



Luther on the Christian Life: Cross and Freedom

Carl R. Trueman , Stephen J. Nichols (Editor) , Justin Taylor (Editor)

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Martin Luther's historical significance can hardly be overstated. Known as the father of the Protestant Reformation, no single figure has had a greater impact on Western Christianity except perhaps Augustine. In *Luther on the Christian Life*, historian Carl Trueman introduces readers to the lively Reformer, taking them on a tour of his historical context, theological system, and approach to the Christian life. Whether exploring Luther's theology of protest, ever-present sense of humor, or misunderstood view of sanctification, this addition to Crossway's Theologians on the Christian Life series highlights the ways in which Luther's eventful life shaped his understanding of what it means to be a Christian. Ultimately, this book will help modern readers go deeper in their spiritual walk by learning from one of the great teachers of the faith.

Luther on the Christian Life: Cross and Freedom Details

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Sam says

"And his emphasis on the objectivity of the action of God in Christ puts all things in perspective and exposes our lives outside of Christ for what they are, acts in a silly farce played out in the shadow of the beckoning grave."

A strong finish.

Jon Green says

As someone who didn't know much about the life and theology of Luther beyond they most basic facts I felt this book was a good introduction and primer. I'm interested in reading more books in this series and more of Luther because of this book.

Grayson Gilbert says

In similar accord to Bonhoeffer and Lewis, Luther is often marginalized by the appeal to a broader evangelical context than he would fit within during his own lifetime. Trueman, recognizing the weaknesses of this approach, argues for a more sensible reading in moving beyond the modernly-evangelicalized Luther by studying the real Luther; the systematic thinking, often bombastic, Christian man, in his own historical context (22).

The reason for moving beyond this one-dimensional study of Luther is painfully obvious: we can never be challenged with a shallow reading focusing only upon areas of agreement. In the scope of many other works on Luther, Trueman devotes time discussing Luther's high sacramentology, his post-1525 writings, the historical/personal context shaping his theological advancements, and the distinction to being a "theologian of the cross" as opposed to a "theologian of glory."

Trueman's basic framework draws mainly from Table Talk publications (among other notable works) in the following structure. Chapter one describes Luther's biographical life, particularly linking Luther's early life experiences to his existential crises, leading to the dominating shift into a Law-Gospel theology. Beyond this, Trueman highlights specific events shaping Luther's theology, for example: The Bondage of the Will being not only a response to Erasmus, but undermining the authority of the Papacy. The second and third chapters deal more extensively with Luther's understanding of the "theologian of the cross," and subsequently, the power of the Word preached. Thus, the true "theologian of the cross" will be dominated by the idea of the scripture's supremacy and power to effectively change the hearts of hearers.

The fourth and fifth chapters respectively deal with Luther's liturgical values and how the Word addresses individual souls. Thus, maturation in the Christian life is not simply one of rote memorization and catechesis, but a profoundly moral exercise intended to grip our affections for God by the knowledge of scripture. Chapter 6 draws out Luther's sacramentology on the effectiveness and importance of baptism and the

presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper. Chapter seven draws upon Luther's response to the "long-haul," recognizing the Immanent Return of Christ was delayed beyond his expectations, thus forcing a structured response to Christian living in lieu of licentiousness and antinomian tendencies. Finally, in chapter 8, Trueman reveals Luther's pastoral nature, specifically with the ordinary aspects of every day life and common struggles of believers.

Trueman fairly reveals Luther, warts and all, as a sinner justified in Christ, mastered by the ideals of being a "theologian of the cross." This was evidenced in seemingly small ways, such as a tract written on prayer for a barber, yet ultimately, in his ability to effectively point to the cross as a source of perseverance through doubt, trial, the pain of death, and the common struggles of man. Personally, what resonated most deeply was the pastoral devotion Luther had for his congregants, sparing time for hospitality, developing catechisms for the maturation of their faith, and utilizing the cross as the means by which we grow to love God. For the clarity with which Trueman writes and this brief, yet illuminating work upon the life of Luther, I would wholeheartedly recommend this book.

Disclosure: I received this book free from Crossway Books through the Beyond the Page book reviewer program. The opinions I have expressed are my own, and I was not required to write a positive review. I am disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255 <http://www.access.gpo.gov/nara/cfr/wa....>

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Ryan Griffith says

Excellent treatment of a remarkable life

While this volume isn't intended to be a biography per se, it not only captures Luther's vision of the Christian life but introduces the reader to Luther's complicated and remarkable life.

Colin Buchanan says

I loved this book. Trueman has created a work that is both substantial and accessible. As an academic, he has kindly done the hard work of descending the mine shaft of Luther's words and emerging back onto the surface - where most of us live - with a sack of precious ore only found deep underground.

But he then refines and applies and demonstrates that, although profound, Luther's writings and reflections have much to offer me in my doubting, my pride, my weakness, my self-reliance and 21st century individualism.

What could easily be met with a "Yeah. Got that." is stirred over a slow heat to let the aroma - and nutrition - of "Christ is enough" do it's life-saving, life-wide work. Trueman's recipe is historical, theological and sociological - a masterful combination that looses some brilliant heart-arrows from the life and writings of Luther into the heart of the reader.

The theologian of glory Vs the theologian of the cross comparison is observed, explained and applied brilliantly. Word and sacrament as the great summary of Christian ministry is likewise probed with practical implications for shepherd and flock alike. ("In the gospel, God doesn't find, he creates." Gold.) The chapter on life and death is potent, personal and powerful. Luther's family life - the death of his dear little Magdalene, the delight of his marriage to Katie - are full of moving - as well as amusing - authenticity, shaped so vitally by the gospel.

Carl Trueman is an author who loves to stir, raise hackles, touch nerves and provoke. His clear familiarity with and affection for Luther explains much of what flavours his work. But this never feels like fanboy nerdism. Luther's shortcomings, faults and the developing nature of his theology are not glossed over. Clearly the man had his faults.

But I love that ultimately what the life of Luther to offers me is a fresh call to look to our big God and His stunning work in saving for himself a people to know Him in Christ, together shaped and served by word and sacrament.

This book has a vital message for us as believers and disciples, for church members, pastors and teachers alike. I thank Carl Trueman for introducing me to the life and times and truths that shaped Luther and for using the reformer's remarkable walk of faith to help shape my own.

Mike Greenwell says

I thoroughly enjoyed reading this book. It is a great starter book to learning about the life of Martin Luther. It cuts to all of the most important moments in his life, giving you a great understanding of why Martin Luther is renowned as a pertinent historical figure, and that especially in the Christian church. As a follower of Jesus myself, by learning about Luther I felt convicted on many topics such as the importance of Scripture, baptism, penance, and communion in my life. Luther took these practices very seriously. In 2019, it is rare to find a church body, let alone an individual Christian, who takes these practices as serious as they should be taken as they were given by God to man for God's glory and certainly not our own, even if our own existed. Amongst the conviction this book brings, be sure to expect convictions against Luther as well. He was a haughty individual. His frequent joking about beer and farts seem to be all in fun. However, there are things that you will learn about this man that will surely be off-putting, possibly a deal-breaker as a Christian influence. All the greater reason to pick this book up and find out who Luther was, how he contributed to the history of the church in the early 1500s, and how that changed the course of history for the Christian church, which in turn, even echoes into the very church you are a part of today. Enjoy!

Cole Brown says

Carl Trueman is given a difficult task: summarize Luther's interesting life and profound theology and focus specifically and how it applies to the Christian life. What's more, he has to do all of this within 215 pages and on a popular reading level. Thankfully, he succeeds. I highly recommend this as an introduction to Luther and his theology or, if already familiar with both, as a means of reflecting on how both can guide us in our living the Christian life today.

Scott says

One of my favorite authors writing about one of my first favorite subjects in church history. A spectacular addition to a great series!

Mark Loughridge says

A dense enough book, but packed with great insight and application. Really enjoyed it - especially the chapter on the theology of the Word preached

David Morrison says

Colourful character

This book brought the great reformed to life with colour and clarity. So many lessons for 21st century believers to help us to continue to walk according to the glory of God.

Jon Jester says

Maybe the best biography I've ever read, and maybe the best book on the reformation I've read.

Jean-Daniel Veer says

Honestly, one of most challenging and awesome reads of the last few years. I've learned so much. By challenging, I really mean that it questioned conclusions that I had for a long time. I had and still have to reevaluate the assurance of some of my positions I've held for so long, and maybe even change my position. Only time will tell here.

We are beggars. This is true. (And the reformation is not all you think it is!)

Mark Nenadov says

This is now the third book I've read in the "Theologians on the Christian life" series by Crossway, edited by Justin Taylor and Stephen J. Nicholls. The author, Carl Trueman (apparently not related to the other Mr. Trueman, the jailor in John Bunyan's Holy War), is perhaps the Reformed/Presbyterian community's "resident Luther expert."

Though I will freely grant his importance as a Reformer and influence on Western Christianity and I respect him as "the father of Protestantism," for whatever reason I've rarely found myself excited to read a book by

or about Martin Luther. But I have an inability to say no to books that call my name, so alas, here I go.

This book has a different flavor than the other two I've read. Certainly there is less of a popular feel to it, and it gets into more involved areas of theology and ecclesiology to an extent which I haven't seen in other books in this series. Trueman's command of his subject shines through a bit more brightly than Nicholls on Bonhoeffer or Ortlund on Edwards. Though Ortlund and Nicholls' books have some areas of strength comparatively speaking, Trueman generally handles his subject in a way that instills more confidence in the accuracy and evenness of the portrayal.

Trueman paints Luther skilfully and fairly. I especially appreciated Trueman's discussion of humor in the conclusion and also the section where he speaks about the misunderstanding of Luther's teaching on sanctification. I also found the discussion of "anfechtungen" to be surprisingly lucid.

I can't say that Trueman has "blown me away" with this book, either. On the negative side, I feel like he sort of got bogged down in discussing historical aspects of Luther's views and practices on liturgy and the sacraments. I'm not saying that these things aren't relevant. They clearly are. However, I feel like they sort of crowded out other aspects that may have been slightly underdeveloped. It seems that he was just sort of rushing to fit in vocation, marriage, children, etc.

That said, though, Trueman has delivered a solid presentation on what we can learn from Martin Luther on the Christian life. It is detailed, well-organized, conveys enthusiasm, interesting, and useful. What more can we ask for? It is a profitable read and well worth taking the time to work through.

Lisa says

Nice read and great blend of what really matters about Luther with a bit of biography and how it can impact us today....

Joel Zartman says

One of the things this book endeavors is to contrast Luther with contemporary evangelicalism. It is done in the interest of historical accuracy and proper Christian memory of the past, but also in the interests of contemporary evangelicals. Christian history is a great repository of wisdom, insight and warnings, but we have to get it right to obtain the benefits. Trueman's message about Luther is: accept no substitutes, they aren't worth it. It's a good book.
