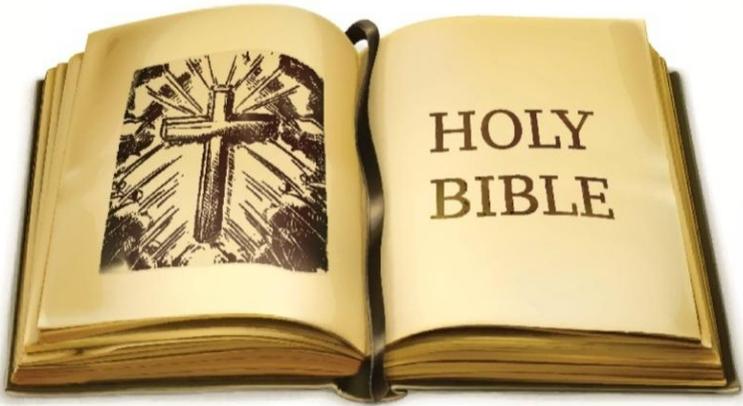


Each Day in the Word



August 31—September 27, 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.

After shutting down the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Scribes for the final time (Matthew 22:46), Jesus turns to His apostles and other followers to offer more of God's truth. He instructs them to keep listening to Moses (which is God's proper Law, the purpose of which is to drive them to their need for the Gospel that comes through Christ), but abandon all manner of their added, man-created works (which they weren't even doing themselves). They were all about themselves and making themselves look and feel good before men; that's it.

Sadly, the same thing happens within Christendom today. There are false teachings in certain church bodies that turn listeners away from the Gospel to focus people on themselves. It is really a sad pretending that is taking place. They may give the appearance that all is well with them, but everything is about works to get into heaven. Even their own "appearance" before men is a work; it's all a charade. And because they exalted themselves, they will be humbled straight into eternal condemnation.

We Christians have been brought to repentance and belief in the merits of the Christ, the One. This means that, through God-created faith, God accounts our flesh as being humbled (that is, drowned and killed). And through that same God-created faith, the New Man arises to live before God as holy and righteous, solely because God accounts Christ's fully atoning merits to us through faith alone. Rejoice that God's means of grace focus us on the One!

Let us pray: Almighty and everlasting God, who is always more ready to hear than we to pray and to give more than we either desire or deserve, pour down upon us the abundance of Your mercy, forgiving those things of which our conscience is afraid, and giving us those good things that we are not worthy to ask, except through the merits and mediation of Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

St. Paul asks the saints to pray for him, even as he serves others. And then he sends word of his activities so that they may learn about and rejoice in God working through him. Why would St. Paul be moved to extend such a request and such words to other Christians? Because fellowship matters! It's simply part of the character of our Lord's Church, which is the very body of Christ Jesus at work in this world. It is truly sad when individuals take on an individualistic mindset when thinking of the Church. Even congregations can have this mindset. Participation, tithing, and other areas get affected because faith is being affected.

Communication between Christians is part of the public confession that Christ commands and accomplishes through His body. Some folks think fellowship is a social gathering (for example, potlucks or events outside of worship). But the proper fellowship of Christ's Church is our catholic unity in what we teach, confess, and do by His Spirit according to all that our Lord has commanded in His Word, to the glory of Christ crucified.

The catholic (universal) Church is a body of people connected in many places and throughout many ages. As St. Paul reveals in this text (and is revealed in many other places throughout holy Scripture), it is "in the Spirit" through which these spiritual things get accomplished. Therefore, when we boast, we boast even more confidently in the Lord.

Let us pray: Almighty and everlasting God, who is always more ready to hear than we to pray and to give more than we either desire or deserve, pour down upon us the abundance of Your mercy, forgiving those things of which our conscience is afraid and giving us those good things that we are not worthy to ask, except through the merits and mediation of Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

What a blessed exhortation St. Paul was inspired to deliver not just to the congregation in Philippi, but to every Christian congregation and generation thereafter! Having a steadfast desire that Christ be preached (whether in pretense or truth)—that Christ would be magnified in his body (whether in life or death)—to be conflicted on behalf of Christ (whether in belief or in suffering)—and in consolation in Christ (whether in self-interest or the interests of others).

Paul is inspired to deliver the Christocentric (Christ-centered) message of God's Word. He reveals how everything is always about keeping Christ in the forefront of a Christian's thoughts, words, and deeds. This is what it means to be a slave to Christ. We might put it this way: in moving forward in life, as if driving a vehicle, Christ needs to be in the windshield of the vehicle and not in the rear-view mirror as some event in the past that is glanced at every once in a while.

When Christ is placed in the rear-view mirror (and remembered or glanced at every once in a while), then being a Christian is reduced to simple moralism—being good or bad. With Christ in the windshield, everything is viewed through the justification that is accounted to you as a believer. Therefore, it makes sense that St. Paul would say that Christ engulfs every aspect of life. Thanks be to God!

Let us pray: Almighty and Everlasting God, who is always more ready to hear than we to pray and to give more than we either desire or deserve, pour down upon us the abundance of Your mercy, forgiving those things of which our conscience is afraid and giving us those good things that we are not worthy to ask, except through the merits and mediation of Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

In the text for today, Timothy and Epaphroditus are commended for their service to Paul and the Church in general. We don't stop often enough to evaluate honestly how we are serving our Christian brothers and sisters within the Church, nor the unbelievers in the world as well. One excuse is because life can get (and usually is) busy and there's just no time. But the most likely excuse for no evaluation is because service is Law-oriented. Where there is Law, we fall short; we never get it done because we are sinners who concentrate on serving ourselves. And the flesh doesn't like having failure pointed out to it.

However, being a Christian changes that because a new nature is given to us from above. This explains the "born again, from above" words that Jesus delivered to Nicodemus in John 3. A Christian has two natures; thus, the battle between the two commences while faith exists within the sinner/saint. We are actually doomed to hell because we are not perfect, but thanks be to God, there is good news!

Christ has finished the perfect, meritorious-works-to-get-into-heaven part for you! That is the Gospel that sets you free from the Law. Not free as in having a license to sin and not serve your neighbor, but free and inspired by that same Gospel, to love and serve your neighbor without keeping track of it in a meritorious way. Where faith is, good works (service within all vocations) necessarily happens.

Let us pray: Almighty and Everlasting God, who is always more ready to hear than we to pray and to give more than we either desire or deserve, pour down upon us the abundance of Your mercy, forgiving those things of which our conscience is afraid and giving us those good things that we are not worthy to ask, except through the merits and mediation of Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

As yesterday's devotion spoke of the understanding of two natures within a Christian, so Paul is inspired in this text to reveal the difference between confidence in the flesh versus confidence in Christ. The flesh presumes itself either to be righteous or to have the ability to earn righteousness by way of the Law. Paul, in his flesh, could have boasted of how merits and goodness look before the eyes of the world. Instead, because of that new nature given by God, he counts it all as nothing before God. Indeed, he regards all his deeds as "rubbish".

Try as you might at being righteous; but there will always be flaws. Before God, the only thing that counts is perfection. To have true righteousness (perfection) before God, one must have the righteousness of the only One who is truly righteous, Jesus Christ. So how does one get such perfection, such righteousness? It is yours through faith in Christ, which Paul notes "is from God." In other words, what God expects from you—perfect righteousness—He gives to you through faith in Jesus and for Jesus' sake. Thus, nothing of Paul and his life is taken into consideration by God regarding Paul's salvation. God took Paul's sins and placed them upon Christ as He hung on the Cross. The same goes for you who believe in Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins. What a joyful, relieving, rescuing Gospel!

Let us pray: Almighty and Everlasting God, who is always more ready to hear than we to pray and to give more than we either desire or deserve, pour down upon us the abundance of Your mercy, forgiving those things of which our conscience is afraid and giving us those good things that we are not worthy to ask, except through the merits and mediation of Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Seeing our brothers and sisters as beloved friends and family is part of belonging to the catholic (universal) Church. We should be of the same mind in the Lord, and we should see ourselves as fellow workers in serving the Gospel of Christ crucified. This is why it is sad to see how other denominations of Christendom misinterpret God's Word to the point that it maligns God's Gospel and needs to be called a false teaching. God's Holy Scripture is most important, and we all should work together in loving service to that shared focus.

One false teaching focuses individuals on their own sense of accomplishing heaven; in other words, being "good enough." This teaching promotes self-esteem and superficial piety over against godly repentance and humility. St. Paul could have done this, as he revealed in yesterday's text, but he didn't. His new nature brought him to forfeit those merits, to sacrifice himself, to put off the old man, and to put on the new man. It moved him to teach that one loses one's life in order to gain it; it brought him to teach us to die (crucify the flesh) in order to live in Christ Jesus, all through God-created faith.

Repentance and belief in Christ's merits alone for salvation are, surprisingly, not popular in a majority of the teachings of today. Christ Jesus, however, teaches His followers humbly to repent and to observe all that He has commanded in His Word to His Church. We are to be of the same mind in His Word and His will. Being in Christ is how we confidently stand fast.

Let us pray: Almighty and Everlasting God, who is always more ready to hear than we to pray and to give more than we either desire or deserve, pour down upon us the abundance of Your mercy, forgiving those things of which our conscience is afraid and giving us those good things that we are not worthy to ask, except through the merits and mediation of Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Paul teaches the saints in the Church at Philippi to meditate on good and positive things, and to see what contentment looks like. But his message is different from the world's ideas about positive thinking and contentment. When the world talks about "the power of positive thinking," or being content, its focus is self-centered. People are taught to be positive or content for the sake of insulating themselves from the sin and evil that are always around. But bliss is not found by being willfully ignorant. As the saying goes, "Ignorance is bliss;" but once it's willful, it's denial.

St. Paul's inspired message, not so shockingly, is different from the world's. He is revealing to Christians that we are to meditate on the things above. His words to the Christians in Colossae were similar: "Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth" (Col. 3:2). Or, as our Lord says, "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness..." (Matt. 6:33). That which is true, noble, just, pure, lovely, of good report, virtuous, or praiseworthy is not always considered to be "joyful" according to the world and our sinful hearts. Sometimes the true and praiseworthy Word of God proclaims, "Woe to you, hypocrites..." and "Repent!" And rightly so! Again, simply ignoring and avoiding such just and virtuous admonitions does not bring peace and contentment. Rather, Christ is our peace and our contentment. Meditating on Him and His fully atoning merits for the forgiveness of sins is how He strengthens us.

Let us pray: Almighty and Everlasting God, who is always more ready to hear than we to pray and to give more than we either desire or deserve, pour down upon us the abundance of Your mercy, forgiving those things of which our conscience is afraid and giving us those good things that we are not worthy to ask, except through the merits and mediation of Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

In the beginning of Matthew's 9th chapter, Jesus healed a paralytic man and forgave his sins—all with simply a word. Jesus' Word always does what it says. Later in the chapter, Jesus raised a ruler's daughter from the dead and healed a woman with a twelve-year flow of blood—all with simply a word. Jesus' Word always does what it says.

Leaving that scene, two blind men follow Jesus. It is quite possible that they had heard of the Lord's miraculous deeds. They seem to know at least this much: that He can do something about their situation. They cry out to Jesus. They don't ask Him to heal them; they ask simply that He have mercy on them. They express their belief in His ability, and they put themselves in the Lord's hands.

Mercy and compassion go hand in hand with Jesus, for He is the very embodiment of both. Jesus is mercy in the flesh. And He bids us do as the two blind men did—to place our God-given faith in His ability to deal with whatever beleaguers us. Like the blind men, we do not even have to ask our Lord or inform Him of our need because, in His omniscience, He knows this in advance. However, it is always good to ask the Lord to address our needs for our sake, in order that we continue to learn to come to Him for all things—to praise Him when things go well and to cry out when they don't.

“Have mercy on us!” That's the cry of faith. That's the cry of the Christian. We sing this prayer in the Divine Liturgy. We pray that God would not give us what we deserve for our sins, but that He would bless us for the sake of His Son who took our sins into His body and paid for them on the tree of the cross.

“Kyrie eleison; Lord have mercy.” And He has done so.

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, strengthen our faith so that we never fail to cry out to You in all things. Amen.

In this chapter St. Paul expresses great care, concern, and love for the Christians in Colossae. He encourages them that, even though he is not physically with them, he most definitely is in spirit; and his greatest concern is that they are not led astray by worldly philosophies and traditions which are not rooted in Christ and His Word. He bolsters the Colossians' faith with the solid truth of Christ's deity—that He is fully God in the flesh, that He is the Head of the Church, and that all believers are complete in Him. When one has Christ, he has the most needed thing.

Paul also teaches the comfort and certainty of Holy Baptism—that it connects us with Christ's death and burial, things by which He has paid for the sins of the world by giving up His body on the tree of the cross. He has given us the comfort of our own victory over death and the grave through His victory over them. Christ Himself has suffered and died for the sins of the world, thereby "wiping out the handwriting of requirements that was against us." Those charges or requirements were laid against Him in our place, and He bore them fully and faithfully. Further, Paul encourages the Colossians to see Christ as the fulfillment of all the Old Testament festivals, for they all point forward to Him. Finally, Paul challenges the Colossians to look to Christ and not to subject themselves to works and ceremonies that hold only the "appearance of wisdom."

St. Paul writes to us, the Church of Christ. Baptized into Christ's death to sin and His resurrection to life, we have His faith and forgiveness. As we continue to avail ourselves of faithful preaching and the right reception of the Sacraments, that faith is sustained. And by that same gift of faith, we are encouraged and strengthened to live our lives to God's glory and the good of our neighbor.

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, keep us in the one true faith and teach us to live by Your Word alone. Amen.

In the first part of the reading, we hear echoes not only of the Fourth Commandment but also what Paul wrote in Ephesians 5 regarding husbands and wives. It is wonderful and godly for wives (brides) to submit to their husbands (bridegrooms) as the head of the Christian home, for this points to Christ the Bridegroom as the Head of His Church, His holy bride. Christ's sacrifice—His suffering, death, and resurrection in man's place—demonstrated the ultimate expression of love and commitment, thereby making it easier for us to trust in the Lord for salvation and protection and continue gladly to obey Him. The result of this is our "inheritance" of ultimately being with the Lord Jesus in heaven for eternity, free from the ravages and effects of our sinful nature and enjoying His perfect presence forever.

In Christ-like fashion a husband is to see and treat his wife as the gift she is to him from God and to sacrifice himself for her, thus making it easier for the wife to respond in love and place herself in godly submission to her husband, trusting him to care for and protect her. The result of this obedience and service is an "inheritance" of a happy and strong marriage which, Lord willing, also produces godly children and proclaims a strong Christian witness to God's promises and faithfulness.

Fathers are to guide and teach their children, and children are to obey their parents "in all things" out of reverence for Christ. And those who work for others (bondservants) are to obey their godly masters in the fear of God and do their work not for men but as serving the Lord. Paul teaches us to look for opportunities "to speak the mystery of Christ" gracefully to those outside the faith.

As Paul wrote to Archippus that he should "take heed to the ministry" which he had received, so he urges us, too, to serve the Lord in our various vocations, giving Him glory as we do.

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, strengthen our faith that we may serve You faithfully through love and service to our neighbors. Amen.

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” Many a faithful pastor begins his sermons with these or similar words as he expounds the Holy Scriptures to the people he is called and ordained to serve. As he preaches, he delivers God’s grace, His love for all, shown in Christ’s death for all, and God’s peace, which is the peace Christ won for them. As this faithful preaching continues and bears fruit, the congregation grows stronger in Christ and becomes an effective witness to those in the community and other places.

In this letter, Paul, speaking not only on behalf of himself but also for his coworkers, thanks God as he recalls the Thessalonians’ “work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope” in the Lord Jesus. Yes, he’s bragging on them, and for good reason. He commends these Christians for their respect and appreciation for those who spoke the Gospel to them and for believing the right things. The Thessalonians “received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit.” They were experiencing challenges for their faith in Christ and for their having “turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.” It could not have been easy for them to make a spiritual 180, leaving behind their former false beliefs and trusting the preaching and teaching of Paul and his companions about Christ crucified for sinners. But with the help of the Holy Spirit working through the preached Word, they were on the right track. This resulted in Paul praising God for their strong and clear witness to the surrounding areas.

May God grant your pastor and your congregation to be faithful always to God’s holy Word and not to bow to any false teachings that can and will lead God’s people astray. And may God make them a strong witness to His grace and peace in Christ.

Let us pray: *O Holy Spirit, grant us grace that we our Lord and Savior in faith and fervent love embrace and truly serve Him ever. Amen. (TLH 293:1a)*

Paul, speaking for himself and his coworkers, writes, “we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts.” These are very telling words, for they point us to a very important aspect which marks a faithful pastor: that he not please people but God. Throughout history many a preacher has given in to the ways of the world and delivered messages that tickle itching ears, soften the fangs of the Law, and speak an impotent Gospel that does little more than say nice things about God. These are not true preachers, but “false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves” (Mt. 7:15). They are pretenders, using words that sound Scriptural, but accomplishing only the devil’s work. They are to be avoided at all costs because the cost of listening to and following them is eternally damning. And the reason that is so is because, as Jesus once tersely said to Peter, they “do not have in mind the things of God but the things of men” (Mt. 16:23).

Paul says, “we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children.” Pastors and lay-folk alike are encouraged to be gentle but clear as they present the Gospel to others. Knowing that the Holy Spirit works through the Word, our happy task is to “speak the truth in love” (Eph. 4:15), and then let the Holy Spirit do His thing, not depending on our delivery, style, or personality, but on the efficient power of God’s Word alone. Paul then thanked God on behalf of himself and his companions because the Thessalonians had received their message “not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the Word of God.” The Thessalonians were modeling the Bereans of Acts 17 who heard Paul and Silas’ preaching, and still “searched the Scriptures daily whether these things were so” (17:11). This is also our happy task as Christians, to make sure that what our pastor is preaching and teaching is soundly Scriptural, and not a message of men. In this way God is glorified, and His church is built up in the saving truth of Christ.

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, make all pastors confident and bold to preach only Your Word and truth. Amen.

At the end of 1 Thess. 2, Paul wrote that he, Silvanus, and Timothy, while away from the Christians in Thessalonica and eager to return to them, had also been hindered by Satan in their plans to reunite with the brethren there. When they “could no longer endure” the separation, Paul and Silvanus sent Timothy to them to establish and encourage their faith. They did this so that the Thessalonians might be encouraged in their faith in Christ and not shaken by their afflictions. Paul then adds these touching words: “Therefore, brethren, in all our affliction and distress we were comforted concerning you by your faith.” Paul and the others were comforted and strengthened by the faith of the Thessalonians as they continued to live their lives to the glory of God in the true confession of Christ.

In Christ’s Church, Christians are gifted by God to be able to bear one another’s burdens and share one another’s joys, for they are all part of the body of Christ. When someone else in the church is hurting, that person can and should be comforted by others in the faith who have experienced similar difficulties and challenges. By sharing with each other God’s faithfulness in seeing them through their own circumstances, brothers and sisters in Christ have not only the duty but the privilege to stand with each other, confess their sins and faults to each other, encourage each other, and simply to live as fellow members of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church. In this way, the whole congregation is bolstered and built up.

Take Paul’s words to heart: “May the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another...so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.”

Let us pray: *Blest be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love; the fellowship of kindred minds is like to that above. This glorious hope revives our courage by the way, while each in expectation lives and longs to see the Day.* (TLH 464:1, 5)

God wills your sanctification; that is, He desires not only that you grow in faith but that you also steer clear of things that militate against saving faith. And if there's one thing that poses a very grave danger to faith, it is sexual immorality. The Greek word is "porneia" which sounds exactly like what it is—pornography, filth, immorality—not treating your own body (or that of others) in a God-pleasing way; seeking self-gratification and personal sexual pleasures; putting yourself and your lusts first, therefore making yourself out to be your own god. It is a violation not only of the Sixth Commandment, but the First as well. When the devil gets you to sin in this way, he knows more than you do how powerful and dangerous it is, and he loves it when you side with him. Paul wrote in 1 Cor. 6:19, "He who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body," which is a temple of the Holy Spirit. When you are tempted to sin in this way, flee to Christ, call on Him, run to preaching and Christ's Sacraments, and trust that He will help.

Of course, all sin is first and foremost against God; and, as Paul stated, the Lord is the Avenger of all such sin. Those who reject Paul's teaching—which is really God the Holy Spirit's teaching—ultimately reject not Paul but God Himself. For this we are called to repentance.

If this is you in any way, confess your sins. Seek out your pastor to hear your confession in order that he may speak Christ's forgiveness and grant you release. Remember your Baptism in which Christ put His name on you, called you His own, and rescued you from death and the devil. And run to Holy Communion where Christ puts His real and true body and blood into you for forgiveness, life, and salvation. These gifts of God will strengthen you and help you to "lead a quiet life" to the glory of God and your spiritual health.

Let us pray: *I come to Thee with sin and grief, for Thou alone canst give relief. Thy death for me, dear Lord, I plead: O Jesus, help me in my need. O Jesus, Lamb of God, alone Thou didst for all our sins atone; be merciful, I Thee implore, be merciful forevermore. Amen. (TLH 330:2, 5)*

Of course, there is consolation in Christ! Of course, there is comfort in love! Of course, there is fellowship of the Spirit! And of course, there is affection and joy! But where do these exist? Answer: where there is a like-mindedness; where there is a being of one accord, of one mind, of having the same love. All of that happens when the New Man overcomes the selfish desires of the Old Man. This happens when and where God creates and sustains faith.

The creating and sustaining of faith happens when and where the Word of God is taught in its truth and purity and the Sacraments are administered according to Christ's institution. When that takes place, then the Holy Spirit is not hindered in working through God's Law and Gospel, which ultimately aim to drive sinners to Christ. The message of Christ—being found in appearance as a man, humbling Himself and becoming obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross—brings the New Man in believers not to do things with selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind they esteem others better than themselves.

As God's Word of Law brings us to be familiar with how selfish our sinful flesh is, it only shows how it has to be something (more like, Someone) that's not natural to us that can bring about such selflessness. That is the power of the Gospel. What God wants, He brings about by His own doing. Consolation, love, fellowship of the Spirit, and affection and joy—all flowing from Christ's fully atoning merits. And all thanks and glory go to God!

Let us pray: Almighty and Everlasting God, give us an increase of faith, hope, and charity; and that we may obtain what You have promised, make us to love what You have commanded; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.

In the beginning verses of this chapter, God brings St. Paul to fix the eyes of the faithful on the object of faith—Jesus Christ, the crucified. Then, not coincidentally, St. Paul moves on to exhort them to recognize those filling the Office of the Holy Ministry “to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake,” and to be “at peace among yourselves.”

Pastors certainly go through hardships when faithfully undertaking the Office of the Holy Ministry (which is aimed not just at bringing peace between man and God, but peace within the flock as well). Having to carry out the ministry of the Law (2 Cor. 3)—in pointing out sin to drown and kill the Old Man through admonishment—will always bring resistance from men, and even believers, who, by nature, will ever be curved inward toward themselves. It is only after such a killing that the ministry of the Gospel can then take place, creating new life through faith alone in the fully atoning merits of Christ Jesus. This rightly brings about a carrying out of the many exhortations contained in these verses, by way of the Gospel, not the Law.

Christians are sanctified—that is, imputed, or accounted with Christ’s righteousness—through faith alone; and good works flow from this faith. Today’s text reveals that it is God who is responsible for all of this: “Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it.” What a blessed theology to have! Straight from Holy Scripture and rightly confessed throughout the Lutheran Confessions.

Let us pray: Almighty and Everlasting God, give us an increase of faith, hope, and charity; and that we may obtain what You have promised, make us to love what You have commanded; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.

It is often said, “There shouldn’t be divisions in the Church.” Yet, this is one text, of many, which reveals why God brings about separation: it is for the sake of His truth! Fallen flesh, by its very nature, though, ever strives to stay alive and live for the self. Such selfishness is displayed when the flesh maligns God’s Word by openly changing or purposefully mis-teaching His doctrine, which amounts to calling God a liar. It is a “nothing-new-under-the-sun,” on-going, yet hopeless notion of the fallen flesh that it can stay alive by way of the Law.

Through St. Paul, God urges Timothy to “charge some that they teach no other doctrine.” Obviously, St. Paul is exhorting Timothy to carry out such a charge through the Office of the Holy Ministry into which he ordained him. Yet all Christians are exhorted—and expected—not to put up with heterodoxy.

A Christian’s confession of being a totally depraved sinner while remaining in the flesh is a confirmation of the truth of God’s Law. As faith does self-examination according to God’s Ten Commandments, all Christians repentantly conclude that they are the chief of sinners. But God’s purpose of the Law is to drive sinners to His Holy Gospel. As Luther once wrote regarding the teaching of the total depravity of man’s flesh: “Before God I will gladly be a sinner, that this article [of forgiveness and justification through faith in Christ’s merits] may remain true.” (W.A. 29. 573 f.) This is the true confession which brings us to realize that it is only in Christ Jesus where we truly have life! Thanks be to God!

Let us pray: Almighty and Everlasting God, give us an increase of faith, hope, and charity; and that we may obtain what You have promised, make us to love what You have commanded; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.

The kingdom of the left (the world) and the kingdom of the right (God's kingdom of grace) need each other. The world, fallen and filled with nothing but sinners, needs grace. Yet God's grace, that is, Christ's fully atoning merits delivered through His Word and Sacraments, needs faithful rulers that maintain a freedom for the Church to exist in order rightly to deliver God's grace through the Office of the Holy Ministry.

Thus, God, through St. Paul, speaks the important exhortation "that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence." Why such an exhortation? Because when the Church is free to exist, then Christ can be proclaimed, for God "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time."

Upon that scriptural truth we confess and proclaim: "Faith justifies... Just as it is necessary to maintain this sentence, 'Christ is Mediator,' so it is necessary to defend that faith justifies. For how will Christ be Mediator, if, in justification, we do not use Him as Mediator; if we are not convinced that, for His sake, we are accounted righteous? But this is to believe: to trust in the merits of Christ, that for His sake God certainly wishes to be reconciled with us" (Ap:IV, 69, Jacobs edition).

Let us pray: Almighty and Everlasting God, give us an increase of faith, hope, and charity; and that we may obtain what You have promised, make us to love what You have commanded; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.

Verse 16 proclaims that Jesus was “justified in the Spirit.” Some hold that if Jesus was justified, then all of sinful humanity was justified in Christ, but apart from faith.

To connect the entire sinful world to Christ apart from faith, however, is to force a man-made philosophical thought upon Holy Scripture; and worst of all, it is unfaithful to Holy Scripture. It is to make God say something He does not say. God’s Word does not rely on philosophy. Rather, the Holy Spirit reveals spiritual understanding through God’s Word of truth where and when He pleases, and the gift of God-created faith simply believes God’s Word.

Many qualifications for the Office of the Holy Ministry are made clear in this text, one of them being, “holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience.” Yet, even when they know it to be false, some pastors continue to defend the teachings of their founding fathers for the sake of a denominational triumphalism, a “glorious kingdom” on earth. This is not “holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience.”

By God’s grace, the men fulfilling the Office, who are sharing fellowship within the Confessional Lutheran Ministerium, have held the mystery of the faith, rightly proclaiming justification not apart from faith but as coming through faith alone in the fully atoning merits of Christ Jesus. By God’s grace they do this not only for the sake of having “a pure conscience” themselves, but for the consciences of the flocks entrusted to them as well. Thanks be to God, indeed!

Let us pray: Almighty and Everlasting God, give us an increase of faith, hope, and charity; and that we may obtain what You have promised, make us to love what You have commanded; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.

Yet again, the Holy Spirit speaks through St. Paul of the importance of protecting sound doctrine. God is making it clear what His hearers should expect of the “good ministers of Jesus Christ,” that they should be defending against the doctrines of demons. That means not only staying with and teaching the orthodox doctrine of God’s Holy Scripture, it means also not allowing false doctrine to be taught.

This means that a congregation cannot simply say that it doesn’t teach or agree with the heterodox teachings and practices of other congregations with whom they knowingly remain in fellowship. To remain in that heterodox fellowship thus allows the heterodox teachings and practices to continue to be taught. This inevitably results in the support of heterodoxy.

Pastors are called to be the spiritual overseers (or fathers) of the saints entrusted to their care. Their conduct matters; they are to be examples to the flock in love, in spirit, in faith, and in purity. The public reading of Scripture matters, for God’s Holy Scripture must always take prominence, because proper preaching, teaching, and practice depend on it. The exhortation of others, especially the flock entrusted to their care, matters, for if there is no accountability to God’s Word, then it all comes across as though it didn’t matter. And lastly, doctrine matters, for where the doctrine is errant, then ultimately Christ and His fully-atoning merits are maligned. Support of such faithful pastors should clearly follow. And the thanks always go to God!

Let us pray: Almighty and Everlasting God, give us an increase of faith, hope, and charity; and that we may obtain what You have promised, make us to love what You have commanded; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.

As God, through St. Paul, instructs Timothy in how to conduct his God-given ministry in a God-pleasing way, He is giving instructions to all pastors. Everything mentioned back then still applies to Christians and the Church today: to provide for oneself when possible; to support the members of your own family who are truly in need; to offer support to needy Church members, along with support to those who, by God's grace working in the New Man, have devoted themselves to serving the saints.

As the other meditations this week have highlighted that having a faithful pastor is something for which to be thankful, so in this reading from Timothy, God points out specifically that the saints of a congregation are to honor and financially support the spiritual fathers who are faithfully overseeing them. Such support is nothing less than supporting Christ's very ministry among them. And God is the One seeing to it.

As we confess in the Book of Concord (on this very text from Timothy): "Christians are under obligation in the sight of God to esteem their pastors...and provide for them. For that, God wishes to give you additional blessings and will not let you come to want" (LC., par. 161, Jacobs, pg. 413). Oh, how God earnestly desires Christ's fully merited forgiveness of sins to be faithfully delivered through His means of Word and Sacrament! Thanks be to God for all the pastors who faithfully do this.

Let us pray: Almighty and Everlasting God, give us an increase of faith, hope, and charity; and that we may obtain what You have promised, make us to love what You have commanded; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.

God elected believers from eternity for everlasting life. In time, God calls people through the Gospel. He justifies those who, by the working of the Holy Spirit, believe the Gospel, and makes them partake of the divine nature by adopting them as sons of God. We are saved by God's grace alone through faith alone. God will not revoke the promise of the Gospel, nor the covenant He enters into with us in Holy Baptism. But it is possible to disqualify ourselves from God's grace by willfully sinning, which drives the Holy Spirit and His gift of faith from our hearts.

It is with this in mind that St. Peter writes, "Be even more diligent to make your call and election sure." How do we do this? By adhering to God's Word, being diligent in our prayers, abiding in God's goodness, and faithfully using the gifts He gives in Holy Baptism and the Lord's Supper. His means for calling and justifying us—His Word and Sacraments—are the same means by which He strengthens and increases the good work of faith He began in us. The elect will faithfully use these means and endure in the faith to the end of their lives.

The elect will also fight the sinful impulses of their flesh and grow in godliness, lest they become ensnared by faith-killing sin. Peter writes that God's divine power "has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue." We have all we need for life and godliness! By the power of the Holy Spirit, we can add to our faith knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love. We make our calling and election sure by believing the Gospel and growing in virtue as the Holy Spirit bears His fruit in us. Then we will be "neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Let us pray: Lord God, increase our faith in Your promises that we, living as Your children, may make our calling and election sure. Amen.

The words of Jesus are sound and healthy words. For those who believe them, they convert the soul from sin, make us wise for salvation, rejoice the heart with forgiveness, and enlighten our eyes by showing us the path of righteousness. Not all believe Jesus' words, though. Rejecting Jesus' clear words, they would rather dispute over words to excuse their sinful behavior and present themselves as more intelligent and righteous than others. They treat godliness as a means of gain, not of money but of reputation and prestige. From such men Timothy is to withdraw himself.

There are also those who desire to be rich. Their hearts are ensnared in the temptation of discontent. Thinking little of what God has given them already, they are led by their lust for money, the phantasm of worldly security, or a certain lifestyle that God hasn't given them. Following those lusts only pierces their hearts with anxieties and eventually leads to destruction. Prestige, honor, money, and riches are fleeting. Even worse, they ensnare the conscience.

“But you, O man of God, flee these things.” Flee those who want to dispute about words to increase their own authority and honor. Flee from the love of money. Timothy is to run from these things. What is he to run to? Paul writes, “Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness.” We flee from temptations and sin by running the course of God's commandments. We pursue righteousness of heart, godliness in our thoughts, increased faith toward God, and love, patience, and gentleness toward others. We pursue these because, by faith and belief in the Gospel, God has forgiven our sins and declared us perfectly righteous in His sight—not of ourselves, but by faith in Christ.

Against the temptation to engage in empty disputes, we confess the wholesome, life-giving words of Jesus. Against the temptation to be discontent, we live content with what God gives today and enjoy it, working to be rich in good works instead.

Let us pray: Heavenly Father, help to us flee from things that are hurtful and pursue contentment and godliness. Amen.

As Paul writes this his final epistle, a sword hangs over his head. Soon he will be put to death for preaching an illegal religion—that God saves people not according to their works but by His grace given in Christ Jesus, who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light. Yet he is not ashamed of the Gospel because he knows Christ, and that Christ will keep the Gospel ministry going until the Last Day in spite of hardships, persecutions, and false brethren.

He is confident in Christ because he has not been given a spirit of cowardice that shrinks back, but a spirit of power, love, and a sound mind. By faith in the Gospel he preaches, Paul's spirit—his inner man—is a spirit of power to continue the work God gave him to do and to endure hardship. His is a spirit of love by which he faces the world's hostility and endures all things for the sake of the elect. His is a spirit of a sound mind which sees all things as God teaches him to see them through the Gospel. He reminds Timothy to keep stirring up this same gift in himself, so that he may continue teaching the Gospel and holding to the pattern of sound words without shame in the midst of suffering.

Paul's words to Timothy to keep stirring up the gift given to him are for our ears as well. Timothy is to move forward, doing the work of his office which was committed to him by ordination. All Christians are to keep stirring up the gift of faith given by God in Baptism. God the Holy Spirit gives us the same spirit of power, love, and a sound mind. He makes us powerful against temptations to sin. He fills us with love toward God and neighbor. He gives us a sound mind by filling our minds with the pattern of sound words—the Gospel.

Let us pray: Give us spirits of power, love, and a sound mind, O Lord, that we may boldly confess Christ without shame in this world. Amen.

Paul compares the Gospel ministry to warfare. There are persecutions and the false brethren's attempt to undo the Gospel. But ultimately, Paul, Timothy, and all ministers do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but spiritual enemies. The Gospel ministry is also like an athletic contest. It is a race that must be run according to certain rules. The Gospel minister is like a farmer who sows the seed of the Word, waters it, and prays to God who alone gives growth. Warfare, running a race, and farming all take endurance.

The strength to endure hardship comes from the Gospel Timothy preaches, "that Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, was raised from the dead." Believers share in Christ's victory over sin, death, and the power of the devil. "If we died with Him"—that is, in Baptism, so that we then daily put to death our sinful nature—"we shall also live with Him." "If we endure" hardship and suffering for His sake, "we shall also reign with Him." Paul's Gospel strengthened him to endure all things for the sake of the elect. Paul's Gospel would strengthen Timothy with the same endurance.

Timothy will endure in this Gospel by shunning unprofitable words—profane and idle babblings that take attention away from God—and instead, rightly dividing God's Word. God's Word is divided into Law and Gospel. The Law condemns sin in thought, word, and deed so that the hearer repents. The Gospel forgives sin and creates a new heart in the penitent. Using God's Word, rightly divided, cleanses from the dishonor of sin, and makes believers vessels of honor in God's house, prepared for every good work. God wants all Christians to endure hardships, suffering, and temptations. By meditating on God's Word, rightly divided, God cleanses us of our sins. By faith, the resurrected Christ dwells in us to be victorious over temptation, death, and the power of the devil, and prepares us for every good work.

Let us pray: Lord, strengthen us by Your rightly-divided Word, so that we may endure hardship as good soldiers. Amen.

Paul left Titus on the island of Crete to set the churches in order and appoint faithful men as ministers. These elders—called bishops in verse 10 because the titles were interchangeable—were to be hospitable, lovers of the good, holy, sober-minded, just, self-controlled, and holding fast the faithful word. The Holy Spirit wants to bear these fruits in all Christians, but ministers must especially work towards “perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2 Corinthians 7:1). If ministers do not grow in these fruits, they will tear down with their deeds what they built up with their teaching.

These qualified men were necessary because there were many who were “insubordinate, both idle talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision.” These men taught Jewish fables and passed off the commandments of men as if they were God’s Commandments. These are diseased words which cannot give the new life of the Spirit and eternal life. Because they believe their own lies, they defile their consciences and their minds so that nothing is pure to them, not even Holy Scripture. Reading their lies into Scripture, they profess to know God, but by their works they deny Him. As Jesus says of false prophets in Matthew 7:16, “You will know them by their fruits.” They do this for the sake of increasing their reputation and financial gain. The words of a Cretan poet apply to these men: “Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.”

Against these men, Titus and the elders whom he appoints are to hold fast the faithful word. By sound doctrine they are to exhort and convict those who teach doctrines contrary to the Gospel. By convicting these men with God’s Commandments, those who repent may then be exhorted with the sound—meaning healthy, life-giving and life-preserving—doctrine of the Gospel. So it is today. Ministers are to exhort and convict by sound doctrine, bringing saving health to the penitent and believing, and then lead them, not in men’s commandments, but in God’s.

Let us pray: Grant us Your saving health, O Lord, and lead us in the way of Your commandments. Amen.

Titus is to admonish his hearers to the things proper for those who believe the sound doctrine. What is proper for those who believe the sound, life-giving doctrine of the Gospel? To live as those who have been reborn as children of God through the Gospel. To that end, Paul presents a table of duties to guide Christians in good works. Despite the separate admonitions to older men, older women, young women, and young men, there is one characteristic that is common to them all: sobriety.

Older men are to be “sober, reverent, temperate, sound in faith, in love, in patience.” Older women are to be “reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things.” Older women are to admonish younger women to be “discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands.” The word translated “admonish” has the same root as the word translated “sober.” That the older women are to admonish the younger women to be sober is shown in that the word translated “discreet” in verse 5 is the same word translated “sober” in verse 2. Young men are to be sober-minded as well. This sobriety is more than temperance and moderation in food and drink. It includes self-control of thoughts, words, and behavior in a way that aligns with the Gospel. Paul writes in verse 12 that the Gospel—the grace of God that brings salvation—teaches all Christians to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts and to live “soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age.”

No matter their callings, all Christians are to live soberly for the sake of themselves, so that they avoid sin, but also for the sake of the Gospel. They live soberly, “that the Word of God may not be blasphemed.” Even slaves are to live in a way that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things. Our lives are examples to other Christians and adorn the Gospel.

Let us pray: Increase our self-control, O Lord, that we may live lives that reflect the sound doctrine of the Gospel. Amen.

Paul writes in Ephesians 2:8-10, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” The grace of God has appeared in Christ Jesus our Lord. He has acquired atonement and perfect righteousness for all mankind. God the Father forgives all sins to those who, by the power of the Holy Spirit, flee to Christ in faith, and counts them righteous with Christ’s righteousness. This is the gift of God. Paul writes in Titus 3:5, “not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit.” God saves us by giving us all the blessings of Christ, including faith, through Baptism.

When we consider that “we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another,” we confess the truth of Paul’s words. Our salvation is by God’s grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, without any work, merit, or worthiness in us. By God’s grace He has washed us and regenerated us in Holy Baptism. The humility that recognizes sin and believes the Gospel is what prepares us for every good work. The Holy Spirit makes us “humble, peaceable, and gentle toward others.” He teaches us self-control over our tongues, so that we speak evil of no one, “but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers” (Ephesians 4:29). We can only be ready for every good work by living in the Gospel of God’s grace. Since He has been—and continues to be—gracious and merciful to us, we strive to be “humble, peaceable, and gentle toward others.”

Let us pray: Heavenly Father, thank you for Your grace. Help us, by a true and lively faith, to be gracious to one another. Amen.