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

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Today Luther talks about human weakness and how God works through that to accomplish His will.  He begins with this from Genesis 26:7 – “Isaac answered, ‘She’s my sister.’  He was afraid to say ‘my wife.’  He thought that the men of that place would kill him to get Rebekah, because she was an attractive woman.”  He goes on to write:
“The theologians argue about whether Isaac was sinning when he lied and said that Rebekah was his sister.  In his weakness, he thought, ‘I’ll say she’s my sister, or else they might kill me.’  That almost sounds like, ‘Go ahead.  Take my wife and disgrace her, as long as I don’t get hurt.  If I say she’s my wife, you’ll only feel like you can’t have her unless you kill me first.’  Isn’t that a foolish, silly, and unworthy attitude for such an important man?  Shouldn’t he just have said, ‘She’s my wife.  I don’t care whether you kill me or not?’  But the passage says that Isaac was afraid.  What a shame that someone as important as he was should be so afraid of death!
This story was written to comfort God’s people.  It shows how merciful and kind God really is.  Even though we are sinful and weak, the Lord will be patient with our weaknesses, as long as we stay away from those who deny, hate, or curse God.  I don’t want to excuse our ancestors in the faith, as some people do.  It’s comforting to hear that even good people in the Bible slipped and did wrong.  I don’t hold up their actions as if they were good.  Similarly, I don’t excuse Peter for denying Jesus.  I don’t excuse the apostles for deserting Jesus or for any other foolish thing they did.
Among his little flock, there ae some poor, miserable, and weak souls.  Jesus is the king of the weak as well as the strong.  He hates arrogant people and opposes the stubborn.  He punishes hypocrites and people who are overconfident.  But he doesn’t want to discourage or crush those who are scared, sad, or worried.  He doesn’t want to extinguish the flickering light (Isaiah 42:3).”

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

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Luther talks once again about prayer.  He talks about God’s command to pray and says that if we don’t pray, we risk God’s anger.  He begins with this from John 16:23-24 – “If you ask the Father for anything in my name, he will give it to you.  So far you haven’t asked for anything in my name.”  He then writes:
“In this passage, Christ shows us how to defend against the obstacles thrown at us by the devil and our corrupt nature.  These threaten to tear us away from prayer.  Christ tells us, ‘If you ask the Father for anything in my name, he will give it to you.’  First, Christ commands us to pray.  Then he admonishes us for not asking.  He repeats his command and drives it home to show that he’s serious.  He demands prayer as true worship and as the real wok of Christians.
Study hat Christ commands in this passage and put it into practice.  Don’t consider prayer as something that you do voluntarily, as if it wouldn’t be a sin if you neglected prayer.  If you don’t pray, you risk the greatest disgrace and the highest penalty.  Christ’s command here is similar to the commandment that prohibits worshiping any other gods and blaspheming God’s name.  Those who never pray should know that they aren’t Christians and don’t belong in God’s kingdom.  Now don’t you think that God has good reason to be angry with idolaters, murderers, thieves, blasphemers, and others who despise his Word?  Don’t you think he’s right to punish these sins?  Why, then, aren’t you afraid of God’s anger when you disrespect his command and confidently act as if you aren’t obligated to pray?
So this passage should serve as a strong encouragement to pray diligently.  Prayer is our comfort, strength, and salvation.  It’s our first line of defense against all of our enemies.”

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

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Today Luther talks about learning to trust God and wait on His timing.  As Luther writes, that is a difficult thing for us to do.  We don’t control that and our sinful nature hates that.  So it is often a struggle to trust and wait on the Lord.
Luther begins with this from Genesis 41:14 – “Then Pharaoh sent for Joseph, and immediately he was brought from the dungeon.  After he had shaved and changed his clothes, he came in front of Pharaoh.”  He then writes:
“Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph were humble people.  They waited patiently for God’s help.  God was with Joseph in prison.  The Lord knew the exact time he wanted to free Joseph.  Joseph had no idea how he was going to become free, but he sat in the dark and didn’t worry about it.  He put himself totally in God’s hands.
Joseph had exceptional faith, and God came and rescued him in a miraculous way: ‘They hurt his feet with shackles, and cut into his neck with an iron collar.  The Lord’s promise tested him through fiery trials until his prediction came true.  The king sent someone to release him.  The ruler of nations set him free’ (Psalm 105:18-20).  Oh, what a wonderful freedom that was!  While in prison, Joseph would have loved to have someone intercede for him.  Whether his defender was his father, the chief cupbearer, or his former master, he would have jumped at the opportunity.  He would have even accepted help from his master’s wife if she felt sorry for her sin.  But God chose none of these methods.  God wanted the king to proclaim Joseph’s freedom.  This made it a public and spectacular event, especially since Joseph was elevated to a position second only to the king.
We must learn to trust the Lord and wait for him.  Just as Joseph did.  His faith enabled him to wait patiently for a long time, even though he had no idea when he would be released.  Joseph’s example should encourage us to resolve: ‘I know my sinful nature is going to complain, but I will try to restrain it.’  Biblical examples, like Joseph’s, set the hearts of faithful people on fire and inspire them to faith, hope, and love.”

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

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Luther talks about loving our neighbor.  This is where our love of God (or lack of it) takes on flesh.  It becomes concrete in our relationship with our neighbors – whoever they may be.  He begins with this from Mark 12:31 – “The second most important commandment is this: ‘Love your neighbor as you love yourself.’  No other commandment is greater than these.”  Luther then writes:
“When you’re wondering whom you should show love to, there’s no living creature better than your neighbor to show love to.  Your neighbor is not a devil, lion, bear, or wolf.  He is not made of stone or wood, but he is a living being who is much like you.  There is nothing living on the earth more lovable, kind, useful, good, comforting, or more necessary.  He was even created for friendly conversation and for social life.  There is nothing in the whole world more worthy of our love than our neighbor.
But it’s the remarkable craft of the devil that he not only severely darkens our hearts and tears this superior object of our love from our hearts.  But he also persuades our hearts of the opposite opinion so that we think our neighbor is more worthy of bitter hatred than of love.  This is easy for the devil to do.  He simply nags us: ‘See, this person has such and such a fault.  He abused you.  He hurt you. . . .’  Then this object of love quickly become contemptible to us so that we no longer recognize our neighbor as one who should be loved but rather as an enemy worthy of intense hatred.  In this way, Satan can amazingly change the love in our heart so that, instead of loving our neighbor, we become capable of demeaning, hating, and persecuting him.  Then all that remains of this commandment, ‘Love your neighbor as you love yourself,’ are the bare and empty letters and syllables.”

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

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Today Luther shares some words about the forgiveness of sins.  He shares how it is all God’s work and that it is a gift given simply by His choice and His work.  Luther begins with this from John15:3 – “You are already clean because of what I have told you.”  He goes on to write:
“In this passage, Christ is offering us a remedy for the poison of arrogance, which is overestimating your own holiness.  Jesus says this so no one will think that his own suffering, apart from Christ, can attain forgiveness of sins or make that person a fruitful branch in the sight of God.  Here’s what usually happens.  Someone does many good works and endures much suffering.  That person becomes aware of producing fruit.  In other words, he is aware of achieving something through preaching or some other method.  Then, that sweet poison begins to make the person think, ‘Oh, I have now done something that will make God notice me and be merciful to me.’  In this way, little wild branches begin growing alongside the true branches.  These wild branches steal the sap and energy from the true branches so that they don’t’ flourish.  That is why the gardener must be alert.  He always has to restrain such arrogance and presumption by constant application of the Word.
Christ is saying here, ‘You aren’t clean because of what you do, what you suffer, or the fruit you produce.  You wouldn’t have done any of these things if you hadn’t already been pruned and been made into good and true branches.  Only God’s Word can make you clean.  It must be present at all times.  The Father sends various kinds of suffering, danger, anxiety, need, and temptation to you so that you may hang on to Go’ds Word tightly and so that it may powerfully work in you.  In this way, he humbles and teaches you that you can’t make yourself clean.  Your suffering doesn’t make you clean before God.  Yet it drives you to reach for and hold on to God’s Word more tightly and firmly.  This is how God exercises your faith.”

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