



A BIBLE STUDY ON POPE LEO X

Condemned the writings of Martin Luther, Excommunicated Martin Luther

“LORD, KEEP US STEADFAST IN YOUR WORD”

(TLH 261; LW 334; LSB 655)

(Ps. 119:5–10; 2 John 9; John 8:31; Eph. 4:3–6)

**“Lord, keep us steadfast in thy Word /
And curb the Turks’ and papists’ sword
/Who Jesus Christ, thine only Son /
Fain would tumble from off thy throne.”**

— Martin Luther

The judgments from the Roman Catholic Church and its pope upon Martin Luther were succinct and clear: Luther was the wild boar in the Lord’s vineyard, teaching heresies against the Roman Catholic Church, its traditions, its councils and even its pope. Luther was to cease all preaching, and his works were confiscated and burned; he and his writings were to be condemned as well as any who would give comfort and aid to this little “drunken German monk” of Wittenberg. On June 15, 1520, Pope Leo X made this condemnation final with his decree “*Exsurge Domine*” (“Arise, O Lord”). Now Luther — and the Christ he was proclaiming — was an outlaw. The Gospel he was proclaiming was summarily condemned.

Pope Leo X grew up in one of the most luxurious households in Europe. His Florentine extravagances were reflected in the enormously expensive building projects initiated to make the Roman church the glory of the world. His plan to finance the building of the Papal Basilica of St. Peter required “creative financing.” Selling positions and indulgences began bringing in large amounts of money for Leo’s grand building projects, despite the fact that all this buying and selling could not be justified by the Word of the Lord and the true Sacraments He established.

Under threat of attack from both the armed forces from Rome and Istanbul, Luther crafted a hymn in 1541 after his Lutheran prince encouraged Christian congregations in his realm to pray and organize special services, asking for the Lord’s defense against the armies sworn to silence the true Gospel of Christ. “Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Your Word” was first sung by a boys’ choir but quickly became a central Reformation hymn for Lutheran congregations and church bodies around the world. (Years later, pietistic church leaders, embarrassed over the direct reference to the pope, altered the wording of the hymn, removing the reference to the Muslim and Roman Catholic forces that swore the

destruction of the teachings of Martin Luther and the gracious Christ he rediscovered in the Scriptures.)

Most significant in this Trinitarian hymn is the object of true Christian faith under the real threat of persecution from those who desire a replacement of the true Gospel with a religious system that earns salvation by good works earned or paid for. Luther sings about the good works paid for by Christ on the cross and received purely by faith; his steady and unwavering confidence in the Word incarnate is reflected in the tune of this Reformation hymn, a tune tradition attributes to Luther.

STANZA ONE

*Lord, keep us steadfast in Your Word; / Curb those who by
deceit or sword / Would wrest the kingdom from Your Son /
And bring to naught all He has done.*

The devil and his armies attempt to destroy the true Christian Church in a hidden way (through crafty deceit, masquerading as an angel of light) and a way that is out in the open (through physical force and coercion). We pray that those forces that desire to silence Christ and the Gospel of Scripture be curbed by our heavenly Father, that His Word would be preserved and broadcast to the ends of the earth.

1. Martin Luther knew that the fight was the Lord’s fight. While Pope Leo X saw Luther as an insignificant German monk meddling in Rome’s business, it was the pope’s insistence that it commanded the sale of forgiveness that endangered the Lord’s vineyard — the kingdom of grace on earth. The Scriptures reveal that the only defense Christians and the Christian Church possess is the Word of the Lord. What does Jesus reveal about the Word of the Lord in John 8:31–36? Why is this passage often read on Reformation Day?

2. What kingdom is mentioned in this stanza? How is the kingdom of power distinct from the kingdom of grace? How has the Roman Catholic Church historically confused these two realms? What weapon has Christ given His Church on earth (EPH. 6:10–18)? Why is it such a great

danger to believe that we must defend Christ instead of believing that Christ must fight for us (EX. 14:13–14)?

3. Quickly after Luther’s death, Roman Catholic armies came to the regions enlightened by the Reformation to snuff out Lutheranism. How do we resist religious forces that will do anything to silence the true Gospel of grace in the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ? How does the kingdom of Christ come, even in the face of martyrdom (1 TIM. 6:13–16)?

STANZA TWO

Lord Jesus Christ, Your pow’r make known, / For You are Lord of lords alone; / Defend Your holy Church that we / May sing Your praise eternally.

It was C.F.W. Walther who followed Luther in regularly reminding the Church that all she teaches and proclaims must give all glory and praise to God and His Christ. In this second stanza, Christ is acclaimed as Lord of lords and the strong defender of His Church.

4. How are the states of humiliation and exaltation revealed by St. Paul in Philippians 2? What role does the Christian have in Christ’s humiliation and exaltation (1 COR. 11:1)?

5. Pope Leo X believed he was Christ’s all-powerful representative on earth. What does the Bible reveal about authority in the Church (MATT. 28:18; JUDE 1:25; LUKE 4:36)?

6. The preservation of the Church lies in Christ and His almighty Word. Especially when we are threatened because we bear the name of Christ, we are tempted to take our eyes off of Christ and His Word. What is the exhortation of the author of the Book of Hebrews when we begin to grow weary and lose heart in the face of opposition and threat (HEB. 12:1–3)?

STANZA THREE

O Comforter of priceless worth, / Send peace and unity on earth; / Support us in our final strife / And lead us out of death to life.

The life of the Christian and the life of the Christian Church are lived out under Christ and His redeeming Word. Christ and His Word alone will endure under attack by the religious forces of a deceived and unbelieving world. When those called to be undershepherds of Christ exchange the Gospel of grace through faith in the merits of Christ with some false gospel of salvation paid for by works or coin, we are robbed of true peace and reconciliation.

7. How does this stanza point to the saving work of the Holy Spirit in Holy Baptism (ROM. 6:4; Luther’s Small Catechism, “What does such baptizing with water indicate?”)?

8. What is the work of the Holy Spirit in remaining steadfast in God’s Word and enjoying concord and unity in what is confessed at the altar and pulpit (PS. 119:5–10; EPH. 4:3–6)?

9. Martin Luther was commanded to submit to the judgments of the pope. He defied Leo X by burning a copy of “*Exsurge Domine*” on Dec. 10, 1520, and continued preaching and teaching the Gospel he had, by God’s grace, rediscovered. Although marked an outlaw and a heretic, the reformer continued to defy any attempt to overthrow the Word of God and its clear teaching that we are justified by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Luther wrote: “When the article of justification has fallen, everything has fallen.” Why is this teaching central to Christian “peace and unity on earth” (ISAIAH 53; JOHN 1:29; 3:16; ACTS 4:12; ROM. 1:16–17; 3:23–28; 4:25; 1 COR. 2:1–5; 3:11; GAL. 2:16; 5:4; 1 TIM. 1:15, 2:4–6; ARTICLE IV OF THE AUGSBURG CONFESSION)?

