**15 Martin Luther Quotes on Preaching the Gospel to Ourselves**

**95 Martin Luther Quotes of Note, Part 4**

**A Word from Bob:** This article originally appeared as Part 4 of a six-part blog series on *95 Martin Luther Quotes of Note*.

For Part 1, visit: [*15 Martin Luther Quotes on the Sufficiency of Scripture*](http://bit.ly/15LutherSuf).

For Part 2, visit: [*15 Martin Luther Quotes on Comforting the Suffering*](http://bit.ly/15LutherComfort).

For Part 3, visit: [*15 Martin Luther Quotes on Looking at Life Through the Lens of the Cross*](http://bit.ly/15LutherCross).

**95 Theses and 95 Quotes**

Martin Luther is famous for his Ninety-Five Theses which launched the Reformation. So, I’m collating my favorite 95 Martin Luther quotes from my book: [*Counseling Under the Cross: How Martin Luther Applied the Gospel to Daily Life*](http://www.rpmministries.org/writing/counseling-under-the-cross/).

Since 95 quotes would make for a very long blog, I’m dividing these quotes into several blog posts. Here’s post number four…with quotes focused on *Preaching the Gospel to Ourselves*.

**The Gospel for Believers**

When we think of Martin Luther, we typically picture him preaching the true gospel of salvation by *faith alone* through *grace alone* in *Christ alone*—to *unbelievers*. And that is certainly true. But it is equally true that Luther *preached the gospel for and to believers*. Robert Kolb summarizes Luther’s pastoral care ministry to believers:

“The combating of evil with the Gospel stood at the heart of his pastoral care.”[[1]](#endnote-1)

As Christians, how should we respond when Satan condemns us? Luther taught that we must preach the gospel to ourselves everyday:

1. “The highest of all God’s commands is this, *that we ever hold up before our eyes the image of his dear Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. He must daily be to our hearts the perfect mirror, in which we behold how much God loves us and how well, in his infinite goodness, as a faithful God, he has grandly cared for us in that he gave his dear Son for us*. *Do not let this mirror and throne of grace be torn away from before your eyes*.”[[2]](#endnote-2)

Luther found that illustrations and images from human relationships often provided powerful illumination and enlightenment about God’s unfailing love. In a table talk on how hard it is to believe in the forgiveness of sin, Luther shares this powerful imagery:

1. “You say that the sins which we commit every day offend God, and therefore we are not saints. To this I reply: *Mother love is stronger than the filth and scabbiness on a child, and so the love of God toward us is stronger than the dirt that clings to us*. Accordingly, although we are sinners, we do not lose our filial relation on account of our filthiness, nor do we fall from grace on account of our sin.”[[3]](#endnote-3)

Luther made this potent image of a mother’s love even more staggering by personalizing it further as he related the love of his wife Katy for their son Martin to the love of God for His children:

1. “*God must be much friendlier to me and speak to me in friendlier fashion than my Katy to little Martin*. Neither Katy nor I could intentionally gouge out the eye or tear off the head of our child. Nor could God. God must have patience with us. He has given evidence of it, and therefore he sent his Son into our flesh in order that we may look to him for the best . . . . When I reflect on the magnitude of God’s mercy and majesty, I am myself horrified at how far God has humbled himself.”[[4]](#endnote-4)

Luther never stopped marveling at the amazing grace of God in Christ:

1. “*For who is able to express what a thing it is, when a man is assured in his heart that God neither is nor will be angry with him, but will be forever a merciful and loving Father to him for Christ’s sake?* This is indeed a marvelous and incomprehensible liberty, to have the most high and sovereign Majesty so favorable to us. Wherefore, this is an inestimable liberty, that we are made free from the wrath of God forever; and is greater than heaven and earth and all other creatures.”[[5]](#endnote-5)

**The Gospel for Defeating the Condemning Lies of Satan**

Luther even taught that we should preach the gospel to the devil!

1. “When the devil casts up to us our sin, and declares us unworthy of death and hell, we must say: ‘I confess that I am worthy of death and hell. *What more have you to say?*’ ‘Then you will be lost forever!’ ‘Not in the least: *for I know One who suffered for me and made satisfaction for my sins, and his name is Jesus Christ, the Son of God*. So long as he shall live, I shall live also.’ *Therefore treat the devil thus: Spit on him, and say: ‘Have I sinned? Well, then I have sinned, and I am sorry; but I will not on that account despair, for Christ has borne and taken away all my sin*, yes, and the sin of the whole world, if it will only confess its sin, reform and believe on Christ. What should I do if I had committed murder or adultery, or even crucified Christ? Why, even then, I should be forgiven, as he prayed on the cross: Father, forgive them (Luke xxiii. 34). This I am in duty bound to believe. I have been acquitted. Then away with you, devil!’”[[6]](#endnote-6)
2. “It’s the supreme art of the devil that he can make the law out of the gospel. If I can hold on to the distinction between law and gospel, *I can say to him any and every time that he should kiss my backside. Even if I sinned, I would say, ‘Should I deny the gospel on this account*?’”[[7]](#endnote-7)

Luther contrasts the lie of Satan with the grace and truth of Christ:

1. “The conscience, spurred by the devil, the flesh, and the fallen world; says, ‘God is your enemy. Give up in despair.’ God, in His own Fatherly love and through His Son’s grace and through His Word and through the witness of His people; says, ‘*I have no wrath. You are accepted in the beloved. I am not angry with you. We are reconciled!*’” [[8]](#endnote-8)

Luther exposes the evil source of condemning thoughts, and how to defeat them through God’s Word.

1. “First, you must firmly fix in your mind the conviction that such thoughts as yours are assuredly the suggestions and fiery darts of the wretched devil. Learn to say: ‘Begone, wretched devil! You are trying to make me worry about myself. *But God declares everywhere that I should let him care for me. He says, ‘I am thy God.’ This means, ‘I take care of you*.’ This is what Saint Peter taught, ‘Cast all thy care upon him, for he careth for you.’ And David taught, ‘Cast they burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee.’”[[9]](#endnote-9)
2. “The wretched devil, who is the enemy of God and Christ, tries by such thoughts to tear us away from Christ and God and to make us think about ourselves and our own cares. *If we do this, we take upon ourselves the function of God, which is to care for us and be our God*. In paradise the devil desired to make Adam equal with God so that Adam might be his own god and care for himself, thus robbing God of his divine work of caring for him. The result was the terrible Fall of Adam.”[[10]](#endnote-10)

Luther counsels us to startle one another with the gospel!

1. “But the Christian says: *I believe and cling to him who is in heaven as a Savior…. Thus the Christian faith differs from other religions in this, that the Christian hopes even in the midst of evils and sins*. Without the Holy Spirit natural man can’t do this. He can only seek refuge in works. To say, ‘I am a child of God,’ is accordingly not to doubt even when good works are lacking, as they always are in all of us. *This is so great a thing that one is startled by it*.”[[11]](#endnote-11)

The battle worsens when Satan adds his condemning lies to our condemning conscience. But Luther prescribes the gospel remedy.

1. “And let not him that suffers this temptation be dismayed, in that the devil can so aggravate sin, that during the conflict he thinks himself to be utterly overthrown, and feels nothing else but the wrath of God and desperation. Let him not follow his own feelings. Comfort yourselves through faith in Christ and remind yourself that ye be not under the law.”[[12]](#endnote-12) “*Hold up the mirror of grace to your tender conscience: So shall he have a strong buckler wherewith he may beat back all the fiery darts with which the wicked fiend assails him*. Therefore, when the emotions of the flesh rage, the only remedy is to take the sword of the Spirit, that is, the Word of salvation, and to fight against them. If we do this, we shall obtain the victory. *But if we do not use the Word, there is no counsel or help remaining*.”[[13]](#endnote-13)

**Gospel Memory Aids for Gospel Amnesia**

As a soul physician, Luther provides a biblical diagnosis of our core spiritual problem as Christians—we forget the gospel. To Christians struggling with despair and spiritual depression, Luther holds up the mirror of sainthood so they can see who God is who and they are in Christ:

1. “*The Holy Scriptures call Christians saints and the people of God. It’s a pity that it’s forgotten that we are saints, for to forget this is to forget Christ*.”[[14]](#endnote-14)

Luther returned again to the salvation imagery of sainthood in his commentary on Galatians:

1. “When I was a monk I often wished that I might once see the life of some saint or holy man.”[[15]](#endnote-15) (Luther then shared that he imagined such a saint living in the wilderness, abstaining from meat and drink, and living only with roots of herbs and cold water. Luther counters this works-based imagery with gospel imagery.) “But now in the light of the gospel we plainly see who they are whom Christ and His Apostles call saints: not they who live a single life, or observe days, meats, apparel, and such other things, or in outward appearance do other great works, but they which believe that they are sanctified and cleansed by the death and blood of Christ. So Paul everywhere calls them holy, the children and heirs of God. *Whoever then believes in Christ, whether he or she is man or woman, bond or free, is a saint; not by his own works, but by the works of God*.”[[16]](#endnote-16)

Satan condemns us when we sin, pummeling us with the lie that we lose our relationship with God. Luther responded by urging Christians to refuse to let sin overwhelm them.

1. “It is enough to have sinned; let the sin now vanish, and let sadness, which is a much greater sin, depart.”[[17]](#endnote-17) “Consequently one ought to be disposed to say, ‘It is true. I have sinned. But I will not despair on this account.’”[[18]](#endnote-18)

The gospel reminds us that Christianity is not about what I have done, but what Christ did once for all.

1. “Once I debate about what I have done and left undone, I am finished. *But if I reply on the basis of the gospel*, ‘The forgiveness of sins covers it all,’ I have won. On the other hand, if the devil gets me involved in what I have done and left undone, he has won, unless God helps and says, ‘Indeed! Even if you had not done anything, you would still be saved by forgiveness.’”[[19]](#endnote-19)

**Join the Conversation**

Of these 15 quotes, which ones resonate the most with you?

How would your daily life and mindset change if you preached the gospel to yourself daily?

How could you minister to other *Christians* by being a gospel memory aid reminding them of how the gospel applies to their daily life?

**Endnotes**

1. Kolb, “Luther as *Seelsorger*,” p. 4. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Tappert, *Luther: Letters of Spiritual Counsel*, p. 116. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*, p. 70**.** [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*, p. 127. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*, p. 314. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Nebe, *Luther as Spiritual Advisor*, pp. 213-215. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Luther, *LW*, Vol. 54, p. 106. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Luther, *LW*, Vol. 16, p. 214. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Tappert, *Luther: Letters of Spiritual Counsel*, p. 116. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Tappert, *Luther: Letters of Spiritual Counsel*, p. 117. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Luther, *LW*, Vol. 54, p. 70. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*, pp. 363-369. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*, pp. 363-369. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Luther, *LW*, Vol. 54, p. 70.  [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*, p. 372. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*, p. 372. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Nebe, *Luther As Spiritual Advisor*,p. 217-218. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. Luther, *LW*, Vol. 54, p. 37. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. Luther, *LW*, Vol. 54, p. 106. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)