

Reading *the* Word of GOD

**A DAILY READING GUIDE
FOR THREE YEARS**



This daily Bible reading guide, *Reading the Word of God*, was conceived and prepared as a result of the ongoing discussions between representatives of three church bodies: Lutheran Church–Canada (LCC), The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) and the North American Lutheran Church (NALC). The following individuals have represented their church bodies and approved this introduction and the reading guide: LCC: President Robert Bugbee; NALC: Bishop John Bradosky, Revs. Mark Chavez, James Nestingen and David Wendel; LCMS: Revs. Albert Collver, Joel Lehenbauer, John Pless and Larry Vogel.

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The translation of the Bible into the vernacular — into the everyday language of common people — was one of the greatest and most far-reaching accomplishments of the Reformation. As we celebrate the 500th anniversary of Luther posting the 95 Theses, we might also recall that following that event in the year 1517, other events ensured that the Reformation would leave a permanent mark on the Christian church. To name only a few, we might include Luther's three great treatises of 1520 (*To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation*, *The Freedom of the Christian Man* and *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*), Luther's catechisms of 1529 and the *Augsburg Confession* of 1530 by Philip Melancthon. But we also cannot omit Luther's translation of the Bible into German, with his publication of the New Testament in 1522 and the entire Bible in 1534. The German Bible and the Catechisms enabled the Reformation to extend deeply into the mind and life of the laity.

During ongoing discussions between representatives of the Lutheran Church—Canada, the North American Lutheran Church and The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, the participants agreed on two foundational matters.¹ First, we came to a common understanding of the Holy Scriptures. In so doing, we adopted a document titled “God’s Word Forever Shall Abide: A Guiding Statement on the Character and Proper Use

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of the Sacred Scriptures” (appended below, issuu.com/thelcms/docs/jlm-september-2016/6). That document has been circulated within our three church bodies to widespread approval. Second, we agreed that, to a great degree, the membership in each of our church bodies suffers from a declining familiarity with the Bible. We are reminded of the commendation of the Bereans, who “received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily” (Acts 17:11).

In order to encourage the people of our church bodies in the daily reading of Holy Scripture, we have compiled a three-year plan of *daily* Bible readings and a year-long series of *weekly* readings on Martin Luther’s approach to the Scriptures. The daily readings are on the attached calendars for 2018, 2019 and 2020. The plan provides a guide that will take the reader through the entire Old Testament one time in three years, with the exception of Psalms, which are read twice each year. The New Testament will be read twice in the three years. A reading from the Old Testament, a psalm (or portion of a psalm) and a reading from the New Testament is assigned for each day. Certain church festivals — Christmas, Easter, Pentecost and so forth — have readings appointed for the specific occasion.

The suggested readings are offered for one reason only: to enhance devotional life as an individual or a family daily examines, and is examined by, the Word of God and then responds in prayer to the heavenly Father. Toward that goal, the following suggestions may be considered. They are merely suggestions, of course, as is this daily reading guide. The most important purpose

of the guide is to encourage a daily practice of reading and meditating on the Bible, God's Word. Since the Scriptures as a whole are God's Word, increasing familiarity with the various books is encouraged.

Individuals who set aside time for personal devotion may find it easier than families to use this guide as a whole. Families, especially those with small children, who believe this is too ambitious for them may want to select only a portion of what is suggested, as a briefer reading that can be simply explained.

A set time is important — typically morning or evening at mealtime. The individual or family is encouraged to choose a time each day when there will be minimal or no distraction, allowing perhaps 20–40 minutes for reading and prayer. The individual or family may begin with the sign of the holy cross and “In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” as a reminder of our baptismal identity, followed by a prayer for the Holy Spirit to prepare the heart(s) to hear and understand the Word of God and to bear fruit in keeping with it (Matt. 13:13; Luke 8:11ff.). One may then read the Old Testament selection, followed by the psalm and concluding with the reading from the New Testament. The individual Christian may wish to read aloud even if reading alone. While reading, remember that the two central messages of Scripture are Law and Gospel, for the Bible continually reminds us of our sins and God's legitimate wrath against human rebellion

(the Law), even as it also tells us the precious truth of God's forgiveness, mercy and love, which are made certain in the incarnation, death, resurrection and assured return of our Lord Jesus.

With the frequent reading of the psalms comes an opportunity to use the psalter as the “prayer book of the Bible,” letting each daily psalm become an encouragement for prayer. The daily devotion will be strengthened even more if, following the counsel and practice of countless Christians, it includes confession of the Apostles' Creed and a purposeful recitation of our Lord's Prayer, considering each petition. As a final suggestion for this devotional time, the use of Luther's Morning or Evening Prayer is encouraged.

Lest this devotional exercise be viewed as an alternative to the church's gathered life in the congregation, two other points are worth noting. First, the user(s) of this guide may wish to keep a notebook of questions that arise during the weekly devotional time. Those questions may be shared with a pastor or other church teachers for further insight in the Word of God. Second, since the morning is given to the Divine Service, the evening of the Lord's Day is probably the best time to set aside for the daily readings, especially for a family. That time can also provide an opportunity for the family to discuss the sermon and the service that Sunday. The Sunday or weekend devotional time is also an ideal time to read the selection about Luther and Holy Scripture.

Abbreviations of Biblical Books

Old Testament

Genesis Gen.
Exodus Ex.
Leviticus Lev.
Numbers Num.
Deuteronomy Deut.
Joshua Joshua
Judges Judges
Ruth Ruth
1 Samuel 1 Sam.
2 Samuel 2 Sam.
1 Kings 1 Kings
2 Kings 2 Kings
1 Chronicles 1 Chron.

2 Chronicles 2 Chron.
Ezra Ezra
Nehemiah Neh.
Esther Esther
Job Job
Psalm Ps.
Proverbs Prov.
Ecclesiastes Eccl.
Song of Songs Song of Songs
Isaiah Is.
Jeremiah Jer.
Lamentations Lam.
Ezekiel Ezek.

Daniel Dan.
 Hosea Hos.
 Joel Joel
 Amos Amos
 Obadiah Obad.
 Jonah Jonah

Micah Micah
 Nahum Nah.
 Habakkuk Hab.
 Zephaniah Zeph.
 Haggai Hag.
 Zechariah Zech.
 Malachi Mal.

New Testament

Matthew Matt.
 Mark Mark
 Luke Luke
 John John
 Acts of the Apostles Acts
 Romans Rom.
 1 Corinthians 1 Cor.
 2 Corinthians 2 Cor.
 Galatians Gal.
 Ephesians Eph.
 Philippians Phil.
 Colossians Col.
 1 Thessalonians 1 Thess.

2 Thessalonians 2 Thess.
 1 Timothy 1 Tim.
 2 Timothy 2 Tim.
 Titus Titus
 Philemon Philemon
 Hebrews Heb.
 James James
 1 Peter 1 Peter
 2 Peter 2 Peter
 1 John 1 John
 2 John 2 John
 3 John 3 John
 Jude Jude
 Revelation Rev.

**Weekly Readings —
 Martin Luther on Holy Scripture²**

As a companion to the Daily Reading Guide, the participants of the LCMS-LCC-NALC consultation are also offering selected readings from the work, *Luther on the Scriptures*, by Johann Michael Reu, (1869–1943), a German-born American Lutheran pastor, theologian and educator who taught from 1899 till his death at Wartburg Theological Seminary, Dubuque, Iowa.

While we in no way intend for these to replace or be understood as equal to the value of daily Bible reading, we do believe they will be helpful, especially for Lutherans. Why?

Undoubtedly, there are those within Lutheranism today who no longer understand the meaning and purpose

of Holy Scripture. Some Christians describe multiple methods of reading and interpreting the Scriptures, and this has had a negative impact in Lutheran churches as well. Increasingly in world Lutheranism, the notion of a “Lutheran” way of approaching the Bible has been lost, ignored or confused by competing yet supposedly equally valid means of studying Scripture. The result has been, in some places, a lack of commitment to the truth and authority of God’s Word, skepticism about the trustworthiness of God’s Word and a general lack of interest in hearing and heeding God’s Word. It should be no surprise, then, that there is the aforementioned “declining familiarity” with the Bible in our churches.

As we commend the Daily Bible Reading Guide to you, then, we also invite you to explore Martin Luther’s understanding of Holy Scripture with the series of weekly readings. Reu’s brief work, now out of print, has been shared among the participants of our consultation, enlightening and directing our conversations as

² Selected from M. Reu, *Luther and the Scriptures* (Springfield: Concordia Theological Seminary, 1960).

we have sought a deeper and richer appreciation for God's Word, largely through Luther's own writing. As he speaks to us of the clarity, simplicity, trustworthiness and infallibility of Scripture, it is our hope and prayer that each member, household and congregation will turn daily to the Biblical readings with renewed desire for the Word which is a "lamp to [our] feet and a light to [our] path" (Ps. 119:105).

1. We know that in 1513, when [Luther] began his lectures on the Psalms, he still operated with the fourfold sense of Scripture, the *sensus literalis*, *allegoricus*, *tropologicus*, and *anagogicus*, but that already in the course of his lectures he combined three of them into *one* and occasionally designated the *sensus literalis* as the *sensus primarius scripturae* behind which the *sensus tropologicus* must retreat. In his lectures on Romans, 1515-1516, and on Galatians, 1516-1517, this view becomes increasingly evident, and after 1519 his exposition is entirely controlled by the principle: Scripture has but *one* meaning, even though in his practical explanations of the Scriptures he still oftentimes pays tribute to the allegorical sense. He now declares in his writing against Emser, "Scripture shall not have a double meaning but shall retain the one that accords with the meaning by the words," and again, "The Holy Ghost is the most simple author and speaker in heaven and earth, therefore His words cannot have more than one, the most simple meaning." In his Christmas Postil of 1522 he even writes, "If we concede that Scripture has more than one sense, it loses its fighting force." (10)
2. Luther's first statements concerning this matter we find in the *marginal notes* written by him in his personal copy of the Sentences of Lombardus, which, in 1510, as a *Sententiarius* he was called upon to teach. Here we find statements such as the following: "But you, dear reader, whoever you may be, take this as the word of a simple man: no one has ever yet had the experience that the vapors of the earth have illuminated the heavens, but rather that they hold back the light from the earth. By that I want to say that theology is heaven, or, to put it still better, the kingdom of heaven. Man is the earth, and his speculations are the vapors; now understand the rest and see for what reason there are such great differences of opinion among the doctors. Note, too, that a swine has never been able to teach Minerva even though it often imagines that it can." "All light must come from revelation, the human understanding is unable to understand supernatural matters." "For since no one has seen them, whatever is added to revelation is certainly nothing but human invention." "Arguments based on reason determine nothing, but because the Holy Ghost says it is true, it is true." In connection with a disputed question Luther affirms: "Though many famous doctors hold this opinion, yet they do not have Scripture on their side but only arguments of reason. But I have the words of Scripture on my side in this opinion that the soul is the image of God, and so I say with the Apostle, 'Though an angel from heaven, that is, a doctor of the Church, teaches otherwise let him be anathema!'" (13)
3. Luther's *Lectures on the Psalms*, 1513-1515, contain many declarations concerning the Scriptures. "What pasture is to the beast ..., the nest for the birds, the stream for fish, the Scriptures are for believing souls. To the arrogant, of course, they are a stumblingblock; he will have nothing to do with them, since they offer him nothing. But to him who approaches the Scriptures with humility they open themselves and themselves produce humility, change man from a desperate sinner into a child of God. They give everything which the soul needs, and it is to tempt God, if anyone will not be satisfied with the Scriptures. They are the fountain from which one must dip. Each word of the same is a source which affords an inexhaustible abundance of water to everyone who thirsts after the saving doctrine. God's will is completely contained therein, so that we must constantly go back to them. Nothing should be presented which is not confirmed by the authority of both Testaments and agrees with them. It cannot be otherwise, for the Scriptures are divine; in them God speaks and they are His Word." (13-14)
4. In his lectures on the Psalms Luther regards the expressions, "God speaks," and, "the Scriptures speak," as convertible [synonymous]. To hear or to read the Scriptures is nothing else than to hear God. They are His sanctuary in which He is present. Therefore we dare not despise one single word of the Scripture for "all its words are weighed, counted, and measured." The prophets who spoke or wrote the Word were the organs of the Spirit; that is the precious fact that in them God himself is heard. For this reason we read in the Prophets, "The Word of the Lord came to me." This is the friendliest and most intimate inspiration there is. Every word of the

Scriptures must be precious to us because it comes from the mouth of God, is written for us, preserved for us, and will be proclaimed to the end of days. Why in one place we read so and not otherwise can be understood only by him who will permit himself to be guided by God. How unconditionally Luther accepted the authority of the Scriptures is evident from the fact that he is willing to accept things as true and real which in any legend would be rejected as absurd, if they are covered by a word of Scripture. No one should prefer his own opinion to that of the Scripture even if it seems much more plausible. (14)

5. In his synodical sermon, which he wrote, not in 1512 as the Weimar Edition assumes, but in 1516 for the Provost of Leitzkau, he energetically declares that the work of pastors is the study and the preaching of Scripture. Here we read: “Therefore in this honorable meeting you may resolve many things and order everything well, but if you do not insist that it is commanded for priests, as the teachers of the people, to do away with all unauthentic legendary matter and to concentrate only on the holy Gospel and the holy exponents of the holy Gospel, to proclaim with a sacred reverence the Word of truth to the people and omit at last all speculations of men, or add them only in moderation, setting forth their difference, and thus faithfully labor for the birth from God—I say, if you will not devote yourselves to this with increasing zeal, then I say to you in all frankness everything else will be as nothing. For that is the chief thing that matters, that is the essence of a genuine reformation, that is the very soul of all piety. (15)
6. In general, there is evident in the sermons [of Luther] preached before the posting of the Theses, as far as they have been preserved, a strong emphasis on the Word as the Means of Grace. In the sermon of October 5, 1516, even this sentence is found, “faith surrenders itself captive to the Word of Christ”—surely a strong emphasis on the authority of Scripture. (15)
7. In his *Acta Augustana*, 1518, Luther writes, “One thing should not be concealed from you, that in this disputation nothing is sought but the clear meaning of Scripture.” In a letter to Staupitz dated September 1, 1518, Luther expresses his joy over the fact that the young theologians are filled with zeal for the Holy Scriptures. In a writing, *Concerning Freedom of the Sermon, Papal Indulgence, and Grace*, June, 1518, we read, “Even though all saintly teachers had maintained this or that, it would mean nothing over against a single statement of Holy Scripture.” (15–16)
8. The disputation with Eck, 1519, especially led Luther even farther on this course. *Now he also divorced himself from the authority of the Councils*. When he denied their infallibility he advanced from their fallibility to the infallible Scripture as the sole decisive norm for everything that wanted to be accepted as divine truth, and thereby without more ado he identified Scripture and the Word of God. Thus in his *Disputatio J. Eckii et Mart. Lutheri* he applied the admonition of Paul, “Prove all things; hold fast that which is good,” to the decrees of Popes and Councils and expressly said of them that they have erred, but that Holy Scripture is the inerrant Word of God (*verbum Dei infallibile*). (16)
9. Luther again speaks of the infallibility of Scripture in *Contra malignum J. Eckii iudicium M. Lutheri Defensio*, which left the press on September 30, 1519. In the preface he refers to the statement of Augustine, “I have learned to ascribe this honor (namely the infallibility) only to books which are termed canonical, so that I confidently believe that not one of their authors erred,” and continues, “but the other authors, no matter how distinguished by great sanctity and teaching, I read in this way, that I do not regard them as true because they themselves judged in this wise but in so far as they could convince me through the authority of the canonical writings or other clear deductions.” (17)
10. Let me mention at least a few testimonies from the year 1520. In June, Luther wrote to the same Dungersheim, “We wish to be judged by Scripture; you wish to judge it . . . If the Fathers are to be read without selection and judgment, the Scripture is taken away.” (17–18)
11. In [Luther’s] writing, *Concerning the Papacy at Rome against the most famous Romanist at Leipzig*, which appeared toward the end of June [1520], we read: “I merely contend for two things, the first, I will not permit men to posit new articles of faith and scold, defame, and judge all other Christians as heretics, renegades, infidels only because they do not submit to the Pope. It is enough that we let the Pope be Pope (in which sense this is to be understood he clearly states in the foregoing) . . . The other, everything that the Pope claims, makes, and does will I receive in this wise that I will

first examine it according to the Holy Scripture. It must remain under Christ and be judged by Scripture.” (18)

12. In regard to the Church Luther says in the same writing: “The Church also has no power to establish new divine promises of grace, as some foolishly speak, that everything which the Church ordains is of no lesser authority than that which is ordained of God, since she is guided by the Holy Spirit. For the Church comes into being through the word of promise through faith ... God’s Word stands incomparably high above the Church, in this Word she, as a creature, cannot resolve, order, or execute but can only be resolved, ordered, and carried out. For who generates his father, who has first called his Creator into being?” (18)
13. Scripture is the *primum principium*; it is [Luther writes] “in itself the *most certain, the most accessible, the most readily understandable* (book) which *interprets itself* and approves, judges, and illumines all (words) of all.” It must “reign as queen.” (18)
14. On Good Friday, March 29 of the same year, Luther had completed his well-deserved coarse answer to Emser. Here he called *the Holy Ghost the most lucid writer* and speaker whose writings do not need the help of church and tradition in order to be understood correctly if they are only taken in their literal sense. (18–19)
15. It was only the culmination point of this whole development when on April 18 [Luther] gave his famous answer in Worms: “Unless I am convinced by testimony from Scripture or evident reason (*convictus testimoniis Scripturae aut ratione evidente*)—for I believe neither the Pope nor the Councils alone, since it is established that they have often erred and contradicted themselves—I am conquered by the writings (i.e., passages from Scripture) cited by me, and my conscience is captive to the Word of God; recant I will and can nothing, since it is neither safe nor honest to do ought against conscience.” This once forever established the *Sola Scriptura*. (19)
16. This word of Luther spoken at Worms has often, unfortunately, been misconstrued. It has been inferred from it that Luther here demanded an unrestricted liberty of thought and conscience, according to which there is no such thing as an objective authority outside of ourselves, and man is responsible to no one but himself, his own subjective, arbitrary conscience. It is not to be denied that natural man would find his greatest delight in such an absolute freedom of thought and conscience, just as such freedom sooner or later always leads to a dissolution of morality and religion but never serves to fortify the same. Such unrestricted individualism, centering only in itself, divorced from all objective authority, was, perhaps, advocated by Italian humanism but never by Luther. This needs no further proof even though historians like Harnack saw fit to write: “The Reformation protested against *all* formal, external authority in matters of religion. Thus Luther also protested against the authority of the letter of the Bible.” Whoever appeals to the confession of Luther at Worms in support of this deliberately closes his eyes to the fact that Luther expressly declared, “my conscience is *captive to the Word of God*.” (19)
17. Wilhelm Walther truthfully says: “It never entered the mind of Luther to deny *all* authority in the Church. Rather, by dethroning the mass of false authorities to which men bowed during the Catholic period, he enthroned another authority as the only one duly authenticated. Indeed, only to this end did he militate against the infallibility of the Church Fathers, Popes, Councils, and universities with such force, to make room for the ‘Empress’ who alone is worthy of all sovereignty, the Holy Scripture. Anyone to whom this must first be proved lacks even elementary knowledge in the field of the history of the Reformation. (19)
18. On April 28, thus ten days later [after Worms], [Luther] wrote his well-known letter to Emperor Charles. ... “But I, who was always humble and zealously ready to do and to suffer all that in me lay, could not obtain *this one concession*, this most Christian prayer, *that the Word of God should remain free and unbound*, and that I should submit my books to your Sacred Majesty and the Estates of the Empire on that condition, nor that in yielding to the decree of a Council I should not submit to anything contrary to the gospel of God, nor should they make any such decree. *This was the crux of the whole controversy*.” Luther then continues: “For God, the searcher of hearts, is my witness that I am most ready to submit to and obey your Majesty either in life or in death, to glory or to shame, for gain or for loss. As I have offered myself, thus I do now, *excepting nothing save the Word of God*, in which not only (as Christ teaches in Matthew 4) does man live, but which also the angels of Christ

desire to see (I Peter 1). *As it is above all things it ought to be held free and unbound in all*, as Paul teaches (II Timothy 2:9). *It ought not to depend on human judgment nor to yield to the opinion of men, no matter how great, how numerous, how learned, and how holy they are.* Thus does St. Paul in Galatians. I dare to exclaim with emphasis, ‘If we or an angel from heaven teach you another gospel, let him be anathema,’ and David says, ‘Put not your trust in princes, in the sons of men, in whom is no safety,’ Ps. 146:3. Nor is anyone able to trust in himself, as Solomon says, ‘He is a fool who trusts in his heart’; Prov. 28:26, and Jeremiah 17, ‘Cursed is he who trusteth in man’ . . . For to trust in man in matters of salvation is to give to the creature the glory due to the creator alone.” (20–21)

19. In connection with Jeremiah 23:16, [Luther writes], “O pope, O bishop, O parson, O monks, O theologians, how can you get by here? Do you think it is a small matter when lofty Majesty forbids what does not come from the mouth of God and something else that is not God’s Word?” *“God’s Word is so hard that it will suffer no additions, that it alone will be or will not be at all. God may suffer it that unclean additions run through our works and lives but in His Word, which should cleanse me from all addition and filth, He can suffer no addition, or our lives would never become clean in all eternity.”* (21)
20. [Luther writes,] “What else can Solomon intend with so many words (Prov. 4:24–27), do you think, than to keep us on the straight (*schnurpleichen*) path, that only God’s Word and way may stand out before our eyes, and no bypath, be it to the right or to the left, good or bad. But now man’s teachings are but mere bypaths and not the divine way (*Richtstrasse*).” (21)
21. In his *Rationis Latomianae Confutatio*, written in June during his stay at Wartburg Castle and published in September, Luther declares: “I would rather drink from the fountain than from the brook—will you forbid this? A twofold fact moves me to do this. First, that I would have the Holy Scripture pure in its own power, untainted by any touch, even that of saintly men, and unmixed with any earthly spice.” (21)
22. At the end of November the Reformer published his writing, *On the Abuse of the Mass*. At the beginning of this we read: “Therefore let the unreasonable sophists, the ignorant bishops, monks, and parsons, the Pope with all his Gomorrahs know that we were not baptized in the name of Augustine, Bernard, Gregory, Peter or Paul, nor yet in the name of those from Paris but only in the name of Jesus Christ. Him only, and Him not otherwise than crucified, *and no other do we acknowledge as our Master.* Paul does not desire that we should believe him or an angel, unless Christ lives and speaks in him. . . . The saints were subject to error in their writings and to sin in their lives; Scripture cannot err.” Again, “It is not the Word of God because the Church says so, but because God’s Word said so, therefore is the Church. The Church does not make the Word but is made by the Word.” (22)
23. During the summer [Luther] defended himself in a German as well as in a Latin treatise against the attack by King Henry VIII of England. I will quote only the brief word from the Latin writing, “They demand that we believe them; I do not demand that men should believe me but that they should believe the clear words of God.” From the German we quote: “But that he (King Henry) cites the statements of several of the Fathers and ridicules my arrogance that I alone would be smart whereas I am the greatest fool, does not affect me. For me it is enough that King Heinz can not quote a single Scripture . . . *But I place against the sayings of all Fathers, all angels, men’s, devils’ artifice and word, the Scripture and the gospel. Here I stand, here I bid defiance, here I strut about and say, God’s Word for me is above everything; divine majesty stands by me* (i.e., in and with the Word); *therefore I will not give a hair though a thousand Augustines, a thousand Heinze-Churches were also against me, and I am certain that the true Church with me holds fast to the Word of God.*” (22–23)
24. Luther did not first come to realize in 1522 that everything in Scripture depends upon that which teaches Christ. He expressed this view already in his first exposition of the Psalms, 1513–1514. Already there we read, “I see nothing in Scripture but Christ crucified” (*Ego non intelligo usquam in Scriptura nisi Christum crucifixum*); and in a fragment of a sermon delivered on November 11, 1515, Luther says: “He who would read the Bible must simply take heed that he does not err, for the Scripture may permit itself to be stretched and led, but let no one lead it according to his affects but let him lead it to the source, i.e., the cross of Christ. Then he will surely strike the center;” and in his Exposition of the Penitential Psalms, 1517, he says in conclusion:

“This I confess for myself, whenever I found less in the Scripture than Christ I was not satisfied; whenever I found more than Christ, I never became poorer myself, so that even that seems true to me, that God, the Holy Spirit, does and will know no more than Jesus Christ, as he says of Him, He will glorify me.” And according to Luther also in the Old Testament writings Christ can be found. (28)

25. It is not a matter of the origin of the Old Testament Scripture and its parts but of the value and the significance which it still has for the Christian. That the Old Testament, too, in its totality, in the opinion of Luther, was the Word of God needs no further proof. Yet, let this at least be quoted from his Introduction to the Old Testament: “I beg and faithfully warn every pious Christian not to stumble at the simplicity of the language and the stories that will often meet him there. He should not doubt that, however simple they may seem, there are the very words, works, judgments, and deeds of the high Majesty, power, and wisdom of God; for this is Scripture, and it makes the wisdom of God that He, lays before you in such simple and foolish (Matt. 11:25). Therefore let your own thoughts and feelings go and think of the Scriptures as the loftiest and noblest of holy things, as the richest of mines, which can never be worked out, so that you may find the wisdom of God that He lays before you in such simple and foolish guise, in order that He may quench all pride. Here you will find the swaddling clothes and the manger in which Christ lies, and to which the angel points the shepherds. Simple and little are the swaddling clothes, but dear is the treasure, Christ, that lies in them.” (28–29)
26. As early as 1523 [Luther] wrote in *Vom Anbeten des Sakraments*: “Beware of this; forget knowledge and understanding that are so vainly exercised as to how it is possible for flesh and blood to be present, and because they cannot comprehend it refuse to believe it. Hold fast to the word that Christ spoke, ‘Take, this is my body, this is my blood.’ *We must not wickedly trifle with God’s words* as those who, without any clearly expressed warrant, want to give another meaning to some word differing from its natural meaning, as those do who sacrilegiously try to twist the word *is* into meaning ‘it signifies,’ and so distort this statement of Christ, ‘This is my body,’ that it is to mean, ‘this signifies my body.’ But we shall and will simply stand by Christ’s words; He will not betray us, and we will repel such error

with no other sword than the fact that Christ does not say, ‘this signifies my body, but this is my body.’ For if such evil frivolity be permitted in one place so that we could say, without any foundation in Scripture, that ‘is’ means ‘signifies,’ there would be no protection against a similar interpretation in any other case, and all Scripture would be nullified because there would be no reason why such wicked trifling could be permitted in one case and denied in another.” (30)

27. As late as 1544 [Luther] wrote in his *Kurzes Bekenntnis vom heiligen Sakrament*: “It is certain that he who does not or will not believe one article correctly (after he has been taught and admonished) does not believe any sincerely and with the right faith. And whoever is so bold that he ventures to accuse God of fraud and deception *in a single word* and does so willfully again and again after he has been warned and instructed once or twice will likewise certainly venture to accuse God of fraud and deception in all of His words. Therefore it is true, absolutely and without exception, *that everything is believed or nothing is believed*. The Holy Ghost does not suffer Himself to be separated or divided so that He should teach and cause to be believed one doctrine rightly and another falsely.” (32–33)
28. It was not only in connection with the Sacrament that Scripture was for Luther the absolute and uncorrupted authority. Throughout the following years he held to the same view. We shall cite a few examples

In the exposition of the Second Epistle of St. Peter, of the same year [1524], is the statement: “Says Peter, what has been written and proclaimed in the Prophets has not been imagined nor invented by men, but holy and devout men have spoken it *through the Holy Ghost*.”

Between 1524 and 1526 Luther held his *Praelectiones in prophetas minores*. In these, in the exposition of Joel, he says: “The prophets do not state what they imagined and thought good but *what they had heard from God himself* and what He, who had created all things, disclosed to them either through dreams or vision; this they reveal and display to us. Consequently they are true hearers of God’s Word, for the eternal, almighty God, *the Spirit of God governs their hearts and tongues*.”

In the year 1526, commenting on Jeremiah 23, Luther wrote, “God’s Word is not for jesting. *If*

you are not able to understand it, take off your hat before it.”

In his *Declamationes in Genesin*, of 1527, he emphasizes again and again: Even if we do not grasp the reason for what is written we honor the Holy Ghost and trust that he knows better.

Between 1530 and 1533 Luther preached on week-days on John 6 to 8. Here he repeatedly emphasized the thought that the Word of God is the touchstone (*Prüfstein, Streichstein*), the rule and plumbline, that tells us what should be preached and whether it is in agreement with God’s will and revelation. . . .

In *Praelectio in Psalmum 45*, of 1532, he asks, If one could attain to these [divine] things by his reason and senses, what need would there be for faith, what need for a Scripture that is given us from above through the Holy Ghost? . . . “In theology only one thing is necessary: that we hear and believe and conclude in our heart: God is truthful, however absurd what He says in his Word may seem to our reason.” (33–34)

29. In [Luther’s] Sermon on the Christian Armor, of 1532, we read: “When the devil has succeeded in bringing matters so far that we surrender *one* article to him, he is victorious, and it is just as bad as though all of them and Christ himself were already lost. Afterward he can unsettle and withdraw others because *they are all intertwined and bound together like a golden chain*, so that if one link be broken, the whole chain is broken, and it pulls apart. And there is no article that cannot be overthrown if it once comes to pass that reason intrudes and tries to speculate and learns to turn and twist the Scripture so that it does agree with its conclusions. That penetrates like a sweet poison.” (34)

30. From the year 1534 we note this declaration: “As Moses is the source from which all the holy prophets and apostles have drawn the divine knowledge and power of redemption and of the way of salvation through the inspiration, (*beneficio*) of the Holy Ghost, so we cannot arrange our labors better or more correctly than if we lead the students and scholars to the same source and seed of divine wisdom, *which the Holy Ghost has sown through Moses*, in such a manner that no reason nor strength of human understanding can acknowledge or understand it apart from the support of the Holy Ghost.” (34)

31. In 1535 Luther’s Lectures on Galatians, delivered in 1531, were published. In these he said: “This vice lies in us that we admire persons and respect them more than the Word while God desires that we adhere to and have our mind fixed *alone upon the very Word*. . . . He does not want us to admire or adore the apostolate in Peter and Paul but *Christ who speaks in them and the very Word of God which comes from their mouth*.” In speaking of the occurrence at Antioch (Gal. 2:11-14) Luther concedes that even prophets err and fail but only when they speak in their own spirit, not inspired by the Holy Ghost, as Nathan did when out of his own spirit (*ex suo spiritu*) he told David that he should build a house for the Lord. “This prophecy was immediately corrected by divine revelation.” Here Luther declares that even Gal. 3:16, a passage so often ridiculed, was written out of genuine apostolic spirit and understanding, and repeats that it is impossible that Scripture should contradict itself, and that a single tittle of Scripture is of greater importance than heaven and earth. *Scripture* he calls *the queen that alone should reign*. (34–35)

32. In 1538 and 1539 Luther wrote his powerful book *Von den Conciliis un Kirchen* and published it in 1539. In this he says: “If anyone would see still farther that the dear holy fathers were men, let him read the little book on the four chapters to the Corinthians by Dr. Pommer, our pastor. From it we must learn that St. Augustine was right when he said . . . that he will not believe any of the fathers unless he has the Scriptures on his side. Dear Lord God, if the Christian faith were to depend on men and be founded in human words, what were the need for the Holy Scriptures, or why has God given them? Let us draw them under the bench and lay the councils and the fathers on the desk instead! Or if the fathers were not men, how shall we men be saved? If they were men, they must also have thought, spoken, and acted sometimes as we think, speak, and act, and then said, like us, the prayer, ‘Forgive us our trespasses,’ especially since they have not the promise of the Spirit, like the apostles, and must be pupils of the apostles . . . When they build without the Scriptures, i.e., without gold, silver, precious stones, they have to build wood, straw, and hay; therefore we must follow the judgment of St. Paul and know how to distinguish between gold and wood, silver and straw, precious stones and hay.” (36)

33. Here (II Samuel 23:2, ‘The Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and His word was in my tongue’) it becomes too marvelous and soars too high for me. God grant that I may at least partially attain to it, for he here begins to speak of the Holy Triune essence of the divine Godhead. First he mentions the Holy Ghost; to Him he ascribes all that the prophets foretell. It is these and similar statements to which St. Peter refers in the II Epistle 1:21, ‘For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of men, etc ...’ Therefore we sing in the Creed, concerning the Holy Ghost, ‘Who spake by the Prophets.’ *So we refer all of Scripture to the Holy Ghost.*” In the same way he refers to Dan. 7:13, 14. “So it is the Spirit who speaks through Daniel, for such secret thing no one could know if the Holy Ghost had not revealed it through the prophets as we have frequently said before, that *Holy Scripture has been spoken by the Holy Ghost.*” (36–37)

34. In his *Enarratio Capitis Noni Esaiiae*, of 1543-44 (printed 1546), [Luther] confesses: “I am much displeased with myself and I hate myself because I know that all that Scripture says concerning Christ is true, that there is nothing besides it that can be greater, more important, sweeter or joyful, and that it should intoxicate me with the highest joy because *I see that Scripture is consonant in all and through all and agrees with itself in such a measure that it is impossible to doubt the truth and certainty of such a weighty matter in any detail*—and yet I am hindered by the malice of my flesh and I am ‘bound by the law of sin’ that I cannot let this favor permeate into all my limbs and bones and even into my marrow as I should like.”

On January 17, 1546, Luther preached his last sermon in Wittenberg. It is necessary to read that sermon, in which he speaks more disparagingly of reason than ever before, to see how at the very end of his life he clung to the literalness of Scripture as the only authority in matters of faith. (37)

35. Luther was not unaware of the difficulties that arise when parallel passages in the Gospels are compared with each other. So in the *Lenten Postil*, of 1525, he discusses the order of time in the three temptations of our Lord. He makes this statement: “The order in which these temptations came to Christ cannot be determined with certainty, for the evangelists do not agree. What Matthew places in the middle, Luke places at the end, and what he places in the middle, Matthew places at the end, as though he

placed little importance on the order. If we want to *preach* about it or discuss it, the order of Luke would be the best, for it makes a fine sequence that the devil first attacks through need and misfortune and, when this does not bring results, follows with fortune and honor. Finally, when this is all in vain, he strikes out with all force with errors, lies, and other spiritual deceits. But because they do not occur thus in our daily experience, but, as it happens, a Christian is tempted now with the last, now with the first, Matthew did not pay much attention to the order, as would be fitting for a preacher. And perhaps Christ was so tempted during the forty days that the devil did not observe any particular order but came today with the one temptation, tomorrow with the other, after ten days again with the first and so on as it happened to take place.” (45)

36. In his exposition of the first and the second chapters of St. John, which was written during 1537 and 1538, Luther discusses the questions as to how this account of the cleansing of the Temple is related to that given by the Synoptists. He says: “The first question is as to how the two evangelists, Matthew and John, agree with each other; for Matthew states that it happened on Palm Sunday when the Lord entered Jerusalem, while here in John it is placed somewhere in the Easter [Passover] season, soon after the baptism of Christ, just as the miracle in which Christ turned water into wine took place about Easter, after which He journeyed to Capernaum. For He was baptized at Epiphany and he may easily have tarried a short time in Capernaum until Easter and began to preach and did what John here narrates about Easter. But these are questions that remain questions which I will not solve and that do not give me much concern, only there are people so sly and keen that they raise all kinds of questions for which they want to have answers. If one, however, has a correct understanding of Scripture and possesses the true statement of our faith that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, has suffered and died for us, it will not be a serious defect if we are not able to answer them. The evangelists do not observe the same order, and what one places first another on occasion places last, just as Mark places the account of this event on the day following Palm Sunday. It is quite possible that the Lord did this more than once, and that John describes the first time and Matthew the second. Let that be as it may, it was before or after; it happened once or twice, in no case does it detract anything from our faith.” (45–46)

37. [Luther continues in his exposition of John chapters 1 and 2]: “But we have to reckon, as all the histories do, that Christ was baptized in the thirtieth year of His life, that He began to preach after His baptism and preached for three full years. The remaining time that followed the third year and was the beginning of the fourth, beginning with either the Festival of the Circumcision or Epiphany Day and continuing until Easter (which can be reckoned as almost a half year), He continued to preach, because He preached three and a half years (though it fell a little short of that time). So it could easily have been that when Christ was thirty years old and after He had been baptized, that in the first year of His activity and at the first Easter [Passover] of that period He did this, but it is a matter of no importance. *When discrepancies occur in the Holy Scriptures and we cannot harmonize them, let it pass, it does not endanger the article of the Christian faith*, because all the evangelists agree in this that Christ died for our sins. As for the rest, concerning His acts and miracles they observe no particular order, because they often place what took place later at an earlier date.” (46)
38. Here we might add what Luther said in 1528 in his *Vom Abendmahl Christi, Bekenntnis* ... “So we must say that Matthew and Mark have placed after the New Supper what took place after the old Supper and is to be located there. For they were not greatly concerned about the order but were satisfied if they wrote history and truth. Luke, however, who wrote after them, states that the reason for his writing was that many others had written such accounts without regard to the order of events, and that he, therefore, had resolved to write them in proper order.” (47–48)
39. In his *Exposition of the Prophet Zechariah*, of 1527, in the explanation of the passage 11:12ff., Luther raises the question, “Why does Matthew (27:9) attribute the text of the thirty pieces of silver to the prophet Jeremiah when it appears here in Zechariah?” He answers: “It is true, this and similar questions do not mean much to me since they are of no particular profit, and Matthew has done enough when he has cited a genuine text even if he does not have the correct name, just as in other places he cites texts but does not give them in the exact words of Scripture; we can pass that by, and it does no harm that he does not use the exact words, for the sense has been preserved, and so here,
- what does it matter if he does not give the name exactly, because more depends on the words than on the name. And that is the manner of all apostles who do the same thing, citing the statements of Scripture without such meticulous care concerning the text. Wherefore it would be much harder to question their procedure than to question Matthew here about the name of Jeremiah. Let anyone who loves idle questions ask on. He will find more to question than he can answer.” (49)
40. In the passage cited above, that is taken from the *Exposition of the First and Second Chapter of John*, 1537 and 1538, there is the statement: “But these are questions that remain questions which I will not solve and that do not give me much concern, only there are people so sly and keen that they raise all kinds of questions for which they want to have answers. If one, however, has a correct understanding of Scripture and possesses the true statement of our faith that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, has suffered and died for us, it will not be a serious defect if we are not able to answer them.” And following this: “When discrepancies occur in Holy Scripture (namely concerning such chronological questions as these: how many years Jesus taught openly, how the account of the Temple cleansing in John agrees with Matthew, and similar questions) and *we cannot harmonize them, let it pass*, it does not endanger the article of the Christian faith.” In these statements Luther does not say that it is a matter of indifference to him whether they contain errors or not but only that his faith would not be endangered, if, in spite of his best efforts, he would be unable to *solve* the apparent contradictions or *to prove the in consequence of all skeptical questions*. He dismisses the matter if he cannot prove it conclusively, but his inability to do so neither commits him to the opinion that these passages really contain error, nor is his faith in salvation thereby imperiled. (49–50)
41. Even in the introduction [to his lectures on Galatians delivered between 1535 and 1545] Luther discussed how the six days of creation are to be understood. He recalls that Hilary and Augustine, these two great lights of the church, were of the opinion that the world was created suddenly and not gradually in the course of six days. Then he opposes this view and writes: “Because we are not sufficiently able to understand how these days occurred nor why God wished to observe such distinctions of times, *we shall rather admit our*

ignorance than attempt to twist the words unnecessarily into an unnatural meaning. As far, therefore, as St. Augustine's opinion is concerned, we hold that Moses spoke literally not allegorically or figuratively, that is, the world and all its creatures was created within the six days as the words declare. Because we are not able to comprehend we shall remain disciples and leave the instructorship to the Holy Ghost." (51)

42. [Luther] had previously expressed himself in a similar fashion in his sermons on Genesis of the year 1527. In these he said: "I have often said that anyone who wishes to study Holy Scripture shall see to it that he sticks to the simple meaning of the words, as far as possible, and does not depart from them unless he be compelled to do so by some article of the faith that would demand another meaning than the literal one. For we must be sure that there is no plainer speech on earth than that which God has spoken. Therefore, when Moses writes that God in six days created heaven and earth and all that therein is, let it so remain that there were six days, and you dare not find an explanation that six days were one day. Give the Holy Ghost the honor of being wiser than yourself, for you should so deal *with Scripture that you believe that God Himself* is speaking. Since it is God who is speaking, it is not fitting frivolously to twist His words to mean what you want them to mean, unless necessity should compel a departure from their literal meaning, namely when faith does not permit the literal meaning." (51)
43. That Luther was not ready to admit that there were errors even in the numerical statements of the Bible we see in his exposition of Genesis 11:27, 28: "This passage is among the most obscure statements of the Old Testament that has caused us many questions, which a diligent reader will encounter here and there in the older and more recent writers.— There is added another fault, that vain spirits hold it very praiseworthy if they can pass unrestricted judgments concerning the difficult and dark statements of Scripture and then can obstinately maintain their opinions. This is a disease of our nature against which an exegete of Holy Scripture should carefully guard himself." Then he discusses the question as to what, in his opinion, makes these passages so difficult: "The second question is still more difficult, though neither Lyra nor the other teachers have paid attention to it. That in connection with Abraham sixty years are lost for us. For the reckoning the text brings with itself is easy. Terah was seventy years when he begot Abraham, now Abraham, when he was seventy-five years old, left Haran, where Terah had died. If you add these together you will have 145 years. But when the account reckons together the years of Terah, it shows clearly that when he died he had lived 205 years. The question is, therefore, as to how we can account for these years. It would be unfitting to follow the example of audacious people who, when they arrive at such difficulties, immediately dare to correct books written by others. For my part I do not know how I should correctly solve the questions though I have carefully reckoned together the years of the world. *So with a humble and proper confession of ignorance* (for it is the Holy Ghost who alone knows and understands all things) *I conclude that God*, because of a certain plan of His own, *caused seventy years to be lost* out of Abraham's life so that no one would venture from the exact computation of the years of the world to presume to predict something certain concerning the end of the world." This hypothesis (because Luther does not express his opinion) may appear even absurd to us moderns, but it will not seem so absurd if we recall that at that time it was customary to place the age of the world at six thousand years, but Luther risks this hypothetical reckoning rather than to admit an error in the Biblical figure. He does not even consider the possibility of such an error. (52)
44. Regarding the statement in Gen. 24:22, that Eliezer had given Rebekah an earring and two bracelets, with a specification as to their weight, Luther makes this comment: "What is here told appears to reason to deal with carnal and worldly matters, and I myself wonder why Moses has so much to say concerning such trifling things and speaks so briefly concerning far more sublime matters. However, there is no doubt that *the Holy Ghost wished that these things should be written* for our instruction, for there is nothing small, nothing useless presented to us in Holy Scripture; but all things that were written, were written for our learning, Rom. 15:4. For God wishes to be recognized in all things, both small and great." (54)
45. No matter how emphatically Luther emphasized the inerrancy and the consistency of the original text of Holy Scripture as the work of the Holy Ghost, he is also, on the other hand, convinced of

the personal cooperation of the original authors. They are not, in his opinion, mechanical instruments and dead machines, mere amanuenses who set down on paper only what was dictated to them by the Spirit of God. He regarded them rather as independent instruments of the Spirit who spoke *their faith, their heart, their thoughts*; who put their entire will and feeling into the words to such an extent that from what Luther reads in each case he draws conclusions concerning the character and the temperament of the authors. So [according to Luther] the Prophet Joel reveals himself in his writing as a “gracious and gentle man, who does not scold and censure like the other prophets but implores and bewails.” Amos, on the other hand, is “violent, scolding almost all the way through his book, so that he is well called, Amos, that is a burden or what is burdensome and vexatious”; and he explains this as being due to his calling and from the fact that he was sent as a “stranger” from the Kingdom of Judah to the Kingdom of Israel, for, he continues, “because he is a shepherd and not one of the order of the prophets, as he says in the seventh chapter, moreover, he goes from the branch of Judah, from Tekoa, into the Kingdom of Israel and preaches there as a stranger.” Of Jeremiah, however, Luther says that he is always afraid that he censures too much, for which reason he compares him with Philip Melancthon. In Paul he observes the deepest emotion because of his writings and can say of his words, “these words are violent above measure, from which it is easy to see that he was much more violently moved than he was able to express in words.” Yes, he adds, “So it has come about that St. Paul under the influence of his intense thought could not control his own word so well, and his speech has become somewhat disordered and peculiar.” (60)

46. It was self-evident to Luther that the evangelists gave consideration to the plan according to which they would relate the history of Jesus and, with that in mind, selected and arranged their materials accordingly, abbreviating here and expanding there. In the *Church Postil* Luther says in the Sermon for the Twenty-fifth Sunday after Trinity (St. Matt. 24:15-28): “In this chapter is described the conclusion and end of both kingdoms, that of Judah and that of the whole world. But the two evangelists, Matthew and Mark, mingle the two and do not keep the order that has been preserved in Luke, for they are concerned only about telling and repeating

the words without troubling themselves as to the order in which the words were spoken.” “So understand that Matthew here weaves together and combines the end of the Jewish nation and of the world, mixes them into one dish. But if you wish to understand it you must separate it and apply the parts to their respective ends.” (60–61)

47. Both facts were certain to Luther: the divine origin of Scripture and its resultant inerrancy, on the one hand, and, on the other, the active cooperation of the human personality of the authors in their composition. The fact that he appreciated the latter distinguishes his view from the inspiration theories of the later dogmatists who either entirely or to a great extent excluded such cooperation; that he did not grow weary of emphasizing the former, establishes his agreement with them. Only in the true unity of both views do we arrive at the whole truth. (62)
48. [Luther writes]: “The meaning of the prophet is that Christ uses no other power against the world than only the Word of God, as we daily see that he acts against the sin, the sinner, and the devil with nothing but the Word, and yet by means of the Word he has converted and subjected the whole world and till the last day his own will defend themselves against all temptation with the Word and defeat all the attempts of devil, flesh and world.” —Compare Luther’s words to Spalatin of 1521 over against Hutten’s offer to defend the gospel by the sword ... Through the Word the world has been conquered, the church was preserved, through the Word it will also be renewed; but the anti-Christ also, as he began without external power (*manu*), will also be destroyed without external power, through the Word.” (75)
49. [Luther writes]: “It is a notorious error to believe that by a statement such as this, ‘It is not permitted to explain Scripture by one’s own spirit’ (*proprio spiritu*) we are called upon to put the holy Scripture aside and to direct our attention to the commentaries of men and believe them. This explanation, I maintain, is doubtlessly invented by Satan himself that by that means he might lead us far away from Scripture and into a desperate understanding of Scripture. On the contrary, this statement wants to say that Scripture is to be understood alone through that spirit by whom it is written, which spirit you can find more present and alive nowhere than in his holy Scripture written by him. Therefore, our

endeavor must be not to put aside Scripture and to direct our attention to the human writings of the Fathers, but to spend all the more and all the more persistent labor alone on the holy Scripture, all the more since there is great danger that one might understand it with his own spirit, in order that the employment of such persistent labor might overcome that danger and finally assure us of the spirit of the Scripture which can be found nowhere else but in Scripture, for ‘here he did put up his tabernacle and in the heavens (that is, the apostles), his dwelling place.’ ... Or tell me if you can, who is the judge who finally decides when two statements of the Fathers contradict themselves? Here the judgment of the Scripture decides, and this cannot be done if we do not give Scripture the first place so that Scripture itself is the most certain, the most accessible, the most readily understood which interprets itself and approves, judges, and illumines all (words) of all ... as Psalm 118 (119:130) says.” (76–77)

50. [Luther writes:] “Here the Spirit plainly ascribes to Scripture that it illumines and teaches, that understanding is given alone through the words of God as through a door or, as they call it, a first principle (*principium primum*) with which everyone who will come to light and understanding must begin. Again: “Principle or head of thine words is truth’ (Ps. 119:160). There you see that truth is here ascribed only to the head of the words of God, that is, if you learned the words of God in the first place and used them as the first principle when you judged the words of all. And what else does this whole psalm do than to condemn the foolishness of our labor and call us back to the fountain (*revocet ad fontem*) and teach us that we should first of all and alone spend our labor on the Word of God and that the Spirit is ready to come voluntarily and to expel our spirit so that we pursue theology without danger? ... Therefore, nothing but the divine words are to be the first principles (*prima principia*) for Christians, all human words, however, are conclusions which are deducted from them and must again be reduced to them and approved by them. They must first of all be well known to everyone but not sought through men nor learned by them, but men must be judged by them. If this were not true, why should Augustine and the holy Fathers, whenever they contradict each other, go back to the holy Scripture as to the first principles of truth (*ad sacras literas seu prima principia veritatis*) and illumine

and approve by their light and trustworthiness their own that is dark and uncertain? By doing so they teach that the divine words are more understandable and certain than the words of all men, even their own ... I do not want to be honored as one who is more learned than all, but this I desire that Scripture alone rule as queen (*solam Scripturam regnare*), and that it is not explained through my spirit or other men’s spirit but understood by itself and in its own spirit.” (77)

51. [Luther writes]: “*The Holy Spirit is the most simple writer and speaker in heaven and earth; therefore His words have only one sense, the most simple one, which we call the literal sense.*” ... “In order that these word jugglers may be seen in their true light, I ask them, who told them that the fathers are clearer and not more obscure than the Scripture? How would it be if I said that they understand the Fathers as little as I understand the Scriptures? I could just as well stop my ears to the sayings of the Fathers as they do to the Scriptures. But in that way we shall never arrive at the truth. If the Spirit has spoken in the fathers, so much the more has He spoken in His own Scriptures. And if one does not understand the Spirit in His own Scriptures, who will trust him to understand the Spirit in the writings of another? That is truly a carrying of the sword in the scabbard, when we do not take the naked sword by itself but only as it is encased in the words and glosses of men. This dulls its edge and makes it obscurer than it was before, though Emser calls it smiting with the blade. The bare sword makes him tremble from head to foot. *Be it known, then, that Scripture without any gloss is the sun and the sole light* from which all teachers receive their light, and not the contrary. This is proved by the fact that, when the fathers teach anything, they do not trust their teaching but, fearing it to be too obscure and uncertain, they go to the Scriptures and take a clear passage out of it to shed light on their teaching, just as we place a light in a lantern, and as we read in Ps. 18: ‘Thou wilt light my lamp, O Lord.’” (77–78)
52. [Luther writes]: “If I am to examine the spirit I must have the Word of God; this must be the rule, the touchstone, the *lapis lydius*, the light by means of which I can see what is black and what white.” ... “This is decisive; it does not matter what name he [the preacher] has, if he only teaches faithfully ... has the Word of God as a plumb line.” ... “What

then, will you do? Will you condemn them? No, I do not want to condemn Benedictum and others, but I will take their books and go with them to Christ and his Word as the touchstone and compare the two.” ... “If one says, the church or the bishops decided this, then answer: Come, let us go to the touchstone and let us measure with the right yardstick and examine whether it agrees with the *Pater Noster* and with the Articles of Faith and whether he also preach forgiveness of sins. If it agrees with what Christ taught us, then let us accept it and do according to it.” (81)

Alternative:

[Luther writes:] “Paul takes them all together, himself, an angel from heaven, teachers upon earth, and masters of all kinds, and subjects them to the holy Scripture. Scripture must reign as queen (*haec regina debet dominari*), her all must obey and be subject to. Not teachers, judges, or arbiters over her, but they must be simple witnesses, pupils and

confessors of it, whether they may be the Pope or Luther or Augustine or Paul or an angel from heaven” ... —“I let you cry in your hostility that Scripture contradicts itself, ascribing righteousness now to faith and then to works. It is impossible that Scripture contradict itself; it only seems so to foolish, coarse, and hardened hypocrites” ... — “We abandon the talk of the Jews and stick to St. Paul’s understanding which, not without cause, emphasizes the little word ‘seed’ and thereby indicates that Holy Scripture in Gen. 12:3 and 22:18 speaks of a single seed not of many, and says plainly that Christ is such seed. Paul does so out of a genuine apostolic spirit and understanding. We Christians do not care if such interpretation does not please the Jews. Paul’s interpretation weighs more with us than all glosses of the rabbis” ... — “One letter, even a single tittle of Scripture means more to us than heaven and earth. Therefore we cannot permit even the most minute change.” (82–83)