

LUTHERAN SPOKESMAN

“...The Scripture Cannot Be Broken.” — John 10:35

God be merciful to us and bless us,
And cause His face to shine upon us, SELAH
That Your way may be known on earth,
Your salvation among all nations. Let the peoples
praise You, O God; Let all the peoples praise You.
Oh, let the nations be glad and sing for joy! For
You shall judge the people righteously, And govern
the nations on earth. SELAH — PSALM 67:1-4





New Excitement at ILC!

Leave It Better

According to a promotional flyer received from our Immanuel Lutheran High School, College, and Seminary, Eau Claire, Wisconsin, an exciting new movement is being promoted by students at the school. (Information that follows is gleaned from the flyer.)

The name, motto, and mission of the movement is “Leave It Better.”

Besides supplying the CLC with dozens of pastors and teachers over the last fifty years, our school has guided hundreds of high school graduates along life’s path. Friends made at ILC become a second family, and the memories last a long time. Immanuel—“God with us”—is a place where the Word of God is taught, learned, shared, and celebrated by those who believe it.

The aim of the new movement is to provide a way for an organized group of students to show their thanks to the Lord for their Christian training by “leaving the school better” than they found it—doing so by improving, restoring, and helping to maintain the campus and its facilities.

About a third of the high school students attended the first meeting last fall, and more are willing to help. Volunteers are stepping forward from experienced collegians. The report also states that there is strong support from the school’s faculty and staff.

“Now we would like to reach out to ILC alumni and other CLC members, asking also for their support. With all this ambition, motivation, and energy, Lord-willing, we can accomplish a lot!”

The flyer adds these words of practical, down-to-earth encouragement:



“During this current school year we have already completed multiple projects and started others.

“We leveled the backyard of one of the professor’s houses, trimmed back the trees and brush on Ingram Drive, and built a staircase down to the athletic fields from the parking lot.

“We also began clearing an area in the woods near the creek, where we hope to create a park.

“Last weekend we started work on our most ambitious project yet. During past years the school used a student-built amphitheater for Class Day exercises, chapel services, weddings, and even graduation services. Over the last few decades, it fell out of use and reverted to a thorny hillside. A ‘Leave It Better’ crew and a few committed volunteers cleared the brush, re-dug the terraces, cut down trees, and planted new grass. There is still much to do, but with the Lord’s help we hope to bring the amphitheater back into use before the close of the school year.”

“Get in touch!” appeals the flyer—after which the following contact information is provided:

Leave It Better • 501 Grover Road • Eau Claire, WI 54701

www.facebook.com/leaveitbetter

E-mail: leaveimmanuelbetter@gmail.com



JESUS' BAPTISM

Seeing Our Lord's Glory

Pastor Jay Hartmann • Corpus Christi, Texas

Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. And John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?" But Jesus answered and said to him, "Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he allowed Him.

When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

(MATTHEW 3:13-17)

We have now entered the season of Epiphany. Epiphany means "to show forth or manifest." It is a time in the church year when we see our Savior as the One in whom dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.

We want to see Jesus as the almighty Savior-God who came with all power to save our lost and fallen world. During the Advent and Christmas seasons we witnessed our Savior through the eyes of faith as the lowly Christ-Child born in a stable and laid in a manger—seemingly helpless. But now it is time to see our Savior as the eternally blessed God who came with all power to save sinful mankind through His holy life and innocent death in our place.

We want to dwell on our Savior's glory now, before we enter the season of Lent, in which we see our Savior-God blasphemed, spit upon, scourged, and ultimately nailed to a cross for the sins of the world.

Epiphany gives us time to contemplate the glory of our Lord before we witness His death as our Substitute!

Our Lord's baptism (Matthew 3:13-17) effectively marked the end of John the Baptizer's ministry and the beginning of our Savior's public ministry. At His baptism Jesus was inaugurated into His three-fold office of Prophet, Priest, and King. He began

His ministry to serve and save all mankind by fulfilling all things written of Him in Holy Scripture.

The Father and the Spirit were present with Jesus; what a fitting beginning as we remember what our Lord's ministry would be like and how the world would receive Him! Isaiah announced His hardship. Jesus would be "*despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief*" (Isaiah 53:3). It was to be a hard, bitter, rough road to travel, but Jesus knew His Father would be with Him—and strengthened by the Spirit, He went forth with confidence that His mission would be a success. Our Savior began His journey to Jerusalem where the final battle would be fought.

Jesus' baptism was a miraculous event that gives us a brief glimpse of our Lord's true glory, for the Holy Spirit descended upon Him when His heavenly Father declared His delight in His Son. Most of the time Jesus kept His glory hidden underneath His humility—and humility remains a distinguishing characteristic of Jesus' followers.

During His earthly ministry Jesus—"*who is over all, the eternally blessed God*" (Romans 9:5)—did not consider being equal to God something to be paraded about. Contrary to what the world teaches, meekness is a most desirable quality. We strive to have the humility of our Lord.

"Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. And John tried to prevent Him, saying, I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?"

Think of how the Baptizer must have felt. He was a humble man who knew he was a sinner. We see a humble Christian man being asked to baptize His God! John vigorously protested this as he said, "*I need to be baptized by You...*" John knew himself to be in need of the forgiveness and salvation that only Jesus could give; certainly we can understand how John felt. We stand humbly beside John as the Father proclaimed, "*This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.*"

During the season of Epiphany, we see through the eyes of faith, at least in part, the true glory of our Savior-God! "*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth*" (John 1:14). Not everyone can see this glory, but those who through the Spirit's working are true Christ-believers **can**.

**Rejoice, dear Christians, for you can see this glory
through the eyes of faith!**



Draw Comfort from Your Lord's Unbreakable Promises!

Pastor Thomas Schuetze, Coloma, Michigan

“Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed, says the LORD, who has compassion on you”

(ISAIAH 54:10, NIV)

“Change and decay in all around I see.”
So wrote Henry Lyte in his well-known hymn
“Abide with Me” (TLH #552:2).

Glancing backward at the landscape we have traveled in calendar year 2012, we can surely relate. We have witnessed numerous changes, many for the worse. Our United States economy has continued to sag. Prices at the pump have escalated. Food costs have skyrocketed. Devastating hurricane storms have drastically altered the lives of thousands, bringing pain and heartache. Many have experienced health problems, and families have undergone change as dear ones have been taken away through death.

Is there anything that has stayed the same? Thankfully, yes! The undeserved love of our heavenly Father and the promises He has given us in the Bible did not waver during the last year. In the midst of the manifold changes we have witnessed or personally experienced, His merciful goodness has stood out in bold relief. He has been our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. He has showered upon us countless blessings of body and soul. The words of Joshua to the Israelites of old have held true: *“Not one of all the good promises the LORD your God gave you has failed. Every promise has been fulfilled”* (Joshua 23:14, NIV). For this, let us thank and praise Him!

What about calendar year 2013? As we embark on the pathway of the future (over which we have no control), we may draw comfort from the assurance that the God of grace who has been our Help in ages past will be our Hope in years to come.

Each promise He has given will surely be fulfilled. Here is a small sampling:

- ❖ Our God will continue to use His Word as a lamp to our feet and light for our path (Psalm 119:105); He will use the Bible to instruct us in all we need to know for our salvation in Christ our Redeemer; He will use the Bible to rebuke and correct us if/when we stray from His paths; He will train us in righteousness so that we may be thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:15-17).
- ❖ He will bless us through the Word with Christian fortitude to weather stormy trials we are bound to encounter; He will give us confidence, born of faith, that each trouble He allows to touch our life is intended for our welfare (Romans 8:28), for the testing and purifying of our faith (1 Peter 1:7), to guide us along the way that leads to glory (Psalm 73:24), so that we will say: “*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me*” (Philippians 4:13).
- ❖ He will use His gospel to comfort us with His forgiveness. As we come with penitent hearts to His throne of grace, imploring His pardon for our sins of thought, word, and deed, He will cheer us with His promise that “*though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool*” (Isaiah 1:18).

Could it be that 2013 will be the year when the Lord fulfills His Word to come again to judge the living and the dead, and to take us into the mansions He has gone to prepare for us (John 14:3)? Only He knows.

In any case, come what may, with hopes anchored in our faithful Lord, we may rest assured that it will be a truly blessed year.

*Life is changing, changing ever As the seasons come and go;
Friends we love no longer with us, Thus 'tis ever, ever so;
But our Savior changeth never; Nothing from His love can sever.*

*All around us swiftly fading, Fading as an autumn leaf;
Earthly fame and earthly honor, All below is very brief.
But our Savior changes never; He abides the same as ever.*

*Yes! Below there naught remaineth, All is frail and fleeting here;
But His Word our soul sustaineth, This our earthly path doth cheer.
That our Savior changeth never, Nothing from His love can sever.*

Anon*

* R.C. Rein, *Treasury of Themes and Illustrations*, NPH, 1983; p. 403 (adapted).

An Epiphany Psalm

Pastor Nathanael Mayhew · Atlanta (Lawrenceville), Georgia

*God be merciful to us and bless us, And cause His face to shine upon us, SELAH
That Your way may be known on earth, Your salvation among all nations.
Let the peoples praise You, O God; Let all the peoples praise You. Oh, let the
nations be glad and sing for joy! For You shall judge the people righteously, And
govern the nations on earth. SELAH Let the peoples praise You, O God; Let all
the peoples praise You. Then the earth shall yield her increase; God, our own
God, shall bless us. God shall bless us, And all the ends of the
earth shall fear Him. (PSALM 67)*

For most people the celebration of Christmas is now little more than a fading memory. The days, weeks, or even months of preparations are over.

For believers in Christ, however, Christmas is an on-going reminder of how God selflessly sent His only-begotten Son into this world of sin to save us. But it is sad to see how quickly the selfless spirit evaporates as soon as the day of Christmas is gone. This is magnified by the national holiday that follows one week after the celebration of Christmas—the celebration of a new year on our secular calendars.

Think about it. What is generally the focus of the people of this world on the dawn of a new year? Is it not generally about oneself? Of the ten top new year's resolutions, most—if not all—are focused on “me.” “What can I do to make my life better?”

Don't get me wrong—it's not a bad goal to try to get out of debt, get into shape, or learn something new. God wants us to be good stewards of the gifts He has given us—money, health, and intellect.

But of even greater importance is our stewardship of God's Word—in particular, the message of salvation which is for all people!

This isn't just a New Testament concept. It has always been God's desire, even back in the days of the Old Testament.

Consider the divinely inspired “Mission Statement” of Psalm 67.

Consider how God carried this out in the Old Testament. He repeatedly brought Old Testament Gentiles to faith through the preaching and witness of His people.

A Canaanite harlot in the city of Jericho was brought to trust in the LORD and His promise of a coming Savior; a woman of Moab followed her mother-in-law to the land of Israel and came to know the true God. The LORD sent the prophet Obadiah to the people of Edom, Jonah to the people of Assyria, and Daniel to the land of Babylon. Many of those Gentiles (like the Magi, for example, who came from the East to see and worship the King of kings) came to believe in the true God and His promise of a coming Savior from sin.

It is important to note that the LORD wants to use those who already know Him as His witnesses to those who do not.

Consider how the LORD used the witness of Elijah to bring about the confession of the widow of Zarephath: *“Now by this I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the LORD in your mouth is the truth”* (1 Kings 17:24).

Remember how the LORD used a little girl as His ambassador to Naaman the Syrian, so that Naaman proclaimed, *“Indeed, now I know that there is no God in all the earth, except in Israel...your servant will no longer offer either burnt offering or sacrifice to other gods, but to the LORD”* (2 Kings 5:15,17).

This is still true today. You and I are Christ’s ambassadors to the unbelieving world!

Let the prayer of Psalm 67 be our own: *“God be merciful to us and bless us, and cause His face to shine upon us—Selah.”* This is not a selfish request, but a request for the

LORD’s blessing on others through our preaching of His Word: *“That Your way may be known on the earth, Your salvation among all nations.”*

Psalm 67 could be called an “Epiphany Psalm,” and it is a fitting prayer as we enter a new calendar year as well. Dear reader, consider your calling as an ambassador of Christ to all people!

May God give us strength and wisdom to carry out our calling effectively, tenaciously, and graciously as He seeks to bring others into His kingdom through our witness.

“Let the peoples praise You, O God; Let all the peoples praise You!”



Understanding Life to Value It!

Pastor Wayne Eichstadt • Mankato, Minnesota

The contrast was stark.

The underlying message was startling.

Two newspaper headlines, one on either side of the fold, told two very different stories.

On the left page large bold letters shouted “Pro-Choice Makes Gains—A Woman’s Right Defended.” The accompanying article set forth the various platitudes typically used in our society to defend the murder of unborn children.

The opposite page headline read “In-Utero Surgery Success.” This article, including a picture, retold the story of an incredible in-the-womb surgery—well-nigh miraculous by virtue of its complexity and the size of the patient.

Imagine! Two stories—one extolling the virtues of child-killing, the other proclaiming the marvelous success of modern medicine in saving a child’s life.

Contradictory? Indeed!

Yet the world tends to little notice the sad contradiction.

If we extract the essence from these two articles (and thousands of others like them), we find that they all tell the same story: The valuation of human life in our society depends upon whether or not that life is wanted. If it is wanted, then it’s precious and worth saving at all costs. If that life is unwanted, it is not considered human life at all, and it is of no consequence to abort it.

How arrogant of sinful mankind—the creature!—to usurp the position of Creator and life-giver!

There are so many “life” questions—beginning with adoption vs. abortion. Questions which arise later may address the matter of purpose—does this life have purpose or not? In the activities of life, questions arise about service: for whom am I living, myself or the

Lord? End-of-life questions pivot on whether or not a person awaits death with humble and submissive confidence, or whether one should “assist death” by suicide or euthanasia.

Such questions in each stage of life come with many attending circumstances and more questions, but ultimately it all comes down to a person’s estimation of what the value of human life is and what can or should be done with it.

For us Bible-believers, the answers in each of these circumstances come down to the simple truth: “*God created man in His own image... male and female He created them*” (Genesis 1:27).

God created—man is but the creature. Life is given to us. Who does man think he is to suppose that he can set himself against the Creator? Life is not a plaything of sinful mankind—it is the gift of Almighty God!

God created man **in His own image**, and therefore man is distinct from every other creature in the universe. Man’s unique creation and elevated position moved God to have compassion upon him when sin took up residence in the hearts of mankind. God so loved the unique life which He had created in His image that, even while it was still lost and rebellious, He sent His Son to redeem that life so that by His Spirit He might restore in it “*the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him*” (Colossians 3:10).

Man’s unique creation and elevated position is what moved God to have compassion upon him when sin took up residence in the hearts of mankind.

An unbiased evaluation of attitudes within our society demonstrates that in large part the creature is worshiped rather than the Creator (cf. Romans 1). When this happens—whether in society or in our own hearts—the Creator is devalued along with the life He gives. The gifts of a devalued Creator will not be treasured unless they serve sinful, selfish ends.

O that our citizenry would be led to widespread repentance for its devaluation of the Lord of life, of the life He gives, and of the Savior He sent! Let each of us repent of any such devaluation—whatever form it takes in our own hearts—and return to Scripture to be reinvigorated with a true understanding of the value of life, of the purpose of our life, and of the Savior who holds the times of our life in His hands.



“For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God...holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught...” (Titus 1:7ff)

Some Mouths Must Be Stopped

Pastor John Klatt • Rapid City, South Dakota

For there are many insubordinate, both idle talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole households, teaching things which they ought not, for the sake of dishonest gain. One of them, a prophet of their own, said, “Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.” This testimony is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, not giving heed to Jewish fables and commandments of men who turn from the truth. To the pure all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscience are defiled. They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work. (TITUS 1:10-16)

FREEDOM OF SPEECH is a right that we value highly. It is a blessing to be able to make comments about public officials and their policies without lowering our voices to a whisper or looking around to see who may be listening.

Yet even freedom of speech has limits. There are laws against libel and slander. There is speech that is harmful and needs to be curtailed—whether in public, in the workplace, in the classroom, or in the home.

In our section from this epistle to Titus, the apostle Paul shows that speech in a Christian congregation also may sometimes need to be curtailed. There are “*mouths that must be stopped.*”

Paul was addressing problems in the churches on the island of Crete. He had left Titus there to set things in order, to appoint elders in every city. This business was urgent; action needed to be taken because there were some who were causing trouble in the churches. Paul describes them as “*insubordinate.*” They refused to submit to the authority of the Word of Christ and the apostles in what they said and taught. They were “*idle talkers and deceivers.*” They were “*teaching things which they ought not.*” They were not just one or two but “*many.*” And they were doing a lot of harm; entire households were being misled.

What were they saying that was so harmful? They were teaching “*Jewish fables,*” inventing tales about Old Testament biblical characters. These were not helpful for spiritual growth, for they were not part of God’s Word. They added nothing of value and could be confusing and

misleading to those who might not understand that they weren't drawn from Bible history. And even worse, these idle talkers and deceivers were teaching "*commandments of men.*" They were disturbing people's consciences by forbidding things that God has not forbidden.

These teachers did not have in mind the best interests of the people they were trying to influence. Paul says that they taught "*for the sake of dishonest gain.*" The love of money was at the root of their activity.

Therefore stern measures were called for. Paul told Titus to rebuke them sharply, for Paul's concern was for the spiritual welfare of the people, "*that they may be sound in the faith.*" The people needed to hear the preaching of law and gospel instead of confusing and misleading stories. They needed to repent of their sins. They needed to be directed to Christ's sacrifice and resurrection so that they could have peace and rejoice in the gospel of salvation.

Are there teachers in our own day who could accurately be called "*idle talkers and deceivers*"? One example would be those who teach many unscriptural things about the last days and the return of Christ, drawing interpretations of biblical prophecies from current events rather than from the Bible. They upset the peace of their hearers rather than comforting them with the gospel. They confused their hearers rather than building them up in the faith.

The best way to stop the mouths of idle talkers and deceivers is to keep them from gaining entrance into the church. It is for this reason that we are careful about who teaches in our congregations. We welcome into our pulpits and classrooms only those who teach God's Word faithfully. Before pastors and teachers are declared eligible for a Divine Call into the ministry, they are required to go through extensive training and instruction.

Those who have been trained in schools outside of our church body and desire to be certified for the ministry among us are required to go through a program designed to test their fitness for that ministry. Those entrusted with the responsibility of preaching and teaching God's Word among us need first to be proven among us.

It may sound harsh to say that the mouths of some people in the church need to be stopped—but not if we keep in mind that the reason for silencing false teachers is so that those who hear them may be sound in the faith.

To this help us, dear Father in heaven!



"...The works that I do in My Father's name, they bear witness of Me" (JOHN 10:25)

Jesus Manifests His Glory

Pastor David Reim • Vernon, BC (Canada)

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Now both Jesus and His disciples were invited to the wedding. And when they ran out of wine, the mother of Jesus said to Him, "They have no wine." Jesus said to her, "Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Whatever He says to you, do it." Now there were set there six waterpots of stone, according to the manner of purification of the Jews, containing twenty or thirty gallons apiece. Jesus said to them, "Fill the waterpots with water." And they filled them up to the brim. And He said to them, "Draw some out now, and take it to the master of the feast." And they took it. When the master of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and did not know where it came from (but the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom. 10 And he said to him, "Every man at the beginning sets out the good wine, and when the guests have well drunk, then the inferior. You have kept the good wine until now!"

This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him.

(JOHN 2:1-11)

Although Jesus usually hid His divine Sonship, in this episode Jesus revealed His divine power and glory as the Son of God.

This miracle may not have been His most spectacular. It was done very quietly. Neither the master of the feast nor most of the guests knew where the wine came from or even realized that a miracle had taken place.

Yet those who knew saw Jesus' glory and believed.

That is the point of this and other miracles—that we too may see the glory of His power as God, and our faith is confirmed. Yet more than that, we see the glory of His LOVE.

As our loving Savior, Jesus performed many miracles of healing, in that way showing His compassion in our times of weakness and suffering. He comes to our aid either with healing or with His grace which makes His power perfect through our weakness.

When Jesus fed the thousands in miraculous fashion, He showed His love and care to provide for human physical needs. Therefore we can trust Him to provide for our daily needs as we continue to seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness.

In miracles in which Jesus calmed the storms, He showed His love and desire to protect His followers from all harm and danger. We find great comfort and confidence in times of catastrophe when we realize that our lives are in His loving hands.

In some ways, though, this quiet miracle of changing water into wine is more remarkable than other miracles. The setting of this miracle—a lack of wine at a wedding—hardly presented a life-threatening situation. The need wasn't even tremendously pressing. Yet our Lord Jesus used His power to enable a newly married couple to enjoy the celebration of their wedding with friends and relatives.

Here the Savior shows His loving concern even in “little” things. There is nothing too small or insignificant to bring before Him in our everyday lives. Consider how our Lord not only can provide for our needs and heal our diseases (when it is His holy will for us), but He blesses us daily so that we can enjoy life. He gives us our parents, spouse, and children. He provides countless daily blessings for us to enjoy. He gives many occasions in which we can celebrate His love—such as the joyful celebrations of the recent Christmas season.

Finally, since we know that Jesus is concerned even about life's “little” things, isn't that proof that He can—and has—taken care of our biggest need? If as our Savior He had not reconciled us to God by shedding His innocent blood on the cross, then He could not provide any other blessings no matter how small, for we would still deserve His wrath and punishment.

So, let us recognize all things which we graciously receive from our loving Savior-God. Then we will enjoy them all the more, for as we celebrate life under His loving care, we will see the glory of our Savior-Lord who has provided all things by His power and great love.

As we so often recognize Jesus' glory in our daily lives, let us just as often give thanks to God!

**There is nothing too
small or insignificant
to bring before Him
in our everyday lives.**

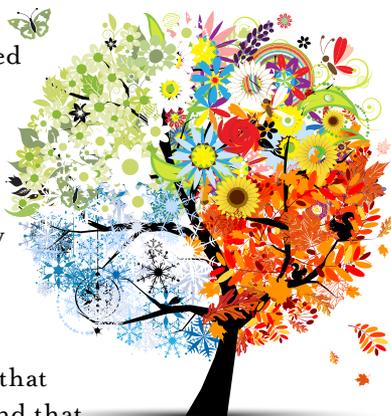


The Beauty and Joy of Christian Fellowship

Pastor Em. David Lau · Eau Claire, Wisconsin

(Fourth of eight)

We have indicated in previous articles that it is possible for believers in Christ to experience already now the beauty and joy of Christian fellowship. There is, of course, one thing that spoils this picture, and that one thing is sin. If there are members of the assembly who are only pretending to be Christians for some external benefit for themselves, they are not really part of the body of Christ at all, and so they cannot be like-minded; in fact, there is nothing that they can do that pleases God. The Lord knows the difference between sheep and goats. Yet it is also true that the Holy Spirit can use the Law and Gospel as taught among the Christians to change these hypocrites from selfish, loveless sinners into new people of God who trust in Christ for salvation and begin to experience the working of the Holy Spirit in their own lives.



Then, of course, there is sinfulness in the Christians themselves. Paul confessed about himself that he did not do the good he wanted to do because of the sinful flesh, the old Adam, that remained in him

(Romans 7). The same

is true of every one of us.

“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8). Sin brings ugliness and pain into what should be a loving, harmonious association. But sin in itself cannot destroy the fellowship, for Christ has given His Church the ministry of the keys, the power to absolve sinners. *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”* (1 John 1:9). God does indeed forgive us our sins through those persons whom the Holy Spirit has called through the Church to absolve sinners, and in fact Christ has given to every believer

the authority to forgive sins in His name. God forgives us for Christ's sake, and we forgive one another. The Holy Spirit in us leads us to heed these words of the apostle: *"Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you"* (Ephesians 4:31-32).

This forgiveness of sins is total, including the most heinous sins of murder and adultery and blasphemy, for Christ's apostle John says to us: *"If we say that we have fellowship with Him and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin"* (1 John 1:6-7). Yes, from all sin! Sin cannot destroy the beauty and joy of Christian fellowship as long as sin is confessed and absolved. We continue to have fellowship with our Lord, and we continue to have fellowship with one another. At the Lord's Table we come together before God as confessing sinners, and together we receive Christ's body and blood for the remission of sins. *"For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread"* (1 Corinthians 10:17).

But what if sin is covered up and not confessed? If it remains hidden to the congregation, we must let God Himself deal with it as He

will. But when sin is harbored in the heart of someone who professes Christ, and this sin becomes known to one or more of the others, then Christian love springs into action in the form of personal and private admonition, as Jesus has taught us in Matthew 18:15-18. The goal of such admonition is gaining the brother. Just as a loving parent will not tolerate the ungodly behavior of his child, so the Lord does not want His people to tolerate open or unconfessed sin on the part of anyone who professes to be one of God's people. According to our Lord's instructions the whole congregation has the responsibility to get involved in attempting to lead the sinner to repentance. How sad it is when Christians lack the love that should move them to help to rescue a brother or sister who needs our help.

The apostle Paul compared such festering sin in the Christian fellowship to leaven or yeast that finally permeates the whole loaf. To the Christians in Corinth who were slow to take needed action he said: *"Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us"* (1 Corinthians 5:6-7). The impenitent sinner in Corinth was continuing in the sin of adultery, and therefore Paul wrote to the congregation: *"Deliver such a one to*

Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus...Put away from yourselves the evil person” (1 Corinthians 5:5,13).

It seems the action demanded by Paul in Corinth achieved its purpose when the man repented of his sin and the congregation received him back, as we read in 2 Corinthians 2:3-11. What a beautiful and joyful thing it is when Christian fellowship is restored!



Even the angels celebrate along with all of God's people. How important and necessary it is that the whole number of Christians in the group listen to Paul's instructions on how to deal with a former member who has been excommunicated but who has been regained: *“You ought rather to forgive and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow. Therefore I urge you to reaffirm your love to him” (2 Corinthians 2:7-8).*

(to be continued)

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

“As the head of the family should teach them in a simple way to those of his household.”

(Martin Luther)

THE SECOND COMMANDMENT

Prof. Em. Paul R. Koch • Eau Claire, Wisconsin

It's short and to the point: “You shall/ should not take the name of the LORD your God in vain...” (Exodus 20:7).

Who is the “you” that shouldn't be cavalier with God's good name? If you are someone who knows God, you are the person who should be circumspect with God's good name. (Unbelievers need a different starting point.)

The Second Commandment

You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain.

What does this mean?

We should fear and love God that we do not use His name to curse, swear, practice witchcraft, lie, or deceive; but we should call upon His name in every trouble, pray, praise, and give thanks.

What is God concerned about in this commandment?

He is concerned that His children protect His good name, His fine reputation, His great renown—against all manner of misuse. For

example, God deserves better than to have His good name tarnished by “Oh, my God!” at every turn.

While others do not recognize the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and Earth, are clueless about Jesus, the one-and-only Son of God, Redeemer of sinners, and are ignorant of the Holy Spirit, conveyor of all blessings—God’s children know better.

And knowing better, we agree with His estimation of the sanctity of His name.

Doesn’t it torque your heart when the name of Jesus Christ is used as a favored curse? That’s what taking God’s name “in vain” means: mouthing God’s name in a smart-aleck, insolent, careless manner—rather than using God’s name reverently to call upon Him in every trouble, to pray, to praise, and to give thanks to Him.

What leads a person to honor and revere God’s good name?

A person honors God by respecting His good name when His Holy Spirit gets into the bones and marrow of a soul and performs the miracle of conversion. That’s accomplished by the Holy Spirit using the Holy Bible to reveal the Triune God’s claim to fame.

Since God’s name is grounded in the Bible, His name is honored/hallowed “when the Word of God

is taught in its truth and purity, and we as children of God also live a holy life according to it” (Luther’s Explanation of the First Petition of the Lord’s Prayer).

Since God’s name identifies and describes Him, every revelation that God has made about Himself equates with/equals His name. To illustrate: whereas our ID card includes our name, God’s ID card is His holy name, embossed with His personal qualities, representing who He is and what He stands for. God inserts His name inside the Holy Scriptures, much as we put our ID card inside our wallet.

What is included in God’s name?

God’s name includes every quality of His person, so when Moses needed bolstering for the long road ahead, “*the LORD . . . proclaimed the name of the LORD. . . ‘The LORD, the LORD God, merciful, and gracious, long-suffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin. . .’*” (Exodus 34:5-7).

God wanted to assure Moses that He is the embodiment of mercy, grace, patience, goodness, reliability, and compassion; these qualities constitute who He IS. It’s as though God, who cannot be seen or touched, has hologrammed His qualities onto His ID-card, with

the name of Jesus as pin-number.

What is the proper way to use God's name?

God has given us His name in order to convey to us His blessings, especially the gift of faith in His Son for the forgiveness of our sins. We use God's name properly when we call upon Him in the day of trouble (Psalm 50:15), and when we pray "in Jesus' name," for Jesus promises that whatever we ask the Father in His name He will give us (John 16:23).

Warning! Let us be on guard against being deceived by those who use God's name to make to make error look like truth. It's bad enough that unbelievers take God's name in vain by cursing, swearing, and practicing superstition, but it's worse when "people of faith" palm off their own religious notions as if they were God's truth.

We are alerted by Jesus' warning, "*Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves*" (Matthew 7:15), and we stay on alert via the Spirit's counsel, "*Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them, for those who are such [false teachers] do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly [their personal agenda] and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of*

the simple" (Romans 16:17-18).

We avoid religious falsehood/false teachers for at least two reasons: first, in love for God we want to bring honor to His holy name; secondly, by abiding in God's Word we intend to spare ourselves great spiritual harm.

Last, but not least, we enjoy using God's name in telling the good news that is inherent in Jesus' name—that heaven is open to repentant sinners who plead the remission of their sins through Jesus. With the psalmist, we "*Bless the LORD, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name! ... who forgives all your iniquities...*" (Psalm 103:1-3). Jesus is God in the flesh, the Word of God incarnate, the embodiment of God's qualities and purposes, the Name of God that we love to praise.

*Jesus! Name of wondrous love,
Name all other names above,
Unto which must every knee
Bow in deep humility.*

*Jesus! Name of wondrous love,
Human name of God above;
Pleading only this, we flee,
Helpless, O our God, to Thee.
Amen!*

(TLH #114:1,6)



“Pet Blessings”

Pastor Paul Fleischer · Cheyenne, Wyoming

While traveling the city recently, we noticed a local Lutheran Church (ELCA) bulletin board advertising an up-coming Sunday as “Pet Blessing Sunday” in/at their church.

Also this week, in our preparations for a Bible Class study of the *Smalcald Articles* written by Dr. Martin Luther, we came upon this paragraph in that Confession of ours: “*Finally, there remains the pope’s bag of magic tricks which contains silly and childish articles...such as the baptism of bells, the baptism of altar stones...Such baptizing is a ridicule and mockery of holy Baptism which should not be tolerated. In addition, there are blessings of candles, palms, spices, oats, cakes, etc. These cannot be called blessings, and they are not, but are mere mockery and fraud. Such frauds...are without number...we do not wish to have anything to do with them.*” (SA, Part III, Article XV, Human Traditions)

Throughout our studies of the *Smalcald Articles* we have been noting that the Reformer’s overriding concern was defending the heart of the gospel—the “*first and chief article...that Jesus Christ, our God and Lord, ‘was put to death for our trespasses and raised again for our justification’*” (Romans 4:25). In particular, this Confession warns against various “traditions” within the system of Roman Catholicism which undermine that “first and chief article.”

As in the above quote, Luther does not mince words as he exposes such traditions as being unscriptural and thus ungodly. That is where he is coming from when he derides the “*pope’s bag of magic tricks...*” No, he does not specifically mention the blessing or baptizing of pets in this Confession (we suspect that such a practice had not yet been invented by the Roman—not to mention the Lutheran—church). Yet “pet blessings” would fit right in with the items mentioned as “*silly and childish...mere mockery and fraud.*”

In saying this, we are coming from the same vantage point as the reformer—being concerned lest anything done or practiced in the church detract from the first and chief article of the gospel. “Pet blessings” and other such supposedly holy practices or rites in and by the church come across as a blasphemous spoof of the divinely instituted Sacrament of Christian Baptism.

When Holy Baptism is administered in accord with the Word of God,

it is indeed a blessing, for it is a miraculous “*washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost*” (Titus 3:5) upon the human recipient. Such a heavenly washing brings about nothing less than the actual rebirth of an otherwise hopelessly lost and condemned sinner, by nature born a child of the devil—“*Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me*” (Psalm 51:5). Through the marvelous working of God the Holy Spirit, the baptized and thus reborn person has become a “saint” who—clothed with the righteousness of Christ—is now a child of God and a member of His family of believers! “*For you are all [children] of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ*” (Galatians 3:26-27).

We realize that pets are part of God’s created world, and that they may even afford folks a measure of therapeutic comfort and enjoyment. Yet when it comes to the spiritual arena, we—with Luther and all fellow Lutheran confessors who accept the *Smalcald Articles* as their confession of faith—“do not wish to have anything to do with” pet or boat/motorcycle/automobile or other “blessings” that mimic and thus devalue the Spirit’s work in Holy Baptism.

(SEPTEMBER 23, 2012 CHURCH BULLETIN)



"PET BLESSINGS" — FOLLOW UP

“...Real Ghouls”?!

Pastor Paul Fleischer · Cheyenne, Wyoming

To our considerable interest, an article touching on pet blessings recently appeared in *WORLD* (a bi-monthly magazine which strives to lend a Christian perspective to world events). Its November 17, 2012, issue contained an article titled “Halloween’s real ghouls” (p. 80, by Marvin Olasky). The subtitle indicates the article’s thrust: “It’s a mistake to say history’s evils couldn’t happen here [in America].”

The article’s author (who is purported to be Christian) refers to blessings of pets and the like with considerable negativity. He leads into his subject matter by referring to The Cathedral of St. John the Divine in uptown Manhattan practicing “groovy celebrations

such as the blessings of bicycles in April, bees in June, and animals generally (from a tortoise to a yak) early in October.” And he continues: “The cathedral’s most recent extravaganza was the Procession of the Ghouls that came this year on Oct. 26....”

Some stark, tragic world history is then rehearsed. The writer speaks of Cambodian killing fields and of how he once visited such fields and a torture chamber in Phnom Penh, North Korea. (The article is accompanied by a photograph showing human skulls on display in Phnom Penh’s Genocide Museum which, in turn, is described as “a ghoulish 10-story platform holding hundreds of skulls.”)

There’s no need to share more details of the writer’s account of similar evils in world history. For our intents and purposes we would simply share his compelling concluding paragraph. It reads as follows:

“God has so blessed America that we can happily relegate such terror to Asia and Europe and say it can’t happen here—but it could if churches content themselves with blessing bicycles, bees, and yaks instead of teaching about sin and what happens to societies that encourage it rather than restrain it. We need to learn about real ghouls.”

Most interesting to us is the fact that the paragraph draws a connection between the practice of nominally-Christian churches pronouncing blessings upon pets (cf. “Pet Blessings” article in this issue) and the failure of many of those same churches to “teach about sin and what happens to societies that encourage it....”

It’s a Bible-based assessment with which confessional Lutheran Christians can agree. Surely the label “real ghouls” applies to sin in all its many guises and ugly ramifications.

For, you see, it was when sin first happened in the Garden of Eden (see Genesis chapter 3) that the whole world became a veritable “killing field”! As the holy Creator-God had forewarned, if our first parents would choose the path of disobedience to Him, they would surely die. Adam and Eve chose the path of sin, and they died (spiritually, and inevitably physically). Soon enough they had undeniable (ghoulish!) proof of their disastrous fall when their first-born son killed their second-born (Genesis 4).

Everything was destined to go downhill from there. “*Just as through*

one man [Adam] sin entered the world, and death through sin...thus death spread to all men, because all sinned" (Romans 5:12). Ghoulish!

If we were on a ghoulish tour, attending the "Procession of the Ghouls" extravaganza at the Manhattan Cathedral or touring Phnom Penh's Genocide Museum, what are the chances of the dry bones/human skulls "fleshing themselves out" and becoming living, breathing, like-new creatures? Zero, zip, nada!

It's sad beyond words. Since the disastrous fall into sin in Eden, the biggest lie the devil has perpetrated on the fallen world is that somehow ghoulish dry bones/dust can self-rejuvenate—for example, by supposedly earning God's eternal favor by good works or by "making a decision" for Christ. The very idea of self-regeneration and rejuvenation is the devil's lie. Biblically and theologically speaking, the idea is a truly ghoulish death-trap.

Yes, Ezekiel beheld the valley of dry bones coming to life, **but only when God put His Spirit in them** (Ezekiel 37)! God was the Doer, the dust and bones merely receivers. All of Holy Scripture agrees that only the God who first created man holy (from dust!) can provide the means for re-creating those "*dead in trespasses and sins*" and making them "*alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)*..." (Ephesians 2:1,5).

Such re-creation is what Jesus was speaking about when He told Nicodemus: "*Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God*" (John 3:3). Such rebirth takes place in the Sacrament of Holy Baptism: "*When the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life*" (Titus 3:4ff).

With all this, we are on board with the *WORLD* article's suggestion that far too many "Christian" churches in our day water down the gospel of Jesus Christ with "groovy celebrations" which

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end up being blasphemous
spoofs of the Sacrament of
Holy Baptism. Bottom line,
such celebrations are among
Halloween's real though
superstitious ghouls.

Through His life-giving
Spirit may God help all
backsliding churches see
sin for what it is so that they
might, in turn, join us
in giving witness to all doomed
and dying sinners of the one
solution for the ghoulish
consequences of sin:

"The wages of sin is death,

**but the gift of God is
eternal life in Christ
Jesus our Lord"!**

(Romans 6:23)



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LUTHERAN SPOKESMAN

"...THE SCRIPTURE CANNOT BE BROKEN." — JOHN 10:35

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