

THE CONFSSIONAL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CONFERENCE

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Make Known God's Manifold Wisdom!



*“His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus, our Lord.”
(Ephesians 3:10-11)*

Essay 1

Holy Scripture: The Source of Our Outreach Message

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“Eureka! Eureka!” (Archimedes). I have used this expression of the famous physicist, mathematician, and astronomer with a purpose. He said this after the discovery of one of the physical laws. Well, even his contemporaries testify about his unusual intelligence. Historians say that he could do everything he wanted to do. We also know another famous saying of his. Plutarch cited his saying: “If there was another Earth, he would stand on ours and move the other one.” According to Pappus of Alexandria, he said: “Give me a place to stand on, and I will move the Earth”¹. But he was not the only one, whose scientific achievements and works survived until now and made a significant contribution in the development of our life. Sometimes they even turned our life upside down. Just remember about the invention of penicillin by the British microbiologist Fleming in 1928. That was a revolution in the medicine for it opened the door for the treatment of some diseases, which were considered to be incurable by that time.

Revolution... When our Lord Jesus Christ descended to us with the preaching of the Word, that was also revolution. That was a revolution in the world-view of that time. That was a total reformation of the human mindset. People at that time saw their life in the strict submission to the Law, its total fulfillment. A Jew had to do something himself in order to change his life. But when Jesus came He stood on the Earth of the Law and moved it by fulfilling it. And then He gave His people the Gospel. He made it with His Word. Power and strength of God's Word, written in the inspired Scriptures still remain the source of our salvation and our message to other people... the only source.

¹ δος μοι πα στω και ταν γαν κινάσω

I. Holy Scripture

At the end of the 1st century Jewish theologians agreed at Jamnia (90 and 118 AD) about what books were to be considered as authoritative. But in fact they only re-confirmed the old truth. Even though some people doubt the reality of these Councils, nevertheless after that there was no discussion about what books are to be included into the Old Testament. There were several criteria by which a book was included into the canon of the Holy Scripture: 1) this book has to be written in between Moses and Ezra, when the Holy Spirit inspired people to write God's Word as they said; 2) the content of the book should not contradict writings of Moses; 3) Hebrew has to be the original language; 4) and in general – this book has to be written in the geographical limits of the Palestine. It was later when Christians developed several criteria as to what books should be included into the New Testament: 1) the book must be written by apostle or a person that was in tight terms with apostles; 2) the book must have clear testimony about its Divine inspiration; 3) it must be recognized by the whole Church; 4) all the books must agree with each other². In 363 AD theologians gathered at the small council at Laodicea examined almost all the questions connected to the Canon of the New Testament. They agreed then that the Canon consists of all the books we are familiar with now, except Revelation. Later in the year 397 AD theologians at the third Council in Cartage declared that only 27 books in the New Testament can be called inspired³. However, all these inspired books in both Testaments represent integrity, based on the message of Salvation – in the Old Testament it is the message that is to be fulfilled, and in the New Testament this is the message fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

This is inspired message, thus – firm and infallible. The Holy Word itself testifies about this: *“I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished”* (Matthew 5:18). And St. John writes: *“...the Scripture cannot be broken”* (John 10:35). St. Paul addresses Timothy in his 2 epistle: *“and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work”* (2 Tim. 3:15-17). Thus, all the books of the Old and the New Testaments testify of Christ, the Savior, who descended to the level of the human life from the glory of Heavens, and while in this human life He submitted to His Law, fulfilled it for us and bore the punishment which was not His naturally. For He is God from eternity, who became man for the sake of Golgotha and for the sake of the resurrection from the dead. All the Scriptures testify about this unspeakable mystery of God's love that was revealed to us in Christ. Therefore the integrity of the Holy Writ – is completely Christological. While witnessing about Himself, Jesus Christ told that the whole Old Testament testified about Him (Jn. 5:46). No wonder that the Holy Word is so efficient and a source of our preaching; in fact – the only source. This infallible message of the Law and Gospel brings people to faith by the Holy Spirit... and thus, to salvation and the life everlasting with the Father in the Heavens. Therefore, Holy Scripture – is infallible Word of God.

Let us now listen to the Fathers and Confessions. They give us a strong support to the Divine inspiration of the Holy Scriptures. Martin Chemnitz writes in his “Enchiridion”: *“Thus God enlightens hearts with His Word... He converts people only through the Word... He creates and gives contrition, but only through the hearing of the Word... He instigates faith from hearing, namely from the hearing of the preaching of the Word... He is God of all comfort.”*⁴ Everything this second Martin of Lutheranism talks about is impossible if the Holy Scripture is not own Word of the Eternal God. He uses it in order to bring

² Gleason L. Archer, Jr., *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (Moody Press, Chicago, 1964).

³ Everett F. Harrison, *Introduction to the New Testament* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1964).

⁴ Martin Chemnitz, *“An Enchiridion: Ministry, Word and Sacraments”*.

people to Himself, convert them to the saving faith and then to support and strengthen it. This living Word can do unthinkable things only because it is the Word of the Almighty God. He, Who can do everything, uses this Word in two ways: He shows a man sin in the Law. He shows human sinfulness and tells that humans cannot themselves struggle with it. He shows death to a human being. And then He crashes this wall of sin around human heart that was there from the very first minute of the human life. This wall did not allow us to see the real life, life with the God in Heavens. He crashes this wall while creating saving faith in the heart. He comforts us with His Word of the Gospel. He binds our wounds; wipes off tears; takes by the hand and brings to the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ... to the cross of Golgotha. Philip Melanchthon writes about the divine inspiration of the Holy Scriptures in his Apology of the Augsburg Confession II, article IV 107-108: *“Truly, it is amazing that the adversaries are in no way moved by so many passages of Scripture, which clearly ascribe justification to faith, and, indeed, deny it to works. Do they think that the same is repeated so often for no purpose? Do they think that **these words fell inconsiderately from the Holy Ghost?**”* Melanchthon wrote this in defense of the Augsburg Confession which was presented to the Roman-Catholic theologians. This is what he writes about the Holy Writings in the Augsburg Confession (V, 1-3): *“That we may obtain this faith, the Ministry of Teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted. For through the **Word and Sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Ghost is given, who works faith; where and when it pleases God, in them that hear the Gospel,** to wit, that God, not for our own merits, but for Christ's sake, justifies those who believe that they are received into grace for Christ's sake.”* A little bit further in the Confession Melanchthon continues. But now he points to the reason why we receive Holy Spirit through the Word of God. He says: *“For man's powers without the Holy Ghost are full of ungodly affections, and are too weak to do works which are good in God's sight”* (AC XX, 31). Doctor Luther in His Smalcald Articles chapter III, 7-8 clearly shows us power of this Word of the Law and Gospel. Thus he re-confirms its Divine inspiration. He says: *“But whenever the Law alone, without the Gospel being added, exercises its office there is [nothing else than] death and hell, and man must despair, like Saul and Judas; as St. Paul, Rom. 7, 10, says: Through sin the Law killeth. On the other hand, the Gospel brings consolation and remission not only in one way, but through the Word and Sacraments, and the like, as we shall hear afterward in order that [thus] there is with the Lord plenteous redemption, as Ps. 130, 7 says against the dreadful captivity of sin”* (SA, part III, III, 7-8). In the preface to his Large Catechism Doctor Luther addresses those people who inconsiderably treat God's Word and do not consider it to be power of God for Salvation, with these words of reproach. He once again tells us that this is the Word of Heavenly God Himself (LC, preface, 10-11): *“Therefore I beg such lazy paunches or presumptuous saints to be persuaded and believe for God's sake that they are verily, verily! not so learned or such great doctors as they imagine; and never to presume that they have finished learning this [the parts of the Catechism], or know it well enough in all points, even though they think that they know it ever so well. For though they should know and understand it perfectly (which, however, is impossible in this life), yet there are manifold benefits and fruits still to be obtained, if it be daily read and practiced in thought and speech; **namely, that the Holy Ghost is present in such reading and repetition and meditation, and bestows ever new and more light and devoutness,** so that it is daily relished and appreciated better, as Christ promises, Matt. 18, 20: Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them. Besides, it is an exceedingly effectual help against the devil, the world, and the flesh and all evil thoughts to be occupied with the Word of God, and to speak of it, and meditate upon it, so that the First Psalm declares those blessed who meditate upon the Law of God day and night. Undoubtedly, you will not start a stronger incense or other fumigation against the devil than by being engaged upon God's commandments and words, and speaking, singing, or thinking of them. For this is indeed the true holy water and holy sign from which he flees, and by which he may be driven away”*.

“For where two or three come together in my name, there I am with them.” We can talk a lot about what is included in these words. But the outcome will be only one – salvation through the faith for the sake of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and His death on the cross of Golgotha. When we gather for the sake of the Savior at the preaching and study of the God's Word, we do it with one and only reason: in

this Word we meet Christ, the Savior. Do you remember epigraph I used at the beginning of the paper? This was an exclamation of Archimedes. I think it is a proper place to use it for our search. *“Eureka! Eureka! (I found, I found!).”* In this case these words we can exclaim with joy and thankfulness for the very fact that the Lord God found us. In the Small Catechism Luther colorfully speaks about this (SC, II, 6): *“I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.”* And Luther did not invent anything new. He just summarized and exposed that, what Lord God said through St. Paul in his Epistle to Colossians 1:21-23: *“Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But how He has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in His sight, without blemish and free from accusation – if you continue in your faith, establish and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel.”* It was later that Lutheran Fathers when speaking about justification in the Formula of Concord clearly stated the Divine Inspiration of the Holy Scripture; namely, about the work of the Holy Spirit in it and through it. They say (FC, SD, chapter III): *“Concerning the righteousness of faith before God we believe, teach, and confess unanimously, in accordance with the comprehensive summary of our faith and confession presented above, that poor sinful man is justified before God, that is, absolved and declared free and exempt from all his sins, and from the sentence of well-deserved condemnation, and adopted into sonship and heirship of eternal life, without any merit or worth of our own, also without any preceding, present, or any subsequent works, out of pure grace, because of the sole merit, complete obedience, bitter suffering, death, and resurrection of our Lord Christ alone, whose obedience is reckoned to us for righteousness. These treasures are offered us by the Holy Ghost in the promise of the holy Gospel; and faith alone is the only means by which we lay hold upon, accept, and apply, and appropriate them to ourselves”.* **“Eureka! Eureka!”**

II. Word of God in history

However, the devil did not stop trying to take people away from God, from His goodness and mercy. He makes continuous efforts to make this real. Even more, he always tries to use the corrupted Word of God in order to achieve his goal. The first example of such a corruption we can find already in the Garden of Eden, when the enemy of human beings approached the forefathers with the famous saying: **“Did God say...?”** He wanted to compel humans to start doubting the truth of the Word of God, in its power. And later in the desert Christ gave us the most effective tool to struggle with these attacks. Every time the Devil tempted Jesus with misinterpretation of the Holy Scriptures, Jesus answered: **“It is written...!”** However, if we look at the history of humanity, we can see that he actually achieved something he wanted to. But in the history of the Church there always were Fathers, who under the guidance of the Holy Spirit defended the truth of the Scriptures. Sometimes it was kind of easy to do, but sometimes they met a strong opposition of their opponents. If we look at the history of the Church, we will note that such a defense started already after Christianity became an established religion. After it became independent from the Jewish religion and pagan beliefs it found the immediate necessity to defend its truth from the attacks of those religions. At the beginning Christianity tried to systematize its teaching. Apologists were among first to do this. The story about Justin Martyr is very interesting because it says about where he found the truth. At first he studied Stoics and Pythagoreans. But after he did not find in them anything, he was thrilled by the studying Plato, expecting that he would find truth there. But finally he met a man, who bound him to the study of the Holy Scripture and the prophets. This man assured him that only the Holy Scriptures present the Divine Truth under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Justin then said: *“My soul immediately burned and I started to study Prophets and friends of Christ. I meditated about their teaching and it was there that I found the most reliable and useful philosophy. This is how I became a philosopher.”*⁵

⁵ Bengt Hagglund, *“History of Theology”* (CPH, St. Louis, Missouri, 1966), p. 26

At the early years of Christianity, it encountered with the Gnostic problem. They interpreted Word of God from the point of view of three abstract concepts: truth, wisdom and reason. Gnostics thought that a man is saved only by the higher knowledge, which they had in their possession. This knowledge is one of the forms of the mystic wisdom that leads to the completeness. Gnostics borrowed certain elements from the Holy Scripture. They even called Christ to be a Savior, but only because He gave this saving knowledge into the world. However, Jesus sufferings and death on the cross was of no importance for them. That is why the Church openly opposed this heresy for it corrupted God's Word and openly rejected its Divine character. In fact, Gnostics themselves invented many scriptures, which, as they said, carried hidden wisdom, gnosis.

At the end of the second century in large cities there appeared catechetical schools. They explained Christianity in a form of answers to the questions. These schools became a basis for the Christian Theological schools which appeared at that time. In the time between 3rd and 6th centuries there were several schools. Even though they differed in some questions, however at the very end they led to some unification of the Christian world-view. But sometimes these differences were very significant. For example – Cappadocian and Carthaginian schools completely rejected philosophy, considering it to be useless and dangerous for the Christian teaching. Others, as for example Antiochene and Alexandrian schools, tried to explain teaching of the Christian church on the basis of philosophy. *“The so called Alexandrian school was the chief defendant of reason and philosophy. In Alexandria, in this center of the science, which overshadowed by its schools and scientific knowledge even famous Athens, Christian Church was first to master science and to use philosophy for the sake of faith... Clement (of Alexandria) somehow solved the question about the relations between philosophy and religion, faith and knowledge. Clement said that there is no knowledge without faith and faith without philosophy.”*⁶ Tertullian from Carthage Theological school was a fervent opponent of Clement and his disciple Origen. He considered heresy to be a *“daughter of philosophy”*. Alexandrian school was engaged in the allegorical interpretation of the Holy Scripture. They tried to confront different things: classical philosophy and Biblical teaching. Clement thought that the Holy Scripture of both Testaments contains everything classical philosophy taught about. He said that we just need to know how to reveal content of the Holy Scriptures. But it will be impossible to achieve, if one apprehends texts of the Bible literally. Antiochene school used rational-analytical method of Aristotle in order to interpret the Holy Scriptures. That is why Antiochenes often did not acknowledge not only the divine inspiration of some Biblical stories, but also books. For example, Theodore of Mopsuestia did not acknowledge canonicity of the *“Song of Songs”*.

However, even inside these two schools there was no agreement. Mostly, these agreements occurred between the earlier and subsequent representatives of this school. Athanasius the Great, for example, could not hold faith in the closed philosophical system. On the contrary, he rejected philosophy in the development of the Christian doctrine: Bible was the only basis for this. He insisted that Bible has to be interpreted in the light of Christ and salvation He brought into the world. In his 39th Easter epistle he writes: *“These are origins of the salvation. Those people that want them satisfy their thirst by the **living word**, consisted in them. Only they instruct the piety. And let no man add to them or take away from them. For when the lord preached to the Sadducees He said: ... you know neither the scriptures (Mt. 22:29); and He reproached Sadducees and said: “learn the Scriptures... these witness about Me (Jn. 5:39).”*⁷

And after the 4th century the question of inspiration of the Holy Scriptures, the question of the Biblical canon was not at stake very often. Only sometimes these questions appeared while in discussions. But after a long period of silence these debates started to appear in the time of Reformation, when tradition started to come to the surface. They were highly estimated, but they led people away from the

⁶ Ivan Andreyev, *“Christian Apologetics”* (Purification Monastery, 2006).

⁷ <http://christianity.shu.ru/Texts/athanasius/mess/messag39.html>

pure Word. They just invented new teachings. In his sermon on the Epiphany in 1522 Doctor Luther said about this very expressly: *“In the third place, they hold up to us the saints’ interpretations of the Scriptures, and consider them a great light. They finally adhere to them and believe that in this interpretation they possess something that no one could reject, and claim again and again in order to keep us away from the pure Word that the Scriptures are obscure and make many heretics”*⁸. And a little bit later in this sermon he condemns the same assailants, who tried to accuse him in blasphemy. Note how he does this – by the Word of God. He directs against them the pure and infallible Word of God. He allows Holy Spirit to testify in the Word about their blasphemy and about their sin. *“However, that heretics originated from the Scriptures, is true. From where else should they have come? There is no other book that teaches the Christian faith but the Scriptures. Therefore, as no one can become a Christian except by the Scriptures, so also can no one become a heretic but by the same Scriptures”*⁹. Luther was disturbed with the situation in the Church. That Church departed from the Holy Scriptures very much and deepened in its own interpretations, traditions and orders... He worried about the fact that they took Christ away from the Bible. He even told: *“Take Christ away from the Bible and what you would find there.”* Theology of Luther – is theology of the Word. He firmly held to what Paul wrote in Romans 10:17, *“Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.”* No wonder why canonists of that time tried so much to force Luther to keep silent. But the work started already. A small fire started to become bigger and this fire changed all the Church. It turned it to the true teaching of the Bible. At that time already Jesus Christ and the Word of God came back to the Church. And now Word of God can be heard in the native language. *“Here I stand!”* This is the slogan with which Luther started the Reformation of the Christian Church. He did not introduce anything new as he was blamed for. He did not invent a new teaching! He just confirmed the authority of the Holy Scripture in the Church as the *norma normans*. I think that the words of Luther *“Here I stand”* remind me of another famous saying of Archimedes *“Give me a place to stand on, and I will move the Earth!”* Looks like Luther has found a fulcrum on which he could firmly stand, lean on. But the only difference lies in the fact that he does not have to do anything. He just has to stay firmly on this. And the Lord Jesus will turn his life of sin and death. *“... But also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification”* (Rom. 4:24-25). *“However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness”* (Rom. 4:5). *“Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes”* (Rom. 10:4). *“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast”* (Eph. 2:8-9). *“He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life”* (Tit. 3:5-7). It looked like after this question was resolved that there was no need to talk about it, but the problem started anew. The Word of God underwent new attacks from theologians - and now from the new theologians. They started attacking the divinity, inspiration and authority of the Holy Scriptures even more vigorously.

In the 18th century at the theological scene there appeared naturalism. It was strongly manifested in Deism. The basic principles of the natural religion can be summed up by these principles: 1) there is a supreme god; 2) he has to be worshiped and served; 3) this worship must consist mainly with piety and innocence. Sin is the deprivation from all this and it has to be repented of. If there is no repentance, then there is no forgiveness as well; in the new life evil will be punished and good will be rewarded. It was later that Deism became even more dependent on the philosophy and rationalism. Morality for the rationalist is even more important than the religion itself. In the time of Enlightenment theology tried to

⁸ Complete Sermons of Martin Luther, Baker Book House, 2000, v. 1, p. 341, 45.

⁹ Complete Sermons of Martin Luther, Baker Book House, 2000, v. 1, p. 342, 47.

“humanize” Christianity. Theology had to promote human welfare and to harmonize well-known rational principles. That is, the main goal of the rationalism lay in achievement of the earthly happiness and rational morality. Then in the 18th century appeared Neologism. At that time typical ideas of Enlightenment have already penetrated the Theology of Protestantism. Johann Salomo Semlers was one of the leading representatives of Neologism. He tried to renew theology and to free it from the chains of dogma.

In the 19th century German theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher thought that the Old Testament was a part of the canon only because it was connected to the New Testament which he considered to be the norm of Theology. He changed principle of the Scripture for the “evolutionary principle of tradition.” He considered Holy Scriptures equal to the Tradition. He thought that the Holy Scripture was first only because of its chronological succession. He said that it could not be the basis for the faith because the faith is already in there. At the end of 19th century there appeared another liberal school. It used historical-critical method for the interpretation of the Holy Scriptures. They changed traditional teachings and harmonized them with the ethic and moral principles. Ritschl, for example, said that salvation, or justification – was a restoration of the ethical freedom that was lost by the man because of sin. Christ can be called God only figuratively. Thus, we can see that they paid very little attention to the Holy Word. Karl Barth was very influential at that time. In the preface to his commentary on Romans he said: *“The matter contained in the text cannot be released save by a creative straining of the sinews, by a relentless, elastic application of the ‘dialectical’ method. The critical historian needs to be more critical. **The interpretation of what is written requires more than a disjointed series of notes on words and phrases. The commentator must be possessed of a wider intelligence than that which moves within the boundaries of his own natural appreciation**”*¹⁰. We can continue until the infinity to give different examples of the misuse of the Holy Scriptures, denying its authority and Divine origin. However, this paper does not aim to examine all of them. But at the end I would like to mention one more attack on the Holy Scripture. It was made at the beginning of the 19th century by German theologian Rudolph Bultmann. He wanted to become a Lutheran pastor and even started to study at the Seminary. As a result of his search he decided that mythical picture of the world which lays in the foundation of the traditional Christian teaching, and which divides world into the three spheres (world of God and angels atop, world of humans in the middle, and world of devil below), is foreign for the modern human being. Thus Bultmann concluded that Christianity has to be demythologized. However, he perceived demythologization not as the destruction of the Christian mythology, but as its completely different interpretation. That is, it had to be anthropological. And this means that Christian myths have to be perceived as a special method of expressing man-to-God relations.

However, even though devil tries to take a man away from God and from its true interpretation, even though he tries to convince people that God’s Word is only a story of the ancient people, Holy Spirit continues to work inside this Word, converting people to God, creating faith and sustaining it. A teacher of the Law said these words about Paul’s sermon: *“But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, who was honored by all the people, stood up in the Sanhedrin and ordered that the men be put outside for a little while. Then he addressed them: ‘Men of Israel, consider carefully what you intend to do to these men. Some time ago Theudas appeared, claiming to be somebody, and about four hundred men rallied to him. He was killed, all his followers were dispersed, and it all came to nothing. After him, Judas the Galilean appeared in the days of the census and led a band of people in revolt. He too was killed, and all his followers were scattered. Therefore, in the present case I advise you: Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God’”* (Acts 5:34-39). Nobody can destroy God’s truth. It exists today as well as the Word of God does. And while we still feel devil’s

¹⁰ Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, Oxford University Press, 1968, p. 8.

attacks on the Holy Scripture, the Ukrainian Lutheran Church together with all the other members of the CELC confidently and boldly teaches on the basis of the Scriptures: *“We believe, that the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments in their pristine form, as they were written down by the prophets, apostles and evangelists, are God-inspired. And this means, that Holy Scripture does not only contain within itself the word of God, but that it is exactly Gods Word in its fullness and entirety. On this account, Holy Scripture is inerrant and infallible in all that it teaches, since it is the single infallible rule and norm of Christian doctrine and practice. We reject the historical-critical method of interpreting Holy Scripture as a completely impermissible, blasphemous method of using of human reason to rule over Holy Scripture”*¹¹. What an incredible joy – to possess God-inspired Scriptures that tell us about Jesus Christ, about salvation and the life everlasting! And no hellish forces can overshadow its power and shake its authority. Even though devil tries very strongly to take this reliable foundation of the Scripture from us, we still remain persuaded and this persuasion comes from the Holy Word. *“Give me a place to stand on, and I will move the Earth.”* Let us now talk about how we can move the earth, turn it using infallible, God-inspired, holy and active Word of God.

III. Place to stand on – Holy Scriptures

A place to stand on... Frankly speaking, I always thought that I could swim well enough. I can swim far away into the open sea and be there some time. However, last year I went to the sea with my family to spend there my vacation. One day I swam some time already and decided to come back to the shore. While I was approaching the shoreline I decided at one time that it was safe already to stand on the firm ground. But I couldn't feel it. And after I couldn't feel a place to stand on immediately I started panicking and drowning. I thought that I ran out of strength and that I would not be able to swim back to the shore. But one more minute and I felt the ground. Indeed, it is so important to have a place to stand on. It does not only give us a sure confidence but a strength also. With the sure place to stand on we can do a lot of things. Recently I watched a TV program that was a story about construction of the Egyptian pyramids. And while watching it I was impressed with the skills with which ancient Egyptians heaved heavy stones. They also used earth as their place to stand. And when we speak about “a place to stand” in the world we live in now, I immediately remembered these words of the Savior in the Gospel of Matthew 11:28: *“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”* In the sinful world it is necessary that we be reconciled with our Heavenly Father. He is angry at us for the sins we commit with our thoughts, words and deeds. We sadden Him with these sins and go away from the life, real life. But He did not leave us. He sent His only begotten Son Jesus Christ into this world to do everything we were not able to do. Saint Paul talks about this in his epistle to Ephesians 2:13-16: *“But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.”* The Holy Word tells us this also: *“There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless”* (Rom. 3:11-12). Natural man considers words about Christ the Savior to be the foolishness. Modern people consider themselves to be strong enough, so that sometimes they reject everything about the salvation that has to come from somewhere aside. And if he suddenly starts to understand this, then he tries to save himself with his own power and to come closer to God and be reconciled to Him. I have remembered the words I have read on the CD I once bought. These were the words of the famous Persian philosopher Jelaluddin Rumi. He said: *“I tried to find Him on the Christian Cross, but He was not there. I went to the Temple of the Hindus and to the old pagodas but could not find a trace of Him anywhere. I searched on the mountains and in the valleys but neither in the heights nor in the depths was I able to find Him. I went to the Caaba in Mecca, but He was not there*

¹¹ http://www.ukrlc.org/eng/Kor_dokt_tv_eng.htm

*either. I questioned the scholars and philosophers but He was beyond their understanding. I then looked into my heart and it was there that He dwelled that I saw Him; He was nowhere else to be found*¹². Sin has come deep inside the human being. Devil darkened human mind. So how can this darkened mind do something? How can blind eyes find the way out? We cannot do anything. That is why God does everything for us. That is why He opens our eyes in His Word through the Holy Spirit the same way He did it to His disciples near Emmaus. We do not need to look inside our heart for we will not find salvation there. We should not look for salvation nowhere except for the Holy Word. God Himself tells us about our salvation in His Word. And not only tells us but gives also. In the Bible our Heavenly Father gives us His only begotten Son Jesus Christ, Lord and Savior from death. First He crashes the wall of sin and then brings up faith with His sweet word of the Gospel. By this faith we are tied to Christ. This Word creates faith. “... *When the Word of God is preached, he neither does nor can understand it, but regards it as foolishness; also, that he does not of himself draw nigh to God, but is and remains an enemy of God, until he is converted, becomes a believer [is endowed with faith], is regenerated and renewed, by the power of the Holy Ghost through the Word when preached and heard, out of pure grace, without any cooperation of his own*” (FC, chapter 2, II, 5). This very Word of the Living God is our “place to stand.” And we stand on It not to complete our salvation. No! We are saved only by grace through faith for the sake of the Savior Jesus Christ. We do not have to add to this on our part. That would be even funny if we try to add something to the thing completed already. The only begotten Son of God saved us and gave us the life everlasting already now. We rely on Him by faith and receive by it everything He has done for us already. Christian faith convinces us that we are sinners and that we have to cling to Christ in faith asking Him about forgiveness. And by the same faith we receive Christ’s benefits. Now we can boldly stand on this island of life, on this “*place to stand on*”, the Word of God which testifies us about Christ and Salvation. The Holy Spirit will continuously support us on this island. This is our “place to stand” in order to live. And we are totally passive in this.

But this place to stand can also serve us a little bit differently. And not only can but must. If we stand firmly on the Word we can bring Christ into the world, we can preach to people the Gospel and bring them closer to God by the Word. Yes, we can use our own abilities to preach the Good News. Sometimes people can object saying they will not be able to do it. No! They can! They just can address people with the Word of God which is written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Then the Lord Holy Spirit will do the rest. We have the most active means to work with people. This is our place to stand on! The only place! This is “the place to stand on” contained in the preaching of the Gospel. The Preface to the Large Catechism (12) gives us beautiful explanation of this “place to stand”: “*And what need is there of many words? If I were to recount all the profit and fruit which God's Word produces, whence would I get enough paper and time? The devil is called the master of a thousand arts. But what shall we call God's Word, which drives away and brings to naught this master of a thousand arts with all his arts and power? It must indeed be the master of more than a hundred thousand arts*”. When preaching the Word of God in all its purity and truth we are preaching Christ, the Redeemer. Heavenly Father will openly testify about His love toward us in Christ by His Holy Spirit. We have already noted earlier in this paper why this Word is so powerful. Certainly, it is because this is the infallible Word of the Most-high God Himself. And certainly it is because we find Son of God, the God-Man Jesus Christ in this Word (Jn. 8:36): “*So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed*”. And Paul tells about this: “*I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile*” (Rom 1:16). This Gospel we want to preach boldly into the world being persuaded with what Paul addressed to the Philippians 3:8-11: “*What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. I want to know Christ and the power of his*

¹² Jelaluddin Rumi (1207-1273), “Where is God?”

resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead”. **Knowing Christ Jesus!** Paul considers only this to be the most important part in his life. He also teaches us about this. And where we can find Him? Only in the Holy Bible, in the infallible Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments which our Heavenly Father gave us under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit for salvation. When bringing these Scriptures to the people we rejoice because we bring to them the Good News about Jesus Christ Himself. This is our privilege. And we should treat it with all the seriousness and respect. When we stand on this firm basis of the Word of God, we can say together with the apostle: *“But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ”* (1 Cor. 15:57).

Epilogue

Eureka, eureka! At the end I would like to tell you an interesting parable which I have found on the Internet. It tells about a small boy walking on the seaside and throwing starfishes back into the sea. Suddenly he met an elderly man. A man was very astonished with what he saw. That is why he asked the boy the reason for doing this. And the boy answered that he wanted to save them throwing back into the water. A man laughed and said that this was very stupid idea for there were millions of starfishes on the seashore and a boy simply could not save all of them. A boy thought for a moment and then answered: “Yes, I will not save all of them, but maybe this one, at least.” And he threw it into the sea. We also have a lot of such starfish that have to be thrown into the living water of the Word of God. And we can do it and must do it with our preaching. And may God help us! *“May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen”* (Heb. 13:20-21).

Make Known God's Manifold Wisdom!



*“His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus, our Lord.”
(Ephesians 3:10-11)*

Essay 2 – Justification: The Theme of Our Outreach Message

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“The article of justification is the master and prince, the lord, the ruler, and the judge over all kinds of doctrines; it preserves and governs all church doctrine and raises up our consciences before God. Without this article the world is utter darkness and death”(Martin Luther).¹

The biblical doctrine concerning how a person is justified before God is the doctrine on which the church stands and falls (*articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae*). Of all the doctrines in the Bible the doctrine of justification is the most important doctrine that God has revealed to sinners. Consequently, it is the most important doctrine we are to preach to other people.

The doctrine of justification above all is the doctrine in holy Scripture that divides Christianity from all other religions in the world. If this doctrine is being falsified in the church or if the church stops proclaiming this doctrine, the church is no longer a Christian church, and the religion which the church is trying to spread is no longer a religion which is distinguished from other world religions. The Christian doctrine of God's universal justification by grace alone, through faith alone, for Christ's sake alone, is completely unique because it gives all credit for man's salvation to God and him alone, in opposite to all other religions, which give credit for man's salvation to a lesser or greater degree to man himself.

But because the Christian doctrine of justification is so unique, it is therefore so conclusive and of such a great importance that the believers proclaim this doctrine to the world. If not men get to hear the

¹ Martin Luther, *What Luther Says*, Vol. 2, p. 703.

good news that God is forgiving all their sins, they must live their whole life carrying their heavy burden of sin.

1. The doctrine of justification defines our mission field: the whole world

All men are by nature born with sin. “Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit,” Jesus said to Nicodemus (John 3:6). And King David must confess: “Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me” (Psalm 51:7). Because all men are born with sin, they are under the wrath and condemnation of God. Sin is universal.

But as the sin is universal, the Bible also teaches a universal justification. By “universal justification” we mean that God has declared all men not guilty. In the first place Paul is writing, “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). But then he continues immediately: “and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:24). Christ died for all. He was “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of *the world*” (John 1:29). By “the world” it is impossible to understand anything else but all people. The sins of all human beings were laid on Christ, and because Christ made a perfect atonement for the sins of all human beings, God forgives all human beings. The apostle John says: “My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense - Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:1,2).

The atoning sacrifice for sin is complete and universal. It covers all the sins of all human beings. The letter to the Hebrews teaches that Christ has won a perfect and eternal reconciliation for men. “He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption” (Hebrews 9:12). “Now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people” (Hebrews 9:26-28).

Because of Christ’s complete atonement of all the sins of the whole world, God forgives all human beings. Paul writes to the Corinthians: “God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them” (2 Corinthians 5:19). Here the apostle teaches clearly three important aspects about our justification.

First of all, it is God who is the active part. It is *He* who is reconciling the world to himself. It is *He* who is not counting sins against men.

Secondly, Paul is teaching by which reason God is justifying, namely because of Christ. Christ is the agent by whom God reconciled us to himself. The cause of justification, therefore, is not something in man, but the cause of justification is Christ and his complete work of reconciliation. Paul says: “God made him [Christ] who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21).

And thirdly, Paul clearly teaches who God is justifying, against whom he is not counting their sins, namely the same people who he has reconciled to himself, “the world,” that is, all human beings. God does not count their sins against “them,” that is, “the world,” all human beings. In other words, God justifies the whole world because of Christ’s universal atonement.

With this word [“world”] Paul clearly teaches that God’s act of reconciliation covers the whole world. It applies to the whole world, to every person, whether he lived before Christ, or at the time of

Christ, or any time since Christ, or in any of the time still remaining before Christ comes again. Thus everyone is included in this word regardless of whether he ever comes to faith or not.²

Paul is teaching exactly the same in Romans 5:18: “Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men.” Because of Adam’s fall all men were condemned or declared to be guilty by God. “Sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned” (Romans 5:12). But because of what Christ did as the substitute of all men, all men were acquitted or declared not guilty by God.

Justification doesn’t concern only those who ultimately come to faith, but justification concerns all men. This we learn from Paul’s word in Romans 4:5. There the apostle says: “However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies *the wicked*, his faith is credited as righteousness.” And in Romans 5:10 he says: “When we were *God’s enemies*, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son.”

There is also another important aspect in the biblical teaching on man’s salvation that emphasizes the universality in God’s justification. The Bible clearly teaches that God “wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4). “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). Nobody will go to hell because God wanted it. “As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live” (Ezekiel 33:11).

God has a general will of grace. God’s grace is universal. It is not limited to a certain part of mankind, as the Reformed churches are teaching³, but it extends to everyone. “For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men” (Titus 2:11). “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son” (John 3:16). Several places it is emphasized that God’s grace even extends to those who ultimately are perished. Christ also died for their sins (see Romans 14:15; 1 Corinthians 8:11).

Through the life, death and resurrection of Christ God has justified the whole world. Yet all men are not saved. The Bible teaches a universal justification and forgiveness. God’s grace is universal. But the Bible doesn’t teach universalism, that is, the notion that all men will be saved at last. If they don’t believe in Christ, they cannot be saved. “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:16).

The Christian mission work is a natural consequence of the doctrine of universal justification. The reconciliation, which Christ has won for all men, implies a total change in all men’s status before God. As the highest judge God has acquitted all sinners because Christ has paid the penalty in their place. What has happened, then, has happened totally outside the sinner. He has in no way contributed to his own justification. His changed status before God has happened without the sinner’s knowledge. Consequently, if the sinner is going to have any benefit from the fact that he is justified by God, someone has to tell him about it. Therefore Paul is writing in Romans 10:14: “How can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?”

² David P. Kuske, *Making Use of Our Lutheran Heritage – “Objective Justification” in Our Mission Outreach* Based on an Exegesis of 2 Corinthians 5:18,19, p. 6, www.wlssays.net.

³ Cf. the Westminster Confession of Faith: “The rest of mankind God was pleased, according to the unsearchable counsel of His own will, whereby He extendeth or withholdeth mercy as He pleaseth for the glory of His sovereign power over His creatures, to pass by and to ordain them to dishonor and wrath for their sin, to the praise of His glorious justice.” (Quote from Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. II, p. 25).

But the gospel of God's free forgiveness in Christ is so foreign to men's way of thinking that no human being is able to comprehend this message by himself. God must reveal it to them. This he is doing when the Holy Spirit operates through the gospel, which is proclaimed and creates faith in the heart of those who hear it. Paul says: "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him, but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit" (1 Corinthians 2:9,10). And concerning all those who believe, he says: "We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us" (1 Corinthians 2:12).

Who will tell the sinner about his changed status before God? All those who have accepted the gospel about the justification and forgiveness should do this. If the sinner doesn't hear that God has acquitted him, it will be of no benefit to him, and the Holy Spirit cannot create faith in his heart so that he accepts and comforts himself with the free forgiveness of God.

If we turn back to 2 Corinthians 5, we realize how the apostle not only teaches about the objective reconciliation which has happened in Christ, and the fact that God because of Christ's atonement not counts the sins of the world against them. Paul also connects this completed reconciliation and justification to the proclamation of it. He writes: "God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God" (2 Corinthians 5:19,20). In other words, God gave us the responsibility of sharing the gospel message with the world.

Because the whole world is reconciled to God and justified by him, Christ admonishes all his disciples through all ages: "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation" (Mark 16:15). "Repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations" (Luke 24:47). "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19). "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

We must in every way hold sturdily and firmly to this, that, as the preaching of repentance, so also the promise of the Gospel is *universalis* (universal), that is, it pertains to all men, Luke 24:47. For this reason Christ has commanded that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations. For God so loved the world and gave his Son, John 3:16. Christ bore the sins of the world, John 1:29, gave His flesh for the life of the world, John 6:51; His blood is propitiation for the sins of the whole world, 1 John 1:7; 2:2. Christ says: Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest, Matt. 11:28. God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that He might have mercy upon all, Rom. 11:32.⁴

The Christian mission work is a corollary of the doctrine of universal justification, and it is a natural consequence for all those who through faith have accepted and comforted themselves with the wonderful message of God's free forgiveness for Christ's sake. Because we know that God in Christ has reconciled the whole world to himself so that he doesn't count the world's sins against them, we can with great confidence share this message with all people. We don't have to think about if there are certain individuals that are not included in the justification. As the gospel is universal, so also our mission field is universal. The doctrine of the universal justification defines our mission field: the whole world.

2. The doctrine of justification proclaims that salvation is by grace alone

⁴ Formula of Concord, Sol. Decl., XI:28, *Trigl.* p. 1071.

Because all human beings are born in sin, they are devoid of the righteousness which God demands. They are under the condemnation of God. The apostle Paul says that “the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men” (Romans 5:18). All human beings are by nature under the wrath of God. “All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath” (Ephesians 2:3). This is the Lutheran doctrine of inherited sin.

Furthermore, it is taught among us that since the fall of Adam, all human beings who are born in the natural way are conceived and born in sin. This means that from birth they are full of evil lust and inclination and cannot by nature possess true fear of God and true faith in God. Moreover, this same innate disease and original sin is truly sin and condemns to God’s eternal wrath all who are not in turn born anew through baptism and the Holy Spirit.⁵

When the sinner is justified because of the reconciliation in Christ, this doesn’t imply a change in the sinner’s nature but a change in the sinner’s status. The Greek word *dikaioo*, which we translate to “justify,” leads us into the courtroom. It means “to declare righteous; to acquit.” God took our sins and laid them on Christ. He “made him who had no sin to be sin for us” (2 Corinthians 5:21). He suffered the punishment, which we had deserved because of our sin. The prophet Isaiah proclaims about the suffering Messiah: “He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5).

We are acquitted, not because we are not guilty, but because Christ paid the penalty as our substitute. God’s justification of the sinner is therefore completely undeserved. Christ got something he didn’t deserve, namely our punishment, while we got something we didn’t deserve, namely God’s justification and acquittal. Christ had no sin, but was punished; we are born in sin and are sinning every day, but yet we were acquitted.

The apostle says of all human beings: “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:23,24). “Freely” is a translation of the Greek word *dorean*, which means “without cost; as a free gift.” When God justifies the sinner, it is a free gift. God gives the justification to the sinner freely, and doesn’t ask for any payment.

The sinner is justified by grace (Greek *charis*). Grace excludes all human works. “And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace” (Romans 11:6). In addition Paul says that the justification relies on “the redemption (Greek *apolutrosis*) in Christ Jesus.” The sinner is redeemed. By whom? By Christ Jesus who with his own precious blood paid the ransom for the sinner. He “gave himself as a ransom for all men” (1 Timothy 2:6). The apostle Peter writes: “For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect” (1 Peter 1:18,19). By means of three different expressions – “freely,” “by his grace,” “through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus” – Paul emphasizes in Romans 3:24 that the justification of a sinner before God is by grace alone. In verse 28 he adds that God justifies a man “apart from observing the law” (Greek *choris ergon nomou*).

We understand how this influences all men’s relationship to God. Instead of looking upon us as condemned sinners, God has forgiven us and declared us not guilty because of his free grace in Christ. This is really good news which we will proclaim to all human beings. Because it implies that the salvation

⁵ Augsburg Confession, II:1,2 (German text – English translation in Lyle Lange, *God So Loved the World, A Study of Christian Doctrine*, p. 336).

is a completely free gift of God. There are no conditions attached to the sinner's justification. It is a completed and finished fact, which Christ has accomplished by his perfect life, his innocent suffering and death, and his triumphant resurrection.

Only because the gospel about the sinner's justification before God is an unconditional message, it is a real gospel for the sinner.⁶ This is the core of the gospel. The gospel is totally different from the law. While the law contains commandments, demands, threats and condemnations, and the law saves only if it is perfectly fulfilled, we find nothing of this in the gospel. The gospel is the glad tidings, which tells us that God by grace alone, "apart from observing the law," has declared all men righteous for Christ's sake.

3. The doctrine of justification proclaims that all is finished

Immediately before Jesus died on the cross of Calvary he said: "It is finished!" (John 19:30). With that he proclaimed to all human beings that the work of salvation was finished and completed. There was nothing that remained to be done for the salvation of all men. His vicarious life, suffering and death were a perfect sacrifice for the transgressions of all men. In Hebrews 10:10-14 the writer points out that Jesus has born one single sacrifice for sins once for all. There is no need for more sacrifices. He says: "And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God. Since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool, because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy." There is no need for man to do anything to complete the justification. Everything, which had to be done, is already done by Christ. "And where these have been forgiven, there is no longer any sacrifice for sin" (Hebrews 10:18).

All men by nature have a legalistic mind (*opinio legis*). Because of that all men have a work-righteous attitude towards salvation. This attitude is so deep-rooted in the natural man that when he hears the gospel, he will not accept that it is possible to be saved without any conditions. He doesn't believe that God's justification is complete without any contributions of himself. But the Bible is very clear. There is nothing we can do. There is nothing we have to do. Jesus did it all for us. God has declared the whole world righteous because of the work of Christ. This is an objective reality, whether we believe it or not. Even if the whole world would reject the message of the gospel about the justification in Christ, it would still remain an objective truth that God really has acquitted the whole world from their sins. We call it *the objective justification* to emphasize that the justification is a finished fact because of Christ's work, and that the justification is unaffected by how men respond to it.

The Roman Catholic Church rejects above all the completed, objective justification. It teaches that man is saved by faith *and* good works. It claims that the merit of Christ enables man to earn his own salvation. Rome states:

They, through the observance of the commandments of God and of the church, faith cooperating with good works, increase in that justice received through the grace of Christ and are further justified.⁷

⁶ August Pieper says about this: "In defining the essence of the gospel, everything depends on whether it is a conditional or an unconditional message of grace." (*The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel and Its Application For Pure Teaching and Spiritual Life*, in *The Wauwatosa Theology*, Vol. II, p. 41.)

⁷ H. J. Schroeder, editor and translator, *The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, Sixth Session, Chapter 10, p. 36 (quote from Lange, p. 345).

If anyone says that the justice received is not preserved and also not increased before God through good works, but that those works are merely the fruits and signs of justification obtained, but not the cause of its increase, let him be anathema.⁸

To refute the Roman teaching that justification is not complete, but gradual, and the hope of eternal life is uncertain, the Formula of Concord states:

In order, therefore, that troubled hearts may have a firm, sure consolation, also, that due honor be given to the merit of Christ and the grace of God, the Scriptures teach that the righteousness of faith before God consists alone in the gracious reconciliation or the forgiveness of sins, which is presented to us out of pure grace, for the sake of the only merit of the Mediator, Christ, and is received through faith alone in the promise of the Gospel. In like manner, too, in justification before God faith relies neither upon contrition nor upon love or other virtues, but upon Christ alone, and in Him upon His complete obedience by which He has fulfilled the Law for us, which is imputed to believers for righteousness.⁹

Because all is finished, God wants us to proclaim to all people that their sins are forgiven. Jesus did that when he said to the paralytic: “Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven” (Matthew 9:2). He didn’t say to him: “Your sins are forgiven *if* you now fulfill certain obligations.” Nor did he say to him: “Your sins are forgiven *if* you accept the gospel and believe.” Jesus only said that his sins were forgiven, because that was a completed fact.

In the Lutheran church we believe that we are saved by grace alone through faith alone, not by works. Yet there are many who call themselves Lutheran, who claim that God does not forgive us our sins if we don’t believe. They regard faith as the reason for God’s forgiveness. They believe that Christ has achieved a perfect forgiveness for all men by his perfect life and his innocent suffering and death, and that God, therefore, is willing to forgive. But before he really forgives us, we first must repent our sins and come to faith in him. First we must believe, then God will forgive, they say.

But God does not forgive us *because* we believe. He does not forgive us *if* we believe. He has forgiven us long time ago when he raised his Son from the death, that is, he has forgiven us long before we began to believe. It is not our faith, which brings about the forgiveness in God’s heart. He forgives us solely by grace for Christ’s sake alone.

The same false opinion about faith we find in the so-called decision theology, which is common within many reformed and charismatic churches. There they regard faith as a work, which man must perform to complete the justification. It is important to make a decision for Christ. This decision, then, becomes the foundation for man’s hope of salvation. In decision theology it is not Christ who has won salvation for all men, who is the hope of salvation, but man’s own decision for Christ.

But isn’t faith so important then? Faith is important because God’s forgiveness comes to us through words. God offers us his forgiveness in the good message of the gospel. And when people hear the gospel about forgiveness, always one of two things will happen. Either the hearer will believe what he hears, or he will reject it in disbelief. The believer receives all the blessings, which the gospel gives. He receives forgiveness, peace and salvation. The non-believer receives nothing of this. He will get neither peace, nor comfort and hope. But the message is true no matter whether it is accepted in faith or rejected

⁸ Schroeder, *op. cit.*, p. 45 (quote from Lange, p. 345).

⁹ Formula of Concord, Sol. Decl. III:30, *Trigl.* p. 925.

in disbelief. God has really declared all men righteous in Christ. God has really forgiven all sinners because Christ has paid the guilt of all.

Paul speaks about the non-believing Jews, and he asks: “What if some did not have faith? Will their lack of faith nullify God’s faithfulness? Not at all!” (Romans 3:3,4). God’s word and promises are always true. If we reject God’s promises, we make God to be a liar. And to make God to be a liar is identical with blasphemy. The apostle John writes: “Anyone who does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because he has not believed the testimony God has given about his Son” (1 John 5:10). Martin Luther once said that those who don’t believe God’s message of forgiveness will one day find out how sure their sins were forgiven, although they didn’t believe it.¹⁰

Through faith the sinners receive what is promised in the gospel, namely forgiveness of all sins, eternal life and salvation. “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). The Lutheran dogmaticians therefore have called faith “the receiving instrument” (*organon leptikon*) in contrast to the gospel, which is the means that God uses to give us faith, “the giving instrument” (*organon dotikon*).

Faith is like the empty hand of a beggar, which receives the gift that someone puts in it. If the beggar refuses to accept the money, which is given to him, he gets no blessings from it. Yet it is not the beggar who creates the gift. The gift is already there and it is reached out to him without his cooperation. In the same way it is with faith. The faith doesn’t create the gift. The faith only accepts the gift, which is already there and is offered to us in the gospel. Non-converted man is like a poor beggar who must get everything from God. He doesn’t do anything to his salvation. He only accepts the complete and perfect gift, which is offered to him in the gospel.

The Bible uses several pictures to describe the non-converted man. These pictures show how unable non-converted man is to do anything to save himself. The Bible says that we by nature are *dead* in transgressions and sins (Ephesians 2:1), *spiritually blind* (1 Corinthians 2:14) and *enemies of God* (Romans 8:7). Therefore we cannot by our own strength believe in Christ. There is only one possibility for a non-believing man to become a believer, a dead man to become alive, a spiritual blind man to become seeing, a man who is an enemy of God to become a child of God, namely that God must in his almighty power create faith in the human heart. Luther says: “I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.”¹¹

Faith is not a good work, which man must do to achieve justification by God. The justification is an objective, completed fact in Christ, even before anyone believes it. The faith accepts the justification; it doesn’t complete it. The justification is already complete because of the work of Christ.

Only God can lead us to faith in the salvation, which is offered in the gospel. In Ephesians 2:8 Paul contrasts faith with work: “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.” It is correct that it is man himself who believes, and as such faith is a work, which is performed by man. But faith is worked by the Holy Spirit through the gospel in Word and sacraments. We can say that faith saves, but it saves not because it is a good work, but because it takes hold of the justification that God promises in the gospel. The Lutheran Confessions expresses it like this:

¹⁰ Luther’s Works, 40:366f.

¹¹ Small Catechism, Third Article, *Trigl.* p 545.

For faith justifies, not for this cause and reason that it is so good a work and so fair a virtue, but because it lays hold of and accepts the merit of Christ in the promise of the holy Gospel.¹²

Neither contrition nor love or any other virtue, but faith alone is the sole means and instrument by which and through which we can receive and accept the grace of God, the merit of Christ, and the forgiveness of sins, which are offered us in the promise of the Gospel.¹³

What are the consequences of this fact? The doctrine of justification by faith alone without works of men has an important consequence for all who proclaim the gospel. All preachers can take Christ's words in their mouth and say: "Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven" (Matthew 9:2). Or as he said to the sick woman: "Take heart, daughter; your faith has healed you" (Matthew 9:22). In our mission work we do not put new burdens on people. We do not demand that they fulfill certain conditions before they can take hold of salvation. We do not expect that they must do good works before they have got faith. Instead of putting new burdens on people we refer them to Christ who says: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). To all penitent sinners we say: "God has forgiven all your sins. Because of our Lord Jesus Christ, his perfect life in your place, and his innocent suffering and death in your place, God has deleted all your sins. For Christ's sake you can be a child of God."

4. The doctrine of justification for Christ's sake alone is the only message that can save the world

In our postmodern time many people think that all religions worship the same God. We only use different names for him. All ways lead to salvation. Everyone is saved in his own faith. Or they say that it is not so important what you believe, you only have to be honest in your belief. The result of this kind of thinking is that Christian mission is unnecessary. Because why would it be necessary to preach the gospel if all human beings will be saved at last no matter what they believe? And how can Christian missions be defended if everyone is saved in his own faith? If all religions lead people to salvation, despite their use of different expressions of salvation, it is unnecessary to do Christian mission work.

Jesus Christ says: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). To people who are used to thinking in the postmodern way of thinking, this sounds both intolerant and pretentious. In a time when people deny that there is only one truth, the words of Jesus are intolerable. How can Jesus say that he alone is the way to the Father when there are many ways? And how can he claim that he is the truth and that God's word is truth (John 17:17) when there are many truths?

But we believe that Jesus Christ is the way, the truth and the life. We believe that he is the only way to God. And we are convinced that he is the only one who can save the world. "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). "Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son" (John 3:18).

Why is Christ the only true Savior? Because he is the one who has atoned for all sins of all human beings. Because of sin all human beings are under condemnation of God. But because of Christ all human beings are acquitted and declared righteous. He has made a perfect atonement for every man when he became the holy substitute for all men. He lived a perfect life without sin and was punished for all the sins of all men by his suffering and death on the cross of Calvary. Therefore he is the only true Savior, and the

¹² Formula of Concord, Sol. Decl., III:13, *Trigl.* p. 919.

¹³ *Op. cit.*, III:31, *Trigl.* p. 925.

gospel of the justification for Christ's sake alone is the only message that can save the world. This is an absolute truth, which is true for all men in all times. It was true in Jesus' time, and it is true today, and it will be true till the last day of history.

All man-made religions teach that man must save himself in one or other way. They teach that god or gods or some other standard must be satisfied by man's own work. The Christian religion therefore is unique because it teaches salvation by grace, without human deeds (Romans 3:28; Ephesians 2:8,9).

Yes, Jesus is the only way to heaven. There is no other way. The idea that all religions lead to heaven or that we all worship the same God but just call him by different names is a soul-destroying lie. In fact, postmodernism today condemns Christianity for asserting that Jesus alone is the way to heaven. Postmodernism believes it is better for a person to have a variety of religious beliefs rather than just one. Yet the Bible is clear. Jesus is the only way to heaven. What a comfort it is for people of all ages to be able to rest their faith on God's promise that "whoever believes in him [Jesus] will not perish but have eternal life" (Jn 3:16). Christianity is the absolute religion because it gives us Jesus, who is the only way to heaven.¹⁴

5. The doctrine of God's universal justification motivates our mission work

What is it that motivates us to reach out with the gospel? We could say that what above all motivates is Christ's command: "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation" (Mark 16:15). In one way it is correct to say that we motivate our mission work from the fact that Christ gives such a clear command to do mission work. But in another way we also must point out that a command in and of itself doesn't give the right motivation. Professor Kuske says about this:

If I'm afraid that the one who commanded me will clobber me if I don't obey him, it will be fear which will motivate me to do what he says. If the one who commands me also offers me a reward for obedience, then it might well be the reward which motivates me. If the one who commands me is one for whom I have a great deal of admiration, my admiration will motivate me. If the one who commands me adds that my obedience will benefit many people, it might be my generosity and brotherly good-will which motivates me. If the one who commands me is one who has done endless favors for me, it might be my sense of indebtedness which motivates me to act.¹⁵

What then, motivates us to obey the Great Commission of Christ? Paul puts it very simple in 2 Corinthians 5:14: "For Christ's love compels us..." But then he immediately continues: "...because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died." In other words, the certainty about God's universal and objective justification for Christ's sake motivates us. We see how Christ loved all human beings so much that he was willing to give up his own life on the cross for all their sins. This love we have experienced ourselves. Even our many sins he has born up on the cross because he loved us so much. We have been hit by the gospel, and this happy and comforting message has done something with us.

What are the consequences of this? Paul formulates it like this in verse 16: "So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view." This means: "We no longer see people as male or female, bond or free, Jew or Gentile, rich or poor, black or white, young or old, healthy or unhealthy, educated or uneducated, beautiful or ugly. No, we see every person as one who has been washed in Jesus' blood and

¹⁴ Lange, p. 23.

¹⁵ Kuske, p. 9.

justified.”¹⁶ Because Christ has loved all people so much that he was willing to die in their place, we cannot make any difference when we look at people. If his love stretches itself to all men and if he died for all, we cannot exclude anyone from our preaching of the gospel. He loves all people; therefore we must go to all people and preach the gospel. His love for all is the inner motivation, which compels us.

It is a great comfort to know that Christ has born the sins of all men up on the cross and suffered the punishment for all. And precisely this fact gives us a great confidence when we are going to proclaim the happy message of the gospel to the whole world. How could we have confidence to preach a message, which only contained a limited forgiveness or a forgiveness, which only applied to some people, but not everyone? But holy Scripture says that God has declared all men righteous and for Christ’s sake he has forgiven all men their sins. This fact gives our mission work the right motivation.

The theme of our outreach message is God’s universal justification. What a privilege it is to proclaim this message to the world! What a joy it is to tell people about our God who loves the world so dearly that he forgives them all their sins for Christ’s sake! What a confidence we have that this is the message that the world needs most of all! What a comfort this message is for every one of us, young and old, men and women, whatever nation we belong to, whatever color of our skin, whatever language we speak! Amen.

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¹⁶ Kuske, *ibid.*

Make Known God's Manifold Wisdom!



*“His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus, our Lord.”
(Ephesians 3:10-11)*

Essay 3 – The Holy Spirit, The Enabler of Our Outreach Message

*Rev. Igor Logvinov
Russia*

The world around us lies in deep spiritual darkness, the darkness of ignorance, sin and death. We also used to be part of that. So we know the deepest problem of all mankind from the inside, so to say. We all were lost and damned sinners before our Holy Creator, deserving nothing but eternal separation from Him in the fiery flames of hell. But our God revealed His unsearchable glory and grace to all of us in the person of His Son Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Through His perfect life and innocent sufferings and death on the cross God justified us, declared us not guilty before Him, forgiving us all of our sins. He brought all mankind back to Himself, the way it was supposed to be from the beginning. That is our comfort, that is our salvation, that is our only but absolutely sure way to heaven. We build our hopes and all of our life on that. *“The blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.”* (1 Jn 1:7)

The message of our justification in Christ was treated in the previous essay. But now we have some practical questions. What are the vessels into which God poured this precious Gospel message? How do we appropriate this salvation, won for us by Jesus on the cross? How did it happen that we possess this treasure now? How can we pass it on to so many hopeless and dying people around us? What or who is the power behind the Gospel? We feel ourselves so weak and helpless to accomplish this huge and seemingly impossible task of bringing the forgiveness of Christ to the dying world! It is impossible to discuss the answers to so many important questions in the frame of this essay in detail, so this work, dear brothers, is just a brief presentation. I just want to share some of my thoughts on this subject with you. We all want to mutually encourage and edify each other in this difficult but blessed work of preaching the Gospel that our Savior has entrusted to us.

I. Original Sin

In order to find proper answers we need to recall first: who did Christ die for? Was it for people who loved God? Was it for people who deserved it? No way! *“You see, at just the right time, when we*

were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”(Ro 5:6-8) What was our real spiritual state after the Fall? Adam and Eve lost the blessed image of God in which they had been created, and all their children, including us, were born without it. The Old Testament testifies about that: *“The LORD saw how great man’s wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.”*(Ge 6:5) *“The LORD looks down from heaven on the sons of men to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God. All have turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one.”*(Ps 14:2-3) The New Testament echoes the same sad truth: *“As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.”* (Eph 2:1-3)

So Christ died for sinners - for us, who by nature were without the image of God, ungodly, undeserving, ungrateful, spiritually dead, enemies of God, who didn’t want to have anything in common with the Lord, His Word, His holy will for us, His mercy, His salvation, His Son. If it had depended on us and our abilities and our own response, the justification of Christ would have brought us no good at all. We would have thrown it all away. By nature we don’t want it. We loathe and despise it. We don’t understand and appropriate it, because we’re dead, you see. We’re talking here about what we call original sin. *“The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so.”*(Ro 8:7) *“The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.”* (1 Co 2:14).

The Reformers also described this horrible state of fallen and spiritually dead men very well in the Book of Concord: *“As little as a corpse can quicken itself to bodily, earthly life, so little can man who through sin is spiritually dead raise himself to spiritual life, as it is written, ‘When we were dead through our trespasses, he made us alive together with Christ.’ ‘Therefore we are not of ourselves ’sufficient to claim anything as coming from us; our sufficiency is from God’”* (2 Cor. 3:5). (The Formula of Concord: 1, II, 3)

II. Concerning Some Heresies About Original Sin

Here’s where the opponents of the biblical doctrine of original sin make their tragic mistake. Most of the visible Christian churches in their teaching don’t recognize the seriousness and deadliness of original sin. They don’t believe what the Bible says about it and think of it as some kind of tough disease which didn’t deprive us totally and completely of our spiritual strengths and abilities before God. People go to opposite sides concerning this teaching but they end up on the same side of synergistic barricade, so to say. Catholics and Orthodox, on one hand, believe that God deals with the problem of original sin in our Baptism and takes it away from us as a coat off our shoulders, so after we’ve been baptized we can and must cooperate with God in the matter of our justification. They believe so strongly in the natural abilities of men that they make our efforts of sanctification almost equal in value to the redemptive work of Christ our Savior. Thus our salvation becomes an uncertain life-long process at the end of which we still can’t be sure of eternal life in heaven, completely won for us by Jesus Christ on Calvary, and our conscience still damns us before the holy God. What a horrible mixture of justification and sanctification, what a horrible “different gospel, which is really no gospel at all” (Gal. 1:6,7), robbing us of all comfort and peace with the Lord!

On the other hand, so-called Protestant churches believe in power of the unregenerate human will to accept and believe God’s Good News of our salvation in Christ. They make a monument out of their

“ability” to believe, shifting the accents and getting it all wrong. “Decision theology” is the clearest example of that. What did they achieve in their erroneous thinking about original sin? It’s even sad to think about it. They turned the objective liturgical worship of God, based on His Word and Sacraments, into mere theatrical gatherings which they simply use as a conversion tool, appealing to human reasoning, emotions and will. They flood the Internet with all kind of virtual churches and forums, where they try to present their most sophisticated arguments and proofs in order to lead people to Christianity. They point to their deep mystical personal experience to bring the Gospel truth to unbelievers. And if one observes this virtual process long enough, one will see that all this avails nothing, and everything remains the same with unbelievers for the truth of God’s Word about the natural state of fallen man remains the same too. And what is worse, Protestants themselves are robbed of the sweet assurance of their forgiveness and eternal life in heaven in the same way as their “opponents” on the Catholic-Orthodox side, for mixing the Law and the Gospel creates only condemning Law again. They all deny the seriousness of original sin and its eternal consequences; they try to soften it. The end is predictable: where the Law is not harsh, there the Gospel is not sweet.

III. God the Holy Spirit is the One Who Makes Us Able

So, the conclusion is this: it is not in our human power or ability either to appropriate God’s gracious justification in Christ by faith or to convey it to other people around us. It is simply impossible with us. But nothing is impossible with God! He is the spiritual Life and Power behind our own faith in Christ and our efforts to testify to His Gospel truth. God the Holy Spirit in His undeserving grace awakens our dead hearts, He gives us new spiritual birth, He creates and sustains in us this “hand of faith” that receives all the blessings of Christ’s vicarious atonement. *“I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.”* (Jn 3:5-6) *“You know that when you were pagans, somehow or other you were influenced and led astray to mute idols. Therefore I tell you that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, ‘Jesus be cursed’ and no one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit.”*(1 Co 12:2-3) *“But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.”* (Eph 2:4-9) The Christian Church has been declaring for centuries this gracious act of our Lord in its ecumenical Creeds: *“And (we believe) in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son: who together with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified.”* (The Three Universal or Ecumenical Creeds: II, 1). The sainted Dr. Martin Luther has perfectly expressed this truth in his theological masterpiece known to us as “The Small Catechism”: *“I believe that by my own reason or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him. But the Holy Spirit has called me through the Gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, and sanctified and preserved me in true faith...”*(The Small Catechism: II, 6)

And so we can see that all the work of our salvation completely belongs to Triune God: the Father, Who in love sent His only begotten Son into this world to save condemned sinners; the Son Jesus Christ, Who became Man to live and fulfill God’s holy will for all mankind in our place, to suffer pains of hell, to die and pay the penalty for our sins before the Father; and the Holy Spirit, Who creates and sustains spiritual life in us through faith in the Son. Nothing is from us, everything is from Him. To Him be all the glory!

IV. Concerning the Heresy of the Enthusiasts

With this in mind we can proceed to the details of how exactly God the Holy Ghost does His gracious work of faith in Christ in us. And here we'll have to deal with the ancient heresy of the enthusiasts, a heresy that claims that God deals with people directly, beside or without the objective means that He has instituted for this purpose. This heresy is very powerful, it began with our first parents in the Garden of Eden, when Satan tempted them to reject the objective command of God and trust their "spiritual" reasoning, and it will live among sinful people until the end of this world, I guess. The sinful mind or sinful heart will always want to play with God according to its own rules, foolishly trying to make God deal with a person the way this person wants it, and not the way God wants it. Dear brothers, when enthusiasts try to pray to God: "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven," they don't know what they're praying for. Their words contradict their beliefs. They are actually praying that God would overthrow their view on His means of grace. They invite Him to work in them according to His ways and not the ways they want.

Especially popular in modern Christianity is the opinion that the Christian is led by the Spirit everyday in this way, that God tells him what to do and how to do it in his heart. New mystics claim that the Spirit will not let them be mistaken and thus the Bible is not of much help for them anymore. They trust their subjective feelings more than the objective Word. Once a person told me that he started living with a woman outside of marriage because, as he put it, "the Lord told him in his heart that it was no sin because they loved each other." I still wonder what kind of "lord" he was talking about. The Apostle John tells us: "*Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world*" (1 Jn 4:1) How else can we test the spirits in absolute spiritual darkness if not by God's Word, which is "*a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.*"? (Ps 119:105) Without the Bible we'll become easy prey for all kinds of evil spirits and "lords".

Enthusiasts try to support their view of God's direct "miraculous" intervention into person's heart, arguing that those, who think otherwise, limit the Lord of heaven and earth in His divine attributes, especially His omnipotence. Well, I'm not going to argue against God's omnipotence, for I know that "*our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him.*" (Ps 115:3) He could have worked faith in my heart directly, without any means. He could have made me a believer in my sleep. But I'm not going to point out to my gracious and merciful Creator, Redeemer and Life-giver how He should do that, either. I need to listen to Him in His holy Word to learn the ways He chose to impart His forgiveness in Christ to me and to work the receiving hand of faith in me in His unspeakable love. And He tells me that.

It takes humility and trust before God on our part to accept and use His objective means of grace – the Gospel in Word and Sacraments. It takes respect for His words and not ours. Enthusiasts need just that. The statement of Dr. Luther in our Confessions about them remains true to this day: "*In these matters, which concern the external, spoken Word, we must hold firmly to the conviction that God gives no one his Spirit or grace except through or with the external Word which comes before. Thus we shall be protected from the enthusiasts — that is, from the spiritualists who boast that they possess the Spirit without and before the Word and who therefore judge, interpret, and twist the Scriptures or spoken Word according to their pleasure...All this is the old devil and the old serpent who made enthusiasts of Adam and Eve. He led them from the external Word of God to spiritualizing and to their own imaginations, and he did this through other external words. Even so, the enthusiasts of our day condemn the external Word, yet they do not remain silent but fill the world with their chattering and scribbling, as if the Spirit could not come through the Scriptures or the spoken word of the apostles but must come through their own writings and words. Why do they not stop preaching and writing until the Spirit himself comes to the people without and before their writings since they boast that the Spirit came upon them without the testimony of the Scriptures?...In short, enthusiasm clings to Adam and his descendants from the beginning to the end of the world. It is a poison implanted and inoculated in man by the old dragon, and it is the source, strength, and power of all heresy, including that of the papacy and Mohammedanism. Accordingly, we should and must constantly maintain that God will not deal with us except through his*

external Word and sacrament. Whatever is attributed to the Spirit apart from such Word and sacrament is of the devil.” (The Smalcald Articles: 3, VIII, 3, 5-6, 9-10)

V. God’s Means Of Grace – the Gospel In Word And Sacraments

The means that God the Holy Spirit uses to give us ability to believe His forgiveness and convey it to others is His precious Gospel – the sweet news about His Son Jesus Christ, Who was crucified and died for our sins. About this very Gospel St. Paul testifies: *“I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.””* (Ro 1:16-17) And also he writes to Christians in Ephesus: *“And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession—to the praise of his glory.”*(Eph 1:13-14) Through the Gospel God reveals to us His grace in the crucified and risen Christ Jesus, makes us spiritually alive, enlightens us and brings us to eternal life and blessed immortality with Him, as it is written: *“This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.”* (2 Ti 1:9-10) Look at the words of Dr. Luther from this angle when you read in “The Small Catechism”: *“But the Holy Spirit has called me through the Gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, and sanctified and preserved me in true faith.”*(The Small Catechism: II, 6)

We shouldn’t forget about the preaching of God’s holy Law, to be sure. Preaching of the Law plays a very important part in preparing unrepentant and spiritually dead hearts to hear the Gospel message. We must preach the Law in all its severity and sternness to crush the proud and wicked thoughts of sinful self-righteous minds so that the seed of the Gospel might be planted in them. *“Through the law we become conscious of sin.”* (Ro 3:20) *“Is not my word like fire, declares the LORD, and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?”* (Jer 23:29) So we must properly distinguish between these two main teachings of the Lord, Law and Gospel, teach and apply them both correctly, as is fitting for *“a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.”* (2 Ti 2:15-16) But in all of this we need to remember that the Law is still the servant of the Gospel of Christ, and after harsh preaching of the Law we must proclaim Lord Jesus crucified for our sins – Good News in all its sweetness. For only through the Gospel God the Holy Spirit makes us truly able.

So let’s return to the Gospel. The message of the Good News of Jesus Christ our Savior is never without its specific forms for us. Where do we find it as the servants of God the Holy Spirit in this blessed work to reach all the people with the news of their full and absolute forgiveness for the sake of atoning sacrifice of our Savior? What vessels of the Gospel should we use so the Lord would make us and everybody able to have it and believe it? He tells us that the Gospel is contained in His Word, Holy Scriptures, the Bible, the inspired writings of His prophets and Apostles, which we should proclaim and diligently study and teach. We have the command of Christ: *“Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.”* (Mk 16:15-16) St. Paul explains: *“Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.”* (Ro 10:17) Our Savior says: *“You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me.”*(Jn 5:39) St. John writes: *“But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”*(Jn 20:31)

And not only that, but in order to reach out to each and every one of us on a very personal and intimate level, our merciful Savior has joined His powerful word of the Gospel with water, bread and

wine, thus instituting His Sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion. In the Sacraments God comes to us, brings us the forgiveness of all our sins, creates and sustains our faith in Jesus, uniting us with our Savior and with the benefits of His life, death and resurrection. The water of our baptism joined with the Word washes us clean of our guilt and makes us the children of God. *“Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.”*(Ac 2:38-39) In a mysterious way Jesus gives us His true Body and Blood along with the bread and wine of the Holy Supper and makes us partakers of heavenly blessings. *““Take and eat; this is my body...Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”* (Mt 26:26-28) Through these means God comes to us, through them He also comes to all the other people. Through the Sacraments He gives us Christ. He makes us truly able, and He wants us to administer His means of grace to give life, strength and faith to the dying world around us. *“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”* (Mt 28:18-20)

The Lutheran Church has always recognized these precious instruments of God’s Gospel. So we confess on the basis of the Bible in the Book of Concord: *“To obtain such faith (in our justification only by merits of Christ) God instituted the office of the ministry, that is, provided the Gospel and the sacraments. Through these, as through means, he gives the Holy Spirit, who works faith, when and where he pleases, in those who hear the Gospel. And the Gospel teaches that we have a gracious God, not by our own merits but by the merit of Christ, when we believe this.”* (The Augsburg Confession: 2, V, 1-3)

VI. God’s Church Is the Work of the Holy Spirit

But let us leave the sad topic of devilish doctrines and proceed to the blessings of God in Christ which He distributes through His means of grace. As the Holy Spirit makes us able to believe and as we continue to administer His Gospel, He creates believers around the Word and Sacraments, and all together by His power and grace we are gathered into one communion of saints, His body, His Bride, His Temple, His Holy Christian Church. *“Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.”*(Eph 2:19-22) From ancient times Christians confessed this in the Creeds, correctly putting faith in God’s Church right after faith in the life-giving Spirit, for building the true Church is His work and not ours. *“I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins...”*(The Three Universal or Ecumenical Creeds: I, 1) And, of course, who could teach this clearer than Dr. Luther? *“...just as (the Holy Spirit) calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth and preserves it in union with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. In this Christian church he daily and abundantly forgives all my sins, and the sins of all believers.”* (The Small Catechism: II, 6)

And the means of grace, the tools of the Spirit, serve as the “marks” of the Church. By them we recognize the presence and manifestation of God’s children born again by the Word and Sacraments. This is what truly unites us and makes us one in fellowship. As our Confessions put it: *“It is also taught among us that one holy Christian church will be and remain forever. This is the assembly of all believers among whom the Gospel is preached in its purity and the holy sacraments are administered according to the Gospel. For it is sufficient for the true unity of the Christian church that the Gospel be preached in conformity with a pure understanding of it and that the sacraments be administered in accordance with the divine Word.”* (The Augsburg Confession: 2, VII, 1-2)

The Spirit preserves the Church through us, unworthy but blessed public ministers, when we continue to administer the forgiveness of sins won by Christ in the vessels of His means of grace. He makes us able. *“So then, men ought to regard us as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God.”* (1 Co 4:1) But we do it by His means, by His power, being called by His grace. *“It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”* (Eph 4:11-13) Therefore, public ministers of the Word can draw immeasurable comfort from their divine call when they carry the cross of hardships and tribulations in their life of service to God. They themselves are weak, but they know the One Who gives them much needed gifts and strength to perform the duties of their call. *“But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.”* (2 Co 4:7)

VII. False Teachings and Visible Churches

And here we have to deal with another problem, instigated by the devil. He simply cannot bear the glorious building of the Kingdom of God by His Spirit through His ministers. He is *“a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.”* (1 Pet. 5:8) Satan tries his best to destroy our faith in Christ and so to remove us from His Church. Satan uses his most effective tool by far – false teachings which the Bible compares with spiritual yeast and cancer. False teachings are so contagious and attractive for our sinful nature, and we must be constantly on guard against them. Our Savior sees that and issues sobering warnings to us in His Word to separate ourselves from visible church bodies that mix the truth of His Gospel with satanic lies. *“I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them.”* (Ro 16:17) He wants us to do that so that we don’t fall away from His invisible Body-Church. He wants us to have true fellowship based on the truth of His Word with the visible churches that remain true to Him. He, our High Priest, prayed to His Heavenly Father on the night He was betrayed for His Apostles and for Christians who would believe their inspired words: *“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you.”* (Jn 17:20-21) And that is a true fellowship: our fellowship with Him and through Him with each other, fellowship, which is through the Gospel message, by the message, based on the truth of this message in love. *“Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit— just as you were called to one hope when you were called— one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”*(Eph 4:3-6)

Unfortunately, the devil seems to be successful in his ungodly campaign all around the world. In our wicked age people clamor about the importance of Christian love, but almost nobody seems to care even a little tiny bit about Christian truth. Any public statement about even the possibility of the existence of absolute objective and divine truth is met with sarcastic laughter and enmity. Everything is relative. Your truth is what you think or prefer, and everyone has his own truth. All-compromising tolerance is in fashion today. Churches sacrifice the truth of God’s Word for the sake of abstract “love” which is not love at all. Huge denominations unite in fellowship despite the differences in their teachings. “Love unites us all,” they claim, without really understanding what true love from God is. They talk and write a lot about sanctification, but they forget what Jesus said in His prayer: *“Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.”* (Jn 17:7) The most painful fact for me is that this devil’s lie has found itself some warm place in the majority of Lutheran churches, churches that have their roots in the Reformation, the movement which was God’s act in history to get the Church back to His truth, to His Gospel.

VIII. The Comfort and Power of God’s Promises

All this could fill us with sadness, but we have comfort from the One, Who truly makes us able! He is the One, Who said: *“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.”* (Mt 24:35) We can rely on the Scriptures more than on anything else. He is the One Who proclaimed through His prophet Isaiah: *“As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.”* (Is 55:10-11) So we preach His Word and the Spirit produces the good fruit of faith in people’s hearts. He is the One Who promised us: *“I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”* (Mt 16:18-19) And we use these keys from the Lord when we announce the forgiveness of sins for the sake of the cross of Christ to the people who receive it in Spirit-given faith and when we deny forgiveness to those who oppose the Spirit by rejecting Good News of their salvation. We use these keys when we baptize people in the Name of the Triune God and distribute Jesus’ Body and Blood in Holy Supper.

And our Lord showed the truth and power of His promises in history which is His Story. He showed it in the first centuries of New Testament Church, defending her through such Church Fathers as Athanasius and Augustine. He showed it in Reformation times, letting the light of His Word to shine anew through Dr. Martin Luther and his work. He showed it 15 years ago when His faithful gathered together to form CELC. He shows it today among us, members of Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference, by bringing us here for fellowship in truth and in love. We may not be many in the world of today, but we have His blessing, His promise to be with us, His power to make us able to keep our faith in Christ, to remain true to His Word, and to share His Gospel with lost and dying people everywhere, for *“God our Savior wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.”* (1 Ti 2:3-4)

These are really difficult times in which we live. The spiritual darkness is growing thicker and thicker. Wickedness is rapidly increasing. The love of many is growing cold, and many are falling away from faith. *“When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?”* (Lk 18:8) The sad question of Christ rings in our ears when we observe how mad people can be in their rebellion against their Creator and Savior. We may begin to wonder if we will ever succeed in preaching God’s grace to this generation. But we have Lord Jesus with us, we have His Spirit with us! He is *“the same yesterday and today and forever.”* (Heb. 13:8) *“In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God’s will. And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?”* (Ro 8:26-28, 31-32)

So dear brothers in Christ Jesus, first we need to strengthen and encourage each other with His word. *“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.”* (Col 3:16) *“Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”* (Heb 10:25) Then we must continue to preach the light of the Gospel in the darkness of this dying world, speaking the truth in love: *“Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your*

ministry.”(2 Ti 4:2-5) And we can continue doing that until the Day when the Lord Jesus comes back to earth for His Bride, to take us to be with Him forever in the heavenly mansions prepared by Him in love for us, because we’re assured by Jesus through His Apostle: “*Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.*” (1 Co 15:58) And why is that so? Because His Spirit makes us truly able! Amen.

Make Known God's Manifold Wisdom!



*“His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus, our Lord.”
(Ephesians 3:10-11)*

Essay 4 – Christology: The Focus of Our Outreach Message

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I. Our call and our message

One of the missionaries sent to Japan by the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod emphasized in his sermon on January 27, 2008: “Paul reminds the Christians in Corinth what his mission was: to preach the gospel, but not with human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. The church does not need eloquence; it needs the message of the cross. The church does not need church leaders who can attract people to themselves; the church needs church leaders who can draw the attention of people to the cross.” I am sure that all of us here agree with this Bible-based message.

We, the CELC, are a group of Lutheran Church bodies. Each of these church bodies is a group of Christians. The firm and only foundation on which a Christian church stands is Jesus Christ. Paul writes to the Christians in Corinth: “You...are God’s building. By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 3:9-11).

The Lutheran Hymnal 465:1 reflects the above truth very well: “Christ is our cornerstone, On Him alone we build.” The original text of this hymn was written in Latin in the eighth century (TLH 465, headnote). Like Paul and the other apostles in the first century, the author built God’s building upon Jesus Christ in his day. Like the apostles, he was faithful to Jesus’ words in Matthew 16:18. Jesus said to Peter there: “On this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.” The Greek word for “rock” in this passage is feminine, *petra*. It does not refer to the masculine Greek word for “Peter,” *petros*, but to the confession Peter made: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16).

We are also building God's building in our communities and around the world. But we should not build them with stirring speeches about politics, philanthropy, humanism, the economy or the environment. It is true that speeches about those matters are useful to a certain degree for our earthly lives, but such speeches will never save people from eternal death in hell as the result of their sins. Such topics should not be the center of our message.

It is the gospel of Jesus that should be the center of our message, because it alone can save people from eternal death. Through it the Holy Spirit works faith in the hearts of people and willing obedience to their Lord. It is for the gospel that Paul was set apart (Romans 1:1). That is why Paul could boldly confess: "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile" (Romans 1:16). That is why he said, "We preach Christ crucified" (1 Corinthians 1:23). That is why he said, "We do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord" (2 Corinthians 4:5).

Paul and the eleven disciples were called to be apostles directly by God (Jesus). We were called to be pastors, missionaries, professors not directly by God, but through our local church or church body. Yet Jesus has given to us the same commission he gave to the apostles: "Go into all the world and preach the good news (gospel) to all creation" (Mark 16:15). It is our God-given role to preach repentance and forgiveness of sins in Jesus' name to all nations (Luke 24:47). In order to carry out that role, we should know who Jesus is, and what he has done to save all people from eternal death. For that reason, let us study together about Jesus.

II. Jesus' divinity and humanity assure our listeners of salvation: nothing is left undone

1. Jesus' divinity and humanity

Not only the Bible, which is the verbally inspired and inerrant Word of God, but also the three universal creeds – the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, the Athanasian Creed – and many other faithful statements derived from the Bible clearly teach us about Jesus' divinity and humanity.

For instance, the Athanasian Creed says:

For this is the right faith, that we believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is at once God and man: he is God, begotten before the ages of the substance of the Father, and he is man, born in the world of the substance of his mother, perfect God and perfect man, with reasonable soul and human flesh, equal to the Father with respect to his Godhead and inferior to the Father with respect to his manhood (Tappert, *The Book of Concord*: 19-20, Article 28-31).

The above article teaches us about Jesus' two natures—divinity and humanity—and about his two states—humiliation and exaltation. This is not a man-made story but is God's truth that we should confess over against heresies. For that reason, we first study Jesus' divinity.

a. The Bible clearly teaches us that Jesus is true God.

The angel Gabriel said to Mary: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called *the Son of God*" (Luke 1:35). We know God the Father's declaration of Jesus at his Baptism and at his transfiguration: "This is *my Son*, whom I love" (Matthew 3:17; 17:5).

When a paralytic man was brought to Jesus, he said to him, “Son, your sins are forgiven.” Having heard this, some teachers of the law thought to themselves: “He’s blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?” Because he is the all-knowing God, Jesus knew their thoughts. Jesus healed the sick man in order to show them *his divine authority* to forgive sins (Mark 2:1-12).

Jesus did many other miracles during his three-year public ministry. He changed water to wine at the wedding in Cana (John 2:1-11). He calmed the storm with one command: “Quiet! Be still!” (Mark 4:39). He fed the five thousand (John 6:1-14). He healed a man born blind at Siloam (John 9:7). Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead (John 11:43,44). He did all these miracles to reveal his glory as *the Son of God* (John 3:11; 10:25).

On the night Jesus was betrayed, Philip, one of the apostles, asked him: “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us” (John 14:8). Jesus replied: “Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves” (John 14:11). Of course, the most wonderful miracle to reveal his divine glory was his own resurrection from the dead. Many disciples saw it. Therefore, Paul writes: “Who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with the power to be *the Son of God* by his resurrection from the dead” (Romans 1:4).

One day Jesus said to the Jews who did not believe in his divinity: “I tell you the truth, before Abraham was born, I am” (John 8:58). This “I am” phrase is not merely a personal pronoun and a linking verb. Jesus is applying the “I AM” phrase of Exodus 3:14 to himself. At Mt. Horeb God introduced himself to Moses, saying: “I AM WHO I AM.” Professor Ernst H. Wendland has a good comment on this:

Those who are familiar with the Hebrew language will see something else of great significance in God’s “I AM.” The letters of the Hebrew that stem for the word “I am” are the same letters used in the Hebrew word which we translate as “LORD” (Wendland, *The People’s Bible on Exodus: 25*).

With that “I am” phrase Jesus solemnly claimed *his divinity*, his oneness with God the Father. Let us also keep in mind Jesus’ words in John 10:30: “I and my Father are one.” Here let me quote from the Concordia Self-Study Bible regarding the word “one”:

The Greek is neuter – “one thing,” not “one person.” The two are one in essence or nature, but they are not identical persons. This great truth is what warrants Jesus’ “I am” declarations (*CSSB*, footnote: 1627).

John, the last remaining apostle, correctly understood Jesus’ divinity and wrote, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning” (John 1:1,2). The phrase “in the beginning” means before the universe and everything in it were created. There were no planets, no water, no air, no time, no fish, no birds, no animals, and no human beings. Before anything existed, the Word existed with God.

The Word is not the language that we daily use to communicate with one another but one of Jesus’ titles. He is called the Word because he has made God known to us, human beings (John 1:18). God the Father communicates with us through Jesus. And the Word, Jesus, was God. He is God forever. Next we go on to Jesus’ humanity.

b. The Bible clearly teaches us that Jesus is true man.

It was immediately after the fall of our first parents that God made the first promise about the Savior who would save human beings from eternal death. In this promise the Savior is called “her (Eve’s) offspring” (Genesis 3:15). These two words implied that the Savior would take a human body and would be born of a woman.

In order to fulfill his saving plan, God chose Abraham’s descendants, the Israelites, as his own people from whom the Savior would be born (Genesis 12:1-3; 22:17,18a). Out of the twelve tribes of Israel, God chose the tribe of Judah as the tribe from which the Savior would be born (Genesis 49:8-10). And out of the tribe of Judah, God chose David’s line as the line from which the Savior would be born (2 Samuel 7:12-16; Isaiah 11:1-5; Jeremiah 23:5,6). As Matthew records in the first chapter of his Gospel, Jesus was born as a descendant of Abraham and David (Matthew 1:1-16). Paul also writes the same truth this way: “Who (Jesus) as to his human nature was a descendant of David” (Romans 1:3).

Jesus took on *a human body* in the womb of Mary. He was born in Bethlehem. He *was wrapped* in cloths and *placed* in a manger (Luke 2:7). Jesus made his dwelling among the Israelites (John 1:14). He *was circumcised* on the eighth day after his birth (Luke 2:21). When he was twelve years old, he *traveled* with his parents from Nazareth to Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Passover (Luke 2:42). As a boy he *was obedient* to his parents (Luke 2:51). He *grew* in wisdom and stature (Luke 2:52). Before he started his public ministry, he *had worked* as a carpenter in Nazareth (Mark 6:1-5).

The Bible gives us other testimony of Jesus’ human nature. He *ate* and *drank* (Luke 7:36,34). He *slept* (Mark 4:38). He had *a will* (Luke 22:42). He had *emotions* (John 11:33). He *wept* (John 11:35). On the night before his crucifixion, when he prayed in the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus *was overwhelmed* with sorrow to the point of death (Matthew 26:38). After he *suffered* many things, Jesus *died* on the cross (John 19:30). He was not falling into a state of suspended animation. The Roman soldiers found that Jesus was dead (John 19:33).

On the same day two of Jesus’ disciples – Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus – took Jesus’ body. According to Jewish burial customs, they wrapped *his body* with spices in strips of linen. At the beginning of his life on this earth Jesus was wrapped in cloths and placed in a manger. At the end of his life he was wrapped in strips of linen and laid in a new tomb near Golgotha, the place of crucifixion. Jesus *was buried* (John 19:38-42).

Jesus had the same kind of body that we have – consisting of *flesh* and *blood* and *bones* (Luke 24:39). One big difference between Jesus and all human beings is that he had *no sin*, since he had been conceived by the miraculous working of the Holy Spirit. Some people teach:

- That Jesus is only seemingly a human being but not so in reality.
- That Jesus had only a human body.
- That Jesus had only a human soul.
- That Jesus did not have a human will and human emotions, etc.

Are these statements true or false? Based on the passages that we have just quoted, the answer is clear: Jesus is indeed true man. Next we will see that Jesus’ two natures assure us of salvation.

2. Jesus’ two natures assure us of salvation: nothing is left undone.

As we have just learned, Jesus is both true God and true man. He is completely God and completely man, yet he is only one person. Professor Lyle Lange writes:

The two natures of Christ retained their essence and properties, even after their union in the person of Christ. The two natures were not mixed so that they became a new substance. They also were not separated so that they had no communication with each other. The Bible tells us that within the person of the God-man, Jesus, there was sharing of the attributes. By attributes, we mean not only what the divine and the human nature are, such as eternal and temporal, but also everything that the two natures do or suffer.

Concerning this sharing of attributes, the Formula of Concord states: Since both natures are personally united (that is united in one person), we believe, teach, and confess that this union is not a connection or association of the sort that neither nature shares things with the other personally (that is, because of the personal union), as if two boards were glued together, with neither giving the other anything or receiving anything from the other. Instead, here is the most complete Communion, which God truly has with this human being; out of this personal union and out of the most complete and most indescribable communication that results from it flows everything human that can be ascribed to and believed about God and everything divine that can be ascribed to and believed about the human Christ. The ancient teachers of the church have explained this union and communication of the natures using similes of a glowing iron and of the union of body and soul in the human being.

Therefore, we also believe, teach, and confess that no mere human being suffered, died, was buried, descended into hell, rose from the dead, ascended into heaven, and was exalted to the majesty and almighty power of God for us, but rather it was a human being whose human nature has such a profound, indescribable union and communion with the Son of God, that this human nature is one person with the Son of God (FC Ep VIII: 9,13). (Lange, *God So Loved The World*: 254,255)

The union of Jesus' two natures, as well as his two states, is treated in detail in *The Eternal Word: A Lutheran Confession For The Twenty-First Century*, Article IV. For that reason, in this essay I would like to emphasize the fact that this union assures us of salvation.

The union of Jesus' two natures is a deep and great mystery. Paul calls Christ "the mystery of God" (Colossians 2:2). The two natures were united at the moment the Son of God was conceived in the womb of Mary. "Not by changing the Godhead into flesh but by taking on the humanity into God" (Tappert, *Op. Cit.* 20, Article 33). Since that time, even after his ascension, Jesus has had two natures. Since his conception, Jesus has not been only man or only God, but the God-man. Jesus is the image of the invisible God and all God's fullness dwells in him (Colossians 1:15,19).

The Bible does not tell us that Jesus divided his work as the Savior: one part as the work of his divine nature, the other part as the work of his human nature. Because of the union of the two natures and because of the sharing of attributes, the baby Jesus laid in a manger was not only a descendant of David but he was also "the Son of the Most High" (Luke 1:32). When the baby Jesus shed his blood at his circumcision to obey God's law, "the Son of the Most High" also shed his blood. When he was twelve years old Jesus called the temple in Jerusalem "my Father's house (God the Father's house)" (Luke 2:49).

At the beginning of his public ministry, the God-man, Jesus, was baptized by John the Baptist. Because he had no sin and because he was the one who instituted Baptism for the forgiveness of sins, Jesus did not need to be baptized. That is why John tried to deter him from being baptized. But Jesus told John to baptize him in order "to fulfill all righteousness" – it was God the Father's will that Jesus become the Substitute for sinners (Matthew 3:15). At that time John saw the Holy Spirit descending like a dove

and lighting on Jesus. This descending of the Spirit was a sign that Jesus, baptized by John, was the Son of God (John 1:33-34).

Right after his baptism, Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by Satan (Matthew 4:1; Mark 1:12). He did not eat anything for forty days and forty nights. He was very hungry. Satan did not overlook this ideal opportunity to tempt Jesus. He came to Jesus and said: "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread" (Matthew 4:3). Satan did not have saving faith in Jesus, but he knew that Jesus who was starving was the Son of God.

On the mountain of Transfiguration Peter, James, and John saw Jesus' face shine like the sun, and his clothes become as white as the light (Matthew 17:1,2). This shows that Jesus' human nature was also shining with the glory and majesty which originally belong to Jesus' divine nature.

When the enemies arrested Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane, he did not resist them at all. This was not because Jesus was powerless, but because he wanted to fulfill God's will. If he had wanted to destroy them, he could have called down out of heaven more than twelve legions of angels (Matthew 26:25). They took Jesus to Caiaphas, the high priest. The high priest said to him, "I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God." Jesus replied, "Yes, it is as you say" (Matthew 26:63, 64).

On the cross Jesus suffered the agony of hell and died. To suffer or to die is characteristic of man. Because of the union of the two natures, however, Jesus' divine nature also suffered and died. The centurion who was guarding Jesus said: "Surely he was the Son of God" (Matthew 27:54). Jesus who was crucified is not merely man; He is also the One who will come with clouds to judge all people. He is the Alpha and the Omega (Matthew 25:31-46; Revelation 1:7, 8).

Reverend Wayne Mueller writes:

The one who will do the final judging on the Last Day identifies himself as "the Alpha and the Omega" (verse 8). Even though John says "the Lord God" said these words, we know that it is the Son, not the Father speaking. Jesus will identify himself with this same name two more times (21:6; 22:13). In 22:13 he explains the name: "I am the Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End." A little later in this chapter Jesus calls himself "the First and the Last" (1:17).

Alpha and Omega are the first and the last letters of the Greek alphabet. Jesus uses these letters for his name to symbolize God's steadfastness from beginning to end. He brought us to faith and will stay with us to the end. We can be confident "that he who began a good work in [us] will carry it on to completion" (Philippians 1:6). Jesus is "the author and perfecter of our faith" (Hebrews 12:2). Words used to describe the Father – who is and who was and who is to come (1:4) – also fit the Son: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Hebrews 13:8). (Mueller, *The People's Bible on Revelation*: 16,17).

Jesus' two natures and their union were absolutely necessary to live a perfect life and to die as the substitute for all people, to pay for all the sins of all people, and to destroy the power of Satan, sin, and death. The God-man completely carried out his work as the Savior. Nothing is left undone. Before he breathed his last, he said: "It is finished" (John 19:30). And his resurrection and his empty tomb testify to that fact. Those who believe in him will live, even though they die (John 11:25). Therefore, together with Paul we can say: "I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because, I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day" (2 Timothy 1:12).

Next we take a look at Jesus' threefold office.

III. Jesus' Threefold Office

Among God's people in Old Testament times, prophets, priests, and kings were important people. They were God's servants to lead the spiritual and daily lives of the people. They were anointed with oil before they began serving in their office. For example, God commanded Moses, "After you put these clothes on your brother Aaron and his sons, anoint and ordain them. Consecrate them so they may serve me as priests" (Exodus 28:41). God commanded Samuel: "Fill your horn with oil and be on your way; I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem. I have chosen one of his sons to be king" (1 Samuel 16:1). God commanded Elijah: "Anoint Elisha...to succeed you as prophet" (1 Kings 19:16). Anointing was a visible means that signified that God would separate that person for a particular task and would pour the Holy Spirit on him to carry it out (1 Samuel 16:13).

Prophets, priests, and kings prefigured the threefold office of Jesus Christ; He is our Prophet, Priest, and King. Jesus was not anointed with oil before he started his public ministry, but the Greek name *Christ* (*Messiah* in Hebrew) means "the anointed one" (Lange, *Op. Cit.* 289). This name showed that the Father set apart Jesus as Prophet, Priest, and King. And the Father poured the Holy Spirit upon him without measure so that he could carry out his threefold office (Matthew 3:16). Unlike the prophets, priests, and kings in the Old Testament, Jesus perfectly carried out his office.

1. Jesus our Prophet stands behind our witness

Professor Lange writes:

The prophet essentially was a preacher. He was told by God to write his Word (Ex 17:14) or to proclaim his Word (Ex 19:7, 8). On occasion, the prophet also proclaimed God's Word concerning what was to happen in the future, as Moses did when he foretold that one day God would send *the Prophet* whom he, Moses, prefigured (Dt. 18:15). The main role of the prophet, however, was to be that of a "forth teller" (preacher), not always a "foreteller" (someone who foretells the future). (Lange, *Op. Cit.* 291)

In Acts 3:22 Peter quotes from Deuteronomy 18:15, and the context tells us that *the Prophet* prophesied in that passage is Jesus. And the Father's declaration at Jesus' transfiguration testifies that Peter's quotation from Deuteronomy 18:15 is correct. The Father declared, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. *Listen to him*" (Matthew 17:5).

We should listen to *the Prophet* because he tells us about the Father (John 1:18). He speaks just what the Father has taught him (John 8:28). What he tells us is truth (John 8:45). His Word sets us free (John 8:32). His Word gives us encouragement, comfort, and peace (Matthew 9:2; 11:28,29). His Word is a lamp to our feet (Psalm 119:105). He can give us eternal life as a free gift through faith in him (John 11:25,26). On the Last Day he will judge all people *according to his Word* (Luke 9:26).

Jesus not only taught God's Word correctly, he also correctly divided and properly used the two main teachings of God's Word—the law and the gospel. Quoting from the ELS Catechism, Professor Wilhelm W. Petersen writes in his essay about the definition and usage of the law and gospel.

The Law teaches us what we are to do and not to do; the Gospel teaches us what God has done, and still does, for our salvation. The Law shows us our sin and the wrath of God; the Gospel shows us our Savior and the grace of God. The Law must be preached

to all men, but especially to impenitent sinners; the Gospel must be preached to sinners who are troubled in their minds because of their sins” (*The 1993 CELC Proceedings*: 103).

Jesus’ message or teaching was generally made up of the law and gospel. A good example is Mark 16:16: “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.” Yet against stubborn sinners, Jesus strongly preached the law alone, as we see in Matthew 23: “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence” (v. 25). He preached the law even to his dear disciples. When Peter tried to block Jesus’ way to the cross, Jesus said to him, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men” (Matthew 16:13). On the other hand, Jesus never hesitated to preach the gospel to penitent sinners. One of the two criminals crucified with Jesus repented of his sins and asked Jesus for forgiveness: “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom” (Luke 23:42). And Jesus proclaimed to him the pure gospel – the gracious, encouraging, and peace-giving message: “I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise (heaven)” (Luke 23:43).

On Sabbath days, as was his custom, Jesus went into synagogues in the towns of Galilee and publicly taught God’s Word (Luke 4:14,16,31ff). He often taught a large crowd of people (Matthew 13:34; Luke 5:1). On occasion He gave private lessons to his mother (John 2:4), to his disciples (Mark 9:33-37; John 13:13), and to his friends (Luke 10:38-42). He mainly taught the Jews, but he also taught some gentiles (Mark 8:24-29; John 4:5-42). He taught his enemies (Matthew 26:62-64). He taught Pilate, the Roman governor (John 18:33-37). He used every opportunity to teach the way of salvation. How about you? Where, when, how, and to whom do you teach God’s Word? Are there unique ways that you can do mission work in your country?

Jesus’ prophetic work did not end with his death. While he was publicly proclaiming God’s Word, Jesus *called and trained* his disciples so that they could continue to proclaim God’s Word (Luke 5:10b). Then, before his ascension he committed his prophetic work *to them and all the Christians of all times*, saying: “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” (Matthew 28:19,20a). And he made the sure promise: “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:20b). Whenever we give witness on behalf of Jesus, he stands behind our witness.

For instance, as an apostle to the Gentiles and their kings and to the Israelites, our Lord called Paul, who had passionately persecuted many Christians. Through Ananias the Lord told him what he might do (Acts 8:1-3; 9:1-15; 26:16,17). Paul understood his God-given role and faithfully carried it out. He proclaimed and taught God’s Word in many places and to many people, especially throughout the Eastern half of the Roman Empire. He could affirm, “But now that there is no more place for me to work in these regions, and I have been longing for many years to see you, I plan to do so when I go to Spain” (Roman 15:23,24). Can we say with confidence, “O Lord, there is no more place for me to work in my mission field?”

Paul was a great apostle, however, it was God who *called* him and *gave* him his role as an apostle. Therefore Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “But *by the grace of God* I am what I am, and *his grace* to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them (the apostles) – yet not I, but *the grace of God* that was with me” (1 Corinthians 15:10). He wrote to the Ephesians, “For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, *which God prepared in advance for us to do*” (Ephesians 2:10). He also wrote, “It is *he* (Christ) who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ

may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God” (Ephesians 4:11-13a).

2. Jesus our Priest answers our prayers for harvest workers

Professor Lange writes:

The role of the priest in the Old Testament was to represent the people before God. Before the giving of the covenant on Sinai (Ex 20-31; Lev), believers of the Old Testament offered sacrifices to God themselves (Abel – Ge 4:4; Noah – Ge 8:20; Abraham – Ge 12:7; 22:13; Jacob – Ge 35:7). The sacrifices reminded believers that they were sinners and needed a substitute to atone for their sins. They were also an expression of thanksgiving to God for his blessings. However, in the Law of Moses, God directed the Israelites to bring their offerings through a priest. The priest was to represent them before God. This reminded the Israelites of their sin and their need for a Savior to represent them before God. (Lange, *Op. Cit.* 292)

Moses tells us about sacred garments for his brother Aaron: a breastpiece, an ephod, a robe, a woven tunic, a turban, and a sash (Exodus 28:4). The turban is interesting. It had to have a plate of pure gold on it. The plate was engraved with the words: “HOLY TO THE LORD.” It had to be attached to the turban with a blue cord and had to be on the front of the turban (Exodus 28:36,37). Whenever Aaron entered the Tent of Meeting or approached the altar to minister in the Holy Place, he had to wear the sacred garments with the plate on his forehead so that he would not incur guilt and die (Exodus 28:35,38). These garments covered his sins and made him holy to be able to stand before God. In other words, he could not stand before God because of his own merits.

As we just heard, the role of a priest was to reconcile the people with God by means of sacrifices and intercessions. The tenth day of the seventh month was one of the special days for the Israelites. It was the Day of Atonement. Only on that day was the high priest allowed to enter the Most Holy Place, wearing the proper garments and with the blood of the sacrifice, to atone for all the sins of the Israelites. Before doing that, however, he had to offer a bull to atone for his own sin. The details of this priestly service on the Day of Atonement are recorded in Leviticus 16.

According to the law, the people offered countless sacrifices through the priest. They offered two lambs a year old *without defect*, as a regular burnt offering each day, one lamb in the morning and the other at twilight (Numbers 28:3-8). Once a week, on the Sabbath day, they offered as a burnt offering two lambs, each a year old and *without defect* (Numbers 28:9). Every month, on the first day, they offered as a burnt offering two young bulls, one ram and seven male lambs a year old—all *without defect* (Numbers 28:11). On the fourteenth day of the first month, as the LORD’S Passover, they offered a male lamb, one year old and *without defect* (Numbers 28:16; Exodus 12:1-14). For seven days after the Passover, they offered as a burnt offering two young bulls, one ram and seven male lambs a year old—all *without defect* (Numbers 28:17-19). On the day of firstfruits, fifty days after the Passover, They offered as a burnt offering two young bulls, one ram and seven male lambs a year old, and one male goat—all *without defect* (Numbers 28:26-31). Leviticus 17 tells about these sacrifices in detail.

In the sentences above, one common phrase stands out: *without defect*. The sacrifices offered to God had to be *without defect*. However, the blood of these animal sacrifices and the atoning work of the high priest could not take away the sins of the people. They were only shadows of Jesus’ atoning death and priestly office. That is why the author of Hebrews writes:

The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming – not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. If it could, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins, because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: “Sacrifice and offering you (God) did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. Then I said, ‘Here I am – it is written about me in the scroll – I have come to do your will, O God.’ ... And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.” (Hebrews 10:1-7, 10).

By one sacrifice Jesus atoned for all the sins of all people (Hebrew 10:14). The sacrifice he offered was not animals but his holy and precious life. Jesus was worthy to be the sacrifice to make atonement for all people, because he had no sin. Unlike the high priest of the Old Testament, he did not need to offer a sacrifice for his own sin before making atonement of all people. He was “the perfect sacrifice” and “the perfect high priest.” Therefore, he could atone for all the sins of all times, once for all, when he died on the cross. That is why Peter wrote, “...You were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers... with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb chosen before the creation of the world” (1 Peter 1:18,19).

Because of the priestly work of Jesus, we can draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith (Hebrews 10:22). He is still doing his priestly work. He is interceding for us before the Father (1 John 2:1). Therefore, Paul writes, “Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died – more than that, who was raised to life – is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us” (Romans 8:34). Because of Jesus’ intercession, the Father hears and answers our prayers. He promises that the Father will hear and answer our prayers, saying: “The Father will give you whatever you ask in my name” (John 15:19). He encouraged his disciples to pray for harvest workers, saying: “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field” (Matthew 9:37,38). We are encouraged to pray in the same way. Jesus will surely provide harvest workers for us.

Reverend G. Jerome Albrecht writes:

Jesus asked his disciples, and he also asks us, to share in his compassion (on people like shepherdless sheep) and he tells us the first thing he wants us to do to such compassion. “Ask the Lord of the harvest...to send out workers into his harvest field.” It is the Lord’s harvest field, and he will see to it that the necessary workers bring the harvest in. He assures us that none of his elect will perish. All his sheep will be gathered into his fold. He will accomplish that either with us or without us. He doesn’t need us, but he wants to use us. He graciously wants to give us the privilege of being involved in this all-important work, work with the blessed results that will last into eternity. And the first thing he asks us to do is exceedingly simple and will cost us nothing but a little of our time. He tells us to pray for workers for his harvest field. In response to our prayers, he will provide them. (G. Jerome Albrecht, *The People’s Bible on Matthew*: 141)

3. Jesus our King promises us final victory and royal blessings, even as we witness in the face of opposition

The role of a king was to rule over Israel and to defend the nation against their enemies. God said to Samuel who would anoint Saul as the first king of Israel, “Anoint him leader over my people Israel; he

will deliver my people from the hand of the Philistines” (1 Samuel 9:16). A king was also called to serve like a shepherd. God said to David: “You will shepherd my people Israel, and you will become their ruler” (2 Samuel 5:2). As a shepherd made his sheep lie down in green pastures and led them beside quiet water, the king of Israel was asked to lead the people in God-pleasing paths that offer blessings, safety, and peace. When Solomon was made king in place of his father David, he wanted to be a good judge of his people and asked God for a discerning heart to govern the nation and to distinguish right and wrong. God was pleased with Solomon’s request (1 Kings 3:7-10).

In his People’s Bible commentary on the psalms, Dr. John Brug has this to say about the role of Israel’s king when he summarizes the meaning of Psalm 101:

In this psalm we have a portrait of the ideal King. He is devoted to serving God. He carries out the duty of a ruler to support the good and oppose the evil. In this opening section David declares his devotion to serving the Lord. One way he will serve him is *by singing his praise*. This David did especially through the psalms he wrote. David will also serve the Lord *with a godly life*. David expresses his eagerness for fellowship with God by the question, “When will you come to me?”

In the second section of the psalm David promises that he will not tolerate evil men in his kingdom. The most basic duties God has given to rulers are *to oppose and punish evil* and *to protect and encourage good*. David was an exceptional ruler, but nevertheless he fell far short of the ideal expressed in this psalm.... In spite of good intentions David fell short of the ideal portrait of a king outlined in this psalm (Brug, *The People’s Bible on Psalms*: 111-113).

It is true that David himself fell short of this ideal portrait of a king. He committed gross sins. He coveted someone else’s wife, slept with her, and killed her husband. What he had done displeased the Lord. Through the prophet Nathan, God pointed out David’s sins. David repented of these sins and asked God for forgiveness (2 Samuel 11:1-12:14; Psalm 51). But what David wrote about in Psalm 101 was not some empty political promise. David knew that the ideal King would come and rule in the future. We have evidence of that. In Psalm 23 David confesses that the Lord – the Messiah or the Christ – is his Shepherd-King! And we have Jesus’ own declaration as the Shepherd-King: “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.... I lay down my life for the sheep” (John 10:11, 15).

The prophet Zechariah also tells us about Jesus’ office as our King. According to the prophet, Jesus is much different from secular rulers. He is the righteous and gentle King. In the time of Zechariah, the Jews who had returned from the captivity did not have very much money. And there was opposition to rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem and the temple of the Lord that had been destroyed. The Jews lost hope and gave up.

At that difficult time God sent Zechariah. The prophet encouraged the people to get to work and to rejoice. He reminded them of God’s wonderful promise of the coming Savior-King, saying: “Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, *righteous* and having salvation, *gentle* and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey” (Zechariah 9:9). This king’s rule will extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth, but he is not an earthly king. He will not come to make the earthly nation of Israel great. He will not come with chariot and war-horses and battle bow. He will come to do battle with Satan and to sacrifice his holy precious blood as payment for all the sins of all people. To the nations he will proclaim peace based on God’s promise of forgiveness and salvation.

Jesus fulfilled Zechariah's prophecy during Holy Week. Though he is the all-powerful King, Jesus set his power aside. On Palm Sunday, he entered Jerusalem as the gentle King, riding on a donkey (Matthew 21:1-11). He was gentle even with his enemies. On the night he was betrayed he allowed the crowd to arrest him. He did not call in his angelic army to destroy them (Matthew 26:47-55). At the Jewish court he had to listen to one false accusation after another, for hours throughout the night; in the end he was charged with blasphemy. His enemies took turns mocking him. They spit on him, slapped him, and struck him with their fists (Mark 14:65). Even when his enemies shouted to Pilate, "Take him away! Take him away! Crucify him!" (John 19:6-15), the gentle King did not beg for his life. As Isaiah prophesied, he was "led like a lamb to the slaughter" (Isaiah 53:7).

Jesus kept on walking faithfully to the cross, his final battlefield against the power of Satan, sin, and death. There he completely carried out the will of his Father who sent him to this world; there he proclaimed with confidence, "It is finished" (John 19:30). This was the solemn report that the God-man made to his Father. He reported that he had reached the final goal of his divine mission. The goal was nothing less than the redemption of all sinners. "It is finished" was also a proclamation that everyone present at Calvary that first Good Friday could hear.

"It is finished" was Jesus' shout of triumph. He destroyed Satan, who held the power of death; he freed all those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death (Hebrews 2:14, 15). All people of all times should hear Jesus' shout: "It is finished." That is why the Holy Spirit moved John to record Jesus' triumphant shout in the Bible. As a result, our Savior's cry of victory has reached our ears and hearts.

"It is finished." Jesus directed all sinners to himself as their sure and only refuge. The atonement Jesus made is all-sufficient; it is valid for all the people of all time, even for the people who lived in Old Testament times. Jesus' sacrifice does not need to be repeated (Hebrews 10:18).

From eternity God determined to redeem sinners from eternal death through his Son Jesus. Jesus faithfully and perfectly completed his Father's will and plan by his substitutionary suffering and death on the cross. Jesus, the Son of God, finished his work as the Savior and gave up his spirit to the Father (Luke 23:46). When we die, our spirits, too, will separate from our bodies. But there is a difference between Jesus and us. We cannot stop the power of death, but Jesus did stop it for our salvation. Jesus won the victory against the power of Satan, sin, and death. To show this victory, Jesus rose from the dead on the third day. As our eternal King, Jesus continues to protect us from every danger; he will finally take us to heaven.

Therefore, with the Apostle Paul we can boldly say:

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:35-39). . . . We have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed (2 Corinthians 4:7). Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing (2 Timothy 4:8).

What a wonderful Prophet, Priest, and King we have! May the Lord Jesus continue to strengthen the CELC's unity of spirit and oneness in faith and confession! May he continue to provide a forum among us for mutual encouragement, spiritual growth, and strengthening in faith and confession! May he promote and strengthen the existing unity in scriptural doctrine and practice among the member churches! May he encourage the members of this Conference to be zealous in sharing the Lutheran heritage of the pure and unadulterated gospel of Jesus with those who do not yet know and believe in Jesus as their Savior! (*The CELC Constitution*, Article III: 1-4).

With the countless saints triumphant and angels in heaven, let us sing in a loud voice: "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and praise!" (Revelation 5:12). Amen.

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Abbreviations

Ge Genesis
Ex Exodus
Lev Leviticus
FC Ep Formula of Concord, Epitome
Op. Cit. Opere Citato

Make Known God's Manifold Wisdom!



*“His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus, our Lord.”
(Ephesians 3:10-11)*

Essay 5 – Eschatology: The Urgency of Our Outreach Message

*Rev. Segundo Gutierrez
Peru*

Introduction

Blessings to all of you. It is a joy to be with you once again participating in this conference and I believe that there will be great blessing for all those who believe, adore and follow Christ. In our heart there is great joy in knowing that our God will come soon; and until Christ comes for his people, for his believers, it is necessary to continue to pray, read his word and participate in his holy sacraments, and take the greatest advantage of the opportunity to bring the word of God to others, to those who have a big empty space in their hearts.

We need to have this precious desire in our hearts to know that our great God, the King of kings and Lord of lords, will come soon and will take us to live with him forever, and this really gives us power to accept our circumstances and see the hand of the Lord in every moment, because the people that serve God experience trials, but we glory in his name, and we rejoice to know that he will come soon for his church, for his people. I know that these last times have been full of struggles and battles for many of us, and as soldiers of Christ we continue to fight the good fight of faith, we mount up as on eagles' wings and we do not flag because his precious Holy Spirit accompanies us, and when we fall he picks us up.

We know that we live a life full of difficulties in a decadent and corrupt world, and that we are surrounded by bad news; the news media show us that there is nowhere on earth, in the whole world, where there are no problems, crime, drugs, sicknesses, hunger, prostitution, wars, etc. We surely live in a dangerous world where there are no longer any values, where evil has become good and good evil. That's why there is urgency to evangelize in these last times. Thus, our desire as those who know Christ is to take the gospel to those who do not yet know it and seek the way to preach, open our lips and tell the

truth, that Christ is coming soon, that he is at the door and that he will return soon. At times fatigue sets in, we feel an urge to give up and go to a far away place, where we are alone, and sometimes we ask if it's all worth it. There are many people who need God, who have a great empty place in their hearts, and for their sake we struggle and strive to bring them the message of salvation.

When Christ comes, all the trials, sufferings, and sadness will end and the peace that surpasses all human understanding will arrive, and we shall be in the city of which we are citizens. There we will live with our Lord forever. There we won't need doctors' visits, medicines, laboratories, psychologists. There will be no depression. All that will end and we shall be in the presence of Christ for all eternity. There will be no more worry, nor envy, nor jealousy, nor murmuring, nor criticism. The dark days will end and fear will remain behind. When Christ comes there will be no more wars or rumors of wars, no more terrorism or threats; all will be peace and happiness.

God's Messengers

God, through his holy word and through the Holy Spirit has worked conversion in our hearts, giving us faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. In the end, it's natural that we who know Christ spread the gospel of Christ without tiring. The Lord says in his word: "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven" (Mt. 5:14-16). It is the nature of light to illuminate, to shine; if it doesn't shine, how can we call it light? In the same way, the nature of Christians is to let the gospel shine over the world; as God's chosen messengers we should not grow weary nor be ashamed to speak of our Savior Jesus Christ.

As those who know the word, we cannot but announce the good news to the whole world. The prophet David says: "Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit to sustain me. Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will turn back to you" (Psalm 51:12-13). Naturally, when someone comes to know Christ, he will teach others. In the book of Acts, we see a great example of Christians, despite the great persecutions that existed in those times and being scattered, they joyfully and fearlessly kept proclaiming the gospel (Acts 8:4). Peter and John said: "For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20). So then as a church, as those who know the word of God, who know the urgent need of the gospel, let us preach with boldness of our Savior Jesus Christ.

The apostle Paul in Ephesians 5:8-14 says: "For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for it is light that makes everything visible. This is why it is said: 'Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.'" In Jesus Christ there is hope of life; there is light for the world; and this light is available for all of us through the means of grace. We have been converted from darkness to light, and the Lord encourages us to live as new creatures, that we take off the darkness that remains in our lives and walk as children of light. God wants of his children that "you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life—in order that I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor for nothing" (Phil. 2:15-16).

Now as messengers of the Lord in Peru we continue showing the world the light of the gospel which Christ has placed in our lives, and we shall continue to announce the precious message of salvation despite the adverse circumstances. It's true that we often feel frustrated, that it appears that the light doesn't shine in the midst of the terrible darkness of this world. Perhaps we can feel overwhelmed or

worried that the work is too huge and too hard. Or we might become discouraged by the lack of results of our preaching of the gospel message. Despite all the obstacles which may be there, what motivates us to go on preaching the gospel is the love which God has shown us sinners and the coming hope which will soon be manifested in us. So we preach the word of God because God has given us this commandment. The Lord in his love does not wish anyone to perish, but that all should come to the knowledge of the truth and be saved. For that reason the Lord has called us, he has chosen us so that we would be messengers of the good news. He has commanded us, saying: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Mt. 28:18-20). "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation" (Mk. 16:15). Our attitude toward the commands of God shows us that our Christian nature is to shine as the light of the world. It is the nature of a Christian to bring the good news to others; we cannot let the light that shines in our hearts not shine in the hearts of others. We cannot stop telling that God has done so much for us by sending his Son to die for us, we cannot keep it a secret. We have to announce to the world that we have a God who loves us more than we can imagine. That he has shown his love by giving us the greatest and most valuable gift that could exist in the whole world, the life of his only-begotten Son, and by means of this son he has given us the gift of eternal life.

When our Lord Jesus Christ was only a child, he never doubted the urgency of evangelism. He said: "Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?" (NKJV). And through a parable he describes the urgency of evangelism: "Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame. ... Then the master told his servant, 'Go out to the roads and country lanes and make them come in, so that my house will be full'" (Lk. 14:21,23). An angel spoke with the same urgency to the women who were amazed at the sight of the empty tomb: "Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead'" (Mt. 28:7). This word, "go," means that we have no excuse for not preaching the word of salvation. What moves me the most to proclaim the urgency of evangelism is that it is the first help that the church can give to each man and to humanity in general in the world: "Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ" (Acts 5:42). Thus we should go and preach the word of God and fulfill this great mission which the Lord has given us.

We all Need the Gospel

The church confronts an inescapable duty: to evangelize, preach the Word of God and administer the holy sacraments. With the proclamation of the work, there is no faith, since faith comes through the hearing of the word, and without faith there is no salvation, since without faith it is impossible to please God. Then, what should the Christian church do? It should be a faithful instrument of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with urgency take the message of salvation to all men. We observe that there are many who are practically ignorant of Christ. Can we remain indifferent and not bring them the knowledge of the Lord Jesus? There is no Christian who is free of the obligation to make Christ known in the entire world. And what is the part of the world which concerns us besides what is around me, what falls to my lot as my field of work, as the field in which I am to sow the gospel? When we look in this way at the church, as an immense field that includes the whole world, but is divided into a multitude of parcels which do not break the unity, but rather all are together in the one and the same church, then we understand this matter of each one of us taking care of his square meter, that is, of the part of the church which is my lot, is around me, and no one will have the bad taste of remaining with his arms crossed while there is so much to do for Jesus Christ and the kingdom of God.

The church should always be involved in this evangelistic work, until the consummation of time, and there will always be an urgency to evangelize, far away or nearby; the person who lives in a remote region or he who exists under our own roof, everyone needs to hear the good news of the gospel. The

gospel is for all and not just for a defined group; therefore we should seek new ways to bring the gospel to all. Each of our families, neighborhoods and cities are the first places that the good news of the gospel should reach, all these living spaces are our true mission fields, in which the dynamism will be more or less visible depending on the free and voluntary response of each one. Our condition as children of God leads us to announce the good news to all our brothers, so that we become preachers of the word; sent to proclaim “what we have seen and heard.” The road that still lies ahead is long, but the assurance that today we are building roads that others will follow later should encourage us. Our effort and commitment will make it possible for many, through the gospel, to come to know Christ and cause others who have departed to return to the church.

Let us preach Christ while we can to as many as we can. What is asked of us is faith, not eloquence. If you have faith, Christ will speak through you. The Psalmist says: “I have believed, therefore I will speak.” I cannot believe and remain silent. The person who does not overflow is ungrateful toward the one who has filled him; each one should overflow in that which has filled him. Therefore, evangelizing and winning souls for Christ is an urgent duty for all. All Christians have imposed on them the glorious task of working so that the divine message of salvation may be known and accepted everywhere by all men. So then, the church of Christ should preach the gospel to every creature and make disciples among the nations until the end of the world (Mk. 16:16; Mt. 28:20); since through this proclamation of the gospel Jews and Gentiles will be saved (Acts 13:43-49).

Preachers By Example

The children of God, those who really believe in Christ, ought to live in accordance with what the word of God commands. We are children of God not only in word, but in deed and in truth. We need to be coherent with our own faith. A certain preacher said: “It is in vain that people expend effort to propagate the gospel, when they contradict it with their deeds.” A Christian tries to live in the present, knowing that the people that surround him make up the generation that he is to lead to Christ. That is the starting point for the urgency of evangelism; and Christians cannot rest until the end of the world, as long as there are souls to save. There are still many people who need to hear the gospel, men and women who urgently need to be brought to faith, and there are persons who need to be won again after they have departed from the faith. We need to use the means that God has given us for this purpose, and we should act with patience, obeying God’s command and leaving the work in the Lord’s hands. Another important thing is that the life of God’s children must testify that they really believe in Christ. I say this because the Lord himself said: “These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me” (Mat. 15:8), and in another place he says: “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’” (Mt. 7:21-23). So then, to have faith in Christ is not to permit that our actions contradict what our words affirm. We need to make every effort to show with our actions what we confess with our lips.

The Lord says in his Word: “By their fruits you shall know them”. A good tree will produce good fruits, but a bad tree will produce bad fruits. And again he tells us that we should always walk with integrity. A person has integrity when he lives and acts in accordance with the will of God; as he behaves inside the church, so he behaves outside the church; as he is before the Lord, so he is also before other people. We need to be respectful, kind, merciful, forgiving, friendly, etc. This in some way will help to give evidence that we truly are children of God; and these evidences will help in the field of evangelism. What’s the use of saying: “I believe in God,” if my acts show the opposite? We need to live for Christ and do what Christ tells us in his holy word.

Jesus’ Return

The Holy Scripture clearly teaches that our Lord Jesus Christ, in the time of his choosing (Acts 1:7; Jn 5:28-29), will appear visibly to all men at the same time, and that he will come in glory surrounded by all his holy angels to judge all nations (Mt. 25:31). In the Apostles' Creed we confess: "On the third day, he rose again from the dead, ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty; and from thence he will come to judge the quick and the dead." Jesus rose on the third day, and forty days after he arose he ascended into heaven, and he will soon return to earth. When Jesus rose to heaven with his disciples looking on, two angels assured them: "'Men of Galilee,' they said, 'why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven'" (Acts 1:11). Ever since Jesus left, the big question has been: when will he return to earth? Some, mistakenly interpreting the prophecies of the Bible, have even fixed exact dates for his return. Nevertheless, the dates have passed and Jesus has not come. It is natural that we should be anxious to know when he will return, but the Bible clearly teaches that no one knows the day of his coming. Jesus Christ said that even he did not know when he would come: "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father" (Mk 13:32; Mt 24:36; 1 Thes. 5:2-3). Therefore we should not pay attention to those who predict that Jesus will return on a certain date. In his wisdom, God has not revealed when Jesus will return. He wants us to be always ready to receive him. If we knew that Jesus would not return until a definite date, we would not prepare ourselves spiritually but would wait until the last moment, because we would think: "There is still time." Since he has not informed us when Jesus will return, God motivates us to be prepared for his coming every day.

There have always been people who have not believed that Jesus will return and mock this divine promise. Maybe you know someone who laughs at the idea that Jesus will return to earth. The apostle Peter advises us not to be deceived by the arguments of the unbelievers: "First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, 'Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.' But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:3-4,8-9). The fact that the world continues on its way as it always has deceives many people. They can't imagine the changes that will take place when Christ comes, and so they reject the idea of the second coming because it has never happened before. The sad thing is that this is exactly as Jesus said things would be when he returns: "As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man" (Mt. 24:37-39). In Noah's time, no one could imagine a universal flood. They were too busy with their daily activities to pay attention to Noah's warnings. The same thing happens today. Those who do not believe in the second coming will be amazed by what happens when Christ returns. Let us note here that Jesus did not emphasize that the people would be especially wicked, but that they would be indifferent and would not have time for the things of God.

In this world we are living a series of events where human beings observe destructions and catastrophes; wars, epidemics, hunger, tidal waves, earthquakes, hurricanes, etc. But men do not seem to be able to recognize that the coming of Christ is closer than we can imagine. Men and women submerged in their own pleasures, nations waging war for power, children who die of hunger. The corruption and evil in the world are greater every day and God will bring his judgment on the earth. Why did God send a flood over the world? Because the evil and corruption of the people had come to dominate, and this corruption had to be eliminated by means of the flood. Why do you think that now there are wars and rumors of wars, earthquakes, tidal waves, fires, floods, etc.? Because the judgments of God are upon the

earth, and all these happenings are preliminary events to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. The word says: "When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near" (Lk. 21:28). Every day we are bombarded with news that remind us that we are living in a world full of pain and tragedy, which grows worse every day. Violence increases daily, human misery can be seen everywhere, injustice prevails over the truth, natural disasters that increase every day not only in quantity but also in intensity; we can see destruction, misery and pain everywhere. Nevertheless, all this will end when Jesus returns to the world. Everything that happens here that keeps many people swinging on the pendulum of despair are signs that announce the imminent return of Jesus Christ. Therefore, this is a warning so that we would be prepared and so that God doesn't surprise us on the road of unbelief. The Scripture says: "Be prepared, for the kingdom of heaven is near". So the word warns us of the second coming of Christ and the destruction that will come upon this world. Those who pay attention to these warnings, as Noah, will be saved. Every year that passes, every month that passes, every week, every day, every hour, every minute, every second that passes brings us closer to the final judgment. "The night is nearly over; the day is almost here" (Rom. 13:12) when we will be judged by God. Now is the time when the children of God should prove themselves faithful and persevere in Christ's doctrine. Although the word of God may be despised, although it may be adulterated or replaced by the words and traditions of men, as good soldiers of Jesus Christ we should remain standing, firm to defend the truth. We will continue to believe, confess and teach that Jesus Christ alone is our true Savior; there is no one else in the world in whom we may be saved. So that Christ alone is the one and only road to the Father. We are already living in the final scenes of this world; the prophecies are rapidly being fulfilled, the time of grace is passing rapidly. Therefore, there is no time to lose, we need to be prepared because Christ is coming.

The need to prepare ourselves for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ is extremely important, since the difference between salvation and condemnation depends on it. The Lord said: "So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him" (Mt. 24:44). Just as those who were not prepared for the day of the flood, who laughed and mocked and despised the word of God, despite the warning that Noah had given to them, this despising cost them their life. The unbelieving people drowned, died and were eternally condemned by God. In the same way all those will be condemned eternally in hell who have despised the word of God and the holy sacraments. Let us be awake and watch, prepared to receive our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who will come with all his power and glory to take us to heaven to enjoy full and eternal life. Let us await with joy the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Final Judgment

Immediately after the coming of Christ will come the final judgment (Mt. 25:31-32), and all without exception will be judged by the Lord. "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:10). This does not mean that man is justified before God by his good works. I say this because there are religious leaders who have invented their own religion, their own doctrines and teachings. They teach that for a person to be saved or go to heaven he has to make every effort to keep the commandments and do good works. The word of God, however, clearly says that man is justified freely through faith in Christ Jesus. Salvation is a gift that God has given us, so that salvation comes from God and not from our efforts. In the death and resurrection of Christ, God in his merciful love has emitted his eschatological sentence in favor of sinners, absolving us for the sake of Christ, offering them in Christ that righteousness that they could never achieve. Thus the man who has faith in Christ is free of all condemnation (Jn 5:24; Rom. 8:33ff). The final criterion in the judgment, therefore, is the relationship of the person with Christ (Mt. 10:32ff.).

Now, "when the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory" (Mt. 25:31). Here our Lord Jesus Christ was prophesying the things that would

happen when he returned to this world. He was making clear that the end is Christ returning on his throne of glory judging all nations. The Scripture says: "When the Son of Man comes in his glory." He did not come in glory when he was born in Bethlehem, when he was crucified; but in the end he will come in all his glory, in all his splendor, and in addition the word says he will not come alone; rather, all his holy angels will come with him, and they will be the Lord's servants to separate his chosen ones from the unbelievers. "The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Mt. 13:41-42). The word says: "All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats" (Mt. 25:32). It says that all nations, all peoples, every person from the whole world, from the first man named Adam until the last man who will exist in this world, absolutely everyone of us will be before the Lord to be judged; no one will escape. We are all going to be in the presence of God. "And he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats." On that final day Christ will make a great division. Now in this world we are all together, believers and unbelievers, but on that day the Lord will separate the sheep and the goats, the believers and the unbelievers. He will place the believers on his right hand and the unbelievers on his left hand. He will say to those on his right: "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world" (Mt. 24:34). Here it speaks of inheriting; it tells us of an inheritance, and an inheritance is something that one receives freely. So then, we do not receive salvation because of what we do, because of our works, but rather freely from the Lord. And the word says that it was prepared "since the creation of the world," that is, before we were born; so then, salvation has nothing to do with our will, with our works; salvation is purely by grace, by God's mercy.

Now then, what happens if you are not a child of God, if you are not one of Christ's sheep? The word says: "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels'" (Mt. 25:41). The judge declares his sentence immediately; and those on his left, the unbelievers, will be unable to advance any argument; they will have no lawyer, and how horrible will the sentence of the judge be: "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire." How sad and painful it will be to live apart from God forever, far away, separated from God, and how horrible is this word "cursed." For they are under the wrath and condemnation of God. When the word says that the fire is eternal and life is eternal, that means that the punishment of God will endure just as long as the life. All of eternity.

Condemnation and Salvation (Heaven and Hell)

Eternal condemnation (Hell): In the final judgment there will occur a complete and eternal separation between the ungodly and the righteous (Mt. 25:46): "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life." The fact that there will be an eternal judgment is real. The Holy Scripture teaches so clearly about eternal condemnation that only those who reject the divine authority of the word of God can deny it. "Everyone who dares to deny eternal punishment also has to deny eternal life," since in Scripture both are taught together (Mt. 25:46). According to the Holy Scripture, eternal condemnation consists in those condemned being excluded forever from divine grace and communion with God; that is, they will forever be separated from God's love and mercy (Mt. 25:41; 8:12; 2 Thes. 1:7-9). To be separated from God means to suffer the greatest of torments, both physically and spiritually. At the same time, the Scriptures describe the unspeakable torments that the condemned will experience: trouble, distress (Rom. 2:9), torment (Lk. 16:23), weeping, sighing, their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched (Mk 9:43-44), weeping and gnashing of teeth (Mt. 8:12). The Scriptures employ very strong terms to demonstrate that the physical and spiritual suffering of the condemned is greater than can be imagined.

The word says that hell is a place of punishment, of total pain and anguish (Rom. 2:9). It is a place of suffering. It is not a place like a jail, a place where one is simply confined; hell is a place to suffer, it is a place of divine punishment. It is a place where the fire is eternal (Mk. 9:43-44). Let us remember that the rich man begged for a drop of water, just one drop of water. This tells us that in hell there is incredible thirst; there is suffering, pain, anguish, torment, weeping, despair, and all this will last for eternity. Hell really is a place where there will be torment and the punishment of eternal fire (Rev. 14:10). It is a place of gloom and darkness (Mt. 8:12; 22:13; 25:30). Hell is a place of eternal death; eternal separation from the presence of God (2 Thes. 1:9). The apostle John describes eternal hell as the second death (Rev. 20:14), that means the separation of body and soul from God, to be completely without God forever, without comfort and hope. In that day the worst thing for the unbeliever will not be the pain, the anguish, the darkness; the worst thing will be to be without God forever and without any hope. And what is it that condemns a man? It is unbelief (Jn. 3:16-18,36; Mk 16:16). Christ through his vicarious atonement reconciled the entire world (2 Cor. 5:19-21), so the sinner is punished eternally only if he refuses to accept through faith in Christ the merciful forgiveness that God offers him. So then, as messengers of God, let us preach and teach of the danger that exists when we reject the gospel (Mk. 16:16), and let us seek ways to motivate and lead people to seek the salvation that is offered in the means of grace.

Eternal salvation (Heaven): Eternal salvation is the opposite of eternal condemnation; heaven is the opposite of hell. According to the Scripture, if you go on the broad and spacious road you are going toward hell and if you walk on the narrow road, you are heading toward heaven. Heaven and hell are the only two alternatives for man: arrive and be thrown into hell or arrive and be received in heaven. Really, only the person who trusts in Jesus Christ can have eternal life (Jn. 3:16; 11:23-27). Just as hell, heaven is a real place, something that exists; heaven is a place of happiness and blessedness; a place where there is no death, nor pain nor tears; there is no kind of suffering there. The apostle in one of his letters says: "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Phil. 1:21), and then says: "I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far" (Phil. 1:23). We may note that Paul does not say: I desire to depart and be in heaven; rather he says that he desires to be with Christ, so we can say that heaven is being with Christ. Now Jesus describes heaven or eternal life as a house: "In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you" (Jn. 14:2); it is also described as a city (Heb. 11:10) and is also called Paradise: Jesus said to one of the criminals who was crucified with him: "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise" (Lk. 23:43). So then, heaven is a place of delight, of joy, of gladness (Ps. 16:11). The Christian who dies and goes to heaven, on the last day when he rises and opens his eyes, will shout with joy and gladness when he sees that heaven does exist, and no one will take away that joy. There will be no sin, no temptations, no sadness, no pain or suffering; the surroundings will be pure and perfect.

In heaven we will all be in harmony; there will be no divisions there, denominations, Baptists, Lutherans, Pentecostals, Adventists, etc. We will all live in love and harmony; and in eternal communion with Christ. In heaven there will be no more evil, nor selfishness, nor envy, nor debts. There will no longer be even one sinner (Ps. 24:3; 1 Cor. 6:9; Rev. 21:8). In heaven everyone will be holy. The weeds will be burned, the devil and his angels will be thrown into eternal hellfire; there will be no more temptation or evil thoughts, everything will be perfect. In heaven we will never tire of adoring and praising the Lord with all our strength and emotions (Rev. 4:8). Thus, what we need to do is take the message of salvation to all who do not know Christ so that they can come to repentance, believe in Christ and be saved. For all those who do not believe in Christ while they are alive have the opportunity to repent of their sins, ask for forgiveness, and place all their confidence in Christ Jesus, our Lord. We need to invest our time in our children, friends, neighbors, relatives, evangelizing them. What will be my crown or my reward? You will be my crown and my reward in heaven, you who listened to and believed in the gospel through me. That will be our great recompense: "Here am I, and the children God has given

me” (Heb. 2:13). What a joy and reward it will be to see our children, wife, friends, relatives to whom we have given testimony concerning Christ! Thus we need to invest our time in evangelism, for judgment day is very near.

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Questions for Discussion

What will be the reward which we will receive in heaven?
In what sense are we judged on our works?