

A Man Named MARTIN

PART 2: THE MOMENT

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Over the 15 centuries before Martin Luther's day, the Christian church in the West developed a system of doctrine and practice that drifted widely from Old and New Testament teachings. Influences came from ideas put forth by religious thinkers, faulty translation choices from the Greek into the Latin Bible, and questionable content pulled from extra-biblical writings like the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, This system was solidified in the late Medieval Church through internal church councils and papal rulings.

The Roman Catholic doctrines that Luther and others came to question included prayers for the dead, purgatory, penance, infused grace, transubstantiation, celibacy, devotion to Mary and the rosary, mandatory confession to a priest to obtain forgiveness, the treasury of merits of Christ, the Mass as a bloodless sacrifice, Mary and the saints, Masses for the dead, the seven sacraments, the institution of the Papacy, and the one that many people tie intrinsically to the Reformation: indulgences.

It was Luther's contention that over the centuries the church had veered perilously away from the New Testament teachings of Christ and the apostles and become something other than a Christ-centered fellowship of believers. What Luther and others sought to restore was the teaching of salvation by grace through faith in Christ. Luther's intent, however, was not to insult the Roman Catholic Church and its institutions. His hoped-for outcome was to enlighten the Pope on the church's manifold errors so as to prompt a *reformation from within*, with the charge led by the Papacy to correct the divergent teachings that had hardened into doctrine over time and which, in turn, caused it to veer widely from the original teachings of Christ and His apostles.

For the Study Leader

Group Discussion:

- Please feel free to move at your own pace through this study and take as much time as you need for each lesson.
- You are welcome to dig in as deep as you want for your personal study, or you might use just the Bible passages and questions included in the discussion guide.
- If you have a limited time for this study, have participants take a few minutes to look through the sessions and choose as a group those questions they would most like to discuss.
- We have designed our questions to be open-ended, thus allowing those in your group to share their experiences and unique perspectives.

A downloadable PDF for this study can be found at **lhm.org/martin2**.

Using Our Digging Deeper Icons

This is an interactive study guide. We designed it to be flexible, so it will fit both group and personal use. It includes icons that link the user to internet sites, where he or she can browse and explore a subject more thoroughly.

We encourage you to look through the Digging Deeper icons to see which ones your group might want to discuss. While you may use the paper discussion guide during your group study, you may want to assign homework for those in the group to check out the various internet sites on their own time. Doing so makes the study much more interactive.

Once you have downloaded the electronic PDF copy of the discussion guide, click on the icons in the text or at the end of the session. When you click on an icon, it will take you to that specific link, which will then open up the corresponding website.

There are only two steps you need to find the Digging Deeper links for this study:

1) Visit **lhm.org/martin2**.
2) On the bottom of this page, click "Additional Resources."

Now you can click the links that interest you and start digging.

To This Discussion Guide User: Because of the changing nature of the internet, occasionally a web link included in a Lutheran Hour Ministries Bible study may change or be deleted altogether by the agency or individual posting it. When you notice an internet link has been modified or has become inoperable, please report this to our Response Center so we can find an alternate site. Thank you.

Please send changes to **LHMResponse@lhm.org**.

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SESSION 1

Opening Prayer: Heavenly Father, keep Your church ever vigilant against Satan's lies and deception. Fix our eyes on Your Son, Jesus Christ, our only Savior and Lord. In Jesus' Name we pray. Amen.

Watch the Video: Session 1

- What were your impressions from the video?

- List some Roman Catholic teachings familiar to you (rosary, purgatory, etc.)

- Describe what you know about them.

Luther Began as a Good Roman Catholic

We date the Reformation from October 31, 1517, when Martin Luther nailed his *95 Theses* to the door of the castle church in Wittenberg. But at that time Luther's outlook was more Roman Catholic than Lutheran. He prayed to the Virgin Mary, believed in the intercession of saints in heaven, in transubstantiation, and a bloodless repetition of the sacrifice on the cross with each Mass. It was the excesses connected with indulgences that got Luther to start looking beneath the surface and realizing just how deep the errors of the Church really went.

- Just like Luther it takes time for us to recognize the worldview in which we were raised. Describe how your parents' understanding of the world affected your worldview.

- As you reached adulthood, on which issues did you continue to side with your parents? On which did you differ?

- How has God's Word influenced how you view the world and the values our culture promotes?

How Did the Church End Up So Far off Course?

It wasn't big doctrinal changes that shifted the Church's course over the centuries; instead, it was small deviations along the way. Over time it ended up looking almost nothing like the early church of the apostles. The video presented many of those small shifts. We will look at one here now. It was an important and pressing question in the early Catholic Church.

What to Do with the Lapsed?

During the Roman persecutions, Christians were given the opportunity to renounce Jesus Christ. They could then make sacrifices to the gods or the emperor and be saved. While many believers were martyred, some saved themselves by lapsing from the faith. Afterwards, many of those who lapsed regretted their decision and sought to be forgiven and reinstated.

Restoration between God and the sinner looks quite different from the restoration between a sinner and his fellow Christians. God sees genuine repentance in the heart of the sinner and for Jesus' sake completely and immediately forgives and restores him/her. But we cannot read each other's heart, so how can we know if a lapsed sinner really feels repentant? Penance gave lapsed sinners a way out. It offered them time (years) and specific deeds (fasting, wearing sackcloth, etc.) by which they could prove the sincerity of their remorse and change of heart.

- How did this process of penance show sensitivity to the grieving families of martyrs better than if the Church took the lapsed at their word and instantly accepted and reinstated them?

- How did it also serve to elevate and honor the sacrifice of the noble martyrs?

- Conversely, how could this form of penance give the false impression that God also requires time and proof of our regret—that He will not forgive our sins unless we first do penance?

Simultaneously Saint and Sinner

The issue of Christians who lapsed under persecution brought up another topic. Why do Christians keep on sinning?

The Scriptures describe justification as God accounting the sinner righteous for Christ's sake—without any works required on the part of the sinner—only the faith worked in him/her by the Holy Spirit. But while God makes us new creatures in the image of His Son through His Word and Baptism, the sinful nature remains in us, causing us to sin.

Now Augustine described justification as a *gradual process* of the Holy Spirit, which enabled us to do more good things and fewer bad things. He gave the impression that justification was only complete when we completely stopped sinning. This gave young Martin Luther fits when he went into the monastery and tried to drive away and curb his sinful desires.

- What kind of pressure does it put on a person to think they will not be justified with God until they can stop sinning?

- Why is it pointless and even dangerous to make the sinner part of his/her own salvation?

- Knowing we are justified through Jesus, how can we avoid the temptation to go too far on the other side and thus cheapen God's grace by thinking we don't need to actively resist sin?

The Rise of the Church Council

Very early in the history of the Christian church, disputes and controversies arose among Christian leaders. To settle these issues, Christian bishops and pastors gathered in ecumenical councils to address matters that were disturbing the church. The first such church council was the Council of Jerusalem recorded in Acts 15.

Read Acts 15:1-2, 6-14, 19-20.

1 Some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, "Unless you are circumcised according to the
custom of Moses, you cannot be saved."
2 And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the
others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question.

6 The apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter.
7 And after there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, "Brothers, you know that in the early days
God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the Word of the Gospel and believe.
8 And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as He did to us,
9 and He made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith.
10 Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither
our fathers nor we have been able to bear?
11 But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will."
12 And all the assembly fell silent, and they listened to Barnabas and Paul as they related what signs and wonders
God had done through them among the Gentiles.
13 After they finished speaking, James replied, "Brothers, listen to me.
14 Simeon (Peter) has related how God first visited the Gentiles, to take from them a people for His Name."

19 "Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God,
20 but should write to them to abstain from the things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from
what has been strangled, and from blood."

- Which church leaders made up this Council?

- What controversy caused the apostles to hold this Council?

- What do you think might have happened to the church if believers had not met to answer this question?

- What decision did the Council reach?

- What advantages does a council have over one or two church leaders (like Peter and John, or a pope) reaching a decision for the whole church?

Digging Deeper: Learn more about church councils here, especially the Jerusalem and Nicaean councils.

How Did the Jerusalem Council Compare to Other Councils?

Similarities with the Council of Nicaea

In 325 A.D. the Council of Nicaea was instrumental in settling controversies regarding the Trinity and how Jesus' divine and human natures were to be understood.

- What is the value in bringing together leaders of the church to discuss controversial matters?

- Why was it important to have an authoritative voice like this to refer back to when these controversies resurfaced later?

- Why was it essential for these councils to submit themselves to the authority of the Holy Scriptures?

- What abuse could happen if they sat as judges reinterpreting Scripture to say what they wanted it to mean?

Closing Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for Your Scriptures, which are a lamp unto our feet and a light for our path. Guard Your church from all error and lead us always into the truth. We pray through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Special Feature:

Could a General Council Have Reunited the Western Christian Church?

Early on, Martin Luther hoped an ecumenical council would be convened to answer his questions about papal abuses. But as time went by he realized Rome would never permit a council to be truly ecumenical.

In the mid to late 1520s Emperor Charles V held off any further actions against Luther because he was waiting for the Pope to summon another general council to settle the questions Luther raised.

When the popes dragged their feet into the mid 1530s, Charles V proposed a general council be held at Mantua, Italy, beginning in May 1537. In preparation for the council, Luther wrote *The Smalcald Articles* (part of the Lutheran *Book of Concord*) to show which articles of faith the Lutheran contingent could and could not compromise. But this council failed to convene when war broke out between Francis I of France and Charles V.

Finally, in 1545 the general council met in Trent, Italy. The Council of Trent met in three sessions between 1545-1563 (1545-47; 1551-52; 1562-63). It was dominated by papal legates. During the second session, the Protestants were invited to be present, were given a letter of safe conduct, and offered the right to discuss, but they were denied a vote. Phillip Melanchthon began to travel there with the Lutheran party, but made it no further than Nuremberg.

Unfortunately, without a Protestant vote on the matter, this could not be considered an ecumenical or general council. Perhaps a true ecumenical council in a similar spirit as the earlier councils, which let the Scriptures have ultimate authority, could have addressed the charges, removed the errors, and reunited the Western Christian Church. But Rome would not allow it; the iceberg of papal power ran too deep.

Digging Deeper: Additional links and resources available at lhm.org/martin2

The Origins of Purgatory

The Council of Trent

The Apology of the Augsburg Confession

The Council of Trent

The Apology, Article XXIV: Of the Mass

Martin Luther and the Idea of Monasticism

SESSION 2

Opening Prayer: Heavenly Father, You so loved the world You sent Your only begotten Son. Deepen our faith and trust in Jesus Christ, our Lord, that we may serve You in peace and joy. In Jesus' Name we pray. Amen.

Watch the Video: Session 2

What Jumped Out at You in the Video?
The late Medieval Church drew a distinction between the guilt and the penalty for our sins. It agreed with Scripture that the *guilt* was removed through confession and the minister's assurance of God's forgiveness in the absolution. But it taught that something different had to be done to remove the *punishment* for those sins. Removing the punishment required penance. And if that penance was not completed in this life, it had to continue after death in purgatory.

There is a certain sense to this idea. When you make a bad decision in this life, you experience the consequences, which can often last years, decades or an entire lifetime. Get drunk and slip behind the wheel and you may become crippled, or you may have to live with the guilt of having taken someone's life in an accident.

- Describe some thoughtless actions or decisions that bring long-term consequences.

- Why do you think some Christians see these consequences as punishment from God for their sins?

Purgatory

If you believe you have to pay the penalty for the sins you commit, then purgatory makes perfect sense. It takes time to make up for sins we commit, especially those committed shortly before our deaths. Just think of serial murderers sentenced to multiple life-sentences; one earthly life isn't long enough to pay the full penalty. If God is just, then the punishment must match the crime. And since one lifetime is not enough to pay the penalty, it makes sense the payment must continue after death.

- How can the lingering effects and the haunting guilt we feel from sins we commit give us the impression that we must bear the punishment for what we have done?

God's Answer—Jesus Christ

The late Medieval Church's teachings of punishment and purgatory took hold because the Church had lost sight of God's solution to the guilt and punishment of sin. Jesus Christ carried our guilt to the cross and there bore the punishment for our sins in our place. His great sacrifice paid the full penalty for each and every one of our sins, as He made clear to a condemned criminal dying at His side.

Read Luke 23:39-43.

39 One of the criminals who were hanged railed at Him, saying, "Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!"
40 But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?
41 And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong."
42 And he said, "Jesus, remember me when You come into Your kingdom."
43 And He said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise."

- As he hung dying on the cross, what kind of penance was this thief capable of doing to make up for his past sins and crimes?

- How does Jesus' promise about "today" show that God does not require us to pay the penalty for our sins?

Right before He died on the cross, Jesus proclaimed, "It is finished!" (John 19:30). The Greek word (teleo) means "to complete, or accomplish, or fulfill, or finish." Jesus had totally completed the payment for the sins of the world. That shows why purgatory is untrue—Jesus finished all the requirements of God for the forgiveness of sins—both our guilt and the penalty. There is nothing more for us to pay here on earth or in a place like purgatory.

Plenary Indulgence

Penance and purgatory were based on individual sins and the punishment or satisfaction that is required for each. The plenary indulgence cut through all of these, granting a complete, universal forgiveness for every sin. The Medieval Church's rationale for this depends on the treasury of merit from Jesus, the Virgin Mary, and the saints. But in truth, God freely grants the same complete forgiveness and release from sin and its punishment through the Gospel that the Church offered through its plenary indulgences.

- In what way did Jesus' promise to the penitent thief work like a plenary indulgence?

- In what sense is a plenary indulgence closer than penance to the truth of God's forgiveness in Jesus Christ?

Confession

In the year 1215 private spoken confession was made compulsory for all Roman Catholics. It had to be made at least once a year. Sinners who did not do it were separated from the Church, pronounced guilty of mortal sin, and damned to hell for all eternity. Luther saw the value of private confession and retained it, but removed the compulsory nature.

Private confession was a tool Jesus provided in John 20:22-23: "Jesus breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.'" When any of us becomes deeply troubled by a particular sin, Christ gives us this opportunity to confess that sin in private to a pastor, and receive the assurance that God forgave that sin, with the promise that everything confessed would remain confidential.

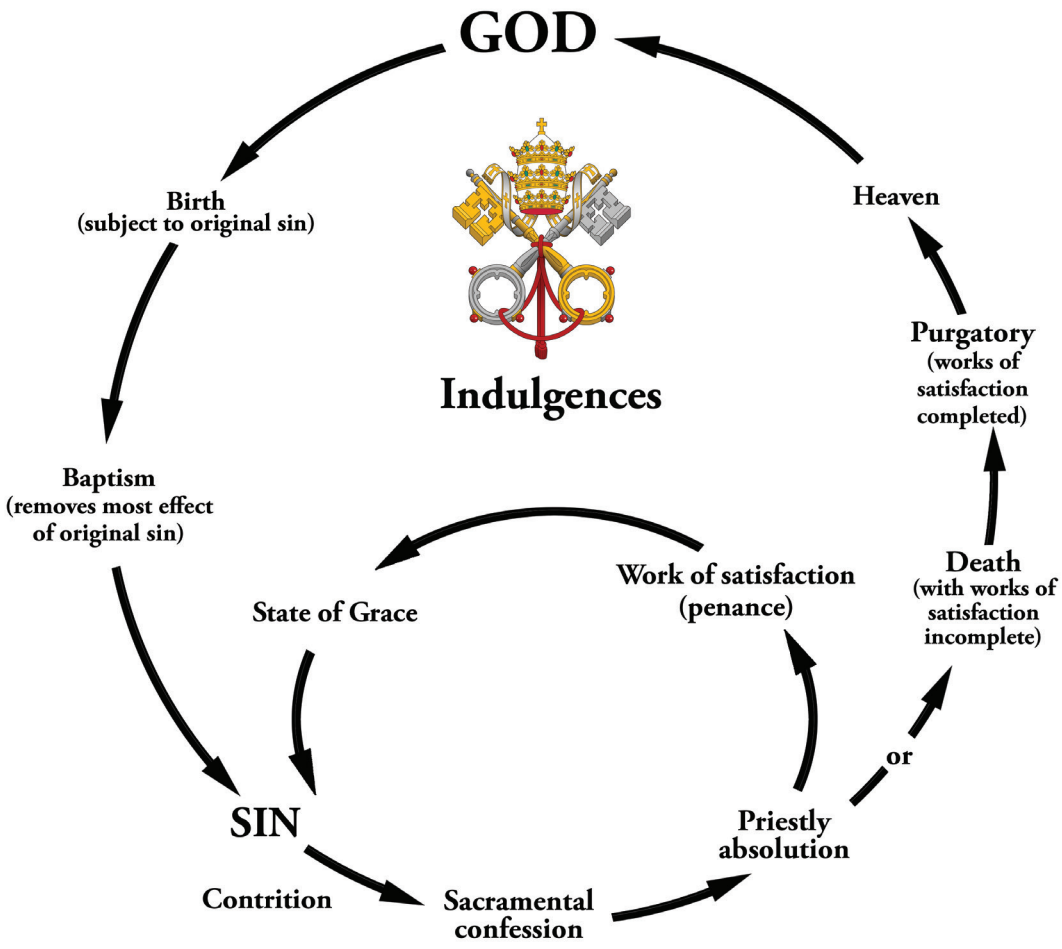
- Describe some sins which could make a Christian feel so guilty he/she would need to confess it privately.

- Why might the general confession we make during a church service not seem enough to provide the assurance of God's forgiveness for such a sin?

Closing Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for Your complete and free forgiveness through Jesus Christ, Your Son. Give me firm faith and confidence that He has paid the full price for all my sins—every last one of them. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

Special Feature:

The Late Medieval Penitential Cycle



This diagram demonstrates the late Medieval Church's process for dealing with the guilt and penalty of committed sins.

- Private confession with the priest removed the guilt of sin through absolution.

- After this the priest assigned penance to remove the punishment of that sin which remained after the guilt was removed.

- If a person died before the penance had removed the punishment of sin, the person entered purgatory to complete the removal of the punishment.

- Indulgences provided a way the living could reduce or completely satisfy the remaining penance of penitent sinners who were in purgatory, paying the punishment of their sins.

Digging Deeper: Additional links and resources available at lhm.org/martin2

Mary, the Mother of God?

SESSION 3

Opening Prayer: Almighty God, Heavenly Father, You take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked would turn from his way and live. Make us truly repentant of our sins so that with the full assurance of Your forgiveness for Jesus' sake, we may be bold to share the Good News of His salvation throughout the world. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

Watch the Video: Session 3

What Did You See in the Video That Means the Most to You?

At the time of the New Testament, Greek was spoken widely throughout the Roman Empire. But as time went by, especially in the Western Church, Latin began to supplant Greek. That opened the door to a whole new problem—translation errors.

Translations Versus the Originals

By 382 there were numerous Latin translations of the Bible, so Pope Damasus I requested that his secretary, Jerome, revise the Latin Bible based on the Greek manuscripts. Unfortunately, Jerome mistranslated some key Greek words. Correct translation would have exposed the errors creeping into the Church and checked the late Medieval Church's drift away from the faith of Scripture.

Repent - *Metanoio*

The original Greek word meant "to change one's mind," that is, to have regret and sorrow over past actions. This repentance is brought about by God's Law, which exposes our sins and our need for a Savior. The Gospel then comes in and shows us the merits of Jesus Christ, assuring us that for His sake all the guilt and penalty of our sins has been paid in full. That is why Matthew summarized Jesus' message in the words, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 3:2).

Notice how only a single word in this message calls for action on our part: it's the word "repent." All the rest shows God at work, bringing His kingdom of grace, mercy and forgiveness to take away sins and the punishment they rightly deserved.

- What do you think you are doing when you repent of your sins?

- How does Jesus show that God is the One active in forgiveness and not us sinners?

When Jerome used the word "penance" in his translation, it contained the idea of regret and sorrow that's found in "repent," but it also included a requirement that acts of reparation and mortification be performed by the sinner in order to obtain forgiveness for those sins.

- How did Jerome's error shift the focus for forgiveness *from* Jesus Christ *back* to the sinner?

- What uncertainty did this bring to sinners (like Luther) who feared God's wrath and wanted to be at peace with Him?

- How does Jesus' original word "repent" indicate that God's forgiveness and peace come immediately—without a need for us to do anything to prove or work out our regret?

Justify - *Dikaiao*

Sadly, Jerome did not just mistranslate the word "repent," he mistranslated the word that identifies God's gift of justification: *dikaiao*. The original Greek word means "to justify, or declare righteous." It was a legal term used of a judge who declared a defendant "not guilty." The righteousness of God in the Bible is Him declaring sinners not guilty for the sake of Jesus' suffering and death.

- What is the comfort in knowing God justifies you and that you do not have to do certain things to justify yourself?

Once again Jerome's mistranslation switched the burden of justification back to the sinner, requiring him/her to live righteously to be just in God's eyes. It was this demand for a sinner's righteousness that led Luther to say of Romans 1:17, "I hated that word 'the righteousness of God,' by which I had been taught according to the custom and use of all teachers … (that) God is righteous and punishes the unrighteous sinner."

- How does Jerome's mistranslation help explain the things Luther did to himself in the monastery—whipping himself, starving himself, sleeping in the cold, etc.?

- Why is it so hard for us to accept that we do not have to do anything to be made right in God's eyes? (Indeed, we *cannot* do anything to be right in His eyes.)

- How would you answer the person who feels Luther made grace *cheap* by assuring sinners that they are forgiven without having to bear any punishment or do anything to prove their sorrow and their desire to change and live the right way?

Read Romans 1:16-17.

16 "For I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.
17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, 'The righteous shall live by faith.'"

- How does the last quote from Habbakuk 2:4 ("The righteous shall live by faith") prove Jerome's translation was wrong?

Favored One - *Kechatiromene*

Another mistranslation by Jerome affected the Roman view of the Virgin Mary. It was the word with which the angel Gabriel greeted the Virgin Mary in Luke 1:28b, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" The original Greek points to one who is the recipient of God's favor. It points to God as the One *doing the favoring*. It indicates God's undeserved grace.

- In what sense is each Christian a "favored one" like Mary?

Jerome's mistranslation read "Hail, full of grace." It transferred the favor or grace from God to Mary. This made Mary the agent, a source of divine grace for others, rather than a helpless sinner who needed to receive God's undeserved grace just like all of us. This contradicts Romans 3:23, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." It also explains Rome's doctrine of the Immaculate Conception—its teaching that Mary was conceived without sin.

- How did Jerome's error pave the way for the treasury of the merits of the Virgin Mary and the saints?

- Do you think Christians still have the idea that some of God's people are so good they are closer to God?

- How would you answer someone who felt that way?

Closing Prayer: Heavenly Father, sinful human pride and arrogance has splintered Your Holy church. Deliver Your church from all error and unite us in the truth of Your Word. In Jesus' Name. Amen.



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660 Mason Ridge Center Drive • St. Louis, MO 63141-8557 • (800) 876-9880

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