

The Concordia Lutheran



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

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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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A Look Ahead on the New Seminary Year

*“Study to show thyself approved unto
God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing
the Word of Truth.” — II Timothy 2:15*

With this directive of the Apostle Paul to Timothy as their focus, our seminarians — all three of them now full-time students — embarked upon their third year of study in our theological curriculum on September 12th. Their class load, especially in the first semester, is arduous, to say the least. While “full-time” study at most universities requires a load of twelve credit hours per semester, our students are taking nineteen; and their courses involve intensive academic labor more typical of graduate study than of undergraduate work. Yet, by the grace of God, all three are maintaining outstanding grades, and the quality of their work is exemplary from day to day.

This fact, coupled with their diligence, zeal, and love for this work that can be properly motivated only by the Gospel, makes the work of their professors equally joyous in the Lord! It is the solemn duty of the instructors *to commit to faithful men* what they themselves “*have heard*” (II Timothy 2:2), correctly understood and sincerely embraced in the course of their own theological training and subsequent pastoral work, namely and chiefly the pure teachings of God’s Word as these have been established and confirmed by the *sedes doctrinae* or “prooftexts” of Holy Scripture. It is therefore our “job description,” solemn duty and great privilege, both moved and enabled by the power of the Gospel (Romans 1:16; II Corinthians 5:14; I John 4:19; II Corinthians 3:6), to declare unto our students “*all the counsel of God*,” as St. Paul exemplified the fulfillment of this responsibility in his preparation of the pastors in Ephesus (Acts 20:27). And, since Scripture, and not merely church tradition, makes this a priority for us, thorough theological training is the fifth object of our Concordia Lutheran Conference according to its Constitution (Article III).

Our student body consists of Jason A. Mabe and David J. Mensing, both of Oak Forest, Illinois, and Daniel P. Mensing of Tinley Park, as full-time students. In some courses they are joined by way of a computer hook-up by James E. Bielefeldt of Sauk Village, who is still auditing

courses as his time and circumstances permit.

This year, the course load includes two taught by Professor Lietz: ***Dogmatics III*** (Soteriology through the Preservation of Faith) and ***Symbolics I*** (the study of the *Lutheran Confessions*, notably, in the first course, the three Ecumenical Creeds through the Smalcald Articles) — and four taught by Professor Mensing: ***Exegesis*** (Interpretation) ***of Romans***, which is a first semester course, ***Church History II*** (the Reformation era), ***Homiletics I*** (the construction, outlining and writing of sermons), and ***Basic Hebrew***. In addition, there is the ***Practicum*** or internship in the local congregation under the supervision of Pastor Mensing (2 credit hours per semester).

Professor Lietz's classes meet on Monday, Wednesday and Friday mornings from nine o'clock until noon. Professor Mensing's classes meet on Monday, Wednesday and Friday afternoons from one until three o'clock, and on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 10:00 a.m. until 2:00 p.m. There is also a *Practicum* Consult scheduled on Saturday mornings as needed. All the classes meet at Peace in Oak Forest, since that is the area where the students and their families live; and Professor Lietz very graciously accommodates this plan by driving 34 miles each way from his home in Oak Park three times a week to teach his courses — for which we all are very grateful in the Lord.

We humbly thank God for the “*faithful men*” He has given us as students in our seminary and for the opportunity we have to instruct them; and we eagerly look forward, each and every day, to both the challenges and joys of teaching these young brethren. Let all of us keep them and their families in our daily prayers regarding their health, well-being, and stamina, that they may pursue their studies with unflagging zeal and diligent labor for the Lord's sake and for the sake of all our congregations. Your professors also beg your prayers for the health and strength needed to carry out their responsibilities, as well as for the diligence and faithfulness required of them as stewards in this important work. May both our students and we professors remain, by God's grace and always moved by His precious Gospel to His glory, “*steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as [we] know that [our] labor is not in vain in the Lord!*” (I Corinthians 15:58). God grant it for Jesus' sake!

— **Professor David T. Mensing**

The Function of Faith in Justification

Before we poor sinners consider the function of faith in justification, let us first remind ourselves from the Word of God where we and all mankind in our natural condition stand spiritually before a just and holy God. Scripture clearly teaches us that *all men* — *including us*— are, by nature, without any righteousness before God (Romans 3:10), without any spiritual good in heart and soul (Jeremiah 17:9; Romans 7:18a), continually inclined only to evil (Genesis 8:21; Romans 7:23), spiritually blind in both heart and intellect (Ephesians 4:18; I Corinthians 2:14), spiritually dead and captive in Satan’s power (Ephesians 2:1-2; Acts 26:18), and enemies of God, with a perverted will in constant voluntary opposition —unable and not desiring to change this opposition— both to the Law of God (Romans 8:7-8) and, with the loss of free will and knowledge in spiritual matters, even to the Gospel of Christ (I Corinthians 1:21, 23; 2:14; John 6:44a).

On account of this state of *total depravity*, Scripture clearly teaches that *all men* — *including us*— by nature, are justly condemned by God as sinners (Romans 3:23, 5:18a, 19a), are under His wrath and alienated from Him (Ephesians 2:3; 2:12; 4:18), and are doomed to death and damnation in hell for eternity (Romans 5:12; 6:23; Ezekiel 18:20; Matthew 25:46a). “*Now we know that what things soever the Law saith, it saith to them who are under the Law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God*” (Romans 3:19). So we learn that we and all mankind cannot make ourselves right with God; for “*by the deeds of the Law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight; for by the Law is the knowledge of sin*” (v. 20), the Law which thoroughly and fully works God’s wrath and indignation on account of our sin (Romans 4:15).

Since we are therefore helpless to help ourselves, God grants full and free pardon to all mankind as the loving, free and unconditional gift of His favor to the wretched and undeserving. First, this justifying grace is grace *in Christ*, purchased and earned by the Redeemer’s *propitiation*, or satisfaction, of God’s justice on behalf of all mankind (I John 2:2) — having earned perfect righteousness for all mankind by His *active obedience*, that is, by His perfect keeping of the Law in man’s place (Romans 5:18-19), and having paid the penalty of their guilt by His *passive obedience*, that is, by His having suffered the pains of hell in man’s stead (John 1:29). Secondly, justifying grace is *universal*, in that the favor unmerited by us and the love of God earned by Christ Jesus ex-

tends not merely to some, but to all men without exception. Christ is the Savior of all men (I Timothy 2:5-6); God earnestly desires the salvation of all men (v. 4; II Peter 3:9); and Christ secured the salvation even of those who ultimately reject the grace of God (Titus 2:11; II Peter 2:1). Thirdly, justifying grace is *serious and efficacious*, in that God seriously desires to bring all men to saving faith by the Gospel and to preserve them by the same means through faith unto salvation (Matthew 23:37; Acts 2:38; 7:51).

Now, “saving faith,” simply defined, is trust or confidence directed to an *object*, and *not* an act of virtue or a show of proper attitude. What is the *object* of this trust or confidence? The object of *justifying* faith is *not* merely “God” as He exists; for even unbelievers “know” God based solely on their natural knowledge of Him (Romans 1:19-21); some even believe “*that there is one God,*” which “*the devils also believe and tremble*” (James 2:19). Neither is the object of justifying faith the Law of God, for “*no man is justified by the Law in the sight of God*” (Galatians 3:11).

No, the *object* of justifying faith is “*the Gospel of peace, ...glad tidings of good things*” (Romans 10:15), the wonderful news that, because of Christ’s vicarious atonement, by which He rendered to the Father complete satisfaction for the sins of all mankind and perfect obedience to the just demands of His holy Law in the place of all sinners, God, as the gift of His mercy and grace, “*reconcil[ed] the world unto Himself,*” fully and freely forgiving their sins and imputed to all men righteousness in His sight (II Corinthians 5:19, 21; Romans 5:18–19).

The *function* of justifying faith is *not* to earn the grace of God (Romans 11:6), *not* to demonstrate one’s proper disposition to it (Ephesians 2:9), *not* to make God’s justification effective (Romans 3:24-26). Rather it is merely the *receptive instrument* by which one “lays hold on” the grace of God in Christ (Cf. I Timothy 6:12). Justifying faith is simply confidence of the heart in the mercy of God which remits sins for Christ’s sake, totally apart from the works of the Law, confidence whereby the sinner clings to the assurance of God’s forensic pardon or amnesty for all mankind and personally receives full absolution from all his guilt and from the punishment that he himself deserves and full assurance that he is now accounted righteous before God. “*Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the Law*” (Romans 3:28). “*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).

Note well how this teaching is in stark contrast to that of the Church of Rome, which anathematizes or curses the Scriptural function of justify-

ing faith, stating in the Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent, Session 6, Canon 12: “If anyone saith that justifying faith is nothing else than confidence in the divine mercy which remits sins for Christ’s sake, or that this confidence alone is that whereby we are justified, let him be anathema.” This dreaded curse is still the Pope’s official position today. Beware!

The role of faith in justification is not a new teaching, as, also in the Old Testament, justification was always by God’s grace, for Christ’s sake, through faith; for *“he [Abram] believed in the Lord; and He [the Lord] counted it to him for righteousness”* (Genesis 15:6; cf. Romans 4:3). Christ’s righteousness was imputed to Abram by **faith**, not because of his righteous works (Romans 4:1-8). *“To Him [Jesus of Nazareth] give all the prophets witness, that through His name whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins”* (Acts 10:43).

It is *“the righteousness of God **without** the Law ...being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets”* (Romans 3:21) that brings us undeserving sinners the divine assurance that *“being justified by faith, we have **peace** with God through our Lord Jesus Christ”* (Romans 5:1). For the true and certain reason that **God** is faithful and that **His** promises in His Word are **sure** (Numbers 23:19; II Corinthians 1:20; II Timothy 2:13; Hebrews 10:23b; I John 2:25), a poor sinner who clings in childlike confidence to God’s declared justification of all mankind in Christ as pronounced in the Gospel (Romans 3:23-26; 4:5; II Corinthians 5:19-21) has the sure and certain assurance of that justification as his own personal possession (Romans 4:16; 8:38-39; Philippians 1:6; II Timothy 1:12).

May we, not only this Reformation season but also throughout our lives, hold fast in the humble hand of faith the chief Scriptural teaching of justification by God’s grace, for Christ’s sake, totally apart from any works of the Law, making its precious comfort our very own by confidence in the Lord’s promises and assurances of **our** justification!

— **Jason A. Mabe**, Seminarian
(Submitted through his Pastor)

A Mighty Fortress Is Our God!



When Dr. Martin Luther nailed his *Ninety-five Theses* or, what we would call today, “talking points,” to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany, on October 31, 1517, he embarked upon a public debate with the Church of Rome that developed into a widespread movement which became known as the **Lutheran Reformation**. This was not a secession from Rome, nor was it a rebellion against Rome, nor did Luther intend to establish “another church bearing his name,” as some historians have erroneously claimed, but the Reformation was intended to “reform” external Christendom by bringing it back to its Scriptural “roots” in doctrine and in practice.

As we well know from our study of church history and particularly from our study of Luther’s life and work, his unwavering stand on “Scripture alone” (*Sola Scriptura*) hardly made Luther universally popular, respected and admired — especially at first when it was sometimes “Luther alone” who stood up to be counted against the adversaries of the truth. Indeed, from 1521, when he stood before Emperor Charles V in Worms and refused to disavow and take back his writings and to cease his agitations against Rome, until his death in 1546, Luther was under the ban of the empire, technically a marked and wanted man, subject to arrest at any time and even to attack on the part of bounty-hunters; and yet, despite incessant threats, he was never arrested, or imprisoned, or exiled, or burned as a “heretic;” but he died a natural death in the city of his birth at the age of sixty-three years.

The hymn, “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God,” which later became known as “The Battle-hymn of the Reformation” and was called by Frederick the Great of Prussia “God Almighty’s Grenadier March,” was originally entitled simply “The Forty-sixth Psalm, *God is our Refuge and Strength*” (“Der XXXXVI Psalm, *Deus noster refugium et virtus*”). It

was written in 1529 when the German princes stood before the emperor at the Diet of Speyer to protest infringement upon their religious liberty and the persecution of their theologians. As a poetic paraphrase of Psalm 46, it proclaimed in song the confidence of the reformers in the Lord's protection and in the vindication of His Gospel. It first appeared in print under its original title in Klug's *Gesangbuch* (Hymnbook) published in Wittenberg in 1529; and the rousing melody, also the fruit of Luther's pen, appeared with the stanzas in Klug's *Geistliche Lieder* (Spiritual Songs) the same year. Luther and his co-workers often sang what they called "the 46th Psalm" together, especially in times of persecution, adversity and trial; and their spirits were renewed, confirmed and buoyed up by the assurance of their Lord's precious Word.

The translation of this hymn that we find in *The Lutheran Hymnal* (1941) as Hymn 262 is a composite that closely parallels the original and even has a remarkable line-by-line correspondence with the German text. Those who know German quickly recognize this and favor this translation over those by such poets as Thomas Carlyle and F. H. Hedge.

It is our particular purpose in this article briefly to "walk through" the stanzas of Luther's masterpiece of hymnody and to examine its Scriptural content, the application of those Scriptures to and in the lives of our cherished Lutheran fathers, and their comfort also to us in these latter days of sore distress. It is also our earnest recommendation that our readers commit this hymn to memory for their ready access when "the old evil foe" strikes his fearsome blow in their own lives.

"A mighty Fortress is our God,
a trusty Shield and Weapon.
He helps us free from every need
that hath us now o'ertaken."

Psalm 46:1 — *"God is our Refuge and Strength, a very present Help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear though the earth be removed and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea, though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof."* The troubles of which the psalmist speaks here are chiefly temporal calamities in nature, although their intensity and magnitude are described in such a way as to make them inescapable by mortal men. Only our almighty God, the Creator of all things and He who governs and controls all things in His kingdom of power, is able to provide us refuge as our "*Fortress*," to help us as our "*Deliverer*," and to protect us as our "*Shield*" (II Samuel 22:2-3).

“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!”

Here Luther points out that our worst trouble consists of the spiritual trials and temptations brought upon us by the devil, whom he calls “the foe.” While this word is not used in Scripture regarding the avowed enemy of God and man, there are plenty of passages in which synonyms for “foe” are applied to the devil. Take for example I Peter 5:8–9 where he is called “*your adversary*.” He is also called the “*enemy*” (Matthew 13:39; Luke 10:19) or by its equivalent in Hebrew, “*Satan*” (I Chronicles 21:1; Job 1:6–12; Psalm 109:6; Zechariah 3:1–2; Matthew 4:10; 12:26; 16:23; Mark 4:15; Luke 10:18; 13:16; 22:3, 31; Acts 5:3; etc.). Note also that he is “evil,” that is, persistently sinning in wanton rebellion against God and doing that which promotes sin in the world in order to captivate man, God’s foremost visible creature, in sin and unbelief (Ephesians 6:12; I John 3:8). His “dread arms” or fearsome weapons are “deep guile” — deceit (Revelation 20:8), trickery (Genesis 3:13; II Corinthians 11:3; Ephesians 6:11), lies (John 8:44 — “*devil*” meaning “liar;” Acts 5:3), and “great might” (Ephesians 6:12; I Peter 5:8 — “*as a roaring lion*”), whereby he *seeks to devour* the believers (I Peter 5:8). While wickedness abounds in the world and “*evil men and seducers wax worse and worse*” (II Timothy 3:13) as the Last Day draws near, there is none that compares to the devil as to his evil power and influence. “On earth is not his equal!”

“With might of ours can naught be done;
 soon were our loss effected!”

Left to ourselves, we are powerless to defeat this “*adversary*.” Even Adam and Eve, in their pristine state of integrity, fell prey to his cunning approach, his daring attack, his unexpected ambush, though at that time they could have repulsed his onslaught and said “No!” to his temptation, exercising their free will for *good*. But they willingly yielded to his wicked manipulation, entertained his challenge to question God’s Word, listened to his suggestion that God had a hidden, selfish agenda for forbidding them to eat of the fruit, and permitted him to appeal to their *physical* eyesight (instead of to their *spiritual* eyesight) in assessing the desirability of the forbidden fruit; and they wantonly disobeyed God’s command. Apart from the strength and steadfastness that God’s Word affords our faith, we cannot “*resist him*” (I Peter 5:9); and

without the “*whole armor of God*” (Ephesians 6:11), we cannot defend ourselves against him nor strike a blow to defeat him. Instead we would quickly be victimized by him and lose our faith entirely!

“But for us fights the Valiant One
whom God Himself elected.
Ask ye, ‘Who is this?’
Jesus Christ it is, of Sabaoth Lord!
And there’s none other God!
He holds the field forever.”

“*The only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth*” (John 1:14) was “*foreordained before the foundation of the world*” (I Peter 1:20), “whom God Himself elected” (Cf. I Peter 2:6), that is, chose and anointed (Acts 10:38, *et al.*), to be our Champion, our Redeemer, our “*Jesus*” (Matthew 1:21), “*the Lord’s Christ*” (Luke 2:26), to do battle with Satan “*for us*,” writes Luther, paying “*the wages of sin*” (Romans 6:23) in our place, “*that through death He might destroy him that hath the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver them [namely us and all mankind] who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage*” (Hebrews 2:14-15). “Who is this?” Luther asks; “Jesus Christ it is, of Sabaoth Lord.” He doesn’t translate that Hebrew word, even in his German original (“*der Herr Zebaoth*”); and our translators left it in Hebrew in our English version as well. *Sabaoth* [să • bah • ō th], a three-syllable word not to be confused with the “Sabbath,” is the transliteration of a Hebrew expression meaning “*of hosts*.” Thus, “He is the Lord of Hosts! And there’s none other God!” “*The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge*” (Psalm 46:7). “He holds the field forever!” (Cf. Luke 1:33; Revelation 11:15b).

“Though devils all the world should fill,
all eager to devour us...”

Again Luther refers to I Peter 5:8, where Satan is pictured “*as a roaring lion [walking] about, seeking whom he may devour*.” Luther himself experienced this threat firsthand when he was summoned to Worms in Germany to appear before the emperor, Charles V, to answer for his writings and to recant, that is, take them back. He was warned by his friends not to go because the city would be full of “devils” lying in wait for him. But Luther is said to have replied in confidence of the Lord’s protection (cf. Psalm 91:11): “I shall go to defend what I have confessed, though there be as many devils in Worms as tiles on the rooftops.”

"We tremble not, we fear no ill;
they shall not overpower us."

"Therefore will not we fear..." (Psalm 46:2). "The Lord is my Light and My Salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? When the wicked, even mine enemies and my foes, came upon me to eat up my flesh, they stumbled and fell. Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear. Though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident" (Psalm 27:1-2).

"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!"

"The prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience" (Ephesians 2:2) "may scowl fierce as he will; he can harm us none" (Cf. I Samuel 2:10; Psalm 71:13; Nahum 1:2; Philippians 1:28; I Peter 3:12-16). "This world's prince...is judged; the deed is done!" (Cf. John 16:11). "One little word can fell him!" In the devil's temptation of Jesus in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1ff.), the weapon that vanquished each and every temptation was "*the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God*" (Ephesians 6:17b), as Jesus cited Scripture. "*It is written,*" He said time and time again. Interestingly (and significantly), that expression in the Greek of the New Testament is "one little word," namely, *γέγραπται* [GEGG • grahp • tai], which means, "It was written, has been written, and even now stands written" [German: *Es steht geschrieben*] with continuing effect even to the present — a most power-packed "little word" that shows the continuing and continuous authority of Holy Scripture, "*given by inspiration of God*" (II Timothy 3:16).

So now, what about that "little word" in the Church of Rome in Luther's day when he penned the lines of this hymn? What about that "little word" in the almost 500 years following the Reformation? And what about that "little word" still today, as it continues to shout out from the pages of Holy Writ the doctrine that **Scripture alone** (*sola Scriptura*) is the only source and standard of Christian doctrine and practice? Luther takes up that question in the fourth stanza and answers it in less-than-optimistic terms, singing:

“The Word they still shall let remain
and not a thank* have for it!”

The asterisk (*) calls to the reader’s attention that this older translation, found in the *Evangelical Lutheran Hymn-book* (Missouri Synod) of 1924, is true to Luther’s original German [„...und kein’n Dank dafür haben”] and expresses the sad fact that the Word of God in its truth and purity is not only maligned and denigrated, set aside and ignored, even by the world of so-called “theologians” in their teaching and practice, but that one hears virtually *no gratitude* expressed “for it”! Even among professing so-called “confessionals” in the “conservative” element of the Missouri Synod today, we hear of appreciation for Luther, for Chemnitz, for Walther, and certainly for the *Lutheran Confessions* (which they hail as their indispensable source of doctrine, and which some have the audacity to represent as the norm of Holy Scripture itself); but where is the gratitude for “the Word” without which the *Lutheran Confessions* would be only so much hot air?? And where is the willingness, motivated by the Gospel, gratefully to *follow* the Word by rejecting and avoiding the heterodox (Titus 3:10; Romans 16:17-18) instead of staying within their ranks as mere talkers in a bogus “state of confession” or “protesting membership” that involves no separation when admonition is not heeded??

“He’s by our side upon the plain
with His good gifts and Spirit!”

The writer to the Hebrews exhorts us to “*run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith, who, for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds*” (12:1-3). We have nothing to complain about concerning the burdens we are called upon to bear, the battles we are enlisted to fight, the threats and intimidations we have to face, and the deprivation we are privileged to suffer — in comparison to what our Savior bore to save us as “*the Author and Finisher of our faith.*” Concerning the Lord’s Church, gladdened by that precious Gospel, the Psalmist writes: “*God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved. God shall help her, and that right early*” (46:5).

“And take they our life, goods, fame, child and wife,
let these all be gone; they yet have nothing won!”

Here Luther summarizes in a brief series the plagues visited upon Job of old in Satan's wicked effort to subvert his fear, love and trust in God, to get him to "*curse [God] to His face*" (1:11), to "*charge God foolishly*" (v. 22), to renounce his faith and die in his sins (2:9). What did Satan accomplish? What did he gain? What did he win? Nothing! Jesus assures us that "*the gates of hell shall not prevail against [His Church]*" (Matthew 16:18). And the Psalmist writes by inspiration of God: "*The heathen raged, the kingdoms were moved; He uttered His voice, the earth melted!*" (46:6). "*He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth; He breaketh the bow and cutteth the spear in sunder; He burneth the chariot in the fire!*" (v. 9).

"The Kingdom ours remaineth!"

"Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the heathen; I will be exalted in the earth. The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our Refuge!" (vv. 10-11). Peter writes in his first epistle: "*But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye; and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled. But 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, having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that they falsely accused your good conversation in Christ*" (3:14-16).

We indeed are engaged in a fierce battle against the devil, the world, and our flesh every day of our lives. And we also have specific spiritual foes among "*the enemies of the cross of Christ*" (Philippians 3:18). There are "*grievous wolves*" (Acts 20:29) "*in sheep's clothing*" (Matthew 7:15), belly-serving theologians who "*with good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple*" (Romans 16:18). And we have had our share of "*perils among false brethren*" (II Corinthians 11:26b) arising out of our own ranks, "*speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after them*" (Acts 20:30). But by God's grace, "they have harmed us none" because Christ, our Champion, has fought for us with the sword of His Word and "holds the field forever." Yet, we still have our work cut out for us. The battle is far from over, as St. Paul writes to Timothy: "*Fight the good fight of faith; lay hold on eternal life whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses*" in humble imitation of our Savior's "*good confession*" before Pontius Pilate (I Timothy 6:12-13) and of Luther's bold profession before the Imperial Diet at Worms in 1521: "Unless convinced by Scripture or logical deductions therefrom..., I am overcome by the Scriptures quoted and my conscience is bound in God's Word.... Here I stand; I cannot do otherwise. God help me!

Amen.” (As quoted in *Concordia Cyclopedia*, 1927.) “God is **our** Refuge and Strength, a very present Help in trouble! Therefore will not **we** fear!” God help **US!** Amen!

—D. T. M.



The Wartburg Castle

What is Imprecatory Prayer?

*“Do not I hate them, O Lord, that hate Thee?
And am not I grieved with those that rise up against Thee?
I hate them with perfect hatred; I count them mine enemies.”*
— Psalm 139:21-22

In the Reformation section of *The Lutheran Hymnal* (1941), we find “Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Thy Word,” a hymn which was originally sung at a service in Wittenberg as the Muslim Turks were threatening to overrun Vienna in 1541. The first verse was written as an *imprecatory* prayer and contained these powerful words: “Lord, keep us in Thy Word and work; restrain the murderous Pope and Turk, who fain would tear from off Thy throne Christ Jesus, Thy beloved Son.” Today we sing it this way: “Lord, keep us steadfast in Thy Word; curb those who fain by craft and sword would wrest the Kingdom from Thy Son and set at naught all He hath done.” The hymn still retains an *imprecatory* tone, although the language is more general.

An “imprecation” is defined as an invocation of judgment, calamity or curse against enemies. An imprecatory prayer calls upon God Himself to act on behalf of His own over against those who oppose God. When Martin Luther burned the papal bull (*Exsurge Domine*) before the Elster Gate on December 10, 1520, he added this imprecation against the Pope: “As thou hast wasted with anxiety the Holy One of God, so may the eternal flames waste thee.” Was Luther justified in praying this? Are such imprecatory prayers—righteous cries for God’s justice—true and proper prayers?

Holy Scripture, the only source for Christian faith and life, provides us with a clear answer. For, in praying as he does, Luther joins a long list of believers in Holy Writ who expressed righteous cries for justice. Our theme passage is contained in an imprecatory section of Psalm 139. Therein David says, “*Do not I hate them, O Lord, that hate Thee? And am not I grieved with those that rise up against Thee? I hate them with perfect hatred; I count them mine enemies*” (Psalm 139:21-22). Here David recognizes God’s just judgment against the wicked and affirms God’s cause. David hates all those who hate God; God’s enemies are David’s enemies! Scripture tells us that this type of righteous hatred is an expression of the true fear of God: “*The fear of the Lord is to hate evil. Pride and arrogance and the evil way and the froward mouth do I hate*” (Proverbs 8:13). As we survey the numerous Psalms which contain imprecatory portions, we learn about imprecatory prayers. Imprecatory prayers are grounded in the promise of God to His own as expressed by the Lord to Abram: “*...I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth*

thee” (Genesis 12:3a). In other words, imprecatory prayers only ask that God *do* what He has already said He would do! As such, imprecatory prayers always acknowledge the principle the Lord Himself lays down in these words: “...’Vengeance is Mine; I will repay,’ saith the Lord” (Romans 12:19b). Psalm 94 illustrates this in David’s prayer: “O Lord God, to whom vengeance belongeth; O God, to whom vengeance belongeth, show Thyself. Lift up Thyself, Thou Judge of the earth; render a reward to the proud” (Psalm 94:1-2).

When an imprecatory prayer speaks of a personal desire for God’s action against one’s enemies, it is not out of personal vengeance but for the sake of God’s own cause. Psalm 118 shows this, as David says: “*The Lord taketh my part with them that help me; therefore shall I see my desire upon them that hate me. ...All nations compassed me about; but in the name of the Lord will I destroy them. They compassed me about; yea, they compassed me about; but in the name of the Lord I will destroy them. They compassed me about like bees; they are quenched as the fire of thorns; for in the name of the Lord I will destroy them*” (vv. 7, 10-12). David’s enemies are God’s enemies (Psalm 3:7, 5:10), and David calls upon God to do His will: “*Arise, O Lord, in Thine anger. Lift up Thyself because of the rage of mine enemies, and awake for me to the judgment that Thou hast commanded. ...Oh let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end, but establish the just; for the righteous God trieth the hearts and reins. My defense is of God, which saveth the upright in heart. God judgeth the righteous, and God is angry with the wicked every day*” (Psalm 7:6, 9-11). The imprecatory prayers in the Psalms often mention the fact that the judgment called for is justly deserved: “*Give them according to their deeds and according to the wickedness of their endeavors; give them after the work of their hands; render to them their desert. Because they regard not the works of the Lord, nor the operation of His hands, He shall destroy them and not build them up*” (Psalm 28:4-5).

In Psalm 35 David says to God: “*Plead my cause, O Lord, with them that strive with me; fight against them that fight against me*” (v. 1). David suffers unjust treatment (vv. 4, 7) as his enemies falsely accuse him (vv. 11, 15, 20) and rejoice over his suffering (vv. 19, 24, 26). David prays for God to deliver him from their evil designs and to punish them for their evil (vv. 1-8). This illustrates that imprecatory prayers are prayers of the innocent victim pleading against the guilty, asking God to judge accordingly (Cf. Psalm 7:3-6, 9:12b, 28:4-5, 31:6). In many cases no one can help but God, so the needy cry to God for justice (Cf. Psalm 10:12, 15; 17:9-13; 35:23-24; 69:1-4). In this regard, we are reminded of what God said to Cain after he had killed Abel: “*...The voice of thy brother’s blood crieth unto Me from the ground*” (Genesis 4:10b; cf. Hebrews 12:24). And we sing in one of our hymns: “Abel’s blood for vengeance pleaded to the skies...” (TLH 158, 3). The oppression of the helpless cries out to God for

public vengeance (Cf. Genesis 18:20; Exodus 3:7; 22:23; James 5:4); but the dead, in particular, have no personal recourse. In the New Testament, however, we read of *"the spirits of just men made perfect"* who appeal *"to God, the Judge of all"* (Hebrews 12:23), with a cry for justice: *"And they cried with a loud voice, saying, 'How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost Thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?'"* (Revelation 6:10). These souls are in heaven, having suffered martyrdom for the sake of Christ (Revelation 6:9). Does God answer such proper prayers? Of course! Our Lord says: *"And shall not God avenge His own elect which cry day and night unto Him, though He bear long with them? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily"* (Luke 18:7-8a).

The prayer of the martyrs in Revelation 6 reminds us of Psalm 79. Therein Asaph pleads: *"How long, Lord? Wilt Thou be angry forever? Shall Thy jealousy burn like fire? Pour out Thy wrath upon the heathen that have not known Thee and upon the kingdoms that have not called upon Thy name. ...Wherefore should the heathen say, 'Where is their God? Let Him be known among the heathen in our sight by the revenging of the blood of Thy servants which is shed. Let the sighing of the prisoner come before Thee; according to the greatness of Thy power preserve Thou those that are appointed to die and render unto our neighbors sevenfold into their bosom their reproach, wherewith they have reproached Thee, O Lord"* (Psalm 79:5-6, 10-12). Imprecatory prayers are cries to God for God to defend His Name and glory, to judge the enemies of His people, who also hate what He hates (Cf. Psalm 5:11; 6:4; 7:11; 10:3; 28:5; 35:8; 58:11). David says in Psalm 58: *"The righteous shall rejoice when he seeth the vengeance; he shall wash his feet in the blood of the wicked, so that a man shall say: 'Verily there is a reward for the righteous; verily He is a God that judgeth in the earth'"* (vv. 10-11). God promises to defend His own, and so we pray with the Psalmist: *"Let them all be confounded and turned back that hate Zion"* (Psalm 129:5).

In the New Testament we have specific examples of imprecatory statements, notably the Apostle Paul's against the high priest (Acts 23:3) and the archangel, Michael's, against Satan (Jude 9). We also have two general "curses" pronounced upon unbelievers and false teachers (I Corinthians 16:22; Galatians 1:8-9).

In the Lord's Prayer we pray that God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Included in God's will are the previous petitions: *"Hallowed be Thy Name"* and *"Thy Kingdom come."* Dr. Luther rightly says that, when one prays these petitions, "he must put all the opposition to this in one pile and say: 'Curses, maledictions and disgrace upon every other name and every other kingdom. May they be ruined and torn apart, and may all their schemes and wisdom and plans run aground.'" (Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, American Edition, Jaroslav Pelikan, Ed., St.

Louis: Concordia, 1956), Vol. 21, p. 101). In this sense, certain petitions of the Lord's Prayer are imprecatory in nature.

The proper understanding of imprecatory prayer requires spiritual discernment regarding several key principles. First, we need a proper understanding of Law and Gospel. Imprecatory prayers are pure Law in that they call upon God to execute His just wrath upon His enemies. The Law of God shows us our sin and the wrath of God (Cf. Romans 3:20, 6:23; Galatians 3:10). The Law also acts as a curb to gross outward sin (Cf. I Timothy 1:9; Romans 2:14-15).

Secondly, we need to distinguish between God's primary (antecedent) and secondary (consequent) will, as Dr. J. T. Mueller explains in *Christian Dogmatics* (p. 253):

The distinction between *voluntas antecedens (prima)* and *voluntas consequens (secunda)* is Scriptural if it is understood in the sense of John 3,16-18: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved. He that believeth on Him 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." It is indeed the gracious will of God that all men should believe in Christ and be saved by faith in Him (*voluntas antecedens*). However, if sinners reject the grace of God and maliciously refuse to believe in Christ, then it is God's will that they should be damned, Mark 16, 15. 16. Thus the *voluntas antecedens* applies to all men, while the *voluntas consequens* applies to all who perish through their unbelief.

The Epistle to the Hebrews contains many examples of this Scriptural distinction (cf. Hebrews 2:1-3, 3:1-4:12, 10:26-31, 12:22-29). Martin Luther rightly observes this distinction when he instructs us first to pray for the *conversion* of our enemies and then, if that fails to happen, to pray for their *restraint* and God's *judgment*:

We should pray that our enemies be converted and become our friends, and if not, that their doing and designing be bound to fail and have no success and that their persons perish rather than the Gospel and the kingdom of Christ. Thus the saintly martyr Anastasia, a wealthy, noble Roman matron, prayed against her husband, an idolatrous and terrible ravager of Christians, who had flung her into a horrible prison, in which she had to stay and die. There she lay and wrote to the saintly Chrysogonus diligently to pray for her husband that, if possible, he be converted and believe; but if not, that he be unable to carry out his plans and that he soon make an end of his ravaging. Thus she prayed him to death, for he went to war and did not return home. So we, too,

pray for our angry enemies, not that God protect and strengthen them in their ways, as we pray for Christians, or that He help them, but that they be converted, if they can be; or, if they refuse, that God oppose them, stop them and end the game to their harm and misfortune (E. Plass, *What Luther Says*. St. Louis: Concordia, 1959, #3517, p. 1100).

With these proper distinctions, we can and should understand imprecatory prayers in the Scriptural manner, namely, as cries for God's justice.

In this manner, we are enabled to understand what moved and motivated Martin Luther in his imprecations. He had a holy zeal for purity of doctrine for the sake of the salvation of souls. Speaking about Christ's zeal for God's temple, Luther once remarked:

This was the experience of Christ, the prophets, and all the apostles. And our hearts, too, should be fairly consumed by a strong and holy zeal, a sorrow, jealousy, and indignation over the lamentable idolatries with which the pope has so woefully deceived and seduced the world. Should it not gnaw at us, consume us, and move us to keep the pure doctrine of God's Word from being falsified further? (*Ibid.*, Vol. III, #5097, p. 1567).

Luther's denunciation of the Pope had everything to do with doctrine, as Luther said of the Pope:

Through your throat and pen the evil Satan is lying as he has never lied before. You force and wrest Scripture to suit your fancy. O Christ, my Lord, look down, let the Day of Thy judgment break and destroy the devil's nest at Rome! Here sits the man of whom St. Paul has said that he will exalt himself above Thee (II Thess. 2:3-4), will sit in Thy church, and will set himself up as God — the man of sin and the son of perdition! What else is the papal power than the teaching and increasing of sin and evil, leading souls to damnation under Thy name and guise?" (*Ibid.*, Vol. II, #3416, p. 1072).

We are to keep in mind that Luther did all he could to get the Pope to listen to the truth, only to be unjustly persecuted, excommunicated and have a death sentence put on his head. The Pope showed himself to be God's enemy in all this, and Luther prayed against him accordingly.

As long as we keep in mind the Scriptural distinctions necessary to understand imprecatory prayer correctly, we should not have any problem using such prayers in the proper manner, ever mindful of love for our neighbor, even for our enemies (Matthew 5:44). Therefore, knowing the *antecedent* will of God, we should first of all pray for the conversion of all men. St. Paul writes to Timothy: "*I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks,*

be made for all men ... For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who will have all men to be saved and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time" (I Timothy 2:1, 3-6). Then, we are to pray that the wicked be restrained from harming God's cause and His Church: *"Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the Word of the Lord may have free course and be glorified, even as it is with you, and that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men; for all men have not faith"* (II Thessalonians 3:1-2). And finally, such prayers include asking God to do whatever is necessary for His cause, including the most severe and final judgment, if need be, upon persistent evildoers who spurn both God's Law and His grace in the Gospel and are set upon His dishonor and the destruction of His true Church! *"The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God. For the needy shall not alway be forgotten; the expectation of the poor shall not perish for ever. Arise, O Lord; let not man prevail; let the heathen be judged in Thy sight"* (Psalm 9:17-19). In that latter sense, Luther prayed for the execration of the Pope (*"Deus impleat vos odio papae!"*) — "May God fill you with hatred for the Pope!"), not according to his *person*, but according to his *office* as the very Antichrist, which will not be converted from its wickedness but will persist until the Lord's second visible advent (II Thessalonians 2:8).

— E. J. W.

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Imperial Parliament April 18, 1521
Worms am Rhein, Germany

“... Unless I can be prevailed upon by the testimonies of Scripture or by clear reasons—for I believe neither the Pope nor the councils alone, who quite obviously have often erred and contradicted themselves—I cannot, nor do I want to, retract anything. I remain convinced by the Holy Scriptures I have cited, and my conscience is bound by the Word of God. Here I stand; I cannot do otherwise. God help me! Amen.”

Martin Luther