

The
Concordia  *Lutheran*

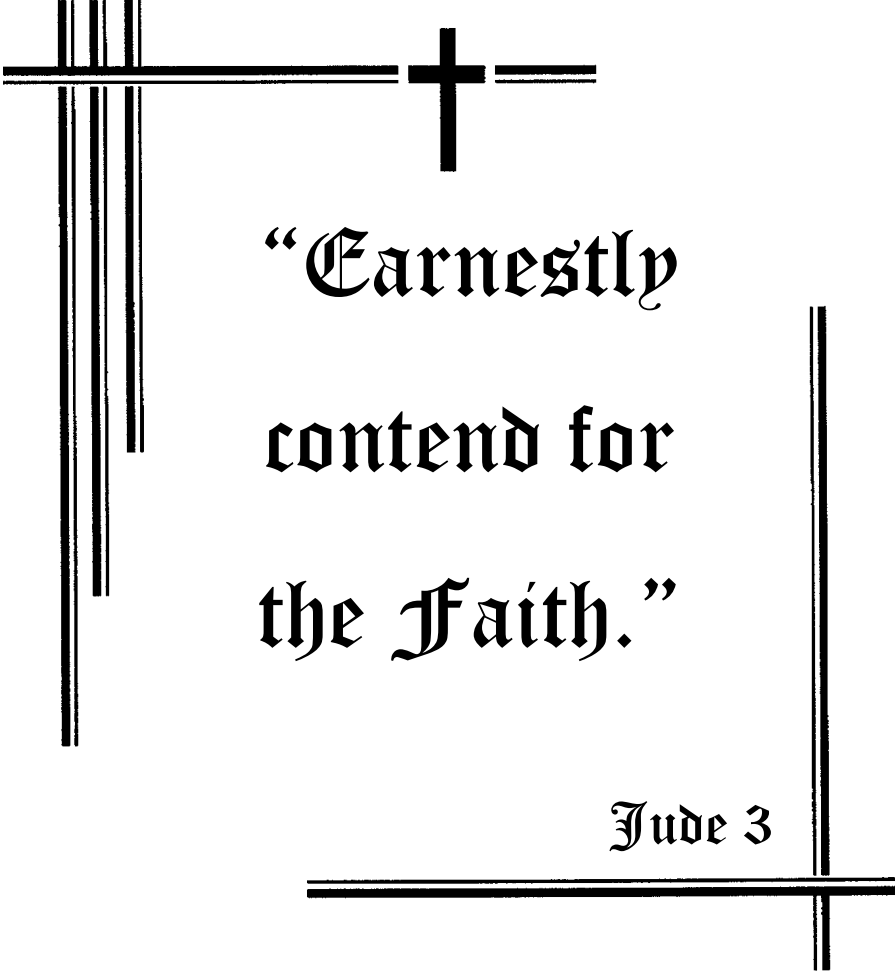
“The Scripture cannot be broken.” John 10:35.

“Thy Word is a Lamp unto my feet, and a Light unto my path.” Psalm 119:105.

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“Earnestly
contend for
the Faith.”

Jude 3



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STATEMENT OF PURPOSE:

To set forth in simple and plain language the pure doctrine of God's Word as taught by the true Lutheran Church in full accordance with the **Book of Concord of 1580** and the **Brief Statement of 1932.**

To show, **on the basis of Scripture,** what true Christians are to believe and how, out of love for their Savior Jesus Christ, they are to lead Godly lives.

To furnish aids for Bible study and articles for Scriptural devotion and meditation.

To demonstrate, by our Scriptural stand, that our **Concordia Lutheran Conference** is not a sect or false church body, but that the congregations which form it confess, teach, and practice the Word of God in its full truth and purity and use the Sacraments according to Christ's institution. All who do this are the true visible Church on earth.

To seek out all who truly share our Scriptural position in doctrine and practice, and to urge the mutual public acknowledgment of such God-given unity. Thus we shall be able thereafter to practice a God-pleasing fellowship with them.

To show that we do not have among us a mixture of divergent teachings but that we are *"perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment."*

To set forth pertinent historical information which has a bearing upon the Church and to expose modern philosophical thought and the so-called scientific theories which contradict the Word of God.

To expose particularly the false teaching and practice of the various so-called "Lutheran" church bodies by comparing their teachings and practices with what is plainly recorded in the Word of God, in the Lutheran Confessions, and in the old orthodox Lutheran writings.

To expose false teaching and practice wherever it makes its appearance and to keep abreast of the current happenings in the church and among the nations as signs of the times.

To be truthful and factual in our reporting and freely to correct any misinformation of which we are not aware and which has been called to our attention. Also to clarify any information or statement of doctrine or practice which may be unclear to our readers or which may create a wrong impression.

The Authority of Holy Scripture— *Sola Scriptura*

*“[Ye] are built upon the foundation
of the Apostles and Prophets.” —Ephesians 2:20*

“Why in the world do you believe everything that is written in the Bible?” That is a question that frequently comes up when discussing the Christian faith with those who regard the Bible as nothing more than a work of fiction that presents a system of beliefs based on ancient superstitions long-disproved by scientists and archeologists. Of course, it should not surprise us that so many people mock the teachings of Scripture (particularly the Gospel), since this is all that man is capable of doing by nature. *“The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them; because they are spiritually discerned”* (I Corinthians 2:14). So then, how is it that we Christians accept the Scriptures as being the absolute truth, and place our trust in the promises of the Gospel for our salvation? We cannot take any credit for this, but must give all glory to *God* for bringing us out of our natural spiritual blindness into the spiritual sight of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. It is a fruit of this saving faith in Jesus (which rests specifically in the *Gospel*) that we also accept the entire content, yea even each individual word, of Holy Scripture as being the precious, infallible, and authoritative Word of the Lord our God.

It is often thought that if an unbeliever does not first acknowledge the Bible as the divine and authoritative truth, then there is nothing more of a spiritual nature that we can discuss with him. But that is actually a backwards way of thinking. We should not expect an unbeliever to accept the authority of the Scriptures; we should, instead, expect him to set his human reason and fleshly pride against it (Romans 8:7). The acceptance of the Bible as the authoritative Word of God, which is never to be doubted or opposed, is a fruit, or resulting product, of one's faith in the Lord Jesus—so it comes *after* faith, not before it. Jesus tells us: *“If a man love Me, he will keep My words”* (John 14:23); and again: *“If ye continue in My Word, then are ye My disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free”* (John 8:31–32); and again: *“He that is of God heareth God's words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God”* (John 8:47).

So then how can we talk to an unbeliever about our Christian faith if he does not first accept what the Bible says as the absolute truth? That is a very good question; and we find the answer to that question in the way that the Apostle Paul preached to the spiritually blind men of Athens, as this is recorded for our instruction in Acts 17:22–29. He preached the truths of Scripture without appealing to the authority of the Bible. Instead, he appealed to the natural knowledge of God, which he knew all of his listeners possessed. By nature everyone knows that there is a God, and that He is omnipotent (all-powerful)—the magnificence of God’s creation gives ample testimony to this fact. By nature man also knows that God is omniscient (all-knowing) and omnipresent (present everywhere)—man’s conscience tells him that he cannot hide anything from the Lord. Therefore, even when talking to those who do not accept the Bible as the Word of God, we can still strike a responsive chord with them by telling them the truths of Scripture that they deep down inside know to be true from their natural knowledge of God, from their natural knowledge of His Law, and from their knowledge that they have not fulfilled His Law perfectly in their lives and therefore have merited His wrath and displeasure. If they accept the fact that they are sinners who can do nothing to save themselves from the punishment of God in the coming judgment, then they will be in a good frame of mind to hear about the forgiveness of sins secured for them by the perfect life, suffering, and death of the Lord Jesus (which they do *not* know by nature). Through this message of the Gospel, the power of the Holy Ghost can bring a person to saving faith; and, as was stated above, the person who trusts in Jesus as his only Savior from sin will hold the words of Scripture so dear and precious that he will not want to relinquish, or even question the authority of, a single one of them.

...every congregation in the Concordia Lutheran Conference believes, teaches, and confesses the doctrine of “*plenary inspiration*”—that *all of the Scriptures are God-breathed*.

That the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments carry the authority of the Lord God Himself is a *fact* whether or not this fact is acknowledged and accepted by a given individual. This is true because “*the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost*” (II Peter 1:21). The Spirit of God “*moved*” (literally: “*carried*”) the holy prophets, apostles, and evangelists in all that they said and wrote as the messengers of the Lord. All of the Bible bears the seal of God’s authority because “*all Scripture*

is given by inspiration of God” (II Timothy 3:16). On the basis of this verse, every congregation in the Concordia Lutheran Conference believes, teaches, and confesses the doctrine of “*plenary inspiration*”—that *all of the Scriptures are God-breathed*. Now there are some liberal Lutheran church bodies that say they believe in plenary inspiration, but what they mean is that the Scriptures as a whole (that is, the general themes, principles, and ideas) were given by inspiration of God, but that the writers decided for themselves the words that they used (which may not have always been the best). Writing to the Christians in Corinth, the Apostle Paul shows this opinion to be erroneous by clearly stating: “*We speak, not in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth*” (I Corinthians 2:13). So on the basis of this verse of Holy Scripture, every congregation in the Concordia Lutheran Conference believes, teaches, and confesses also the doctrine of “*verbal inspiration*”—that *every word of Holy Scripture is God-breathed*.

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Because the teachings (doctrines) of the Bible are the teachings of the Lord our God, they, and *they alone*, are to govern all that is taught in the Lord’s Church. This is what the *sola Scriptura* (Scripture alone) principle, advanced by Luther in the Reformation, was all about. As basic as this principle may seem to us who were, by God’s grace, raised in the true Lutheran Church, it was quite a radical departure from what was almost universally believed by those within outward Christendom at the time of Luther prior to his work as the Reformer. At that point in history practically all who called themselves Christians were either Roman Catholics or Eastern (Greek) Orthodox; and both of these groups, still to this day, exalt, in addition to the Scriptures, what they refer to as “church traditions” as an authority in deciding what is taught and practiced in their churches. And a little over 300 years after the death of Luther, the Roman Catholic Church officially declared that the pope has the authority to define doctrines over and above what God has set forth in His written Word (Fourth Session of the First Vatican Council held on July 18, 1870, Chapter 4).

But is the *sola Scriptura* principle itself really set forth in the Bible? Well, if it were not, then we would be compelled by that very principle

to reject it. Not only is the *sola Scriptura* principle implied by the above-quoted passages concerning the divine inspiration of Holy Writ, but it is also specifically stated in both the Old and New Testament Scriptures. The Lord declares: “*Ye shall not add unto the Word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the Commandments of the Lord your God which I command you*” (Deuteronomy 4:2); “*To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this Word, it is because there is no light in them*” (Isaiah 8:20); “*In vain do they worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men*” (Mark 7:7–8). Accordingly, the Apostle Paul wrote by inspiration of the Holy Ghost the following severe warning and curse directed at all those who violate the *sola Scriptura* principle: “*Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed*” (Galatians 1:8–9).

Even though the Romanists might be the first ones that come to mind as being offenders against the *sola Scriptura* principle, they are by no means the only ones. It is a common trait of cult groups like the Mormons and Christian Science to regard a particular person (like Joseph Smith or Mary Baker Eddy) as having special insights or revelations from God; and the teachings of these leaders are then permitted to displace the clear teachings of Holy Scripture. In a somewhat similar vein, the “enthusiastic” (*Schwärmerei*) groups, such as the Mennonites and Pentecostals, tell all their members that they should expect God to talk *to* them or *through* them completely apart from the Scriptures. But is it not possible for God to speak to us directly through chosen men as He did through the Prophets, Apostles, and Evangelists of old? And is it not possible for God to speak to us directly through dreams and visions as He did with various believers mentioned in the Bible? Certainly it would be *possible* for God to do this still today, for “*with God all things are possible*” (Matthew 19:26). However, we should not *expect* or *long for* God to communicate with us

We should not *expect* or *long for* God to communicate with us in any way other than through the Scriptures, since He has not promised to do so, and since His written Word contains everything that we **need to know** for our Christian faith and life.

in any way other than through the Scriptures, since He has not promised to do so, and since His written Word contains everything that we need to know for our Christian faith and life (John 20:30–31). Furthermore, if we ever would hear a voice or have a dream that conveyed a distinct message, we could not simply assume that it is a message from God. Any such message would have to be evaluated on the basis of Holy Scripture—if the voice or dream would lead us contrary to the written Word of God, it must be quickly discarded as a dangerous message from the devil. Of course, if the message said exactly what is taught in the Scriptures, then the message can be accepted as true—*not* because it was revealed in a vivid dream or by a mysterious voice, but because it said no more than what Holy Scripture itself declares. We must not allow ourselves to be deceived by a “*dreamer of dreams*” (Deuteronomy 13:1–5), but instead “*hold fast the form of sound words*” (II Timothy 1:13) as the Lord has recorded for us in His written Word.

Another way that the *sola Scriptura* principle is often violated is by man setting his own sin-corrupted mind as an authority over the words of Holy Scriptures. This is done in all branches of the Reformed Church, as well as every denomination (including heterodox Lutheranism) that has been infected with modern liberalism. Even though exalting the wisdom of man above the wisdom of God is so blatantly arrogant and blasphemous, yet this kind of disregarding of *sola Scriptura* is the most subtle because those who engage in it usually *say* that the Bible alone determines what they believe. In a great show of piety, some argue that they are letting God speak through His Word in way that is more special and meaningful to them; but instead of letting God speak for Himself (taking His words literally and in context), they put their own personal spin on the Scriptures, and completely miss the meaning that God desires to convey. If they rightly understood and respected the fact that the Bible is the Word of *God* and not the word of men, they would not allow its true message to be either diluted or strained out of the text by their own subjective opinions. “*No prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man, but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost*” (II Peter 1:20–21).

Still others defend their departure from *sola Scriptura* by saying that they interpret the Scriptures in a way that befits the dignity of God, since, God is not irrational or illogical, nor would He ask us to believe anything that is irrational or illogical. Therefore, such clear teachings of Scripture as the power of God being present in Baptism to work regen-

eration, justification, and salvation, are rejected on the grounds that it is not reasonable that these spiritual gifts could be conveyed through the physical application of water. In like manner also the doctrine of the real presence of Christ's body and blood in, with, and under the bread and wine in the Lord's Supper is rejected on the basis of the rationalistic, anti-Scriptural construct that "the finite is not capable of the infinite." Furthermore, in order to satisfy their rationalism, they set about to answer the question that cannot be answered in accordance with Holy Scripture (the *crux theologorum*), namely: "Why are some people saved instead of others?" The *Calvinists* try to answer the crux by saying that God does not want to save all people; and in so doing they twist, distort, or simply discard what the Bible so clearly teaches about God's universal will of grace (Ezekiel 33:11; I Timothy 2:4; II Peter 3:9). The *Armenians* and liberal Lutheran synergists try to answer the crux by saying that some people assist in their conversion while others do not; and in so doing they twist, distort, or simply discard what the Bible so clearly teaches about man's natural depravity (Romans 3:10–18, 23; I Corinthians 2:14) and about salvation being a gift of God's pure grace without any merit or worthiness on the part of man (Ephesians 2:8–9; II Timothy 1:9). Strictly abiding by the principle of *sola Scriptura*, will not permit a person to venture an answer to the *crux theologorum*.

Everything that has been clearly revealed in the Scriptures, and that alone, must be accepted and respected as a declaration straight from the Lord our God in heaven; so we should tremble before His Word in Godly reverence and not even entertain the thought of opposing it or trying to evade it (Isaiah 66:2; John 10:35). The Christian faith is to be strictly "*built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets*" (Ephesians 2:20) and is to be governed by these inspired writings without any contrivance of the mind of man interfering with what God Himself caused to be written for our faith and life on the pages of Holy Scripture. *Sola Scriptura*, the formal principle of the Reformation, not only gives us the perfect standard whereby doctrine and practice are to be judged, but it also gives us the perfect standard whereby Christian fellowship is to be established, regulated, and practiced. So then let us out of loving gratitude to the Lord for His precious truth "*hold fast the form of sound words*" and "*shun profane and vain babblings*" (II Timothy 1:13; 2:16)—"*casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ*" (II Corinthians 10:5).

—P. E. B.



*“He that is not with Me is against Me;
and he that gathereth not with Me scattereth abroad.”*

—Matthew 12:30

In his first epistle chapter three, the Apostle Peter exhorts his readers, including us Christians today, who have sanctified the Lord God in their hearts by faith, to stand up for Jesus, to give testimony from conviction and confidence, with readiness and preparedness, with meekness and Godly fear, in mounting a courageous defense of their faith. He says: *“Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear”* (v. 15). By way of example, we follow the Lord’s apostles in the Book of Acts and observe how they conducted themselves as Christian soldiers on the battlefield of this world. To characterize their work as anything less than an arduous battle would be to diminish *“the good fight of faith”* (I Timothy 6:12) which they so courageously fought and also reduce to a mere exaggeration the Savior’s prophecy: *“Ye shall be hated of all men for My Name’s sake”* (Matthew 24:9) and His prediction: *“The time cometh that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service”* (John 16:2). We read in Acts 5 that the apostles were constantly harassed, arrested, and hauled off to court for preaching and teaching, for healing the sick and those vexed by the devil, yea, for doing nothing at all unlawful but only that which was beneficial to their neighbor, both temporally and spiritually. But by God’s grace, they continued to preach, to heal, to testify, to lay it on the line, no matter what their enemies did or threatened to do to silence them! The prospect of confrontation did not frighten them, the voices of intimidation did not weaken them, the injunction of the court did not stop them. They stood their ground and stated the principle that will endure to all times, the *First Commandment* principle that overrides the authority of governments, popes, princes, and today’s synodical officials: *“We*

ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29).

But there is **another** tactic which has been used by those who find themselves in spiritually confrontational situations —a tactic which many have deemed to be much “wiser” and more desirable than meeting the enemy head-on, taking risks, suffering abuse, and even “breaking a sweat” in the battle for principle, in defense of the truth, for conscience’ sake, and for the honor of God. It is the tactic employed by Gamaliel (Acts 5:34ff.), the tactic of **sitting on the fence** to wait out the battle. To *many* here in this world, —yea, to many who claim to be *Christians*, indeed, to many who claim to be *Christian theologians*— the “art of compromise” is the wise and peaceful way to go, especially when religious controversy is involved; and the “wait and see” attitude is preferred over jumping into the fray. Nobody gets hurt; everybody gets something. In fact, the proponents of this tactic claim that much is *gained* from their inaction; and they imagine their silent “stand,” their quiet “conservatism,” their determination merely to “survive” without getting bloody, to be a “fight.” On the contrary, we see from the title-text of our article that, far from fighting the good fight of faith, far from standing up with a bold confession of Christ before men, and far from achieving a victory for the cause of God’s truth, spiritual fence-sitting is the admission of *defeat*.

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On October 31st we celebrate the four-hundred eighty-ninth anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation; and we offer praise and thanks to God for the stalwart, vocal, active and unflinching stand of Martin Luther and his faithful brethren for the truth of God’s Word, for the name of their Savior, and for the principles whereby we are made wise unto salvation: *Sola Scriptura*, *Sola Gratia*, and *Sola Fidei*. Had Luther been a “fence-sitter,” even a “talker” and “protester,” but only a “poser;” if he had not been a **fighter**, ready to take on the juggernaut of the Papacy single-handedly if necessary, armed only with “*the Sword of the Spirit*” (Ephesians 6:17) and prepared to suffer the consequences, even death, rather than to take one step backward in compromise, in accommodation, in “tactical retreat” from the enemy; there would have been no “reformation” of the church, and we would still be steeped in

soul-destroying error, captive to “*the commandments of men*” (Matthew 15:9), spiritually enslaved to the very Antichrist (II Thessalonians 2:1-12), and, following his teachings, on the road to hell!

The advice of Gamaliel in Acts 5:38-39 has often been referred to as “wise” counsel to the Sanhedrin, even “Scriptural” counsel; and the Pharisee has been praised for his wisdom. But what does he advise? “*Refrain from these men, and let them alone. ...If this work be of men, it will come to naught; but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it*” (v. 38-39a). Sorry, Gamaliel, but your profound advice is what we call today a “no-brainer”! It doesn’t take a genius to figure out that fighting against God is a useless and fruitless effort! Rather, let us view this advice from where Gamaliel is **sitting**. —Gamaliel is “on the fence” —he’s trying to do a **balancing act** between what would be a “quick fix” to the vexing problem of these so-called “apostles” [getting them out of the way once and for all] and the “long term,” more politically expedient tack of “wait-and-see” what they’re up to. After all, by this time the Christian Church has become a kind of power to be reckoned with: 3,000 souls on the Day of Pentecost, another 5,000 after the healing of the lame man. And there are, of course, the Romans to consider. After all, the Sanhedrin’s hair-brained scheme to pressure Pilate to crucify Jesus of Nazareth backfired miserably; just look at His movement NOW!

The Sanhedrin is “on the fence” too. They thought they had gotten rid of Jesus, but they were wrong. They had flexed their muscle at the Apostles and had forbidden them to preach in Jesus’ Name (4:18), but that wasn’t working either. Now they haul the apostles back into court to have them show cause why they shouldn’t be held in contempt, and they get a **sermon!** They’re “fed up”! They “[*take*] *counsel to slay [the apostles]*” (v. 33). What else **can** they do?? —They look to Gamaliel for advice. After all, he has the experience; he’s a shrewd Pharisee; he has the degree [*“a doctor of the law”*]; he has the “reputation among all the people.” “Let’s see what HE has to say.”

Instead of doing the RIGHT thing by going to the sacred scrolls and comparing what the apostles had to say with what “*Moses and the prophets*” (Luke 16:29, etc.) had written; instead of relying upon the **infallible** wisdom of Scripture **doctrine**, they relied upon the **reputation** of a mere **man**. And this right after the Apostles had told them: “*We ought to obey God rather than men*” (Acts 5:29). Spiritual fence-sitters have *always* done this, allowed themselves to be

influenced and their decisions to be formed by what **others** told them to do— Eve by the serpent, Adam by Eve, Lot by the men of Sodom, Aaron by the elders of Israel, King Darius by the presidents of Babylon, Pilate by the chief priests, King Agrippa by the governor Festus, and so on. Thus indeed the early Christian Church brought upon itself the Papacy by relying upon reputation and clout and influence over doctrine. Thus in *our own* time the once orthodox Missouri Synod forsook its solid position on the sound doctrine of God’s Word and chose to be ruled by a **hierarchy of theologians**, so that when laymen wondered what was right or wrong they relied upon their pastors to decide *for them* (whether those pastors were faithful or not!). Pastors, who should have been well-equipped and unashamed workmen (II Timothy 2:15), well able to judge on the basis of *sola Scriptura*, looked to the seminary faculties for answers. And all of them, laymen, pastors, and professors alike, with only rare exceptions, were quite content (as evidenced by their silence and lack of decisive action) to follow what the synodical officials and committees thought, decided, arranged and dictated. Indeed, when many of the chief and powerful “luminaries” of the Synod departed and continued to depart from Scripture, refusing to be corrected, and kept on causing divisions and offenses contrary to sound doctrine (Romans 16:17), the rank-and-file fol-

...the [Missouri] Synod, at least from the early fifties, began to decide matters of doctrine and practice in conferences and conventions **by majority vote** instead of by Scriptural unanimity; and this practice continues down to the present day.

Still today, so-called “conservatives” look to **men of reputation** for their advice, “conservatives-in-high-places” who *surely* will lead them in the right direction, instead of relying upon the **doctrine** of God’s pure Word to guide and lead them!

lowed them “rank-and-file;” and the Synod, at least from the early fifties, began to decide matters of doctrine and practice in conferences and conventions **by majority vote** instead of by Scriptural unanimity; and this practice continues down to the present day. Gone was the “*unity of the Spirit*” (Ephesians 4:3) and the *unanimity* of one mind and one voice (I Corinthians 1:10) with which Missouri had spoken in the days of its orthodoxy. Those who were “concerned” waited first to see where “names” like Dr. Arndt, Dr. Friedrich, Dr. Mueller, Dr. Behnken, and others would stand, and when and *if* “names” like Becker, Burgdorf, Rehwinkel and Romoser — indeed, the constituent memberships of the Chicago and St. Louis Study Clubs, for exam-

ple, who had clearly marked the error and errorists— would decisively “*avoid*” the now-heterodox synod, or whether they would “stay in and fight,” as the common expression was used in those days. And still today, so-called, self-styled “conservatives” look to **men of reputation** for their advice, “conservatives-in-high-places” who *surely* will lead them in the right direction, instead of relying upon the **doctrine** of God’s pure Word to guide and lead them! No wonder they have what they have today in the large church bodies! —Let it never be said of YOU, beloved readers from our Conference fellowship, that, **just because** Pastors Mensing, Lietz, Worley, Natterer, Dierking, Mahan, Redlin, or Bloedel take such and such a stand, you’ll do the same! Don’t be a **spiritual fence-sitter**, relying upon **reputation over doctrine**; for that will be your admission of defeat in the spiritual battle for God’s precious truth that you must wage and win here in this world! Rather, “*take heed...unto the doctrine*,” St. Paul says, when you make your stand, when you open your mouth to testify, “*for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself and them that hear thee*” (I Timothy 4:16). And as to those who **depart** from that pure doctrine, the Apostle writes in Romans 16:17, “*Mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them!*” Don’t accommodate them; don’t “split the difference” with them; don’t just debate with them; and don’t “stay in” and fight windmills with much “sound and fury, signifying nothing” (Shakespeare). The Apostle’s words are as clear as crystal; and there is NO so-called “time element” either stated or implied in his directive that grants you or anyone else a fifty-year window of opportunity to obey it or to ignore it!

Don’t be a **spiritual fence-sitter**, relying upon **reputation over doctrine**; for that will be your admission of defeat in the spiritual battle for God’s precious truth.

Now, as we go back to Gamaliel’s advice in Acts 5, we find that nowhere does he, “*a doctor of the Law*,” an expert on the Old Testament Scriptures, refer his learned colleagues to the **Scriptures**. Remember that this is a **spiritual matter** before the Sanhedrin, one which should be decided on the basis of the **Holy Scriptures**, which are “*profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works*” (II Timothy 3:16-17). Yet, Gamaliel refers the members of the council to two **historical** cases, that of Theudas and his following of some four hundred men, and Judas of Galilee at the time of the second

census under Cyrenius and his revolt against the government. Both of these movements *failed*, Gamaliel tells the Jews; and this Jesus-of-Nazareth cult could do exactly the same. “*Let them alone; for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will surely come to naught.*”

Nowhere does Gamaliel refer his fellow councilmen to the prophecies of the Old Testament concerning the Messiah, concerning His Gospel message, concerning His gracious kingdom, concerning His vicarious atonement, concerning His full and free salvation! For if he *did*, he would have led them to a completely different conclusion, namely, “*Let them alone; don’t persecute them; for they are the servants of the most high God! Let us repent of our sins against God’s promised Messiah, throw ourselves upon His mercy, confide in His promised forgiveness, and do all in our power to extend His gracious kingdom among us!*”

But, no, Gamaliel wasn’t about to go **that far**, even though some commentators think that he had come to that conclusion *personally*. There’s simply no evidence for that proposition in Acts 5. He simply **sits on the fence** and treats the “Jesus movement” **historically**, suggesting that it might well be a passing fad!

Now when we study Church history, we don’t do it to **evaluate** our **doctrinal position** and the **orthodoxy** and **viability** of our fellowship! THAT we do on the basis of *Scripture alone*, which doesn’t **permit** us to “straddle the fence” regarding doctrine and practice, but rather **requires** us to get OFF any “fence” and judge our position according to the only source and standard of doctrine, faith, and life: The holy Word of our God! For “*if [we] continue in [Christ’s] Word, THEN are [we His] disciples indeed,*” He tells us. **That’s** the standard. —History only shows us in retrospect how **departure** from sound doctrine has been the **cause** of countless “*divisions and offenses*” in the Church over the centuries, that these all have that one feature in common, and that, even though many sects have been successful in terms of numbers (contrary to Gamaliel’s standard), they are still heterodox, false, pernicious, and dangerous, their outward success notwithstanding!

Judging by Gamaliel’s **historical** standards, our little fellowship of congregations is **not** “*of God*” because we, numerically-speaking, have “*come to naught*” by the world’s reckoning. And if spiritual fence-sitters look at **us** in the Concordia Lutheran Conference to see whether we are “*of God*” or “*of men,*” looking to **history** instead of to **Scripture** in order to make their judgment, they will come to the *wrong* con-

clusion! —What’s **your** conclusion, dear reader? Do **you** sit on the fence, waiting with bated breath to see if our church and Conference and fellowship will **fall** with the passage of time, waiting for **historical eventuality** to judge between truth and error, between right and wrong?? May God graciously forbid that you ever fall into that trap of Satan; for the judgment of **Scripture** is that we will get smaller and smaller (Luke 12:32; 18:8) and less influential with every passing day (John 16:2) until the Lord comes; but “*he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved,*” vindicated not by history, but by the judgment of Christ Himself according to His Word!

Fence-straddlers like Gamaliel, and like the members of the Sanhedrin who blindly followed his leading, **fear to fight**. That’s why they sit on the **fence** in the first place. They’re not **sure** of **anything**! Using plain common sense, they don’t want to “*fight against God,*” as Gamaliel told the Jews (though they **do so** in their rejection of Scripture and of the Savior it reveals to them). But their compromising attitude, like that of Pilate, who was unwilling to acknowledge even the existence of objective “*truth,*” makes them also unwilling to **take a stand**. Gamaliel’s advice, in essence, was just to “wait it out.” Fence-sitters are notorious for that cowardly tack, including all those former brethren of fifty years ago who simply stayed in the heterodox Missouri Synod, claiming that their motive was to “fight” from within, but who in the course of time became leavened with complacency and indifference to the truth, mounted no effective fight at all, and lost their sense of sight from sitting in the dark, so that now they’re **blind** and can’t find the exit from their burning building! They’re not “wise” when they operate like Gamaliel!! A person is not “wise” when he refuses to bail out of a crashing plane, to ditch a sinking ship, or to flee a raging inferno, but waits for someone of reputation to advise him, waits for the lessons of history to teach him what to do, and fears to make a decision on the basis of sound principles. That’s not “wise,” that’s plain **foolish**! It’s a recipe for sure disaster. **Spiritual fence-sitting is an admission of defeat**, pure and simple. There’s no fight in a compromiser! He identifies no enemy to con-

...former brethren of fifty years ago who simply stayed in the heterodox Missouri Synod, claiming that their motive was to “fight” from within, but who in the course of time became leavened with complacency and indifference to the truth, mounted no effective fight at all...

front! He recognizes no objective for his assault! He sees no purpose for the conflict! There's no hill to defend! There's no crown to win!

Jesus says in our title-text: "*He that is not with Me is against Me, and he that gathereth not with Me scattereth abroad*" (Matthew 12:30). We can't have it **both ways** as *Christians*, as *Christian soldiers*. We have to get **OFF the fence** and **ON our feet** spiritually like the dear apostles who, though they had been severely beaten and commanded that they should NOT speak in the name of Jesus, their precious Savior, "*rejoic[ed] that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His Name. And daily in the Temple and in every house, they CEASED NOT to teach and preach Jesus Christ.*" God grant US that same courage, the courage of the apostles, the courage of Luther, the courage of our "fathers" who by God's grace and with His neverfailing help marked and avoided the heterodox Missouri Synod in 1951, uncompromisingly and untiringly to fight the cause of our dear Savior and His precious Word of Truth for His Name's sake!

*Saints and heroes long before us
Firmly on this ground have stood!
See their banner waving o'er us,
conquerors through the Savior's blood.
Ground we hold whereon of old
fought the faithful and the bold.*

*Fighting we shall be victorious
by the blood of Christ our Lord!
On our foreheads, bright and glorious,
shines the witness of His Word!
Spear and shield on battlefield,
His great Name we dare not yield!*

T.L.H 472, 2 & 3

—D. T. M.

Continuing in the Word of God

*“Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on Him,
‘If ye continue in My word, then are ye My disciples indeed;
and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.’”*

—John 8:31-32

As we Lutheran Christians celebrate on October 31st the Reformation of the church under Martin Luther, we acknowledge with gratitude to our gracious God that He restored to us the “formal principle” of all true theology, namely, that Holy Scripture is the only source and norm of Christian faith and life — *sola Scriptura*. For, without this perfect standard of doctrine, we would never know the true God and His love to all the world in Christ Jesus, and we would never be sure of His good and gracious will that all men be saved and come unto the knowledge of the truth — the truth that makes us wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus (II Timothy 3:15). *“This is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent”* (John 17:3). How thankful we should be that God has blessed us with the saving knowledge of Himself in and through His Word, opened our ears and hearts to hear and believe the Gospel that, by His grace for Christ’s sake, He has forgiven the sins of the whole world, and that in the precious Sacraments He offers, gives, and seals this forgiveness to all believers. By faith in Christ’s merits alone, *“without the deeds of the Law”* (Romans 3:28), we personally lay hold on that forgiveness, *“have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ”* (Romans 5:1), and rejoice in the blessed truth that makes us free from the tyranny of Satan, from slavery to the commandments of men, and from bondage to the Law. **Scripture alone** affords us that freedom; and we continue in that freedom only as long as we continue in Christ’s Word. We, who by faith are living stones (I Peter 2:5) in the Holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints, *“are built,”* St. Paul tells us, *“upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets,”* that is, the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, *“Jesus Christ Himself being the Chief Cornerstone [or Keystone]”* (Ephesians 2:19-20) in whom alone we are acceptable to God (I Peter 2:5). It is this precious Word of God *“which liveth and abideth forever”* (I Peter 1:23b),

specifically the Gospel, which is the means whereby the Holy Ghost offers us the blessings of Christ and works in our hearts the faith which lays hold on them. To our blessed Savior and His vicarious satisfaction of God's justice in our place "*give all the prophets witness, that through His Name, whosoever believeth on Him shall receive remission of sins*" (Acts 10: 43). And, as Jesus Himself during His public ministry here on earth proclaimed the saving Gospel witnessed by Moses and the prophets, "*many believed on Him*" (John 8:30). God opened their hearts by His Spirit and granted them faith to become His disciples.

The Spirit of God does the same work of grace in the hearts of sinners today. God has revealed Himself to mankind *by nature* in His creation and in man's conscience (Romans 1:20; 2:15); but these alone cannot reveal to us who the true God is, nor does the natural knowledge of God reveal how man, the sinner, deserving of God's wrath by nature, may escape His fearful justice, establish peace with him, and be saved eternally. Only by means of the Gospel does God reveal to man His grace in Jesus Christ and the way of salvation through faith in Him. The Gospel shines like a light in a world steeped in the darkness of sin, spiritual ignorance, and unbelief (Psalm 119:105). God Himself through that Gospel brings sinners to the knowledge of Jesus Christ, shining the light of His Word into their hearts. "*For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ*" (II Corinthians 4:6). And, as with those Jews which believed on Him in John 8, Jesus wants all believers to grow in "*the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God*" (II Peter 3:18; Ephesians 4:13-15), to become mature in their faith, "*thoroughly furnished unto all good works*" (II Timothy 3:16,17); and so He points them to the one source of spiritual life and saving faith, "*the incorruptible seed*" of His Word (I Peter 1:23), by which saving faith is engendered (Romans 10:17), strengthened (I Peter 2:2), and preserved (I Peter 1:5) in the hearts of men... *sola Scriptura*.

The child of God is known by love of God's Word and his desire to continue in it. Today, particularly in sectarian churches which deny the principle of *sola Scriptura*, people claim to be seeking spiritual reality through emotion, experience, and special revelations, listening for the voice of God in their own heart and mind, while despising the pure doctrines of God's Word. Paul predicted that this would happen in the last days. "*For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers,*

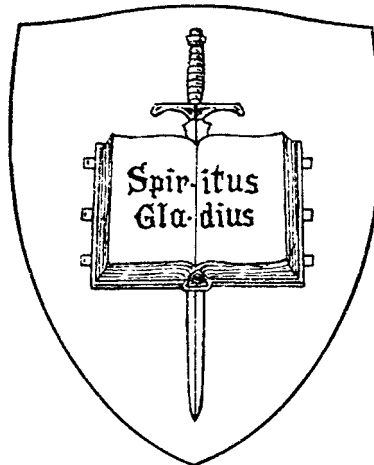
having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables” (II Timothy 4:3-4). But those who have departed from His fold and gone their own way into the wilderness of ignorance and uncertainty, the true sheep of Christ continue to hear the voice of their Good Shepherd in the preaching of God’s Word and humbly and lovingly follow Him in faith. Jesus said: “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give unto them eternal life. And they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand” (John 10:26-27). God’s Word is bread for the hungry soul (Matthew 4:4) and the water of life to quench his spiritual thirst (John 7:37), and the true believer eagerly hungers and thirsts after the righteousness that God gives him through His Word (Matthew 5:6). The Christian confesses with the Psalmist David: “As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God?” (Psalm 42:1-2).

This is our Lord’s desire for every child of God. When a person is brought by the power of the Gospel out of the darkness of sin, ignorance and spiritual death into the light of saving faith in Jesus Christ, trusting in His blood and righteousness for right standing with God, he is Christ’s disciple. But Jesus wants us to be more than erstwhile disciples, temporary believers, “*which for a while believe and in time of temptation fall away*” (Luke 8:13). He wants us to be *established* in His Word, to be His disciples *indeed*, that is, *genuine* disciples, to continue, to abide and to remain in the pure doctrines of His Word and never fall away from them. The word “*continue*” in the Greek means to *dwell, endure, remain, stand, or abide*. Jesus used this same word to define our relationship to God through Him. “*Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in Me. I am the vine, ye are the branches; he that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without Me ye can do nothing*” (John 14:4-5). If we truly desire to “*abide*” in Christ by faith as His genuine disciples, we must abide also in His Word “*which effectually worketh also in you that believe*” (I Thessalonians 2:13), strengthening and preserving us in the true faith unto salvation. Continuing in the pure doctrines of the Word of God characterized the early Christians in Jerusalem who “*continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers*” (Acts 2:42).

God in His gracious wisdom has given us saving faith and the assurance of salvation by means of His precious Word, as it stands written

(Matthew 4:4) and as it is faithfully preached and taught (Romans 10:17). We are born again, sanctified, strengthened and kept in the true and saving faith by “*the power of God,*” the power of His Word (I Peter 1:4; Romans 1:16). True faith clings to the assurances of God in His Word despite what we see or hear around us, and the Word grants us strength to overcome the world, the flesh and the devil. Therefore, in these last days, when men are exchanging sound doctrine and the pure Word of God for “*a form of godliness*” that denies the power of the Gospel (II Timothy 3:5), let us continue to use the Word of God diligently (Colossians 3:16) by reading (John 5:39), learning (II Timothy 3:14), and hearing it (Luke 11:28) regularly (Hebrews 10:25) with Godly fear and true humility (Isaiah 66:2), clinging to its precious truths and promises, even when human reason cannot understand it (II Corinthians 10:5). As we read God’s written Word, we are made wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus and are trained in holiness of living (II Timothy 3:15); and as we hear the faithful preaching of His Word, we hear our Savior Himself speaking to us (Luke 10:16). That Word, and that Word alone ...*sola Scriptura*...grants us riches more precious than gold or silver. We are able gratefully to say with David: “*O how love I Thy law! It is my meditation all the day*” (Psalm 119:97). May God grant us renewed love for His Word in these last days, that by His grace we may truly be and remain Christ’s genuine disciples unto life everlasting.

—R. A. M.



What is it about faith that justifies?

*“Being justified by faith, we have peace with God,
through our Lord Jesus Christ.” —Romans 5:1*

When, by the gracious operation of the Holy Spirit through the means of the Scriptures, Martin Luther came “unto the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4), there unfolded to him in the pages of God’s Holy Word the threefold principle upon which his entire work of the Reformation was based and which is briefly and simply set forth in three, easy-to-remember phrases: “**Scripture alone**” (*Sola Scriptura*) as the only source and standard of Christian doctrine; “**grace alone**” (*Sola Gratia*) as the sole cause of God’s forensic justification or forgiveness of the whole world when we were all still His enemies; and “**faith alone**” (*Sola Fide*) as the one and only means whereby a poor, undeserving sinner can personally lay hold upon the forgiveness, life and salvation offered to him in the Gospel and make it his very own (the *receiving means*, or *medium leptikon*). In this special Reformation issue of the *CONCORDIA LUTHERAN*, we want to address the so-called “third *sola*”, which by God’s grace continues to stand as an uncompromising *shibboleth* or distinctive hallmark of orthodox Christianity and of truly confessional Lutheranism in spite of an incessant bombardment of attack from the enemy: **SOLA FIDE — Faith Alone!**

“**Faith**,” according to its simplest definition, is nothing but **trust** or **confidence**. But, especially with reference to justification and salvation, faith is much **more** than “believing in God” —namely, acknowledging that He exists, that He exercises divine providence over all things, that He has standards for and expectations of mortal men, and that all men will one day have to give account to Him for their actions; for even the unregenerate, headed for eternal damnation, can have **such** a “faith” based solely on the **natural knowledge of God**. Neither is faith, in a purely general sense, “blind acceptance” of what a church professes and teaches, or diligent adherence to the same, without even knowing what that profession is, and yet being “personally convinced” of it. Nor is saving faith a virtuous act, a display of moral conduct, correct behavior, outward compliance with the Law, or the achievement of ethical superiority

which gains God's attention and merits His favor; otherwise justification and salvation would be by the Law, attainable by man's own efforts.

Moreover, the **object** of saving faith, that to which faith clings, is not the Law of God, for "*no man is justified by the Law in the sight of God*" (Galatians 3:11). Such a "faith" would either drive a poor sinner to despair because of his inability to keep the Law, or it would make of him a Pharisee, bent upon earning his own salvation. Neither are the entire Scriptures (including all the doctrines and all the historical portions of Holy Writ) the object of saving faith, as if **orthodoxy** and **saving faith** were one and the same thing. For, while true orthodoxy is in every case the result of saving faith (as Dr. Pieper points out in his *Christian Dogmatics*, II, 424), there are cases where justifying (or saving) faith has not as yet produced either the knowledge or the acceptance of every Scripture doctrine (Luke 23:39-43; Acts 8:26ff.; 19:1-7; etc.).

No, the sole object of saving faith is **the Gospel**, pure and simple — the good news that, because of Christ's **vicarious atonement**, by which He rendered to the Father complete satisfaction for the sins of all mankind and perfect obedience to the just demands of His holy Law in the place of all sinners, God, as the gift of His mercy and grace, fully and freely forgave the sins of the whole world and declared all men righteous for Jesus' sake (*Objective Justification* — II Corinthians 5:19). **SAVING FAITH**, then, is the reliance of the heart on the assurances of God's grace published to all and offered to all in the Gospel. It is a **personal trust** by which the believer applies those promises to himself and is assured that his own sins have been forgiven for Jesus' sake (Galatians 2:20; Job 19:25; etc.). It is an **active trust**, that is, the **laying hold on** those promises *by an act of the intellect and will* (knowledge, assent, and confidence) created in the believer by the Holy Spirit through the Means of Grace. Saving faith "desires" Christ, "seeks" Him, "runs after" Him, "embraces" Him and "clings to" Him. It is a **certain trust**, confirmed to the believer not by the "strength" of his faith but by the **sure promises of God in the Gospel**; for professed faith in Christ without faith in Christ's Word is a sham (Matthew 8:35-38).

And how does this faith **justify** a poor sinner before God? In our first paragraph, we defined *Sola Fide* as "the one and only means whereby a poor, undeserving sinner can personally lay hold upon the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation offered to him in the Gospel and make it his very own." Justifying or saving faith, therefore, is merely the **receptive instrument** (*medium leptikon*) by which God's grace in Christ is

“apprehended” or “laid hold on” (I Timothy 6:12). Saving faith has no intrinsic value of its own, as if it merited anything in the sight of God as an act of man. Rather, faith justifies **because of its object**. The *Apology of the Augsburg Confession* states that “faith justifies and saves, not on the ground that it is a work in itself worthy, but only because it receives the promised mercy.” Even the fact that saving faith is a creation of God’s Holy Spirit adds no merit or justifying power to it, nor the fact that saving faith is identified in Holy Scripture as “obedience” (Romans 1:5, etc.), “doing the will of God” (John 7:17), “working the works of God” (John 6:28-29) and “doing the Word” (James 1:22ff.). “Faith may be called a **work** if the word is not used in the specific sense signifying a work commanded by the **Law**, but in a general or wider sense signifying a movement, an activity, in the intellect and will of man. It is not the Holy Ghost, but **man** who believes through the operation of the Holy Ghost” (Francis Pieper on Quenstedt, *Christian Dogmatics*, II, 442). Thus **justifying faith** is wholly outside of the realm of good works! (Romans 3:28; 4:3 and 5; Galatians 2:16; etc.)

This is precisely why the Church of Rome, through its popes and councils, anathematizes or curses the doctrine of **Justification by Faith Alone** (*Sola Fidei*), stating, for example, in the *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, Session 6, Canon 12: “If anyone saith that justifying faith is nothing else than confidence in the divine mercy which remits sins for Christ’s sake, or that this confidence alone is that whereby we are justified, let him be anathema.” And this curse stands still today as the official teaching of Rome, surely held by Pope Benedict and all those who seek to minimize the differences between us and the church of the Roman Antichrist, as surely as it was held on the day when the cursed ink was not yet dry upon the page! **Be not deceived!** The chief article of Christian faith, the most fundamental article upon which the Christian Church stands or falls, the doctrine of **justification by grace for Christ’s sake through faith**, still bears the Pope’s official curse and therefore remains the chief wall of partition that separates us. Take away that grave error by which the Antichrist leads precious souls to hell, and with it will fall all the rest: Indulgences for sins, the sacrifice of the Mass, the intercession of saints, their works of supererogation, purgatory, penances and satisfactions, holy days of obligation, the rosary, prayer for the dead and masses on their behalf, holy orders, the indelible character of the priesthood, and so on down the line! For they all hinge directly upon **justification by works!**

Since this is a *Reformation* issue, Rome’s rejection of *Sola Fide* and its

complete perversion of the doctrine of Justification has been our chief “target.” Nevertheless, there are also, sad to say, among the so-called “protestant” and even “Lutheran” churches and church-bodies many patently false doctrines taught which actively militate against *Sola Fide* — so many that an entire booklet could be written identifying and refuting *them* — including the preposterous but “politically correct” idea, contrary to countless clear passages of Holy Writ, that faith in Jesus Christ is NOT necessary at all for salvation! (Cf. John 8:24; John 14:6; Acts 4:12; Ephesians 2:8; etc.) No wonder that, in the climate of “ecumenism” so popular today, most “protestants” and, to be sure, many “Lutherans” either cannot see or are not all that concerned about the Pope’s vile curse upon the central doctrine of Holy Scripture! Apparently many simplistically think that the only difference between us and Rome is that Roman Catholics pray to Mary and other saints, while we do not. In their ignorant folly, such uninformed “ostriches” play into the hands of the Roman Antichrist, abet his plan of deceiving the entire world, and fall victim to his snare without even realizing it!!

God be thanked, that He has preserved to us in its purity the precious doctrine of Justification by Grace for Christ’s sake through Faith —the **Gem of the Reformation**— and that He emboldened Luther and his brethren in the 16th Century to hold fast to it, to proclaim it to the comfort of precious souls, and to teach it and to write it in the clearest of terms for our benefit! O may we never take this precious doctrine for granted, but let us zealously guard it against any and all perversion in doctrine or practice, teach it diligently and faithfully in our churches and in our homes, and cling to it with all our heart, making its comfort our very own by confidence in the promises and assurances of our gracious and merciful, faithful God and Lord, for Jesus’ sake!

<p>Salvation unto us has come by God’s free grace and favor; good works cannot avert our doom, they help and save us never. Faith looks to Jesus Christ alone, who did for all the world atone; He is our one Redeemer!</p>	<p>Faith clings to Jesus’ cross alone and rests in Him unceasing; and by its fruits true faith is known, with love and hope increasing. Yet faith alone doth justify; works serve thy neighbor and supply the proof that faith is living.</p>
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T. L. H. 377, 1 & 9

—D. T. M.

(Adapted from an article that appeared in the September-October *Concordia Lutheran*, 1993)

Rightly Judging the



Lutheran Church— Missouri Synod

“Mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them.” —Romans 16:17

In the March-April 2006 issue of the *Concordia Lutheran*, we began a series of articles pinpointing persistent, ongoing errors in doctrine and in practice which make it necessary for us to “mark” certain other Lutheran church bodies as **heterodox**. Heterodox bodies are those in which there are open, public, and known preaching, teaching, or practice which are “*contrary to the doctrine which [we] have learned*” from the Holy Scriptures. Furthermore, in these heterodox bodies, the persistent errors and the persistent errorists are tolerated and are allowed to remain without being opposed and without being removed by means of doctrinal discipline (Romans 16:17; Titus 3:10; I Timothy 5:22b and 6:3-5; *Brief Statement*, ¶29).

This series of articles on heterodox Lutheran bodies fulfills one of the proper, God-pleasing functions, both of our Conference and of our official organ, the *Concordia Lutheran*, as clearly set forth in our **Statement of Purpose** on the inside front cover of our periodical: “To expose particularly the false teaching and practice of the various so-called ‘Lutheran’ church bodies by comparing their teachings and practices with what is plainly recorded in the Word of God, in the Lutheran Confessions, and in the old orthodox Lutheran writings... To expose false teaching and practice wherever it makes its appearance and to keep abreast of the current happenings in the church and among the nations as signs of the times.” While we cannot, for the sake of space, identify *every* false doctrine and *every* evidence of false practice in *every* heterodox body, we nevertheless intend to continue this series of articles as a service to our readers, judging *righteously* (John 7:24) the well-documented facts-in-evidence according to the perfect, completely trustworthy standard of Holy Scripture, and thus to help them to “mark” and to “avoid” persistent errorists who “*lie in wait to deceive*” (Ephesians 4:14) the hearts of unwary, uninformed and ignorant sheep by their “*good words and fair speeches*” (Romans 16:18).

In this present article we righteously judge as heterodox The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod (LCMS) —as we righteously judged it already in 1951 when our Conference had its beginnings as the Orthodox Lutheran Conference. Our judgment is, therefore, “nothing new;” but we repeat it anyway **fifty-five years later** because it is **still a true, right, and Godly judging** of the LCMS. In fact, today the heterodoxy of the Missouri Synod is so pronounced, so blatant and yet so commonplace, so far-reaching and yet so well-supported and vigorously-defended, that many LCMS laymen and pastors do not even **recognize** the false heterodox doctrine and practice as being false and heterodox! This is not only tragic, but it is very, very sad to behold! We will focus in

this present article upon some of the early-on “*leaven*” of the Missouri Synod’s heterodoxy, which has today grown into huge, grotesque, and out-of-control spiritual “tumors.” The LCMS is a chilling and shocking illustration of the truthfulness of Galatians 5: “*A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump*” (v. 9). Every genuine Christian should be able rightly to judge the LCMS on the basis of the Word of God and the irrefutable documentation set forth just in this brief article.

Today the heterodoxy of the Missouri Synod is so pronounced, so blatant and yet so commonplace, so far-reaching and yet so well-supported and vigorously-defended, that many LCMS laymen and pastors do not even **recognize** the false heterodox doctrine and practice as being false and heterodox!

The LCMS’s “roots” can be traced back to 1839, when about 1,000 immigrants came to America because of religious oppression in Germany. They settled in St. Louis, Missouri, and in Perry County, south of St. Louis. The organization of this church body took place in 1847. In 1922, at the 75th anniversary of the founding of the Missouri Synod, a special book, *Ebenezer*, was published in gratitude to their gracious, merciful, and faithful God and Savior for His bountiful blessings. “*Ebenezer*,”... “*Hitherto hath the Lord helped us*” (I Samuel 7:12) was the slogan for this anniversary. Another verse which was closely associated with this anniversary was from Psalm 115: “*Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy name give glory, for Thy mercy and for Thy truth’s sake*” (v. 1). Both of these verses pin-pointed very appropriately the Source of the LCMS’s overflowing gifts and benefits during the first seventy-five years, especially the treasure of God-pleasing, **true unity in doctrine and practice** (I Corinthians 1:10) based alone on God’s iner-

rant Word (John 17:17; II Timothy 3:16), without compromise, without any “intention of yielding aught of the eternal, immutable truth of God for the sake of temporal peace, tranquility, and unity” (Thorough Declaration, *Formula of Concord*, XI, 95-96, *Concordia Triglotta*, page 1095). This confession by the Reformation “fathers” was also the Gospel-motivated confession of the LCMS after 75 years.

But, in spite of being so abundantly, amazingly, astoundingly, and graciously blessed by the Triune God for so many years, especially in the preservation of orthodox, Scriptural doctrine and practice [“practice” being the on-going, consistent application of Scriptural doctrine – Exodus 34:11; James 1:22; Luke 6:46], the LCMS soon began to show the “small cracks” of ingratitude toward and rebellion against God’s Word. Pressure was especially being applied by the **American Lutheran Church** (the ALC), a heterodox Lutheran body now *merged* into the **Evangelical Lutheran Church of America** (ELCA). To counteract that pressure, the *Brief Statement of the Doctrinal Position of the Missouri Synod* was adopted by the LCMS in 1932.

But suddenly and shockingly, those “small cracks” of ingratitude toward and rebellion against God’s Word became public “gushers” of gross ingratitude and brazen rebellion against God’s Word, especially against Romans 16:17-18, when in **September, 1945**, forty-four pastors and professors, many of them well-known theologians in the Missouri Synod (Dr. William Arndt, Dr. Oswald Hoffmann, Dr. Theodore Graebner, etc.), made it abundantly clear that they were no longer in agreement with the Scriptural position of the LCMS on church fellowship. They issued *A Statement* as the vehicle for their offensive, arrogant objections to Scriptural doctrine and practice. We will quote from two sections of *A Statement* to document the “*fruits*” (Matthew 7:16a) and the “*leaven*” (Galatians 5:9) of false doctrine and practice of “the FORTY-FOUR” in 1945:

Forty-four pastors and professors, many of them well-known theologians in the Missouri Synod, made it abundantly clear that they were no longer in agreement with the Scriptural position of the LCMS on church fellowship.

Section Five: We affirm our conviction that sound exegetical procedure is the basis for sound Lutheran theology. We therefore deplore the fact that Romans 16:17-18 has been applied to all

Christians who differ from us in certain points of doctrine. It is our conviction based on sound exegetical and hermeneutical principles, that this text does not apply to the present situation in the Lutheran Church in America.

Examination of Section Five:

1. First Sentence: The only solid, sound basis for Scriptural, truly Lutheran theology is **clear Scripture itself, the clear and certain proof passages of God's Word** [*sedes doctrinae*], the passages which constitute the "*analogy*" or "**rule of faith**" which stand on their own and neither need nor permit of any interpretation. They are so clear in and of themselves that both the learned and unlearned alike can understand them. "If Scripture did not have this quality, it would not be for all Christians 'a lamp unto their feet and a light unto their path,' nor would all Christians be able to establish the truth of their faith by Scripture, and in the light of Scripture to mark and avoid false teachers" (Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, I, pp. 359-60). Note Dr. Pieper's direct reference to Romans 16:17! Therefore, the idea that "exegetical procedure" (the method of interpreting the less clear passages of Scripture in the light of the crystal clear *sedes*), even if it be "sound," is "the basis for sound Lutheran theology" must be rejected because it establishes a **false principle** which robs Scripture of its own light, injects fog into its clarity, and holds *prooftexts* hostage to a "procedure" on the basis of which their authority and certainty are held captive to the judgment of men. Many false doctrines and many false prophets have thus been built on and anchored to what their adherents represented as "sound exegetical procedure" (Cf. Matthew 7:22-23). This **first sentence** of Section Five "affirms the conviction" of the FORTY-FOUR that they had the legitimate right to question the clarity, authority and application of Romans 16:17 on the basis of "exegetical procedure" which they falsely represented to be "sound" and thus cleverly disguised themselves in "*sheep's clothing*" (Matthew 7:15) and in "*good words and fair speeches [to] deceive the hearts of the simple*" (Romans 16:18)! Far from being "sound," however, such procedure is **false, arrogant, and deceitful**, and is **deserving only of renunciation!**

2. Second Sentence [from Section Five]: Now, because of **their** "sound exegetical procedure," the FORTY-FOUR placed themselves over God Himself, as He reveals Himself in His Word, by "throwing out" and rejecting Romans 16:17-18. These forty-four men said: "We therefore deplore the fact that Romans 16:17-18 has been applied to

all Christians who differ from us in certain points of doctrine.” These two verses do most certainly apply to **ALL PEOPLE, including professing Christians** who keep on causing and persist in making divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine from God’s Word. Is there anything in these two verses which clearly and plainly teaches that these verses do **not** apply to Christians? Do these verses say: “*Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them [except for Christians] which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them. For they that are such [except for Christians] serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by good works and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple*” (Romans 16:17-18). It is absolutely disgusting and shameful that the FORTY-FOUR foisted a new meaning on Romans 16:17-18, a meaning which is NOWHERE to be found in these two verses. God **does** apply Romans 16:17-18 to **professing Christians**. He speaks directly to THEM: “*Now I beseech you, brethren...*”; and He does **not exempt professing Christians** from those “*which cause divisions and offenses.*” In fact, He shows the **very opposite**: The errorists represent themselves as “*serv[ing] our Lord Jesus Christ*” while serving their own wicked self-interests, and they use the “*good words and fair speeches*” of Christian profession, the disguise of “*sheep’s clothing*” (Matthew 7:15), to “*deceive the hearts of the simple.*”

3. Third Sentence [from Section Five]: Once again, as in the first sentence, it is the conviction of the FORTY-FOUR, based on “sound exegetical and hermeneutical principles,” that, since they have **earlier** concluded that Romans 16:17-18 does not apply to Christians who differ in doctrine and practice, then surely they now **furthermore** conclude that Romans 16:17-18 “does not apply to the present situation in the Lutheran Church in America.” Where in Romans 16:17-18 does it say that these two verses do **not** apply to “the present situation in the Lutheran Church in America? These FORTY-FOUR well-known LCMS theologians who signed *A Statement* in September, 1945, showed themselves to be “*false prophets ...by their fruits*” (Matthew 7:15-16a) and furthermore revealed themselves, according to I Timothy 6, to be “*proud, knowing nothing, ...destitute of the truth*” (vv. 3-5). They and their eager adherents fulfilled the Holy Spirit’s prophecy in II Timothy 4: “*They shall turn away their ears from the truth and shall be turned unto fables*” (v. 4).

Section Eleven: “We affirm our conviction that ...fellowship is possible without complete agreement in details of doctrine and

practice which have never been considered divisive in the Lutheran Church.”

Now it is crystal clear that after these FORTY-FOUR LCMS “theologians” (?) arbitrarily **removed** Romans 16:17-18 from having any “say” concerning fellowship with heterodox Lutheran churches (Section Five), they considered themselves free to **have fellowship with heterodox** Lutherans, the very opposite of what the fellowship “pillar” of Romans 16 teaches: “**Avoid them.**” The FORTY-FOUR have given us a striking example of Bible abuse, Scripture abuse, lording it over the Word of God, and making the Word of God say and teach whatever they wanted it to say and to teach in order to **fit their own theological thoughts and ideas.**

What happened to these FORTY-FOUR men who publicly and openly rebelled against God’s Word in *A Statement* and distributed it far-and-wide in the LCMS, seeking to get others to “sign on” to it? **Nothing!** Were they dealt with according to the instruction of God’s Word: “*A man that is an heretic after the first and second admonition reject*” (Titus 3:10)? **No!** They were allowed to keep and retain their positions and their fellowship in the LCMS **without any doctrinal discipline!** Were they told to repent of this shameful, offensive, and ungodly document which they had drafted, approved and supported, and required to bring forth the fruits of repentance? And, failing such repentance, were they told that they could no longer be in fellowship with the LCMS, lest “*a little leaven leaven the whole lump*” (Galatians 5:9)? **No!** They were not required to **retract**, nor did they retract or **renounce ANYTHING** in *A Statement*. The president of the LCMS at that time, Dr. J. W. Behnken, verified this in a public letter dated January 18, 1947. This tragic **toleration** of public, open false doctrine and practice in *A Statement* by the FORTY-FOUR in 1945 not only brought **heterodoxy** (different, conflicting doctrines and practices contrary to Scripture which were allowed to remain alongside of the truths of God’s Word) into the LCMS, but it also has demonstrated the absolute, changeless truth of the words of Scripture: “*A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump*” (Galatians 5:9); for what was the RESULT?

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It comes as no surprise, as we study and observe in horror how the **un-**combated and **unremoved** (*Brief Statement ¶129*) cancer-like gangrene (II Timothy 2:17) of the “leaven” of the FORTY-FOUR in the LCMS has worked during the past 61 years (1945 – 2006), that the current *heterodox* “state” of the LCMS is as sad, as pronounced, and shocking as the following illustrations clearly demonstrate:

—There is vast, offensive **disunity** in doctrine and practice in the Missouri Synod today, in sharp contrast to the **unity** in doctrine and practice which Scripture teaches should exist according to the clear instruction of St. Paul in I Corinthians 1: “*Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment*” (v. 10). The Scriptures abhor the “leaven” of the FORTY-FOUR that “fellowship is possible without complete agreement in details of doctrine and practice” (Section Eleven of *A Statement*). According to this declaration by the FORTY-FOUR, God is a liar; they know better than He does; His words don’t count. The current, persistent, ever-worsening **disunity** in LCMS doctrine and practice is public proof and documentation that this church body has cast its “lot” with the “leaven” of the FORTY-FOUR and has openly and persistently rejected God’s own requirement in I Corinthians 1:10 that complete unity in doctrine and practice exist between those who are “brethren.” Therefore, since the “leaven” of the FORTY-FOUR has not been rejected and removed, this “leaven” of false doctrine and practice **IS** the doctrine and practice of the LCMS **today**. The LCMS **cannot honestly claim** that it stands on **Scripture alone**. Now, and for almost sixty years, the LCMS has stood on **God’s Word AND man’s word** (the different, heterodox doctrine and practice of the FORTY-FOUR plus over 250 subsequent signers). The LCMS today, that is, all who are **members of or in fellowship with this heterodox body**, have placed the words of men in *A Statement* **OVER and ABOVE the clear words of God** in Romans 16:17-18, I Corinthians 1:10, I Timothy 6:3-5, Titus 3:10, Amos 3:3, etc., etc.

—The early cry of so-called “conservatives” back in the late forties and early fifties to “stay in and fight” became in most cases their lifetime attitude and permanent fall-back position of retreat; and they ended up just “staying in” without a “fight.”

That attitude was NOT based on God's Word, and therefore it was not God-pleasing; for it was and is the **exact opposite** of the "*Mark...and avoid*" (Romans 16:17) teaching of the Holy Spirit in God's Word of truth (John 17:17). Here we see that the "*leaven*" of the FORTY-FOUR "*Korahs*" (Numbers 16) from 1945 **has indeed** thoroughly leavened "*the whole lump*" (Galatians 5:9) of the doctrine of fellowship in the LCMS, so that today Romans 16:17 **is not** and **will not be** applied by the Synod to "Christians who differ from us in certain points of doctrine" (Section Five of *A Statement*). This shows the devastating effect of the persistent lies of false doctrine and practice, even though they are "dressed up" in the "*good words and fair speeches*" (v. 18) of "*false prophets*" (Matthew 7:15) who by "*sleight...and cunning craftiness...lie in wait to deceive*" (Ephesians 4:14)!

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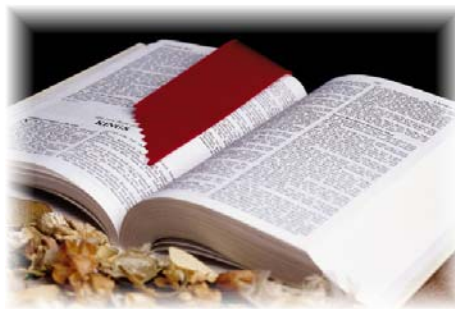
—Dr. David Benke, the president of the Atlantic District of the LCMS, on September 23, 2001 (twelve days after 9/11), at Yankee Stadium in New York City, openly prayed **with** Muslims, Jews, a Hindu, Roman Catholics, and other non-Lutherans. By his action, he gave evidence, in a very public way, that "*the commandments of men*" (Mark 7:7), the "*leaven*" of the FORTY-FOUR, took the place of "*the commandment of God*" (Mark 7:8) in Romans 16:17. Due to a "backlash" from "conservatives," he was *temporarily* suspended from his office as district president; but he appealed his suspension to a synodical committee, had the suspension overturned because he had not violated any *rule of the Synod*, and then returned to his district president's office **without one word of regret, admission of sin, expression of repentance, or apology for the grievous offense he had given to many**. And even more shameful, the president of the LCMS, Dr. Gerald Kieschnick, supported Dr. Benke, as he had from the be-

ginning, and defended him all the way through this process. Both of these men are still in their respective offices as of this very day! This is absolutely disgusting, especially in regard to the pastors and laypeople of the Missouri Synod, and also in regard to the officers and theological professors, who all by their silence and/or inaction became and still are accomplices in the offensive conduct of these two leaders (I Timothy 5:22b) and in the shameful way in which Dr. Benke's ungodly conduct on September 23, 2001, was "white-washed" in clear violation of the instruction of God's Word (Romans 16:17-18; II Corinthians 6:14-18; Romans 12:9; etc., etc.)!

The above are just a very few illustrations of well-documented, pervasive, and ever-worsening heterodoxy in the LCMS. Because of this sad fact, we cannot help but continue, by God's grace, to "mark" and rightly judge this once-orthodox body as one which "keeps on causing divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which [we] have learned" from the precious Word God, leaving us with only one God-given choice, that is, to "avoid them" (Romans 16:17). We do this, not out of spite or malice (Ephesians 4:31), but out of genuine love and concern for **our own** souls and spiritual welfare, as well as for **theirs**, wanting them to take heed to the warning in Hebrews 10: "For if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins" (v. 26).

In gratitude to our gracious God for His many mercies toward our Conference for fifty-five years, let us learn from the tragic downfall and spiritual crash of the Missouri Synod (LCMS) and, with His promised strength and help (Isaiah 41:10), remember the words of our dear Savior: "Behold, I come quickly; hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown" (Revelation 3:11).

—R. J. L.



Especially for our Christian youth and their parents...

Battling the Temptation to Yield to Peer Pressure

“My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not.” —Proverbs 1:10

David the Brave, Solomon the Wise, Samson the Strong—all have fallen to the temptations of “peer pressure.” What is that? A peer is anyone of your age group or social status, the people around you, the ones with whom you interact with on a daily basis, at school, at your job or out in the world. Pressure is the force exerted by others upon you, being pushed to doing something, being influenced to act a certain way. Obviously, our concern is negative peer pressure and the focus of this article is especially on teenagers. As a matter of fact our text is from the Book of Proverbs, the handbook from God for young people especially! Teenagers are often less resistant to negative peer pressure because of inexperience in dealing with it, the desire to find approval with others, and a general uncertainty about themselves.



Peer pressure may come from a large group. The claim, “Everyone is doing it,” is an illustration of the justification offered by others to go with the flow. A person may submit to such pressure by keeping silent when bad things are going on or by just putting on an appearance of conformity, sort of “putting your-hands-in-your-pocket” and “looking-down.” Others actively join in the wickedness and thus directly partake of the evil deeds.

Peer pressure may also come from an individual or small group, such as a “clique” (an “in-group”). This situation may even be more difficult because it may be much more personal and directed forcefully at you, even demanding you to make a choice.

Why is peer pressure so powerful? First of all, human beings are not meant to be alone. God made that clear in Genesis (cf. 2:18). We need companionship, involving acceptance, approval and belonging. We need a connection to others. Even newborn babies often face a “failure

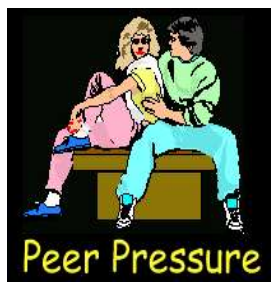
to thrive” when deprived of such a human connection. The need is “hard-wired,” as it were, in us. God also tells us that the *type* of companionship we have makes all the difference. Consider I Corinthians 15:33 in which the apostle warns: “*Be not deceived; evil communications [lit., associations] corrupt good manners [lit., morals].*” Associate with evil people, and your character will change as evidenced by how you conduct yourself! The proverb, “Bad company ruins good morals,” is taken directly from this passage! God thus commands us: “*Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men*” (Proverbs 4:14). God promises a blessing upon those who obey in childlike faith: “*Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the Law of the LORD; and in His Law doth he meditate day and night*” (Psalm 1:1-2). A fellow Christian who follows a multitude to do evil, or even an individual, rightly deserves this rebuke applied by all true Christians: “*If any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed*” (II Thessalonians 3:14). The bottom line is this: If you associate with people who do evil, you will eventually follow suit—it is natural according to the Old Adam of sin to do so!

As a believer you may immediately feel bad when you “cave-in” to peer pressure: Guilty, unhappy, worried or anxious, disappointed and defeated. You might feel like a “wimp” or “pushover.” Or these feelings may only come after a fellow believer “calls you out” for your behavior with God’s Law, which then pricks your heart. Your conscience is telling you what you need to know. Don’t ignore it! Repent and amend! Seek good Christian companionship! Treasure your forgiveness for the sake of your perfect best friend, the Friend of Sinners, Jesus Christ; and serve Him in gratitude, by His grace, in the New Man.

Why do we give in to peer pressure? “*My son, if sinners entice thee...*” (Proverbs 1:10a). The term “sinners,” properly speaking, include everyone who misses the mark of God’s Law both by nature and in his life, ever falling far short of God’s glory. But, in our context, they are those who are against the godly, those “*evil men and seducers*” which grow “*worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived*” (II Timothy 3:13). These “entice” the godly to sin. The Hebrew primitive root word is “to be spacious, open, wide.” Thus it came to mean those who are “open-hearted, easily persuaded or enticed.” “Sinners” prey on the simple, the gullible, the naïve, those who are ignorant of their devices and tricks. The problem is that, besides our New Man of faith,

we Christians still have our Old Adam within us, who is spiritually a fool and a simpleton. “Sinners,” unconverted as they are, are 100% Old Adam and delight in sin. The verb “entice” can be understood as a seduction (as when a man entices a maid into fornication, Exodus 22:16) and a continuous pressure by various methods to get someone to do what he do not want to do. Thus Samson’s wife enticed him by weeping and complaining that he didn’t love her (Judges 14:15-17) in order to get him to reveal a secret; and Delilah enticed him with similar tactics: “*And it came to pass, when she pressed him daily with her words, and urged him, so that his soul was vexed unto death, that he told her all his heart...*” (Judges 16:16-17a). Enticement is an attack on the heart, as Job remarks: “*My heart hath been secretly enticed*” (Job 31:27); and thus, to be “open-hearted” means to be easily enticed. This influence is mentioned in Proverbs 16:29-30: “*A violent man enticeth his neighbor, and leadeth him into the way that is not good. He shutteth his eyes to devise froward things; moving his lips, he bringeth evil to pass.*” His evil proceeds from his heart to his lips and actions, which then mislead others to follow his lead.

What methods of enticement are commonly used? They may “reason” with you with such enticing words as “Don’t worry; no one will find out.” “C’mon, it won’t hurt you; just try it and see. We do it, and we’re sill okay.” “Don’t you want to see what it’s all about before condemning it?” “It’s just a little harmless fun!” Or, to quote the most infamous seducer: “*Ye shalt not surely die*” (Genesis 3:4). Then there is the *insult* method: “You’re such a wimp, a baby, a dork. You’re so uncool and straight; you’re never any fun!” The “put-downs” may even escalate to threats: “If you’re too good for us, then just leave!” “Who needs you as a friend anyway?!” “If that’s how you feel, we don’t have to hang out anymore!” “What’s the matter with you? Why don’t you at least try a drink or smoke a joint? Do you want to die a virgin?” Sometimes these methods are combined with unspoken pressure methods such as “the huddle-up”: A group gets together in close quarters and points at you whispering and laughing. Then, there’s “the dirty-look”: Others give you that look that means utter disdain, as if saying, “We’re cool... you’re sooo not!”



In doing these things, the pressure group plays on feelings such as not wanting to be rejected, the fear of having no

friends, the desire to appear grown-up, not wanting to feel ridiculed, and so on. Sometimes a person caves in because he don't know how to get out of the situation.

Ask yourself about the times you felt this way, the situations that you have had to confront. Did you cave in and give up the fight? Our text tells us: "*Consent thou not.*" Do not acquiesce, yield, and turn your will over to another! Consider the times you have failed. Did you risk losing your parents' trust, being grounded, or even getting arrested, just to please others, to try to fit in? Some teens even lead double lives. They appear to be one thing—to their parents and pastor—and actually live a secret life of sinful rebellion when they are in the company of their peers! God forbid that any one reading this article fits that description! That's hypocrisy! God warns us all: "*Be sure your sin will find you out*" (Numbers 32:23)! Do not wait until the police make the call to your parents! Do not wait until you end up with a pregnant girlfriend!

Remember that, even with the Lord Jesus Himself daily in their midst, the disciples were often weak in faith, proudly arguing who was the greatest, doubting themselves as to who would betray Him and so forth. All Christians face a daily battle with their flesh, the world, and the devil. When Jesus visibly walked among us, as today, men often feared men and sought their praise. They used pressure tactics to get people to do their will. Their victims cowered in fear and refused to confess Jesus (cf. John 12:42-43), loving the praise of men more than God's praise. Peter fell from faith under pressure to conform and from fear of exposure and reprisal. Remember how the parents of the healed blind man feared the Pharisees? (John 9:20-23). The enemies of Jesus even used peer pressure on the officers who failed to arrest the Lord when they said: "*Are you also deceived? Have any of the rulers of the Pharisees believed on Him? But this people who knoweth not the law are cursed*" (John 8:47-49). Yes, the tactics are not new! In Noah's day, the earth was *filled* with violence; everyone but Noah and his family followed the violent society! This corruption began when Godly men followed the crowd and chose wives based on what the world values—outward beauty—Genesis 6:2. In the days of Lot, the entire society of Sodom and Gomorrah, with the exception of "*just Lot,*" a "*righteous man*" (II Peter 2:7-8), was perverted—young and old! (Genesis 19:4). Yes, throughout history the evil of the ungodly has corrupted the good—with a few exceptions. Hebrews chapter 11 is a roll call of these Godly exceptions, from Abel onward. Consider Moses as an example: "*By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of*

Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured, as seeing Him who is invisible” (vv. 24-27). Unmoved by temporal pleasure or pain, Moses, by God’s gift of faith in the promised Savior, made the right choice: The reproach of Christ. He knew that his soul’s salvation was worth it. He believed God’s Word, and the New Man within him could rest in hope. The Holy Ghost through Peter asks every believer: “And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?” (I Peter 3:13). Scripture answers this question in Romans 8, doesn’t it? “What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?...Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?” (Romans 8:31-32, 35a). “They can harm us none,” as Dr. Luther sings. For our Lord promises, after warning of betrayal and hatred from parents, brethren, kinsfolk and friends: “But there shall not a hair of your head perish. In your patience possess ye your souls” (Luke 21:18-19).

How then are we enabled by God’s grace to “*consent not*” to peer pressure, when sinners dare us to do what they want, entice us and do all they possibly can to get us to “*run with them*” to “*excess of riot*,” thinking it so very “*strange*” when we do not do so, and “*speaking evil*” of us for that refusal? (I Peter 4:4). We need to consider in faith our one true perfect friend—Jesus our Savior. He is our perfect companion. His influence on our heart and soul through the Gospel has converted us and now preserves us in saving faith. In Him who was “*holy, harmless [and] separate from sinners*” (Hebrews 7:26) we have not only the vicarious active obedience of our Savior, as He overcame all temptations on our behalf, but we have the perfect example of how we, by the power of His grace, should resist temptations to sin. He was tempted and tried, pressured and plied, intimidated and threatened in every conceivable way, even by the devil himself; but He never yielded once. He even overcame peer pressure! When His worldly relatives mocked Him and told Him where to go (i.e., to Judea), He did not listen (John 7:3ff). Even Satan himself could not influence our Savior, who ever pleased His Father. Therefore our Redeemer is not only the completely successful victor over all temptation, but, being touched with the feeling of our infirmities, He is able to provide sympathetic help

from His throne of grace in every type and time of need! *“For in that He Himself hath suffered, being tempted, He is able to succor [help] them that are tempted...For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need”* (Hebrews 2:18, 4:15-16).

What a friend we have in Jesus! He sticks closer than a brother! He answers every proper prayer for help and gives us in His Word the patience and comfort we need to bear our burdens, carry our crosses, survive our trials, and overcome our temptations. He told us: *“These things I have spoken unto you, that in Me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer. I have overcome the world”* (John 16:33). True peace comes from God’s sure and certain Word. Our Lord gives us in Holy Writ the truth upon which we can rely. *“Everyone that is of the truth heareth [His] voice”* (John 18:37); for as our perfectly true teacher *“we know that [He saith and teacheth] rightly, neither [accepteth] the person of any, but [teacheth] the way of God truly”* (Luke 20:21). Truly confiding in Jesus, our soul’s caretaker and our perfect, best friend, we can, through His Word, resist the devil, the world and our own sinful flesh! And, in the exercise of Godpleasing fellowship, we exhort and edify one another by our joint study and meditation in His Word and in our joint participation in the Sacrament of His body and blood. Remember how the apostles waxed strong in faith and stood up before the strongest “peer pressure” exercised against them by the unbelieving Jews (Cf. Acts 4:19-21)? Their enemies even knew the source of their courage and power in the Word: *“Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus”* (Acts 4:13). Have you *“been with Jesus”*? Have you been *“taught of God”*? Do you seek to please men or to serve God? Are you a friend of Jesus? He says: *“Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you”* (John 15:14). The friends of Jesus are described this way in Holy Writ: *“And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers”* (Acts 2:42). Friends of Jesus stand together in and on God’s Word alone. If you give in to peer pressure, you violate the principle that only God’s Word orders our faith and life. As Gregory of old put it so well: *“We are not entitled to such license, namely, of affirming whatever we please. For we make Sacred Scripture the rule and norm of every doc-*

trine. Upon that we are obliged to fix our eyes, and we approve only whatever can be brought into harmony with the intent of these writings” (St. Gregory of Nyssa, 330-395, *On the Soul and Resurrection*).

“*What saith the Scripture?*” (Romans 4:3) is what a believer in Christ, a true friend of Jesus, always asks according to the New Man. Then, when enticed to something contrary to the will and Word of God, that New Man replies with Joseph of old: “*How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?*” (Genesis 39:9). Even when our fellow Christians yield in weakness to evil influences (See the example of Peter in Galatians 2:11-13, not only being carried away but carrying away also others, such as Barnabas!), we must stand like Paul the Apostle and rebuke them to the face out of love for the truth and for their souls! God’s will is clear: “*Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil; neither shalt thou speak in a cause to decline after many to wrest judgment*” (Exodus 23:2). Don’t just follow the crowd! We, who are strangers and pilgrims in this present evil world and no longer *of it*, must not permit ourselves to be conformed to it (I Peter 2:11; Romans 12:2) or deliberately to walk in sinful ways (Psalm 1; Romans 6:1)! The broad way upon which evil “peers” want us to travel with them leads only to hell’s eternal destruction! The narrow way affords no creature-comforts and is often a rocky road to walk; but, fear not, this is the way to life (Matthew 7:14)! “*Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom*” (Luke 12:32)! “*Stand fast in the faith, quit you like men!*” (I Corinthians 16:13). Stand together like Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the face of adversity, confiding in your Savior! (Cf. Daniel 3:16-18). Set a good example to others of faithful attendance in the House of God, even if “*the habit of some*” professing Christians is *negative* pressure in this regard: “*Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for He is faithful that promised;) And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as ye see the day approaching*” (Hebrews 10:23-25). Cultivate Godly friendships by being a Godly friend to others: “*A man that hath friends must show himself friendly; and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother*” (Proverbs 18:24). Stand fast together in common cause with



your Christian brethren! For Solomon reminds us: “*And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.*” (Ecclesiastes 4:12). Live this Christian motto of true Godly friendship: “*I am a companion of all them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts*” (Psalm 119:63).

Finally, continue to put all your trust in Christ Jesus, your Savior, whose blood blots out all your failures and whose grace gives you this comforting promise: “*There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it*” (I Corinthians 10:13). For the Apostle Paul, who earnestly prayed for just such a way to escape his thorn in the flesh, the Savior answered him: “*My grace is sufficient for thee, for My strength is made perfect in weakness*” (II Corinthians 12:9). May the power of Christ rest upon *you* in and through His precious Word! (v. 10).

— E. J. W.

*My soul, be on thy guard!
Ten thousand foes arise,
and hosts of sin are pressing hard
to draw thee from the skies!*

*Oh, watch and fight and pray;
the battle ne'er give o'er!
Renew it boldly every day,
and help divine implore!*

*Ne'er think the victory's won,
nor lay thine armor down!
Thine arduous work will not be done
till thou obtain thy crown!*

TLH 449, 1-3

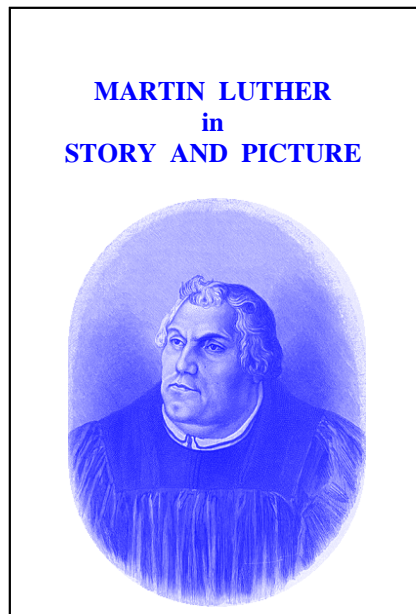
Correction: In the July-August issue, p. 93, the citation, Numbers 28:19, was a typo. It should be Numbers 23:19. Thanks!

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