

Christian MONTHLY

DEDICATED TO THE PROCLAMATION
OF THE WORD OF GOD



Psalm 119:105
Thy word is a lamp unto my feet,
and a light unto my path.

August 2017

The Word of God Is Not Bound

Orval Wirkkala
Kingston, Minnesota

WE CONTINUE OUR STUDIES in the letter of Apostle Paul to his young co-worker Timothy. Paul was being held in a Roman prison; shortly he would be martyred for preaching that Jesus was alive and that He was the Savior of the world. As Paul anticipated the challenges that Timothy would face, he wrote this letter of counsel, admonition, and encouragement, for Paul had experienced the hardships that come from being a proclaimer of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This letter is called a pastoral epistle, which means that mainly it is written to pastors/teachers/leaders of the church, but it has application for all. Regardless of our station in life, as Christians we all have those whom we have opportunity to influence...

First, Paul calls upon Timothy to be strong in the giving of God's grace to himself. He gives three illustrations to help Timothy ward off those things that would eat into his effectiveness in passing on the Gospel to others, so that they might also teach others: a soldier of an army, an athletic competitor, and a farmer. The soldier's loyalty is to the army he is serving, the competitor competes according to the rules, and the farmer eats from the crops he produces.

Remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead according to my gospel: Wherein I suffer trouble, as an evil doer, even unto bonds; but the word of God is not bound. Therefore I endure all things for the elect's sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us: If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself. Of these things put them in remembrance, charging them before the Lord that they strive not about words to no profit, but to the subverting of the hearers. (2 Timothy 2:8-14)

Paul encourages Timothy to remember, which means to bring it back to mind and recall. This is what is true. This is fact. This is reality! Christ, who can be traced from the ancestry of David, was raised from the dead. Jesus Christ is alive, is reigning from the right hand of God the Father, and is always present here on earth by His Spirit in His body.

This is such an outstanding truth and reality that Paul says like this: "For this reason I suffer trouble, as an evil doer, (like a common criminal) even to the extent that I am in prison, in chains, in a cold dark prison in which conditions are despicable. But you know what? They might put me into these chains, but there is no way that they are going to put the Word of God in chains!"

Remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead according to my gospel: Wherein I suffer trouble, as an evil doer, even unto bonds; but the word of God is not bound. Therefore I endure all things for the elect's sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.
—2 Timothy 2:8-10 KJV



Those few words have huge significance for us and need to be imprinted on our hearts and minds so deeply that we would rarely stop thinking about what it means that "the Word of God is not bound."

Paul earlier pointed us to the grace of God as our strength, and reminded us that the resurrection is a reality! Now he points to the power of the Word of God, saying that it cannot be bound, it cannot be chained.

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His confidence is not in his flesh, but it is in the grace of God, in the living Christ, and the Word of God. Why the emphasis on the Word of God? The messenger is not important, even though the life and conduct is important; the message is all-important!

"The gospel, the good news of God's love for us in Christ Jesus—the gospel is really the most powerful force on earth. Emperors cannot stop it. Chains cannot bind it. The gospel of salvation in Christ is moving forward, marching forward, liberating captives along the way, setting them free from their prisons of sin and death, unchaining the captives long held under Satan's sway. That's you. That's me. We have been redeemed, set free by the blood of Christ, as the life-giving gospel declares. The word of God is not bound, and indeed it sets free all those who are bound, and gives them life and courage and freedom, the strength even to suffer death for the cause of Christ.

The unbound word, alive and active and setting people free. Pharaoh couldn't stop it. Nero couldn't stamp it out. Castro couldn't crush it. Mohammed, Mao, Stalin—all have failed. Persecution, martyrdom, the blood-red sword—unable to stop the advance of the gospel. The more subtle instruments of Satan—ridicule, philosophical 'enlightenment,' pop culture that has no use for what they sneeringly call 'organized religion'—none of this has been able, or will be able, to stop the spread of Christianity. For Jesus himself has told us, 'I will build my

church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.'" (Pastor Charles Henrickson, St Matthew Lutheran Church, Bonne Terre, Missouri)

The Word cannot be bound, it cannot be chained! And it is the only power that is able to break the chains that bind us in unbelief and sin. Jesus came to set us free, to unchain us. The Word that was Spirit became Flesh, and now is spoken to listeners and is God's means of grace by which He desires to bring sinners to the awareness of their need for His forgiveness.

Jesus has instituted the Office of the Ministry to declare the wonderful works of God for the purpose of bringing the forgiveness that He accomplished through the preaching of the Gospel. The declaration is made to all, and where the message is believed, the chains are broken, but where the message is not received, the chains are not broken. It is not the Office of the Ministry that keeps the chains on, but it is the lack of receiving the message that keeps the chains on.

Yes, the Word of the Gospel cannot be chained, for it not only remits sin, it also breaks the power of canceled sin!

May we be strong in the grace of our Lord. May we remember that Jesus Christ is reigning on high and in the hearts of His Church. May we trust in the unchainable Word, so we would say with the Apostle Paul: *Therefore I endure all things for the elect's sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.* (2 Timothy 2:10)

In His Grace.

Speak the Truth in Love



WE'VE ALL HEARD THAT THE Bible tells us to speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15). And while that seems simple and straightforward, as is so often the case, we can benefit greatly by taking just a little time to consider exactly what it means. After all, a rigid application of truth can leave people cold. On the other hand, it is possible to compromise the truth in an effort not to offend. In Paul's instructions to the Ephesian church we learn that we are to find the balance between the two. It's important to begin by always trying to make sure that what we say is indeed the

truth. It seems as if that could be left unsaid, but it is something that we need to consider. None of us is above making a mistake and so we do well to consider what we have to say before we speak. And we have the added advantage of an infallible source of truth to which we can look. In His Word, God has given us access to Truth. And that is not something that should be quickly overlooked in a time when the very existence of truth is questioned by so many.

Then, if what we are saying is true, we are also admonished that we speak in a spirit of love. And speaking in love appears to be on the decline. In our fast-paced world of a twenty-four-hour news cycle and the constant clatter of social media, the goal all too often seems to be getting in a one-liner that drives the point home with a sledge hammer. And while that may be momentarily satisfying and might even win an argument, that type of approach does nothing to convince others of the truth, but rather makes them more resistant to it. In Proverbs it says that, "A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger (15:1)." Giving a soft answer requires that we suppress our pride. And in so doing, we earn trust and a hearing for what we have to say.

The last thing that we should consider is whether and now is the right time to speak. There is certainly a time and place to speak the truth in love, but there is also something to be said for waiting on a better time. Prudence sometimes requires that we leave things left unsaid for the time being and trust that the Lord will allow us another opportunity to say what should be said. That often carries with it the double benefit of allowing the other person to be more receptive as well as giving us time to reflect on how to speak to them in as true spirit of love and humility.

We live in a world that is in desperate need of the truth. And since that is the case, it falls on each one of us to hold up the truth in such a way that the name of Christ is honored. By God's grace and with His help, I pray that we will all be able to speak the truth in love.

God's peace be with you.

Pastor Jason Salmi
Vancouver, Washington

Good, Bad or In Between

A Short Survey in the Doctrine of Man

Name that Creed

What is man? All theologies answer this question. Some say man is good; others that man is bad, but most say that there is a mix of good and bad. So we'll play a theological game (your favorite kind, I know). Below are four statements on the teaching of man and the depth of sin. Your job is to guess who said it.

1. Man is responsible for sin because he is endowed with free will; yet he is by nature frail, and the tendency of the mind is to evil: *"for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth"* (Genesis 8:21)
2. By his free choice man sinned against God and brought sin into the human race. Through the temptation of Satan man transgressed the command of God, and fell from his original innocence, whereby his posterity inherit a nature and an environment inclined toward sin. Therefore, as soon as they are capable of moral action, they become transgressors and are under condemnation. Only the grace of God can bring man into His holy fellowship and enable man to fulfill the creative purpose of God.
3. [Original sin] is a deprivation of original holiness and justice, but human nature has not been totally corrupted: it is wounded in the natural powers proper to it; subject to ignorance, suffering, and the dominion of death; and inclined to sin—an inclination to evil that is called 'concupiscence.'
4. Nor do I absolve my own self of blame: the human soul is certainly prone to evil, unless my Lord do bestow His Mercy: but surely my Lord is Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful.

Before we get to the answers, let's point out the difficulty of the game: all the answers are the same! The key word in each answer is 'inclination.' In the first answer: "the tendency of the mind is to evil." In the second and third: "a nature and an environment inclined toward sin" and "inclined to sin." And in the last answer: "The human soul is certainly prone to evil." There is a common theme in all of these teachings, and that is that man is not good, and yet not necessarily evil, but inclined and prone to do evil.

Now for the source of each statement:

1. The Jewish Encyclopedia
2. Baptist Faith and Message (2000)
3. The Catechism of the Catholic Church, 405
4. The Quran 12:53

Stunned? It is amazing that modern Judaism, the Southern Baptist Church, the Roman Catholic Church and the Muslim religion have the same doctrine of man. All of these teach that man is wounded, sick, troubled, but that there is still some degree of freedom and life in the will of man.

I, A Poor, Miserable Sinner

Most people think of themselves as a "pretty good person." The Scriptures beg to differ. The denial of original sin means that most people live in the delusion of their own freedom, but the Bible teaches that all men are dead in trespasses and sin. How many good people are there? St Paul answers: *As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. Their throat*

is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness: Their feet are swift to shed blood: Destruction and misery are in their ways: And the way of peace have they not known: There is no fear of God before their eyes. Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. (Romans 3:10-19) See also Eph. 2:1ff.

The Scriptures teach with clarity that man is wicked and unholy, and yet (as we have seen above) this teaching that no one is righteous or holy is almost universally denied. But this makes sense. Our sinfulness is so complete that we are blind to our sinful condition.

Imagine a man falls off a ladder and breaks his ankle. He is broken and he knows it; he cries out for help from someone else. But imagine again that this man breaks his ankle and his back. Now he doesn't feel the pain of his injury, and in fact might not even know that he is hurt. "Give me a hand up, I'll be okay." So is our fall, we are so badly hurt that we do not even feel the injury; we do not know the depth of our sin.

Martin Luther talked of this trouble, that our sin is so deep that we don't even feel it:

"This hereditary sin is so deep and horrible a corruption of nature that no reason can understand it, but it must be learned and believed from the revelation of Scriptures, Psalm 51:5; Romans 6:12ff; Exodus 33:3; Genesis 3:7ff." [Smalcald Articles III.1.3]

What Does it Matter?

Most churches teach that our sin is a tendency, not a death. Does this matter? Yes, in fact the Gospel is at stake.

If the article of Justification is the article upon which the church stands or falls, then the article of Original Sin is the article upon which justification stands or falls. When we know the depth of our sin then we know the height of God's love for us. The law shows us the depths to which we have fallen, our complete inability to love, serve, and fear God, our complete lack of freedom, and so our utter dependence on Jesus for freedom, life, and salvation.

Our Lutheran Confessions comment on this:

"But the knowledge of original sin is necessary. For the magnitude of the grace of Christ cannot be understood and no one can heartily long and have a desire for Christ, for the inexpressibly great treasure of divine favor and grace which the Gospel offers, unless our diseases be recognized. As Christ says Matt. 9:12; Mark 2:17: "They that are whole need not a physician." The entire righteousness of man is mere hypocrisy and abomination before God, unless we acknowledge that our heart is naturally destitute of love, fear, and confidence in God, that we are miserable sinners who are in disgrace with God. [Apology to the Augsburg Confession, II.33-34]

The depth of our sin puts the "alone" in front of grace, in front of faith, in front of Christ. When we know the depth of our sin then we cry out with full voice to God, "Help!" "Lord, have mercy!" And the biblical doctrine of our original sin gives us the comfort that Jesus has done all to win our salvation. This is the only comfort for sinners. May God grant us this comfort in life and in death.

*In the Name of Jesus.
Pastor Bryan Wolfmueller*

Forgive Us Our Debts as We Forgive Our Debtors

Gwen Wilson
Ridgefield, Washington

Dear Children far and near,

Hello to each of you. I really hope your day is going well. Mine is going well. The sun is shining, the flowers are blooming and the birds are singing, and that is just right for me. I want to share with you something that has been going through my mind and that is forgiveness.

IT CAN BE VERY HARD to forgive someone for hurting you, or to forgive someone who has hurt a person you love.

It can also be very hard to seek to be forgiven.

Sin came when Adam and Eve fell in the Garden of perfect Eden, by eating of the one tree they were forbidden to take from. Who told them NOT to eat of that tree? God did, right? God told man he would surely die if he ate of that one tree.

Who told Eve they could eat of that tree and they would NOT die but be as gods, knowing good and evil? Yes, the devil. He made it sound not so bad if they were only going to be made wiser! This sounded good to Eve, who ate first, and then she gave some to Adam.

When they did this, they then knew they were naked and needed covering. God sent them out of that beautiful garden forever. Adam and Eve knew they had sinned.

Our flesh has a hard time following God's commands. We tend to want to just do our own thing so much of the time. Do you know what comes out of this behavior? Usually disappointment and consequence for sin.

You can be sure you will always experience that you don't feel as happy as you could be if you have sin in your heart. And you can be sure to know that when you are free from that wrong you hide, you will feel like your feet are not even on the ground. It is so freeing!

I know when one has been hurt by someone how hard it can be to forgive, and that it can even take years to come to that time when the heart is ready to be rid of that bitterness and forgive, BUT I also know with all my heart that with God's guiding and help, one can freely forgive and be free. God knows us so well and knows how to be ever so gentle with us.

Jesus died on the cross for sinners, and He shed every drop of His blood to save us. If you are struggling to forgive someone, please think of this. In the Lord's Prayer we pray: *And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. (Matthew 6:12)*

You may say in your heart, "What? I can't forgive that person." I understand if you think like this, but then think of this: that person who has offended you has the same right as you to go to heaven if they repent of their wrong. They just might be there also, and what do you think of that? It's sobering, for sure, but pray to God continually and He will provide a way for you.



Artist: Mike Waters
image-source: <http://www.turnbacktogo.com>.

Even if you have not been sinned against but have your own wrong sitting tucked away in your heart and your mind, do pray to be free. Jesus died for you and He has forgiven you for all your sin, and sometimes we need to hear that precious message of the fact that Jesus shed His blood for you once and FOR ALL.

Our God is so great and loved us so much that He sent His one and only Son to die to save mankind. Who of us could do that for anyone, let alone the whole race of man?

I praise God for His greatness, His love and care for my soul and for all who will believe on His Son Jesus.

Let us rest in Him who never changes and put our trust in Him. He is our solid Rock. If we are not standing on that Rock we will experience trouble.

Trusting in God and Jesus- SOLID PEACE

Trusting in self - NO PEACE

God be with you all as you continue to serve the Lover of your precious little hearts and souls.

God's peace.

THE CHURCH'S MESSAGE is the message of the forgiveness of sins. And indeed God on account of Christ gives this forgiveness as gift to all who believe on Jesus as "Lord and Christ." Furthermore this message is not a theory about the forgiveness of sins, but the offer to all mankind to have their sins forgiven. *Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. (2 Corinthians 5:20-21)* This and nothing else is the message of the apostles. This, and nothing else, is the message of the church today. Whatever else the church includes in her proclamation, she does for the sake of this message. Her message is a call to mankind to be reconciled with God. She has no other Gospel than the Gospel of the forgiveness of sins. Her Baptism is a Baptism for the forgiveness of sins. "Given and shed for you for forgiveness of sins" - this is the Gospel for the church in the Lord's Supper.

Hermann Sasse

Reformation Beginnings:

The Reformation #3

(continued from back cover)

This child, whom his parents lend to the Lord as long as he liveth; the song of Hannah, in which she declares that Jehovah "raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes;" this child who grew up in the temple in the presence of the Lord; those sacrificers, the sons of Eli, who are wicked men, who live in debauchery, and "make the Lord's people to trans-gress;" — all this history, all this revelation that he has just discovered, excites feelings till then unknown. He returns home with a full heart. "Oh! that God would give me such a book for myself," thought he.

Luther was as yet ignorant both of Greek and Hebrew. It is scarcely probable that he had studied these languages during the first two or three years of his residence at the university. The Bible that had filled him with such transports was in Latin. He soon returned to the library to pore over his treasure. He read it again and again, and then, in his astonishment and joy, he returned to read it once more. The first glimmerings of a new truth were then beginning to dawn upon his mind.

Thus had God led him to the discovery of His Word — of that book of which he was one day to give his fellow countrymen that admirable translation in which Germany has for three centuries perused the oracles of God. Perhaps for the first time his precious volume has now been taken down from the place it occupied in the library of Erfurth. This book, deposited upon the unknown shelves of a gloomy hall, is about to become the book of life to a whole nation. In that Bible the Reformation lay hid.

*Excerpts from Volume 1, History of the Reformation
By J. H. Merle D'Aubigne, Printed in New York in 1880*



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FAITH IS A LIVING, UNSHAKEABLE CONFIDENCE in God's grace; it is so certain, that someone would die a thousand times for it. This kind of trust in and knowledge of God's grace makes a person joyful, confident, and happy with regard to God and all creatures. This is what the Holy Spirit does by faith. Through faith, a person will do good to everyone without coercion, willingly and happily; he will serve everyone, suffer everything for the love and praise of God, who has shown him such grace. It is as impossible to separate works from faith as burning and shining from fire. Therefore be on guard against your own false ideas and against the chatters who think they are clever enough to make judgements about faith and good works but who are in reality the biggest fools. Ask God to work faith in you; otherwise you will remain eternally without faith, no matter what you try to do or fabricate.

Martin Luther
Preface to the Letter of St. Paul to the Romans

A Wife to Love and Live With in Peace

Pastor Mark Matson
Pasco, Washington

Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it... Ephesians 5:25

Advice to consider for young men who desire a wife:

1. Choose for a wife a Christian who loves God and His Word. *Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? (2 Corinthians 6:14) Can two walk together, except they be agreed? (Amos 3:3)*
2. Don't marry until you can love the lady you desire to marry completely without reservation.
3. Don't hurry into marriage until you get to know her as she is with all her faults, which could cause you to despise your wife after you are married.
4. Remember God commands you to love one who has forsaken all others for you, one who is content to be your wife in good times and bad times, through joy and sorrow, as long as life will last.
5. Always magnify her strengths and minimize her weaknesses. Remember you also have your weak and strong points.
6. As women are affectionate and passionate, they also expect the same love and affection from you. *My beloved is mine, and I am his: he feedeth among the lilies. (Song of Solomon 2:16)*
7. Thank her always and be ready to praise her for her efforts to make the home you will establish a happy, joyful place. *Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her. (Proverbs 31:28)*
8. Don't stir up anger in your wife. Remember what the Bible says: *For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God. (James 1:20)*
9. Smother her with love and kindness, and you will find it returns many times over.
10. Two sinners saved by God's infinite grace are getting married. Remember to always have forgiveness toward your wife; as Christ has forgiven you, so also you forgive her. Know for sure that this side of heaven, neither of you will be without the need of forgiving each other.
11. The man and wife who pray together stay together. *And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint. (Luke 18:1)*



This advice is fitting for all who would be married, and for all of us who are married.

God's peace!



Ship in a Storm Lev Lagorio
Courtesy of www.the-athenaeum.org

And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

Ephesians 4:11-16

SO LONG AS A PERSON is weak in Christian knowledge, having no thorough understanding of Christian doctrine, so long he is apt to be tossed to and fro, driven back and forth, like a rudderless ship in a storm. Every new temptation from within, every new attack from without, makes some new inroad upon such a person's firmness. Every new wind of false doctrine takes such a person along, because the ship of his faith is not anchored firmly enough in the knowledge of Christ. The false teachers that attack the weak Christians deal with the Scriptures and with the truth and with the men whom they try to beguile with their oily voice, just as gamblers play with dice. One never knows what new trick is coming next, what new doctrine will be invented to deceive the souls of men. Their entire behavior tends to treacherous tricks, they practice carefully planned deceitful devices. The Christian, therefore, that is not yet firmly grounded in all the doctrines of the Bible as they pertain to man's salvation, is apt to stray from the way, to wander hither and yonder, and thus to be lost forever. Thus the deceitful schemes of the false teachers and seducers lead to the false way of life that strays fatally from the truth. Note: It belongs to the business of the pastors and teachers whom Christ has given to His Church that they point out the dangers threatening on the part of false teachers, that they refute their arguments, that they expose the tricks and the jugglery which false prophets practice upon the Word of Grace, that they continue the instruction of all the church-members by means of doctrinal sermons and discussions, so that all the Christians in their care are furthered in the knowledge of truth and learn to distinguish between falsehood and truth and to try the spirits.

Paul Kretzmann

Believing Is Seeing

Lois Matson
Yacolt, Washington

HAVE YOU EVER HEARD the idiom “seeing is believing”? This phrase is first seen in 1639 in a book of proverbs published by John Clark. It means that only things that can be seen, that have concrete, physical evidence can be trusted. Those who hold to this teaching say, “See first. Then believe.” But this thought was around long before 1639. It is basically what Thomas said to the disciples when they claimed to have seen the risen Lord.

Thomas wasn’t there when Jesus appeared to His disciples on the evening of the resurrection, saying, “Peace be unto you.” Then Jesus showed them His hands and His side, and the disciples were so happy. Their Lord was alive!

When the disciples gave this glad news to Thomas, he didn’t believe it. He said, *Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.* (John 20:25) “I’ll see first, or I’ll not believe.” Thomas even added the caveat that he must touch the print of the nails and the opening in Jesus’ side, or he would never believe that Jesus was alive.

Thomas had witnessed the power of God. He had seen miracles, and he had strong faith. When Jesus wanted to go to Lazarus in Judea, where the Jews had recently tried to stone Him, Thomas had been willing to go with Jesus, even if it meant his death.

But Thomas had also seen Jesus die. His faith was crushed. He was unable, or unwilling, to believe that his Lord had returned to life. Without seeing, there was no believing.

Earlier, when Jesus had come to the tomb of Lazarus, Jesus told them to take away the stone from the opening of the cave. Martha, the sister of Lazarus, protested, “Lord, by this time he stinks, for he has been dead four days!” Jesus said to Martha, “Didn’t I tell you that **if you would believe, you would see** the glory of God?”

Jesus uses the phrase “seeing is believing” in reverse. He turns everything around; He makes everything new. Jesus says, in essence, “Believe first. Then see.”

When the stone was taken away from Lazarus’ tomb, Jesus prayed to His Father and spoke to the dead man: “Lazarus! Come forth!” And they saw. The man who had been dead stumbled out of the grave with the strips of burial cloth still wrapped around him.

Thomas witnessed this, but he didn’t comprehend the power of our Lord to conquer even death. Jesus was so tender, so merciful, so caring to Thomas the Doubter. Eight days later, the disciples were gathered again, and this time, Thomas was there. Jesus appeared to them behind locked doors, saying, “Peace be unto you.” Then He said to Thomas, “Reach your finger here, and see my hands. Reach your hand here and touch my side. Do not be faithless, but believing.”

And Thomas answered, “My Lord and my God!” Thomas saw and believed.

Jesus said, “Thomas, because you have seen Me you have believed. Blessed are they who have not seen and yet have believed.”

The gospel of John continues with these words: *And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.* (John 20:30-31)

The words of John were written so that you would believe, and by believing you would have life through His name. Even though you haven’t seen miracles or witnessed the raising of a dead man. Even though you haven’t seen, physically, the resurrected Lord. First believe. Then see. Have faith in the unseen. You do have eternal life through the name of Jesus, though you cannot see Him physically today.



The writer to the Hebrews states: *Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.* (Hebrews 11:1) Examples are given of the elders who died without seeing the promise realized: ***These all died in faith, not having received the promise’s, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth... But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.*** (Hebrews 11:13, 16)

We, too, are pilgrims and strangers on earth. We, too, desire a better, heavenly country. Let us look to Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith. ~

Christian Monthly Vol. LXXIII—No. 8

Subscription Rate: 1 Year

US: \$12 (Washington residents add your local sales tax)

Canada: \$18 (US money order only) Foreign: \$25

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The *Christian Monthly* (ISSN 0009-5494) is published monthly for \$12 per year by the Apostolic Lutheran Book Concern, 19113 NE 144th Street, Brush Prairie, WA 98606. Periodical permit paid in Brush Prairie, Washington.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to: PO Box 2126, Battle Ground, WA 98604

General Disclaimer: The material in the *Christian Monthly* is reviewed for scriptural soundness and to ensure that it does not conflict with the teachings of the ALCA. Publication does not imply that other material by included authors has been so approved.



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Reformation Beginnings: The Seed that Grew a Tree

The Reformation #3

[Editor's Note: This is the third in a series celebrating the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. Thus far, we've seen how the printing press allowed for easier distribution of printed materials, and the desperate need for reformation in the Church. This month we see God beginning the work of the Reformation.]

THERE IS IN CHRISTIANITY WHAT no other religious system possesses. It does not, like them, present certain general ideas mingled with tradition and fable, destined to fall sooner or later under the assault of reason: it contains a pure and undefiled truth, founded on facts capable of bearing the examination of every upright and enlightened mind.

Christianity does not propose merely to excite in man certain vague religious feelings, whose charm once lost can never be recovered: its object is to satisfy, and it does really satisfy, all the religious wants of human nature, whatever may be the degree of development which it has attained.

It is not the work of man, whose labors pass away and are forgotten; it is the work of God, who upholds what He has created; and it has the promise of its Divine Head as the pledge of its duration.

It is impossible for human nature ever to rise superior to Christianity. And if for a time man thought he could do without it, it soon appeared to him with fresh youth and a new life, as the only remedy for souls. The degenerate nations then returned with new ardor toward those ancient, simple, and powerful truths, which in the hour of their infatuation they had despised.

In fact, Christianity manifested in the sixteenth century the same regenerative power that it had exercised at first. After fifteen centuries the same truths produced the same effects. In the day of the Reformation, as in the time of Peter and Paul, the Gospel overthrew mighty obstacles with irresistible force. Its sovereign power displayed its efficacy from north to south among nations the most dissimilar in manners, character, and intellectual development. Then as in the times of Stephen and James, it kindled the fire of enthusiasm and devotedness in the lifeless nations, and elevated them to the height of martyrdom.

How was this revival of the Church accomplished? We observe two laws by which God governs the Church in all times.

First He prepares slowly and from afar that which He designs to accomplish. He has ages in which to work.

Then, when the time is come, He effects the greatest results by the smallest means. It is thus He acts in nature and in history. When He wishes to produce a majestic tree, He deposits a small seed in the bosom of the earth; when He wishes to renovate His Church, He employs the lowliest instruments to accomplish what emperors and learned and distinguished men in the Church could not effect. We shall soon go in search of, and we shall discover, that small seed which a Divine hand placed in the earth in the days of the Reformation...

The Word, the Seed and Luther the Tool

Luther was sensible of his entire dependence upon God — a simple and powerful conviction, which is at once the cause of deep humility and of great actions! He fervently invoked the divine blessing upon his labors. Every morning he began the day with prayer; he then went to church, and afterwards applied to his studies, losing not a moment in the whole course of the day. "To pray well," he was in the habit of saying, "is the better half of study."

The young student passed in the university library all the time he could snatch from his academical pursuits. Books were as yet rare, and it was a great privilege for him to profit by the treasures brought together in this vast collection. One day — he had then been two years at Erfurth, and was twenty years old — he opens many books in the library one after another, to learn their writers' names. One volume that he comes to attracts his attention. He has never until this hour seen its like. He reads the title — it is a Bible! a rare book, unknown in those times. His interest is greatly excited: he is filled with astonishment at finding other matters than those fragments of the gospels and epistles that the Church has selected to be read to the people during public worship every Sunday throughout the year. Until this day he had imagined that they composed the whole Word of God. And now he sees so many pages, so many chapters, so many books of which he had had no idea! His heart beats, as he holds the divinely inspired volume in his hand. With eagerness and with indescribable emotion he turns over these leaves from God. The first page on which he fixes his attention narrates the story of Hannah and of the young Samuel. He reads — and his soul can hardly contain the joy it feels.

