

**NOT EVERY HILL IS WORTH DYING ON...BUT SOME ARE.**

2 Thessalonians 2:15

*So then, brothers, **stand firm** and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter.*

Ephesians 6:11, 13, 14a

*Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to **stand** against the schemes of the devil...¹³ Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to **withstand** in the evil day, and having done all, to **stand firm**.*

¹⁴ **Stand** therefore,

1 Corinthians 16:13

*Be watchful, **stand firm** in the faith, act like men, be strong.*

“I am ready to defend my convictions even unto death...” – John Wycliffe

Who was John Wycliffe? (1330-1384 A. D.)

- John Wycliffe was born around 1330 on a sheep farm near Yorkshire, England. Educated at Oxford, he became a leading scholar in theology and philosophy.¹ Due to interruptions from the Black Death, Wycliffe did not earn his doctorate until 1372.
- Lived in a time of political and religious corruption: The age of the “Babylonian Captivity” where the papacy was split between Avignon, France and Rome.² Rival popes simultaneously claimed the office. The popes at Avignon collected three times more income than the king of France!³
- Church and state were one. No real clergy accountability. Simony and corruption were the norm. Not only were the official clergy not preaching the Gospel but they were largely a protected class of corrupt swindlers who operated in the name of God. Wycliffe argued that godly character was the qualification for spiritual leadership.
- OG “heretic.” “England had been virtually free from heresy until John Wycliffe.” – *Encyclopedia Britannica*⁴

- Encouraged English nobles to reject oppressive religious taxes levied by the Pope.
 - Wycliffe argued that the Church was called to fulfill the mission of Christ rather than seek temporal power and riches.
- Summoned to London to answer charges of heresy and the tribunal broke into an open brawl before he was forced to speak.⁵
- Forced to leave Oxford at the age of 50 (1380) and sentenced to “parish arrest” in Lutterworth.⁶
- Wrote extensively until his death on December 30/31, 1384 after having suffered two strokes.⁷
- His passion for Bible translation led to a movement that is still going strong today.

What moved Wycliffe to take a stand?

- a. Rightful authority: We are under, not above, the authority of Scripture. This enables us to recover the Gospel.

“Trust wholly in Christ; rely altogether on his sufferings; beware of seeking to be justified in any other way than by his righteousness.” – John Wycliffe⁸

“If there were one hundred popes, and all the friars were turned into cardinals, their opinion ought not to be acceded to in matters of faith except in so far as they base themselves on Scripture.” – John Wycliffe⁹

- b. Passion for sharing the Word of God.

“Believing that every Christian should have access to Scripture (only Latin translations were available at the time), he began translating the Bible into English, with the help of his good friend John Purvey. The church bitterly opposed it: “By this translation, the Scriptures have become vulgar, and they are more available to lay, and even to women who can read, than they were to learned scholars, who have a high intelligence. So the pearl of the gospel is scattered and trodden underfoot by swine.” Wycliffe replied, “Englishmen learn Christ’s law best in English. Moses heard God’s law in his own tongue; so did Christ’s apostles.””¹⁰

Taking a stand and building a legacy

- 1) Childlike faith, not childish thinking: You can love Jesus Christ and be a world-class thinker.
 - Wycliffe's first work was, *De Logica* ("On Logic").¹¹
- 2) Do what you can for God with what you have.
 - Translation: Wycliffe's translation was from Latin to English since he and his co-workers lacked knowledge of the original Greek and Hebrew...but they still did what they could for God with what they had.¹²
 - Preaching: "There is no evidence that he considered that his more political or polemical remarks, or even his more academically technical ones, were unsuitable for use with a popular audience."¹³
- 3) Resist the normalcy of evil: Corruption and evil profoundly bothered Wycliffe, so he took a stand.¹⁴
- 4) Leverage your influence for the Truth.
 - John of Gaunt protected Wycliffe just as Frederick the Wise did for Martin Luther.
- 5) Seek to leave a legacy that both inspires and irritates.

"In 1415, the Council of Constance, which condemned Jan Hus to death, declared Wycliffe a heretic. His bones were exhumed and burned and the ashes were put into the River Swift."¹⁵ As a later chronicler observed, "Thus the brook hath conveyed his ashes into Avon; Avon into Severn; Severn into the narrow seas; and they into the main ocean. And thus the ashes of Wycliffe are the emblem of his doctrine which now is dispersed the world over."¹⁶

"The movement continued to expand despite the death of its founder and the government's attempts to destroy it." – *Encyclopedia Britannica*¹⁷

"I believe that in the end the truth will conquer." – John Wycliffe¹⁸

"Let every man wisely, with meek prayers, and great study, and also charity, read the words of God and holy Scriptures." – John Wycliffe¹⁹

¹ Kenneth S. Latourette, *A History of Christianity* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1953), 662.

² B. A. Gerrish, *Reformers in Profile* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1967), 3-4.

³ Roland Bainton, *The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1952), 14.

⁴ Ralph Charles Atkins & Lacey Baldwin Smith, "John Wycliffe," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, October 21, 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/place/United-Kingdom/Richard-II-1377-99#ref482858>.

⁵ "Such opinions got Wycliffe into trouble, and he was brought to London to answer charges of heresy. The hearing had hardly gotten underway when recriminations on both sides filled the air. Soon they erupted into an open brawl, ending the meeting. Three months later, Pope Gregory XI issued five bulls (church edicts) against Wycliffe, in which Wycliffe was accused on 18 counts and was called "the master of errors." "John Wycliffe: Medieval "Protestant", *Christianity Today*, accessed October 10, 2018, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/history/people/moversandshakers/john-wycliffe.html>.

⁶ Atkins & Smith, "John Wycliffe," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/place/United-Kingdom/Richard-II-1377-99#ref482858>.

⁷ Stephen Nichols, "John Wycliffe: The Morning Star of the Reformation," *Desiring God*, October 16, 2018, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/the-morning-star-of-the-reformation>.

⁸ "John Wycliffe: Medieval "Protestant", *Christianity Today*, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/history/people/moversandshakers/john-wycliffe.html>. S. Harrison Thomson concurs: "His whole corpus of writing is infused with a deep conviction that all truth and guidance may be found in the Scriptures alone. The Bible for him was the rule of faith." S. Harrison Thomson, "John Wyclif," B. A. Gerrish, ed. *Reformers in Profile* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1967), 19. "Wycliffe's greatest contribution to church history was his elevation of the Bible to its supreme place and his insistence that it be made available to all Christians in their own language. In his book, *The Truth of Holy Scripture*, Wycliffe declared that Scripture was divinely inspired in every part and that it was the source of doctrine and the standard of life for all people, from peasants to kings and popes." See, David B. Calhoun, "John Wycliffe: Morning Star of the Reformation," *C. S. Lewis Institute*, November 26, 2012, http://www.cslewisinstitute.org/John_Wycliffe_page3.

⁹ Albert Henry Newman, *A Manual of Church History: Ancient and Mediaeval Church History (To A. D. 1517)* Vol. 1 (Philadelphia: The American Baptist Publication Society, 1933), 607.

¹⁰ "John Wycliffe: Medieval "Protestant", *Christianity Today*, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/history/people/moversandshakers/john-wycliffe.html>.

¹¹ Wycliffe was, "a philosopher, a theologian, a reformer and a political thinker, all at the same time." B. A. Gerrish, *Reformers in Profile* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1967), 4.

¹² "Wycliffe and his coworkers, unfamiliar with the original Hebrew and Greek, translated the Latin text into English." P. M. Bechtel, & P. W. Comfort, "Wycliffe, John," J. D. Douglas & P. W. Comfort, eds., *Who's Who in Christian History* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1992), 735.

¹³ G. R. Evans, *John Wyclif: Myth & Reality* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic Press, 2005), 235.

¹⁴ "The aspects of the papacy that most offended Wycliffe were: the extortion of funds from England, involving the impoverishing of the State and the robbing of the poor; the appointment of foreigners to benefices, rather than such as would minister to the people; and the sending forth of mendicant monks who were at this time gaining predominance in the University of Oxford, and whose mendicant proceedings in robbing the poor filled him with indignation." Newman, *A Manual of Church History*, 604-605.

¹⁵ Nichols, "John Wycliffe: The Morning Star of the Reformation," <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/the-morning-star-of-the-reformation>.

¹⁶ "John Wycliffe: Medieval "Protestant", <https://www.christianitytoday.com/history/people/moversandshakers/john-wycliffe.html>.

¹⁷ Atkins & Smith, "John Wycliffe," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/place/United-Kingdom/Richard-II-1377-99#ref482858>.

¹⁸ E. Ritzema, & R. Brant, eds., *300 Quotations for Preachers from the Medieval Church* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2013), in *Logos Library Systems*.

¹⁹ J. D., Barry, J. Mailhot, D. Bomar, E. Ritzema, & C. Sinclair-Wolcott, eds., *DIY Bible Study* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014), in *Logos Library Systems*.