

John Wycliffe: The Morning Star

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Pre-Reformation

INTRODUCTION

1. As we begin the month of October, we are going to look at the men and events that led to the Protestant Reformation on October 31, 1517.
2. To do that we must understand what the pre-reformers and reformers were up against, mainly the Roman Catholic Church
3. The Roman Catholic Church controlled everything during this time
4. At one point there were two popes and that caused issues with the church
5. During John's life, he would see the reign of eight popes: John XXII, Nicholas V, Benedict XII, Clement VI, Innocent VI, Urban V, Gregory XII, and Clement VII. (Hall)
6. Rome held ultimate authority in the lives of all people both on the continent of Europe and in the British Isles. (Hall)
7. The papacy controlled both the Church and State, which were inseparably joined together in medieval England.
8. This meant that there was no personal liberty in everyday life or in religion, in fact the Papacy was universally accepted as the head of a common Christian religion. (Hall)
9. It is estimated that the clergy owned almost half of the estates in the kingdom, therefore they did not see any need for freedom of choice for the common man. (Hall)
10. They were the lords over the whole nation, the people merely being the servants at their beck and call. They dictated what the people did, thought and believed. (Hall)
11. All the pre-reformers and reformers felt the burden of this micromanagement of the people
12. They saw the solution to be a Bible in English
13. That was true of John Wycliffe, who is called "The Morning Star" of the Reformation
14. If the Bible was in the language of the people then they could understand the Gospel for themselves and also provide accountability to the Roman Catholic Church
15. They would also understand that salvation was through the Church
16. It was in Jesus Christ alone

17. And it was Scripture alone that would be the authority in their lives and not the Church
18. John Wycliffe's championed this view of salvation when he said, "Trust wholly in Christ; rely altogether on his sufferings; beware of seeking to be justified in any other way than by his righteousness."
19. This statement threatened the Roman Catholic Church
20. In fact, his teaching left quite an impression on the Catholic church that 43 years after his death, "the council of Constance denounced his teaching and ordered that his bones be dug up, burned, and cast into the river Swift" (<https://www.lordsandladies.org/john-wycliffe.htm>)
21. After this occurred, someone said, "Thus the brook hath conveyed his ashes in Avon; Avon into Severn; Severn into the narrow seas; and they into the main ocean. And thus the ashes of Wycliffe are the emblem of his doctrine which now is dispersed the world over."

· Let's begin our study this morning getting acquainted with John Wycliffe and...

LESSON

I. His Early Life

- a. There is no record of his birth or much of his early years
- b. "He has conventionally been given a birth date of 1324 but Hudson and Kenny state only records "suggest he was born in the mid-1320s". Conti states that he was born "before 1331." (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Wycliffe)
- c. So it is dated between 1320-1330
- d. He was born in Yorkshire, England during the reign of King Edward III
- e. He was born 100 years before the printing press (All books were handwritten and copied) and 100 years before the birth of Martin Luther
- f. He died of a stroke on December 31, 1384 in Lutterworth, Leicestershire
- g. Someone said that John was "the greatest of the English Reformers: he was in truth the first Reformer of Christendom...If Luther and Calvin are the fathers of the Reformation, Wycliffe is its grandfather" (J. H. Merle d'Aubigne, *History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976), 710.)

> He was...

II. His Education

- a. Educated at Oxford University

- b. Like everyone beginning university life he would have immediately taken the Arts course, which included grammar, arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, music, rhetoric, logic, philosophy (both natural and metaphysical), medicine, law, and theology.
 - c. Added to this he studied the Law of Optics, the Genesis of Sleep, and National Economics.
 - d. All instruction would be given in Latin, the language of the Church and, since it controlled education, that of the learned. (Hall)
 - e. He received his doctorate in 1372 (He originally came to Oxford in 1346. The length of time (26 yrs) was due to the eruptions of the Black Death plague that claimed more than 25 million people)
 - f. John was influenced by a number of teachers
 - g. One was Thomas Bradwardine (the Archbishop of Canterbury)
 - h. He taught that salvation was in Jesus Christ alone
 - i. John was also influenced by the writings of Robert Grossetete (the bishop of Lincoln and English Master at Oxford University)
 - j. He wrote against the moral conditions of both the church and state and against the Papacy of Rome.
 - k. He stated if Rome did not return to the Truth, as found in the Holy Scriptures, then she would be the cause of a great schism in the Church.
 - l. This was an exact prediction of the coming Reformation in England.
 - m. Another man who inspired Wycliffe was William of Ockham (1285-1349), a theologian at Oxford University
 - n. He also would have studied “Sentences” by Peter Lombard (1100-1160), an Italian theologian.
 - o. The “Sentences” were a four volume manual of theology that was a standard textbook in the Middle ages.
 - p. It was also a systematic compilation of the teachings of the Church Fathers and theologians..
 - q. John was also influenced by the teachings of Augustine who taught on predestination and rejected the teachings of free will that William of Ockham had taught
 - r. In 1374 he became the rector of the church in Lutterworth
- Wycliffe began to see that the teaching and dogmas of the Church of Rome were at variance with the written Word of God...

III. His Teaching

- a. In 1384 he spoke out against several major Roman Catholic teachings: (this is where I want to spend the rest of our time together)
- > One of those doctrines the Roman Catholic Church taught and he spoke out against was...
- i. Transubstantiation
1. The word “transubstantiation” means “a change of substance”
 2. The Roman Catholic Church taught then and still teaches today “that the whole substance of the bread and wine is changed into the literal physical body and blood of Christ” (Boettner) “during the consecration of the mass” (Kapic)
 3. The belief is that as the priest performs a prayer, the substance or essence of the bread and wine is changed into the actual body and blood of Christ (Kapic). The elements remain the same.
 4. This word, transubstantiation, was in widespread use in the later part of the 12th century and at the Lateran Council of 1215 the Eucharistic elements were said to be ‘transubstantiated’ into the Body and Blood of Christ; but the elaboration of the doctrine was not achieved till after the acceptance of the Aristotelian metaphysics later in the 13th century when it found classic formulation in the teaching of St Thomas Aquinas.
 5. At the Council of Trent (sess. 13, cap. 4) the medieval doctrine was reaffirmed, but with a minimum of technical philosophical language;
 6. ‘transubstantiation’ was confirmed as the ‘most apt’ term to describe the conversion. (Livingstone)
 7. Wycliffe rejected this and said “it was against Scripture” (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Wycliffe)
 8. He “argued that Christ was figuratively but not essentially present” (<https://www.learnreligions.com/john-wycliffe-biography-699998>)
 9. But the Roman Catholic Church fought back and was persistent in it’s teaching
 10. In their latest revision of their 1994 Catechism of the Catholic Church, #1376 says, “The Council of Trent summarizes the Catholic faith by declaring: “Because Christ our Redeemer said that it was truly his body that he was offering under the species of bread, it has always been the conviction of the Church of God, and this holy Council now declares again, that by the consecration of the bread and wine there takes place a change of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the body of Christ our Lord and of the whole substance of the wine into the substance of his blood. This change the holy Catholic Church has fittingly and properly called transubstantiation.” (Jones, Richard F. Understanding Roman Catholicism (p. 64). Richard F Jones. Kindle Edition.)

11. Catechism #1333 says, “At the heart of the Eucharistic celebration are the bread and wine that, by the words of Christ and the invocation of the Holy Spirit, become Christ’s Body and Blood.” (Jones)
12. Catechism #1377 specifies when Christ comes into the eucharist and how long he stays: “The Eucharistic presence of Christ begins at the moment of the consecration and endures as long as the Eucharistic species subsist. Christ is present whole and entire in each of the species and whole and entire in each of their parts, in such a way that the breaking of the bread does not divide Christ.” (Jones)
13. Catholic theologian Ludwig Ott writes, “The body and the blood of Christ together with His soul and His divinity and therefore the whole Christ are truly present in the Eucharist” (*Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma* [St. Louis: B. Herder, 1954], 382).
14. The problems with this view:
 - a. It views the work of Christ as unfinished, the sacrifice continuing in the Mass. Yet Christ declared His work completed ([Jn.19:30](#)) as did also the writer of Hebrews ([Heb.10:10-14](#)).
 - b. Christ’s human body would have to be omnipresent if this teaching were true; however, Christ’s human body is localized in heaven according to [Acts 7:56](#), Stephen said as he was being martyred, “Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.”
 - c. In instituting the Supper, Christ used a common figure of speech — the metaphor (‘This is my body...my blood’) — in referring to the bread and cup. He was physically present yet distinct from the elements when He referred to them as His body and blood. Similarly, in the [John 6](#) passage, Jesus used a powerful metaphor (‘eat my flesh...drink my blood’) to vividly picture a saving faith relationship to Himself. To insist that these expressions are literal language is to do violence to fundamental hermeneutical principles.
 - d. It was forbidden for Jews to drink blood ([Lev.17:10-16](#)), yet this is what Jesus would be asking them to do if transubstantiation was what He intended. (Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology*)
15. The Roman Catholic Church says this is the meaning of John 6:53-54, “53 So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves. 54 “He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”
16. But is that what this verse means?
17. If Jesus is teaching transubstantiation, then He is teaching cannibalism, which is forbidden in Genesis 9:4 and Leviticus 17:12.
18. Jesus was not talking about physically eating His flesh and drinking His blood as is seen in verses 63-69.

19. He is using metaphorical language to speak of the necessity of accepting His sacrificial death (See also [John 6:63-69](#); [14:21-23](#))
20. The NT frequently uses the term “blood” as a graphic metonym to speak of Christ’s death on the cross as the final sacrifice for sin
- a. [Acts 20:28](#), “Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.”
 - b. [Romans 5:9](#), “Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him.”
 - c. [Ephesians 1:7](#), “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace”
 - d. To drink blood or eat meat with blood still in it was strictly prohibited by the OT law - [Leviticus 17:10-14](#), “10 ‘And any man from the house of Israel, or from the aliens who sojourn among them, who eats any blood, I will set My face against that person who eats blood and will cut him off from among his people. 11 ‘For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement.’ 12 “Therefore I said to the sons of Israel, ‘No person among you may eat blood, nor may any alien who sojourns among you eat blood.’ 13 “So when any man from the sons of Israel, or from the aliens who sojourn among them, in hunting catches a beast or a bird which may be eaten, he shall pour out its blood and cover it with earth. 14 “For as for the life of all flesh, its blood is identified with its life. Therefore I said to the sons of Israel, ‘You are not to eat the blood of any flesh, for the life of all flesh is its blood; whoever eats it shall be cut off.’”
 - e. What did Jesus mean by this then?
 - i. It means to appropriate His life and the saving merit of His death
 1. It should be noted that the verbs translated “eat” and “drink” are aorists, not present tense verbs
 2. That suggests a one-time appropriation of Christ at salvation, not the continual eating and drinking of His body and blood portrayed by the Roman Catholic Mass (MacArthur)
 3. Jesus was not literally calling for them to eat His flesh or drink His blood
 4. [Luke 9:23-24](#), “23 And He was saying to them all, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. 24 “For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it.”

5. This is what is meant by appropriating the life and death of Christ to your life

6. This is what it means to follow Christ

ii. It means to believe in a saving way.

1. It's clear from verse 29 that this is another way of calling them to believe

2. What does God require? "That you believe in Him whom He has sent"

3. He stated it again in verse 35: "Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst.'

4. ***It's worth noting that eating His flesh and drinking His blood issues in the same results as believing which gives evidence that He is speaking metaphorically and not literally.***

a. John 5:24, "24 "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life."

b. John 6:53-54, "53 So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves. 54 "He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day."

5. ***The promises are the same for eating His flesh and drinking His blood as they are for believing***

6. ***Jesus' point in verses 53-58 was an analogy that has spiritual, rather than literal, significance: just as eating and drinking are necessary for physical life, so also is belief in His sacrificial death on the cross necessary for eternal life.***(MacArthur)

7. I conclude that He is speaking of the same thing

· So what does the Bible teach about the Lord's Supper?

· I believe the Bible teaches the Memorial View which says "there was no real presence of Christ [in the Communion] but only a spiritual fellowship with Christ by those who partake in faith"

· This view was held by Baptists and the Mennonites but is also referred to as the Zwinglian view because the Swiss Reformer Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531) taught this view in contrast to the other views that existed at this time

· Essential to the memorial view is the notion that the bread and the cup are figurative only; they are a memorial to the death of Christ.

- While Zwingli acknowledged a spiritual presence of Christ for those who partake in faith, Anabaptists rejected the idea of Christ being present in the Lord's Supper any more than He would be present anywhere else.
- The memorial view emphasizes that the participants demonstrate faith in the death of Christ through this symbolic activity. (Enns)
- I would like to use our remaining time to talk about...

IV. What the Bible Teaches About the Lord's Supper

- a. There are 5 references to the Lord's Supper in the NT
 - i. [Matthew 26:17-30](#).
 - ii. [Mark 14:1-26](#).
 - iii. [Luke 22:1-20](#).
 - iv. [John 13](#).
 - v. [1 Corinthians 11:23-34](#) which “many conservative scholars agree that 1 Corinthians was probably written before any of the Gospels. If that is true, Paul's account here is the first biblical record of the institution of the Lord's Supper, and includes direct quotations from Jesus. It is perfectly consistent with the gospel accounts, but Paul's revelation most likely was received from the Lord directly, not through the other apostles (cf. [Gal.1:10-12](#)), even though the terms here speak of a chain of tradition that had come from the Lord to Paul and then to the Corinthians” (Ibid., MacArthur, 1 Corinthians, p.271).
- b. All the Gospel accounts tell us this is the Passover or the Feast of Unleavened Bread
 - i. The Passover began the day before the Feast of Unleavened Bread
 - ii. The Mosaic law required that sacrificial lambs for Passover be selected on the tenth day of the first month and that the lamb be kept in the household until it was sacrificed on the fourteenth ([Ex.12:2-6](#)).
 - iii. During this time over “250,000 sacrificial lambs were slain during a typical Passover in Jesus' day.
 - iv. And because tradition required that no fewer than ten people or more than twenty were to eat of one lamb, the number of celebrants easily would have exceeded two million.
 - v. Because the lambs had to be slaughtered within a twenty-four hour period, an enormous amount of blood poured from the altar site in a very short period of time” (Ibid., MacArthur, Matthew, p.140).

- vi. Warren Wiersbe writes, “Peter and John would have had to secure the bread and bitter herbs, as well as the wine, for the feast. They would have had to find a perfect lamb, and then have had the lamb slain in the court of the temple and the blood put on the altar. The lamb would be roasted whole, and then the feast would be ready.”
- vii. It is also during this time that we read in [Luke 22](#) where Jesus says, “the hand of the one betraying Me is with Me on the table” (v.21).
- viii. The disciples, according to verse 23 began to “discuss among themselves which one of them it might be who was going to do this thing.”
- ix. Verse 24 says there was also a “dispute among them as to which one of them was regarded to be greatest.”
- x. “In the year Jesus was crucified (whether taken as A.D. 30 or 33), the tenth of Nisan was the Monday of Passover week.
- xi. Therefore, although the incident is not mentioned in the gospels, the disciples would have selected a lamb on the day of Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem, perhaps keeping it at the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus in Bethany, where they were staying” (Ibid., MacArthur, Matthew, p.140).
- xii. Now when Paul writes about the Lord’s Supper to the Corinthians, he is correcting their perversion of it.
- xiii. Some were “taking his own supper ahead of others; and one is hungry and another drunk” ([1 Cor.11:21](#), NKJV).
- xiv. And not only that there were “divisions” in the church (v.18).
- xv. Paul was not happy and nor was the Lord Jesus who was the Passover Lamb when He was crucified.
- xvi. Paul says, “What! Do you not have houses in which to eat and drink? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you? In this I will not praise you.” (v.22).

> **Now he launches into...**

c. The purpose of the Lord’s Supper ([1 Corinthians 11:20-26](#))

i. Fellowship (vv.20-22)

In Verses 20-22, the church came “together” to eat the “love-feast” ([Jude 12](#)) or Supper which consisted of the evening meal followed by the Lord’s Supper or Communion.

The love-feast was a place of fellowship with other believers. But the Corinthians were perverting it. These abuses “eventually forced the two to be separated in order to protect the Communion. The love feast soon disappeared altogether” (Ibid., MacArthur, 1 Corinthians, p.269).

ii. Historical (v.23)

1. “For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you.”

- a. “Received” Gr.paralambano (aor.act.ind.), means, “To take, receive, to take near, or to oneself” (Zodhiates).
- b. Paul is making a “direct claim to revelation from the Lord Jesus on the origin of the Lord’s Supper” (AT Robertson, *Robertson’s Word Pictures*).

2. “That the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread”

This gives “the historical setting, which many of the believers may not have known, because...probably none of gospels was yet written” (Ibid., MacArthur, 1 Corinthians, p.271).

- a. “The Passover meal began with the host's pronouncing a blessing over the first cup of red wine and passing it to the others present.
- b. Four cups of wine were passed around during the meal. After the first cup was drunk bitter herbs dipped in a fruit sauce were eaten and a message was given on the meaning of Passover. Then the first part of a hymn, the Hallel (which means 'praise' and is related to hallelujah, 'praise ye the Lord'), was sung. The Hallel is comprised of [Psalms 113-118](#), and the first part sung was usually 113 or 113 and 114.
- c. After the second cup was passed, the host would break and pass around the unleavened bread. Then the meal proper, which consisted of the roasted sacrificial lamb, was eaten.
- d. The third cup, after prayer, was then passed and the rest of the Hallel was sung.
- e. The fourth cup, which celebrated the coming kingdom, was drunk immediately before leaving.
- f. It was the third cup that Jesus blessed and that became the cup of Communion.

'And in the same way He took the cup after they had eaten, saying, 'This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood' ([Luke 22:20](#)).

After Jesus gave some brief words of warning, rebuke, and instruction (vv.21-38), the meal was concluded with the singing of a hymn ([Matt. 26:30](#))” (Ibid., MacArthur, 1 Corinthians, p.271).

iii. Obedience (vv.24-25) [“do this”]

1. This was instituted by Jesus

2. This is a “command from the lips of our Lord Himself. Sharing in the Lord’s Supper is therefore not an option for believers.”

3. We must have Communion on a regular basis if we are to be faithful to the Lord who bought us through the act we are called to remember.
4. Not to partake of the Lord's Supper is disobedience and a sin" (Ibid., MacArthur, 1 Corinthians, p.272).
5. The specifics of what Jesus did are found in verses 24-25

a. He first gave thanks

"Thanks" is a participle of eucharisteo, from which we get Eucharist, the name by which some Christians refer to the Lord's Supper.

b. He "took bread" (v.23)... "broke it" (v.24).

- i. The "bread" that had represented the Exodus now came to represent the body of Jesus Christ, the Messiah.
- ii. To the Jewish mind the body represented the whole person, not just the physical body.
- iii. The word "broken" does not appear in the best manuscripts or in most modern translations.
- iv. "Though the Romans frequently broke the legs of crucified victims in order to hasten death as an act of mercy, John specifically tells us that Jesus' legs were not broken...(John 19:33, 36)" (Ibid., MacArthur, 1 Corinthians, p.272).
- v. The best reading is "This is My body, which is for you."
- vi. "For you" are two of the most beautiful words in all of Scripture. Jesus gave His body, His entire incarnate life, for us who believe in Him.
- vii. Romans 5:8, "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

c. He "took the cup after supper" (v.25).

The *cup* had represented the lamb's blood smeared on the doorposts and lintels now came to represent the blood of the Lamb of God, shed for the salvation of the world.

iv. Remembrance (vv.24-25)

1. "Do this in remembrance of Me" is mentioned 2 times.
2. "For the Hebrew to remember meant much more than simply to bring something to mind, merely to recall that it happened.
3. To truly remember is to go back in one's mind and recapture as much of the reality and significance of an event or experience as one possibly can.

4. To remember Jesus Christ and His sacrifice on the cross is to relive with Him His life, agony, suffering, and death as much as is humanly possible.
5. When we partake of the Lord's Supper we do not offer a sacrifice again; we remember His once-for-all sacrifice for us and rededicate ourselves to His obedient service" (Ibid., MacArthur, 1 Corinthians, pp.272-273).

v. Proclamation (v.26)

1. To one another
2. To the world

CONCLUSION

1. Paul concludes with verses 27-34 that speak of examining yourself first so that you not eat and drink judgment on yourself.
2. As you can see from Wycliffe's stand against transubstantiation, we see his commitment to the authority of the Bible
3. These convictions caused him to speak out against other unbiblical practices of the Roman Catholic Church
4. We will look at these in our next time together as well as his greatest work
5. As we bring our time together to a close, I want to ask, "Do you share the same commitment as Wycliffe?"
6. He said, "I am ready to defend my convictions even unto death.... I have followed the Sacred Scriptures and the holy doctors." (Boettner)
7. Pope Gregory XI issued five bulls (church edicts) against Wycliffe, in which Wycliffe was accused on 18 counts and was called "the master of errors. (Boettner)
8. These were the underlying teachings that 150 years later brought about the Protestant Reformation
9. And though he lived long after Wycliffe's death, Martin Luther, too, felt an obligation to recognize the pioneering reforms of John Wycliffe.
10. Luther stood on the shoulders of Hus, who stood on the shoulders of Wycliffe.
11. Hus, Luther, and the other Reformers were indebted to him. So are we. (Nichols)
12. Aren't you thankful for men like Wycliffe?
13. A man of conviction
14. Where are men like this today?
15. No wonder he was called "the morning star of the Reformation"

16. He brought light in a time when darkness dominated
17. Wycliffe was “situated historically between the darkness and the morning light” (Nichols)
18. In 1415, the Council of Constance, condemned Wycliffe a heretic
19. But their condemnation could not stop what was coming
20. “This Morning Star shone brightly against the horizon, signaling the soon coming of daylight” (Nichols)
21. Do you know the Gospel that men like Wycliffe vigorously proclaimed?
22. Over 2000 years ago, a carpenter named Jesus, came into this world, born of a virgin, for one purpose
23. [Matthew 1:21](#), “...He will save His people from their sins.”
24. If you have never believed and repented from your sin and come to Jesus, who alone, paid your penalty for breaking His law, come right now!
25. Let’s pray (Lord’s Supper)

Exported from [Logos Bible Software](#), 7:34 AM October 2, 2022.