

As Lutherans we are well aware that it is by grace we “have been saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9). In James 2:26 we read, “For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.” These two Bible verses seem like a paradox to us. They almost seem to contradict one another.

Dr. Luther deals with the concern in this way:

“Insist on it, then, that inwardly, in the spirit, before God, man is justified through faith alone, without all works, but outwardly and publicly, before the people and himself, he is justified through works, that is, he thereby becomes known and certain himself that he honestly believes and is pious. Therefore you may call the one a public justification, the other an inward justification, but in this sense that the public justification is only a fruit, a result, and a proof of the justification in the heart. Accordingly, man is not justified by it before God but must previously be justified before Him. Just so you may call the fruits of the tree the obvious goodness of the tree, which follows and proves its inner, natural goodness.

“This is what St. James means in his Epistle when he says: ‘Faith without works is dead,’ that is, the fact that works do not follow is a certain sign that there is no faith, but a dead thought and dream, which people falsely call faith” (*What Luther Says*, CPH, p.1231-32).

Thus Luther answers this seeming contradiction.

We pray: Lord, we beseech Thee, grant Thy people grace to withstand the temptations of the devil and with pure hearts and minds to follow Thee, the only God. Amen.

THE LUTHERAN HERALD



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The Calendar

September 2	Trinity 14
September 9	Trinity 15
September 16	Trinity 16
September 21 (F)	<i>St. Matthew, Apostle, Evangelist</i>
September 23	Trinity 17
September 29 (S)	<i>St. Michael and All Angels</i>
September 30	Trinity 18

Episcopal Visitations for September

Bishop Heiser is scheduled to conduct the following visitations in September:

Friday, Sept. 7–Mon. Sept. 10 Pr. Tolar/Kenai, Alaska

He will also provide pastoral care for the saints of Faith Lutheran Church (Beaverton, Oregon) on September 16, 23 and 30.

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 28: JAMES 2:1-13 17TH SUNDAY A. TRINITY

Concerning the “Close of the Commandments” Dr. Luther writes, “God threatens to punish all who break these commandments. Therefore, we should fear His wrath and not do anything against them. But He promise grace and every blessing to all who keep these commandments. Therefore, we should also love and trust in Him and gladly do what He commands.”

St. James makes an admonition against his readers about “partiality” or prejudice. This could well be said of any of us at some time or another. This is a sin that is dear to the old sinful man. We all do it! James tells us that we Christians should “love your neighbor as yourself.”

James is not saying that if we love our neighbor we will be saved. Doing the Law does not save. Nobody does the Law! Those who are trying to be saved by obeying the Law “will be judged by the law of liberty. For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy.”

In the Lord’s Prayer we pray: “Forgive us our trespasses...” Luther says, “We pray in this petition that our Father in heaven would not look at our sins, or deny our prayer because of them. We are neither worthy of the things for which we pray, nor have we deserved them, but we ask that He would give them all to us by grace, for we daily sin much and surely deserve nothing but punishment. So we too will sincerely forgive and gladly do good to those who sin against us.”

We pray: Lord, we beseech Thee, grant Thy people grace to withstand the temptations of the devil and with pure hearts and minds to follow Thee, the only God. Amen.

It is clear from verses 1 and 2 that James is writing to Christian people, people who had been scattered and were suffering. These people were being tested in several ways. Testing is not the exception to the rule for Christians. Jesus says in John 16:33, “In the world you will have tribulation.” God’s people have always had tribulations. James knew that. And he also knew that his readers needed to be encouraged to stay strong in the faith. He knew they couldn’t stay strong of themselves, so he told them where to find the strength they needed.

Jesus’ disciples asked Him to teach them to pray. In Matthew 6 and Luke 11 Jesus taught them the Lord’s Prayer. He taught them where to go to find needed strength. In his explanation of the Lord’s Prayer Luther does the same thing. He invites us to remember that God is our true Father and that we are His true children. He reminds us to keep God’s name holy. He points out to us that God’s will is always best and we should desire that our will conforms to His will. He reminds us where to look for our daily needs. He promises not to lead us into temptation and to deliver us from evil. Our Father in heaven does rescue us from every evil of body and soul. And when our last hour comes He will give us a blessed end and take us to Himself in heaven.

In the midst of trial and tribulations God’s people can and should always look to Him for help.

We pray: Lord, we beseech Thee, grant Thy people grace to withstand the temptations of the devil and with pure hearts and minds to follow Thee, the only God. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord The Fourteenth Sunday after Trinity

I. Of Sin.

Here we must confess, as Paul says in Rom. 5:11, that sin originated from one man Adam, by whose disobedience all men were made sinners, and subject to death and the devil. This is called original or capital sin.

The fruits of this sin are afterwards evil deeds which are forbidden in the Ten Commandments, such as unbelief, false faith, idolatry, to be without the fear of God, arrogance, blindness, and, to speak briefly, not to know or regard God; secondly, to lie, to swear by God’s name, not to pray, not to call upon God, not to regard God’s Word, to be disobedient to parents, to murder, to be unchaste, to steal, to deceive, etc.

This hereditary sin is so deep a corruption of nature, that no reason can understand it, but it must be believed from the revelation of Scriptures, Ps. 51:5; Rom. 5:12 sqq.; Ex. 33:3; Gen 3:7 sqq. Wherefore the dogmas of the scholastic doctors [that is, medieval Roman Catholic theologians] are pure errors and obscurations contrary to this article, for by them it is taught:

That since the fall of Adam the natural powers of man have remained entire and incorrupt, and that man by nature has right reason and a good will, as the philosophers teach.

And that man has a free will to do good and omit evil, and, again, to omit good and do evil.

Also that man by his natural powers can observe and do all the commandments of God.

And that, by his natural powers, he can love God above all things, and his neighbor as himself.

Also if a man do as much as is in him, God certainly grants to him His grace.

And if he wish to come to the sacrament, there is no need of a good intention to do good, but it is sufficient if he have not a wicked purpose to commit sin; so entirely good is his nature and so efficacious the sacrament.

Also that it is not founded upon Scripture that, for a good work, the Holy Ghost with His grace is necessary.

Such and many other things have arisen from want of understanding and learning concerning both sins and Christ our Saviour, and they are truly heathen dogmas which we cannot endure. For if these dogmas would be right, Christ has died in vain, since there is in man no sin and misery for which He should have died; or He would have died only for the body, not for the soul, inasmuch as the soul is entirely sound, and the body only is subject to death. —The Smalcald Articles

For us Christians, our citizenship is in Heaven. Therefore, our eyes of faith should always be directed toward our heavenly home, and not at the vain, useless things of this world and life. We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain that we will not carry anything of ours beyond the grave. So then, why be concerned about the things of this life? Why do we chase after money and possessions in this life? These things will pass away from us.

The Lord God provides all that we need to support this body and life. Therefore, we can learn to be content in abundance or in lack through faith in the Lord God. St. Paul tells St. Timothy that he should flee from the things of this world and pursue “righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness,” that is, the things that the Holy Ghost gives through our use of the means of grace. He teaches us to turn from the things of this world, and trust solely in the Triune God.

When we forsake the things of the world, and continue to look to the life in Heaven that was promised to us through our Lord’s atonement, we are fighting the good fight of faith. We are trusting in the Lord to provide all that we need to support this body and life.

We pray: Keep, we beseech Thee, O Lord, Thy Church with Thy perpetual mercy; and because the frailty of man without Thee cannot but fall, keep us ever by Thy help from all things hurtful and lead us to all things profitable to our salvation; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Throughout the book of Hebrews the writer has been pointing his readers to the Word and will of God. He encourages them to live out their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, especially in times of persecution and suffering. In our text he points us, his readers, back to the Old Testament to remind us where the will and strength to do this comes from. First, he reminds us of the Good Shepherd, “that great Shepherd of the sheep,” who in Psalm 23 provides abundantly all that His sheep could ever want or need. He also reminds us of the “God of peace,” the one who in Numbers 6:23-27 places on His people the Aaronic Blessing and says of it, “So they shall put My name on the children of Israel, and I will bless them.”

The writer of Hebrews knows that his readers and Christians of all times constantly need reassurance and strength to remember that God is still with them.

Dr. Luther, in his explanation of the Third Article of the Apostles Creed, also points this out: “I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me..., enlightened me..., sanctified and kept me in the true faith. In the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church..., and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith... He daily and richly forgives all my sins and the sins of all believers. On the Last Day He will raise me..., and give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ.”

We pray: Lord, we beseech Thee, grant Thy people grace to withstand the temptations of the devil and with pure hearts and minds to follow Thee, the only God. Amen.

TUESDAY, SEPT. 25: HEBREWS 12:1-17 17TH SUNDAY A. TRINITY

With this great cloud of witnesses to the faithfulness of the Triune God, the text for today encourages us to “lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.” Indeed, in this world you and I face many sins, trials, and temptations which are trying to draw us away from the faith given us in our Baptism. As it has always been, Satan in one form or another still comes to us just as he did to Adam and Eve and says, “Did God really say...?” The devil, the world, and our old sinful nature are still trying to lead us away from eternal life in Christ. We see it all around us. The world is full of false teachers.

We too have the witness of the faithful Old Testament believers, we have the witness of the New Testament Apostles, and we have the witness of the faithful church fathers and the Lutheran Confessions. Through all of these faithful witnesses the Lord is calling us, guiding us, encouraging us, and keeping us in faithful service to Him, to our neighbor, and especially to those of the household of faith.

As we recognize that we live in a world that is trying to draw us away from the True God we see our need to pray that He would keep us in His Word and Sacraments. He does indeed keep us through this life unto eternal life with Him forever.

We pray: Lord, we beseech Thee, grant Thy people grace to withstand the temptations of the devil and with pure hearts and minds to follow Thee, the only God. Amen.

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 4: 2 TIM. 1:1-18 14TH SUNDAY A. TRINITY

Our Lord Jesus Christ has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light. Therefore, our hope in this life is always centered on our eternal home in Heaven. Our Lord Jesus won for us our citizenship in Heaven through His suffering and death on the cross. This is the way of the Christian as well. The rewards of salvation are given through suffering.

We suffer in this life not only on account of our sin and its consequences, but our enemies--the devil, the world, and our flesh--also seek our demise daily. St. Paul reminds St. Timothy that he will endure suffering from this world on account of his preaching the Gospel; for preaching that the Lord Jesus defeated death.

This message is still mocked today by those who refuse to believe. And those of us who believe in life everlasting are mocked as uneducated fools. But, the wisdom of the world is true foolishness. The testimony of the Lord is true, and the preaching that St. Paul, St. Timothy, and every faithful preacher has proclaimed up to the present is still the truth. Our Lord Jesus Christ has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light. And those of us who hold fast to this promise in faith will gain an everlasting crown. Thanks be to God!

We pray: Keep, we beseech Thee, O Lord, Thy Church with Thy perpetual mercy; and because the frailty of man without Thee cannot but fall, keep us ever by Thy help from all things hurtful and lead us to all things profitable to our salvation; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

“You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.”

St. Paul was in chains for preaching the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. He was considered by the world an evildoer for proclaiming that the Lord Jesus, the seed of King David, had suffered and died for the sins of the whole world, and was raised again on the third day, so that all those who now believe on the Lord Jesus have forgiveness of sins.

Why would St. Paul endure imprisonment? Why would he encourage St. Timothy to endure similar persecution? Because he believed what he preached. He would not have endured the suffering if he did not believe with every fiber of his being. He chose St. Timothy as a fellow preacher because he also believed the Word and was faithful in preaching the Gospel.

St. Timothy was to look for other faithful men who would be able to teach the good news of our Lord's redemption. Faithful preachers today continue to fill our ears with the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. They continue to proclaim that Christ died for all mankind, and that the redemption that He won can be claimed through faith, so that all those who believe on Him have forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and salvation.

We pray: Keep, we beseech Thee, O Lord, Thy Church with Thy perpetual mercy; and because the frailty of man without Thee cannot but fall, keep us ever by Thy help from all things hurtful and lead us to all things profitable to our salvation; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

The past week and a half we have been reading texts from Hebrews. As we read these texts it is clear that the writer knew the Old Testament. It is also clear that he did not see the Old Testament only as law. He saw it primarily as a witness to the Gospel. From the first verse he is witnessing to the fact that right from the very beginning, even from the first sin, the Holy Triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—has been calling His people back to Himself.

Hebrews uses example after example to show that God's people, the nation of Israel, refused to hear the Word of God and follow His leading. But as per His Holy Promises, the Lord kept His promises and continued to call and guide His Church on earth toward the birth of the Savior.

So why does the writer use all the Old Testament witnesses? He does this to show that God is faithful! He does not mislead His people. God still does what He promises for His people. Luther, in his explanation of Baptism in the Small Catechism, makes it plain this also applies to God's people today. He says, “[Baptism] works forgiveness of sins, rescues from death and the devil and gives salvation to all who believe this, as the words and promises of God declare.” Luther also quotes St. Paul in Romans 6:4: “We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.”

We pray: Lord, we beseech Thee, grant Thy people grace to withstand the temptations of the devil and with pure hearts and minds to follow Thee, the only God. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord

The Seventeenth Sunday after Trinity

The Third Commandment.

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.

When, then, it is asked: “What is meant by the commandment: ‘Remember the sabbath-day to sanctify it?’” Answer: To sanctify the Sabbath is the same as “to keep it holy.” But what is meant by “keeping it holy”? Nothing else than to be occupied in holy words, works and life. For the day needs no sanctification for itself; for in itself it has been created holy. But God desires it to be holy to thee. Therefore it becomes holy or unholy on thy account, according as thou art occupied on the same with things that are holy or unholy.

How then does such sanctification occur? Not that we sit behind the stove and do no rough work, or deck ourselves with a garland and put on our best clothes, but (as has been said) that we occupy ourselves with God’s Word, and exercise ourselves therein.

And indeed we Christians ought always to keep such a Sabbath, and to be occupied with nothing but holy things, i.e. daily to meditate upon God’s Word, and carry it in our hearts and upon our lips. But because (as has been said) we do not all have leisure, we must devote several hours a week to the young, or at least a day to the mass of people, in order that we may be concerned about this alone, and especially urge the Ten Commandments, the Creed and the Lord’s Prayer, and thus direct our whole life and being according to God’s Word. The Sabbath is truly kept whenever time is devoted to earnest attention to this, and the practice of it; but that cannot be called a true Christian Sabbath where this is not done. For they who are not Christians can keep holiday and be idle just as well as the entire swarm of our ecclesiastics, who stand daily in the churches, singing, and ringing bells, but who keep no Sabbath day holy, because they neither preach nor practice God’s Word, but teach and live contrary to it.

For the Word of God is the sanctuary above all sanctuaries, yea, the only one which we Christians know and have. For though we had the bones of all the saints, or all holy and consecrated garments upon a heap, they would not avail us anything; for all that is a dead thing which can sanctify nobody. But God’s Word is the treasury which sanctifies everything whereby even all the saints themselves were sanctified. —The Large Catechism, §87–90

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 6: TITUS 1:1-16 14TH SUNDAY A. TRINITY

St. Titus is charged by St. Paul to place into the churches of God faithful pastors, for the devil and the world, as enemies of the Church, always seek to pervert the pure word of God. They entice away many through spreading false doctrine, turning people away from the things of God to the things of this world, and getting people to trust in every false idol but the one true Triune God.

Faithful ministers of God stand in defense of their parishes to refute false doctrine. Such pastors are to point out the falsehoods that the devil and the world preach through false preachers and heretics. They are even charged with rooting out the falsehoods that reside within mankind from sinful thoughts and desires.

The faithful minister of God leads people away from the world and her lies, to the Word of God, which teaches us about the Lord Jesus Christ. He has defeated the devil once and for all on the tree of the holy cross. He has won forgiveness for all those who believe on His name. We as Christians have been baptized into Him, and bear His name. For this reason the devil and the world seek to take this great thing away from us through lies and deception. Thanks be to faithful ministers who guard and protect us from the lies of the false preachers and keep us in the one true faith.

We pray: Keep, we beseech Thee, O Lord, Thy Church with Thy perpetual mercy; and because the frailty of man without Thee cannot but fall, keep us ever by Thy help from all things hurtful and lead us to all things profitable to our salvation; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

No one is saved by his good works. But good works do serve a purpose. When we live good lives, those outside the Christian faith cannot bring a real accusation against us or the Church. St. Paul encourages St. Titus to exhort everyone under his care to live sober and reverent lives in order that no one outside of the faith would be able to condemn them. But more so, so that by their “good” lives the person outside of the faith would see the hypocrisy of the modern philosophers, and turn from their evil ways and cling in faith to Christ.

We do our society an injustice when we live our lives not as if we have an eternal home, but as if our lives here on Earth are the only lives that matter. When we model our lives after the world and unbelievers—when we live the same way they do—they are not given the opportunity to see that there is a life beyond this one; a life in Heaven with our Lord Jesus and all the saints who have gone before us.

Good works serve our neighbor and supply the proof that faith is living. But faith clings to the Lord Jesus alone and what He has done for us on the cross. Therefore, let us cling in faith to Christ, so that others may see our great faith and the good works faith produces, and also come to believe on the Lord Jesus.

We pray: Keep, we beseech Thee, O Lord, Thy Church with Thy perpetual mercy; and because the frailty of man without Thee cannot but fall, keep us ever by Thy help from all things hurtful and lead us to all things profitable to our salvation; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

We learned from Hebrews chapter 10 that it is impossible to earn forgiveness of sins through our works of the Law. Therefore, God sent Jesus Christ to be our payment for sins so that we might be saved, not through works of the Law, but through faith in Christ. Since the works and sacrifices of the old covenant did not forgive sins, it was also necessary that the believers of the Old Testament be saved through faith in the Christ.

This faith is what “counts” for salvation. Only those works which are done in faith please God. But these works of faith do not merit anything from God, since those who perform them out of faith have already been forgiven. It is only through faith that works become “good”. We learn this from the example of Cain and Abel. Why was Abel’s sacrifice acceptable while Cain’s was not? Because Abel’s sacrifice came from faith and Cain’s did not. Commentators on the text often try to explain that Cain’s offering was of poor quality and that this is why it was not accepted by God. Poor quality it may have been, but this is not why it was rejected. The simple truth is that Abel believed and Cain did not. Cain may have offered far more and better than Abel, but it would not have mattered because his offering was not in faith.

In the same way, those works performed by Christians—according to God’s commandments—are pleasing to God on account of faith. But no unbeliever can please God with any work.

We pray: Lord, we pray Thee that Thy grace may always go before and follow after us and make us continually to be given to all good works; through Jesus Christ, Amen.

“All Scripture ought to be distributed into these two topics, the Law and the promises” (Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article IV:5). Today’s text divides the old and new covenants according to these topics. The author speaks of the old covenant fulfilling the function of the Law, while the new covenant is that of the promises of the Christ.

The sacrifices of the old covenant did not pardon sins. Far from it, those sacrifices were a constant reminder of sins. In this way, the old covenant functioned as the mirror of the Law, which serves to show sinners their sinfulness and need for a Savior. The people of Israel offered sacrifices because the Law required it, knowing that this act in itself did not forgive their sins. The Law reveals our sinful state, but it offers no solution.

In the new covenant one sacrifice sufficed to cover the sins of all men. “There has been only one propitiatory sacrifice in the world, namely, the death of Christ” (Apology, Article XXIV:22). This one sacrifice was done on our behalf because we could not fulfill the Law’s demands. All those who believe in the Christ receive the forgiveness which He won: this is the promise of the new covenant. No work of ours can fulfill the demands of the Law, let alone earn forgiveness. This is why salvation is a gift; it had to be won for us by another’s sacrifice. Christ has fulfilled the Law, has paid for our sins, and has risen from the dead. Those who believe in Him receive forgiveness and eternal life. This is the Gospel.

We pray: Lord, we pray Thee that Thy grace may always go before and follow after us and make us continually to be given to all good works; through Jesus Christ, Amen.

You have hopefully heard that all men are sinners. That “all” includes you, too. It also includes all those outside the Christian faith. The difference between you and an unbeliever is that by faith you live in repentance of your sin, striving to lead a holy life according to the Ten Commandments, and trusting in the Lord Jesus’ forgiveness won on the cross. The unbeliever has no such repentance.

St. Paul tells St. Titus to remind his hearers that they are sinners. He is to remind them that they should “be peaceable, gentle, showing all humility to all men,” for his hearers (and us as well) were also once “foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another” before we were brought into the faith through our Holy Baptism. In other words, remember that you too are still a sinner, so be gentle to other sinners, just as you would want people to be to you when your sins are uncovered.

For this reason, live daily in your Holy Baptism, confessing your sins daily to the Lord Jesus, and clinging to Him in faith that by His shed blood and suffering and death your sins are forgiven you. In fact, go tell your sins to your pastor in private confession, and he will remind you that, yes, you are a sinner, but the Lord has redeemed you and won forgiveness for you, and will impart that forgiveness to you.

We pray: Keep, we beseech Thee, O Lord, Thy Church with Thy perpetual mercy; and because the frailty of man without Thee cannot but fall, keep us ever by Thy help from all things hurtful and lead us to all things profitable to our salvation; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

The Apostle Paul shows us two opposing ideas: faithful sayings and foolish disputes. These differ from each other with regard both to content and to fruit.

The two previous verses define the content of St. Paul's "faithful saying" as the fact that we are justified by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, through the work of the Holy Spirit. A faithful saying is especially that which concerns our salvation, for Scripture has revealed these things in clear, certain, and trustworthy terms. St. Paul desires that the daily life of the Christian would be saturated with the faithful sayings of Scripture.

The fruits of faith are words—the good confession of the Lord Jesus Christ—and good works, which benefit the fellow man. St. Paul urges good works because they are the necessary fruit of true faith, and because they are commanded by God. The Augsburg Confession likewise teaches "that faith is bound to bring forth good fruits, and that it is necessary to do good works commanded by God, because of God's will, but that we should not rely on those works to merit justification before God" (Article VI:1).

Foolish disputes, however, are concerned with worldly matters—genealogies and strivings about the Law. Such things are uncertain and unedifying, for they teach distractions from eternal truths or do not offer eternal blessings. The fruit of such is sinful division. It is deplorable how often Christians are divided over political opinions or over disputes of Christian freedom. But faith and good works are preserved by faithful doctrine.

We pray: O Lord, we beseech Thee, let Thy continual pity cleanse and defend Thy Church; and because it cannot continue in safety without Thy help, preserve it evermore by Thy help and goodness; through Jesus Christ, Amen.

Those "copies and shadows" of heavenly things by which the Old Testament Church was taught were of lesser standing than the heavenly reality. The Old Testament tabernacle and laws of worship taught many things about the Christ and about salvation through pictures and similes. It was also significant that the tabernacle was a weak copy, so that the people would not mistake the earthly tabernacle for the true, heavenly one. In this way, the believers of the Old Testament would learn about the Christ from the lesser "copies", but would also more eagerly expect the real thing.

Jesus Christ is, at last, the real thing. He is the Sacrifice that was offered once for all and in Him our atonement is finished. He is the High Priest who entered once into the Most Holy Place of heaven, and has opened it up for us. His is the blood that truly forgives sins, forever. The tabernacle, the priesthood, and the sacrifices were "copies and shadows" of the Christ, so that we would recognize Him when He came, and not be content with the mere "copies."

We have been born into the time of the New Testament. The heavenly realities which the Jews awaited have been revealed to us in the coming of the Christ. Christianity is not a matter of unfulfilled signs and practices; it is a matter of faith in the Christ who fulfilled all things for our salvation.

We pray: Lord, we pray Thee that Thy grace may always go before and follow after us and make us continually to be given to all good works; through Jesus Christ, Amen.

“The ark of the covenant overlaid on all sides with gold, in which were the golden pot that had the manna, Aaron’s rod that budded, and the tablets of the covenant.”

The ark of the covenant, which had its place within the tabernacle, is one of those “copies and shadows” spoken of in the previous chapter—that is, it was a symbol of the greater, heavenly reality. The ark contained three things: some of the manna, with which the Lord had fed the Israelites in the desert; Aaron’s budded staff, by which sign the Lord chose Aaron, of the tribe of Levi, to be the father of the priestly line; and the tablets of the Ten Commandments, which were written by the finger of God.

These three things represented the good which the Lord provides for His people: daily bread and sufficiency, forgiveness for sins (declared through the priest), and the divine Law. These three things correspond also to what we confess in the Apostles’ Creed. In the first article we confess that God the Father gives us all that we need to support this body and life. In the second article we confess that the Christ has won for us forgiveness of sins by His own blood. And according to the third article we confess that the Holy Spirit works faith in sinners and causes them to love the Law of God and to desire to follow its commands. Our daily bread, forgiveness, and the divine Law are all merciful gifts from God.

We pray: Lord, we pray Thee that Thy grace may always go before and follow after us and make us continually to be given to all good works; through Jesus Christ, Amen.

The apostolic office is the means by which the Lord delivers grace to the saints. For this reason, the Lord Jesus chose the twelve and sent them into all the world: that they would deliver the grace of God which was won by Christ on the cross, and everyone who heard and believed the words of the apostles concerning the Christ were saved. When St. Paul writes his epistle to Philemon, he writes as an apostle—one chosen by the Lord Jesus to deliver the grace of God by preaching the Gospel of the Christ.

Therefore, when St. Paul declares to Philemon the grace of the Lord Jesus, it is more than a pious wish; the epistle itself, written by the hand of the apostle, which teaches and confirms the saving faith in Christ which Philemon already possesses, actually delivers the grace of God to him.

The called and ordained pastors of the Church are the heirs of that apostolic office, of which St. Paul was a member. Likewise, the grace of God is delivered to the saints when the pastor preaches the Word of God and administers the sacraments. The faithful pastor is the Lord Jesus’ chosen means through which He speaks to His people, even as the Augsburg Confession declares, “That we may obtain this faith, the Office of Teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted” (Article V:1).

We pray: O Lord, we beseech Thee, let Thy continual pity cleanse and defend Thy Church; and because it cannot continue in safety without Thy help, preserve it evermore by Thy help and goodness; through Jesus Christ, Amen.

It is not enough to “believe in God.” One must also believe that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

In the fourth century, Arius (called by some the “arch-heretic”) taught that the Son of God was merely the first of God’s creations, who in the fullness of time was crucified, raised again from the dead, and assumed to the right hand of God, but that the Son of God was not essentially God. Against such a heresy we hold the Athanasian Creed, which confesses, “It is necessary to everlasting salvation that [one] also believe faithfully the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. For the right faith is that we believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and Man” (TLH, p. 53). This is also the message of Hebrews. Verse 3 declares that the Son of God is the very brightness of God’s glory, that He is the express image of God’s person, and that He upholds all things. This is nothing less than to say that the Son of God is God. And, as God, He is glorified above the angels, which are His creatures.

By denying the divinity of Christ, Arius robbed the crucifixion of its efficacy. No created thing, not even an angel, could be a sacrifice sufficient for the sins of the whole world. Only God could make such a payment. Therefore, the Son of God became man, so that, being man, He might die and, being God, His death might be sufficient for the sins of the world.

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In the previous chapter the author of the epistle explained the priest, Melchizedek, as a type of the Christ—a lesson by example in who the Christ would be or what He would do. In chapter 8 the author now comes to “the main point”: the difference between the old covenant and the new.

The old covenant did not accomplish the forgiveness of sins. Let us be clear: forgiveness of sins still came to the Jews of the Old Testament through faith in the coming Christ. Nonetheless, when Moses read the Words of the old covenant to the people and sprinkled on them the blood of calves and goats for its institution (Exodus 24:3–8), this blood of the old covenant was unable to forgive sins. Sacrifices for sins were required of the Jews, but not that they would earn forgiveness by them, only that they would be a symbol of the coming Christ.

Of the new covenant (also translated as “testament”) Christ says, “This is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Matthew 26:28). The blood of animals could not forgive sins, but the blood of the Son of God establishes the new covenant for the forgiveness of sins. When the faithful eat and drink the body and blood of the Christ, they receive, thereby, forgiveness of sins. In the New Testament the “copies and shadows” are taken away; we now receive forgiveness and life directly from the Christ Himself.

We pray: Lord, we pray Thee that Thy grace may always go before and follow after us and make us continually to be given to all good works; through Jesus Christ, Amen.

The author of the epistle to the Hebrews shows us how the Old Testament is to be interpreted. All of Scripture teaches about the Christ. The Old Testament taught about the Christ who would come in the future, whereas the New Testament teaches that the Christ has come and has completed the work of salvation. Sometimes the Old Testament teaches about the Christ by direct prophecy, as when Isaiah plainly said that the Christ would be born of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14). At other times the Old Testament teaches by example, as in the case of Melchizedek, priest of Salem (Genesis 14). In such a case, God provides a small truth, which points forward to the greater reality to be revealed in the New Testament.

Melchizedek is a type of the Christ, meaning he points forward to Christ's person or work by a point of similarity. Melchizedek was a priest of God, even though he was before the line of Levi. In the same way, Christ is the High Priest because He was before all. Melchizedek is greater than Abraham, for he both blessed Abraham and received an offering from him. In the same way, the Christ is the God of Abraham who is worthy of worship from Abraham's descendants. Melchizedek has no recorded family. In the same way, the Christ, though born of Mary, has no biological father, but His Father is God and His family is those who believe in Him. Melchizedek's life-span is not recorded, even as the Christ lives and reigns forever, so will those who believe in Him.

We pray: Lord, we pray Thee that Thy grace may always go before and follow after us and make us continually to be given to all good works; through Jesus Christ, Amen.

There is a three part hierarchy present in this text: God, the Creator and sustainer of all things; angels, God's blessed and mighty servants; and then man, fallen and sinful. In the Incarnation, the Son of God humbled Himself to be lower than the angels in order to raise up sinful man from sin and death.

We must not confuse the Incarnation of the Son of God with His humiliation. The Incarnation is that God became man in the person of the Christ. His humiliation is that the Christ, though God, willfully limited Himself and did not make full use of His divine power. Thus, in His humiliation He suffered pain, weariness, hunger, and death—the consequences of sin—in order to make payment for sin, but was not Himself sinful. When He had died and His humiliation was over, He remains incarnate even after His Resurrection and, rather than leaving His human nature behind, He is glorified at the right Hand of the Father as both God and man.

Therefore, we who are baptized and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ are called His brethren and His children, for He shared our suffering and still shares our nature. While on earth, we remain sinners in need of His continual forgiveness, but when He returns on the Last Day, we who have believed in Him will also be glorified with Him.

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“Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.”

There is only one true Confession, because there is only one true Faith. The Lord Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the only way of salvation. He has proved this by His death, resurrection, and ascension. The Lord Jesus Christ really did come as a man, He really did die, and He really did rise bodily from the dead. Having made Himself the sacrifice for our sins, He is the High Priest before God the Father. A high priest is a mediator, who stands between the people and God; the high priest prays to God on the people’s behalf and, in turn, delivers the Word of God to the people. The Lord Jesus Christ likewise mediates between God and those who trust in His salvation. Therefore, we must hold fast to this one true Confession, lest we fall away from His grace and perish.

There are those who want to compare religions by talking about “your belief” and “my belief,” and that it does not matter what you believe as long as you stand up for it. This is a lie. If you stand up for a false faith, in the end you will be damned. The one belief that saves is the one true Confession of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who sacrificed Himself for our sins and sits at the right hand of the Father as our mediator.

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“For when God made a promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself.”

It is customary in court (or at least used to be) to swear on the Bible to tell the truth. When public officials are “sworn into office,” they swear on the Bible. Lest men, in their fallen nature, make vows rashly or unfaithfully, it is right to appeal to a higher authority that the vow may be confirmed and men held accountable to what they have vowed. It is right that godly vows be taken on the Bible, for it is the greatest authority there is. God alone has nothing greater to swear by, so He confirms His oath by swearing by Himself, on His own Word. There can be nothing more certain than what God promises on His own Word.

When Christ commissioned the Apostles to teach and baptize, He established their ministry on His own authority, since there is none greater. He says, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore...” (Matthew 28:18-19). When the called and ordained minister of the Word teaches the Word of God, baptizes for the forgiveness of sins, and distributes the Lord’s Supper, life and salvation are truly given to those who believe. God has sworn it; there is nothing more certain. The devil would use doubts, persecutions, and fear to lead us to believe that God is unfavorable toward Christians. God has sworn by Himself salvation to all who believe. Nothing is more certain.

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