

Almighty God, merciful Father, who made the light to shine out of darkness, we thank You that You have shown mercy unto us and our fathers and by means of Your servant Martin Luther have restored the pure light of Your Gospel; we ask that You keep us in sound doctrine, that we may steadfastly believe and worthily follow Your saving Word and finally, by its holy comfort, depart in peace and joy; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord. Amen. (adapted from The Lutheran Liturgy p. 183)

But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that He is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me. Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you.

In Christ Jesus, who has entrusted to His Church His teachings, which alone set sinners free, dear fellow redeemed:

Have you ever listened to a public speaker and then asked yourself what was he/she trying to say? You may go through these explanations: *I must be too dense and the speaker must be very smart.* or *This person does not know what he/she is talking about.* or *The speaker is just a poor communicator.* or *This must be a politician who cannot give a straight answer if his/her life depended on it.* or some other explanation.

One of the qualities we recognize as Christians about the Word of God is that it is clear. Our loving God of truth desires that we know the truth of our salvation and so speaks clearly. Whereas Satan and his allies: the unbelieving world, false prophets and our own sinful natures want us to conclude that God is a God of confusion. But one of the truths, which came into clear focus once again in the outward Church through the Lutheran Reformation, is that **God Speaks to Enlighten; Satan Speaks to Confuse.**

### I

At the end of his life, Martin Luther said, *"You can burn all of my books except for two, The Bondage of the Will and the Small Catechism."* In the preface to the latter, he wrote this to the pastors: *"avoid many versions or various texts and forms of the 10 Comm., the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, the Sacraments ... [a pastor] should choose one form to which he holds and teaches all the time ... For ... people must be taught by uniform, settled texts and forms. Otherwise they become confused."* p.313

Luther recognized that in his little book of instruction something beyond his words made it so precious. It is what the

Apostle Paul encouraged Pastor Timothy to recognize already in the first century of Christianity. First Paul observed this: "I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that He is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me." What was entrusted to him? - the sound words which he then passed on to Pastor Timothy.

The Church has been plagued by those, who are always seeking to devise something new, using words that are unsound but seem attractive to itching ears. Because they strike a chord with some, they are retained and reused and built upon. But all such unsound words depart from the expressions used by God in His Word. So for example the word "*purgatory*" is not found in Scripture, but a whole system of teachings is built around it so that a large segment of the outward Christian Church do such things as labor under the requirement to confess sins to a priest and pay for priests to commune themselves. The expression "*you, the sinner, must invite Jesus into your heart*" contains another extra-biblical unsound set of words. A large segment of the outward Church in America while claiming that salvation is all by grace contradict it with this expression and take on at least in part the work of saving themselves.

Now do not misunderstand we as Lutherans use words too not found in the Bible, like "*Trinity*", and expressions like "*means of grace*" and "*the Lord's Supper*". But these are all based on sound words found in the teachings of Scripture. The other words and expressions first mentioned create new teachings, confuse and mislead Christians.

## II

Have you been misled by words coming from the kingdom of Satan, which end up only confusing you my fellow Christians? If your salvation is in constant doubt, so that you are almost never certain you are going to heaven when you die, that can be a telltale sign that you have been misled by unsound words and expressions popular among your many neighbors today.

The Lord has given us His Word to enlighten us with His saving truth. Take for example the religious leaders of Jesus' day. On at least one occasion He pointed out to them that they searched the sacred Scriptures of God's Word thinking that thereby they might have life everlasting. But as He also pointed out to them, these Scriptures testified about Him as the Christ, but they refused to believe in Him to have the life He so freely offered them. What unsound words led them astray? They redefined the word "enemy" to be flesh and blood. They looked for only the Son of David, not the

Son of God. They wanted the Christ to be a new Lawgiver like they thought of Moses, instead He came to fulfill the Law for us sinners.

Now because we retain our sinful flesh with all its doubts and unbelief, we know that we are vulnerable to the lies of Satan which come to us from many directions, whether it be through the messages of the unbelieving world, false teachers in the outward Church, or our own sinful flesh itself. Our new man of faith speaks over those deceptive voices with the loud confession of who Christ is and what He has done to save us all. So Paul encourages his young protégé, Pastor Timothy: “Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.”

Several times Paul refers to faithful sayings that comprise these sound words: “The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” And just as Paul was confident for himself that the Lord was “able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me” so he directed Timothy to have that same confidence: “By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you.” The power of these sound words not only create our faith in them, but they also have the power to preserve that faith until the day we must stand before the divine throne of judgment. You too, like Paul and Timothy, are the chief of sinners. You need not look around to find a real hardboiled sinner, just hold up the mirror of the Holy Law of God before yourself; there that sinner is reflected in all of its ugliness.

But the sound words of forgiveness and justification through the blood and merit of your holy Substitute, Christ Jesus, are true and unmistakably clear. Not one sin condemns you. You are forgiven. You lack no righteousness. Jesus’ perfect life is attributed to you through faith. So you are justified before the eternal throne of God today, on the Day of Judgment, forever in the courts of heaven.

What is confusing about those messages from your Lord? God the Father tells you to look to His Son alone and there you have life. Satan will direct you through his many allied voices out there to look at yourself and despair. If you have ever been seriously ill and your pastor has come to visit you, you know how he spoke the clear word of God to you directing you to the love of God for you in His Son. But the diabolical voices of confusion were very likely also heard by you, telling you that the reason you are so sick is that God has finally caught up with you and your many sins. He is now paying you back for all your great wickedness.

Be not confused. God loves you. He has redeemed you from the curse of your sin by the life, death and resurrection of His Son.

Follow that pattern of sounds words and tell the devil to go back to hell with all his lies. *“O Lord, we put our trust in Thee: Confounded let us never be.”*<sup>1</sup> Amen

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<sup>1</sup> “We Sing Thy Praise, O God”, Martin Luther’s version of the *Te Deum Laudamus*, Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary, Hymn #45, v. 26.)