



God's Outlaw: William Tyndale

Study Guide

INTRODUCTION:

For ten years he eluded capture, though the English king and his ministers had repeatedly sent spies to Europe to track him down. What was his crime? Murder? Insurrection? Embezzlement? Plotting to overthrow the government? No. William Tyndale's life was a model of holy living. Even Sir Thomas More, one of Tyndale's bitter opponents, admitted Tyndale was well known. Thomas noted Tyndale was:

...a man of right good living, studious and well learned in Scripture, and in diverse places in England was very well liked, and did great good with preaching...(he was) taken for a man of sober and honest living, and looked and preached holily.

If that was the kind of man Tyndale was, why was he hunted down like a menace to Church and State? Because of his passion to translate the Scriptures into English. He wanted an English Bible so that even the common plowman could read it!

TEACHER BACKGROUND AND INFORMATION:

THE BIBLE IN ENGLISH

Like several of the other Reformers, Tyndale came to see the importance of the Scriptures by first reading Erasmus' edition of the Greek New Testament. Tyndale's dream of having an English Bible which every plowboy could read was an idea first expressed by Erasmus in the preface to his New Testament: *Christ wishes his mysteries to be published as widely as possible. I would wish even all women to read the gospel and the epistles of St. Paul, and I wish that they were translated into all languages of all Christian people, and that they might be read and known, not merely by the Scotch and the Irish, but even by the Turks and the Saracens.*

Tyndale affirmed that *it was in the language of Israel that the Psalms were sung in the temple of Jehovah; and shall not the gospel speak the language of England among us?...Ought the church to have less at noonday than at dawn?...Christians must read the New Testament in their mother tongue.*

To have the Bible in English was illegal, however. Wycliffe's English Bible had been translated from the Latin Vulgate and had been strongly resisted by the authorities. In 1408 Parliament passed the "Constitutions of Oxford" which forbade anyone translating or reading a part of the Bible in the language of the people without permission of the ecclesiastical authorities. Whoever read the Scriptures in English could forfeit their lands, goods, and life. They were considered heretics to God, enemies to the Crown, and traitors to the kingdom. Men and women were burned for teaching their children the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Ten Commandments in English.

MORE AND TYNDALE

Sir Thomas More, author of *Utopia*, was the greatest literary man in England. That he would think it necessary to write against the work of Tyndale is an indication of how effective Tyndale's work was. Since More was a layman and not ordained, he had to receive a special license from the bishop to read Tyndale's "heresy" without penalty! In June 1529 his work *Dialogue...Touching the Pestilent Sect of Luther and Tyndale* was published. Between 1532 and 1533 More published his five volume *Confutation of Tyndale*. What did More find wrong with Tyndale's work?

Sir Thomas believed that the Church made the Scriptures and that the teaching of the Church was as authoritative as the Scriptures themselves. God daily raised up prophets and preachers within the Church who could speak with the same authority as the Scriptures themselves. Besides, the Scriptures were very difficult to understand. Theologians with years of learning

still found difficulties in the Scriptures...how could any ordinary, unlearned person possibly understand them? Church scholars ever since Origen in the third century had interpreted the Scriptures allegorically. The common people did not have the training in such methods, so they could not have a proper interpretation, thought More. Tyndale, however, believed in a literal, non-allegorical interpretation of Scripture, and there was no reason why the common people of England could not understand the same words that were first addressed to the common people of Israel.

The idea that faith and repentance could put out the fires of hell and purgatory also seemed impossible to More. These were too slight to eradicate the judgment due men. Yet, More thought the worship of images of Christ and the saints was the simple man's way of worshipping Christ Himself.

Sir Thomas strongly objected to some of Tyndale's choice of words. Though technically correct translations, More felt they had a bias against the established church. Tyndale, for example, routinely used the word "congregation" for the church. If he had used the word church, he felt people would think of the Roman church with all its corruption and errors...and that was not what the New Testament meant by church! For similar reasons, Tyndale used the word "senior" for priest and "love" for charity. This raised cries of heresy among some.

CHURCH AND STATE

Tyndale's best known work to his contemporaries was *Obedience of a Christian Man*, published in 1528. Basically it answered charges that the reformers were teaching disobedience and stirring up rebellion. Both Wycliffe and Luther had been accused of causing peasant revolts. Tyndale wrote to encourage obedience to the government, since it was established by God. He discouraged forceful rebellion against an unjust government. If it were necessary to disobey the government in order to obey God, Tyndale said the Christian should submit to the government's punishment:

Our teaching is that of Christ, to obey the civil powers and leave all vengeance to God. What then is the duty of the Christian in this terror? He must disobey ungodly commands but he must not resist by force. If the king, at the bidding of the Bishops makes Bible reading a treason against the State and punishes it with prison and the fire, true believers will stand firm and suffer every penalty for Christ's sake.

Tyndale's attitude about government was very Biblical, and he taught Christians how to die for their faith if necessary. When Thomas Bilney, the early Reformation martyr, was executed at Norwich, he had a copy of Tyndale's *Obedience* in his hand.

Anne Boleyn had a copy of *Obedience* which (in a marvelously strange way!) found its way into King Henry's hand. When Henry read it, he was pleased with the obedience theme and said, "This is a book for me and all kings to read!"

TYNDALE'S INFLUENCE IN TRANSLATION

Tyndale's translation of the Bible into English was not only an important precedent, but it was a good, literate translation which was copied by others. His prose was excellent and established a literary standard for translation work. Just four months after Tyndale's arrest, his friend Myles Coverdale issued a Bible with the encouragement of Thomas Cromwell. Much of the New Testament was Tyndale's translation. Dedicated to Henry VIII, Coverdale's Bible was the first to circulate in England without active persecution and was the first complete Bible printed in English.

Tyndale's associate John Rogers issued "Matthew's Bible" in 1537 ("Matthew" was a pseudonym used for protection). This included Tyndale's New Testament, Pentateuch, and his translation of Joshua through Chronicles. This was basically Tyndale's work, and Matthew's Bible became the basis for the King James Bible. The King James Bible became the historic authorized version and became the most influential book in the history of the English language. William Tyndale's translation provided over 90% of the wording of the King James version.

TYNDALE CHRONOLOGY

1494	Tyndale born in the Cotswolds
1506	Studied at Magdalen Hall at Oxford
1512	Graduates B.A.
1513	Ordained
1519	At Cambridge
1521	Little Sodbury Manor
1523	Seeks Tunstall's patronage for Bible translation
1524	At Hamburg and Wittenberg
1525	Prints part of New Testament at Cologne
1526	First complete printing of New Testament at Worms
1528	<i>Obedience of a Christian Man</i>
1529	Translates Pentateuch
1531	Meets Steven Vaughan, refuses invitation of Henry VIII to return to England Sir Thomas More begins writing against Tyndale.
1535	Betrayed by Henry Phillips, arrested at Antwerp, imprisoned at Vilvoorde
1536	Strangled and burned at Brussels



DISCUSSION AFTER VIEWING FILM:

1. Who were some of the leading men in England with whom Tyndale had to contend?
Henry VIII, Cardinal Wolsey, Sir Thomas More

Why were they so opposed to Tyndale translating the Bible into English? *They were afraid if the common people had the Scriptures in their own language, the existing order of things in church and state would be upset. They would lose some of their own power and position. The common people could not be expected to properly understand the Scriptures.*

2. Tyndale and his evangelical cohorts were smuggling the Bible and religious works into England from continental Europe. Wasn't that going against the laws of England? Don't the Scriptures say the Christian is to be obedient to the powers that be? Was Tyndale right in breaking the laws in this way? Support your opinion with Scripture.

3. What does the house Cardinal Wolsey built for himself tell you about Wolsey's character and his attitude to his priestly office? *He used his office to accumulate wealth and fortune for himself. It is said that at one point he was wealthier than the king of England himself!*

4. Why would teaching children the Lord's prayer and Ten Commandments in English be considered such a crime? Do you think any such laws could be passed in our modern world today?

5. What was the great idea Tyndale conceived while a tutor at Little Sodbury Manor? *To translate the Bible into English so that every plowboy in England would have the Scriptures.*

What abilities did he have to accomplish this? *Excellent linguist; knew 7 languages.*

6. Why did Tyndale want to work for Cuthbert Tunstall, the Bishop of London? *He needed an official patron so that translating the Bible into English could be legal.*

What objections did Tunstall give for accepting Tyndale's proposal? *Everything must be taken in its time. Meat should not be given to babes, and the common people are not yet ready for the strong meat of the entire Word of God.*

7. How did the merchants encourage the cause of Reformation in England? *They smuggled evangelical literature into England from the continent.*

8. Even in Europe, Tyndale faced obstacles to preparing a Bible in English for his countrymen. What difficulties did he face? *He still was hunted down by the English authorities as well as the imperial authorities and others who disapproved of the Reformation and Tyndale's translation work.*

9. How did the Archbishop of Canterbury unwittingly help Tyndale in his work? *When he bought up copies of Tyndale's New Testament to be burnt, Tyndale was able to use the money to finance a new and better revised edition!*

10. After having escaped capture for years, Tyndale was finally arrested by the authorities. How did this come about? *By the betrayal of the false friend Henry Phillips.*

How did you feel about Henry Phillips' treatment of Tyndale?

What did Phillips do right before Tyndale's arrest which revealed the depths of his degraded character? *Borrowed some money from Tyndale so he could take from him as much as he could before betraying him to the authorities.*

11. Tyndale was arrested by the agents of the Emperor Charles, not by any authority of the King of England. The accusations brought against Tyndale again show the close association between Church and State in that day. What were the accusations? *Tyndale believed in justification by faith alone, that forgiveness of sins and embracing the mercy offered in the gospel*

is enough for salvation, that tradition does not bind the soul, and that neither the virgin nor the saints should be prayed to.

12. What was Tyndale's belief about the roles of faith and works in the believer's life? *A man is reconciled before God by faith alone; works only serve to make known before men whether a man is justified or not.*

How does that compare with the other Reformers we have studied?

13. What was William Tyndale's dying prayer? *"Lord, open the King of England's eyes..."*

Was it ever answered? *Two years after Tyndale's death, Henry ordered every church in England to place an English Bible in it!*

CONCLUSION:

John Foxe began his famous *Book of Martyrs* by quoting Jesus' words in Matthew 16:18, "...I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Foxe noted that in these words three things are to be noted: first, that Christ will have a Church in this world; secondly, that the same Church should be mightily impugned, not only by the world, but also by the powers of hell; and thirdly, that the same Church, notwithstanding the efforts of the devil, should continue.

Tyndale's life and death are tremendous reflections of these observations.



Tyndale was a tutor in the home of Sir John Walsh at Little Sodbury Manor. Here his vision for the English Bible developed.



Behind the Scenes

with Ken Curtis

After the film on John Wycliffe was made, the actor who played Wycliffe, Peter Howell, went to a friend who was the head of Channel 4 England and asked if he would put the film on television. Channel 4 is a nationwide television channel in Britain. Mostly, I suspect, as a favor to his old friend, the television executive arranged for the program to be transmitted but scheduled in a low rated throw-away time period on a Saturday afternoon. The response of the public amazed Channel 4. Calls and letters poured in thanking them for putting on this program. Channel 4 asked what might be produced to follow up this program. We proposed a drama on the life of William Tyndale. They accepted, and we had the wonderful blessing of a secular television company putting up over half the budget to make this Christian-themed drama.

In our early script planning meetings we ran into the problem of how to show Tyndale in a human light. Tyndale was almost too good to be true. Even his distinguished and capable opponent, Sir Thomas More, conceded he was a devout and pure man. To present a hero without flaws would not make a good film. Obviously we could not invent flaws, so we felt the best approach was to reveal his vulnerabilities, his disappointments, and especially to show his sometimes naivete, as well as his very human driving passion.



Tyndale on Why Love God

For to love God truly is to love our neighbor for His sake, for upon His person thou canst bestow no benefit...If we love God for the benefits we receive, then we love ourselves. But if we love Him to do Him pleasure again, that we can not otherwise do than in loving our neighbors for His sake, them that are good—to continue them in their goodness, them that are evil—to draw them toward good. Love is the instrument wherewith faith maketh us God's sons and fashioneth us like the image of God.

OPTIONAL BIBLE STUDY FOR WILLIAM TYNDALE The Priesthood of All Believers

INTRODUCTION:

The Reformation was dealing with the most important issues of life: How can anyone have a relationship with God? How is a person made right with God? What means or intermediaries are necessary to approach God?

The Roman Catholic Church had taught that the most efficacious prayers were those addressed to the Virgin Mary and the Saints. They had the most pull with God and could get prayers answered better. The seven sacraments of the Church also bestowed a grace which drew man closer to God. Those in holy orders, the bishops, priests, and deacons, had special privileges in ministry and a closer contact with God than did ordinary Christians.

Once the Reformers looked to the Scriptures, they could not find any support for praying to the Virgin or to the Saints. Neither did they find a special sacramental blessing in holy orders. Rather, they discovered that every believer is a priest! What do the Scriptures say about the universal priesthood of the believer?

TEACHER BACKGROUND AND INFORMATION:

AN ESTABLISHED CLERGY

Under the law of Moses, the Israelites had a group of priests who served as the nation's representatives before God. Detailed instructions in Leviticus and other books of Moses prescribed in detail the dress, functions, and ceremonies of the priestly life. The early Christians, however, had no such priesthood. They believed Christ's death on the cross was the final sacrifice of propitiation. When He died, the veil in the temple was torn from top to bottom; believers could enter God's presence, the Holy of Holies. Christ was their High Priest, and Christians were a kingdom of priests serving God and worshipping Him.

Over the centuries, however, the Christian clergy developed a position of superiority to the Christian populace, and the clergy adopted some of the unique distinctives of the Levitical priesthood of the Old Testament. Though the belief in the universal priesthood of the believer was never totally abandoned, it retreated into the background. By the fourth century, the role and nature of the priesthood had begun to take the form which prevailed in the Middle Ages, and in the Catholic Church down to the present day.

Also by the fourth century in the western church, the strong influence of monasticism made the celibacy of the priesthood an important requirement. The Eastern Orthodox church has always allowed marriage for the lower clergy. There was no Biblical basis for requiring celibacy for the priests, and it has been very difficult for the Catholic Church to enforce. Throughout the middle Ages clerical concubines were common, and the Church could not adequately enforce its celibate rulings. The Reformers recognized this as a non-Biblical requirement and allowed the clergy to marry.

A SACRAMENTAL RELIGION

Under the Roman Catholic system which developed during the Middle Ages, a faithful priest was not a preacher but one who administered sacraments. He was, in a very literal sense, a master of ceremonies, and the ceremonies and rituals were most important. By the fifth century, the idea of sacraments began to be used in a technical sense as sacred forms of worship by which divine blessings were mystically bestowed. Augustine said the sacraments were visible signs of an invisible grace or divine blessing.

The first sacraments recognized were baptism and the eucharist, which developed into the ceremony or sacrifice of the mass. By the thirteenth century, seven sacraments were recognized: baptism, confirmation, eucharist, marriage, ordination for holy orders, penance/confession, and extreme unction or the last rites. Baptism and the eucharist were considered necessary for salvation. The other sacraments gave grace for the spiritual struggle. The unique power of the clergy or priesthood lay in its ability to administer the sacraments, and it was this authority and position of the clergy which the Reformers believed went contrary to the Scriptures.

David Schaff well summarized these differing views: *In the authority to administer them [the sacraments] lay the power of the priesthood to open and shut the kingdom of heaven, to pass the judgment of bliss or woe for this life and for the life to come. The sacramental theory...substituted the mechanical efficiency of sacramental grace for the Saviour into whose immediate presence the soul has a right to approach through penitence of heart and prayer. The sacramental system became the Church's Babylonish captivity, as Luther called it in his famous tract, in which the rights and liberty of the Christian believer are fettered by the traditions of men.*

EXAMINING THE SCRIPTURES:



Go to the accompanying study sheets on
The Priesthood of All Believers

CONCLUSION:

By the sixteenth century, the church was festering with corruption. The Reformers, each with different emphases and in different situations, challenged the church to return to the Scriptures, to realize that becoming right with God was not achieved through any institutional system or ceremony. They stripped away many of the trappings which had enshrouded and asphyxiated the church, and they drew attention to the spiritual nature of the people Christ called to Himself. All who had been redeemed could now draw near to God and offer to Him the sacrifices of praise, thanksgiving, and indeed dedicate their entire lives to Him.



King Henry VIII fulfilled Wycliffe's dying prayer by ordering an English Bible in every church.

Practical Advice from God's Outlaw

Because we are blind, God has appointed in the Scripture how we should serve and please Him. As pertaining unto His own person, He is abundantly pleased when we believe His promises and the holy testament which he has made unto us in Christ, and [hence] for the mercy which He there showed us, [we] love His commandments.

All bodily service must be done to man in God's stead. We must give obedience, honor, toll, tribute, custom and rent unto whom they belong. Then if thou have ought more to bestow, give unto the poor which are left here in Christ's stead, that we show mercy to them....

Moreover, Christ became poor, to make others rich and bound, to make others free. He left also with His disciples the law of love. Now love seeketh not her own profit, but her neighbor's.... The spirituality [the clergy], therefore, are condemned by all the laws of God, who through falsehood and disguised hypocrisy have sought so great profit, so great riches, so great authority and so great liberties; and have so beggared the laymen, and so brought them into subjection and bondage, and so despised them, that they have set up franchises in all towns and villages, for whosoever robs, murders or slays them, and even for traitors unto the king's person also.

Concluding Summary

Now go to reader, and according to the order of Paul's writing [referring to the Epistle to the Romans], even so do thou. First behold thyself diligently in the law of God, and see there thy just damnation. Secondly turn thine eyes to Christ, and see there the exceeding mercy of thy most kind and loving father. Thirdly remember that Christ made not this atonement that thou shouldest anger God again: neither died he for thy sins, that thou shouldest live still in them: neither cleansed he thee, that thou shouldest return (as a swine) unto thine old puddle again: but that thou shouldest be a new creature and live a new life after the will of God and not of the flesh. And be diligent lest through thine own negligence and unthankfulness thou lose favour and mercy again.

From a paragraph Tyndale added to his translation of Luther's *Prologue to the Epistle to the Romans*