

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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**"God is our
Refuge
and
Strength."**

—Psalm 46:1



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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.*"

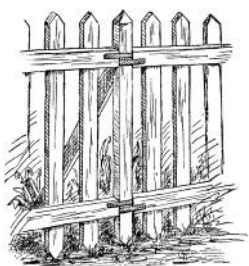
To set forth pertinent historical information which has a bearing upon the Church and to expose modern philosophical thought and the so-called scientific theories which contradict the Word of God.

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.

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Straddling the Fence: The Admission of Defeat

“He that is not with Me is against Me; and he that gathereth not with Me scattereth abroad.” —Matthew 12:30

On October 31st we celebrate the four-hundred ninety-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!

In his first epistle chapter three, 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 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*, to many who claim to be Christian *theologians*, indeed, to many who claim to be *Lutheran* 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*" (I Timothy 6:12), far from standing up with a bold confession of Christ before men (Matthew 10:32), and far from achieving a victory for the cause of God's truth, **spiritual fence-sitting** is the admission of *defeat*.

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. What did he advise? "*Refrain from these men, and let them alone; for if this counsel or 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 was **sitting**. Gamaliel was "on the fence" — 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 had become a kind of power to be reckoned with: 3,000 souls on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:41), another 5,000 after the healing of the lame man by Peter and John (Acts 4:4). And there were, 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, only three months after His death and resurrection!

The Sanhedrin was “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, but that wasn’t working either. So they hauled the apostles back into court to have them show cause why they shouldn’t have been held in contempt, and they got a **sermon** from Peter! They were “fed up”! They “*took counsel to slay [the apostles]*” (v. 33). What else **could** they do?? —They looked to Gamaliel for advice. After all, he had the experience; he was a shrewd Pharisee; he had the degree [“*a doctor of the Law*”]; he had the “reputation among all the people” (v. 34). “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*” 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.*”

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 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 stand they should take in this or that matter, they relied upon their pastors to decide *for them* (whether those pastors were *faithful* or not, cf. I Corinthians 4:2). And 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 faculty for answers. All of them, laymen, pastors, and professors alike, with only rare excep-

tions, 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 followed them “rank-and-file;” and the Synod, at least from the early fifties, began to decide matters of doctrine and practice in committees, 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 the Missouri Synod had spoken in the days of its orthodoxy. 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 and “save the Synod” on *their* terms, 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 those large church bodies!

Never let it be said of YOU, beloved reader, that, **just because** your pastor takes such and such a stand on such and such an issue, you’ll do the same! “*Try the spirits*” (I John 4:1) as to whether they are following Scripture and *Scripture alone* before you cue up behind them! 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,*” 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 Paul’s words are as clear as crystal; and there is NO so-called “time-element” either stated or implied in his directive, “*avoid them,*” that grants you or anyone else a fifty or sixty year window of *option* to obey or to ignore it!

Now, as we go back to Gamaliel’s advice, we find that nowhere did he, “*a doctor of the Law,*” an expert on the Old Testament Scriptures, refer his learned colleagues to the **Scriptures**. Remember that this was a **spiritual matter** before the Sanhedrin, one which should have been 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 referred 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 told 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 come to naught"* (v. 34).

Nowhere did 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 *had*, 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 **sat on the fence** and treated 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 "sit on 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 (John 8:31). **That's** the standard. —History only shows us in retrospect how **departure** from sound doctrine has been the **cause** of countless *"divisions and offenses"* (Romans 16:17) 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* conclusion! —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***” (Matthew 24:13), vindicated **not** by **history**, but by the judgment of Christ Himself according to His Word!

Fence-sitters 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 asked Jesus: “*What is 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 sixty-five 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 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 confront! 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 and his co-workers, the courage of our orthodox “fathers” who by God’s grace and with His neverfailing help marked and avoided the heterodox Missouri Synod in 1951, sixty-five years ago this month, two of them on *Reformation night*— uncompromisingly and untiringly to fight the cause of our dear Savior and His precious Word of Truth for His Name’s sake —and for OUR OWN 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**!*

(TLH 472, 2 and 3)

— D. T. M.



The Pillars of the Reformation



Scripture
Alone

Grace
Alone

Faith
Alone

I. The First Commandment

“Thou shalt have no other gods before Me.” --Exodus 20:3

This series on the Ten Commandments, beginning with a timely review of the First Commandment, is for you and for me. Let us not think that we have outgrown such a review. The Apostle Peter, *“moved by the Holy Ghost”* (II Peter 1:21b), wrote down this exhortation: ***“I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them and be established in the present truth. Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle [this body], to stir you up by putting you in remembrance. ...Moreover, I will endeavor that ye may be able after my decease [my death] to have these things always in remembrance”*** (vv. 12-13 and 15). May this series on the Ten Commandments, beginning with the First Commandment in this issue of *The Concordia Lutheran*, *“stir [us] up by putting [us] in remembrance”* of the divine standards which our Triune God, through His *“Word”* (Psalm 119:105) of truth, has revealed and made known to us in the Ten Commandments.

What are we to do with God’s commandments? As God’s *“people”* (I Peter 2:10), we are to use His commandments as a curb, as a mirror, and as a rule for our Christian lives; we are also to hear His commandments as they are set forth in the Scriptures; we are to believe them, teach them, talk about them, and give them much-needed attention in our daily lives. This use of God’s commandments is so clearly conveyed to us in Deuteronomy 6, where Moses, God’s writer, said: *“These words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart, and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes, and thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house and on thy gates”* (vv. 6-9). Here we see how God wants us to make use of His commandments day and night! Some excellent, practical, and edifying ways to keep God’s words before our eyes and hearts more and more are having daily devotions, placing Scripture verses in every room in our homes (possibly on walls, tables, desks, countertops, exterior of cupboards, refrigerator, and freezer, and maybe even on windows), and memorizing passages from God’s Word, considering the old-fashioned, but ever-new method of *“flash cards,”* with the words of the verse on one side and the Bible location (the address) of the words on

the other side.

Now let us place before our eyes and hearts the words of God's First Commandment: "*Thou shalt have no other gods before Me.*" This "*Me*" is the **only true** God: "*There is none other God but One*" (I Corinthians 8:4c); "*Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve*" (Matthew 4:10b). Furthermore, this "*Me*" is the **Triune** God, as Jesus Himself confirmed in Matthew 28, when He said to all of His followers: "*Go ye therefore and teach [make disciples of] all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost*" (v. 19). Yes, indeed, without any hesitation, we can most confidently and most certainly declare on the basis of the sure foundation of God's Word of "*truth*" (John 17:17), that this one, true, and Triune God is:

■ **Everlasting** – "*From everlasting to everlasting, Thou art God*" (Psalm 90:2b). This one, true, and Triune God is timeless: "*One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day*" (II Peter 3:8b).

■ **Unchangeable** – "*I am the Lord; I change not*" (Malachi 3:6a). People can change, but the one, true, and Triune God will ever remain "*the same*" (Psalm 102:27a). We can be certain that all the "*promises of God in Him [in Christ] are 'Yea [Yes], and in Him [in Christ] Amen*" (II Corinthians 1:20a); "*God ...cannot lie*" (Titus 1:2).

■ **All-powerful** – "*With God nothing shall be impossible*" (Luke 1:37); "*With God all things are possible*" (Matthew 19:26b). He can do and He does do whatever He desires to do according to His divine will: "*He hath done whatsoever He hath pleased*" (Psalm 115:3b); "*He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think*" (Ephesians 3:20a). This almighty God worked **directly** at the creation of the world: "*He spake and it was done*" (Psalm 33:9a). It is also a fact that this almighty God works **indirectly**, through means, such as through the means of "*the Gospel of Christ*" (Romans 1:16a), which "*is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth*" (v. 16b), both creating faith and preserving faith (Romans 10:17; I Peter 1:5). However, the one, true, and Triune God cannot do anything that would go against His written words and promises in the Holy Scriptures: He cannot do evil; He cannot contradict Himself. The Apostle Paul declared: "*If we believe not, yet He abideth faithful; He cannot deny Himself*" (II Timothy 2:13).

■ **Just** – "*A God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is He*" (Deuteronomy 32:4b); "*The Lord is righteous in all His ways and holy in all His works*" (Psalm 145:17); "*Thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness, neither shall evil dwell with Thee. The foolish shall not stand in Thy sight; Thou hatest all workers of iniquity; Thou*

shalt destroy them that speak leasing [lies]; the Lord will abhor the bloody and deceitful man" (Psalm 5:4-6); *"There is no respect of persons with God"* (Romans 2:11); *"'Vengeance is Mine; I will repay,' saith the Lord"* (Romans 12:19b). The one, true, and Triune God is a Judge whose judgments are in perfect conformity with His commandments, a Judge who demands of all people *"perfect"* (Matthew 5:48) conformity with all of His commandments, and a Judge who will punish those who fail in even *"one point"* (James 2:10b) to obey perfectly, to *"do"* (Galatians 3:10c) His commandments perfectly.

■ **Merciful** – *"The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering and abundant in goodness and truth; keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin"* (Exodus 34:6-7a); *"When the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth **His Son**, made of a woman, **made under the Law**, to redeem them that were under the Law"* (Galatians 4:4-5a); *"**Christ** hath redeemed us from the curse of the Law, being **made a curse for us**, for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree'"* (Galatians 3:13); *"Think not that I am come to destroy the Law or the Prophets; I am not come to destroy, but **to fulfill**"* (Matthew 5:17); *"**Christ is the end of the Law** [the fulfillment of the Law] **for righteousness to everyone that believeth**"* (Romans 10:4). Justice and mercy are seemingly contradictory attributes, but the one, true, and Triune God never, ever contradicts Himself. These two attributes of God (justice and mercy) are completely reconciled to each other, totally agreeable with each other, and both wonderfully harmonious **in Christ Jesus, and only in Christ Jesus**. The one, true, and Triune God took out the full force of His justice on **Jesus** as the Substitute, the Redeemer, the Savior *"under the Law"* (Galatians 4:4) for us and for *"the whole world"* (I John 2:2) of sinners, so that He, as the one, true, and Triune God, having His justice fully satisfied by Jesus, could be and was merciful in Christ Jesus toward every single sinner, doing, finishing, and giving to all the marvelous, undeserved, unmerited, and unearned work of *"reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing [not charging] their trespasses unto them. ... For He [the one, true, and Triune God] made Him [Christ Jesus] to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him [in Christ Jesus]"* (II Corinthians 5:19a and 21). We ought to join the Prophet Jeremiah again and again and again, confessing with profound thanks and much praise that *"it is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed [by His just wrath], because His compassions fail not; they are new every morning; great is Thy faithfulness"* (Lamentations 3:22-23). These mercies and compassions from the one, true, Triune, and faithful God are inseparably connected to and built on the *"Seed"* of the woman (Genesis 3:15), the *"Seed"* of Abraham (Genesis 22:18a), who was and is none other than *"Christ"* (Galatians 3:16), *"the Lord our Righteousness"* (Jeremiah

23:6b). How are these priceless, never-changing, and everlasting mercies and compassions from the one, true, and Triune God **only received, only enjoyed, and only treasured** by needy sinners? There is only one right answer to this question: *“God sent not His Son [the Son of Man and the Son of God, Christ Jesus] into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He that believeth on Him [the Son of Man and the Son of God, Christ Jesus] is not condemned, but he that believeth not is condemned already, 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 3:18 and 36).

It is this one, true, Triune, everlasting, unchangeable, all-powerful, just, and merciful God who has said to us in Exodus 20: *“Thou shalt have no other gods before Me”* (v. 3). All other gods in the world, no matter what their name might be, are nothing gods, are worthless gods, are not true, but false gods. The Apostle Paul spoke these changeless words of truth in I Corinthians 8: *“We know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but One”* (v. 4c).

Scripture names for us some of these nothing, worthless, false gods, and teaches **us** through the *example* of the Israelites the great danger of such gross idolatry:

■ Judges 2 – *“The children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord and served Baalim. And they forsook the Lord God of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods, of the gods of the people that were round about them, and bowed themselves unto them, and provoked the Lord to anger. And they forsook the Lord and served Baal and Ashtaroth. And the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel”* (vv. 11-14a).

■ Numbers 25 – *“And Israel abode in Shittim, and the people began to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab. And they [the daughters of Moab] called the people unto the sacrifices of their gods, and the people [the people of Israel] did eat and bowed down to their gods. And Israel joined himself unto Baal-peor, and the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel”* (vv. 1-3).

■ Exodus 32 – *“And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron and said unto him: ‘Up, **make us gods** which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not [we know not] what is become of him.’ And Aaron said unto them: ‘Break off the golden earrings which are in the ears of your wives, of your sons, and of your daughters, and bring them unto*

me.’ And all the people brake off the golden earrings which were in their ears and brought them unto Aaron. And he received them at their hand and fashioned it with a graving tool after he had made it a **molten calf**; and they said: ‘These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.’ And when Aaron saw it, he built an altar before it, and Aaron made proclamation and said: ‘Tomorrow is a feast to the Lord.’ And they rose up early on the morrow, and offered burnt offerings and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. And **the Lord said unto Moses**: ‘Go, get thee down, for thy people, which thou broughtest out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves; they have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them; they have made them a molten calf and have worshipped it, and have sacrificed thereunto, and said: ‘These be thy gods, O Israel, which have brought thee up out of the land of Egypt’” (vv. 1-8).

Why did our God have these tragic events in the lives of His people written down in Judges 2, Numbers 25, and Exodus 32? The Apostle Paul answered this question in Romans 15, where we are told: “Whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written **for our learning** [for our teaching, for our instruction], that **we** through patience [endurance] and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope” (v. 4). In I Corinthians 10, the same apostle said to the Christians at Corinth and to each of us: “Now all these things happened unto them [the Israelites] for examples, and they are written **for our admonition** [for our warning] upon whom the ends of the world are come. Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth **take heed** lest he fall. ...Wherefore, my dearly beloved, **flee from idolatry**” (vv. 11-12, 14).

What are some of the idols, some examples of fine idolatry from which we should flee in our day-after-day lives, following the clear counsel of the one, true, and Triune God: “Thou shalt have **no other gods before Me**”?

■ Proverbs 3 – “Trust in the Lord with all thine heart and **lean not unto thine own understanding**” (v. 5). **We** are **not to make an idol of ourselves**, trusting in **our own** understanding when that understanding is contrary to the Word of God, trusting in **our own** opinions, thoughts, and desires when those opinions, thoughts, and desires are contrary to God’s Word. When Jesus, in Matthew 16, began “to show unto His disciples how that He must go unto Jerusalem and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day” (v. 21), how did the Apostle Peter show that he **made a god of himself over** the Son of God, Jesus Christ? He (Peter) took Jesus “and began to rebuke Him, saying: ‘Be it far from Thee, Lord; this shall not be unto Thee’” (v. 22). How did Jesus respond to Peter placing and elevating **his own understanding above** the

“understanding” (Psalm 119:104) of “the true God,” Jesus Christ (I John 5:20b), as revealed in His clear words in verse 21 of Matthew 16 (see above)? He (Jesus) said to Peter: “*Get thee behind Me, Satan; thou art an offense unto Me, for **thou savorest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men*** [contrary to God’s things]” (v. 23). Following this, the Savior taught the disciples who were present and His disciples of all time: “*If any man will come after Me, let him **deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me***” (v. 24). Let us “*flee from [the] idolatry*” (I Corinthians 10:14) of **making ourselves an idol over** the one, true, Triune, and merciful God “*in Christ*” (II Corinthians 5:19a), **over** His revealed words in the Holy Scriptures, especially **over** His words in Exodus 20: “*Thou shalt have no other gods before Me.*”

■ Matthew 10 – “*He that loveth father or mother **more than Me** is not worthy of Me, and he that loveth son or daughter **more than Me** is not worthy of Me*” (v. 37). When **we** show that **we** have loved our **blood relatives more than** the one, true, and Triune God, even if we have done that only “*one*” (James 2:10) time, then it is evident that we have **placed those blood relatives** (whether it is a spouse, a child, a sibling, a grandparent, or any other relative) **before and above** the Lord God, our Creator, our Preserver, our Redeemer, our Justifier, and our Comforter. Abraham’s love for his son, who was to be one of the human links from whom the only Savior for sinners would most certainly be born, was greatly tested when the one, true, and Triune God said to him: “*Take now thy son, thine only son, Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah, and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of*” (Genesis 22:2). When Abraham eventually came to “*the place*” (v. 9) where he was to go, and “*stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son*” (v. 10), the Lord God called out to him and said: “*Abraham, Abraham; ... Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou anything unto him, for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from Me*” (vv. 11-12). Let us, like Abraham, “*flee from [the] idolatry*” (I Corinthians 10:14) of **loving any of our blood relatives more** than we love the one, true, and Triune God, who so greatly “*loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life*” (John 3:16).

■ Let us also “*flee from [the] idolatry*” (I Corinthians 10:14) of participating with and supporting those organizations (such as the Boy Scouts and Alcoholics Anonymous) which confess that the one, true, and Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, is just **one of many gods** which we are to respect and support in our lives, a confession which is the complete opposite of what the one, true God teaches us in the Holy

Scriptures: “*Thou shalt have no other gods before Me.*”

This “one” (I Corinthians 8:4b), true, and Triune God is the only gracious, merciful, and forgiving God who, through “*the Lamb of God*” (John 1:29a), has taken “*away the sin of the world*” (v. 29b). No other god has done this great, undeserved, unearned, unmerited, and perfect work for all sinners. Who is this Lamb of God? He is none other than that Lamb “*slain from the foundation of the world*” (Revelation 13:8b), that Lamb of God, our “*Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous; ...He is the propitiation [the complete payment, the total ransom] for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world*” (I John 2:1b-2), that Lamb of God who “*was wounded for our transgressions; He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and with His stripes we are healed*” (Isaiah 53:5). Concerning this precious Substitute and Savior for all sinners, Christ Jesus, the Apostle Peter declared: “*Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved*” (Acts 4:12). The Apostle Paul also testified concerning this only Savior for sinners: “*There is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all*” (I Timothy 2:5-6a). And how vital and how important is this one Mediator in our behalf before God? “*He that believeth on Him is not condemned*” (John 3:18a) for our many imperfections, shortcomings, and sins of not perfectly fearing (respecting), loving, and trusting in this Son of God, God the Son, “*The Lord our Righteousness*” (Jeremiah 23:6b), of not perfectly fearing (respecting), loving, and trusting in God the loving heavenly Father, who “*so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son*” (John 3:16), and of not perfectly fearing (respecting), loving, and trusting in God the Holy Ghost, who through His revealed Word, is our never-changing “*Comforter*” (John 14:26). “*Thanks be to God [the only true, Triune, gracious, and merciful God] which giveth us the victory [over death, over the grave, over our sins, over hell] through our Lord Jesus Christ*” (I Corinthians 15:57)!

— R. J. L.

Luther's Lament

Even before Luther's death, false "Lutherans" were perverting the true teachings of the Lutheran church. How might Martin Luther react to the perversions in Lutheranism today? We suspect with the same type of indignation that we see below. Excerpt taken from Luther's *Preface to the Smalcald Articles*.

What shall I say? How shall I complain? I am still living, writing, preaching, and lecturing daily; [and] yet there are found such spiteful men, not only among the adversaries, but also false brethren that profess to be on our side, as dare to cite my writings and doctrine directly against myself, and let me look on and listen, although they know well that I teach otherwise, and as wish to adorn their venom with my labor, and under my name to [deceive and] mislead the poor people. [Good God!] Alas! what first will happen when I am dead ?

Indeed, I ought to reply to everything while I am still living. But, again, how can I alone stop all the mouths of the devil? especially of those (as they all are poisoned) who will not hear or notice what we write, but solely exercise themselves with all diligence how they may most shamefully pervert and corrupt our word in every letter. These I let the devil answer, or at last God's wrath, as they deserve.

Especially for our Youth...

Dangers in Dating for a Consistent Christian

“And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him.”

—Colossians 3:17

Dating: A Modern Practice

Although opinions vary greatly among social historians, most would agree that “dating” as we find it today is a relatively new social practice. In Holy Scripture we read that the custom of arranged marriages was the norm. The father, as head of the household, made the choice; and even today this custom prevails in many cultures.

Dating Defined

Because dating is largely a social custom without sharply defined rules and often determined by the influence of popular culture and peers, a precise definition of dating is unattainable. The world “out there” is an inconsistent place, and social customs are in flux and often quite chaotic. Generally speaking, “dating” today means “going out” or “spending time together.” It may be as non-committal as casually eating together, sitting together, and sharing “small talk.” On the other hand, a date may be a long evening spent talking on the most personal level in an attempt to get to know one another and to learn more about the other person’s deeply held values and judgments; and such knowledge might eventually help a person to make the choice of an individual with whom one would want to enter into the holy estate of marriage with a lifetime commitment. Usually, dating progresses from the “fun” level to the “serious” level over time; but some relationships move very quickly as if driven by forces beyond one’s control. But more on that later.

Dating and the Christian

Scripture enjoins: *“I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God”* (Romans 12:1-2). How does this apply to our subject at hand? Obviously, a true Christian, according to the New Man, does not conform to

the attributes, desires, motivations and behavior of those of the world, whom Scripture accurately describes as being *“without Christ...having no hope, and without God in the world”* (Ephesians 2:12), those who *“...walk in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them because of the blindness of their heart, who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness”* (Ephesians 4:17-19). They, in their entire behavior, have a manner of living that is entirely governed by the *“old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts”* (Ephesians 4:22), who do not even know *“what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God”* (Romans 12:2) but oppose all spiritual things of God and cannot do otherwise in their carnal mind: *“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), *“because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the Law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God”* (Romans 8:7-8). The Holy Ghost also speaks to this marked contrast between believers and those of the world in these telling words from St. Peter’s first epistle: *“Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind; for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin, that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men but to the will of God. For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries; wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you, who shall give account to Him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead”* (4:1-5).

Any Christian man or woman who thinks that a worldly person is not “as bad” as Scripture itself depicts him is not only fooling himself or herself, but is calling God a liar and rejecting God’s Word! Sad to say, such a compromising attitude about worldly people is usually the result of already having given in to their influence and having allowed the sinful flesh to conform the naive person to their deceit. The common argument, “But he (or she) is not like *that!*” is completely erroneous and flies directly in the face of clear passages of Holy Writ, the only source and norm for Christian faith and practice! Don’t deceive yourself! And don’t be deceived by the world!

Dating and the Sixth Commandment

Dating, as a Christian should understand it, must be according to the Biblical norm, namely in accordance with *“that good, and acceptable and*

perfect will of God” (Romans 12:2). As our title-text clearly enjoins, “... *whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him*” (Colossians 3:17).

What do we learn from the Bible about God’s will in male–female relationships? Consider the commandment that focuses on these relationships: “*Thou shalt not commit adultery.*” With Luther we ask, “What does this mean?” and reply on the basis of Scripture: “We should fear and love God that we may lead a chaste and decent life in word and deed and each love and honor his spouse” (*Small Catechism*, Sixth Commandment). God Himself instituted holy matrimony in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:18-24) as a lifelong union (I Corinthians 7:39) of one man and one woman (I Corinthians 7:2). The chief purpose of marriage is companionship as God’s own solution to loneliness (Genesis 2:18, 21-24); and His blessing upon marriage is the gift of children (Genesis 1:28; Psalm 127:3). Since the Fall, marriage is also a deterrent to fornication (I Corinthians 7:2-5) as God protects marriage with the Sixth Commandment and instructs us regarding His will for the life-long intimate relationship that He ordained as legitimate between a man and a woman: Marriage.

But the Sixth Commandment also governs the relationship between those of the opposite sex who are NOT married to one another. How so? The application of the commandment teaches them to lead a chaste and decent life in thoughts, desires, words and deeds, and to avoid all unchastity (I Peter 2:11; Philippians 4:8; Ephesians 5:3-4, 12; 4:29; Matthew 5:28; 15:19). Obviously, this Scriptural application also expresses God’s will regarding the conduct of those who are on a “date.”

The Purpose of Dating as a Christian Should Understand It

The world has a variety of reasons for dating that go beyond an effort to find a spouse. Some date for the sake of harmless diversion and fun among friends, while others admittedly seek carnal seduction and fornication which they refer to as “getting lucky” or “scoring.” A *Christian*, however, dare not determine *his* purposes according to a *fleshly* agenda (Ephesians 5:3-4). As with everything else that a Christian does here in this world, he should regard dating and its interpersonal relationships as opportunities for chaste behavior to the glory of God (I Corinthians 10:31-32) and should recognize that dating, as a means to an end, might well serve the salutary purpose of finding a Godly spouse with whom to share his life in the divinely-instituted estate of marriage which is honorable in all (Hebrews 13:4).

Whom Should a Christian Date?

According to Holy Writ there are only two “kinds” of people in the world: Godly and ungodly. Regarding a Godly woman, Scripture speaks of her rarity: “*Who can find a virtuous woman? For her price is far above rubies*” (Proverbs 31:10), and it speaks of the blessing that the Lord bestows upon a truly Godly marriage: “*Whoso findeth a [Godly] wife findeth a good thing and obtaineth favor of the Lord*” (Proverbs 18:22). Scripture also contrasts a Godly woman with an ungodly woman in very sobering words and warns a man to use God’s wisdom, the wisdom of His Word, to avoid falling prey to the ungodly:

“When wisdom entereth into thine heart and knowledge is pleasant unto thy soul, discretion shall preserve thee; understanding shall keep thee” (Proverbs 2:10-11).

“...to deliver thee from the strange woman, even from the stranger which flattereth with her words, which forsaketh the guide of her youth and forgetteth the covenant of her God. For her house inclineth unto death, and her paths unto the dead” (Proverbs 2:16-18).

“For the lips of a strange woman drop as an honeycomb, and her mouth is smoother than oil; but her end is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword. Her feet go down to death; her steps take hold on hell. Lest thou shouldest ponder the path of life, her ways are moveable that thou canst not know them” (Proverbs 5:3-6).

“And why wilt thou, my son, be ravished with a strange woman, and embrace the bosom of a stranger? For the ways of man are before the eyes of the Lord, and He pondereth all his goings” (Proverbs 5:20-21).

To enter into a romantic relationship with such an ungodly, unstable, unbelieving woman is dangerous and foolish. To marry such a woman brings constant misery: “*It is better to dwell in a corner of the housetop, than with a brawling woman in a wide house... It is better to dwell in the wilderness, than with a contentious and an angry woman*” (Proverbs 21:9, 19; cf. Proverbs 19:13b; 25:24; 27:15).

Regarding a Godly man, Scripture promises: “*A faithful man shall abound with blessings...*” (Proverbs 28:20a) and warns against any relationship with the ungodly which allows them influence over us: “*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 medi-*

tate day and night” (Psalms 1:1-2). The Apostle Paul warns us: “*Be not deceived: Evil communications [Greek: companionships, associations] corrupt good manners [Greek: morals]*” (I Corinthians 15:33). Moreover, we have this clear prohibition: “*Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers; for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? Or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?*” (II Corinthians 6:14-15). How can a Christian read such clear passages of Scripture and deliberately enter with an ungodly person into a relationship that, according to the world’s standards, is expected to become progressively more intimate with time and may eventually lead to the life-long commitment of marriage with an *unbeliever*? That is not the “free choice” that the world sees it to be! A Christian is free to marry whom he or she chooses, Scripture tells us, but “*only in the Lord,*” that is, only to a fellow-believer (I Corinthians 7:39). The Bible exhorts 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); and that exhortation certainly applies to making choices with life-long temporal and even spiritual implications.

We are to be responsible at all times to God and to be morally self-aware: “*Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life. Put away from thee a froward mouth, and perverse lips put far from thee. Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee. Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established. Turn not to the right hand nor to the left; remove thy foot from evil*” (Proverbs 4:23-27). God holds us responsible for our decisions.

When He clearly warns us not to entangle ourselves with the ungodly and we ignore these warnings to our own spiritual peril, we should not be surprised when the misery God foretells comes upon us! All too often we act not upon the basis of better knowledge but impulsively and foolishly. Like Peter, we frequently consider those warnings as meant for everyone else, but not for ourselves (Matthew 26:33). What?! That is sheer arrogance and conceit! God promises great blessings to those who seek and find a *Godly* spouse, but do we trust His promises? God warns us of great miseries in ungodly relationships, but we often pursue and cultivate such relationships as if He had said nothing. Do we know better than God? Evidently we often *think* we do — just as Peter did. And Peter fell! Scripture warns us: “*Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall*” (I Corinthians 10:12).

The Sad Scenario Repeated So Often

How often inconsistent Christians invest in bad relationships, hoping that a rare exception will occur and everything will, miraculously, work out in the end! They give their time, attention and effort to a person who cannot reciprocate in kind because he is not a believer, does not have a “*new man*” of faith which after God’s image “*is created in righteousness and true holiness*” (Ephesians 4:24), does not know the true teachings and the power of God’s Word, and in his carnal mind, which is “*enmity against God*,” has no desire to be subject to God’s Law, “*neither indeed can be*” (Romans 8:7). Over time the inconsistent Christian gives also his or her heart and mind to the other ...still hoping that “love will conquer all,” when the other person cannot love in true unselfish charity because he or she has no living faith. Nevertheless the inconsistent Christian refuses to recognize the one-sided relationship. Is it because so much has been “invested” that to give up would constitute great emotional loss? Has the inconsistent Christian become so desperate for *any* relationship that he or she will *settle* for one that is not God-pleasing, for one devoid of Christian fellowship, for one in which Christ is not the center, Savior, and Head, for a relationship without God’s blessing and therefore destined for unhappiness, misery and failure? How can a person continue to do the same thing in relationship after relationship and expect *different* results? Yet, inconsistent Christians often cultivate and seek to maintain a relationship with an ungodly person for the paltry return of “feeling” loved, needed, and of course sexually satisfied — as long as it lasts! Is that all there is?? It makes no sense. It is not reasonable. It is sad. It is pitiful. And it is spiritually destructive! Even when others point out the obvious and warn against the disaster that awaits those who walk not after the spirit but after the flesh (cf. Romans 8:1 and 4), the warning is rejected in blind stubbornness. Somehow the inconsistent Christian thinks, “I will show everybody that he is wrong. I will have what I need ...someday.” Such “belief” is not only without any basis in God’s promises in the Bible but is actually *contrary* to God’s express warnings! It is not only a form of “enthusiasm” (expecting miracles apart from God’s means) but “rebellion” (fighting against God)! How can people think that they are doing what God wants and claim His blessing upon their lives when they deliberately walk contrary to His Word and will? They are only deceiving themselves!

Dating “Evangelism”

A Christian should not begin a dating relationship with someone on false pretenses. Even when two people are mere acquaintances and visit with one another only socially or casually, it should be a consistent Christian’s priority (assuming concern for the welfare of the friend’s immortal soul) to inquire about his or her religious background and be-

liefs. While to most people here in this world the subject of religion is NOT among the first things to be discussed, our friends should know up front that God and our faith in Him constitute the most important part of our life, that His Word is the one thing truly needful (Luke 10:41-42), and that seeking His kingdom and His righteousness is our prime consideration and top priority (Matthew 6:33). In confessing this faith from the very outset, both in word and in deed (James 1:22, 26), a consistent Christian will be on record as to what his friends should expect from him in the way of values, attitudes, opinions and judgments, as well as in overt conduct; and this agenda may well determine the eventual extent of the relationship. We cannot expect the unregenerate to be “open” to the instruction of God’s Word or to be willing to place himself under the spiritual care of a faithful, orthodox Christian pastor (whose faithfulness and orthodoxy he is in no position to evaluate); but we can rightly expect him — if he is at all interested in an on-going relationship with us — to be curious about what makes us “tick” spiritually, to be inquisitive about what we believe and why, to be interested in seeing for himself our church and in attending one of its services or Bible classes. If such minimal interest is not evident, the relationship should be kept strictly social and not permitted to become at all “serious.” Why? Simply because anyone who is unwilling even to “explore” our faith and confession — the most important thing in our life — its basis and its substance is not a candidate for a close friendship and for a relationship that is intended, eventually at least, to lead to marriage. It is that simple; it is that clear!

Charity: The Bond of Perfectness

Scripture enjoins: *“Put on, therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering, forbearing one another and forgiving one another if any man have a quarrel against any. Even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful. Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly, in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another; in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him”* (Colossians 3:12-17). The character and actions of a consistent Christian are described here. If he is looking for a spouse, a consistent Christian should desire a true “soul-mate,” a person who shares such God-wrought, God-pleasing character, virtues and actions. Mark well the emphasis on “*charity*.” Charity is that unselfish, self-giving, undeserved love that only true believers know and have. Why? Because it

is one-of-a-kind love, a gift of God's grace in Christ Jesus wrought in us by God's Spirit through the Gospel. It is what forms a *perfect bond*. How so? As a Gospel-generated gift from God, it manifests itself in sacrificial service to others even when they deserve nothing! Unlike forms of human love which are self-motivated or stimulated by the "likeable" or "desirable" qualities and actions of other *people*, charity is generated in us by God, who loved (and loves) us perfectly and completely in His Son (I John 4:9; 3:16). Charity forgives and forgets sin for Christ's sake. Charity is the fruit of genuine Christian faith (I John 3:14; Ephesians 4:32). This charity is a "*bond*" that joins Christians together out of gratitude for God's forgiveness and enables a Christian couple to love one another, even when one or the other is not so "lovable"! A consistent Christian should want such charity to be the foundation of his or her marriage and, therefore, to seek only a truly Godly spouse; and the understanding of this priority should govern a Christian even in the choice of the person he or she dates!

The Prayer of Faith

Christians cherish this marvelous promise of God from Romans 8: "*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?*" (v. 32). Out of sheer grace, purchased by Christ by His holy life and by His innocent suffering and death, God gifts us with the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation; and alone through faith in the Gospel we lay hold on it and make it our own. For the sake of our Savior, Jesus Christ, God the Father shall also "*freely give us all things*"! Does that promise include also a spouse, a life-long companion? If we desire to have one — yes! In the Fourth Petition of the Lord's Prayer we pray for "*our daily bread*," which, as Luther properly explains, includes "everything that belongs to the support and wants of the body, such as...a pious spouse." God answers every proper prayer in His own time and in His own manner, very often through *means*. He wants us to work for our daily bread (I Thessalonians 4:11; II Thessalonians 3:12); and we should seek a "pious spouse" where he or she may be found, the most obvious place being within the congregations of our Christian fellowship! To pray for a pious or Godly spouse and then to go contrary to God's Word in seeking someone who is otherwise is not acting in good faith toward God! God's Word also tells us, "*Delight thyself also in the Lord; and He shall give thee the desires of thine heart. Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in Him; and He shall bring it to pass*" (Psalms 37:4-5). Consistent Christians should understand that God will bless their actions when they conform to what His Word enjoins, and that includes truly God-pleasing decisions and actions in dating. "*And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks*

to God and the Father by Him" (Colossians 3:17). May God work within us, by His Gospel, "*both to will and to do of His good pleasure*" (Philippians 2:13) to our own great blessing and to His glory, for Jesus' sake.

Lord, keep me watchful then and humble,
and suffer me no more to stray.
Uphold me when my feet would stumble,
nor let me loiter by the way.
Fill all my nature with Thy light,
O Radiance, strong and bright!

(TLH 399, 4)

— E. J. W.

Martin's Lieder

Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott, ein gute Wehr und Waffen
 Er hilft uns frei aus aller Noth, die uns hat der Teuffel
 Und was die Welt viel trübselt an, und thut uns gar verflohen
 So fürchten wir uns nicht, so ist uns doch getrauen
 Der alte Böse Feind, mit dem wir es jetzt meinet, ist
 Der Feind, der uns nicht - der Feind, der sich nicht, ist er
 Und was die Welt viel trübselt an, und thut uns gar verflohen
 So fürchten wir uns nicht, so ist uns doch getrauen

A mighty Fortress is our God, a trusty Shield and Weapon.
 He helps us free from every need that hath us now o'ertaken.
 The old evil Foe now means deadly woe.
 Deep guile and great might are his dread arms in fight!
 On earth is not his equal!

Though devils all the world should fill, all eager to devour us,
 we tremble not, we fear no ill; then shall not overpower us!
 This world's prince may still scowl fierce as he will.
 He can harm us none. He's judged; the deed is done!
 One little word can fell him!

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- 3. That he purged its material from all manner of papal ballast;***
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- 5. That he refilled the ancient forms with their genuine Evangelical and Scriptural meaning.***

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Bente**