

## HERE I STAND

When Martin Luther was on trial for heresy he made this legendary statement: *"Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise. God help me. Amen."* R. C. Sproul, in his book, *The Holiness of God*, states that these famous words were not uttered with a loud voice and a clenched fist raised defiantly in the air. In fact, he says, it was a rather subdued Luther who spoke on that occasion. The following account is adapted from Sproul's book, pages 108 - 115.

The first session met on April 17. The air was filled with electricity as Luther had been described as a wild boar in the vineyard of the Lord. His books had been burned and he would soon be on trial for his life. Before arriving at the trial he had written: *"This shall be my recantation at Worms: 'Previously I said the pope was the vicar of Christ. I recant. Now I say the pope is the adversary of Christ and the apostle of the Devil.'* "

When the trial opened Luther was standing in the centre of a great hall with his controversial books by his side. When asked if he had written those books, he answered in a voice barely a whisper: *"The books are all mine, and I have written more."* When asked to recant his writings Luther replied in a voice that was almost inaudible, *"I beg you, give me time to think it over."*

The emperor was shocked by the request but granted clemency for twenty-four hours. That night Luther went through his private Gethsemane and wrote this beautiful prayer:

*"O God, Almighty God everlasting! How dreadful is the world! Behold how its mouth opens to swallow me up, and how small is my faith in Thee! Oh! The weakness of the flesh, and the power of Satan! If I am to depend upon any strength of this world - all is over. The knell is struck. Sentence is gone forth. O God! O God! O thou, my God! Help me against all the wisdom of this world. Do this, I beseech thee; thou shouldst do this by*

*thy own mighty power. The work is not mine, but Thine, I have no business here. I have nothing to contend for with these great men of the world! I would gladly pass my days in happiness and peace, but the cause is Thine. And it is righteous and everlasting! O Lord! Help me! O faithful and unchangeable God! I learn not upon man. It were vain! Whatever is of man is tottering, whatever proceeds from him must fail. My God!~ My God! Dost thou not hear? My God! Art thou no longer living? Nay, thou canst not die. Thou doest not hide Thyself. Thou hast chosen me for this work. I know it! Therefore, O God, accomplish thine own will! Forsake me not, for the sake of thy well - beloved Son, Jesus Christ, my defence, my buckler, and my stronghold.*

*Lord - where art thou? My God, where are thou? Come! I pray thee, I am ready. Behold me prepared to lay down my life for thy truth, suffering like a lamb. For the cause is holy. It is thine own! I will not let thee go! No, nor yet for all eternity! And though the world should be thronged with devils - and this body, which is the work of thine hands, should be cast forth, trodden under foot, cut in pieces, consumed to ashes, my soul is thine. Yes, I have thine own word to assure me of it. My soul belongs to thee, and will abide with thee forever! Amen! O God send help! Amen!”*

Late the next afternoon Luther returned to the hall. This time his voice did not quake or quiver. He said:

“. . . Unless I am convicted by Scripture and plain reason - I do not accept the authority of popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other - my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against my conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise. God help me! Amen!”

What Luther did was an act of great courage and conviction, and it was not done capriciously. Some have heard the story and concluded that Luther was insane. How could any rational man dare to stand alone against the pope, the emperor, the councils, the creeds, the finest scholars, and the entire organization of Christendom? That, of course is precisely what Luther did! There he stood! God did help him! And from his convictions came a great reformation!