

Getting Off Track

by Wayne Goff

Most everyone is familiar with the Protestant reformer, **Martin Luther**. He was a Catholic priest who “protested” the numerous corruptions within the Catholic church when such a protest could get one killed. He is famous for posting his “Ninety-Five Theses” on the door of the Catholic Church in Wittenburg, Germany. He followed up his plea with the offer to debate anyone who might disagree with his objections. One must appreciate such convictions. How many people do you know who will place their lives on the line for their sincere faith?

Unfortunately, Mr. Luther never intended to leave the Catholic Church -- he only wanted to **reform** it. For anyone well-versed in the New Testament, Mr. Luther was not going far enough. Part of the reason for this was his stance on biblical authority. Mr. Luther believed one could **practice** a thing *religiously* so long as it was **not expressly forbidden**. Hebrews 7:14 easily refutes that position. Martin Luther died without seeing his beloved *reforms* enacted, and his followers (disciples?) began the Lutheran Church -- in spite of his express denunciation of just such a thing.

Getting Off Track?

So how did Mr. Luther’s followers get off track? Well, Martin Luther began his objections to Catholicism based upon the Scriptures. His followers began to squabble among themselves over the *interpretation* of certain Scriptures. So far so good (cf. Acts 15:2).

Unfortunately, the followers of Luther had been asked for a statement of faith by Charles V in 1530 in an effort to realign these protestors with the Catholic Church. It is believed that one of Luther’s able disciples, Melancthon, formulated this statement of faith, and it became known as “the Augsburg Confession.”

Unfortunately, after Luther’s death, Lutherans began to make loyalty to the creed a test of fellowship and as a result most of their *reform movement* was lost! Once man begins to argue **for men** rather than **for God** and the Word of God, things go wrong quickly! They got off track in more ways than one from their original goal.

The Same Error Repeated

Many denominational theologians today repeat the same mistake. They fill their minds with some version of *Systematic Theology* (formulated faith written by men) and argue loud and long for that rather than for the Word of God. They *believe* that they are arguing for the Faith of the Gospel, no doubt, but their mistake is easily seen by others. Their minds are *tainted* by that system of biblical interpretation, and when “push comes to shove” they accept their “*version*” of biblical interpretation over the Bible itself!

Jesus faced the exact same issue with the Pharisees in the New Testament. They asked Jesus the question, “*Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders?*” (Matt. 15:2). “**Tradition of the elders**” equaled “accepted interpretation” or “status quo” or “the orthodox view.” You see, you are not to question the authority of those in charge! You don’t pull on Superman’s cape, so to speak.

But Jesus’ answer brings us all back to the right track of thinking: “*Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition?*” (Matt. 15:3). Their interpretation negated the truth of the very Scriptures they *thought* they were defending! (see Matt. 15:3-6).

The application? Do you hold to some *traditional* interpretations of the Scripture which are *assumed* to be correct but which might instead be man’s erroneous interpretation? Be sure to study the Scriptures properly, in their context, with pure motives, to avoid making that same mistake. Don’t just take some man’s word for it; study the Bible for yourself.