

Chapter Three (3)

1. *And unto the angel of the church of the church in Sardis write: These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.*

A. **Sardis:** “Sardis was a war-torn city. Cyrus the Great of Persia captured it from the fabulously rich King Croesus in 546 B.C. The Athenians burned it in 490 B.C. In 334 B. C. it surrendered to Alexander the Great of Macedonia. Antiochus III (the Great), a Seleucid King of Syria, took it in 214 B.C. and lost it to the Romans in 190 B.C. Finally, A.D. 17, it was destroyed by an earthquake and has never again been of great importance, although it was rebuilt. At the time of St. John it had definitely become a city whose glory had departed. There was nothing in view for it except inevitable decay. In the 14th century it was completely destroyed in the invasion of the Turks. Today little is left of old Sardis except a small settlement called Sart (or Sert-Kalessi), consisting of shepherds’ huts in the area.”¹ Sardis’ location is in the west part of modern Turkey.

B. **“He that hath seven Spirits of God”:** The Seven Spirits of God are the Seven-Fold Gifts of the Spirit: “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.” “To the Spirit, who rest on him [Christ], are given seven names that designate the Spirit’s various gifts and powers. On the basis of this passage the church speaks of a Spiritus septiformis. Accordingly, the prophecy of Zechariah, 4,6.10, and Rev. 1,4; 3,1; 4,5; 5,6 speak of the seven eyes or the seven spirit sof God, that is, of the Spirit of God in the diversity of his gifts, powers, and activities.”²

Because Christ is the Omniscient Son of God³ and possesses God’s Spirit, He is able to search the hearts of men. “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” **Isaiah 11:3.** Such judgment is spiritual, scrutinizing not only someone’s outward behavior, but also their inward conduct, just as we see with the Ten Commandments. **“Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s house. ... 72. What does God require of us in the**

¹The Rev. Luther Poellet, *Revelation*, p. 53.

²The Rev. Dr. George Stoeckhardt, *Isaiah: The First Twelve Chapters*, Ft. Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, p. 119. Dr. Stoeckhardt is commenting on Isaiah 11:2.

³cc²⁹⁶ Lord, Thou knowest all things. *John 21:17.* (Omniscience.)” *The Small Catechism*, p. 103.

Ninth Commandment? God requires that our hearts be filled with *holy desires only*.¹⁹⁸ Ye shall *be holy*; for I, the Lord, your God, am holy. *Lev. 19:2.*” *The Small Catechism*, pp. 77, 79. “The heart is deceitful above *all things*, and desperately wicked: who can know it? I the LORD search the heart, *I try* the reins⁴, even to give every man according to his ways, *and* according to the fruit of his doings.” **Jeremiah 17:9-10.**

C. “**the seven stars**”: The seven stars are the seven angels (pastors) of the seven churches (**Revelation 1:20**). Pastors are in the right hand and under the control of and answerable to Christ. “*It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*” **Hebrews 10:31** “Obey them that have the ruler over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account” **Hebrews 13:17.** 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.”⁵ *Finally, it is a comfort to congregations and pastors to know that they are in the Hand of Christ, their Savior.* Jesus says, “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. My Father, which gave *them* me, is greater than all; and no *man* is able to pluck *them* out of my Father’s hand. I and *my* Father are one.” **St. John 10:27-30.** The Rev. Dr. George Stoeckhardt writes: “This holy and Almighty God holds the destiny of the Church and all its congregations in His hands. Therefore they enjoy the fullest security against any enemy attack.”⁶ “How the pastor of the church at Sardis must have read and reread for himself the words ‘These things saith He that hath ... the seven stars’! ... He was one of those seven stars. He belonged to Jesus. With that thought fixed indelibly on his heart and mind he could take all the discouragement at Sardis in his stride. Inseparably involved is also a reminder to the member of the church that their pastor belongs to God, who gave him to the church (Eph. 4:11). They are to receive and regard him accordingly.”⁷

D. “**I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.**” One can fool the Church, but he cannot fool Christ. For, as has already been noted earlier, Christ is the Omniscient God and also possesses God’s Omniscient

⁴Reins means the very heart and core of a person’s being, both body & soul.

⁵*Luther’s Works*, Vol. 35, p. 401.

⁶*Lectures on the Revelation of St. John*, pp. 3, 4.

⁷The Rev. Luther Poellet, *Revelation*, p. 54.

Spirit because Christ, again, is God. So, while individuals may fool the Church into believing they are Christians, they cannot fool Christ.

Good works proceed from faith. St. Paul the Apostle writes: "... whatsoever is not of faith is sin." **Romans 14:23**. The Lutheran Church confesses: "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 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.*"⁸

Nominal, i.e. in name only, Christianity is vanity and death. Jesus says: "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." **St. Matthew 7:21**. What is the will of the Father? The will of the Father is to believe – there it is again, *faith* – in Christ for eternal life. "And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day. And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day." Apart from such faith there is only death because of the wages of sins. Hence, nominal Christianity does not save, but only produces death and phony works, the works of religiosity and busy-bodyness." St. James writes of this dead faith: "Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone." **St. James 2:17**. In other words, where faith does not produce good works, there is in reality no faith at all. One might think he is fooling God, but in

⁸*The Formula of Concord, Thorough Declaration*.9-12, Triglotta, p. 941.

fact he is not. And so Christ tells the congregation at Sardis, “thou hast a name that thou art living, but thou art dead.” “It [Sardis] had a reputation for being very much alive. Dead faith can only produce dead works. The only life that is worth striving for is ‘to be dead indeed unto sin but alive unto God through Jesus Christ, our Lord.’”⁹

2. *Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God.*

A. **I have not found thy works perfect before God:** In other words, there is no faith. For even our imperfections are made perfect in faith. “Measured by the standard of the divine Law, the works of heathen do not deserve to be called good. What, then, becomes of the good works of Christians? They, too, do not measure up to the requirements of the divine Law. They show a deficiency, first, as to the requirement that the Law be the only norm of good works. Christians are in daily need of the warning of Scripture against ... self-appointed worship, Col. 2:16-23 And, secondly, the deficiency as to the requirement that all good works must be done in a willing spirit is shown by Paul’s confession: ‘I delight in the Law of God after the inward man. But I see another law in my members warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members,’ Rom. 7:22-23. No Christians boasts about the quality of his good works.

“And yet the works of Christians are pronounced good. They receive high praise: ‘Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which ye have to all the saints,’ Col. 1:4; Rom. 15:14; 1 Cor. 1:7; Phil. 2:12; 1 Thess. 1:3; 2 Thess. 1:3-4. And the reason for this praise is the fact that Christians, unlike heathen, believe in the remission of sins and through this faith receive forgiveness continually also for those sins which stain their good works because of their imperfect application of the right norm and their lack of perfect willingness. Christ’s atoning blood, which cleanses the person of Christians, *eo ipso* cleanses also their works. Christ’s righteousness covers the person of the Christians and also their deeds. ‘We have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the Righteous; and He is the Propitiation for our sins’ (1 John 2:1-2). Baier’s¹⁰ ...

⁹Luther Poellet, *Revelation*, p. 54.

¹⁰“**Baier, Johann Wilhelm**, b. 1647; professor at Jena, rector of the University of Halle, general superintendent, court preacher, and city pastor at Weimar; d. there 1695. His chief work is *Compendium, Theologian Positivae* [Compendium of Positive Theology], which shows the great influence Johann Musaeus, his teacher and father-in-law, had upon him (synergism [the false doctrine that man cooperates with God in his salvation]) . This work

definition of good works agrees perfectly with the terminology of Scripture: ‘The [form] of good works, considered in themselves, is their conformity with the Law of God; but when we consider why they please God, though they do not comply perfectly with the Law, their [form] is faith in Christ.’ The Lutheran Confessions and the works of Luther are replete with such statements.⁷³” “Apology: ‘Well does Augustine say: “All the commandments of God are fulfilled when whatever is not done is forgiven”’ (Trigl. 171, III, 51).” Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. III, p. 46.

St. Paul writes: “For he hath made him *to be* sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” **II Corinthians 5:21**. Christ’s righteousness is perfect. Obviously, if God finds our works imperfect, then, we are outside of Christ because we are outside of faith in Christ. Hence, Christ, in another way, is telling the people of Sardis they have abandoned saving faith. “Such works as there were on the part of the church of Sardis made for a good reputation among men. We may think not only of church services but also of other activities and a general humming and buzzing, with many wheels going around fast, as it were, so that the people in the sister congregations would be moved to say, ‘They’ve really got something over there at Sardis!’

“Yet, something was radically wrong there. Spared the suffering of persecution and the strife and dissension of heresy, the church was dying from the inside out. If the heart is not right with God, nothing else can be ‘perfect’ or ‘complete’ with Him.”¹¹

B. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: How, then, are they to be watchful if they be dead? St. Paul writes, “Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace are ye saved:)” **Ephesians 2:5**. Christ quickens, i.e. makes men alive, through the Gospel. St. Paul writes of Holy Baptism: “Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.” **Romans 6:4**. The Lutheran Church confesses: “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. And because God truly quickens through the Word, the keys truly remit sins before

passed through many editions, latest by Dr. Walther, St. Louis, Mo., 1879, with a rich collection of extracts from earlier Lutheran theologians.” *Concordia Cyclopedia*, p. 56, translation and amplification in brackets added.

¹¹Luther Poellet, *Revelation*, p. 55.

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.”¹²

Men remain watchful through the Gospel. Luther writes: “This, then, is the meaning: Make haste, and hurry to worship Christ, so that you do not perish because of His anger. And do not deceive yourselves, as though you still had a long time. You should know that His anger will be quickly and speedily kindled, that it will come suddenly, when you least expect it, as in Matt. 24:48-50: ‘If that wicked servant says to himself, “My master is delayed,” the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know.’ So in Prov. 1:27: ‘When calamity comes like a whirlwind,’ and 1 Thess. 5:2-3: ‘For you yourselves know well that the day of the Lord comes like a thief in the night. When people say, “There is peace and security,” then sudden destruction will come upon them.’ Therefore this threat is terrible, because if the wrath of God suddenly clutches them, there will be no one to save them. Finally, this psalm concludes with a most beautiful exclamation. This, he says, is the sum of it all: ‘Blessed are they who take refuge in Him.’ For this He suffered, for this He was resurrected, for this He was established as King, and for this He received everything as His heritage, in order that He might be able to save all who take refuge in Him”¹³

3. *Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not now what hour I will come upon thee.*

A. Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. Notice here Christ does not urge Christians on to novel ideas and new teachings, but rather to hold fast to what we’ve received from Him, namely, the Gospel. One doesn’t play chicken with God. And Christ commands this not for His sake, for He is God and has no need of the Gospel, but rather for our sakes because the Gospel gives salvation and life eternal (**Romans 1:16, Titus 3:4-7**).

B. If there thou shalt now watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not now what hour I will come upon thee. Those who slumber are not alert and can easily be taken by surprise. The alertness of a Christian is faith. For faith puts us in constant communion with God.

¹²*The Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article XII. (V.).*39-40, *Triglotta*, pp. 261, underscore added.

¹³*Luther's Works*, Vol. 14, p. 349.

Francis Pieper: “As soon as a Christian has been justified by faith and thus has become God=s child, he begins to commune with God. This personal conversing of the Christian with God is called prayer. It is altogether Scriptural to define prayer as ‘the conversation of the heart with God’ (Ps. 27:8), whether the heart alone communes with God without clothing the prayer in words of the mouth ... or whether the mouth utters the prayer of the heart. ... Prayer, the [consequence] of faith in the remission of sins, is a *continuum*, the continuous longing of the heart for God; the Holy Ghost, who by faith has made His home in the heart and is the [efficient cause] of prayer, never ceases His activity but unceasingly vivifies and moves the heart. A Christian prays even when, as often happens while fulfilling his earthly calling, he is not conscious of praying, yes, even when by reason of great sorrow and grief he imagines that he cannot pray. ... Prayer has been fittingly compared to the heartbeat of a physical life: it never ceases. Luther says: ‘Where there is a Christian, there is the Holy Ghost, who is always engaged in prayer. For though the Christian does not continually move his lips to utter words, nevertheless the heart is beating and pulsating, like the arteries and the heart in the body, unceasingly sighing: O dear Father, may Thy name be hallowed, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done among us and all people, etc. And as the attacks, trials, and troubles press and crowd harder, also such sighing and begging becomes more urgent, even audible. So, then, you cannot find a Christian who is not always praying, as little as a living person is without a pulse, which never rests, but beats continuously, though the person may be sleeping or is occupied otherwise, so that he is not aware of its beating.’”¹⁴

Because the Gospel gives the Holy Spirit, God, again, is active waking and sleeping to pray for that which we know not we need, with groans to deep for understanding. “Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.” **Romans 8:26.**

Christ dwells with us already through the Gospel, i.e 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.** “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, *even* unto the end of the world.” **St. Matthew 28:20.** “If a man love me, he will keep my words [**obedience of faith, Romans 16:26**]: and my Father will love him; and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.” **St. John 14:23.** “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them,

¹⁴*Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. III, pp. 76, 77. “¹²⁷Dividing Prayer into thanksgiving and supplication fully covers the ground Luther: >With God we cannot deal in more than two ways, namely, thanksgiving and petition. In our thanksgiving we praise Him for the gifts and graces already received; in our petitions we praise Him for the gifts and graces we desire.=@ ibid. p. 77 and p. 77 footnote 127.

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 10:27-28**. It, therefore, does matter when He return, for we are already with Him through the Gospel and faith. Through the Gospel we dwell in the Bosom of the Holy Trinity. One cannot be any more alert than that. St. Augustine: “That death is not to be judged an evil which is the end of a good life; for death becomes evil only by the retribution which follows it. They, then, who are destined to die, need not be careful to inquire what death they are to die, but into what place death will usher them.”¹⁵

4. *Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy.*

A. ... a few names ... which have not defiled their garments: These souls are still operating from faith, which alone keeps men free from the stain of sin because while sin resides in a Christian (**Romans 7:18**). “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.” **Isaiah 1:18**. The Lutheran Church confesses in the words of St. Augustine: “Well does Augustine say: *All the commandments of God are fulfilled when whatever is not done, is forgiven.*”¹⁶

Luther writes: “I would not believe St. Augustine if St. Paul did not support him when he says in Rom. 8 [:1], ‘Those who believe in Christ have nothing damnable in them, because they do not obey the flesh.’ He does not say, ‘They have nothing sinful in them,’ but, ‘nothing damnable,’ for he has said previously that there is sin in the members and the flesh which is at war with the spirit. But since the spirit fights against this sin and does not obey it, it does no harm, and God judges a man not according to the sin which assails him in the flesh, but according to the spirit which is at war against sin, and is thereby like the will of God, which hates and fights against sin. ... God does not hold against us whatever sin is still to be driven out, because of our steady battle against sin which we continue to expel. He chooses not to charge this sin against us, though, until we become perfectly pure, he might justly do so. For this reason, he has given us a bishop, namely Christ, who is without sin and who is to be our representative until we too become entirely pure like him. ... Let us now conclude

¹⁵**The City of God**, Book I, Chapter 11, *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, ed. Philip Schaff, Volume II, **St. Augustin’s City of God and Christian Doctrine**, Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., reprinted, May 1988, p. 9.

¹⁶*The Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article III. Of Love and the Fulfilling of the Law.* 51, Triglotta, p. 171.

the discussion of this article — almost the best and most important of them all — with the beautiful saying of St. Augustine, ‘Sin is forgiven in baptism; not that it is no longer present, but it is not imputed.’ ... Here we see plainly that sin remains, but it is not imputed. The two reasons were mentioned above. First, because we believe in Christ, who, through faith, takes our place and covers our sin with his innocence; second, because we battle unceasingly against sin, to destroy it. Where these two reasons are not present, sin is imputed, is not forgiven, and condemns us eternally. The joy, the comfort, and the blessing of the New Testament is this: We learn the benefits Christ offers us and why we need him. Out of this root grow love and delight, praise and thanksgiving to Christ and to the Father of all mercy. This makes for free, joyful, and brave Christians, whose love causes them to fight against sin, and gladly repent. But those who would hide our sin from us and make it out to be merely a weakness, lull us into a false sense of security, make us lazy and sullen, take Christ from us, and allow us to go on without fear and without care concerning the eradication of our sin. If we become callous in such horrible presumption we shall relish neither Christ nor God. God preserve us from this presumption and save all those now caught in it. Amen.”¹⁷

B. for they are worthy: Men are not worthy in and of themselves, but for Christ’s sake. “But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, *even* to them that believe on his name.” **St. John 1:12.**

C. walk in white: The Rev. Dr. George Stoeckhardt writes: “In that congregation at Sardis there were still found who had not soiled their garments with the contamination of their surroundings. To them the Lord gives a beautiful word of promise in verse 5: ‘He that overcometh the same shall be clothed in white raiment, and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life.’ All those who conquer the sins and temptations of this time are described as being clad in a white garment. That is the righteousness of Christ which they put on by faith. While their life here on earth is still imperfect, God will there in heaven dress them in robes unspotted and of pure white. That is the sure prospect of all true believers: a glorious, everlasting life, a life in complete holiness and righteousness, from which every stain of sin has been removed. And even now already all true believers yearn for this glorious consummation, hoping and praying that they may once awaken as found fully in God’s likeness. And this their desire will be fulfilled.”¹⁸

¹⁷**Defense and Explanation of All Articles, *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 32, pp. 27, 28, 29.**

¹⁸*Exegetical Lectures on the Revelation of St. John*, tr. the Rev. H. W. Degner, Ft. Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, p. 14.

5. *He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.*

A. white raiment: Christians in glory are adorned with white to reflect their purity which came to them by Christ through the Gospel. "... 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, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish." **Ephesians 5:25, 26-27.**

B. and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life: Self-evident in Christ's Words is that everyone's name is written in the Book of Life. That's because Christ came to save all from their sins. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved." **St. John 3:16-17.**

If, therefore, men do not gain eternal life, it is because of their own rejection of God's gift in Christ. Hence, Christ says of the Jews – and really anyone who follows their footsteps of unbelief – in the midst of His Passion that they will be blotted out of the Book of Life because of their unbelief: "Reproach hath broken my heart; and I am full of heaviness: and I looked *for some* to take pity, but *there was* none; and for comforters, but I found none. They gave me also gall for my meat; and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink. Let their table become a snare before them: and *that which should have been* for their welfare, *let it become* a trap. Let their eyes be darkened, that they see not; and make their loins continually to shake. Pour out thine indignation upon them, and let thy wrathful anger take hold of them. Let their habitations be desolate; *and let none* dwell in their tents. For they persecuted *him* whom thou hast smitten¹⁹; and they talk to the grief of those whom thou hast wounded.²⁰ Add iniquity unto their iniquity: and let them not come into thy righteousness. Let them be blotted out of

¹⁹The Jews persecuted Christ, even crucifying Him.

²⁰The Jews also persecuted Christ's Church because they reflect the Cross. Hence, they are "wounded of God" because they suffer the persecutions of the world, the flesh, and the devil for the sake of the Gospel, as did Christ Himself. "Because for thy sake I have borne reproach; shame hath covered my face." **Psalms 69:7.** "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." **St. John 14:18-20**

the book of the living, and not be written with the righteous.”²¹ Dreadful is unbelief and its judgment: Iniquity is added to iniquity. Because absolution of iniquity is refused, iniquity compounds iniquity and the judgment of God against always increases against the ever-effervescing geyser of their iniquity – dreadful.

Men are only blotted out of the Book of Life because they have rejected His gift. Christ has not ordained them to destruction, but they have been fitted by their unbelief to destruction. “*What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory.*” **Romans 9:22-23**. In other words, God suffered their unbelief a long time, desiring them to turn and be saved. But they hardened themselves in unbelief and perished. *Hence, because they have been fitted by their own unbelief for destruction, why may not God use these vessels of wrath through unbelief for a positive purpose, namely, the building of His Church, e.g. Pharaoh?* “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.” **Romans 8:28**. Another example of God using creatures for the good of the Church that have been fitted for destruction by their own unbelief are the devil and his angels. “Scripture also tells us that God uses the evil angels not only to punish the godless (2 Thess. 2:11-12), but also to try the believers, as was the case with Job (Job 1:7ff) and the Apostle Paul (2 Cor. 12:7).”²²

Later on in **Revelation**, St. John the Apostle, reflecting the language of **Psalm 69:28**, says: “The beast that thou sawest was, and is not; and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit, and go into perdition: and they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they behold the beast that was, and is not, and yet is.”²³ Here St. John writes of a completed action whose results remain.²⁴ Pilate

²¹**Psalm 69:20-28.**

²²The Rev. Dr. Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. 1, p. 510.

²³**Revelation 17:8.**

²⁴The perfect mood, reflecting completed action whose results endure, and the passive voice, the form used which receives the action of the agent. “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 [leluka – 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

used similar language²⁵ when he said regarding the notice posted above our Crucified Savior: “Then said the chief priests of the Jews to Pilate, Write not, The King of the Jews; but that he said, I am King of the Jews. Pilate answered, What I have written I have written.” **St. John 19:21-23**. The result that remains is the inscription Pilate wrote. What results remains when St. John writes “whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world ...”? **Revelation 17:8**. Is it the result of the Lord never writing their names in there because they were the people God elected to eternal damnation? Certainly not. *The result that remains is that their names were blotted out by their own belief*. Likewise when St. John the Apostle writes: “And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.” **Revelation 13:8**. Again, the result that appears here is the result of their unbelief.

But why does St. John write, “from the foundation of the world” in both instances? St. John writes “from the foundation of the world” to reflect the foreknowledge of God. While God through His foreknowledge knows the outcome of these matters, His foreknowledge of these matters doesn’t reflect God’s desire, namely, that all men be saved²⁶.

Likewise, St. John writes “of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.” Why does St. John write that the Lamb was slain “from the foundation of the world” when in fact He was slain thousands of years from the foundation of the world? Again, St. John writes this way because God through His foreknowledge knew Christ’s Atoning Work was a done deal and, therefore, as good as done. Hence, God was reconciled to the world in Christ even before the world was created, indeed, stretching back into eternity and, therefore, the world continues on that basis of that foreknown reconciliation and God rules this world according to that grace.²⁷ St. Paul, therefore, writes: “According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of

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.

²⁵The perfect mood, passive voice (see footnote 22).

²⁶“Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.” **I Timothy 2:4**.

²⁷“The world owes its continued existence to the unfinished task of the church in spreading that Word (Matt. 24:14).” The Rev. Dr. Eugene F. A. Klug, *Church and Ministry, The Role of Church, Pastor, and People from Luther to Walther*, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1993, p. 135.

children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will” **Ephesians 1:4-5**. Consequently, we also see that St. John connects our election only with Christ when he writes: “... whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.” **Revelation 13:8**. Consequently, St. John reminds us that we should ever only consider our eternal election in Christ and never apart from Christ. “Accordingly, this eternal election of God is to be considered in Christ, and not outside of or without Christ. For *in Christ*, the Apostle Paul testifies Eph. 1, 4 f., *He hath chosen us before the foundation of the world*, as it is written: *He hath made us accepted in the Beloved*. This election, however, is revealed from heaven through the preaching of His Word²⁸, when the Father says, Matt. 17, 5: *This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him*. And Christ says, Matt. 11, 28: *Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest*. And concerning the Holy Ghost Christ says, John 16, 14: *He shall glorify Me; for He shall receive of Mine, and shalt show it unto you*. Thus the entire Holy Trinity, God Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, directs all men for Christ, as to the Book of Life, in whom they should seek the eternal election of the Father. For this has been decided by the Father from eternity, that whom He would save He would save through Christ, as He [Christ] Himself says, John 14, 6: *No man cometh unto the Father but by Me*. And again, John 10, 9: *I am the Door; by Me, if any man enter in, he shall be saved*.”²⁹

Johann Staupitz, Luther’s superior in the Augustinian order summed it up well: “Staupitz used to comfort me with these words: ‘Why do you torture yourself with these speculations? Look at the wounds of Christ and at the blood that was shed for you. From these predestination will shine. Consequently, one must listen to the Son of God, who was sent into the flesh and appeared to destroy the work of the devil (1 John 3:8) and to make you sure about predestination. And for this reason He says to you: “You are My sheep because you hear My voice” (cf. John 10:27). “No one shall snatch you out of My hands.””³⁰

Great consolation it is that Means of Grace, God’s Means of Salvation,

²⁸Hence, the Lutheran Confessions remind us elsewhere to consider only the revealed will of God: “With this revealed will of God we should concern ourselves, follow and be diligently engaged upon ... it, because through the Word, whereby He calls us, the Holy Ghost bestows grace, power, and ability to this end, and should not [attempt to] sound the abyss of God’s hidden predestination” **The Formula of Concord, Thorough Declaration, XI. Of God’s Eternal Foreknowledge [Predestination] and Election**.65-66, pp. 1083, 1085, underscore added.

²⁹**The Formula of Concord, Thorough Declaration, XI. Of God’s Eternal Foreknowledge [Predestination] and Election**.33, p. 1073, underscore added.

³⁰*Luther’s Works*, Vol. 5, p. 47.

i.e. God's Word and Sacraments, originated in eternity in God's election. "Thus this doctrine affords also the excellent, glorious consolation that God was so greatly concerned about the conversion, righteousness, and salvation of every Christian, and so faithfully purposed it [provided therefore] that before the foundation of the world was laid, He deliberated concerning it, and in His [secret] purpose ordained how He would bring me thereto [call and lead me to salvation], and preserve me therein. Also, that He wished to secure my salvation so well and certainly that, since through the weakness and wickedness of our flesh it could easily be lost from our hands, or through craft and might of the devil and the world be snatched and taken from us, He ordained it in His eternal purpose, which cannot fail or be overthrown, and placed it for preservation in the almighty hand of our Savior Jesus Christ, from which no one can pluck us, John 10, 28. Hence Paul also says, Rom. 8, 28, 39: *Because we have been called according to the purpose of God, who will separate us from the love of God in Christ?*"³¹

"The sheep of Christ, the elect hear and believe His voice, and follow His direction, as the result of their election. This is a sure way of knowing that we belong to the number of the elect if we hear the voice of Christ. Our confessions cite this passage from John 10 showing us how the elect are described. ... The Lord preserves us steadfast in His word and faith unto the end, and not even the devil, the world, and our own flesh will be able to tear us away from Him. As one commentator expresses it, the Lord gives here a guarantee 'against ourselves.'"³²

C. but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels: What a glorious triumph to endure suffering and in the end to be confessed by Christ before God Our Father and the Father's angels. Such glory makes Christians in this life perpetually forward leaning and looking.

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

A. God's Spirit speaks to men through the Word: Jesus says, "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, *they* are spirit, and *they* are life." **St. John 6:63.** Not surprisingly, then, Jesus later on again says of the Word and Spirit: "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." Jesus' Word of Absolution is Spirit and, therefore, gives life. For

³¹*The Formula of Concord, Thorough Declaration, XI. Of God's Eternal Foreknowledge [Predestination] and Election.* 45, 46, p. 1079, underscore added.

³²The Rev. Dr. George Stoeckhardt, *Wisdom for Today, Volumes II & III*, tr. the Rev. Arthur E. Beck, Ft. Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, pp. 216, 217.

where there is remission of sins, there is life and salvation.³³ “For the wages of sin *is* death; but the gift of God *is* eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Romans 6:23. “For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believe our report? So then faith *cometh* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” **Romans 10:13-17.** “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.” **Ephesians 2:8-9.**

The Lutheran Church confesses that God speaks to men only through His Word: “In a word, enthusiasm inheres in Adam and his children from the beginning [from the first fall] to the end of the world, [its poison] having been implanted and infused into them by the old dragon, and is the origin, power [life], and strength of all heresy, especially of that of the Papacy and Mahomet. Therefore we ought 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.”³⁴

B. The ear of faith is a gift of Christ’s Active Obedience.

And the ear that hears, namely, faith, is a gift to be Christ crafted by His *Active Obedience*, i.e. by His fulfilling God’s commandments and all righteousness for us. In **Psalm 40** we read: “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 man is created in the Image of God, hearing and obedience become a distinct characteristic of man. God is not moved by material goods such as sacrifice but rather hearing and obedience because these attributes reflect that man possesses the Image of God and man enjoys a personal and happy

³³“What is the benefit of such eating and drinking? That is shown us by these words, ‘Given and shed for you for the remission of sins’; namely, that in the Sacrament forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation are given us through these words. For where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation.” *The Small Catechism*, p. 21.

³⁴*The Smalcald Articles, VIII. Of Confession*.9-10, 11, *Triglotta*, p. 497.

relationship with God.³⁵ Hence, Jesus delighted at the centurion's faith: "When Jesus heard it, he marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel." **St. Matthew 8:11.**

Man forfeited these ears of faith in the Garden of Eden. For this reason Christ is given ears by God to that He may use these ears to hear God's Word perfectly for us and, thereby, reestablish the Image of God in man, the Blessed Personal Relationship with God, and save man and give him life eternal. This Work to hear God perfectly for us is apart of Christ's *Active Obedience*, i.e. His perfectly keeping all of God's commandments for us. "As my *Priest*, Christ *fulfilled the Law* in my stead perfectly (active obedience), *sacrificed Himself* for me (passive obedience), and still *intercedes* (pleads) for me with His heavenly Father."³⁶ Christ obviously did not need to possess ears to listen to God because He Himself is God. But rather God became man and assumed these human ears in order to give us perfectly attentive ears that hear and obey God's Word and, thereby, gain salvation, life everlasting, and everlasting joy in the company of the Holy Trinity.

Hence, God does not desire sacrifice in and of itself (one might say *ex opere operato*, i.e. simply because they went through the exercise void of faith³⁷)

³⁵“**113. What was the image of God?** The image of God consisted in this – A. That man *knew God* and was *perfectly happy* in such knowledge. ²⁶³ [Ye] have put on the new man, which is renewed in *knowledge* after the *image of Him that created him*. *Col. 3:10* B. That man was *perfectly holy* and blessed. ²⁶⁴ Put on the new man, which *after God* is created in *righteousness and true holiness*. *Eph. 4:24*. ... **114. Does man still bear the image of God?** Man *lost* the image of God when he *fell into sin*. In *believers*, a *beginning* of its renewal is made. Only in *heaven*, however, will this image be *fully* restored. ²⁶⁵ [Adam] begat a son *in his own likeness*, after his image. *Gen. 5:3*. ... ²⁶⁶ I will *behold Thy face in righteousness*; I shall be satisfied, when I awake, *with Thy likeness*. *Ps. 17:15*.” *The Small Catechism*, pp. 96, 97.

³⁶*The Small Catechism*, question 132 B, p. 108. “This teaching of Scripture is of great practical importance. In his life of faith the Christian continually resorts to Christ's vicarious fulfillment of the Law. Luther: ‘He satisfied the Law; He fulfilled the Law perfectly, for He loved God with all His heart, and with all His soul, and with all His strength, and with all His mind, and He loved His neighbor as Himself. Therefore, when the Law comes and accuses you of not having kept it, bid it go to Christ. Say: There is the Man who has kept it; He fulfilled it for me and gave His fulfillment to me. Thus the Law is silenced.’” The Rev. Dr. Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. II, p. 375.

³⁷“[The Jews also did not understand their ceremonies aright, and imagined that they were righteous before God when they had wrought works *ex opere operato*. Against this the prophets contend with the greatest earnestness.] Accordingly, the prophets also in the Old Testament condemn the opinion of the people concerning the *opus operatum*, and teach the righteousness and sacrifices of the Spirit. *Jer. 7, 22, 23: For I spake not unto your fathers, nor*

because such a sacrifice is devoid of faith and, thereby, despises God's Promise and, thereby, despises God's Word, which Word God created man to hear in order to joy the personal and happy relationship with the Holy Trinity.

7. *And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth and no man openeth.*

A. Philadelphia: "Built about the middle of the second century B.C., Philadelphia ... was named after its found, Attalus II Philadelphus, who succeeded his brother Eumenes II ... as King of Pergamos in 159 BC." Philadelphia was north northeast of Ephesus in western Asia Minor, now modern day Turkey.

B. He that is Holy, He that is True: Christ is the Holy One of Israel. David identifies Christ as the Holy One of Israel: "Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth: my flesh also shall rest in hope. For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption." **Psalms 16:9-10.**

St. Peter the Apostle identifies Christ as the Holy One of Israel: "Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it. For David speaketh concerning him, I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved: Therefore did my heart rejoice, and tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope: Because thou wilt not leave y soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou hast made know to me the ways of life; thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance. Men *and* brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead

commanded them, in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices; but this thing commanded I them, saying, Obey My voice, and I will be your God, etc. How do we supposed that the Jews received this arraignment, which seems to conflict openly with Moses. How do we suppose that the Jews received this arraignment, which seems to conflict openly with Moses? For it was evident that God had given the fathers commands concerning burnt offerings and victims. But Jeremiah condemns the opinion concerning sacrifices which God had not delivered, namely, that these services should please Him *ex opere operato*. But he adds concerning faith that God had commanded this: *Hear Me, i.e., believe Me that I am your God; that I wish to become thus know when I pity and aid; neither have I need of your victims; believe that I wish to be God the Justifier and Savior, not on account of works, but on account of My word and promise; truly and from the heart seek and expect aid from Me. ... Likewise Ps. 40, 6: Sacrifice and offering Thou didst not desire; mine ears hast Thou opened, i.e., Thou hast offered to me Thy Word that I might hear it, and thou dost require that I believe Thy Word and they promises, that Thou truly desirest to pity, to bring aid, etc.*" *The Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article XXIV. (XII.): Of the Mass.* 27, 28, 29, Triglotta, p. 393.

and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; He seeing this before speak of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption.” **Acts 2:24-31.**

St. Paul the Apostle identifies Christ as the Holy One of Israel: “And as concerning that he raised him up from the dead, *now* no more to return to corruption, he said on this wise, I will give you the sure mercies of David. Wherefore he saith also in another *psalm*, Thou shalt no suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption: But he whom God raised again saw no corruption.” **Acts 13:34-37.**

St. John the Apostle identifies Christ as He who is True: “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.” **St. John 1:14.**

C. he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth and no man openeth. The Key of the House of David (**Isaiah 20:22**) is an expression for the Gospel. The House of David refers to that fact that salvation comes through the House of David because the Messiah descends from David (**II Samuel 7:12, I Chronicles 17:11**). The Key refers to the Gospel which grants access to the benefits of the House of David, namely, absolution, saving faith, life eternal, the resurrection of the body, and the riches of the Kingdom of Heaven, the House of David. All men become members of the House of David by the Gospel through faith.

Because Christ opens heaven to men freely through the Gospel, no one can ever close heaven again because it is Christ Himself who opens it. Luther: “Now Christians see heaven opened, always hear God the heavenly Father conversing with them, and behold the dear angels continuously ascending and descending upon us. The Heavenly Father still addresses these words to us: ‘This is My beloved Son!’ He will continue to do so until the Day of Judgment, nor will heaven ever be closed again. When you are baptized, partake of Holy Communion, receive the absolution, or listen to a sermon, heaven is open, and we hear the voice of the Heavenly Father; all these works descend upon us from the open heaven above us. God converses with us, governs us, provides for us; and Christ hovers over us.”³⁸

Conversely, when Christ closes heaven, no one can open; hence, we see here again men gaining heaven by the own inventions, ideas, or works. It rests solely on Christ and He grants it freely through the Gospel. But if men refuse the Gospel, then, Christ closes heaven and if they remain in the state when they die, heaven remains forever closed and they will never be able to open it, no matter

³⁸**Luther’s Works**, American Edition, Vol. 22, p. 202.

how many eternities they have to try. “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity. Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.”³⁹

8. I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name.

A. I know thy works: Christ is He who tries “reins”⁴⁰, i.e. searches, examines, weighs, and tries everything about a man, including his innermost core of body and soul, his “reins”. Hence, when works are spoken of here, Christ speaks of works in thought, word, and deed, not just external works.

B. I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: Christ opens the door to heaven through the Gospel. Because Christ opens the door through the Gospel, it must stay ajar and no man can shut it because it is Christ who opens and keeps it open.

C. for thou hast a little strength: Men have no strength to enter heaven on their own. Christ brings them into solely by His own power through the Gospel.

D. and hast kept my word: Fidelity to Christ’s Word is the highest mark of a Christian. “And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion, beseeching him, And saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented. And Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him. The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this *man*, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and

³⁹**St. Matthew 7:21-27.**

⁴⁰“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.**

he doeth *it*. When Jesus heard *it*, he marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.”⁴¹

Christians keeps God’s Word faithfully **1.** in order to honor God’s Word in our midst, and **2.** in order to preserve the saving Gospel in our midst and **3.** in order to preserve the saving and precious Gospel for others also in need of salvation. 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 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.”⁴²

E. and hast not denied my name: Not to maintain fidelity to Christ’s Word is to deny Christ. St. John the Apostle writes: “Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father’s which sent me.” **St. John 14:23-24.** Luther: “Before faith would permit the Word of God to be destroyed and heresy to stand, it would prefer that all creatures be wiped out; for heresy deprives one of God Himself.”⁴³ Heresy (or false doctrine) deprives us of God because connects to us through His Word. If such heresy is done knowingly, then, obviously a man has severed himself from God by his unbelief. To imbibe in heresy or false doctrine out of ignorance can lead eventually to unhinging faith altogether through the logical progression of false doctrine to complete departure from God and Christ. Consequently, as Luther has noted, Christians would rather be deprived of all things rather than suffer heresy.

“This congregation at Philadelphia wins recognition and praise from the Lord of the Church. It had but little strength, i.e., it was outwardly small and insignificant. But it had kept and observed God’s Word in all detail, both in

⁴¹**St. Matthew 8:7-10.**

⁴²*The Formula of Concord, Article XI. Of God’s Eternal Foreknowledge [Predestination] And Election.*95-96, *Triglotta*, p. 1095, underscore added.

⁴³*Luther’s Works*, Vol. 14, p. 258, underscore added.

doctrine and in practice. It did not deny the name of God before men and so had not brought disgrace upon it. And here the Lord would encourage this church to continue and persevere in the divine Word to the end. ... What the Lord here tells the church in Philadelphia pertains to all other church and individual Christians. Some have found in this congregation a type representing the Lutheran Church.”⁴⁴

9. *Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee.*

A. synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie: The synagogue (or church) of Satan refers to the Jews who had rejected Christ. Not all Jews had rejected Christ, e.g Sts. Peter, Paul, Matthew, John, the Virgin St. Mary, St. John the Baptist, etc. Christ Himself is a Jew. Hence, to be a Jew truly means to have the faith of father Abraham and not merely be born according to the flesh of Abraham. St. John the Baptist warned those Jews who did not believe: “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 unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.” **St. Matthew 3:7-10.** So it is today. Just because one is born into the Christian Church does not necessarily make one a Christian. One may be born of the flesh of a Christian, but if that someone lacks faith, then, he is no Christian but rather a member of the synagogue of Satan.

B. behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee: This event constitutes a component of Christ’s ongoing work of subduing the enemies of the Church from the Right Hand of God. “The Lord said to my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.” St. Paul the Apostle writes: “But now is Christ risen from the dead, *and* become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man *came* death, by man *came* also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ’s at his coming. Then *cometh* the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy *that* shall be destroyed *is* death. For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith all

⁴⁴The Rev. Dr. George Stoeckhardt, *Lectures on the Revelation of Saint John*, tr. H. W. Degner, Ft. Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, p. 15, 16.

things are put under *him*, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him. And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all.”⁴⁵

Anyone who denies the Gospel opposes Christ and threatens Christ’s Church because successfully leading someone away from the Gospel destroys the souls of men. “Why do ye 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. And because I tell *you* the truth, ye believe me not.” **St. John 8:43-45.** Luther: “These I would call ‘curses of faith.’ (Luther here is commenting on Christ’s condemnation of Judas in **Psalm 109** for his betrayal of the Gospel) Before faith would permit the Word of God to be destroyed and heresy to stand, it would prefer that all creatures be wiped out; for heresy deprives one of God Himself. The cursing of Christ in this psalm, then, is not on account of His person but on account of His office and His Word, because the error of the Jews is seeking to establish itself and to beat down the Gospel. He wishes that they be destroyed and have no success with their Judaizing, just as Moses prays in

⁴⁵**I Corinthians 15:20-28.** “These words: ‘Then [after the Last Day] shall the Son also Himself be subject,’ do not, we repeat, refer to the Trinitarian relationship (according to which He is one with the Father, the Father being in Him and He in the Father, is in the bosom of the Father, and operates in numerical unity with the Father), but these words refer to the Son in so far as He is a unit with the Church, which indeed remains also after the Last Day subject to God. While much of this matter (of the {one mystical body} of Christ and the Church before and after the Last Day) remains hidden to us in this life, we know this much, that, in the words of Gerhard, ‘the subjection refers to the subjection of the {mystical body}.’ Gerhard had weighed a number of interpretations, and his reasoning shows that he was well acquainted with the linguistic usage of Scripture: ‘Scripture ascribes to Christ a twofold body, a personal one, which was assumed into the Person of the Logos, and a spiritual, or mystical, one, which is united with Him by the bond of His Spirit, the members of which body are all true believers. The Apostle is really speaking of this mystical body when he says that Christ is to be subject to His Father in the Last Day.’ ... Because the Church is united with Christ in one mystical body, the Church is directly called Christ ... in 1 Cor. 12:12, and, speaking of Christ in the same relation, 1 Cor. 3:23 says: ‘Christ is God’s.’” The Rev. Dr. Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. II, p. 391, footnote 103.

“By the way, the subordinationist interpretation is self-contradictory. First, the subordinationists teach that the Son is subordinate to the Father from eternity, and then they say that, on the strength of the statement: ‘Then shall the Son also Himself be subjected to Him that put all things under His feet,’ the subjection of the Son to the Father will take place after Judgment Day.” The Rev. Dr. Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. II, p. 391, footnote 103.

Num. 16:15 that God would not hear the prayer of Korah or respect their offering. Therefore it is necessary to curse, to wish evil, and to pray for vengeance against the persecution and perversion of the Gospel and against those who are guilty of it.”⁴⁶

Sadly, there is no need for this disaster to befall the non-believing Jews nor any other unbelievers. Their destruction comes about at their own bidding and not Christ’s because Christ desires all men to be saved. “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen *doth gather* her brood under *her* wings, and ye would not!” **St. Luke 13:34**. “O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me *is* thine help.” **Hosea 13:9**. “For this *is* good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.” **I Timothy 2:3-4**.

10. Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.

A. Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation. It must necessarily be so, because wherever the God’s Word, i.e. the Gospel, is kept, there is saving faith and there God dwells with him. “Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.” **St. John 14:23**. “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 the Holy Ghost.” Because the Holy Trinity dwells with one through the Gospel and faith, then one is completely prepared for any and all hours of temptation. Thus the Word of Patience is the Gospel. Jesus says: “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**. St. Paul the Apostle writes: “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. 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**.

B. which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth. This trying time would appear to be the life of any and all Christians throughout the New Testament era. “These things I have spoken unto you, that in

⁴⁶*Luther’s Works*, Vol. 14, p. 258, underscore added.

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**. Poellet ascribes the temptation to the persecution of the Roman Emperor Trajan⁴⁷: “We hold that the Book of Revelation was written A. D. 95 or 96 Church history gives us good reason to look for the fulfillment of Rev. 3:10 in the persecution under Trajan, who became Roman emperor in A. D. 98, and perhaps also in the many other persecutions which followed. The church at Philadelphia continued to exist through the centuries. ‘It is interesting to note that the church in Philadelphia survived the Ottoman invasions, and the town still has a bishop and about 1,000 Christian inhabitants. The historian Gibbon reports that among the seven churches, only Philadelphia remained erect, a column in a scene of ruins.’”⁴⁸ Even Poellet seems to broaden the scope by adding, “and perhaps also in the many other persecutions which followed.” Hence, it would appear consistent simply to apply this “hour of temptation” to the general tenor of the New Testament, which is full of tribulation because God’s Word and Sacraments create flashpoints along the enemy lines of the prince of darkness wherein He is rolling back the borders of the kingdom of darkness throughout the breadth and depth of the world and down through the ages.

Trials (temptations) can be for the good of the Christian or the bad. Trials (temptations) imposed by the devil are temptations to evil, i.e. trial devised to lead men away from the saving Gospel. Temptations (trials) to good and plied by God to strengthen the faith of Christians through the Gospel. “There is a) a temptation

⁴⁷“The persecution under Trajan (98-117) extended over Asia Minor, Syria, and Palestine. Among noted martyrs of his reign are Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, who was carried to Rome and thrown to the wild beasts in the Colosseum, and Symeon, bishop of Jerusalem, who was crucified at the age of one hundred and twenty.” *Concordia Cyclopedia*, p. 581, s. v. **“Persecutions of Christians”**.

“Ignatius, bishop of Antioch in Syria at the close of the first and the beginning of the second century; suffered martyrdom under Trajan at Rome, where he was thrown to the lions in the Colosseum (107). During his transportation to Rome he wrote letters to various churches in Asia Minor and one to Polycarp. ... As seen from these letters, the celebrated bishop and martyr manifests a surpassing interest in maintaining the divinity of Christ, in combating Judaistic and docetic heresy, and, particularly, in exalting the episcopate. ‘Follow the bishop, all of you, as Jesus follows the Father, and the presbytery, as if it were the apostles Let that be a valid Eucharist which is celebrated by the bishop, or by one whom he appoints It is not lawful to baptize without the bishop. ... It is good to know God and the bishop. He who does anything without the knowledge of the bishop, is serving the devil.’ These ideas he constantly and persistently presses home; but there is no trace in Ignatius of a diocesan episcopacy.” *Concordia Cyclopedia*, p. 346, s. v. **“Ignatius”**.

⁴⁸*Revelation*, p. 62.

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 Example of the [seduction to sin] 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 [temptation to good] 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 the 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)." The Rev. Dr. Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. I, p. 563, translations in brackets added.

11. Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.

A. Behold, I come quickly: When we consider we have met the Lord already in the Gospel, then He has come quickly. "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." **St. Matthew 18:20.** When, also, we consider we are only a heartbeat away from the final judgment, then He also comes quickly. "And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment" **Hebrews 9:27.** And because, as we have seen earlier, He is in the midst of every congregation, Christ is observing and judging our works and our lives.

B. hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown: No man can take away our crown of life. "My sheep here 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. My Father, which gave *them* me, is greater than all; and no *man* is able to pluck *them* out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one." **St. John 10:27-30.** A man, however, can take one's crown of eternal life if he let him. This sad event happens when men are led away from the Voice of the Good Shepherd into another Gospel. "Let no man deceive you by any means: for *that day shall not come*, except there a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition." **II Thessalonians 2:3-4.** Here St. Paul refers to the master of leading men away from the Voice of the Shepherd to a false gospel: The Antichrist, the Papacy.

One example is the Papacy's teaching on Holy Baptism, which Baptism is

the Gospel.⁴⁹ Because Holy Baptism is the Gospel, it saves (**I Peter 3:21**). The Papacy, however, limits the saving benefits of Holy Baptism. **“WHY A SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION AFTER BAPTISM? ...** *Conversion* to Christ, the new birth of Baptism, the gift of the Holy Spirit and the body and blood of Christ received as food have made us “holy and without blemish,” just as the Church herself, the Bride of Christ, is “holy and without blemish.” ... Nevertheless the new life received in Christian initiation has not abolished this frailty and weakness of human nature, nor the inclination to sin that tradition calls *concupiscence*, which remains in the baptized such that with the help of the grace of Christ they may prove themselves in the struggle of Christian life. ... This is the struggle of *conversion* directed toward holiness and eternal life to which the Lord never ceases to call us. ... **The sacrament of forgiveness.** ... Christ instituted the sacrament of Penance for all sinful members of his Church: above all for those who, since Baptism, have fallen into grave sin, and have thus lost their baptismal grace and wounded ecclesial communion. It is to them that the sacrament of Penance offers a new possibility to convert and to recover the grace of justification. The Fathers of the Church present this sacrament as “the second plank [of salvation] after the shipwreck which is the loss of grace.” ... The forgiveness of sins committed after Baptism is conferred by a particular sacrament called the sacrament of conversion, confession, penance, or reconciliation.”⁵⁰ Of course, the Fathers meant no such thing. The Fathers merely meant a return to one’s Baptism in repentance. “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.”⁵¹

⁴⁹“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.* Thus the term *leitourgia* agrees aptly with the ministry.” *The Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article XXIV. (XII.): Of the Mass, Of the Term Mass.* 80, 81, Triglotta, p. 411.

⁵⁰*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, pp. 397, 398, 403, 415.

⁵¹*A 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.,* Grnad Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, reprinted, September 1980, p. 408.

12. *Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jersusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name.*

A. Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God.

Through God's Word and Sacraments, men become a part of the Temple of God, namely, God's Everlasting 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 built together for an habitation of God through the Spirit." **Ephesians 2:19-22.**

B. pillar: Pillar is another expression for Christ's Church: "*Wisdoms* hath builded her house, she hath hewn out her seven pillars." **Proverbs 9:1.**⁵² *Wisdoms*, the plural, is the Hebrew expression here, reflecting the *Septiformis Spiritus*, i.e. the Sevenfold Gifts of the Spirit expressed in **Isaiah 11:2**, and hence, "seven pillars" the Church, the creation of the Spirit, reflect the *Septiformis Spiritus*, which Spirit is Christ's (**Isaiah 11:1-2**).⁵³

⁵²Luther: "The apostles and martyrs were like this when they were drunk with the Holy Spirit. For a vine is very choice, and concerning it Wisdom says in Prov. 9:5: 'Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed. Then you will drink and become drunk, but with spiritual drunkenness.' ... Thus I understand this passage to mean that in Christ and in the time of Christ we must become drunk on the abundance of His house (cf. Ps. 36:8); that is, we are to receive the Holy Spirit from the Word and hearing." *Luther's Works*, Vol. 8, p. 249.

⁵³"To the Spirit, who rests upon him, are given seven names that designate the Spirit's various gifts and powers. On the basis of this passage the church speaks of a *Spiritus septiformis* [Sevenfold Spirit]. Accordingly, the prophecy of Zechariah, 4,6.10, and Rev 1,4; 3,1; 4,5; 5,6 speak of the seven eyes of the seven Spirits of God, that is, of the Spirit of God in the diversity of his gifts, powers, and activities. ... What we read here in V. 2 points to the work which the Messiah performs in the power of God's Spirit during his visible, lowly appearing on earth. The kingly rule of the Exalted One is first discussed from V. 3 on. And so the New Testament then testifies that David's Son Jesus Christ, who was conceived and born by the power of the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary was anointed beyond measure with the Spirit of God, that the Spirit of God was already with the boy Jesus, that then at the baptism, when he was to be revealed to Israel, the Spirit of God descended upon him in visible form, and that he, anointed with the Holy Spirit and with power, went about doing good. Acts 10, 38. In all his life and activity on earth Christ displayed the Spirit's gifts and powers. His entire life was submission to God, fear, love, and obedience. He preached with power and not as the scribes, he revealed to the immature the

C. and I will write upon him the name of my God: God records His Name upon us through the Gospel and, thereby, makes us His children. "... in all places where I record my name I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee." **Exodus 20:24**. "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, *even* unto the end of the world. Amen." **St. Matthew 28:19-20**. "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ." **Galatians 3:26-27**.

D. and I will write upon him my new name: His New Name is, of course, Jesus. "And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sin." **St. Matthew 1:21**. Prior to the fall into sin, the Son of God had no need for the Name Jesus, which means Savior. But after the fall into sin, the Son of God in His Great Mercy for fallen mankind offered Himself to save men from their sin. The Rev. Dr. John Gerhard: "The reason this why this Child, this Son, is also called **Counselor** is that He, in counsel with [the other Persons of] the Holy Trinity, helped reach the conclusion of how fallen mankind could be helped again. The unending righteousness of God was offended by the Fall of Adam. Now then, there was only an unending payment required, which neither angel nor man could provide. Therefore there was no counsel either in heaven or upon earth. Thus, the Son of God, the eternal Wisdom, came up with the counsel that He would volunteer Himself as Mediator and Redeemer, that He especially in the fulness of time wanted to take into Himself human nature and within it make payment for us men."⁵⁴ This Name He writes upon Christians in Holy Baptism, i.e. the Gospel: "... baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" **St. Matthew 28:19**. "Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in

mysteries of God and showed them the right way of God. He counseled and helped his people in all their needs and delivered them from their direst afflictions. Through suffering and death he redeemed Israel from all its sins." The Rev. Dr. George Stoeckhardt, *Isaiah: The First Twelve Chapters*, pp. 119, 120, amplification added.

⁵⁴*Seven Christmas Sermons*, tr. the Rev. Elmer M. Hohle, ed. David O. Berger, Decatur, IL: The Johann Gerhard Institute, first edition, November 1996, pp. 75, 76. "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 preach [sic] 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 name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.” **Acts 2:38.**

13. He that hat an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

Once again, the Spirit is heard where Christ’s Word is spoken. “In a word, enthusiasm⁵⁵ inheres in Adam and his children from the beginning [from the first fall] to the end of the world, [its poison] having been implanted and infused into them by the old dragon, and is the origin, power [life], and strength of all heresy, especially of that of the Papacy and Mahomet. 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

⁵⁵Enthusiasms means “God within” and specifically refers to men claiming to communicate with God *outside of God’s Word*, which is what Adam and Eve did when they stepped outside of God’s Word, obeyed the devil’s word, and transgressed God’s commandment with catastrophic consequences. An example of enthusiasts of crass enthusiasts today are charismatics who claim that the Holy Spirit speaks directly to them outside of God’s Word. Subtle enthusiasts would be papists and Calvinists who teach that the Spirit works along side *but not through God’s Word and Sacraments*. “The divine power must never be separated from the Word of Scripture; that is to say, the Holy Ghost does not operate beside our outside the Word (enthusiasm, Calvinism ...), but always in and through the Word, Rom. 10, 17; 1 Pet. 1, 23; John 6, 63. This important Scriptural truth our Lutheran theologians have always maintained against the Reformed (Zwingli: ‘The Holy Spirit requires no leader or vehicle’ ... ; Hodge: ‘Efficacious grace acts immediately’). The practical result of the separation of the divine power from the divine Word of Scripture is the rejection of the Bible as the only source and norm of faith (*norma normans* [the norm or standard that norms all other norms, e.g. our confessions, catechism, or is the standard by which all other standards, e.g. confessions, catechism, creeds, are measured] This is proved by the very fact that the enthusiasts have invariably placed the ‘inner word’ ..., of the ‘spirit,’ above Holy Scripture ... , assigning to the latter an inferior place in the realm of divine revelation. To the enthusiasts the Bible is only a *norma normata* [a norm which is normed], or a rule of faith subject to the ‘inner word,’ that is, to their own notions and figments of reason. ... The *Romanists*, who ascribe to their Popes the charisma of infallible teaching outside and beyond Scripture. With regard to the Papacy, Luther writes in the *Smalcald Articles*: ‘The Papacy also is nothing but sheer enthusiasm, by which the Pope boasts that all rights exist in the shrine of his heart, and whatever he decides and commands with [in] his Church is spirit and right, even though it is above and contrary to scripture and the spoken Word.’ (Part III, Art. VIII, 4.) ... The *Calvinists*, who teach that the saving work of the Holy Spirit occurs *immediately, i.e.,* outside and apart from the Word.” The Rev. J. T. Mueller, *Christian Dogmatics*, pp. 134, 135, 96, amplification in first two brackets added,

whatsoever is extolled as Spirit without the Word and Sacraments.”⁵⁶

14. And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God;

A. Angel: The angel of the church is the pastor. The basic meaning of angel is messenger.⁵⁷ The angels on Christmas were messengers bringing to the shepherds the Gospel. Pastors, likewise, are God’s messengers bringing to people the Gospel⁵⁸. Luther: “Like the angels in the stead of the apostles, these are appointed to preach and proclaim God’s Word; for an *angelus* is a messenger or an ambassador who brings his message orally. Therefore Scripture calls preachers *angeli*, that is, messengers of God.”⁵⁹

⁵⁶*The Smalcald Articles, Part III, Article VIII. Of Confession. 9-10, 11, Triglotta, p. 497.*

⁵⁷“**angel**, *n.* [L. *angelus*; Gr. *angelos*, a messenger.] 1. literally, a messenger. [Rare.] 2. a spirit or a spiritual being, employed by God, according to the Scriptures, to communicate his will to men. ... 5. a minister of the gospel, or pastor; as, the *angel* of the church at Ephesus.” *Webster’s Unabridged Dictionary*, p. 69, s.v. “**angel**”.

⁵⁸**St. Luke 9:52** shows another example of using the word “angel” for human messengers. “And He sent two messengers [angels] before His face: and they went, and entered into a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for him.” Likewise, St. John the Baptist is called an angel in **Malachi 3:1** (“Behold, I will send my messenger [angel], and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts.”) and **St. Mark 1:2** (“As it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger [angel] before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.”)

⁵⁹*Luther’s Works*, Vol. 30, p. 177. Stoeckhardt says we cannot say with certainty that angel here refers to pastors: “As to whether the seven angels mentioned here were real Angels; i.e., holy spirits of God, whom God also uses to bring messages to men, or whether the usually bishop or pastors are here called angels, cannot definitely be determined from the text. But so much is sure, every one of the seven angels is the representative of his respective church, and what is said to him concerns the whole congregation.” *Lectures on the Revelation of St. John*, pp. 4, 5.

Luther Poellet, however, says it does refer to pastors: “We hold that it does not refer to the world of spirits but that it means ‘messenger’ and refers to the pastors of churches. ‘It is practically inconceivable that John should be commissioned to write to, or act as the messenger to, such a superterrestrial being as an angel, instructing him what to do in connection with each

B. Laodicea: “About 40 or 50 miles southeast of Philadelphia, and about 100 to 115 miles east of Ephesus, lay ancient Laodicea, named after Laodice, the wife of Antiochus II. The modern city, near the ruins of the old, is called Denizli and has a population of about 17,000. It is only about 15 miles west of old Colossae.”⁶⁰

C. the Amen: Amen means to be sure and certain. Christ is sure and certain because He is the Almighty God who has redeemed men from their sins. The life of the Christian rests on the sure and certain foundation of Christ. “And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner *stone*;” **Ephesians 2:20.**

D. the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God: Christ is the Witness Faithful and True because He is the “Amen”. Christ is also the Witness because He Himself has witnessed the Godhead because He is in the Godhead because He is God Himself. “No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared *him*.” **St. John 1:18.**

Christ is the beginning of the creation of God because He, too, is the Creator. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.” **St. John 1:1-3.**

15. I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou were cold or hot.

A. I know thy works: One can fool the Church and the pastor, but one cannot fool Christ. He knows our works.

B. that thou art neither cold nor hot: Fashionable today it is to be a “middle of the roader”, opting for neither position until after it is evident which way the debate is turning out. The congregation at Laodicea were of the fashionable and urbane, having no conviction, appearing in this way to be enlightened and never taking a stand in order to keep itself unscarred by any controversy over the Gospel and the salvation of men.

C. I would thou were cold or hot: The congregation’s “clever” strategy doesn’t

of these churches.’ ... Elsewhere in the Bible we read of God sending angels as messengers to men, but never of God using men to send a message to angels.” *Revelation*, pp. 23, 24.

⁶⁰*Revelation*, p. 65.

work, for the Lord rejects it.⁶¹ While the congregation's indifference pleased the world because in Laodicea the frontiers of the kingdom of darkness were safe from the Gospel because the Laodiceans in effect muzzled it, it did not please the Lord and their ultimate strategy to live a life of comfort will, in the last analysis, fail. If the Lord be against you, who can be for you?

16. *So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.*

I will spue thee out of my mouth: Indifference to the Gospel is not a good idea. The Laodiceans were neither for the Gospel nor opposed, but merely indifferent – which in the last analysis is opposition to the Gospel. Hence, their spiritual well-being is grave and they, numb in their lukewarm bath of temporal comforts, are dismissed by Christ because in their spiritual numbness He cannot communicate nor work with them.

17. *Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked:*

A. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing: These statements remind one of the parable of the foolish rich man: “And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, *and* be merry. But God said unto him, *Thou fool*, this night [they are requiring thy soul from thee]: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?”⁶² The very objects the man thought would sustain him are demanding and consuming his soul. The Laodiceans likewise took refuge and comfort not in the goods of the Kingdom of Heaven, namely, the Gospel, but in temporal and material objects of the world.

⁶¹“The truth that Christ is the real Teacher in the Church is of great practical importance. It earnestly warns men against teaching their own word in the Church. They that presume to do so are encroaching on the prophetic (and royal) office of Christ, who will have only His Word proclaimed in the Church. Every false doctrine is lese majesty. *Not only the Papists, but all who teach ‘without, or contrary to, God’s Word’ are rebelling against Christ. They are [antichristoi], I John 2:18.* The modern indifference towards heresy is criminal. Furthermore, this truth, that Christ is the Teacher, will greatly comfort all that hear and read the Word of God; in this Word, which is brought to men by human instrumentality, Christ Himself is dealing with them. Finally, it admonishes us not to despise the Word which comes to us through men, but to receive it with all reverence. For ‘he that hearth you heareth Me, and he that despiseth you despiseth Me’ (Luke 10:16).” The Rev. Dr. Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. II, p. 341, italics added.

⁶²**St. Luke 11:19-20.**

B. and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: Our material well-being tells us nothing about our spiritual well-being. While the Laodiceans were well-off materially, they were impoverished spiritually. In reality, they were poor materially also because they were poor spiritually because, in the last analysis, what has a man gained if he were to acquire the whole world and lose his soul? “For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”⁶³

18. I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eye with eyesalve, that thou mayest see.

A. I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich: Buy from Christ gold that is tried in the fire, namely, gold that is sound and does not perish. Christ Himself is the purifier. “But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he *is* like a refiner’s fire, and like fullers’ soap: And he shall sit *as a* refiner and purifier of silver; and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the LORD an offering in righteousness.” **Malachi 3:2-3.** And, of course, Christians buy the heavenly treasures with nothing of their own but with the grace of God in Christ. “Ho, every one that thirsteth, and come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for *that which* is not bread? and your labour for *that which* satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye *that which is* good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness.”⁶⁴ This passage once again reminds us that nothing new is revealed in Revelation but merely what Scripture has always taught. As one my seminary professors⁶⁵ once noted, “The epistles [letters] are nothing but commentaries on the Gospels.” Because the epistles, including **Revelation**, are merely commentaries on what has already been taught in the Gospels, we shouldn’t expect to find anything at new or at variance with the Gospels.

B. and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and *that* the shame of thy nakedness not appear: Nakedness, of course, refers to the shame of sin. “And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where *art* thou? And he

⁶³St. Matthew 11:26.

⁶⁴Isaiah 55:1-2.

⁶⁵The Rev. Dr. G. Waldemar Degner.

said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I *was* naked; and I hid myself. And he said, Who told thee that thou *wast* naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?”⁶⁶

The garment of white raiment is the saving righteousness of Christ that covers and removes our nakedness of sin. “For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.” **Isaiah 1:18.**

C. and anoint thine eye with eyesalve, that thou mayest see: Spiritual blindness is unbelief induced by sin. The balm of the Gospel restores sight to the eyes. For we walk by faith, i.e. by the Word, and not by sight. “For we walk by faith and not by sight.” **II Cor. 5:17.** Spiritual sight consists of faith. Spiritual blindness consists of unbelief. “for whatsoever *is* not of faith is sin.” **Romans 14:23.** The balm of the Gospel is what restores sight to the spiritually blind.

19. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.

Because Christ died for all men, He loves all men and calls them to repentance. “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”⁶⁷

20. Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.

A. Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: Christ is the one who takes the initiative, not man, and knocks on the doors of the hearts of men. Through the Gospel, i.e. the Word and the Sacraments, Christ knocks on the doors of the hearts of men for admission. Just as the knock on the door rouses the man and moves him to the door, so the knock on the door of the rouses the heart and moves the heart to Christ, i.e. the knock on the door of the heart through the Gospel creates faith in the heart, which faith receives Christ. “Lift up your heads, O ye gates;

⁶⁶Genesis 3:9-11.

⁶⁷*The Formula of Concord. Thorough Declaration. V. Of the Law and the Gospel.1, Triglotta, p. 955.*

and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in.”

Psalm 24:7.

“God the Holy Ghost, however, does not effect conversion without means, but uses for this purpose the preaching and hearing of God’s Word, as it is written Rom. 1, 16: *The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.* Also Rom. 10, 17: *Faith cometh by hearing of the Word of God.* And it is God’s will that His Word should be heard, and that man’s ears should not be closed. Ps. 95, 8. With this Word the Holy Ghost is present, and opens hearts, so that they, as Lydia in Acts 16, 14, are attentive to it, and are thus converted alone through the grace and power of the Holy Ghost, whose work alone the conversion of man is. For without His grace, and if He do not grant the increase, our willing and running, our planting, sowing, and watering, all are nothing, as Christ says John 15, 5: *Without Me ye can do nothing.* With these brief words He denies to the free will its powers, and ascribes everything to God’s grace, in order that no one may boast before God. 1 Cor. 1, 29; 2 Cor. 12, 5; Jer. 9, 23.”⁶⁸

This Work of Christ is also called *Divine Monergism*, namely God working (“ergism”) alone (“mono”) to bring man to faith and to save. “‘The Holy Scriptures ascribe conversion ... not to the human powers of the natural free will, neither entirely nor half nor in any, even the least or most inconsiderable, part, but in solidum, that is, entirely, solely, to the divine working and the Holy Ghost.’ F.C., Th. D., II, 25.⁶⁹ ... God creates faith by His almighty power, Eph. 1, 19f. (‘who believe according to the working of His mighty power’); ... moved thereto solely by His grace in Christ, 2 Tim. 1, 9 (‘not according to out works, but according to His own purpose and grace’) The numerous organizations and churches which deny the doctrine of *monergism* (‘sola gratia’), teaching instead *Pelagianism* (Man possesses the power of self-regeneration) or *Semi-pelagianism* (Man can and must cooperate with God towards his regeneration, the production of faith), are compelled to ascribe to man powers which he does not possess, 1 Cor. 2, 14 (‘The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, ... neither can he know them’) ... and to deny that the only powers he possesses are powers for evil, 1 Cor. 2, 14 (‘They are foolishness unto him’); Rom. 8, 7 (‘The carnal mind is enmity against God’) Leading man away from his only help, the mighty grace of God, and asking him to bring about his conversion by employing non-existent powers, they thwart his conversion, his salvation. ... The imperatives [commands]: ‘Believe,’ ‘Return,’ ‘Arise from the dead’ ... do not call for the employment of powers inherent in man, as little as the command of John 11, 43, asked Lazarus in the grave to exert his powers; but these Gospel

⁶⁸*The Formula of Concord, Epitome. Article II. Of the Free Will.* 4-6, Triglotta, p. 787.

⁶⁹“F.C., Th. D., II, 25 ”stands for *Formula of Concord, Thorough (or Solid) Declaration, Article II.25, Triglotta, p. 891.*

exhortations and invitations bestow and effect what they call for, just as in the case of Lazarus.”⁷⁰

B. if any man hear my voice, and open the door: Here is another expression for faith. Unbelief does not open the door to Christ. Faith, however, does.

C. I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me: “Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.” **St. John 14:23.**

21. To Him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.

A. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne: Christians have much to look forward to, namely, keeping company with the Almighty and Our Savior at His Throne.

B. even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne: Christ walked in this ways of righteousness and judgment to make a way for us. “He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou *art* with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.” **Psalms 23:3-4.** “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.” **Ephesians 2:10.**

C. and am set down with my Father in his throne: Christ sat down at the Right Hand of God not for His Sake, He’s God is has no need of such human experiences, but for us that He might Rule all things for the sake of His Church. “The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.” **Psalms 110:1.**

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

Through St. John the Apostle, Christ has impressed deeply upon men the truth of the **Third Commandment**: “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. (Thou shalt sanctify the holy day.) *What does this mean?* We should fear and love God that we may not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred and gladly

⁷⁰The Rev. Dr. Theodore Engelder, pp. 57, 58, *Handbook of Lutheran Theology*, with a preface by the Rev. Dr. Eugene F. Klug, Ft. Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 1981, pp. 57, 58, amplification in brackets added.

hear and learn it.⁷¹

⁷¹*The Small Catechism*, p. 5, underscore added.