

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.

March 2019

The Conduct of the True Christian and Its Reward

Paul Kretzmann

But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses.

1 Timothy 6:11-12

HAVING SHOWN THE TRANSITORINESS, the superfluity, and the danger of possessing and, more still, of striving after great earthly possessions, St. Paul, by way of contrast, now shows the glory of spiritual possessions, as an incentive to him to make every effort toward their attainment: *But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow rather after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness.* It is a title by which high honor was conferred upon Timothy and upon all Christians, that of being designated a man of God (2 Timothy 3:17). The believers are children of God, they belong to God as His own, a fact which alone is a strong argument for the Christians to show themselves worthy of the grace expressed by the name. He that belongs to God as His own has the fullness of riches in Him and is not in need of temporal gifts and blessings to complete his happiness. The Christians, therefore, gladly heed the call of the apostle: Shun, avoid, flee these things. It is a bad plan to try out one's powers of resistance in courting the dangers connected with the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. To keep away from their alluring attractions is the one safe thing to do. By constant activity in matters pertaining to the kingdom of God and the service of his neighbor a Christian will put away from him the temptation to many sins of the flesh. Rather, on the other hand, he will follow after, seek with all his might, the virtues which are so often praised so highly in Scriptures: righteousness of life, according to which a person will at all times and in all conditions conduct himself in accordance with the Word of God and His holy will; godliness, according to which the entire religious life of a person will be one of reverence for the holy God; faith, which accepts the merits of Christ and finds comfort in the grace and help of God at all times; love, by which faith shows itself



active in good works toward God and one's neighbor; patience or steadfastness in sustaining trials; meekness and humility, according to which a person will not permit himself to become embittered. That is the one side of true Christian conduct.

But the other side is emphasized by the apostle with just as much force: *Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses.* The apostle uses the picture of an athletic contest, in which the participants must exert every muscle, every nerve to the utmost, if they desire to possess the victor's crown. The entire life of the Christians is a continual battle against the many enemies of their faith; they must hold their faith against every attack, against every temptation. Hereby faith itself must contribute and impart strength for proper steadfastness, especially for securing, for laying hold upon, eternal life. The life of eternity with God

above is in itself the prize for which the Christians must strive with unabated rigor and eagerness. For obtaining this prize Timothy and every other Christian has been called, that is the real object of their lives (Philippians 3:14). This argument possessed all the more weight, since Timothy had professed his faith in Christ and in the certainty of eternal life in a confession before many witnesses.

St. Paul is most probably referring to the confession made by Timothy at the time of his Baptism and reception into the congregation. For even in those early days a special baptismal confession was in use. This was a good, a fine, an excellent confession, both its content and its significance elevating it above all confessions with a mere worldly content. Since, moreover, many witnesses, very likely the entire congregation, had been present at the time of his making his confession of faith, he should remember also the obligation toward these Christian brothers and sisters, and not lightly set aside the responsibility resting upon him. These words are so important that they should be heeded also in our days by every catechumen or confirmand, both before and after the special rite by which he joins the congregation as a communicant member.



The matter is of such importance to Paul as to make him add a very impressive exhortation: *I give thee charge in the sight of God, who quickeneth all things, and before Christ Jesus, who before*

Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession; That thou keep this commandment without spot, unrebukeable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Timothy 6:13-14) It is in the form of a serious, emphatic, cordial exhortation, of an earnest charge, that Paul addressed his pupil at this point. He adjures him before, in the sight of, God, of whom he says that He gives life to all things. God is the Source of all life, both physical and spiritual; Timothy, therefore, having received his spiritual life from God, may be assured that the same Lord will continue to keep him by His power unto life everlasting. But Paul not only reminds Timothy of God and His quickening strength, but also of his Savior Christ Jesus, whose frank confession as to His person and office during the trial before the Roman governor Pontius Pilate is an example for all Christians of all times. These two facts should be the reasons influencing and strengthening Timothy to keep the commandment, the sum of the entire body of Christian doctrine entrusted to him, immaculate, pure, uncontaminated, without the slightest admixture of error, and also irreproachable, so that no one would be able to bring a charge against him of even the slightest irregularity in his preaching. The gift of the pure doctrine is too precious to permit any careless handling. Timothy should therefore observe the charge to keep the doctrine in all purity until the revelation, the last coming, of the Lord Jesus Christ. With the second advent of Christ the Church will be transformed from the humble and militant to the glorious and triumphant state. Then also the proclamation of the Gospel-message will have an end, for then we shall see, possess, and enjoy what we have here believed.

As usual, the feeling of exaltation which takes hold of the apostle here lifts him to the point of joyous exclamation: *Which in his times he shall shew, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords; Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honour and power everlasting. Amen. (1 Timothy 6:15-16)* The revelation of Christ will be shown; according to His human nature He will be revealed before the eyes of the astonished nations. God will set this revelation forth, cause it to be made. In due time this will be done, at the period of the world's existence which is known only to God, having been hidden even from Christ according to His human nature in His state of humiliation. The Blessed and the only Powerful One God is called, since He is in possession of the fullness of heavenly bliss and happiness, and since He is, in His essence, almighty, the Sovereign, the Lord, or, as Paul continues to explain, the King of kings and the Lord of lords. ALL people that dwell on earth, no matter whether they bear the title and exercise the power of unlimited monarchs over millions of subjects, sink into insignificance beside Him. He alone has immortality; He is the only one in whom this attribute is a quality of His essence; He is the Source of everlasting life. He lives in a light of heavenly glory, which is inaccessible to mere human beings, to mortal sinners. The very reflection of the divine glory is unbearable to human eyes (Exodus 34:30); much less will they be able to look into the glory of the divine essence itself. No man's eyes have seen nor will see the glory of the great God of heaven, not on this side of eternity. And yet the apostle breaks forth into a deliberate doxology, saying that both glory and eternal strength should be given to Him. Our praise and adoration of His wonderful essence will continue throughout eternity, long after we have changed the mortal hull of our body into the glorified body of heavenly majesty. This is most certainly true. ~

The Holy Spirit: Grace and Truth

Pastor Orval Wirkkala
Kingston, Minnesota

Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

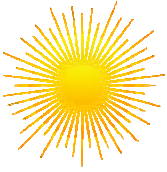
John 8:31-32

WE ALL VALUE our political and physical freedom, but we realize that the liberty which we have received through the merits of Jesus is superior to all other freedoms, for it is a freedom which is guaranteed. And there will never have to be another battle in which to win this freedom. *In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise. (Ephesians 1:13)*

It is possible for a person to live in freedom of the political nature but to be a slave to sin. It is also possible for one to live under a totalitarian type of government but to be a free child of God in the grace of our Lord Jesus through faith. Therefore, in order to maintain this spiritual freedom, it is important to remember that in our spiritual relationship with Jesus we must continue to abide in His Word which gives us direction.

God has given us precepts and principles by which to live. Precepts are those teachings which He has recorded in His Word, those moral teachings which He commands us to honor and which are according to His will. Principles are given to us so that we learn His ways and are guided to holy living by the enlightenment, direction and power of the Holy Spirit. Knowledge of Scripture alone will not empower us to exercise our spiritual liberty rightly, as knowledge must be linked with love. *Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth. (1 Corinthians 8:1b)*

The knowledge of God and the love of God are as twins. If we separate truth from relationship, we may become prideful and lacking in love or we may fall into licentiousness, lacking the direction which truth provides. *As free, and not using your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God. (1 Peter 2:16) For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. (Galatians 5:13) But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen. (2 Peter 3:18)*



In Your Light

How excellent is thy lovingkindness, O God! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings. They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house; and thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures. For with thee is the fountain of life: in thy light shall we see light.

Psalm 36:7-9

EVERYBODY WANTS TO HAVE A LOOK AT GOD. Even Moses begs for a glimpse of the divine presence. In His mercy, God refuses to grant such a thing. This request to see God as He is certainly belongs in the “Be careful what you pray for, because you might get it,” category. To look upon God Himself would be like gazing directly into the noon day sun. The sun’s piercing brightness would be the eyes’ last sight as the darkness caused by its searing rays blotted it out. The eyes burned by the sun’s glory would fall into absolute night.

Moses’ request to “see” God was more than a desire to see some “appearance.” Moses knew better than to think he would be able to take in the full majesty of God’s appearance. Moses was aware that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was not reducible to visual data. He wanted to see God’s glory, which is far more than His appearance (Exodus 33:18). He desired to see God so as to know God as He was in Himself. Such a vision God does not open to Moses, nor to us. We are creatures. He is God. We are mortal. He is eternal. We are sinful. He is holy. He keeps from us what our minds cannot take in.

Yet because He is the Light of the world, Christ our Lord illumines all by giving us what we need to know about God and His divine treasures. Just as the sun illumines the world and gives glorious light so that we can see what is around us, so the Son of God gives light to the sin-darkened world and enlightens the eyes of the blind, so that we can see what He wants to reveal to us. To look for more is to look into blindness. The Psalmist is right: “in your light we see light” (Psalm 36:9). That light is Christ Himself.

Rev. Scott R Murray

I am not ignorant how much the grandeur of the divine mystery baffles our weak understanding, so that language can scarcely express it, or reason define it, or thought even embrace it. The Apostle, knowing that the most difficult task for an earthly nature is to apprehend, unaided, God’s mode of action (for then our judgment were keener to discern than God is mighty to effect), writes to his true son according to the faith, who had received the Holy Scripture from his childhood, *As I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus, when I went into Macedonia, that thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine, Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith: so do.* (1 Timothy 1:3-4) He bids him forbear to handle wordy genealogies and fables, which minister endless questionings. The edification of God, he says, is in faith: he limits human reverence to the faithful worship of the Almighty, and does not suffer our weakness to strain itself in the attempt to see what only dazzles the eye.

If we look at the brightness of the sun, the sight is strained and weakened: and sometimes when we scrutinize with too curious gaze the source of the shining light, the eyes lose their natural power, and the sense of sight is even destroyed. Thus it happens that through trying to see too much we see nothing at all. What must we then expect in the case of God, the Sun of Righteousness? Will not foolishness be their reward, who would be over wise? Will not dull and brainless stupor usurp the place of the burning light of intelligence? A lower nature cannot understand the principle of a higher: nor can Heaven’s mode of thought be revealed to human conception, for whatever is within the range of a limited consciousness, is itself limited.

The divine power exceeds therefore the capacity of the human mind. If the limited strains itself to reach so far, it becomes even feebler than before. It loses what certainty it had: instead of seeing heavenly things it is only blinded by them. No mind can fully comprehend the divine: it punishes the obstinacy of the curious by depriving them of their power. Would we look at the sun we must remove as much of his brilliancy as we need, in order to see him: if not, by expecting too much, we fall short of the possible. In the same way we can only hope to understand the purposes of Heaven, so far as is permitted.

We must expect only what He grants to our apprehension: if we attempt to go beyond the limit of His indulgence, it is withdrawn altogether. There is that in God which we *can* perceive: it is visible to all if we are content with the possible. Just as with the sun we can see something, if we are content to see what can be seen, but if we strain beyond the possible we lose all: so is it with the nature of God. There is that which we *can* understand if we are content with understanding what we can: but aim beyond your powers and you will lose even the power of attaining what was within your reach.

Hilary of Poitiers, On the Trinity

PRAISE THEN, AND PRAISE WITH ALL YOUR HEART; and whom you praise, love; for you were created for this, to praise Him, and to love Him also. For that man, charmed by prosperity into blessing God, but checked by adversity from the privilege of blessing, praises God, but not with all his heart; while that man, who amid his praises of God seeks for some other good in praising than God Himself, praises, but without loving. Praise therefore, and praise rightly; in such a way that there is no care, no aim, no thought, no anxious bent of mind in you, uninspired by praise of God, grace helping you. Let no prosperity of this present life seduce you from praise of Him, and no adversity restrain you; for in this way you shall praise Him with all your heart. But when you shall praise Him with all your heart, and praise with the homage of your love as well, then you will desire nothing from Him but Himself, and you will pray that the object of your longing may be God; the reward of your toil, God; your solace in this life of shadows, God; your possession in that blissful life to come, God.

Saint Anselm of Canterbury (1033 -1109)

Waxed Strong in Spirit

Gwen Wilson
Ridgefield, Washington

Dear Children,

I want to share with you the only account of Jesus' boyhood that is recorded in the Bible, found in *St. Luke 2:40-52*. Before Jesus began His ministry at 30 years old, this is only the second time we read of Him since birth.

JESUS WAS NO ORDINARY CHILD. He was God's own Son and God was with Him and protected Him from being killed by Herod, helped Him to grow strong in spirit, filled Him with wisdom, and God's grace was upon Him.

V.41: Now his parents went to Jerusalem after every year at the feast of the passover. (This was to celebrate the Israelites' freedom from slavery in Egypt as they were led out by Moses.)

V.42: And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast.

After the feast days were over, Joseph, Mary, and Jesus started their walk back home. There were many people with them all traveling together. They had traveled for a whole day, and as they walked along chatting with other travelers, Mary had supposed that Jesus was among the people.

When it was time to stop and rest for the night, Joseph and Mary then wandered among the people looking for Jesus. Joseph and Mary had not bothered to check to make sure He had come along. After looking for Him among the crowd, and not finding Him, they turned back to Jerusalem.

They looked for three days around the city of Jerusalem and finally found Jesus in the temple, sitting in the middle of doctors (wise men), listening to them and asking them questions. I can only imagine what His parents were thinking. I'm also sure they didn't really know what to think, other than that this helped them understand a little more that their son Jesus was not an ordinary boy.

V.47: And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers. The learned men who were listening to Him and asking questions could only be amazed at this young man's knowledge. Jesus was only twelve years of age and they were maybe two or three times Jesus' age, and Jesus knew more.

When Joseph and Mary saw Him they themselves were amazed. **V.48: And his mother said unto him, Son why hast thou thus dealt with us? thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing.**

Jesus' parents were very worried about their son as they had no idea what had happened to Him. That is just how we as parents are, as we love our children and don't want any harm to come to them. Quite often children will do things that would worry their parents but children don't think about that.

What was Jesus' reply to His parents? **V.49: How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not (didn't you know) that I must be about (doing) my Father's business? (working for God His Father)**

Jesus was also obedient to His parents and as He saw their love for Him and their desire to have Him come home with them, He went with them to Nazareth.



V.52: Jesus increased in wisdom and stature (height), and in favor with God and man.

Children, obey your parents. Serve the Lord and He will also help you to grow in Him. Though you are young, God can work through you. When you share something about God or Jesus with a friend or a stranger, you are doing the Lord's will. Never forget how much God and Jesus love you, and I pray you keep them in your heart and mind, always.

In God's peace.

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good report. Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.

Hebrews 11:1-3

FAITH IS A GIFT THAT GOD WOULD IMPART to the whole human race. It is an assurance and conviction that is beyond our abilities and strength. We battle a three-fold enemy, described by Luther as the devil, the world and our own flesh. A formidable enemy, yet the Lord Jesus Christ has defeated the devil, He sends the message of the Gospel to the entire world, and supplies faith to all that will look to Him, who is described as the "author and finisher" of our faith. He is the founder and perfecter of faith.

Pastor Stan Lampinen
Seattle, Washington

The Theology of the Cross

Martin Luther

A theology of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theology of the cross calls the thing what it actually is.

This is clear: He who does not know Christ does not know God hidden in suffering. Therefore he prefers works to suffering, glory to the cross, strength to weakness, wisdom to folly, and, in general, good to evil. These are the people whom the apostle calls “enemies of the cross of Christ” (Philippians 3:18), for they hate the cross and suffering and love works and the glory of works. Thus they call the good of the cross evil and the evil of a deed good. God can be found only in suffering and the cross, as has already been said. Therefore the friends of the cross say that the cross is good and works are evil, for through the cross works are dethroned and the old Adam, who is especially edified by works, is crucified. It is impossible for a person not to be puffed up by his good works unless he has first been deflated and destroyed by suffering and evil until he knows that he is worthless and that his works are not his but God’s.

That wisdom which sees the invisible things of God in works as perceived by man is completely puffed up, blinded, and hardened.

This has already been said. Because men do not know the cross and hate it, they necessarily love the opposite, namely, wisdom, glory, power, and so on. Therefore they become increasingly blinded

and hardened by such love, for desire cannot be satisfied by the acquisition of those things which it desires. Just as the love of money grows in proportion to the increase of the money itself, so the dropsy of the soul becomes thirstier the more it drinks, as the poet says: “The more water they drink, the more they thirst for it.” The same thought is expressed in Ecclesiastes 1:8: “The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.” This holds true of all desires.

Thus also the desire for knowledge is not satisfied by the acquisition of wisdom but is stimulated that much more. Likewise the desire for glory is not satisfied by the acquisition of glory, nor is the desire to rule satisfied by power and authority, nor is the desire for praise satisfied by praise, and so on, as Christ shows in John 4:13, where he says, “Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again.”

The remedy for curing desire does not lie in satisfying it, but in extinguishing it. In other words, he who wishes to become wise does not seek wisdom by progressing toward it but becomes a fool by retrogressing into seeking “folly”. Likewise he who wishes to have much power, honor, pleasure, satisfaction in all things must flee rather than seek power, honor, pleasure, and satisfaction in all things. This is the wisdom which is folly to the world.

The “law brings the wrath” of God (Romans 4:15), kills, reviles, accuses, judges, and condemns everything that is not in Christ.

Thus Galatians 3:13 states, “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law”; and “For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse” (Galatians 3:10); and Rom. 4:15: “For

the law brings wrath”; and Romans 7:10: “The very commandment which promised life proved to be the death of me”; Romans 2:12: “All who have sinned without the law will also perish without law.” Therefore he who boasts that he is wise and learned in the law boasts in his confusion, his damnation, the wrath of God, in death. As Romans 2:23 puts it: “You who boast in the law.”

Yet that wisdom is not of itself evil, nor is the law to be evaded; but without the theology of the cross man misuses the best in the worst manner.

Indeed “the law is holy” (Romans 7:12), “every gift of God good” (1 Timothy 4:4), and “everything that is created exceedingly good”, as in Genesis 1:31. But, as stated above, he who has not been brought low, reduced to nothing through the cross and suffering, takes credit for works and wisdom and does not give credit to God. He thus misuses and defiles the gifts of God.

He, however, who has emptied himself (cf. Philippians 2:7) through suffering no longer does works but knows that God works and does all things in him. For this reason, whether God does works or not, it is all the same to him. He neither boasts if he does good works, nor is he disturbed if God does not do good works through him. He knows that it is sufficient if he suffers and is brought low by the cross in order

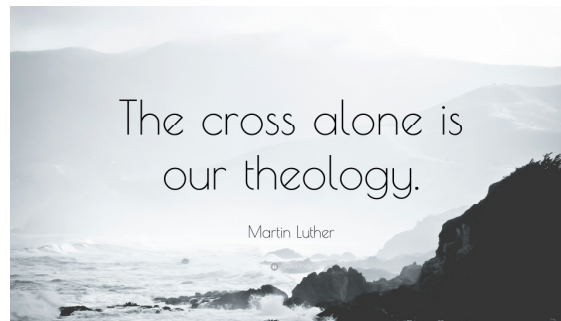
to be annihilated all the more. It is this that Christ says in John 3:7, “You must be born anew.” To be born anew, one must consequently first die and then be raised up with the Son of Man. To die, I say, means to feel death at hand.

He is not righteous who does much, but he who, without work, believes much in Christ.

For the righteousness of God is not acquired by means of acts frequently repeated, as Aristotle taught, but it is imparted by faith, for “He who through faith is righteous shall live” (Romans 1:17), and “Man believes with his heart and so is justified” (Romans 10:10). Therefore I wish to have the words “without work” understood in the following manner: Not that the righteous person does nothing, but that his works do not make him righteous, rather that his righteousness creates works. For grace and faith are infused without our works. After they have been imparted the works follow. Thus Romans 3:20 states, “No human being will be justified in His sight by works of the law,” and, “For we hold that man is justified by faith apart from works of law” (Romans 3:28). In other words, works contribute nothing to justification.

Therefore man knows that works which he does by such faith are not his but God’s. For this reason he does not seek to become justified or glorified through them, but seeks God. His justification by faith in Christ is sufficient to him. Christ is his wisdom, righteousness, etc., as 1 Corinthians 1:30 has it, that he himself may be Christ’s vessel and instrument.

The law says, “Do this,” and it is never done. Grace says, “Believe in this,” and everything is already done. ~



The Comfort of the Gospel

C.F.W. Walther

AFTER FINISHING THE TASK of redemption and reconciliation, Christ said to His disciples: *Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature.* (Mark 16:15) To preach the Gospel means nothing else than bringing to every creature the glad tidings that they have been redeemed, that heaven is opened to all, that all are made righteous, that perfect righteousness has been brought to them by Christ, and that men are but to come and enter by the gate of righteousness even as they shall one day enter by the gate of eternal salvation. Is it not horrible to tell men that they may not believe this? Everybody is to know that the Gospel is for him, that God has had the glad tidings brought to him. For what purpose? In order that he may believe it and take comfort in it. If he refuses to believe it, he declares God and all His prophets and apostles liars. Is it not horrible to tell people who have learned by experience that they are poor, lost sinners and are still mired in sin that, while God has indeed redeemed them, much remains still to be done on their part before they may believe and be actually redeemed? By this horrible teaching the sinner wants to share with God in the work of redemption. That is nothing short of blasphemy.

Nor does this harmonize with the fact that God has already declared in the presence of heaven and earth, of angels and men: "My Son has reconciled the world to Me. I have accepted His sacrifice. I am satisfied. He was your Surety, and I have set Him free. Therefore rejoice, for you have nothing to be afraid of." By the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead God has absolved the entire world of sinners from their sins. Is it not horrible for men to say that this is indeed a fact, but that a person may not yet believe it? Does not that mean to charge God with lying and to deny the resurrection of Christ from the dead?

Furthermore, this teaching is also contrary to the doctrine of absolution. Christ says to His disciples, *Matthew 18:18: Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.* And in *John 20:23: Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain they are retained.* He does not speak of certain qualities which persons must possess, but simply says: *Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted... Whosoever ye shall loose shall be loosed.* Only a genuine Lutheran believes this; to all sects it is an abomination to hear it. They twist these precious words from the Mouth of Truth so that they are made to say something altogether different from what they really do state. However, it is verily true, my friends, that Jesus Christ, after redeeming the entire world, has given His followers power to forgive everyone's sins. Some claim that the meaning of Christ is this: "When a minister notices that a person is in the proper condition, he may persuade him to believe that he has forgiveness of sins." But these are human imaginings; what the Lord says is simply this: "Thy sins are remitted." Moreover, this statement is

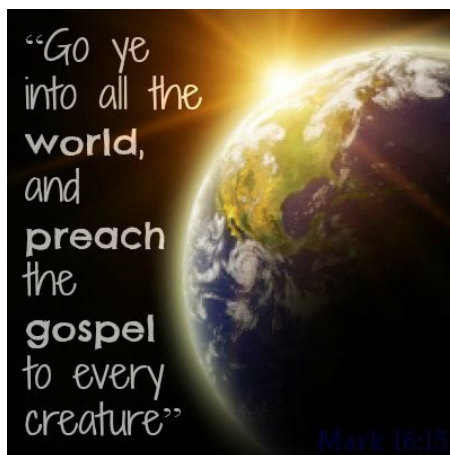
readily comprehended by anyone who believes in the completeness of the redemption and reconciliation with God which Christ accomplished.

To illustrate: Suppose a king has declared that a rebellious town has been granted full amnesty, and no one is to suffer for his sedition. In a case like that anybody can say: "The king has quelled the rebellion; he has conquered you rebels, but you can be of good cheer, because he has pardoned you. I know this for a certainty, because I myself heard the king say so." If the speaker, in addition, were to bring a document signed and sealed by the king which contained the same statement, everybody would rejoice and begin to celebrate the event. The situation is identical with the case now under discussion. By the resurrection of Christ, God has declared that He is reconciled with all mankind and does not intend to inflict punishment on anybody. He has this fact proclaimed in all the world by His Gospel and, in addition, has commanded every minister of the Gospel to forgive men their sins, promising that He will do in heaven what the minister is doing on earth. The minister is not first to look up to heaven to ascertain what God is doing. He is

merely to execute His orders on earth and forgive people's sins, relying on God's promise that He is forgiving them. To some people this looks like a horrible doctrine, but it is the most comforting doctrine imaginable and is firmly established on the blood of God that was shed on the cross. Sin really has been forgiven, and all that God is now concerned about is that we believe this fact. We absolve men from their sins for no other purpose than to strengthen the faith of those who ask absolution in what they have heard proclaimed from the pulpit. Accordingly, none of them can say: "How can the minister know the

condition of my heart? What is absolution to profit me when I am impenitent? Answer: "Indeed, in that case it is of no benefit, but it is of benefit when it is believed. However, this is certain that you have been absolved. Your eternal punishment will be all the more grievous because you did not believe the absolution which God Himself has pronounced to all sinners and which He has ordered His ministers to continue to pronounce to them."

This applies also to the Sacraments. The water in Baptism saves us. When the Lord offers communicants the blessed bread and says: "This is My body, which is given for you," It is plain that He means to tell them, they must believe, or His body will not benefit them. A person who believes that Christ, by sacrificing His body, has paid for the communicant's sins can leave the altar rejoicing and exulting. When the Lord, offering the cup, says: "This is My blood, which is shed for you, for the remission of sins," He means to emphasize particularly the words "for the remission of sins" and to cause every communicant who believes them to shout inwardly with joy when he goes home from church after communing. ~



No Choice at All

Lois Matson
Yacolt, Washington

HAVE YOU EVER WONDERED WHY the children of Israel were God's chosen people? Was there something special about them? Not at all. The Scripture says: *For thou art an holy people unto the Lord thy God: the Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth. The Lord did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: But because the Lord loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the Lord brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.* Know therefore that the Lord thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations; And repayeth them that hate him to their face, to destroy them: he will not be slack to him that hateth him, he will repay him to his face. Thou shalt therefore keep the commandments, and the statutes, and the judgments, which I command thee this day, to do them. (Deuteronomy 7:6-11)

And before that, why did God choose Abram to receive His promise? Was there something in Abram that made him special? Not at all. The Scripture says he and his fathers were idol worshippers.

Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem, and called for the elders of Israel, and for their heads, and for their judges, and for their officers; and they presented themselves before God. And Joshua said unto all the people, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, **Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood in old time, even Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nachor: and they served other gods. And I took your father Abraham from the other side of the flood, and led him throughout all the land of Canaan, and multiplied his seed, and gave him Isaac...** (Joshua 24:1-3)

Through the mouth of Joshua, God reminded the children of Israel that since He had chosen Abraham, so He had faithfully led them. He brought them out of Egypt and through the Red Sea. He drove out their enemies and gave them a land that wasn't theirs.

Joshua reminded them that their fathers had served other gods in Egypt. Joshua said to put away the false gods and serve the Lord. If it was evil in their eyes to serve the Lord, then they could choose among the false gods. Their choice was not between the living God and false gods; their choice was between the false gods their fathers had worshipped across the River, and the false gods of the Amorites.

Now therefore fear the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the Lord. And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.

Of course, the children of Israel vowed to serve the living God, and of course, they broke their promise. After all, we know how faithful our sinful flesh can be. Thankfully the God who chose Abraham, who chose Israel, also chooses us.



But thou, Israel, art my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend. Thou whom I have taken from the ends of the earth, and called thee from the chief men thereof, and said unto thee, Thou art my servant; I have chosen thee, and not cast thee away. Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness. Behold, all they that were incensed against thee shall be ashamed and confounded: they shall be as nothing; and they that strive with thee shall perish. Thou shalt seek them, and shalt not find them, even them that contended with thee: they that war against thee shall be as nothing, and as a thing of nought. For I the Lord thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not; I will help thee. Fear not, thou worm Jacob, and ye men of Israel; I will help thee, saith the Lord, and thy redeemer, the Holy One of Israel. Isaiah 41:8-14

God's choice is to love us. He sent His Son, who purchased us from the bondage of sin. He is our Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel. Thanks be to God!

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Jesus Only

Pastor Jay Weidner
Laurium, Michigan

“In the beauty of the lilies Christ was born across the sea, With a glory in His bosom that transfigures you and me.”

Julia Ward Howe “The Battle Hymn of the Republic”



The Transfiguration James Tissot

THE FIRST SUNDAY OF THIS MONTH is The Transfiguration of Our Lord. This is a day that celebrates the divinity of the Lord Jesus being revealed in stark display to Peter, James and John and to every reader/hearer of this sacred text. The God incarnate was momentarily unveiled to appear as He truly appeared and for a moment the disciples were awestruck and extremely afraid. Moses and Elijah had appeared with Jesus, yet when the disciples looked up they were gone and Jesus only remained. This lesson is a powerful one: apart from Jesus the Law and the Prophets cannot save. They can only point and foretell; Jesus only is the substance. Only through Christ's atoning work can humans be saved. Jesus did not reveal Himself to us as He truly appears because we couldn't handle that, so He came in flesh so that we could look upon Him without fear and, even more, that we could see Him and be saved. The Transfiguration shows us how deeply God wanted to save us. He would even come in flesh so that we wouldn't be alienated by Him but rather that we would come to Him as one of us. Jesus only. These words provide the theme of a sermon by Henrik Schartau, the Awakener of Lund. Schartau powerfully uses the redundancy of these terms to hammer home his point. It is Jesus only, the Christ for all of fallen Adam's race, who shows the true desire of the Father. His desire is to save, even if He must personally fulfill the requirements of His own regulation, even if He must pay the price in full for Adam's transgression passed down through many generations, even if He must offer the atoning sacrifice and indeed be sacrificed, He will do it and indeed has. Schartau depicts this as a gigantic cross overshadowing the world, promising redemption to all those who would come to God. It is Jesus only and no other, Jesus only minus all the vain

imaginings of humans, Jesus only apart from even the most holy of religious constructs. It is Jesus only; He is the Son with whom the Father is fully satisfied. Hear Him.

Hear Him we shall and do, whenever one dares to take up the Word and boldly declare the message of Jesus only. Yet this message always leads to incredible opposition. People may often choose to hear Jesus together with Moses and Elijah, Jesus together with the old regulation, Jesus interpreted by the Old Testament, instead of the Jesus who fulfills the original covenant in totality and now provides a new and living way, a New Testament in His blood and no other, Jesus only who takes away the sin of the world. Still nothing else provides satisfaction to God and nothing else will ever do. It is Jesus only or nothing. There is therefore no other option but to proclaim Jesus only and so by God's grace we will endeavor to do so, and by God's Spirit succeed. So that, as Julia Ward Howe indicated, we would all be transfigured by Him. All for Jesus only.

And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.

Acts 2:42

THE EARLY CHURCH UNDERSTOOD THE IMPORTANCE of the communion of saints. It was Jesus Himself who gathered this first assembly of His friends, and He was the very center of their fellowship. After the ascension and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, the disciples continued to nurture this fellowship. They needed this communion with each other.

You, too, need this if you are a Christian. No one is so strong that he does not need the fellowship of believers. The communion of saints is God's family on earth. There we are permitted to share common experiences and common tasks. There we are one.

H. E. Wisloff