss was left to languish in prison for more than eight months. Still, he refused to retract his teachings, saying, "I appeal to Jesus Christ, since He will not base His judgment on false witnesses and erring councils but on truth and justice."

Then, without being given an opportunity to defend himself, he was brought from the dungeon to the cathedral in Constance. There, on July 6, 1415, his birthday, in the presence of the bishops and the emperor he was stripped of every article of priestly attire with curses. The cardinals drew demons on a paper hat and jammed it on Huss' head. Huss was led forth from the cathedral to a place before one of the city's gates. As soldiers tied him to a pole and prepared to burn him alive, Huss prayed: "Lord Jesus, please, have mercy on my enemies." He died singing psalms.

In addition to burning Huss, the Council ordered that the writings of Wycliffe should be burned and that his body should be dug up and burned. A crusade was organized against the followers of Huss, and for many years Bohemia was ravaged by war. But the spirit of reform lived on, and when the Reformation began in Germany, opposition to the Roman Church was still strong.

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REFORMATION 500 WEEK 2: Heidelberg Catechism, QUESTIONS 3-5

Based on how the book of Romans is divided, the Heidelberg Catechism is divided into three major sections: (1) **SIN** (Questions 3-11); **SALVATION** (Questions 12-85), and **SERVICE** (Questions 86-129). Today we begin the first main section.

Question 3: From where do you know your misery? **From the law of God.**

The Bible defines sin as “the transgression of the law” (1 John 3:4). Therefore, the law of God (summarized in the Ten Commandments) reveals to us the knowledge that we are sinners: “by the law is the knowledge of sin” (Romans 3:20). “I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, “You shall not covet” (Romans 7:7). “The Law speaks first to our hearts, and demands purity of love and obedience there; for without a pure heart that seeks only God’s glory, neither our words nor our actions will be pure” (Jones, *Study Helps*).

Question 4: What does the law of God require of us? **Christ teaches us in sum, Matthew 22: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.**

Question 4 quotes from Matthew 22:37-40, where Jesus Himself quotes from the Old Testament. The command to love the Lord with all your heart is taken from Deuteronomy 6:5; and the command to love your neighbor is taken from Leviticus 19:8. The phrase *law and prophets* is another way of referring to the entire OT. The entire OT hangs on these two commands: love God and love your neighbor. Everything God commands has to do with either loving Him or loving our neighbor.

Question 5: Can you keep all this perfectly? **No, for I am prone by nature to hate God and my neighbor.**

The law demands whole-hearted love to God and to our neighbor, but we are *prone – we have a natural tendency –* to hate God and our neighbor; “the fleshly mind is enmity [hostile] against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be” (Romans 8:7). We show our hatred of God by disobeying or disregarding His law – which is also written in our conscience (Romans 2:14-15), leaving us no excuse for our disobedience. We do not love our neighbor as our self. We *naturally* hate our neighbor. Prior to salvation, we live “in malice and envy, *hateful* and *hating* one another” (Titus 3:3). Our hatred does not always openly show itself, but it is still there. “The words of his mouth were smoother than butter, but war was in his heart” (Psalm 55:21). We lie to ourselves, thinking we are not a bad person. But the Bible tells us the truth: we cannot keep God’s law perfectly because by nature we are prone to hate God and our neighbor. This truth is designed to make us see our disease and our need for the Great Physician, who came to call sinners to repentance (Mark 2:17).

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