

LUTHERAN SPOKESMAN

“...The Scripture Cannot Be Broken.” — John 10:35

REFORMATION 2013



*“Unless I am convicted by Scripture
and plain reason... my conscience is captive
to the Word of God. I cannot and I will
not recant anything, for to go against conscience
is neither right nor safe. God help me. Amen.”*

MARTIN LUTHER

Here I Stand — A Life of Martin Luther: Roland H. Bainton, p. 144

The Reformer on “Judging”

God-pleasing Judging:

“You must understand this in such a way that it does not take away the right of the man in the public ministry of preaching to judge matters of doctrine as well as of life. Indeed, it is incumbent on him in his office to rebuke publicly whatever does not square with true doctrine, for the very purpose of preventing sects from coming in and taking hold. When he sees that a life is wrong, he must likewise denounce it and resist it. He is put there to oversee this, and he will have to give account of it (Heb. 13:17). In fact, whenever any Christian sees his neighbor doing wrong, he has the duty of admonishing and restraining him, which is impossible without judging and passing judgment...”

(Luther’s Works, Vol. 21, p. 213)

Judging Incorrectly:

“What is needed here is the virtue called tolerance and the forgiveness of sins, by which one person bears with another, pardons him, and forgives him, as St. Paul teaches in beautiful words (Rom. 15:1): ‘We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves.’ This is the same thing that Christ says here: ‘Judge not’... We love to beautify and decorate ourselves and to see what is good in us... (but) If we notice the least little pimple on him, we fill our eyes with it and so magnify it that on its account we see nothing good (in our neighbor)... we can learn from this warning and get used to tolerating, concealing, and adorning our neighbor’s transgressions.”

(LW, loc. cit., p. 213ff.)

Using the Reformation

Pastor David Reim · Vernon, BC, Canada

Using a gift is a fine way to express appreciation and gratitude.

The sixteenth century Lutheran Reformation was a great gift from God, for through it God restored to us His greatest gifts. **Our full and free Salvation** in and through Jesus Christ had been put on the shelf by the Roman Catholic Church, which then substituted works that man himself had to accomplish, and **God's undeserved Grace** had been shelved in favor of the notion that God infuses grace into man, enabling people to do His will and thus supposedly merit eternal life.

Those precious gifts were all but lost because **God's Word** had been put away on a shelf and all but forgotten, being replaced by the teachings of men.

God gave these gifts anew when He led Martin Luther to understand that we learn God's will **BY SCRIPTURE ALONE**, not via the traditions of the church. In the Scriptures Luther rediscovered the truth that sinners are saved **BY GRACE ALONE**, which is God's undeserved love that saves because He chose to punish His own Son in our place. God also restored the blessed truth that sinners receive His grace and salvation **BY FAITH ALONE**, not because of our good works or by our own choosing.

How will we treat these gifts from God? Will we celebrate the Reformation again this October with thanksgiving and praise, and then tuck its gifts back on the shelf for another year? God forbid! Let us continue to use the wonderful spiritual gifts of the Reformation day after day after day!

Using the Reformation means continuing to contend for the Word and ever striving to preserve it from error.

God's Word is under attack today as much as ever. It is being attacked by atheists and evolutionists, who try to get us and our children to think that the account of creation in the Bible is foolishness. It is even being attacked by many "Christian"—and even some "Lutheran"—churches that are not willing to believe and accept everything the Bible teaches.

We use the Reformation correctly when we teach that every word of Holy Scripture is holy because it is God's own divinely inspired and inerrant Word! In addition, we need to treasure that Word in our own hearts, delighting in it by daily letting God speak to us as He leads us and strengthens us through His Word. May we have a desire to dig into God's Word and all the wonderful truths that God reveals to us there!

We preserve the Reformation by living in that grace daily, letting God's holy law convict us of sin and then turning to God in humble contrition and repentance. The more we are aware of our sin and sinfulness, the more we will rejoice in God's grace and forgiveness.

In other words, the Lutheran Reformation was and is not only about Christian churches and synods teaching the truth of God's Word and the truth about our salvation, but it is also about each of us living in God's grace, delighting in His Word, and continuing in the faith which the Holy Spirit has given us.

Let us treasure the spiritual gifts God has given us and use them every day!



REFORMATION DEVOTION

Contend Earnestly for the Faith!

Pastor Theodore Barthels · Austin, Minnesota

In his short epistle Jude wanted more than anything to write about the wonders of *“our common salvation”* (v. 3), which is the marvelous gospel of God's gracious love and forgiveness through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. We have been led by the Spirit to appreciate how *“God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them”* (2 Corinthians 5:19).

This is the amazing truth—the Christian faith which God has entrusted to us, His saints! We are people whom the Lord no longer sees as sinners, but rather as His holy ones—made holy by His covering us with the righteousness of His Son, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

This truth is so amazing because, when we know and feel the guilt of our sins, the gospel comforts us with the assurance that *“...where sin abounded, grace abounded much more”* (Romans 5:20). That wonderful gospel we cherish. Its truth shall not change. It cannot change, for it has been written with the blood of Christ!

As he continues, Jude makes clear that already in the first century this marvelous truth was being attacked and abused. For example, he saw how false brethren used this gracious truth as a license to sin, which caused the apostle Paul to exclaim, *“Certainly not!”* (Romans 6:2)

This was but one attack that came from within the visible Christian church. By the time of the sixteenth century the gospel was all but lost, with many poor sinners—including a certain monk named Martin Luther—living under the terrors of God's holy law.

In this Reformation season we rejoice that in the richness of His grace God opened Luther's heart to comprehend the gospel and believe in Jesus for the remission of all sins. However, this truth was not welcomed by everybody within the established visible church. Therefore it became necessary for Luther—as well as many laymen—“to contend earnestly for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3).

Many staunch confessors of God's Word of Truth stood in defiance not only of church authority but also of the Holy Roman Emperor. They put their lives at great risk for the sake of the blessed gospel of Christ. And, yes, some lost their lives for the sake of that gospel, though they retained their confidence in Christ even in the face of death.

In our day the gospel continues to come under attack within the visible church. Satan has not let up in his efforts to deceive. The errors which Jude saw creeping into the church are visible in many Christian denominations today. Not only is sin tolerated but at times it is even celebrated!

The doctrinal errors of the Reformation age—where the merits of man were seen as requirements for forgiveness and eternal life—continue to be embraced by many. Since we have a sinful flesh that would lead us into misbelief, the danger is there also for us. We might be tempted to sin willfully today, thinking we can always repent tomorrow, and so abuse the gospel. The world attacks many teachings of Scripture, and our sinful flesh confuses us.

So it is that we need to heed the Spirit's call to contend for the faith which has been entrusted to us, for God's gospel is the only way of salvation. Later in his epistle Jude shows us exactly how to go about this: “*But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life*” (Jude 20-21).

As we pray for the Spirit's blessing on our study of God's pure Word, we shall build ourselves in that truth against the wiles of the devil and the heresies of this world. In the process we are comforted by the assurance that it is not our own human strength that keeps us steadfast, but the Lord! The Holy Spirit strengthens us and Christ preserves us in true faith unto eternal life.

Jude's closing doxology serves well as a Reformation word of prayer and praise. “*Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to God our Savior, who alone is wise, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen*” (Jude 24-25).

Keeping The Wells Unblocked!

Pastor David Fuerstenau • Ketchikan, Alaska

Most kids are curious, and I was no different. When I asked my father why a certain pasture which we passed almost every Sunday had a small fenced-off area serving no apparent purpose, he explained what could not be discerned at a distance. A spring of water was being protected from cattle which in the past had blocked up the water's flow with their trampling hooves.

Isaac was confronted by a similar situation (recorded in Genesis chapter 26). There was a famine in the land, and Isaac was living in Philistine territory by permission. Despite the famine, Isaac's herds increased, and his planted crops yielded bountifully. The Philistines, envious of his wealth, filled in all the wells his father Abraham had dug there in the hope of limiting Isaac's power. Then they demanded that Isaac vacate the area.

Isaac moved, but first he reopened the Abraham-dug wells in the Gerar Valley (which had also been plugged by the Philistines), and even dug new ones which yielded water—a precious find on the edge of the Sinai desert.

Some of the new wells were contested by the locals, and Isaac gave them appropriate names: Esek ('Argument' Well) and Sitnah ('Opposition' Well). He also dug one over which there was no dispute and named it Rehoboth ('Plenty of Room' Well).

It was obvious to all that God was blessing Isaac in his endeavors, just as He had promised.

The lesson for us today is not about unblocking springs or digging wells of the physical type. It's about keeping open those blessed spiritual wells—Truth Well, Salvation Well, Gospel Well, etc.—in which are found the free waters of Life.

This is the stuff of true reformation!

We remember that Jesus identified Himself as "*living water springing up into everlasting life*" (John 4) and invited thirsty sinners to come to Him and drink (John 7:37). We are also told that His Jewish enemies were envious of Him, and that the world hated Him. They killed Jesus and

made it their mission to plug up those wells which afford forgiveness, life, and every spiritual blessing through our Lord's obedience, death, and resurrection.

As with Isaac, so for us—the task is clear. Grab the shovels and keep those precious wells of God's Word and its sacred doctrines open!

In this respect every day is Reformation Day. When the 'True God of Israel Well' was in danger of being lost because idolaters had stuffed it with the dung of Baal, the prophet Elijah took decisive action and cleaned it out. When fourth century Christendom was confronted with Arius—a Philistine type who sought to muddy up the 'Jesus Well'—Athanasius and others took to the task of vindicating and confessing in clear and unambiguous terms the true deity of Christ and His relationship with the Father.

When Dr. Martin Luther discerned that the wells of the fathers had been virtually trampled and plugged with the dirt of 'justification by human works,' the Reformer grabbed his shovel. And today we yet drink of the pure, scriptural water of 'salvation by God's grace alone, received by faith alone, based on God's inspired Word alone, in and through and by Christ Jesus alone.' Today, conscientious Lutheran Christians still drink rightly at the gracious wells of the sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion.

When some erring Lutherans sought to muddy and hence block up the 'Election' Well—arguing that salvation was based not on God's eternal grace, but on man's faith or other causes—Dr. C. F. W. Walther and others got out the shovels and dug. When the 'Fellowship Well' was in danger of becoming polluted among us—our own CLC fathers responded: 'To the shovels, men, to the shovels!' (One blessed result was the confessional document *Concerning Church Fellowship*, which we do well to dig through, striving ever to live our faith according to God's Word and before a watching world.)

Do we have picks and shovels still in hand? True and continuous reformation demands it. For nothing is more important in this dreary desert world than drinking from those precious wells of pure living water upon which our Christian faith and our eternal salvation depend.

The devil and his Philistine slaves will try to plug and even fence off this holy ground against us. But with the shovel of the Holy Spirit (the Bible) in our hands, even those fences and gates of hell will not prevail.

Are we ready to use those shovels? Should we? Jesus said, “*Keep on searching the Scriptures...for these are they which testify of Me*” (John 5:39). The apostle Jude exhorted that we “*contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints...*” (v. 3).

For ourselves, for our children, for God’s very Church, may He bless our continual searching and reformation digging. The gracious reward for the faithful is blessed and glorious—drinking from an eternal ‘Plenty of Room Well.’

“*And He showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as a crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb*” (Revelation 22:1).



THE HOLY CHRISTIAN CHURCH

Membership Has Its Privileges

Pastor Jay Hartmann • Corpus Christi, Texas

We understand and appreciate the difference between a church denomination or congregation and the Church—the spiritual Israel, “the Holy Christian Church, the communion of saints” (The Apostles’ Creed).

Through membership in our local congregations the Spirit strengthens us in the Christian faith through His Word and Sacraments; there we praise and worship Him together; there we gather with like-minded believers to encourage and build one another up in our holy faith.

Christ-believers understand their Lord’s directive to “go to church” (Colossians 3:16, Romans 10:17; Hebrews 10:25) as coming from His unconditional love for their spiritual welfare.

But let us consider that, first and foremost, we are at the same time members of His Church—“the Holy Christian Church, the communion of saints”!

Membership in this Church (we distinguish it in this writing with the large case “C”) has many privileges.

The Church belongs to Jesus; it is His creation through the Holy Spirit.

As members of the Church, we also belong to Him. We are a part of the Body of Christ—which is *“His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all”* (Ephesians 1:23). As part of that Body we are enabled to serve Him through Spirit-worked faith and love. As members of the Church we earthen vessels have the solemn honor, privilege, and responsibility to share God’s Word with as many as we can throughout all the world. Jesus authorizes us, *“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature”* (Mark 16:15)!

As we go about this blessed work, let’s remember that Jesus is the very foundation stone upon which His Church is built. Having been *“built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone”* (Ephesians 2:20), we stand on the foundation of His Word in all its truth and purity, and we are entirely safe and secure in His loving hands.

As Head of the Church Jesus is watching over and guiding us safely through life to our eternal home. He is always with us, promising He will never leave us nor forsake us. He provides our every need of body and soul.

The Church is loved by Jesus with a perfect, unconditional, and never-ending love! That love was displayed in greatest measure when He shed His sacred blood on Mt. Calvary—*“Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption...”* (Hebrews 9:12).

Jesus also sanctifies and cleanses His Church. He has changed us from being creatures of sin and death into His reborn, believing children. *“...But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God...”* (1 Corinthians 6:11).

Finally, Jesus also defends the Church with His almighty Word, keeping and preserving His believers as members of His Body.

These blessings are but part of the privileges of membership in “the Holy Christian Church, the communion of saints”!

Membership in this Church can’t be bought or earned. It is totally a gift of God’s free grace. Knowing this, we will cherish such membership each and every day of our lives until we are called out of this earthly life into the glorious Church triumphant in heaven!



EDITOR'S NOTE: This month and next we look at some of the people who preceded the Reformer, Dr. Martin Luther (1483-1546). They might be called "forerunners" of the Reformation, for through them the stage was set for the gospel of Jesus Christ to break free from a cold and corrupt church, once again taking its rightful place at the center of Christian teaching. (These Reformation vignettes are adapted from the CLC webpage with daily devotions available at www.redeemerclc.info/devotional.html.)

Forerunners Of The Reformation

John Wycliffe (1320?-1384)

"Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world." (1 John 4:1)

The message of preachers must ever be judged by what the Bible says. Those who preach Christ as Savior are from God. Those who don't, aren't. But what if we did not have the Bible with which to judge their messages?

Unbiblical teaching consistently came from the church of Wycliffe's day. Since Bibles were unavailable in English, the English people had no reliable way of judging what they heard. False teachings went largely unchallenged.

Knowing Latin, John Wycliffe was able to study the Bible extensively. Seeing that the teaching of the church did not mirror the teachings of God's Word, he spent much of his life attempting to reform the church.

He spoke out against unbiblical teachings and even challenged the authority of the Pope, preaching that the true church of God needed only one head, Christ (Ephesians 5:23).

Wycliffe's greatest gift to the world, however, was his translation of the Latin Bible into English. Corrupt church leaders greeted this first EVER English translation of the Bible with contempt, saying, "The jewel of the clergy has become the toy of the laity."

Thirty-one years after Wycliffe's death, the church showed its lack of



John Wycliffe—
(Clipart courtesy FCIT
<http://etc.usf.edu/clipart>)

appreciation for Wycliffe's work by excommunicating him. Twelve years later, Pope Martin V had Wycliffe's remains exhumed, burned, and cast into the Swift River.

What Wycliffe placed in the Englishman's hand, let us place in our hearts. That is where God intends His Word to live. Then we will be ready to test the spirits with confidence.

Savonarola (1452-1498)

“Jesus called them together and said, You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Matthew 10:42-45)

The church was corrupt. High-ranking religious leaders godlessly abused their offices to gain wealth and power.

But not all churchmen were so spiritually bankrupt. Martin Luther would later honor one such man, the Dominican Friar Girolamo Savonarola, by publishing a meditation on Psalm 51. And now, the rest of the story.

When Savonarola spoke out against the immorality of Pope Alexander VI, he was commanded to cease preaching. When he refused, he was imprisoned. After six weeks of torture, in which the rack was used, Savonarola signed a confession with the arm his torturers had spared for this purpose. This would not be the last word from Savonarola's hand.

Before being burned as a heretic, Savonarola wrote the meditation on Psalm 51 that Luther would publish in 1528. In it, Savonarola pleaded for God's mercy for his weakness under torture, and expressed his hope for salvation:

“Who will take pity on me? To heaven I dare not lift up my eyes, for I have deeply sinned against it; on Earth I find no refuge, for I have been an offense to it. What therefore shall I do? Shall I despair? Far from it. God is merciful, my Savior is loving. God alone therefore is my refuge....”

It is a humble service that Savonarola's life and death provide to us, but such is the service that Christ gives His children to provide. Through



Girolamo Savonarola
Painting by
Fra Bartolomeo,
c. 1498

Savonarola we see the depravity of the days preceding the Reformation, and the depths to which God's love was willing to reach.

John Huss (1369-1415)

“If anyone teaches false doctrines and does not agree to the sound instructions of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, he is conceited and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions and constant friction between men of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain.” (1 Timothy 6:3-6, NIV)



John Huss

In 1411 two popes were claiming leadership in the church, Pope Gregory XII and Pope John XXIII. Today the Roman Catholic Church recognizes only the first as the real pope of that day.

In 1411 Pope John XXIII was at war with Naples, Italy. In order to raise money for this war, he authorized the selling of “plenary indulgences.” These slips of paper claimed that some of the “extra” good deeds done by Christians now dead had been transmitted to the record of the person purchasing them and would therefore lessen one’s suffering in “purgatory.”

John Huss, a priest working in Prague, protested the selling of indulgences. So did many of the students of the University. Three students were detained and beheaded in secret because of the public opposition to indulgences. These murders enraged the people, but their anger didn’t stop the Pope from excommunicating Huss and placing Prague under the “interdict.” This meant that no clergy of that city could perform the regular “sin-cleansing acts,” such as Baptism, Holy Communion, or the pronouncing of absolution upon those who had made confession of their sins.

Many religious leaders of our time still preach lies in order to fill their bank accounts. But their false teachings cannot give true peace or forgiveness.

True forgiveness does not come with a price tag. It cannot be purchased with any currency minted by man. Nor can forgiveness be secured with the imaginary currency of “extra” good works done by Christians of the past.

Our forgiveness was purchased by Jesus’ sinless life and innocent death and made ours through faith. You see, the Church does exist to make men rich—spiritually rich in Christ Jesus our Lord.

(To be continued)

FROM OUR CLC PRESIDENT

Consumer-Driven Or Spirit-Drawn?

Pastor Michael Eichstadt • Hales Corners, Wisconsin

I am a typical consumer. If a new grocery store opens down the street and advertises lower prices, I'll abandon my old store without a second thought. After all, saving fifty cents a gallon on milk adds up. Airlines make a point of thanking passengers for choosing them because they know that consumers have choices and will go to a competitor if they are not satisfied with the price and service. Consumers have a lot of clout. They are in control.

The "I'm in control" mindset carries over into people's religious lives. This is not that surprising, for it appeals to our sinful human natures to think that we are in control, that we can set our own terms. As a result, many people choose for themselves what they want God to be like. They decide that as long as they are "spiritual" in some way, God is happy and accepting.

As in the realm of commerce, even so in religion it seems that just about anything goes. In the search to find what one wants, "church shopping" is viewed much the same as checking out the new grocery store.

Much more surprising and disturbing is the fact that many churches have gone along and, like many businesses, offer what they think the "consumer" wants. In the process, they eagerly accommodate what itching ears want to hear (see 2 Timothy 4:3). The desire for public acceptance, political correctness, and satisfying social needs ends up with relegating God's Word to a lesser, even optional, status in some churches.

At the time of the Lutheran Reformation some five hundred years ago, things were in some ways much different. Subsistence living, not consumerism, was the norm. However, what was similar was that God's Word was being pushed aside and ignored—being replaced with manmade rituals and rules as the way to God.

We remember with heartfelt gratitude to the Lord how the Holy Spirit led Martin Luther into the pure Word of God “*which is able to save your souls*” (James 1:21). The only way to peace with God and eternal life is through faith in His Son Jesus Christ. Christ’s obedience—not our own efforts at being good and loving people—is our righteousness before God. It is Jesus’ bloody sacrifice on Calvary’s cross and not our feeble attempts at making up for past failings which pays our sin-debt. “*Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ*” (Romans 5:1).

Even as Luther, so we as individual believers, as congregations, and as a church body have been drawn by God’s grace through His Spirit to build our lives and futures on the truth of the Word rather than on the whims, emotions, or whatever happens to be trending at the moment.

God’s Word is not always easy to hear. When God’s law exposes our sin and condemns us to hell, it cuts to the heart and terrifies. But it is the truth we need to hear, for it prepares us for the uplifting and life-giving news of Christ’s righteousness being credited to sinners by faith alone.

That gospel is not one of several salvation options on the shelf—it is the only one! “*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).

When it comes down to what matters most for time and eternity, we don’t need choices. We need the saving truth of our loving God.

Take time today to thank your parents for teaching and modeling that truth for you from childhood on.

This Sunday thank your pastor for faithfully proclaiming the one true and saving gospel of Jesus Christ.

Every day praise God for His saving Word!

**When it comes down
to what matters most
for time and eternity,
we don’t need choices.
We need the saving
truth of our
loving God.**

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

The Right Kind of Judging

Pastor Thomas Schuetze • Coloma, Michigan

"Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye. Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces" (MATTHEW 7:1-6, NIV).

We've probably all seen them in the media: top ten lists. The ten best-selling books for the year. The ten greatest actors of all time. The ten greatest athletes in sports history. The ten most popular fast food chains.

Here is a list you may not have seen: the top ten Bible passages most often misunderstood. If such a list were compiled, this verse from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount would probably rank near the top: *"Do not judge, or you too will be judged."*

This passage is frequently used (at times, by well-intentioned Christians) in support of the idea that God's will for His people is that they refrain from labeling any actions done or words spoken by others as either right or wrong.

Living in an age of political correctness where everyone wants to get along and few wish to take a firm stand on controversial subjects, the thought is sometimes expressed: "Who am I to judge others, since I am far from perfect myself? And doesn't Jesus tell us not to judge?"

Yet a careful consideration of this section of Scripture—and reading it in its context—actually reveals that the Lord is not instructing us to refrain from all forms of judging. Rather, He is condemning the kind of judging which is reserved for the omniscient God—the judging of

the thoughts and motives of our neighbor's heart. He is also forbidding self-righteous judging that is done without mercy or love, which is inclined to magnify and condemn others for their faults while lightly passing over one's own.

The Pharisees were known for that kind of judging. They were quick to point out the sins of those they considered less holy than themselves, but they did not see the need for repentance of their own sins. They did not think they needed a divine Redeemer to cleanse them of their guilt before God (compare the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector, Luke 18:9-14). So the Lord shared this godly counsel with His disciples about the importance of taking the plank out of their own eye (that is, recognizing and repenting of their sins), so that they might then be able, in the right spirit, to remove the speck that was in their brother's eye (that is, leading him to repent of his sins).

When such judging is done according to God's Word, it may also be necessary at times to recognize those whom the Lord Himself considers to be "dogs" and "pigs." Dogs (mangy street dogs, not cuddly house pets) and pigs were some of the most despised animals in Jesus' day. When Jesus says that what is sacred must not be given to dogs nor pearls thrown to pigs, He is making the point that the precious gospel treasure should not be shared with those who scorn it, with those who show by their words and actions that they have no appreciation for it. Sharing the gospel treasure with such people would make as much sense as giving a diamond ring to a street dog or a necklace of pearls to a pig.

So we see that this passage of Scripture does not forbid every kind of judging. Jesus forbids unwarranted judging while at the same time He encourages the kind of judging that is done according to His Word. He teaches us to look into the mirror of His holy law, to recognize the serious nature of our transgressions against our God in thought, word, and deed, so that we might, in turn, approach His throne of grace in godly sorrow and repentance (Romans 3:19-20, 23-26). Then He would have us—as people thankful for His precious gospel treasure—do what we can to help our brother see his need for the Savior too.

This is the right kind of judging...judging that is pleasing to God...and which serves for the spiritual and eternal good of our neighbor.

Lord, help us so to do!



Missionary David Koenig

The Shocked

One on whom (or near whom) judgment has fallen
(Fourth of a Series)

Then the scribes and Pharisees brought to Him a woman caught in adultery. And when they had set her in the midst, they said to Him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses, in the law, commanded us that such should be stoned. But what do You say?" This they said, testing Him, that they might have something of which to accuse Him. But Jesus stooped down and wrote on the ground with His finger, as though He did not hear. So when they continued asking Him, He raised Himself up and said to them, "He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first." And again He stooped down and wrote on the ground. Then those who heard it, being convicted by their conscience, went out one by one, beginning with the oldest even to the last. And Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. When Jesus had raised Himself up and saw no one but the woman, He said to her, "Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said to her, "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more." Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life" (JOHN 8:3-12).

Imagine the woman's feelings as her accusers caught her red-handed. Stoning was the proper punishment for adultery. Not only does she face that fact, but before the judgment was to be carried out, a public spectacle was to be made of her. Only a very hardened individual would not cringe before all this. Judgment was about to fall.

Our Lord knew well the hypocrisy that drove the Pharisees to drag this 'sinner' before Him. A lesson must be taught them—and with that lesson comes the woman's release.

Imagine the gloom gradually lifting from her as one by one her accusers went away, from the eldest on down. What relief! She knew well that she deserved judgment, but she was to have another chance. When she said, "No one, Lord," it is hard not to see more in that word 'Lord' than mere respect for a good teacher!

Our Lord spoke the gospel good news, "Neither do I condemn you." Then He

SERIES Backdrop

With examples from Holy Scripture we are trying to learn ways and attitudes which will better enable us to witness to our Lord. These examples, drawn from the four Gospels and from the book of the Acts of the Apostles, are by no means exhaustive.

As with the basketball strategy of one-on-one, we are looking at examples of one Christian witnessing to another individual. We are not considering what was said to individuals already in the faith, though that is also applicable. We are not considering what was said to groups, though that also is applicable as a witnessing technique. We will be considering various situations where it was one-on-one, and the one being witnessed to was living in unbelief....

The ultimate goal in all witnessing is to be like John the baptizer and point to Christ as the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. While we want to try earnestly to develop our skills in this area, we don't want to forget John's motto, *"He must increase, but I must decrease"* (John 3:30).

No matter what spiritual gifts we have and how we develop them, we are not looking for glory for ourselves. We are looking to have another soul join us in glorifying our Savior-God.

reminded her of the obedience of faith, *"Go, and do not sin again."* Our Lord, of course, could read hearts and knew her repentance. On our part, we are not privy to the feelings of another's heart and must go by what a person does and says.

There is no question that a threatened judgment or disaster causes a person to reassess his life and doings. Years ago after a flood in a certain city, it was noted that church attendance was up considerably. People were shocked out of their sinful complacency. Reflecting on how people died and property was destroyed brought a change in people's lives, and thus church attendance increased.

When we encounter people in such a case, we do not want to let them think they escaped because of their uprightness or innocence (remember, we are considering unbelievers). The woman was 'caught' in adultery. She knew her guilt. So we want our prospect to grasp the fact of his or her unworthiness, and then point out the mercy of God that spares sinners. Our thrust is to proclaim the undeserved love and unmerited favor of our Lord. When the person knows his or her guilt under God's law, we want to communicate what our Lord said, *"I am the light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."*

(Our next installment considers those "shocked" by a demonstration of love *not* in connection with a falling judgment.)

PART FIVE OF A SERIES

“This is most certainly true!”

THE APOSTLES' CREED

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into hell; the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of God, the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.

(TLH, p. 12)

The Father of Grace

CDS Teacher David Bernthal • Fond du Lac, Wisconsin

This is the final article of a series focusing on Dr. Martin Luther's explanation to the First Article, the article which directs us specifically to the work of the first person in the Holy Trinity, God the Father.

So far we have examined the almighty nature of our Heavenly Father, including the work of His creating heaven and Earth, and subsequently His role as the Preserver, Provider, and Protector of that creation. This writing will focus on our Heavenly Father's grace—the undeserved love He bestows on us sinners, followed by our response to that love.

The statement “There but for the grace of God go I” is attributed to John Bradford, a sixteenth century English Protestant preacher who was imprisoned in the Tower of London

by the Roman Catholic monarch, Mary Tudor (“Bloody Mary”). Bradford reportedly uttered these words as he witnessed other prisoners being led to their execution. He knew that it was only God's grace that was preserving his life at that time.

The Five Installments:

- 1) God is my Father Almighty;
- 2) God is Maker of Heaven and Earth;
- 3) God is my Preserver and Provider;
- 4) God is my Protector;
- 5) **God does all this for me by His grace.**

How often don't Bradford's words apply to us as well? Think of all the times in our lives when, had it not been for God's grace, we would have gone astray, experienced harm, or denied our Lord. Words of a familiar hymn come to mind, "Thou hast not left me, oft as I left Thee," and "I need Thy presence every passing hour; what but Thy grace can foil the tempter's power?" (TLH #552:5-6)

Similarly, Martin Luther says of this article, "Whenever we escape from disaster or danger, we ought to remember that it is God who gives and does all these things. In these escapes we sense and see His fatherly heart and His surpassing love toward us" (Luther's *Large Catechism*, Part II, para. 23). In the book of Lamentations we read, "Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness" (3:22-23).

However, if God's grace were beneficial for our lives only on this Earth, it would be short-lived and hollow. That is why, when we speak of that grace, we rightfully connect it to the person and work of Christ. God the Father's greatest love was shown toward us in the sending of His Son to be our Savior. "He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" (Romans 8:32) There was nothing in us that was loveable when God bestowed His grace on us, and so we declare, "And all this purely out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me" (Luther's *Small Catechism*, Gausewitz edition, 1956).

Think again of John Bradford, who was burned at the stake as a martyr on July 1, 1555. The doubting might ask, "Where was God's grace then?"

We too may have the same question when "bad" things happen to us. But what better evidence of God's love do we have than the transitioning of a Christian into eternal life? "For to me, to live is Christ [by God's grace], and to die is gain [by God's grace]" (Philippians 1:21).

Reportedly, John Bradford's last words were spoken to a young man being executed with him: "Be of good comfort, brother, for we shall have a merry supper with the Lord this night."

A word should yet be said about our response to God's grace. "We love Him because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19). "In this way the heart would be warmed and kindled to be thankful, and to use all such good things to honor and praise God" (Luther's *Large Catechism*, Part II, para. 23).

In other words, in response to Christ's love toward us, we will want to thank, praise, serve, and obey Him.

“For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your Spirit, which are God’s” (1 Corinthians 6:20).

*Oh, how great is Thy compassion,
Faithful Father, God of grace,
That with all our fallen race
And in our deep degradation
Thou wast merciful that we
Might be saved eternally.*

*I will praise Thy great compassion,
Faithful Father, God of grace,
That with all our fallen race
And in our deep degradation
Thou wast merciful that we
Might bring endless praise to Thee.
(TLH #384:1&5)*

THE FIRST ARTICLE

(About Creation)

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.

What does this mean?

I believe that God has created me and all creatures. He has given me my body and life, eyes, ears, and all my bodily members, my mind, and all my senses and still keeps them for me. God also preserves me by richly and daily providing clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, spouse and children, land, animals, and all my property and all I need to support this body and life. He protects me from all danger. He guards and defends me from every evil. God does all this because He is my good and gracious Father in heaven, not because of anything I have done to earn or deserve it. For all of this it is my duty to thank, praise, serve, and obey Him.

This is most certainly true.

(Martin Luther's SMALL CATECHISM, Sydow edition, 2000)

EVIL CANNOT PREVAIL!

Pastor Emeritus Daniel Fleischer • Oakdale, Minnesota

When our Lord Jesus Christ was crucified, there was a certain glee among His enemies, for in their minds they had accomplished their goal of being rid of Jesus. But as the Passion history suggests, they could not rid themselves of the nagging thought that perhaps what He said was true. Perhaps He would rise from the dead. They concocted a cover for their uneasiness by suggesting that the disciples would come by night and steal the body of Jesus, saying that He had risen from the dead. They prevailed upon Pilate to post guards at the tomb.

Unbelief is as delusional as it is fearful, for Jesus rose from the dead!

Our God is not the Author of evil, yet He uses the evil of the fallen world to bring His purposes to pass just as He wills. To the accomplishment of His purpose He permits the ungodly to presume success. Wickedness and unbelief seemed to prevail, but Jesus rose from the dead. He accomplished the redemption of the world and restored life and immortality. Our Lord is not vindictive. He desires the repentance of all—and that all should have life in Him. But neither is He One with whom to trifle: *“He who sits in the heavens shall laugh. The Lord shall hold them in derision”* (Psalm 2:4).

In Messianic Psalm 8 we read, *“For You have made Him a little lower than the angels...”* (v. 5). Hebrews 2:6-8 verifies that this is a reference to Jesus who, taking the form of a bondservant, *“humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross”* (Philippians 2:8). This humiliation was not imposed upon Him by His enemies, for He willingly permitted His enemies to take Him (Luke 22:51) and bore the ignominy that He might accomplish the purpose for which He came—namely, to bear the sins of all and pay the penalty we deserved.

Christ’s humiliation served a purpose in the Father’s plan that His foes could not know. They mocked and ridiculed Him at the cross, but again

He bore it and ultimately was exalted as He was crowned with glory and honor by the Father who “*made Him to have dominion*” and put all things under His feet (Psalm 8:5-6). As God and Man our Lord rules over all things in heaven and on Earth.

That is significant for us who believe, because we have been graciously incorporated into the body of Christ. As members of His body we are co-rulers with Jesus over all things! Though now we are in the weakness of our mortal body, beset by affliction and sorrow, and put upon by the evil world about us, yet our real status as rulers with our Lord shall be revealed when we are translated from Earth to heaven.

We need not recount the evils that the world visits upon God’s people, but we want to remember that even the evil and the attacks made against us as people of God are only for a while. The world rejects the grace of God and mocks those who believe the “foolishness” of God, but evil will not prevail against all who trust in the accomplished victory of our Lord Jesus. As surely as we are in Christ, we shall prevail (as Luther wrote in his Reformation Battle-hymn, *TLH* #262), and even death itself cannot rob us of the kingdom.

In the life of Christ on Earth things were not as His enemies perceived them or hoped they would be. So today what the enemies of Christ’s Church—which is His Body!—perceive and hope only feeds their delusion.

In our Christian walk and confession we ourselves can identify with the Apostle Paul: “*We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed--always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body*” (2 Corinthians 4:7-8).

Or as Joseph told his brothers, the evil which they visited upon him was meant by God to bring about a salutary purpose (Genesis 45:3-8; 50:20). The devil could not win then; all appearances to the contrary, he cannot win now! Christ our Strength and Stay has won for us the victory. We shall conquer in the strife if we do not faint. It remains the Father’s good will to give us the kingdom!

Thanks be to God, who is “*our Refuge and Strength, a very present Help in trouble*” (Psalm 46:1)!



“Judge Not...” — and the Lutheran Reformation

Pastor Paul Fleischer, Cheyenne, Wyoming

This Reformation month our on-going series treating Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount arrives at the “*Judge not, that you be not judged*” (Matthew 7:1ff) section, prompting some thoughts.

Every year at this time orthodox Lutherans celebrate notable stands taken by Dr. Martin Luther (1483-1546). On October 31, 1517, he posted the 95 Theses for debate on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany, challenging the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church on the subject of indulgences. Some four years later, on April 18, 1521, at the Council convened at the city of Worms, Germany by the young Emperor Charles V, Luther—under threat of his life!—made his famous “Here-I-stand-I-cannot-do-otherwise-God-help-me-Amen” speech, refusing to recant his many Bible-based writings.

It is not too far-fetched to suggest that the Lutheran Reformation may not have occurred had Luther lived in today’s religious climate—or at least, if he had bought into that climate. At any rate, a lowly German monk’s challenge of the “mighty” Roman Catholic Church establishment would likely have been passed off as intolerant judgmentalism.

In connection with this, a conservative religious magazine has pointed out: “A sociologist at Boston University has discovered that the American middle class has added an 11th commandment to its culture: ‘Thou shalt not judge.’ He says Americans shy away from mentioning moral absolutes because they are afraid of appearing judgmental. ...Even Christians are being influenced by the nation’s new moral code: relativism and tolerance. ...In the moral relativism that pervades our society...it is considered intolerant to make moral judgments.”

These good words follow: “Christians, however, can not let the fear of being considered intolerant stop them from making judgments based on God’s Word. If they do that, the judgment made is not theirs but God’s. At some point such judgments have to be made—if we care about our fellow man and his world.”

Because of the “11th commandment,” not only is one “Christian” church or denomination passed off as good as another, but approval is also given to Christ-less religions. “There are many ways to heaven.” “We’re all sooner or later going to end up in the same place anyhow.” By the same token, anyone who claims that moral absolutes exist, who claims

to have and know absolute Truth, is likely labeled as an intolerant, narrow-minded bigot.

Someone has pointed out that the ultimate response in our “tolerant” society is the dismissive “Whatever.” For example, one may believe that practicing the homosexual lifestyle is a sin and another may not so consider it; discussion is dismissed with “Whatever.” You may believe that abortion is murder and I may not—“Whatever!” (Other moral examples could be mentioned.) It’s the same in the area of doctrine. “You can believe there is a heaven and a hell; you can believe there isn’t, or that there’s a third place called purgatory—Whatever! You may believe in creation and I in evolution, you may believe Christ rose bodily from the dead and I may not—Whatever!” On and on the list goes. “What’s true and truth for you or for me may be at odds, but what difference does it make?”

In a society which wants the ten commandments to be just the ten suggestion (but adds an 11th one binding on all), we are still convinced that there is absolute truth. And yes, we believe that truth is on our side—that is, on the side of the Bible and its clear, authoritative, and not-to-be-compromised teachings. As Jesus told His disciples: *“If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free”* (John 8:31f).

Consider a few other Bible examples where the duty to judge is laid on Christ’s disciples. Romans chapter 13 says that civil magistrates have the responsibility to judge evildoers. Matthew chapter 18 tells how individual Christians and Christian congregations are to deal with openly impenitent sinners. How can these injunctions be carried out without judging—not a person’s heart, but his actions!? The apostle exhorts: *“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world”* (1 John 4:1). How can that injunction be carried out without judging the teaching, the doctrines, of other teachers, other churches, other religions? Later in Matthew chapter 7 Jesus says, *“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits.”* How can that directive be carried out if our ability to exercise critical judgment is cauterized or neutralized? In the same chapter of Matthew (v. 6) Jesus warns against giving what is holy to “dogs” and casting pearls before “swine” (speaking metaphorically, of course). Shall we accuse Jesus of being intolerant and judgmental when He

suggests that there are people who want to drag the pearl of great price—God’s gospel—through the mud?

In a culture and society with a watered-down moral code and in a religious atmosphere where people want a “tolerant” God and a “tolerant church” with no “negative” doctrines about sin, sin-guilt, and ultimate judgment, God help us by His Holy Spirit to stand firm on Bible truth with the Reformer, saying: *“Here I stand. I cannot do otherwise. God help me! Amen!”*



IN MEMORY OF

Pastor Paul F. Larsen

August 24, 1932 – August 2, 2013

The Scripture passage *“A man’s heart plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps”* (Proverbs 16:9) comes to mind when one contemplates the many “steps” a child of God takes over the course of four-score years—such as the eventful 80-years-plus of our long-time Christian friend and fellow pastor in the Church of the Lutheran Confession, Paul Ferdinand Larsen.



The LORD who first gave Paul life directed his earthly pilgrimage along a path with many twists and turns, but every step of the way the servant’s focus, it becomes clear, was on the life in Christ Jesus which never ends. On Friday, August 2, just an hour after being released from the hospital into hospice care at his Eau Claire, Wis., home, and while surrounded by family members singing the triumphant “I Know that My Redeemer Lives,” Pastor Larsen entered the eternal peace and joy of his Lord and Savior.

The gospel comfort which he had proclaimed publicly for so many years to others—at Peace Lutheran, Mission, and St. Paul’s of White River, S.Dak. (‘66-70), Berea Lutheran, Inver Grove Heights, Minn. (‘70-83), Zion, Corpus, Christi, Tex. (‘83-86), Holy Truth, Ketchikan, Alaska (‘86-92), Our Savior’s, Jamestown, N.Dak. (‘92-98), Church of the Lutheran Confession, North Port, Fla. (‘98-2010)—was echoed by his pastor, Bruce Naumann, for the memorial service conducted at 5:00 p.m. Tuesday, August 6, at Messiah Lutheran Church, Eau Claire. The sermon text was Philippians 3:20-4:1 with its comforting assurance that in both life and death God’s believing children have a heavenly citizenship.

In addition to forty-plus years of pastoral ministry, the LORD directed the CLC church family to use brother Larsen’s Spirit-given gifts as Visitor for the Minnesota Conference, as a member of the Immanuel Lutheran College

Board of Regents, and on the Synod's Technology Committee.

Paul was the fourth of ten children born to Pastor and Mrs. Ulrik Larsen. His father baptized him at Zion Lutheran, Tracy, Minn., and confirmed him at Cross Lake Lutheran, Fosston, Minn. Drafted into the Army after high school (during the Korean War), and serving but a year (in Germany), Paul was led to prepare for the gospel ministry at Northwestern College, Watertown, Wis. At the time a spiritual "war"—doctrinal controversy—was tearing away at the "Lutheran Synodical Conference." As the LORD through His holy Word and Spirit directed Paul's steps, he joined the newly formed CLC in 1960, graduating from its seminary in Mankato, Minn. in 1963.

Paul and his faithful helpmate every step along the God-directed way, Kathleen (nee Healy), were united in Christian marriage on June 18, 1960. As one of the first steps in their pilgrim journey together, the Larsens rented an older house in Mankato to provide dorm space for up to twelve boys attending the newly established Immanuel Lutheran High School, College, and Seminary. Prior to his first call into the public ministry, another "twist and turn" occurred from 1963-66 when Paul served as the first caretaker at the relocated ILC in Eau Claire.

In August 2010 Pastor Larsen was released from his pastoral call in Florida to care for his Kathy, whom the LORD took home to Himself a month later at their home in Eau Claire. Their marital union had been blessed with five children who remain in their time of grace: Lisa (Mrs. Timothy Noeldner, Eau Claire), Jonathan (Mrs. Naomi, Jefferson City, Tenn.), Aaron (So. St. Paul, Minn.), Joel (Mrs. Jennifer, Lee's Summit, Mo.), and Rachel (Mrs. Marchel Krieger, Jamestown, N.Dak.). Also among the survivors—besides the CLC church family—are thirteen grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

*For all the saints who from their labors rest,
Who Thee by faith before the world confest,
Thy name, O Jesus, be forever blest.*

Alleluia! Alleluia!

*The golden evening brightens in the west;
Soon, soon, to faithful warriors cometh rest.
Sweet is the calm of Paradise the blest.*

Alleluia! Alleluia!

(TLH, #463:1,6)

—Pastor Paul Fleischer, reporter

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Great Lakes Pastoral Conference

October 1-3, 2013

Calvary Lutheran Church

Marquette, Michigan

Agenda:

- + New Testament Exegesis: Romans 4:14ff—Pastor Thomas Schuetze
 - + Old Testament Exegesis: Essayist's choice—Pastor Bruce Naumann
 - + Homiletical Topic: Essayist's choice—Pastor Michael Wilke
 - + Evangelism Topic: Essayist's choice—Pastor Richard Kanzenbach
 - + What Constitutes Saving Faith?—Pastor Walter Schaller
 - + Practical Ways the Pastor can Help Congregational Leaders Fulfill their Roles—Pastor Joel Fleischer
 - + How a Pastor Can Balance Family and Church Responsibilities—Pastor Paul Krause
 - + Church History: Essayist's choice—Attending ILC Professor
- Conference Chaplain—Pastor David Schaller
Communion Service Speaker—Pastor Neal Radichel

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LUTHERAN SPOKESMAN

“ . . . THE SCRIPTURE CANNOT BE BROKEN .” — JOHN 10 : 35

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