

Here I Stand

Christ is risen! He is risen, indeed! Thus we confess the glorious truth and promise of Easter.

And what does the world say to our confession? Sadly, many reply, “Who cares!” Others are more vehement in their response: “You’re pushing your ‘truth’ on me, and I find that offensive. Take it back!”

Today, the confession of the Christian Church runs up against the world’s “cancel culture.” Church bodies and individual believers are being pressured to “take back” our confession and recant our faith (or at least, to keep quiet about it). One of the tools in common use today is that of incessant attacks via social media.

But “cancel culture” has been around for a long, long time. We have written record of it happening five hundred years ago, but back then the pressure applied was much more direct and deadly: Papal excommunication from the Roman Church, and the Imperial threat of death.

When we celebrated the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther’s *95 Theses* back in 2017, some people might have gotten the impression that with that document the Reformation was “over” and the battle “won.” In fact, that document only marked the beginning of the fight for the Gospel and the Word of God.

Three and a half years after the *Theses* were published, Martin Luther was summoned to the German city of Worms (pronounced ‘Vorms’). There he appeared before the Emperor, Princes, and church authorities, who accused Luther of teaching heresy in his writings. While there was much discussion during the days Luther was there, the purpose of the meeting was to ask Luther one direct and critical question: “Do you wish to defend all your acknowledged books, or to retract some?”

Luther tried to point out that many of his now accused writings had actually been approved and commended by his opponents, and many of his books taught what everyone considered sound teaching of the faith. Nonetheless, the speaker for the Emperor demanded a simple answer to his question: “Do you wish to retract and recall them and their contents or to cling to them henceforth and to insist on them?”

After being given twenty-four hours to consider his response, the question was asked again, and Martin Luther gave his answer:

“Since then your serene majesty and your lordships seek a simple answer, I will give it in this manner, neither horned nor toothed: Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason (for I do not trust either in the pope or in councils alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not retract anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. I cannot do otherwise, here I stand, may God help me, Amen” (*Luther’s Works, American Edition* 32:112–13).

What followed was drama and intrigue of the highest order, but Luther’s stand on God’s Word remained unshakeable. The 500th anniversary of that confession will be Sunday, April 18th. On that Sunday, let us stand together in God’s house, not on Martin Luther, but with him. Let us stand together on the Holy Scriptures, boldly confessing them to be the divinely inspired, inerrant Word of God. Let us stand together and confess the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ, our crucified and risen Savior. Here let us stand, and may God help us so to stand!