

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 2022

Preach the Word

Charles Korhonen
Tapiola, Michigan

*Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season;
reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.*

2 Timothy 4:2

APOSTLE PAUL WROTE TWO LETTERS to Timothy in what amounts to be his final words of guidance to believers in Christ. Above all, he exhorted Timothy to guard his heart against false doctrine, especially against those *desiring to be teachers of the law...* (1 Timothy 1:7) One might question what is wrong with trying to satisfy the Ten Commandments seeing that God gave them to us. After all, we should do whatever we can to please our heavenly Father, shouldn't we? Throughout his ministry, Paul opposed the notion that man should somehow try to fulfill the Law, even if only partially. It is human nature to try to please God; but Paul contends that it only matters what God has done for you, not the other way around.

The Book of Acts details Paul's struggle against such false doctrine when people from his own faith began to teach fellow believers that *except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.* (Acts 15:1) Paul taught that it was faith alone that saved a person and that there was no requirement to try to satisfy the law as well. However, there were certain "believers" who adamantly opposed this idea, preferring instead to teach that it was *needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses.* (Acts 15:5) To this Peter responded by saying that those who *hear the word of the gospel, and believe* will receive the gift of the Holy Ghost from God, *which knoweth the hearts.* (Acts 15:7-8)

Before his conversion, Paul, being a Pharisee himself, would have totally agreed with the need of obeying the Law in order to be saved for he too *taught according to the perfect manner of the law...* (Acts 21:3) However, when Jesus spoke to him on the road to Damascus, Paul became awakened to his lost condition for the very first time in his life. But it was not until Ananias placed his hands on him that Paul was saved being *filled with the Holy Ghost* (Acts 9:17), just as John the

Baptist said would happen to all who repent of their sins in the name of Jesus: *I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I...he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire.* (Matthew 3:11) Paul testified that God gave him the "faith" to believe that his sins were forgiven when he met with Ananias: *arise and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.* (Acts 22:16) Thus, Paul's salvation had nothing to do with satisfying the Law of Moses but with being baptized with the Holy Ghost; that's how he and the other apostles taught.

This battle for the hearts and minds of man has not relented over time and will only gain in strength of deception in the latter days: *For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry.* (2 Timothy 4:3-5) It is abundantly

clear today that most people think more of themselves than of others, let alone to think of the eternal salvation of others. Preachers of "false doctrine" have always appeared to be righteous, *Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.* (2 Timothy 3:5) Sadly, those who stubbornly turn their back to God will continue to listen to false doctrine and to go about life without knowing that they are sinners in need of God's saving grace: *but the wicked shall do wickedly: and none of the wicked shall understand...* (Daniel 12:10)

Thus, Paul's guidance to Timothy centers on believers being ever-ready to preach the Word. That is to never tire of teaching that *through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins*" (Acts 13:38) It will then follow that those who truthfully call upon God will be granted the grace to repent of their sin and to believe the gospel message of forgiveness proclaimed by a messenger of God, such as Ananias. These penitent souls will then personally understand what God has done for them as they study Scripture under the tutelage of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

God's peace.



As My Father Has Sent Me, Even So I Send You

From the Archives of the late Pastor Alvin Holmgren, May 1992

THIS COMMISSION OF CHRIST AND the giving of the Holy Spirit are inseparably connected—the commission cannot be accomplished without the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit.

When Jesus met His disciples on the evening of the day of resurrection, His first words were a comfort to His troubled followers. Not long before this momentous meeting, Jesus had said to them: “PEACE I LEAVE WITH YOU, MY PEACE I GIVE UNTO YOU. NOT AS THE WORLD GIVES, GIVE I UNTO YOU. LET NOT YOUR HEART BE TROUBLED, NEITHER LET IT BE AFRAID.” (John 14:27)

But much had taken place between that meeting and this resurrection day meeting. Now fear gripped their hearts as they waited behind closed doors. In reassuring manner, Jesus greeted them with peace: “PEACE BE UNTO YOU.” Then He showed them His nail-pierced hands and His sword-riven side. Joy began to flood their hearts, dispelling the sorrow of the events of Good Friday and their succeeding hopelessness.

Jesus repeated this greeting: “PEACE BE UNTO YOU,” and then added: “AS MY FATHER HAS SENT ME, EVEN SO I SEND YOU.” When He had said these words, He breathed on them and said: “RECEIVE YE THE HOLY GHOST. WHOSESOEVER SINS YE REMIT, THEY ARE REMITTED UNTO THEM, AND WHOSESOEVER SINS YE RETAIN, THEY ARE RETAINED.” (John 20:19-23)

Peace is the fruit of the Lord’s resurrection. Without this final victory-gaining conclusion to His atoning and reconciling ministry, no soul would ever experience peace here in this life, victory over sin, and be able to rest in the quiet embrace of peace in eternity. The peace of Christ is hidden from mortal senses. It is not of the nature which the world pictures and seeks, nor such as we can understand through intellectual powers alone.

Jesus told the disciples that they would experience tribulation in the world but encouraged them to be of good cheer because He would overcome the world. The peace of God, which passes all understanding, is the means by which our hearts and minds are guarded through Christ Jesus.

As Christians, we are content with having the Lord as our Friend and through Him, God as our gracious Father who daily desires our spiritual and temporal welfare in this life, and eternal peace to be our portion in the life that is to come. Having given such a great gift as His peace, Jesus then spoke the words whereby it has been said that He established His kingdom, the kingdom which He repeatedly described as not of this world. It is the purpose of this kingdom, which He often called the Kingdom of Heaven, both to know and to show how we may be freed from sin and its condemnation, and possess righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost.

These commissioning words of Jesus are important: “AS MY FATHER SENT ME, EVEN SO I SEND YOU.” As His followers, we are to preach the word which we have heard and received from Him. When He finished the work which He came here on earth to do, He did not take the ministry of the Word with Him to heaven, but He left it here in His kingdom as a special calling and commission for His followers. He has given us both the ministry and the word of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18-19).

Special power is required to accomplish this work—a power that is not human, but divine. Jesus did not equip His followers with natural swords or with carnal or worldly power, but with that of the Holy Spirit. He breathed upon them and said to them: “RECEIVE YE THE HOLY GHOST” and then the authority, “WHOSESOEVER SINS YE REMIT, THEY ARE RE-MITTED UNTO THEM, AND WHOSESOEVER SINS YE RETAIN, THEY ARE RETAINED.”

Although the power to remit sins belongs to God only, He exercises and imparts it through the office of the Holy Spirit by means of the ministry which Jesus gave to His disciples with the words: “AS MY FATHER HAS SENT ME, EVEN SO I SEND YOU.”

This commission is not something assumed or appropriated by man, nor performed by human will and power, but by the authority and on the command of Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit. It extends farther than all other authority known here on earth because it opens heaven itself to all who believe the gospel.

In writing about the only acceptable righteousness, which the Apostle Paul terms the righteousness which is by faith, he states: “...SAY NOT IN YOUR HEART, WHO SHALL ASCEND INTO HEAVEN? THAT IS, TO BRING CHRIST DOWN FROM ABOVE. OR WHO SHALL DESCEND INTO THE DEEP? THAT IS, TO BRING UP CHRIST AGAIN FROM THE DEAD. BUT WHAT SAITH IT? THE WORD IS NIGH THEE, EVEN IN THY MOUTH AND IN THY HEART: THAT IS THE WORD OF FAITH WHICH WE PREACH. THAT IF THOU SHALT CONFESS WITH THY MOUTH THE LORD JESUS, AND SHALT BELIEVE IN THINE HEART THAT GOD HAS RAISED HIM FROM THE DEAD, THOU SHALT BE SAVED. FOR WITH THE HEART MAN BELIEVES UNTO RIGHTEOUSNESS, AND WITH THE MOUTH CONFESSION IS MADE UNTO SALVATION.” (Romans 10:6-10)

From these Biblical teachings, and from the words of our Lord in particular, we can understand the significance of this commission regarding which Luther wrote: Even if we could ascend into heaven on a golden ladder, we could accomplish nothing in that way because the words of Jesus still remain: “AS MY FATHER HAS SENT ME, EVEN SO I SEND YOU.” We should not try to reach God in a different way than that which He has ordained.

This is the true doctrine concerning the Kingdom of Christ and the office of the keys. Let us act accordingly and remain Christians who through the power of the Holy Spirit are then prepared for all things in our relationship both with God and our fellow men. This kingdom was established so that the inhabitants of this world may obtain a treasure that cannot be bought with money. Let us be grateful to our Lord and Savior, who through His resurrection founded this kingdom of grace wherein all our spiritual needs are satisfied.

In Him alone we have all things. *But of him are ye in Christ Jesus who of God has made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption: That, according as it is written, he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord. (1 Corinthians 1:30-31) ~*

*This was written just before Pastor Holmgren went to Riga, Latvia, the second time. He went there three times to preach and teach shortly after the Baltic States regained their Independence.

The Power of the Holy Ghost

C. O. Rosenius

Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.

Romans 15:13

HERE THE APOSTLE DOES NOT wish us any small measure of hope and consolation. No, he wishes us a full assurance of faith, even up to **joy**. He says: *the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing*. The expression *all joy and peace* reminds us of the causes for rejoicing we have by our union with God. *Peace and joy in believing*, says the apostle. This again tells us that it is not the matter of joy that depends on good circumstances or on our seeing ourselves so pious than good that we would be able to rejoice at that. But it speaks about joy that only depends on **faith**. That joy only depends on our trusting in the words and promises of God, whereas in ourselves we see sheer causes for sorrow. To **believe** is to have consolation in something invisible only on the promises of God. And here the saving faith in Christ is meant, because it shall work with *joy and peace* and that *through the power of the Holy Ghost*. This faith is only a gift from God and for that faith we may well pray. This faith is a work God brings about only by the preaching of the Gospel when it hits the destitute and the powerless sinners. But then we see and feel with ourselves only most depressing things. And so shall also faith during all possible worries be trusting in the mere Word of God, while we only see and feel what is threatening and deplorable. But how then can we have joy and peace? Yes, expressly then there will be a supernatural joy and peace, which will only be the work of God. And it is such a work of God that the apostle wishes us here.

He now adds furthermore: *That ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost*. This is now the last and sweetest fruit of all the good things God has done and does: we have a perfectly sure hope of the eternal bliss. Such a hope is a great power in all our Christianity. This hope gives us an inclination and power to run faithfully in the race that is set before us. It gives us courage and strength to do, suffer and endure in everything that belongs to the fight. *The joy of the Lord is your strength. (Nehemiah 8:10)* And the hope of salvation is our helmet in the fight. All the life is also otherwise so full of afflictions, trials and misery, that a perfect hope of the glory that God will give us is well needed, if we shall not succumb on the way, become tired and negligent, but shall endure with patience and faithfulness.

But now: we certainly have extremely strong foundations for the hope of salvation and eternal bliss, because we have

been created for the eternal life. We have been redeemed at such a price for the eternal life. Christ has given Himself out for that life—not for this short life on earth—to be an expiatory sacrifice. God has given us the Sabbath, the Word, the Sacraments and the work of the Holy Spirit in our souls for the eternal life. If we are the children and friends of God, we are then also sure to become His heirs. To be sure He will make His friends really happy and full of joy.

Although the grounds are so firm and unfailing, still our hearts—by the depravity of nature—are so full of doubt and so unsteady, that we cannot keep this blessed hope if God Himself does not give us the precious gift. A hope depending on some effort, thinking and deciding on our own part is always weak and uncertain. But when God Himself gives us the assurance by the Holy Ghost and fills us with joy and peace in faith—then we get the perfect hope the apostle speaks of here. Therefore he adds the words: *through the power of the Holy Ghost*.

The apostle now mentions the third person in the Deity and says He is active to give us full consolation. The eternal Father—called *the God of hope*—works a perfect hope in us by the Holy Ghost, when He fills us with joy and peace in faith.

And by this addition, *through the power of the Holy Ghost*, the apostle again wants to remind us that we cannot do or take anything ourselves, but it is given from above. Oh, how important it is to feel deeply, how all grace and power depends on the giving of God! All our peace and growth in good is all the time prevented by the imagination that we ourselves are capable of something. Even if we can use the outward means and—when we hear the admonition—eagerly

desire what is good for ourselves, we will soon experience that we cannot take it ourselves. And still the imagination of our own capability is so deeply rooted in our nature that it is the greatest obstacle to the work of God in us. On one hand then God should perpetually cast down this imagination by leaving us in powerlessness. On the other hand, this imagination which is the source of unbelief works as an obstacle to the work of God in us. On the contrary, how warm and willing the person becomes when we feel and believe deeply that all good comes because God gives it!

About this we have such texts as these: *without me ye can do nothing. (John 15:5)* *Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves. (2 Corinthians 3:5)* *For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure. (Philippians 2:13)* The apostle wants to remind us of such things by the words: *through the power of the Holy Ghost*. ~



Upcoming Services

Tapiola, Michigan, the 3rd weekend of September. Contact: Tom Mackrain
Hockinson, Washington, September 30-October 2. Contact: Andy Mickelson
High Point, North Carolina, the 2nd weekend of November. Contact: Jeff Deakins

Give thanks unto the Lord, call upon his name, make known his deeds among the people. Sing unto him, sing psalms unto him, talk ye of all his wondrous works. Glory ye in his holy name: let the heart of them rejoice that seek the Lord. (1 Chronicles 16:8-10)

Did You Know...?

Gwen Wilson
Ridgefield, Washington

Dear Children,

Hello to each of you. I pray this finds you having a good day. We don't always have those and on those tough days, our God sees us and cares for us. We can go to Him in prayer with our problems and He can help us have a better day.

I was looking around in my Bible for something to write about and I got this idea to share some interesting things that are in there. I hope you enjoy these. You can even look them up and read them for yourself if you like.

Before God created rain to fall from heaven, a mist went up from the earth and watered the ground. Genesis 2:6

Methuselah was the oldest man in the Bible. He lived 969 years. Wow! Genesis 5:27

Methuselah's son Lamech lived 182 years, and then he had a son.

- Lamech called his son Noah, saying, *This same (son) shall comfort us concerning our work and toil of our hands, because of the ground which the Lord hath cursed.* (Genesis 5:29)
- Noah would be a blessing to his generation. You know the great thing that God called Noah to do. He built the ark!

Giants lived before and after the flood. The first mention of them is in Genesis 6:1-4.

- Many giants were living near the coast of Moab, in the land of the Ammonites, and as God was leading His people to the promised land of Israel, He told them to go there. He was giving this land as a possession to Lot. The Lord went before them and slew all of the giants so the land could be for His people. Deuteronomy 2:16-21
- Another giant, the only one remaining, lived many miles north of Moab in the land of Bashan. This was Og, the king of Bashan. Here's the interesting thing about him. His bed was made of iron, and it was thirteen feet long, and almost six feet wide. Deuteronomy 3:11. That was one big bed! I suggest you get a measuring tape to get an idea how a person your size would look in that bed.
- Goliath, with whom we all are most familiar, is first mentioned in 1 Samuel 17:4. This is the battle where David slays him. Goliath was over 9 ½ feet tall. He possibly had one brother and four sons. They all had six fingers on each hand and six toes on each foot. 2 Samuel 21:15-22 tells of the four sons dying by the hand of David and his servants.



In the land of Israel in the Old Testament times they had a certain way of purchasing land or exchanging ownership of land and/or possessions.

- *Now this was the manner in former time in Israel concerning redeeming (purchasing) and concerning changing (altering a rule that had been in place), for to confirm (signed and sealed deal) all things; a man took off his shoe, and gave it to his neighbor (the one who is selling something or making the deal); and this was a testimony in Israel. Ruth 4:7*
- This was performed in front of a group of elders as witnesses.

I'm sure you're familiar with King Saul and know that his son Jonathan and David were close friends. When they grew up, Jonathan married and had a son named Mephibosheth, who was five years old at the time of one of the battles in which Saul and Jonathan were fighting. King Saul and Jonathan both died in that battle.

- Back at their home, Mephibosheth was with his nurse (or nanny, as we call them). The nurse took Mephibosheth and was fleeing to a place of safety where the child would not be harmed, due to the fact that he was of royal blood. On her way, the nurse fell while carrying Mephibosheth, and in the fall both of his legs were badly injured, resulting in him growing up lame. 2 Samuel 4:4
- When David became king, he wanted so much to do something for his friend Jonathan's family. When King David discovered that his friend's son was still alive, he called for Mephibosheth to come and live with him. Mephibosheth did come and he lived in David's house as a son for the rest of his days. He even was given permission to eat at King David's table. Not many got that privilege! 2 Samuel 9



THERE ARE SO MANY MORE things one could write about, but more will have to wait. I do hope you will look these Scriptures up and read more about these accounts. The Bible is full of many interesting things, especially the good things that the Lord has done and will do and wants to do for those who love Him.

I have always enjoyed coming across interesting events in the Bible. Ecclesiastes, a book in the Bible, says that there is nothing new under the sun. God knew and knows all things. He knew and knows every detail about each one of us, and there is nothing any of us can hide from Him.

I pray you will continue to seek and serve Him until the day He comes to take His beloved to come and be with Him in perfect peace FOREVER.

Everything Reproduces After Its Own Kind

Austin Ojala
Rindge, New Hampshire

GENESIS LAYS DOWN THIS PRINCIPAL right away in the first chapter. God cannot produce a sinner, because in Him there is no sin. Yes, everyone is born into sin. The Gospel is that we can be and must be born again. Being born again is supernatural by the power of the Holy Spirit. Faith comes by hearing the Word of God.

And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth: and it was so. And the earth brought forth grass, and herb yielding seed after his kind, and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself, after his kind: and God saw that it was good. (Genesis 1:11-12)

And God created great whales, and every living creature that moveth, which the waters brought forth abundantly, after their kind, and every winged fowl after his kind: and God saw that it was good. And God blessed them, saying, Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let fowl multiply in the earth. And the evening and the morning were the fifth day. And God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after his kind: and it was so. And God made the beast of the earth after his kind, and cattle after their kind, and every thing that creepeth upon the earth after his kind: and God saw that it was good. And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. (Gen 1:21-27)

Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you, Who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God. Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently: Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever. (1 Peter 1:18-23)

Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. (1 Jn 3:9)

As the bride of the first Adam came out of his side, even so shall the bride of the second Adam/Jesus come forth from His side being born of blood (covenant), water (baptism), and the Spirit.

Every man was born into Adam. Every man needs to be born again, reconciled to the Father to be His image bearer.

There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him. Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit. (John 3:1-8)

And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him. And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; And the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh. (Genesis 2:20-24)

But when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs: But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water. And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe. For these things were done, that the scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of him shall not be broken. (John 19:33-36)

For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God? This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth. For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one. (1 John 5:4-8)

But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is therefore Christ the minister of sin? God forbid. For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor. For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God. I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and 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. I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain. (Galatians 2:17-21)

What happens while you're still a newborn? Circumcision! Oh yes, thank You, Jesus!!

After being born again while we are new in Christ, we are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands. He fillets our heart in a supernatural way that no rule or law could ever do, putting off the sinful flesh.

For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God. (Romans 2:28-29)

And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power: In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead. (Col 2:10-12) ~

Stephen, the First Martyr

Paul Kretzmann

Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers: Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it. (Acts 7:51-53)

Stephen had now reviewed the whole history of the Jews, showing in what manner they had at all times acted toward the Lord and the leader whom the Lord had given them, relying rather upon outward forms and ceremonies, connected with a visible sanctuary, for a justification before God. Stephen's just indignation therefore reaches its culmination at this point of his recital. Boldly he tells his judges that they are stiff-necked, obstinate, refractory, unwilling to listen to reason (Ex 33:3,5; 34:9; Deut 9:6). And in addition to that, they are uncircumcised both as regards heart and ears (Lev 26:41, Jer 6:10, Ezek 44:7,9).

These were severe terms of reproach and contempt, placing the leaders of the Jews in a class with the heathen nations and with the apostate Jews. This severe denunciation Stephen corroborates by the charge that they were always, continually, resisting the Holy Ghost, literally, throwing themselves in His way, against Him, thus shutting off the working of His grace in their hearts. The Holy Spirit wanted to convert also these enemies of Christ, He was giving them every evidence of His gracious will toward them by having the Gospel preached before them for such a long time; but they deliberately, willfully, refused to listen to His call. And herein they were following their fathers, of whose disobedience and obstinacy Stephen cited a number of cases. Every one of the ancient prophets the Jews had persecuted in one way or the other, and those that proclaimed in advance concerning the coming of the Righteous One they had killed. The prophets foretold the coming of Jesus Christ, the Just and Holy One, and their reward, at the hand of their countrymen, was death. And the spirit of these ancestors was yet alive, for those that were sitting in the Council to judge the present case had become the betrayers and murderers of this same just and holy Christ.

And not only that, but Stephen declared that the very Law which was their boast, which they had received by the disposition of angels, probably in this manner, that the Lord spoke through the mouths of angels in proclaiming the Law on Mount Sinai, this Law they had not kept. Thus Stephen, in a burst of magnificent eloquence, preached the Law to these hardened hypocrites of the Sanhedrin, in order to work in them a true knowledge of their sin which might lead to repentance and faith.

Note: The sermon of Stephen admonishes us Christians to be mindful of the great blessings of God under the new dispensation, lest we also become indifferent and then callous, and finally resist the work of the Holy Ghost.

When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth. But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God. (7:54-56)

Stephen's speech was probably not finished as he had intended, but the increasing impatience and the murmuring of his hearers did not permit him to conclude in such a way as to bring Jesus into greater prominence. For the indignant words of the accused cut the judges to the heart, literally, sawed asunder in or to their hearts. In uncontrollable anger they gnashed on him with their teeth, thus cutting off every further attempt to deliver his speech properly.

But Stephen was here given a special grace, a manifestation of the Holy Ghost's power, which caused him to disregard and forget his surroundings altogether, and a revelation of God's glory such as has been vouchsafed to but few people. He firmly fixed his eyes upward to heaven and there saw the glory and majesty of God and Jesus standing at God's right hand, as though He were making ready to assist and to receive His servant, as one commentator has it. In a burst of ecstasy, Stephen testified to that which his eyes beheld by special grace of God. The Son of Man he called Jesus, the Redeemer, who, according to both natures, has gained a perfect redemption for all men. Note: Jesus, at the right hand of the Father, is ready to receive with open arms of love all those that rely upon the salvation earned by Him. Where He is, there shall also His servants be. He wants to receive them into His kingdom that they may see His glory and the glory and majesty of the Father. Thus the believers are, through the merits of Christ, taken from this vale of tears to their heavenly home.

Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, And cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul. And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep. (7:57-60)

The last announcement of Stephen, concerning the vision which was granted to him, raised the anger of the judges to a perfect storm of fury. That this man should receive such bliss before their very eyes caused them to forget dignity, justice, humanity, all the virtues of which they usually made their boast. They cried out with a loud voice, in order to drown out any attempt of Stephen to make himself heard in the resulting din and confusion. They held their ears shut tightly lest another word from his hated lips find entrance there. They rushed upon him with one accord, like a maddened herd of cattle over which all control has been lost. They cast him forth out of the city and there stoned him.

This proceeding did not have even a show of right. It was against all the rules of the Jewish criminal law (Edersheim, *The Temple*). It can in no way even be called an execution; it can be described only by the word "murder," committed by an infuriated mob, in violation of all law. And yet the mob retained enough sanity to observe some forms of the Law, such as taking the prisoner out of the city and also requiring the witnesses to begin the stoning. It is expressly stated that the witnesses, in making ready for their murderous attack, laid down their outer clothes at the feet of a young man by the name of Saul. As for Stephen, he died the death of a true Christian martyr.

(cont on back cover)

Inhuman Forgiveness

Lois Matson
Yacolt, Washington

THE MAN CALLED SAUL—who would become Apostle Paul—kept watch over the outer garments of those who stoned Stephen. Saul may have heard the inhuman cry from the lips of Stephen, that first martyr for Christ, as the rocks pummeled his body and his life drained away: “Lord, do not lay this sin to their account!”

It makes me wonder if Stephen witnessed the inhuman cry from the lips of our Lord Christ, as His life drained away on the cross: “Father, forgive them! They know not what they do!”

Do not hold this sin against them! Forgive them!



The cries of Stephen and Jesus are not human in nature or character, but Jesus wasn't a sinful human. In His crucifixion, Jesus was carrying out the salvation of the world, so we might possibly recognize that the God-Man would pray for the forgiveness of His executioners. Stephen was a fully sinful man, though, and he also begged the Lord's forgiveness for those who threw large rocks at him until he died.

That's not normal human behavior.

We sometimes treat forgiveness as a commodity to be traded like stock. It's worth x number of tears today, but the value changes with the market. If the sinner re-offends, forgiveness will be more expensive, and the offender will need to spend a greater quantity of tears before we will consider forgiving. If the sin perpetrated against us is really heinous, the price of forgiveness will be at a premium.

Even for a fairly innocuous offense, we require that the transgressor be at least a little repentant and ASK for our forgiveness. Then we'll grudgingly squeeze out the tiniest drop from our eyedropper of grace, because after all the Lord Himself says to forgive those who trespass against us. Apostle Paul—who was forgiven much—also instructed us to forgive:

Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you. Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour. (Ephesians 4:31-5:2)

The forgiveness of our Lord is not dispensed one tiny drip at a time from a little eyedropper. It's not even ladled out from the oversized kettle of a large church kitchen. The grace and forgiveness of God—for Christ's sake—rolls out from His cross in a red tide, washing over us like an ocean. Our God is GENEROUS with His forgiveness. In fact, we have received double payment for all our sins! *Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins. (Isaiah 40:1-2)*

The prayer from the lips of our Savior was not only a prayer for His personal executioners, who weren't aware that they were crucifying the Lord of glory. In our own ignorance and blindness, we also offend the Law of God at every turn. According to Luther's Small Catechism, “We sin much every day and deserve nothing but punishment...” Thanks be to God, the intercession of Christ flows down through the ages to YOU, to ME. “Father, forgive them!” mean, in essence, “Father, forgive ALL of them!”

Do not hold this sin against them! Forgive them!

How, then, do we live? Paul instructs us to forgive one another as we have been forgiven in Christ. This inhuman forgiveness, requested of God even before the sinner repents, is worked by the Holy Spirit within us. When we are aware that we have been doubly forgiven for our many offenses, we love much and we forgive much. Let us ask our generous God for soft hearts, so when we're sinned against, we would have abundant, flowing forgiveness for our neighbors, even before they ask for it. Let us pray: **Do not hold this sin against them! Forgive them!** Our gracious Lord will hear and answer.

*Jesus, in Your dying woes,
Even while Your lifeblood flows,
Craving pardon for Your foes;
Hear us, holy Jesus.
Savior, for our pardon sue
When our sins Your pangs renew,
For we know not what we do:
Hear us, holy Jesus.
Oh, may we, who mercy need,
Be like You in heart and deed,
When with wrong our spirits bleed:
Hear us, holy Jesus.*

Thomas B. Pollock

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The Song of the Multitude

Martin Luther

Now these be the last words of David. David the son of Jesse said, and the man who was raised up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel, said, The Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and his word was in my tongue. (2 Samuel 23:1-2)

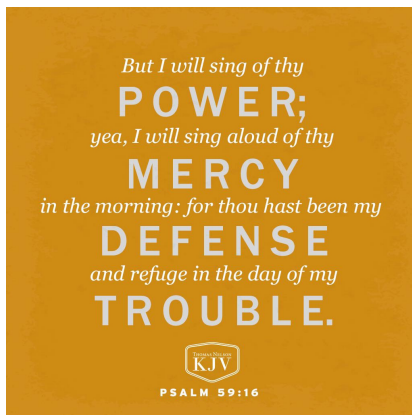
Faith knows no rest or ease. It goes out, speaks and preaches, and for very joy it begins to compose sweet and lovely psalms. But it not only thinks of the sweetness and loveliness of the psalms as grammar and music, how neatly and skillfully the words are arranged, and how sweet and lovely the chanting and the music sound, but also thinks of the lovely spiritual meaning of the psalms. Yet the music helps as a wonderful creation and gift of God, especially where the congregation joins in the singing and their minds and hearts are in earnest.

David calls his psalms Israel's psalms. He does not want to ascribe them to himself alone and claim the sole glory for them. For a word or psalm needs to be accepted or rejected by the congregation or the people of God. Thus we Christians talk about our psalmists.

St. Ambrose wrote many lovely hymns, and they are called church hymns because the church accepted them and uses them as if the members had written them themselves and they were their hymns. That is why we do not say, "Thus St. Ambrose, Gregory, Prudentius, or Sedulius sings," but we say, "So sings the Christian church." For these are now the songs of the church, which Ambrose, Sedulius, and so forth sing with the church and the church with them. And when they die, the church remains, singing their hymns forever. ~

***To you our morning song of praise, to you our evening prayer we raise;
We praise your light in ev'ry age, the glory of our pilgrimage.***

St Ambrose, 340-397



(cont from page 6)

While the stones were flying around him, and after he had been struck, he called loudly upon his Lord and God, in the person of Jesus, the Savior. His first prayer was that the Lord Jesus, the exalted Christ, would receive his spirit. And having thus committed his soul into the best safekeeping, he let his last sigh be an intercession for his murderers. Sinking down upon his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, which may, at least to one of those present, have sounded in his ears for years afterward: Lord, do not charge to them this sin. And then he calmly fell asleep in his Savior. Thus Stephen became the first martyr of the Christian Church.

Since his time thousands of Christians have been martyred for the sake of the name of Jesus. And their death teaches a lesson, namely, that of cheerfully sacrificing temporal possessions and fortune for the sake of the Lord. In the end we gain everything that a reward of mercy can bestow upon us, heaven itself with all its glories. ~

Lastly, there is here a fine comfort that St. Stephen here sees the heavens standing open, and that he fell asleep. Here we should mark that our Lord God stands by us if we believe, and that death is not death to them that believe. Thus you have pictured here in this story the entire Gospel faith, love, cross, death, and life."

Martin Luther

Remember, O Lord!

Remember, O Lord, your church; deliver her from all evil, perfect her in your love, and from the four winds gather her, the sanctified, in your kingdom that you have prepared for her. Amen.

Didache 10:5, late first century or early second century

When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

Matthew 25:31-34