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

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Luther is writing about the problem of boasting – a temptation that comes because of the blessings we receive from God.  We can take too much credit for those blessings and forget to be thankful.  Humility is a difficult to place to find and even harder to stay there.
Luther begins with this from q Corinthians 4:7 – “Who says that you are any better than other people?  What do you have that wasn’t given to you?  If you were given what you have, why are you bragging as if it weren’t a gift?”  He goes on to write:
“God is loving and kind by nature.  Therefore, he cannot keep himself form giving us abundant gifts.  He gives us homes and families, healthy bodies, wisdom, skills and talents, and knowledge of the Scriptures.  Unfortunately, we cannot keep ourselves from taking credit for these gifts and bragging about them.  Without God’s gifts, our lives would be miserable.  But even with God’s gifts, our lives end up being miserable because we are still experiencing the effects of original sin.  The whole human race is thoroughly infected with original sin.  Unbelievers don’t understand the seriousness of it, so they act as if it doesn’t matter.
We see this problem not only in ourselves, but in others as well.  We brag about our material possessions, even though these are rated as the least valuable of God’s abundant gifts.  Consequently, the wealthy, regardless of whether they are nobles, merchants, or farmers, consider other people to be mere pests.  Even more serious abuses exist with the more important gifts, such as wisdom and justice.  The fact that God gives his gifts to every one results in the following predicament: God cannot tolerate bragging, and we cannot keep from doing it.
This was how the world sinned before the flood.  Among Cain’s descendants were some of the finest and most intelligent people in the world.  But in God’s eyes they were very evil because they had become filled with pride about the gifts God had given them.  Then, they despised God who gave them their gifts in the first place.  The world doesn’t understand why this is wrong and therefore doesn’t condemn this behavior.  But God condemns it.”

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

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Luther talks about prayer.  He begins with this from Matthew 6:9 – “This is how you should pray: Our Father in heaven, let your name be kept holy.”  He goes on to write:
“The Lord’s Prayer teaches you to recognize your great misery and corruption before God.  In other words, if you think about what you are praying, you will soon notice you’re blaspheming God.  You will become terrified by your own prayer.  For you certainly haven’t kept God’s name holy.  And whoever isn’t keeping God’s name holy is dishonoring his name.  Moreover, dishonoring God’s name is a serious sin, and you would deserve the punishment of eternal fire if God were to judge you.  Where, then, will you turn?  Your own prayer punishes you and works against you.  It accuses and deplores you.  You’re stuck, lying there.  Who will help you?
After you have sincerely repented and are humbled by recognizing the miserable position you’re in, then the comforting teaching will come and lift you up again.  The Lord’s Prayer teaches you not to despair, but instead to ask for God’s kindness and help.  For you must firmly believe that he will hear you because he is the one who taught you to pray this way.  The result of your prayer will be that God won’t credit your sin to you or deal with you harshly.  God approves of only those who seriously confess that they have dishonored his name and sincerely want to keep it holy at all times.  However, it isn’t possible for people to be saved if they trust in their conscience and don’t think they’re dishonoring God’s name, for these people are still too confident, secure, arrogant, and irreverent.  They’re not the kind of people Christ speaks about in Matthew: “Come to me, all who are tired from carrying heavy loads, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28).  They don’t understand the Lord’s Prayer and don’t know what they are praying.”

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

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Today Luther writes about prosperity and its  dangers – a topic appropriate for our time for sure, but it’s really for all generations – past, present and future.  He begins with this from Amos 3:1-2 – “Listen to this message which I, the Lord, have spoken against you Israelites. . . . I have known no else but you.  That is why I am going to punish you for all your sins.”
He goes on to write: “In this book, the prophet Amos rebukes and warns the people of Israel to look inward and repent of their godlessness.  By doing so, Israel could be aware of God’s coming judgment.  However, the message of Amos was widely ignored and scorned by the Israelites.  The world generally hates God’s Word as well as the messengers of the Word.  But worse yet, Amos prophesied during Jeroboam’s reign, when the kingdom of Israel was at its peak, and everything was going well.  Though godless, Jeroboam was a famous and brave king who won many military victories.  Through these victories, “he restored Israel’s boundaries from the border of Hamath to the Dead Sea’ (2 Kings 14:25).  As a result, he became deluded by the prosperity of his kingdom.
When things are going well, godless people tend to become foolish and end up destroying themselves (Proverbs 1:32).  They don’t think they need God, and, in their blindness, they continue to behave in an ungodly way.  They keep  on doing this until they face God’s judgment and perish.  The Word is proclaimed to them uselessly, which is what we see happening in the book of Amos.  So, Amos prophesied at an unfortunate time, but also at a very appropriate time.
We can learn a lot from this.  When times are bad, we should remind ourselves about God’s goodness and mercy.  In good times, however, we should remember to fear God.”

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

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Today Luther writes about the danger of separating Christ from God.  When dealing with the mystery of God’s nature (Triune – three distinct persons – one God), it is an easy trap to fall into.  We become like the blind men trying to describe an elephant that they can’t see.  They can only describe what they can feel and touch.  They can’t see the full reality.
Luther reminds us that we have to continually listen to God’s Word and run from the temptation to come to conclusions without having all the information.  That is always the danger when dealing with mystery.  Luther begins with this from John 14:9 – “I have been with all of you a long time.  Don’t you know me yet, Philip?  The person who has seen me has seen the Father.  So how can you say, ‘Show us the Father’?”
He goes on to write: ‘We should carefully guard against separating Christ from God.  This is what Philip was doing here.  He ignored Christ and looked for God in heaven.  He was thinking, ‘I hear Christ talking to me.  But how do I know what God in heaven thinks about me or has decided to do with me?’  What else is this than unbelief and a secret denial of God?  Christ had to correct Philip in order to tear him away from such a misconception.  He said, ‘Philip, why are you trying to separate the Father from me? With your thoughts, you’re climbing up into the clouds and leaving me here on earth talking uselessly.  Don’t you hear what I’m saying?  Whoever sees me, sees the Father too.  Don’t you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?’
Those are loving yet serious words from the Lord, for he can’t tolerate us fluttering around in uncertainty.  Christ wants us firmly tied to him and his Word so that we don’t search for God anywhere else except in him.
A devout hermit named Anthony noticed that some of the young and inexperienced monks wanted to be smart and figure out God’s secrets.  But Anthony warned his brothers that if they saw someone climbing heavenward and planting one foot in heaven, they should immediately pull that person down.  For if he set his other foot in heaven too, he would come crashing down headfirst.  These are appropriate words for those who would like to drill a hole into heaven to peek in and see God himself and everything he is doing.  In the meantime, they ignore Christ.  Protect yourself from ideas that go beyond God’s Word and that separate Christ from God.”

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

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Luther is talking about the far-reaching effects of sin.  If we don’t confess our sin (both that which we know and that which is not known to us), then sin continues to work in our lives in destructive ways.  Luther begins with this from Genesis 50:15 – “Joseph’s brothers realized what their father’s death could mean.  So they thought, ‘What if Joseph holds a grudge against us?  What if he decides to pay us back?’”
Luther goes on to write: “The Bible tells us how easy it was for Simeon, Levi, and Joseph’s other brothers to sin.  But it also tells us how difficult it was for them to be reconciled with Joseph again and be healed.  This is the reason why many people who don’t hear the message of God’s kindness are driven to despair.  Some even commit suicide by drowning or hanging themselves.  They can’t handle the power of sin they feel working inside them.  When sin is ‘lying outside your door’ (Genesis 4:7), people neglect it.  Then, it takes hold, and one offense leads to the next – each more outrageous than the last.  But when sin is stirred to life, the precious blood of God’s Son is the costly medicine needed to remove it.
Stay away form sin if you can.  But if you have fallen into sin, you must learn how to get up again and regain a firm faith.  These very struggles show us what it means to really believe.
We need to realize that sin is a horrible evil. This doesn’t seem to be true when we’re committing sin.  We enjoy it while we are doing it.  But after God’s laws make us aware of our sin, we realize that sin is hell itself and far more powerful than heaven or earth.  After that, we can’t understand God’s kindness to us without great effort.  But a heart burdened by sin can say, ‘Even though I have committed many sins, “God sent his Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but to save the world”’ (John 3:17).  Without this comfort, we would have no remedy or defense against sin and its sting.”