**15 Martin Luther Quotes on Looking at Life Through the Lens of the Cross**

**95 Martin Luther Quotes of Note, Part 3**

**A Word from Bob:** This article originally appeared as Part 3 of a six-part blog series on *95 Martin Luther Quotes of Note*. For Part 1, visit: [*15 Martin Luther Quotes on the Sufficiency of Scripture*](http://bit.ly/15LutherSuf). For Part 2, visit: [*15 Martin Luther Quotes on Comforting the Suffering*](http://bit.ly/15LutherComfort).

**95 Theses and 95 Quotes**

Martin Luther is famous for his Ninety-Five Theses which launched the Reformation. So, I’m collating my favorite 95 Martin Luther quotes from my book: [*Counseling Under the Cross: How Martin Luther Applied the Gospel to Daily Life*](http://www.rpmministries.org/writing/counseling-under-the-cross/).

Since 95 quotes would make for a very long blog, I’m dividing these quotes into several blog posts. Here’s post number three…with quotes focused on *Looking at Life Through the Lens of the Cross*.

**Understanding the Fundamental Scheme of Satan**

Luther found that during times of suffering, Satan seeks to distort our image of God. Luther teaches us that Satan’s fundamental strategy is to *paint pictures of God shaking a wrathful, angry finger at Christians*.

1. “By the temptation of faith is meant that the evil conscience drives out of a person his confidence in the pardoning grace of God, and *leads him to imagine that God is angry and wishes the death of the sinner*, or that, in other words, the conscience places Moses upon the judgment-seat, and casts down the Savior of sinners from the throne of grace. *This is the strongest, greatest and severest temptation of the devil*, that he says: ‘*God is the enemy of sinners, you are a sinner, therefore, God is your enemy*.’ This is the noose which Satan throws over the head of the poor child of man in order to strangle him.”[[1]](#endnote-1)
2. “This one line of attack the devil pursues to the utmost against us, undertaking to break down our faith and confidence *by the thought that God is angry with us*.”[[2]](#endnote-2)

**Interpreting God Through Circumstances or Through the Cross?**

Satan tempts us to interpret God through the grid of our circumstances. Luther encourages us to *interpret our circumstances through the grid of the cross*.

In a table talk from 1533, Luther explained that according to reason alone:

1. “Our God is always in the wrong, no matter what he does.”[[3]](#endnote-3)

When we think about God and see what happens in this world, *without faith*, we conclude that either God is very weak and cannot stop suffering, or he is very wicked and delights in suffering.

1. “Let it be granted that God *appears* to be angry when we are vexed and tempted; yet, if we repent and believe, we shall come to see that beneath the wrath of God lie hidden grace and goodness, just as his strength and power lie concealed beneath our weakness.”[[4]](#endnote-4)

What is the believer to do when confronted with the devil’s lie? The heart of Luther’s healing counsel involved turning people back to the heart of God—revealed in Christ:

1. “I know nothing of any other Christ than he whom the Father gave and who died for me and for my sins, and *I know that he is not angry with me, but is kind and gracious to me; for he would not otherwise have had the heart to die for me and for my benefit*.”[[5]](#endnote-5)

Luther is very specific in teaching how to counter Satan’s deception about God’s relationship to the Christian:

1. “For the spirit and heart of man is not able to endure the thought of the wrath of God, as the devil represents and urges it. Therefore, whatever thoughts the devil awakens within us in temptation we should put away from us and cast out of our minds, so that *we can see and hear nothing else than the kind, comforting word of the promise of Christ, and of the gracious will of the heavenly Father, who has given his own Son for us*, as Christ, our dear Lord, declares in John iii. 16: ‘God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life.’ Everything else, now, which the devil may suggest to us beyond this, that *God the Father is reconciled to us, and graciously inclined to us, and merciful and powerful for the sake of his dear Son*, we should cast out of our minds as wandering and unprofitable thoughts.”[[6]](#endnote-6)

**The Love of God and the Cross of Christ**

In his commentary on Genesis, Luther describes how biblical reasoning is always faith-based reasoning:

1. “True faith draws forth the following conclusion: God is God for me because He speaks to me. *He forgives my sins. He is not angry with me*, just as He promises: ‘I am the Lord your God.’ Now search your heart, and ask whether you believe that *God is your God, Father, Savior, and Deliverer, who wants to rescue you*.”[[7]](#endnote-7)

To combat the lies of Satan about the character of God, Luther constantly reminded people of God’s fatherly love and friendship.

1. This was his counsel and consolation to his father when he lay ill and near death: “Herewith I commend you to Him who *loves you more than you love yourself*.”[[8]](#endnote-8) In a letter of pastoral counsel to the Elector John, Luther wrote: “*God’s friendship is a bigger comfort than that of the whole world*.”[[9]](#endnote-9)

Luther directly connected Christ as a suffering Savior to God as a loving Father:

1. “The flesh cries out against the belief that God is good, but that *the suffering Savior brings consolation that this is indeed true*.”[[10]](#endnote-10) Through Christ people can grasp with assurance that God is Father and cry out, “*Abba, dear Father*.”[[11]](#endnote-11)

**God’s Gracious Reason for Allowing Suffering**

Like the lamenting Psalmists, our souls still cry out seeking an answer to why a good God would allow evil and suffering. Luther empathized with this line of questioning, and addressed it directly with biblical wisdom.

Writing to the Elector John of Saxony, who was deathly ill, Luther clearly conveyed how God uses tribulations, suffering, and pain to draw us nearer to him and make us more like him:

1. “*Suffering is the school in which God chastens us and teaches us to trust in him* so that our faith may not always stay in our ears and hover on our lips but may have its true dwelling place in the depths of our hearts. Your grace is now in this school.”[[12]](#endnote-12)

When evil intrudes into the usual rhythms of life, God brings us to a full stop and moves us to the verge of defenselessness—fertile ground for the growth of faith.

1. “The *most dangerous trial of all is when there is no trial*, when everything is all right and running smoothly. *That is when a man tends to forget God, to become too independent* and put his time of prosperity to a wrong use. In fact, at this time he has more need to call upon God’s name than in adversity.”[[13]](#endnote-13)
2. “Therefore, we should willingly endure the hand of God in this and in all suffering. Do not be worried; indeed *such a trial is the very best sign revealing God’s grace and love for man*.”[[14]](#endnote-14)

**With Christ in the School of Suffering**

Luther wrote to the Magdeburg chancellor, Laurentius Zoch, after Zoch’s wife had died, explaining the mysterious, but gracious work of God.

1. “Therefore, God often withdraws from us the comfort of visible things, *in order that the comfort of the Scriptures may find room and opportunity within us*, and not remain standing uselessly in the bare letter without exercise.”[[15]](#endnote-15)

Luther recognized how difficult and painful it was to wait patiently on God when our flesh is crying out for fixed feelings and changed circumstances. Yet, this painful process teaches us dependent trust:

1. “All of this, both such patience and such comfort, is the work of God and beyond our power. *This is the school of Christians*. They take lessons daily in this art and cannot comprehend it, much less learn it thoroughly, but they always remain children, *spelling the A B C of this art*.”[[16]](#endnote-16)

According to Luther, faith and trials are God’s healing medicine against the disease of self-trust:

1. “Inasmuch as tribulation serves the same purpose as rhubarb, myrrh, aloes, or an antidote against all the worms, poison, decay, and dung of this body of death, it ought not to be despised. We must not willingly seek or select afflictions, *but we must accept those which God sees fit to visit upon us, for he knows which are suitable and salutary for us and how many and how heavy they should be*.”[[17]](#endnote-17)

**Join the Conversation**

Of these 15 quotes, which ones resonate the most with you?

Let’s be honest, like the Christians of Luther’s day, we also struggle to see the good heart and gracious hands of God in the midst of our suffering.

How can Luther’s candid, biblical counsel help you to interpret life through the lens of the cross instead of through the lens of your circumstances?

How can Luther’s candid, biblical counsel help you counsel others to interpret life through the lens of the cross instead of through the lens of their circumstances?

**Endnotes**

1. Nebe, *Luther As Spiritual Advisor*, p. 189-190. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Nebe, *Luther As Spiritual Advisor*, p. 179. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Luther, *LW*,Vol. 54, p. 105. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Nebe, *Luther As Spiritual Advisor*, p. 192. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Nebe, *Luther As Spiritual Advisor*, p. 180-181. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Nebe, *Luther As Spiritual Advisor*, p. 184-185. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Luther, *LW*,Vol. 4, p. 149. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Luther, *LW*,Vol. 49, p. 270. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Luther, *LW*,Vol. 49, p. 306. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Nebe, *Luther As Spiritual Advisor*, p. 157. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*, p. 249-250. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Tappert, *Luther: Letters of Spiritual Counsel*,p. 56. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Luther, *LW*, Vol. 44, p. 47. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Luther, *LW*, Vol. 42, p. 184. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Nebe, *Luther As Spiritual Advisor*, p. 159. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. *Luther As Spiritual Advisor*, pp. 160-161. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Tappert, *Luther: Letters of Spiritual Counsel*,p. 165. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)