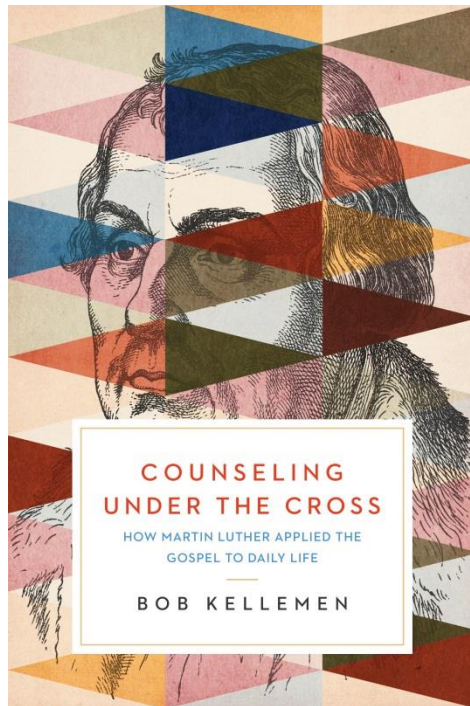


95 Martin Luther Quotes of Note

From

*Counseling Under the Cross:
How Martin Luther Applied the Gospel to Daily Life*



By

Bob Kellemen and New Growth Press

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95 Martin Luther Quotes of Note, Part 1

15 Martin Luther Quotes of Note on *Sola Scriptura* and the Sufficiency of Scripture

95 Theses and 95 Quotes

In 1519, Martin Luther nailed his Ninety-Five Theses to the church door in Wittenberg, launching the Protestant Reformation. For the 500th Anniversary of that world-changing event, I've collated 95 Martin Luther quotes from my book: [*Counseling Under the Cross: How Martin Luther Applied the Gospel to Daily Life*](#). I've divided these 95 quotes into 6 categories, starting with 15 Luther quotes on *Sola Scriptura* and the Sufficiency of Scripture.

Martin Luther and *Sola Scriptura*: By Scripture Alone!

Church historians call it *Sola Scriptura*: by Scripture alone. Biblical counselors call it *sufficiency of Scripture*—trusting in God's Word for the care of souls. Martin Luther always pointed people to the Word of God as their ultimate hope and primary help in suffering, sin, and sanctification. The Scriptures, for Luther, are sufficient to comfort the hurting, confront the sinning, and cheer the saint.

Preach the Gospel to Yourself Daily

1. "You have the Apostle Paul who shows to you a garden, or paradise, which is full of comfort, when he says: 'Whatever was written, was written for our instruction, so that through patience and the consolation of the Scriptures we might have hope' (Romans 15:4). Here he attributes to *Holy Scripture the function of comforting*. *Who may dare to seek or ask for comfort anywhere else?*"¹
2. "Comfort yourself with the Word of God, *the pre-eminent consolation*."²
3. "It is thus very true that we shall find consolation *only through the Scriptures*, which in the days of evil call us to the contemplation of our blessings, either present or to come."³
4. "*Nothing helps more powerfully* against the devil, the world, the flesh, and all evil thoughts than occupying oneself with God's Word, having conversations about it, and contemplating it."⁴
5. "I have learned by experience how one should act under temptation, namely, when any one is afflicted with sadness.... *Let him first* lay hold of the comfort of the divine Word."⁵
6. "Therefore, whenever any one is assailed by temptation of any sort whatever, *the very best that he can do in the case* is either to read something in the Holy Scriptures, or think about the Word of God, and apply it to his heart."⁶

7. "If you now attempt, in this spiritual conflict, to protect yourself by the help of man without the Word of God, you simply enter upon the conflict with that mighty spirit, the devil, naked and unprotected." Such an endeavor would be worse than David against Goliath—without God's supernatural power helping David. You may, therefore, if you so please, oppose your power to the might of the devil. It will then be very easily seen what an utterly unequal conflict it is, if one does not have at hand *in the beginning the Word of God.*"⁷
8. "Christ heals people *by means of his precious Word*, as he also declares in the 50th chapter of Isaiah (verse 4): 'The Lord hath given me a learned tongue, that I should know how to speak a word in season to the weary.' St. Paul also teaches likewise, in Romans xv 14, that we should obtain and strengthen hope from the comfort of the Holy Scriptures, which the devil endeavors to tear out of people's hearts in times of temptations. Accordingly, as *there is no better nor more powerful remedy* in temptations than to diligently read and heed the Word of God."⁸
9. "Let us learn, therefore, in great and horrible terrors, when our conscience feels nothing but sin and judges that God is angry with us, and that Christ has turned His face from us, not to follow the sense and feeling of our own heart, *but to stick to the Word of God.*"⁹

Preach the Gospel to One Another Daily

10. "No man should be alone when he opposes Satan. The church *and the ministry of the Word* were instituted for this purpose, that hands may be joined together and one may help another. If the prayer of one doesn't help, the prayer of another will."¹⁰
11. "Those who are tempted by doubt and despair I should console in this fashion. First, by warning them to beware of solitude and *to converse constantly with others about the Psalms and Scriptures.*"¹¹
12. "For one has to instruct consciences that the comfort of the gospel is directed to each individual particularly; therefore, as you people who understand these matters know, the gospel has to be applied through *the Word to each individual particularly*, so that each individual in his conscience is tossed about by the questions whether this great grace, which Christ offers to all men, belongs to him too."¹²
13. "So we also *labor by the Word of God* that we may set at liberty those that are entangled, and bring them to the pure doctrine of faith, and hold them there."¹³

Scripture for the Soul; Medicine for the Body

Luther's doctrine of sufficiency was robust enough to make room for the appropriate use of medication.

14. "Accordingly a physician is our Lord God's mender of the body, as we theologians are his healers of the spirit; we are to restore what the devil has damaged. So a physician administers *theriaca* (an antidote for poison) when Satan gives poison. Healing comes from the application of nature to the creature . . . It's our Lord God who created all things, and they are good. Wherefore it's permissible to use medicine, for it is a creature of God. Thus I replied to Hohndorf, who inquired of me when he heard from Karlstadt that it's not permissible to make use of medicine. I said to him, 'Do you eat when you're hungry?'"¹⁴

On the other hand, when convinced that an issue was spiritual in nature, Luther did not hesitate to call for spiritual, rather than medicinal cures. Scripture is God's prescription, God's choice medicine, for soul sickness. Luther writes to his friend John Agricola concerning John's wife:

15. "Her illness is, as you see, rather of the mind than of the body. I am comforting her as much as I can, with my knowledge. In a word, her disease is not for the apothecaries (as they call them), nor is it to be treated with the salves of Hippocrates, but by constantly *applying plasters of Scripture and the Word of God*. For what has conscience to do with Hippocrates? Therefore, I would dissuade you from the use of medicine and advise the power of God's Word."¹⁵

95 Martin Luther Quotes of Note, Part 2

15 Martin Luther Quotes of Note on Comforting the Suffering

Many people are surprised at how comforting Luther was in his writings. They picture Luther as the bold Reformer. These quotes on comforting the suffering remind us that alongside Luther's boldness was another side—the tender pastoral shepherd.

As one of Luther's translators said of Luther's letter to a troubled man, "The entire writing echoes his experience as a pastor and confessor constantly in contact with men and women who were terrified by the maze of popular customs and practices observed by the church in connection with death. To Scharf and others like him *Luther speaks with intimate and comforting understanding.*"

Comforting His Mother

Luther's compassionate ministry included comforting his mother when it was apparent that she was near death.

16. "My *dearly beloved Mother!* I have received my brother James's letter concerning your illness. Of course *this grieves me deeply*, especially because I cannot be with you in person, as I certainly would like to be. All your children and my Katie pray for you; *some weep.*"¹⁶
17. "Dear Mother, you also know the true center and foundation of your salvation *from whom you are to seek comfort in this and all troubles, namely, Jesus Christ, the cornerstone.* He will not waver or fail us, nor allow us to sink or perish, for he is the Savior and is called the Savior of all poor sinners, and of all who are caught in tribulation and death, and rely on him, and call on his name. *The Father and God of all consolation* grant you, through his holy Word and Spirit, a steadfast, joyful, and grateful faith blessedly to overcome this and all other trouble."¹⁷

Exposing Satan's Lies and Christ's Grace and Truth

A cornerstone of Luther's comforting counsel was to remind believers of the *lie of Satan and of the love and truth of God*, as he does in the next quote.

18. "When God sends us tribulation, it is *not* as reason and Satan argue: 'See there God flings you into prison, endangers your life. Surely He hates you. He is angry with you; for if He did not hate you, He would not allow this thing to happen.' In this way Satan turns the rod of a Father into the rope of a hangman and the most salutary remedy into the deadliest poison. He is an incredible master at devising thoughts of this nature. Therefore, it is very difficult to differentiate in tribulations between him who kills and Him who chastises in a friendly way."¹⁸

Luther always directed people to the comfort of Christ, as he does in these words to the Elector Frederick.

19. “When, therefore, I learned, most illustrious prince, that Your Lordship has been afflicted with a grave illness and that Christ has at the same time become ill in you, I counted it my duty to visit Your Lordship with a little writing of mine. I cannot pretend that I do not *hear the voice of Christ crying out to me from Your Lordship’s body and flesh saying, ‘Behold, I am sick.’* This is so because such evils as illness and the like are not borne by us who are Christians but by Christ himself, our Lord and Savior, in whom we live even as Christ plainly testifies in the Gospel when he says, ‘Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.’”¹⁹

Looking at Life with Cross-Eyes

Luther sought to help suffering people reshape their perspective or interpretation of their life situation—from a gospel-centered perspective.

20. “The Holy Spirit knows that a thing only has such *value and meaning to a man as he assigns it in his thoughts.*”²⁰
21. Therefore, “if we consider this (the broader rule and plan of God) rightly, we shall see how greatly we are favored by God. We thus see that all our suffering is nothing when we consider and ponder the afflictions of men. *Oh, if we could only see the heart of Christ as he was suspended from the cross, anguishing to make death contemptible and dead for us.* This (delighting in suffering) will come to pass if this image (of Christ’s resurrection) finds its way into our heart and abides in the innermost affections of our mind.”²¹

Luther wanted to help Frederick to understand that the death of Christ for him and the suffering of Christ with him could change Frederick’s perspective:

22. “How does this come to pass? Surely, it comes to pass when you hear that Jesus Christ, God’s Son, has by his most holy touch consecrated and hallowed all sufferings, even death itself, has blessed the curse, and has glorified shame and enriched poverty so that death is now a door to life, the curse a fount of blessing, and shame the mother of glory. Suffering has been touched and bathed by Christ’s pure and holy flesh and blood and thus have become holy, harmless, and wholesome, blessed, and full of joy for you. *There is nothing, not even death, that his passion cannot sweeten.*”²²
23. “*If only a man could see his God in such a light of love . . . how happy, how calm, how safe he would be!* He would then truly have a God from whom he would know with certainty that all his fortunes—whatever they might be—had come to him and were still coming to him under the guidance of God’s most gracious will.”²³

Luther wanted people's non-faith or earth-bound, human story of suffering to give way to God's narrative of the cross and resurrection:

24. "He who does not believe this is like a deaf man hearing a story.... If we considered it properly and with an attentive heart, this one image (Christ crucified and raised)—even if there were no other—would suffice to fill us with such comfort that we should not only not grieve over our evils, but should also glory in our tribulations, scarcely feeling them for the joy that we have in Christ."²⁴

Giving Hurting People Permission to Grieve and Pointing People to Christ—The Ultimate Comforter

Luther often wrote to hurting people, giving them permission to grieve and encouragement to hope.

25. "I am not so inhumane that I cannot appreciate how deeply the death of Margaret distresses you. For the great and godly affection which binds a husband to his wife is so strong that it cannot easily be shaken off, and *this feeling of sorrow is not displeasing to God...since it is an expression of what God has assuredly implanted in you*. Nor would I account you a man, to say nothing of a good husband, if you could at once throw off your grief."²⁵
26. "My dear Cordatus: *May Christ comfort you in this sorrow and affliction of yours. Who else can soothe such a grief?* I can easily believe what you write, for I too have had experience of such a calamity, which comes to a father's heart sharper than a two-edged sword, piercing even to the marrow. But you ought to remember that it is not to be marveled at if he, who is more truly and properly a father than you were, preferred for his own glory that your son—nay, rather his son—should be with him rather than with you, for he is safer there than here. But all of this is vain, a story that falls on deaf ears, when your grief is so new. *I therefore yield to your sorrows. Greater and better men than we are have given way to grief and are not blamed for it.*"²⁶

Luther frequently offered permission to grieve by communicating that it was abnormal and unhealthy *not* to grieve. For instance, Mr. and Mrs. Matthias Knudsen were the parents of John Knudsen, a graduate of the university in Wittenberg. Luther wrote to them after their son's death. After expressing consolation in the experience of the death of their son, Luther writes:

27. "It is *quite inconceivable that you should not be mourning*. In fact, it would not be encouraging to learn that a father and mother are not grieved over the death of their son."²⁷

28. "So you too, when you have mourned and wept, should be comforted again. *The Lord and supreme Comforter Jesus Christ*, who loved your son even more than you did and who, having first called him through his Word, afterward summoned him to himself and took him from you, comfort and strengthen you, with his grace until the day when you will see your son again in eternal joy."²⁸

Sharing Personal Suffering

Luther often vulnerably shared his own raw grief, such as these honest words after his father's death:

29. "*This death has cast me into deep mourning*, not only because of the ties of nature but also because it was through his sweet love to me that my Creator endowed me with all that I am and have. Although it is consoling to me that, as he writes, my father fell asleep softly and strong in his faith in Christ, yet his kindness and the memory of his pleasant conversation *have caused so deep a wound in my heart that I have scarcely ever held death in such low esteem.*"²⁹

John Zink was a young graduate student at Wittenberg and a frequent guest in Luther's home. On April 20, he died, and Luther wrote his parents to express the great personal loss John's death was to him and to empathize with their grief:

30. "Accordingly we all are deeply grieved by his death. As is natural, your son's death, and the report of it, will distress and grieve your heart and that of your wife, since you are his parents. *I do not blame you for this, for all of us—I in particular—are stricken with sorrow.*"³⁰

95 Martin Luther Quotes of Note, Part 3

15 Martin Luther Quotes of Note on Looking at Life Through the Lens of the Cross

Understanding the Fundamental Scheme of Satan

Luther found that during times of suffering, Satan seeks to distort our image of God. Luther teaches us that Satan's fundamental strategy is to *paint pictures of God shaking a wrathful, angry finger at Christians*.

31. "By the temptation of faith is meant that the evil conscience drives out of a person his confidence in the pardoning grace of God, and *leads him to imagine that God is angry and wishes the death of the sinner*, or that, in other words, the conscience places Moses upon the judgment-seat, and casts down the Savior of sinners from the throne of grace. *This is the strongest, greatest and severest temptation of the devil*, that he says: '*God is the enemy of sinners, you are a sinner, therefore, God is your enemy.*' This is the noose which Satan throws over the head of the poor child of man in order to strangle him."³¹
32. "This one line of attack the devil pursues to the utmost against us, undertaking to break down our faith and confidence *by the thought that God is angry with us.*"³²

Interpreting God Through Circumstances or Through the Cross?

Satan tempts us to interpret God through the grid of our circumstances. Luther encourages us to *interpret our circumstances through the grid of the cross*. In a table talk from 1533, Luther explained that according to reason alone:

33. "Our God is always in the wrong, no matter what he does."³³

When we think about God and see what happens in this world, *without faith*, we conclude that either God is very weak and cannot stop suffering, or he is very wicked and delights in suffering.

34. "Let it be granted that God *appears* to be angry when we are vexed and tempted; yet, if we repent and believe, we shall come to see that beneath the wrath of God lie hidden grace and goodness, just as his strength and power lie concealed beneath our weakness."³⁴

What is the believer to do when confronted with the devil's lie? The heart of Luther's healing counsel involved turning people back to the heart of God—revealed in Christ:

35. "I know nothing of any other Christ than he whom the Father gave and who died for me and for my sins, and *I know that he is not angry with me, but is kind and gracious to me; for he would not otherwise have had the heart to die for me and for my benefit.*"³⁵

Luther is very specific in teaching how to counter Satan's deception about God's relationship to the Christian:

36. "For the spirit and heart of man is not able to endure the thought of the wrath of God, as the devil represents and urges it. Therefore, whatever thoughts the devil awakens within us in temptation we should put away from us and cast out of our minds, so that *we can see and hear nothing else than the kind, comforting word of the promise of Christ, and of the gracious will of the heavenly Father, who has given his own Son for us*, as Christ, our dear Lord, declares in John iii. 16: 'God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life.' Everything else, now, which the devil may suggest to us beyond this, that *God the Father is reconciled to us, and graciously inclined to us, and merciful and powerful for the sake of his dear Son*, we should cast out of our minds as wandering and unprofitable thoughts."³⁶

The Love of God and the Cross of Christ

In his commentary on Genesis, Luther describes how biblical reasoning is always faith-based reasoning:

37. "True faith draws forth the following conclusion: God is God for me because He speaks to me. *He forgives my sins. He is not angry with me*, just as He promises: 'I am the Lord your God.' Now search your heart, and ask whether you believe that *God is your God, Father, Savior, and Deliverer, who wants to rescue you*."³⁷

To combat the lies of Satan about the character of God, Luther constantly reminded people of God's fatherly love and friendship.

38. This was his counsel and consolation to his father when he lay ill and near death: "Herewith I commend you to Him who *loves you more than you love yourself*."³⁸ In a letter of pastoral counsel to the Elector John, Luther wrote: "*God's friendship is a bigger comfort than that of the whole world*."³⁹

Luther directly connected Christ as a suffering Savior to God as a loving Father:

39. "The flesh cries out against the belief that God is good, but that *the suffering Savior brings consolation that this is indeed true*."⁴⁰ Through Christ people can grasp with assurance that God is Father and cry out, "*Abba, dear Father*."⁴¹

God's Gracious Reason for Allowing Suffering

Like the lamenting Psalmists, our souls still cry out seeking an answer to why a good God would allow evil and suffering. Luther empathized with this line of questioning, and addressed it directly with biblical wisdom.

Writing to the Elector John of Saxony, who was deathly ill, Luther clearly conveyed how God uses tribulations, suffering, and pain to draw us nearer to Him and make us more like Him:

40. *“Suffering is the school in which God chastens us and teaches us to trust in him so that our faith may not always stay in our ears and hover on our lips but may have its true dwelling place in the depths of our hearts. Your grace is now in this school.”*⁴²

When evil intrudes into the usual rhythms of life, God brings us to a full stop and moves us to the verge of defenselessness—fertile ground for the growth of faith.

41. *“The most dangerous trial of all is when there is no trial, when everything is all right and running smoothly. That is when a man tends to forget God, to become too independent and put his time of prosperity to a wrong use. In fact, at this time he has more need to call upon God’s name than in adversity.”*⁴³

42. *“Therefore, we should willingly endure the hand of God in this and in all suffering. Do not be worried; indeed such a trial is the very best sign revealing God’s grace and love for man.”*⁴⁴

With Christ in the School of Suffering

Luther wrote to the Madgeburg chancellor, Laurentius Zoch, after Zoch’s wife had died, explaining the mysterious, but gracious work of God.

43. *“Therefore, God often withdraws from us the comfort of visible things, in order that the comfort of the Scriptures may find room and opportunity within us, and not remain standing uselessly in the bare letter without exercise.”*⁴⁵

Luther recognized how difficult and painful it was to wait patiently on God when our flesh is crying out for fixed feelings and changed circumstances. Yet, this painful process teaches us dependent trust:

44. *“All of this, both such patience and such comfort, is the work of God and beyond our power. This is the school of Christians. They take lessons daily in this art and cannot comprehend it, much less learn it thoroughly, but they always remain children, spelling the A B C of this art.”*⁴⁶

Faith and trials are God’s healing medicine against the disease of self-trust:

45. *“Inasmuch as tribulation serves the same purpose as rhubarb, myrrh, aloes, or an antidote against all the worms, poison, decay, and dung of this body of death, it ought not to be despised. We must not willingly seek or select afflictions, but we must accept those which God sees fit to visit upon us, for he knows which are suitable and salutary for us and how many and how heavy they should be.”*⁴⁷

95 Martin Luther Quotes of Note, Part 4

15 Martin Luther Quotes of Note on Preaching the Gospel to Ourselves

The Gospel for Believers

When we think of Martin Luther, we typically picture him preaching the 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.”⁴⁸

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

46. “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.*”⁴⁹

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:

47. “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.”⁵⁰

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:

48. “*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.”⁵¹

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

49. *“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.”*⁵²

The Gospel for Defeating the Condemning Lies of Satan

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

50. *“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!’”*⁵³

51. *“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?’”*⁵⁴

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

52. *“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!’”*⁵⁵

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

53. *“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 thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee.'"⁵⁶

54. "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."⁵⁷

Luther counsels us to startle one another with the gospel!

55. "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.*"⁵⁸

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

56. "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."⁵⁹ *"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.*"⁶⁰

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:

57. "*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.*"⁶¹

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

58. “When I was a monk I often wished that I might once see the life of some saint or holy man.”⁶² (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.*”⁶³

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.

59. “It is enough to have sinned; let the sin now vanish, and let sadness, which is a much greater sin, depart.”⁶⁴ “Consequently one ought to be disposed to say, ‘It is true. I have sinned. But I will not despair on this account.’”⁶⁵

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

60. “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.’*”⁶⁶

95 Martin Luther Quotes of Note, Part 5

15 Martin Luther Quotes of Note on Growing in Grace

Speaking Gospel Truth in Love to One Another

Martin Luther knew that we grow in Christ through the *mutual ministry of the Body of Christ* (Ephesians 4:15-16). That's why, during times of spiritual temptation, Luther counsels us toward spiritual conversations. When we doubt God's forgiveness, we must cling to gospel reminders from our brothers and sisters in Christ.

61. The voice and words of "brethren and fellow Christians are to be heard and believed as the word and voice of God himself, as though God were speaking to them."⁶⁷
62. "I beseech you by the Lord Christ, as earnestly as I can, not to depend upon yourself and your own thoughts, but to hear the brother in Christ who now speaks to you."⁶⁸
63. "When we have laid bare our conscience to our brother and privately make known to him the evil that lurked within, we receive from our brother's lips the word of comfort spoken by God himself. And if we accept this in faith, we find peace in the mercy of God speaking to us through our brother."⁶⁹
64. "Be contented, therefore, and of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you. Depend boldly upon this; turn not to your own thoughts, but listen only to that which your pastors and preachers repeat to you out of God's Word. Do not despise their word and comfort; for it is Christ himself who speaks to you through them."⁷⁰

Reminding Each Other of Who Christ Is and Who We Are in Christ

For Luther, the greatest threat to empowered Christian living was a darkened understanding of Christ and our identity in Christ. Luther understood this battle in his own life. Speaking of Galatians 3:1 and Satan's bewitching deceptions, Luther told his students:

65. "To tell the truth, he sometimes assails me so mightily and oppresses me with such heavy cogitations, that he utterly shadows my Savior Christ from me and, in a manner, takes Him out of my sight."⁷¹

So how do we minister to one another and counter the lying, condemning schemes of Satan?

66. "So we also labor by the Word of God that we may set at liberty those that are entangled, and bring them to the pure doctrine of faith, and hold them there.... The Scripture does not set forth Christ as an accuser, a judge, or a tempter, but as a reconciler, a mediator, a comforter, and a throne of grace"⁷²

Nothing was more important to Luther than reminding God's children to remind themselves that they were indeed God's children. Speaking of Galatians 1:4 ("Who gave himself for our sins"), Luther challenges us to personalize the gospel:

67. "Weigh diligently every word of Paul, and specially mark well this pronoun, '**our.**' You may easily believe that Christ the Son of God was given for the sins of Peter, of Paul, and of other saints, whom we account to have been worthy of this grace; but it is a very hard thing that you who judge yourself unworthy of this grace should from your heart say and believe that Christ was given for your own invincible, infinite, and horrible sins."⁷³
68. "Labor diligently when your conscience is thoroughly afraid with the remembrance of your sins past, and the devil assails you with great violence, going about to overwhelm you with heaps, floods, and whole seas of sins, to terrify you and to drive you to despair; that then I say, you may be able to say with sure confidence: Christ the Son of God was given, not for the righteous and holy, but for the unrighteous and sinners."⁷⁴
69. "Let us therefore arm ourselves with these and like verses of the Holy Scriptures, that we may be able to answer the devil (accusing us, and saying: You are a sinner, and therefore you are damned) in this sort: 'Christ has given Himself for my sins; therefore, Satan, you shall not prevail against me when you go about to terrify me in setting forth the greatness of my sins, and so to bring me into heaviness, distrust, despair, hatred, contempt and blaspheming of God. As often as you object that I am a sinner, you call me to remembrance of the benefit of Christ my Redeemer, upon whose shoulders, and not upon mine, lie all my sins; for 'the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all,' and 'for the transgression of people was he stricken' (Isaiah 53:6, 8). Wherefore, when you say I am a sinner, you do not terrify me, but comfort me above measure."⁷⁵

Faith Active in Love: Gospel Indicatives AND Gospel Imperatives

So, is Luther simply saying that we just rest in what Christ has done for us and in our identity in Christ (gospel indicatives)? Is he saying that we have no calling from God to grow in grace and to serve Christ and others? Not at all. To the gospel indicatives, Luther adds the gospel imperatives. Our faith is to be active in love for God and others. Our new relationship to God through Christ motivates and empowers us to love like Christ.

Before explaining the role of works of love, Luther ensured that people understood the relationship between faith and works:

70. "The apple makes not the tree, but the tree makes the apples. So faith first makes the person who afterwards brings forth works.... Christians are not made righteous by doing righteous things, but being made righteous by faith in Christ, they do righteous things."⁷⁶ And, "We must first of all to believe, and so through faith to perform the law. We must first receive the Holy Ghost, through whom we, being enlightened and made new creatures, begin to do the law, that is to say, to love God and our neighbor."⁷⁷

Luther believed that because Christ has already changed us (regeneration and redemption), our lives should progressively change:

71. “When I have Christian righteousness reigning in my heart, I descend from heaven as the rain makes fruitful the earth; that is to say, *I do good works*, how and wheresoever the occasion arises. If I am a minister of the Word, I preach, I comfort the brokenhearted, and I administer the sacraments. If I am a householder, I govern my house and family well, and in the fear of God. If I am a servant, I do my master’s business faithfully. To conclude, whoever is assuredly persuaded that Christ alone is his righteousness, does not only cheerfully and gladly work well in his vocation, but also submits himself through love to the rulers and to their laws...”⁷⁸
72. “Therefore you must by all means put off the old man and cast him far from you... For glorying in the grace of God and the forgiveness of sin is inconsistent with following sin—remaining in the former old un-Christian life and walking in error and deceitful lusts.”⁷⁹

For Luther, and for Paul in Galatians 5:6, the work of faith is love:

73. “Paul therefore in this verse sets forth the whole life of a Christian, namely, that inwardly it consists in faith towards God, and outwardly in charity and good works towards our neighbor.”⁸⁰

What does it mean to be godly and to express our faith in God active in love for others? In a table talk recorded in 1533, Luther succinctly captured the relationship between faith and love:

74. “Concerning the verse in Galatians 5:6, ‘faith working through love,’ we also say that faith doesn’t exist without works. However, Paul’s view is this: Faith is active in love, that is, that faith justifies which expresses itself in acts.... Faith comes first and then love follows.” Luther concluded with this summary: “But this, he says, is what counts: ‘Believe in me and be godly.’”⁸¹
75. “Thus, Christians, even if completely free, become willing servants once again in order to help the neighbor, walking alongside and dealing with each neighbor the way God through Christ dealt with them—and all for nothing, looking for nothing in return except God’s good pleasure.”⁸²

95 Martin Luther Quotes of Note, Part 6

20 Martin Luther Quotes of Note on Salvation by Faith Alone

Luther the Pastor Inspired Luther the Reformer

Martin Luther is usually thought of as a world-shaking figure who defied papacy and empire to introduce a reformation in the teaching, worship, organization, and life of the Church and to leave a lasting impression on Western civilization. It is sometimes forgotten that he was also—and *above all else*—a pastor and shepherd of souls. It is therefore well to remind ourselves that the Reformation began in Germany when Luther became concerned about his own parishioners who believed that if they had purchased letters of indulgence they were sure of their salvation.

The next four quotes are from Luther's cover letter attached to his 95 Theses.

76. "I bewail the gross misunderstanding among the people which comes from these preachers and which they spread everywhere among common men. Evidently the poor souls believe that when they have bought indulgence letters they are then assured of their salvation."⁸³

77. "O great God! The souls committed to your care, excellent Father, are thus directed to death. For all these souls you have the heaviest and a constantly increasing responsibility. Therefore, I can no longer be silent on this subject."⁸⁴

78. "The first and only duty of the bishops, however, is to see that the people learn the gospel and the love of Christ. For on no occasion has Christ ordered that indulgences should be preached, but he forcefully commanded the gospel to be preached."⁸⁵

79. "My humble supplication to Your Electoral Grace is, therefore, that Your Electoral Grace refrain from leading the poor people astray and from robbing them, and present yourself as a bishop and not as a wolf. It is sufficiently well known that indulgences are nothing else but knavery and fraud and that Christ alone should be preached to the people."⁸⁶

The False Hope of Works

Before Luther came to understand salvation as coming through Christ alone, by faith alone, through grace alone, he attempted to earn his salvation by works. The following Luther quotes show the futility of works—for Luther and for us.

80. "Though I lived as a monk without reproach, I felt that I was a sinner before God with an extremely disturbed conscience. I could not believe that anything that I thought or did or prayed satisfied God."⁸⁷

81. "I had hoped I might find peace of conscience with fasts, prayer, and the vigils with which I miserably afflicted my body, but the more I sweated it out like this, the less peace and tranquility I knew."⁸⁸
82. "The greatest holiness one could imagine drew us into the cloister.... We fasted and prayed repeatedly, wore hair shirts under woolen cowls, led a strict and austere life. In short, we took on a monkish holiness. We were so deeply involved in that pretentious business that we considered ourselves holy from head to toe."⁸⁹
83. "I was a good monk, and I kept the rules of my order so strictly that I may say that *if ever a monk got to heaven by his monkery it was I*. All my brothers in the monastery who knew me will bear me out. If I had kept on any longer, I should have killed myself with vigils, prayers, reading, and other work."⁹⁰
84. "I almost fasted myself to death, for again and again I went for three days without taking a drop of water or a morsel of food. I was very serious about it."⁹¹
85. "While I was a monk, I no sooner felt assailed by any temptation than I cried out—'I am lost!' Immediately I had recourse to a thousand methods to stifle the cries of my conscience. I went everyday to confession, but that was of no use to me."⁹²

Luther entered the monastery to find peace with God. Though driven there for rest for his soul, monastic life failed to ease his guilt:

86. "Then, bowed down by sorrow, I tortured myself by the multitude of my thoughts. 'Look,' exclaimed I, 'thou art still envious, impatient, passionate! It profiteth thee nothing, O wretched man, to have entered this sacred order.'"⁹³

Luther's Journey to Salvation in Christ Alone

Luther wrote to his fellow Augustinian friar, George Spenlein, on April 8, 1516. After just one paragraph, Luther abruptly inquires about the state of his friend's soul:

87. "Now I should like to know whether your soul, tired of its own righteousness, is learning to be revived by and to trust in the righteousness of Christ."⁹⁴
88. "For in our age the temptation to presumption besets many, especially those who try with all their might to be just and good without knowing the righteousness of God, which is most bountifully and freely given us in Christ. They try to do good of themselves in order that they might stand before God clothed in their own virtues and merits. But this is impossible. While you were here, you were one who held this opinion, or rather, error. So was I."⁹⁵

89. "Therefore, my dear Friar, learn Christ and him crucified. Learn to praise him and, despairing of yourself, say, 'Lord Jesus, you are my righteousness, just as I am your sin. You have taken upon yourself what is mine and have given to me what is yours. You have taken upon yourself what you were not and have given to me what I was not.'"⁹⁶
90. "Meditate on this love of his and you will see his sweet consolation. For why was it necessary for him to die if we can obtain a good conscience by our works and afflictions. Accordingly, you will find peace only in him when you despair of yourself and your own works. Besides, you will learn from him that just as he has received you, so he has made your sins his own and has made his righteousness yours."⁹⁷
91. "This Epistle (Romans) is really the chief part of the New Testament and the very purest Gospel, and is worthy not only that every Christian should know it word for word, by heart, but occupy himself with it every day, as the daily bread of the soul."⁹⁸

In Romans, Luther found that the route to God led through the path of faith:

92. "Hence it comes that faith alone makes righteous and fulfills the law."⁹⁹ Going yet further, Luther discovered that the essence of sin is unbelief or lack of faith: "Hence, Christ calls unbelief the only sin, when He says, 'The Spirit will rebuke the world for sin, because they believe not on me.' For this reason, too, before good or bad works are done, which are the fruits, there must first be in the heart faith or unbelief, which is the root, the sap, the chief power of all sin."¹⁰⁰
93. "Faith is a living, daring confidence in God's grace, so sure and certain that a man would stake his life on it a thousand times. This confidence in God's grace and knowledge of it makes all men glad and bold and happy in dealing with God and all His creatures; and this is the work of the Holy Ghost in faith."¹⁰¹
94. "Hereby it appears that the doctrine of the gospel (which of all others is most sweet and full of most singular consolation) speaks nothing of our works or of the works of the law, but of the inscrutable mercy and love of God towards most wretched and miserable sinners. Our most merciful Father, seeing us to be oppressed and overwhelmed with the curse of the law, and that we could never be delivered from it of our own power, sent His only Son into the world and laid upon Him all the sins of all men, saying, be Thou Peter that denier; Paul that persecutor and cruel oppressor; David that adulterer; that sinner who did eat the fruit in Eden; that thief who hanged upon the cross, and be Thou that person who has committed the sins of all me; see therefore, that Thou pay and satisfy for them."¹⁰²

The very expression at which Luther had trembled—the justice of God—now became his friend. Luther explains the results of this shift. It is a fitting quote to use to conclude our 95 Martin Luther quotes of note:

95. “Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise.” Now, “the whole of Scripture took on a new meaning, and whereas before the ‘justice of God’ had filled me with hate, now it became to me inexpressibly sweet in greater love. This passage of Paul became to me a gate to heaven.”¹⁰³

Endnotes

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- ¹Luther, *LW*, Vol. 49, p. 16.
- ²Tappert, *Luther: Letters of Spiritual Counsel*, p. 63, emphasis added.
- ³Luther, *LW*, Vol. 42, p. 124.
- ⁴Luther, *The Large Catechism*, p. 187, in Krey, *Luther's Spirituality*.
- ⁵Nebe, *Luther As Spiritual Adviser*, pp. 175-176.
- ⁶Nebe, *Luther As Spiritual Adviser*, p. 178.
- ⁷Luther, *Commentary on Romans*, pp. 179-180.
- ⁸Nebe, *Luther As Spiritual Adviser*, p. 179.
- ⁹Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*, pp. 333, 126.
- ¹⁰Luther, *LW*, Vol. 54, p. 78.
- ¹¹Tappert, *Luther: Letters of Spiritual Counsel*, p. 117.
- ¹²Luther, *LW*, Vol. 50, p. 77.
- ¹³Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*, pp. 333, 126.
- ¹⁴Luther, *LW*, Vol. 54, pp. 53-54.
- ¹⁵Smith, *The Life and Letters of Martin Luther*, p. 402.
- ¹⁶Luther, *LW*, Vol. 54, pp.17-24.
- ¹⁷Luther, *LW*, Vol. 54, pp.17-24.
- ¹⁸Luther, *LW*, Vol. 16, p. 214.
- ¹⁹Tappert, *Luther: Letters of Spiritual Counsel*, p. 27.
- ²⁰Luther, *LW*, Vol. 42, p. 124.
- ²¹Luther, *LW*, Vol. 42, pp. 126, 131, 132, 147, 149, 135, 139, 143, 145.
- ²²Luther, *LW*, Vol. 42, pp. 141-142.
- ²³Luther, *LW*, Vol. 42, p. 154.
- ²⁴Luther, *LW*, Vol. 42, p. 165.
- ²⁵Tappert, *Luther: Letters of Spiritual Counsel*, p. 62.
- ²⁶Tappert, *Luther: Letters of Spiritual Counsel*, p. 60.
- ²⁷Tappert, *Luther: Letters of Spiritual Counsel*, p. 61.
- ²⁸*Luther: Letters of Spiritual Counsel*, pp. 61-62.
- ²⁹Tappert, *Luther: Letters of Spiritual Counsel*, p. 30.
- ³⁰Luther, *LW*, Vol. 50, p. 51.
- ³¹Nebe, *Luther As Spiritual Advisor*, p. 189-190.
- ³²Nebe, *Luther As Spiritual Advisor*, p. 179.
- ³³Luther, *LW*, Vol. 54, p. 105.
- ³⁴Nebe, *Luther As Spiritual Advisor*, p. 192.
- ³⁵Nebe, *Luther As Spiritual Advisor*, p. 180-181.
- ³⁶Nebe, *Luther As Spiritual Advisor*, p. 184-185.
- ³⁷Luther, *LW*, Vol. 4, p. 149.
- ³⁸Luther, *LW*, Vol. 49, p. 270.
- ³⁹Luther, *LW*, Vol. 49, p. 306.
- ⁴⁰Nebe, *Luther As Spiritual Advisor*, p. 157.
- ⁴¹Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*, p. 249-250.
- ⁴²Tappert, *Luther: Letters of Spiritual Counsel*, p. 56.
- ⁴³Luther, *LW*, Vol. 44, p. 47.
- ⁴⁴Luther, *LW*, Vol. 42, p. 184.
- ⁴⁵Nebe, *Luther As Spiritual Advisor*, p. 159.
- ⁴⁶*Luther As Spiritual Advisor*, pp. 160-161.
- ⁴⁷Tappert, *Luther: Letters of Spiritual Counsel*, p. 165.
- ⁴⁸Kolb, "Luther as Seelsorger," p. 4.
- ⁴⁹Tappert, *Luther: Letters of Spiritual Counsel*, p. 116.
- ⁵⁰Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*, p. 70.

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- ⁵¹Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*, p. 127.
- ⁵²Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*, p. 314.
- ⁵³Nebe, *Luther as Spiritual Advisor*, pp. 213-215.
- ⁵⁴Luther, *LW*, Vol. 54, p. 106.
- ⁵⁵Luther, *LW*, Vol. 16, p. 214.
- ⁵⁶Tappert, *Luther: Letters of Spiritual Counsel*, p. 116.
- ⁵⁷Tappert, *Luther: Letters of Spiritual Counsel*, p. 117.
- ⁵⁸Luther, *LW*, Vol. 54, p. 70.
- ⁵⁹Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*, pp. 363-369.
- ⁶⁰Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*, pp. 363-369.
- ⁶¹Luther, *LW*, Vol. 54, p. 70.
- ⁶²Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*, p. 372.
- ⁶³Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*, p. 372.
- ⁶⁴Nebe, *Luther As Spiritual Advisor*, p. 217-218.
- ⁶⁵Luther, *LW*, Vol. 54, p. 37.
- ⁶⁶Luther, *LW*, Vol. 54, p. 106.
- ⁶⁷Luther, *Commentary on Romans*, pp. 181-182.
- ⁶⁸Nebe, *Luther as Spiritual Advisor*, p. 217.
- ⁶⁹Luther, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, p. 201.
- ⁷⁰Nebe, *Luther as Spiritual Advisor*, p. 215.
- ⁷¹Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*, p. 125.
- ⁷²Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*, p. 126.
- ⁷³Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*, p. 36.
- ⁷⁴Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*, p. 38.
- ⁷⁵Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*, pp. 38-39.
- ⁷⁶Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*, p. 163.
- ⁷⁷Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*, pp. 162-163.
- ⁷⁸Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*, p. 21.
- ⁷⁹Luther, *LW*, Vol. 8, p. 308.
- ⁸⁰Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*, p. 335.
- ⁸¹Luther, *LW*, Vol. 54, p. 74.
- ⁸²Luther, *The Freedom of a Christian*, p. 87, in Krey, *Luther's Spirituality*.
- ⁸³Luther, *LW*, Vol. 48, p. 46.
- ⁸⁴Luther, *LW*, Vol. 48, p. 46.
- ⁸⁵Luther, *LW*, Vol. 48, p. 47.
- ⁸⁶Luther, *LW*, Vol. 48, 340-341.
- ⁸⁷Luther, *LW*, Vol. 34, p. 336.
- ⁸⁸Luther, *LW*, Vol. 8, p. 326.
- ⁸⁹Quoted in Hendrix, *Martin Luther*, p. 27, from WA 17:1, p. 309.
- ⁹⁰Bainton, *Here I Stand*, p. 34.
- ⁹¹Luther, *LW*, Vol. 54, pp. 339-340.
- ⁹²D'Aubigne, *The Life and Times of Martin Luther*, p. 24.
- ⁹³D'Aubigne, *The Life and Times of Martin Luther*, p. 31.
- ⁹⁴Luther, *LW*, Vol. 48, p. 12.
- ⁹⁵Luther, *LW*, Vol. 48, p. 12.
- ⁹⁶Luther, *LW*, Vol. 48, p. 12.
- ⁹⁷Luther, *LW*, Vol. 48, p. 13.
- ⁹⁸Luther, *Commentary on Romans*, p. xiii.
- ⁹⁹Luther, *Commentary on Romans*, p. xv.
- ¹⁰⁰Luther, *Commentary on Romans*, p. xvi.
- ¹⁰¹Luther, *Commentary on Romans*, p. xvii.
- ¹⁰²Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*, p. 182.

¹⁰³Bainton, *Here I Stand*, pp. 49-50.