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"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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**“Be not
faithless but
believing.”**

— John 20:27



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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.

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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.

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Just How Free Is Free Grace?

“...being justified freely by His grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,...” — Romans 3:24



It has been said that there is no such thing as a “free lunch.” To be sure, it may indeed be *free of charge* to the recipient; it may have been *freely provided* without cost to him; and it may have been *donated* as a *free gift* to feed someone who otherwise would go hungry for want of money to purchase his own food. BUT the lunch was not without cost. Someone had to buy the food itself; someone had to prepare the food; someone had

to package the food; and someone had to deliver the food. And the “means of production,” as we well know, are not without cost here in this world.

Similarly, **the justifying grace of God** to poor sinners is *free of charge* to its intended **recipients**, namely, to all lost and condemned mankind; for St. Paul writes to Titus by inspiration of the Holy Ghost that “*the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to **all men***” (2:11), and to the Ephesians that “*it is the **gift of God, not of works***” (2:8-9). Indeed, Isaiah, the “evangelist of the Old Testament,” writes in the fifty-fifth chapter of his prophecy concerning that very same grace, the gift of God’s mercy to the undeserving, manifested in the Gospel covenant: “*Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters; and he that hath **no money**, come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk **without money and without price**. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? And your labor for that which satisfieth not? Harken diligently unto Me, and eat ye that which is good; and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come unto Me. Hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David*” (vv. 1-3).

Indeed, **justification** *had to be* the free gift of God to fallen mankind (Romans 3:24a); and the **reconciliation** of the reprobate world of sinners to their just and holy God *had to be* the unilateral act of God Himself (II Corinthians 5:19). And from the inerrant Word of God, we know why. Since the fall of man into sin (Genesis 3:6), since man's willful and wanton disobedience of God's simple command (v. 11; 2:16-17) and his consequential loss of the image of God in which he had been created (Genesis 1:26-27) "*in righteousness and true holiness*" (Ephesians 4:24), all mankind has borne by nature both sin and guilt (Romans 5:12-14, 19a), as well as the "*condemnation*" of God's justice (v. 18) and sin's "*wages*" (6:23a). As we confess on the basis of incontrovertible Scripture, man is by nature totally corrupt, "lost and condemned, ruined in body and soul," so that by nature man is "without true fear, love and trust in God. He is without righteousness, is inclined only to evil, and is spiritually blind, dead, and an enemy of God" (*Catechism*, 1943 Ed., Q/A 94-96; Ephesians 4:22; Psalm 51:5; John 3:6a; Genesis 8:21; Romans 3:10-19; etc.). "*Therefore by the deeds of the Law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight*" (Romans 3:20). Man is simply incapable of restoring himself to a right relationship with God, no matter what he does, no matter how hard he tries; "*for there is not a just man upon earth that doeth good and sinneth not*" (Ecclesiastes 7:20). And every attempt to do so is doomed to failure, "*for as many as are of the works of the Law are under the curse; for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things which are written in the Book of the Law to do them!'*" (Galatians 3:10). It is therefore "*evident*," Paul continues, "*that no man is justified by the Law in the sight of God*" (v. 11).

Therefore the sinner's **justification**, his **reconciliation** with God, and his final **salvation** are ALL the **free gift of God** to the ungodly (Romans 1:18), to the undeserving (Genesis 32:10), to the unjust (Ecclesiastes 7:20), to the unrighteous (Romans 3:10), to the unprofitable (Romans 3:12); "*for by grace are ye saved, through faith; and that, not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast*" (Ephesians 2:8-9). "*And if by grace, then is it no more of works; otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then it is no more grace, otherwise work is no more work*" (Romans 11:6). For **justification**, for **reconciliation** with God, for **salvation**, grace and works are mutually exclusive as causal factors. They are not dependent upon one another, they do not work in conjunction with one another, they do not supplement one another, they do not enhance one another. "*Where is boasting then? It is excluded!*" (Romans 3:27).

Thus we and all lost and condemned mankind are “*justified freely by [God’s] grace,*” Paul writes in our title-text. “*The free gift came upon all men unto justification of life*” (Romans 5:18b), so that “*God... reconcil[ed] the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them*” (II Corinthians 5:19), as His free, unilateral, unqualified and by-man-unmerited gift to every sinner.

But, as we noted before, even a “free” gift is not without its cost. Here in this world, among things temporal, to receive a gift that has not been purchased or, even if it has been “homemade,” its materials have not been paid for, is equivalent to receiving “stolen property,” a “hot” item, or at best what is often called a “re-gifted” present. In the latter case, St. Paul writes that no one has given anything to God that would have caused Him to “re-gift” it back again: “*Who hath first given to Him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again?*” (Romans 11:35). The idea that God gave to sinful mankind the gift of His saving grace “just because He felt like it” or “because He could afford to be generous” is contrary to Holy Scripture. To do so, God would have had to set aside and to ignore His attribute of **perfect justice** according to which He **a)** requires **perfection** of every human being (Matthew 5:48; Leviticus 19:2), **b)** demands **perfect obedience** to His Law (Deuteronomy 6:5, 17), and **c)** pronounces the sentence of “*death*” upon everyone that sins even once (James 2:10; I John 3:4b; Ezekiel 18:4b; Romans 6:23a). It is, therefore, a grave error concerning the doctrine of God and His absolute perfection to teach, or even to suggest, that there is an inherent *contradiction* in God, that He strikes a necessary *compromise* between His justice and His mercy, that He *tempers* or softens His wrath in order to accommodate His love, that He *sets aside* His justice in favor of mercy, or that He establishes the preeminence of one attribute (namely, love, including His mercy and grace) over another attribute (namely, His unremitting justice) — all by divine *fiat* or arbitrary decree. This error, essential to Reformed theology, expresses itself in the false teaching of God’s “*sovereign grace*” and His absolute or arbitrary election or predestination of some to everlasting life.

Scripture teaches the exact opposite as has already been pointed out above. It teaches that there is NO contradiction in God; that God did NOT set aside His justice in favor of His mercy; that God did NOT accommodate the inability of sinners to regain reconciliation with Him by cutting them some “slack” in satisfying His justice; that God did NOT replace His Law with the Gospel; that God did NOT by sovereign fiat grant His grace to some while withholding it from others; that God

does NOT grant an *exemption*, as it were, to believers, so that His Law no longer applies to them; and that God does NOT justify sinners and count them righteous on the basis of their works of sanctification done after their conversion to faith in Christ. According to God's never-changing justice (Malachi 3:6), "*all the world*" is "*guilty*" before God (Romans 3:19); "*there is none righteous, no, not one*" (v. 10); "*all our righteousnesses* [that is, even those of Christians] *are as filthy rags*" (Isaiah 64:6); and the just demand remains unchanged and unchangeable: "*If ye love Me, keep My commandments*" (John 14:15). Moreover, this unremitting indictment of divine justice, penned by inspiration of God after Christ suffered, died, rose again, and ascended into heaven, still convicts every sinful being: "**Whosoever** [regardless of whether he is a believer or an unbeliever] *shall keep the whole Law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all*" (James 2:10). And, according to God's unremitting justice, the curse of the Law still condemns every sinner: "*Cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things which are written in the Book of the Law to do them!*" (Galatians 3:10).

So **at what COST** are "*all [who] have sinned and come short of the glory of God*" (Romans 3:23) "*justified freely by His grace*" according to our title-text? How could God's perfect, unremitting and unrelenting justice be completely **satisfied** (and not just set aside)? How could His Law be perfectly **obeyed** (and not merely indulged)? How could the curse of the Law be fully **borne** (and not simply dismissed)? How could all of this be **accomplished** if sinners themselves, those who are "*under the Law*" (Romans 3:19), could never hope to do it? **Someone** had to assume the cost! **Someone** had to pay the price! **Someone** had to bear the expense ...so that justice could remain just, and grace could indeed be free!

Redemption is properly-speaking a business transaction. It involves a *quid pro quo*, literally a "what-for-what" exchange of things of equal or better-than-equal value to satisfy a debt or to effect a change in ownership. It is the transaction whereby an exchange is made for the purpose of "buying back" an item held in lieu of payment, a pawned article held by a broker in lieu of cash, personal property retained as surety on a debt, even a person held for ransom, and so on. It may be a redemption effected by a borrower's payment to a lender, or it may be a redemption effected by a "third party" who, for reasons known or unknown, renders a payment of sufficient value to unencumber another person's property or assets or to purchase his release from custody or bondage.

As we have already seen, the individual sinner has no hope of redeeming **himself** to God, because he is unable perfectly to keep God's Law *at all* and therefore is incapable of scraping together a redemption payment of sufficient value to pay off his debt to God and to effect his release from bondage to sin and Satan. Similarly, a third party, who is also a sinner, cannot hope to "*redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him; for the redemption of their soul is precious,*" the Bible tells us (Psalm 49:7-8). Instead, it was God's own **eternal decree of redemption**, effected before the foundation of the world (I Peter 1:20; II Timothy 1:9; Ephesians 1:4), according to which His only-begotten Son would become incarnate ("*made flesh,*" John 1:14; "*took part of the same [flesh and blood],*" Hebrews 2:14; "*made under the Law*" Galatians 4:4) and **take the place** of sinful mankind under God's justice. As our Substitute, He would, on behalf and in the stead of sinful men, satisfy God's justice on **TWO FRONTS**: **a)** He would, first of all, render perfect obedience to the Law as to its **requirements** ("*the obedience of One*" — Romans 5:19b) and thereby gain righteousness for every soul of man (v. 19b) by His **active obedience**. He would earn perfect righteousness in the sight of God (Romans 3:21; Romans 5:19b), righteousness graciously imputed to the ungodly (Romans 4:5), the righteousness of Christ, which is called already in Old Testament prophecy, "*the garments of salvation*" and "*the robe of righteousness*" (Isaiah 61:10) and is referred to by Jesus in the New Testament as the "*wedding garment*" (Matthew 22:11ff.) without which no one is admitted to the marriage of the King's Son. **b)** Secondly, Christ would "*redeem*" lost and fallen mankind "*from the curse of the Law*" (Galatians 3:13), that is, take upon Himself the punitive demand of the Law that all sinners **die** (Ezekiel 18:4; Romans 6:23a), and He would bear man's **punishment** in his stead (Isaiah 53:5-8) by His **passive obedience** "*unto death, even the death of the cross*" (Philippians 2:8).

This substitutionary satisfaction of both God's legislative and punitive justice is known as the **vicarious satisfaction** [*satisfactio vicaria*] or *atonement* of our Savior, the perfect redemptive work whereby Christ became "*the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world*" (I John 2:2) . By definition, a "propitiation" is a satisfaction or payment of sufficient value not only to retire a debt but to change the way in which the creditor views his former debtor. Had Christ *only* "retired our debt" by paying the penalty of our guilt, the debt itself surely would have been "paid off;" but since we were spiritual "deadbeats" by nature and unable to do one thing either

to earn righteousness before God or to pay our debt to Him, and Someone Else had to do it for us, we would have remained “deadbeats” in His sight, unworthy of everlasting life. But Christ completely “propitiated” God’s justice on all counts, so that “*in Christ*” [*propter Christum*] — because of Christ’s all-sufficient and all-surpassing *propitiation* — God graciously reconciled the whole world of sinners unto Himself, “*not imputing their trespasses unto them*” (II Corinthians 5:19). He not only forgave the sins of the world for Christ’s sake and forensically declared all men righteous in His sight, but He refuses to “*remember*” our sins against us, as if they had never been committed! (Isaiah 38:17; Jeremiah 31:34; Hebrews 8:12; 10:17). Therefore, Christ’s *vicarious satisfaction* and *propitiation* which He “*offered without spot to God*” (Hebrews 9:14) already in eternity (Revelation 13:8) was the **cause** of His merciful and gracious reconciliation and justification of the world, and also of His eternal Decree of Election whereby He purposed to bring us by the Gospel to saving faith in that object and by that same Gospel to keep us in faith unto salvation (Ephesians 1:4; II Timothy 1:9; II Thessalonians 2:13-14; I Peter 1:5).

The **COST itself**, the assumption of our guilt and the payment of our debt, is properly-speaking restricted to Christ’s *passive obedience*, as the Apostle Peter by inspiration of the Holy Ghost described it — as contrasted with a temporal payment in terms of “hard, cold cash” — saying: “*Ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things as silver and gold from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot*” (I Peter 1:18-19), who was “*foreordained*,” chosen, set apart and anointed in advance for this work of redemption “*before the foundation of the world*” but was “*manifest*” or made known “*in these last times*” (v. 20) by the Word of the Gospel, the “*Word of Reconciliation*” (II Corinthians 5:19b), for us poor sinners. How blessed indeed to know that God did not have to “wait around” for Jesus to *accomplish* His mission on the tree of the cross (John 19:30), but that “*in Christ*” (II Corinthians 5:19a), in view of Christ’s foreseen fulfillment of His foreordained mission, God reconciled unto Himself and justified the world of sinners from Adam and Eve to the very last man ever to be born into this vale of tears, and announced to all mankind this scenario of amazing grace in the Gospel, down through the whole **OLD Testament** already (Acts 10:43) and continuing in the **NEW Testament** (I Peter 1:20), that all penitent sinners — from the beginning of time even unto the end — might be **comforted** by that “*Word of Reconciliation*,” **justified personally** by faith

in its assurance, and **saved eternally** by confidence in the merits of Christ Jesus as having paid in full the price of our redemption — all of it “**by grace...through faith...[as] the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast**” (Ephesians 2:8-9)!

Salvation unto us has come
by God’s **FREE GRACE** and favor!
Good works could not avert our doom;
they help and save us never!
Faith looks to **JESUS CHRIST ALONE**,
who did for all our sins **ATONE!**
He is our one **REDEEMER!**

Yea, as the Law must be fulfilled,
or we must die despairing,
Christ came and hath God’s anger stilled,
our human nature sharing.
He hath **for us** the Law **OBEYED**
and thus the Father’s vengeance stayed
which over us impended.

Since Christ hath **FULL ATONEMENT MADE**
and **bought** for us salvation,
each Christian therefore should be **glad**
and build on **THIS foundation:**
Thy GRACE ALONE, dear Lord, I plead!
Thy DEATH is now **my life** indeed,
for **Thou hast paid my ransom!**

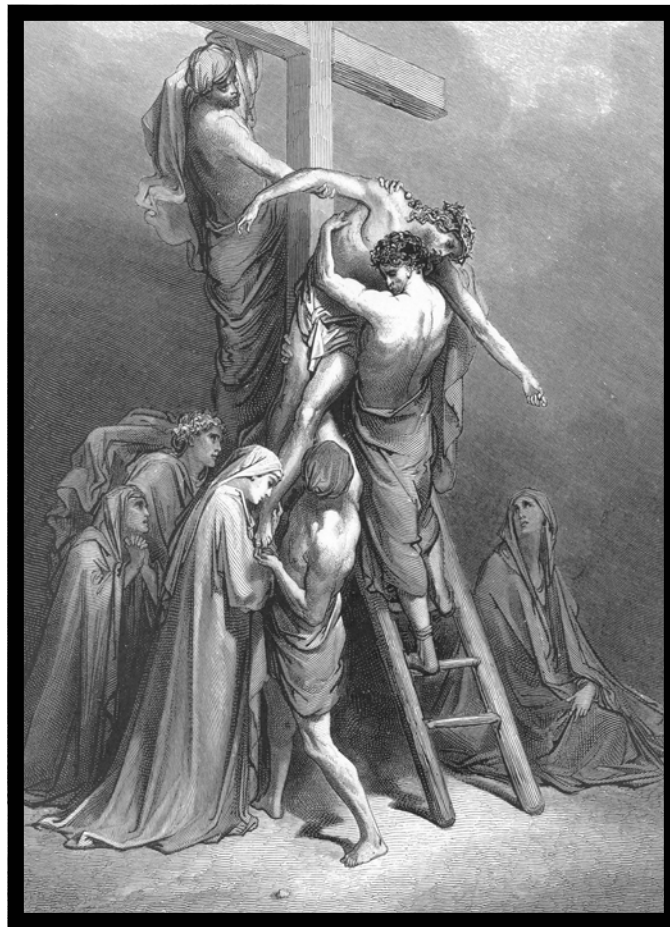
(*TLH 377, 1, 5, 6, adapted*)

— **D. T. M.**



“O Sorrow Dread! Our God is Dead!”

*“For when we were yet without strength, in due time
Christ died for the ungodly.” — Romans 5:6*



What do the Holy Scriptures teach us about this “*Christ*,” this Christ, who “*died for the ungodly*”? He was from all eternity true God with the Father and the Holy Ghost, as the Evangelist John, by divine inspiration

describes Him, the Eternal Word (I John 1:1), in the first words of his Gospel account: *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made”* (vv. 1-3). Then in *“the fulness of the time”* (Galatians 4:4), *“the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us; and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth”* (John 1:14). This “Word,” the eternal Son of God, took into His divine person human *“flesh and blood”* (Hebrews 2:14a) at the moment of His conception by *“the Holy Ghost”* (Matthew 1:20c). From that moment onward, forever and ever, Christ was, is, and will remain **true God and true man**, *“the same yesterday, and today, and forever”* (Hebrews 13:8), *“one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus”* (I Timothy 2:5).

“What two natures, then, are united in Christ?” we ask in our Catechism. And we reply on the basis of Scripture, “The divine and the human natures are united in Christ, both natures together forming one undivided and indivisible person (personal union)” (*Luther’s Small Catechism*, 1943 Ed., Q/A 128, page 105). This statement is most certainly true, as we see in Colossians 2, verse 9: *“In Him [Christ] dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.”* This unique personal union of Christ Jesus (this one-of-a-kind relationship) was necessary for Him to be the Redeemer and Savior of sinners, *“that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver them who, through fear of death, were all their lifetime subject to bondage”* (Hebrews 2:14b-15). Therefore, St. Paul writes to Timothy: *“This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus [the God-Man] came into the world to save sinners”* (I Timothy 1:15). This personal union of our Savior and its purpose are evident already in divine prophecy, in the certain promise of Isaiah 9, verse 6: *“Unto us a Child is born; unto us a Son is given, and the government shall be upon His shoulder, and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.”* This child’s human nature is manifested to men by His birth; yet in His birth *“the Mighty God”* is revealed, as the Angel Gabriel told Mary in Luke 1, verse 35: *“that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God,”* so that the divine and human natures perfectly work together as **one person** for our redemption and salvation.

The title for this article is from the translation of the *original German text* of Hymn 167, stanza 2, in *The Lutheran Hymnal*, as it appears in the

Evangelical Lutheran Hymn-Book edition of 1924: “O sorrow dread! **Our God** is dead!” (or more precisely from the German, “God Himself is dead!”). As shown above, this wording is clearly supported by the clear testimony of Scripture. Our title-text, “**Christ** [the **God-Man**] **died** for the ungodly” (Romans 5:6), clearly establishes the blessed fact that on the cross of Calvary **God died** — in the person of Jesus Christ; and the reports of all four Gospel accounts confirm His true death (Matthew 27:50; Mark 15:37; Luke 23:46; John 19:30). First Corinthians 15, verse 3, in child-like simplicity, announces to us that “**Christ died** for our sins according to the Scriptures,” that is, according to prophetic Scriptures penned by divine inspiration even before the fact, such as Isaiah 53, verses 9a and 12c: “*He* [Christ, the Messiah] *made His grave with the wicked and with the rich in His death. ...He hath poured out His soul unto death;*” and the infallible witness of II Corinthians 5, verse 15, after the fact, is priceless and never-changing: “**He** [**Christ**] **died** for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto **Him** which **died** for them and rose again.”

In the title-text for this article we are told that “*Christ died for the ungodly.*” Christ Jesus, the God-Man, “*died for the ungodly,*” for the wicked, for the world of unbelievers by nature, for those who “*were yet without strength*” to save themselves from the consequences of both their inherited and their actual sins and, according to the original Greek, continued in that weak and helpless state by nature. **Who** died for them? To the people standing before him, the Apostle Peter, in Acts 3, said: “*The God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified His Son Jesus, whom ye delivered up and denied Him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let Him go. But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you, and killed the Prince of Life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses*” (vv. 13-15).

God allowed His enemies to “*crucify the Lord of Glory*” (I Corinthians 2:8b) because of “*our offenses*” (Romans 4:25a), because “*the wages of sin is death*” (Romans 6:23a), that is, not only spiritual death, not only temporal death, but also eternal death, eternal damnation. The Apostle Peter by inspiration of God conveys to us this good news: “*Christ* [the one God-Man] *also hath once suffered for sins, the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the spirit*” (I Peter 3:18). As unjust, even according to human standards, as the treatment of Christ, the God-Man, was in the final days and hours before His death, yet He was “*delivered*

[into wicked hands] by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God” (Acts 2:23). Why? The answer comes in the message of Paul in II Corinthians 5, verse 21, the message of Christ’s *vicarious* or *substitutionary* atonement for us unworthy and condemned sinners, that God “*hath made Him* [Christ Jesus, the God-Man] *to be sin for us, who [Christ] knew no sin.*” This message declares the fulfillment of what God had revealed already in the Old Testament regarding His plan of Redemption, as if it had already been accomplished: “*All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way, and the Lord hath laid on Him* [on Christ, God’s Son] *the iniquity of us all*” (Isaiah 53:6). This was “*the offering of the body of Jesus Christ* [the God-Man] *once for all*” (Hebrews 10:10).

Why was it necessary that our Savior, Jesus Christ, be **true God** in order to accomplish our redemption? **First of all**, that His substitutionary work of being perfectly and completely obedient to the Law of God would be sufficient for all sinners, that it would fully satisfy God’s demands, and that it would move Him to declare all sinners righteous in His sight (including each of us). Romans 5, verse 19, assures us that “*by the obedience of One* [Christ Jesus, the God-Man] *shall [the] many be made righteous.*” **Secondly**, it was necessary for our Savior, Christ Jesus, to be **true God** so that the sinless offering of His suffering and death would be a sufficient ransom price to God for the redemption of all sinners (including each of us). First John 2, verse 2, leaves no doubt that Jesus Christ, the God-Man, “*is the propitiation* [the payment, the ransom price] *for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.*” Our Savior assured us that the full and complete ransom price had been paid to God for all sinners when He cried out from the cross: “*It is finished*” (John 19:30) — “*It has been and therefore continues to stand as accomplished!*” [from the Greek]. No further payment or satisfaction is required by God for our sins and for anyone else’s sins in the world. **Thirdly**, it was necessary for our Savior, Christ Jesus, to be **true God** so that He might be able to overcome and win the everlasting victory over death and over the devil and hell for all sinners (including each of us). The Apostle John sets forth that specific purpose of Christ’s redemptive work when he tells us: “*For this purpose the Son of God was manifested that He might destroy the works of the devil*” (I John 3:8b); and St. Paul breaks forth into this grateful declaration of Christ’s accomplishment, saying: “*O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the Law; but thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!*” (I Corinthians 15:55-57).

The Scriptural assurance of the **benefits** of Christ's redemptive work is our great comfort when from God's Law we realize the enormity of our sin and guilt, know the condemnation and punishment that we deserve, and, with the jailer at Philippi, cry out: "*What must I do to be saved?*" (Acts 16:30). We and all mankind, who "*have sinned and come short of the glory of God*" (Romans 3:23) are "*justified,*" that is, forgiven and made right with God, "*freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus*" (v. 24). That's why "**Christ died for the ungodly**" (Romans 5:6). "*God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son [into death], that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish [in eternal death and damnation in hell], but have everlasting life. For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him [through His suffering and death] might be saved. He that believeth on Him is not condemned [for his sins], but he that believeth not is condemned already [for his sins] because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. ...He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life, and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him*" (John 3:16-18, 36). God imputed the sins of the world to Christ "*for us,*" in our place, "*that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him*" (II Corinthians 5:21). Here we see the everlasting blessings and benefits of His redemptive work because of the fact that "**Christ [the God-Man] died for the ungodly.**" And we appropriate to ourselves, apprehend or lay hold on for ourselves, and have those price-less blessings for our own, "**by faith without the deeds of the Law**" (Romans 3:28), by confidence of the heart in the mercy of God to poor sinners **in Christ**; "*for by grace are ye saved through faith, and that, not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast*" (Ephesians 2:8-9). "**Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ,**" said Paul to the jailer, "*and thou shalt be saved*" (Acts 16:31).

Out of gratitude to Christ Jesus, the God-Man, Son of God and Son of Man (Matthew 16:13-17), our Redeemer, what do we owe Him for all that He has done for us and for all other sinners **in eternity**, "*The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world*" (Revelation 13:8b) and for all that He has done for us and for all other sinners **in time** — "*Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures*" (I Corinthians 15:3-4)? — **First**, we should express our on-going joyful gratitude to Him, the God-Man, for laying down His sinless life for us and for the whole world of sinners to reconcile us to God (Romans 5:10), so that God no longer imputes (charges) our sins against us. "*God was in*

Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them, and hath committed unto us the Word of reconciliation” (II Corinthians 5:19). “*I am the Good Shepherd; the Good Shepherd giveth His life for the sheep*” (John 10:11). “*Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say, Rejoice*” (Philippians 4:4). — **Secondly**, we should show our continuing love for **Him who “first loved us”** (I John 4:19) by listening to and following His voice as He speaks to us in the Holy Scriptures. “*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 10:27-28). “*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). “*If a man love Me, He will keep My words*” (John 14:23a). — And **thirdly**, we should, as thank-offerings to Him for “*His unspeakable gift*” (II Corinthians 9:15), dedicate ourselves to Him, body and soul, as “*a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is [our] reasonable service*” (Romans 12:1), because “*He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves but unto Him which died for them and rose again*” (II Corinthians 5:15).

Christ, the Life of all the living, Christ, the death of Death, our foe;
who Thyself for me once giving to the darkest depths of woe;
through Thy sufferings, death, and merit, I eternal life inherit!
Thousand, thousand thanks shall be; dearest Jesus, unto Thee!

Thou, ah, Thou hast taken on Thee bonds and stripes, a cruel rod;
pain and scorn were heaped upon Thee, O Thou sinless Son of God!
Thus didst Thou my soul deliver from the bonds of sin forever.
Thousand, thousand thanks shall be; dearest Jesus, unto Thee!

Then, for all that wrought my pardon, for Thy sorrows deep and sore;
for Thine anguish in the Garden, I will thank Thee evermore;
thank Thee for Thy groaning, sighing, for Thy bleeding and Thy dying,
for that last triumphant cry, and shall praise Thee, Lord, on high!

(TLH 151, 1-2, and 7)

—R. J. L.



The Blessedness of Believing Without Seeing

“Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen Me, thou hast believed. Blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed.”

— John 20:29

“Seeing is believing” is an age-old expression, indicating that people will not believe anything to be true unless they can see it for themselves. You may also have heard it said that Missouri calls itself the “show me” state, which apparently means that the people there, even more than others, have to be shown that something is true before they will believe it.

Why is this the case with so many people? Why are they reluctant to *believe* something to be true? Connected with belief is *trust*. We are more likely to trust and believe someone whom we have known for a long time and has proven himself to be *reliable*. This is very often the situation with people who have been married for a number of years, provided that trust has been built up between them; and they will *believe* one another without visual evidence. The same situation will often exist (and should exist) between parents and children. And in the church, when a pastor has served faithfully at the same place for a number of years, trust will have been established; and the members will be likely to believe their pastor, and the pastor his members. Nevertheless, as the Apostle John warns us, we should not believe our pastors because of who they are or because of the longevity of their service among us (I John 4:1), but because they consistently preach, teach, and apply the *perfectly reliable* **Word of God** in its truth and purity (Luke 10:16); for then they are “*of God*.”

And this brings us to the state of Thomas, the Savior’s disciple, mentioned in the passage above. The situation was as follows: The risen Christ on Easter day had appeared to Mary Magdalene, to the other women, to Peter, and to the Emmaus disciples. Reports of the empty tomb, of the message of the angels and of the Lord’s bodily appearances were being spread among the disciples (Luke 24:9-10) and were being evaluated as to their *reliability*; but even “*the apostles*” did not believe the reports of the women, regarding them to be nothing more than “*idle tales*” (v. 11). The text doesn’t say that it was anything

“personal” against the reporters; it was just news that was, as we commonly say today, “too good to be true;” and they simply dismissed it.

“Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst and saith unto them, ‘Peace be unto you.’” (John 20:19) —a very common and ordinary greeting among God’s people then (and even among the Jews today, yea, even among the Muslims in Arabic — “*Shalom!*” “*Salaam!*”). Nevertheless, the Evangelist Luke reports that “*they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit*” — a ghost!! (Luke 24:37). “*And He said unto them, ‘Why are ye troubled, and why do thoughts arise in your hearts?’”* (v. 38). The doors were securely locked out of fear that the Jews might well have targeted them as their next objects of persecution. And the fact that they had, up to that very moment, felt secure and safe from any intrusion made the appearance of Christ all the more shocking to them. His appearance was nothing short of miraculous. Walls and locked doors offered no obstacle to the Lord according to His “illocal presence,” and the disciples knew this well. Even in His *state of humiliation*, when He did not always and fully use His divine attribute of omnipresence (*Catechism* Q/A 134), Jesus had occasionally manifested it (e.g., Matthew 14:25-26; John 8:59). But even then, as in His appearance to them walking on the sea, their reaction was exactly the same: “*They were troubled, saying, ‘It is a spirit!’ And they cried out for fear*” (Matthew 14:26). Even though the apostles themselves now **saw** Him with their own eyes, they still did not believe.

Therefore, Jesus’ greeting, “*Peace be unto you,*” was MORE than a social form. It was *MUCH MORE* than the casual “Hello” that it signifies among unbelievers still today including Jews and Muslims, among antinomians and Gospel reductionists who profess themselves to be Christians, and among social pacifists who accompany it with a quickly-flashed “peace sign.” For His disciples it was the same **simple Gospel assurance** as the “*Fear not*” proclaimed by the angel to Zacharias (Luke 1:13), to Mary in Nazareth (v. 30), to the shepherds on Bethlehem’s fields (2:10), and to the women at the tomb (Matthew 28:5). It was Jesus’ assurance to the disciples after Peter’s catch of fishes (Luke 5:10) and on many other occasions when He manifested forth His glory (John 1:14; 2:11; Matthew 17:1-9 etc.) in the eyes of sinful, mortal men. It was His exhortation that they stop fearing what should not at all

be troubling them and instead have *His* peace in their hearts because of His work of redemption (cf. I Peter 1:18-19) and reconciliation (Romans 5:10). He assured them of that peace in John 14:27 in words which should be dear to every Christian's heart: "*Peace I leave with you; **My** peace I give unto you. Not as the world giveth give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid!*"

*"And when He had so said, He **showed** unto them His hands and His side. Then were the disciples glad, when they **saw** the Lord"* (John 20:19-20). The hands and feet and side of Jesus still bore the marks of the nails and of the spear, retained as evidence of his saving work of redemption in His now glorified body. And they were "*glad*" when they saw this evidence. But, since they still "***believed not for joy and wondered***" (Luke 24:41), still filled with doubts and misgivings, He also "*did **eat** before them*" (Luke 24:43) as further evidence that He had risen with His own **real human body**. Jesus then said to them a second time, "*Peace be unto you*" and then repeated to them the authority He had given to them and to all true believers, and very specifically to the local congregation as God Himself sees it (Matthew 18:17), to forgive the sins of penitent sinners (**The Office of the Keys**, *Catechism*, Fifth Chief Part).

*"But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said unto him, 'We have seen the Lord!' But he said unto them, 'Except **I** shall see in His hands the print of the nails, and put **my** finger into the print of the nails, and thrust **my** hand into His side, I will not believe'"* (John 20:24-25). As "*one of the twelve*" Thomas should have believed his fellow disciples when they described their encounter with Jesus and the proofs He gave them of His resurrection. But, **like the others** who had dismissed the reports of the women (Luke 24:10-11), he did not believe them. Rather he insisted, or demanded, that he be able to have the same physical, tangible evidence granted to HIM personally, so that he could place **his OWN** finger into the nailprints and his hand into the Savior's side. This was the same unbelief, the same doubt, the same lack of "general faith" or confidence in God's Word and its promises, of which the rest had been guilty, the same unbelief they had manifested during that great tempest on the Sea of Galilee (Matthew 8:24ff.), concerning which Jesus had asked them, saying: "*How is it that ye have **no faith**??*" (Mark 4:40). This was not damning unbelief — the rejection of the mercy of God to poor sinners in Christ, but the lack of confidence in ALL of God's promises in His Word — lack of confidence of which ALL, even

Christians, are guilty before God (Romans 3:23; Isaiah 64:6). Jesus points that out in Matthew 6:24-34, for example, where He says that even children of their “*heavenly Father*” are overtaken by anxiety about their future in spite of His promised providence. It is that doubt, that skepticism, which often makes excessive demands and sets its own terms for proof above that which the Lord provides in His Word (cf. Luke 16:27-31; also John 4:48).

Out of condescending love for this weak sheep — as He had manifested the same for the others — yet not in any way to validate his skepticism, “*after eight days again His disciples were within, and Thomas with them. Then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, ‘Peace be unto you.’ Then said He to Thomas, [singling him out from the rest according to His omniscience], ‘Reach hither thy finger, and behold My hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into My side; and be not faithless, but believing’*” (John 20:26-27). The words used here indicate that the scene described is the same as it was the week before. However, this time it was especially for the sake of Thomas that Jesus had come. What condescending love of the Lord Jesus to accommodate Himself to the conditions which Thomas had set, though he had no right to set them! (Cf. the twofold test that Gideon proposed to the Lord in Judges 6:37-40). Nevertheless, in order to banish all doubts from the mind of Thomas, Jesus invited him to place his hands into His wounds. “*And Thomas answered and said unto Him, ‘My Lord and my God.’*” (John 20:28). Now Thomas believed and confessed with true conviction. And his words comprise one of the clearest personal confessions recorded in the New Testament that Jesus Christ is true God (Cf. also Peter’s confession in Matthew 16:16). Both Thomas’s faith and his confession were wrought by God Himself (Philippians 2:13) through the hearing of God’s Word (Romans 10:17) in the mouth of his Savior.

The following words of the Lord Jesus could well have been said to ALL the disciples because of their own unbelief of His Word: “*Jesus saith unto him, ‘Thomas, because thou hast **seen** Me, thou hast believed. Blessed are they that have **not seen**, and yet have **believed**’*” (John 20:29). True faith rests on the clear testimony of **the Word of God** (Romans 10:8). St. Paul writes by inspiration of the Holy Ghost: “*Faith cometh by hearing and hearing **by the Word of God***” (Romans 10:17); and he tells both the Ephesians and us: “[*Ye*] *are built upon the foundation of **the apostles and prophets** [the written Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments], *Jesus Christ Himself being**

the Chief Cornerstone” (Ephesians 2:20). Faith does not depend upon our feelings and our senses. “*Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him*” (I Corinthians 2:9). Rather, the Apostle Peter writes concerning Jesus: “*Whom having **not seen**, ye love; in whom, though now ye see **Him not**, yet BELIEVING, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory*” (I Peter 1:8). “*Now **faith** is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things **not seen***” (Hebrews 11:1). “*We walk **by faith, not by sight***” (II Corinthians 5:7). Is this “blind faith,” as the scoffers of this world call our Christian confidence? Absolutely not, for the Lord has given us **His Word** on which to base our faith concerning the things which are “*not seen*” (Hebrews 11:1). “*God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit, ...which things also we speak, not in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth*” (I Corinthians 2:10a, 13). “*All Scripture is given by inspiration of **God***” (II Timothy 3:16). For that reason we should accept His words, the words of Holy Scripture, without hesitation and doubt; and that makes the “seeing” of empirical proof irrelevant and completely unnecessary.

But what do the **unbelieving scoffers** of this world say? To this very day they reply, “Had our eyes seen the miracles that are ascribed to Jesus in the New Testament, the healing of the sick, the crippled and the blind, the calming of the sea, the feeding of thousands with a few loaves of bread, the calling forth of the dead, the resurrection of Christ Himself from the dead, and all those miraculous deeds which, it is alleged, Christ performed; had we ourselves witnessed all those wonderful things presumably connected with His life, suffering, death, and resurrection, then we would not hesitate for a moment; but we would believe in Him immediately. But we did not see these things. They are unbelievable. They are inconsistent with the common order of things in this world. And therefore we do not believe.”

There is a distinct and profound difference between the doubt of Thomas and the blasphemous unbelief of such scoffers! First of all, Thomas was a believer in the Savior and one of His disciples and apostles. Unbelieving scoffers do not believe in God *at all*, that they have sinned and deserve nothing but damnation, that Jesus is the Son of God, that He redeemed the world by His vicarious atonement, that the Scriptures are His inerrant Word, that they are justified before God alone by faith in Jesus’ merits, etc., etc. Secondly, Thomas was guilty of *sinful uncertainty* about the Savior’s resurrection from the dead on Easter morning

— the same uncertainly initially expressed by the others. It was the *sinful uncertainty* of the disciples in the boat tossed with waves (Luke 8:22-25), of the man whose son was possessed by an evil spirit (Mark 9:24), of the apostles on the Mount of Olives concerning Jesus' mission as our gracious King (Acts 1:6), etc. It was *sinful uncertainty* of which they, by the grace of God, **repented**. But the doubt of *scoffers* is their **deliberate** (and *persistent*) effort, as unbelievers (Romans 8:7), to *discredit* the statements of the Bible, to *mock* its claims of verbal inspiration, inerrancy, authority and all-sufficiency, to *reject* Jesus as the only Savior of men, and to *denounce* God's pronouncement of their guilt and of their ultimate damnation in hell because of their impenitence and unbelief. And though they claim willingness to be convinced by empirical evidence and even by miracles that they themselves might be able to witness, the Lord Jesus Himself says of them, as He said of the rich man's five brothers: "*If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead!*" (Luke 16:31).

It is continued confidence in the authority of **God's Word** that the Lord's Jesus requires for true discipleship (John 8:31-32). Jesus expected His disciples to accept the testimony of the women **not** because the women were good and responsible and truthful Christians, but because His angel and HE Himself had directed them to tell His disciples the news of His resurrection (Matthew 28:7, 10). Jesus had fully expected Thomas to accept both the women's report and the subsequent report of the disciples, "*We have seen the Lord*" (John 20:25), **not** because the disciples were men of character who were both able and willing to give a truthful statement, to present things exactly as they were, but because they were the authorized purveyors of His Word (John 20:21). Moreover, Jesus fully expects US to accept and to believe "*the apostles and prophets*" (Ephesians 2:20), **not** merely because they themselves had seen those things which they reported and had heard what Christ said, **not** because they were honest and upright men who would rather have died than deviate from the truth, but because the "*holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost*" (II Peter 1:21; cf. also I Corinthians 2:13).

Unbelieving scoffers represent God's penmen as men of doubtful character, looking to gain some temporal advantage for the preaching of the Gospel, imposters who made up the resurrection of Jesus to gratify their own ambition or to gain some material benefit. But what earthly benefit did the apostles reap from the preaching of the Gospel? Did they gain any earthly advantage thereby? Did they gain fame, honor, riches, or

worldly possessions? No, they were hated, ridiculed, persecuted, banished, tortured, and put to death for their testimony. And who ever heard of a person with a rational mind making up a lie, and maintaining that lie, so that he might suffer and be put to death, while he could save his life if he told the truth? Indeed, the apostles sealed with their own blood the truthfulness of their own report.

Nevertheless we must ever remember that all such reasoning falls far short of validating what they wrote. It was not merely “their report” which they penned, as if they had been nothing more than “honest journalists on the scene;” for even the most honest journalist is fallible. No! Jesus prayed to His heavenly Father, “*Thy Word is truth*” (John 17:17), because it is **His** Word, not merely that of the apostles and prophets, because they spoke “*not in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth but which the **Holy Ghost** teacheth*” (I Corinthians 2:13), because Jesus assured them, “*He that heareth you heareth **Me***” (Luke 10:16), and because He chides as “*fools*” those who, like His own disciples, are “*slow of heart to believe all that **the prophets** have spoken*” (Luke 24:25). That same Jesus tells us, as He confirmed the same to Thomas, “*Blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed,*” yea, “*Blessed are they that hear the **Word of God** and keep it*” (Luke 11:28).

Do we, because of the perverseness of our flesh, have doubts at times? Are we too all too often “*fools and slow of heart to believe*” what God in His Word has revealed and promised to us? Certainly, for we, too, are sinful. But by the grace of God, who elected us to come to faith through the ministration of the Word, who predestinated us to eternal glory even before He created the world, who in time, by the means of His Gospel, called us to faith, justified us by faith, sanctified us and kept us in the faith, we humbly acknowledge our transgressions of doubting His Word, sincerely repent of them, and pray that, according to His promise, He will keep us steadfast in His Word and faith unto our end. For that is the blessedness of those who have not seen and yet have believed that “*Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing [we] might have life through His name*” (John 20:31).

— D. G. R.



Why are Christians Sometimes “Fools and Slow of Heart to Believe”?

*Then He said unto them, “O fools, and slow of heart to believe
all that the prophets have spoken!” — Luke 24:25*

Doubt is the absence of certainty. Doubt is a form of *unbelief*, not necessarily, however, the unbelief that **damns**. **Damning unbelief** is the rejection of the Gospel of justification by grace, for Christ’s sake, through faith (Mark 16:16b; John 8:24; 12:48), ignorance of the Gospel (John 17:3; Romans 10:1-3; Ephesians 4:18), or doubt concerning one’s own salvation by faith in its promises (Mark 16:16b; John 3:18b; etc.). **Damning unbelief** is the absence of *saving* or *justifying faith*, that is, confidence in the mercy of God which remits sins for Christ’s sake totally apart from the works of the Law. **General faith**, on the other hand, accepts and trusts all the truths revealed in God’s Word; and this faith may be *weak* at times and fraught with *doubts* and *misgivings* (Matthew 14:27-31). It is really a **fruit of saving faith**; and, like the Christian’s entire life of sanctification, is imperfect because of the Old Adam or sinful flesh which inheres even in believers (Romans 7:18).

Therefore, the presence of doubt in the heart concerning the Lord and His Word does not render a person an unbeliever, provided that the Gospel is not denied. After Jesus told a man who besought His help concerning his son who was possessed with a devil, “*If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth,*” the man tearfully replied: “*Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief*” (Mark 9:23–24). This man confessed faith in Jesus as his Lord, and he believed that Christ could help his afflicted son; but he also knew that his trust was not perfect—there was also some doubt, some “*unbelief,*” in his heart. Nevertheless, in loving compassion for this weak believer, Christ did not reject his plea for help on account of his doubts. In like manner, He will not reject *our* pleas for help even though our trust in the Lord is never perfect, for He promises: “*Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out*” (John 6:37).

This does not mean, however, that a Christian should regard the presence of doubts in his heart as a harmless or unimportant matter. Jesus chided His own disciples for their lack of confidence in Him when their ship was tossed in a great tempest and said to them: “*Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?*” (Matthew 8:26), “*Where is your faith?*” (Luke 8:25), and even “*How is it that ye have no*

faith?” (Mark 4:40). Even though being “*slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken*” does not mean that a person has no saving faith in the Lord, yet such doubts are produced by man’s corrupt flesh, and must be identified as a transgression of the very *First Commandment*, which Luther explains in his *Small Catechism* as follows: “We should fear, love, and *trust in God above all things.*” The Scriptures command each one of us: “*Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding*” (Proverbs 3:5); and even a sin of omission in this regard must be humbly and sincerely repented of (James 4:17; Romans 7:19a, 24).

Now a Christian, in an outburst of his arrogant flesh, might say: “Of course I trust in God above all things! I never have any doubts concerning what He tells me in His Word.” Such a declaration is not only a self-deception and in actuality a blatant lie (I John 1:8), but it make a liar out of God Himself, “*and His Word is not in us*” (v. 10). That latter characterization of the Apostle John is a most earnest warning against such wicked assertions which come from sinful pride; and they must be repented of without delay (Proverbs 4:24; 8:13)! We do *not* have *perfect trust* in God’s gracious promises regarding His continuous, never-failing love and care, as His admonition in Matthew 6:24ff. clearly shows. Even Christians chafe under the discomfort and anxiety that stressful situations produce in their lives, complain about “*the sufferings of this present time*” (Romans 8:18), and worry about what might happen in the future with regard to such matters as food, drink and clothing (Luke 12:28-29). “*After all these things do the Gentiles seek,*” says Jesus, “*for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things*” (Matthew 6:32). Rather, as the fruit of our faith in Christ our Savior, we should flee for comfort to such wonderful passages as these: “*All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose*” (Romans 8:28); “*My times are in Thy hand*” (Psalm 31:15); “*I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee*” (Hebrews 13:5); “*Fear thou not; for I am with thee. Be not dismayed; for I am thy God. I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of My righteousness*” (Isaiah 41:10). “*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?*” (Romans 8:32).

As if we had received the grace of God in vain (II Corinthians 6:1), we are sometimes not comforted much at all by such glorious portions of Scripture. But why not? It is because of sinful doubts that arise in our deceitful and desperately wicked hearts by nature (Jeremiah 17:9) when these are not actively combated and rooted out by the applica-

tion of God's Word in our battle with the devil, the world, and our flesh (I Peter 5:9; Psalm 51:10). In our sinful weakness, we *foolishly* lose sight of and only barely confide (Mark 9:24b) in His promise that "*all things,*" even our crosses and trials, "*work together for good to them that love [Him]*" (Romans 8:28) because we are "*slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken*" (Luke 24:25) in His precious Word (Cf. Proverbs 3:11-12; Isaiah 40:31; 43:1-3a; etc.).

A believer's trust in the Bible can indeed be worn down by the devil, the world, and the sinful flesh. Due to the temptations of these spiritual enemies, Christians may at times be swayed by so-called "experts" in secular wisdom — in science and technology, in medicine and in the law, for example — and allow their "educated" opinions and analyses to carry greater weight in their minds than the Word of the Lord. The world would have us establish as our first priority to become "scientific" and "logical" in our thinking, in our reasoning, and in our "world view." What passage of God's Word enjoins that upon us? There is, of course, no comparison between the wisdom of this world (which is foolishness with God, I Corinthians 3:19) and the spiritual wisdom imparted to us by the Scriptures. Objective scientists can gather, test and even develop reliable information and convey to others various facts that may be useful in this life — provided that their use does not conflict with the Word and will of God. But all ideas, theories and operations of man that conflict with the Bible — whether they are represented to us as being "scientific" or not — pose a danger to a Christian's faith and ultimately to his salvation! "*Science [knowledge] falsely so called*" (I Timothy 6:20) is not true knowledge at all! Concerning the worldly wise who reject what nature itself reveals about God (Romans 1:20), St. Paul writes: "*Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools*" (Romans 1:22). Likewise, regarding atheists, who deny the existence of God altogether, the Psalmist writes: "*The fool hath said in his heart, 'There is no God'*" (Psalm 14:1; 53:1).

Of course, we Christians know from the Scriptures (even without doing any investigations or experiments of our own) that if the scientists advance any ideas that conflict with the Scriptures, then the scientists are wrong because God cannot be wrong. "*What if some did not believe? Shall their unbelief make the faith [i.e., faithfulness] of God without effect? God forbid! Yea, let God be true, but every man a liar*" (Romans 3:3-4). "*The wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain*" (I Corinthians 3:19-20). What could be more foolish than to believe a fallible man more than the infallible God? Due to man's

imperfect knowledge in the secular world, “new” discoveries are made every day, and “new” technology is “developed” at an astounding pace. On almost a weekly basis there are new findings in medicine and science that show previously held beliefs to be outdated. And yet, for all the advances of science and technology arising out of human “research and development,” none of them are worthy to be compared to the infallible Word of our faithful God. The knowledge of God, as revealed to us in His Word, does not change. Christian doctrine is not “developed.” *“I am the Lord; I change not,”* He says (Malachi 3:6), and *“the Word of our God shall stand forever”* (Isaiah 40:8). When it comes to a choice, *“It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man”* (Psalm 118:8).

Christians let their trust in God’s Word weaken and slip away when they pursue acceptance and approval from worldly individuals. It is very troubling for a true believer to learn that all of his coworkers and acquaintances outside of his church (even those who claim to be Christians) dismiss the authority of the Scriptures and laugh at the idea of taking the Bible literally (especially in such matters as God’s creation of all things in six 24-hour days, the virgin birth of Christ, the existence of hell, and the real presence of Christ’s body and blood in His Supper). And Satan tries to use the opinions of worldly “friends” to make Christians feel awkward about believing what the Bible explicitly states — as if only “religious nuts” and fanatics trust without question what is written in the Bible. Christian children, for example, may feel compelled by social pressure at school to adopt the beliefs of their classmates and teachers who say that the Bible should not be regarded as authoritative in the areas of history and science. Instead of feeling ashamed or foolish for believing the Scriptures, the Christian should be so very thankful that the Holy Ghost has brought him to the knowledge of the truth (I Timothy 2:4) through the Gospel (II Thessalonians 2:14) and given him wisdom unto salvation through the Scriptures (II Timothy 3:15a) and the truth concerning everything he needs for his faith and life (II Timothy 3:16-17; John 8:31-32); and He has created in his heart the faith to trust and believe it (I Thessalonians 2:13). Though the world despises God’s Word and ridicules our confidence in it, we should gratefully declare to the Lord with the Psalmist: *“Thou through Thy Commandments hast made me wiser than mine enemies; for they are ever with me. I have more understanding than all my teachers; for Thy Testimonies are my meditation”* (Psalm 119:98–99).

Another trick that the devil uses to erode a Christian's confidence in the Scriptures is *pessimism* disguised as "realism" that leads a person to think that the promises of the Lord are "too good to be true," unrealistically positive, naively optimistic, wonderful in theory but not to be expected "in the real world." People who permit the devil thus to "deceive [them] and seduce [them] into misbelief, despair, and other great shame and vice" (Luther), reveal their unbelief in such statements as these: "I know the Bible says, '*Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things [food, drink and clothing] shall be added unto you;*' but if I don't miss church to take the overtime that my boss is offering me, my family is going to starve!" "I know the Bible says that '*all things work together for good to them that love God,*' but nothing good can come from this situation!" "I'm not being pessimistic; I'm being *realistic!*" Such statements are *sinful*; they are the murmuring and complaining of which God convicted the children of Israel (I Corinthians 10:10); and when words to this effect are expressed by us, or such thoughts reside silently within our hearts, then we certainly need to hear and to heed the same stern reprimand that Jesus addressed to His doubting disciples: "*O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!*" and we need sincerely and humbly to repent of despising His grace and of reticence to believe His promises.

The context of Luke 24:25 shows that these disciples had been seriously shaken in their faith due to the capture, torture, and crucifixion of Jesus. They confessed that prior to these events they "*trusted that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel*" (v. 21); but since Christ was killed, and they still believed Him to be dead, their faith in Him had all but disappeared. In their words to the presumed Stranger, they acknowledged having heard a report from the women who had gone to the sepulcher, found it empty, were told by the angels of His resurrection (v. 23), and had "*seen Him after He was risen*" (Mark 16:14; cf. Matthew 28:9-10). However, they did not consider this report to be valid (Luke 24:11 – "*idle tales*"), and were, therefore, not comforted at all by it. They certainly *wished* that it were true, but were unable to believe that Jesus had risen from the dead—having been deceived by the devil and their flesh to regard it as *too good to be true*. Simply *wanting* to believe something is true cannot make a person actually believe it to be true. Saving faith in Christ and the resulting confidence in the other teachings of Scripture are not produced by human effort and willpower (John 1:12-13; Philipians 2:13). Interestingly enough, as wonderful and as powerful as the Gospel is (Romans 1:16), and though an unbeliever might say, "I

wish that I could believe it,” yet, according to Holy Scripture, man in his natural state of unbelief does *not* even really *want* to believe the Gospel, but has the opinion that it is pure *foolishness*. “*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). Consider also the **hostility** that man by nature has against the Lord since his “*carnal mind is **enmity against God***” (Romans 8:7), and the fact that this results in a **repudiation** of His Word (Proverbs 1:24–25; John 8:47; Luke 10:16).

Again, the doubting disciples had heard the glad tidings of Jesus’ resurrection from the women who went to the tomb; but they rejected it out-of-hand and did not allow this message to gladden their hearts. No wonder the two on the way to Emmaus were so “*sad*” (Luke 24:17)! So also it can be with us Christians, that it is not necessarily a matter of us **lacking the *knowledge*** of what the Scriptures say concerning a specific issue (we may even be able to recite the appropriate passages verbatim), yet we may still be **dismissive** of the ***knowledge*** and “*slow of heart to **believe***” what those passages state. And this is, indeed, a most sinful and shameful thing! The faithful Word of our faithful God dare never be doubted! Does not God mean what He tells us in His Word (Numbers 23:19a)? Does He not know how to speak accurately and exactly (Psalm 119:105; 130)? Is He not able to keep every one of His promises (II Peter 3:9; Numbers 23:19b)? Absolutely!

As was mentioned earlier, if we really had a perfect trust in the wonderful promises of Scripture concerning the love, care, guidance, and protection of the Lord, if we ever attained perfect sanctification in our confidence of His Word and had no sinful flesh to lust against our New Man of faith (Galatians 5:17), then there would be nothing in this life that could cause us to experience any fear, worry, stress, or anxiety and we would be able perfectly to fulfill the Savior’s exhortation in Matthew 6:34, for example. The fact that we *do* experience these things is evidence of the sinful doubts that frequently arise out of our fleshly hearts (Matthew 15:19). But what can we do to combat such doubts? We find the only effective remedy for doubt in the Word of our God, where He tells us: “*Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths*” (Proverbs 3:5-6). “*Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the Law of the Lord. Blessed are they that keep His testimonies, and that seek Him with the whole heart!*” (Psalm 119:1-2).

Note again how Jesus responded to those doubting disciples: “*Then He said unto them, ‘O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?’ And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself*” (Luke 24:25–27). So the antidote for doubting the Scriptures is found in Holy Scripture itself—particularly in the Gospel. Whenever the devil, the world, and our flesh tempt us to doubt, we need to remember and truly to appreciate what great things the Lord our God has done for us in saving our souls from eternal destruction in hell by the perfect life, suffering, and death of Jesus Christ. Through that Gospel the Holy Ghost works to increase the love of Christ in our hearts and to produce a firmer confidence in the Lord’s Word. Jesus says: “*If a man love Me, he will keep My words*” (John 14:23). The word here translated as “*keep*” means “*guard*” and “*hold firmly*” according to the original Greek (Thayer’s *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*). St. Paul writes in Philippians 2, verse 13: “*It is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure.*” And Dr. Luther reminds us of that in his explanation of the petitions of the *Lord’s Prayer*, when he says that God’s good and gracious will is done when **He** “strengthens and preserves us steadfast in His Word and faith unto our end” (Third Petition), “so that the devil, the world, and our flesh may not deceive us nor seduce us into misbelief, despair, and other great shame and vice; and though we be assailed by them, that still we may finally overcome and obtain the victory” (Sixth Petition). No matter how our spiritual enemies try to shake our faith, let us by His grace remain completely confident of everything recorded in Holy Scripture, as confident of every word “as [Christ] is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity. This is most certainly true!”

Who trusts in God, a strong abode
in heaven and earth possesses;
who looks in love to Christ above,
no fear his heart oppresses.
In Thee alone, dear Lord, we own
sweet hope and consolation,
our Shield from foes, our Balm for woes,
our great and sure Salvation.

(TLH 437, 1)

— P. E. B.

Churches in Fellowship

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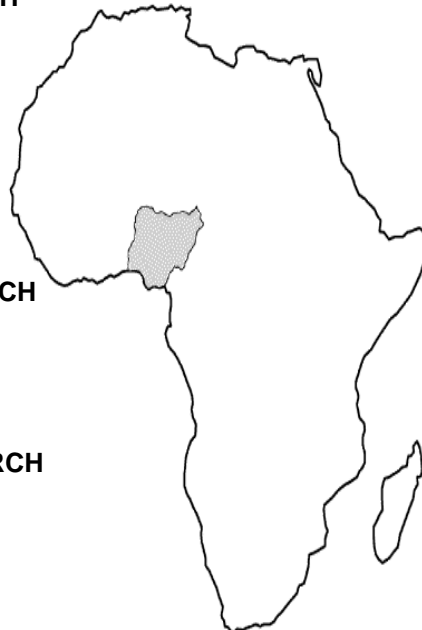
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Worship Service 10:30 a.m.

The Rev. EDWARD J. WORLEY, Pastor

9658 – 54th Avenue South, Seattle, WA 98118 (206) 723-7418

E-mail: revworley@comcast.net

NOTE: Services are also held in **Victoria, British Columbia** on the 1st and 3rd Sundays. Please call the Pastor for current location.

Worship Service 7:00 p.m.

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The Rev. PAUL E. BLOEDEL, Pastor

22012 Torrence Avenue, Sauk Village, IL 60411 (708) 757-6859

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300 North Ridgeland Avenue, Oak Park, IL 60302 Telephone: (708) 386-6773

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Worship Service 10:15 a.m.

The Rev. ROBERT J. LIETZ, Pastor

233 North Cuyler Avenue, Oak Park, IL 60302 (708) 386-4145

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Announcing...

The Sixtieth Annual Convention

of the

Concordia Lutheran Conference

June 24, 25 and 26, 2011

at

Peace Ev. Lutheran Church

Oak Forest, Illinois

The Rev. David T. Mensing, Pastor

with the

Plenary Pastoral Conference

on June 21 and 22

and the

Board of Directors Meeting on June 23

Convention Motto:

The Authority of Holy Scripture

Ephesians 2:20

The Friday Keynote Sermon is on **Ephesians 2:20**

The Sunday Convention Sermon is on **John 8:31-32**

Doctrinal Essays:

- I. The Authority of Scripture for the Establishment of Doctrine
- II. The Authority of Scripture for Truly Orthodox Practice