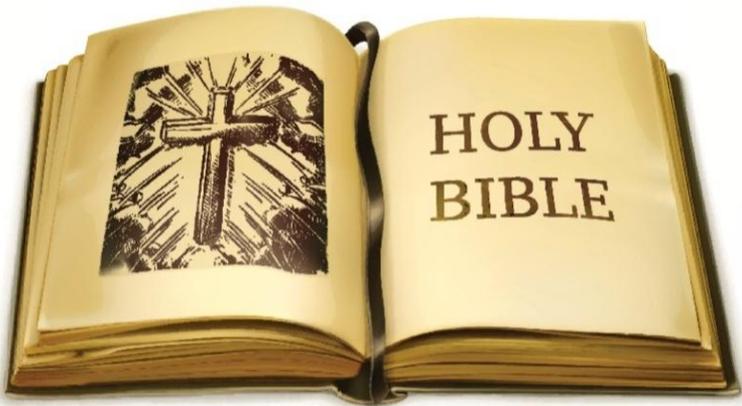


Each Day in the Word



September 28—November 1, 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.

“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him... And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.”

The contrast is clear: It's the world vs. us. We are *in* the world, but we are not *of* the world. In Genesis, God created the world, and in John 3:16 we are told that “God so loved the world.” But here we are told not to love the world, because in this case, “the world” refers to the fallenness of this sinful world. The true distinction we should hear in these verses is the distinction between the penitent and the impenitent, between the faithful and the fallen, between those redeemed and restored of the Father and those still lost of this fallen world.

We, too, were once lost, part of the fallen world, from the youngest of us to the oldest of us. However, as babes in Christ, we came to a right understanding of the Father through faith in His redeeming love in His Son. We were of the same sinful world, but then Christ's death on the cross for us canceled the debt of our sin, as we received the free gift of forgiveness through faith in His name and work. Then we were transferred from the domain of this world into the kingdom of Christ, no longer of this world but of the Father. Therefore, John the Elder calls us to acknowledge that change in status and to live accordingly: no longer loving this fallen world, but walking in the Father's love, loving the things of the Spirit, and abiding in Him.

Let us pray: O Lord, in Your continual mercy, cleanse and defend Your Church. Because we cannot continue in safety without You, always help and guide us; through Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

These are the parting words in a pastoral letter, in that it is the Apostle Paul's instructions to help Pastor Titus in his pastoral duties.

For example, Paul instructs Titus to avoid "strivings about the law." As with every time Paul mentions the Law, we must here distinguish between these three: we Christians are free from the condemnation of the Law in general, and we are free from the ceremonial Law (which Paul refers to here), but we are not free from the moral Law (which is evident from Paul's admonition in verse 8 to "maintain good works").

There in verse 8, Paul instructs Titus, saying, "I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works." This shows that even though we Christians are free from the Law's condemnation and from Jewish ceremonial Law, we are not free from the moral Law, which is God's eternal will for His people.

One final instruction to look at is this: "Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition, knowing that such a person is warped and sinning, being self-condemned." This might seem like a quick version of the Matthew 18 procedure for church discipline, but this is actually how the pastor must deal with false teachers in the midst of the flock; it has to be done quickly and decisively. Heresies are self-chosen, and therefore they are self-condemning. So, if the pastor tries to correct someone who is teaching falsely to the flock, and this teacher does not stop after the second warning, then he is simply removed. This is necessary to safeguard the flock from false teaching that could lead people away from Christ. This is how the shepherd rightly protects God's sheep.

Let us pray: O Lord, great Shepherd of the sheep, we thank You for Your under-shepherds who provide spiritual care and protection for us, Your flock; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

“The Lord works in mysterious ways.” A similar Biblical saying is this: “How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out” (Romans 11:33). Consider how God works in this story with Paul and Philemon. Paul is in prison in Rome, and Philemon is a Christian in Colossae. In prison with Paul are Epaphras and Onesimus, who are also from Colossae. Onesimus is a captured run-away slave whom Paul has converted, and now Onesimus is about to be returned to his owner... guess who? Philemon. So, Paul makes an appeal on behalf of his new “son in the faith” Onesimus to fellow Christian, Philemon.

What kind of appeal should that be? Paul could simply say, “Slavery is wrong. Therefore, release Onesimus from slavery when he is returned to you.” We know he said elsewhere to Christians who were slaves not to let it bother them, but if they could gain their freedom, do so (1 Cor. 7:21). So, rather than condone slavery, Paul shows that it is obviously something to be avoided, if possible. However, instead of immediately overthrowing cultures, institutions, and practices, Christianity addresses people directly, and those people then address these other things. Thus, wherever Christianity has permeated a culture sufficiently, slavery is seen to be wrong and eradicated. More mysterious ways of the Lord in play here.

So, yes, Paul could easily have made this letter to Philemon a simple command. Instead, he makes a masterful appeal, hoping that Philemon will see the proper path himself and voluntarily do what is right. Again, the emphasis is on instilling a godly character rather than forcing certain outcomes. The bottom line is this: God cares more about our character than about our circumstances.

Let us pray: O almighty God, grant that we may know Your Son, Jesus Christ, as the Way, the Truth, and the Life, that following in His steps, we may steadfastly walk in the way that leads to eternal life; through Your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

“God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son.”

The book of Hebrews is one of the general epistles, along with James, 1 & 2 Peter, 1, 2, & 3 John, and Jude. Hebrews was received by the Church as apostolic, that is, part of the apostles’ teaching, but it is not certain which apostle is the human author. Most scholars suggest that it was Barnabas, the “son of encouragement,” who is now writing this “letter of encouragement.” Some scholars suggest that it was Apollos, whom Luther favors. Another suggestion, which has historical precedence, is that the writer was Paul, although most scholars today dismiss this as less likely. Regardless, the writing was received by the Church as being in line with the teaching of the apostles of our Lord and received as Holy Scripture, God’s Word to God’s people.

Verses 1-2 show that the message of the Gospel is in line with the Old Testament prophecies, but at the same time is distinct from them, which anticipates the division of the Christian Bible into Old Testament and New Testament. Not only is the more recent message and revelation of God through His Son superior to the older messages, but the Son Himself is superior to other messengers or “angels,” which are the same words both in Hebrew and in Greek. The writer will go on to show other ways that Christ is superior, and superior to others, like Moses. Nevertheless, already it is clear that Jesus is not simply someone you ask into your life to be an assistant to help you make your life better. Instead, He is someone that you bow before, worship, and submit to as Lord.

Let us pray: Lord Jesus Christ, thank You that You are the clearest image of the Father and seated at His right hand as Lord of all and my Lord; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Today's reading explains how Christ, being both God and man, fulfilled the purposes of God: "Therefore He had to be made like His brothers in every respect, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people." So, by becoming a man, Jesus both identified with humanity and then delivered humanity. Jesus Christ has delivered us from the grip of sin, Satan, and death; He has delivered us from them all!

Today in our reading, the writer to the Hebrews explains how the very Son of God came that we might become the very children of God. Christ accomplished that by giving Himself for us upon the cross. As St. Paul writes in his first letter to Timothy, "For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all men" (1 Tim. 2:5-6). It cost Christ dearly to save and deliver us humans from our sin. And He did so out of love. St. John, in his first letter, says, "This is how God showed his love among us: He sent His one and only Son into the world that we might live through Him" (1 Jn. 4:9).

Today's reading calls us to listen to all the ways that God is speaking to us through His Word. In one verse after another, we are reminded of all the things that God has given us in Christ, including our final glory with Him.

Let us pray: Almighty and everlasting God, in Your tender love towards humanity You sent Your Son, our Savior Jesus Christ, to take upon Himself our flesh and to suffer death on the cross. Grant that we may follow the example of His patience and humility and also be made partakers of His resurrection; through Your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Considering Christ, our great High Priest, “let us hold fast our confession” (Heb. 2:14). This is the opening encouragement of our text. The basis for this encouragement is then given: “For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses.” The result of this is further encouragement: “Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” This “letter of encouragement” has one encouragement after another for us, all based in Christ—who He is and what He does for us.

However, this letter also contains a warning. The warning is that we must listen properly to the message of Christ, lest, by being “dull of hearing,” we fail to grow spiritually in Him: “For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God.” Through neglect of the Word, we can become complacent, and then not grow in the Word as we should. Instead, we are to heed this warning to give proper attention to the Word and follow the admonition to grow spiritually in it, moving from spiritual milk to solid food: “But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.” This spiritual maturity and accompanying ability are becoming increasingly rare in our culture, and, therefore are even more valuable. Our great High Priest calls us to Himself, encourages us in His Word, and nurtures us toward maturity in that same Word.

Let us pray: O God, who for Your glory and the salvation of the human race willed to establish Christ as the eternal High Priest, grant that the people He has gained for You by His blood, through their participation in faith, may experience the power of His cross and resurrection; who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Here in this text, we are first encouraged to continue growing in our understanding of the faith, rather than risk falling away from it. Restoring those who have fallen away is an impossibility for us, but not for God, for all things are possible with Him (Mat. 19:26). The impossibility is simply that since there is only one way to heaven, which is through Christ, if a person closes himself off from that option, there is no other option; therefore, restoring him apart from Christ is an impossibility. As Luther says: "If anyone has fallen away from Christ, who is the true sacrifice for sins, and seeks another way or mode to be saved and go to heaven, he will never go there; he will not succeed" (St. Louis edition. 7:959).

Instead, for those of us who are in Christ, we can confidently expect the "better things" that "accompany salvation," namely, all the spiritual blessings that come to us because of our new life in Christ. For this reason, we are encouraged to "show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end," and to "not become sluggish," but imitate those who have gone before us in the faith.

God has determined "to show more abundantly" to us, "the heirs of promise," that His Word is unchangeable. Thus, our faith is bolstered by these two certainties: that 1) God has promised us salvation in Christ, and that 2) God's oath stands firm, because God cannot lie, so His promises are sure. God's promises are, in fact, our very hope, which is the "anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast" which is securely established in Christ in heaven.

Let us pray: O Lord, keep Your household always faithful to Your truth, that we who rely only on the hope of Your heavenly grace may always be defended by Your mighty power; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Death was not part of God's original plan for mankind. But since the fall into sin, when our first parents brought the curse of death upon themselves and their children, God has woven even death into His grand design for our race, so that it must accomplish His good purposes. In the account of the young man from Nain whom the Lord Jesus raised from the dead (Luke 7:11-17), death served to highlight the compassion, power, and divinity of Jesus, so that we put our faith in Him to care for us in life and to rescue us even from death. In the case of today's devotional reading, death serves as an urgent call for the living to repent.

Sometimes God strikes sinners down for specific sins they've committed, as He did on several occasions with the people of Israel (see 1 Cor. 10:5). But that is not always the case, as Jesus reveals in today's reading. Instead, when we see tragedy strike others, we should not think about their sins, but about our own. Our first thought should be this: "Death could come to me at any time, so I must be ready for it. I must immediately turn away from sin and toward Christ my Savior, who died for me that I might live for Him. If I haven't been baptized, I need to be. If I have, then I must be serious about living as a forgiven child of God, hearing His Word, gathering with His people, avoiding sin, and producing the good fruit that the Father seeks."

There will always be death in this world. In the face of death, let us not be quick to point fingers or to question God's goodness, but let death accomplish God's good purpose to keep us watchful and ready and living in daily contrition and repentance. For the penitent and believing, death is merely a temporary sleep from which the Lord Christ will soon awaken us.

Let us pray: O Father, remember us, that we are mortal, and have mercy on Your servants. In the face of death, fix our eyes on the death and resurrection of Your Son, who is the Resurrection and the Life for all who believe in Him. Amen.

We know next to nothing about the Old Testament figure named Melchizedek. He was a king and a priest of the true God who had a brief encounter with Abraham as Abraham was returning from his victory over the kings who had kidnapped his nephew Lot. We are told nothing of the origin of this priest-king and nothing of his end, which is why he is called a priest “forever.” His name isn’t mentioned again in Scripture until he is mentioned in a cryptic verse in Psalm 110, speaking about the coming Christ: “The LORD has a sword and will not relent; You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.” The writer to the Hebrews explains this verse for us.

The priesthood that was so well-known to the Jews was tied to the tribe of Levi, one of the twelve sons of Jacob, while the kings were descended from David, from the tribe of Judah. Like Melchizedek, the Christ would be both priest and king. His kingship would come from His ancestor David, but His priesthood would not come from Levi. Instead, He would be a priest like Melchizedek, who was greater than Levi, whose priesthood came directly from God and was not defined by the Levitical Law. Yes, the priesthood of the Christ would be far greater than that of the Levites. The Levitical priests all served as priests for a finite number of years, but Christ serves forever. The Levitical priests were weak and sinful, but Christ is sinless and perfect. The Levitical priests had to sacrifice daily for their own sins and for the sins of the people, but Christ offered the one perfect sacrifice of Himself to make atonement, not for His own sins, but for the sins of the rest of mankind.

Let us pray: O Lord, we thank You for foreshadowing the priesthood of Your Son in the Old Testament and for revealing it to us in the New. Hear us and help us in all things only for the sake of Christ, our great High Priest. Amen.

St. Paul says in Romans 8 that Christ “is at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us” (Rom. 8:34). This same truth is emphasized in today’s reading.

The writer to the Hebrews shows us that the tabernacle described in the Law of Moses was a “copy and shadow” of how things really are in heaven, just as the ministry of the priests in the earthly tabernacle was a picture of the heavenly ministry of Christ before God the Father. The ministers who served under the covenant God made with Israel on Mt. Sinai had an important, God-given role. But that role was always meant to be temporary. The sacrifices they offered and their mediation between sinful Israel and the holy God were vivid pictures of the true sacrifice of Christ, which He, as our perfect Mediator, being both God and Man, continually holds before the eyes of the Father as He makes intercession for all who believe in Him. Through that intercession of our High Priest, His atoning sacrifice is credited to us by God-given faith, and we sinners are no longer counted as sinners in the eyes of the holy Father, but as holy ones, cleansed by the blood of a better sacrifice.

There are some who claim that the Old Testament is still in force, side by side with the New. But today’s reading makes it clear that the old covenant (or testament) was always meant to be replaced by the new covenant instituted by Christ Jesus. The Old Testament, with its ministers and their sacrifices, was a shadow, pointing to the better promises of the better covenant of which Christ Jesus is the Mediator.

Let us pray: Holy Father, we thank You for establishing the new covenant of the forgiveness of sins through Christ and for bringing us into it through Holy Baptism and faith. Have mercy on us and grant us our petitions for the sake of Christ, our Mediator. Amen.

The Holy Spirit was depicting a very important truth in the design of the Old Testament tabernacle.

The Holy Place represented the holy assembly of Israel that had been separated from the nations and sanctified by God through the covenant He made with them on Mt. Sinai. Everything in the Holy Place represented Israel as it stood in its covenant relationship with God. Just as the seven lampstands in Revelation 1-3 stood for the churches in Asia Minor, so the lampstand in the Holy Place stood for the church of Israel, which was to burn at all times with the light of the knowledge of God. The table with the twelve cakes of showbread represented the twelve tribes of Israel, whose lives were to be a continual offering to the Lord.

But a veil separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place, with its golden censer and the ark of the covenant, which symbolized God. Only the High Priest could pass behind the veil once a year, bringing with him the blood of animals to make atonement for Israel. The veil in the tabernacle was to teach Israel that, for as glorious as the first covenant was between the Lord and Israel, it was still lacking. There was still a separation between the presence of God and the people of Israel. A High Priest—a Mediator—was needed. And blood was needed to bring God and His people together.

The High Priest symbolized the coming Christ, true God and true Man, who would enter into God's presence with His own blood which now sanctifies all who believe in Him. He is the Mediator of the new covenant, and His blood reconciles believers to God, as God revealed in a shocking way when the veil in the temple was torn in two at the moment of Jesus' death.

Let us pray: O Lord God, we thank You for reconciling us poor sinners to You through the death of Your Son and through the ministry of reconciliation by which You have brought us into the new covenant of the forgiveness of sins. Amen.

In English, we don't use the words "covenant" and "testament" interchangeably. A covenant is a formal, binding agreement. A testament is a formal promise to pass on an inheritance upon the death of the one making the testament (the "testator"). We don't speak of people making a "testament" with one another, nor do we speak of a person's last will and "covenant."

But in Greek, the same word can have both connotations, so that the same Greek word is used throughout the Bible for both "covenants" and "testaments." And sometimes, both aspects are in view, as is the case with the Old Covenant/Testament and the New Covenant/Testament.

In today's reading, the writer to the Hebrews shows us that the covenant God made with Israel on Mt. Sinai was also a testament in that it required the blood of animals to ratify it and to bring the people into it. That First Testament was a shadow of the New Testament that Christ, the Mediator, would institute in His own blood. He was the Testator whose death was foreshadowed under the Old Testament. Indeed, Jesus was both the Testator and, as the promised Seed of Abraham, the Heir of the Old Testament. The Heir of the Old Testament instituted the New on the night in which He was betrayed. It went into effect when the Testator died on the cross. And now, risen from the dead, He sprinkles sinners with His blood in Holy Baptism, through faith, and He shares with baptized believers the fellowship meal of His sacrifice in Holy Communion. As a result, all who believe in Christ Jesus have become heirs of all the good things He promises in the New Testament, even the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation.

Let us pray: O Lord Jesus, we eagerly wait for You to appear at the end of the age for our salvation. Keep us firm and steadfast in the faith until that day. Amen.

The Law of Moses required the Israelites to bring the same sacrifices year after year. What were they to learn from that? That the sins they committed throughout the year kept piling up until they needed to be atoned for again eventually? No, the many sacrifices were to teach the Israelites that the blood of animals can never make atonement for human sins, and yet, atonement had to be made if they were to be God's people. All the sacrifices they brought were to be little shadows and reminders that the Lord Himself would one day provide the true atoning sacrifice for their sins.

By the one sacrifice of Christ, God has "perfected forever those who are being sanctified." In other words, on account of the atoning sacrifice of Christ, God has justified believers in Christ through faith. Our sanctification began when we were converted and baptized. It continues as the Holy Spirit renews believers in love each day. Through faith, we stand righteous before God all the time. No more sacrifices for sin ever need to be made. We can approach God the Father boldly and confidently for the sake of Christ and His one sacrifice.

But we must "hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering." We stand righteous before God through faith, not apart from faith, and God will faithfully sustain our faith through Word and Sacrament. But if we fail to gather with other Christians around Word and Sacrament, then we jeopardize both our faith and theirs. And if we turn back to sin, knowingly and willfully sinning against God, then we separate ourselves from Christ's sacrifice; we drive out the Holy Spirit and the faith by which we have access to God. So let us take great care to live each day in repentance and to encourage one another to remain faithful until Christ comes.

Let us pray: Holy Father, we dare to approach You only for the sake of Your beloved Son and the blood He willingly shed for us. Be gracious to us and deliver us from evil, especially the evil of falling into willful sin. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

“Just have faith,” people say. What they usually mean is, “Convince yourself that the thing you hope for will come true.” What an empty thing such a faith is! As if your hopes and desires had any power to make something happen, or as if God were bound to give you whatever you hope for.

The faith of which the Bible speaks, however, is a sure and certain thing, because it isn’t based on our hopes but on God’s sure and steady Word. When God tells us of things we can’t see in the past or present, or when He promises things in the future, faith latches onto God’s Word and rests on it securely.

God tells us, for example, that He created the universe, and how He created it. We were not there to see it. But faith latches onto God’s Word and confidently says, “Yes, God did make all things, just as He says He did.” Abel and Enoch latched onto God’s Word, telling them He was a good and gracious God who had promised salvation to Adam and Eve and their children after they fell into sin. They didn’t live to see the promised Savior, but they lived as men who believed God’s Word. Noah was so certain of the word God had spoken about the impending flood that he got right to work building the ark when all he could see were sunny skies.

These Old Testament believers were rewarded for their faith, one way or another, either in this life or in the next. But the greatest reward of faith is that God, in His grace, counts it for righteousness, according to His promise. He has invited all sinners to come to His Son, promising that in Him we will find the forgiveness of sins. The Holy Spirit works through His promise to make us sure that He is telling the truth, and so we believe it, come to Christ, and, through that faith, receive the promised forgiveness.

Let us pray: Lord God, You have given us Your Word and have promised us so many things. Help us by Your Spirit always to believe what You have said and to live by every word that proceeds from Your mouth. Amen.

We are most definitely in the end times. The unbelieving world is getting more and more violent. Toleration for Christians is decreasing daily. Churches and pro-life centers are being vandalized and burned. The Christian faith is being mocked nearly everywhere you look. Ungodly marriages—those *not* between one man and one woman—are becoming more and more popular. Talk of chastity and purity is ridiculed as not only outdated but irrelevant. This sinful and unbelieving world hates you, God, and faithful Christians everywhere.

None of this should be news to you nor come as a surprise. The devil has been trying to usurp, upset, vilify, and corrupt God’s Word, His people, and His Church ever since Genesis 3; he is nothing if not consistent. Therefore, you need to take seriously Jude’s words in this reading both as a warning as well as comfort.

“Remember the words which were spoken before by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ” (v.17). The apostles taught what Jesus taught them, that there is forgiveness and eternal life only in Him; that is your strength and comfort. They also taught from Jesus that end times mockers would be walking “according to their own lusts” (v.18). These, says Jude, do not have the true Spirit of God. And in our day, they manifest themselves in all the ways mentioned in the opening paragraph above.

But, dear fellow redeemed, “Build yourselves up in the most holy faith...” and keep “looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life” (vv. 20-21). Christ paid for all your sins; therefore, remember your Baptism wherein God made you His own child, run to the Sacrament of Jesus’ real and true body and blood for forgiveness and strength, and cling by God-given faith to Christ’s work for you. He alone is “able to keep you from stumbling,” and He will “present you faultless” before His Father for Christ’s sake.

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, keep us in the one true faith, protect us in our vocations, and bring us, by Your mercy and grace alone, to everlasting life with you in heaven. Amen.

The words “by faith” appear in this reading 11 times, and “through faith” once. Faith is vitally important. It is only by God-given faith that anyone listed in this reading was able to withstand a test, believe in a promise from God, overcome impossible odds, endure torture, be kept safe from hungry lions, remain strong even when weak, march through enemy territory, withstand temptation, defeat attackers who outnumbered them greatly, avoid certain death, offer up one’s own son, and not deny God’s promises even while being killed. To be sure, only faith in God’s promises can do these utterly miraculous things, for ultimately it is God Himself doing it.

Each week we recite these words in the Divine Liturgy: “I, a poor, miserable sinner...” It is good that we do, for not only is the statement true, but to recite and believe these words about ourselves places us in the right position before God—the position of understanding that we are, in and of ourselves, hopeless, helpless, and powerless either to save ourselves or have anything at all to do with our salvation, forgiveness, or deliverance from any kind of evil or hardship. All those in today’s reading understood this, and the only thing they had by which to survive spiritually was God-given faith in His promises of deliverance; that was all they needed.

You do well to remember that even the faith you have is God’s gift to you; Eph 2:8-9, “It is by grace you have been saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves, it (faith) is a gift of God, not by works lest any man should boast.” You boast in God’s work for you in and through Christ.

By faith in Christ’s suffering, death, and resurrection for you, you also will be able to withstand everything the devil, the world, and your sinful flesh throw at you.

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, thank You for paying for my sins and giving me Your promises that You never break. Strengthen me in the one true faith so that I may live, die, and rise again in You. Amen.

The opening words of Hebrews 12 are very comforting; they remind us as Christians that we are never alone. We are surrounded (Greek: “encircled, enclosed”) by saints among us in God’s Church. We draw strength from other like-minded Christians whose testimony to God’s faithfulness in their lives strengthens our own.

Hebrews 12 teaches us by the Holy Spirit to be thankful that we have not yet given our own blood in our spiritual trials, and to understand that any hardship that comes our way is either given or allowed by God for our good. We are to see life’s chastenings as signs of God’s love and care for us, the same way human parents discipline and chasten their children in order to mold them into Godly people and productive citizens. The Christian life is a “race” (v. 1) that we “run with endurance” by the power of the Holy Spirit. God works in us through the Gospel and Christ’s sacraments which deliver forgiveness, strength, and peace in ways the world cannot give.

As we live out our various vocations suffering rejection, chastisement, and persecution for standing in the one true faith in Christ, we remember that God Himself chastened His own Son. Christ, the perfectly innocent, only-begotten Son of God was mocked, ridiculed, scourged, hung on a cross, and killed in our place. His substitutionary death for all sins of all people of all time bought forgiveness of sins for all who believe in Him by God-given faith. And Christ’s resurrection from the grave on the Third Day gives us the sure and certain hope of our own resurrection, so that we have everything to look forward to when our Lord calls us Home to be with Him in heaven. There we will be free from all the ravages and effects of sin forever and have eternal fellowship with all the saints and witnesses who have gone before us.

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, thank You for enduring the wrath that my sins deserved and for giving me Your forgiveness, life, and salvation. Strengthen me in the true faith unto the end. Amen.

In this final chapter of the letter to the Hebrews, the writer gives many instructions to Christians: do good, remember those imprisoned for the Gospel, honor Godly marriage, be content with what you have, remember, respect, and obey those whose vocation it is to preach Christ crucified to you because “they watch out for your souls” (v. 17).

But these words are much more than instructions to do good and be on your best behavior. They don’t so much as tell us what to do as they describe what Christians have been made into and how they have been gifted with God’s free grace in Christ for good works. These words are not a “have to” but a “get to;” they describe the very fruits of God-given faith.

Of special note are the words in vv. 8-9: that Christ is unchangeable, (“immutable”), and that the Christian can rely absolutely on Him who is no respecter of persons and who treats all people the same according to His Word and promises. There is great comfort knowing that our good and gracious God will never act contrary to His Word; He will never change course or veer from His Word; there will be no surprises. He is constant, consistent, just, fair, loving, and faithful.

Unbelievers everywhere serve gods that they must placate, for they serve and worship themselves. They worship gods who change according to personal and emotional whims. There is no comfort or certainty in an unfaithful god.

As we live out our various vocations, we are bolstered by Christ’s gifts delivered to us in the Divine Service—Baptism, Absolution, Gospel, and Supper. These gifts always strengthen our faith and demonstrate God’s kindness and love to us.

Receive His blessing: “Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well-pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.”

Count it all joy when you fall into various trials? Blessed is the man who endures temptation? Not too many Christians consider it a joyous occasion whenever trials come into their lives. Not too many Christians consider it a blessing when they endure temptation. On the contrary, we poor, miserable sinners are very often overcome and frustrated by temptation and beaten down by trials. We crumble under the pressure of dealing day in and day out with our sinful nature that seems way too often to win the day and do us in. And when we are overcome in those ways, we tend to forget to pray and ask in faith that God in His mercy would strengthen us, bolster us, and help us against temptation and defeat. For that we must repent.

However, when we do pray, we do so in faith. We pray trusting that Christ will answer and deliver. We do not pray doubting. We do not say, “God, if You’re there and if You can do anything about this, that would be great.” No; that, as James says, is being “double-minded” and “unstable.” Praying that way will get us nowhere; we will receive nothing from the Lord—nothing except rebuke.

No, dear fellow redeemed, we may indeed consider it a blessing to endure temptation and experience trials, for we know that temptations and trials are allowed to come to us by our good and gracious God who knows us better than we know ourselves. He allows these things come our way in order that we may cry to Him for help and strength. He allows these things that we may trust in Him all the more, and then praise Him for keeping His Word and promises to us. And then, when future trials and temptations come, we have even more confidence in Him who previously delivered us. And then we see the blessings of God’s providence even more.

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, thank You for being faithful in keeping all Your promises to us, and strengthen us all the more. Amen.

Our sinful nature revels in partiality. We generally prefer to be associated with people who dress well, speak well, eat well, are better educated, and live well. Being around these types of people gives us a better feeling about ourselves. To be accepted by these types of people lifts us up and causes us to be seen in a better light in our workplace and communities. Our sinful nature is also generally put off by folks who are not well-educated, not well-dressed, and not well-spoken. We may shy away from folks whom we deem “lesser” citizens because of their lifestyles, choices, and economic status.

Further, our sinful nature generally and quite naturally tends to show less mercy to others than we would expect to receive for ourselves. We tend to want certain folks to suffer appropriate consequences for what we may deem as poor choices. We tend not to cover for them in certain situations; we’d rather stand back and let them “get what they deserve.” To deny these thoughts, words, and actions is to deny that you are a sinner. To deny these accusations is to be as much of a blasphemer as those who oppress the poor and drag them into courts (James 2:6).

But to accept these truths is good. We need to accept the fact that our sinful nature reeks at times of favoritism, judgmentalism, and partiality. And when we own those sins and attitudes—when we confess them, by the power of the Holy Spirit working through God’s Word—we agree with James that we “have become judges with evil thoughts.” And then we get to repent of these and all other sins and receive Holy Absolution and the Lord’s Supper which deliver Jesus’ forgiveness to us. Repentance, wrought by God through His Word, brings us to receive mercy and not judgment. Our sins have been paid for by Christ’s all-atoning sacrifice on the cross. He is merciful toward us.

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, thank You for Your love and mercy which you give without measure. Amen.

Faith or works? Can you have one without the other? According to James, writing by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, “faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead” (v. 17). And that statement is basically repeated in vv. 20 and 26. So, no works = no faith. Faith cannot exist without works, for faith, of itself, produces good works.

Works naturally—rather supernaturally—pour forth from faith. The saved and forgiven person performs good works out of joy, gladness, and profound thanks to God for giving his Son to die for his sins. If someone saves your life in this world, you are extremely thankful and want to do good things for that person in return. How much more, then, when we have been saved from eternal damnation by Christ’s all-atoning sacrifice, taking our hellish torture and punishment in our place, so willingly and lovingly? We do good works, then, for God by doing them for our neighbor in thanksgiving to God for saving our sorry hides.

Properly understood, works save no one. We cannot work our way to heaven any more than we can do anything to pay for our own sins. We cannot bring ourselves to spiritual life any more than a corpse can revive itself.

As Luther so brilliantly put it in the meaning to the Third Article of the Apostles’ Creed, “I believe that I cannot, by my own reason or strength, believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him. But the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified, and kept me in the true faith.” It is the Holy Spirit alone, working through the Word of God, that brings us to Christ and Christ to us. When we are brought to eternal life by Christ, we have every reason to live our life in thankfulness and praise to our good and gracious God in love and service to our neighbor, doing good works for him to God’s glory and our neighbor’s good.

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, thank You for Your work of paying for my sins. Amen.

God is love. Is it so strange, then, that He should require His creatures to be like Him, to love as He loves—to love Him with their whole heart, and to love their neighbor as a sort of extension of themselves? But that is not what He finds in us when we are born. Instead, in those descended from Adam and Eve He finds creatures who are naturally selfish and lovers of self above all things.

And yet, in His great love for us fallen creatures, He sent His Son to suffer for our lovelessness. And then He reached out to us and called us to repentance and faith in Christ, and “to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God” (Jn 1:12). This is the manner in which He has loved us!

What does it matter that the world does not recognize us Christians as God’s children? The world does not recognize our God, either. What matters is that God knows us, and that we know Him, and that we now seek to be like Him in this life.

True believers in Christ seek to imitate Him, to be righteous like Him, to love as He loves. When they stumble and fall into sin, they quickly repent and seek again to walk in the footsteps of Christ, and their love is evident to all. Hypocrites, on the other hand, only pretend to be Christians. They let anger and pride have their way with them. They give in to sinful pleasures and keep going back for more. They are not careful to turn from sin and to walk in love but live to serve themselves.

Christ came to destroy the works of the devil and to free us from sin. If we belong to Christ, then let us also be careful to turn, in faith, from the devil’s works and to live as those who are free *from* sin, and not as those who are free *to* sin.

Let us pray: O Father, how great is Your love for us! We thank You for making us Your children by bringing us into fellowship with Your beloved Son. Now strengthen us to imitate Your love and to flee from sin in all its forms. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Like John's first epistle, the Epistle of James is largely focused on exposing and rooting out hypocrisy from among Christians. We have been rescued from the devil's kingdom. We have been washed of our sins in Holy Baptism. We now call upon the God of love as our Father, our Savior, and our Lord, who is pure, holy, and good. It only makes sense that our lives as His children should also be pure, holy, and good.

That purity flows from the new hearts created in us when we were born again, but the next stop is the tongue. James points out what a big part our tongues play in steering our lives, and how hard they are to control. God's Word is all-powerful, but our words have power, too. They can do great good for our neighbor, and they can do great damage.

The Christian uses his tongue to praise God. He strives to speak only things that are true and that are helpful to his neighbor. The hypocrite, on the other hand, blesses God with his mouth but then uses the same mouth to curse and to put down his fellow man, or to speak falsehood in order to save his own skin. James exposes the hypocrisy of this behavior and warns his fellow Christians—and us—to watch out for such hypocrisy, and to repent of it immediately if we have fallen into it.

He then encourages us to examine our hearts, to see if there is "bitter envy and self-seeking," and to be honest with ourselves if we find it. Am I jealous of my neighbor? Am I seeking his good or my own? How is this reflected in my words? How is this reflected in my actions? If we believe in God and wish to be wise, then let us pursue heavenly wisdom, which is "first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy."

Let us pray: Lord, forgive us for misusing our tongues to harm our neighbor. Help us to control them, to speak only words that edify, and to show mercy in all that we say and do. Amen.

Like one of the Old Testament prophets, James issues stern warnings and urgent calls to repentance in today's lesson. He moves from one topic to another, urging the Jewish Christians to whom he is writing to live more humbly before God and before man.

Is there strife among you? It is likely because some of you are wrapped up in the "cares, riches, and pleasures of life" (Luke 8:14). It's so easy, so tempting to fall in with the world, to value what the world values, to engage in the activities the world promotes. But the Church is, by definition, the assembly of those who have been called out of the world into Christ's kingdom, even though we still live in the world. The world is opposed to Christ and, therefore, opposed to Christians. If our goal is to get ahead in this world or pursue the pleasures of this world, then we are bound to be at odds with our fellow Christians, even as we are at odds with Christ. But if we repent of our worldliness and humble ourselves before God, then He will lift us up. If we resist the devil, he will not be able to overcome us.

James then calls out two groups among the Christians: those who arrogantly make plans for themselves with no regard for God or His will, and those who have bowed to the god Mammon, who have trusted in their wealth and heaped up treasures for themselves with no regard for their fellow man. Both of these sins are all too common today and flow from the same worldliness that James upbraided above. This life is not all there is, so it's foolish to live as if it were. Indeed, those who fail to repent of their idolatry of self and of wealth will soon learn just how foolish it was for them to ignore God's warning issued through the Epistle of James. Instead, turn to God in humility before it's too late, and you will find mercy with Him for Christ's sake.

Let us pray: O God, come to our aid against the devil, the world, and our flesh, that we may be victorious over these enemies and walk before You in humility and sincere faith. Amen.

James closes his epistle by encouraging the scattered Jewish Christians to pray, an encouragement which is just as fitting for us today.

If you are suffering, pray! “Lord, have mercy!” That mercy may come in many forms. It may come in the form of relief, but it also may come in the form of peace, or perseverance, or the learning of a needed lesson. It may even come in the form of death as the Lord finally delivers you from all evil of body and soul and brings you safely into His heavenly kingdom.

If you are cheerful, sing psalms, that is, songs of praise! And to whom are songs of praise sung but to the Lord? Another form of prayer.

If you are sick, James says to call for the elders (that is, pastors) of the church that they may pray for you. The healing James promises is the miraculous healing that was common in the apostolic era as the Holy Spirit manifested His gifts to confirm the apostles’ testimony. While physical healing is no longer promised, the healing of the forgiveness of sins is. Indeed, James assures you that the prayers of the righteous are always powerful and effective. God takes them very seriously and will surely hear and help, either in a miraculous way, as He did for the prophet Elijah, or in an “ordinary way.” That is, He may “simply” order the events of this universe so that all things must work together for good to those who love Him. In either case, you can be sure that God will take your prayers into account.

Finally, James gives a powerful encouragement to love a brother who has “wandered from the truth.” If we succeed in turning him back to the truth, we will have been God’s instruments in saving his soul from death. What stronger incentive could there be to approach an erring brother in love and to do all we can to bring him back into the way of life?

Let us pray: Our Father in heaven, hear our prayers in times of suffering and in times of joy. In all things, may Your will be done; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

The focus of this week has been God's commandment to love our neighbor, to put that second great commandment into practice, and that we do it genuinely and sincerely, not with hypocrisy. Today's lesson focuses on the home, in the context of husband and wife as neighbor to one another.

In the context of marriage, the Lord would have Christian wives submitting to their husbands in love, as the Church submits to Christ. Even if their husband is not a believer, God would have wives loving their husbands through "chaste conduct" and "fear," that is, respect, which, in turn, may influence their husband toward the faith. God would have women pursue the "incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit." This, in God's estimation, is what love looks like on the part of a wife, and it is "very precious in the sight of God." That's not the message that women hear from the world or that rises up from our sinful flesh. But then, the world and our flesh have never been friendly to Christians. As we heard earlier this week from James, "Whoever wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God" (James 4:4).

For their part, believing husbands are not to be gruff or uncaring toward their wives, but considerate. They are to cherish and honor them as equals when it comes to their status before God, as coheirs of eternal life. Part of that honor includes recognizing with thanksgiving that God intentionally designed women as the "weaker vessel," that is, softer in demeanor, less forceful, less physically strong, so that they might complement their husbands. This "weakness" is not a flaw but part of God's good design. If we succeed at ignoring the world's wisdom and if we live together in love, according to God's design, then husbands and wives will be great sources of comfort, strength, and support for one another.

Let us pray: Lord, in this world that has grown to despise marriage, help us all to lead a pure and chaste life in word and deed, and strengthen husbands and wives to love and honor each other. Amen.

In today's reading, Peter highlights one of the best ways for us Christians to love our neighbors: By explaining to them, when they ask, the reason for our hope. And if they're asking, that implies that we are giving them a reason to ask.

We do our neighbor a great service when we simply "wear our hope on our sleeve," when we make it evident by our attitude, words, and behavior that we Christians are different, that we have a sure hope that triumphs over every adversity, a joy that remains even in the midst of hardship and sorrow. If we live like this in the world, people are bound to ask why. When they do, let us be prepared to give a "defense" or an explanation.

Peter gives his own explanation in today's reading. Why do we remain faithful to Christ, even when it causes us suffering? Why do we hope even when we suffer? Because Christ suffered, "the Just for the unjust," to bring us to God. He willingly suffered and died. But He was also raised from the dead. He even descended into hell to proclaim His victory to the souls of the disobedient, some of whom had been suffering there for over 3,000 years, since the days of Noah. Nothing that we suffer here on earth can compare with what those unbelievers suffer in hell.

But Christ has saved us from sin, death, and hell. Not only did He suffer for our sins, but He washed us in Holy Baptism, which connects us with His death and resurrection. In fact, Peter says that "Baptism saves you," not as a one-time event, but as a continual reality. Just as the waters of the flood kept lifting up Noah and his family in the ark for the whole duration of the flood, keeping them safe from drowning with the unbelieving world, so Baptism keeps lifting us up from eternal condemnation as we constantly appeal to God for a good conscience for the sake of Christ Jesus, our Lord. This is the reason for our hope!

Let us pray: Father in heaven, we thank you for the blessed hope we have in Christ. Give us opportunities to explain it to others and grant us wisdom and a mouth to speak. Amen.

The command to “love your neighbor” is to be carried out in every vocation. In today’s reading, the first application of this command is made to presbyters (that is, “elders”), which is just another word in the New Testament for pastors (that is, “shepherds”), whom Peter also addresses as “bishops” (that is, “overseers”). Yes, all pastors are bishops and overseers, charged by the Good Shepherd to love their flocks by shepherding them well, tending to them with care and compassion, and preaching and teaching what their sheep need to hear and learn. They are to do it willingly and eagerly. They are not to rule their sheep as lords but are to be examples to them of genuine love and humble service.

Peter then moves on to the young and teaches them what love looks like for them. It looks like submitting to their “elders,” which includes both pastors and older people in general. The world and the flesh teach young people to do the opposite, to look down on their elders and to exalt themselves, as if they were wiser and more capable than anyone who ever came before, and as if their elders were of little value to society. But Peter warns that those who exalt themselves in their own minds will be humbled by God.

Indeed, God is looking for humility as one of the chief traits in all His children. He calls on all of us to submit to one another and to be “clothed with humility.” That involves listening. It involves gentleness. It means considering the needs of others ahead of our own needs and actively looking out for their wellbeing. When Christians live like this, it is truly a “good and pleasant” thing (see also. Ps. 133).

Let us pray: Our Father in heaven, we thank You for sending Your Son, our Good Shepherd, to save us from our sins and to set for us the perfect example of humble service. Grant us Your Holy Spirit, that we may imitate Jesus at all times, in whose name we pray. Amen.

As members of Christ's body, the baptized faithful "are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28). Being members of His body, they all have the same spiritual blessings: the forgiveness of sins, the promised inheritance of everlasting life, and the Holy Spirit by whom they live new lives of love. Being members of Christ's body, all that is Christ's is ours equally with all other Christians.

But within the Church God has appointed these: "First apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues." The first three are offices. The last five are gifts which God gave to individuals in the church at Corinth according to His will. God did not give every Christian these offices or gifts equally, just as in the human body there are different parts, each with their own specific duties to be done for the sake of the whole body. Many of the gifts ceased early in the church's history as false prophets arose and showed signs and wonders in order to deceive people, as Jesus foretold in Matthew 24:24.

Some of the offices have ceased as well. There are no longer apostles and prophets as God gave the early church. But God still appoints gifts to members of His body by which they serve others in the body. He still appoints men to serve as pastors who teach the gospel and administer the sacraments. They are not apostles, for apostles were witnesses of Christ's ministry (Acts 1:22). But they continue in the office of the apostles, forgiving and retaining sins, since God "had given such power to men" (Mat. 9:8). Not all Christians are ministers. Not all have the same gifts. God has ordered the body this way so that we may serve one another in love and depend on one another as members of one body.

Let us pray: We give You thanks, O Lord, for incorporating us into your body so that we share in your life. Enable us to perform the tasks you give us to do today, according to the gifts and offices you give us. Amen.

John writes so that our joy may be full. The Word of life—the eternal Son of God who was from the beginning—revealed Himself by becoming flesh. The apostles heard His words. They saw Him with their eyes and touched Him with their hands, witnessing to the reality of His incarnation. The eternal Son of God became flesh to give us life. The life of Christ is received by believing it, and that belief brings joy because we have fellowship with the Father and the Son through faith in the apostles' doctrine, which is the doctrine of Christ. Being in fellowship with the Father means that “the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanses us from all sin,” and we look forward to eternal life. No one can take this joy from us.

But that joy is forfeited by walking in darkness. If we return to our former sins, or say that we have no sin in us, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. The truth is that we sin each day because we have sin in our flesh. If we don't cut off the indwelling sin when it tempts us, but take pleasure in it and consent to it, we sin. Instead of minimizing and rationalizing our sins and the sin in our flesh, we are to confess our sins to God our Father and return to the Word of Life. The apostle reminds us, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” Walking in the light means confessing our sins and believing God's promise of forgiveness and cleansing. Each time we confess our sins to God we hear the words of Jesus from Matthew 9:2, “Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you.” God's forgiveness restores our joy and motivates us to love God, serve our neighbor, and abstain from sin.

Let us pray: Heavenly Father, grant us grace to recognize the sin in our flesh, battle against it, and if we consent to it, bring us quickly to repentance and faith. Amen.

Knowing that we have sin in us (the sinful nature) may lead us to assume that we will give in to every temptation that comes to mind. St. John writes that since we have fellowship with God and walk in the light, we are to fight temptation with the Holy Spirit's aid. He writes, "My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin." Christians fight the sinful flesh's desires, the world's wicked influence, and the devil's fiery darts. We should do all we can to avoid sinning when tempted from within ourselves or from an external enticement. Jesus taught this very thing in Matthew 5:29-30 when He taught us to pluck out and cut off the temptation when we feel it. We avoid sin by recognizing the devil's fiery darts and immediately removing them from our heart. We cut off the temptation with the power of the Holy Spirit. We recall who we are in Christ and that we have died to the sin with which we are being tempted.

There are times we fall to temptation. When we do consent to temptation and sin, St. John would not have us despair. We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, who is the atoning sacrifice for all the world's sins. If we sin, we are not to let the sin rule in our conscience, imagining that it's too big, grievous, or vile to be forgiven. Nor are we to let the sin continue to rule in our body and mind, so that we treasure it, hold hands with it, and use our fall as an excuse to keep sinning. John points us to Christ, the Advocate, who died for our sins and promises to forgive our sins when we repent of them and flee to Him for mercy.

Let us pray: Gracious Lord, give us Your Holy Spirit that we may not sin today, and if we do, we may immediately rise again in repentance, flee to Christ our Advocate, and rejoice in His holy gospel. Amen.

St. John continues to teach us faith and love. Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ, that He is our Advocate and the propitiation for the sins of the world, that person is born of God. Faith regenerates us. Faith in Christ rebirths us as sons of God. John wrote in his Gospel, “as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name” (John 1:12). Faith in Christ makes us new men and women since we are justified by faith alone.

When the Holy Spirit works faith in our hearts, He creates new hearts in us as well, with new movements and motivations. This is why John can say that God’s commandments aren’t burdensome. Believing the Gospel makes living according to God’s will in the Ten Commandments a joy. Those who are reborn through faith in the Gospel can say with the psalmist, “Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day” (Psalm 119:97). We delight in the Law of the Lord and look for ways to love God and our neighbors. Philip Melanchthon writes in the *Apology of the Augsburg Confession*, “Therefore, when we have been justified by faith and regenerated, we begin to fear God, to pray to Him, to expect from Him aid, to give thanks and praise Him, and to obey Him in afflictions. We begin also to love our neighbors” (Ap. III:4). God’s commandments aren’t burdensome because faith regenerates us as God’s children. As children of God, justified and fully forgiven, we begin to keep His commandments in love.

We also love God’s law because it continues to show us our sins in order that we may repent of them, rejoice in the Gospel, and work to amend our lives so that we keep His commandments more each day.

Let us pray: Lord God, we give You thanks for rebirthing us through faith in Your Gospel and creating in us clean hearts with pure desires. Increase our faith so that we love Your law and rejoice to live in it. Amen.

What does it mean when John writes, “We know that whoever is born of God does not sin”? Does this mean the Christian never sins? Didn’t the same apostle write earlier in 1 John 1:8, “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves”? Which is it?

The answer is that the believer does not willfully sin. Those who are born of God, regenerated by faith in Christ, who have the Holy Spirit, and love God and their neighbor, do not intentionally consent to sin. We have sin. We acknowledge sin in our flesh. St. Paul calls it concupiscence—the inborn desire to sin. St. Paul complains of this inborn sin in Romans 7:18 when he says, “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells.” St. James describes how the inborn sin in our flesh works: “Each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed” (James 1:14). The inborn sin remains in us though we are regenerated by faith. It taints our new obedience so that although we have the desire to fulfill God’s law and love our neighbor, we are not able to do either one perfectly.

When the sin in our flesh entices us, we remember that we are born of God. James writes that “when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin” (James 1:15). Whoever is born of God does not let his own desires and enticements conceive and bring forth sin. Our goal is to stop temptation so that sin does not reign over us so that we do its will. John speaks so often about living in love because love is the opposite of every sin. Loving God and loving neighbor keeps us busy with good works. We live in the new obedience of faith. Living in love keeps us away from willful sins, and the wicked one doesn’t touch us. If we fall to temptation, we go back to 1 John 2:1: “My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.”

Let us pray: Lord God, give us Your Holy Spirit so that faith and love reign in us today. Amen.

This small letter from John deals with truth and love. Truth is vital because there are many deceivers in the world who teach a different doctrine than Christ's. Those who follow such teachings do not have God. The one who abides in the doctrine of Christ—the gospel purely taught— “has both the Father and the Son.” This recalls Jesus' words from John 14:23, “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him.” Abiding in the truth of the gospel—believing the Gospel and loving God for the salvation He gives in the Gospel—means God the Father and God the Son dwell in our hearts by faith.

Having God dwell in our hearts by faith, we love God and our neighbor. John reminds us of the commandment to love one another because our sinful flesh is selfish and self-serving. The sin that dwells in us does all it can to thwart our love for one another and direct our love to ourselves. We need the continual reminder to love one another.

How do we love one another? “This is love, that we walk according to His commandments.” Each of the Ten Commandments shows us what love for our neighbor is. We love others by helping them in every bodily need. We love our spouses by being chaste and giving our heart and body only to them. We love one another by helping others retain their property and income. We love one another by defending them and speaking well of them. We love one another by being content with what God has given us and helping others appreciate what God has given them. Within the Ten Commandments there are countless ways to love others as they need. When we transgress the law of love, we confess our sins and receive God's forgiveness, then return to our vocations with renewed love for those around us.

Let us pray: Heavenly Father, keep us in Christ's doctrine and fill us with love for You and others. Amen.

Children learn by imitation. They learn to speak by hearing the sounds their parents make, then attempting to repeat their words. As children grow, they learn how to behave from their parents as well, observing them and imitating their behavior and attitudes. This is how Christians learn the Word of God in the Divine Service. We hear God's Word and we speak it back to Him by confessing our faith, praying to Him, praising, and giving thanks to Him.

St. John writes to Gaius, "Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God, but he who does evil has not seen God." Christians are sons of God because they believe in Christ Jesus for the forgiveness of their sins. Like earthly children, we are to imitate the good our Father in heaven does. Since the Father is invisible and unseen, we imitate the good we see our elder brother Jesus do in the gospels. We also imitate the apostles whom Christ has called and sent specifically to preach the Gospel and live as a pattern for others. This is why St. Paul tells the Corinthians, "Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1). Thus, we imitate Christ and His apostles, as well as the saints, and follow their faith and good works according to our callings.

Christians are not to be like Diotrephes. It seems that this man had preeminence in the church and became puffed up with pride because of it. Diotrephes did not receive John or follow his example of humility and service which the apostle had learned from Christ Himself. His pride led him to speak maliciously against John and excommunicate those who wished to receive faithful brethren. John will call Diotrephes to repentance and back to the imitation of what is good. His example reminds us to beware of conceit, no matter our position in the church, but imitate the good.

Let us pray: Lord God, grant us childlike faith to believe Your Word in all circumstances and imitate the good that Christ has shown us. Amen.