



A BIBLE STUDY ON KATHARINA VON BORA

Escaped Nun, Wife, Mother

“OH, BLESS THE HOUSE”

(TLH 625; LW 467; LSB 862)

(Josh. 24:15b; Eph. 6:4; Luke 2:41–52; 10:38–42)

“I will cling to Christ as a burr clings to a coat!” — Katharina von Bora

Even before meeting the reformer Martin Luther, Katharina von Bora was graciously given the gift of a strong faith and confidence in Christ and His promises. She received that promise through Holy Baptism and later through hearing the Word of the Lord — muted and twisted in the convent but clear and strong as she read the Reformation pamphlets of Martin Luther.

Upon reading about the teachings of the Augustinian monk Martin Luther from another nun (Magdalene von Staupitz), Katharina realized that her salvation was not at all about her vows and hard work but rather Jesus’ redeeming promise to her — His hard work of being the sinless Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

STANZA ONE

Oh, blest the house, whate’er befall, / Where Jesus Christ is all in all! / A home that is not wholly His— / How sad and poor and dark it is!

When Katharina and the other nuns escaped the convent, they did not escape life under the cross of Christ. She was shunned by her own family. She willingly took on great responsibilities in the household of the Reformation artist Lucas Cranach and later as the wife of Martin Luther. Together, they lived as husband and wife, believing their household was truly blessed, even though finances were difficult as they cared for not only their own children but others living in and around what was formerly the Black Cloister in Wittenberg.

1. Anyone who has read about the life of Katharina von Bora (especially the last years) is tempted to feel sorry for her. But is this the proper response to Katharina’s life of faith and perseverance in the grace and mercy of Christ for her and for her family? What does Heb.12:1–15 exhort us to do?



2. What made the house of Martin and Katharina — or any of us — a Christian home? What does the design of Luther’s engagement ring say about Christian marriage?

STANZA TWO

Oh, blest that house where faith is found / And all in hope and love abound; / They trust their God and serve Him still / And do in all His holy will!

Katharina’s life is a great witness to her greater faith as she faithfully picked up her cross and followed her suffering servant Lord. She not only cared for her husband and six children but also took in and cared for several children of Luther’s sister even when resources were scarce. Her hope and love were not self-manufactured; they were reflections of Christ’s loving promises to Katharina and the entire fallen world.

3. Katharina’s life of faith was one of hope and confidence in the midst of tribulations and suffering. She knew the heartache of losing a child through miscarriage or sickness. On what basis could she have joy and hope in the face of so much adversity? See James 1:2–4; Matt. 6:31–33. Why is it impossible for those who do not have Christian faith to “count it all joy when you meet trials of various kinds”?

4. Why did Katharina take upon herself so much responsibility in managing the household, selling linen, renting horses and brewing beer? How could she do this cheerfully as she served her husband, her children, those she did business with and those Martin and Katharina took into their home? What kind of faith was given to Katharina? See Heb. 11:1–3.

STANZA THREE

Oh, blest the parents who give heed / Unto their children’s foremost need / And weary not of care or cost. / May none to them and heav’n be lost!

As parents, both Martin and Katharina strived to give their children the best of things for this life and the next. As reflected in the “Table Talks” of Martin Luther, the gathering of the household for meals was much more than food and drink for the stomach. It was a regular opportunity to gather around the gift-giving Christ with thanksgiving and God-pleasing conversation as His creatures.

5. What are the great gifts a Christian father and mother can give their children? How does the giving of these gifts mirror the work of Christ in the life of husband and wife? What constitutes God-pleasing Christian instruction in the home? Read Deut. 11:18–19; Eph. 6:1–4.

6. The household table was deigned to be a place where family and friends would receive their Lord’s good gifts: food and Christian conversation about saving faith in the midst of a fallen and unbelieving world. What does the refusing-to-believe-in-Christ world talk about around the table?

STANZA FOUR

Oh, blest that house; it prospers well. / In peace and joy the parents dwell, / And in their children’s lives is shown / How richly God can bless His own.

Parents care for their children with the prayer that the grace and forgiveness shown to them in Christ will be reflected in the lives of their children. See Matt. 6:14.

7. Why would some parents say that one of the greatest gifts given to our baptized children is the Christian example of love and honor and selfless sacrifice between husband and wife? See Titus 2:4–5. What does it mean as a Christian spouse and parent to “have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus” (PHIL. 2:5–11)?

8. Luther and the Reformers broke with tradition and emphasized the importance of the education of girls. How does the Lutheran Church continue this belief that the gift of a good Christian education be offered to all children, regardless of status or gender or mental, emotional or physical abilities? See Deut. 6:6–7; Eph. 6:4.

STANZA FIVE

Then here will I and mine today / A solemn promise make and say: / Though all the world forsake His Word, / I and my house will serve the Lord!

Katharina’s faith was not in her own human abilities to remain strong and faithful even when attacked by so many struggles in the last years of her life. The words of Psalm 31 became one of her greatest comforts in the last days of her life. It is reported that her last words were, “I will cling to Christ just as a burr clings to a coat!”

9. How can this quote, and passages such as Josh. 24:15b or Prov. 3:5–6, be misunderstood and misapplied to the Christian life? What happens when we mistakenly think we are contributing something of value to our own salvation?

10. The faith of Katharina was all about the object of her faith, not on her human grip on Christ but simple trust and confidence on the gracious Savior who had redeemed her mistaken belief that salvation is about building a ladder to heaven out of one’s own good works. Read Gal. 6:9a; Rom. 8:37–39. Where does the Bible exhort us to “fix our eyes”? See Heb. 12:1.

11. Katharina freely gave to her family for one single reason: Christ freely gave even more to her and to her family. Whose faithfulness comes first: Christ’s or our own? See 1 Cor. 10:13. What does Rom. 5:1–11 say about saving faith and the object of our faith?