

## Quotes from and about Martin Luther

### PROLIFIC AUTHOR

“He kept three printing-presses going and yet they could not keep up with his pen. His lightning speed was the despair of friends and foes alike.... The physical and mental vitality of the man was one of the most amazing things about him, and one of the secrets of his tremendous power.” (McGiffert’s *Life of Luther* cited in *What the World Owes Luther*, p 13)

### PREACHING ABILITY

Luther was the greatest pulpit orator of his time. Calvin wrote, “Luther is the trumpet, or rather he is the thunder, he is the lightning which has roused the world from its lethargy. It is not so much Luther who speaks as God, whose lightnings burst from his lips.”

### RECOGNIZED LEADER

“If the Reformation had been led by Zwingli or Carlstadt it would have failed. But that it was able to establish itself was due to the person of commanding mind in whose words the bravest and truest saw their own thoughts represented, and that, recognizing him as the wisest among them, he was allowed to impress upon the Reformation his own individuality.” (Historian Froude in *What the World Owes Luther*, p. 34)

### LUTHER’S CONFUSION IN EARLY LIFE OVER GOD’S RIGHTEOUSNESS

“I was angry with God, and said, ‘As if, indeed, it is not enough, that miserable sinners, eternally lost through original sin, are crushed by every kind of calamity by the law of the Decalogue, without having God add pain to pain by the gospel and also by the gospel threatening us with His righteousness and wrath!

“I hated Paul with all my heart when I read that the righteousness of God is revealed in the Gospel” (Rom. 1:16-17; from *Table Talk* as in Wood, *Captive to the Word*, p. 46)

“At last, by the mercy of God, meditating day and night, I gave heed to the context of the words, namely, ‘In it the righteousness of God is revealed, as it is written, He who through faith is righteous shall live.’ There I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous lives by the gift of God, namely by faith. And this is the meaning: the righteousness of God is revealed by the gospel, namely, the passive righteousness of God with which merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written, ‘He who through faith is righteous shall live.’ Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates. There a totally other face of the entire Scripture showed itself to me.” (Wood, p. 52)

### LUTHER and the BIBLE

Some objected that Luther’s emphasis on the inscripturated Word diminished the Incarnate Word—Christ. “Luther says the opposite is true. To the degree that the Word of God is disconnected from the objective, “external Word,” to that degree the incarnate Word, the historical Jesus, becomes a wax nose shaped by the preferences of every generation. Luther had one weapon with which to rescue the incarnate Word from being sold in the markets of Wittenberg. He drove out the money changers—the indulgence sellers—with the whip of the “external Word, the book.” (Piper, *Legacy of Joy*, p. 80) Without the fixed, inscripturated Word, the “incarnate Word would be everybody’s clay toy.”

In 1540, Luther said “The Bible is the proper book for men. There the truth is distinguished

from error far more clearly than anywhere else, and one finds something new in it every day. For twenty-eight years, since I became a doctor, I have now constantly read and preached the Bible; and yet I have not exhausted it but find something new in it every day” (*WA TR 5*, no. 5193).

#### LUTHER on ASSURANCE through JUSTIFICATION

“I am saying this in order to refute the dangerous doctrine of the sophists and the monks, who taught and believed that no one can know for certain whether he is in a state of grace, even if he does good works according to his ability and lives a blameless life. This statement, widely accepted and believed, was a principle and practically an article of faith throughout the papacy. With this wicked idea of theirs they utterly ruined the doctrine of faith, overthrew faith, disturbed consciences, abolished Christ from the church . . . If everything else were sound there [in the papacy] still this monster of uncertainty is worse than all the other monsters (Luther's Works, 26:377,386).

Let us thank God, therefore, that we have been delivered from this monster of uncertainty . . . And this is our foundation: The Gospel commands us to look, not at our good deeds or perfection but at God Himself as He promises, and at Christ Himself, the Mediator . . . And this is the reason why our theology is certain: it snatches us away from ourselves and places us outside ourselves, so that we do not depend on our own strength, conscience, experience, person, or works, but depend on that which is outside ourselves, that is, on the promise and truth of God, which cannot deceive (LW 26:387).

Let everyone accustom himself, therefore, to believe for a certainty that he is in a state of grace and that his person with its works is pleasing to God. For if he senses that he is in doubt, let him exercise his faith, struggle against the doubt, and strive for certainty, so that he can say: "I know that I have been accepted and that I have the Holy Spirit, not on account of my worthiness or virtue but on account of Christ, who subjected Himself to the Law on our account and took away the sins of the world (John 1:29). In Him I believe. If I am a sinner, and if I err, He is righteous and cannot err (LW 26:379)."

#### EVANGELICAL GRACE VS ROMANISM

“Catholic theology will gladly accept salvation by grace, but it is adamant that this is grace that assists human free will and therefore is not grace alone. Likewise Catholics can affirm justification by faith, but this is faith formed by love, not faith alone (*sola fida*). The Council of Trent concluded that even before coming to faith we can dispose ourselves to receive God’s justifying grace. Consequently, salvation was portrayed as a cooperative endeavor between the gracious god and the human sinner, thug we cannot move toward God on our own apart from His grace. In evangelical Protestantism grace does more than enable our free will; it liberates our will for faith and service. Grace does not simply bring us the possibility of salvation yet to be realized; it brings us the reality of a salvation already accomplished. Our role is not to cooperate with God in procuring grace or justification but to celebrate and proclaim a salvation won by Christ alone (*solus Christus*). We are not agents of God’s saving work but witnesses to His saving work. His grace when it first comes to us is irresistible, for it breaks down the resistance of the old nature and in effect implants within us a new nature. The decision of faith is a sign that grace is working for us and in us; it is not the condition for receiving grace.” (Theologian Donald Bloesch, “Is Spirituality Enough? Differing Models for Living,” in *Roman Catholicism: Evangelical Protestants Analyze What Divides and Unites*; cited in *Whatever Happened to the Reformation*, pp. 9,10)

#### LUTHER on MUSIC

"I, Doctor Martin Luther, wish all lovers of the unshackled art of music grace and peace from God the Father and from our Lord Jesus Christ! I truly desire that all Christians would love and regard as worthy the lovely gift of music, which is a precious, worthy, and costly treasure given to mankind by God. The riches of music are so excellent and so precious that words fail me whenever I attempt to discuss and describe them.... In summa, next to the Word of God, the noble art of music is the greatest

treasure in the world. It controls our thoughts, minds, hearts, and spirits... Our dear fathers and prophets did not desire without reason that music be always used in the churches. Hence, we have so many songs and psalms. This precious gift has been given to man alone that he might thereby remind himself that God has created man for the express purpose of praising and extolling God. However, when man's natural musical ability is whetted and polished to the extent that it becomes an art, then do we note with great surprise the great and perfect wisdom of God in music, which is, after all, His product and His gift; we marvel when we hear music in which one voice sings a simple melody, while three, four, or five other voices play and trip lustily around the voice that sings its simple melody and adorn this simple melody wonderfully with artistic musical effects, thus reminding us of a heavenly dance, where all meet in a spirit of friendliness, caress and embrace. A person who gives this some thought and yet does not regard music as a marvelous creation of God, must be a clodhopper indeed and does not deserve to be called a human being; he should be permitted to hear nothing but the braying of asses and the grunting of hogs." (Luther in his *Forward* to Georg Rhau's *Symphoniae*, a collection of chorale motets published in 1538)

### LUTHER'S POLEMIC STYLE

Luther was a man of like passions, notorious for his invective fired against the enemies of the gospel. Here is how he answered the critics of his earthy, Germanic style:

"I own that I am more vehement than I ought to be; but I have to do with men who blaspheme evangelical truth; with human wolves; with those who condemn me unheard, without admonishing, without instructing me; and who utter the most atrocious slanders against myself no only, but the Word of God. Even the most phlegmatic spirit, so circumstanced, might well be moved to speak thunderbolts; much more I who am choleric by nature, and possessed of a temper easily apt to exceed the bounds of moderation.

"I cannot, however, but be surprised to learn whence the novel taste arose which daintily calls everything spoken against an adversary abusive and acrimonious. What think you of Christ? Was he a reviler when he called the Jews an adulterous and perverse generation, a progeny of vipers, hypocrites, children of the devil?

"What think you of Paul? Was he abusive when he termed the enemies of the gospel dogs and seducers? Paul who, in the thirteenth chapter of the Acts, inveighs against a false prophet in this manner: "Oh, full of subtlety and all malice, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness." I pray you, good Spalatin, read me this riddle, *A mind conscious of truth cannot always endure the obstinate and willfully blind enemies of truth*. I see that all persons demand of me moderation, and especially those of my adversaries, who least exhibit it. If I am too warm, I am at least open and frank; in which respect I excel those who always smile, but murder." (cited in Piper, *Legacy of Sovereign Joy*, p 30)

### LUTHER in HINDSIGHT

Compared to earlier attempts at administrative reforms that dealt with external abuses, "Luther's break with Rome was not the result of a fundamentally negative impetus towards the Roman Church, but of a positive grasp of the gospel which led him to enthrone Christ, the salvation of Christ and the Word of God in a heart that burned with the discovery of God's way of justification." (Stephen Williams, Editorial in *Themelios*, 22:1:1, Oct 1996)

"Luther's Reformation was concerned with essentials, with the very heart of Christianity. It is for this reason that it swept through Europe and had such amazing results. Without *this* Reformation, there would have been no salvation, for the Gospel would have remained largely hidden. When we celebrate the Reformation, we are celebrating this rediscovered Gospel that we believe in; and we are celebrating our salvation through Jesus Christ." (Pastor Richard Bucher,

<http://www.ultranet.com/~tlclcms/whatwas.htm>)

## FINAL TRIBUTES to LUTHER

Thomas Carlisle's tribute to Luther: "I will call this Luther a true Great Man, great in intellect, in courage, affection and integrity; one of our most loveable and precious men. Great, not as a hewn obelisk; but as an Alpine mountain,--so simple, honest, spontaneous, not setting up to be great at all; there for quite another purpose than being great! Ah yes, unsubduable granite, piercing far and wide into the Heavens; yet in the clefts of it fountains, green beautiful valleys with flowers! A true Son of Nature and Fact, for whom these centuries, and many that are to come yet, will be thankful to Heaven." (Carlisle, *Heroes and Hero Worship*, p. 372, as cited in Remensnyder, p. 61.)

Great men need not that we praise them: we need rather that we know them." (McGiffert in Rumensnyder, p. 30).

## LUTHER'S SEAL

*While a professor at Wittenberg, Luther devised this seal which he declared was meant to be "expressive of his theology." This explanation is the gist of a letter to his friend, Herr Spengler, town clerk of Nuremberg.*

The first thing expressed in my seal is a cross, black, within the heart, to put me in mind that faith in Christ crucified saved us. 'For with the heart man believes unto righteousness.' Now, although the cross is black, mortified, and intended to cause pain, yet it does not change the color of the heart, does not destroy nature -- i.e., does not kill, but keeps alive. 'For the just shall live by faith,' -- by faith in the Savior. But this heart is fixed upon the center of a white rose, to show that faith causes joy, consolation and peace. The rose is white, not red, because white is the ideal color of all angels and blessed spirits. This rose, moreover, is fixed in a sky-colored ground, to denote that such joy of faith in the spirit is but an earnest and beginning of heavenly joy to come, as anticipated and held by hope, though not yet revealed. And around this groundbase is a golden ring, to signify that such bliss in heaven is endless, and more precious than all joys and treasures, since gold is the best and most precious metal. Christ, our dear Lord, He will give grace unto eternal life. Amen.

