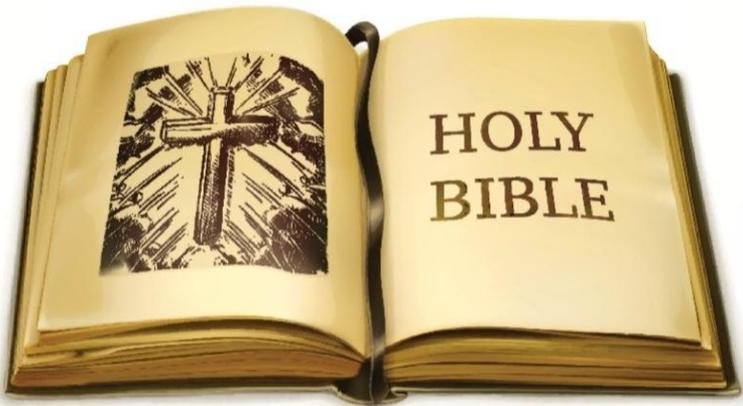


Each Day in the Word



July 27—August 30, 2025

FOREWORD

This booklet is compiled by the pastors of the Confessional Lutheran Ministerium for congregations and individuals not necessarily affiliated with any Lutheran denomination. Indeed, it is for anyone who finds it in their hands whether they are Lutheran or not. It is our prayer that God's people will be edified by this humble offering.

While it is tempting for everyone when reading daily devotional booklets to skip the Scripture lesson and read only the devotional material, it is highly recommended that the reader set their attention on the Scripture lesson before reading the devotion itself. The Holy Spirit tells us in Hebrews 4:12 that "the word of God is living and powerful." As the Scripture is the very Word of God, we ought to devote time and attention to it each day so that through it, God the Holy Spirit may strengthen our trust in His promises and kindle in our hearts love for God and our neighbor.

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Quotations from Martin Luther works are taken from Luther's Works, American Edition, vols. 1–30, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia, 1955–76); vols. 31–55, ed. Helmut Lehmann (Philadelphia/Minneapolis: Muhlenberg/Fortress, 1957–86), hereafter AE.

If salt loses its flavor, it's useless. If a light is hidden, it's useless. If a city is built on a hill, it cannot be hidden. Can you imagine seeing a city being built on the side of a mountain or hillside, and then hearing the developers say, "We're going to be so well hidden there"? It just wouldn't make any sense!

Christ is always the key to the Scriptures. And look to whom He points: Himself. Christ did not come to destroy the Law or the Prophets, but to fulfill them. In other words, He is revealing that He is the Christ. He is the One in whom believers are to put their trust.

There is no escaping this need for Jesus, for the Law is what reveals that need. God's Law will ever stand as the alien, killing agent of God, the only source which drives sinners to repentance so that His Gospel can be heard and received by faith. Jesus also makes it clear that there is no skirting around the exactness of God's Law either. Break one of the least of these Laws and, as it says elsewhere in God's Holy Scripture, you have broken them all. Sinful man doesn't stand a chance. From where will sinful man turn to get his righteousness before God and avoid condemnation?

Strangely, Verse 20 is left off in today's devotional reading. But when read within this context, Christ can be understood as pointing to Himself yet again. "For I say to you," Jesus said, "that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven." Christ's righteousness is the only true righteousness that avails before the Father in heaven. Rejoice that you have been accounted – fully declared – righteous through God who has brought you to repentance and belief.

Let us pray: Lord of all power and might, author and giver of all good things, graft into our hearts the love of Your name, increase in us true religion, nourish us with all goodness, and of Your great mercy keep us in the same; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

"Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls."

"You aren't supposed to judge me!" Those are popular words from unrepentant people in the hopes of excusing their sinful behavior. Sure, St. Paul gives instruction about not judging, but those who would justify themselves are a lot less likely to refer to his words.

St. Paul is teaching the same idea that the Lord gives in His instruction. By inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul makes it clear that the judgments of one sinful man against another have little value, yet at the same time Christians are always subject to the judgment of the Master. It is not that we are never to be judged for our wickedness, but we are to remember that the Lord judges us according to His holy wisdom. With His righteous judgment, however, also comes His divine desire to save us from that sin.

Everyone stands judged guilty on account of their sins. Thankfully, as Holy Scripture makes clear, "We love because He first loved us." This results in the love of our brothers and sisters in the faith admonishing us for our offenses. Our true Master ever calls us, by His powerful Word of Law, to repent and to believe that those sins are paid for in the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. He edifies us and makes us able to walk in righteous faith, which simply means that we are walking in Christ; and that necessarily leads to true works of love. All to God's glory!

Let us pray: Lord of all power and might, author and giver of all good things, graft into our hearts the love of Your name, increase in us true religion, nourish us with all goodness, and of Your great mercy keep us in the same; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The "true religion" of which Paul speaks is the message of forgiveness in Jesus Christ crucified and new life in His righteous commands. False teachers twist religion to be about the works of man to earn a person's place in heaven, but such teachings are not focused on the work of God in Christ. They say religion is about man's love or sincerity or doing the right things or keeping the right traditions. Such religion, however, does not actually help or serve others; it serves the pride of those who would focus on themselves.

The teachings, practices, and customs of the faithful Christian Church, however, are focused on making men and women from all nations and all backgrounds into true disciples who believe and confess the life they have in Jesus Christ. We absolutely believe that we are judged guilty by God's righteous Law, that we are forgiven and justified by faith on account of Christ's death on the cross, and that we are to observe all that Christ commands in the Scriptures, doing these works in love for God through our neighbors. This is the Christian life of dying and rising.

Love or works that are focused on man's notions are a different gospel and a different religion. Man's nature is already inclined to serve himself. Religions that encourage self-indulgence, self-importance, and self-sufficiency do not benefit us; they just end up pulling us apart. True love and true works of benevolence come from God alone, generated by Him. Who better fully to rely upon? In the truth of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit alone we are truly blest!

Let us pray: Lord of all power and might, author and giver of all good things, graft into our hearts the love of Your name, increase in us true religion, nourish us with all goodness, and of Your great mercy keep us in the same; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

"Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. ...And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen."

False teachers say that they desire peace and that those who reject or condemn their errors are causing needless division. They cry out "Peace! Peace!" but they ignore or flat out deny what the true God of peace has to say in His holy Word. You will hear others say, "Doctrines divide."

Divisions are not evil in themselves; they are the result of evil. The Lord's entire ministry exemplified His desire to heal the divisions and offenses caused by sin, but He also clearly taught that those who taught contrary to His doctrine were wrong. He condemned Satan's lies and crushed the power that Satan exercised through the false shepherds and wicked men who were harming God's people. Such divisions and force against evil are, in fact, God's way of bringing peace.

Thankfully, God's grace in Jesus Christ is sufficient for us. We lack peace and unity in this world because evil will cause divisions. We are not to ignore evil in order to encourage fake peace. We are to recognize sin — call it what it is — and cling to the truth of God's righteousness. The peace of His forgiveness in Christ is sufficient until the end of this age. As we proclaim back to God in the liturgy of God's Divine Service: "Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good. His mercy endures forever!"

Let us pray: Lord of all power and might, author and giver of all good things, graft into our hearts the love of Your name, increase in us true religion, nourish us with all goodness, and of Your great mercy keep us in the same; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

“Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.”

False teachers frequently abuse this verse. They plead that those who would mark error be quiet and not cause divisions. But such dishonest shepherds are only trying to foster a unity that is not based on the true commands of Jesus Christ. The mind and judgment of these sinful men are set on human institutions. Their idol is a kingdom on earth, not on the one holy Church that faithfully preaches Christ crucified.

To preach Christ crucified is to preach all that God taught leading up to His atoning death, and all that God continues to teach in His Church, which continues through all that Jesus commanded His Apostles. He sends His Holy Spirit, only through His Word, to bring us to know and remember His truth. This reveals the importance of faithful pastors holding to God’s Word and properly proclaiming God’s teachings.

False teachers defile the name of our Lord and break the Second Commandment by saying their false teachings are in the name of Jesus Christ, or in the name of His love. We are not called to peace and unity in such blasphemous lies. Rather, we are called to be of one mind that is humbled before Christ crucified and shaped by the Holy Spirit through repentance, belief, and faithful worship. And, thanks be to God, He brings us to do so!

Let us pray: Lord of all power and might, author and giver of all good things, graft into our hearts the love of Your name, increase in us true religion, nourish us with all goodness, and of Your great mercy keep us in the same; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

“For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.”

St. Paul does not mean that he or the Church would only say the words "Jesus Christ crucified" over and over. Nor does it mean that all other topics would be minimized or ignored, and all matters of preaching and teaching would be only about the moment when Christ was crucified. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, St. Paul makes the point that the entirety of the Church's doctrine and practice should be faithfully connected to and focused on the Gospel of our forgiveness through faith in Christ's atoning death.

All that Christ taught and commanded to the Apostles is for the purpose of making all people disciples who are focused on His crucifixion. Simply put, all of our Lord's Words from Genesis to His death on the cross were pointing forward to that event, and all His teaching since the crucifixion points back to it. Jesus Christ crucified is the true focus of God's righteousness for us.

False teachers are characterized by their efforts to shift the focus away from Christ crucified. Permissive love is not more important than repentance and faith in the Gospel. Man's works — or false unity — are not an equal or greater focus than the work of God's Word and Spirit to make us one in His kingdom, which is defined according to Jesus Christ crucified. Rejoice that God's instituted Word and Sacrament ministry keeps you so rightly focused!

Let us pray: Lord of all power and might, author and giver of all good things, graft into our hearts the love of Your name, increase in us true religion, nourish us with all goodness, and of Your great mercy keep us in the same; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

“What do you want? Shall I come to you with a rod, or in love and a spirit of gentleness?”

False teachers try to make you believe that there is no rod of discipline for people of the Church. They proclaim a false love that minimizes Christ's commands for you to observe the Ten Commandments and His other guides for doing works of righteous love. False shepherds twist the Gospel of Christ crucified into a different gospel, a gospel which ignores sin and panders to man's pride by identifying unrepentant sinners as totally OK, even righteous.

The rod and staff of the Good Shepherd are holy comforts that did not pass away when Christ was crucified. The righteous admonition and discipline that comes from God's Law are good and wise, and these things are meant to direct readers and hearers to repentance and faith in the forgiveness that comes from our Lord Jesus on His cross.

Man's sinful flesh tries to convince him that comfort now is more important than the welfare of our spirit. But the Word and Spirit of our Lord continue to come to us so that the sinful flesh may be destroyed, suppressed even, and our spirit saved in the life that truly matters. Our abundant life in the kingdom of God through faith in Jesus Christ alone is a far greater blessing than any comforts of the flesh in this age. The world, our flesh, and the devil will do nothing less than try to focus us on our circumstances. But, as God's Word exhorts us, “We live by faith, not by sight.”

Let us pray: Lord of all power and might, author and giver of all good things, graft into our hearts the love of Your name, increase in us true religion, nourish us with all goodness, and of Your great mercy keep us in the same; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

In Matthew 14 Jesus feeds “about five thousand men, besides women and children” (Matt. 14:21). In this chapter He feeds “four thousand men, besides women and children.” John 6 records another time Jesus fed five thousand men. Why does Jesus provide daily bread to those who heard His teaching? He wants to teach us that He will not let us go hungry in this life. He teaches us to pray for daily bread in the Lord’s Prayer. By His miracles He shows us His compassion and that He will answer our prayer for the things we need for the support of this body and life God has given us.

We know He opens His hand and satisfies the desire of every living thing, even the unbeliever who does not ask Him for daily bread or acknowledge Him. But He teaches us that He has compassion on those who continue with Him. This crowd of four thousand men plus women and children have continued with Jesus for three days. They have heard His teaching of repentance, forgiveness, and the new life of faith that works through love for God and neighbor. This crowd has continued with Jesus and forgotten everything else, it seems. Jesus has compassion on them and satisfies their hunger because He does not want them to faint on their way home. He wants to teach them that He provides daily bread.

Jesus asks, “Where could we get enough bread in the wilderness to fill such a great multitude?” He answers this by feeding the crowd. Where will we get enough for this body and life? The only place we will find enough—along with the realization that it is enough—is in the compassion of Jesus. He wants us to continue with Him by hearing His Word, meditating on His Gospel, and praying to Him. By continuing with Jesus, He teaches us that He will not let us go hungry but will give us everything we need for this body and life even as He gives us all things for everlasting life.

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, we give You thanks for Your compassion by which you give us our daily bread, and ask for Your grace that we may continue with You in faith. Amen.

The devil, the world, and our flesh want us to believe that our bodies are our own so that we use them for our own purpose and pleasure. The pro-abortion slogan, “My body, my choice,” is the sinful flesh’s slogan for all forms of self-indulgence, especially sexual self-indulgence.

St. Paul teaches otherwise. “Now the body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.” God hasn’t given us our bodies to use for our personal pleasure and gratification. The body is for the Lord and His service. Sexual immorality of any kind is especially dangerous because “he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body.” This sin is insidious because it turns the sinner increasingly upon himself so that he worships his desires and is unable to love and serve others. It is ultimately a form of self-idolatry.

The body is for the Lord, not only because the Lord made our bodies but because He has made the believer’s body a temple of the Holy Spirit by faith. The Holy Spirit dwells in all who believe so that faith is sustained and fruit in borne in them, especially the fruits of love toward others and self-control of the mind and body. The Holy Spirit dwells in believers to guide them into good works and defends them from every temptation that assails them from the world, the devil, and the wicked impulses of the sinful flesh.

With this in mind, flee sexual immorality as something dreadfully harmful. Pursue chastity in thought, word, and deed as something profitable and useful. Use your body to serve others in selfless love and thereby glorify God with your body and spirit since you were bought with the price of Christ’s precious blood. The Christian’s slogan isn’t “My body, my choice,” but “My body for God’s service.”

Let us pray: Grant us Your Holy Spirit, O Lord, that we may glorify you with our bodies and be chaste in our thoughts, our words, and our behaviors. Amen.

St. Paul praises celibacy, which is the complete abstention not only from lusts and fornication, but also marriage. What makes celibacy good isn't that it justifies us before God or earns God's favor. What makes it good is that it frees men and women from the cares of this world so that they can devote themselves to prayer, the Word, and service to the Lord in the church. Yet celibacy is not for everyone. "Each one has his own gift from God, one in this manner and another in that." Celibacy, marriage, and a family are gifts from God, not choices we make.

To those whom God has not given the gift of celibacy, Paul writes, "If they cannot exercise self-control [celibacy], let them marry." Yet even in marriage there is to be self-control so that husbands and wives give themselves to each other in love and sanctification, "not in passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God" (1 Thess. 4:5). Sex within marriage is an expression of the one-flesh union that God has created, so that marriage isn't a matter of "me" but of "we." The Christian spouse says, "What is good for my spouse whom God has given me and what is good for us – that is what is good for me." This is how the Christian spouse ought to think about all things in marriage, including physical intimacy, so that in all things the one flesh union is celebrated.

Paul then urges single people who can be celibate to serve the Lord without distraction. But those who desire marriage and family are to pray for a Godly spouse, as well as patience and self-control. Self-control is simply chastity, and chastity is something required outside of marriage and within marriage as well. Whatever gift God has given – celibacy, singleness, or marriage – we are to glorify God by living in sanctification and holiness, loving our neighbor as ourselves.

Let us pray: Grant us wisdom, O Lord, to recognize our callings. Increase in us the gift of self-control that in our callings we may love one another and glorify you. Amen.

The Corinthians asked Paul if it was acceptable to eat meat sacrificed to idols. Would eating the sacrifice make them partakers of the sacrifice to a pagan idol and make them idolaters? Paul responds that “an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one.” Scripture at times calls other beings—usually leaders of the church—gods, such as in Psalm 82:6. The Gentiles made their ancestors into gods and gave them divine honors and worship. But these are not gods in the true sense. There is only one God, the Father, His eternal Son Jesus, and the Holy Spirit that proceeds from them. This is why “idols are nothing in the world.”

Paul sees that the real issue isn't eating this meat but about the effect such eating could have on the consciences of Christians whose faith was weak. The weak in this instance are Corinthian Christians who were former idolaters and still had scruples that such meat was truly offered to another god. Their knowledge of the one God was frail. These Christians would see the more certain Christians eating meat previously sacrificed to idols and be scandalized, imagining that their brothers and sisters in Christ were partaking in idolatry.

Christian freedom is not always easy to understand and practice. Those who have understanding must be mindful of those who are weak in understanding. If meat scandalized a brother, Paul would never eat meat again. So, we are to be careful not to use our freedom to scandalize others. However, neither are we to allow the weaker brother to remain in his weak state. Thus, Paul can write that those with knowledge should temper their knowledge with love while those who are weak should consider that there is, in fact, only one God. Let us love the brethren so we neither scandalize them in free matters nor allow them to remain in their weak understanding.

Let us pray: Heavenly Father, increase in our hearts knowledge of the Gospel as well as love for others, so that in all things we confess our faith and live in love. Amen.

Paul is free to take a believing wife with him on his missionary journeys as the other apostles do. He has the right to reap material things from his congregations and make his living from preaching the Gospel. It is the Lord's command that "those who preach the Gospel should live from the Gospel." But Paul does not use or abuse these rights. He uses his freedom to provide the Gospel free of charge to his hearers.

Paul is free from all men. But he uses his freedom to win men to the Gospel. When among Jews, he lives as a Jew. He observes the Mosaic laws even though he is not under the law. He does this so that the Jews might more readily hear the Gospel. When among Gentiles, who are not under Mosaic law, he lives as the Gentiles. He doesn't live by Mosaic law among the Gentiles because that would hinder his preaching that faith in Christ alone justifies, apart from the works of the law. Yet even among the Gentiles he is not without law toward God. He lives under the law of Christ which is the law of love. To the weak, those in yesterday's reading whose understanding and faith was not strong, Paul condescends to their weakness. He lives as one who is weak in order to strengthen them in knowledge and faith. He becomes all things to all men that he might by all means save some. He uses his freedom from the law to preach to others in their present condition so that some might be saved by faith in the Gospel.

All who believe in Christ's perfect atonement and righteousness are free from the condemnation and coercion of the law. We are perfectly free, subject to no one. But believers use their freedom, not as a cloak for vice, but to serve others in love. Paul used his freedom, condescending to the spiritual state of his hearers, to serve them with the Gospel. Christians use their freedom from the law to serve others in their vocations, meeting others where they are as well.

Let us pray: O Lord, grant us Your Holy Spirit that we may understand our freedom in Christ, rejoice in it, and use it to serve our neighbors in love. Amen.

When Christians partake of the Lord's Supper, they eat Christ's very body and drink His very blood which was sacrificed on the cross for the sins of the world. By eating the sacrifice, we have fellowship, or communion, with Christ's body and blood and receive the benefits won by His death.

Israel ate the sacrifices they offered in the tabernacle and temple, and by that eating had fellowship, or communion, with the true God, receiving His promised benefits by faith. But when Gentiles eat the sacrifices they offer to idols in their temples, they have fellowship, or communion, with the demons who inspired the idol. If a Christian has fellowship with demons by eating the sacrifice to them in their temple, they arouse the Lord's jealousy and anger by their idolatry.

However, Christians can buy meat at the marketplace and eat as guests in other's homes without harm to their conscience. If the host discloses that the meat was sacrificed to an idol, the Christian isn't to eat it, not for the sake of his own conscience, but for the sake of the host's conscience who told them. Christians were not to worship in idols' temples. Neither were they to go searching for things to avoid based on their origins or how they were made. Christians should only abstain from the things of this world if those things trouble the conscience of others. This is using Christian freedom for the sake of others so that their consciences aren't burdened.

The rubric for Christian freedom is simply this: "Let no one seek his own, but each one the other's well-being." Consider Christ: the bruised reed He did not break; the smoldering wick He did not snuff out. He came not to be served but to serve. Christ did not seek His own good because love "does not seek its own" (1 Cor. 13:5). We have fellowship with Christ and receive His benefits in the Lord's Supper, which strengthens us to love our neighbor and seek their good.

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, fill us with your love so that we, having partaken of your sacrifice and received Your benefits, may live for the good and benefit of our neighbor. Amen.

“The head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.” This principle lies behind the ancient Christian custom of women wearing head coverings.

The custom was a sign that they were under a man’s authority which, properly understood, means self-sacrificing service to the higher power, not blind obedience to an autocratic power. It recalled the order of creation, that “Adam was formed first, then Eve” (1 Tim. 2:13) and original sin, namely that “Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression” (1 Tim. 2:14). The woman’s head covering was also a sign of the Lord’s atonement for original sin, since atonement literally means “a covering.”

A Christian man did not cover his head because “he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man.” God created man first and set him as His representative on the earth. God created woman second, from man’s side, to be man’s helper. Yet this does not mean that man doesn’t have a Head. “The head of every man is Christ.” Under the Old Testament, the man had a sign of authority on him just as the woman wore a sign of authority. Circumcision was a sign of original sin and its covering. The foreskin—a sign of the sinful flesh—was removed so that the spiritual covering of Christ’s righteousness covered the original sin. Circumcision served as a sign of Christ’s authority over them, which is self-sacrificing service, not autocratic power (Lk. 22:24-27).

There are different Scriptural roles for men and women. Men are designed to be fathers and some of them are ordained to be pastors. Women are designed to be mothers. Thus, God shows the equality of the sexes and their interdependence “in the Lord.” Head coverings, like circumcision, are optional for Christians. But the principle that we all have a Head who has sacrificed Himself for us is not an indifferent thing.

Let us pray: Lord Jesus Christ, we give You thanks for Your authority over us which you exercised by sacrificing Yourself to make full atonement and cover all our sins. Amen.

The demonic doctrine which deceives many people teaches that outward discipline by itself pleases God and increases one's holiness. Some will abstain from marrying or from marital relations within marriage, thinking this abstention is a holier state. Others fast from certain foods, imagining that living according to the Old Testament dietary restrictions pleases God and increases holiness. But the Gospel teaches that everything "is sanctified by the word of God and prayer." Sexual relations within marriage are good and God-pleasing because they are an expression of the one flesh union. Husband and wife may abstain for a time for prayer, but this discipline does not make them holy. Fasting is a way to discipline one's flesh and tame its wicked desires, but fasting does not make one holy.

St. Paul writes, "Bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." Bodily exercises—the abstaining from certain good gifts of God—are to be used in our exercise toward godliness, but of themselves they are not godliness. Godliness, which can also be translated 'piety,' means reverence for God in one's heart and life. The exercise of godliness is the daily training of ourselves in contrition, faith, and serving our neighbor in love. Reverence in the heart toward God is daily confessing our sins and believing God's promises in the Gospel. Reverence for God in one's life means living holy lives according to His holy Word. We train ourselves in godliness with the Holy Spirit's aid because it is God's will and it is good for us. "Godliness with contentment is great gain" (1 Tim. 6:6). It profits us in this life by keeping our focus on the things of God rather than the temptations of the world and flesh. Godliness profits in the life to come because it keeps us in the faith in the midst of life's dangers and prepares us for the life of the world to come.

Let us pray: Heavenly Father, give us Your Holy Spirit so that we exercise ourselves toward godliness every day. Amen.

Each of us has only one body, but our one body is made up of many different parts. Each part has its own unique function and operates inseparably with the other parts. If one part of our body suffers, the entire body suffers. If one member of our body is honored, the entire body—we ourselves—are honored.

So it is with Christ. His body, the church, is one yet consists of as many members as there are believers. The Holy Spirit baptized us into Christ's body and gives us of Himself to drink for our spiritual nourishment. He does this through God's Word and sacraments. But this equality does not mean that we are all the same part. Feet cannot be hands. Ears cannot be eyes. Within the church God has appointed some to be apostles, prophets, and teachers. In Corinth God had also appointed miracles, gifts of healing, and a variety of tongues – gifts which He no longer gives to His church.

Within Christ's body we do not seek those things which God has not given or appointed for us, nor do we puff ourselves up because of what God has appointed to us, for "God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased." Every individual is a member of Christ's body and works best when he or she works for the honor of the body, which is Christ's, and serves the other members, our brothers and sisters in Christ. No matter what God has appointed for you in Christ's church, whether pastor or hearer, "the members should have the same care for one another."

This is why we are to "earnestly desire the best gifts." What is the best gift? The next chapter answers that. The best gift is love because it has countless opportunities to serve other members of Christ's body, no matter what member of the body God has appointed you to be.

Let us pray: Lord God, as we drink from the Spirit through your Word and sacraments, teach us true love for the other members of Your Son's body, so that we selflessly serve them. Amen.

The speaking of God's Word should always be done for the edification—the building up—of those who hear God's Word. Speaking in tongues, that is, speaking in another language, only edifies people's faith and love if there is a translator. Otherwise, the only one who understands the tongue is the Lord who gave that gift to the speaker. It doesn't edify believers but drives away unbelievers, confirming them in their unbelief. Paul doesn't discourage tongues, but he makes it clear that prophecy—the speaking of God's Word—excels tongues, because “he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men.”

Five intelligible words that speak of Christ, the forgiveness of sins, and the new obedience of faith are far better than ten thousand words no one can understand. This preaching—which is prophecy—speaks clearly of Christ and His salvation for everyone's benefit. St. John writes in Revelation 19:10 that “the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.” All prophecy has to do with Jesus, His perfect life lived in our stead, His death died with all our sins imputed to Him, His resurrection which makes justification available for all who believe and trust His atoning work. St. Paul commands that the message of Christ be proclaimed clearly for the edification of all the church.

Paul also forbids women from speaking in the church. This speaking is the authoritative, public preaching, and does not include the singing of hymns and psalms or responses, nor does it exclude speaking the Gospel to others in their vocations. This is not because women are inferior to men; after all, not all men are qualified to be preachers. Rather, this reflects the order in which God created man and woman. Christians are to do all things decently and in order, especially according to what God has ordered in holy Scripture.

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, we give you thanks for ordering all things to reflect your good creation and the Gospel so that we may be edified and built up in your will. Amen.

Paul's closing exhortation is to faith and love. He exhorts the Corinthians—and all Christians—to faith when he writes, "Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong." Faith keeps watch against temptation, knowing the devil's devices. Faith stands fast, firmly believing the apostles' doctrine. Faith is brave; it trusts God's promises to be true and certain no matter how the devil, the world, and the sinful flesh attack or entice. Faith makes us strong against all our enemies because by faith we have Christ's strength to overcome every temptation. If we fall to temptation and consent to sin, faith remembers "we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous" (1 John 2:1).

Paul teaches us love when he writes, "Let all that you do be done with love." The faith that watches, stands fast, being brave and strong in the Gospel promises, works through love. Everything we do ought to be done with the motivation of love. Without love all our good works, charitable deeds, and service to God and others are clanging cymbals and sounding brass. When lethargy tempts us to be sluggish in our callings, Paul's words remind us to do the work of our vocations in love. When selfishness creeps into our motivation so that we help others with the thought of getting something in return, Paul's words point us to the motivation that Christ had in sacrificing Himself for His bride, the Church.

Walking in faith, we are to be "steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that our labor is not in vain in the Lord." This is the labor of watching and standing fast. It is the labor of loving our neighbors in our vocations. No matter the labor to which Christ has called us, no matter the field of service, we know that our labor is not in vain because it is the labor He has given to us to do.

Let us pray: Strengthen our faith in Your promises, Lord Jesus, so that we might stand fast in the faith against all temptations and do all we do for others out of love for them and you. Amen.

Paul writes in Romans 8:28, “We know that all things work together for good to those who love God.” In today’s reading he explains two ways in which God works even our afflictions for our good.

First, although while suffering any affliction we feel the sentence of death hanging over our heads, we learn daily to trust in God who raises the dead. In the midst of our sufferings, tribulations, and crosses the Holy Spirit wants to lead us to deeper faith in the Gospel. Though we might even despair of our very lives because of hardship, Christ uses our sufferings to show that His strength is made perfect in weakness, just as it was during the days of His earthly life.

Second, God comforts us in our afflictions so that, as we receive heavenly comfort, we might turn around and comfort those in our lives who need the comfort of the Gospel. This is not a generic comfort. It is the comfort of the Holy Ghost working through the Word of God to give us Christ. The word *comfort* is the same word used to name the Holy Ghost *the Comforter* in St. John’s Gospel. The comfort which the God of all comfort offers to Paul in His tribulation is that of the Holy Ghost, who calls to His mind the perfect peace Jesus brings by forgiving sins, bestowing righteousness, and the ability to do all things with the strength Christ provides.

This is the comfort that Paul, and all the faithful, offer to each other in the midst of their afflictions. It is the comfort that as our Lord suffered while in the flesh, so must His baptized suffer. But as Christ was vindicated by the Father on the Third Day, so all the baptized will be vindicated from their sufferings, if not in this life, then on the Last Day at the resurrection of the dead, so that nothing lasts forever except the comfort, peace, and joy of the Gospel.

Let us pray: Lord God, grant us the holy comfort of Christ’s peace and strength in our afflictions, so that, rejoicing in your comfort, we may comfort others with the same. Amen.

Paul urges the Corinthians to forgive the man who had taken his father's wife as his own. Paul advised them to hand the man over to Satan for the destruction of his flesh "that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus" (1 Cor. 5:5). Being excommunicated from the church led the man to see the severity of his sin and grieve over it. Now Paul urges them to forgive the penitent man lest he be swallowed up by excessive sorrow and despair that he is beyond forgiveness. Despair is the first of the devil's devices of which St. Paul wants the Corinthians to be aware. Another satanic device the Corinthians must watch for is the temptation to become puffed up at the fact that they had not fallen into such a sin and say with the Pharisee in Luke 18:11, "God, I thank You that I am not like other men." Although despair and pride seem very different, they are both unbelief. Despair says, "I am beyond forgiveness for my sin." Pride says, "I have no sin for which I need forgiveness." Love for the erring brother is not puffed up nor is it unwilling to forgive if he repents.

The saving knowledge of Christ that forgives sins and offers newness of life is a sweet-smelling fragrance that God diffuses through Paul's preaching. To those who are perishing in their unbelief, the Gospel reeks of death by requiring the admission of their sin, repenting their pride, trust in Christ's death and righteousness, and amendment of life. The Gospel is the fragrance of death to unbelievers because it means the death of their old Adam, which many refuse to tolerate.

But to those who are being saved, like the penitent Corinthian, Paul's ministry is the fragrance of life. It smells of life because as it puts the Old Adam to death through repentance, it raises up the New Man who is renewed in Christ's image. The New Man lives before God in righteousness and purity, for where there is forgiveness of sins there is new life and the promise of eternal salvation.

Let us pray: Keep us from pride and despair by true repentance and faith, O Lord, and grant us new life. Amen.

“Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”

The great promises of which St. Paul speaks are the Lord’s promises to dwell within the baptized and be their God so that the baptized belong to God and God belongs to them. The second promise is that God will be a Father to them, making them His sons and daughters. These are great promises indeed! The Lord promises to be with us, to dwell within us by faith so that we belong to the Lord. He promises that we are His sons and daughters and therefore co-heirs with Christ of all the heavenly blessings. All of this He promises us in His Word, and all of this He gives us in Holy Baptism.

Therefore, since we are baptized and have received such great promises, St. Paul urges us to cleanse ourselves from all the world’s filthiness of body and soul by godly sorrow. All manner of lust, ambition, greed, along with every excuse and rationalization for our sin, are to be acknowledged for what they are: sins which displease God and earn His wrath. We also sorrow over the sin in our flesh, desires and impulses, as displeasing to God. This sorrow leads to true repentance, that we confess our sins and believe the Gospel of Christ’s full atonement and perfect righteousness which He promises to the penitent. Worldly sorrow, however, does not lead to repentance and faith. Worldly sorrow is only sorrow for being caught and having to endure the earthly consequences. Godly sorrow and faith in God’s promise of forgiveness enables us to live our identity as temples of the Spirit and children of God the Father. Living in this identity each day, we put off our sins and work, with the Spirit’s aid, to perfect our holiness in the fear of God.

Let us pray: Lord God, grant us godly sorrow that leads to repentance so that we may rejoice in Your promises and live according to the identity You give us in the Gospel. Amen.

Shall we sin? Certainly not! The answer seems obvious to the Christian. And yet, history shows that this simple question and answer needs to be repeated often, because God's people, influenced by the devil, the world, and our flesh, easily grow complacent and secure. Such was certainly the case for Israel at Mt. Sinai. God had redeemed them from slavery in Egypt and claimed them as His special people. They were finally safe and secure under the grace and protection of the LORD God. But instead of serving Him and obeying the commandments He had recently spoken to them, they went right back to serving sin instead...and the consequences were fatal.

So, just as Paul warns the Corinthian Christians in today's Epistle, so he instructs and urges the Romans in today's devotional text: Shall we sin? Certainly not!

Why not? Because you wanted to be free from sin. Remember? The Law condemned you because of your sins. It warned you of God's wrath and eternal punishment, and you were rightly afraid. And then the Gospel called you away from the judgment seat of the Law to flee in faith to Christ Jesus, to be judged under grace instead. There you received the forgiveness of sins and were welcomed into God's house and into God's service, leading to life instead of death. It is good to be reminded of that, because the devil would gladly convince you that you can live under grace while also living in willful sin. He would lull you to sleep, convincing you that you are secure in God's grace even as you reject that very grace through impenitence. When he makes such an attempt, return to Paul's question and answer: Shall we sin? Certainly not! For you have been delivered from sin and death and are now a servant of the God of grace, to do good instead of evil.

Let us pray: Merciful Father in heaven, we thank you for delivering us from sin through faith in Your beloved Son. Help us by Your powerful Spirit to flee from sin each day and to serve You in righteousness. Amen.

St. Paul spent two chapters in his second epistle to the Corinthians urging them to finish gathering a generous offering for the saints in Jerusalem who were suffering scarcity due to famine. He gives them one reason after another to follow through with the charitable aid they had promised, and we do well to note that his words apply not to their divine obligation to support the local ministry of the Gospel, but to an offering that was above and beyond their local responsibilities, an offering that was entirely free, and yet still subject to the guidance of God's Word. We can apply his counsel especially to the charitable offerings we gather for other Christians or congregations within our fellowship.

Give, because giving itself is God's gracious gift to you, as the Macedonian Christians had already proven by the generous offering they had gathered, even though they themselves were suffering.

Give, because it will prove the sincerity of your love.

Give, because Christ gave everything for you, to the point of impoverishing Himself, and has made you rich with the gifts of forgiveness, adoption, access to God, and an eternal inheritance.

Give, because you said you would give and already expressed your desire to help.

Give, because it is a godly thing for Christians who have more of something to share with Christians who have less. Right now, you have more money, and they have less. They, on the other hand, may have an abundance of something else which they can share with you, like wisdom, prayer, thanksgiving, or doctrinal insight.

Let us pray: O God of grace, we pray for all our fellow Christians who are suffering any need. Grant us the grace to supply their needs out of the abundance You have given us. Amen.

St. Paul continues his admonition about the special offering the Corinthians were gathering—or were supposed to be gathering—for the saints in Jerusalem. Again, we can apply his instructions to our own charitable offerings to other Christians in their time of need.

Give, because I know you're willing. You said you were willing. I know you want to help your fellow Christians.

Give, because I've already boasted to others about your willingness and zeal to help, and I don't want to be put to shame if I arrive and find that you were all talk and no action. Then I will appear to have deceived others about you.

Give, because I've already boasted to others about you, and I don't want you to be put to shame. You said you wanted to help. How embarrassing it would be for you if your fellow Christians learned that you chose not to help them.

Give, not grudgingly, not out of a sense of obligation, but cheerfully, because God loves a cheerful giver.

Give, not sparingly, but generously, because God will bless you far beyond what you give, sometimes with physical blessings, but always with spiritual ones.

Give, because it supplies the needs of many, even beyond what you actually give, because God is able to multiply the little works that we do, even as Jesus once multiplied a few loaves of bread and a few fish to feed more than 5,000 people.

Give, because it results in thanksgiving to God as the recipients of your gift praise Him for working such love in you and for providing for them through you.

Let us pray: O Lord, increase in us the mind of Christ to keep us focused on fulfilling the needs of others, as You give us the means and the opportunity. Amen.

It appears that some members of the church in Corinth were listening to the wrong people. Other ministers had come claiming to be apostles and had led them to distrust Paul, who would soon be coming to pick up their offering for Jerusalem. “Don’t worry about Paul. He only sounds tough in his letters. He won’t rebuke you harshly when he comes in person. He’ll be meek and mild.”

On the contrary, Paul promises that he will be “bold against some,” even as the meek and mild Jesus sometimes upbraided the Pharisees for their hypocrisy or drove out the moneychangers from the Temple. Paul and the other apostles and ministers of Christ wielded God’s Word as a mighty weapon. No sin is off limits from being identified and condemned. No false argument is immune from being dismantled. No human idea is at all safe from being criticized and even brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.

Paul asserts his divine authority and insists that the Corinthians recognize it, especially since Paul was the very one who brought the Gospel to them in the first place, and who was in fellowship with the rest of the Lord’s handpicked apostles.

Ministers today are not handpicked by Jesus as the apostles were; their authority is governed by the authority of the apostles and prophets. But their authority is still valid, given to them by God in their call and ordination, so they, too, have been armed with mighty spiritual weapons to address men’s behavior, ideas, and teachings and to make them conform to the Word of Christ. This they do, not to seek men’s approval, but God’s.

Let us pray: O Lord, bless the ministry of Your faithful ministers. Grant them wisdom and boldness to preach Your Word with power. Amen.

Be very careful whom you trust, especially in matters of faith. St. Paul scolds the Corinthians in today's reading for being too trusting of those who claimed to be apostles. They were proud of their "simplicity in Christ," proud of their gullibility, proud of accepting the preachers who came to them without passing judgment on them. After all, didn't Christ command us to "judge not"?

But the apostle warns that by failing to judge the *message* of those preachers, the Corinthians were not doing well; they were leaving themselves open to being deceived and led astray to a different gospel.

It is possible to be overly critical of those who preach the Gospel; that flows from lovelessness and lack of respect for authority. On the other hand, it is very dangerous to be underly critical of them, because both Satan and his human ministers like to pretend to be something they are not. Satan pretends to be an angel of light instead of the demon of darkness that he is. His ministers pretend to be teachers of righteousness instead of the false teachers that they are. And even well-intentioned Christian ministers can err.

The true apostles and ministers of Christ are known by their fruit, both their doctrine and their life. Paul's Scriptural teaching and Paul's insistence on not taking a salary from the churches in Corinth should have made the Corinthian Christians more trusting of him and more critical of those who came with a different message and a different way of life. There is no virtue in the kind of intentional simplicity that says, "Jesus loves me, this I know—and this is all I care to know."

Let us pray: Lord, keep us from being deceived by false prophets, and help us each day to grow in grace and the knowledge of You. Amen.

No minister of God enjoys being harsh with his flock, just as no godly father enjoys having to speak harshly to his children. But sometimes it is necessary. When members of the flock are stubbornly living according to the flesh without repentance, the preacher must rebuke them, as Paul feared he would have to rebuke the Corinthians when he arrived.

So, he encourages them, ahead of his visit, to “examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves...” (2 Cor. 13:5). Use the Word of God to judge your own desires, attitudes, and actions. Do you recognize the self-centeredness of your flesh? Do you recognize your sins against God and man? Do you mourn over them and renounce them? Do you believe in the Lord Jesus who was delivered to death for your sins and raised to life for your justification? Do you wish to amend your sinful life? Are you filled with thankfulness toward God and committed to love your neighbor and especially your fellow Christians? Do you believe all the things God’s holy prophets and apostles have taught you to believe? Do you respect the ministers of Christ? Do you long to hear the voice of the Good Shepherd preaching to you through His ministers? Do you long for the Sacrament of His body and blood? Do you struggle against your sinful flesh and hope for the coming of the Lord Jesus?

An honest “yes” to these questions reveals that you are “in the faith” and are not in need of a harsh rebuke from God’s ministers, though we all need correction from time to time. Where rebuke or correction is needed, know that God’s minister administers it for your good, that you may be eternally saved.

Let us pray: O God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, accompany us with Your grace, love, and fellowship. Amen.

Yet again, in writing to the Christians in Galatia, St. Paul found himself having to defend his divine authority as an apostle chosen and sent by God to speak to men in God's name and on God's behalf. His authority was all-important, because the Gospel he preached was all-important. If Paul could not be trusted to speak for God, then neither could his message from God be trusted.

So, the Holy Spirit inspired the apostle, not only to defend his authority in this epistle, but to rebuke those who opposed him and to teach them again the sweet Gospel of justification by faith alone in Christ, lest they be led astray to believe that there is any other way to be justified.

Martin Luther, in his commentary on Galatians, beautifully summarized Paul's teaching: "I teach only what has been divinely commanded. And I do not glorify myself; I glorify Him who sent me. In addition, I bring upon myself the enmity and indignation both of the Jews and of the Gentiles. Therefore, my doctrine is true, pure, sure, and divine. Nor can there be any doctrine that is different from mine, much less better. Therefore, any doctrine at all that does not teach as mine does—that all men are sinners and are justified solely by faith in Christ—must be false, uncertain, evil, blasphemous, accursed, and demonic. And so are those who either teach or accept such a doctrine" (American Edition:26:59).

Let us pray: Let Your merciful ears, O Lord, be open to the prayers of Your humble servants; and that they may obtain their petitions, make them to ask such things as are pleasing to You; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.

“For I am not ashamed of the Gospel... For in it the righteousness of God is revealed” (vv. 16-17).

This very verse has special importance for us as Lutherans because of how important it was for Luther himself. It was this very place in Scripture that God used to make the Gospel clear in Luther’s own young mind. In what has come to be known as Luther’s “tower experience” of 1519, the struggle with this verse became a turning point for his understanding of the Gospel itself and indeed all of Scripture.

Luther later recorded the conclusion of this struggle: “At last, by the mercy of God, meditating day and night, I gave heed to the context of the words, namely, ‘In it the righteousness of God is revealed, as it is written, “He who through faith is righteous shall live.”’ There I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous lives by a gift of God, namely by faith. And this is the meaning: the righteousness of God is revealed by the Gospel, namely, the passive righteousness with which merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written, ‘He who through faith is righteous shall live.’ Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates. There a totally other face of the entire Scripture showed itself to me” (American Edition 34:337).

In another place Luther recorded that it was this particular verse that helped him to learn to distinguish between Moses and Christ, between Law and Gospel. The result? Luther says, “But when I discovered the proper distinction—namely, that the law is one thing and the Gospel is another—I made myself free” (AE 54:442).

We pray: O God, you reveal Your almighty power chiefly by showing mercy and compassion. Pour out Your grace on us that we pursue Your promises and enjoy Your heavenly blessings; through Your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

“We did not yield submission even for an hour, that the truth of the Gospel might continue with you.” (v. 5)

In Galatians, Paul must deal with a distortion of the Gospel. However, we must keep in mind that the Gospel can be distorted in more than one way. For example, in the Gospels, we see that the Pharisees erred on the *right* by promoting works-righteousness, while the Sadducees erred on the *left* by promoting secular tolerance. Early in the Reformation, Luther fought the errors on the *right* of works-righteousness in Roman Catholicism, while later he also fought the errors on the *left* of licentiousness in the antinomians, etc.

Here in Galatians, Paul must fight the distortion of the Gospel on the *right* side that imposes legalism (works-righteousness) onto the Gospel. In Corinth, however, Paul had to fight the distortion on the *left* side that imposes licentiousness (lawless tolerance) onto the Gospel, which is prominent in our culture and has compromised many churches today.

Thus, Paul says to the Galatians that through the law he died to the law (v. 19), but this certainly does not mean absolute freedom from God’s *moral* law. This is why it is vitally important, when reading Galatians, to understand what Paul means by the law, and what does and does not apply to the Christian. Namely, these three things: 1) the law, as a total body of all of God’s legal codes, no longer condemns us, in so far as we are Christians; and 2) that portion of God’s legal codes which are *ceremonial* laws no longer applies to us as Christians. However, 3) the *moral* law of God’s Word, while it has no saving or justifying power, still applies to the Christian as curb, mirror, and rule/guide.

We pray: Holy Father, sanctify us through Your Word and Spirit so that we are led only by the true Gospel of the forgiveness of sins in Christ our Lord, and not led away by any false ‘gospel’ that the world puts forth. Amen.

“O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified?” (v. 1)

There is a play on words in the Greek text that does not come across in the English. Paul asks who has “bewitched” the Galatians—a term that speaks of deception through the eyes, like a sleight-of-hand magician. Then Paul continues the visual imagery by reminding them of the surpassing sight that was “portrayed” before their eyes: Christ crucified for their sins. This is their true reality, and the former things are a false substitute.

The issue here is how salvation in Christ is appropriated or received. The true means of receiving is “by hearing with faith” and “by the Spirit”; but the false substitute is “by works of the law” and “by the flesh.” The problem is that Paul has to argue against the Judaizing influence on Gentile Christianity that says salvation starts by grace in Christ but then it is completed by following Jewish ceremonial laws like circumcision and table fellowship (v. 12). Paul speaks against the necessity of these *ceremonial* laws, while the *moral* laws are still binding upon the Christian. These *moral* laws, like the Ten Commandments, are still binding for us because they are God’s eternal will for His people. Paul also says that *all* of the Law does not justify in any sense, before conversion or after. Christ alone justifies us by His perfect life and His death in our place on the cross, as we receive this by faith alone. There is no bewitching magic here, just God graciously at work through His Word, and received by faith. God gives; faith receives.

Let us pray: Holy Father, we are thankful that You saved us purely out of grace and brought us to faith through the power of Your Word and Spirit. Guide us by Your Spirit to trust fully in You and Your sustaining power, which is ours by faith alone in Christ alone. In His name we pray. Amen.

“My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you...” (v. 19). All pastors and parents can identify with Paul here. That’s why 1 Cor. 15:58 is so comforting: “Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.” Amen! So often the work of parents and pastors can *feel* very much in vain, but we take comfort in God’s Word here that our work *in the Lord* is not in vain.

Paul wants the people to be as he is: in Christ. For example, true pastors do not allow hero-worship or make direct followers of themselves *per se*. Instead, they lead by example by demonstrating how to be followers of *Christ*. This also means that since God uses our weaknesses for His purposes, faithful congregations must look beyond physical limitations of their pastors and receive the message of Christ through weak, human servants.

The real issue is the truth of the Gospel, but we see all over America today something else. Namely, while truth is still at a premium for us, it is not so for the world and worldly “churches.” Instead, like the Judaizers of Paul’s day who added to God’s Word and tried to create their own criteria for association, false leaders in many compromised churches today have basically created their own stained-glass country clubs, wherein hero-worship and party-spirit are rampant.

Instead, Paul emphasizes for us the true Gospel, true pastors, true fellowship in Christ, and the true church. These all go together and are centered in Christ. Truth matters—God’s truth, in Christ.

Let us pray: Holy Father, keep us faithful to Your Son, His true Gospel, His true pastors, and His true Church. Help us to reach out with Your true Gospel to all who are victims of various falsehoods that they might hear Christ Himself inviting them to return to You through forgiveness in Him alone. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

“For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.” (v. 13)

Freedom is never absolute. The only freedom that is worthwhile is freedom from the things that harm us. No mature and sane person seeks freedom from the things that do us good. Those are things we keep, maintain, preserve, and conserve. Thus, with respect to the *bad* things in life we are “liberal”—but only in the sense that we want to be liberated *from* them (not liberated and free to *indulge* in them); and with respect to the *good* things in life we are “conservative”—but only in the sense that we want to conserve them for our benefit and not be imprisoned or enslaved by them.

Not everyone understands or lives in this kind of Christian maturity, so we constantly hear contrary voices—not just from the world but also from other people who call themselves Christians. To our dogged dedication to “obeying the truth” (v. 7), they insist instead on “tolerance and love.” Dr. Martin Luther, in his own great Galatians commentary on verse 9, “[The words] ‘A little yeast leavens the whole lump’ offers this corrective: ‘A curse on a love that is observed at the expense of the doctrine of faith, to which everything must yield—love, an apostle, an angel from heaven, etc.!’” (American Edition 27:35-39). God’s love, as described in the Bible, is very different from what the world calls love. The world’s version of love is simply tolerance and indulgence, while God’s kind of love is lifting us out of ourselves to be in proper relationships with others and living in loving service to them and God.

Let all others go their way; we will stick with Christ and His Word!

Let us pray: “Lord, keep us steadfast in Thy Word; Curb those who fain by craft or sword Would wrest the Kingdom from Thy Son And set at naught all He hath done.” (TLH 261:1)

“But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation” (vv. 14-15).

Paul points out the hypocrisy of the Judaizers who, while they tell others to keep the law, they themselves do not even keep the law. Then Paul says that the demands of the world are meaningless to him. This was obviously true of Christ, and here Paul says it of himself. He asks his hearers to follow his example—his example of following Christ’s example. After all, that is what it means to be His disciples: we follow His teachings, and we follow His example. To do otherwise, quite simply, is not the way of Christ nor is it the way of His disciples. Thus, claiming to be Christian while behaving in a worldly manner sets us up for the charge of hypocrisy as well.

Instead of all the nonsense about Jewish ceremonial law, Paul directs our attention to the thing that really matters: *a new creation*. This is the new reality for us in Christ that began in our baptism when we were marked with the cross of Christ.

Rather than the mark of circumcision on the body, Paul directs our attention to the marks on his body that are the result of being persecuted for Christ. In view of those marks, let all opposition now be silent! Finally, Paul concludes by pronouncing a blessing and by drawing their attention away from the body (the flesh) and toward the seat of our faith in Christ, through the Spirit.

Let us pray: Holy Father, in baptism You united us with Christ, putting our old nature to death and bringing forth the new nature to walk according to Your Word and Spirit. By the same Word and Spirit, guide us so to walk in the newness of our life in Christ, which is now our new creation. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

These verses function as part of Paul’s “Table of Duties” which Luther uses in the Small Catechism’s “Table of Duties” for parents, children, workers, and employers. Here we see a helpful corrective to what our anti-authority culture sees as that ugly four-letter word: “obey.” However, as Christians, rather than recoil from it, we embrace it as the Word of God, and a much-needed word at that, considering the times in which we now live.

“Bondservants” would also seem to be an ugly word, but Luther applies this term in verses 5-8, “To Workers of All Kinds.” In fact, Paul often uses the term “bondservant of Christ” to refer to himself. Note also that in the Small Catechism’s Table of Duties, these verses on employees and employers are not applied to pastors because in God’s Word pastors are not to be “hirelings” or employees.

Instead, the verses which apply to pastors are a different set of verses—a unique set of verses—which includes one with that same ugly word ...*obey*. Heb 13:17 - “Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.” This sounds very much like “the commandment with a promise,” as Paul calls it, addressed to children. In fact, Luther includes pastors as fathers by extension in the Large Catechism’s explanation to the Fourth Commandment. This is something that the churches of our day need to hear, and Confessional Lutheran churches especially need to take seriously. Namely, our congregations are to be taught from proper biblical models rather than worldly models that their pastors lead without lording over, and serve without pandering.

Let us pray: O God, you reveal your almighty power chiefly by showing mercy and compassion. Pour out your grace on us that we pursue your promises and enjoy your heavenly blessings, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.