**By Faith Alone:**Week Sixty-one: Day One

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Today Luther speaks to a characteristic of the post-modern world.  He speaks to the notion that truth is subjective – that we can live by our own truth.  Luther puts that discussion in the context of knowing God.  He speaks to the limits of human reason to know the true identity of God.  He begins with this from Romans 1:22-23 – “While claiming to be wise, they became fools.  They exchanged the glory of the immortal God for statues that looked like mortal humans, birds, animals, and snakes.”
He goes on to write: “Human reason can’t quite identify God correctly.  Reason knows that there is a God, but it can’t figure out which god is the true God.  This is exactly what happen3ed to the Jewish leaders while Christ was on earth.  John the Baptist plainly told them that Christ was present.  They knew that Christ was living among them and walking among the people.  But they couldn’t tell which person it was.  Hardly any of them could believe that Jesus of Nazareth was the Christ.
In a similar way, human reason plays ‘blindman’s bluff’ with God.  Reason always makes foolish mistakes and keeps on missing the mark.  It calls something god that isn’t really God and can’t quite identify the real God.  If reason didn’t have any awareness of God’s existence, it wouldn’t attempt to identify God.  If reason knew exactly who God was, it wouldn’t mistakenly identify something else as god.  Reason just blurts out, calls something god, and gives divine honor to its own concept of god.  By doing so, it misses the true God and instead finds the devil – or its own idea of god, which is ruled by the devil.
There’s a big difference between knowing there is a God who exists and knowing who that God is.  All of creation teaches us that there is a God.  This is already written on all of our hearts.  But only the Holy Spirit can teach us who that God is.”

**By Faith Alone:**Week Sixty-one: Day Two

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Today Luther talks about good works and against trying to commend ourselves before God by those works – to prove ourselves worthy of His notice let alone His love.  He begins with this from John 15:6 – “Whoever doesn’t live in me is thrown away like a branch and dries up.  Branches like this are gathered, thrown into a fire, and burned.”
He goes on to write: “When I was a monk, I read the mass daily.  I weakened myself with prayer and fasting so much that I couldn’t have kept it up for much longer.  Yet all of my efforts couldn’t help me in the smallest temptation.  I could never say to God, ‘I have done all this.  Look at it, ad be merciful to me.’  What did I achieve with all this striving?  Nothing.  I merely tormented myself, ruined my health, and wasted my time.  Now I’m forced to listen to Christ’s judgment on my works.  He says, ‘You did all this without me.  That’s why it amounts to nothing.  Your works don’t belong in my kingdom.  They can’t help you or anyone else obtain eternal life.’
So in this passage, Christ has passed a terrifying judgment over all works – no matter how great, glorious, and beautiful they might appear.  If these works are performed apart from Christ, they amount to nothing.  They may appear to be great in the eyes of the world, for the world considers them excellent and precious.  But in Christ’s kingdom and before God, they are truly nothing.  They don’t grow out of him, nor do they remain in him.  They won’t pass God’s test.  As Christ says, they will be tossed into the fire as if they were rotten, withered branches – branches without any sap or strength.  So let other care from those branches and see what they can create apart from Christ.  Let them try to fashion a new birth from their good works.  Let them try to create a tree from its fruit.  No matter what they do, all of their works will add up to a big zero.”

**By Faith Alone:**Week Sixty-one: Day Three

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Luther talks about a balancing act – a balance between being despondent and overconfident – a balance between fear and joy.  He is dealing with the tensions that exists between the truth of what speaks to us through His Word and the realities we face each day that run contrary to that truth.
Luther begins with this from Psalm 2:11 – “Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling.”  He goes on to write: “When I was a young man, I hated this verse because I didn’t want to hear that I should fear God.  I didn’t realize that fear should always be combined with joy and hope.  I didn’t understand the difference between what we do and what Christ does for us.  Everything we do is corrupt, just as all of creation is spoiled.  So we shouldn’t become overconfident.  We need to be afraid of God’s judgment.  But what Christ does for us is holy and perfect, and we should cling to his mercy.
So we should fear God in a way that doesn’t entirely exclude joy.  It should be a genuine joy – a joy that can’t be kept bottled up in our hearts.  Someone who truly believes that he has been reconciled to God because of Christ will have a smile on his face, a twinkle in his eyes, and a song of praise on his lips.  The Holy Spirit tells us to serve our heavenly King with inward and outward joy, combined with reverence.  If we don’t, we’ll become overconfident.  We’ll start acting like animals and sink into lustful human pleasures.  If we make sure we don’t become overconfident, then God won’t be offended by our happiness.  In fact, he’s offended by sadness and demands joy.  That’s why people who were in mourning were not allowed to bring God sacrifices, and why the offerings in Malachi were unacceptable to God (Malachi 2:13).  We have tao mix joy with fear and mix fear with hope.
This psalm warns us not to become either proud or despondent.  Falling into despair is as offensive to God as being overconfident.  God doesn’t want us to be down in the dumps or high up in the clouds.  He wants us to be somewhere in the middle.”

**By Faith Alone:**Week Sixty-one: Day Four

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Luther talks today about something else that we should avoid – arrogance.  He begins with this from Galatians 5:25-26 – “If we live by our spiritual nature, then our lives need to conform to our spiritual nature.  We can’t allow ourselves to act arrogantly and to provoke or envy each other.”  He goes on to write:
“When you are praised, you should know that it is not you who are being praised but Christ, to whom all praise and honor belong.  The fact that you may teach in a godly way and live a holy life are not your gifts but God’s.  So it’s not you being praised but God in you.  If you acknowledge this, you won’t get out of live.  You won’t become proud because of this praise.  For “what do you have that wasn’t given to you?” (1 Corinthians 4:7).  Instead, you will give God the glory.  You will also not allow yourself to give up your calling because of abuse, disgrace, and persecution.  God covers our glory with shame by his special grace.  He covers it with the wo4rld’s bitter hatred, persecution, and blasphemy.  Furthermore, we face contempt and ingratitude from our own followers – peasants, townspeople, and nobles.  Though hidden and inward, their animosity towards and persecution of the gospel is more harmful than the enemies who persecute openly.  God allows this so that we don’t become proud of our gifts.  This millstone must be hung around our necks so that we will not be infected by the plague of honoring ourselves.
Certainly, many of our own followers honor us because we are in official positions as preachers.  But for every one who honors us, there are a hundred who hate, despise, and persecute us.  The blasphemy and persecution from our opponents, combined with the contempt, ingratitude, and secret hatred from our won followers, is such a lovely sight that delight us so much we easily forget all about personal glory.  As a result, we rejoice in the Lord and stay in line.”

**By Faith Alone:**Week Sixty-one: Day Five

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Today Luther talks about being accountable – accountable for our own sin – our own shortcomings.  He speaks against the tendency to point a finger anywhere but at ourselves.  He begins with this from John 3:19 – “This is why people are condemned: The light came into the world.  Yet, people loved the dark rather than the light because their actions were evil.”
He goes on to write: “Suppose you’re a homeowner and something in your home is damaged.  You become angry about it but soon discover that ‘No One’ did it.  Even though nobody admits to it, the damages remain, and it bothers you.  Every so often, a servant is aught in the act of damaging property but still denies doing it.  If the servant would only confess, the master could easily forgive him.
The devil and death have brought ‘No One’ into the world.  People today are so bad, evil, and full of sin that they place their own guilt on other people’s shoulders.  If they would only admit their sin, they could be forgiven and would find that God is merciful.  God wouldn’t deny us anything if we would only crawl to his cross.  But we don’t do it.  And in the process we pile seven other sins on top of one sin.  Yes, we multiply our sins to no end and beyond all measure!
The devil does the same.  He denies everything and makes many sins out of one sin.  If a child were to say, ‘O father, I have done wrong.  Forgive me,’ he would be forgiven.  But the child stubbornly says ‘no’ and refuses to admit any wrongdoing.  He adds a lie to the sin and to the damage he has already caused.  Once again, more sins spring from the first sin.  On the other hand, if he were to confess the sin and say, ‘I have done it,’ he would remain in the light and would be like an angel.”
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