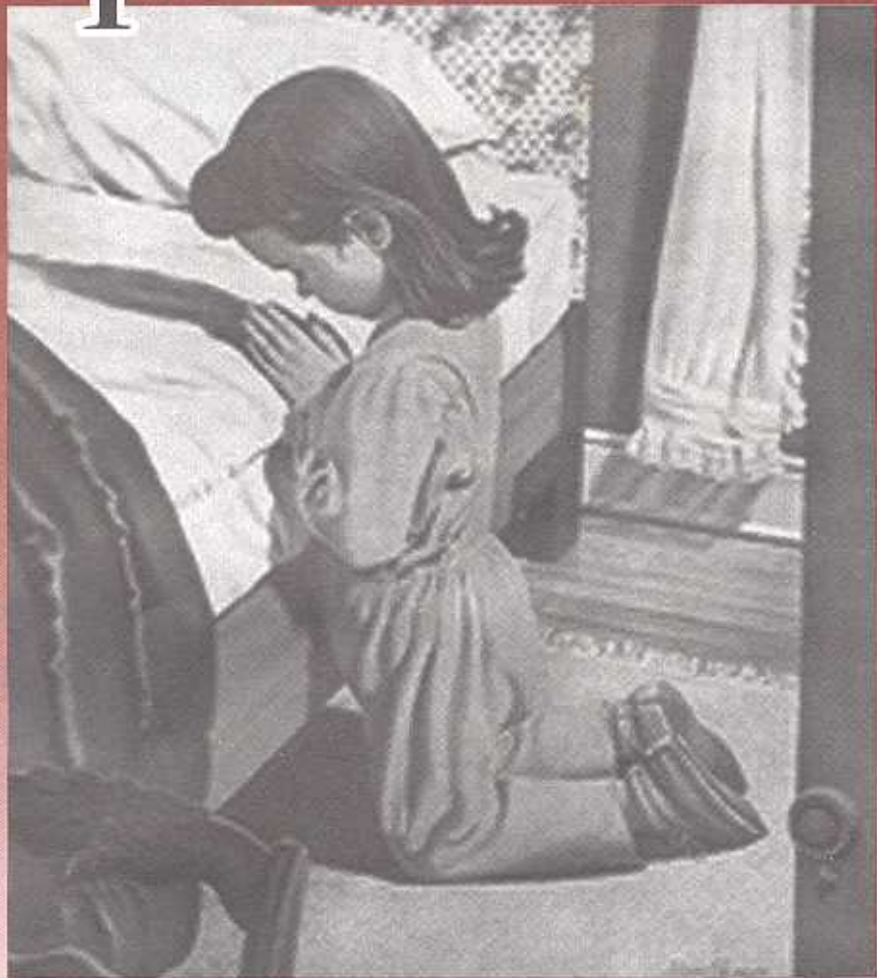


Lutheran Spokesman



"Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence."

1 Timothy 2:1-2

Thank You, Lord, For a Quiet and Peaceable Life

The main road in town has been torn up for months. An elected official is caught in a scandal. Taxes are raised—again!

Such thoughts as these easily come to mind when we think about our government. We do not often have kind words for those who are in authority. Even patriotic fervor rapidly diminishes when tax season rolls around.

Yet our Lord tells us through the apostle Paul: "Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority" (1 Tim. 2:1-2).

We are not only to pray for our government, but also should give thanks for it!

The reason given is found, as verse two continues: ". . . that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence." Since we pray for

a quiet and peaceable life, it makes sense that we should also give thanks when we have it. Even during this ongoing war, the vast majority of us have quiet and peaceful lives.

We do have much to be thankful for in this area. For two centuries in these United States we have not had to endure a prolonged foreign invasion on our soil. Not only has the Lord allowed our nation to become the world's only superpower, but He has allowed democracy and freedom to accompany that power.

In addition, this quiet and peaceable life that we enjoy has been accompanied by economic prosperity; such material blessings, however, are only a side benefit of such a life. The real purpose that God has for us is to "lead" this life "in godliness and reverence."

What would living "in godliness and reverence" include? Certainly it

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would include putting down strong roots in a study of our Savior, walking in our Lord's ways, and also broadcasting the message of Christ crucified to those who have not heard the truth.

The apostle continues, "For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:3-4). We are to take advantage of peacefulness by excelling in the gospel.

That the Kingdom May Prosper

Remember well why it is that God elevates any kingdom on earth—so that His Kingdom may prosper! We can indeed be thankful that our government—flawed though it may be—does not inhibit the proclamation of the gospel within our borders and allows for a quiet and peaceable life for a continuation of the Lord's work. Even though the war on terrorism con-

tinues, our freedom of religion remains intact. The knowledge of the truth continues to be proclaimed uncensored in our homes, Christian Day School classrooms, and pulpits.

We can also give thanks that . . .

- To this point Moslem terrorists who hate Christianity have been held at bay.

- We have a volunteer army stationed in Iraq not only protecting our freedom, but giving an opportunity for quiet and peaceable life for those who may not have ever experienced that before.

- We have the freedom to unite and worship in spirit and truth in America.

- We have access and the means to enter many other nations with the message of Jesus.

- The Lord has controlled history to bring us to this point (we think especially of the defeat of communism, which not many years ago was the greatest threat to a quiet and peaceable life).

Yes, that street may still not be fixed. Corruption continues. Taxes may go up. However, look beyond that side of the government and pray for a continuation of—and give thanks for—a quiet and peaceable life in which there is no governmental interference with the "knowledge of the truth."

—Pastor Michael Schierenbeck

"In Everything Give Thanks"

In the book of Psalms, one refrain found repeatedly is the exhortation for us to give thanks to the LORD.

One of those many exhortations to express gratitude is customarily used in our midst at meal time.



Acknowledging the Giver of our food, we call upon one another to voice appreciation to the LORD, saying, "Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever" (Ps. 136:1).

Since "every good gift and every perfect gift" (Jms.1:17) comes to us from the gracious and powerful hand of our LORD and God, every single day of our lives we have ample cause to give thanks to Him. And at our annual Thanksgiving Festival we make a special point of gathering with fellow Christians to return thanks to God for the many blessings He has graced us with in the past year.

With this in mind, how are we at putting into practice the exhortation in Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians—"in everything give thanks"? (5:18)

When our fields have produced bumper crops, we join our voices in giving thanks and praise to the LORD for His bounty. How about this year, since the widespread drought conditions severely reduced the yield and in some cases has caused complete crop failure?

When our loved ones in the military were brought safely through the major battles in Iraq, we rejoiced over God's protective hand. How about now, since those same loved ones will not be ending their tour of duty by the holidays as originally planned, but are being called upon to remain still longer in that ghastly hot, windy, and dangerous

land?

When our health was faring well and our jobs were providing us with a steady income, we lifted up our voices in gratitude to God for His providential care. Do we find any reason for a grateful spirit when we are struggling with our health or we have been laid off from our job?

What reasons are there to give thanks in everything?

In Psalm 136 where we receive the exhortation, "Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever," there is a long list of blessings that God had granted the children of Israel—from the time they were delivered from their captivity in Egypt to the time God delivered the pagan land of Canaan into their hands (please take the time to read them for yourselves). Those were not easy times in the least. For forty years the children of Israel lived in tents in a hot, arid wilderness. They received just enough food for each day, and that was the same manna day after day. In addition, they were faced with hostile enemies along the route to their promised homeland.

In and through it all God blessed them until they entered that land of plenty.

After each and every one of those listed blessings, the psalmist declared, "for His mercy endures forever." Repeating this phrase twenty-six times may seem redundant and even unnecessary. And yet, the Spirit of God had this wording inserted each time, because He saw the need to emphasize an important truth, namely, sinful man's need for God's merciful help.

Like the children of Israel, the only

thing we deserve by reason of our sinfulness is God's fiery wrath and condemnation. Nevertheless, as He sees us in our wretched condition, on the basis of His infinite love in Christ Jesus He has mercy upon us, doing all that is truly beneficial for us according to His wise providence. In His mercy He has given us our daily bread in answer to our prayer. According to His mercy He has watched over our troops when in the face of danger.

Through all the trials of life we encounter, the LORD in His merciful love draws us ever closer to Him,

strengthening our faith in His saving grace. In and through all of God's merciful care in our lives, He has the final aim and goal of bringing us into the promised land of heaven, which our Savior won for us by conquering our enemies of sin, death, and the devil. This is the ultimate land of plenty that God wants us to enjoy throughout all eternity!

"Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever!"

—Pastor Mark Gullerud



THE END TIMES— wholesale and retail

At the tail-end of the church year, we look forward to a few good sermons about the End Times. We have always found this Scriptural truth particularly fascinating and comforting. As we like nice surprises sprung on us by friends, and as reunions are happy times, so it will be wonderful when Jesus gets close enough for us to see the smile on His face, and we take His hand to step with Him into endless day! Hallelujah!!

The End Times can't come too soon to suit the child of God, as it becomes more clear every day that planet Earth is spiraling down into chaos. How much longer can God put up with the smut of humanity, what with dereliction of clergy and cultural degeneracy (by now God's preview in 2 Peter 2:12-23 and 2 Tim. 3:1-8 looks so familiar!) coupling with perversions that mimic the dog savoring its own vomit! The ground shudders beneath our feet (Rom. 8:22) at being the incubator of

monstrosities spawned by Satan, over which we groan with all creation (2 Cor. 5:1-4).

So we are going to stifle that part of us which always raises an objection—our "Old Adam," our sinful flesh. It's human nature, after all, to avoid eye contact with the End Times, to deny hell and damnation, to forget about Jesus and salvation. Our Old Adam will never get to heaven, so this world is all he will ever have, and he knows it. It follows that he lives totally absorbed with and dedicated to the here-and-now, for the end of earthly time rings his death-knell.

The New Man in us, however, expectantly anticipates the end times, for the clanging bell that ends our earthly pilgrimage is the self-same alarm that awakens us to eternity. The child of God looks forward to his God-scheduled departure time. My end time may come when I am half-way through mowing the back yard (the mower will

die too, thanks to its dead-man switch). Or the clock will register 2:33 a.m. when God's finger plugs an artery in my heart, and my use of clocks is over. Your end time may sneak up on you between the entree and dessert, or the snow-shovel will clatter from your lifeless hands at the end of the driveway.

The daily obituaries tally us up, one by one, and our ranks are thinning as each mortal attains the time of his end. Tomorrow's paper may include its thin memorial reflections on my/your having passed this way. Ask not for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for you and it tolls for me, just as it tolls for our neighbor. Who's next?

But if we get impatient at God's patience with the world (eager as we are to be rid of it), let's admit that we are just being selfish; remember that

there are still souls to be salvaged from destruction, and impatience does not serve so as to save.

Since God has not yet reached the end of His marvelous mercy-patience with planet Earth (wholesale), we must strive to catch a soul here and a soul there (retail) in the net of His Savior-mercy. You and I are ready, thank God, for the time of our own end—and when I love my neighbor enough, I will help him prepare for his also.

Meanwhile, keep your eye on the closing gap—and when it's your turn to be served at the head of the line, step forward with "Here I am, finally! And all I have with me is my Jesus-Credit card. It's good, isn't it?"

Thank God, it IS!

So check out and go home.

—Paul R. Koch



The Discourses of Christ

Christ and the Father

John 5:24-30

Part Two

True Life Through Jesus

Please read the text cited above.

The world has always been in search of perpetual life.

People have always desired to attain immortality. At one time this was pursued through the vain search for the fountain of youth. For many today it has become a chase for life through science and technology. For

many others it remains a spiritual pursuit, but they have chosen the futile path of work-righteousness. The imagined innate goodness of man is held to be the key to life. But we know that "we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags" (Isa. 64:6).

Jesus reveals the truth of this mat-

ter. Jesus Himself holds the key to eternal life and judgment.

In the first portion of this discourse, Jesus was very clear in proclaiming that He was equal with the Father and that only those who honor the Son—our Savior, Jesus Christ—are worshipping the true God.

Now Jesus makes it clear that it is only though knowing the truth of His Word—comprehending His death upon the cross as the atonement for sin—that anyone can possess life. But this truth man will not hear. By nature we are spiritually dead, and the dead can't hear. Man does not even know what it means to be alive. Apart from Christ there is no life. The hour has come in which we who were dead, and so unable to hear, have been made able to hear the voice of the Son of God—and He has made us alive! By grace you are saved!

Through faith in Christ we have been made alive, and not only for this short pilgrimage on Earth. We have already passed from death to life. We, who were dead in our trespasses and sins, God has made alive. We are made alive together with Christ, so that our eternal outcome is secured. Already God sees us as sitting together with Christ in heavenly places (Eph. 2:1,5-6)!

We are already possessors of everlasting life. The impending judgment leaves no question about the outcome for us. We shall NOT come into judgment, for "there is therefore now NO condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom 8:1). God has entrusted the authority to execute judgment to Jesus, because He is the Son of Man.

Because Jesus is the One who came

" . . . We, who were dead in our trespasses and sins, God has made alive. We are made alive together with Christ, so that our eternal outcome is secured. Already God sees us as sitting together with Christ in heavenly places."

down to Earth to be our Brother, to bear our sin, God declares that Jesus is entrusted with the judgment. Jesus, who has granted us life by His death and resurrection, will separate the saved from the lost—the believers from the unbelievers. So Jesus brings a permanent end to spiritual death.

God Is At Work In Us!

At the same time we are continually confronted with the apparent reality of physical death. To man it is so obvious that physical death is the end of life. Physical death appears to be so final, and yet it is anything but final. The true temporary nature of physical death will be revealed as Jesus calls us forth from the grave. "The hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth" (Jn. 5:28-29).

Then again Jesus addresses the matter of judgment. Jesus Himself declares that "those who have done good (come forth) to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of condemnation" (Jn. 5:29).

How are we to understand these words? Our natural reason would take these words as an endorsement of work righteousness. Indeed, we must indeed keep the law if we are to enter into the kingdom of God. But when we are better instructed by the Spirit of our God,

we are led to understand properly that it is God who works in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure. We could never be good enough to attain righteousness by our works, "For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all" (Jms. 2:10).

God states very plainly that "there is none who does good, no, not one" (Ps. 14:3). Every single human being on the face of the earth is seen for what he truly is. God declares, "There is not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin" (Eccl. 7:20).

So what is Jesus saying? Who then can stand before Him on the last day? Those who put their trust in Him for righteousness! Those who connect themselves to Him will bring forth fruits that He has sanctified—works that He sees as good because of *His* righteousness.

By the grace and power of Jesus,

the fruits abound. Jesus teaches us this connection when He says, "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit, for without Me you can do nothing" (Jn. 15:5). So it is that Jesus will look upon these works which He has empowered and placed in our lives as evidence for our righteous judgment.

This judgment of Jesus shall be, and can only be, righteous. It is not based on the will of Jesus alone, but also on the will of God the Father. It is the Father, who desired our salvation, who sent His Son into the world to be the propitiation for our sins; it is this will to save that is ultimately fulfilled in the judgment in our salvation.

We shall not come into judgment, but have passed from death into life. Hearing His Word and believing in Him we do have everlasting life!

—*Pastor Theodore Barthels*



LESSONS FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT

“That we might have hope” (Rom. 15:4)

Ezra Chapters 1-6 and Nehemiah

The Return From Captivity

It had been a long time since the Jews had seen their homeland. They had spent seventy long years as captives in Babylon as God had foretold through the prophet Jeremiah, "This whole land shall be a desolation and an astonishment, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years" (25:11).

The captivity had come because of their sin. The Jews had followed in the footsteps of their brothers, the kingdom of Israel, which had been taken captive by the Assyrians a century before. They had turned away from the Lord in unbelief, to follow after other gods, the false idols of their neighbors. Even though the Lord had sent prophet

after prophet with words of warning and encouragement to turn back to Him, they refused and brought down God's judgment upon themselves.

But now it was over. As the psalmist penned, "Lord, You have been favorable to Your land; You have brought back the captivity of Jacob" (85:1). The Lord had raised up the Persian king Cyrus to defeat the Babylonians. And as had been prophesied, he proclaimed: "The Lord God of heaven has commanded me to build Him a house at Jerusalem. Who is there among you of all His people? May his God be with him! Now let him go up to Jerusalem and build the house of the Lord God of Israel" (Ezra 1:2-3).

A Daunting Task

The Jews were finally free to go home! Soon the first remnant of about 50,000 were wending their way back to Jerusalem.

Ahead was the daunting task of rebuilding—first the Temple and then the city walls. Their initial efforts were directed at building "the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings on it, as it is written in the Law of Moses" (Ezra 3:2). Under the capable leadership of Zerubbabel, a descendant from King David, they proceeded to erect the foundation for the Temple. As Solomon had done years before, they had "the people of Sidon and Tyre bring cedar logs from Lebanon, according to the permission which they had from Cyrus king of Persia" (3:7).

When the foundation had been laid, "all the people shouted with a great shout. But many of the priests and Levites and heads of the fathers' hous-

es, who were old men, who had seen the first temple, wept with a loud voice when the foundation of this temple was laid before their eyes; yet many shouted aloud for joy, so that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people, for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the sound was heard afar off" (3:11-13).

But as the people worked first under Zerubbabel, then under Ezra and Nehemiah, they faced almost constant opposition from the Samaritans, the peoples who were living in the land already. They and their leaders (Sanballat, and Tobiah the Ammonite) did all they could to stop the reconstruction. Letters were sent back to the kings of Persia, warning them of the dangers of allowing Jerusalem to be rebuilt. They ridiculed the Jews, threatening to attack them if they continued, thus trying to discourage them in countless ways.

Then there were the internal problems. When Ezra arrived on the scene with a later group of returnees, he found the people not separating themselves from the peoples of the land. Later on, Nehemiah also had to contend with his own people: "You shall not give your daughters as wives to their sons, nor take their daughters for your sons or yourselves" (Neh. 13:25).

" . . . As God's New Testament people, we too have the privileged responsibility to be focused on "building the Church"—not a physical building of cedar logs and stone, but one made of living stones with Christ as its foundation."

But through it all the Lord blessed His people, and after several decades the work was finally completed. Those who had stood against the Jews themselves finally had to acknowledge the Lord's hand: "They perceived that this work was done by our God" (Neh. 6:16).

Checking Our Focus

As God's New Testament people, we too have the privileged responsibility to be focused on "building the Church"—not a physical building of cedar logs and stone, but one made of living stones with Christ as its foundation.

As he tried with the Jews, also today the devil does all he can to stall, slow down, or altogether stop our progress. We too face the ridicule of the world around us; we too have our sinful nature which would have us pursue the things and pleasures of this world.

God help us to learn from Ezra! As he carefully laid out the Word before the returned exiles, and "gave the sense, and helped them to understand" (Neh. 8:8), so may we also continue to be led by the Spirit back to the Word.

May we make use of every opportunity to sit together at the feet of our called servants of the Word who are to help us study the Bible so that we may apply what it says in our day-to-day living.

God also help us to learn from Nehemiah! As he surveyed the sad state of affairs at Jerusalem when he arrived—how the walls were still in a state of disrepair—he encouraged the people to get back at it: "I told them of the hand of my God which had been good upon me. So they said, 'Let us rise up and build'" (Neh. 2:18). When they were faced with military attack, he encouraged them to keep on, saying, "Our God will fight for us" (Neh. 4:20). And so they did: "With one hand they worked at construction, and with the other held a weapon" (Neh. 4:17).

Let us also "be strong in the Lord and . . . put on the whole armor of God . . . that you may be able to withstand in the evil day" (Eph. 6:10, 11, 13). May we learn to move forward with the Lord's work, knowing that His blessing is on us as we "go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mk. 16:15).

—Pastor Paul Krause



Ladies of Berea, Berea Lutheran Church, Inver Grove Heights, Minnesota



CROSS PURPOSES



So What Is Marriage?

The morals of a godless society have shrunk to such depths that our president, who believes that marriage is a union between a man and a woman, nevertheless tells us that government lawyers are looking into codifying the marital relationship.

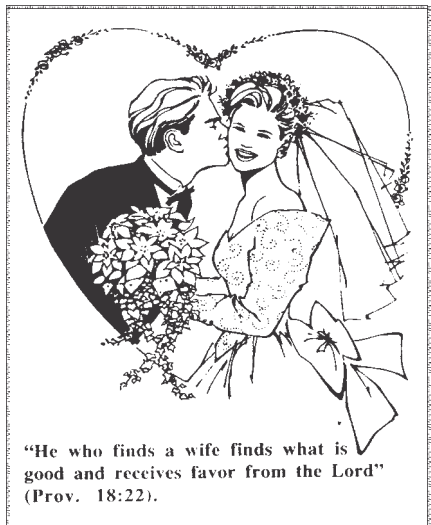
Granted that we live in a secular society. So, what is going to change if the law says that marriage is the union between a man and a woman? Nothing will change! Law may codify morality, but the law does not accomplish or create morality. The most that can be accomplished is that, if such a codification is in fact even passed, same-sex couples will be denied getting into your pocketbook!

We will see. Further, no codification is necessary to confirm that which God Himself has spoken in His Word!

The defense of—and the promotion of homosexuality generally, as well as of homosexual unions—begins with a defiance toward as well as rejection of God's Word. "Having exchanged the truth of God for a lie, God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was meet. And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient" (Rom. 1:26-27).

Can a homosexual be saved? Yes, in the same way as an adulterer, one wrongfully divorced, a drunkard, an idolater, an abuser of spouse or children, a covetous person, or any other sinner is saved—by way of repentance and through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, whose blood and merit has washed away and taken away the sin of all.

So what is marriage? The gracious heavenly Father, who instituted marriage at creation, concluded, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet [suitable] for him" (Gen. 2:18). So what did God do? Make a man for Adam? Scripture



says, "And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man" (Gen. 2: 22).

The divine conclusion of the whole matter is, "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh" (Gen. 2:24). "Male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish [fill] the earth" (Gen. 1:28).

Jesus reiterated these facts. And He answered and said unto them, "Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?" (Mt. 19:4-5)

The husband-wife relationship is illustrative of the relationship of the bride, the Church, to Christ. "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church and gave Himself for it" (Eph. 5:25). Any perversion of the husband and wife relationship breaks the parallel between marriage and Christ and His bride, the Church.

One may search through the Bible from beginning to end and find not one single reference to a marital union between like sexes. And right there is the problem. Promoters of such life-style—whether they are in the church or outside of it (and there are churches that promote it!)—"hold [suppress] the truth in unrighteousness" (Rom. 1:18), with the end result that "professing themselves to be wise, they became fools" (Rom.1:22).



Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness. . ."
Isaiah 5:20.

The only conclusion to which the Bible believer and disciple of our Lord Jesus Christ can come is that marriage is the life-long union of one man and one woman. Laws may change in society. Standards of morality have certainly changed for the worse. But the child of God in his or her own life and confession will not change principles which have been established upon the Word of God. The child of God cannot approve that which God calls sin.

The fact that society approves what the Heavenly Father condemns does not change reality. Sin is sin!

So long as the world shall stand, all people (including children of God, in the flesh as we are) are confronted by temptation from within and without. The struggle against sin and our flesh will not end until the penitent sinner has been taken home to heaven. We daily sin much and indeed deserve nothing but punishment (Fifth Petition).

Yet the child of God, believing the Bible, recognizes the love of God in Christ Jesus, even if he cannot understand the depth of the riches of that love. For the child of God "the blood of Jesus Christ His [God's] Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 Jn. 1:7) is one of the grandest passages. We are washed, we are cleansed, and we are sanctified by the merit and grace of Jesus.

It is only this precious gospel that

changes hearts and creates the desire within the heart to live within the bounds of honesty and morality that glorifies the Lord our God. Until the heart is changed, nothing is changed. Government codification does not change hearts—any more than the Law has the power to save the soul!

As God is our judge, we will let God be the judge of those who walk their own way. Yet we will judge that which is contrary to God's will. We will call sin what it is, sin. Victory over sin is not accomplished by denying the

Truth. It is overcome through Christ revealed in sacred Scripture.

The tragedy is that Satan continues to mislead by asking, "Has God said?" (Gen. 3:1)

The truth is that marriage according to God's institution is the union of a man and a woman. The source of that truth is God's Word, which also tells us concerning any sinful activity: "He that covers His sins shall not prosper; but whoso confesses and forsakes them shall have mercy" (Prov. 28:13).

—Pastor Daniel Fleischer



SIGNS OF OUR TIMES

Third in a series

"Trust in God and do good"

When I first began selecting messages from church signs for comment, I determined not to comment on those that were simply quoting Bible passages. But when such an exhortation as this (seemingly from Psalm 37:3, which says, "Trust in the Lord") is placed out there for the less-than-knowledgeable passersby to contemplate, without additional explanation, it could result in all kinds of wrong ideas. That old saying is certainly true with regard to the Bible: A little knowledge is a dangerous thing.

First we have to consider what it means to trust in God—also to trust God, to believe in God, and to believe God. Anyone can say, "I believe in God; I trust God." But he may mean no more than "I believe that there is a god, and I hope he does right by me." As we

noted in a previous article in this series, if a person does not know the true God through Jesus Christ His Son, any claim of belief and trust in God is meaningless. In fact, it is a form of idolatry. (Note that the specific name that the psalmist uses here—"Jehovah," commonly translated "Lord"—carries rich gospel content.)

Because of such wrong beliefs, some people "trust" that God will get them out of a predicament into which they have gotten themselves, if they promise (make a deal?) to do better next time or not to do it again. Some people "trust in God" to miraculously take away some pain or infirmity through a faith healer.

We could come up with many other examples of "trust in God" that people have conjured up in their own minds or

which they have learned from false teachings. But this should be enough to remind us that there is such a thing as a wrong belief and trust in God.

To trust God in the right way has to include taking Him at His Word. He has given us His written Word in the Bible. Now, in order to trust God, one has to know what God says. This kind of knowledge comes from hearing and studying God's Word all through life. Thereupon follows "trust in God"—that is, relying on God, first for forgiveness of sins and eternal life through Jesus' work of redemption, and then for all the things in life that He wills to give us.

The second part of the church sign ("do good") also has to be explained and put in its proper place. When a true believer does good, it is not a payment for salvation, but a fruit of faith in Jesus. As we learned in catechism class: "Good works are everything that a believing child of God does in the fear and love of God" (Gausewitz Catechism, Question 232, p. 141).

Jesus put good works in their proper place when He said, "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing" (Jn. 15:5).

Furthermore, when these few words "Trust in God and do good" are posted on a church sign, there is an implied

result. Questions will arise such as "Then what? What will I get if I trust in God and do good?" This is where the human mind, left to its own devices, will surely come up with salvation by good works. Witness all pagan religions.

Therefore, it is imperative that we be able to follow up with additional truths from God's Word to show people that salvation is by God's grace alone, not by works. "By grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast" (Eph. 2:8-9).

When we understand these things correctly, the passage on the church sign becomes a beautiful summary of justification and sanctification. First, true faith—"Trust in God." Then works—"and do good."

The Bible, especially in Paul's epistles, contains numerous examples of Christians being exhorted and encouraged to a life of good works—not to pay for or gain salvation, but as a thank-offering to God for His grace and mercy in Christ.

May we continue to have opportunities to tell these things to a great number of people in this world.

—Gene Rutz

(Editor's Note: These articles are revised versions of articles that previously appeared in another periodical.)



GROW UP!

If a person is called naive, this is generally not considered to be a good thing. But it can be. For God says, ". . . in malice be babes" (1 Cor. 14:20). In

the evil that surrounds us, it is better to be unaware, not informed, and without knowledge.

By nature we want to "fit in." We

want to be mature and understanding when it comes to evil. But again, when it comes to evil, God wants us to be babes.

In our confirmation instruction and Sunday School, we will hear about certain sins. In the Bible God shows us the consequences for fornication, adultery, homosexuality, and murder. But these are not things upon which we dwell. We are by no means explicit in our instruction, but we do show our young people the difference between right and wrong. It is still for their benefit if they don't have to witness these acts on TV, or read about it in books, or hear it on the playground.

This is also proper for us as adults. We should not know the latest degradation of God's will as it is displayed on *The Bachelorette* or *Joe Millionaire*, or be able to understand the dirty joke or the sexual innuendo. But often we do. That's what we might be pouring into our system because we don't want to be left out.

There is a trap that persuades Christian parents to let their children be exposed to all sorts of foul stuff—because "they're going to find out about it eventually anyway." I can't say that God agrees with that philosophy. What value is found in exposing youngsters to nudity, gore, and foul language?

What value do adults reap by exposing themselves to the very same thing? Because we're adults, do we think that we are immune to the effects of indulging our sinful flesh?

Sin does not work like an immunization in which you may receive a little bit of the smallpox disease to teach your body to build antibodies. Even a supposedly "controlled" expo-



sure to sin is not beneficial.

Rather than benefiting us, exposure to sin causes us to build up a tolerance for evil. The more we see of it, the more that we desensitize ourselves to it. Instead of being babes in malice, one becomes an expert. Do we even think it odd when there are live-in situations on sitcoms? Do we find it unusual if there is a homosexual character on a series? Do we even blink when there is an "adult situation"? Most likely, no. Even the new Disney movies routinely portray adults living outside of marriage, and we don't bat an eye. This is not lost on the youth.

When we become mature in wickedness, it is not merely a waste of time, it is harmful. In fact, it's playing right into Satan's hands. This is a slap in the face to God because it is for these very things that Jesus had to die. The book of Hebrews tells us that when we behave in such a fashion, we have "insulted the Spirit of grace" (Heb. 10:29). Filling ourselves with things to which God is opposed will work against faith. When we constantly expose ourselves to the filth that is so readily available, we cannot help but be affected. It is all too easy to live what you learn, and then die because of what you've forgotten.

When it comes to malice we are told to be like babes, but when it comes to

spiritual things we should have maturity and strive for excellence. When it comes to spiritual matters we should have a child-like faith, but that does not mean that we should not mature and grow in the understanding of the Scriptures. We're often quick to try to grow in things that are evil, but we chafe at the notion that we can and should grow and mature spiritually.

There is a temptation to be complacent when it comes to our study of the Word of God. There always seems to be something more important to do than have a family devotion or time for personal study of the Bible. There is always something that seems more attractive than attending church or Bible Class. Yet our Lord wants us to be mature in understanding, namely in

the understanding of what is spiritual.

The message of the gospel fits on a postcard. Yet, God gave us more than one statement on a postcard, He gave us the 66 books of the Bible. All of Scripture is given to encourage growth and maturity as Christians. The more you know about God, the stronger your faith will become. The more you know about God, the more you'll be able to handle the ups and downs of life. The more you know about God, the more you'll be able to resist temptation. Just as an adult can handle more weight than a child, so also a Christian who is mature in understanding can handle more than one who is content to be immature and stunted in growth.

—Pastor Michael Schierenbeck



"CLOSE COMMUNION"

Or: "Who is to be admitted to the Lord's Supper?"

Eighth In A Series

The very essence and purpose of Holy Communion calls for the removal of a private or public offense before one communes.

This is not a matter of arbitrariness or of legalism. Since the Lord's Supper is intended only for Christians, if a person has made his Christianity doubtful, whether to one or many fellow-Christians, he must make the effort to assure them that he is a penitent sinner. Neither party can pretend that nothing happened, when private or public sin is not dealt with.

The same applies to what is called "the sin of implacability." This is when



someone refuses to be reconciled or soothed, thus refusing to be forgiving toward a fellow penitent. The Lord's Supper is the distribution of the forgiveness of sins. We make right use of the Sacrament when we have a true desire for God's forgiveness and at the same time have a readiness to pass on that forgiveness to another (and also to seek forgiveness, if we have been in

the wrong).

Hence the petition preceding the words of institution: "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us." (Page 27 in the liturgy is not just some shallow ceremonial formality. Listen up!)

Martin Luther encourages us to pray "*that our Father in heaven would not look upon our sins, nor on their account deny our prayer ... We are worthy of none of the things for which we pray ... We daily sin much and indeed deserve nothing but punishment. So will we also heartily forgive, and readily do good to those who sin against us.*"

In Matthew chapter 18 Jesus supplies us with a beautiful depiction of God's forgiveness—and a horrible depiction of a man refusing to share it. That Scripture prompts the question: What right do I have to hold back the love and forgiveness of God from my fellowmen? The answer: none whatsoever.

Faith in the forgiveness of sins saves us. And it immediately wants to go to work—even when it is very hard work to love and forgive someone (be

it husband, wife, child, in-law, pew-mate). It is much easier to be cool and compassionless, pretending to be children of God, nursing grudges which blossom forth into gossip. Hypocrisy comes easy. Satan tempts us in that direction every day.

The Lord's Prayer goes on to say: "Lead us not into temptation" and "Deliver us from evil"—the word "evil" in the original Greek being the same word as used for "the evil one," Satan himself.

This prompts another question (which is what self-examination is all about): "Is Jesus my Master and Manager, or is Satan sometimes more in control of my heart and actions?"—even though, to all appearances, one might hardly detect that from the outside of my life!

Perhaps the "Christian Questions and Answers" from Luther's *Small Catechism* could be taped on the bathroom mirror, to be seen and read every morning and evening. What a good idea!

Don't put them too high, though. They are for all members of the family.

—Pastor Em. Warren Fanning

FROM A PASTOR'S DESK —

GOD IN THE ROOM OF JESUS CHRIST IN THE HEART?

The last weeks we have been witnesses to the successful effort to remove the monument containing the Ten Commandments from the court building in Alabama. We have also witnessed the passionate defense for retaining it in public view in the building. Theoretically, it was removed because it violated the constitutional

separation of church and state. We shall leave that to constitutional lawyers. On the face of it, however, that argument rings hollow when the nation itself names God on its coins and has a chaplain in the Congress. The court system itself uses the name of God in its oaths. Every president has quoted (mostly, misquoted) Scripture

and has invoked God. Somehow this smacks of hypocrisy!

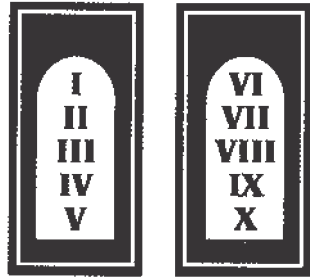
The passion to remove any reference to God in public discourse is of course just another manifestation of the anti-religious mentality of our age in general, and specifically of the anti-Christian mentality in the post-Christian era in which we live.

Having the Ten Commandments carved into and displayed on a slab is, however, by itself quite meaningless, except for the evidence it gives of the natural knowledge of God. People certainly are not more religious because they spend money that is imprinted "In God we trust." They will not be less religious if it weren't there or on a stone slab in a courthouse. The natural knowledge of God contributes to a restraint of evil. It does not create faith, and it does not reveal Christ or bring salvation!

In our society God is the god of many faces and many names. Therefore the passion to invoke the name of God in public discourse is itself a violation of the very law carved into that monument, "Thou shalt have no other gods before Me."

Furthermore, would the people who are troubled at the removal of the Ten Commandments allow one to stand up beside this monument and declare that the God of the Ten Commandments is the Triune God, beside whom there is no other? Would they show the same passion when confronted with the reality that God's Word is being removed, twisted, distorted, and compromised in many churches in our land—maybe even theirs? Do they practice their faith in their home and in the church?

The real problem is not the Ten Commandments have been removed



from the courthouse. The real tragedy is that Jesus Christ is not at the center of man's heart!

The meaningful words are not those on a slab of stone—Israel was dancing around an idol even while Moses was receiving the law from God! The meaningful Word is that which possesses the heart. "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Rom. 10:9-10).

We lament the growing apostasy of our age. Yet we should not be surprised. Scripture says, "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away" (2 Tim. 3:1-5).

Time spent protesting the removal of the Ten Commandments from the courthouse would be time better spent in study of the Word—which leads to

personal repentance, acknowledgment of sin, and which leads to Christ, true God and true Man, in whom is forgiveness and life eternal.

Pastors serve best who heed the word of the Lord through the Apostle Paul, "I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who

shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom, preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine" (2 Tim. 4:1-2).

—*Pastor Daniel Fleischer*



Pastors, teachers, students, and children at the House dedication, May 22nd. Pastor Udo fourth from left.

From the Editor:

It was last July when Pastor Karl Stewart, Grace Lutheran Church, Live Oak, Florida, passed along these pictures, as well as the information about the Nigerian house dedication to us.

About the house dedication in Efa, Nigeria, Pastor Stewart wrote: "On May 22 a dedication service was held

for the new house for Pastor Patrick Udo. He is the principal and head teacher of the NCLC Bible Institute in Efa, Nigeria. The home was built at the garden site in Efa, where we lease about two acres of land. The site also has a small dormitory for the students of the Bible Institute and another home for Pastor Edwin, the other teacher at



Teacher's House for Pastor Edwin. It is next door to the new house.

the Bible Institute. Those pictured are many of those who worked so hard to clear the land, make the cement blocks by hand, build the walls and floors, and put on the roof. Pictured are all except Pastor David Koenig, who was attending the wedding of his son, Karl, in the U. S."

The Board of Missions report to the Coordinating Council adds these details: *"Pastor Karl Stewart spent the months of May and June serving in Nigeria during Missionary Koenig's visit to the U.S. He taught in the Bible Institute, visited the orphans each week, and preached at various village churches. He also spent a week in Lome, Togo, teaching Pastor Gideon of Denu, Ghana, and Pastor Kossi, who lives in Lome. We thank Pastor Stewart for his selfless work in Christ's name, and we are also grateful to the members of Grace for allowing Pastor Stewart this leave of absence. During those two months services (at Grace, Live Oak) were conducted by pastors Nathanael Mayhew, John Schierenbeck, and Paul Larsen, as well as lay readers from the congregation."*

Twenty-fifth Anniversary

Prince of Peace of Loveland, Colorado, will hold a celebration of twenty-five years of the Lord's gracious support in a service and program November 9, 2003. The service will be held at 3:00 p.m. at church, with a fellowship meal to follow. We cordially invite all present and former members of the congregation, as well as other friends and CLC members, to join us for this special occasion. For more information please contact Pastor Peter Reim, 620 E. 50th St., Loveland CO 80538; Phone (970) 663-3594; E-mail: peter-reim@CLClutheran.com



New house dedicated for Pastor Udo.

COVER:
John Fox