

Fear of What is Inside

“I more fear what is within me than what comes from without.”

Why would Luther make such a statement or express such a fear? Why is the “within me” (or what is in the heart or soul of man) so much more dangerous to himself than what comes from elsewhere? Was this statement or belief based on some kind of evil spirit or wickedness that Luther was aware of...?

What I’ve learned of Luther was that he struggled with the scriptures: though being a student (and professor) of theology, Luther was vigilant in “working out the faith” through thorough and relentless study and application. Somewhat analogous to Jacob (of the Old Testament), Luther wrestled with God (or the word) for answers and understanding. He was anything but satisfied – not in God as holy, but in his humanity to understand who God is...among other things. **We can never fully understand or know God and his ways, but the quest or journey to understand God is always before us.**

Fear is a subject that I’ve addressed to some level (see “Falling Rocks” and the summaries on *Freedom From Fear...*) Jesus spoke to his disciples on the matter of fear and, in relation to what Luther is fearful of, the truism that our souls – or what is eternal – is far important than our physical bodies. **Hence, whom or what should we fear?** When the possibility or risk of persecution was addressed – or where the established religion of the time would oppress Christ’s followers – he instructed them:

Don’t be bluffed into silence or insincerity by the threats of religious bullies. True, they can kill you, but then what can they do? **There’s nothing they can do to your soul, your core being.** Save your fear for God, who holds your entire life—body and soul—in his hands.

As Luther examined himself – as we each are called to do in our obedience to God – perhaps the more he learned (of God), the more **he realized how unrighteous** he was within himself...apart from God. He feared this unrighteousness or condition.

In Romans chapter 7, Paul speaks on that “within” us (or the condition):

I realize that I don’t have what it takes. I can will it, but I can’t do it. I decide to do good, but I don’t really do it; I decide not to do bad, but then I do it anyway. My decisions, such as they are, don’t result in actions. Something has gone wrong deep within me and gets the better of me every time.

But in his awareness of not having “what it takes”, he continues:

The answer, thank God, is that Jesus Christ can and does. He acted to set things right in this life of contradictions where I want to serve God with all my heart and mind, but am pulled by the influence of sin to do something totally different.

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All believers must face the knowledge and gained understanding of this condition of fallibility or weakness. Paul recognized this condition time and time again – so much so that he was *at then end of his rope*. Luther echoes this condition with his expressed fear of “what is within”. Considering the noted stature and maturity of these two men of Christianity is perhaps reason for each of us to take instruction as we worked-out our own faith.

On this growing realization (of the “condition”), was Luther (and Paul) consigned to give-up or give-out? Well, in one way, “yes”; because only when we admit our sinful or fallen state, can we see and seek the perfection and forgiveness of Christ; but in another way – as believers – Paul and Luther were to continue to acknowledge Christ’s perfection and, as well, to boast or brag about it. If we must brag about anything, let’s brag about Christ who offers to save us.

For anyone familiar with Luther’s story (or the movie), you can appreciate his statement:
I am afraid of my own heart more than I am of the pope and all his cardinals. I have within me the great pope, Self.

When we realize as Luther realized, **we can come to the cross**...again...and again with our gained...and gained understanding of who we are – and who Christ is...