**20 Martin Luther Quotes on Salvation by Faith Alone**

**95 Martin Luther Quotes of Note, Part 6**

**A Word from Bob:** This article originally appeared as Part 6 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).

For Part 3, visit: [*15 Martin Luther Quotes on Looking at Life Through the Lens of the Cross*](http://bit.ly/15LutherCross).

For Part 4, visit: [*15 Martin Luther Quotes on Preaching the Gospel to Ourselves*](http://bit.ly/15LutherGospel).

For Part 5, visit: [*15 Martin Luther Quotes on Growing in Grace*](http://bit.ly/LutherGrace).

**95 Theses and 95 Quotes: See All 595 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 upcoming book: *Counseling Under the Cross: How Martin Luther Applied the Gospel to Daily Life* (releasing September 11 by New Growth Press).

Since 95 quotes would make for a very long blog, I’m dividing these quotes into several blog posts. Here’s post number 6—our final post—with Luther quotes focused on *Salvation by Faith Alone*.

**Luther the Pastor Inspired Luther the Reformer**

Martin Luther is usually thought of as a world-shaking figure who defied papacy and empire to introduce a reformation in the teaching, worship, organization, and life of the Church and to leave a lasting impression on Western civilization. It is sometimes forgotten that he was also—*and above all else*—a pastor and shepherd of souls. It is therefore well to remind ourselves that the Reformation began in Germany when Luther became concerned about his own parishioners who believed that if they had purchased letters of indulgence they were sure of their salvation.

These first 4 quotes are from Luther’s cover letter attached to his 95 Theses.

1. “I bewail the gross misunderstanding among the people which comes from these preachers and which they spread everywhere among common men. Evidently the poor souls believe that when they have bought indulgence letters they are then assured of their salvation.”[[1]](#endnote-1)
2. “O great God! The souls committed to your care, excellent Father, are thus directed to death. For all these souls you have the heaviest and a constantly increasing responsibility. Therefore, I can no longer be silent on this subject.”[[2]](#endnote-2)
3. “The first and only duty of the bishops, however, is to see that the people learn the gospel and the love of Christ. For on no occasion has Christ ordered that indulgences should be preached, but he forcefully commanded the gospel to be preached.”[[3]](#endnote-3)
4. “My humble supplication to Your Electoral Grace is, therefore, that Your Electoral Grace refrain from leading the poor people astray and from robbing them, and present yourself as a bishop and not as a wolf. It is sufficiently well known that indulgences are nothing else but knavery and fraud and that Christ alone should be preached to the people.”[[4]](#endnote-4)

**The False Hope of Works**

Before Luther came to understand salvation as coming through Christ alone, by faith alone, through grace alone, he attempted to earn his salvation by works. The following Luther quotes show the futility of works—for Luther and for us.

1. “Though I lived as a monk without reproach, I felt that I was a sinner before God with an extremely disturbed conscience. I could not believe that anything that I thought or did or prayed satisfied God.”[[5]](#endnote-5)
2. “I had hoped I might find peace of conscience with fasts, prayer, and the vigils with which I miserably afflicted my body, but the more I sweated it out like this, the less peace and tranquility I knew.”[[6]](#endnote-6)
3. “The greatest holiness one could imagine drew us into the cloister…. We fasted and prayed repeatedly, wore hair shirts under woolen cowls, led a strict and austere life. In short, we took on a monkish holiness. We were so deeply involved in that pretentious business that we considered ourselves holy from head to toe.”[[7]](#endnote-7)
4. “I was a good monk, and I kept the rules of my order so strictly that I may say that if ever a monk got to heaven by his monkery it was I. All my brothers in the monastery who knew me will bear me out. If I had kept on any longer, I should have killed myself with vigils, prayers, reading, and other work.”[[8]](#endnote-8)
5. “I almost fasted myself to death, for again and again I went for three days without taking a drop of water or a morsel of food. I was very serious about it.”[[9]](#endnote-9)
6. “While I was a monk, I no sooner felt assailed by any temptation than I cried out—‘I am lost!’ Immediately I had recourse to a thousand methods to stifle the cries of my conscience. I went everyday to confession, but that was of no use to me.”[[10]](#endnote-10)

Luther entered the monastery to find peace with God. Though driven there for rest for his soul, monastic life failed to ease his guilt:

1. “Then, bowed down by sorrow, I tortured myself by the multitude of my thoughts. ‘Look,’ exclaimed I, ‘thou art still envious, impatient, passionate! It profiteth thee nothing, O wretched man, to have entered this sacred order.’”[[11]](#endnote-11)

**Luther’s Journey to Salvation in Christ Alone**

Luther wrote to his fellow Augustinian friar, George Splenlein, on April 8, 1516. After just one paragraph, Luther abruptly inquires about the state of his friend’s soul:

1. “Now I should like to know whether your soul, tired of its own righteousness, is learning to be revived by and to trust in the righteousness of Christ.”[[12]](#endnote-12)
2. “For in our age the temptation to presumption besets many, especially those who try with all their might to be just and good without knowing the righteousness of God, which is most bountifully and freely given us in Christ. They try to do good of themselves in order that they might stand before God clothed in their own virtues and merits. But this is impossible. While you were here, you were one who held this opinion, or rather, error. So was I.”[[13]](#endnote-13)
3. “Therefore, my dear Friar, learn Christ and him crucified. Learn to praise him and, despairing of yourself, say, ‘Lord Jesus, you are my righteousness, just as I am your sin. You have taken upon yourself what is mine and have given to me what is yours. You have taken upon yourself what you were not and have given to me what I was not.’”[[14]](#endnote-14)
4. “Meditate on this love of his and you will see his sweet consolation. For why was it necessary for him to die if we can obtain a good conscience by our works and afflictions. Accordingly, you will find peace only in him when you despair of yourself and your own works. Besides, you will learn from him that just as he has received you, so he has made your sins his own and has made his righteousness yours.”[[15]](#endnote-15)
5. “This Epistle (Romans) is really the chief part of the New Testament and the very purest Gospel, and is worthy not only that every Christian should know it word for word, by heart, but occupy himself with it every day, as the daily bread of the soul.”[[16]](#endnote-16)

In Romans, Luther found that the route to God led through the path of faith:

1. “Hence it comes that faith alone makes righteous and fulfills the law.”[[17]](#endnote-17) Going yet further, Luther discovered that the essence of sin is unbelief or lack of faith: “Hence, Christ calls unbelief the only sin, when He says, ‘The Spirit will rebuke the world for sin, because they believe not on me.’ For this reason, too, before good or bad works are done, which are the fruits, there must first be in the heart faith or unbelief, which is the root, the sap, the chief power of all sin.’”[[18]](#endnote-18)
2. “Faith is a living, daring confidence in God’s grace, so sure and certain that a man would stake his life on it a thousand times. This confidence in God’s grace and knowledge of it makes all men glad and bold and happy in dealing with God and all His creatures; and this is the work of the Holy Ghost in faith.”[[19]](#endnote-19)
3. “Hereby it appears that the doctrine of the gospel (which of all others is most sweet and full of most singular consolation) speaks nothing of our works or of the works of the law, but of the inscrutable mercy and love of God towards most wretched and miserable sinners. Our most merciful Father, seeing us to be oppressed and overwhelmed with the curse of the law, and that we could never be delivered from it of our own power, sent His only Son into the world and laid upon Him all the sins of all men, saying, be Thou Peter that denier; Paul that persecutor and cruel oppressor; David that adulterer; that sinner who did eat the fruit in Eden; that thief who hanged upon the cross, and be Thou that person who has committed the sins of all me; see therefore, that Thou pay and satisfy for them.”[[20]](#endnote-20)

The very expression at which Luther had trembled—the justice of God—now became his friend. Luther explains the results of this shift. It is a fitting quote to use to end our mini-series:

1. “Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise.” Now, “the whole of Scripture took on a new meaning, and whereas before the ‘justice of God’ had filled me with hate, now it became to me inexpressibly sweet in greater love. This passage of Paul became to me a gate to heaven.”[[21]](#endnote-21)

**Join the Conversation**

Which of the 20 quotes resonate the most with you?

Throughout our series, which of the 95 quotes has most impacted your life? Your ministry?

**Endnotes**

1. Luther, *LW*, Vol. 48, p. 46. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Luther, *LW*, Vol. 48, p. 46. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Luther, *LW*, Vol. 48, p. 47. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Luther, *LW*, Vol. 48, 340-341. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Luther, *LW*, Vol. 34, p. 336. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Luther, *LW*, Vol. 8, p. 326. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Quoted in Hendrix, *Martin Luther*, p. 27, from WA 17:1, p. 309. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Bainton, *Here I Stand*, p. 34. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Luther, *LW*, Vol. 54, pp. 339-340. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. D’Aubigne, *The Life and Times of Martin Luther*, p. 24. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. D’Aubigne, *The Life and Times of Martin Luther*, p. 31. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Luther, *LW*, Vol. 48, p. 12. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Luther, *LW*, Vol. 48, p. 12. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Luther, *LW*, Vol. 48, p. 12. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Luther, *LW*, Vol. 48, p. 13. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Luther, *Commentary on Romans*, p. xiii. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Luther, *Commentary on Romans*, p. xv. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. Luther, *Commentary on Romans*, p. xvi. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. Luther, *Commentary on Romans*, p. xvii. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*, p. 182. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. Bainton, *Here I Stand*,pp. 49-50. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)