the Concordia Lutheran

"The Scripture cannot be broken." John 10:35.

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

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"Who are kept by the power of God through Faith unto salvation"

I Peter 1:5

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EDITOR:
Rev. E. R. Stallings, Jr.
110 Grasmere Court
San Antonio, TX 78218
ASSISTANT EDITOR:
Rev. M. L. Natterer
483 Tangent Street
Lebanon, OR 97355
LAY MEMBER:
Dr. John M. Steinke
5910 Elk Ridge
San Antonio, TX 78249

Address all subscriptions, renewals, and remittances to: **Scriptural Publications, 5910 Elk Ridge, San Antonio, TX 78249-2482.** A special notice of expiration will be inserted in the issue which terminates your subscription.

Officers of the Concordia Lutheran Conference
PRESIDENT:
Rev. Paul R. Bloedel
9658 - 54th Avenue South
Seattle, WA 98118
VICE-PRESIDENT:
Rev. Mark W. Dierking
Box 33
Wilmot, SD 57279
SECRETARY:
Rev. David T. Mensing
17151 South Central Avenue
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TREASURER:
Mr. Victor K. Bloedel
10200 - 62nd Avenue South
Seattle, WA 98178

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 a false church, but that the congregations which form it confess, teach, and practice the Word of God in its full truth and purity and use the Sacraments according to Christ's institution. All who do this are the true visible Church on earth.

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

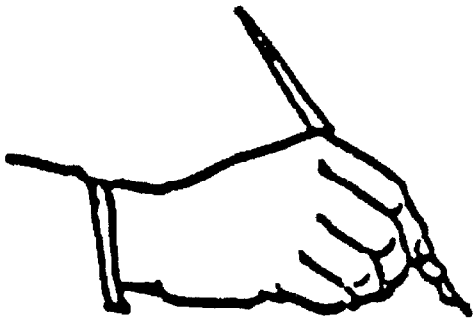
To show that we do not have among us a mixture of divergent teachings but that we are "perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment."

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

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

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

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



The President's Column

EVERY PASTOR IN THE CONCORDIA LUTHERAN CONFERENCE PREACHES THE DIVINE INSTITUTION OF THE LOCAL CONGREGATION AND ITS PASTORAL OFFICE

The Church is any chance gathering of Christians, so that any chance gathering of those who call themselves Christians has the full power of the keys -- whether that gathering be a synod, a local congregation, a pastoral conference, a laymen's conference, a Bible class, a ladies aid, or whatever. We must also recognize various ministries in the Church besides or on an equal par with the pastoral office, such as, the ministry of teaching, the ministry of education, the ministry of music, the ministry of social services, the ministry of this, the ministry of that, etc., etc. This is the kind of doctrinal position on the Church and Ministry we hear expressed today in the Wisconsin Synod, the Church of the Lutheran Confession, and the Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

We have, of course, no quarrel with those who want to use the word "church" in a purely non-Biblical sense, such as calling a house of worship or a religious denomination a "church." Likewise, we have no quarrel with those who want to use the word "ministry" in a wider or looser sense and apply it simply to those who serve others in a Christian context. However, to make these non-Biblical uses of the terms "church" and "ministry" equal to the specific sense in which these terms are used in the Bible is ludicrous to say the least.

In the congregations of our Conference, every pastor preaches the divine institution of the visible Local Christian Congregation and of its Pastoral Office specifically. We find that the pastors and professors who hold to

the strange teachings on Church and Ministry in the Lutheran bodies mentioned above, place great and undue emphasis on **linguistics** and **etymology** *and, especially in this instance, let* **man's wisdom** *in these* areas of academics lead them into the development of their pet doctrines. If they, however, were to use such a method of Biblical interpretation consistently, for example, with regard to the doctrine of Baptism, they would have to insist upon immersion as the only mode of baptizing. The mode of baptism, however, must be based upon how the word is used by God Himself in the Bible and NOT upon what man's etymological or linguistic impression is of that word or its meaning set forth in some dictionary or thesaurus.

The etymology of a word or its use insisted upon by great and learned linguists is of minor moment for Biblical interpretation *when compared* with how God Himself uses that word in the Scriptures. In the church bodies mentioned above there were those who insisted that because the word "*ekklesia*," etymologically speaking, means "*the called-out ones,*" this term can therefore refer only to the true believers wherever this term is used in the Bible. Then there were those who found that the word "*ekklesia*," linguistically speaking, refers to an assembly or gathering of people, any gathering, and therefore proceeded to apply this meaning to every use of "*ekklesia*" in the Bible. And so we find it taught in these Lutheran bodies that the word "*ekklesia*" (or "church" as it is translated in the Bible) refers to any gathering of the "*called-out ones*" or Christians. How they can determine WHO they are, because ONLY "*the Lord knoweth them that are His,*" naturally becomes very difficult for them to explain, for the Lord God has not given us the power to determine that even **one** *professing* Christian is a true believer. We **cannot** even state with absolute certainty that wherever two or three are gathered together *professing* Jesus' name, at least one of them is a believer.

Looking at the Biblical use of the word "*ekklesia*" (church), it does not take a genius or a great theologian to discover that this word is used in ONLY **TWO** WAYS throughout the New Testament (with the exception of its purely secular use in the Book of Acts, chapter 19, where it is translated "*assembly*" in the KJV and where it refers to a confused mob of heathen people who were stirred up by the silversmiths of Ephesus to assemble in the theater). Elsewhere, and in its **true spiritual sense**, the word "*ekklesia*" (church) refers ONLY **1**) to **the great invisible**

gathering of all true believing children of God on earth and in heaven (the Una Sancta or the Holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints -- the Church Militant and the Church Triumphant) and **2**) to **the local gathering of Christians** (as God sees them) or **of *professing* Christians** (as men see them and as the only way in which they are able to function among men in this world) who regularly assemble for public worship -- for the regular hearing and learning of God's Word and the frequent use of the Lord's Supper as well as teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.

The Church, in the sense of the Local Congregation as God sees it, is therefore the TRUE BELIEVERS who, according to God's command, **regularly assemble together** at a certain location for public worship (Heb. 10:25; Col. 3:16; Eph. 5:19); **celebrate frequently the Lord's Supper in their gatherings** (I Cor. 11:26); **establish the Office of the Ministry** (the Pastoral Office) **in their midst** (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5); **endeavor to maintain the unity of the Spirit** (Eph. 4:3; I Thess. 4:9,10; I Cor. 1:10); **exercise the divinely ordained discipline of the church** (Matt. 18:17; I Cor. 5:1-13; 6:1-8; II Cor. 2:6-11; Gal. 6:1; I Thess. 5:14; II Thess. 3:6,14,15; II John 10,11); and **perform works of Christian charity** (I Cor. 16:3; etc.). NOW, *these things* which God requires of the true believers in any locality *can be accomplished **only** as a **visible** communion of professing Christians among whom there are or may be hypocrites* (unbelievers). The Bible *therefore* also uses the word "Church" in the sense of the Local Congregation **as men see it**. Such a *visible* local congregation MUST therefore be regarded as a divine institution because the functions, obligations, and responsibilities which the Holy Ghost places upon Christians in a certain respective locality require the very existence of such a visible local congregation and permit of no other conclusion than that the local visible congregation (and NOT any chance gathering of Christians) is indeed instituted and ordained by God. Not the etymological or linguistic use of a word, but ***the way that word is used in Scripture*** is the way we permit God to speak to us through His Word. We are then on safe ground and not on the sinking sand of man's wisdom.

Moreover, we can be absolutely certain that in the local visible church there are true believing children of God because of God's promise in Isaiah 55:10,11. In what other grouping of Christians is the Word of

God so regularly and consistently in use ("*as the rain cometh down and the snow from heaven*") than in that local visible Christian church where the Word of God is taught in its full truth and purity and the Sacraments are administered according to Christ's institution? There, above any other place, the promise of God will indeed be fulfilled, namely, that His Word, like the rain and the snow which saturates the earth and makes it bring forth and bud, will accomplish that which He pleases and will prosper in the thing whereto He sent it.

Furthermore, the phrase "*to minister*" certainly means *to serve,* and the word "*minister*" certainly means *a servant*, and the word "*ministry*" certainly refers to *an office of service.* In this way these words are used in a general sense in the Bible. But it is not in a general sense that God requires the local Christian congregation to establish in its midst the Office of the Public Ministry or the Pastoral Office. The incumbents of this office are referred to in Scripture as ministers, bishops, elders, pastors and teachers. In I Cor. 4:1, the Apostle Paul refers to himself, the Apostle Peter and Apollos (who was not an apostle, but a local pastor in the church at Corinth) as "***ministers** of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God*" (see also I Cor. 3:5). Speaking of the duties of the local pastors as shepherds and overseers of their respective congregations, the Apostle Peter refers to them as "*elders*" and to himself also as an "*elder,*" I Peter 5:1.

The Pastoral Office is set apart from the Universal Priesthood of all true believers and from all man-made offices by the specific God-given functions, duties, qualifications, authority, responsibilities, and honor due to the office of the local pastor. All of these are spelled out very clearly in such passages as Titus 1:5-9; Acts 20:28; I Peter 5:2; II Cor. 4:5; I Cor. 4:1; II Cor. 5:21; I Thess. 5:12,13; I Tim. 5:17; Gal. 6:6; I Cor. 9:14; Heb. 13:17; and I Tim. 3:1-7. On the basis of **these clear Scripture texts** (without any historical, linguistic, etymological, exegetical maneuvering or rationalism) every pastor in our Concordia Lutheran Conference preaches, by God's grace alone, that the Pastoral Office, the Office of the Ministry of the Word, as well as the local visible congregation, is indeed a divine institution. And may the Lord keep us steadfast in this **true** teaching of His Word on the Church and its Ministry that we may not, together with the Lutheran bodies mentioned above, fall into the error of Korah and his followers (Numbers 16:3) which is referred to also in Jude 8-11. Here we have, in these bodies,

prominent pastors and religious leaders minimizing the pastoral office by equating it with all the various offices of the church and synod and by not clearly distinguishing it from the general priesthood of all believers, and, by their false teaching on the doctrine of the Church, threatening to destroy the God-given autonomy of the local congregation. *From such preserve us dear heavenly Father!*

-- P. R. B.

CONVENTION ESSAY

delivered to the
45th Annual Convention
of the
CONCORDIA LUTHERAN CONFERENCE

by the Rev. Mark W. Dierking,
Pastor, St. Stephen's Ev. Lutheran Church
Wilmot, South Dakota

Dear pastors, delegates, and brothers and sisters in the faith, assembled here in Seattle, Washington around God's precious Word for the 45th Annual Convention of our Concordia Lutheran Conference:

On February 18, 1546, 450 years ago, a former Roman Catholic monk felt a crushing pain in his chest. His name was Dr. Martin Luther, and as the day passed on into evening, he became more and more aware that death was approaching. But Luther was not fearful, for by the grace of God he was ***"confident of this very thing, that [God] which [had] begun a good work in [him would] perform it until the day of Jesus Christ"*** (Philippians 1:6), that is, that the gracious God who had brought him to faith through the waters and Word of baptism, who had restored and preserved him in the faith throughout all the turbulent years of his ministry, would keep His promise and deliver him from this vale of tears into the glory of heavenly mansions. But you can be sure that Luther was not in his bedchamber alone. His sinful flesh was still there with him and Satan was most certainly at his ear, whispering to him, reminding him constantly of his sinfulness and unworthiness before God, trying to cause Luther to despair of his salvation. It is not without reason then that Luther three times spoke the words of Psalm 31:5 -- spoke them so loudly that he could be heard in the next room through a closed door: ***"In manus tuas commendo spiritum meum, redemisti me Domine, Deus veritatis,"*** that is, ***"Into thine hand I commit my spirit: Thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth!"*** As his physical strength failed him and he lay in his bed, three times he said out loud the precious promise of John 3:16, thereby being reassured by the Holy Spirit of the truth that ***"God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but***

have everlasting life." Even as his own flesh and Satan tried to devour him, the Holy Spirit preserved Luther, focusing his heart and soul on the central objective truth of His Word, that God had graciously and freely forgiven Luther and all men their sins for the sake of the life and death of His beloved Son, Jesus Christ, and it was these truths alone that comforted Luther as he fell asleep in Jesus. By God's grace Luther remained faithful unto the end.

The glorified Savior exhorts us, as we hear in our Convention Motto this year, ***"Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life,"*** Revelation 2:10. Luther had accomplished much for the Gospel in his lifetime. Indeed, God had used him to restore the Gospel to His Church on earth and to reveal unto the world the Antichrist, the Roman Pontiff, which, St. Paul tells us, had to take place before the end comes (II Thessalonians 2:3). But when Luther knew he was facing death, did he rely upon what he had effected, the fact that he was willing even to suffer death for the sake of His Savior? No, he relied upon the objective Gospel, the truth that His sins were forgiven, not because of any works that he had done, but for the sake of the perfect life, bitter death, and glorious resurrection of Christ Jesus, the Son of God, for the whole world.

Indeed, both things which Paul tells the Thessalonians would have to be fulfilled before Christ would come again in glory have already taken place: **First**, the Antichrist has been identified. **Secondly**, we even now are seeing the great apostasy, the great falling away from the Christian faith, the last of the precursors of Christ's Second Coming. So He may indeed appear at any moment to end this present age and to take us from this present evil world into a new heaven and a new earth. Because none of us knows when his end may come, because death may overtake us at any moment, because a Christian by his own fault can fall away from the faith, it is altogether appropriate that we focus our attention on the theme of our essay for this year,

"THE CHRISTIAN'S PERSEVERANCE IN THE FAITH."

May God the Holy Spirit guide us through this essay, that all that is written and said may be to the glory of our God and Savior and to the edification of each person who reads or hears it. Amen.

I.

Before we can begin any discussion of final perseverance, first **it is necessary that we understand the true nature of Saving Faith** or, in other words, what is saving faith? Saving faith **is not**, as the Roman Catholic Church teaches, a mere knowledge of the intellect, a rudimentary acceptance of or assent to whatever the church teaches without any knowledge or understanding of what these things are. On the other hand, neither is saving faith simply becoming or remaining a member of an orthodox Lutheran congregation in and of itself, no matter how much knowledge one may have of the truths of God's Word. Dr. C. F. W. Walther bemoaned the fact that most Lutherans of his day had only a kind of vague hope of their salvation. He said: "Either people are spiritually dead and therefore careless and think they will surely get to heaven; or they are anxious and uncertain. How many meet death with the thought: Will I reach heaven or not? That is a terrible faith, a form faith. No, faith must be certain!"[1] True, justifying faith doesn't question salvation given freely by God's grace, but is the sure, certain, absolute confidence that one is indeed justified by God for the sake of Jesus' substitutionary life and death. Faith is a living, vibrant confidence in the grace of God in Christ through whom the remission of our sins has been earned and given. Faith is so sure that it is willing to suffer anything, to give up anything, to deny anything to the self for the sake of that salvation earned by Christ and given us by grace. In the Apology to the Augsburg Confession, Melanchthon clearly asserts the true nature of saving faith where he writes:

> "That faith which justifies is not merely a knowledge of history, [not merely this, that I know the stories of Christ's birth, suffering, etc., (that even the devils know,)] but it is to assent to the promise of God, in which, for Christ's sake, the remission of sins and justification are freely offered. [It is the certainty or the certain trust in the heart, when, with my whole heart, I

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[1] As quoted by A. E. Wagner, "The Certainty of Salvation," Abiding Word, Vol. I, p. 223

regard the promises of God as certain and true, through which there are offered me, without my merits, the forgiveness of sins, grace, and all salvation, through Christ the Mediator.] And that no one may suppose that it is mere knowledge, we will add further: it is to wish and receive the offered promise of the remission of sins and of justification. [Faith is that my whole heart takes to itself this treasure. It is not my doing, not my presenting or giving, not my work or preparation, but that a heart comforts itself, and is perfectly confident with respect to this, namely, that God makes a present and gift to us, and not we to Him, that He sheds upon us every treasure of grace in Christ.]"[2]

Such saving faith is clearly God's work, not man's, as the Apology correctly states. Man can do nothing to attain saving faith, nothing to deserve it, nothing to merit it. The Christian's saving faith is worked in Him **solely** by the grace of God and, because it is solely the work of God, it is absolutely sure and certain, for its certainty is founded in God and not in the heart of the Christian.

Just as saving faith is solely the work of God, so **also final perseverance, that is, remaining in the faith unto the day of salvation, is the work of God alone**. Paul testifies, ***"It is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure,"*** Philippians 2:13. Scripture clearly teaches that it is God alone who works faith in the Christian's heart and that it is *God alone who maintains that faith unto the end.* ***"[GOD] SHALL ALSO CONFIRM YOU UNTO THE END, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ,"*** I Corinthians 1:8. ***"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to His abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who ARE KEPT BY THE POWER OF GOD THROUGH FAITH UNTO SALVATION ready to be revealed in the last time,"*** I Peter 1:3-5. Dr. Franz Pieper writes of this

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[2] Triglotta, "The Apology of the Augsburg Confession, p. 135, para 48

powerful verse: "God has begotten the Christians to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, through faith unto salvation.' Here is a declaration, without any reservations or restrictions (1) that the inheritance of Christians is reserved in heaven for them by God, and (2) that they, the Christians, are kept by the power of God through faith for that inheritance so that nothing shall separate the heirs from their inheritance."[3] It is evident from these texts that God not only works faith in the Christian's heart, but also maintains and preserves that faith in the heart of every Christian unto the promised inheritance of life eternal in the heavenly mansions. So final perseverance, like the creation of saving faith in the heart of man, is dependent solely upon God and is not and cannot be contingent upon anything that a man does. God is the Guarantor, and that makes the promise sure!

Because it is God that confirms us, that is, keeps us in the saving faith unto the end, the final perseverance of the Christian is as sure and certain in the heart of the Christian as is faith itself; for, just as faith is not our work or creation and thus is not dependent upon us, so also our preservation and perseverance unto the end is sure and certain, not because of anything that we have done or do, but because God is faithful and His promises cannot be broken: ***"He abideth faithful: He cannot deny Himself!"*** II Timothy 2:13. He promises to guard and defend us against every foe; indeed, even the gates of hell shall not prevail against us (Matthew 16:18). To be sure, Satan will come to every Christian's heart and assail and attack him with doubts as to his faith and final perseverance in that faith. Such doubts, however, are not of faith. They are sin and the fruit of the Old Adam in us. Thus, doubts are not to be praised as some inward evidence of humility. No, they are to be condemned as sin, and must be drowned daily in contrition and repentance, and the heart must turn once again to the assurances of God in His Word. ***"If our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things,"*** I John 3:20.

If perseverance in the faith unto the end is God's work alone, why does Scripture then exhort Christians to ***"be ... faithful unto death,"*** to ***"work out your own salvation with fear and trembling,"*** Philippians 2:12? Why these warnings against falling away from the

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[3] Franz Pieper, Christian Dogmatics, Vol. III, p. 95

faith, against apostasy? Such admonitions are given to Christians because of the Old Adam within them. In Popular Symbolics, the following explains this "dilemma" clearly:

> "The warnings against apostasy, Rom. 11:20f; I Cor. 10:12, are aimed not at the confidence of faith, but at carnal security, self-confidence; heeding them, the Christian casts himself upon the Gospel promises and thus obtains and retains the certainty of final salvation. So also the 'fear and trembling' of Phil. 2:12, resulting from the realization of weakness and inability, does not replace the confidence of faith, but exists side by side with it and subserves it. The assertion that one who knows that he may become a castaway (I Cor. 9:27) cannot have the assurance that he will not become a castaway may be logically correct, but is theologically false; Rom. 8:38. The difficulty which this matter presents cannot be solved by means of logic, but only by distinguishing between the Law and the Gospel. The convictions produced by the Law must not, and do not, eliminate the convictions produced by the Gospel, the assurance of perseverance, but subserve them."[4]

If final perseverance is indeed the work of God alone, then the next question that naturally arises in such a discussion is the *crux theologorum*, the question, "Why do some persevere unto the end while others do not?" Since it is by grace alone that a man remains faithful unto death, why does one man remain faithful and another man fall from faith and lose his eternal salvation? Why did Peter, who sinned greatly by denying his Lord, repent and thereafter persevere in his faith unto everlasting life, while Judas, who also sinned greatly by betraying his Lord, despaired of all mercy, all grace, lost his faith and hanged himself? These questions and others like them are rightly called the *crux theologorum*. The questions "Why some and not others?", "Why some before others?", and "Why not all?" are not answered in the Scriptures. So instead of letting Scripture speak for itself, many try to make

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[4] Th. Engelder; W. Arndt; Th. Graebner; F. E. Meyer; Popular Symbolics, p. 75

Scripture speak from its silence. If answers to these questions are sought when Scripture itself does not answer them, such speculation inevitably leads to the false doctrines of synergism, semi-Pelagianism, or Calvinism. What God has revealed to us in His Word regarding those who are saved and those who are damned is the following: **1)** God's grace is most certainly extended to all men (*gratia universalis*); ***"[God] will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth,"*** I Timothy 2:4; **2)** Saving faith is worked in man and preserved in him by the grace of God alone (*sola gratia*); ***"By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast,"*** Ephesians 2:8,9; and **3)** If a man is lost eternally, if he never comes to faith, or if he comes to faith and then falls from that faith, he is lost by his own fault alone; ***"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and YE WOULD NOT!"*** Matthew 23:37.

Thus, the fault if one does not persevere unto the end is not God's, but man's alone. Many of the Reformed church bodies and, tragically, many so-called Lutherans deny this truth in their public doctrine and have fallen into the trap of synergism. They quote Philippians 2:12, ***"Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling"*** to prove that man must contribute something to his perseverance in the faith -- whether that something is passive or active, i.e. lesser guilt, lesser resistance to the Holy Ghost, making a "decision for Christ," exercising the moral qualities of the new life, etc. Thus, they argue: if evil works and the evil conduct of man bring about the loss of faith, it must follow that perseverance in the faith depends on man's abstaining from evil conduct and doing that which is right and pleasing in God's sight (see the Majoristic Controversy, Historical Introduction to the Concordia Triglotta, pp. 112-124). They fail to take note of verse 13 in Philippians 2, which sets forth the truth so clearly that perseverance is God's work alone and not man's work, for after Paul exhorts Christians to ***"work out your own salvation with fear and trembling,"*** he immediately adds: ***"for IT IS GOD WHICH WORKETH IN YOU both to will and to do of His good pleasure."*** According to the synergists, if man does not contribute at least *that* much, that is, lesser guilt, lesser resistance to the Holy Ghost, etc., to his perseverance in faith, then both man's conversion and man's perseverance in the faith would be

accomplished by coercion. Both man's conversion and his preservation in the faith by God's grace *alone* the synergists cannot abide, for they believe they must supply some sort of human answer to the *crux theologorum*, and their answer is that it is not by grace alone (*sola gratia*). But as Pieper correctly notes: "The person who holds, not merely at his desk and in his polemics, but in his heart and before God, that his salvation rests not exclusively with his gracious God, but depends also on his conduct, has lost his faith. It is the nature of Christian faith to rest on pure grace, and faith ceases the moment a man widens the foundation to include human good conduct."[5]

Just as damning is the argument of the Calvinists of "once saved, always saved," that once a man has been converted he cannot fall from the faith and so his final perseverance is assured. This error, too, springs from the *crux theologorum*. Calvin, however, claimed to believe that man is saved by grace alone. The difficulty with Calvinism is that the grace of God it speaks of is not the grace of God as revealed by God in the Scriptures. They pervert the grace of God in two ways: First, Calvinists maintain that since some persevere unto the end while others do not, God must have predestined some to eternal salvation while predestinating the rest of mankind to eternal damnation (double predestination). They hold that the outcome, namely, that few are chosen, must be indicative of the will of God, and thus attribute to Him a **double** predestination -- that God not only predestined some to eternal **life**, but predestined the bulk of mankind to eternal **damnation**. Calvinists arrive at this remarkable unscriptural teaching by denying the *gratia universalis*, that the grace of God is truly extended to all men, and they do this by changing the wording in key passages of Scripture, i.e. John 3:16; I John 2:2 from "world" to "elect." Flowing from this denial of universal grace is yet another perversion of grace itself. The Calvinists actually argue that the grace of God **is not resistible,** contrary to what Jesus Himself says in Matthew 23:37, ***"ye would not."*** They begin with the premise that God's salutary work, like His governance of the universe, flows from God's omnipotent, irresistible power. While properly maintaining divine monergism in conversion and preservation of faith, they improperly credit saving faith to the naked, omnipotent operation of God which cannot be resisted, i.e. the power which God

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[5] Franz Pieper, Christian Dogmatics, Vol. III, p. 94

used to create and uses to preserve the universe. Calvinism maintains that once a man is converted by the grace of God, he cannot lose his faith, no matter what he does. Indeed, Calvinism holds that a man can live in gross and open sin and still have saving faith in his heart and persevere unto the end. Answering this error, Friedrich Philippi (1809-1882) wrote:

> "Though it is true that no one and nothing can pluck [the elect] out of the hand of God and Christ, since the omnipotence and grace of God is stronger than all earthly powers, this does not do away with the fact that we can willfully and voluntarily break away from God. Though tribulation cannot separate us from God, our sin can."[6]

So the Calvinist will always find himself with either false security about his faith and perseverance in that faith, or with absolutely no comfort whatsoever regarding his salvation because he cannot be sure he is among the elect.

This leads us to the relationship of final perseverance to the election of grace. First, it must be noted that God's eternal election *is* an election of grace. John Theodore Mueller in his Christian Dogmatics defines election so that even the simplest of us can understand it:

> "Election is the eternal act of God with respect to all who are saved, by which, out of pure grace and for Christ's sake (*Praedestinatio gratuita et libera est*) [Predestination is gracious and free], He purposed to endow them in time with the spiritual blessings of conversion, justification, sanctification, and preservation unto life eternal. ... The doctrine of election centers in the consolatory message that whatever spiritual

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[6] Franz Pieper, Christian Dogmatics, Vol. III, p. 95, footnote #10

blessings God's saints receive in time He has graciously decreed for them from eternity."[7]

Paul states these truths in his Epistle to the Romans where he writes: ***"All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose. For WHOM HE DID FOREKNOW, HE ALSO DID PREDESTINATE to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the Firstborn among many brethren. Moreover WHOM HE DID PREDESTINATE, THEM HE ALSO CALLED: and WHOM HE CALLED, THEM HE ALSO JUSTIFIED: and WHOM HE JUSTIFIED, THEM HE ALSO GLORIFIED. What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?"*** Romans 8:28-32.

The election of grace does not exist so that we can try to look into the mind of God and thereby determine whether or not we are among the elect. The doctrine of election exists solely for the comfort of Christians -- and that includes the Christian's comfort regarding his perseverance in the faith. All the spiritual blessings that the Christian enjoys can be traced back to his election: his call by the Gospel, his conversion or coming to faith, his justification, his sanctification, and yes, his preservation and final perseverance are all a **result** of God's election of grace. Two basic truths must be forever carried in one's mind and heart regarding election and final perseverance: First, God's eternal election **DID NOT TAKE PLACE IN VIEW OF MAN'S FORESEEN FINAL FAITH** (*intuitu fidei finalis*), but rather embraced saving faith in Jesus with all the blessings of salvation such as conversion, justification, sanctification, and final preservation in the faith. In other words, election is the **effective cause** of all these blessings. What God ordained in eternity He brought about in time. Secondly, anyone who denies that his election, conversion, justification, sanctification, and final perseverance is due to the grace of God alone (*sola gratia*), but includes some good quality, some inner worthiness (i.e. lesser resistance, lesser guilt, etc.), has erred in his doctrine and, if he truly hold to this fallacy in his heart, he has also erred from the faith, that is, has fallen from the faith -- if he ever had it to begin with. Thus, when we discuss perse-

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[7] p. 585

verance in the faith in relation to God's election of grace, the Christian can take great comfort from the fact that what God ordained in eternity, He will carry out in time, that is, He will call us by the Gospel, enlighten us with His gifts, sanctify us and **keep us** in the one true faith unto life everlasting. Thus, if we wish to be sure of our election and salvation, we must trust in the grace of God offered to us and to all men in the Gospel.

However, some argue, Peter urges us to make our calling and election sure by adding good works to our faith. Peter indeed urges us to make our calling and election sure and thus to make our final perseverance sure; but Peter does not make our works either a cause or a contributing factor to our election or final perseverance. In II Peter 1:2ff. we read: *"Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord, according as His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him that hath called us to glory and virtue: Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall"* (vv. 2-9). Note that Peter begins with the great and precious promises of the Gospel. This is where every Christian must begin and end every day, in the gracious promises of God, namely, that we are reconciled to Him by the substitutionary work of His Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ, and that through Him we, even now, have everlasting life. Through these Gospel promises God Himself has worked and preserves living, justifying faith in our hearts, thereby making us partakers of His divine nature, so that the image of God in which He originally created man is renewed in the Christian. The perfection of that image, however, cannot be attained in this life because we still have the Old Adam with us, but a beginning is made. Flowing out of this justifying faith created in our hearts by the Holy Spirit

through the promises of the Gospel itself, Christians are to add to their faith, that is, show as evidences of their faith the fruits of faith which Peter enumerates -- virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and the crown of them all, charity or love. Peter correctly notes that where these evidences of living faith abound, where they increase day by day in the life of the Christian, that Christian can be sure that the precious promises of the Gospel have changed him; that he truly is a "new creature"; that the old things of the Old Adam are being combated daily and that the New Man in us truly desires to do the works of God. So yes, we are to make our calling and election sure, but it is not the performance of outward works in and of itself that accomplishes this goal, but true, living, vibrant, powerful faith in the promises of God -- which promises include our final perseverance, the fruits of which faith are an outward testimony that we are of the elect.

This leads us to one final question before we end this section of our essay: If one is concerned about whether or not he is a Christian, if he wonders whether or not his sins are truly forgiven him, whether or not he has saving faith, whether or not he will persevere unto the end, he should not turn to his outward fruits to be assured of his salvation. The fruits of faith can never assure us of our salvation nor our final preservation. No, when one questions whether or not he truly has saving faith, whether or not his sins are forgiven, whether or not he will be preserved unto the end, he must turn to those exceedingly great and precious promises of the Gospel and ***"[be] ... confident of this very thing, that He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ,"*** Philippians 1:6. ***"Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen."*** Jude 24-25.

II.

Final perseverance in the faith is so sure and certain because God is the Guarantor. Therefore it would seem that no Christian should ever hold his final salvation in doubt. As we all know, however, that is not the case. Christians still have the Old Adam with them and, hard as they war against it, at times that Old Adam gains the upper hand in the battle, and questions and doubts arise. (See Romans 7:14-25). Thus, in

the second part of our essay, we are going to examine some of the causes of those questions and doubts.

It should be noted, first of all, that no matter what the problem is, no matter what the doubt or the seeming cause of the doubt of one's final perseverance is, all such weaknesses are sin, and all are traceable to one thing: a perversion of the doctrine of the grace of God. No matter how trivial a perversion of God's grace something may seem, the Christian must know in his heart of hearts on the basis of God's Word that there is no such thing as a "trivial" perversion of the grace of God, for any and every single perversion is always disastrous for immortal souls. So what is this grace of God upon which the certainty of our final perseverance hinges? It is the unmerited, unwarranted love of God for miserable sinners in and through Christ Jesus. Luther writes: "According to the usage of Scripture, grace signifies that favor of God which wishes us well and justifies us. That is, it freely grants us the faith [in Christ] which alone justifies us."[8] So Paul writes to the Ephesians: ***"Even when we were dead in sins, [God] hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved)"*** (Ephesians 2:5); and again to the Romans, chapter 3, verse 24: ***"Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."*** We could quote scores of other passages explaining, equally clearly, what the grace of God is -- but even one clear passage is sufficient. A thousand clear passages, however, are evidently not sufficient for the vast majority of visible Christendom. The Roman Catholic Church, from the Reformation forward, has hurled anathemas on anyone who dares to say that grace is simply the favor of God for poor sinners by which sinners are justified. Instead, they still teach today that grace is "the charity which is poured forth in their hearts by the Holy Ghost" (*gratia infusa*), infused grace, a kind of blood transfusion or "grace transfusion" whereby the sinner is enabled to do works pleasing to God and earn his own justification. This "trivial" perversion of grace robs hearts crushed by the Law of any possible comfort and condemns souls to constant uncertainty, not only about their perseverance in the faith, but about their very salvation. Indeed, where this perversion or any perversion of God's grace is held to in the heart, there is no faith, for faith is the gift of God alone, a gift of His grace, and anything or anyone that says otherwise is calling God a liar.

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[8] Martin Luther, What Luther Says, Vol. II, p. 603, #1838

Tragically, such perversion of the grace of God is not just in the Romish church, but the Reformed churches also trivialize grace by referring to it as "the inner light," "the indwelling of the Spirit," "the Christ in us," a "gracious experience," or, they have limited grace to only a portion, a very small fragment of mankind, actually changing the word "world" in John 3:16 and similar passages to refer only to the elect. The Reformed still use the word grace -- indeed, they use it a great deal -- but they have destroyed its Scriptural meaning; they have turned and twisted it until it actually has become another word for "works." As one Lutheran pastor put it regarding the Reformed view of grace, "Justified by grace is said to mean justified by personal experience."[9] So both the Romish church and the Reformed churches have robbed precious souls of the only means of salvation, the grace of God in Christ Jesus, and turned grace into either an active "work" or a passive "feeling," and with such "grace" have thus robbed souls of any peace about their own salvation, much less about their perseverance in the faith. To repeat again, then, **grace is the undeserved, unmerited, unwarranted love of God for sinful mankind, the favor of God in Christ Jesus, by which favor God forgives the sins of all men;** and it is this grace which is the **SOLE SOURCE** and **CERTAINTY** of our salvation and perseverance in the faith. With this in mind, we look at some of the temptations to which even sincere and informed Christians are subject with regard to their perseverance in the faith.

The most obvious of these temptations is simply "carnal security," that is, fleshly security. There is probably no more dangerous or insidious delusion into which a sincere Christian may fall. Carnal security is simply believing that everything is okay in one's life as a Christian when in reality it isn't. Orthodox Lutherans are not exempt from this temptation; indeed, they are an even greater target for Satan to attack than some poor deluded soul who truly believes that he is justified by his own works. Once again, simply being a member of an orthodox Lutheran congregation does not guarantee that one is a believer or that one will persevere unto the end. Having a mental knowledge of the doctrines of God's Word is not a guarantee of one's perseverance.

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[9] A. E. Wagner, "The Certainty of Salvation," The Abiding Word, Vol. 1, p. 225.

Simply sitting in a pew Sunday after Sunday, but living one's life like the rest of the world Monday through Saturday, certainly means that one is living in carnal security. Living in carnal security is knowing with one's head that he was baptized, that he was confirmed in the Lutheran church, that he knows all the doctrines of the Lutheran church, that he faithfully sits in a pew Sunday after Sunday, that he is an active member, takes his turn at cleaning, or mowing, or teaching -- or preaching sermon after sermon (for pastors are not exempt), -- but somewhere along that long road, that individual, like the many members of the church in Ephesus to which the glorified Christ speaks in Revelations 2, has lost his first love. Such a person feels secure in his faith, but his faith is an empty sham; it is no faith. Such a person has the appearance of godliness, but is not experiencing its power in his life (II Timothy 3:5). Sin is never a terror to a person living in carnal security because, after all, he argues, one is only "human," and "we still have the Old Adam." Without ever acknowledging the sin of carnal security, such a man has fallen into dead orthodoxy which the glorified Christ excoriates in His letter to the congregation at Laodicea: ***"I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of My mouth,"*** Revelation 3:15,16 . He has also fallen into the trap of Calvin's "once saved, always saved," "once converted, certainly saved." He convinces himself that all his sins are sins of weakness which are to be expected and, as such, are automatically forgiven. So he believes he can live his life in any way he sees fit and still remain a Christian, no matter what gross sins he may be guilty of committing. Someone who is carnally secure truly believes that he is still a believer, but his confidence is a "self-confidence," an arrogant disdain for the grace of God. It is a reliance on self, not a reliance on Christ. Such a person needs to hear the Law of God and the Law of God alone. Any Christian who resents such preaching of the Law, who will not let himself be warned by the threatenings of God's Law, is heading for his soul's eternal damnation. Such a man has abused the grace of God, trampling the blood of Jesus under foot, crucifying ***"to themselves the Son of God afresh, and [putting] Him to an open shame,"*** Hebrews 6:6. Any assurance such a man has is self-deception. His faith is a sham and his perseverance in that faith is also counterfeit. He is deceiving his own self (I John 1:8).

Equally damning is the notion fostered by the Roman Catholic Church that just the outward act is sufficient for saving faith and perseverance unto the end of faith, eternal glory in heaven. Again, though no orthodox Lutheran would admit to such a spirit, it is an opinion into which any Christian can easily fall. It is called *ex opere operato*, or "the doing does it." Again, just warming a spot in a pew doesn't do one a bit of good if he doesn't hear with his heart the Word of God as it is being proclaimed. Just receiving the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper without real confidence that through them one receives the body and blood of Christ for the forgiveness of sins and strengthening of faith is taking that holy Supper to his own damnation (cf. I Corinthians 10:23-30). One can pray until he is blue in the face, but if all he is doing is repeating meaningless words and empty phrases, giving no thought to what he is saying, or worse yet, no thought to whom he is supposed to be speaking, it is worse than worthless -- it is an affront to a gracious and loving God (cf. Matthew 7:21; Matthew 15:8). Such a person has taken the grace of God and changed it into the simple performance of an outward act without thought as to why, or for what, or to whom he is doing it. He may be confident that he will persevere unto the end because of his outward acts, but such a person cannot persevere in the faith -- he has none.

St. Paul, in writing to the young pastor, Timothy, exhorts him: ***"Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of Truth,"*** II Timothy 2:15. While the admonition rightly to divide the Word of Truth, that is, properly to divide Law and Gospel, is directed specifically to pastors, it applies to all Christians in all aspects of their lives. Confusing Law and Gospel, applying the Law where only the Gospel should be applied, or applying the Gospel where the Law should be applied, or mixing Law and Gospel, is a snare which Christians face every day of their lives. The proper distinction between Law and Gospel must also be maintained with regard to one's assurance of final perseverance. A simple example of this is the command so often heard -- and properly so -- from Lutheran pulpits, ***"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ!"*** Acts 16:31. This is what theologians call a "Gospel imperative." Grammatically it is a command. That cannot be disputed. But it is a command similar to telling a starving man to sit down and eat his fill at a banquet and live. There is no merit on the part of the beggar and **he earns nothing by eating his fill**. He simply is given a gift, a meal; he eats and lives! Faith is similar

to that. Faith is indeed a work, but it merits nothing, it earns nothing, for it is not **that** one believes that saves, but **in whom** one believes. If just the bare words, ***"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ"*** were spoken Sunday after Sunday without any additional explanation, the grace of God **could** be perverted into something terrible. Christ could become nothing more than a new law giver. Faith, if not rightly understood as the open hand of the beggar simply accepting the treasure placed into it, becomes partial payment for sins. If such a notion is not quickly drowned along with the rest of the thoughts of the Old Adam, it could easily overwhelm one, and faith would become a virtuous, heaven-meriting work. Again, a man's perseverance becomes dependent upon what he does, not upon what God has done and continues to do for him. Such a person can have no real confidence, for he can never be sure that he "believes" enough!

Another deception of Satan is to cause one to gauge whether or not he is certain of his salvation and perseverance in the faith **on the basis of how he feels**! Feelings are indeed part and parcel of the Christian faith and are not to be despised. Orthodox Lutherans should not be, as they are often accused of being, feelingless automatons going through the motions of a liturgical service without an honest emotion among the entire congregation. Joy is a feeling. Peace is a feeling. Contentment is a feeling. Love is a feeling. But so is hatred, and discontentment, and uneasiness, and anger, and depression. All are feelings, and all are common to Christians. The first group of feelings is a fruit of the Spirit of God; the second is the fruit of our Old Adam. God knows that man has these feelings and, by His limitless grace, did not make Christian assurance depend upon such feelings; for God knew no matter how hard we worked at it, we could never keep our feelings on an even keel. And yet, how many Christians gauge their faith, and yes, their final perseverance, on how they feel. Pastor A. E. Wagner wrote an essay entitled "The Certainty of Salvation," in which he tells the story of a man who came to him on Monday complaining of how he felt. The man explained that during the divine service and Bible class the previous day, and for the rest of the day, he felt such joy, such peace, such certainty of his salvation and the promise of heaven that was waiting for him. Yet, when he woke up Monday morning, all those feelings were gone. Where he felt joy yesterday, today he felt sadness; where he felt peace, he now felt conflict; where there was certainty the day before, he now felt uncertain. The pastor responded by telling the man how glad he

was that the man was experiencing this. The man was obviously astonished. But the pastor replied: "Yesterday God gave you joy, and today He sees you are resting on your emotions instead of on the promises of Christ." The reason the pastor was glad is that this Monday morning experience was a learning experience. Positive feelings are a wonderful gift from God, but never let anyone rest his faith on those feelings, for they are as changeable as the weather. Whenever and wherever one rests his faith on his feelings, there will never be and can never be confidence regarding his final perseverance, for such a person is never sure from one day to the next whether or not he is in the faith because his feelings change from day to day.

Closely related to those feelings are the trials and tribulations of a Christian and the effect they have on him, either positive or negative. First, understand that not all the tribulations a Christian experiences are of God. Our own sinful flesh does more than enough to bring trials and tribulations upon us, things which we oftentimes may have to pay for in temporal consequences. Satan can also bring times of adversity and pain and affliction. Remember Job. Think of Paul's affliction, the ***"messenger of Satan to buffet [him],"*** II Corinthians 12:7. Though Satan is limited by God as to how far he can go (I Corinthians 10:13), these afflictions can be so great that they would seem able to cast us to the ground and grind us into the dust of which we are made. Finally, God Himself sends afflictions upon us, trials to purify our faith and drive us back to those great and precious promises of Scripture whereby the Spirit strengthens our faith and trust in God and His salvation for humankind. The writer to the Hebrews testifies, ***"For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth,"*** Hebrews 12:6. And Peter writes, I Peter 1:5-7: ***"[Ye] are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ."*** However, such afflictions or crosses can come upon us so suddenly that instead of rejoicing we cry out, "Where is God now? Why isn't His mercy with me now?" Here we have the wonderful promise of God that ***"there hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the***

temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it," I Corinthians 10:13. Here we have God's own gracious promise that He will never allow a trial to come upon us that is so great that it would drive us from the faith, or interfere with the confidence we can have in our final perseverance. However, if the Christian lets the flesh run free under a temptation or trial, he will begin to murmur and complain, thus blaspheming God's Name and calling God a liar. The crosses of the Christian are designed by a gracious God to turn the Christian back to the great and precious promises of the Gospel, not to drive him away. Thus, the Christian must know that ***"tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope"*** (Romans 5:3,4), and that hope is the confidence the Christian has in God's promises, and among those promises is the assurance that God will keep him in the true faith unto the end.

Knowing that both his faith and his perseverance in that faith are by the grace of God alone, no orthodox Lutheran would ever claim that anything he does, thinks, or feels affects his final perseverance. And yet, how many have tried "to make deals with God." "Please, God, if only you'll forgive me this one last time, I promise that I'll never fall into that sin again! ... God, if only you'll get me out of this mess this one last time, I promise that I will be more faithful in reading my Bible ...," and the like. Aware that his works contribute nothing to his salvation, it seems ludicrous that such an attempt to bargain with God would ever be made by an orthodox Christian. But being aware of the fact that our works contribute nothing to our salvation and perseverance, and applying that truth in one's life, are two completely different things. It is a trap into which a Christian can easily fall, and it will always rob the Christian of his assurance of final perseverance.

Finally, there is the sin of uncertainty. How many times have Christians asked themselves whether or not they were really forgiven, whether or not they were really to be counted among God's children? How many times have you asked whether the grace of God in Christ Jesus is also yours, whether or not you will still be a Christian when you face death? Tragically, such questions are not infrequent among Christians, and such questions act like a poison to the entire spirit. Why? Because they all stem from doubt about the grace of God in Christ, about the surety of God's promises. The promises of God are universal. They are *in*tended and *ex*tended to all men. This includes the

promise of final perseverance. Doubts and uncertainty arise because in one way or another we question the fact that we are saved by grace alone, or that the grace of God is extended to all men -- including you and me. Such doubts must be crushed in us. Where such doubts arise, the Christian must turn again to the great and precious promises of God. Where the heart is troubled by sin, then the Gospel alone must be heard and heeded, the promise that God has already forgiven the sins of all mankind for the sake of the substitutionary life and death of His beloved Son, our Savior Jesus Christ; that Jesus kept the Law perfectly in our stead and that His keeping of that Law was sufficient to remove the guilt of all mankind; that He suffered and died to bear in our place the punishment for our sins which we justly deserve; that He rose again, triumphing over sin, death and Satan, making His victory our victory; and that even the desire in the heart of a man that his sins be forgiven for Jesus' sake is saving faith, weak though it be. From that kernel of faith God will, through the continued preaching of the Gospel, produce in us also the assurance of perseverance in the faith unto life everlasting with Him and His Son in the glorious mansions of the New Jerusalem. Yes, when our hearts accuse us, we must turn to God, who says through the Apostle John: ***"If our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things,"*** I John 3:21. And we have the assurance of God that even though our faith be weak and flickering, He will not forsake us, for ***"a bruised reed shall He not break, and the smoking flax shall He not quench,"*** Isaiah 42:3. These, too, are part of the great and glorious promises of God.

This brings us to the third part of our essay, namely, **Final Perseverance and Its Relation to the Means of Grace.**

III.

"The God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, ... give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him: the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of His calling, AND WHAT THE RICHES OF THE GLORY OF HIS INHERITANCE IN THE SAINTS, AND WHAT IS THE EXCEEDING GREATNESS OF HIS POWER TO US-WARD WHO BELIEVE, ACCORDING TO THE WORKING OF HIS MIGHTY POWER, which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places," Ephesians 1:17-20. The Lord Jesus

Himself says: *"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, NEITHER SHALL ANY MAN PLUCK THEM OUT OF MY HAND. My Father, which gave them Me, is greater than all; AND NO MAN IS ABLE TO PLUCK THEM OUT OF MY FATHER'S HAND,"* John 10:27-29. Paul writes: *"[Be] confident of this very thing, that He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ,"* Philippians 1:6. And again Paul writes, *"Faithful is He that calleth you, WHO ALSO WILL DO IT,"* I Thessalonians 5:24; and, *"The Lord is Faithful, WHO SHALL STABLISH YOU, and keep you from evil,"* II Thessalonians 3:3. Peter writes: *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to His abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, RESERVED IN HEAVEN FOR YOU, WHO ARE KEPT BY THE POWER OF GOD THROUGH FAITH UNTO SALVATION ready to be revealed in the last time,"* I Peter 1:3-5. These are just a few of the great and precious promises of God assuring us that He not only works faith in our hearts, but will also preserve that faith in us unto eternal life. What would these promises avail if we knew nothing about them? God could have the greatest intentions for sinful man, but without the Means of Grace, there would be no way that man could take advantage of those intentions -- or even know about them. And these promises are more than just promises. They are the very power which the Holy Spirit uses to work, strengthen, and maintain saving faith in the heart of the Christian. As Paul says, *"I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ: for IT is the power of God unto salvation,"* Romans 1:16. And these promises are to be found nowhere but in the Means of Grace, the Gospel and the Sacraments. Look for them hard as you may, you cannot find these promises revealed anywhere in nature. Your conscience will not speak to you of these promises. They are revealed to mankind only in God's Word. Thus, trust and confidence in those promises are worked in man only through the Means of Grace, the Gospel and the Sacraments -- the means whereby God not only offers and conveys the promises, but seals and assures the Christian in them. And because these promises are more than just promises, but also the very power which God the Holy Spirit uses to work in us trust and confidence in these great and glorious promises, the Christian's final perseverance is inextricably connected to the Means of Grace. Without

the Means of Grace, the Christian could have absolutely no confidence in his salvation today, much less in his final perseverance.

Oh, how good, and great, and transcendent is our God and Savior. Not only does God provide for our salvation through the meritorious work of His Son, but the Spirit also condescends to use His Word and the Sacraments as the Means of creating and maintaining faith in our hearts unto the end -- working our final perseverance in the faith. As Wagner testifies in his essay on "The Certainty of Salvation," a remarkable confirmation of this fact is found in St. John's simple statement in I John 5, verse 8:

> "There are three that bear witness in earth: the Spirit [referring to the Word], the water [meaning baptism], and the blood [the Lord's Supper].' 'And,' he adds, 'these three agree in one'; that is to say, they agree in having one and the same purpose. They are designed to 'bear witness on earth,' and bear witness of the fact 'that God' as he says in verse eleven, 'hath given to us eternal life and this life is in His Son.' Not only do they inform us of this blessed, saving truth, but also 'bear witness' of it, render positive and powerful testimony with the purpose of making us sure of it. Therefore, also St. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians: 'Our Gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance' (I Thess. 1:5). And so the Gospel, both in the Word and Sacraments, (*verbum audibile et visibile*), comes to us still today. Its effectual purpose is to assure, seal, and make us certain of our salvation. The means of grace are the means of certainty."[10]

And that certainty includes our certainty of perseverance unto the end.

Since it is God that has ordained means by which He works and maintains saving faith in the human heart, it would seem inconceivable that anyone would despise and neglect God's Word and the Sacraments.

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[10] A. E. Wagner, "The Certainty of Salvation," The Abiding Word, Vol. 1, p. 227

As inconceivable as it is, however, tragically it is true. Even in orthodox Christian congregations, there can be some who, with little or no conscience qualms, absent themselves regularly from divine services, Bible classes and the Lord's Supper; who never from one Sunday to the next open their Bible and just read for themselves; who never have a family altar where the head of the house can teach and explain to his family the way of salvation. Indeed, as in the parable of the great wedding feast, ***"they all with one consent began to make excuse. The first said unto him, I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come,"*** Luke 14:18-20. "I don't need to be there every Sunday. Besides, God doesn't **require** me to be there. And as far as Bible Class goes, the Bible never mentions such a thing. And what I do in my own home is my business, and *nobody* is going to tell me that I need to have a family altar. I know my family and what they need -- and besides, we're busy keeping up with work, and concerts, and ball games of all sorts, and on, and on, and on ...!" Like the gracious Lord who invites us to that feast, a true Christian pastor, a *seelsorger*, a caretaker of souls, does not urge and exhort the flock ***"over the which the Holy Ghost has made [him] overseer"*** to come regularly and consistently to divine services, to take advantage of Bible classes, just so that there are bodies in the pews. He does not urge his sheep to read their Bibles regularly and with devout attention, nor to have a regular family altar at home just to hear himself speak. No faithful pastor urges his confirmands just to memorize the words with the hope that they will someday understand them and apply them in their lives. No, he requires them to make real effort in their instruction classes so that they know the enchiridion and the Bible passages well for their soul's eternal welfare. A faithful pastor exhorts all to use and memorize the Word because he knows from Scripture and personal experience that if one cuts himself off from the Means of Grace, he is committing spiritual suicide. No one would think of eating one meal a week and call that sufficient to healthy living. Yet, there are those who think that they can partake of the Bread and Water of Life, the Word of God once a week, on Sunday morning, and remain strong, healthy, and confident Christians. What fools such people are! Luther writes regarding hearing the Word:

"Aside from contempt of His Word, we have on our consciences much that goes against our Lord and justly displeases Him: such sins as anger, impatience, covetousness, economic worries, sexual lust, evil desires, unchasteness, hatred, and other vices. These are nothing but great, terrible, mortal sins: everywhere they are taking the world by storm and gaining the upper hand. And yet such sins are nothing compared with the terrible contempt of the divine Word. This is so great and common that coveting, stealing, adultery, fornicating, etc., are truly not so widespread. I dare say they would not be committed at all if we loved and esteemed God's Word. Unfortunately, however, we are experiencing the opposite: all the world is drowned in this sin (of contempt of the Word). Peasants, townsfolk, and they of the nobility care not a fig for the Gospel but snore and consider it no sin to despise or even persecute the Gospel. So I see to my amazement that in the audience in church one yawns in this direction and another in that, and that in so large a group, scarcely ten or twelve are there because they want to remember something of the sermon.

"But in addition to being so common, this sin is also a truly terrible, hellish, devilish sin in that it does not want to be recognized, as do other sins. Everybody considers it a slight matter to attend preaching and not to listen closely. Nay, the majority goes on under the impression that wine and beer taste just as good at sermon time as at another time. No one is concerned about the fact, much less does anyone disturb his conscience by the consideration that he thinks so little of the precious Word.

"This does not happen in the case of other sins, such as murder, adultery, theft. Repentance follows these, if not immediately, yet in its time, so that the heart is terrified because of them and wishes they had not been committed. But that he does not diligently hear the Word, nay, despises, persecutes, adulterates it -- this

> bothers no one's conscience. Therefore contempt of the Word is a sin so terrible that a country and its people must finally be destroyed because of it; for since it remains unrecognized, no repentance, forgiveness, or improvement can follow. This is what happened to Jerusalem, Rome, Greece, and their kingdoms."

Thus far Luther. Tragically, this is the attitude of many professing Christians toward the Word. However, when we stop to consider that our very perseverance in the faith is worked and maintained in us by the Holy Spirit only through the Word and the Sacraments, such despisal is worse than crazy; it is spiritually self-destructive. It is an invitation to fall from the faith, tc lose the precious grace of God in Christ Jesus forever.

The question which now comes to mind is this: Since the New Man in us is the creation of the Holy Spirit through the Means of Grace, and since the New Man truly desires to do the will of God -- indeed, according to I John 3:9, does not sin -- isn't it reasonable to say that the Christian cooperates with the Holy Spirit in availing himself of the Means of Grace? Scripture's answer to this question is an unequivocal yes. Paul writes in I Corinthians 3:9: ***"For we are labourers TOGETHER with God."*** It is true that we have the Old Adam still in us, and that Old Adam wars against the New Man in us. Paul describes this internal battle well, this battle which takes place in every Christian in Romans 7: ***"For we know that the Law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin. For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the Law that it is good. Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the Law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I***

myself serve the Law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin," Romans 7:14-25. The battle is very real -- and were Christians left to themselves, they certainly could not prevail. But as Jesus says to all His disciples: *"The things which are impossible with men are possible with God,"* Luke 18:27. The Christian, according to his New Man, desires the Word of God in his life and in his heart more than anything else. This spirit is expressed well by the Psalmist who wrote: *"I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord,"* Psalm 122:1; and again, *"Lord, I have loved the habitation of Thy house, and the place where Thine honour dwelleth,"* Psalm 26:8; and still again, *"One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in His temple,"* Psalm 27:4; and yet again, *"For a day in Thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness. For the Lord God is a Sun and Shield: the Lord will give grace and glory: no good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly,"* Psalm 84:10,11. The first Christian congregation in Jerusalem set the example for all Christians: *"They continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers ... And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people,"* Acts 2:42-46. Jesus Himself exhorts Christians to remain in His Word, saying: *"If ye continue in My Word, then are ye My disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free,"* John 8:31,32; and of such He says: *"Blessed are they that hear the Word of God, and keep it,"* Luke 11:28. And Paul urges Christians to keep the Word of God the center of their hearts and lives: *"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. So the Christian according to his New Man, whose will is perfectly conformed to the will of God, deliberately chooses good over evil. By God's grace, he chooses to hear and learn and grow in the Word at every opportunity and he refuses to yield to his Old Adam's will which encourages him to despise God's Word by absenting himself from divine services and from Bible classes, by not teaching the Word diligently to his children, and by neglecting family devotions in his home. The New Man in him desires these things, but the Old Adam in the Christian hates

these things, indeed, hates God. And so the battle between *"the spirit"* and *"the flesh"* continues -- the battle in which the New Man must actively ***"crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts"*** and maintain the upper hand over his old sinful flesh.

Are the New Man in the Christian and the Holy Ghost equal partners, then, in the work of sanctification, in preserving the New Man? Absolutely not! Scripture testifies clearly that ***"it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure,"*** Philippians 2:13. Once again we quote those words of Peter written by divine inspiration: ***"Ye are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation,"*** I Peter 1:5. It is true that the New Man cooperates with the Holy Ghost in preserving His faith, but the Source and Power for all of this is God. It was God who worked faith in our hearts through the Gospel, and it is by the power of God in the Gospel that faith is preserved in us. The Christian cooperates in this work in so far as the New Man in him overcomes the Old Adam and continues in those things necessary to preserve saving faith, namely, the Word and the Sacraments. Let no Christian think that he stands in the grace of God or is preserved in the faith by his own power, or even that he contributes to his own preservation in the faith. For the warning of the Apostle Paul speaks to you and to me, ***"Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall!"*** I Corinthians 1:12.

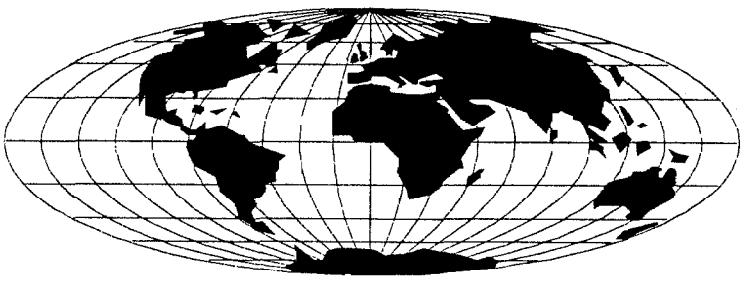
The New Man in the Christian, however, is not a "free agent" who desires and acts according to the will of God by its **own** power, fortitude, and determination. The New Man is **God's** creation, and the Spirit of God and of Christ rests upon and in that New Man, constantly giving to the New Man his life and strength. The Christian, according to his New Man, indeed has a free will in spiritual matters -- but it is God who works in the Christian ***"both to will and to do of His good pleasure,"*** Phil. 2:13. Each true Christian must therefore confess with St. Paul, ***"The life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me,"*** Galatians 2:20. Through Christ every believer can mortify the flesh with its affections and lusts every day of his life. Through Christ the true believer can now choose the things of the spirit over the things of the flesh. Overcoming his Old Adam is an integral part of the Christian's life. The New Man is kept alive and well and functioning in the Christian's life when the believer holds fast to the grace of God in Christ Jesus *through the Means*

of Grace that God has given him; and, to that blessed end, the Christian is nurtured by the regular and consistent hearing of God's precious Gospel and the frequent reception of the Lord's Supper.

Finally, through Christ every believer has the ultimate victory over sin and death and is granted the **gift** of God's limitless grace, eternal life and salvation. Therefore, through the power of Christ in us, we Christians can persevere against the most horrendous of trials, knowing that ***"tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope"*** (Romans 5:3,4), the sure and certain anticipation of the gracious gift of everlasting life with the Father and His Christ in the glories of the heavenly mansions. May God grant us all such perseverance unto the end for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria!

Around the World



with editorial comment

by M. L. Natterer

These tragic words, part of a twisted rewording of the beloved 23rd Psalm, were discovered recently in Reidsville, N.C., in a closed car alongside a dead heroin addict. She was 23 years old. Her death was ruled a suicide. A hookup with the car's exhaust had sent carbon monoxide fumes from a running motor into the vehicle. Here's the complete "Psalm."

King Heroin is my shepherd; I shall always want. He maketh me to lie down in the gutter.

He leadeth me beside the troubled waters.

He destroyeth my soul.

He leadeth me in the paths of wickedness.

Yea, I shall walk through the valley of poverty and will fear no evil, for thou, Heroin, are with me.

Thy needle and capsule comfort me. Thou strippest the table of groceries in the presence of my family. Thou robbest my head of reason.

My cup of sorrow runneth over. Surely heroin addiction shall stalk me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the House of the Damned forever.

The above sacrilegious rendition of the 23rd Psalm appeared in the Dear Abby column of the Sunday Oregonian, January 19, 1997. While we certainly deplore the blasphemous changing of God's Word, at the same time, we recognize that the above words express the cry of a despairing soul. There is simply no doubt about it. Drug addiction has become so widespread in our country -- controlling the lives of thousands upon thousands of adults and teen-agers -- that many within the upper echelon of our government believe that a solution to this problem should take top priority. There is scarcely a city or town, a profession or occupation, that has

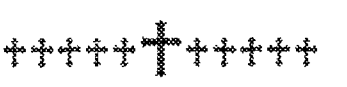
not experienced this growing menace, not to mention the grief and heartache felt by those whose loved ones have been so ensnared. Those who have fallen prey to drug addiction and alcoholism, making them their god contrary to the 1st Commandment, not only ruin their minds and bodies but, above all, their souls. And who can begin to estimate the misery which they cause others. We know, of course, that behind such destruction of bodies and souls is the destroyer himself (Rev. 9:11) who, as the Apostle Peter pictures him to us, "as a roaring lion walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (I Peter 5:8). But there is hope! "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil" (I John 3:8). Now we who are the children of our dear heavenly Father through faith in Christ (Gal. 3:26) can overcome his temptations no matter what they may be! Dressed in the precious garment of Christ's righteousness we can now "resist the devil and he will flee from you" (James 4:7). Likewise, "taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And [taking] the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God: praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit" (Eph. 6:16-18), we Christians can now, by God's grace, declare with the Apostle Paul, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Phil. 4:13).

†††††✝†††††

There is trouble in the "True Family" home. Sun Myung Moon's eldest son, Hyojin Moon, appears to be in hot water not only with Moon but with the Massachusetts' judicial system as well. Last year he was removed from the Unification Church business due to his alcohol and drug abuse. Now, in a Massachusetts courtroom, he has pled guilty to violating a court injunction prohibiting him from contacting his estranged wife, Nansook Hong Moon, and their five children. The sentence handed down was eighteen months probation. The Boston Globe reported, "Nansook fled the lavish family compound in Irvington, N.Y., last August to escape a marriage that she says was ravaged by her husband's alcohol and cocaine induced rages." During the hearing Nansook told the court, "I had reached a point in my life when I could no longer endure and live with the constant threatening, verbal abuse and incidents of physical violence" (June 29, 1996, Metro Section p. 13).

Teaching on the family is a central doctrine of the Unification Church. Sun Myung Moon and his wife, Hak Ja Han, are called the "true Parents" and with their children they constitute the "True Family" in Unification theology. It is through them the heavenly kingdom will be established upon earth. Moon stated, "I represent God, I represent the center of humankind, and I represent True Parents' family, God's family center." One of Moon's daughters, Ye Jin, is said to have denounced her father while another, Sun-Jin, left her husband only weeks after having received her "blessing" (The Sunday Telegraph, Nov. 5, 1995). Moon teaches that Adam failed to accomplish God's plan because of his sin; Jesus failed because he did not marry ... Critics have long pointed out that Moon's first marriage ended in divorce. Some sources even indicate Moon had two other wives between the first Mrs. Moon and the current Mrs. Moon. (Watchman Expositor, Vol. 13, No. 5, 1996)

Look at the thousands who have been taken in by this false prophet! He has blasphemously labeled himself as the promised Messiah who would with his family not only provide the perfect example but also unite couples in marriage with his indispensable blessing which includes the couple drinking a wine mixture containing tiny amounts of blood from Moon and his wife. Early in the 1980s Moon was convicted of failing to report $112,000 in interest from a $1.6 million bank account, and $50,000 in stock held in his name as personal income. Moon's Unification Church is one of the newer religious cults which have been sweeping the country for the last decades. It claims to have 3 million followers worldwide and assets worth several billion dollars. All this is, of course, a fulfillment of what the Lord Jesus foretells. "MANY false prophets shall arise, and shall deceive many" (Matt. 24:11). We Christians know from the Word of God that marriage is indeed God's institution and a gift of His immeasurable love. And only when married Christian couples sincerely strive to follow the Word of God (Ephesians 5:22-33), can there really be a lifelong harmonious companionship of mutual understanding and unselfish cooperation!



Rita Swan keeps a folder stuffed with pictures of smiling kids, all of them now dead. They died for lack of medical care as their parents prayed, she says -- just as her own son died 19 years ago. The folder's

contents inspire Swan in her efforts to end legal protection for parents who allow harm to their children in the name of religion. The former Christian Scientist has helped change the law in four states ... but until this year her battle has consisted of small victories and big disappointments ... The breakthrough came in January when the Supreme Court let stand a $1.5-million verdict against four Christian Scientists ... After Swan's son, 16-month-old Matthew, died of treatable meningitis, Christian Scientists made her feel guilty, telling her that prayer would have saved the boy if Swan had been more pure or religious. Swan, now 52, and her husband Doug, 56, broke from the church and severed ties with her family ... At least 165 children have died since 1975 because medical care was withheld on religious grounds, Swan said. (Los Angeles Times, June 2, 1996)

The Christian Scientist does not believe in the Triune God of the Bible but rather in a principle. How can a person even pray to a principle, expecting to be delivered from sin, sickness, and evil when Christian Science teaches that they simply do not exist? They are figments of the imagination. For them prayer is hypnotizing themselves into believing that such things are not real. Mary Baker Eddy, their founder, states "a self-evident proposition, in the science of mind healing, is that disease is unreal" ... "man is never sick" ... "Sickness is always hallucination" (Christian Science and Health, pages 1, 392, 406). Scripture, however, recognizes the existence of sickness and disease (Mark 1:33,34). When we Christians are plagued with sickness and disease we pray that the Lord would remove it or grant us the necessary strength to endure it. Just think of Paul's example in II Cor. 12. Whenever possible, we are to make use of the means which the Lord has placed at our disposal -- doctors, medication, remedies etc. Not to avail ourselves of such means because of some foolish personal whim contradicts the Word of the Lord, "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God" (Matt. 4:7). The Apostle Paul refers to Luke as "the beloved physician" (Col. 4:14). Look at the cures effected by the Lord through means: Mark 5:25-31; 7:33-35; John 9:6,7; Acts 19:12. At the same time, however, we Christians recognize that in the final analysis it is the Lord "who healeth all thy diseases" (Ps. 103:3). While we are not to minimize the means which the Lord has so mercifully provided for us, we are not to place our trust in the physicians and medication like King Asa did (II Chron. 16:12), but in the Lord who so

graciously grants us the various remedies either to cure us or to alleviate the pain which a specific affliction may cause us. This blessed truth stands: "I am the Lord that healeth thee!" (Exodus 15:26).

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