By Faith Alone: Week Fifty-two: Day One

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Luther writes about God’s care and protection – specifically how He guards and protects us from the devil. As he writes, Luther gives a perspective that is not common among our culture today – at least not in America. Whether you agree with all that Luther writes or not, the bottom line is this: God has and continues to rescue us from the devil.
Luther begins with this from Psalm 34:7 – “The Messenger of the Lord camps around those who fear him, and he rescues them.” The Messenger of the Lord here would be the Son of God. This is evidence of His work to rescue His Old Testament people prior to His incarnation in the person of Jesus of Nazareth.
Luther writes: “This is one of the most remarkable passages in the Psalms. We can claim it as our own. But you might say, ‘I don’t see or feel God’s angels around me. Actually, I feel like I am under the power of the devil and am being led to hell.’ My answer would be, ‘Don’t let yourself think that way! If you had been handed over to the devil, he wouldn’t let you live one hour without plunging you into a life of crime. As a matter of fact, he probably wouldn’t even give you any time to do anything wrong, but would kill you right away. You are still alive because of the protection of the holy angels. The time will come when you have to leave this earth and, with God’s permission, you may be subjected to Satan’s anger. But God, in his mercy and underserved kindness, will strengthen you through his Word.’
When you are handed over to Satan, it will only be for a very short time. This isn’t to condemn you but to test you, to bring about salvation and endless blessings. Christ said, ‘A single grain of wheat doesn’t produce anything unless it is planted in the ground and dies. If it dies, it will produce a lot of grain’ (John 12:24). In the same way, Christ was handed over to murderers, but only for a short time and to bring about salvation. So when you feel Satan bothering and tempting you, pray and thank God that you won’t fail but that you are only going through a trial in order to be purified. Jeremiah comforts us by saying, ‘I keep this one thin in mind: the Lord’s mercy. We were not completely wiped out. His compassion is never limited’ (Lamentations 3:21-22).”

By Faith Alone: Week Fifty-two: Day Two

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Today Luther focuses on God’s gracious gift of life that comes to us through Christ. It is an objective work – a work that comes from outside of us. Luther writes about how important it is for us to keep our focus on that external work of God so that we don’t fall into the trap of thinking that there is something that we contribute to His saving work.
Luther begins with this from Galatians 2:19-20 – “I have been crucified with Christ. I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.” He goes on to write:
“The righteousness Paul is speaking about here is external and comes from Christ living in us. It’s not internal, and it doesn’t come from ourselves. So if we are concerned about Christian righteousness, we must completely set aside the self.
If I focus on myself, then I become concerned about works and become subject to the law – whether I intend to or not. Instead, Christ and my conscience must become one so that I see nothing else except the crucified and risen Christ. If I ignore Christ and only look at myself, then I am ruined. Soon I being thinking, ‘Christ is in heaven, I am on earth. How can I come to him? I will try to live a holy life and do what the law requires so that I will find eternal life.’ If I consider myself – my condition and what I should be doing – then I will always lose sight of Christ. He alone is my righteousness and my life. If I lose him, no one else will be able to help me. Despair and condemnation will certainly follow.
Unfortunately, this happens all the time. When facing temptation or death, it’s natural for us to ignore Christ and look at our own lives. If we aren’t strengthened through faith during those times, we will perish. So during these struggles of conscience, we must learn to let go of ourselves. We must forget about the law and works. They only drive us to look at ourselves. Instead, we must turn our eyes directly toward the bronze snake, Christ, the one nailed to the cross (John 3:14). We must fix our gaze upon him.”

By Faith Alone: Week Fifty-two: Day Three

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Today Luther writes about becoming children of God and the security that is ours in being made children of God. It is not without it’s difficulties as we live in this world that is broken by sin and hostile to God and the salvation He gives through faith in Jesus Christ.
Luther begins with this from John 1:11-12 – “He went to his own people, and his own people didn’t accept him. However, he gave the right to become God’s children to everyone who believed in him.” He goes on to write:
“To everyone who believes in Christ, God offers the privilege of becoming his children. Yet, this greatest of offers is despised, ridiculed, and laughed at by the blind and condemned people of this world. In addition, God’s offer is abused and even regarded as blasphemy. Although those who confess his name and trust his words are children of God, they’re executed as though they were children of the devil, blasphemers, and revolutionaries. The religious leaders did the same to Christ, God’s only Son. They accused him of stirring up troubles among the people, of keeping the people from paying taxes to the emperor (Luke 23:2), and of claiming to be the Son of God (John 19:7).
Sometimes the devil attacks devout Christians so fiercely with his flaming arrows (Ephesians 6:16) that they forget about the endless glory they have as God’s children. They begin thinking the opposite and wonder if God has forgotten about them, abandoned them, and thrown them so far away that he can’t see them anymore.
Our faith is s till very weak and cold. If our faith were as strong and steady as it should be, we would practically die from sheer joy. But we praise God because we know that even those who have only a little faith are also children of God. That’s why Christ said, ‘Don’t be afraid, little flock’ (Luke 12:32). So we always need to pray with the apostles, ‘Give us more faith’ (Luke 17:5), and pray with the man in the book of Mark who cried out, ‘I believe! Help my lack of faith’ (Mark 9:24).”

By Faith Alone: Week Fifty-two: Day Four

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Today Luther talks about the cross of Christ and of our taking up His cross and following Him. It is interesting to read his words because I can see him speaking to and understanding God’s Word in the context of his experiences of persecution.
He begins with this from Galatians 6:14 – “It’s unthinkable that I could ever brag about anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. By his cross my relationship to the world and its relationship to me have been crucified.” He goes on to write:
“The cross of Christ doesn’t refer just to the wood that Christ carried on his shoulders and on which he was nailed. It also signifies all the troubles of the faithful people whose suffering is Christ’s suffering. Paul talks about Christians enduring these sufferings in 2 Corinthians 1:5-7. In Colossians 1:24, he says, ‘I am happy to suffer for you now. In my body I am completing whatever remains of Christ’s sufferings. I am doing this on behalf of his body, the church.’ Therefore, the cross of Christ generally refers to all the afflictions that the church suffers for the sake of Christ.
Christ himself testifies to this in Acts 9:4 when he says, ‘Saul! Saul! Why are you persecuting me?’ Saul didn’t attack Christ. He persecuted his followers. But whoever touches them touches the apple of his eye (Zechariah 2:8). We know by experience that the head is more sensitive than other parts of the body. For if a toe or another tiny part of the body is injured, the head recognizes the feeling, and the face shows it. The nose wrinkles, the eyes squint, and so on. Similarly Christ, our head, makes our afflictions his own and suffers when we, his body, suffer.
It’s helpful to remember this so that we don’t despair when our opponents persecute, excommunicate, and kill us, or when heretics hate us with such deep hostility. We should remember Paul’s example and pride ourselves in the cross. We have taken up this cross, not because of our own sins, but for the sake of Christ.”

By Faith Alone: Week Fifty-two: Day Five
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Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Today Luther talks about the reasons why prayer is often a neglected activity. Even though God invites us to pray, our own sinful nature can find many other things to do. Luther begins with this from Matthew 7:10-11 – “If your child asks for a fish, would you give him a snake? So how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him?”
He goes on to write: “Our own urgent needs should be enough to make us pray. But as though that were not enough, Jesus uses a beautiful illustration from family life to coax us to pray. Even a problem child wouldn’t receive a snake instead of a fish from his parents. With this illustration, Jesus is saying, ‘Your human nature is corrupt. You aren’t nearly as good as God, but you still give your children good gifts. Because God, your heavenly Father, is perfect, won’t he also give you good things if you ask him?’ If we take this illustration to heart, we will want to pray.
Yet, when you understand what God says in his Word, begin to live according to it, and teach it to others, then you’ll face many temptations and frequent opposition. Your corrupt human nature is an enemy of prayer. It quickly becomes bored, careless, and indifferent to what God says and the good life he gives us. For this reason, you will never have as much wisdom, knowledge of God’s Word, faith, love, or patience as you should. Every day your corrupt nature hangs around your neck and drags you away from prayer. The world is also an enemy of prayer. It’s so envious that you have faith and God’s precious Word that it refuses to put up with any of it, no matter how weak you may be. The world condemns you, tries to take away what you have, and gives you no peace.
These are the two enemies of prayer: our corrupt nature and the world. On the inside, they try to decrease our desire to pray, and on the outside, they try to chase us away from prayer. All we can do is to continue crying out to God. We should pray for strength and better understanding of his Word.”