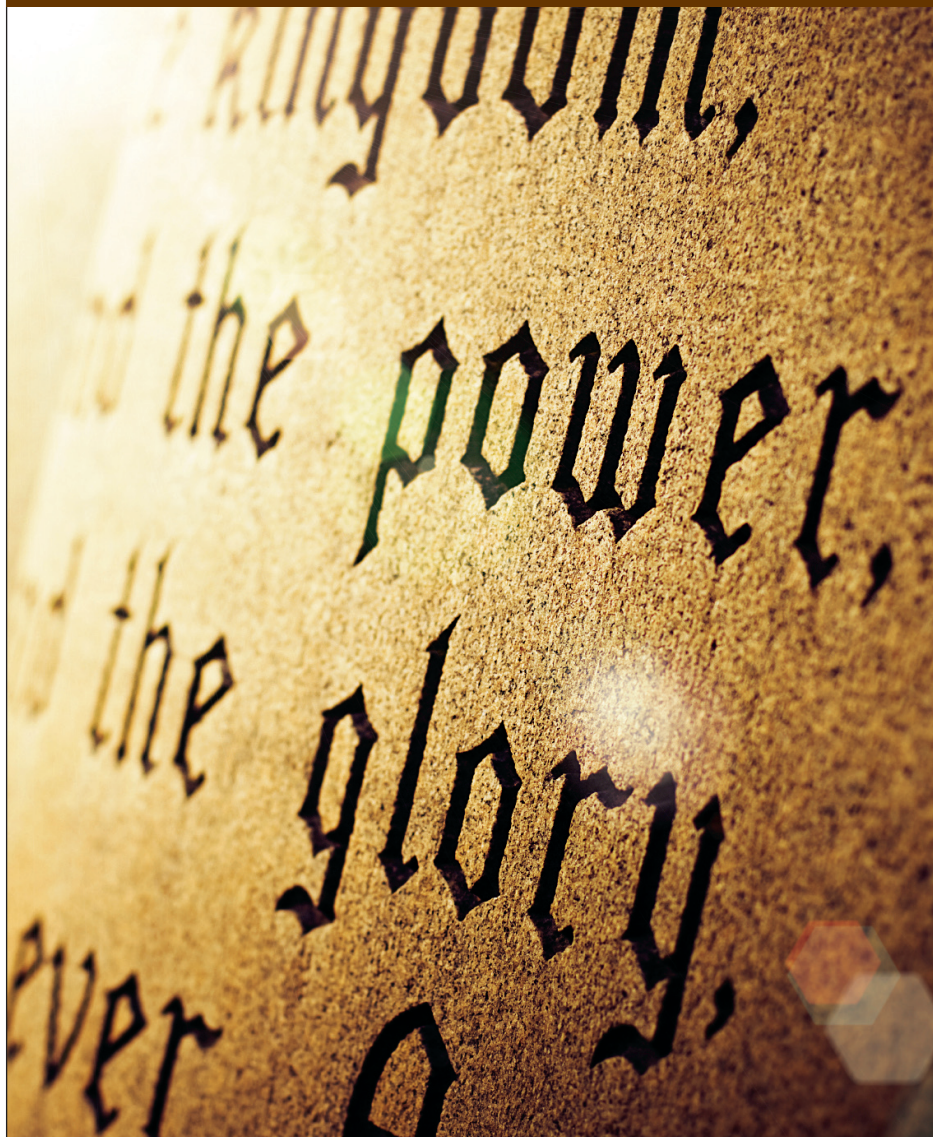


LUTHERAN SPOKESMAN

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



“The Christian’s Vital Breath”

Pastor Nathanael Mayhew • Lawrenceville (Atlanta), Georgia

The hymnwriter **John Montgomery** wrote, “Prayer is the Christian’s vital breath.”

How important it is to remember that prayer is a vital sign of the spiritual life of a Christian — much like a spiritual pulse. If prayer-life is lacking, then most likely faith needs a spiritual jump-start from the Word. Or maybe we have been doing a lot of praying with an incorrect focus—praying more for physical blessings than for spiritual.

Old Testament believer Nehemiah provides a wonderful example of a faithful prayer life. Through Nehemiah the Holy Spirit has recorded a balanced model prayer which can help us keep a proper focus (please read Nehemiah 1:1-11).

Nehemiah’s prayer can be divided into four parts: **Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication.** (This format can be easily remembered with the acronym ACTS.)

Nehemiah began his prayer with **Adoration**, praising the LORD (1:5).

The God to whom Nehemiah



The hymnwriter John Montgomery (November 4, 1771 - April 30, 1854) was a British editor, hymnwriter and poet.

prayed was not a man-made god of wood or stone or a Persian deity. The God that Nehemiah was placing his trust in was the God of heaven, Jehovah.

Nehemiah went on to make **Confession** of his own sins as well as the sins of his people (1:6-7).

Nehemiah knew he had sinned. We too know we have sinned against God in many ways. We too have acted corruptly, disobeying God’s will by the things we should not have done and also by not doing what we should have done.

NEHEMIAH 1:1-11

1 The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah. It came to pass in the month of Chislev, in the twentieth year, as I was in Shushan the citadel, 2 that Hanani one of my brethren came with men from Judah; and I asked them concerning the Jews who had escaped, who had survived the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem. 3 And they said to me, "The survivors who are left from the captivity in the province are there in great distress and reproach. The wall of Jerusalem is also broken down, and its gates are burned with fire." 4 So it was, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned for many days; I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven. 5 And I said: "I pray, LORD God of heaven, O great and awesome God, You who keep Your covenant and mercy with those who love You and observe Your commandments, 6 "please let Your ear be attentive and Your eyes open, that You may hear the prayer of Your servant which I pray before You now, day and night, for the children of Israel Your servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel which we have sinned against You. Both my father's house and I have sinned. 7 "We have acted very corruptly against You, and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, nor the ordinances which You commanded Your servant Moses. 8 "Remember, I pray, the word that You commanded Your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations; 9 'but if you return to Me, and keep My commandments and do them, though some of you were cast out to the farthest part of the heavens, yet I will gather them from there, and bring them to the place which I have chosen as a dwelling for My name.' 10 "Now these are Your servants and Your people, whom You have redeemed by Your great power, and by Your strong hand. 11 "O Lord, I pray, please let Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant, and to the prayer of Your servants who desire to fear Your name; and let Your servant prosper this day, I pray, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man."

Confession of sins is an important part of our relationship with God. We need to realize our own unworthiness and then come to the LORD for His grace in forgiveness.

Confession leads us to **Thanksgiving** (1:10). After making confession of his sin and the sins of his people, Nehemiah thanked God for not forgetting them and leaving them in this foreign land.

We also want to remember to

thank God for guiding us with His great power and strong hand. We should thank Him for the many ways that He has kept us from temptation and delivered us from evil.

Above all, we want to be thankful for that greatest demonstration of God's power—how He has overcome sin, eternal death, and even the devil for us through the perfect life of His Son Jesus and His atoning death on the cross, whereby He takes away all our sins!

Then (1:11) Nehemiah brought his **Supplication** to the LORD.

Nehemiah was praying that the LORD would bless his meeting with the king (see chapter 2). When he heard about the problems in Jerusalem, Nehemiah wanted to go and help out, but he was still employed by the king in a very important office. The LORD granted him mercy in the sight of the king, and the king allowed Nehemiah to return to his homeland—more than once!

Just as the LORD heard Nehemiah's prayer, so He hears our prayers.

Nehemiah's prayer is a balanced,

model prayer that we can use and benefit from in our own difficulties. Let us bring our prayers before God with **Adoration** of a great and merciful God; with **Confession** of our own sins and shortcomings; with **Thanksgiving** for the Lord's past mercy and deliverance; and finally with **Supplications**—requests for both physical and spiritual help and strength.

And we can have confidence that the Lord will hear and answer the prayers we offer up to His throne in Jesus' saving name.



THE SACRAMENT OF HOLY BAPTISM

A TRUE ACT OF GOD

Pastor Andrew Schaller • Watertown, South Dakota

"For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ"

(Galatians 3:26-27).

"An act of God"

is what it is called in our legal system when an event occurs that is entirely outside of human control. Floods, tornados, earthquakes, hurricanes, tsunamis, and the like are natural disasters for which no human being can be held responsible because they're considered "acts of God."

Though the Triune God provides richly and daily for every living thing, when the worst imaginable disasters occur that may result in thousands of fatalities—these are labeled "acts of God"?! Isn't it sad?!

Let me remind you that some of the greatest things ever done—in a positive sense!—are also acts of God because only God could and did accomplish them!

For example: The creation of this world was an act of God—NOT the result of some accidental, cosmic ka-boom!

The redemption of humankind was an act of God—for God accomplished it without input or aid of mankind. We are redeemed because the Son of God took up human flesh and blood and lived a sinless life according to God's Law and then willingly laid down that life to atone for every human sin. This is an act of God which causes our hearts to leap for joy!

In our Scripture text (Galatians 3:26-27) the Spirit of God reveals two great acts of God.

The first one mentioned is — faith!

The Galatians had become sons of God (God's beloved children) through faith in Christ Jesus (and so have we). God says plainly in His Word that this faith is created by the Spirit of God. Thus the imparting of faith is properly an act of God (cf. Ephesians 2:8-10). It is not something man brings about, but something the Holy Spirit works.

The second one mentioned is — Baptism!

God can do whatever He wants to do. But He has revealed in His Word that He works through means—that is, through the gospel in Word and Sacrament.

Baptism is a sacrament and, as such, it is a true act of God, for He

Himself works in it.

Baptism is an act of God, for in it He does what no one else can do—He cleanses of sin. We know that He does this because He says so in His Word (Acts 22:16; Acts 2:38-39).

Baptism is an act of God, which is why the Apostle Paul calls it a washing that regenerates: "*But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit...*" (Titus 3:4-5).

Baptism is an act of God, for only God could make spiritually dead people come alive through simple water and His Word.

Baptism is an act of God—and because God is the only active agent through His Word, Scripture also says that Baptism saves, for "*He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned*" (Mark 16:16). And Peter writes by divine inspiration, "which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ..." (1 Peter 3:21).

May we treasure this act of God and look back upon the day of our Baptism with great joy. On that day we were first granted saving faith and received into God's Family and Kingdom.



"BEHOLD, THE SON OF GOD!"

(Matthew 3:16-17)

Pastor Nathan Pfeiffer • Spokane, Washington

The church season known as Epiphany is largely misunderstood and to a certain extent even ignored.

Unlike the seasons of Advent and Lent, Epiphany is not marked with special services in many churches. There are no special Epiphany sales at the department stores nor are there any special Epiphany family dinners which relatives drive great distances to attend.

So what is Epiphany all about?

Epiphany means "an appearance or manifestation, especially of a deity." On the calendar date of January 6 the Church marks the visitation of the Gentile Wise Men to the Baby Jesus, led by the appearance of the star.

When we listen carefully to Scriptures read in church during the Epiphany season, we note an emphasis on the different ways Jesus showed or "manifested" Himself to be the Son of God.

One Epiphany text in particular drives this point home. It is the account of Jesus' baptism in the Jordan River. As important as the baptism of Jesus was (... *to fulfill all righteousness,*" Matthew 3:15), what happened after the baptism is equally important.

The Holy Spirit emphasizes this by leading Matthew to use the word BEHOLD. Though it's not used very much in our everyday conversation, it's a good word! The word is similar to "Check it out!" or "Look at that!" It focuses a person's special attention on what is about to happen.

After Jesus had come out of the Jordan River after being baptized, *"BEHOLD, the heavens were opened to him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest upon him; and BEHOLD, a voice from heaven said, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased'"* (Matthew 3:16-17, ESV).

The Holy Spirit wanted His readers to pay close attention to what was being revealed here. God the Holy Spirit and God the Father made their presence visibly and vocally known at Jesus' baptism. And why? Because at His baptism Jesus was "revealed" to be the beloved Son of God anointed to be our Savior! This Jesus, who had such a humble servant's form, was Himself the almighty and eternal God!

Thus we see the great significance of Epiphany. It helps us make a proper transition from the cradle of Christmas to the cross of Lent.

It's good to be reminded again and again that it was no mere human who was first laid in the manger and who then laid down His life on the cross.

The One who was lying in a manger and was then nailed to a cross truly was/is God Himself. Jesus is the beloved Son of God with whom the Father is well pleased.

Jesus is our Savior—God who went to incredible lengths to rescue us from the devil's iron grip, to save us from our sins, and to give us the gift

of eternal life. "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8).

So let us not pass over or ignore the blessed season of Epiphany. Rather, as we go from the cradle of Christmas to the cross of Lent, let us stand in complete and utter amazement that the Father sent His well-beloved Son on His mission to save us from sin and all its consequences! Praise be to God!

STUDIES IN SECOND TIMOTHY

How to stand fast in an evil day

"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." 2 Timothy 2:15

Pastor Em. Daniel Fleischer • Oakdale, Minnesota

2 TIMOTHY 3:10-17

10 But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, 11 persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra—what persecutions I endured. And out of them all the Lord delivered me. 12 Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. 13 But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. 14 But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, 15 and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. 16 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

As we view the intense assaults on Christianity in our day, we may feel that such assaults are recent phenomena. If we feel that way, it is only because now is our time to

endure what has been happening ever since sin entered the world.

Throughout history Christians have been subjected to hatred, ridicule, and death for their faith in Jesus Christ. Referring to events

recorded in the book of Acts (see chapters 13-16), the apostle Paul says to Timothy, *"But you have carefully followed my...persecutions, afflictions which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra—what persecutions I endured."* Recall also the Reformation era and the experiences of Luther.

What we face today is disconcerting but not unexpected, for Paul also wrote to Timothy: *"But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come" (3:1), and "Yes, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution" (3:12).* The apostle told the Ephesians that after his departure *"savage wolves [false prophets and teachers] will come in among you, not sparing the flock."* Such would arise even *"from among yourselves" (Acts 20:29,30).* And yes, Paul writes that *"evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse" (3:13),* seeking to mislead the believer in both faith and life!

We should not expect it to be different in these latter days!

In the Scripture verses before us, we are privileged to hear the apostle's instructive and supportive words in his farewell letter as he equipped Timothy for his ministry in a godless world. Paul spoke first of all of his doctrine. *"But you have carefully followed my doctrine..." (3:10).*

It was Paul's doctrine because he preached what had been committed to him by the Lord. As the bearer of the doctrine committed to him, he testified to eternal salvation by grace through faith in Christ

Jesus (Ephesians 2:8), and he was a stalwart testifier of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ from the dead (1 Corinthians 15).

Furthermore, Paul's *"manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance" (3:11)* witnessed to the power of the gospel. He expended his life proclaiming Christ. His love was evident in his concern for his people (see Romans chapters 10 & 11). His perseverance was evident in the face of the many assaults he endured for his proclamation of the gospel. Paul's example testified to Timothy what it meant to *"endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ" (2:3).*

Continuing in what we have learned

As we study Holy Scripture, we see that no evil can befall us beyond what others have already endured, which by the grace of God they were able to overcome!

To the success of Timothy's ministry as well as for his personal assurance, Paul encouraged his young co-worker to *"continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them" (3:14).* Timothy had been persuaded by the doctrine of Paul, and he trusted the faithful spiritual father who had nurtured him. Timothy should avoid any philosophy or flattering speech that contradicted the doctrine which he had learned and of which he had been convinced. For his ministry

Respect for our faithful spiritual fathers begets blessings in ministry and life!

Timothy—and we—should hold fast to the doctrine, being steeled to persevere also by the same example of Paul!

We will be blessed as we continue in the things we have learned, “*knowing from whom we have learned them.*”

Some may piously object to our respect for the fathers, suggesting that we should forget them and get back to Scripture. To this Dr. Norman Madson Sr. said to the Synodical Conference (at its 75th anniversary in 1948), “But what if Scripture, to which they appeal, has something to say about those fathers who have spoken to us the Word of God... And this is what Holy Writ enjoins upon us all: ‘*Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct*’” (Hebrews 13:7). [Madson, *Preaching to Preachers*, p. 203].

Respect for our faithful spiritual fathers begets blessings in ministry and life!

What Timothy learned from Paul was no different from what Timothy had learned on the knees of his grandmother and mother (2 Timothy 1:5), for “*from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are*

able to make you wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (3:15). All who are wise unto salvation can endure a great deal, for when this passing life is over, then real life—eternal life—is gained because the victorious Redeemer lives.

Continue therefore in the things which you have learned from the Holy Scriptures—Scriptures which are inspired of God and thus as true and eternal as God Himself! The everlasting Word of God is “*profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness*” (3:16).

The Scripture is God’s Word which “takes man in hand, lays the gentle yoke of His Savior upon him, puts his reckless life in order, and makes of him a ‘man of God... complete, equipped for every good work’” (3:17) [Franzmann, *Concordia Bible with Notes*, p. 421].

The Word of God is spirit and it is life. It energizes the believer to service and confirms to him perfect rest from the toil and trouble of this present world.

Take our hand, O Lord, and lead us to that perfect rest. Amen!



“In This Is Love...”

Teacher David Bernthal • Fond du Lac, Wisconsin

It's not only around Valentine's Day that we hear about love. Throughout the year we hear and/or use the word 'love' in any number of contexts.

“Love is a many splendored thing.” — “I love your new haircut!” — “I'd love to see them get into the playoffs.” — “I love Moose Tracks ice cream.” — “I love you, Mommy.” — “I'd love to see that guy get what's coming to him!” — “I love You, Lord Jesus.”

The word 'love' is often over-used, abused, and misunderstood in the English language. Is it any wonder that our God chose the more precise verbiage of the Greek language to express the love we receive from Him and the love with which we respond to His love?

The Bible's account of Simon Peter's restoration by the Lord Jesus is an excellent example of God's desire to help us understand the depth of His love and our great need for His love in our lives.

This narrative—see the entire episode in John chapter 21—actually begins in the Garden of Gethsemane before Jesus' arrest. Peter had boldly stated that he would never abandon nor deny his Savior, even to the point of death. “I won't

deny you, Lord. *I'd* never do such a thing! Even if all others turn away from you, *I'll* remain true to You.”

Peter's first-person 'I's' were very near-sighted. He was looking to his own courage and strength to cling to Jesus. Our Lord warned Peter of the fate of the prideful, telling him that he would deny his Lord and Savior three times that very night.

Fast-forward past Jesus' atoning sacrifice on the cross and His victorious resurrection.

The disciples had seen and been with the resurrected Lord. By the sea they were gathered with Him for a third time since His return to life. We hear Jesus ask, “*Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me...?*” (John 21:15)

In the Greek language the word Jesus chose for 'love' was *agape*—a love which does not seek its own but is self-sacrificing; it is a love which gives, not waiting or worrying about getting something in return (That's the kind of love Jesus has for us!).

Perhaps not liking where this conversation was going, Peter answered, “*Yes, Lord, You know that I love You.*” But Peter was not claiming a superior love for Jesus any longer. Instead, he used the Greek word *philia*, meaning a “brotherly love.”

The Lord Jesus then asked Peter a

second time if he had unconditional love for Him. And Peter once again claimed only brotherly love.

When Jesus questioned Peter the third time, Peter was cut to the heart, not only because of the repeated question but because the Lord used Peter's own word for love when He asked, "*Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me [even with a brotherly love]?*"

And In Our Own Hearts?

This time Peter responded with a heart-wrenching, "*Lord, You know all things; You know that I love you*"—as much as to say that he knew the Lord could see into his heart and there discover that brotherly love was all Peter could claim!

When our Lord Jesus searches our hearts, what kind of love does He find?

Even as redeemed children of God, do we have and demonstrate an all-consuming, passionate, selfless love for our Savior?

God requires our unconditional love in the 'first and great' commandment: "*Jesus said to him, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind'*" (Matthew 22:37).

How easy it is to discover that we don't always have the great *agape* love for God or for our neighbor in our hearts. For example, how do we respond to those around

us? Friends, family (beginning with our spouse), acquaintances, even total strangers? Is it our life's goal to live for these people, always seeking their best interest, never asking anything in return?

What about toward our enemies? Do we have unconditional love for them as Jesus commands? (Matthew 5:44). If not, then how can we claim to love God, "*for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?*" (1 John 4:20)

Thanks be to God that our salvation relies not on the love we have for Him, but rather on the love He has for us! "*In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation [perfect payment] for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another*" (1 John 4:10-11).

Our loving God has not only shown us an example of pure love, but through the Savior's work of redeeming us He has covered our sin and cold hard-heartedness with His love. At the same time He has given us His powerful Word through which the Holy Spirit is able to shape our stony hearts to more resemble His.

May the Lord fill our hearts with His love, enabling us to show and share this love with all people—beginning with our "loved ones" at home!



33 But when they came to Jesus and saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs. 34 But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out. 35 And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you may believe. 36 For these things were done that the Scripture should be fulfilled, "Not one of His bones shall be broken." 37 And again another Scripture says, "They shall look on Him whom they pierced." 38 After this, Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly, for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus; and Pilate gave him permission. So he came and took the body of Jesus. 39 And Nicodemus, who at first came to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds. 40 Then they took the body of Jesus, and bound it in strips of linen with the spices, as the custom of the Jews is to bury. JOHN 19:33-40

Too Much to Ask?

Pastor John Klatt • Rapid City, South Dakota

It has been said that no teacher has ever asked as much of His disciples as Jesus has asked of His.

And it is true that what Jesus asks of His disciples is astonishing.

He calls for a devotion greater than that extended to father or mother, son or daughter (Matthew 10:37).

He calls on His disciples to deny themselves and take up the cross, at the same time declaring that whoever is unwilling to do so cannot be His disciple (Luke 14:26f).

He asks of His disciples that they confess Him openly (Matthew 10:37) and that they be faithful to Him until death (Revelation 2:10).

Whether or not anyone else has asked such devotion of disciples, it is certain that Jesus is the only one who has the right to ask it.

We understand why as we see Him

lifted up on the cross. It is there that we see His devotion to us—a devotion that inspires the highest devotion to Him.

Jesus' devotion to us was, first of all, devotion to His heavenly Father. His submissive death on the cross was an act of loving obedience to the Father's will. In Gethsemane He struggled with the horror of the cross yet went forward to face it with prayer to the Father, "Your will be done."

John's account of the crucifixion shows that it was God's will that Jesus should submit to it by pointing out how the Scriptures were fulfilled: the soldiers cast lots for Jesus' clothing; He called for something to drink; none of His bones was broken; they pierced His side with a spear—all of these events were foretold in the Old Testament.

Jesus went to the cross just as it was

written of Him (Matthew 26:24). It was God's will that His Son should bear the world's sin and suffer the curse of sin by hanging on a tree (Galatians 3:13).

This was the divine plan of salvation devised before creation and revealed to fallen mankind by the Holy Spirit through the prophets.

In Jesus' acceptance of death on the cross, we see His devotion to all mankind. For a world of sinners Jesus endured the most painful death that cruel man could devise. And He also suffered the agony of hell when, during those hours of darkness, He cried out, *"My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"*

In all this Jesus took the place of sinners. He suffered the full measure of divine wrath for human sin to free sinners from being cast into hell for their sins. He reconciled us to God and made us God's children and heirs of eternal life.

Such devotion inspires devotion!

We see this already immediately after the death of Jesus when two secret disciples were emboldened to come out into the open. Joseph of

Arimathea went to Pilate and asked permission to take charge of Jesus' body. He was joined by Nicodemus who had come to talk to Jesus late at night for fear of being seen with Him. Now he came in daylight and spent lavishly on myrrh and aloes. These two men personally prepared Jesus' body for burial and laid it in Joseph's new tomb.

The uplifted Christ had become paramount to them! Considerations of family, fortune, and honor had faded into the background. They took up the cross and followed.

The responses of Joseph and Nicodemus to the uplifted Christ help us understand His call for unqualified devotion from all those who would be His disciples. Jesus' unspeakably great sacrifice FOR US inspires that unqualified devotion which He desires FROM US.

To see the uplifted Christ and to believe that what He suffered on the cross He suffered for us is to see Him as supreme. Everyone and everything else in our lives falls back and takes its place behind Him who loved us and gave Himself for us.



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 |

"Living Our Faith In This Present World"

Pastor Em. Daniel Fleischer • Oakdale, Minnesota

On a sports talk show recently the subject was Tim Tebow, quarterback for the Denver Broncos. Through his college years Tebow had a reputation of being a confessing Christian on the field as well as off. This reputation has followed him into pro football, where he has had mild success and his share of critics.

One commentator said that he handles the criticism well, noting that for Tebow there is more to life than football. He is anchored in his faith and has a higher goal than accomplishments in football. His goals are beyond this life. Consequently, criticism of his football ability is not a big issue with Tebow. He simply goes about his business, using his gifts to the best of his ability and letting the chips fall where they may. (There was no suggestion of ridicule on the part of the reporter.)

To hear such an assessment was a breath of fresh air. It was impressive that a reporter of the athletic scene would speak so well of this young player who shows that he grew up in a Baptist pastor's home. During his college football career Tebow wore biblical verses on his "eye black" (blackener under the eyes which deflects the sun).

When he displayed "John 3:16" on his eye paint in the 2009 BCS Championship Game, 92 million people searched "John 3:16" on Google during or shortly after the game. Messages in the eye blackener have since been banned by the NCAA.

As Christians we are encouraged by Holy Scripture to be ready to give a reason for the hope that is in us (1 Peter 3:15). We need not wait to be asked for that reason, and we pray for the courage and strength to speak of our faith and hope without prompting. But unless it is apparent that we are Christian, it is likely that few will ever ask us of our faith and hope.

By themselves our lives will not convert hearts of inquirers, for only the Word of God converts the heart. Nevertheless, our lives are always a witness—either for good or for bad. When our lives are lived to the glory of God, they can become instruments which move people to ask what we believe or why we confess, live, and act as we do.

We serve the Lord Christ by preaching the truth of God's Word, and by living as His children. Our lives frequently speak louder than our words—for better or for worse. By living our faith we are reflecting

the power of God and the power of the gospel. Surely that will be the purpose of our lives as we await the entrance into heaven which our Lord has prepared for us. If our walk "is heavenward all the way," it will be far different from the walk of those who are earthbound and whose anticipation reaches no further than the dreaded grave.

The Christian walk is one that desires to please the Heavenly Father and not the world! It is a walk that invites those who watch and hear to join us in that walk. Our walk will be one that seeks the favor of God, that

people "may see [y]our good works and glorify [y]our Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16).

We live our faith in word and deed not to attract people's attention, but because the love of Christ constrains us so to conduct ourselves in ways that bring glory to our Father in heaven. Furthermore, the Christian faith in action armors us against the criticism of the world.

As we are secure in our faith and eternal hope, we will understand that what is important is not what critics think of us, but what our Father has given us in Christ Jesus!



CLC PREACHING STATIONS Many CLC congregations have members who live a great distance from their home congregation or other sister CLC congregations. As the Lord gives the opportunity, preaching stations have been established. Pastors from several congregations serve these small groups with the Word and Sacrament on a regular basis. Some of these groups meet in homes, others in rented facilities. Visitors are always warmly welcomed. Those who are considering a move, or are just traveling through the area, are encouraged to contact these preaching stations and worship with them.

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MEDITATIONS ON JESUS' SERMON ON THE MOUNT
MATTHEW CHAPTERS FIVE THROUGH SEVEN

"You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.' But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire. Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are on the way with him, lest your adversary deliver you to the judge, the judge hand you over to the officer, and you be thrown into prison. Assuredly, I say to you, you will by no means get out of there till you have paid the last penny." MATTHEW 5:21-26

Dealing With An Adversary

Pastor Paul Krause • Markesan, Wisconsin

At first glance it may appear that of all God's commandments, "You shall not murder" is the one we would be most successful at keeping. The very thought of murder brings to mind grisly crime-scene photographs and serial killers such as Jeffrey Dahmer.

Unlawfully ending a person's physical life is an act from which we Christians shrink in horror. We would never even think of doing such a horrific thing!

So it follows that we have kept this commandment, right?

The religious leaders and courts of Jesus' time would have agreed. "Whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment," they said.

It is certainly true that the physical act of murder is a sin against this commandment and rightfully

brings down the full weight of the civil code's condemnation upon the criminal. But to think that the taking of physical life is all God forbids in this commandment is to miss the point.

The fact is—not only is the act of murder wrong but also that which precedes it!

Of course, civil courts cannot render judgments on what can't be seen, but God is not limited to externals. *"The word of God...is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart"* (Hebrews 4:12).

In God's sight murder is committed even before the angry word crosses the lips (see v. 22). It is committed in the mind and heart, as John writes: *"He who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him"* (1 John 3:15).

Our Lord would also have us faithfully pursue reconciliation.

Yes—the sin of murder has its beginnings in the sinful human heart! Jesus once said, *"For out of the heart proceed...murders"* (Matthew 15:19). The devil will be there with his rationalizations to tempt us to think that the connection between the intent and the action is tenuous at best. But don't be deceived! Sinful anger in thoughts/words can lead to assault and murder in deed.

Pursue Reconciliation

Recall the biblical account of how Cain became angry at his brother Abel. Abel's offering brought in true faith had been acceptable to God, whereas Cain's offering brought in unbelief was not. *"Why are you angry?"* God asked Cain, and added: *"Sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it." ... And it came to pass ... that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him"* (Genesis 4:6-8).

The Law of God serves as a mirror to show us our sinful hearts. But as Jesus speaks to His believers in this Sermon on the Mount, He is giving His law also as a guide or norm for Christian living. And as the heart and core of such Christian living is forgiving and being forgiven, Jesus makes a fitting application. If a Jew was about to make a gift at the Lord's altar—and at that inopportune

moment remembered his brother had something against him, Jesus directs him: *"Leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift."*

Our Lord would also have us faithfully pursue reconciliation. Do you remember something you did to a "brother"? Did it happen many years ago? Are you hundreds of miles apart? Is the friendship no longer as close as it had been in your college years?

Or does the timing seem to be "bad"? No matter! Call! Text! Visit! Make the effort to communicate with the one you have wronged so that God's blessed forgiveness can be given and received! *"Agree ... quickly, while you are on the way..."* (v. 25).

None of us knows which day may be our last. So let us not procrastinate; rather, as soon as possible, strive to be reconciled with an offended brother, to correct whatever wrongs we can! As the Apostle Paul says, *"Do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil.... Let all ... wrath, anger, clamor... be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you"* (Ephesians 4:26, 27, 31, 32).



"ALL HISTORY IS GOD'S STORY!"

Great Expectations

in Exodus chapters 19-24

Prof. Em. Paul R. Koch • Eau Claire, Wisconsin

It's more than a novel notion that we live under great expectations. Even if we don't normally phrase it that way, we do realize that God has great expectations of His children, for Jesus has inscribed it on our hearts, "For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required" (Luke 12:48).

This divine formula is validated also in the record of Exodus, chapters 19 through 24.

As soon as the LORD opens His mouth to Moses on Mount Sinai, this principle pops up: "You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself."

That's the introduction to His great expectations: "Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all the people; ...And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:4-6).

Since God gives much, He expects His redeemed people to live up to His high hopes for them. He expects that they will admire Him and be devoted to Him for having delivered them from their enemies. He expects His beloved people to defend His honorable

name and reputation. He expects that His children will gladly find rest for their souls in His Word, personified in Jesus.

Further, He expects children to appreciate their parents as His representatives, under whose care they will prosper. He expects us to appreciate human life enough to protect ourselves and others from harm. He expects us to value spousal love, to foster the human race, to respect the marriages of others and to practice fidelity in our own. He expects us to honor His decision to bless others with earthly assets. He expects us to love our neighbor enough to defend him against verbal assault and to be happy that God has given to others their spouses, employees, and assets.

Those are some of His great expectations; we call them the Ten Commandments.

And at the bottom of His great expectations is this: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage" (Ex. 20:2).

In other words, "You belong to Me, and I expect you to behave accordingly."

That's true religion in a nut-shell.

God's great expectations mean respecting the LORD enough to avoid false deities (20:22-26); appreciating their own freedom will prompt His people to be considerate of slaves (21:1-11); their experiences in Egypt would be reminders that all life deserves to be protected from violence (21:12-27).

God expects His cherished people to treat others as they wish to be treated, making restitution for loss caused by carelessness, theft, or mismanagement (21:28-22:15). God expects His people to behave well under His moral principles, capped with His greatest expectation: "*You shall be holy people to Me*" (ch. 22). Indeed, personal conduct should be exemplary, respect for God should govern the work-week, the calendar year, and national relationships (ch. 23). Of course, that's expecting a lot!

It probably took half-an-hour for Moses to carefully repeat everything we have just read in four chapters of the sacred text while all Israel stood at attention. When Moses had finished with God's say-so, it was Israel's turn to respond.

How would they react? Were God's great expectations just too much to swallow? When "*Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD and all the judgments*" (24:2), (thanks be to God!) "*All the people answered with one*

voice and said, 'All the words which the LORD has said we will do.'"

Did you get that? "*ALL the people answered with ONE voice.*"

This means that not a single individual objected; nobody protested that God expected too much. His dear, redeemed people, one and all, were convinced that they were privileged to be considered worthy of God's great expectations.

This miracle is worth pondering: When a person is convinced in his heart that he has been richly blessed by the God of his salvation – then (and only then) is he moved to make the giant step of declaring that he is happy to live according to God's holy will. It is likewise fundamental that when the Spirit of God makes Himself at home in the believer's Christ-centered heart – then that person has the spiritual will-power to begin to do God's will in consecrated living, day in and day out. That makes for Hallelujah living.

We cannot close without this sobering thought: When we sin, we are not only disappointing God's great expectations—we have also become defectors, for to not revere, love, and honor the Triune God above all else/others means that we have switched our allegiance over to the enemy. The old, evil foe now means deadly woe, for when Satan steals souls away from their salvation, he intends to rape and murder!

Even if disappointing God's great expectations may not seem like a hellish maneuver, it's Satan's work all the same, stealing us away from God's family to join the entourage of the damned.

Dear reader, Satan and God are at war over your soul, and you are the prize to be lost or gained! Don't let Satan take you by surprise (as our military forces were taken by surprise at Pearl Harbor), for all hell can break loose upon you!

The Bible reminds us that since the fall into sin, we are by nature sinful through and through. Since God in His mercy, grace, and goodness brings us back to Him in repentance, we as God's children strive daily to "put off the old man and put on the new."

Fellow Christian, since you have seen what the Lord has done in your life and how He has borne you on eagles' wings and brought you to Himself, as a new creature baptized into Christ, stand fast in God's Word, agree with God's will, and as His dear child commit—with the Spirit's power—to serving Him in willing and loving obedience.

Help us, dear Lord Jesus, to say it and mean it, "All the words which the LORD has said we will do." Amen!



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

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