**By Faith Alone:** Week Fifty-seven: Day One

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Luther writes today about the work of God.  He talks about the mysterious nature of God’s work – how often it seems beyond our understanding or appears foolish.  He also speaks to the arrogance that we often display when we think that we know more than God.  We should pour out our hearts to God in prayer, but we shouldn’t be disappointed when He doesn’t answer according to our will.
Luther begins with this from Ecclesiastes 11:5 – Just as you don’t know how the breath of life enters the limbs of a child within its mother’s womb, you also don’t understand how God, who made everything, works.”  He then writes:
“God leads and directs his people in mysterious ways.  In the Bible, we read, ‘Your road went through the sea.  Your path went through raging water, but your footprints could not be seen’ (Psalm 77:19).  Christ himself told Peter, ‘You don’t know now what I’m doing.  You will understand later’ (John 13:7).  Christ seems to be saying, ‘You want to see me and want to do what seems good and right to you.  But I will act in a way that will make you think I’m a fool rather than God.  You will see my back, not my face.  You wont’ understand what I’m doing or why I’m doing it.  Then I’ll be able to mold you and remold you the way I would like.  My methods may appear as foolish to you as if they were from the devil himself.’
We need to learn how God guides his people as they grow and develop.  I, too, have often tried to dictate to our Lord God a certain way in which I expected him to run things.  I have often said, ‘Oh Lord, would you please do it this way and make it come out that way?’  But God did just the opposite, even though I said to myself, ‘This is a good suggestion that will bring honor to God and expand his kingdom.’  Undoubtedly, God must have laughed at my so-called wisdom and said, ‘All right, I know that you are an intelligent, educated person, but I never needed a Peter, a Luther, or anyone else to teach, inform, rule, or guide me.  I am not a God who will allow himself to be taught or directed by others.  Rather, I am the one who leads, rules, and teaches people.’”

**By Faith Alone:** Week Fifty-seven: Day Two

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Today Luther writes about a topic that is often the focus of our conversations – the Holy Spirit.  He focuses especially on how we can know that the Holy Spirit lives in us (just as God promised through Baptism – Acts 2:38).  That is a great Word and confidence builder because “the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.”
Luther begins with this from 1 Corinthians 6:19 – “Don’t you know that your body is a temple that belongs to the Holy Spirit?  The Holy Spirit, whom you received from God, lives in you.  You don’t belong to yourselves.”  He goes on to write:
“We shouldn’t doubt that the Holy Spirit lives in us, but we should certainly recognize that we are a temple of the Holy Spirit, as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6:19.  If someone feels a love for God’s Word and gladly hears, speaks, thinks, teaches, and writes about Christ, you should know that this doesn’t come from a person’s will or reason but from the Holy Spirit.  It’s impossible for this to happen without the Holy Spirit.  On the other hand, where there is hatred and contempt for the Word, you should know that the devil, the ruler of this world, blinds the hearts of the people and holds them captive, so that the light of the gospel, the glory of Christ, can’t shine on them.  We see this today in the masses who are not moved by the Word but despise it as if it has nothing to do with them.
But those who have any kind of love and desire for the Word should gratefully acknowledge that these attitudes are poured into them by the Holy Spirit.  For we are not born with these attitudes and cannot acquire them through the law.  This transformation rests completely and absolutely in the hand of the Almighty.  So when we eagerly listen to preaching about Jesus Christ, the Son of God – who for our sakes became a human being and subjected himself to the law to save us – then God sends the Holy Spirit into our hearts through this preaching.  Therefore, it’s very useful for believers to remember that they have the Holy Spirit.”

**By Faith Alone:** Week Fifty-seven: Day Three

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
In this post-modern culture, what Luther says today speaks to the ever increasing number of voices who say that they speak the truth.  Those voices range from the absurd to the well respected and they are all aimed at taking our eyes off of Christ – the author and perfecter of our faith.
Luther begins with this from John 2:24 – “Jesus, however, was wary of these believers.  He understood people.”  He goes on to write:
“No one understands how difficult it was when I first realized that I had to believe and teach an idea that was contrary to the teachings of the church fathers.  This was especially shocking to me when many outstanding, reasonable, and educated people shared their views.  The church fathers include many holy people, such as Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine.  Despite that, my dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ must be worth more to me than all the holy people on earth – yes, even more than all the angels in heaven.  When I read Augustine’s books and discovered that he had also been in error, I was greatly troubled.  Whenever this happens, it’s very difficult for me to calm my own heart and differ with people how are so greatly respected.
But I dare not accept something just because a respected person says it.  A person can be holy and God-fearing and still be in error.  That’s why I don’t want to rely on people.  As this passage says, the Lord Christ didn’t rely on people either.  Furthermore, in the book of Matthew, Jesus earnestly warns us to beware of false prophets, who will come and not only claim to be Christians, but will also “do wonderful thing to deceive, if possible, even those whom God has chosen” (Matthew 24:24).
Rather than trusting the church fathers and their writing, we should crawl under the wings of our mother hen, the Lord Christ, and look to him alone.  The heavenly Father said, “This is my Son, whom I love and with whom I am pleased.  Listen to him” (Matthew 17:5).  God wants us to listen to Christ alone.”

**By Faith Alone:** Week Fifty-seven: Day Four

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Today Luther talks about what it looks like to hide from God.  And we could say, in our defense, that it is only Luther’s opinion.  However, I have seen what Luther talks about here in the lives of others and in my own more times than I care to admit.
Luther begins with this from Genesis 3:10 – [Adam] answered, “I heard you in the garden.  I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid.”  He goes on to write:
“We need to realize that hiding form God is the essence of sin.  Unless God immediately sends help and calls the sinner back, he will keep on trying to hide from God.  And because the sinner tries to justify himself with lies, he piles one sin on top of another.  In the end he will reach the point of open hypocrisy and deep despair.  As a result, one sin leads to another, until the weight of his sin pulls him down into the pit.  Ultimately, the sinner accuses God of causing the sin rather than placing the blame on himself.
Adam should have said, ‘Lord, I’ve sinned!’  But he didn’t do this.  Instead he blamed God, saying, in effect, ‘Lord, you sinned.  I would have enjoyed a holy life in paradise in spite of eating the apple if you hadn’t said anything.’  Adam’s thoughts and feelings were revealed when he implied that he wouldn’t have hidden if God’s voice hadn’t frightened him.  Even though all people are guilty of sin, they don’t acknowledge it.  Rather, they place the blame on their creator.  This will only increase the burden of sin to infinite proportions unless God shows mercy and comes to help.
Adam believed that his wicked and foolish thoughts were the highest wisdom.  He was so overcome by his fear that he was barely aware of what he was saying or doing.  As he tried to excuse himself, he actually condemned himself over and over and increased his burden of sin proportionately.  At any rate, we must not think that these things happened to Adam alone.  Every one of us does the same.  Our human nature allows us to do nothing else, especially after we have committed a sin.  We all prefer to put the blame on God rather than to admit that we are sinners.”
And God does come to our aid.  He came looking for Adam in the garden.  He clothed them in animal skins.  They didn’t die.  A sacrifice was made.  And that pointed forward to Jesus who is the sacrifice for sin once and for all.  He is our rescue and He is our life.  Perfectly love casts out all fear.  Because of what Christ has done for us and given to us, we don’t need to hide from God in fear.

**By Faith Alone:** Week Fifty-seven: Day Five

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Today Luther is talking about the life of prayer.  He is certainly talking from his context and the state of the Church in his day.  Few of the clergy were faithful men of great wisdom founded on God’s Word.  Many were working to please God with their external works, but their hearts were far from Him.  In that way, these words are timeless because they speak to the sinfulness that plagues us all.
Luther begins with this from Matthew 15:8-9 – “These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.  Their worship of me is pointless because their teachings are rules made by humans.”  He goes on to write:
“Everyone who feels burdened should pray the Lord’s Prayer.  Even those who don’t know the meaning of the words may pray it from their heart.  That type of prayer is the best because the heart is saying more than the lips.
On the other hand, another person stands in church, turning the pages, and counting the prayer beads – almost rattling.  Meanwhile, his heart is far from what his lips are praying.  That is not prayer.  For God describes these kinds of people through the prophet Isaiah, ‘These people worship me with their mouths and honor me with their lips.  But their hearts are far from me’ (Isaiah 29:13).  We also find some religious people who blabber the prayers for each day without any inner feeling.  Then they say without shame, ‘O, I feel happy.  I have now paid back our Lord.’  They think they have satisfied God through their prayers.
Although some might praise them fro their efforts, God will say, ‘These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me’ (Matthew 15:8).  What’s frightening is that these people rely on these kinds of prayers and never send up any other prayer to God.  So those who pray the least appear to pray the most.  And those who pray the most appear to pray the least.”