

## THE ESSAY (PART II) DELIVERED AT THE SIXTY-FIRST ANNUAL CONVENTION

by

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### Christ, Our Divine Prophet — *“The Messenger of the Covenant”* in the New Testament

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#### Introduction

*“I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren...and will put My words in His mouth.”* —Deuteronomy 18:18

*“The Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to His temple, even the Messenger of the Covenant, whom ye delight in; behold, He shall come, saith the Lord of hosts.”*  
—Malachi 3:1

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The term “*prophet*” is sometimes broadly defined as a person who speaks the words of the Lord to others—a messenger of God. In this wider sense, a *pastor* can be considered a *prophet* in so far as he is conveying God’s Word to his flock. Likewise, *any person who is bringing the Word of God to others* can be called a *prophet* according to this broad definition. Indeed, it is God’s will that we all be His prophets in this particular sense—speaking in full accord with His written Word. *“If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God”* (I Peter 4:11; see also Jeremiah 23:28, Joshua 1:8, and Colossians 3:16). A related, though more unique example of this usage of the word “*prophet*” can be found in Exodus 7:1, where Moses is likened to God in his dealings with Pharaoh, and Aaron is referred to as Moses’ “*prophet*” because he would be the spokesman for Moses. However, this wider sense of the word is *not* what is *usually* meant by the term “*prophet*.” Much more commonly, the title of “prophet” is used for one to whom the Lord God speaks directly, in a supernatural way, apart from His written Word, and who is then commissioned to convey those divine messages to certain people. It is according to this more narrow definition that the writers of the Old Testament Scriptures are designated as “*prophets*” (Luke 24:27). An interesting passage to consider in this connection is I Corinthians 14:31–32, in which the Apostle Paul tells the Christians in Corinth: *“Ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted. And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets”* (see also v. 37). Thus anyone who claims to be setting forth the Word of God must keep his words in line with the inspired writings of the prophets, namely, the Holy Scriptures.

Now there is one Man whom the Scriptures identify as a Prophet who is in a class all by Himself; for in addition to being a Man who conveyed messages from God to others, at the same time He also was and is and ever shall be the one true God Himself. This is He whom the Apostle John describes as “*the Word*” who “*was with God*” and who “*was God*” from all eternity (John 1:1–2), namely, the only-begotten Son of God, who “*was made flesh*” (v. 14) and who has revealed the invisible Lord God to mankind (v. 18). It is to this singular Prophet that all the other prophets give witness (Acts 10:43); and it is upon Him alone that all true Christian preaching must be focused (I Corinthians 2:2). It is, therefore, very appropriate for us to meditate in this second doctrinal essay upon...

## Our Divine Prophet: Christ, the Messenger of the Covenant in the New Testament

We shall first consider *what Christ did as our divine Prophet during His public ministry*; and, in the second place, *what Christ is still doing today as our divine Prophet*.

### I. What Christ Did as Our Divine Prophet During His Public Ministry

Even though *not all* of the Old Testament prophets were moved by the Holy Ghost to *write* His Word, they *were all* moved to *speak* His Word. In this way, the Spirit of the Lord used the prophets' mouths to convey the exact words that He breathed into them—the exact messages that He wanted them to deliver. Sometimes those divinely inspired messages dealt specifically with the current situation of the audience to whom they were spoken, such as when Jonah was sent to proclaim God's wrath against the city of Nineveh (Jonah 3:1–4), or when Nathan was sent to David to rebuke him for his sins and then to comfort him with God's gracious forgiveness after he repented (II Samuel 12:1–13). At other times the messages delivered by the prophets concerned events that would take place many years in the future, such as the rise and fall of the various nations described in Daniel 11, or even the prophecies concerning the Last Day, which are still yet to be fulfilled (Daniel 12:1–3; Joel 2:31). When such prophecies of future events were fulfilled, they testified to the faithfulness of God's proclamations through the prophets. In fact, one test that God instructed His people to use in determining which prophets were true and which were false was to see whether or not the given prophecy actually came to pass. "*If thou say in thine heart, 'How shall we know the Word which the Lord hath **not** spoken?' when a prophet speaketh in the name of the Lord, **if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord hath **not** spoken; but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously***" (Deuteronomy 18:21–22).

By far the most important future events foretold by the Old Testament prophets were those that dealt with the coming, person, and work of the Messiah, Jesus Christ; for these prophecies set forth the *Gospel* through which the Spirit created and nurtured saving faith in the hearts of the Old Testament believers. One such prophecy was given through Moses, who described the coming Messiah as being a great *Prophet*, saying: "*The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto Him ye shall hearken*" (Deuteronomy 18:15; compare with Acts 3:22). It is interesting to note that the Lord sent many prophets to the Children of Israel between the time of Moses and the birth of Christ; and yet the people correctly understood that the great Prophet foretold by Moses still had *not* come during that time. Consequently, when John the Baptist started preaching and baptizing in preparation for the ministry of Jesus, the priests and Levites of the Pharisees asked if he were "*that Prophet*" (John 1:21) whose coming had long been anticipated. Of course, John answered "*no*" to their question; for even though he was *a* prophet, he was not "*that Prophet*." In fact Jesus spoke of John the Baptist, saying: "*A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet. For this is he of whom it is written, 'Behold, I send My messenger before Thy face, which shall prepare Thy way before Thee'*" (Matthew 11:9–10). And the prophecy to which the Savior there referred is one that foretold both the coming of John the Baptist *and* Jesus, calling each one of them a "*messenger*" of the Lord, but additionally calling one of those messengers "*the Lord*" Himself. Thus we read in Malachi 3:1 these words: "*Behold, I will send **My messenger** [John the Baptist], and he shall prepare the way before Me; and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to His temple, even **the Messenger of the Covenant** [Christ], whom ye delight in; behold, He shall come,' saith the Lord of hosts.*" The "*Covenant*" here mentioned is the pledge of God's grace in the Messiah—namely, the Gospel—in which all of the believers in the Old Testament confided and rejoiced as they waited for that divine Prophet to come.

But when the time came for “*the Messenger of the Covenant,*” the Son of God, Jesus Christ, to begin His public ministry at the age of 30 (Luke 3:23), His preaching was not well-received in Nazareth, the town “*where He had been brought up*” (Luke 4:16). Though the people marveled “*at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth*” (v. 22), yet they also *despised Him* as merely being “*Joseph’s son*” (v. 22); and they even tried to kill Him after He declared Himself to be a Prophet and the fulfillment of a Messianic prophecy recorded by Isaiah (vv. 28–29). Removing Himself from them, Jesus went to Capernaum and taught the people there; and those people, as the Bible describes it, “*were astonished at His doctrine, for His Word was with power*” (v. 32). His powerful words came directly from the heavenly Father, who had sent Him to be His greatest Prophet. Accordingly, Jesus testified concerning His words: “*I have many things to say and to judge of you ... and I speak to the world those things which I have heard of Him*” (John 8:26); and again: “*I have not spoken of Myself; but the Father which sent Me, He gave Me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak*” (John 12:49). Indeed, the preaching of Jesus showed that He was a Prophet having a much greater authority than the religious leaders of the Jews. In the Gospel according to St. Mark we are told: “*On the Sabbath Day He entered into the synagogue, and taught. And they were astonished at His doctrine; for He taught them as One that had authority, and not as the scribes*” (1:21–22). It is not surprising, therefore, that Jesus was generally regarded by the people to be “*a prophet*” (Matthew 16:14, Mark 6:15); nor is it surprising that this fact angered those who themselves wanted to be viewed as authoritative in matters of religion and who now saw Jesus as a threat to their influence over the people (Mark 15:10). Consequently, the chief priests and Pharisees sought to silence the “*Messenger of the Covenant;*” but even the officers who were sent by them to apprehend Jesus, when they returned empty-handed, confessed: “*Never man spake like this Man*” (John 7:46).

Being the Son of God Himself, our great Prophet spoke with such wisdom, power, and authority that no one could out-debate Him or find any weaknesses in His knowledge of the Scriptures, though many tried to do just that. In Matthew 22:15–46 we learn how Jesus exposed the spiritual ignorance of the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Herodians, and put them to silence when they challenged His teachings and tried to entangle Him in His speech. His enemies also tried *ad hominem* attacks to undermine His status as a Prophet — attempting to criticize Jesus *as a person*, even though He was the only person ever to live His entire life completely sinless (Hebrews 4:15). They said that He could not be a prophet of the Lord simply on the basis that He was a Galilaeen (John 7:52). A Pharisee named Simon despised Jesus and concluded that He could not be a prophet because He allowed a woman who was known to be a sinner to anoint and kiss His feet (Luke 7:39). Most blasphemously His enemies labeled Him “*a gluttonous man, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners*” (Luke 7:34). In their rejection of the divine Prophet, those unbelievers despised Him as their fathers also despised the other prophets that the Lord had sent them (Luke 6:22–23). And since His work as Prophet meant proclaiming God’s Word faithfully rather than seeking the favor of men, Jesus clearly pointed out the hypocrisy of the Jewish religious leaders (Matthew 23:3), the grave spiritual offenses they caused (vv. 13, 15), their theologically foolish opinions (vv. 16–22), and their blatant transgressions against God’s holy Law (v. 23). With great power and righteous indignation, Christ pronounced the curse of divine wrath upon them, repeatedly declaring: “*Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!*” (vv. 13, 14, 15, 23, 25, 27, 29). And because of their most grievous sins contrary to better knowledge, this Prophet announced the following judgment of the most high God: “*Ye shall receive the greater damnation*” (v. 14).

It would be wrong, however, to think of Jesus as a “fire-and-brimstone” preacher whose only message was one of divine condemnation. On the contrary, this Prophet declared: “*I came not*

to judge the world but to save the world” (John 12:47); “for God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved” (John 3:17). Accordingly, the most important message that Christ as our divine Prophet proclaimed was that of the *Gospel* of God’s gracious forgiveness — salvation for sinful mankind through faith in Him. While that good news was thoroughly despised by the proud and self-righteous Pharisees (Matthew 9:12), it was the sweetest message imaginable to humble, contrite sinners (Matthew 9:2; Acts 13:47–48; Psalm 119:103). This work of the Savior in preaching the Gospel was foretold in the Old Testament; in fact, the pre-incarnate Christ Himself declared through the pen of the Prophet Isaiah: “*The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me, because the Lord hath anointed Me to preach good tidings unto the meek; He hath sent Me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord; ... to comfort all that mourn, to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord*” (61:1–3; compare Luke 4:16–21). Some examples recorded in the Bible where Jesus proclaimed to the sorrowful the glad tidings of the Gospel include what He said to the man sick of the palsy (“*Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee,*” Matthew 9:2), what He said to the woman who anointed His feet with precious ointment and washed them with her tears (“*Thy sins are forgiven ... thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace,*” Luke 7:48, 50), and what He told Martha when she was grieving over the death of her brother (“*Thy brother shall rise again. ... I am the resurrection, and the life. He that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die,*” John 11:23–26). To all those who were suffering in anguish under the crushing load of their sins, Jesus extended the gracious invitation to come and find the spiritual rest of forgiveness, saying: “*Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest*” (Matthew 11:28). And lest anyone fear that this divine Prophet would turn them away because of their unworthiness, Christ gave the comforting assurance: “*Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out*” (John 6:37).

Of course, the prophets that came before Christ also preached the Gospel; in fact, Isaiah is sometimes given the title “Evangelist of the Old Testament.” But unlike those prophets who directed the people to place their faith in the Messiah who would come in the future, Jesus — the prophesied *Messenger of the Covenant* — directed the faith of the people *to Himself* as the very fulfillment of those Messianic prophecies (Luke 4:17–21). To the woman of Samaria who confessed, “*I know that Messiah cometh, which is called Christ. When He is come, He will tell us all things,*” Jesus testified of Himself, saying: “*I that speak unto thee am He*” (John 4:25–26). Concerning the grace of God that can be found only through faith in the Messiah, Jesus declared: “*I am the Bread of Life. He that cometh to Me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on Me shall never thirst*” (John 6:35). To a man whose blindness Jesus had healed, the Lord directed the following question: “*Dost thou believe on the Son of God?*” When the man responded saying, “*Who is He, Lord, that I might believe on Him?*” then “*Jesus said unto him, ‘Thou hast both seen Him, and it is He that talketh with thee’*” (John 9:35–37). In the presence of His enemies, the Lord Jesus testified under oath that He is the Christ (the Messiah) and the very Son of God Himself (Matthew 26:63–64; Mark 14:61–62). Responding to Pontius Pilate’s question concerning whether or not He was a king, Jesus forthrightly affirmed: “*Thou sayest that I am a King. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the Truth. Every one that is of the Truth heareth My voice*” (John 18:37). And many more instances can be cited in which our divine Prophet, when speaking to His disciples, clearly identified Himself as the only Savior of mankind who is one in essence with the only true God (Matthew 28:18–20; John 14:6, 9–11; 16:15, 33; 17:5).

Now if such declarations were received correctly as the authoritative statements of a true prophet of the Lord, then Jesus would have to be accepted as the Messiah and the very Son of God, because that is what He clearly proclaimed Himself to be. But that testimony of the divine Prophet only enraged His enemies (Matthew 26:63–66). In John 10:30–33 we are told about a group of unbelieving Jews who, when they recognized that He was setting forth His own equality with God the Father, instead of receiving Him as their Lord and Savior, *they sought to stone Him* — denouncing Jesus as a blasphemer. There were, however, some who, by the working of the Holy Ghost through the preaching of that divine Prophet, were brought to faith in Him — believing Jesus’ testimony concerning Himself and thus rightly regarding Him to be much more than a prophet (John 4:42). Accordingly, Peter confessed on one occasion: “*Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God*” (Matthew 16:16); and on another occasion: “*Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that Thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God*” (John 6:68–69). Unlike any other prophet sent by the Lord God, our great Prophet, *the Messenger of the Covenant*, Jesus Christ, is God Himself; therefore every single utterance that ever proceeded out of His mouth was necessarily God’s own infallible Word.

In addition to proclaiming the *words* that the Holy Ghost breathed into their minds, the prophets in the Old Testament would often be moved and enabled by the Lord to perform *miracles* in His name as evidence of the divine authority that supported their preaching. The prophets were, thereby, able to refute those who disputed the fact that their message was from God. After the pre-incarnate Christ, “*the Angel of the Lord,*” appeared to Moses in the burning bush and commissioned him to be His prophet before Pharaoh and the Children of Israel (Exodus 3:2, 10, 15), Moses protested thus: “*But, behold, they will not believe me nor hearken unto my voice; for they will say, ‘The Lord hath not appeared unto thee’*” (Exodus 4:1). It was in response to this stated concern that God gave Moses three miracles to perform — turning his rod into a serpent (vv. 3–4), making his hand leprosy white (vv. 6–7), and changing water into blood (v. 9) — for the following divinely-stated purpose: “*That they may believe that the Lord God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath appeared unto thee*” (v. 5). By the miracles worked through the prophets, the Lord also displayed His grace and mercy to those in need, such as when Naaman was cured of his leprosy (II Kings 5:1–14) and when the dead son of a widow woman was restored to life again (I Kings 17:10–23). Those miracles clearly identified the one true God, as well as His true messengers. Thus Naaman declared: “*Behold, now I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel*” (II Kings 5:15); and the widow of Zarephath said to the prophet Elijah: “*Now by this I know that thou art a man of God, and that the Word of the Lord in thy mouth is truth*” (I Kings 17:24).

Our great Prophet, Jesus Christ, performed miracles that displayed His own divine power, grace, and compassion (Matthew 14:14; Luke 22:50–51) and testified to the divine authority of His preaching. Unlike the miracles of the Old Testament prophets (who did not use their own power, but God’s), the miracles of Christ were done with His own almighty power (Matthew 28:18) and demonstrated His own glory as the only-begotten Son of God (John 1:14). Consequently, after turning water into wine at the wedding in Cana, the Bible says: “*This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth His glory; and His disciples believed on Him*” (John 2:11). In response to the Jews who sought to kill Him after He had healed a lame man on the Sabbath Day, Jesus declared His authority and ability to do the same works as God the Father, saying: “*My Father worketh hitherto, and I work. ... What things soever He [the Father] doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise. ... For as the Father raiseth up the dead and quickeneth them, even so the Son quickeneth whom He will*” (John 5:17, 19, 21). Speaking to those who had witnessed His miracles but did not believe on Him, Jesus declared: “*The works that I do in My Father’s name, they bear witness of Me. ... If I do not the works of My Father, believe Me not.*”

*But if I do, though ye believe not Me, believe the works; that ye may know and believe that the Father is in Me and I in Him*” (John 10:25, 37–38). Not only did His miracles show His divinity as the only-begotten Son of God, but they also showed Him to be the Messiah, whose coming had long been expected. In the Old Testament Scriptures it had been foretold that the Messiah would perform miracles of mercy, such as giving sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, speech to the dumb, and the ability to walk to those that were lame (Isaiah 35:5–6). Jesus pointed out how His miracles fulfilled that Messianic prophecy when He was asked by two of John the Baptist’s disciples: “*Art Thou He that should come, or do we look for another?*” (Matthew 11:2–5). Yes, the miracles of Jesus gave clear evidence that He was *the Messenger of the Covenant*, the Messiah, the Son of God, and Savior of the world.

Christ’s miracles captured the attention of the people. The Bible says: “*And many of the people believed on Him, and said, ‘When Christ cometh, will He do more miracles than these which this Man hath done?’*” (John 7:31). His miracles did not escape the notice of the Pharisees; and one of them, a man named Nicodemus, was honest enough to admit that those miracles bore witness to the fact that Jesus was a Prophet of the Lord. Nicodemus told Him: “*Rabbi, we know that Thou art a teacher come from God; for no man can do these miracles that Thou doest, except God be with him*” (John 3:2). Now that was not a confession of saving faith, but only an acknowledgment that Jesus was a prophet. That was, however, an important realization to attain, for it meant that Jesus’ words were to be respected and believed. This is similar to how the Samaritan woman acknowledged Jesus to be a prophet, based on His ability to tell her specific details of her private life (John 4:17–19) even before He revealed Himself to her as the Messiah (vv. 25–26). The same thing happened in the case of a man who was born blind, to whom Jesus gave the gift of sight. When asked what he thought of Jesus, the man replied: “*He is a prophet*” (John 9:17); but it was not until later that the Savior made Himself known to him as the very Son of God. The Apostle John relates: “[*Jesus*] *said unto him, ‘Dost thou believe on the Son of God?’ He answered and said, ‘Who is He, Lord, that I might believe on Him?’ And Jesus said unto him, ‘Thou hast both seen Him, and it is He that talketh with thee.’ And he said, ‘Lord, I believe.’ And he worshiped Him*” (9:35–38). It would be wrong to conclude that Jesus’ miracles brought anyone to saving faith; for even the most visually impressive miracles will not convert the heart of an unbeliever and make him a Christian (Luke 16:31). However, the miracles Christ performed *did* aid the people in acknowledging Him to be a *Prophet* (Luke 7:11–16) whose words were to be heeded; and then through the Word of the Gospel, He was able to manifest Himself as the Son of God and Redeemer of the world and work saving faith in the hearts of His hearers.

His miracles, however, did not always have this salutary effect (John 12:37). On one occasion, a miracle of Jesus (the feeding of the 5,000) *did* convince the observers that He was the long-awaited “*Prophet*,” the Messiah; but they were only interested in a messiah who would be an *earthly* king, which, of course, Jesus was *not* (John 6:14–15; 18:36). In the cities of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum, “*wherein most of His mighty works were done*,” most of the people still refused to repent (Matthew 11:20–24). The miracles of the divine Prophet sometimes attracted those who simply wanted to be benefitted *physically* by them and had little to no concern for their spiritual well-being (John 6:26–27). The enemies of Christ discounted His miracles as being the products of witchcraft and cited them as proof of His allegiance with Satan, saying: “*He casteth out devils through the prince of the devils*” (Matthew 9:34). And the more miracles Jesus performed, the more His enemies were filled with rage against Him; for we read in the Gospel according to St. John: “*Then gathered the chief priests and the Pharisees a council, and said, ‘What do we? for this Man doeth many miracles.’ ... Then from that day forth they took counsel together for to put Him to death*” (11:47, 53). And though they had already

rejected His prophetic office and His miracles that bore witness to it, the Pharisees and Sadducees still urged Jesus to give them *another* miraculous sign to demonstrate His authority; but Jesus refused to satisfy their disingenuous request, saying: “*A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given unto it but the sign of the prophet Jonas*” (Matthew 16:1–4). That “*sign of the prophet Jonas*” was a reference to Christ’s own resurrection from the dead on the third day: “*For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale’s belly, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth*” (Matthew 12:40). Jesus’ resurrection of Himself (John 2:19) was the ultimate miracle in demonstration of His divine authority (Romans 1:4). But after they were confronted with evidence of His resurrection, the enemies of the Savior still refused to believe, and even paid the soldiers who were guarding the tomb large sums of money to spread a lie about Jesus’ disciples taking His body while they slept (Matthew 28:11–15).

Both the preaching and the miracles of Jesus clearly revealed Him to be the great Prophet, the Son of God and Redeemer of the world, in whom the Old Testament believers trusted for their salvation. By the grace and power of the Lord, there were some who gladly received *the Messenger of the Covenant* in believing hearts — being brought to saving faith in Him through the Gospel He proclaimed. Sadly, however, most of the people who heard His powerful words and observed His mighty deeds still rejected Him in unbelief. Out of the thousands of people who witnessed the amazing prophetic work of the Savior, there were only about 120 believers (Acts 1:15) at the time that His *public ministry* concluded. *But Jesus’ work as our divine Prophet did not conclude at that time.*

## **II. What Christ is Still Doing Today as Our Divine Prophet**

After His ascension into heaven, the Lord Jesus continued His work as the divine Prophet of His Church through the preaching of His disciples. On Easter evening, when the apostles were gathered together behind closed doors for fear of the Jews, the risen Savior appeared to them, announced the peace of God to cheer their sad hearts, and told them that He was sending them to proclaim His Word, as the heavenly Father had sent Him to carry out His own prophetic work. Christ told them: “*As My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you*” (John 20:21). That their mission included the proclamation of the Law and the Gospel according to the spiritual needs of their hearers can be observed by what Jesus told them next, namely: “*Receive ye the Holy Ghost. Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained*” (vv. 22–23; see also Luke 24:47). Declaring the judgment of God’s holy Law, the sins of the proud and impenitent were to be “*retained;*” they were to be informed of the wrath of the Lord that they were bringing upon themselves. But the sins of the penitent — those who sorrowed over sins and despaired of any self-righteousness — were to be “*remitted;*” they were to be given the glorious *Gospel* of God’s gracious forgiveness on account of Christ Jesus’ work of redemption.

But could those disciples really be trusted to carry out that supremely important commission of the divine Prophet faithfully? Think of all the times the disciples had expressed themselves badly in spiritual matters, requiring Jesus to reprove and correct them (Matthew 16:22–23; Mark 4:38–40; 10:13–15, 35–45; Luke 9:49–50, 54–56; John 9:1–3; 13:6–10; 14:8–10). And what about the Apostle Paul, who, prior to his conversion, had violently opposed the doctrine of Christ and persecuted the Christians so terribly (Acts 26:9–11)? How could the prophetic work of Christ be expected to prosper through such individuals? The Apostle Paul gives the appropriate answer to all such objections in his second letter to the Corinthians, where he says: “*Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God, who*

*also hath made us able ministers of the New Testament*” (3:5–6). Our divine Prophet, Jesus Christ, fully equipped those men to carry out His prophetic work. On Pentecost, ten days after His ascension into heaven, the Lord Jesus poured out His Spirit, the Holy Ghost, in rich measure upon the disciples and made them proper vessels for conveying His Word to others. Christ had told His disciples to expect this, saying to them on the night of His betrayal: *“I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when He, the Spirit of Truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth; for He shall not speak of Himself; but whatsoever He shall hear, that shall He speak; and He will show you things to come. He shall glorify Me; for He shall receive of Mine and shall show it unto you. All things that the Father hath are Mine; therefore said I that He shall take of Mine and shall show it unto you”* (John 16:12–15). The apostles were thus made faithful spokesmen of the Lord — prophets of the great Prophet Christ. They did not have to rely on their fallible human memory; for Jesus told them: *“The Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in My name, He shall teach you all things and bring all things to your remembrance whatsoever I have said unto you”* (John 14:26; see also Luke 24:45). Under the rich blessing of God, the apostles had great success preaching the Word (I Corinthians 3:6). Thousands of people were brought to faith on Pentecost (Acts 2:41), and thousands more were added to the congregation in Jerusalem shortly thereafter (Acts 4:4). Through the missionary journeys of St. Paul, untold multitudes of people in many different cities were saved by faith in the divine Prophet who was working perpetually through the preaching of His apostles (II Thessalonians 2:13–17).

Christ’s continued prophetic work was not limited, however, to the preaching of the apostles. Our exalted Prophet in the heavens has carried on His work down through the ages through the people whom He has sent to preach His Word. In Ephesians 4:10–12 we are told: *“He that descended [namely, Christ] is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that He might fill all things. And He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ [namely, the Church].”* Now the only one of those offices that still exists in this present day is that of *pastor and teacher* — both terms describing the exact same office (the Office of the Ministry, or Pastoral Office). The term “pastor” (which means “shepherd”) is a very appropriate one for the men who hold that office, because God has given them the important work of caring for, guiding, feeding, nurturing, and guarding Christ’s flock of believers (John 21:15–17, Acts 20:28; I Peter 5:2). Likewise, the term “teacher” is also very appropriate, because God has given those men the responsibility of educating and training in Christian doctrine the congregation that the divine Prophet has placed under their instruction (I Timothy 4:13–16; II Timothy 4:2; Titus 1:9).

There is, however, a significant difference between how Christ carried out His prophetic work through the preaching of the apostles in contrast to the preaching of *“pastors and teachers.”* Whereas the Holy Ghost guided the preaching and teaching of the apostles so that their words were the very ones that Christ wanted to be spoken or written to the people (*“we speak, not in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth,”* I Corinthians 2:13; cf. 14:37); pastors, on the other hand, are capable of preaching and teaching falsely—and most of them do. Therefore, the pastor who desires to be a faithful mouthpiece of the divine Prophet must conform his preaching entirely to the written Word of God, Holy Scripture (II Timothy 2:15). Furthermore, the members of the congregation must be careful to evaluate and judge their pastor’s preaching in light of the Scriptures (compare Acts 17:11). Accordingly, the Apostle John writes in his first epistle: *“Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world”* (4:1); and the test that Christians are to perform as they *“try the spirits”* is to compare the preaching of the



pastors with what the divine Prophet has taught them through the inspired writings of His prophets, evangelists, and apostles. Thus St. John writes again five verses later: “*We are of God. He that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth and the spirit of error*” (v. 6). Consequently, true modern-day “prophets” — those who are in the position of bringing God’s Word to others — must at all times conform their preaching and teaching to the infallible doctrines set forth in Holy Scripture (I Corinthians 14:32, 37; II Timothy 4:2).

Sadly, in the world around us false prophets outnumber the true prophets by a staggering ratio. Instead of being guided exclusively by God’s Word in spiritual matters, those false prophets put their own private interpretation upon the words of the divine Prophet. And even though this abominable practice is clearly forbidden by God in II Peter 1:20 (“*no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation*”), some actually pride themselves on being able to read between the lines of Holy Scripture and to infuse the Bible with their own insights. Similarly, there are numerous churches that promote the idea that Christ communicates with His devoted followers *apart from His written Word* — giving them important revelations not found in the Bible, which they are then to share with (and perhaps also bind upon) others. “Enthusiasts,” such as the “Zwickau Prophets” of Luther’s day, made such claims and were able to deceive many people. In outward Christendom today there are vast numbers of people who are not content with what has been revealed in the Bible and desire that Christ would speak to them through contemporary church leaders apart from what has been written so long ago by the prophets and apostles. Thus the Roman Catholics cling to their “traditions” (that which has been historically taught and accepted in their church) as being just as authoritative as what is recorded in Holy Writ, and *even more so* because those traditions are *more recent*. The Romanists claim that Jesus gave His own authority to His representatives in the Church to define matters of doctrine apart from the Scriptures when He said in Luke 10:16: “*He that heareth you heareth Me*” (see *Confutation, Of the Distinction of Meats*). In response to that assertion, Melancthon very properly declared in the Apology (defense) of the Augsburg Confession:

It is certain that the expression Luke 10:16: *He that heareth you heareth Me*, does not speak of traditions, but is chiefly directed against traditions. For it is not a *mandatum cum libera* (a bestowal of unlimited authority), as they call it, but it is a *cautio de rato* (a caution concerning something prescribed), namely, concerning the special command [not a free, unlimited order and power, but a limited order, namely, not to preach their own word, but God’s Word and the Gospel], *i.e.*, the testimony given to the apostles, that we believe them with respect to the word of another, not their own. For Christ wishes to assure us, as was necessary, that we should know that the Word delivered by men is efficacious, and that no other word from heaven ought to be sought. *He that heareth you heareth Me*, cannot be understood of traditions. For Christ requires that they teach in such a way that [by their mouth] He Himself be heard, because He says: *He heareth Me*. Therefore He wishes His own voice, His own Word, to be heard, not human traditions. (*Triglotta, Apology, Art. XXVIII: Of Ecclesiastical Power, §17–19*).

Christ’s own voice, His own Word, is, indeed, heard when pastors faithfully “*preach the Word*” and “*reprove, rebuke, exhort*” their members “*with all longsuffering and doctrine*” (II Timothy 4:2), as the Apostle Paul instructed the young pastor Timothy to do. It is, therefore, right and proper for Christians to receive the orthodox preaching of their pastors as if “*the Messenger of the Covenant*” Himself were standing visibly in front of them proclaiming His holy Law and blessed Gospel, without getting distracted by a pastor’s lowly appearance or unexceptional voice. When a pastor is correctly instructing his members in the doctrines of Holy Scripture, that instruction is to be respected as having the authority of the Lord Himself, *since He is the real Source*. Accordingly, Christian laymen are told to “*obey*” their pastors and “*submit*” themselves

(Hebrews 13:17), not because the pastors have pope-like authority, but because of the supreme authority of the divine Prophet who made them His messengers. Consequently, to despise the Scriptural preaching and teaching of one's pastor is more than just despising the messenger, but includes a disdainful rejection of the Son of God, the divine Prophet, who sent the pastor as His messenger, and also involves a despising of the heavenly Father, who sent that great Prophet into the world. In this way, what Jesus told His disciples when He sent them out to preach His Word certainly applies to faithful pastors: "*He that heareth you heareth Me; and he that despiseth you despiseth Me; and he that despiseth Me despiseth Him that sent Me*" (Luke 10:16).

However, it should not be thought that this passage *only* applies to pastors; for it rightly applies to *anyone who is bringing the Word of God to others*. If that Word is heard, then it is Christ Himself who is being heard; and if that Word is rejected, it is Christ Himself who is being rejected. Therefore, we need to be on guard against the temptation of the devil and our sinful flesh to be dismissive of Scriptural instruction if it is brought to us by a person who is beneath us in authority, or whom we might regard to be inferior in doctrinal knowledge, life experience, spiritual understanding, or even basic intellect. None of that really matters in this regard, because none of those things diminish the authority of our divine Prophet whose Word may be brought to us through the most humble of vessels. In practical application of this point, not only must Christian wives be willing to receive instruction in the Word from their husbands, but Christian husbands also need to be willing to receive the instruction of God's Word brought to them by their wives. Not only must Christian children submit themselves to the Scriptures that their parents bring to them, but Christian parents also need to be willing to be instructed and corrected by the Word of the Lord when it is applied to them by their children. Not only must Christian laymen obey their pastors' proper guidance in the doctrines of the Bible, but Christian pastors also need to be willing to bow in humble submission to the words of the great Prophet that are brought to them by their members. Far from feeling insulted or becoming angry when that happens, a true Christian pastor who receives Scriptural counsel, guidance, and instruction from his own sheep should be so very thankful to the Lord for enabling them through the power of His Word to be such a spiritual blessing to him. The authority and efficacy of Christ's Word apply in every situation where God's holy Word is correctly brought by any individual; even if that messenger happens to be a hypocrite or an open unbeliever, the authority of the divine Prophet still stands in every word of Holy Scripture!

Everyone who has access to a Bible, thereby has access to the infallible, powerful, and authoritative Word of the Lord Jesus Christ. Just think of the amazing blessing all of us have, in that we have full access to the pure Word of God all the time! It is to our great shame that we are very frequently distracted by the devil, the world, and our flesh and, therefore, do not always avail ourselves of the prophetic work of Christ in and through the Scriptures, and may not always read His Word with the proper attitude of humble submission and childlike acceptance. But if we have the proper respect for the divine authority of the Prophet whose Word the Bible is, then we cannot take lightly anything taught in the Scriptures, but must tremble in awe at His Word (Isaiah 66:2) and thus read, study, and meditate upon it with the utmost reverence. Furthermore, if we remember the great spiritual blessings that are conveyed through the Scriptures — how this glorious Book makes sinners "*wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus*" and is also "*profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness*" (II Timothy 3:15–16) — then we should certainly be most cheerful and eager to be like Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, and sit at the feet of our divine Prophet to hear His Word (Luke 10:39) as He speaks so clearly on the pages of Holy Writ.

Through the Prophet Jeremiah, the Lord God declares: “*He that hath My Word, let him speak My Word faithfully*” (23:28). Since we all have His Word, the Bible, and have been instructed in its precious doctrines, we have the obligation to speak His Word faithfully. Thus the Lord does not want us to keep His Word to ourselves and hide it from others, but He wants us to do the part of prophets in carrying His inspired words — the words of Holy Scripture — on our lips at all times (Joshua 1:8). This includes speaking His Word both to those inside and outside our fellowship, both to believers and unbelievers. With reference to Christian laymen edifying one another with the Word, St. Paul wrote by inspiration of the Holy Ghost: “*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*” (Colossians 3:16). Every member of the congregation has the opportunity thus to *teach and admonish* their brethren through “*the Word of Christ*” when they assemble for public worship. Oh what a valuable opportunity it is to have Christ’s prophetic work carried out among us and through us as we worship with our fellow Christians! Think of how important it is also for those who do not know the blessed doctrines of Holy Scripture to have the Law and the Gospel rightly divided and applied to them for their spiritual and eternal welfare. It is through the continuous, present-day prophetic work of Jesus Christ in the Scriptures that our gracious Lord God is revealed to men for the saving of their souls. Jesus says: “*No man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him*” (Matthew 11:27).

Now we should realize that Satan, as well as the Old Adam in us all and the unbelieving world around us, are vehemently opposed to this prophetic work of the Savior being carried out among us and through us. Thankfully, “*the Messenger of the Covenant*” has not left us to struggle against those spiritual enemies on our own, but is constantly with us (Matthew 28:20) and will continue to instruct, strengthen, and protect us through His powerful Word (Acts 20:32; I Peter 2:2). He has armed us with “*the Sword of the Spirit*” — “*the Word of God*” (Ephesians 6:17) — whereby we are able to bring to bear the powerful words of the divine Prophet, and firmly declare with the prophets of old: “*Thus saith the Lord*” (a phrase that occurs more than 400 times in the Old Testament). This is the exact method that our great Prophet demonstrated by His own example when He refuted every temptation of the devil with a powerful, “*It is written!*” (Matthew 4:4, 7, 10). Being thus spiritually equipped and fortified by the prophetic work of Christ in the Scriptures, the Holy Christian Church will continue to stand against every assault of the devil (Matthew 16:18). “*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*” (Luther in *TLH* 262, v. 3).

With a sincere desire to be faithful and effective “prophets” of the divine Prophet — carrying His precious Word to others — we should pray that the Lord would use us as His instruments in spreading His Word throughout the world and bless its effect in the hearts of the hearers (II Thessalonians 3:1; *TLH* 292, v. 3). This is not to be thought of as being the exclusive work of *pastors*, but of everyone who knows the Savior’s Word and is given the opportunity to bring it to others (I Peter 4:11). We are all thus exhorted: “*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*” (I Peter 3:15). As members of an orthodox Lutheran conference, each one of us has been given a rare treasure — the pure Word of God uncorrupted by human opinions and lies. And with that blessing comes an important responsibility. Remember that the Lord says: “*He that hath My Word, let him speak My Word faithfully*” (Jeremiah 23:28). When we fail to do this consistently in our day-to-day lives, the problem is usually not that we lack the knowledge of what to say, nor is it usually a problem of not having an opportunity to say what needs to be said; rather, the problem is usually one of *not using* the spiritual knowledge that

Christ has given us through His Word, and thus not taking advantage of the opportunities that He presents to us — remaining silent out of embarrassment, fear of receiving negative responses, or some other fleshly consideration.

Each one of us should be able to confess sincerely from our heart: *“I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth”* (Romans 1:16). The Gospel of our divine Prophet is such a glorious doctrine — setting forth the amazing love of God for sinful mankind. St. John writes: *“In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. ... We love Him, because He first loved us”* (I John 4:9–11, 19). Out of love for our merciful Lord and for the precious souls of our neighbors, we should earnestly desire to be witnesses of His saving grace for sinful mankind through the blood of the Redeemer. May the Lord Jesus Christ ever continue, therefore, graciously to bless His Church through His ongoing work as our divine Prophet — preserving His Word in its full truth and purity among us! Amen.

*Soli Deo Gloria*

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