

LUTHERAN SPOKESMAN

"...THE SCRIPTURE CANNOT BE BROKEN." — JOHN 10:35



"For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God..."

(Romans 8:14)



PRAY FOR THE SPIRIT

Pastor David Reim · Vernon B.C., Canada



“If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!” (Luke 11:13)

When I was a young child, I recall feeling somewhat disappointed when I heard this Bible verse. It was building up to a grand conclusion, “If you then, being evil know how to give good gifts...” Then I expected, “How much more will your heavenly Father give even greater gifts to those who ask!”

Again, as a child I thought about all the greater things God could give. When the passage continued, it somehow wasn’t quite what I had in mind: “How much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him.”

I soon realized that there is no greater gift than the Holy Spirit!

Earthly fathers can give us only earthly gifts: food, clothing, a home, and other things to enjoy in this life, but all such things are temporary. Through the Holy Spirit, however, our heavenly Father can give gifts that last forever!

Let’s take a few moments then to remember blessings that make the Holy Spirit the ULTIMATE gift from our heavenly Father.

The Spirit gives the most precious possession of all—Jesus Christ. Without the Holy Spirit we can’t even confess that Jesus is our Lord (1 Corinthians 12:3). Without the Holy Spirit we do not belong to Christ (Romans 8:9). But by the Holy Spirit we were baptized (1 Corinthians 12:13) and through baptism we “have put on Christ” (Galatians 3:27).

When we have Christ as our Lord and Savior, we have forgiveness of all sins. With our sins forgiven we have escaped condemnation. With all condemnation removed, the arms of our Father are open to receive us. “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God... and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ” (Romans 8:14&17).

What more could we ask for? Yet there IS more! Jesus is teaching believers, who already have the Spirit, to pray for the Spirit and receive from Him a multitude of additional gifts. The Holy Spirit is the Divine Distributor of all the gifts and blessings Jesus won for us on the cross. “One and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills” (1 Corinthians 12:11).

The Ultimate Gift!

Through the Spirit we receive the “fruits of the Spirit” which are “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23).

These are the gifts that make life truly meaningful and worth living. Pray for the Spirit to give these fruits in greater abundance.

Do we want to be great in God’s Kingdom? Jesus teaches that greatness in His kingdom comes through humble service. The Holy Spirit gives the “spiritual gifts” which enable us to serve in a meaningful way.

- “The manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit...” 1 Corinthians 12:7). With this wisdom we can truly help one another and give good counsel.
- “To another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit...” (v. 8). With Spirit-given knowledge we are able to teach His Word to others (the greatest gift we can give!).
- “To another faith by the same Spirit...” (v. 9) This is not speaking of the saving faith (that all believers already have) but of a greater faith to trust God in all kinds of adversity and to share that confidence with others in their times of weakness.

These are just a few of the Spirit’s gifts which enable us to serve one another and thus to promote the growth of God’s Church. The Holy Spirit gives the power to really make a difference—to be able to “give liberally,” to “show mercy,” or to give “exhortation” (Romans 12:8).

God also gives the Holy Spirit as the seal of our Christian faith. “...Having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory” (Ephesians 1:13).

All this is just a sneak peak at what the Spirit can do for us! Do we want the power of Pentecost to continue in our lives? Pray for the Spirit. Let us pray for the gifts we need to resist sin and be useful participants in God’s kingdom.

Pray for the Spirit, and God promises to give the ultimate of all His gifts!



The Festival of The Holy Spirit...

A Celebration of Joy

Pastor Thomas Schuetze • Coloma, Michigan

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” (Romans 15:13)

According to our time-honored custom, we Christians celebrate three main festivals each year during the course of the Christian church year.

At CHRISTMAS we remember how God sent His Son Jesus to our world as a tiny child at Bethlehem that He might serve as our Redeemer from death, hell, and sin. With hearts brimming with joy we commemorate the birth of Christ. We sing happy Christmas carols and share “Merry Christmas” greetings—all because of the Bible truth that our heavenly Father condescended in love to give us the best Gift ever in the person of His own dear Son.

Likewise, we celebrate a second major festival of the church year amid songs of jubilation. Our hearts swell with joy at EASTER because of the extraordinary event this festival commemorates. Our churches reverberate with exuberant “alleluias.” We greet each other merrily with “The Lord is risen! He is risen indeed!”, for we know Jesus’ resurrection proves beyond a doubt that everything the Bible teaches about Him and His work as our Savior is true. Jesus paid for our sins completely. He broke the power of the devil. He robbed the grave of its sting. Reasons indeed for Christian hearts to break forth with anthems of joyous praise to God!

Set Apart as Holy!

Soon we will observe the third major festival of the church year: PENTECOST. This festival too is a celebration of joy. What makes it so?

On Pentecost we remember the special work the Holy Spirit performs for us.

By His power in the gospel, the Spirit accomplishes the awesome miracle of instilling faith in Jesus within our hearts. We realize that apart from the Spirit’s work we could not benefit from nor appreciate any of the blessings our Savior obtained for us through His holy life, sacrificial death, and glorious resurrection. In the words of Martin Luther in the Third Article: “I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, nor come to Him. But the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel and enlightened me with His gifts.”

The Bible word for this work of the Holy Spirit is “sanctification,” which means “to set apart as holy.” That’s what the Spirit did for us when He turned us from unbelief to faith in God’s Son, Jesus Christ. He set us apart from the godless world and transformed us into holy children of God who are privileged to serve Him without fear in holiness and righteousness for

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KING COMFORT

Pastor Em. Warren Fanning • Sun City, Arizona

No, this writing is not intended to be a promotion for a bedding or mattress company! Rather, it has to do with Jesus and the comfort He sends from heaven where He reigns as our King.

Actually, though, the gospel allows us to go to bed and sleep in peace and comfort (Psalm 4:8)!

The word “comfort” occurs frequently in the Bible as well as in worldly writings. Take Shakespeare, for example. In *The Tragedy of King Richard II* we find the Queen and others troubled, woeful, and sad (Act II, Scene ii). The Duke of York walks in, and she asks him to “speak comfortable words.” His answer contains a memorable line: “Comfort’s in heaven; and we are on the earth, where nothing lives but crosses, pain, and grief.”

It is a grim line, but it makes one think of heaven and the comfort there.

Yet this comfort is not just a “thing” or a “commodity.” It is a Person! Our Comfort in heaven is Christ Himself. And His Ascension and Session (being seated) provide us with much comfort down here, before we get to heaven.

We are in the brief Season of Ascensiontide. We have come through Christmas, which teaches that God became Man. We have come through Epiphany, which teaches that this Man really is God! Then came Lent with its sharp focus on this very special Man taking our sins upon Himself. It cost Him His life. But then soon came Easter—where we rejoice in the comfort that “He lives!”

Comfort Pouring Out of the Bible!

My old Catechism (Concordia Publishing House, 1943) dealt well with all this, focusing on the comfort conferred by Jesus’ resurrection, His ascension, and His Session at the right hand of His heavenly Father.

And three “comforts” pour out of the Bible:

- As our Prophet, Jesus sends preachers and teachers of the gospel.
- As our Priest, He intercedes for us constantly before our Father.
- And as our King, He “governs and protects His Church as the Head of the Church and rules the world in the interest of the Church” (Catechism).

Sometimes that third point seems not so easy to accept, given the deterioration in Christianity this past century, plus the extreme secularization of our society, and the unrest everywhere.

The Duke of York was right: “On the earth... nothing lives but crosses, cares, and grief.”

But our Savior has provided for that, as we know. He and the Father sent the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, right on the heels of Easter and Ascension. That Spirit is the One who brings all heaven’s comfort down to us—pointing us to Christ, giving us Christ, keeping us in Christ—to be our Comforter sent by the God of all comfort (see 2 Corinthians 1:3) and by His Son.

We are always in the care of our King. And we always have access to the comfort He brings in Word and Sacrament.

God-Pleasing Fatherhood

Pastor Mark Gullerud • Bowdle, South Dakota

What is fatherhood? What does it mean to be a father?

Those interested in learning the meaning of this important role in life would be well advised not to study the current examples of the unbelieving world.

By observing the practice of a growing number of men, we might be led to think that fatherhood involves no more than biologically fathering children. After fathering a child, heartless self-serving men cut and run, leaving mother and child to fend for themselves. Other proud and arrogant men think they are doing society a favor by donating to a sperm bank (believing that they are improving the gene pool).

Holy Scripture has long genealogical lists of so-and-so begetting so-and-so, but these lists are not recorded and preserved in order to teach that fatherhood involves only the begetting of children!

One of the most important purposes of Bible genealogies is to reveal the long family line of the promised Messiah. Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ was born of flesh and blood so that through His redemptive work we could become a part of His eternal family. And in this very special family, the Lord enables Christian fathers to be a blessing to their children. Far from being a cut-and-run begetter, a Christian father makes a commitment to provide his children with a loving, healthy, stable, safe, and well-supplied family home.

Christian fatherhood goes beyond merely ensuring that children are well cared for and provided for. A Christian father will also be actively engaged in the rearing of his children. The apostle Paul gives divine counsel both on how to—and how not to—go about this parental function, when he exhorts, *“Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord”* (Ephesians 6:4, NIV).

By addressing fathers here the apostle is not forgetting about the role of mothers in family life. What he says is intended to impress fathers with the responsibility of serving as the head of the family. They are to take a leading role in the children's Christian upbringing.

To Guard Against...

When it comes to what to guard against in fatherhood, the apostle warns not to do or say things that would serve to exasperate, frustrate, or anger their children. The wide array of pitfalls includes being inconsistent, saying one thing and doing another, showing favoritism, yelling at the children, being harsh and oppressive in handing out discipline, being too lax and lenient, being overly protective, and being unrealistic in what is expected of the children according to their age maturity.

When and where we fathers have sinned against our children, let us in Christian humility apologize and seek



their forgiveness. We want them to know how God wants fathers to conduct themselves.

On the positive side, the apostle encourages fathers to bring up their children in the training and instruction of the Lord. The root meaning of the word for “training” includes the sense of instruction, nurturing, discipline, and correction (the word translated as instruction can also have the meaning of warning).

A Christian father will also serve as spiritual priest of the family. As such he is to nourish the souls of the children, teaching them about the Lord, His will for their lives, and about His loving, gracious, and merciful ways.

In addition to using Holy Scripture, Martin Luther prepared the Small Catechism—a very helpful book for fathers in their instruction of the children. At the beginning of the Catechism, Luther wrote, “As the head of the family should teach them in a simple way to those of his household.”

This small book, the Catechism, covers all the basic Christian teachings for the benefit of our children. Fathers,

A Christian father will also serve as spiritual priest of the family. As such he is to nourish the souls of the children, teaching them about the Lord, His will for their lives, and about His loving, gracious, and merciful ways.

how often do we make use of this handy book in the raising of our children?

When a child's sinful nature kicks up, displaying a rebellious spirit, this is to be met with loving, measured discipline. On these occasions (as well as any other opportunity that presents itself), the Lord expects fathers to be diligent in correcting what is amiss, warning what is to be guarded against, all the while instructing the children what is good, right, and pleasing to their Savior God.

Christian fathers will want to keep in mind that the threats and demands of the Law can never transform a child's attitude. Rather, we want them to be motivated by the love of Christ. We will teach and remind the children of their Lord's redeeming love and His wonderful merciful kindness toward them and all sinners.

The primary goal in fatherhood is to help children grow in the Lord so that throughout their lives they will look to the Savior in faith and follow Him in Christian love. Our most fervent hope and prayer is that they will be and remain members of God's eternal family.

May God bless our fathers in carrying out their crucial role in Christian fatherhood!



The True Vine

Pastor John Klatt • Rapid City, South Dakota

“I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser.

Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. 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. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.” (John 15:1-8)

Jesus did not only say *“I am the vine”* (v. 5), but also *“I am the TRUE vine”* (v. 1). Jesus is the real vine!

All vines in nature that grow branches and produce grapes are only pictures of this true vine. Jesus alone is the source of life for us who apart from Him are dead in trespasses and sins.

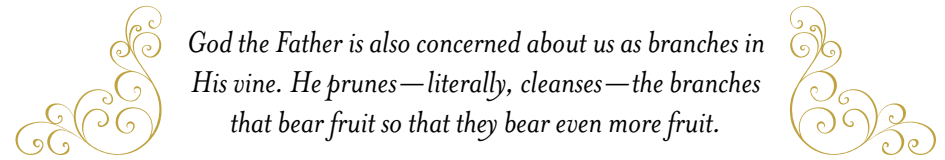
We learn this same great truth about Jesus from the statements that He is *“the true Light”* (John 1:9; 1 John 2:8) and *“the true bread”* (John 6:32). The light of day that enables us to move about and the bread that gives us strength are pictures of the life that Christ alone can give.

We draw our life and strength from Christ. He is the vine, we are the branches. Our faith in Him is our connection to Him through which His life flows to us. From His gospel word we have forgiveness of our sins and are *“already clean”* (v. 3).

As branches connected to a vine are able to bear fruit, disciples of Jesus draw from Him the strength and ability to do works that are pleasing to God. Without Him we can do nothing of the sort.

God the Father is also concerned about us as branches in His vine. He prunes—literally, cleanses—the branches that bear fruit so that they bear even more fruit.

We understand this as the discipline by which He humbles us and draws us closer to Him.



No Substitute!

If faith in Jesus ceases, the vine-branch connection is broken. Then, as the Savior warns here, the disciple becomes like a branch cut off from a vine, dry and withered. Nothing remains but the certain prospect of divine judgment.

There is no substitute for Him who is the true Vine. This becomes clear when we look at the things that people try to substitute for Christ.

A documentary film titled *Forever* (2006) furnishes some examples. In it, Dutch director Heddy Honigmann put together a series of interviews with people who had come to visit and tend graves in a cemetery in Paris where many famous artists are buried. They place flowers or other items on the graves. They tell of how they have been moved by the music, art, or literature of the person.

In itself that is not a bad thing, of course, but the impression given is that for these people music, art, and literature have become a replacement for religion. Instead of going to church to worship the living God and risen Savior, they go to a grave in hopes of communing with a dead artist. Apparently they think they have found a vine that can supply what only Jesus Christ can supply.

The same must be said of those who care nothing for Christ and the Word of God but claim to commune with God in nature.

When Jesus calls Himself the true Vine, He warns against trying to draw life from any source other than Himself. Recreation, hobbies, and work are all good and useful, but when a person neglects worship and Bible study in favor of them, isn't that trying to get life out of some vine other than Christ?

By Word and sacrament Christ nourishes and strengthens our vital faith connection to Him. The result: much fruit—good works that glorify God.



“Portraits of Christ” in John’s Gospel:

Ch. 1 The Son of God	Ch. 8 The Defender of the Weak	Ch. 15 The True Vine
Ch. 2 The Son of Man	Ch. 9 The Light of the World	Ch. 16 The Giver of the Holy Spirit
Ch. 3 The Divine Teacher	Ch. 10 The Good Shepherd	Ch. 17 The Great Intercessor
Ch. 4 The Soul-Winner	Ch. 11 The Prince of Life	Ch. 18 The Model Sufferer
Ch. 5 The Great Physician	Ch. 12 The King	Ch. 19 The Uplifted Savior
Ch. 6 The Bread of Life	Ch. 13 The Servant	Ch. 20 The Conqueror of Death
Ch. 7 The Water of Life	Ch. 14 The Consoler	Ch. 21 The Restorer of the Penitent

Christian Apologetics

James Arndt · Member at Peace Thru Christ Lutheran Church and School - Middleton, Wisconsin

“But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you...” 1 PETER 3:15

Introduction To Worldviews

“I AM WHO I AM” (Exodus 3:14)

In articles so far we’ve seen that there is no neutral ground between the Christian and the non-Christian. This means that we will defend Christianity as a whole and complete system, and we will set it against any other (2 Corinthians 10:5).

But what exactly is a worldview?

A worldview is a network of presuppositions or foundational commitments that a person has. These commitments are not tested by natural science. They guide one’s thinking and hold the highest authority in one’s life. If one’s core presuppositions were to change, then one’s whole view of life would change with it.

In order to challenge other people’s beliefs, one needs to do an internal critique of their worldview in order to expose the errors in their presuppositions. And to do this effectively we need to understand the three components of a worldview—namely, reality, knowledge, and ethics.

What is reality?

Is the universe real or does it just appear to be real?

Am I real?

The Christian worldview states, *“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth”* (Genesis 1:1). From that sentence we learn the reality of God’s existence. Genesis does not argue for God’s existence but presupposes it. This means that there is a clear distinction between the Creator and



His creation, and all reality can only be properly understood when in reference to Him.

The second component of a worldview refers to knowledge.

We tend to take knowledge for granted, but what exactly is knowledge and how does one justify a claim to actually ‘know’ something? God has revealed many things for us to know. In His general revelation (nature), God has revealed His existence (Romans 1:20), His glory (Psalm 19:1-2), and His wrath (Romans 1:18). He has also revealed Himself by special revelation to Moses, the prophets, the evangelists and apostles (2 Peter 1:21). Most importantly, God has revealed Himself through His Son Jesus.

God’s existence is undeniably known to all people (Romans 1:20; 2:1), which means that all knowledge necessarily reveals God. Because He has pre-interpreted all facts, the only way that man can claim to have knowledge is if his thoughts reflect God’s thoughts.

Yet we wouldn’t say that something is good only because God said so—or that what is good is based on something *outside* of God, either. Instead, we would say that the standard of all ethics and morality is grounded in God’s nature. He is holy. Therefore His moral commands are universal, and the words He uses reflect His very character (Psalm 119:137, Mark 10:18b).

What do other worldviews say about reality, knowledge, and ethics? Some say

that all of reality is based upon random chance processes. If that were the case, how could we depend upon science which needs order and predictability to work?

Others may say that everything is material, and we human beings are merely matter in motion. If that were the case, how do laws of logic (upon which knowledge depends) make sense? The laws of logic cannot be heard, seen, or touched, but we depend on them to know things.

Claiming that knowledge is possible while saying that immaterial things do not exist does not work.

If we do not need God as a grounding point for ethics, where do we look? Some say to humans; but what gives one human the authority to determine what is right or wrong? Another place to look is society, but isn’t a society made up of humans? And if one human has no authority to determine right from wrong, why would a group of humans have that authority?

Everybody has presuppositions, and one of the jobs of an apologist, a defender of the faith, is to understand one’s opponent’s worldview better than he (the opponent) does. One who trains himself to do an internal critique can show the contradictions in any non-Christian worldview.

It will be seen that the proof of the Christian worldview is the impossibility of its contrary.



(The apologetic method and organization for these articles is taken from the book *Pushing the Antithesis: The Apologetic Methodology of Greg L. Bahnsen*, American Vision, Powder Springs, Georgia, 2007.)

Defilement before God comes from within, not without!

Pastor Andrew Schaller • Watertown, South Dakota

When He had called the multitude to Himself, He said to them, “Hear and understand: Not what goes into the mouth defiles a man; but what comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man.” Then His disciples came and said to Him, “Do You know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?” But He answered and said, “Every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted. Let them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch.” Then Peter answered and said to Him, “Explain this parable to us.” So Jesus said, “Are you also still without understanding? Do you not yet understand that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and is eliminated? But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. These are the things which defile a man, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man.” Matthew 15:10-20

Whenever I read this Word of God, I can't help but shake my head at the striking example of hypocrisy.

The words, often included in our Lenten Passion History readings, are found in the 18th Chapter of John's Gospel, and tell us: “Then they (i.e. Caiaphas, and a midnight gathering of some of the members of the Sanhedrin) led Jesus from Caiaphas to the Praetorium, and it was early morning. But they themselves did not go into the Praetorium, lest they should be defiled, but that they might eat the Passover.”

Caiaphas and his cronies refused

to set foot in the Praetorium...lest they be rendered unclean. This after convening a portion of the Sanhedrin in the middle of the night to condemn an innocent man on trumped-up charges!

When their false witnesses couldn't agree, Caiaphas asked Jesus a self-incriminating question (Luke 22:70) — “Are You then the Son of God?”

Jesus didn't “plead the fifth” but answered plainly and truthfully (Luke 22:70), “You rightly say that I am.”

We will get into the reason why Jesus answered as He did in a moment... but

first let's consider the words of Jesus recorded in Matthew 15:10-20 (Please READ!).

When I was a child, I was told: “You are what you eat.”

But, of course, the statement is not literally true.

Moreover, Jesus tells us that what makes us unclean in God's sight is neither what we eat nor is it eating with unwashed hands. What's already inside a person is what makes one unclean before God. Since each of us is born of two sinful human beings, we are born with a sinful nature. Our corrupt nature reveals itself daily in all manner of sinful thoughts, words, and deeds—such as “evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.”

So when an unbalanced man goes into a McDonald's Restaurant and starts shooting people, folks immediately begin asking: “How could this happen? Why would someone do such a thing?” Jesus answered that question a long time ago when He said that these things proceed “out of the heart....”

Questions Answered!

People will also ask, “How could God let such a thing happen?” The answer is that God is not the origin of evil, but such evil finds its origins in the sinful, corrupt, self-centered nature of human beings.

Why did Herod have the children of Bethlehem killed?

Why were Caiaphas and the religious leaders willing to condemn and kill an innocent man?

Why did Pontius Pilate send a man he knew was innocent to be crucified?

Why do we willfully put ourselves in positions where we are tempted to sin?

Why do we say hurtful things to our spouses?

The answer is that we are corrupt, rotten, and sinful within. We live in a corrupt world and are surrounded by sinful human beings.

Now I'd like to get back to the questions asked earlier. Why didn't Jesus “plead the fifth”? Why did Jesus answer the High Priest's question (“Are you the Son of God?”) when He knew that His answer would be considered blasphemy?

It was Jesus' incredible love for sinners...among whom we are numbered.

It was divine grace and love on the part of Jesus (and the Father!) that led Him to take our sin and guilt upon Himself and suffer and die to atone for every misdeed.

He did it that we might be cleansed of sin...by faith in Him.

He did it so that when we die and are finally separated from our corrupt sinful nature, we might go to be with the Lord, ultimately enjoying an existence with Him apart from sin, death, sorrow, and crying (see Revelation 21:4).

We Christians still have unclean thoughts. Sins of word and deed still show up in our lives because we have corrupt natures. Rather than minimizing such things, let's confess them and seek cleansing in the blood of Jesus who loved us and gave Himself for us.

We are rotten sinners...with corrupt natures...who stand forgiven in the blood (1 John 1:7) of the crucified and risen Savior, Jesus Christ!



“ALL HISTORY IS GOD’S STORY!”

God never loses

Exodus chapters 5 – 10

Pastor Em. Paul R. Koch · Eau Claire, Wisconsin

Only a fool will challenge the Almighty, and the Emperor of Egypt had to learn the hard way that God never loses a contest. While we shudder as God ravaged Egypt’s economic, civil, and religious life, it does our heart good that God’s will gets done on Earth as well as in heaven. We want to be on God’s side in the winners’ circle.

Let’s watch as Jehovah’s mighty hand won the contest against a foolish mortal who thought he ruled Egypt-land. The EofE (Emperor of Egypt) was a tough fellow, over-confident that he had divine status, and he did not intend to roll over and play dead before a God he did not recognize: “Who is the LORD, that I should obey His voice...? I do not know the LORD...” (5:2). Though God would rather win his heart than subdue him by force, this fool chose to toughen himself against the God he soon got to know better.

That’s what made the contest drag on for months. See how he misrepresented a religious issue as laziness (5:4-5,17) in order to punish his slaves? That callous disregard for God’s religion and for His people instigated the LORD’s declaration: “Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh.” (Stand back and watch, for I, Jehovah God, will make visible My superiority over the uppity king of Egypt. When I have finished with the EofE, he will yield to Me, not only allowing the Israelites to leave as per our original request – but actually issuing a

federal mandate that My chosen people get expelled from Egypt.)

If you note the repeated “I am the LORD,” you realize that this is a key point: God insists on being who He is—Master of the Universe. God will not compromise on being true to Himself as Creator, and His creation will serve Him through the miracles/strokes against the wicked king and his unholy empire.

God makes a second, related point—that Egypt deserves to know the truth about deities and religions: “the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD” by the unassailable evidence of nature bowing in obedience. Four times God left an opening for the EofE to change his mind—encouraging him to “Let My people go, that they may serve Me” (8:1,20; 9:1,13), but the Emperor dug in his heels.

Consequently, God’s agenda escalated: First, He struck the life-blood of their “sacred” Nile river to become rotten; then He roused billions of froggy marsh critters to invade homes, and nobody escaped by pulling up the covers (8:2-7). The frog-flood prompted the EofE to ask for divine intervention, and Moses graciously extended him the honor of picking the time when God would remove the frogs (8:9). He picked “Tomorrow,” and God obliged, just as if the EofE were in the driver’s seat. (Our God surely has winning ways!) The King then relapsed again into tough-minded resistance to God’s will—but the tougher he got, God

got even tougher, gripping Egypt-land ever more tightly.

Dead frogs can be shoveled out, but what can anyone do when the dust of the earth morphs into lice? Sensible people admitted, “this is the finger of God” and called it quits. But not the EofE, whose “heart grew hard, and he did not heed them” (8:19). By now, the sacred Nile, its revered critters, and the venerated Egyptian soil had all turned against their obstinate king. His toughness merited tougher treatment by God.

A Foolhardy Contest With God!

Next, God employed creatures that were not venerated or revered – and amplified them so exponentially that “the land was corrupted because of the swarms” of bugs (flies, midges, gnats, hornets, wasps, etc.). This divine stroke spared Israel but was so devastating to Egypt that the EofE capitulated, granting a three-day religious retreat to Israel (8:28)—“but just don’t go very far away,” he begged. When God miraculously swept Egypt clean of the bugs, the EofE reversed himself again. Evidently he couldn’t (or wouldn’t) break free of his slavery to self and Satan.

Lest the EofE miss the point that God was targeting Egyptians and sparing Israel, the next divine stroke made it clear, for God directed a virulent and fatal disease to infect Egyptian livestock but spare the flocks of Israelites. The king investigated and found it to be true (9:7) but was not moved to abandon his foolhardy contest with God.

So God ramped up another notch with a plague of boils on humans and all animals still alive in Egypt—cats, jackals, and other wild critters

venerated in the heathen Egyptian religion. From this point onward God was done playing games with the EofE (9:12).

In case anyone wonders why God allowed this mis-matched contest to drag out so long: God was making a religious statement about Himself, and the EofE would become the case-book example of human folly. “For this purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth” (9:16).

Then God made a merciful proposal: the king and his people might avoid the next stroke if they would take cover when the lightning and hail come boiling down. When the storm was over, everything left outdoors was hammered into the ground while those Egyptians who trusted God’s word found safety indoors. That was right impressive, and the Emperor came up with a fine-sounding apology; but Moses had heard that sorry tune before, and he did not buy it (9:18-30).

So it boiled down to this: On the one hand God abandoned the obstinate king, while on the other hand He moved forward with a great and worthwhile lesson—that the next generations should learn “the mighty things I have done in Egypt, and My signs which I have done among them, that you may know that I am the LORD” (10:2).

To carry the point, God sent His squadrons of locusts to cover the face of the Earth, fill every nook and cranny of homes, and devour everything edible left over from the hailstorm—at which point the EofE was driven to admit his sinfulness and to beg forgiveness. His words sounded good,

but (we deduce that) his heart wasn't in it!

What finally budged the king to issue the federal mandate expelling God's people? It was the plague of darkness so thick that for three "days" and three nights no Egyptian dared move, while the children of Israel had light in all their dwellings. That pressured the EofE to sputter: "Get away from me! Take heed to yourself and see my face no more! For in the day you see my face you shall die!"

With that murderous threat against God's servants, he turned on his royal heel and stalked off stage. When Moses responded, "I will never see your face again," he meant what Pharaoh didn't mean—that they were already separated by the divine barrier between salvation and damnation. You and I will see Moses in God's heaven, but Pharaoh's face is obliterated among the legions of the damned.

What shall we then say to these things? Let us take to heart the warning embedded in these six

chapters: "Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of un-belief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, while it is called 'Today,' lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin" (Hebrews 3:12-13).

Today anyone who does not know the LORD aright (in the person of Jesus, His beloved Son), is not going to surrender his autonomy to an unknown, invisible deity. Nonetheless, what is foolishness to the non-Christian is God's wisdom, and Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1:18-31).

Lord, have mercy upon us; Christ, have mercy upon us; Lord, have mercy upon us!



See "Installation" in announcements on (page 18)

"Is there a hell?" OR "Has God Indeed Said...?"

Pastor Emeritus Daniel Fleischer • Oakdale, Minnesota

The devil in the cloak of the serpent posed the question that ensnared Adam and Eve. God said, "...but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat..." (Genesis 2:17). Satan asked, "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?'" (Genesis 3:1)

God had declared the consequence of disobedience. If Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden fruit, they would "surely die" (Genesis 2:17). Flatly contradicting God, Satan said, "You will not surely die" (Genesis 3:4).

God said what He meant, and meant what He said! With sin came death—spiritual, physical, and eternal. With the sin of Adam and Eve "... death spread to all men, because all sinned" (Romans 5:12).

But God is gracious. He gave to the fallen couple the wonderful promise of a Savior from sin. He promised the Seed of the woman who as man's substitute under the divine law would suffer a bruised heel in the fearful battle through which He would deliver a mortal wound to the devil.

To the devil God said, "He shall crush your head" (Genesis 3:15). The Seed of the woman was the Lord Jesus Christ through whose righteous act "the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life" (Romans 5:18).

While humanity must suffer the bitter consequences of sin in this life—the greatest of which is death—in Christ eternal death has been conquered and is no longer a threat to any who believe in Christ. "For God so loved the world that He

gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

Yes, in Christ Jesus God the Father reconciled the whole world unto Himself (2 Corinthians 5:19). Blessed are all who by power of the Spirit believe in Him who is the personification of the gospel, for Scripture says, "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1).

In his Gospel Mark records, "He who believes and is baptized shall be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned" (16:16).

In one of his epistles John records, "God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life" (1 John 5:11, 12).

Making God a Liar!

Nevertheless, unbelieving man out of the deceit of his own heart contradicts God as did the devil.

We recently read (*St. Paul Pioneer Press, from the New York Times—3/5/11*) of a "most influential evangelical pastor" who has a problem with the teaching that—as he describes it—"a select few Christians" will go to heaven "while the rest of humanity spends forever in torment and punishment in hell with no chance for anything better." The writer terms the idea of eternal punishment in hell "misguided and toxic."

Such a deceiver is neither a Christian pastor nor an evangelical. He is a purveyor of

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Announcements



Installation of Pastor Kesterson

On the big day at St. Stephen Lutheran, many of Pastor Kesterson's extended family were present (see photo on page 16). The same day the congregation celebrated the anniversary of its sanctuary (it had belonged to a funeral home and was permanently moved to the site 25 years ago). Don Drews narrated a slide show that depicted the move, the construction of a foundation, and the reassembly of the building. Before this the congregation had met in rented facilities.

Left: Pastor Kesterson with wife Peggy and son Mark. Right: Other pastors participating were Steven Karp, Rollin Reim, & Delwyn Maas.

CLC GENERAL PASTORAL CONFERENCE • June 14-16, 2011

Immanuel Lutheran College — Eau Claire, Wisconsin

Agenda:

- Update on Current Theological Issues in American Lutheranism, With a Focus on Former Members of the Synodical Conference – Pastor Delwyn Maas
- Attending Religiously “Affiliated” Schools: A Pastoral Perspective – Pastor David Schierenbeck
- New Testament Exegesis (1 Thessalonians 4:13ff) – Pastor Caleb Schaller
- A Study of Forgiveness as it Relates to the Lord's Supper – Professor Steven Sippert
- Becoming a More Effective Preacher – Pastor Paul Nolting
- Why Young People Are Leaving the CLC (Survey/Study) – Pastor Paul Naumann
- Old Testament Exegesis (Joel 2:28ff) – Pastor Paul Krause

Communion service speaker: Pastor Norman Greve

Communion Service Liturgist: Pastor David Schaller

Conference Chaplain: Pastor Richard Kanzenbach

Program Committee: Pastors Edward Starkey & David Baker

Excuse Committee: Pastor Lawrence Bade

Organ Coordinator: Pastor John Klatt

Is there a hell? *Continued from Page 17*

death! Yes, in this world everyone is free to believe whatever he chooses to believe, and a preacher is free to preach what he chooses to preach.

But one who denies that only those who believe in Christ will go to heaven while those who reject Christ will go to hell is not a spokesman of God, but makes of God a liar. This purveyor of false doctrine who is described as “part of the emerging church movement, which caters to younger believers” speaks the imagination of his own mind.

Does God the Father desire the eternal death of any sinner? Absolutely not! It is His desire that all people turn from their unbelief and wickedness and live (Ezekiel 33:11, 2 Peter 3:9).

In this regard God again said what He meant, and meant what He said! For that very reason He promised the Savior, nurtured that promise throughout the Old Testament period, and ultimately brought it to pass through the birth, suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Although Christ died for all, has God indeed said that only believers in Christ Jesus will go to heaven and spend eternity with Him? *“Then the King will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of*

the world” (Matthew 25:34). “And thus we shall always be with the Lord” (2 Thessalonians 4:17).

Has God said that those who deny and reject Him will go to hell for eternity “with no chance for anything better”? He will say to those who do not have the Son of God (1 John 5:12) and who do not believe (Mark 16:16), *“Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his wicked angels... And these will go away into everlasting punishment” (Matthew 25:41,46),* from which there is no release (Luke 16:23-26).

The God of Scripture is the living God who loves all. What more could He have done and offered to manifest that love and His desire for the salvation of the sinner? How much more could He have done than what He did?!

Concerning both the salvation of those who believe in Him or the judgment of those who reject Him in unbelief, He is faithful to His Word!

People can deny the truth, but they cannot change it! *“Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).*

Thus saith the Lord. Blessed are all who believe, for they shall see Him whom they have believed in heaven!



Announcements

Minnesota District Delegate Conference

June 12, 2011 - 3:00 p.m.

Grace Lutheran Church — Sleepy Eye, Minnesota

Agenda:

- A Christian in Public Service – Matt Dick
- Prayer – Pastor Theodore Barthels
- Synodical Board Reports

- Old Testament Exegesis (Joel 2:28ff) – Pastor Paul Krause

Great Lakes Delegate Conference June 6-7, 2011

Messiah Lutheran Church — Hales Corners, Wisconsin

Sessions begin at 10:00 a.m. Monday, running until noon on Tuesday

The Festival of The Holy Spirit...

Continued from Page 4

as long as we live on Earth and then
hereafter in heaven.

This is the happy truth we confess every
Sunday when we declare in the Creed:
"I believe in the Holy Spirit; the Holy
Christian Church, the communion
of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the
resurrection of the body; and the life
everlasting."

In view of all that God's Spirit has done
for us, let us ever praise Him! Let us look
forward to the approaching Pentecost
Festival with eagerness and joy when we'll
be privileged to honor Him for His great
work of love.

**Glory and praise,
still onward reaching,**

Be Yours, O Spirit of all grace,

**Whose holy power
and faithful teaching**

**Give me among
Your saints a place.**

Whatever good by me is done

Is worked by grace divine alone.

— TLH #243:4 —

About the Lutheran Spokesman Cover
LOVE. BE LEAD. LIVE ETERNALLY...

Is the title of this month's cover art that was
Art directed and designed by Matt Schaser.
Send your photos and art (in digital format)
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Lutheran Spokesman

"...THE SCRIPTURE CANNOT BE BROKEN." — JOHN 10:35

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