

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.

July 2020

The Pearl of Great Price

Pastor Dennis Hannu
Spruce Grove, Minnesota

THE KINGDOM OF GOD/HEAVEN IS very much central to Jesus' teachings. These two terms are interchangeable, both meaning the sovereign, dynamic, and eschatological rule of God. Some people teach that there is a difference between the two kingdoms, but that is not the case. For example, in the story of the rich young ruler in Matthew 19:16-24, Christ uses both terms. In verse 23, Jesus said to His disciples, "I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven." In the very next verse, Christ proclaims, "Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." So, in answer to the rich young ruler's question concerning eternal life (v. 16), Christ uses the phrases "kingdom of God" and "kingdom of heaven" interchangeably. If you study the parallel accounts of the parable of the mustard seed as recorded in Matthew 13:31-32, in Mark 4:30-32, and in Luke 13:18-19 you will notice that kingdom of heaven is used in the Matthew account and kingdom of God is used in Mark and Luke. The two kingdoms are one and the same. For the sake of this article I will be referring to the kingdom of heaven as I will be referencing accounts from the gospel of Matthew.

Jesus, as He preached the kingdom of heaven, taught very often in parables as is the case in the 13th chapter of Matthew. Jesus tells the parable of the sower and several parables of the kingdom of heaven. A parable is simply a story that illustrates a point. The parables of the kingdom include the wheat and the tares or weeds, the mustard seed, leaven or yeast, a treasure hid in a field, a pearl of great price, and the net. These all illustrate different aspects of the kingdom of heaven.



The Pearl of Great Price, by Domenico Fetti
Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

The parable of the wheat and the tares, or weeds, is showing unto the reader/hearer of it that we as Christians, the kingdom people, are to live in this world among those who are not Christian. We are not to judge or try to determine who is in or out, but rather we are to live as kingdom people. God is the One who in fact takes care of this; He is the Judge and the One who will make the separation at the end of the age. The parable of the mustard seed and the leaven, or yeast, shows unto us that the kingdom started small. It started with this small group of disciples, these Jewish men, but soon grew large and all nations come and dwell within it. The kingdom of heaven encompasses all who are Christian. Likewise with leaven, a small amount of yeast placed in bread dough permeates the whole batch, so it is with the kingdom of heaven, a small group led by the Spirit of God grows into a large gathering as we have seen recorded in the book of Acts and also in history. Christianity has spread over the world.

The parables of the treasure hidden in the field and the pearl of great price are two of the most beautiful parables, because of what they illustrate for us. The parables are as follows in Matthew 13:44-46: *Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that had, and bought it.* The common interpretation of these parables is that we are the ones who do the seeking, finding, and purchasing. In other words we are the ones doing the acting. This is simply not the case, as we know from other Scripture. Romans 3:11: *There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God.* And in Luke 19:10: *For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.*

The beauty of these parables is the reality that we are in fact the ones who are being sought out. The treasure hid in the field is us. We have been found by God and now are hidden again. We are hidden under His grace and covered by the blood of His only born Son Jesus the Christ. We have been set free to live in this world (the field), because God has reconciled Himself to the world and we who are hidden in His grace now are the ones who proclaim this message of reconciliation. This is all done because of the action of God, purely by His graciousness and by His great love for mankind. The parable of the pearl of great price illustrates this as well.

We are the pearl that was found and God is the merchant who sells all that He has in order to purchase us. What is the price paid for us? It is the price of His only born Son, Jesus the Lamb of God. He gives all that He has in order to purchase us, His pearls. Jesus comes and becomes the sacrifice for sin in order to purchase us for God the Father. You and I have much to be thankful for. We are the ones who make up the kingdom of heaven/God. We are the kingdom people, purchased by the blood of the Lamb. We are the Pearl of Great Price. God Be Praised!

God's peace.

A New Life as a Child of God

Pastor Mark Matson
Pasco, Washington

Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

2 Corinthians 5:17

We have heard above that the two parts are to be together in a Christian and emphasized in Christian teaching. The first part is faith, that we are redeemed from sin through the blood of Christ and have forgiveness. The second part, after we have [faith], is that afterward we should become different people and live a new life. In Baptism, or when we begin to believe, we receive not only the forgiveness of sins (which is the grace that makes us God's children) but also the gift that must do away with the remaining sins and kill them. Our sins are not forgiven so that we would continue in them (as St. Paul says in Romans 6), as the insolent spirits and despisers of grace allege. Rather, even though sins have been blotted out through Christ's blood, so that we do not need to pay or make amends for them, and we now are children of grace and have forgiveness, yet that does not mean sin has been entirely done away with and killed in us.

The forgiveness of sins and the killing of them are two different things. Both of them must be proclaimed against those who confuse and turn things upside down with false doctrine. Against the first, the pope and many others have taught that the forgiveness of sins is to be obtained through the trickery of their own self-chosen and invented works and their own satisfactions. This error always continues in the world from Cain at the beginning to the end. Then, when this error has been put down, there are again false spirits on the other side, who have heard the preaching about grace and boast about it and yet produce nothing more from it, just as if that were enough, and forgiveness should do nothing more in us than that we remain as we were before. Afterward, there were just as many as before, when we still knew nothing at all about Christ and the Gospel.

Therefore, those who want to be Christians must know and learn that, since they have obtained forgiveness without their own merit, they must from now on not allow or indulge in sin, but rather oppose their former, evil, sinful lusts and avoid and flee their work and fruits. That is the summary and meaning of this Epistle reading.

Luther's Works, Vol. 78: Church Postil III (St. Louis: CPH, 2014), 154-155



"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."

2 Corinthians 5:17 (KJV)

King James Bible Online.org

And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins. Where in in time past ye walked according to the course of this world... (Ephesians 2:1)

...Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh... If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. (Galatians 5:16, 25)

We are sinners, covered by the grace of God in Christ Jesus our Lord! We do sin every day this side of our last breath. As Christians, we thank and praise God, for His Church on earth whereby the Word (Jesus) richly and daily forgives us all our sins.

Three questions for all of us.

How then shall we live?

Turning to our sin daily?

Or in repentance turning to Jesus daily?

God's peace be with you all.



God Is Practical

Rev. Scott R. Murray

For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them. But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith. And the law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them. Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree: That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. Brethren, I speak after the manner of men; Though it be but a man's covenant, yet if it be confirmed, no man disannulleth, or addeth thereto. Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ. And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect. For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise. Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator. Now a mediator is not a mediator of one, but God is one. Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law. But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe. But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster. For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Galatians 3:10-29

ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY IS EMINENTLY practical. It calls a thing what it is. There are no evasions and no circumlocutions. There are no mythological re-imaginings as there are in other religious traditions. The Bible is actually willing to disparage a creation of God, which in itself is good and holy, because the divine creation causes

such damage; killing and destroying those who were enervated by the fall and live in slavery to its effects. That divine creation is God's law. Sometimes commentators want to rescue the divine law from this disparagement, thinking that thereby they are saving God some embarrassment, by claiming that when Paul talks about the law, he is not talking about the divine law, but human rules and principles of action or ceremonial law. They argue that the law of which Paul is speaking could not be the moral law. Paul resists this teaching by the power of His use of the word 'law.' All law, including the divine law, is pointed out by Paul as an instrument that results in sin.

The law functions the way a hunting weapon is used in a domestic dispute. It was intended to be useful by putting meat on the table, but it is used to threaten and to kill another human. The weapon itself is not a problem, but its use against humans is deadly. The law has its proper purposes in the world, but when it is used against humans as children of God, the results are ugly. It kills by increasing the trespasses of those under the condemnation of Adam. This is not caused by the law which is good and holy, but by the humans who are weak and depraved. So this is why the Bible disparages the law, not because the law is a problem, but because it does such damage to humans, who are weakened by the fall.

How easy it would have been for God to have said about this damage: "It's not my fault. They can deal with it, because it's really their problem." He would have been morally just to say this, but He would have not been the God who justifies the ungodly (Romans 4:5). God's Word is then quite full of disparaging remarks about the law; God's law, because it hurts, kills, and slays the people whom God has loved so completely as to become one of them, incarnate of Mary, to bear their sins and depravity, to die for them, and to fulfill the law and counteract its deadly power over humans through His obedient life and sacrificial death. What a great difference there is between grace and the law. For God there are no legalistic quibbles, just action to redeem us sinners from the power of the law, His law. You don't get much more practical than that; by putting Your own skin in the game to rescue humans from the ravages of Your own good gift to them, the law. Theology is practical because God is. ~

Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

Romans 5:1-2

For if when liable for so many sins we were freed from all by Christ, much more shall we be able through Him to abide in the estate wherein we are. For it is not the same thing to receive peace when there had been none, and to keep it when it has been given, since to acquire surely is harder than to keep. Yet nevertheless the more difficult hath been made easy, and carried out into effect. That which is the easier thing then will be what we shall easily succeed in, if we cling to Him who hath wrought even the other for us. But here it is not the easiness only which he seems to me to hint at, but the reasonableness. For if He reconciled us when we were in open war with Him, it is reasonable that we should abide in a state of reconciliation, and give unto Him this reward for that He may not seem to have reconciled untoward and unfeeling creatures to the Father. If then He hath brought us near to Himself when we were far off, much more will He keep us now that we are near.

Chrysostom

JESUS—The Author and Finisher of Our Faith

Gwen Wilson
Ridgefield, Washington

Dear Children,

Hello to each and all of you. I do pray you are well. It has been a little while since I have written. The editor for this page was kind in finding material for the last two months. I'm so grateful to her.

She did let you know in the April article why I wasn't writing. It was because on March 6th, one of our daughters-in-law (Rosa) was in a terrible accident caused by another person who was driving at high speeds. Rosa was just going home after picking her two kids up from school. Her three-year-old daughter was also along. She and her five-year-old daughter died. The oldest son, eight years, and the youngest daughter, three years, were critically injured. It was a day that changed our lives forever.

Our son and his kids are living with us. The kids are healing very well which we are so thankful to God for. They will eventually move back into their home after they finish a remodel that was started.

The week before the accident our son Brian, his wife Rosa and three kids came to stay with us as their house was having some electrical work done and there was not going to be any power. It was a good week. They came on a Monday and Friday packed up to go home. First the two eldest were driven to school. Then it was at school day's end pick-up when the accident happened. ALL too fast. Our hearts are sad and often weary as we grieve and also try to bear with COVID-19 that has also made life and grieving hard.

For my writing, I want to focus on Jesus who knows our life story from beginning to end. He knows all we need, He hears our prayers, He cares when we hurt.

*Hebrews 12:1-2: Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, **Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.***

WE CAN BE ENCOURAGED TO KNOW that "cloud of witnesses" are the saints who by faith did the Lord's will. You can find them in Hebrews 11. Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sara, etc., just to name a few. These walked with God by faith and looked toward even the promise of a savior, and a land flowing with milk and honey. This means a land that would supply all one needs and in the end save us.

These saints all died in faith with the hope of the promise in their hearts. We can think of these and be encouraged to keep on pressing toward that heavenly home where they have gone. We can say that they paved the way for us. Now they are gone, as are many others, and we come after with the same hope in our hearts to live with Jesus one day.

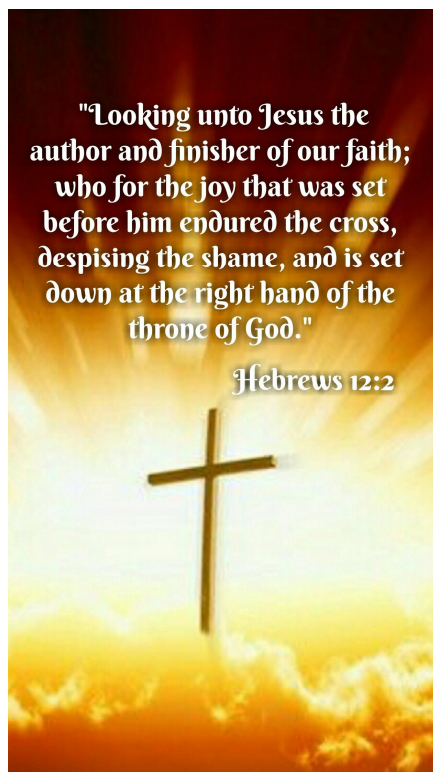
As we walk this road of being a Christian, we are in verse 1 encouraged to "lay aside EVERY weight and sin." We are to

reject or give up those things that are wrong and keep us from peace with God in our hearts. We CAN have that peace through JESUS who can strengthen us. Pray to Him for that strength. This laying aside is not something we can do on our own to make ourselves feel better.

Then in verse 1 we are encouraged to run with patience. This race we are running has a finish line but we finish in God's time. We are to live our lives each day for Jesus in such a way that our Christian light shines even though we have problems of whatever sort, or suffer while keeping our eyes on Jesus all the way to eternity.

Jesus is the Author who wrote a Book, the Bible, and in it we can find everything we need to know about His Father God, Himself and how we have faith. He has not missed any details as to the subject of faith. He began the work of faith in the hearts of the believers, and He will finish that work.

Jesus gave His life on the cross, and He did it with joy knowing that He had accomplished His Father God's plan and would once again return to His former glory where He now sits at His Father's right hand. By shedding His blood selflessly, He would save people from their sins and give them eternal life, WITH HIM. He loved us so much He did this. He loved us first.



Jesus sees each of you every day and hears your sighs, and prayers that even come with only a whisper.

There are things we will never understand this side of heaven and that really is okay, and many times we are given a glimpse of why certain things happen. One of those things for me is, "Why did our son's wife and daughter have to die so suddenly when they are needed so much?" I have to leave that with God even though it hurts so much to think about it.

I must pray for God to protect our hearts from Satan who would want to give us reasons to turn against God. I know there is a very perfect home waiting for all His children and that is where we all need to keep our focus. I pray we all press on to that promise that waits for us. It is my prayer that God will establish

and make each of you strong in your faith so that you will always have the power of the Holy Spirit to stand strong against Satan and his wicked whisperings.

Let's us pray that right now God will stay (stop) this virus that is causing so much fear and problems. I know the world is being tested and we need to keep looking up.

God bless each of you today. Please keep our family in your prayers. I endeavor to keep you all in prayer also.

God's peace.

The Apostolic Greeting

Martin Luther

Grace be to you and peace from God the Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ.

Galatians 1:3

THE TERMS OF GRACE AND PEACE are common terms with Paul and are now pretty well understood. But since we are explaining this epistle, you will not mind if we repeat what we have so often explained elsewhere. The article of justification must be sounded in our ears incessantly because the frailty of our flesh will not permit us to take hold of it perfectly and to believe it with all our heart.

The greeting of the Apostle is refreshing. Grace remits sin, and peace quiets the conscience. Sin and conscience torment us, but Christ has overcome these fiends now and forever. Only Christians possess this victorious knowledge given from above. These two terms, grace and peace, constitute Christianity. Grace involves the remission of sins, peace, and a happy conscience. Sin is not canceled by lawful living, for no person is able to live up to the Law. The Law reveals guilt, fills the conscience with terror, and drives men to despair. Much less is sin taken away by man-invented endeavors. The fact is, the more a person seeks credit for himself by his own efforts, the deeper he goes into debt. Nothing can take away sin except the grace of God. In actual living, however, it is not so easy to persuade oneself that by grace alone, in opposition to every other means, we obtain the forgiveness of our sins and peace with God.

The world brands this a pernicious doctrine. The world advances free will, the rational and natural approach of good works, as the means of obtaining the forgiveness of sin. But it is impossible to gain peace of conscience by the methods and means of the world. Experience proves this. Various holy orders have been launched for the purpose of securing peace of conscience through religious exercises, but they proved failures because such devices only increase doubt and despair. We find no rest for our weary bones unless we cling to the word of grace.

The Apostle does not wish the Galatians grace and peace from the emperor, or from kings, or from governors, but from God the Father. He wishes them heavenly peace, the kind of which Jesus spoke when He said, "Peace I leave unto you: my peace I give unto you." Worldly peace provides quiet enjoyment of life and possessions. But in affliction, particularly in the hour of death, the grace and peace of the world will not deliver us. However, the grace and peace of God will. They make a person strong and courageous to bear and to overcome all difficulties, even death itself, because we have the victory of Christ's death and the assurance of the forgiveness of our sins.

Men Should Not Speculate About the Nature of God

The Apostle adds to the salutation the words, "and from our Lord Jesus Christ." Was it not enough to say, "from God the Father"?

It is a principle of the Bible that we are not to inquire curiously into the nature of God. "There shall no man see me, and live," Exodus 33:20. All who trust in their own merits to save them disregard this principle and lose sight of the Mediator, Jesus Christ.

True Christian theology does not inquire into the nature of God, but into God's purpose and will in Christ, whom God incorporated in our flesh to live and to die for our sins. There is nothing more dangerous than to speculate about the incomprehensible power, wisdom, and majesty of God when the conscience is in turmoil over sin. To do so is to lose God altogether because God becomes intolerable when we seek to measure and to comprehend His infinite majesty.

We are to seek God as Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 1:23-24: "We preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God." Begin with Christ. He came down to earth, lived among men, suffered, was crucified, and then He died, standing clearly before us, so that our hearts and eyes may fasten upon Him. Thus we shall be kept from climbing into heaven in a curious and futile search after the nature of God.

If you ask how God may be found, who justifies sinners, know that there is no other God besides this man Christ Jesus.

Embrace Him, and forget about the nature of God. But these fanatics who exclude our Mediator in their dealings with God, do not believe me. Did not Christ Himself say: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me"? Without Christ there is no access to the Father, but futile rambling; no truth, but hypocrisy; no life, but eternal death.

When you argue about the nature of God apart from the question of justification, you may be as profound as you like. But when you deal with conscience and with righteousness over against the law, sin, death, and the devil, you must close your mind to all inquiries into the nature of God, and concentrate upon Jesus Christ, who says, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Doing this, you will recognize the power, and majesty condescending to your condition according to Paul's statement to the Colossians, "In Christ are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge," and, "In him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." Paul in wishing grace and peace not alone from God the Father, but also from Jesus Christ, wants to warn us against the curious incursions into the nature of God. We are to hear Christ, who has been appointed by the Father as our divine Teacher. ~



Sermon of Laestadius in the Year of 1856

L. L. Laestadius, Sixth Sunday after Trinity, January 1976 CM

Submitted by Ralph and Barbara Somero; New Ipswich, New Hampshire



Paul writes thus: **Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.**

Romans 6:6

From these words of Paul it sounds that his theory is, that our old man was crucified with Christ, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.

WE MUST NOW EXPLAIN TO you how we have understood these words of Paul. With the old man is understood, not only the old Adam, which is impatience and wrath, but also covetousness, or the love of the world, which is bound to come out under the many shades of privilege, also light-mindedness, which is so noticeable in the young people, and worldly glory, which reveals itself, not only in setting one's self after the fashion of the world, but also in that, that the Christians do not speak the truth, are dumb, but speak much of the world. Besides comes fornication, which reveals itself in the young people through ostentation and fleshly freedom, which discloses itself in that, that no one wishes to be under the rule of another. All of these sins, that are bound to become evident in this Christianity which we now have, are called the old man, which must be crucified with Christ. For Paul also points out in many passages, that he does not hold those as Christians, that still serve sin; I must also speak out my feelings, that I cannot hold those as true Christians, who through many liberties show forth the habits of the old man. Namely, where sin breaks out in words or deeds, there the old man is not crucified. If the tail of the old Adam wags between the teeth or if words of impatience are permitted to pass out freely, there is not war against sin. If fornication reveals itself in ostentation and, there is no self denial from the world, or a fleshly freedom become so permissible, that all want to be free-lords, there is no self denial; or if light-mindedness becomes permissible, through which the enemy has already slain the sorrow which is according to the mind of God, then the fall from the state of grace is right at hand.

Therefore I must remind you with the words of Paul: "That the old man must be crucified with Christ, for the body of sin must be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin." We have begun to awaken your consciences with the austere judgment and righteousness of God, when you traveled in sorrowlessness after the fashion of this world, when you had served whiskey, selling, swindling, stealing, despising the Word of God, as you well remember what you

were like before this awakening came. But if we see that some sins are becoming permissible under the guise of Christianity, as for example, light-mindedness, the love of the world, fleshly freedom and lordly Christianity, then we must set the austere righteousness of God alongside of the words of Paul, that the old man must be crucified, and the body of sin must be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.

How and in what way must the body of sin be destroyed? Not as the Papists, who abuse their bodies by scourging, and do not give the body its necessary nourishment, with which they imagine that they merit some salvation. But the body of sin must be destroyed by not giving rule to sin, that we will not give our mortal members into the service of sin. *Dead faith will soon grow out of living faith, if we will not remain ever watching and warring against sin.* We are not real Christians if we are moved at times and other times practice fornication, or if we're in devotion of the Holy Spirit at times and in devotion of the old Adam at other times, or if at times we are in fervent love and at other times in covetousness and attached to the love of the world. We have preached against this double life for the past ten years and yet preach now, that a Christian must not lead a two-fold life, or double tongued; a different motive in a deal than in church; different conversations behind the backs of the Christians than before their eyes. A Christian must have the same goal before his eyes, whether he is at school or at the marketplace, with whether he is awake or asleep, whether he is walking or lying down, whether he is a servant or a master.

I do not preach such a doctrine to you that you should cease from believing, and only serve the law for your justification. But I preach such a doctrine to you, that you should believe so much upon Christ, that you could war against sin, that Christ should not become mocked among the Gentiles on your account. For the law truly could not give life, but the righteousness and the love of God are both equally powerful, that on account of His love, God does not forget His righteousness, neither does He forget His love on account of His righteousness. For the love and righteousness are both equally powerful. For He says: "I can be equally wrathful as I can be merciful." It signifies, that the righteousness of God cannot end His love, neither can His love bring His righteousness to naught.

Therefore my beloved, watch with prayer on the way of life this little while and seek with fear and trembling through faith and watching, that you should become blessed, that you should not become astrayed to the right nor to the left. Hear Thou great Shepherd of Israel, the sighs of the penitent and timid-minded ones. Our Father, who art in heaven. Amen.

WHAT CHRIST WAS HE LAID ASIDE. What He was not He assumed. Not that He became two, but He deigned to be one made out of the two. For both are God, that which assumed, and that which was assumed; two natures meeting in one, not two Sons (let us not give a false account of the unity). He who is such and so great—but what has befallen me? I have fallen into human language. For how can 'so great' be said of the absolute? How can that which is without quantity be called 'such'? But pardon the word, for I am speaking of the greatest things with a limited instrument. That great, long-suffering, formless, and body-less divine nature will endure this, namely, my words as from a human body and that weaker than the truth. For if He condescended to assume flesh, He will also endure such language.

Gregory Nazianzus

The Fellowship of the Mystery

Lois Matson
Yacolt, Washington

*Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; And to make all men see what is **the fellowship of the mystery**, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord: In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him.*

Ephesians 3:8-12

GOD'S MYSTERIOUS PLAN OF SALVATION was from before the foundation of the world, but it was hidden for ages.

The first mysterious promise of salvation (first Gospel) was spoken in the Garden, just after Adam and Eve fell into sin. The LORD God cursed the serpent and promised that the coming Seed would bruise the serpent's head, and he would bruise His heel (Genesis 3:15). This fall into sin would be atoned for at great price, but humankind would be redeemed. Adam and Eve belonged to the fellowship of the mystery.

The forefathers and prophets were given strangely specific and wonderful promises, but they perceived them only in a mysterious way. The Messiah would be a descendant of Abraham (Genesis 12:3) and He would sit on King David's throne forever (Isaiah 9:7). He would come from the womb of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14), be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2), and live in Nazareth (Isaiah 11:1). He would be betrayed (Psalm 41:9) and crucified with criminals (Isaiah 53:12). He would rise from death (Psalm 16:10) and He would be the sacrifice for the sin of the world (Isaiah 53:5-12). These fathers and prophets—and those who believed their words from God—were partakers of the fellowship of the mystery.

Throughout the Old Testament, glimpses of the Messiah were seen in shadowy shapes, but these misty silhouettes rested on the solid promises of God. His promises are sure, so though the prophets and faithful Hebrews did not live to see the fulfillment of the mystery, they believed God and it was counted to them for righteousness.

Many of the Hebrew people missed the coming of the Messiah, and they didn't believe in Him. More than that, His own people rejected Him and put Him to death, as had been promised before by the prophets!

The apostles often preached the Gospel to their Hebrew-blood brothers, with the desire that they would hear and believe the fulfillment of God's promises. The unbelieving Hebrews, though they were descendants of Abraham, were not part of the fellowship of the mystery.

When Jesus came, fulfilling all the prophecies, the mystery of the redemption of humankind was no longer a shadow. God kept His promises and sent His Son into the world, and Jesus bought humankind back from slavery to sin, Satan, and death. Through faith we are justified by His grace, we are buried with Christ in baptism, and we are raised with Him to a new and eternal life. All this by God's amazing grace!

We Gentiles have received the unsearchable mysteries of Christ. We may not be Abraham's blood descendants, but we who believe God's promises, fulfilled in Jesus Christ, are counted righteous with faithful Abraham. Through the preaching of the Word and the revelation of the Holy Spirit, we can perceive and believe the hidden mystery of God's perfect plan of salvation, and we belong to the fellowship of the mystery.

That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full. This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. (1 John 1:3-7)

Sometimes doubts nearly overwhelm our hearts and we can hardly believe the Good News can be true, that Christ is FOR US. Hear another promise: the only wise God is able to establish and keep us in the obedience of faith. To Him be glory through Jesus Christ forever and ever. Amen. Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, **according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, But now is made manifest**, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith: To God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ for ever. Amen. (Romans 16:25-27) ~



Christian Monthly Vol. LXXVI—No. 7

Subscription Rate: 1 Year

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

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

Send **articles for publication** to:
Lois Matson, Editor
Email: cm@apostoliclutheran.org
Phone: (360) 904-6951
Postal Mail to:
CHRISTIAN MONTHLY
PO Box 2126
Battle Ground, WA 98604 USA

Address **subscriptions, payments, and Book Concern orders** to:
Anders & Clara Sundqvist, Managers
THE BOOK CONCERN
PO Box 2126
Battle Ground, WA 98604 USA
Phone: (360) 896-7344
Email: books@apostoliclutheran.org

Apostolic Lutheran Church of America

www.apostoliclutheran.org

Western Mission: western@apostoliclutheran.org

Eastern Mission: eastern@apostoliclutheran.org

Foreign Mission: foreign@apostoliclutheran.org

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

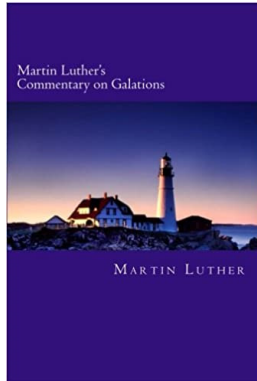
General Disclaimer: The material in the *Christian Monthly* is reviewed for scriptural soundness and to ensure that it does not conflict with the teachings of the ALCA. Publication does not imply that other material by included authors has been so approved.



HAVE YOU MOVED? Please notify the Book Concern of address changes. We must pay return postage on undelivered mail.

Book Recommendation: Luther's Commentary on Galatians

Pastor Tom Lappi
Newberg, Oregon



I'D LIKE TO RECOMMEND LUTHER'S "Commentary on Galatians" for a number of reasons. First, because it stays very close to the Biblical text. Secondly, because it is very readable for the general Christian audience. That being said the the writer assumes a certain familiarity with the Old Testament, in particular with the Law of Moses and with events in the life of Abraham. In keeping with the main subject of the Epistle to the Galatians, the thrust of this work is that man is justified by faith and not by the works of the Law. This comes as no surprise, because one can safely say that Justification by Faith is the heart and soul of all of Luther's works, period!

The explanation of the verse that Paul takes from Isaiah 54:1 is an excellent one of Luther. The verse reads, *Sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear; break forth into singing, and cry aloud, thou that didst not travail with child: for more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife, saith the Lord.* This verse is part of the allegory Paul uses in Chapter 4. Luther clearly explains this allegory which focuses on Hagar and her son Ishmael who represent the Law given on Mt. Sinai and by extension all those born after the will of man. Sarah and her son Isaac represent the Jerusalem

which is above, the Church and by extension those born after the will of God. Even though there are many born by the Law, they are not "children," they are slaves. Even though the Church seems barren and unable to produce very many children, those she engenders are the only ones considered truly "children" of God. Abraham for the sake of the allegory represents God. Luther further goes on to explain the persecution among "religious" people. This is not the scoffing the Christians experience from the world because of their testimony of faith and their manner of living, but this is the persecution of Christians by "religious" people. These are the ones with a profession of faith, yet are offended in Christ and the doctrine of His Church.

I'd encourage you to read this book. Read it with the same filter you use when reading anything other than the Word of God itself.

God's peace.



How is the faithful city become an harlot! it was full of judgment; righteousness lodged in it; but now murderers. Thy silver is become dross, thy wine mixed with water: Thy princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves: every one loveth gifts, and followeth after rewards: they judge not the fatherless, neither doth the cause of the widow come unto them.

Isaiah 1:21-23

IF EVER WE GET THE IDEA, as it is with some, that once we become God's children we are out of danger, we cannot be lost, then we must seriously consider what God's Word says. Here we read that the faithful city where righteousness dwelt has become a harlot and murderer.

The purified silver has now become dross, the wine of Redemption from the wounds of Jesus has been mixed and polluted with water. This speaks of the backsliding Christian. This is as Demas who left the way of faith because he loved this present evil world. This is the one who believes they can continue in sin that grace may abound. This is the branch grafted into the Vine who should bring forth grapes, but instead brings forth wild grapes. Are we so deceived? Do we know that Scripture says that as we have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him? Have we not heard that Scripture says that if we refuse and rebel we shall be devoured by the sword? Do we hear and heed what Scripture warns us, If you continue in the faith, grounded and settled, and be not removed from the hope of the Gospel? Beloved, if we've been saved from the burning building, let's not go back in because it still burns!

Paul Coponen; Chassell, Michigan

Submitted by Ralph & Barbara Somero; New Ipswich, New Hampshire

I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.

John 15:1-5