

CORNERSTONECONNECTIONS
JULY 25 2026

standing for the right

Scripture Story: Romans 1–3; John 15:19, 20.
Commentary: *The Great Controversy* (or *Love Under Fire),* chapters 7, 8.
Key Text: Romans 1:17.

PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS

Martin Luther once was so depressed over a prolonged period that one day his wife came downstairs wearing all black.

Martin Luther said, "Who died?"

She said, "God has."

"God hasn't died," he said.

She replied, "Well, live like it and act like it."[1]

Even the eminent Reformer Martin Luther was a real man who struggled with the same things that we all do. This is important to remember when teaching about this man of great faith and courage. For when you expose Luther's humanness students can see him as he really was—an ordinary guy that God used to do extraordinary things. Similarly, your Sabbath School class is full of ordinary kids that God wants to use in extraordinary ways. As you paint Martin Luther as a real person, full of faults and doubts, you will showcase God's ability to use fallible, damaged sinners to accomplish His grand purposes.

Inherent in Luther's story are many great themes of Scripture. You could explore his theology and highlight some of the most important and basic tenets of Christianity—righteousness by faith, the experience of salvation, and the authority of the Bible. Or you may opt to highlight some of the more nuanced learnings that Ellen White points out—the importance of parents training their children, Christian education, being willing to die for your convictions, and the importance of prayer. Whatever track you take, there are plenty of teachable gems from this ordinary man whom God used to change the course of history.

II. TARGET

The students will:

- Be exposed to the history of the Reformation. *(Know)*
- Sense the importance of building one's life on the unshakable foundation of Jesus Christ and His Word. *(Feel)*
- Be challenged to act with the same conviction as Martin Luther did to the doctrine of righteousness by faith. *(Respond)*

III. EXPLORE

The Experience of Salvation, Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Beliefs, No. 10

"In infinite love and mercy God made Christ, who knew no sin, to be sin for us, so that in Him we might be made the righteousness of God. Led by the Holy Spirit we sense our need, acknowledge our sinfulness, repent of our transgressions, and exercise faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord, Substitute and Example. This saving faith comes through the divine power of the Word and is the gift of God's grace. Through Christ we are justified, adopted as God's sons and daughters, and delivered from the lordship of sin. Through the Spirit we are born again and sanctified; the Spirit renews our minds, writes God's law of love in our hearts, and we are given the power to live a holy life. Abiding in Him we become partakers of the divine nature and have the assurance of salvation now and in the judgment" (Gen. 3:15; Isa. 45:22; 53; Jer.

31:31-34; Ezek. 33:11; 36:25-27; Hab. 2:4; Mark 9:23, 24; John 3:3-8, 16; 16:8; Rom. 3:21-26; 8:1-4, 14-17; 5:6-10; 10:17; 12:2; 2 Cor. 5:17-21; Gal. 1:4; 3:13, 14, 26; 4:4-7; Eph. 2:4-10; Col. 1:13, 14; Titus 3:3-7; Heb. 8:7-12; 1 Peter 1:23; 2:21, 22; 2 Peter 1:3, 4; Rev. 13:8).

TEACHING

I. GETTING STARTED

Activity

Refer the students to the What Do You Think? *section of their lesson. Using the questions in the Sabbath section under* Connecting to Life, *let the students discuss their experience in conducting the survey. If the students did not do the activity on their own, do the survey together in class.*

Illustration

Remember those old-fashioned church picnics? The pastor would announce, "Let's all meet at Glendale Park tomorrow at 1:00 p.m. Bring your own supper."

At the last minute you decide to go. Scrounging through the refrigerator, you find some tired slices of bread, a rusty head of lettuce, and just enough guacamole for your bread slices. You slap together a sandwich and hurry to the park.

Finally the pastor calls everyone together and blesses the food. You disappear into the shadows and plop down on a rickety picnic table. There you slump, ready to bite into your sorry sandwich when out of the corner of your eye you see something that makes you smile.

Here comes a sweet little grandma with a white bun on the top of her head. She's carrying a picnic basket the size of a Sherman tank. She comes to your picnic table and unfolds a red-and-white checkered Gingham tablecloth right up to your elbow!

And there you sit with your little sandwich.

She unpacks her feast. She's got blackberry cobbler, blueberry pie, potato salad, roasted corn, juice, peaches, pears—it's a feast that defies the senses.

And there you sit with your little sandwich.

Just then, she looks over at you and says, "What you say we just throw it all together? I've got plenty of cobbler and corn and pie—and besides, I love sandwiches." You came with very little, but you will eat as a rich person.[2]

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story

So God comes to you sitting on that rickety picnic table called life. He unfolds His white linen tablecloth right up to your elbow. He looks down at you clutching your sandwich and He says, "Why don't we just throw it all together? You need forgiveness? I've got more forgiveness than you could ever use in one lifetime."

Ellen White wrote: "Christ was treated as we deserve, that we might be treated as He deserves. He was condemned for our sins, in which He had no share, that we might be justified by His righteousness, in which we had no share. He suffered the death which was ours, that we might receive the life which was His. 'With his stripes we are healed.'"[3]

Martin Luther put it this way: "This is the mystery of the riches of divine grace for sinners; for by a wonderful exchange our sins are now not ours but Christ's, and Christ's righteousness is not Christ's but ours."[4]

This was the core message that got Martin Luther in trouble. The organized church postured that we must earn our salvation by purchasing indulgences (forgiveness). Luther contended that righteousness comes only by faith—freely for all who ask.

Out of the Story for Teachers

After you read the Into the Story *section with your students, use the following in your own words to process it with them.*

John 15:19, 20

- Why does the world hate Jesus?
- How does Jesus' statement "No servant is greater than his master" relate to persecution and fitting in with the world?

Romans 1:16, 17

- What is righteousness?
- What is the relationship between righteousness and faith? How can you strengthen your faith?

Romans 3:21-31

- Compare the New International Version (from *Into the Story*) with the King James Version below to write a definition of the word "propitiation."
- King James Version: "Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God" (Romans 3:25).

Definition of "propitiation": _____

_____

_____

- Why does faith not nullify the law (verse 31)?
- Summarize Paul's conclusion about righteousness and the law._____

_____

_____

Sharing Context and Background

Use the following excerpts and quick facts as a reference for clarity on a few of the key people in the story of Martin Luther.

Martin Luther's parents and family—"Luther's parents bestowed great care upon the education and training of their children."[5]

Martin Luther was born to Hans Luder and his wife Margarethe on November 10, 1483, in Eisleben, Germany. Hans Luder was a leaseholder of copper mines and smelters and served as one of four citizen representatives on the local council. Religious scholar Martin Marty describes Luther's mother as a hardworking woman of "trading-class stock and middling means." He had several brothers and sisters, and is known to have been close to one of them, Jacob.[6]

Staupitz—"When it appeared to Luther that all was lost, God raised up a friend and helper for him. The pious Staupitz opened the Word of God to Luther's mind and bade him look away from himself, cease the contemplation of infinite punishment for the violation of God's law, and look to Jesus, his sin-pardoning Savior."[7]

Johann von Staupitz was a theologian, university preacher, and vicar-general of the Augustinian Order in Germany. Luther himself remarked, "If it had not been for Dr. Staupitz, I should have sunk in hell." Although he died a Catholic monk and repudiated the Protestant Reformation, he was later commemorated as a priest in the Calendar of Saints of the Lutheran Church.[8]

Tetzel—"The official appointed to conduct the sale of indulgences in Germany—Tetzel by name—had been convicted of the basest offenses against society and against the law of God; but having escaped the punishment due for his crimes, he was employed to further the mercenary and unscrupulous projects of the pope."[9]

Johann Tetzel was a German Dominican preacher remembered for selling indulgences and for a couplet attributed to him. In 1517 Tetzel was trying to raise money for the ongoing reconstruction of St. Peter's Basilica, and it is believed that Martin Luther was inspired to write his 95 theses, in part, because of Tetzel's actions during this period of time.[10]

Melanchthon—"God's providence sent Melanchthon to Wittenberg. Young in years, modest and diffident in his manners, Melanchthon's sound judgment, extensive knowledge, and winning eloquence, combined with the purity and uprightness of his character, won universal admiration and esteem."[11]

Philip Melanchthon supported Luther at the Leipzig debates with Johann Eck in 1519. In the same year he received his Bachelor of Theology degree, his thesis supporting many of the critical points of Luther's

Teaching From the Lesson

Refer your students to the other sections of their lesson.

- **Key Text**
  Invite students to share the Key Text *with the class if they have committed it to memory.*
- **Flashlight**
  Read the Flashlight *statement, pointing out that most of the time it is from the commentary on this week's story found in the book* The Great Controversy. *Ask what relationship they see between the statement and what they have just discussed from* Out of the Story.
- **Punch Lines**
  Point out to your students the verses listed in their lesson that relate to this week's story. Have them share the verse that spoke most directly to them and allow them to explain why they chose it.
- **Further Insight**
  Ask them how the quote in Further Insight *conveys the point of the story in this lesson.*

Tips for Top-Notch Teaching

RABBI 101

Teaching History With a Box

You can have your students each use a tissue box and make a diorama to teach history. With this approach students research historical events and share their findings with others in the class.

Have students glue their completed materials to the appropriate side of the tissue box. Allow students to be creative, while being historically correct.

For example, you can teach about the Diet of Worms by having your youth group work individually or in a group on tissue boxes in the following way:

- *Top:* Put a title and/or an artist's rendering of the event.
- *Bottom:* Student name and resources used in research of the Diet of Worms.
- *Side 1:* A brief description, including facts about the Diet of Worms.
- *Side 2:* A visual arts representation of the historical event; such as a diagram, pictures, collage, etc.
- *Side 3:* Quotes from Ellen White about the Diet of Worms.
- *Side 4:* How the Diet of Worms has impacted Christian history.

reform: justification by faith, and opposition to papal authority.

III. CLOSING

Activity

Re-create a modern-day court scene that puts Martin Luther on trial. Have your students research the primary issues that the church had with Luther and then attempt to prosecute him. Minimally you should set up the following characters in the drama:

- Martin Luther (defendant)
- Defense attorney
- Prosecuting attorney
- Judge
- The rest of the class can serve on the jury.

Summary

Break the class into small groups and give each group a 3" x 5" card. On one side place one of the questions below. Have the groups agree on a one-sentence answer to write on the back side.

1. What does the story of Martin Luther teach us about Christianity?
2. What does the story of Martin Luther teach us about conviction?
3. What does the story of Martin Luther teach us about salvation?
4. What does the story of Martin Luther teach us about the Bible?
5. What does the story of Martin Luther teach us about Christian education?

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[1] Robert Russell, "Releasing Resentment," *Preaching Today,* Tape no. 136.

[2] Parable adapted as it was told by Joseph Aldrich, former president of the neoevangelical, psychologized Multnomah School of the Bible in Portland, Oregon.

[3] Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1898), p. 25.

[4] As quoted at www.enjoyinggodministries.com/article/15-the-theology-of-luther/.

[5] Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy,* p. 121.

[6] Adapted from sthweb.bu.edu/index.php?option=com_awiki&view=mediawiki&article=Martin_E._Marty&Itemid=176.

[7] Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy,* p. 123.

[8] Adapted from en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Johann_von_Staupitz.

[9] Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy,* p. 127.

[10] Adapted from en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Johann_Tetzel.

[11] Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy,* p. 134.



Remind the students about the reading plan that will take them through the inspired commentary of the Bible, the Conflict of the Ages Series. The reading that goes with this lesson is *The Great Controversy* (or *Love Under Fire),* chapters 7, 8.

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STUDENT LESSON

Scripture Story: Romans 1–3; John 15:19, 20.
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standing for the right



Photo by Luis Guerra, Jr.

flashlight

"The fear of the Lord dwelt in the heart of Luther, enabling him to maintain his steadfastness of purpose and leading him to deep humility before God. He had an abiding sense of his dependence upon divine aid, and he did not fail to begin each day with prayer, while his heart was continually breathing a petition for guidance and support. 'To pray well,' he often said, 'is the better half of study'" (*The Great Controversy,* p. 122).

keytext

"For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: 'The righteous will live by faith.'"

(Romans 1:17, NIV)

what do you think?

Conduct a survey asking respondents what percentage (0-100) of truth they would ascribe to each statement. Invite your friends to conduct the survey as well. Calculate the average for each answer. Compare and discuss your findings with your friends' results.

What percentage of truth would you give to each statement?

____ There is no absolute truth.
____ We can get to heaven through an equal combination of faith and works.
____ Christianity is a cause worth dying for.
____ The Bible contains mistakes, but it is still the Word of God.
____ People are better Christians today than they were in the past.

did you know?

When Martin Luther married, neither he nor his bride, Katherine von Bora, felt "in love." Katherine was still getting over a broken engagement to a man she truly loved. Martin admitted, "I am not 'in love' or burning with desire." Yet their love for one another and for others flourished throughout their 20-year marriage.

They regularly took in so many sick and dying people, their house had to be quarantined long after the plague of 1527 ended. In 1541 a transient woman came to their home. Martin and Katherine fed and housed her, only to discover she had lied and stolen. Even on his wedding night, Luther couldn't refuse a person in need. At 11:00 p.m., after all the guests had left, Radical Reformer Andreas Karlstadt knocked at the door. Largely because Luther fiercely opposed him, Karlstadt had fled town. But now, when Karlstadt was fleeing the Peasants' War and needed shelter, Luther took him in.[1]

INTO THE STORY

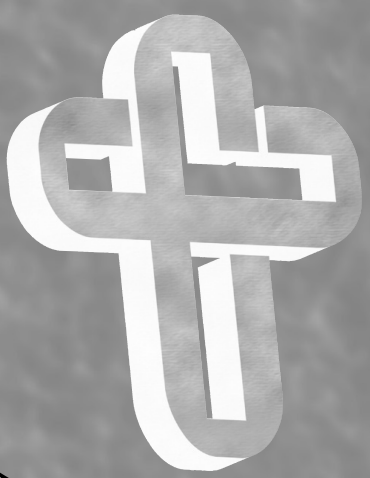
"If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. Remember what I told you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also."

"I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: 'The righteous will live by faith.'"

"But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—he did it to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

"Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. Because of what law? The law that requires works? No, because of the law that requires faith. For we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law. Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too, since there is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith. Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law."

(John 15:19, 20; Romans 1:16, 17; Romans 3:21-31, NIV)



OUT OF THE STORY

Why do you think the world hates Jesus and His followers? What does it mean to "belong" to Jesus?

What do these passages teach us about the Christian faith?

What do these passages teach us about the experience of salvation?

How do these passages inform us about the gospel?

What is it about the gospel that would make someone ashamed of it? How have you addressed that in your life?

What is the relationship between keeping the law and being saved?

The book of Romans was life-changing for Martin Luther. Why do you think this was the case? Are the concepts in Romans equally life-transforming for you? If so, why? If not, why not?

punch lines

"See, the enemy is puffed up; his desires are not upright—but the righteous person will live by his faithfulness" **(Habakkuk 2:4, NIV).**

"For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people" **(1 Peter 2:15, NIV).**

"An honest witness tells the truth, but a false witness tells lies" **(Proverbs 12:17, NIV).**

"Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord" **(Acts 3:19, NIV).**

"Do you see what this means—all these pioneers who blazed the way, all these veterans cheering us on? It means we'd better get on with it. Strip down, start running—and never quit! No extra spiritual fat, no parasitic sins. Keep your eyes on Jesus, who both began and finished this race we're in. Study how he did it. Because he never lost sight of where he was headed—that exhilarating finish in and with God—he could put up with anything along the way: Cross, shame, whatever. And now he's there, in the place of honor, right alongside God. When you find yourselves flagging in your faith, go over that story again, item by item, that long litany of hostility he plowed through. That will shoot adrenaline into your souls!" **(Hebrews 12:1-3, *The Message*).**

further insight

"The spirit of the world is no more in harmony with the spirit of Christ today than in earlier times, and those who preach the Word of God in its purity will be received with no greater favor now than then."—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy,* p. 144

Sabbath

Read John 8:32.

After doing the survey in the *What Do You Think?* section, meet with friends who also surveyed others and discuss the following questions:

- What was the most interesting response you got? Why?
- Which statement got the most diverse answers? Which one got the most similar responses? How would you explain the responses?
- Suppose you surveyed Martin Luther. What percentages do you think he would have given to each statement?
- How did the average percentages for each statement compare with your own answers?

Sunday

Read Romans 1-3 and reflect: How have I been set aside for the gospel? What does this mean for me today? (Remember, you have Notes pages in the back of your study guide to write longer answers.)

In what areas does my faith need to be strengthened? What can I do today to strengthen my faith?

If God were to ask me, "Why should I let you into heaven?" how would I respond?

How would I explain the true meaning of Christian faith to an unbeliever?

If I had to explain the gospel solely based on Romans 1-3, what would I say?

Monday

Read Romans 1:17.

Review the *Key Text* and then consider this scenario detailed in Mark Finley's book *Solid Ground.*

Two men confronted each other. One a prison guard, Grecu, and the other a prisoner, Richards Wurmbrand, who was pale and weak from weeks of torture.

Grecu yelled, "Enough! We know you have been communicating in code with the other prisoners. We want to know exactly what you have said. Here is some paper for you to write your confession.

Richard knew anything he wrote could and likely would be twisted and used as evidence that he was a spy.

This is what he finally wrote: "I am a disciple of Christ, who has given us love for our enemies. I have never spoken against the Communists. I understand them and pray for their conversion so that they will become my brothers in faith."

The guard's heart was touched, and Richard's confession led to many discussions about Jesus and the meaning of life.

No matter where you are, your testimony is a powerful witness of Christ's love. Trust Him whatever your circumstances are. He is there for you and will use you to help others.[2]

What does it mean to you to have faith?

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Tuesday

Read Habakkuk 2:4.

Compare and contrast Ellen White's statement in the *Flashlight* section with this text: "See, the enemy is puffed up; his desires are not upright—but the righteous person will live by his faithfulness" (Habakkuk 2:4, NIV).

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Wednesday

Choose one of the *Punch Lines* and incorporate it into a morning and evening prayer to use this week to begin and end your day.

Thursday

Read Ephesians 2:4-10.

How can I experience salvation today?

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_____

Friday

Read Romans 1:17.

How does this text compare to Hebrews 12:1-3? What do these texts tell you about "living by faith"?

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[1] "Martin Luther—The Later Years and Legacy," *Christian History,* Issue 39.

[2] Adapted from Mark Finley, *Solid Ground,* pp. 288, 289.

this week's reading*

The Great Controversy (or *Love Under Fire),* chapters 7, 8.

**Love Under Fire* is a special adaptation of *The Great Controversy*, created for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and Pacific Press. Get more information about it at http://www.cornerstoneconnections.net/article/191/about-us/conflict-of-the-ages-companion-books#.URlhF1rBO9s. By following the weekly reading plan, you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages Series each year.