

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 2023

Walk in Truth

Pastor Jay Weidner
Laurium, Michigan

AS WE APPROACH THIS Fourth of July, I was moved to share with you some of Abraham Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address. At the time he penned these words, the United States was involved in a war that threatened to bring the end of the Union. Under that threat he was elected to his second (all too short) term as President. Knowing that both sides who were at war were Christian, he said:

"Both read the same Bible and pray to the same God, and each invokes His aid against the other... The prayers of both could not be answered. That of neither has been answered fully. The Almighty has His own purposes."

God is all too often invoked to support political causes without much thought given to what His name is being associated with. Lincoln clearly understood that he was not God and could not fully discern God's purpose. God alone knows His ways and God alone must execute His plans. To confuse the works of human beings with the will of the Almighty is a fatal error of which God is very aware. So the Second Commandment: *Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain. (Exodus 20:7)* To use God's name as a vain thing doesn't only mean to use it in cursing but it means to use it emptily. Sadly many who seek office or support for a cause merely use the name of God to gain popularity; they use the name of God in vain. We must be aware that every plan of human beings is not necessarily that of God, and the invocation of God's name does not guarantee that we are doing what God wants.

"With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations."

The words quoted above are the last portion of Lincoln's address and are often quoted but seldom understood. They clearly show that Lincoln was simply reflecting the very clear teaching of Jesus: *Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love*

your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect. (Matthew 5:43-48)

It is too easy to begin to hate people. God indeed hates sin, but He does not hate those who sin. God has given His Son to reconcile sinners to Himself. Lincoln recognized the difference and did not give in to the impulse to hate those who hated him, even though Booth's bullet fired in hate ended his life and ended the greatest hope of a seamless restoration of the Union. The language of hate is often cloaked in the terms of Divine retribution or righteousness. We must take care not to confuse the two. The retribution and righteousness of God are seen on the cross, where sins are forgiven in the blood of Christ. There alone is true righteousness, there alone God demonstrates and achieves His purpose alone. *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. (John 3:16)* We are ambassadors of this truth.

As we rightly wax patriotic and remember the greatness of our nation in celebrating its birth this month, may we remember these words of Lincoln and even more the words of Jesus and continue to walk in the truth.

God's peace.

*All nations whom thou hast made shall come and worship before thee, O Lord; and shall glorify thy name. For thou art great, and doest wondrous things: thou art God alone. **Teach me thy way, O Lord; I will walk in thy truth:** unite my heart to fear thy name. I will praise thee, O Lord my God, with all my heart: and I will glorify thy name for evermore.*

Psalm 86:9-12

Arise, Shine!

Pastor Nathan Juntunen
Esko, Minnesota

Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon thee.

Isaiah 60:1

RATHER THAN PREOCCUPYING OURSELVES WITH shining the light that we've been given, the Christian church has become preoccupied with the process by which a person is justified before God. Some say, "I have chosen Christ," others, "I have been chosen by Christ." Some say, "I have repented," others, "I have been born again." Some say, "I have been baptized," others, "I have been baptized by the Holy Spirit." The process of salvation has become a matter of hot debate, with different factions, even denominations, arising as a result. This is not really new, of course. Recall this portion of the Corinthian correspondence: *Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. (1 Corinthians 1:12)*

We are, in fact, "reviving all the irregularities of the Corinthian congregation as though they were placed on record to be imitated and not avoided," as one brilliant historian has said. Meanwhile, the *purpose* for which we have been delivered has been lost. Our chief concern should not be the discrimination of saints but rather the shining of light.

Isaiah's essential call to his people was, "Get up!" "ARISE!" he says. "Become uprooted from the ground to which you have attached yourselves. The time of your slumber is at an end." Paul's emphasis to the Corinthians was just the same: *For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal? (1 Corinthians 3:4)* The divisions within our ranks admirably demonstrate our "dusty" way of thinking and our "fleshly" immaturity. The way of the Spirit is decidedly different: *Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven. (Matthew 5:16)*

Far from discrimination of the saints is the true work of the saints: shining the light of good works. We are actually

afraid of emphasizing works ever since the great Reformation, when we were reminded that no one is made righteous by the doing of works but rather by faith in Christ. Unfortunately, however, we forget that the very Lord who has saved us *without* works actually tells us to busy ourselves *with* them. Our lights are to shine and the light is simply this: good works. We do them because our Light has come. The fire was not available to us before Christ. We had a vague notion of guilt and accountability, and perhaps a taste of civility thrown in, but good works were simply not available to us as they are now. God has "foreordained" good works for us that we should walk in them (Ephesians 2:10). When we walk in them (a poetic way of saying "do them") we will be blessed and recognize the blessing of Christ in that He loves the world and desires to do good to them that are in the world.



Isaiah 60:1 KJV

Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon thee.

No darkness can overcome this Light. No doubt can creep into the mind of the believer as he does good in the world. His purpose is clear; his footing is sure. We can do no more honor to that Light than to engage the world in the good purpose to which God has called His people. Let us shine, therefore, unafraid! ~

David therefore calleth him Lord, how is he then his son?
Luke 20:44

The Wondrous Mystery of God's Plan

Through the wondrous mystery of God's plan, Jesus Christ is revealed as both David's Son and David's Lord. In His human nature, He is descended from the royal line of David, fulfilling the messianic prophecy. Yet, in His divine nature, He reigns as Lord over all creation. David's Son and David's Lord, Jesus embodies the perfect union of humility and authority.

Though born in a humble manger, He came to establish a kingdom that transcends earthly realms. As believers, we find solace in His gentle guidance and strength in His sovereign rule.

In the incarnation of Jesus, we witness the fulfillment of ancient promises. As David's Son, He walks among us, sharing in our human experiences, understanding our struggles, and bringing salvation through His sacrificial love. Simultaneously, as David's Lord, He holds the power to redeem and reconcile us to God, leading us to eternal life.

Recognizing Jesus as both David's Son and David's Lord deepens our understanding of His redemptive work. His lineage ensures His qualification as the promised Messiah, while His lordship reveals His divine authority to conquer sin, death, and all spiritual powers. In Him, we find hope, restoration, and the assurance of everlasting victory.

The phrase "David's Son and David's Lord" underscores Jesus' unique position in salvation history. Through His sacrificial death on the cross and triumphant resurrection, He secures forgiveness and gives eternal life to all who believe. As we acknowledge His dual nature, we embrace the beautiful truth that our Savior is both relatable and majestic, accessible and awe-inspiring. Let us humbly approach Jesus, the Son of David, seeking His mercy and grace.

Devotional Writing

The Revelation of Jesus Christ

Edith Bisila
Circle Pines, Minnesota

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John: Who bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw. Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.

John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne; And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

Revelation 1:1-6

WITH THESE INTRODUCTORY WORDS from the first chapter of Revelation, the Spirit of God desires to draw our hearts and our attention to the following messages to the seven churches which are in Asia. As with all of the Word of God, He has left this record not only for the people of the specified period of time but for all people everywhere, that we might be benefited by the hearing and reading of it. For it is the perfect the will of God that none should perish but that all should come to repentance and eternal life.

Perhaps most of us view the book of Revelation with a sense of mystery and awe and thus spend little time reading or meditating on it. I do not presume to understand it more than others, but I do not believe that God meant for us to overlook its content anymore than He does the rest of His Word. It will benefit us to consider His reason for sending John with His message to the churches of Asia. *All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.* (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

To each of the churches of Asia, Jesus concludes His message with *He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches...* It is comforting that He concludes with God's promise such as: *To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.* (Revelation 2:7) To each who overcomes, He promises a successful journey to an eternity with Him.

In spite of the fact that He sees many commendable attributes in the churches—their works, their labors, their patience, their faith, their charity and service, their endurance—to most of them He says, “Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee.” All of their good attributes seemed not to weigh nearly as heavily in their favor as did the one

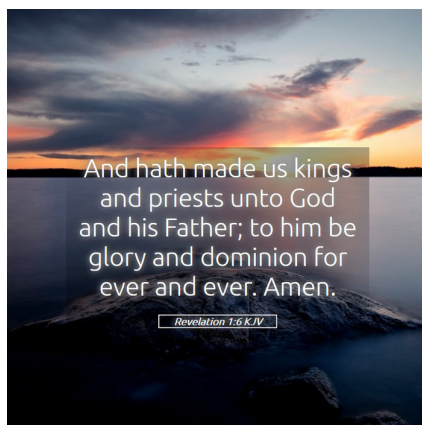
most important thing against them in their disfavor. These good things are not nearly so important, good as they are, as it is that they should consider the charges against them. Principally they have fallen short of the most important matter. The charge boiled down to this fact: “Ye have left your first love.” What have you done with Jesus? That is the question. This is equally as needful to consider even today, for all of us. What have WE done with Jesus? Does Jesus fill the first place in our heart or have we found another love that keeps us from hearing the Word, meditating on it, and desiring to do God's

will with all our heart, soul, body and mind? *I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord.* (Psalm 122:1) *So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.* (Romans 10:17) Of ourselves we are incapable. Lord, enable us by Thy indwelling Spirit; lead us in Thy truth and righteousness to be what You want us to be.

Oh, that we might be found abiding in Him even as the church of Philadelphia was found. Wonderful comfort!

And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write; These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth; I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name. Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee. Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth. Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown. Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. (Revelation 3:7-13)

God's peace.



Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. (Romans 8:26)

Prayer is a precious way of communicating with God; it gladdens the soul and gives repose to its affections. You should not think of prayer as being a matter of words. It is a desire for God, an indescribable devotion, not of human origin, but the gift of God's grace. As Saint Paul says: we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words.

Chrysostom

Who's Your Hero?

Gwen Wilson
Ridgefield, Washington

Dear Children, wherever you are,

Hello to you all. I'm hoping you are well.

I want to touch on a topic that you may be familiar with. Several years ago, one of our sons was to write a short report on his "hero." He decided to write about Jesus. A hero, so to speak, is someone you admire for who they are and what they do, and quite often you have thoughts of wanting to be like that person. I ask you: Who is your hero?

As I thought on my son's hero, I have to say that God and Jesus have always been my heroes. I never have been attracted to the stars of this world to want them as a person to put on a pedestal.

Let's take a look at some facts that remind us that the best heroes are God the Father and His Son.

FIRST AND FOREMOST, we have GOD. Who is God, you may ask? No one has ever seen God at any time. Take a look in *Genesis 1:1*, and we have to believe that He always was. *In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.* God was also like unto man as He said to His Son Jesus, who was in heaven with Him from the beginning: *And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness...* (*Genesis 1:26*)

Our God made ALL things, by just speaking. "Let there be light, a firmament, earth, seas, grass and seed-bearing plants and trees, stars, birds, fish, cattle, other beasts and creeping things, etc." Our God is wise and powerful, and there is nothing He can't do.

God always means what He says and sometimes has to punish us for our wrongdoings, but He is a God of love, and we must never forget that.

God desires that we all worship Him only, and if we don't he gets jealous (to feel uneasy about one wanting someone else besides himself). God tells us in *Exodus 20:4-6*: *Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.*

God is right; He's merciful, loving, kind, almighty, everlasting. God loved us so much that a man He became, and that was in the person of JESUS. *John 3:16*: *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*

Now we have come to Jesus coming here to the earth. God saw that the time was right to send His only Son to save people from their sins. So in the likeness of man Jesus came. He left His beautiful throne in heaven to come walk with man and show him the way to God.



What was Jesus like? Well, as you've read about the young Jesus in the temple, talking to the older men and asking them questions, you can see He was an exceptional child, much different from you or me in many ways. Jesus worked in His earthly father Joseph's carpenter shop as a young man and was obedient to His parents.

When Jesus turned 30, He started preaching. What did Jesus do during His time of ministering? He came to do His Father's will. He healed the sick, raised the dead, gave sight to the blind, made the lame to walk, the deaf to hear, and most importantly, taught people how to love one another, to repent of wrong things that bother us, and to forgive.

Jesus was our Savior. He was full of compassion, love, gentleness, meekness, kindness, peace, long-suffering, patient, and the list could go on and on of all the good that Jesus stood for. He did not give in to people's pressures, He could not be influenced by those who chose to live their lives in the wrong ways. He set that example for us to follow, not to listen to wrong thinking or teachings.

Jesus said, *I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.* (*John 14:6*) If we keep our eyes on Him, He is all any of us need to find peace in our hearts, and live Christian lives, and one day be taken to heaven to receive a crown of gold.

Just as God is a God of love so is His Son Jesus as they are one. We must remember that, and you must never think that if you do something wrong, God is going to strike you down and not love you. No, He loves us and is merciful and will forgive us our wrongs. We can be free in Jesus. He gave His own life and died on the cross and forgives us all of our sin.

How can we be sure Jesus loves us? The Bible tells us this is so. *John 10:14*: *I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine.*

I pray that you would all want to be like Jesus. I sure do. God bless you all today and always.

God's peace.

Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place. For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: To the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things? For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ...

And such trust have we through Christ to God-ward: Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God; Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.

2 Corinthians 2:14-17, 3:4-6

Pray for Our Nation

*Congressional Record (Bound Edition), Volume 147 (2001), Part 14
[House]*

Mr. BARTLETT of Maryland, to the House of Representatives on January 3, 2001:

My goal is twofold: first, I want to set the record straight by exposing the lie that the last 40 years of revisionist history and arbitrary judicial legislation concerning American history, the faith of the Founding Fathers and the intent of the United States Constitution, especially the First Amendment, which protects religious freedom; and, second, I hope to instill in our hearts a renewed boldness for believing that only a true Biblical Judeo-Christian world view could and did produce a Nation like ours, and only a distinctive Judeo-Christian world view can sustain it.

Now, let me take you back on a journey. Were the Founding Fathers deists or atheists? Actually, 52 of the 55 signers of the Declaration of Independence were orthodox, deeply-committed Christians. The other three all believed in the Bible as divine truth, the God of scripture, and His personal intervention. This deep personal faith was also true of all of our Presidents until recently.

This explains why when you go to Washington DC, everywhere you turn there are scriptures written on every monument and building. This explains why the same Congress that signed the Declaration of Independence also formed the American Bible Society, of which the second and sixth US Presidents served as chairman. This explains why after creating the Declaration of Independence, immediately the Continental Congress voted to purchase and import 20,000 copies of scripture for the people of this new Nation.

They were not deists or atheists, but believed that the foundation of this new Nation must rest on the revealed truth of scripture and morality and the constant sovereignty of God revealed in scripture.

Let us let them speak directly. Patrick Henry is called the firebrand of the American Revolution. His words spoken in St. John's Church Richmond on March 23, 1775, "Give me liberty, or give me death," are still memorized by students. But in current textbooks the contents of these words is deleted. Here is what he said.

"An appeal to arms and the God of hosts is all that is left us. But we shall not fight our battle alone. There is a just God that presides over the destinies of nations. The battle, sir, is not to the strong alone. Is life so dear or peace so sweet as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it, Almighty God. I know not what course others may take, but as for me, give me liberty, or give me death."

These sentences have been erased from our textbooks. Was Patrick Henry a Christian? The following year, 1776, he wrote this: "It cannot be emphasized too strongly or too often that this great Nation was founded not by religionists, but by Christians; not on religious, but on the Gospel of Jesus Christ. For that reason alone, people of other faiths have been afforded freedom of worship here."

Now to the man that historical revisionists most often claim was a deist, thus who believe God was not concerned in the affairs of men, Benjamin Franklin. Was Benjamin Franklin a deist? Let us allow him to speak for himself.

The time was June 28, 1787. Benjamin Franklin was 81 years old, Governor of Pennsylvania and the most honored

member of the Constitutional Convention. The convention was deadlocked over several key issues of State and Federal rights when Franklin rose and reminded them of the Continental Congress in 1776 that shaped the Declaration of Independence.



This is what he said: "In the days of our contest with Great Britain when we were sensible of danger, we had daily prayer in this room for divine protection. Our

prayers, sir, were heard, and they were graciously answered. All of us who were engaged in the struggle must have observed frequent instances of superintending providence in our favor. To that kind providence we owe this happy opportunity to establish our Nation. And have we now forgotten that powerful friend? Do we imagine that we no longer need His assistance? I have lived, sir, a long time, and the longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth, that God governs in the affairs of men. And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without His notice, it is probable that a new Nation cannot rise without His aid. We have been assured, sir, in the sacred writings that except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that built it. I therefore beg leave to move that henceforth prayers imploring the assistance of heaven and its blessings on our deliberations be held in this assembly every morning before we proceed to any business."

The following year, in a letter to the French Minister of State, Franklin, speaking of our Nation, said, "Whoever shall introduce into public office the principles of Christianity will change the face of the world."

The other deist, it is claimed, probably with most evidence, was Thomas Jefferson. Jefferson was a great student of scripture who honored Christ as his greatest teacher and mentor but doubted his divinity. But was Jefferson a deist? On the front of his well-worn Bible Jefferson wrote, "I am a real Christian, that is to say, a disciple of the doctrines of Jesus. I have little doubt that our whole country will soon be rallied to the unity of our creator and, I hope, to the pure doctrine of Jesus also."

On slavery, Jefferson wrote, "Almighty God has created men's mind free. Commerce between master and slave is despotism. I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just; that His justice cannot sleep forever."

For the revisionist, these two men are their best and only shot at deist; and they clearly were not. Yet from them they generalize to all. So let us turn to our other early leaders. George Washington is called the Father of our Nation. Listen to his heart on the Christian faith. In his farewell speech on September 19, 1796, he said, "It is impossible to govern the world without God and the Bible. Of all the dispositions and habits that lead to political prosperity, our religion and morality are the indispensable supporters. Let us with caution indulge the supposition," that is, the idea "that

morality can be maintained without religion. Reason and experience both forbid us to expect that our national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle.”

What did Washington mean by religion? Was he a true Christian? Let me excerpt several lines from his personal prayer book: “Oh, eternal and everlasting God, direct my thoughts, words and work. Wash away my sins in the

emaculate blood of the lamb and purge my heart by Thy Holy Spirit. Daily, frame me more and more in the likeness of Thy son, Jesus Christ, that living in Thy fear, and dying in Thy favor, I may in Thy appointed time obtain the resurrection of the justified unto eternal life. Bless, O Lord, the whole race of mankind and let the world be filled with the knowledge of Thee and Thy Son, Jesus Christ.” ~

Death and Life

Gerry Southerton
Osage, Minnesota

TOTAL OPPOSITES. Hot and cold. Black and white. Life and death. Death and life. Most of the time we think in terms of life and death, but when we deal with the calling of Jesus Christ to us we must deal in terms of death to life.



And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; ²Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: ³Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. ⁴But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, ⁵Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) ⁶And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: ⁷That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. ⁸For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: ⁹Not of works, lest any man should boast. ¹⁰For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

Ephesians 2:1-10

The Apostle Paul makes it perfectly clear that we are dead in the flesh. We have no ability to believe God or to come to God. We are opposite of God. He is life but we are dead. What is a dead person able to do? We all want to take some credit for our salvation. We think that somehow we are better than others or we did something that helped God save us. When a person gives up their last breath, their body just lies there. It can do nothing. We do not save ourselves, it is a gift of God. We are given new life in Christ Jesus.

Now, if we actually think that somehow we are going to make this dead flesh conform and become holy, we fool ourselves. The flesh is the flesh and it is dead. Notice that in verses 4-7 it is all God's work. We have nothing to do with it. Two thousand years ago, God washed our sins away in the blood of His Son. Many people think that when we come to this understanding or we receive this gift that somehow we can now convert the flesh and make the flesh holy. The flesh is still the flesh and will never be converted. The good things that we do we can't take credit for, because it is God working in and through us (v. 10). Even the good things we do after receiving the gift of God are not credited to us, but rather to what God had planned for us from the beginning. This is not an easy concept to accept, because we want to think that at least by the good things that we do or the bad things we avoid we somehow deserve the grace that has been given to us by God. We can never deserve the grace that has been lavished upon us through Jesus' death and resurrection. We are better off to stop looking at the deeds of dead flesh and rather focus on the deeds of the One who brings life, the person of Jesus.

When we receive the grace of God through Word and sacrament we put on Jesus Christ. Our true place is not here on earth but rather we are hid with Him in the heavenly places. Heaven is not someplace we attain at death, it is the place we currently reside. We just cannot see it now. It is only after death that we will see this face to face.

We give thanks to God that we do not have to earn life (a dead man can do no work) and so we now live and move and have our being in Jesus Christ. In death, we live.

Yours in Christ.

*As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving. Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. 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. **And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses;** Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it.*

Colossians 2:6-15

If My People

Lois Matson
Yacolt, Washington

KING SOLOMON HAD finished building the glorious temple where the Lord God would dwell with His people. Solomon blessed the people (2 Chronicles 6:3) and the Lord (v. 4), and, kneeling before the altar, he offered a beautiful prayer (vv. 14-42) to the Lord God of Israel, who keeps covenant and shows mercy.

Solomon's prayer included specific requests:

When the heaven is shut up, and there is no rain, because they have sinned against thee; yet if they pray toward this place, and confess thy name, and turn from their sin, when thou dost afflict them; Then hear thou from heaven, and forgive the sin of thy servants, and of thy people Israel, when thou hast taught them the good way, wherein they should walk; and send rain upon thy land, which thou hast given unto thy people for an inheritance.

If there be dearth in the land, if there be pestilence, if there be blasting, or mildew, locusts, or caterpillars; if their enemies besiege them in the cities of their land; whatsoever sore or whatsoever sickness there be: Then what prayer or what supplication soever shall be made of any man, or of all thy people Israel, when every one shall know his own sore and his own grief, and shall spread forth his hands in this house: Then hear thou from heaven thy dwelling place, and forgive, and render unto every man according unto all his ways, whose heart thou knowest; (for thou only knowest the hearts of the children of men:) That they may fear thee, to walk in thy ways, so long as they live in the land which thou gavest unto our fathers. (2 Chronicles 6:26-31)

When Solomon's prayer was finished, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and sacrifices, and the glory of the Lord filled the temple. Can you imagine this?! The priests couldn't even go into the Lord's house because it was filled with the glory of the Lord. When the people saw the fire come down and the glory of the Lord, they fell on their faces and worshipped and praised the Lord, saying, *For he is good; for his mercy endureth for ever.* (2 Chronicles 7:3)

Then the king and the people of Israel offered sacrifices—22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep—and dedicated the house of the Lord. *Thus Solomon finished the house of the Lord, and the king's house: and all that came into Solomon's heart to make in the*

house of the Lord, and in his own house, he prosperously effected. And the Lord appeared to Solomon by night, and said unto him, I have heard thy prayer, and have chosen this place to myself for an house of sacrifice. If I shut up heaven that there be no rain, or if I command the locusts to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among my people; If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land. (2 Chronicles 7:11-14) The Lord responded to Solomon's specific requests.

Notice that both King Solomon's prayer and the Lord's response include humility, repentance and confession of sin. When we have sinned against the Lord our God, humility, repentance and confession are the only proper reaction.

What did Solomon request when the Lord's people humbled themselves, repented and confessed? Forgiveness!

And what did the Lord promise when His people humbled themselves, repented and confessed? Forgiveness!

We, the Lord's people, come to Him in humility, in repentance, confessing that we have sinned against the Lord our God. Please pray with me:

Almighty God, our Maker and Redeemer, we poor sinners confess unto You that we are by nature sinful and unclean, and that we have sinned against You by thought, word, and deed. Wherefore we flee for refuge to Your infinite mercy, seeking and imploring Your grace for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ.

O most merciful God, who has given Your only-begotten Son to die for us, have mercy upon us, and for His sake grant us remission of all our sins; and by Your Holy Spirit increase in us true knowledge of You and of Your will, and true obedience to Your Word, to the end that by Your grace we may come to everlasting life, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, has had mercy upon us, and has given His only Son to die for us, and for His sake forgives us all our sins. To those who believe on His name He gives power to become the children of God, and has promised them His Holy Spirit. He that believes and is baptized shall be saved. Grant this, Lord, unto us all! Amen.



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Hymn History: Stricken, Smitten and Afflicted

He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. (Isaiah 53:3-4)

**Stricken, smitten, and afflicted,
See Him dying on the tree!
'Tis the Christ, by man rejected;
Yes, my soul, 'tis He, 'tis He.
'Tis the long-expected Prophet,
David's Son, yet David's Lord;
Proofs I see sufficient of it:
'Tis the true and faithful Word.**

**Tell me, as you hear Him groaning,
Was there ever grief like His,
Friends through fear His cause disowning,
Foes insulting His distress?
Many hands were raised to wound Him,
None would intervene to save;
But the deepest stroke that pierced Him
Was the stroke that justice gave.**

**If you think of sin but lightly
Nor suppose the evil great,
Here you see its nature rightly,
Here its guilt may estimate.
Mark the sacrifice appointed,
See who bears the awful load;
'Tis the Word, the Lord's anointed,
Son of Man and Son of God.**

**Here we have a firm foundation,
Here the refuge of the lost:
Christ, the Rock of our salvation,
Is the name of which we boast;
Lamb of God, for sinners wounded,
Sacrifice to cancel guilt!
None shall ever be confounded
Who on Him their hope have built.**

“Stricken, Smitten, and Afflicted” was penned in 1804 by Anglican priest Thomas Kelly, the author of over 750 hymns in his lifetime. Its title is taken directly from Isaiah 53:4, but throughout it draws from much of the prophet’s continuing

depiction of the Suffering Servant. The haunting melody fits well with the theme—the awful and awesome reality that God sent His own Son to be the sacrifice for man’s sin. Though He was the coming King in the line of David, He was rejected by His own people and abandoned by His closest companions. As the hymn progresses, it reminds us that we alike must come to terms with this Man on the cross. Will we likewise reject Him, or will we recognize the awful weight He bears? Will we see that He suffers not only the agony and shame of a public scourging and a torturous death but that He receives a worse affliction?

In the depths of our souls, we find solace and profound meaning in this timeless hymn. These devotional sentences capture the essence of our faith. We humbly contemplate the weight of Christ’s sacrifice, vividly depicted. The verses remind us of His willingness to bear our sins, suffering on the cross, and enduring the depths of agony for our redemption.

We are reminded of the immense love and compassion our Savior demonstrated by willingly embracing His suffering for our sake. It deepens our understanding of the incredible sacrifice Jesus made to reconcile us with God, renewing our gratitude and awe.

The hymn invites us to reflect on the profound mystery of Christ’s suffering, which holds the power to heal our broken sinfulness. In every verse, we encounter the divine grace that flows abundantly from His wounded side.

This hymn emphasizes the significance of Christ’s atoning work on the cross. Through His suffering, we find forgiveness, hope, and everlasting life. With each note and every lyric, “Stricken, Smitten and Afflicted” leads us to the foot of the cross, where we encounter the crucified Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. It stirs our hearts to meditate on His sacrifice and respond with heartfelt devotion.

We find comfort and assurance in this portrayal of Christ’s suffering, knowing that it was not in vain. Through His wounds, we are healed; through His death, we find life. This hymn points us to the eternal hope that rests in our Savior, helping us to face our trials with unwavering trust. It reminds us that even in our own sufferings, we can find solace and strength by fixing our gaze upon the One who suffered for us. May this hymn continue to inspire us to gratitude and devotion to our crucified and risen Lord.

As Lutherans, we cherish the rich heritage of hymns like “Stricken, Smitten and Afflicted,” which stir our souls, deepen our faith, and lead us into meditation on the redemptive work of Christ. ~