

Chapter Two (2).

1. *Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write: These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks;*

A. **The seven stars are the pastors (angels) of the churches** (“The sevens stars are the angels of the seven churches.” **Revelation 1:20**): Luther: “From these chapters we learn in addition that the word ‘angel’ is to be understood later on, in other images or visions, to mean bishops and teachers in Christendom – some good, such as the holy fathers and bishops, some bad, such as the heretics and false bishops.”¹ The basic meaning of the word “angel” is “messenger”. The messenger can be a spirit, like angel who announced the birth of Christ to the shepherds at the birth of Christ, or a messenger can be a man, as St. John alludes to in this passage.² (The word “angel” derives from the Greek word “angelos”,

¹Luther’s Works, Vol. 35, p. 401.

²“**angels** (messengers). **1.** Unseen, spiritual (Mt. 22:30; Heb. 1:14), holy (Ps. 89:5, 7) celestial beings who continually do Gods bidding (Ps. 104:4; Mt. 4:6; Heb 2:7). They protect and serve those who fear God (Gn 28:12; 48:16; 2 K6:17; Ps. 34:7; Is. 63:9); differ in rank and dignity (Dn 10:13, 21; Lk 1:19, 26,; Ro 8:38; Eph 1:21. **2.** An angel of the LORD may be an angel which executes God’s will (1 K 19:5, 7); yet there is frequent mention of ‘the angel of the LORD,’ a distinct person and yet of essence of the LORD (Gn. 16:10, 13; 18:2-4, 13, 14, 33), who revealed God (Gn. 32:30), has the LORD’S name (Ex. 23:21) and presence (Ex 32:14), and is therefore identified with preincarnate Son. **3.** Evil angels are fallen spirits (2 Ptr 2:4). See *demon; Satan*. **4.** The ‘angels of the seven churches, possibly representatives of the churches, possibly pastors (Rv. 1:20; 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14). **5.** John the Baptist called messenger (G *angelos*) sent before Christ (Mt 11:10; Mk 1:2; Lk 7:27).” *Concordia Dictionary of the Bible*, Erwin L. Lueker, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1963, p. 10, s. v. “**angel**”.

Jesus appears as the Angel of the Lord in the Old Testament: “Jesus appears as God on the pages of the Old Testament. He reveals Himself under such titles as ‘the Angel of the Lord,’ ‘Jehovah,’ ‘Lord,’ etc. Whenever in the Old Testament the name ‘Lord’ occurs, it is pre-eminently not the Father, nor the Holy Spirit, but the Son of God. Ex. 13:21 Moses writes of the writes of the Israelites in the wilderness: ‘And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light.’ Who is this ‘Lord’? Ch. 14:19 He is called ‘the Angel of God,’ which is a well-known appellation of Jesus in the Old Testament. Here the Angel of God is directly termed ‘Lord.’ All doubt is removed by Paul (I Cor. 10:3-4): ‘Our fathers did all eat the same spiritual meat; and did all drink the same spiritual drink; for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them; *and that Rock was Christ.*’ ... Which person of the Godhead summoned Moses to the summit of Mount Sinai and gave him the two tables of the Law? Again it was the Son of God. The evidence is presented in the Ascension Psalm 68; vv. 7-8, and 17-18. And all doubt is excluded by Heb. 12:18-26, especially v. 24. ... Luther writes: ‘The God who led Israel out of Egypt and through the Red

meaning messenger).³

B. Seven golden candlesticks: The seven golden candlesticks are the congregations. We see that Christ is present in the congregation because **(1)** He is omnipresent because He is God (“And, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the age.” **St. Matthew 28:20**) and **B.** because He promises to be with us in His Word and Sacraments (“For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” **St. Matthew 18:20**). For example, we gather around His Name when in Holy Baptism, for we baptize “in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.” **Matthew 28:19**. A Christian’s conduct in Church is formed and informed by the fact that we are in the presence of God and He is present graciously to serve us with the forgiveness of sins, faith, and life everlasting.

C. The Rev. Dr. George Stoeckhardt: “Moreover, these churches in their diversity are a good representation of all churches of all times. Therefore what once was said of and to the churches in Asia is a timely message for Christian congregations today.”⁴

2. I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars:.

A. **Works and labor:** Christians labor in Christ’s Word and Sacraments.

B. **Patience:** Laboring in Christ’s Word and Sacraments produces patience.

“Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord

Sea; who went before them in a pillar of a cloud and of fire; who nourished them with bread from heaven and did all the miracles which Moses relates in his books; again, who brought them into the land of Canaan and gave them kings and the priesthood and everything, is this God and none other than Jesus of Nazareth, Mary’s, the Virgin’s, Son, whom we Christians call our God and Lord Again, He it is who on Mountain Sinai gives Moses the Ten Commandments ... Yes, Jesus of Nazareth, who died for us on the cross is the God who says in the First Commandment: “I, the Lord, am thy God.”’ So then, the same God on Sinai and Calvary. What comfort for the believers! Now the flames of Sinai can no longer fill us with terror. Indeed, we daily transgress the holy Law of Sinai, but we break through its condemnation and flee to the Redeemer on Calvary, who Himself fulfilled the Law for us and paid its penalty.” The Rev. Louis E. Roehm, *The Abiding Word*, Vol. 1, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1946, pp. 20, 21

³“**angel, n.** [L(atin). *angelus*; Gr(eek). *angelos*, a messenger.]” *Webster’s Unabridged Dictionary*, p. 68, s. v. “**angel**”.

⁴*Lectures on the Revelation of St. John*, p. 5.

Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only so, but we glorify in tribulation also; knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.”⁵ With the Holy Ghost comes the peace of absolution through Christ’s Word and Sacraments “Then said Jesus to them again, Peace *be* unto you: as *my* Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And when he had said this, he breathed on *them*, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; *and* whose soever *sins* ye retain, they are retained.”⁶ And with peace with God comes the patience to bear and even grow in tribulation.

C. **Tried them:** Christians are to test the spirits by scrutinizing what they say against the Word of God. “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is the *spirit* of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.” An “antichrist” is someone who teaches for God the doctrines of men.⁷ They, thereby, are subtle opponents of Christ, wolves in sheep’s clothing⁸, not openly denying Christ but subverting His teaching, subverting the Gospel. *Antichrists attack the Gospel.* For St. John says that every spirit that confesses not that Jesus has come, i.e. comes and remains⁹, in the flesh is antichrist. Jesus

⁵**Romans 5:1-5.**

⁶**St. John 20:21-23**

⁷“Howbeit in vain do they worship; me, teaching *for* doctrines the commandments of men.” **St. Mark 7:7.** The Rev. Dr. Francis Pieper, past President of the Lutheran Church -- Missouri Synod, writes: “Scripture uses the term ‘antichrist’ in a wider and in a narrow sense. In the passage I John 2:18 all false teachers are called ‘antichrists’ Scripture shows clearly enough why all false teachers are ‘antichrists’ Since Scripture enjoins that in Christ’s Church nothing but Christ’s Word is to be taught and to rule (Matt. 28:20; John 8:31-32; 17:20; I Pet. 4:11; I Tim. 6:3ff), all who teach another word are *eo ipso* [by that itself] [antichrists], opponents of Christ, rebels in His kingdom.” *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. III, p. 462.

⁸“Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.” **St. Matthew 7:15.**

⁹St. John the Apostle uses here the Greek perfect tense. The perfect indicates an action

came in the flesh in order to be with us in the Word and the Sacraments in order to forgive our sins and save us.¹⁰ Luther: “Christ has flesh, but in it there is the full Divinity. God has offered Himself to us in Christ. *Christ came into the flesh to be with us in Baptism and at the Holy Supper.* Every spirit who is at pains to teach that Christ does everything through the sacraments is of God, is glad to hear about Christ, and gives thanks. For he understands that Christ is his and that He came in the flesh. Therefore this has been stated emphatically: Behold, this is the test of a spirit, whether he is of God or of the devil.”¹¹

D. **False apostles:** Chemnitz writes these false apostles denied the Gospel by denying the Deity of Christ, who is the Source and Power of the Gospel because He is God our Savior: “When the remaining apostles had died and John had been banished to Patmos, Ebion¹² and Cerinthus¹³ stirred up contentions concerning

that occurs with continuing results. “The Greek perfect tense denotes the present state resultant upon a past action. Examples: (1) Suppose someone asks an official, ‘What is your relation to that prisoner?’, and he replies, ‘I have released him,’ the verb in this answer of the official would be [léluka – I have released]. The perfect would express the present state of the official (with reference to the prisoner) resultant upon his past action of releasing. ... The perfect passive is often much easier to translate into English than the perfect active. Thus [gegraptai] means *it is written* (in the Scriptures). Here the English *it is written* is not present tense at all, but reproduces the Greek perfect very well; the meaning is *it stands written*. Both English and Greek here refer to a present state resultant upon an act of writing which took place long ago.” (The Rev. Dr. J. Gresham Machen, *New Testament Greek for Beginners*, pp. 187, 188) Hence, when St. John the Apostle writes, “Jesus Christ is come [perfect tense] in the flesh,” he is saying, “Jesus Christ is come in the flesh and remains” or we might say, “Jesus Christ come in the flesh to stay.”

¹⁰St. Paul, for example, writes of Christ acting in the Sacrament of Holy Baptism to absolve and to save: “... even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word.” **Ephesians 5:25, 26.** “This Baptism is also founded upon the name of Christ ... because it was purchased by Christ’s vicarious [substitutionary] satisfaction, as Eph. 5:26 expressly teaches: ‘Christ also loved the Church and gave Himself for it ... , that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word.’” The Rev. Dr. Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. III, p. 259, amplification added. Dr. Pieper was President of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod from 1899-1911.

¹¹*Luther’s Works*, Vol. 30, p. 286.

¹²“The ancients quite properly called these men Ebionites, because they held poor and mean opinions concerning Christ. ... For they considered him a plain and common man, who was justified only because of his superior virtue, and who was the fruit of the intercourse of a man with Mary. In their opinion the observance of the ceremonial law was altogether necessary, on

the ground that they could not be saved by faith in Christ alone and by a corresponding life. ... There were others, however, besides them, that were of the same name, ... but avoided the strange and absurd beliefs of the former, and did not deny that the Lord was born of a virgin and of the Holy Spirit. But nevertheless, inasmuch as they also refused to acknowledge that he pre-existed, ... being God, Word, and Wisdom, they turned aside into the impiety of the former, especially when they, like them endeavored to observe strictly the bodily worship of the law.” Eusebius, *Church History*, in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Second Series, Vol. I, eds. Philip Schaff, and Henry Wace, Grand Rapids, MI, Wm. B. Eerdmans, rpr. June 1991, p. 159.

¹³“We have understood that at this time Cerinthus, ... the author of another heresy, made his appearance. Caius, whose words we quoted above, .. in the Disputation which is ascribed to him, writes as follows concerning this man: ‘But Cerinthus also, by means of revelations which he pretends were written by a great apostle, brings before us marvelous things which he falsely claims were shown him by angels; and he say that after the resurrection the kingdom of Christ will be set up on earth, and that the flesh dwelling in Jerusalem will again be subject to desires and pleasures. And being an enemy of the Scriptures of God, he asserts, with the purpose of deceiving men, that there is to be a period of a thousand years for marriage festivals.’” Eusebius, *Church History*, in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Second Series, Vol. I, eds. Philip Schaff, and Henry Wace, Grand Rapids, MI, Wm. B. Eerdmans, rpr. June 1991, p. 160. Wm.

“**Cerinthus**, a Judaizing Gnostic, who maintained the validity of the Mosaic Law, but in true Gnostic fashion separated the creator (Demiurge) from God, denied the humanity of Christ (Docetism) , yet, inconsistently, retained the Jewish notion of a millennium with its

center in Jerusalem. According to Irenaeus the Gnostic ideas of Cerinthus furnished the background of St. John's polemic in his epistles.” *Concordia Cyclopaedia*, p. 124, s. v.

“**Cerinthus**”.

“**Gnosticism**, purporting to be a higher and more philosophic form of Christianity (gnosis, knowledge as opposed to mere faith), is a paganizing religious philosophy, which included Christianity in its vagaries and speculations. It has its roots in that peculiar mode of thought which in the early days of Christianity (Gnosticism was at its height in the second half of the second century) sought to save the wreckage of decadent heathenism by fusing into a single system the manifold and heterogeneous religious elements which the ancient world had produced. Gnosticism is the most stupendous and the most fantastic form of religious syncretism known to history. Oriental mysticism and Greek philosophy, Buddhistic nihilism and Platonic idealism, Zoroastrian dualism and Alexandrian Judaism, Babylonian cosmology and Greek mythology, and other elements together with Christian ideas are thrown into the crucible and, as it were, chemically compounded. Gnosticism was a serious attempt to solve the deepest metaphysical and theological problems, such as the nature of the Deity, the antithesis between God and matter, the creation of the material world, the origin of evil, etc.” *Concordia Cyclopaedia*, p. 291, s.v. “**Gnosticism**”.

observances, etc., and sadly disturbed the churches. But hear ... in what matter and under what cloak and pretext they did this. Eusebius¹⁴, Bk. 3, ch. 28¹⁵, quotes from Caius that Cerinthus wanted to bring his fantastic doctrines into the church under the pretext of revelations supposedly received from a great apostle. And he adds that he was an enemy of the Scriptures of God. And because it was still fresh in the memory of the church that the apostles had transmitted certain other things concerning the deeds and words of the Savior beside what was written in the accounts of the three evangelists, Cerinthus and others misused this as a pretext and set forth their false doctrines which they could not prove from the then existing apostolic writings, maintaining that the apostles had taught these things orally; and they insisted that the things that had been written must be made to agree with these forged traditions. St. John is looking back on these battles when he says in Rev. 2:2, 220: 'You have tested those who call themselves apostles but are not'; also, 'Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, etc.' Therefore they boast of both revelations and traditions for which they want to claim apostolic authority. John says in the epistle to Thyatira that they called these doctrines 'the deep things,' that is, not the commonly proclaimed dogmas of the apostles, which were known to all in the church also from the Scriptures, but deep, hidden, and secret mysteries, which the apostles had delivered from hand to hand, not to anyone and everyone, but privately and orally to their friends, as mysteries that were to be honored in silence. But John calls them deep things not of the apostles but of Satan. ... The strife which was incited in this way greatly disturbed the churches. For they could not deny, since it was of recent memory, that the apostles had handed down more concerning the works of Christ by word of mouth than was contained in the writings of the evangelists. And since the other apostles had already died, God without doubt granted John a longer life ... that he might with apostolic vigilance see to it for the good of the church for all time that neither fraudulent traditions nor spurious writings should be foisted on the churches as the true and genuine teaching of the apostles. ... Therefore, when John had returned to Asia from exile on Patmos, the controversies which had been

¹⁴“**Eusebius of Caesarea**; b. ca. 280, surnamed Pamphili—the friend of Pamphilus, his teacher; imprisoned in Egypt for confessing; bishop of Caesarea soon after 313; enjoyed the confidence of Constantine; d. 339. He was prominent at Nicea, working for a compromise; he subscribed to the Nicene Creed, but later was at the head of the moderate Semi-Arians and presided at the synod in Tyre, 335, which condemned Athanasius. In the field of Church History he served the Church well, "the Father of Church History," being the first in the field and preserving valuable material for his successors. His *Church History*, *Chronicle* (a universal history), *Life of Constantine*, etc., are the fruit of most painstaking research. He wrote, besides, apologetic, dogmatic, and exegetic treatises and collaborated with Pamphilius on the *Apology for Origen*.” *Concordia Cyclopaedia*, pp. 240, 241, s.v. “**Eusebius**”.

¹⁵Eusebius writes:

stirred up in the meantime by Cerinthus and others were brought before him as the last watchman and overseer from among the apostles, to be examined and judged, not only by the bishops in Asia, but also by representatives of many believers and of the whole church, as Jerome says. There John, as Eusebeius writes, Bk. 3, ch. 24, approved of the writings of the three evangelists and testified that they are true. But because the question was then being discussed very noisily whether everything which the Lord had done and taught, and which the apostles had transmitted concerning his works, was contained in the writings of the three evangelists, or whether more had been transmitted than was written, John made use of this occasion and wrote his Gospel narrative and set before the church those things of which he knew and they had been done and transmitted to the church over and above the accounts of the three evangelists, and which the Holy Ghost judged to be necessary and sufficient for the church for all time to come. He did this so that the church might not in the future be carried about by any wind and pretense of traditions but be sure in the doctrine of the apostles concerning the deeds of Christ. And because Ebion ... accepted only the Gospel of Matthew, for which he invented peculiar interpretations, ostensibly received by tradition, John reported the speeches of Christ more diligently than the other apostles had done and showed that the true interpretation must be taken from them. It is very instructive to observe the true occasion and cause of the writing of John. Had everything which Jesus did and said been comprehended in writing, when also John had written? By no means! For John himself concludes his Gospel thus: 'There are also many other things which Jesus did; were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.' Have we not therefore all things that are necessary and sufficient concerning the doctrine of Christ in the writings of the evangelists, or are also other things ... from the traditions necessary for faith and salvation? This, indeed, the papalists maintain. But hear what John says: 'But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.'"¹⁶

Luther: "Whatever they teach, compare it with these words from 1 Tim. 1:15: "Jesus came into this world to save sinners." You must understand that whatever agrees with this is of God. But you must believe that whatever does not agree with this is from the father of lies (John 8:44). First the Jews deny constantly that Christ came in the flesh, and Cerinthus kept denying that Christ existed before Mary. If He came into the flesh, it follows that He existed before the flesh. He who denies that He came into the flesh denies that He is God and man.

¹⁶*The Examination of the Council of Trent, Part I*, tr. Fred Kramer, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, pp. 91, 92, 93.

Accordingly, he is not of God but is of the devil.”¹⁷

Eusebius: “But Irenaeus, in the first book of his work *Against Heresies*, ... gives some more abominable false doctrines of the same man, and in the third book relates a story which deserves to be recorded. He says, on the authority of Polycarp¹⁸, that the apostle John once entered a bath to bathe; but, learning that Cerinthus was within, he sprang from the place and rushed out of the door, for he could not bear to remain under the same roof with him. And he advised those that were with him to do the same, saying, ‘Let us flee, lest the bath fall; for Cerinthus, the enemy of the truth, is within.’”

3. *And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name’s sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted.*

A. Borne, patience: Christ commends the Ephesians very bearing the burden of the world’s, the flesh’s, and the devil’s opposition to the Gospel. “Blessed are ye, when *men* shall revile you, and persecute *you*, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great *is* your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.” **St. Matthew 5:11-12.** Opposition to Christians comes from the world, the flesh, and the devil. God makes life easy by freely forgiving and delivering from sin for Christ’s sake. “And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.” **St. John 17:3.** Christians bear these burdens with patience because they have peace with God through the Gospel.

¹⁷*Luther’s Works*, Vol. 30, p. 285.

¹⁸“**Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna**; b. ca. 69 A. D., a disciple of John and friend of Ignatius ; burned at the stake during the persecution under Antoninus Pius (155). According to Irenaeus, his pupil, he was a man of saintly character and deeply concerned in preserving the purity of the apostolic teaching. His testimony is substantiated by the whole tenor of Polycarp’s letter to the Philippians, which breathes a noble Christian spirit and warns against the vanity of false teaching.

‘Every one,’ says he, ‘who does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is an antichrist.’ (Cf. 2 John 7.) He understood and quotes ‘the blessed and glorious Paul.’ ‘By grace ye are saved, not by works, but by the will of God through Jesus Christ.’ (Cf. Eph. 2, 8. 9.) Indeed, Polycarp shows acquaintance with nearly all the New Testament writings. ‘His letter is full of the New Testament’ (Gregory), a fact of prime importance for the history of the New Testament canon. The circumstantial account of Polycarp’s martyrdom, contained in a letter from the church of Smyrna to the church of Philomelium, is substantially true.” *Concordia Cyclopaedia*, p. 594, s.v. “**Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna**”.

B. for my name's sake: Christians suffer precisely because they world hates Christ, their Lord and Savior: "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before *it hated* you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also. But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake, because they know not him that sent me." **St. John 14:18-21.**

C. hast not fainted: Christians do not faint in the midst of these labors and struggles because they are sustained by the Word and the Sacraments, the Gospel, the power of God unto salvation (**Romans 1:16**): "... but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not." **Galatians 6:8, 9.**

4. *Nevertheless, I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left they first love.*

A. somewhat against thee: Christ notes a slippage in their motives for their good works. The slippage is sliding away from Gospel motivation to law motivation. Stoeckhardt: "Earlier all their works had been prompted by their love for their Lord. Now they are yet performing the same works outwardly, but they no longer flow from a heart of love towards their Savior. They perform their Christian duties, either by sheer force of habit, or they are motivated by some other selfish interest."¹⁹

B. because thou hast left thy first love: A Christian's first love is the Gospel. Hence, Christ reproves the Ephesians for sliding a bit from an evangelical motive for their labors and for opposing false teachers. A Christian's motive for good works and for opposing false doctrine and preserving pure doctrine flows from the Gospel²⁰, from love of Christ, his Savior, love of the Gospel, and love of

¹⁹The Rev. Dr. George Stoeckhardt, *Lectures on the Revelation of St. John*, p. 6.

²⁰"Therefore, of works that are truly good and well-pleasing to God, which God will reward in this world and in the world to come, *faith* must be the mother and source; and on this account they are called by St. Paul true *fruits of faith*, as also of the *of the Spirit*. For, as Dr. Luther writes in the Preface to St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans: *Thus faith is a divine work in us, that changes us and regenerates us of God, and puts to death the old Adam, makes us entirely different men in heart, spirit, mind, and all powers, and brings with it [confers] the Holy Ghost. Oh, it is a living, busy, active, powerful thing that we have in faith, so that it is impossible for it not to do good without ceasing. Nor does it ask whether good works are to be done; but before*

neighbor. The Lutheran Church confesses: “From this our explanation, friends and enemies, and therefore every one, may clearly infer that we have no intention of yielding aught of the eternal, immutable truth of God for the sake of temporal peace, tranquility, and unity (which, moreover, is not in our power to do). Nor would such peace and unity, since it is devised against the truth and for its suppression, have any permanency. Still less are we inclined to adorn and conceal a corruption of the pure doctrine and manifest, condemned errors. But we entertain heartfelt pleasure and love for, and are on our part sincerely inclined and anxious to advance, that unity according to our utmost power, by which His glory remains to God uninjured, nothing of the divine truth of the Holy Gospel is surrendered, no room is given to the least error, poor sinners are brought to true, genuine repentance, raised up by faith, confirmed in new obedience, and thus justified and eternally saved alone through the sole merit of Christ.”²¹

C. Zeal for pure doctrine flows not from the law but from the Gospel: The Rev. Dr. C. F. W. Walther, the first President of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod, writes: “From what has been said you can gather how foolish it is, yea, what an awful delusion has taken hold upon so many men’s minds who ridicule the pure doctrine and say to us: ‘Ah, do cease clamoring, Pure doctrine! Pure doctrine! That can only land you in dead orthodoxism. Pay more attention to pure life, and you will raise a growth of genuine Christianity.’ That is exactly like saying to a farmer: ‘Do not worry forever about good seed; worry about good fruits.’ Is not a farmer properly concerned about good fruit when he is solicitous about getting good seed? Just so a concern about pure doctrine is the proper concern about genuine Christianity and a sincere Christian life. False doctrine is a noxious seed, sown by the enemy to produce a progeny of wickedness. The pure doctrine is wheat-seed; from it spring the children of the Kingdom, who even in the present life to come will be received into the Kingdom of Glory. May God

the question is asked, it has wrought them, and is always engaged in doing them. But he who does not do such works is void of faith, and gropes and looks about after faith and good works, and knows neither what faith nor what good works are, yet babbles and prates with many words concerning faith and good works. [Justifying] faith is a living, bold [firm] trust in God’s grace, so certain that a man would die a thousand times for it [rather than suffer this trust to be wrested from him]. And this trust and knowledge of divine grace renders joyful, fearless, and cheerful toward God and all creatures, which [joy and cheerfulness] the Holy Ghost works through faith; and on account of this, man becomes ready and cheerful, without coercion, to do good to every one, and to suffer everything for love and praise to God, who has conferred this grace on him, so that it is impossible to separate works from faith, yea, just as impossible as it is for heat and light to be separated from fire.” *The Formula of Concord, Thorough Declaration.9-12, Triglotta, p. 941.*

²¹*The Formula of Concord, Thorough Declaration, Article XI. Of God’s Eternal Foreknowledge [Predestination] and Election.95-9, Triglotta, p. 1095, underscore added.*

even now implant in your hearts a great fear, yea, a real abhorrence, of false doctrine! May He graciously give you a holy desire for the pure, saving truth, revealed by God Himself.”²²

Some folks sometimes confuse zeal for pure doctrine with zeal for the law. But such an error is to fall into the same mistake as the Jews. St. Paul the Apostle writes: “For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.” **Romans 10:2-3**. The law motivates people to pursue the righteousness of the law (pure doctrine) for themselves and not for Christ’s sake and their neighbor’s sake. Such endeavors obviously do not serve God and neighbor. But the Gospel motivates to love of God because of Christ, and, therefore, love of neighbor. For the Gospel teaches men that Christ’s Blood covers all their sins against God, all their sins against their neighbors, and all their neighbors’ sins against them. Knowing that the injustice done them by their neighbor has been atoned for by the Blood of Christ, the Christian, then, seeks not vengeance or his own righteousness, but rather seeks the welfare of the neighbor, that his sins might not poison his soul and cause them to perish. St. Paul urges the Galatians to raise up men fallen in error through absolution: “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual” Spiritual means absolution and faith²³: “Then said Jesus to them again, Peace *be* unto you: as *my* Father hath

²²*The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel*, pp. 20, 21.

²³ “Moreover, the power of the keys administers and presents the Gospel through absolution, which [proclaims peace to me and] is the true voice of the Gospel. {German: The word of absolution speaks peace to me and is the Gospel itself.} Thus we also comprise absolution when we speak of faith, because *faith cometh by hearing*, as Paul says Rom. 10, 17. For when the Gospel is heard, and the absolution [*i.e.*, the promise of divine grace] is heard, the conscience is encouraged and receives consolation. (40) And because God truly quickens through the Word, the keys truly remit sins before God [here on earth sins are truly canceled also before God in heaven] according to Luke 10, 16: *He that heareth you heareth Me*. Wherefore the voice of one absolving must be believed not otherwise than we would believe a voice from heaven. (41) And absolution [that blessed word of comfort] properly can be called a sacrament of repentance, as also the more learned scholastic theologians speak. (42) Meanwhile this faith is nourished in a manifold way in temptations, through the declarations of the Gospel [the hearing of sermons, reading] and the use of the Sacraments. For these are [seals and] signs of [the covenant and grace in] the New Testament, *i.e.*, signs [of propitiation and] the remission of sins. They offer, therefore, the remission of sins, as the words of the Lord’s Supper clearly testify, Matt. 26, 26. 28: *This is My body, which is given for you. This is the cup of the New Testament*, etc. Thus faith is conceived and strengthened through absolution, through the hearing of the Gospel, through the use of the Sacraments, so that it may not succumb while it struggles with the terrors of sin and death. (43) This method of repentance is plain and clear, and increases

sent me, even so send I you. And when he had said this, he breathed on *them*, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; *and* whose soever *sins* ye retain, they are retained.” **St. John 20:21-23**. Those who are spiritual, then, are men who have received the Holy Spirit through absolution (“... be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.” **Acts 2:38**) and are charged to apply this blessings to others fallen in sin (“overtaken in a fault”) to raise them back up again. “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.” The Gospel produces sacrificial love. Sacrificial love means fulfilling the Ten Commandments, which are love²⁴, regardless of whether or not that love is requited. “Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.” **Galatians 6:2**. The law of Christ is, “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.” **St. John 13:34**. Christ love us while we were yet sinners (**Romans 5:8**), which means He loved us even when we did not requite His love and died for our sins. That is sacrificial love, namely, fulfilling commandments, which is love, even when our neighbor does not requite our love. Consequently, a Christian seeks to help his neighbor from the motivation of the Gospel, whether it be pure doctrine or anything else, not from the motivation of the law, but rather the Gospel. For starting to slip from this motivation, Jesus reproveth the Ephesians.

While it is easy to slip in these matters in the midst of the tribulations imposed by the world, nevertheless, a Christian can and does overcome the world because Christ has already accomplished this and granted him this triumph through the Gospel. “These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” **St. John 16:33**. Good cheer at its root is absolution: “Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee.” **St. Matthew 9:2**. And absolution and faith crushes the head of the devil, the prince of this world, and, thereby, the world, the flesh, and the devil is overcome. “And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly. God promises to bruise the head of the serpent in the Garden of Eden (**Genesis 3:15**). This bruising comes through peace with God, which peace with God is absolution (**St. John 20:21-23**). Absolution creates faith (**Romans 10:17**) which makes Christ work of trampling Satan under foot our work and, therefore, gives us victory over the prince of the world, and, thereby, over the world and our own flesh.

the worth of the power of the keys and of the Sacraments, and illumines the benefit of Christ, and teaches us to avail ourselves of Christ as Mediator and Propitiator.” *The Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article XII. (V.)*.39-43, pp. 261, 263.

²⁴“... love *is* the fulfilling of the law.” **Romans 13:10**.

5. *Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candle stick out of his place, except thou repent.*

A. repent: Simply return to the Gospel from whence they had strayed; for the Gospel is the cure for all sins, including straying from the Gospel. St. John Chrysostom: “For this is not the only thing Baptism has the power to do, to obliterate our former transgressions; for it also secures against subsequent ones.”²⁵ *The Small Catechism:* “What does such baptizing with water signify? It signifies that the Old Adam in us should, by daily contrition and repentance, be drowned and die with all sins and evil lusts and, again, a new man daily come forth and arise, who shall live before God in righteousness and purity forever.”²⁶

B. will remove thy candlestick: The Gospel is Christ’s gift (**Ephesians 2:8-9**) and remains in our presence only by His good graces. The Gospel can be removed by Christ if people despise it.

6. *But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate.*

A. Nicolaitines: The Nicolaitines were a libertine sect. Eusebius writes in his *Church History:* “At this time the so-called sect of the Nicolaitans made its appearance and lasted for a very short time. Mention is made of it in the Apocalypse of John. ... They boasted that the author of their sect was Nicolaus, one of the deacons who, with Stephen, were appointed by the apostles for the purpose of ministering to the poor. ... Clement of Alexandria, in the third book of his *Stromata*, relates the following things concerning him. ... ‘They say that he had a beautiful wife, and after the ascension of the Saviour, being accused by the apostles of jealousy, he led her into their midst and gave permission to any one that wished to marry her. For they say that this was in accord with that saying of his, that one ought to abuse the flesh. And those have followed his heresy, imitating blindly and foolishly that which was done and said, commit fornication without shame. But I understand that Nicolaus had to do with no other woman than her to whom he was married, and that, so far as his children are concerned, his daughters continued in a state of virginity until old age, and his son remained uncorrupt. If this is so, when he brought his wife, whom he jealously loved, into

²⁵A *Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Volume XI, Saint Chrysostom: Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistle to the Romans: Homilies of St. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople on the Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Romans, Homily XI, Rom. VI. 5.*, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, reprinted, September 1980, p. 408.

²⁶p. 17.

the midst of the apostles, he was evidently renouncing his passion; and when he used the expression, “to abuse the flesh,” he was inculcating self-control in the face of those pleasures that are eagerly pursued. For I suppose that, in accordance with the command of the Saviour, he did not wish to serve two masters, pleasure and the Lord. ... But they say that Matthias also taught in the same manner that we ought to fight against and abuse the flesh, and not give way to it for the sake of pleasure, but strengthen the soul by faith and knowledge.’ So much concerning those who then attempted to pervert the truth, but in less time than it has taken to tell it became entirely extinct.”²⁷

Eusebius is not saying that Nicolaus taught and engaged in such scurrilous practices, but that rather this corrupt group capriciously took their name from Nicolaus by misrepresenting his actions before the apostles.

B. But this thou hast: Christ does not reprove the because faith still apparently remained. Christ commends the Ephesians for hating the works of because **A.** they are contrary to the law written in the heart (the conscience)²⁸ and **B.** from faith.

7. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.

A. He that hath an ear: Only faith hears the Lord’s Word and, therefore, is the only proper listening device for the Gospel: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.” **St. John 5:24.**

²⁷*Church History, Chapter XXIX. Nicolaus and the Sect named after him.* in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Second Series, Vol. I, eds. Philip Schaff, and Henry Wace, Grand Rapids, MI, Wm. B. Eerdmans, rpr. June 1991, p. 159.

Dr. Brighton does not agree with Eusebius: “Some have thought that he was one of the seven deacons in Acts 6:5. ... But that identification is unlikely if for no other reason than that the sect appears to have existed much later than the time in which the deacon of Acts 6 lived.” *Revelation*, p. 66.

²⁸“**19. How did God give His Law?** When God created man, He *wrote* the Law *into* man’s heart. Later He arranged the Law in Ten Commandments, wrote it on *two tables of stone*, and made it known through Moses. ²⁰ When the Gentiles, which have not the Law, do by nature the things contained in the Law, these, having not the Law, are a law unto themselves: which show the work of *the Law written in their hearts*, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another. *Rom. 2:14, 15.*” *The Small Catechism, question 19*, p. 44.

B. hear what the Spirit saith to the churches: Christ's Holy Spirit speaks to His Churches in order to build them up. Scripture is inspired by God. "All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness (II Timothy 3:15). The Holy Spirit builds Christ's Church through the Word and the Sacraments, which are the application of the Fruits of Christ's Work on the Cross to men to create in them saving faith and, thereby, build Christ's Church. "Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner *stone*; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit." **Ephesians 2:19-22.** "Nevertheless I tell yo the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: Of sin, because they believe not on me; Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more. Of judgment because the prince of this world is judged." **St. John 16:7-11.**

C. of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God: Poellet: "Paradise regained! Man did not eat of the tree of life in the original Paradise, the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:2:9-3:24). Death had entered the world by sin (Rom. 5:12). But in heaven, the Paradise which is to come, the saints eat of the tree of life. ... drink of the water of life (Rev. 21:6; 22:1, 17), and never die (Rev. 21:4). The devil, who by the tree of the knowledge of good and evil once overcame, likewise by a tree, the tree of the cross, was overcome, through Christ, our Lord.

"The 'Paradise of God' (Rev. 2:7b) is heaven. 'Paradise' means a beautiful park or garden. Luther began his delightful letter about heave to his four-year old son Hans: 'I know a lovely, pleasant garden where many children are.' The Septuagint calls the Garden of Eden paradise (Gen. 2:8; 3:1). But in our English Bible the word is used only of heaven, ... where, in the presence of God, there is fulness of joy and at His right hand pleasure forevermore. (Ps. 16:11)."²⁹

8. *And unto the angel fo the church in Smyrna write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive;*

Smyrna: Brighton: "Smyrna is modern Izmir, in Turkey on the Aegean Sea. The city at the time of Paul and John had a well-known stadium, a noted library, and a public theater, which was the largest in Asia Minor. Smyrna was also noted for its imperial cult [worship]. It was the first city in the ancient world to build a

²⁹*Revelation*, pp. 33, 34.

temple in honor of *Dea Roma*, the goddess of Rome. ... In A.D. 26 the city built a temple to Tiberius (emperor from 14 to 37), Livia, and the Roman senate. ... The province of Asia was the only province in the Roman Empire to have more than one center of the emperor cult; several provinces had none. Smyrna's strong allegiance to Rome, together with its large Jewish population, made life particularly difficult for Christians."³⁰

9. *I know thy works, tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan.*

A. I know thy works, tribulation, and poverty (but thou art rich): Christ here speaks of spiritual matters, i.e. matters of the Gospel, which is absolution and faith (**St. John 20:21-23**) because the Holy Spirit is given through the Gospel (**Acts 2:38**):

1. Works: These works are those which are done in faith. Notice, their works pass muster with God Himself because their works issue from faith. "for whatsoever *is* not of faith is sin." **Romans 14:23.**

2. Tribulation: The Christians at Smyrna suffer tribulation (trouble) because of their very best work: preaching the Gospel. "Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also. But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake, because they know not him that sent me." **St. John 15:20-21.** "These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." **St. John 16:33.** Francis Pieper: "'The world hath not the grace,' says Luther, to appreciate and reward the good works of Christians, e.g., their preaching of the Gospel in the world, their prayers, their intercessions. ... The world hates and persecutes Christians just because of their very best works. ... [For the preaching of the Gospel the Apostles were beaten, Acts 5:40; Rom. 8:36; I Cor. 4:13] But our gracious God makes up for that. He is so pleased with our good works that He rewards us richly for doing them."³¹

3. Poverty: This poverty is the material poverty heaped upon Christians in this life by the world because of the spiritual wealth of Christians through the Gospel. The reversals suffered in this life mean nothing because Christians are made eternally and immeasurably rich through the Gospel. "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich." **II Corinthians 8:9.** "Blessed

³⁰*Revelation*, p. 70.

³¹*Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. III, p. 52.

are ye, when *men* shall revile you, and persecute *you*, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.” **St. Matthew 5:11-12.**

B. synagogue of Satan: Those who claim to be Jews but reject Jesus are not Jews because in rejecting Jesus they are rejecting the God of Israel and do not share the faith of Abraham, their father: “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day; and he saw *it*, and was glad.” **St. John 8:56.** “They answered and said unto him, Abraham is our father, Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abraham’s children, ye would do the works of Abraham. But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham. Ye do the deeds of your father. Then said they to him, We be not born of fornication; we have one Father, *even* God. Jesus said unto them, If God were your Father, ye would love me: for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me. Why do you not understand my speech? *even* because ye cannot hear my word. Ye are of *your* father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.” **St. John 8:39-44.**

St. John the Baptist likewise warned them that true Jews means having the faith of Abraham: “But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance: And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to *our* father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.” **St. Matthew 3:7-9.**

The Lord warned Israel in the days of the prophet that they would be “Lo ammi”, Hebrew for “Not My people”, if they strayed from Him: “The beginning of the word of the LORD by Hosea. And the LORD said to Hosea, Go, take unto thee a wife of whoredoms and children of whoredoms: for the land hath committed great whoredom, *departing* from the Lord. ... Now when she had weaned Loruhamah, she conceived, and bare a son. Then said *God*, Call his name Lo-ammi: for ye *are* not my people, and I will not be your *God*.” **Hosea 1, 8-9.**

If someone, whether he be a Jew or a Gentile, worship a false god, then he is worshipping demons, hence, the synagogue (synagogue comes from the Greek word *synagoge*³², assembly) of Satan: “What say I then? that the idol is any thing, or that which is offered in sacrifice to idols is any thing? But *I say*, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I

³²**synagogue** “[Fr{ench}. from L{ate} L{atin}, *synagoga*, from Gr{eek}. *synagoge*, a bringing together, assembly; *syn*, together, and *agein*, to bring, drive]” *Webster’s Unabridged Dictionary*, s.v. “**synagogue**”, p. 1849, amplification added.

would not that ye should have fellowship with devils.” **I Corinthians 15:19-20.**

Brighton: “Not only were they poor, they were also persecuted by their Jewish neighbors, some of whom seem to have infiltrated their Christian community. [footnote 4 The Martyrdom of Polycarp graphically portrays a result (c.a. A.D. 155) of such opposition Smyrna. It describes how both the pagan Gentiles and the Jews living in Smyrna cried out for Polycarp’s blood. In particular it say that the Jews were ‘extremely zealous’ in assisting in the gathering of faggots for the fire of his martyrdom (The Martyrdom of Polycarp 13:1). Compare such agitation with that of the Jews against Paul (Acts 13:50; 14:2-5. 19; 17:5) These Jews claimed that they (and not the Christians) represented the true inherited faith of Moses and the prophets (Gal. 3:1-14). But the Lord names these oppressors for what they are: the synagogue of Satan – referring metaphorically to the fact that they, as a group, follow the lies of Satan. [footnote 5: Jesus says to those ‘descendants of Abraham’ in whom his word ‘finds no place’ (Jn. 8:37) that they are in fact children of the devil, a ‘murderer from the beginning’ and the ‘father of [lies]’ (8:44). Also Paul distinguishes between the Jew whose Jewishness is outward or visible and who is regulated by the letter of the law ... and the true Jew, who is one inwardly and whose circumcision is of the heart by the Spirit The Christian believes that those who are in Christ are the true ‘Israel’ and ‘Jews’.”³³

10. *Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.*

A. Fear not of those things which thou shalt suffer: “And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” **St. Matthew 10:28.**

Christ forewarned of these sufferings: “But beware of men; for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues; And ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles. But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you. And the brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child: and the children shall rise up against *their* parents, and cause them to be put to death. And ye shall be hated for my name’s sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved. But when they persecute you in this city, flee³⁴ ye into another: for verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone over the

³³Revelation, p. 72.

³⁴Compare **Isaiah 66:19.** “And I will set a sign [the Gospel of Christ-Crucified] among

cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come. The disciple is not above *his* master, nor the servant above his lord. It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more *shall they call* them of his household? Fear them not therefore: for there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; and hid, that shall not be known.” **St. Matthew 10:17-26.**

B. that ye may be tried: The Lord tries Christians in order to strengthen their faith and preserve them in life eternal through that same faith. “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into his grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only *so*, but we glory in tribulations also; knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.” **Romans 5:1-5.** The love the Holy Ghost sheds is absolution of all sin for the sake of Christ Crucified, God’s love of the world (**St. John 3:16**): “And when he had said this, he breathed on *them*, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; *and* whose soever *sins* ye retain, they are retained.” **St. John 20:22-23.**

These trials are God’s temptations (temptation means trial) to good. Pieper: “There is a) a temptation to evil, and b) a temptation to good. The temptation to evil comes from the devil, from other men, and from our own depraved nature. Its object is the seduction into sin The temptation to good comes from God, and its purpose is the testing and strengthening of faith Examples of the *tentatio seductionis* [temptation to seduce] are Christ’s temptation by the devil (Matt. 4:1 ff.) and the Christians’ temptations by their evil flesh (James 1:14: ‘Every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust’). Examples of the *tentatio probationis* [i.e. temptation to prove] are God’s tempting of Abraham by the command to sacrifice Isaac (Gen. 22:1-18) and God’s permitting false prophets to come with signs and wonders to put the people to the test whether they will continue in the Word of God (Deut. 13:3: ‘The Lord, your God, proveth you to know whether ye love the Lord, your God, with all your heart and with all your soul’). Also in the New Testament God permits heresies ... to arise, not to bring about apostasy of the Christians, but ‘that they which are approved may be made manifest among you’ (1 Cor. 11:19), and Paul tests ... the love of the Christians whether it be sincere (2 Cor. 8:8).” *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. I, p. 563.

them, and I will send those that escape [Hebrew: *paletim*, i.e. those who flee or fugitives, A *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, Brown, Driver, Briggs, p. 812] of them unto the nations, *to* Tarshish, Pul, and Lud, that draw the bow, *to* Tubal and Javan, *to* the isles afar off, that have not heard my fame, neither have seen my glory [His Mercy in the Cross of Christ]; and they shall declare my glory among the Gentiles.” Comments in brackets added.

C. crown of life lies at the end of martyrdom: Life seems incongruous to death, but because Christ has conquered death already, then a Christian's martyrdom culminates not in death but life eternal. And it's not so much gaining the crown of life as retaining the crown of life granted through the Gospel. St. Chrysostom: "... but this (i.e. grace) crowned them first, and then led them to the contest."³⁵

11. *He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.*

A. He that hath an ear, let him hear: The ear is faith, for faith hears and receives was the Spirit, who created faith in the heart, says. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life."³⁶

B. let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches: It is Christ's Spirit who speaks to His Church: "And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth went a sharp twoedged sword: and his countenance *was* as the sun shineth in his strength." **Revelation 1:16.** "And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" **Ephesians 6:17.** "Then said Jesus to them again, Peace *be* unto you: as *my* Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And when he had said this he breathed on *them*, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; *and* whose soever *sins* ye retain, they are retained." **St. John 20:21-23.**

³⁵A *Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, ed. Philip Schaff, **Volume XI: Saint Chrysostom: Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistle to the Romans**, Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, reprinted September 1980, p. 411.

In this passage St. John Chrysostom makes a clear distinction between the promises of the law and the promises of the Gospel: "For it is not the Law only that exhorteth us, but grace too which also remitted our former sins, and secures us against future ones. For it promised them crowns after toils, but this (i.e. grace) crowned them first, and then led them to the contest. Now it seems to me that he is not signifying here the whole life of a believer, but instituting a comparison between the Baptism and the Law. And this he says in another passage also; "The letter killeth, but the Spirit given life." (2 Cor. iii. 6) For the Law convinceth of transgression. As then the former by convincing establisheth sin so the latter by forgiving suffereth us not to be under sin. And so thou art in two ways set free from thralldom; both in thy not being under the Law, and in thy enjoying grace." *ibid.*, pp. 411, 412.

³⁶**St. John 5:24.**

“Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sins, and of righteousness, and of judgment: Of sin, because they believe not on me; Of righteousness because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged. I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, *that* shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew *it* unto you. All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall shew *it* unto you.” **St. John 16:7-15.** “For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake *as they were* moved by the Holy Ghost.” **II Peter 1:21.** “All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God” **II Timothy 3:16.** “Which things also we speak, not in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth” **I Corinthians 2:13.**

C. the second death: The second death comes about when someone dies without saving faith. “And death itself serves this purpose, namely, to abolish this flesh of sin, that we may rise absolutely new. Neither is there now in the death of the believer, since by faith he has overcome the terrors of death, that sting and sense of wrath of which Paul speaks 1 Cor. 15, 56: *The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the Law.* This strength of sin, this sense of wrath, is truly punishment as long as it is present; without this sense of wrath, death is not properly punishment.”³⁷

St. Augustine: “For ‘the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live,’ *i.e.*, shall not come into damnation, which is called the second death; into which death, after the second or bodily resurrection, they shall be hurled who do not rise in the first or spiritual resurrection. For ‘the hour is coming’ (but here He does not say, ‘and now is,’ because it shall come in the end of the world in the last and greatest judgment of God) ‘when all that are in the graves shall hear His voice and shall come forth.’ He does not say, as in the first resurrection, ‘And they hath heard shall live.’³⁸ For all shall not live, at least with such life as ought alone to be

³⁷*The Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article VI: Of Confession and Satisfaction.* 56. 57, *Triglotta*, p. 299.

³⁸“For the conversion of our corrupt will, which is nothing else than a resurrection of it from spiritual death, is only and solely the work of God (just as also the resuscitation in the resurrection of the body must be ascribed to God alone), as has been fully set forth above and proved by manifest testimonies of Holy Scripture.” *The Formula of Concord, Thorough Declaration, Article II. Of Free Will.* 87, *Triglotta*, pp. 913, 915.

called life because it alone is blessed. For some kind of life they must have in order to hear, and come forth from the graves in their rising bodies. And why all shall not live He teaches in the words that follow: ‘They that have done good, to the resurrection of judgment,’ – these are they who shall not live, for they shall die in the second death. They have done evil because their life has been evil; and their life has been evil because it has not been renewed in the first or spiritual resurrection which now is, or because they have not preserved to the end in their renewed life. As, then, there are two regenerations, of which I have already made mention, – one according to the flesh, and which shall be accomplished in its incorruption and immortality by means of the great and final judgment, – so there are there also resurrections, – the one the first and spiritual resurrection, which has place in this life, and preserves us from coming into the second death; the other the second, which does not occur now, but in the end of the world, and which is the body, not of the soul, and which by the last judgment shall dismiss some into the second death, others into that life which has not death.”³⁹

John Gerhard: “The second death is eternal death⁴⁰, where the godless in particular are separated and remain separated in eternity. This, then, is the horrible death about which Scripture testifies that we should protect ourselves from it.

“And this is what is really odd about death: it exists side by side with life. For, the godless will live in eternity in as much as they have to suffer eternal suffering and yet they will still be dead in eternity, for they will be separated from the true life which is in God. They live forever. Why? Because it is written: **Their worm will not die, Isa. 66:24**. They die forever. Why? Because it is written that this is the **second death**, Rev. 20:14. There will be a ‘dead’ life and also a ‘living’ death. After the passage of many hundred thousands of years they will remember that this is first the beginning of their torture.

“The third is a spiritual death in sins, which is the path to eternal death. Here, in particular, the godless who confidently and sacrilegiously plow ahead in their sins are dead before the eyes of God, Eph. 2:1, 2 – You formerly were **dead in sins**. That’s why when at one time a person called by the Lord, said: **Lord, allow me that I may first go out and bury my father**. Jesus answered him: **Let the dead bury their dead**. Notice that He is referring to this spiritual death in

³⁹A *Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, ed. Philip Schaff, **St. Augstin’s City of God and Christian Doctrine**, Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, reprinted, May 1988, pp. 425, 426, underscore added.

⁴⁰Francis Pieper” Moreover, the essence of death is really the fact that if nothing intervenes, it is followed by the ‘second death’ (ho thanatos ho deuterous, Rev. 20:14), eternal torment.” *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. III, p. 510.

sins.

“And St. Paul says in 1 Tim. 5:6 about a widow **who was living in willful lust: she was dead while living.**

“That this, then, is a death you may conclude from the fact that just as the life of the body is embodied in the soul, the life of the soul is thus embodied in God. If, then, on this account, God the Lord does not rest in a soul with His grace and Spirit, how is that soul able to live? Now, however, God does not rest in the soul of the godless with His grace and Spirit.”⁴¹

12. *And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write, These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges;*

A. Pergamos: Poellet: “Pergamos was a royal city, ‘with its immense acropolis [1,000 ft. high] on a rock rising out of the plain like a mountain, self-centered in its impregnable strength, looking out over the distant seas [15 to 20 miles west] and over land right away to the hills besides far-off Smyrna [about 50 miles south].’ ... Its population today is about 14,000. Also in ancient times it was a city of some size and importance. Like Ephesus, it challenged Smyrna’s claim of ‘First in Asia,’ and it gives one the very definite impression of permanence, strength, and sure authority. Situated on the north bank of the navigable river Caicus, it was a city of kings as early as 241 BC, and later it was residence of a Roman proconsul. It also became known for its library. ... The Roman scholar and author Varro says that Eumenes II ... of Pergamos restored the use of parchment for writing when the king of Egypt forbade the export of papyrus from Egypt. It is probable that parchment was the common material for copies of the Old Testament. At Pergamos the animal skin used in parchment was prepared in a special way to make it sound and more suitable for writing. The word ‘parchment’ is usually taken to mean literally, ‘of, or pertaining to, or belonging to Pergamos.’ Emperor worship was well established in the city, which boasted the first provincial temple of this religion, built on the acropolis about 29 B.C. Near this temple was another, erected to Athena, and an immense altar dedicated to Zeus. ... Not far outside the city there was a shrine for the worship of Aesculapsius, regarded as the god of medicine.

“Pergamos was quite a city. But much of its ancient glory has departed by

⁴¹The Rev. Dr. John Gerhard, *Eleven Easter and Pentecost Sermons*, pp. 74, 75.

“Johann Gerhard (1582-1637) has rightly been classified the ‘third preeminent theologian after Luther and Chemnitz.’ ... However, while Gerhard is best remembered for his great dogmatics, the *Loci Theologici*, Gerhard produced a number of devotional volumes and preached many sermons to the ‘common man.’ The sermons in this volume were apparently preached when Gerhard was 31 years old and already superintendent at Heldburg and a Doctor of Divinity.” **Foreword** from *Seven Christmas Sermons*.

the time of St. John the Divine. Mark Antony (died 30 B.C.), infatuated by Cleopatra, had caused the famous library which did not belong to him, to be removed to Alexandria, Egypt, as a gift to 'the man-trap of the Nile.' In 6 B.C. the resident of the Roman proconsul was moved to Ephesus. But even so the influence and authority of Pergamos had not yet come to an end when John wrote Rev. 2:12-17.

"The church at Pergamos is referred to only twice in the Bible (Rev. 1:11; 2:12-17). All that we know about it is in seven verses. We do not know when it was founded, or by whom, or whether it was large or small."⁴²

B. These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges: "For the word of God *is* quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and *is* a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." **Hebrews 4:12.**

Compare also **Isaiah 11:2-4:** "And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD. And shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the LORD: and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked." Christ's Word pierces to the heart and soul of men because in, with, and under Christ's Word is His Holy Spirit, who is able to search "all things, yea, the deep things of God." **I Corinthians 1:10.** If the Holy Spirit can fathom even the infinite depths of God, how much more so can He plumb the depths of men, heart, mind, body, and soul?

13. *I know they works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth.*

A. Throne of Satan: Pergamos' permeation with emperor worship and idolatry certainly set itself in powerful and perilous opposition to the Church and the True God. Compare, for example, the dragon behind the throne, namely, King Herod's throne, at the birth of Christ, seeking to murder Him. "When Herod the king had heard *these things*, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born. And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet, And thou Bethlehem, *in* the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a

⁴²The Rev. Dr. Luther Poellet, *Revelation*, pp. 39, 40.

Governor, that shall rule my people Israel. Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, enquired of them diligently what time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found *him*, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him. ... And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him. ... Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently enquired of the wise men.” **St. Matthew 2:2-8, 13, 16.** “And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads. And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth: and the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born.” **Revelation 12:3-4.**

B. thou holdest fast my name, and hast no denieth my faith: Stoeckhardt: “The Lord praises the faithfulness of this congregation. Its members already had endured seven persecutions, in which one of their number was put to death as a witness of Christ. This congregation was situation in a very dangerous area. The text says that Satan had set up his throne there, claiming absolute domination over all people that lived there. So it was particularly hard for any one to be a true Christian.”⁴³

14. *But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication.*

A. Doctrine of Balaam: Poellet: “But not everything was right with the church at Peragmos. There were a few things which the Lord had against it (Rev. 2:14, 15). Among them was this, that some of its members held ... the doctrine of Balaam. (Rev. 2:14)

“Balaam (Num. 22-24; 31:8; Joshua 13:22) was a soothsayer, a diviner, son of Beor, and a resident of Pethor, on the Euphrates River, in Aram, in the hill country of the East. Balak, a king of Moab and an enemy of Israel, asked Balaam to curse Israel. Instead, Balaam repeatedly blessed Israel. But finally he counseled Balak to lead the Israelites ‘to eat things sacrificed unto idols’ and to have ‘the daughters of Moab’ seduce them ‘to commit fornication’ and ‘whoredom’ (Num. 25:1, 2; Ex. 34:14, 15). This ‘stumbling block’ was cast also

⁴³The Rev. Dr. George Stoeckhardt, *Lectures on the Revelation of St. John*, p. 9.

before the Christians at Pergamos, who were tempted to eat the food for the idol feasts and to take part in the rituals of the pagan temples. Some of these rituals involved sex orgies with the temple prostitutes – a temptation which in some cases served just as effectively as fire and flame and the stake to lead a man to fall from faith (Psl 106:28-29). The Lord’s rebuke was brief but sharp and to the point. Idolatry and fornication are an abomination in His sight.”⁴⁴

B. Christ appears before Balaam: The false prophet Balaam saw Christ: “And God’s anger was kindled because he went: and the angel of the LORD stood in the way for an adversary against him. And the ass saw the angel of the LORD standing in the way, and his sword drawn in his hand; and the ass turned aside out of the way, and went into the field; and Balaam smote the ass, to turn her into the way. ... Then the LORD opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the LORD standing in the way, and his sword drawn in his hand: and he bowed down his head, and fell flat on his face.” **Numbers 22:22-23, 31.**

Compare this appearance of Christ to His appearance to Joshua: “And it came to pass when Joshua was by Jericho that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and, behold, there stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand: and Joshua went unto him, and said unto him, *Art* thou for us, or for our adversaries? And he said, Nay; but *as* captain of the host of the LORD am I now come. And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did worship, and said unto him, What saith my lord unto his servant. And the captain of the LORD’S host said unto Joshua, Loose thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest *is* holy. And Joshua did so.” **Joshua 5:13-15.** Compare this passage from Joshua with Moses’ experience with the Angel of the Lord on Mt. Sinai: “And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush *was* not consumed. And Moses said, I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt. And when the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, Here *am* I. And he said, Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest *is* holy ground.” **Exodus 3:2-5.**

The Angel of the Lord is Christ, the Son of God, God Himself: The Rev. Louis Roehm writes in *The Abiding Word*: “Jesus appears as God on the pages of the Old Testament. He reveals Himself under such titles as ‘the Angel of the Lord,’ ‘Jehovah,’ ‘Lord,’ etc. Whenever in the Old Testament the name ‘Lord’ occurs, it is pre-eminently not the Father, nor the Holy Spirit, but the Son of God. Ex. 13:21 Moses writes of the Israelites in the wilderness: ‘And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light.’ Who is this ‘Lord’? Ch. 14:19 He is

⁴⁴*Revelation*, pp. 42, 43.

called ‘the Angel of God,’ which is a well-known appellation of Jesus in the Old Testament. Here the Angel of God is directly termed ‘Lord.’ All doubt is removed by Paul (I Cor. 10:3-4): ‘Our fathers did all eat the same spiritual meat; and did all drink the same spiritual drink; for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them; *and that Rock was Christ.*’ ... Which person of the Godhead summoned Moses to the summit of Mount Sinai and gave him the two tables of the Law? Again it was the Son of God. The evidence is presented in the Ascension Psalm 68; vv. 7-8, and 17-18. And all doubt is excluded by Heb. 12:18-26, especially v. 24. ... Luther writes: ‘The God who led Israel out of Egypt and through the Red Sea; who went before them in a pillar of a cloud and of fire; who nourished them with bread from heaven and did all the miracles which Moses relates in his books; again, who brought them into the land of Canaan and gave them kings and the priesthood and everything, is this God and none other than Jesus of Nazareth, Mary’s, the Virgin’s, Son, whom we Christians call our God and Lord Again, He it is who on Mountain Sinai gives Moses the Ten Commandments ... Yes, Jesus of Nazareth, who died for us on the cross is the God who says in the First Commandment: “I, the Lord, am thy God.”’ So then, the same God on Sinai and Calvary. What comfort for the believers! Now the flames of Sinai can no longer fill us with terror. Indeed, we daily transgress the holy Law of Sinai, but we break through its condemnation and flee to the Redeemer on Calvary, who Himself fulfilled the Law for us and paid its penalty.”⁴⁵

“**Nay; but as captain of the host (Hebrew: ‘sar [prince⁴⁶] tsava⁴⁷ adonai’; compared to Isaiah 9:6: ‘Prince of Peace’, ‘sar shalom’) LORD am I now come.**” So, the Babe in the Manger in the Bethlehem is the Captain of the Lord’s Hosts. Hence, we see that the Captain of the Lord’s Host, the Babe born in Bethlehem, order His hosts (armies⁴⁸) to sheath their swords and proclaim instead the Gospel for the salvation of men: “And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.” **St. Luke 2:13-14.** Numbers 22-24.

⁴⁵The Rev. Louis E. Roehm, *The Abiding Word*, Vol. 1, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1946, pp. 20, 21.

⁴⁶Prince and captain both have the basic meaning “chief”.

⁴⁷The word “sabaoth” is the plural form of “tsava” and means hosts. Sabaoth appears in *The Sanctus*: “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Sabaoth.” *The Lutheran Hymnal*, p. 26.

⁴⁸The Greek word used is “stratia”. From the same root as “stratia” comes our word “strategy”. “**strategy** ... [Gr.{eek} *strategia*, generalship, from *strategos*, general.]” *Webster’s Unabridged Dictionary*, s.v. “**strategy**”, p. 1799.

15. *So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which thing I hate.*

Nicolaitanes⁴⁹: Christ, again, expresses His hatred of licentiousness regarding marriage. Christ singles this sin out because marriage is the foundation of civilized order. And Christ wants civilized order maintained to the Gospel can be preached. But where marriage is undermined, there civilized order is undermined and the preaching of the Gospel hindered. “Therefore God has also most richly blessed this estate above all others, and, in addition, has bestowed on it and wrapped up in it everything in the world, to the end that this estate might be well and richly provided for. Married life is therefore no jest or presumption; but it is an excellent thing and a matter of divine seriousness. For it is of the highest importance to Him that persons be raised who may serve the world and promote the knowledge of God, godly living, and all virtues, to fight against wickedness and the devil.”

16. *Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.*

Repent; or ... will fight against them with the sword of my mouth (His Word⁵⁰): Here we see, again, that it is Christ who binds and looses sins through the Keys of the Church. For to fight against the impenitent, i.e. those who refuse to repent, means to bind their sins. And Christ says He is the one who is binding their sins. This fact Christ taught elsewhere regarding the Office of the Keys when He said, “Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” **St. Matthew 16:18**. And in **verse 20** Christ makes it clear again He is present for this work: “For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” **St. Matthew 16:20**. The Church gathers around Christ’s Name in His Word and Sacraments. In Holy Baptism we are Baptized “in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.” **St. Matthew 28:19**. Hence, Christ is in the midst where His Name is invoked. And the Church Baptizes for the remission of sins, which is the Office [Work⁵¹] of the Keys. “Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of

⁴⁹See verse 6.

⁵⁰“... the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God” **Ephesians 6:17**.

⁵¹Office means work or appointed rounds. “a function or duty assigned to someone, especially as an essential part of his work or position.” *Webster’s Unabridged Dictionary*, p. 1243, s.v. “office”.

the Holy Ghost.” **Acts 2:38**. Christ, then, is the One who is binding and loosing through the Office of the Keys, i.e. His Word and Sacraments.⁵²

17. *He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To Him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.*

A. “Hear that hath an ear, let him hear” This statement is an exhortation to faith. For only faith receives, believes, and hears what the Lord is saying; for the Gospel is foolishness⁵³ unto those who are perishing⁵⁴, but to those who believe it is life eternal which overcomes all things. “But ye believe me not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any *man* pluck them out of my hand.” **St. John 10:26-28**.

B. “... what the Spirit saith unto the churches” Notice that the Spirit is heard through the Word of God, not directly. This teaching of Christ should not surprise us because the Sword of the Spirit is God’s Word. “And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” **Ephesians 6:17**.

Christ, then, gives to us a serious admonition to hearken unto the Word and not to those who claim God’s Spirit speaks directly to them.. For he who says he hears the Spirit directly and not through God’s Word is not hearing God’s Spirit because the ear that hears God’s Spirit is tuned into the Spirit’s Voice through the Word. The Lutheran Church, therefore, confesses: “Therefore we ought and must constantly maintain this point, that God does not wish to deal with us otherwise than through the spoken Word and the Sacraments. It is the devil

⁵²The Word and the Sacraments of the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. “[T]he ‘keys of the Kingdom of heaven’ are nothing else, and can be nothing else, than the means of grace, the Gospel. Through the offer of the Gospel, and through nothing else, Christians remit sins and thus open heaven; through withholding the Gospel, they retain sins and thus lock heaven. Now, since the believers are the persons to whom Christ has entrusted the means of grace, they have...been given the keys of the kingdom of heaven.” *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. III, p. 453.

⁵³“But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned.” **I Corinthians 2:14**.

⁵⁴“For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: To the same one *we are* the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life.” **II Corinthians 2:15-16**.

himself whatsoever is extolled as Spirit without the Word and Sacraments. For God wished to appear even to Moses through the burning bush and spoken Word; and no prophet, neither Elijah nor Elisha, received the Spirit without the Ten Commandments [or spoken Word]. Neither was John the Baptist conceived without the preceding word of Gabriel, nor did he leap in his mother's womb without the voice of Mary. And Peter says, 2 Ep. 1, 21: *The prophecy came not by the will of man; but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.* Without the outward Word, however, they were not holy, much less would the Holy Ghost have moved them to speak when they still were unholy [or profane]; for they were holy, says he, since the Holy Ghost spake through them.”⁵⁵

C. “secret manna” The treasures of heaven. Stoeckhardt: “To those who overcome all the temptations of life the Lord here makes a beautiful promise: ‘To him that overcometh I will give to eat of the hidden manna.’ The joys of this world, such as the lust of the flesh, appeal to the palate of worldlings for their sweetness and good taste. But that appeal is very short-lived. Before long the sweetness of sins grows stale and nauseating, and ends in bitterness and death. But this hidden manna offers the most exquisite sweetness, which never deteriorates and of which one never tires. It is the perfect joy of everlasting life, prefigured by the manna which Moses had to hide away in the ark. And that is given to every one who remains faithful.”⁵⁶

D. “... and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name” Stoeckhardt: “The mention of a white stone, which the Lord promises to give to the faithful, is made with reference to the final judgment, in which we all must once appear as defendants [sic]. The imagery of giving a white stone is taken from the custom of the Greeks where the judge or the jurors, sitting on the trial of the defendant, were given two stones, one black and one white, to decide upon the guilt or innocence of the defendant. If the judge found the defendant guilty, he would give him the black stone, if innocent, the white. The Lord here is the Judge. To him who has conquered all the temptations of life by faith He gives the white stone as the verdict of innocence. At the same time, there is written upon this stone a new name, which more fully explains the verdict and which no man understands, except he who receives it. What is this name? The eternal Judge declares the faithful Christian a child of God. The dignity of such a name no one can understand or appreciate, unless he is himself a Christian and so a child of God. But a Christian congregation is made up of such children of God who are

⁵⁵*The Smalcald Articles, Part III, Article III. Of Repentance, Of the False Repentance of the Papists.* 10, 11-13, Triglotta, p. 497.

⁵⁶*Lectures on the Revelation of St. John,* pp. 9, 10.

steadfast in suffering and victorious against all the allurements of sin and faithful to their Lord to the end. All Christians are to strive to gain such a grand verdict and glorious lot.”⁵⁷

The Rev. Dr. Theodore Laetsch writes: “To wear the name on the forehead is to be publicly acknowledged as that which the name implies. This is a name incomprehensible to all except the recipients of the white stone on which it is written (Rev. 2:17), for it is the name of Christ’s God, of the city of Christ’s God, Christ’s *new* name, the name He bears since His exaltation (Rev. 3:12). We have here a clear reference to Jer. 23:6 and 33:6; Christ’s name is Jehovah (cp. Ex. 3:2, 4, 14; 23:20, 21; Phil. 2:9-11; Rev. 3:12); and that is the new name which Christ will write upon all believers in heaven, publicly acknowledging them as His own by writing His name (Jer. 23:6) and the name of Jerusalem (Jer. 33:16), Jehovah Our Righteousness, on their foreheads; the same name whereby He had called her while she still dwelt on earth.”⁵⁸

18. *And unto the angel of the church in Thyatira write; These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass.*

A. Thyatira: Poellet: “Acts 16 tells how Paul was directed in a vision to go to Macedonia. At Philippi, the first important city he visited in Europe, he found welcome Christian hospitality at the home of ‘a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira.’ ... Her home city was know for its purple dyes or dyed goods, its trade builds, and its workers in bronze. ... I twas not large, but it was in an important place, in the region of Lydia, near the boundary of Mysia, about 40 miles southwest of Pergamos, on a Roman road from Pergamos to Sardis. This road was strategic in war and in peace.”⁵⁹

B. “Son of God, who hat his eyes like unto a flame of fire” Christ’s eyes penetrate exteriors to try the very core of a man because He is the Son of God, the Almighty and Omniscient. “And shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the LORD: and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears” Stoeckhardt: “He is not, as it goes on, guided by and does not resolve according to what he sees and hears, does not judge according to outward appearances, but he looks at the heart, he searches the

⁵⁷*Lectures on the Revelation of St. John*, p. 10.

⁵⁸*Concordia Classic Commentary Series: Jeremiah*, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, p. 270.

⁵⁹*Revelation*, p. 45.

hearts and reins⁶⁰. And those who fear God with whole heart are pleasing to him; they are his dear children.”⁶¹

C. “and His feet are like fine brass.” Brass is one of the most resilient and impervious metals on earth. Brass feet reflects Christ’s complete and irresistible vanquishing of the Devil, and, correlatively, any of those who follow the Devil in unbelief (**Romans 14:23**: “for whatsoever *is* not of faith is sin.”). “And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.” **Genesis 3:15**. Brighton: “The brass-like feet demonstrate his firmness and determination to trample under foot these same enemies (cf. Dan. 2:33, 40-41).”⁶²

19. *I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; and the last to be more than the first.*

A. “works”: Christ is aware of the good works of Christians. For good works are a gift of Christ that proceed from another gift of Christ: saving faith. “Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform *it* until the day of Jesus Christ.” **Philippians 1:6**. “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ

⁶⁰“Reins” means kidneys and is used in Scripture as a metaphor for the very inner core and fiber of a man’s being, the inner sanctum, as were, of an individual – and because Christ is the Omniscient God, He can search every last nook and cranny of a man’s secrets and passes judgment upon them. “But, O LORD of hosts, that judges righteously, that triest the reins and the heart, let me see thy vengeance on them: for unto thee have I revealed my cause.” **Jeremiah 11:20**. “I the LORD search the heart, *I* try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, *and* according to the fruit of his doings.” **Jeremiah 17:10**. “But, O LORD of hosts, that triest the righteous, *and* seest the reins and the heart, let me see thy vengeance on them: for unto thee have I opened my cause.” **Jeremiah 20:12**.

Christ uses this word reins to express His *Active Obedience* from the very inner core of His Theanthropic (God-man) Person for us in the midst of His Passion for us: “I will bless the LORD, who hath given me counsel: my reins also instruct me in the night seasons.” Stoeckhardt: “His reins by night exhort Him not to neglect the praise of God. The reins or kidneys are the seat of emotion and affection. His inward parts chasten Him through the nights, lest He should forget the praise He owes God.” *Lectures on Select Psalms*, tr. H.W. Degner, Ft. Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, p. 37.

⁶¹*Isaiah: The First Twelve Chapters*, tr. Erwin W. Koehlinger, Ft. Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, p. 120.

⁶²*Revelation*, p. 82.

Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.” **Ephesians 2:8-10.**

Good works are of great value because Christ gives them to us and also He along with the Father and the Holy Spirit closely observe (hence in the book of **Daniel** the Holy Trinity is called the “Watchers”⁶³) them because they are Their gifts to men. The Rev. Dr. Francis Pieper writes on the great value of good works proceeding from saving faith:

“After Luther had brought to light the great truth of the Christian doctrine that good works have no value in gaining justification and salvation (Rom. 8:28: ‘without the deeds of the Law’; Eph. 2:8-9), the psuedo-reformers, in their desire to outdo Luther, claimed that the good works of Christians had no value whatever. Over against them Luther emphasized the great excellence of the good works. He declared: ‘Outside of the article of justification we cannot sufficiently praise and magnify these works which are commanded by God. For who can sufficiently commend and set forth the profit and fruit of only one work which a Christian does through faith and in faith? Indeed, it is more precious than heaven or earth.’

“The Anabaptists declared that good works are worthless. Luther replied: ‘See what little value they attach to good works – they are ready to sell their good works for a penny! By this they want to ape us and our teaching that good works do not make a sinner pious, do not blot out sins, do not reconcile God. To this the devil adds his bit and so utterly despises good works that he is ready to sell them for a penny. I thank God that the devil in his cleverness here overreaches himself and so shamefully befouls and befools himself. We teach that to reconcile God, to make righteous, to blot out sin, is so high and great and glorious a work that alone Christ, the Son of God, could do it and that this is indeed such a pure, special, peculiar work of the one true God and His grace that our works are nothing and be worth only a penny, who ever heard of such a thing, or who could teach such a thing except the lying mouth of the devil? I would not give up one of my sermons, not one of my lectures, not one of my treatises, not one of my Lord’s Prayers, nay, whatever small work I have ever done or am doing, for all the riches of the world; yea, I hold my good works dearer than my own life, which certainly should be held more precious than all the world; for if what I do is good, God has done it through me and in me. But if God has done it and it is God’s work, what is the whole world over against God and His work? Though it does not make me holy – that must be done before, through Christ’s blood and grace, without works – still it is done to the praise and glory of God and for the benefit and welfare of my neighbor, both of which cannot be paid for or equaled by all the world’s goods. And this fine rabble would take only a penny for it! Has not Satan here hidden himself well? Who cannot fell him here?’

⁶³“This matter *is* by the decree of the watchers, and the demand by the word of the holy ones: to the intent that the living may know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whosoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men.” **Daniel 4:17.**

“Luther’s hymnic praise of good works is entirely Scriptural. 1. Good works have such a great value because they are done according to the norm of God’s will. While all works that are not done according to God’s will are worthless, all works which flow from obedience to the will of God, the supreme Lord, are great and precious. 2. Good works are God’s work. He is the *cause efficiens* [the working cause] of them this co-operation is so completely subordinate to God’s operation that the Christian does only the good only so far and so long as God works in and through him. Scripture expressly calls the good works of Christians God’s work, God’s operation (Phil 2:13; 2 Cor. 3:5; 1 Cor. 12:6-11; Eph. 2:10). And who will dare to place a low valuation on the works of the great God? Luther indeed would have all works that are mingled with the article of justification trampled under foot as blasphemy But such works are not God’s work but accursed (Gal. 1:8), works of the flesh and the devil. 3. Good works have great value for all Christians because they serve as *testimonia Spiritus Sancti externa* [external testimony of the Holy Spirit] for their state of grace (Luke 7:47; 1 John 3:14). 4. Scripture furthermore declares that they are worth more than heaven and earth in that, while heaven and earth will pass away, the good works of Christians abide. All the earthly possessions of men, of Christians, too, will be consumed by the fire of Judgment Day, but the good works of Christians, also those performed by means of their perishable possessions, will not be consumed, but will follow them into eternity (Rev. 14:13) and will be crowned with an eternal reward of grace (Matt. 5:12; 19:29; 10:42; Gal. 6:9). Why, it is only for the sake of the good works of the Christians, among which they preaching of the Gospel ranks first, that the world is being preserved (Matt. 24:14; 1 Pet. 2:9). 5. Accordingly, the Christians are admonished to make the most of their short stay on earth by performing good works (Gal. 6:10; Eph. 5:16; Col. 4:5), and the pastors are directed to teach good works with all diligence (Titus 3:8, 14; 1 Tim. 6:17ff). For what purpose does God leave Christians in this world? As soon as a man comes to faith in Christ, he no longer belongs in this world; his true home is heaven (Phil 3:20; John 5:24). But God wants him to stay in this world for a while in order to serve Him on earth, particularly in the cause of the Gospel. The ultimate purpose of our life on earth is the performance of good works.”⁶⁴

B. “charity” (love): This love of the saints at Thyratira is the sacrificial love born of the Gospel. “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.” **St. John 13:34.** Sacrificial love loves even when love is unrequited: “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

⁶⁴*Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. III, pp. 59-61. Dr. Pieper was President of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod from 1899-1911.

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.” **St. Matthew 5:44-48.**

Of course, the most important aspect of sacrificial love is the Christians’ support of the Gospel, which earns the world’s hatred, but blesses their neighbor and glorifies God. Pieper: “The world hath not the grace,” says Luther, to appreciate and reward the good works of Christians, e.g., their preaching of the Gospel in the world, their prayers, their intercessions. ... The world hates and persecutes Christians just because of their very best works. ... [For the preaching of the Gospel the Apostles were beaten, Acts 5:40; Rom. 8:36; I Cor. 4:13] But our gracious God makes up for that. He is so pleased with our good works that He rewards us richly for doing them.⁶⁵ Luther: Therefore let no one think or hope that we who are Christians shall have peace on earth or be rid of these enemies. On the contrary, let us joyfully accept this condition and expect Christendom to be attacked and persecuted without interruption by one enemy after another until the Last Day, not for our own sake but for the sake of our dear brethren who are to be born after us and to come to Christ also. After all, our fathers also had to suffer for our sakes; and they comforted themselves with the thought that we were to come later, so that Christendom might survive. For this reason they must lie below the ground and wait for their final redemption until we join them (Rev. 6:11). Why should we want to have it easier than they and not suffer for the sake of our brethren, yes, our own children and children’s children? Better that we suffer for a brief time and allow Turk, pope, tyrants, and all the world to work their mischief on us than to let a single one of our brethren be lost or remain behind!⁶⁶

C. “service”: A Christian’s service is to support the Public Ministry of the Gospel, for from this Service flow all blessings, even eternal blessings, to mankind: “But let us speak of the word *liturgy*. This word does not properly signify a sacrifice, but rather the public ministry, and agrees aptly with our belief, namely, that one minister who consecrates tenders the body and blood of the Lord to the rest of the people, just as one minister who preaches tenders the Gospel to the people, as Paul says, I Cor. 4, 1: *Let a man so account of us as the ministers of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God, i.e. of the Gospel and the Sacraments.* And 2 Cor. 5, 20: *We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us; we pray you in God’s stead, be ye reconciled to God.*

⁶⁵*Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. III, p. 52.

⁶⁶*Luther’s Works*, Vol. 13, pp. 259, 260.

Thus the term *leitourgia* agrees aptly with the ministry.”⁶⁷ “This power [of the keys] is exercised only by teaching or preaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments, according to their calling, either to many or to individuals. For thereby are granted, not bodily, but eternal things, eternal life. These things cannot come but by the ministry of the Word and the Sacraments, as Paul says, Rom. 1, 16: *The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.*”⁶⁸

D. “faith”: Christ sees that these works proceed from faith and, therefore, are pleasing to Him. For whatsoever is not of faith is sin. (**Romans 14:23**).

E. “patience”: Patience is born of faith and, therefore, a gift of Christ and glorifies Him. “Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom we also have access by faith into this grace whereby we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only *so*, but we glory in tribulations also; knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience experience, and experience, hope: and hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost [cf. **Titus 3:4-7**] which is given unto us.” **Romans 5:1-5**.

F. “and the last to be more than the first”: Christians’ works are greater over time because they grown in faith through the Word.

20. *Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols.*

A. “Jezebel”: While this might be the actual name of the false teacher, it seems more likely a good symbol (a symbol is a summary) for the destructive work this woman is producing.⁶⁹ For Christ has used Old Testament language to convey the meaning of the New Testament in our time, and so, Jezebel would be

⁶⁷*The Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article XXIV. (XII.): Of the Mass, Of the Term Mass.* 80, 81, *Triglotta*, p. 411.

⁶⁸*The Augsburg Confession, Article XXVIII: Of Ecclesiastical Power.* 8-9, *Triglotta*, p. 85.

⁶⁹Stoeckhardt: “In the congregation of Thyatira mention is made of a woman, named Jezebel. Is this really a particular person by that name, a woman who under the profession of spirituality led people to commit immorality, or is Jezebel here to be understood as a symbolical name, applied to a sect, similar to that of the Nicolaitans? The latter seems most probable.” *Lectures on the Revelation of St. John*, tr. H. W. Degner, Ft. Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, p. 11.

consistent with His manner of speaking here⁷⁰ a good summation and a vivid expression to convey to us what this woman was about. Stoeckhardt: “**JEZEBEL SLAIN** ... The most horrifying lot befell Jezebel, who had instigated all the trouble, and had misled Israel into idolatry, witchcraft and whoredom. She was cast down from the top room in the palace on the street below, at the command of Jehu, and trodden to death by the horses of Jehu, and then the dogs came and ate her flesh. ... The wicked seducers, who turn men away from God and hurl them into destruction, will receive the heaviest punishment in the final judgment, and the bitterest lot in hell. They will receive woe, anguish, shame, and disgrace more than others.”⁷¹

B. “prophetess”: This Jezebel parlayed herself as a prophetess, but was actually a false prophetess because (1) she was not sent from God and (2) she taught contrary to God’s Word. Regarding being a false prophet because she is not sent by God, Martin Chemnitz writes: “*Is one, therefore, immediately to believe all fanatics when they claim that God has appeared to them, that the Lord has spoken to them, that the Father has given them this commission, and that they are thus stirred up and moved by the Spirit?* ... By no means. For God has forbidden this with an express warning. Jer. 14:14. But God endows those whom He calls without means either with the gift of miracles or with other testimonies of the Spirit with which to prove and confirm their call. Thus Moses established his call before Pharaoh with the gift of miracles, Ex. 4:1 ff. Therefore Paul also calls signs, wonders, and mighty deeds proofs of the apostolate, 2 Cor. 12:12. Christ speaks of these, Jn 5:36; Mt 10:8. But one should not believe false doctrine that leads away from God and conflicts with the Word, even if miracles follow it. Dt.

⁷⁰“3. Honor the context (i.e. the setting of the passage).” *Hermeneutics, the Rules for Interpreting Holy Scripture*. by the Rev. James B. Jenson, pastor, St. James Lutheran Church, Bothell, WA, and with annotations and footnotes by the Rev. Willis C. Jenson, supply pastor, Concordia Lutheran Mission, Terrebonne, Oregon, 3 August 2009, p. 2.

⁷¹*Wisdom for Today, Volume I*, tr. Arthur E. Beck, Ft. Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, pp. 330, 331. “And Ahab said to Elijah, Hast thou found me, O mine enemy? And he answered, I have found *thee*: because thou hast sold thyself to work evil in the sight of the LORD. Behold, I will bring evil upon thee, and will take away thy posterity, and will cut off from Ahab him that pisseth against the wall, and him that is shut up and left in Israel, And will make thine house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and the like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah, for the provocation wherewith thou hast provoked *me* to anger, and made Israel to sin. And of Jezebel also spake the LORD, saying, The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel. Him that dieth of Ahab in the city the dogs shall eat; and him that dieth in the field shall the fowls of the air eat. But there was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the LORD, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up.” **I King 21:20-25**.

12:1 ff; Mt 7:22-23; 24:23-24; 2 Th 2:9.”⁷²

And clearly, what this Jezebel taught clearly conflicted with God’s Word for she taught, amongst other things, false revelation, fornication, and idolatry. “But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. And we said before, so say I now gain, If any *man* preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.”⁷³

C. “sufferest”: The congregation at Thyratira permits her to continue her despicable work without private or public rebuke. Stoeckhardt: “Those who practiced fornication and adultery belonged to this sect, which also adorned itself with the name and the Word of God. Its followers insisted on being counted as members of the Christian Church. They lived in open works of the flesh, claiming that through appeasing their lust they could mortify their flesh. This, of course, was diabolical blindness. In Pergamos there were found a few Nicolaitans. Here in Thyatira this libertine sect had many followers, whom the congregation tolerated as their members. It is this that the Lord holds against the church at Thyatira. The congregation, granting recognition to the followers of the sect as being its members, was to blame that many of its faithful servants were carried away to immorality.”⁷⁴

21. *And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not.*

Here, again, we see from the lips of the Lord Himself why these wicked things go on: These things go on not because God He is indifferent to evil, but rather He suffers it for the sake of absolution and faith, namely, that these people might repent, come to faith, and be saved eternally. *Absolution is what underpins the world order until Christ returns again in glory.* St. Peter the Apostle writes: “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.” **II Peter 3:9.**

22. *Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her unto great tribulation, except they repent.*

A. “... cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her unto

⁷²Martin Chemnitz, *Ministry, Word, & Sacraments, An Enchiridion*, p. 31

⁷³**Galatians 1:8-9.**

⁷⁴*Lectures on the Revelation of St. John*, tr. H. W. Degner, Ft. Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, p. 11.

great tribulation” Christ uses their instruments of pleasure and despising God’s creation as the very instrument of their punishment. Stoeckhardt: “The followers of Jezebel are threatened with death. Their bed of lust shall become a bed of torment. Their pleasures of sins shall soon be turned into weeping and gnashing of teeth.”⁷⁵

B. “except they repent”: Christ carries out His *alien work*, i.e. to threaten punishment in order to call to repentance and, thereby, afterward carry out His natural work, which is to give grace and comfort: “Therefore the Spirit of Christ must not only comfort, but also through the office of the Law *reprove the world of sin*, John 16, 8, and thus must do in the New Testament, as the prophet says, Is. 28, 21, *opus alienum, ut faciat opus proprium*, that is, He must do *the work of another* (reprove), in order that He may [afterwards] do His own work, which is to comfort and preach of grace. For to this end He was earned [from the Father] and sent to us by Christ, and for this reason, too, He is called the Comforter, as Dr. Luther has explained in his exposition of the Gospel for the Fifth Sunday after Trinity, in the following words: *Anything that preaches concerning our sins and God’s wrath, let it be done how or when it will, that is all a preaching of the Law. Again, the Gospel is such a preaching as shows and gives nothing else than grace and forgiveness in Christ, although it is true and right that the apostles and preachers of the Gospel (as Christ Himself also did) confirm the preaching of the Law, and begin it with those who do not yet acknowledge their sins nor are terrified at [by the sense of] God’s wrath; as He says, John 16, 8: ‘The Holy Ghost will reprove the world of sin because they believe not on Me.’ Yea, what more forcible, more terrible declaration and preaching of God’s wrath against sin is there than just the suffering and death of Christ, His Son? But as long as all of this preaches God’s wrath and terrifies men, it is not yet the preaching of the Gospel nor Christ’s own preaching, but that of Moses and the Law against the impenitent. For the Gospel and Christ were never ordained and given for the purpose of terrifying and condemning, but of comforting and cheering those who are terrified and timid. And again: Christ says, John 16, 8: ‘The Holy Ghost will reprove the world of sin;’ which cannot be done except through the explanation of the Law.*”⁷⁶

23. *And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searecheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works.*

⁷⁵Lectures on the Revelation of St. John, p. 11.

⁷⁶The Formula of Concord. **Thorough Declaration. V. Of the Law and the Gospel.** 11-13, Triglotta, pp. 955, 957.

A. “I will kill her children with death”: Her children are not her natural offspring but the spawn of her false doctrine, which doctrine is the devil’s. “Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.” **St. John 8:44**. False doctrine is the lie of the devil through which he produces his own seed or offspring.⁷⁷ “And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed: it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.” **Genesis 3:15**. The seed of the devil is the offspring of his false doctrine. Walther: “*False doctrine is a noxious seed, sown by the enemy to produce a progeny of wickedness.*”⁷⁸ We, therefore, must follow Christ’s admonition and concern ourselves not with the allures and threats of the world, but rather with Christ who is Lord over all things. “And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” **St. Matthew 10:28**.

⁷⁷“From what has been said you can gather how foolish it is, yea, what an awful delusion has taken hold upon so many men’s minds who ridicule the pure doctrine and say to us: ‘Ah, do cease clamoring, Pure doctrine! Pure doctrine! That can only land you in dead orthodoxism. Pay more attention to pure life, and you will raise a growth of genuine Christianity.’ That is exactly like saying to a farmer: ‘Do not worry forever about good seed; worry about good fruits.’ Is not a farmer properly concerned about good fruit when he is solicitous about getting good seed? Just so a concern about pure doctrine is the proper concern about genuine Christianity and a sincere Christian life. False doctrine is a noxious seed, sown by the enemy to produce a progeny of wickedness. The pure doctrine is wheat-seed; from it spring the children of the Kingdom, who even in the present life to come will be received into the Kingdom of Glory. May God even now implant in your hearts a great fear, yea, a real abhorrence, of false doctrine! May He graciously give you a holy desire for the pure, saving truth, revealed by God Himself.” The Rev. Dr. C. F. W. Walther, *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel*, pp. 20, 21, underscore added.

“Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther (1811-1887), the father of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, served as its first president from 1847 to 1850 and then again from 1864 to 1878. In 1839 he emigrated from Saxony, Germany, with other Lutherans who settled in Missouri. He served as pastor of several congregations in St. Louis, founded Concordia Seminary and in 1847 was instrumental in the formation of the LCMS (then called the German Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States). Walther worked tirelessly to promote confessional Lutheran teaching and doctrinal agreement among all Lutherans in the United States. He was a prolific writer and speaker. Among his most influential works are *Church and Ministry* and *The Proper Distinction between Law and Gospel*” From “Commemorations Biographies,” Lutheran Service Book, LCMS Commission on Worship.

⁷⁸See footnote 77, italics added.

B. “and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts”: By the fact of their manifest end in unbelief, the church shall know that Christ judges not by sight (**Isaiah 11:3**) but sees the very inner core of a man’s being (the “reins”⁷⁹). One can fool the Church; but he cannot fool Christ the Lord in His omniscience.

C. “and I will give unto every one of you according to your works”: “for whatsoever is not of faith is sin.” **Romans 14:23.**

24. *But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyratira, as many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak: I will put upon you none other burden.*

A. “depths of Satan” The depths of Satan is false doctrine. These depths go on without end because false doctrine is by definition the wrong answer. For example, how many wrong answers are there to two plus and what would be the depths thereof? The number of wrong answers would be endless and the depths fathomless. Hence, the world, of which Satan is the prince, is called the bottomless pit in **Revelation 20:3**. “And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years. And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season.” **Revelation 20:2-3**. Christ clearly circumscribes His Kingdom of Heaven and the kingdom of the devil. Never shall the twain meet or intersect. “Jesus answered, and said, ... Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all *men* unto me. This he said, signifying what death he should die.” **St. John 12:30, 31-33**. The Gospel binds Satan because it looses sin, the only hold he has over fallen men. The Gospel also, as Christ has said, casts out Satan because his work and power, which is sin, has been purged and cast out by Christ. Hence, elsewhere Scripture speaks of Satan being cast out into the earth, i.e. cast out of the lives of Christians, or, in other words, cast out of the Church, cast out of Christ’s domain. Hence, the Church is truly the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth, wherein lies nothing evil because sins are absolved for Christ’s sake through faith. “And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it *shall be* for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err *therein*.” **Isaiah 35:8**.⁸⁰

⁷⁹See footnote 60.

⁸⁰“*And a highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Holy Way. ... The Gospel is a wide road, a smoothed way by means of the completely firm Word in the footsteps of the holy*

When Christ speaks of Satan being cast out into the earth, He speaks in this way in order to draw a stark line demarcating the kingdom of the devil, i.e. the earth, from the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth, i.e. the Church. The Kingdom of Heaven is truly on earth through Christ's Reign in Word and Sacrament. But while it is in the earth, it is not of the earth. "In Christ's Kingdom of Grace the means indeed are perceptible, for we hear the Gospel and see the external Sacraments; yet the kingdom itself is invisible to us, since it is internal, or in the hearts of men, Luke 17, 20.21; 1 Peter 2, 5. But in spite of the opposition of the devil, Matt. 16, 18, of false teachers, 2 Tim. 2:17-19, and of the world, John 16, 33, we believe that the Christian Church, or the Kingdom of Grace, will exist on earth till the end of time, Matt. 28, 20."⁸¹

The "depths of Satan", therefore, is simply the abyss, the world, of which he is the prince, and of which he became prince through his false doctrine. Stoeckhardt: "The Jezeblites boasted that they had fathomed the depths of Satan. They claimed they had practiced immorality in the name of their holy religion and so had defeated Satan. ... When works of the flesh are performed as a function and ceremony of religion, their practitioners have certainly delved into the depths of Satan. However, they have done Satan no harm, but rather have come his helpless victims."⁸²

B. "I will put upon you none other burden." Christ exercises the faith of Christians for their edification, not their ruin. Stoeckhardt: "And those who why away from such depths and carnal lusts are by no means naive simpletons, but dear children of God. And for these the Lord has encouraging words. He tells them He will not lay on them a new burden, but asks them to hold His Word, and to observe it in their daily life, and so to flee and avoid all lusts of the flesh. And to all such He gives special promise."⁸³

25. *But that which ye have already, hold fast till I come.*

Continue in faith and the works thereof for this is **A.** God's will and **B.** burgeoning with

patriarchs who have gone before. This is the royal and holy way. ... *The unclean shall not pass over it.* This way is so guarded that it is impossible for an unclean person to walk on it. ... However, no ungodly person will walk on this way of faith and the Gospel. ... *And it shall be for them*, ... many godly people will be walking on it. It is not to be doubted that these are the hearers and doers of the Word." Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, Vol. 16, p. 304.

⁸¹The Rev. Dr. J. T. Mueller, *Christian Dogmatics*, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, p. 317.

⁸²*The Revelation of St. John*, p. 12.

⁸³*The Revelation of St. John*, p. 12.

eternal blessings.

26. *And he that overcometh and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations.*

A. “Then answered Peter and said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore? And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you. That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name’s sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life.” **St. Matthew 19:27-29.** “Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? ... Know ye not that we shall judge angels?” **I Corinthians 6:2, 3.**

B. Christians enjoy this rule over the nations because they are co-heirs with Christ. “And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ, if so be that we suffer with *him*, that we may be also glorified together. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time *are* not worthy to be *compared* with the glory which shall be revealed in us.” **Romans 8:17-18.**

The nations are the inheritance of Christ through His suffering and death on the Cross for the sins of the world. “Ask of me, and I shall give *thee* the heathen *for* thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth *for* thy possession.” **Psalms 2:8.** The reason the Lord uses the word “inheritance” is because Christ, who is God and Creator of all the nations and earth, regains His creation through His Last Will and Testament, namely through His death for the sins of the world on the Cross. St. Paul the Apostle writes: “For where a testament *is*, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament *is* of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth.” **Hebrews 9:16-17.** And through this Last Will and Testament Christ not only inherits His lost creation, but also inherit eternal life which was lost through sin. “then I restored that which I took not away.” **Psalms 69:4.** Luther: “You see, therefore, that what we call the mass is a promise of the forgiveness of sins made to us by God, and such a promise as has been confirmed by the death of the Son of God. For the only differences between a promise and a testament is that the testament involves the death of the one who makes it. A testator is a promiser who is about to die, while a promiser (if I may put it thus) is a testator who is not about to die. This testament of Christ is foreshadowed in all the promises of God from the beginning of the world; indeed, whatever value those ancient promises possessed was altogether derived from this new promise that was to come in Christ. Hence the words ‘compact,’ ‘covenant,’ and ‘testament of the Lord’ occur so frequently in the Scriptures. These words signified that God would one day die. ‘For where there is a testament, the death of the testator must of necessity occur’ (Heb. 9[16]). Now God made a

testament, therefore, it was necessary that he should die. But God could not die unless he became man. Thus the incarnation and the death of Christ are both comprehended most concisely in this one word, ‘testament.’”⁸⁴

27. *And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shives: even as I received of my Father.*

“**rod of iron**”. This phrase is from **Psalm 2**, a Messianic psalm.⁸⁵ “Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel.” **Psalm 2:9**. For the impenitent nothing remains but punishment. There is either absolution of sin or punishment. If someone refuses the absolution and remains impenitent, then, nothing remains but the penalty: “Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron” For the penitent, however, nothing but blessing remains. “Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.” **Psalm 2:12**.

28. *And I will give him the morning star.*

Christ does not give us a paltry reward, but the best of His Kingdom. Christ, in the first place, is *The Morning Star* without peer. “I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not night: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre⁸⁶ shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and

⁸⁴*Luther’s Works*, Vol. 36: 38.

⁸⁵“**PSALM 2. Of the Eternal Sonship of the Messiah.** ... That the entire psalm is Messianic is clearly shown by the quotation Acts 4, 25, 26, together with the explanation there added: ‘For of a truth against Thy holy Child Jesus, whom Thou hast anointed, ... the people ... were gathered together,’ v. 27. Cp. Acts 13, 33; Heb. 1, 5.” The Rev. Dr. P. E. Kretzmann, *Popular Commentary of the Bible, The Old Testament, Volume II, The Poetical and the Prophetical Books*, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1924, p. 61.

⁸⁶Cf. **Genesis 49:10**: “The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him *shall* the gathering of the people *be*.” Regarding **Genesis 49:10**, specifically, Shiloh, the Messiah, the Rev. Dr. P. E. Kretzmann writes: “This is one of the most remarkable and inspiring Messianic promises in the entire Old Testament. The scepter is the mark of royal power, and the ruler’s staff, or the mace of the chieftain, resting between his feet as he sat upright, likewise belonged to the insignia of authority and power. The government, the princely power, was to remain in the hands of Judah, culminating finally in the reign of Shiloh, the Messiah, the Author and Source of true rest, the Prince of Peace, through whom all mankind should have peace with God by the acceptance of the justification earned by Him. Rom. 5, 1. To Him the nations, His people, render obedience in faith and thus become partakers of all the blessings of His kingdom, here in time, and hereafter in eternity.” *Popular Commentary of the Bible, The Old Testament, Volume I*, St. Louis:

destroy all the children of Sheth.” **Numbers 24:17.**⁸⁷ Christ Himself is our great reward: “After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I *am* thy shield, *and* thy exceeding great reward.”

Genesis 15:1.

Finally, because Christ’s work of redemption was for us, we gain Christ and the entire Holy Trinity Himself and all the blessings that go with that, including the pleasant and cheering morning star, i.e. the beautiful and everlasting dawning of an eternal day of unending glory and bliss. Stoeckhardt: “And even now, while they must pass through such strife and storm, so that at times the dark night of suffering closes in them, in the promises of Christ the brilliant Morning Star rises to view, cheering their hearts, assuring them that the great Day of their Lord is about to break. Then they will walk and reign in glory forever.”⁸⁸

Because of these great blessings that await Christians, Christians are very much forward looking. The Rev. Dr. Francis Pieper writes: “Luther made this view the theme of his sermon on ‘the blessed hope.’ We bring some of his main thoughts. Luther calls it ‘the fine art and true masterpiece of Christianity’ for the believer ‘to turn his back on this transient life and keep his gaze fixed on the future life, firmly and confidently hoping that it will endure forever and be our proper home.’ ‘The citizenship, the sojourn, and the home of Christians is not in this world but in heaven.’ ... But every Christian needs to learn this article: ‘Whoever does not direct and prepare his heart for yonder imperishable life, but continues to cling only to this temporal, perishable life, does not understand what Baptism Gospel, Christ, faith, mean. We have not been baptized unto this life; we are not called Christians in order that we might be burghers, peasants, masters, servants, mistresses, maids, rulers, subjects, laborers, householders. But for this we are baptized, for this we hear the Gospel and believe in Christ, that we may set aside all these vocations (though we abide in these vocations here on earth as long as it pleases God and therein serve God, each one in his appointed calling) and turn from this world to another existence and life where there is neither servant nor master, neither maid nor mistress, neither wife nor husband, but where we are altogether equal and one in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:28), which equality begins here in

Concordia Publishing House, 1923, p. 108.

⁸⁷“**THE STAR OF JACOB** The fourth and final prophecy points to the distant future, to the end of days. ‘There shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel,’ which is the Messiah King, Christ, the Lord. This bright and shining Star signifies, and brings to His people salvation and peace from on high. ... Also the heathen, who like the Kenites, the people of Jethro, who were friendly to God’s people, will have a portion of the salvation of the Messiah King.” The Rev. Dr. George Stoeckhardt, *Wisdom for Today, The Biblical History of the Old Testament*, tr. Arthur E. Beck, Ft. Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, p. 139.

⁸⁸*Lectures on the Revelation of Saint John*, pp. 12, 13.

faith, but yonder is made perfect in sight (1 Cor. 15:53), where there is no death, but only eternal and imperishable life, no sin, but only righteousness and innocence, no fear nor sorrow, but only security and joy, no dominion nor authority nor power, but God alone will be All in All; in short, where God and Christ Himself is with all His elect and saints. Unto this eternal life we have been baptized, unto this life Christ has redeemed us by His blood and death, and to reach this life we have received the Gospel. As soon as the child is baptized and clothed in the chrisom, he is from that hour dedicated unto eternal life, so that henceforth throughout his life he is only a pilgrim and stranger in this work, prepared and ready to leave this temporal life, always hoping and looking for yonder enduring life.”⁸⁹

29. *He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.*

A. ear that hears: Christ created the ear that hears, i.e. responds to God’s Word, by His life for us. “Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire; mine ears hast thou opened: burnt offering and sin offering hast thou not required.” **Psalm 40:6.** Because Christ is God, He has no need of ears opened to God’s Word. Consequently, Christ took up into Himself these ears – along with the entire human nature – so that we would have ears that respond to God’s Word, namely, faith. “So then faith *cometh* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” **Romans 10:17.** “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.” **Ephesians 2:8-10.**

B. “let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches”:

The Spirit speaks, namely, He speaks God’s Word to the churches. “For prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake *as they were* moved by the Holy Ghost.” **II Peter 1:21.** “Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, *that* shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come.” **St. John 16:13.** God’s Spirit, then, does not operate apart from God’s Word. The Lutheran Church confesses: “Therefore we ought and must constantly maintain this point, that God does not wish to deal with us otherwise than through the spoken Word and the Sacraments. It is the devil himself whatsoever is extolled as Spirit without the Word and Sacraments. ... And Peter says, 2. Ep. 1, 21: *The prophecy came not b the will of man; but holy men of God*

⁸⁹*Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. III, pp. 85, 86.

*spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.*⁹⁰ If, then, we wish to hear the Spirit speak, we must hearken unto the Scriptures.

⁹⁰*The Smalcald Articles, Part III. Article VIII. Of Confession.*10, 11, 13, *Triglotta*, p. 497.