

**Even unto Death:
The Spiritual Armory of the Evangelical Lutheran Church**

by

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Dedication

In memory of Gilbert and Bernice, who, remaining faithful to the teachings of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, departed this life in the certain hope of eternal life through the blood of Christ.

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Dr. Martin Luther, in his explanation of the Fourth Petition of the Lord's Prayer, explained that daily bread includes everything that belongs to the support and needs of the body. Among the things Luther cited were a devout spouse, devout children, good friends, and faithful neighbors. For the daily bread of spouse, children, family, friends, and neighbors I offer praise and thanksgiving to Almighty God. They supported me in this project with their prayers, recommendations, and encouragement. Special thanks to:

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Preface

Even unto Death: The Spiritual Armory of the Evangelical Lutheran Church is a resource for Lutheran congregations to understand what it means to be Lutheran and why it matters in our spiritual warfare. My conversations with fellow Lutherans have led me to conclude that many Lutherans do not know how to articulate what it means to be Lutheran, do not recognize that we are in the midst of spiritual warfare, and do not understand how our Lutheran heritage can assist us in spiritual warfare.

I believe that there is an all-out satanic assault on the Christian Church. I also believe that our Lutheran heritage represents a potent resource in fighting the crafts and assaults of Satan. For some Lutherans, this book will be an opportunity to discover or rediscover the weapons in our spiritual armory. For other Lutherans, this will be an opportunity to learn how to wield the weapons in our spiritual armory.

The means I propose for discovering or rediscovering the weapons in our spiritual armory is to review the vows Lutherans make in The Rite of Confirmation and The Rite of Ordination. Both rites contain what I refer to as the distinguishing characteristics of what it means to be Lutheran. I will offer examples from Scripture to support this position as well as examine each of the distinguishing characteristics to demonstrate how they are inseparable from Scripture, the proclamation of the gospel, and the administration of the sacraments.

Upon reviewing these vows, I will challenge individual Lutherans and Lutheran congregations to renew their vows. My prayer is that by reviewing and renewing the vows we make in The Rite of Confirmation and The Rite of Ordination we shall gain a deeper sense of appreciation for what it means to be Lutheran and why being Lutheran matters in the midst of spiritual warfare. The vows in both rites remind us that we are baptized children of God, saved by the blood of Christ, and heirs of eternal life. Keenly aware that the forces of evil are determined to vanquish us, we trust God's Word: "Be strong and courageous; do not be afraid nor dismayed, . . . with us is the LORD our God, to help us and to fight our battles" (2 Chron. 32:7).

To pastors and congregations, I suggest that this book may find its most effective use in a Bible Class forum in the weeks leading up to 25 June, which is the anniversary of the Presentation of the Augsburg Confession. After reflecting on the chapters and reviewing the vows in The Rite of Confirmation and The Rite of Ordination, pastors and congregations are encouraged to observe 25 June as a service of renewing their vows and thus making the observance of the Presentation of the Augsburg Confession all the more meaningful. I have included a sample order of service to assist pastors and congregations in this endeavor.

For elders, I have included *An Evangelical Lutheran Presence: A Retreat for Congregational Elders*. The purpose of the retreat is to assist congregational elders in evaluating the practices and activities of their congregations to determine if they bear faithful witness to the teachings of Scripture. Elders are encouraged to complete *Even unto Death* before engaging in the retreat.

Soli Deo Gloria

Contents

1. A Slow Poison & The Precious Antidote	1
The <i>Gift</i> that Kills	1
God's antidote	3
Reviewing and Renewing	4
Another Jesus?	5
The One Gospel	7
2. "Do you . . .?"	9
Our Vows - Our Identity	9
Rooted in Scripture	13
Centered in the Gospel	15
Professed in the Creeds and Confessions	15
Celebrated in Worship	16
Imparted through Instruction	17
Declared in the Sacraments	17
Reviewing and Renewing our Identity	19
3. What Does It Mean To Be Scriptural?	22
<i>Sola Scriptura</i>	22
Qualifying Our Identity	23
"An Astonishing and Horrible Thing"	24
The Messenger of the Word	27
4. What Does It Mean To Be Evangelical?	31
<i>Euangelion</i>	31
A Lutheran Sermon	33
A Battle for Souls	35
Warriors of God	37
5. What Does It Mean To Be Creedal and Confessional?	42
Pledging Allegiance	42
The Ecumenical Creeds	43
Confessional Courage	45
Even Death	47
6. What Does It Mean To Be Liturgical?	51
The Cadence of the Faithful	51
Marching to the Cadence	53
The Unequivocal Word in the Liturgy	54
Mobilizing the Force through Hymnody	60
7. What Does It Mean To Be Catechetical?	64
A Common Language	64
Solidarity of the Faithful	66

The Chief Parts	66
Battle Skills for the Faithful	74
8. What Does It Mean To Be Sacramental?	77
Fellowship in Word and Sacrament	77
Entrapped by Emotions or Liberated through Faith?	79
A Redeemed Identity—A Redeemed Community	80
A New Heart—A New Spirit	85
9. What Does It Mean To Be Evangelical Lutheran?	89
Being Bound	89
Why it Matters	91
A People of the Word	93
Wielding the Weapons of Faith	95
Celebrating the Victory	99
Appendix A: A Service Commemorating the Presentation of the Augsburg Confession	100
Appendix B: Observations on What It Means to Be Lutheran	111
Appendix C: Scriptural Support for the Vows	122
The Chosen People	122
Fidelity or Apostasy	124
Josiah	125
Ezra	127
Christ	128
The Church	130
Sources Consulted	134

1. A Slow Poison and a Precious Antidote

Almighty God, unto whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden, cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit that we may perfectly love you and worthily magnify your holy name; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.¹

The Gift that Kills

“What kind of gift can kill you?” That was one of the riddles my father employed to teach me a little German and a big spiritual truth. While I readily accepted the challenge of his riddles, on occasion I had to admit that I could not solve one, and that was certainly true in this case: “What kind of gift can kill you?” Yet my father never simply gave me the answer to his riddles, and this was no exception. He reminded me that Jesus often spoke in parables and specifically pointed to the Parable of the Sower, in which Jesus explained what the seed sown by the wayside represented: “When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart” (Mt 13:19).² Reflecting on how Satan attacks the reception of God’s word reminded me of the fall of Adam and Eve into sin. Satan craftily twisted words to seduce our first parents:

Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, “Has God indeed said, ‘You shall not eat of every tree of the garden’?” And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, ‘You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.’” Then the serpent said to the woman, “You shall not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (Gn 3:1-5).

Now I had all I needed to solve the riddle. The devil slithers into our lives, twists God’s word, and then strikes at us with his poisonous fangs. The answer to the riddle is a

¹The Commission on Worship of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, *Lutheran Service Book* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), 312 (211).

² Unless otherwise indicated, this and all subsequent Scripture references will be from The New King James Version (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1988).

“*schleichendes Gift*.” The German phrase *schleichendes Gift* means slow poison. The German word *schleichendes* conveys the sense of slinking, sneaking, and skulking, while the German word *Gift* means poison. My father explained that *Sich in sein Vertrauen schleichen* means “worm oneself into a person’s confidence.” Is not this what the devil tries to do with us? He poisons us slowly by worming his way into our confidence.

I entitled this book *Even to Death: The Spiritual Armory of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* in recognition of the vows we make in The Rite of Confirmation to remain faithful to Christ even to death. I believe that we are in the midst of spiritual warfare and that a slow poison has been introduced into the body of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. *Schleichendes Gift* captures the essence of our spiritual warfare. The fall of our first parents into sin exposes the slinking, sneaking, and skulking nature of the devil. The devil got Eve’s attention by presenting himself in the most attractive manner. It has been said that first impressions count, and that was certainly true in the case of the devil making himself appealing to Eve.

Once the devil had her attention, he held her interest by employing the tactic of planting doubt regarding what God actually said. Eve’s response compels us to review what God really said: “And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, ‘Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day you eat of it you shall surely die’ ” (Gn 2:16-17).

Recognizing immediately that he was at a tactical advantage over his opponent, Satan shifted from challenging what God said to challenging God’s authority, “You will not surely die” (Gn 3:4). Satan challenged God’s motive, “For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil”

(Gn 3:5). Satan seduced Eve into thinking she would be left out, that she would be missing out on something, if she did not partake of the fruit. The following chapters will take a closer look at how Satan continues to use the tactic of seducing people into thinking they will be left out unless they do what he is enticing them to do. After Adam and Eve ate of the fruit their eyes were opened, but what did they see?

God's Antidote

Satan successfully poisoned the relationship between God and man; he poisoned the relationship between Adam and Eve. Satan the Accuser injected Adam and Eve with the poison of fear. The death sentence, “You shall surely die,” now looming over the horizon, terrified Adam and Eve. Where could they go to flee from God? He found them and confronted them. Their attempt to wriggle their way out of trouble proved futile. God pronounced the punishment: They would be left out—no—expelled from the Garden of Eden; they would undergo toil, pain, and sorrow; yes, they would die, but God would not allow them to die for eternity. He would not allow the satanic poison to destroy them forever. In pronouncing a curse on Satan, God gave Adam and Eve a precious antidote: “Because you have done this, you are cursed more than all cattle, and more than every beast of the field; on your belly you shall go, and you shall eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel” (Gn 3:14-15). God provided an antidote for sinners: He sent a Savior, his Son, to take away the sin of the world.

In contrast to the *schleichendes Gift*, slow poison, of Satan, the gospel of Christ is *ein augenblickliches Gegengift*, an instantaneous antidote. When the Holy Spirit creates

faith, it is an instantaneous action. The Holy Spirit applies the instantaneous antidote of the gospel so that we may at once receive saving faith. The precious antidote of the gospel is the centerpiece of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. When those desiring membership in the Evangelical Lutheran Church make confirmation vows, they assert that the gospel will occupy the central position in their understanding of God's word, their confession of faith, their worship, their instruction in the faith, and their participation in the sacraments. Similarly pastoral candidates, called by Evangelical Lutheran congregations, pledge that the gospel will occupy the center of their pastoral ministry.

Reviewing and Renewing

I challenge readers to review the vows in The Rite of Confirmation and The Rite of Ordination in order to assist Lutherans in understanding what it means to be Lutheran and why it matters for our context of spiritual warfare. The vows in The Rite of Confirmation and The Rite of Ordination contain what I refer to as the distinguishing characteristics of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. These distinguishing characteristics revolve around the gospel and constitute the armory of faith, from which we draw our weapons and armor to engage in spiritual warfare. Upon reviewing our vows, I will challenge readers to observe The Presentation of the Augsburg Confession (25 June) for a renewal of their vows. In renewing our vows, we make public profession of faith with the words of the gospel as the only antidote for salvation.

Since the antidote of salvation through Christ is only found in God's word, Satan will do everything in his power to withhold this antidote and taint the message of the gospel in our confession, worship, instruction, and administration of the sacraments.

Satan attempts to turn the world into his toxic laboratory where he brews his diabolical potions with the objective of poisoning God's relationship with man. Satan will try to get our attention, hold our interest, and seduce us into accepting his interpretation and adopting his language. Satan's strategy attempts to get man to challenge God's word, God's motive, and God's authority.

Satan knows that Scripture exposes him for what he is—a liar and a murderer. “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pt 5:8). Satan will exploit sin and death to consign everyone to eternal damnation. The enemy will employ every weapon in its arsenal and every tactic toward the objective. Using the element of surprise, he will worm his way into one's confidence and then inject his deadly poison into the unsuspecting soul. As in the fall of Adam and Eve, when the poison has worked its way through the soul, fear grips the soul with paralysis.

Another Jesus?

St. Paul recognized the perils believers face as a direct result of sin poisoning the world. He reminded the Corinthians how Satan deceived Eve and that certain people, working on behalf of Satan, would withhold the precious antidote of salvation through their preaching:

Oh, that you would bear with me in a little folly—and indeed you do bear with me. For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted—you may well put up with it! (2 Cor 11:1-4).

St. Paul detected a slow poison working its way among Christians in Corinth. The antidote of Christ's all-atoning sacrifice was being withheld because the Corinthian believers were receiving and putting up with those who preached *another Jesus, a different spirit, and a different gospel*. The congregations did not detect the toxic teachings because they were introduced incrementally through the cunning use of words. The false teaching accepted by the Corinthian believers was the *schleichendes Gift*, the poison that was slowly working its way through their bloodstream. It was the incremental and subtle introduction of the venom that infected the believers in Corinth.

Carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning, which claims hundreds of lives each year, serves to illustrate the effects of incremental poisoning. CO is a deadly gas. You cannot see it; you cannot smell it. At high levels, CO can be fatal in minutes. Lower to moderate levels of CO will cause severe headaches, dizziness, confusion, or nausea—symptoms also caused by influenza, food poisoning, or other illnesses. The similarity to symptoms of less serious maladies contributes to the difficulty in the detection of CO and, consequently, to its lethality. Your own home could play host to a lethal poison. Unless you have a CO detection device, you will have no idea until it's too late that you are being poisoned in your own home, little by little, slowly, gradually—incrementally.

If believers in Corinth were slowly poisoned through the incremental introduction of false teachings, could it happen to us—in our church homes? Is it possible that our Evangelical Lutheran congregations are being poisoned little by little, slowly, gradually—incrementally with false teachings? Could St. Paul's warning of another Jesus, a different spirit, and a different gospel apply to us? How would we know? Have we allowed Satan to worm his way into our confidence?

The incremental and subtle introduction of the poison makes it difficult, if not impossible, for us to detect it. Indeed, on our own, we cannot detect it. When the slow poison of words travels through the bloodstream of Evangelical Lutheran congregations, it corrupts life in the congregation. Similar to the effects of CO, the incremental introduction of the satanic poison leads congregations away from God's word. Since you may be dead before you know what killed you, we rely on Scripture to detect the poisons we face.

The One Gospel

The one gospel is the only antidote for the *schleichendes Gift*—the slow poison of fear that leads congregations to adapt to the world or withdraw from the world. The precious antidote of the gospel travels through our bloodstream and replaces the paralysis of fear with boldness of faith. It is in the boldness of faith that those who are baptized and instructed come forward and make vows to be members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. It is in the boldness of faith that pastoral candidates come forward and make vows to be pastors of Evangelical Lutheran congregations. It is the antidote of Christ's love we celebrate in the third stanza of the hymn, *What God Ordains Is Always Good*:

What God ordains is always good: His loving thought attends me;
No poison can be in the cup that my physician sends me.
My God is true; each morning new
I trust his grace unending,
My life to him commending.³

In the next chapter, we shall examine how our vows of confirmation and ordination profess the one Christ, the one Spirit, and the one gospel.

³ *Lutheran Service Book*, 760:3.

Discussion Questions:

1. *What tactics did Satan employ in the Fall of Adam and Eve into sin?*
2. *How did Satan use words to tempt Eve?*
3. *How often do people fall into sin because they are afraid of being left out of something?*
4. *How would you describe satanic poisoning? Fast-acting? Gradual? Lethal?*
5. *What was Paul's assessment of the situation in Corinth?*
6. *What is the only antidote against satanic poisoning?*

2. “Do you . . .?”

Merciful Father, through Holy Baptism you called us to be your own possession. Grant that our lives may evidence the working of your Holy Spirit in love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, according to the image of your only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen.⁴

Our Vows - Our Identity

The armed forces operate with rules of engagement to establish the manner in which military units carry out their respective missions. Rules of engagement determine the type and limits of deadly force to be used against the enemy. Most importantly, rules of engagement remind military personnel of their identity in the fog of war with its carnage, chaos, and confusion. Similarly, the vows we make in The Rite of Confirmation and The Rite of Ordination remind us of our identity as members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church.

A vow is a solemn pledge or formal promise. In The Rite of Confirmation, confirmands freely pledge to remain faithful to the teachings of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. In The Rite of Ordination, pastoral candidates freely pledge to conduct their public ministry and live their lives in conformity with the teachings of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. What do the words in these vows mean? What obligations are inherent in our vows? When was the last time you reviewed your vows or considered what they mean? (See Ps 116:14.)

The vows we freely made in the Rite of Confirmation and the Rite of Ordination compel us to reflect on what it means to be Lutheran laymen and pastors. That obligation was entered into voluntarily. Consider the vows in The Rite of Confirmation:

⁴ *Lutheran Service Book*, 310 (175).

Confirmation

The pastor addresses the catechumens.

Beloved in the Lord, ... You have been baptized and catechized in the Christian faith according to the Lord's bidding. Jesus said, "Whoever confesses me before men, I will also confess before my Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies me before men, I will also deny before my Father who is in heaven." Lift up your hearts, therefore to the God of all grace and joyfully give answer to what I now ask you in the name of the Lord.

Do you this day in the presence of God and of this congregation acknowledge the gifts that God gave you in your Baptism?

Do you renounce the devil?

Do you renounce all his works?

Do you renounce all his ways?

Do you believe in God, the Father Almighty?

Do you believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord?

Do you believe in the Holy Spirit?

Do you hold all the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures to be the inspired Word of God?

Do you confess the doctrine of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, drawn from the Scriptures, as you have learned to know it from the Small Catechism, to be faithful and true?

Do you intend to hear the Word of God and receive the Lord's Supper faithfully?

Do you intend to live according to the Word of God, and in faith, word, and deed to remain true to God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, even to death?

Do you intend to continue steadfast in this confession and church and to suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from it?⁵

For the believer, life starts with baptism and that is why the confirmation vows begin with baptism. In baptism, you receive a new identity. You are a redeemed child of

⁵ *Lutheran Service Book, 272-273.*

God. Baptism provides the means by which you wage war and renounce the devil and all his treachery. The Holy Spirit works in you to renounce the devil and all his works and ways. The Holy Spirit works in you to profess faith in the Triune God and to declare your intention to continue steadfast in this confession and church, and to suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from it. The Holy Spirit works in you so that you hold all the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures to be the inspired word of God and confess the doctrine of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, drawn from them, as we have learned to know it from the Small Catechism, to be faithful and true. The Holy Spirit works in you to conform your life to the divine word, to be faithful in the use of God's word and sacraments, which are his means of grace, and in faith, word, and action to remain true to God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, even to death. (See Eph 4:1-6.)

Compare the elements contained in The Rite of Confirmation with the elements contained in The Rite of Ordination below.

The Rite of Ordination

Questions posed by the presiding minister on behalf of the congregation to a candidate who has received a regular call to minister in the church:

1. Do you acknowledge that the Lord has called you through his church into the ministry of Word and Sacrament?
2. Do you believe and confess the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments to be the inspired Word of God and the only infallible rule of faith and practice?
3. Do you believe and confess the three Ecumenical Creeds, namely, the Apostles', the Nicene, and the Athanasian Creeds, as faithful testimonies to the truth of the Holy Scriptures, and do you reject all the errors which they condemn?
4. Do you confess the Unaltered Augsburg Confession to be a true exposition of Holy Scripture and a correct exhibition of the doctrine of the Evangelical Lutheran Church? And do you confess that the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, the Small and Large Catechisms of Martin Luther, the Smalcald Articles, the Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope, and the Formula of

Concord—as these are contained in the Book of Concord—are also in agreement with this one scriptural faith?

5. Do you promise that you will perform the duties of your office in accordance with these confessions, and that all your preaching and teaching and your administration of the sacraments will be in conformity with the Holy Scriptures and with these confessions?
6. Will you faithfully instruct both young and old in the chief articles of Christian doctrine, will you forgive the sins of those who repent, and will you promise never to divulge the sins confessed to you? Will you minister faithfully to the sick and dying, and will you demonstrate to the church a constant and ready ministry centered in the gospel? Will you admonish and encourage the people to a lively confidence in Christ and holy living?
7. Finally, will you honor and adorn the Office of the Holy Ministry with a holy life? Will you be diligent in the study of Holy Scripture and the confessions? And will you be constant in prayer for those under your pastoral care?⁶

The very first pledge in The Rite of Ordination calls for the pastoral candidate to declare publicly that God’s word is inspired and the only infallible rule of faith and practice. Following from this vow, the pastoral candidate asserts his acceptance of the three Ecumenical creeds, and his rejection of all the errors which the Ecumenical creeds condemn. He asserts his belief that the confessional writings contained in the *Book of Concord* are a true exposition of the word of God and a correct exhibition of the doctrine of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. Then he promises to perform the duties of the pastoral office, including his teaching and administration of the sacraments, in accordance with Scripture and the confessional writings. Furthermore, he promises to instruct both young and old in the chief articles of Christian doctrine, to forgive the sins of those who repent, never divulging the sins confessed, to minister faithfully to the sick and dying, to demonstrate a constant and ready ministry, admonishing the people to a

⁶ *Lutheran Service Book Agenda* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), 165.

lively confidence in Christ and holy living, and to adorn the office of the public ministry with a holy life.

Rooted in Scripture

The vows in both The Rite of Confirmation and The Rite of Ordination emphasize God's word, God's grace, a confession of faith in the one true God, worship of the one true God, the instruction of believers concerning the one true God, and the sacramental presence of the one true God. The vows in both rites remind us of our identity as redeemed children of God and members of the body of Christ. The vows in both rites point us to the weapons in the spiritual armory of the Evangelical Lutheran Church.

Our vows are rooted in Scripture. Consider the reforms implemented by King Josiah in 2 Kings 22. The sequence of events in the account of Josiah's reforms demonstrates the power of God's word. The hearing of the word was followed by repentance and reconciliation, a confession of faith in the one true God, true worship of the one true God, faithful instruction about the one true God—all of which culminated in the celebration of the Passover.

1. **God's Word**—Josiah listened to God's word and repented: "Then Hilkiah the high priest said to Shaphan the scribe, 'I have found the Book of the Law in the house of the LORD.' And Hilkiah gave the book to Shaphan, and he read it...Now it happened when the king heard the words of the Book of the Law, that he tore his clothes" (2 Kg 22:8, 11).
2. **God's Grace**—God responded with grace: "Concerning the words which you have heard—because your heart was tender, and you humbled yourself before the LORD when you heard what I spoke against this place and against its inhabitants, that they would become a desolation and a curse, and you tore your clothes and wept before Me, I also have heard you, says the LORD. Surely, therefore, I will gather you to your fathers, and you shall be gathered to your grave in peace; and your eyes shall not see all the calamity which I will bring on this place" (2 Kg 22:18-20).

3. **Faith in the one true God**—Josiah eradicated false doctrines and led God’s people to faith in the one true God: “Moreover Josiah put away those who consulted mediums and spiritists, the household gods and idols, all the abominations that were seen in the land of Judah and in Jerusalem, that he might perform the words of the law which were written in the book that Hilkiah the priest found in the house of the LORD” (2 Kg 23:24).
4. **Worship of the one true God**—Josiah eradicated false worship, removed the false priests, and restored worship of the one true God: “Then he removed the idolatrous priests whom the kings of Judah had ordained to burn incense on the high places in the cities of Judah and in the places all around Jerusalem, and those who burned incense to Baal, to the sun, to the moon, to the constellations, and to all the host of heaven” (2 Kg 23:5).
5. **Instruction from the one true God**—Josiah taught the people God’s word and led them in renewing their covenant with the one true God: “The king went up to the house of the LORD with all the men of Judah, and with him all the inhabitants of Jerusalem—the priests and the prophets and all the people, both small and great. And he read in their hearing all the words of the Book of the Covenant which had been found in the house of the LORD” (2 Kg 23:2).
6. **God’s Gracious Presence**—Josiah led the people in celebrating the Passover the way in which the one true God intended for the Passover to be celebrated: “Then the king commanded all the people saying, ‘Keep the Passover to the LORD your God, as it is written in this Book of the Covenant.’ Such a Passover surely had never been held since the days of the judges who judged Israel, nor in all the days of the kings of Israel and the kings of Judah” (2 Kg 23:21-22).

We make vows concerning God’s word because Scripture is the bedrock of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. The Apostle Paul writes, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:16-17). The LORD says, “So shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me void, but it shall accomplish what I please” (Is 55:11). In God’s word there is power, truth, condemnation and salvation. (Please refer to Appendix C for a comprehensive treatment of the scriptural support for our vows.)

Centered in the Gospel

Scripture is the bedrock of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, and the gospel is the centerpiece of the church's life. The word evangelical signifies adherence to the teaching that Christ died for our sins and rose victorious from the grave. Job, in the midst of darkest despair, declared in faith, "For I know that my Redeemer lives, and he shall stand at last on the earth; and after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!" (Job 19:25-27). Our vows assert that the central doctrine of the Evangelical Lutheran Church is the gospel, the Good News of our salvation. Our vows are rooted in Scripture and centered in the gospel. John the Evangelist heralded the good news, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life" (Jn 3:16).

Professed in the Creeds and Confessions

The gospel is the centerpiece of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, and all of the creeds and confessions of the church profess the gospel as the only source of salvation. The Ecumenical creeds are a public confession of what we believe, teach, and confess about the Triune God. In Deuteronomy 6:4, we read, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one." In the Gospel according to St. Matthew, we read "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you" (Mt 28:19-20). The confessions contained in the Book of Concord are a public declaration of the teachings of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, to which pastoral candidates subscribe. Standing before the congregation, he states unequivocally that he

will discharge the duties of his pastoral office in accordance with Scripture and the confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, which revolve around Christ's all-atoning sacrifice:

But what does it say? The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith which we preach): that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation...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? (Rom 10:8-10, 14).

Celebrated in Worship

The Ecumenical creeds summarize the core of Christian faith and the confessions contained in the Book of Concord are a public declaration of the teachings of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, so worship in Evangelical Lutheran congregations will reflect and celebrate that core of faith and public teaching. In the divine service Evangelical Lutheran congregations give public testimony of their faith in the Triune God, even as the early church did when "they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:42). The writer of Hebrews exhorts believers: "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching" (Heb 10:23-25). And later he writes, "Therefore by him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to his name. But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased" (Heb 13:15-16).

Imparted through Instruction

Worship in Evangelical Lutheran congregations gives public testimony to her teachings, and instruction in Evangelical Lutheran congregations imparts the teachings of the Triune God to future generations. Instruction with Luther's Small Catechism guides members through the basic articles of the Christian faith: the Ten Commandments, the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer, the sacrament of baptism, the office of keys and confession, and the sacrament of the altar. God said, "And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up" (Dt 6:6-7). St. Paul writes, "To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus" (Col 1:27-28).

Declared in the Sacraments

When instruction faithfully imparts the teachings of the Triune God to future generations of believers, Evangelical Lutheran congregations celebrate the presence of God in the means of grace, the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper. Regarding baptism, Paul said, "Therefore we were buried with him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" (Rom 6:4). Regarding the Lord's Supper, Paul said, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till he comes" (1 Cor 11:26).

The Rite of Confirmation and The Rite of Ordination declare publicly what we believe, teach, and confess. The common elements in both rites are distinguishing characteristics of the Evangelical Lutheran Church: God's word, God's grace, our confession of faith, our worship, our instruction, and our administration of the sacraments. Through the means of grace the Holy Spirit sanctifies us to face the fog of spiritual warfare with its carnage, chaos, and confusion. Consider the following admonition to parents and sponsors of the child presented for the sacrament of baptism:

After this child has been baptized, it is your duty and privilege as parents and sponsors to remember him/her in your prayers, put him/her in mind of his/her Baptism, give your counsel and aid that he/she be brought up in the true knowledge and worship of God and be taught the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and the Lord's Prayer; and that, as he/she grows in years, you place in his/her hands the Holy Scriptures, bring him/her to the services in God's house, and provide for his/her instruction in the Christian faith, that he/she come to the Sacrament of Christ's Body and Blood and thus, abiding in his/her baptismal grace and in communion with the church, he/she may grow up to lead a godly life to the praise and honor of Jesus Christ.⁷

I have framed each of the common elements of The Rite of Confirmation and The Rite of Ordination into the form of a question and titled each chapter accordingly to assist the reader in considering each element in its relationship to the other elements. In this way we will consider each of the distinguishing characteristics of the Evangelical Lutheran Church more fully, particularly, as each of these characteristics reflects life in Evangelical Lutheran congregations.

1. The chapter entitled, "What does it mean to be Scriptural?" examines the vow concerning the word of God.
2. The chapter entitled, "What does it mean to be Evangelical?" examines the vow concerning the gospel.

⁷ The Commission on Worship of The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod, *Lutheran Worship Little Agenda* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1985), 12.

3. The chapter entitled, “What does it mean to be creedal and Confessional?” examines the vow concerning our confession of faith.
4. The chapter entitled, “What does it mean to be Liturgical?” examines the vow emphasizing worship.
5. The chapter entitled, “What does it mean to be Catechetical?” examines the vow on instruction in the faith.
6. The chapter entitled, “What does it mean to be Sacramental?” examines the vow regarding the sacraments.

Reviewing and Renewing our Identity

Reviewing and renewing our confirmation and ordination vows remind us of God’s promises to us in our baptism, and assists us in detecting deadly toxins in our homes and in our congregations. Consider the words of St. Paul, “In him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with him in baptism, in which you also were raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead” (Col 2:11-12). And, having been raised with him in baptism, St. Paul can say, “Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of darkness of this age, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Eph 6:10-12).

Satan’s goal is to destroy the church one congregation at a time and one member at a time. Satan wants our allegiance. Jesus said, “Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, saying, I am the Christ, and will deceive many” (Mt 24:4-5). In the following chapters we shall examine how the distinguishing characteristics

of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, represented in our vows in The Rite of Confirmation and The Rite of Ordination, boldly profess the inspired word of God, God's grace through the blood of Christ, our confession of faith in the Triune God, worship of the Triune God, instruction in faith of the Triune God, and the sacramental presence of the Triune God. The spiritual armory of the Evangelical Lutheran Church confesses the true Jesus, the right Spirit, and the pure gospel.

The enemies of Martin Luther pejoratively referred to his followers as Lutherans. Luther warned his followers not to identify themselves with Luther, but rather to call themselves Christians.⁸ Luther drew a razor sharp distinction between his person and the corpus of doctrine he taught. For Luther, if individuals identified themselves as Lutherans because they recognized that he taught the unadulterated doctrine of Christ, they were identifying themselves solely and totally with the word of God and not a personality cult.⁹ In the same manner, the term *Evangelical Lutheran Church*, as it is employed in The Rite of Confirmation and The Rite of Ordination, is not an institution, but the teachings handed down to us from the Reformation, which are the teachings of the apostles.

The following chapters will reflect on each of the characteristics suggested by the vows in The Rite of Confirmation and The Rite of Ordination and how those vows reflect the teachings of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. As the rules of engagement for the armed forces remind military personnel of their identity in the fog of war with its carnage, chaos, and confusion, our vows remind us of our identity as baptized children of

⁸ Ewald M. Plass, comp., *What Luther Says: A Practical In-Home Anthology for the Active Christian* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), 856:2676.

⁹ Plass, 857:2677.

God, members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. Our vows were born in the crucible of spiritual warfare and handed down to us over the centuries. The next chapter will consider what it means for Evangelical Lutherans to be scriptural.

Discussion Questions:

1. *What is a vow?*
2. *What is the first pledge we make in The Rite of Confirmation?*
3. *Describe the power of holy baptism.*
4. *What does the pastoral candidate pledge in The Rite of Ordination?*
5. *Are elements in The Rite of Confirmation and The Rite of Ordination supported by Scripture?*
6. *What obligations do confirmands accept when they are confirmed?*
7. *What obligations do pastoral candidates accept when they are ordained?*
8. *What does it mean for your congregation to claim adherence to the Evangelical Lutheran Church? What obligations arise from that adherence?*
9. *When was the last time you reviewed the vows made in The Rite of Confirmation and The Rite of Ordination?*
10. *What is the role of our confirmation vows and ordination vows in reminding us of our identity?*

3. What Does It Mean to Be Scriptural?

Blessed Lord, you have caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning. Grant that we may so hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them that, by patience and comfort of your holy Word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.¹⁰

Sola Scriptura

Every military service employs a service manual or manual of arms, which introduces prospective military members to life in the armed forces. The manual includes a history of the armed forces, highlighting the role played by the specific branch of service in the battles and wars waged by the nation. Service manuals rehearse acts of heroism and promote discipline, *esprit de corps*, and valor. Above all, the wisdom encapsulated in service manuals clearly identifies the military member as one set apart for the national defense. For Evangelical Lutherans, Scripture—God’s Manual of Arms—introduces us to life in the Kingdom of God.

What does it mean for the confirmand to hold all the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures to be the inspired word of God? What does it mean for the pastoral candidate to believe the canonical books of the Old and New Testament to be the inspired word of God and the only infallible rule of faith and practice? The Latin words *sola Scriptura* (by Scripture alone), *sola gratia* (by grace alone), and *sola fide* (by faith alone), have been employed among Evangelical Lutherans to profess that the canonical books of the Old and New Testament are the inspired word of God and the only infallible rule of faith and practice (see 2 Pet 1:21); that the word of God reveals the grace of God through the all-atoning sacrifice of Christ (see 1 Pet 1:25); and that the grace of God is apprehended through faith, which the Holy Spirit works through the gospel (see 1 Pet 1:21). It is through the word that we hear the message of grace, that God the Father sent his Son to save sinful man. Through the word we see all of the prophecies regarding the Messiah fulfilled in Christ (for example, see Gn 3:15 and Mt 1:21-25.). The Holy Spirit works through the word to create faith, which clings to God’s grace. Luther unabashedly

¹⁰ *Lutheran Service Book*, 308 (148).

contended, “God’s word cannot be without God’s people, and conversely, God’s people cannot be without God’s word.”¹¹

The Holy Spirit, working through the word, reveals God’s grace and creates saving faith. The Holy Spirit, through the word, steels us for spiritual combat. God has not left us defenseless; he has given us his word to be believed and confessed, to be proclaimed and sung in worship, to be taught to successive generations of believers, to be in and with visible means for believers to be assured of their salvation. Hence, the benefit of reviewing the vows we have made in The Rite of Confirmation and The Rite of Ordination—because in the vows we are reminded of the Holy Spirit, who brought us to faith and keeps us in the faith through water and the word in baptism.

Qualifying our Identity

Some Lutherans feel compelled to qualify who they are. For example, some Lutherans describe themselves as conservative, liberal, or moderate. When they attempt to define what these qualifications mean, they often select a single issue as the hallmark of what it means to be conservative, liberal, or moderate. For example, when these labels are used to describe how Lutherans understand the Lord’s Supper, the conservative’s position on the Lord’s Supper will be portrayed by liberals and moderates as restrictive; the liberal’s position on the Lord’s Supper will be portrayed by the conservative as indulgent and by the moderate as misunderstood; and the moderate’s position on the Lord’s Supper will be portrayed as appeasing by the conservative and vacillating by the liberal. Consequently, discourse concerning the Lord’s Supper is shaped by the highly incendiary rhetoric of the political arena.

¹¹ *Luther’s Works*, American Edition 41:150.

These terms connote political alignment rather than a precise statement of one's theological position. Applying political terms within the Evangelical Lutheran Church fosters an environment in which the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh shape the meanings of words and issues in the church, rather than the Holy Spirit conforming our lives to the teachings of God's word.

Politically charged terms have entered the life of congregations and spawned the use of other words. For example, "tolerance," and its opposite, intolerance, are terms that have been used to categorize individuals according to specific issues. In the contentious arena of politics, the person who carries the banner of tolerance and aligns himself with an ideology will automatically identify those in opposition as intolerant. The words *tolerance* and *intolerance* arouse passion and drive wedges between individuals. When Lutherans espouse the words of the world rather than the word of God to define who they are, the world rather than God's word shapes their identity. Consequently, the words of the world dictate congregational beliefs and practices.

"An Astonishing and Horrible Thing"

The prophet Jeremiah offered a poignant summary of what happens when God's people blithely embrace the words of the world: "An astonishing and horrible thing has been committed in the land: The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule by their power; and my people love to have it so. But what will you do in the end?" (Jer 5:30-31). The very kings who were to be shepherds for the people of Israel and lead them in righteousness instead led the people into idolatry or spiritual adultery. They affirmed their pagan neighbors and, in so doing, tolerated and included false teachings. They empowered false gods: "My people have been lost sheep. Their shepherds have led them

astray; they have turned them away on the mountains. They have gone from mountain to hill; they have forgotten their resting place” (Jer 50:6). God’s people rejected God’s holy word, which gives forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation, in favor of seductive words, which led to wickedness, death, and destruction. Rather than being messengers who proclaimed the pure word of God, prophets, priests, and kings became instruments of Satan. Because of their apostasy, God declared war on his chosen people:

“Prepare war against her; Arise, let us go up at noon...Arise, and let us go by night, and let us destroy her palaces...Cut down trees, and build a mound against Jerusalem. This is the city to be punished. She is full of oppression in her midst. As a fountain wells up with water, so she wells up with her wickedness. Violence and plunderings are heard in her. Before me continually are grief and wounds. Be instructed, O Jerusalem, lest my soul depart from you; lest I make you desolate, a land not inhabited” (Jer 6:4-8).

Likewise, the book of Ezekiel serves as an alarm to all who think they serve both the world and God. Ezekiel's symbolic prophecy of the siege against Jerusalem dramatized the divine strategy of siege works with ramps and battering rams around the model of Jerusalem. Why would Almighty God attack his own people? They refused to listen to his word (Ez 3:7); they rejected God’s grace (Ez 2:3); they rejected the one true God (Ez 5:6); they worshipped false gods (Ez 6:4); they tolerated wicked instruction (Ez 11: 1); they profaned God’s name by not observing the Passover as God’s act of delivering his people and profaned the Sabbath by despising his judgments (Ez 20).The next phase of the strategy graphically portrayed how God’s judgment would cause them to eat defiled food, which would be followed by a phase of starvation. Through fire and outdrawn sword, God would pursue his chosen people and exact punishment for their sins (Ez 4-6). The punishment was not an end in itself but was to accomplish the purpose of driving God’s people to repentance:

“And I will sanctify my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst; and the nations shall know that I am the LORD,” says the Lord God, “when I am hallowed in you before their eyes. For I will take you from among the nations, gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land. Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my Spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes, and you will keep my judgments and do them. Then you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; you shall be my people, and I will be your God” (Ez 36:23-28).

In view of incessant demonic assaults on the church through the crafty use of words, it is absolutely essential that we reclaim the words of our Evangelical Lutheran heritage, which are rooted in Scripture. Are we Lutherans in danger of being severed from our Evangelical moorings because we have permitted enemy words to infiltrate our vocabulary?

The culmination of spiritual warfare in Scripture is recorded in the book of Revelation. Satan’s diabolical scheme is revealed in all its lethality: “And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer. So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him” (Rv 12:7-9). In addition to being the great deceiver, Satan is the great accuser. St. John described him as the “accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night” (Rv 12:10). Satan deceives and accuses. How do we escape his deceptions and accusations? St. John declared, “Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short

time” (Rv 12:14). Louis A. Brighton captures the intensity of St. John’s vision of the spiritual battlefield:

He sees the battlefield as “a glassy sea mixed with fire” (15:2). Surely John was reminded of the “glassy sea, like crystal” before the heavenly throne of God (4:6). However, in 4:6 the heavenly sea, though reminiscent of the past turmoil of the warfare on earth, was quiet and peaceful. Thus it was a reminder to John that the saints in heaven, though they had been in the warfare, were now at rest and peace before God’s heavenly presence (see 6:9-11; 7:9-17). Now in 15:2 the “glassy sea mixed with fire” is a reminder of the horrifying warfare with its suffering that the people of God on earth are experiencing. The fiery red reflection of the sea symbolizes this suffering that confronts all Christians. But in this terrifying conflict, though they are conquered by the beast and its image (13:5-7), through death and martyrdom they come out of the struggle victorious, just as their Lord did on their behalf (19:15; cf. Is 63:1-6).¹²

The Messenger of the Word

God has the first word and the last word. Being scriptural is not a matter of empowerment or consensus; it is a matter of trusting and obeying God’s word. Rather than slipping into a pattern of worldly jargon and sophisticated verbiage, we must nourish ourselves on God’s word, which reveals his grace to us through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Only the Holy Spirit, who calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the church, works in us to bind us to Scripture. The Holy Spirit teaches us that God the Father created us, God the Son redeemed us, and God the Holy Spirit sanctifies us. God’s word is the Sword of the Spirit for the believer. God our Father wants us to believe in his Son (Jn 8:27). God our Father wants us to live lives that are led by the Holy Spirit (Jn 14:16). That is why we maintain our battle skills with *sola Scriptura*, *sola gratia*, and *sola fide*.

¹² Louis A. Brighton, *Revelation* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1999), 400.

“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you” (Jn 14:26).

The pastoral candidate, standing before assembled believers and representing the office of the public ministry, binds himself to Scripture because only the Word of God can make us wise to salvation and keep us out of those places where our faith would be compromised. The people of God wield the Sword of the Spirit, not the spirit of this world. Equivocation reigns where people are not bound to God’s word.

Since our salvation depends upon God’s word, Satan and the world will attack God’s word. Satan and the world hold up empowerment as a rallying cry. Be careful whom you empower. We dare not forget that Satan wants us to go to Hell. Satan and the world will assail everything associated with God’s word—its veracity, authority, source, integrity, inspiration, infallibility, inerrancy, relevance, and transmission. If you empower Satan and the world, you will perceive God’s word as intolerant, exclusive and fabricated.

It matters how we understand Scripture. Is it an authoritative manual of arms given to us for our salvation, or is it fantasy? Is it inspired, with God as its Author and Source, or is it the result of a select group of individuals who wanted to suppress the masses? Is it infallible, or is it filled with errors and contradictions?

Since our salvation depends on God’s word, Scripture holds a prominent position in our confirmation vows and ordination vows. It is God’s word that establishes the Office of the Public Ministry. In ordination, congregations call Evangelical Lutheran pastors into a sacred trust. The purpose of this sacred trust is to proclaim God’s word publicly: “Let a man so account of us as of the ministers of Christ and stewards of the

mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful” (1 Cor 4:1-2).

The Office of the Public Ministry was instituted by God, and believers are commanded by God to maintain it: “Take heed therefore...to all the flock, over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers” (Acts 20:28). “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy and not with grief” (Heb 13:17). Evangelical Lutheran congregations elect and call men judged worthy to fill the sacred trust: “And we have sent...the brother...who was also chosen of the churches to travel with us” (2 Cor. 8:18-19). By virtue of its association with God’s word (Rom 10:14), the Office of the Public Ministry serves the church: “So Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace to you! As the Father has sent me, I also send you.’ And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained’ ” (Jn 20:21-23).¹³

Since Satan and the world attack the word, they will also attack messengers of the word and the office they fill. When the messenger falls, Satan slanders the Office of the Public Ministry so that believers call God’s word into question. Satan will tempt pastors to lord it over believers and tempt believers to oppose the pastor. The Office of the Public Ministry is neither a position of empowerment over people or enslavement to people, but one of shepherding God’s flock. Satan rejoices when the pastor lords it over the congregation and when the congregation resists the pastor. Both of these aberrations are

¹³ E. E. Foelber, “The Office of the Public Ministry,” in Theodore Laetsch, ed., *The Abiding Word: An Anthology of Doctrinal Essays for the Year 1946, Volume. Two*, (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1947), 474-492.

avoided when pastors and congregations remember the public ministry is a divinely instituted office for the proclamation of the gospel. All the functions associated with the Office of the Public Ministry reflect that purpose.

While military service manuals introduce members to life in military service, Scripture introduces us to life in the Kingdom of God. God's word introduces us to God's history, God's law, and God's grace. God's word reveals to us his plan of salvation through the blood of Christ. The Holy Spirit binds us to Scripture and equips us for life in the Church Militant. The Holy Spirit, through the word, makes us grow in the grace and knowledge of God. We are a people set apart for service in the Kingdom. In God's word, we have all the power we need to resist the devil, the murderer and father of lies. Around those who believe in Jesus and trust in God's word, God erects a wall of fire (Zec 2:5).

Discussion Questions:

- 1. What areas of Israel's life were affected when they rejected God's word?*
- 2. Was Israel's rejection of God tantamount to desertion?*
- 3. What does it mean when the Holy Spirit binds us to God's word?*
- 4. How will a congregation's understanding of God's word shape its beliefs and practices?*

4. What Does It Mean to Be Evangelical?

O Lord, our heavenly Father, almighty and everlasting God, you have safely brought us to the beginning of this day. Defend us in the same with your mighty power and grant that this day we fall into no sin, neither run into any kind of danger, but that all our doings, being ordered by your governance, may be righteous in your sight; through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.¹⁴

Euangelion

The armed forces maintain good order and discipline by adhering to law codes specifically designed for military life. Since obedience, respect, and discipline serve as the foundation of an effective fighting force, military justice codes execute swift punishment on those who through their actions would crack the foundation. Dereliction of duty, disrespect, disobedience, disorderly conduct, and desertion are but a few of the offenses for which a service member could face court-martial. Depending upon the offense, a service member could receive a reprimand, reduction in rank, restriction, a fine, confinement, a dishonorable discharge, or death. A person who makes a military oath recognizes that his actions could have grave consequences. As Adam and Eve discovered, breaking God's law condemns man to death.

What does it mean when the confirmand pledges to be a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church? Is the confirmand pledging adherence to an institution? A club? An organization? What is the pastoral candidate binding himself to when he pledges to instruct both young and old in the chief articles of Christian doctrine, forgive the sins of those who repent, and promise never to divulge the sins confessed, minister faithfully to the sick and dying, demonstrate to the church a constant and ready ministry, admonishing the people to a lively confidence in Christ and holy living?

¹⁴ *Lutheran Service Book*, 228 (409).

While many church bodies include the words Lutheran and Evangelical in their official titles, the term Evangelical Lutheran Church, as it is used in The Rite of Confirmation and The Rite of Ordination, refers to the teaching handed down to us from the Reformation; it is not an institution, club, or organization. What, then, is the teaching of the Evangelical Lutheran Church? From what source did the Reformation derive its teaching?

The word evangelical has its origin in the Greek word *euangelion*, which means good news—gospel. The gospel is the good news of our salvation, which proclaims that we are saved because of Christ’s death and resurrection. Without the gospel the Lutheran Church would not be Evangelical.

But why would I see the necessity of believing the gospel of salvation unless I was convinced of my sinfulness and that, because of my sinfulness, I was on the path to eternal death? Through God’s holy law, the Holy Spirit convinces me of my sin and delivers a warning that without God’s grace I am on the road to eternal damnation; through the gospel, the Holy Spirit invites me to become an heir of salvation through Christ. Dr. C.F.W. Walther explained, “The doctrinal contents of the entire Holy Scriptures, both of the Old and the New Testament, are made up of two doctrines differing fundamentally from each other, viz., the law and the gospel.”¹⁵ Walther explained the difference between the law and the gospel in this way:

What is the effect of the preaching of the Law? It is threefold. In the first place, the Law tells us what to do, but does not enable us to comply with its commands; it rather causes us to become more unwilling to keep the Law...In the second place, the law uncovers to man his sins, but offers him no help to get out of them

¹⁵ C. F. W. Walther, *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel*, Reproduced from the German edition of 1897 by W. H. T. Dau (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1981), 6.

and thus hurls man into despair. In the third place, the Law does indeed produce contrition. It conjures up the terrors of hell, of death, of the wrath of God. But it has not a drop of comfort to offer the sinner... The effects of the Gospel are of an entirely different nature. They consist in this, that, in the first place, the Gospel, when demanding faith, offers and gives us faith in that very demand. When we preach to people: Do believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, God gives them faith through our preaching...The second effect of the Gospel is that it does not at all reprove the sinner, but takes all terror, all fear, all anguish, from him and fills him with peace and joy in the Holy Ghost...In the third place, the Gospel does not require anything good that man must furnish: not a good heart, not a good disposition, no improvement of his condition, no godliness, no love either of God or men. It issues no orders, but it changes man. It plants love into his heart and makes him capable of all good works. It demands nothing, but it gives all. Should not this fact make us leap for joy?¹⁶

A Lutheran Sermon

Addressing the application of law and gospel in Lutheran worship and preaching, Gene Edward Veith, Jr. explained, "Lutheran spirituality is embodied, expressed tangibly, in Lutheran worship...A Lutheran sermon is never a moralistic pep talk, nor a meditation on current events or pop psychology, but the proclamation of both law and gospel, drawn from the appointed text of Scripture."¹⁷ To do otherwise would be to consign souls to the condemnation of the law with no hope of salvation.

Through political machinations and socio-political words, the devil and the world have colluded to camouflage certain sins in an attempt to nullify God's law. In the name of inclusiveness, affirmation, and empowerment, what God has called sin has become politically, socially, and culturally acceptable. In the name of inclusiveness and affirmation, born out of worldly pressure to exercise tolerance, some pastors have denuded their sermons of a definitive statement of sin and how God's law condemns sin

¹⁶ Walther, 13-16.

¹⁷Gene Edward Veith, Jr., *The Spirituality of the Cross* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1999), 108.

with the punishment of death. Some pastors refuse to, or are afraid to, preach and teach that the wages of sin is death (Gn 2:17 and Rom 6:23).

If God's law has become impotent, the gospel has likewise become impotent. God does not tolerate sin; he does not condone sin; he does not overlook sin. In fact, when God looked down on the earth to see if anyone understood and sought God, he did not find anyone who fit that description. Everyone on the face of the earth had turned aside, become corrupt, and no one did what was good (Ps 14:2). All human righteousness is considered as dirty rags in the eyes of God (Is 64:6). If we do not understand that the wages of sin is death, how will we understand or believe that the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus the Lord (Rom 6:23)? If God's law, which condemns sin, is null and void, there was no reason for Christ to suffer and die for our sins. If Christ did not die for our sins, he was not raised from the dead, and if he was not raised from the dead, there is no hope of the resurrection for us (1 Cor 15:13).

Every teaching that softens the absolute demands of the law and every teaching that compromises Christ's all-atoning sacrifice is heresy. Heretical attacks on the law and gospel manifest themselves in self-indulgence and self-righteousness. For Richard R. Caemmerer, preaching law and gospel was non-negotiable; preaching law and gospel "is of the essence of every sermon."¹⁸ Caemmerer, commenting on the necessity of preaching the law, said, "The preacher is God's agent for reaching people with his word. This means that he speaks with God's own concern for man's plight and distance from God...The preaching of the law is not simply a defining of good conduct from the negative: God wants us to be good, that is, not to be bad. The preaching of the law is

¹⁸ Richard R. Caemmerer, *Preaching for the Church* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), 24.

always God's saying: 'You are cutting yourself off from me, you are experimenting with death; see its signs! You need help!'"¹⁹ It is only through the power of the Holy Spirit working through both law and gospel that we behold the revelation of salvation: "But God has revealed them to us through his Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God...Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God" (1 Cor 2:10).

After the law has performed its function of confronting and convicting man of his need for salvation, the Holy Spirit creates and strengthens faith through the gospel. "But faith is a hold on God himself and on the promise of his life, and the doctrine of the gospel is the means by which the faith is wrought and preserved. Let the preacher say: 'I know that you have trouble to believe that God is your Father and Christ your Savior. But it's a matter of life and death that you do.'"²⁰

A Battle for Souls

Walther's description of Martin Luther's spiritual torment due to the condemnation of the law vividly depicts the distinction between the law and gospel:

Remember the agonies of Luther! Considering the darkness which reigned in his day, we must say that, compared with others he had acquired a great deal of knowledge at the beginning of his career, but he did not know how to distinguish the Law from the Gospel. Oh, the toil and torments he had to undergo! His self-castigation and fasting brought him to the point of death. The most crushing, the most appalling statement in his estimation at that time was this, that the righteousness which is valid in the sight of God is revealed in the Gospel. 'Alas!' he mused, 'what a woeful state of affairs! First we are approached by the Law, which demands of us that we fulfill it; and now, in addition, we are to be made righteous by obeying the Gospel!' Luther confesses that there were times in his

¹⁹ Caemmerer, 270.

²⁰ Caemmerer, 183.

life when he was harassed with blasphemous thoughts. Suddenly a new light shone in upon him, showing him of what kind of righteousness the Gospel is speaking. He relates that from that moment he began to run through the whole Scriptures in an endeavor to obtain a clear understanding as to which portions of the Scriptures are Law and which Gospel. He says that he pried into every book in the Bible, and now all its parts became clear to him. The birth of the Reformer dates from the moment when Luther understood this distinction. The tremendous success of his public activity, moreover, is due to the same cause. By his new knowledge Luther liberated the poor people from the misery into which they had been driven by the Law-preaching of their priests.²¹

Building on that knowledge of salvation through the gospel, Luther ensured the gospel occupied the preeminent position in his preaching and teaching. According to Fred W. Meuser, Martin Luther preached "as if the sermon were not a classroom, but instead a battleground! Every sermon was a battle for the souls of the people."²² Expounding on "the Lord of hosts," in Zec 1:3, Martin Luther rendered the phrase to mean the army.

He is, then, the Lord of soldiers or of the military. This certainly is a wonderful name for God. It is given to us not only to teach but also to comfort us. For teaching, you apply it this way: all those who confess the name of this King or Lord must be soldiers. They must always be armed and in the field, just as Job says (Job 7:1): "Man's life on earth is military service."...So we must lead the life of active soldiers as we are assailed by very powerful foes and as we do battle under the Lord our God. Then he is called the Lord of hosts to comfort us, that we may know that he who is in us is greater than he who is in the world (1 John 4:4)...Instead, he has overcome both the world and the prince of the world, but he has overcome them on our behalf. Therefore it is our consolation that this good Lord of ours faithfully comes to our aid and battles for us in the field. He fights for us at our side, lest we lose faith, regardless of what great evils assail us. So this is why the prophet Zechariah here repeats the expression "the Lord of hosts" three times, as if to say: "Whatever you fear, whatever it is that you are concerned about, be confident. The Lord does battle for you. He goes ahead of you as general of the war as he fights in the field, etc."²³

²¹ Walther, 62-63.

²²Fred W. Meuser, *Luther the Preacher* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1983), 25.

²³*Luther's Works*, American Edition 20:8.

Throughout his lectures on Zechariah, Luther called every believer, regardless of earthly occupation, a soldier of the Lord, who wields the word of God as the weapon in waging spiritual warfare.²⁴ Luther included the earthly insights he gleaned from soldiers who fought on the battlefield to demonstrate how faith with its confidence, vigilance, and righteousness rises to the challenge of spiritual forces.²⁵ Since the Holy Spirit works through the word, believers wage warfare not with earthly armor or weaponry, but with the proclamation of the gospel.²⁶ In the din of war, where the adversary thrives on pandemonium with shouting and cursing, the believer fights with prayer lifted to the Lord of hosts. Through the believer's supplication in the name of Jesus, Satan and his henchmen are thwarted.²⁷ In contrast to legendary conquerors like Attila the Hun, who surrounded himself with hoards of warriors, the Christian does not maintain an army. He does not employ mercenaries. God himself surrounds the believer with a wall of fire. For the believer, God's wall of fire means refuge, and for the adversary, God's wall of fire means terror.²⁸

Warriors of God

The warriors of God are apostles and teachers, equipped with the word, who valiantly oppose the forces of evil. They know that they cannot defeat the satanic hoards on their own. They know on the basis of the law that they are helpless and cannot save

²⁴ *Luther's Works*, American Edition, 20:25.

²⁵ *Luther's Works*, American Edition, 20:44.

²⁶ *Luther's Works*, American Edition, 20:108.

²⁷ *Luther's Works*, American Edition, 20:139.

²⁸ *Luther's Works*, American Edition, 20:187.

themselves, let alone wage warfare against a diabolical force. Warriors of God know that only the gospel can save them for eternity and fortify them for battle. Since the office of preaching will become the focal point for spiritual warfare, only words that conform to the gospel are acceptable. Luther concluded his commentary on Zechariah in the same way he introduced it, namely, reminding his audience that the Lord of hosts is the General of his army and fights through the gospel. It is the Holy Spirit, through the gospel, who makes the arrows go forth straight and true.²⁹

Being Evangelical means that we hold tenaciously to the gospel, that we are saved through the blood of Christ. It is not a matter of inclusiveness or exclusiveness; it is a matter of condemnation because of the law's judgment on sin, and salvation because Christ took on himself the condemnation we deserved. To ensure the gospel is not diluted with words from the satanic arsenal, we employ law and gospel words—sin and grace words. Luther's perception of the sermon as the "battleground of Christ" or *Kampfplatz Christi*,³⁰ is rooted in Scripture. Through his sermons, Luther's distinction between the law and gospel in his preaching put the listener on the highest state of alert:

Open your eyes and look into your life and the life of all Christians, particularly the spiritual estate, and you will find that faith, hope, love, obedience, chasteness, and all virtues are languishing; that all sorts of terrible vices are reigning; that good preachers and prelates are lacking; that only rogues, children, fools, and women are ruling. Then you will see that there is need to pray throughout the world, every hour, without ceasing, with tears of blood, because of the terrible wrath of God over men.³¹

²⁹ *Luther's Works*, American Edition, 20:293.

³⁰ Paul J. Grime and Dean W. Nadasdy, ed., *Liturgical Preaching* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2001), 252.

³¹ Plass, 1084:3462.

Without the Holy Spirit working through the gospel, all our righteousness is as filthy rags (Is 64:6), but when the Holy Spirit breathes life into us through the gospel, we walk in God's word and seek him with our whole heart (Ps 119:1). Where the Holy Spirit works through the word and where Christ dwells in the hearts of man through faith, there love for God and love for the neighbor are found (Mt 22:37). It is the Holy Spirit who circumcises our hearts (Dt 10:16) "to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways and to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul" (Dt 10:12). The Holy Spirit brings this about because the "LORD our God administers justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing" (Dt 10:18), the Holy Spirit working through the word brings about a fervent desire in us to "love the stranger" (Dt 10:19), for we were once strangers to God.

Feeding the hungry, giving a drink to those who thirst, showing hospitality to the stranger, clothing the naked, visiting the sick, and coming to those imprisoned cannot be separated from the One who uttered those words (Mt 25:31). The believer, being called to the gospel by the Holy Spirit and being enlightened and sanctified by the Holy Spirit, loves his neighbor in the name of Christ; for it is in imitating the love of Christ that every believer follows the command of our Savior to "make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you" (Mt 28:19-20). For the believer, loving the neighbor cannot be done without the power of the Holy Spirit and is never separated from the gospel.

In the power of our baptism, the Holy Spirit binds confirmands and pastoral candidates to the gospel, because for the Evangelical Lutheran Church to have meaning at

all depends upon the work of the Holy Spirit working through the gospel to unify believers in their adherence to the prophetic and apostolic word, in their confession of faith in the Triune God, in their worship of the Triune God, in their teaching of the Triune God, and in the faithful administration of and participation in the sacraments. Where the Holy Spirit works through the gospel, believers are those “who join themselves to the LORD, to serve him, and to love the name of the LORD, to be his servants—everyone who keeps from defiling the Sabbath, and holds fast my covenant—even them I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations” (Is 56:6-7). The Holy Spirit, who gave birth to the church on Pentecost, sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. (See Luther’s Explanation to the Third Article of the Apostles’ Creed.)

Unlike military justice codes, which pronounce and execute swift punishment on those who transgress the standards of good order and discipline, the gospel pronounces sinners righteous in the sight of God because of Christ taking our punishment upon himself. The holy law of God condemns us and sentences us to death for our dereliction of duty in serving God, our disrespect and disobedience of God’s word, our disorderly conduct, and our desertion. The gospel pronounces forgiveness full and free. The gospel, the good news that we have been saved because of the righteousness of Christ, keeps our feet steady, our minds alert, and our hearts fixed on our Savior. It is the Holy Spirit working through the gospel who maintains good order and discipline in the church.

Through the Reformation, the apostolic teachings were returned to the people. Standing solidly on Scripture, Lutheran nobles, risking their lives, asserted their allegiance to the Augsburg Confession as their statement of faith. In subsequent confessional writings, Lutheran nobles again pledged their lives and honor to the faith contained therein. The next chapter will examine how the ecumenical creeds and confessions contained in the Book of Concord are essential resources in the spiritual warfare arsenal.

Discussion Questions:

- 1. In the vows of The Rite of Confirmation and The Rite of Ordination, what is meant by “the Evangelical Lutheran Church”?*
- 2. What is the law? What is the law’s purpose?*
- 3. What is the gospel? What is the gospel’s purpose?*
- 4. How does the Holy Spirit work through both law and gospel?*
- 5. How will the gospel direct your life? Life in your congregation?*

5. What Does It Mean to Be Creedal and Confessional?

Almighty God, send your Holy Spirit into our hearts that he may rule and direct us according to your will, comfort us in all our temptations and afflictions, defend us from all error, and lead us into all truth that we, being steadfast in the faith, may increase in all good works and in the end obtain everlasting life; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.³²

Pledging Allegiance

Every member, officer and enlisted, takes an oath upon entry into military service. The officer commissioning oath and enlistment oath establish a legal agreement between the member and military service. In taking the oath, the member promises that he or she will obey orders and regulations; the member pledges allegiance to the nation and promises to defend the nation against its foes. In addition to the oath, the armed forces establish various codes of conduct for the harsh realities of war. Depending upon the nation, military members may be instructed and expected to follow a code of conduct should they be taken captive. Such codes of conduct intend to inculcate an indomitable spirit in each service member to maintain allegiance to their country regardless of the severity of their treatment if captured. To whom do Evangelical Lutherans pledge allegiance?

What does it mean for the confirmand to assert faith in God, the Father Almighty, in Jesus Christ, his only Son, and in the Holy Spirit? Moreover, what does it mean when the confirmand pledges to continue steadfast in this confession and church and to suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from it? What does it mean for the pastoral candidate to accept the three Ecumenical creeds as faithful testimonies to the truth of the Holy Scriptures, and to reject all the errors which they condemn? Why does the pastoral

³² *Lutheran Service Book*, 310 (183).

candidate make a public statement regarding his faith that the Unaltered Augsburg Confession is a true exposition of the word of God and a correct exhibition of the doctrine of the Evangelical Lutheran Church; that the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, the Small and Large Catechisms of Martin Luther, the Smalcald Articles, the Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope, and the Formula of Concord—as these are contained in the *Book of Concord*—are also in agreement with this one scriptural faith? Why does it matter that the pastoral candidate solemnly promise that he will perform the duties of the pastoral office in accordance with these confessions, or symbols, and that all his teaching and administration of the sacraments will conform to Holy Scriptures and the aforementioned symbols?

In Scripture, we see God’s plan of salvation. God’s prophets prophesied that the Messiah would come to deliver sinful man from the curse of death; God’s evangelists and apostles saw those prophecies fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Our creedal and confessional heritage points us to the objective truth of Christ revealed in Scripture. The term *creedal* identifies one as holding to the faith articulated in the three ecumenical creeds, the Apostles’ Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed. The term *confessional* refers to The Book of Concord.

The Ecumenical Creeds

Those adhering to the teachings of the Evangelical Lutheran Church have employed all three ecumenical creeds during worship, not because they are inspired, but because the doctrines professed in the creeds are grounded in the inspired word of God. The three ecumenical creeds mobilize those gathered for worship to make a unified profession of faith. Spanning the globe and passing through generations, the words

expressed in the ecumenical creeds have passed over the lips of myriads of believers. The words contained in the ecumenical creeds, in contrast with equivocating political words, are reliable and trustworthy.

The Apostles' Creed and other early forms of the creed were known as the "rule of faith." Having its origins in credal statements and confessions from the New Testament (such as Mt 10:32, 16:16, 28:19; Jn 1:49, 6:69, 20:28; Rom 10:9; 1 Tim 6:12; Heb 4:14, 10:23; Jude 3, 20) the Apostles' Creed unites believers around the globe in a bold statement of faith. Friedrich Bente described how the Apostles' Creed was used in the life of the church:

The Christian writers of the first three centuries, furthermore, furnish ample proof for the following facts: that from the very beginning of the Christian Church the candidates for Baptism everywhere were required to make a confession of their faith; that from the beginning there was existing in all the Christian congregations a formulated confession, which they called the rule of faith, the rule of truth, etc; that this rule was identical with the confession required of the candidates for Baptism; that it was declared to be of apostolic origin; that the summaries and explanations of this rule of truth, given by these writers, tally with the contents and, in part, also with the phraseology of the Apostles' Creed; that the scattered Christian congregations, then still autonomous, regarded the adoption of this rule of faith as the only necessary condition of Christian unity and fellowship.³³

Bente's description indicates that the church of the first three centuries placed tremendous value in the faith expressed in the words of the Apostles' Creed. Yet what happened to the church that it became necessary to adopt subsequent statements of faith? The Nicene Creed (A.D. 325) responded to an urgent need. The Arian heresy, named after Arius, who denied the deity of Christ, threatened the life of the church. The Arian heresy was so insidious and pervasive that three Ecumenical Councils (First Ecumenical Council of Nicea in 325, the Second Ecumenical Council of Constantinople in 381, and the Third Ecumenical Council of Toledo, Spain in 589) wrestled with words and wording to ensure the creed accurately reflected the teachings of Scripture.³⁴

³³ F. Bente, "Historical Introductions to the Symbolical Books," in *Concordia Triglotta* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), 10.

³⁴ Bente, 13.

The longest and most intricate of the ecumenical creeds is the Athanasian Creed. While the origin of the Athanasian Creed remains obscure, the creed takes the truths of Scripture and possibly the decisions rendered by various ecumenical councils, and summarizes the doctrines of the Trinity and the two natures of Christ. The teachings expressed in the Athanasian Creed present an unequivocal declaration of faith in the Triune God.

For Luther, the creeds constituted indispensable weapons in the believer's armory: "This is the way the devil goes to work. He attacks Christ with three storm-columns. One will not suffer him to be God; the other will not suffer him to be man; the third denies that he has merited salvation for us...Weakness [of faith] does not work the harm, but false faith—that is eternal death."³⁵ The history of the church emphasizes that successive generations of believers were called to give an account of their faith in response to the scheming of the devil. The historical context of the Lutheran Confessions illustrates what was and is at stake in our confession of faith.

Confessional Courage

On 21 January 1530, Emperor Charles V issued a proclamation to hold a diet, a deliberative assembly, at Augsburg on 8 April. The Emperor's proclamation began by drawing attention to the specter of a Turkish invasion and then stated that the diet would consider what must be done to resolve the divisions and separations in the church. Upon receipt of the Emperor's summons to the diet, Elector John appointed Luther and others to prepare a written statement addressing those matters causing division. In addition to articulating what they believed, those professing adherence to an Evangelical Lutheran

³⁵ Bente, 14-15.

faith were faced with slanderous accusations; their opponents misrepresented their faith.

The resulting statement, the Augsburg Confession, was read in public on 25 June.³⁶

From this day on she stands before all the world as a body united by a public confession and separate from the Roman Church. The lone, but courageous confessor of Worms saw himself surrounded with a stately host of true Christian heroes, who were not afraid to place their names under his confession, although they knew that it might cost them goods and blood, life and limb. When the Emperor, after entering Augsburg, stubbornly demanded that the Lutherans cease preaching, Margrave George of Brandenburg finally declared: "Rather than deny my God and suffer the Word of God to be taken from me, I will kneel down and have my head struck off."³⁷

The Roman Imperial Confutation claimed to contain the faith of the Emperor and his verdict on the Augsburg Confession. The Confutation was read in public on 3 August 1530. The Emperor asserted that the Confutation refuted the Augsburg Confession and that those who held to the Evangelical teachings must return and submit to the Roman Church or be prepared to face the consequences. The Confutation was never delivered to the adherents of the Augsburg Confession for inspection.³⁸

Those committed to the Evangelical teachings were opposed to inciting rebellion in the Empire; they negotiated to prevent all out war and attempted to work toward harmony in the church. They recognized the risk they faced by refusing to submit to the demands of the Emperor and the Pope. They understood that their adherence to Evangelical Lutheran teachings could lead to all out war. While their opponents engaged in threats, intimidation, and slander, the German nobles who followed the Evangelical Lutheran teachings responded with bold statements of faith. One such statement of faith is recorded in the preface to the Apology of the Augsburg Confession:

³⁶ Bente, 19.

³⁷ Bente, 22-23.

³⁸ Bente, 35.

Discord does not delight us, neither are we indifferent to our danger; for we readily understand the extent of it in such a bitterness of hatred wherewith we see that the adversaries have been inflamed...Wherefore we believe that troubles and dangers for the glory of Christ and the good of the church should be endured, and we are confident that this our fidelity to duty is approved of God, and we hope that the judgment of posterity concerning us will be more just.”³⁹

Even Death

Recognizing that those following the Evangelical Lutheran teachings would not renounce their faith, the Emperor seized the opportunity four months after Luther’s death to compel them by force of arms to return and submit to Rome. With his overwhelming military might, the Emperor easily triumphed in the Smalcald War of 1546 and captured Elector John Frederick. The Elector, armed only with the word of God written on his heart (for his captors deprived him of Luther’s writings and the Bible) made a bold statement of faith and would not recant. “Since now in my conscience I am firmly persuaded of this, I owe this gratefulness and obedience to God, who has shown me such unspeakable grace, that, as I desire to obtain eternal salvation and escape eternal damnation, I do not fall away from the truth of his almighty will which his word has revealed to me, and which I know to be the truth.”⁴⁰ The Elector further asserted “that they [his captors] were able indeed to deprive him of the books, but could not tear out of his heart what he had learned from them.”⁴¹

Why does it matter for confirmands to assert the faith of the creeds? Why does it matter for pastoral candidates to pledge fidelity to the teachings contained in the creeds

³⁹ *Concordia Triglotta: The Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), 101, 103.

⁴⁰ Bente, 97.

⁴¹ Bente, 97.

and confessions? Since those being confirmed make a vow to renounce the devil and to suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from the confession of faith, perhaps we need to review the gravity of our confession of faith. Paul warned Timothy, “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables” (2 Tim 4:3-4).

Likewise, John issued a warning, “For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist... Whoever transgresses and does not abide the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him” (2 Jn 7, 9-10). Peter said, “But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction” (2 Pt 2:1).

Since confirmands make a vow to renounce the devil and to suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from the confession of faith, doesn't it follow that the members of those congregations would understand the value of the corpus of teaching to which they call their pastors to subscribe? If the confirmand makes a vow to remain faithful even to death, why shouldn't Evangelical Lutheran congregations call upon their pastoral candidates to subscribe unconditionally to the Lutheran Confessions?

The martyrdom of Heinrich Voes and Johannes Esch serves as a poignant reminder of what faithfulness to the gospel even unto death really means. Heinrich Voes

and Johannes Esch, two Augustinian monks, followed the Evangelical Lutheran teachings. Refusing to recant, they were burned at the stake on 1 July 1523. Luther honored their faithfulness in a ballad, *A New Song Now Shall Be Begun* (*Ein neues Lied wir heben an*).⁴² Referencing the recommendation in the preface to observe 25 June, the anniversary of the Presentation of the Augsburg Confession, as an opportunity to renew the vows in The Rite of Confirmation and The Rite of Ordination, I would encourage pastors and congregations to observe 1 July in recognition of the martyrdom of Heinrich Voes and Johannes Esch, the first martyrs of the Evangelical Lutheran Church.

In binding us to the creeds and confessions, the Holy Spirit binds both pastor and congregation to the teachings of Scripture and the brave souls who died with the faith of the creeds and confessions on their lips. The binding nature of our creeds and confessions reminds us to be on guard for satanic devices that dilute the teachings of Scripture, erode the soil upon which foundation of the church is built, and corrode our spiritual armor. The creeds and the confessions remind both pastor and congregation that Jesus Christ is Lord, that we are members of the body of Christ (Eph 4:12), and that Christ is the Head of the body, the church (Col 1:18). Rather than identifying ourselves as conservative, liberal, or moderate, which are highly charged political terms susceptible to whims and caprices of those who employ them, we follow the example of Elector John, who, when ordered to renounce his confession of faith, told his captors that they could not rip the teachings of the Evangelical Lutheran Church out of his heart.

One of the most powerful means of promoting our creedal and confessional heritage is through worship. The liturgy handed down through generations of Lutherans

⁴² Martin Luther, *Hymns, Ballads, Chants, Truth* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2005), 8. http://www.cph.org/pdf/991726_booklet_C.pdf.

since the Reformation, “reflects the movement of the Christian life: sin, confession, absolution, proclamation and hearing of the word, union with Christ, reception of the promise of eternal life, peace, and prayer.”⁴³ Through music and meter, the men and women of God raise their voices in praise and thanksgiving. The following chapter will focus on what it means for Lutherans to be liturgical and why it matters.

Discussion Questions:

1. *What does it mean when you profess the faith of the Ecumenical Creeds?*
2. *What was at stake when people pledged themselves to the teachings contained in the Augsburg Confession and the other confessional writings composing the Book of Concord?*
3. *Does it matter whether the preaching and teaching in your congregation conform to the faith expressed in the creeds?*
4. *Does it matter whether the preaching, teaching, and practices in your congregation conform to the faith expressed in the Lutheran Confessions?*
5. *Does it matter if pastoral candidates bind themselves unconditionally to the creeds and the Lutheran Confessions? Why or why not?*
6. *Does it matter who serves as pastor in your congregation?*

⁴³ David C. Ratke, *Confession and Mission, Word and Sacrament: The Ecclesial Theology of Wilhelm Loehe* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2001), 118.

6. What Does It Mean to Be Liturgical?

Almighty and gracious God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, you have commanded us to pray that you would send forth laborers into your harvest. Of your infinite mercy give us true teachers and ministers of your word who truly fulfill your command and preach nothing contrary to your holy word. Grant that we, being warned, instructed, nurtured, comforted, and strengthened by your holy word, may do those things which are well pleasing to you and profitable for our salvation; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.⁴⁴

The Cadence of the Faithful

Military forces employ cadences, rhythmic verses, to ensure troops stay in formation, maintain a quick pace, promote *esprit de corps*, and instill unit cohesion during marches. As the formation marches to a cadence recalling heroes and battles, a member in front of the formation bears the unit guidon. The guidon, a small flag, serves as the standard for the unit or force. Words set to rhythm and symbols inspire generation after generation of military members. The words of Scripture, reflected in the worship service, establish the rhythmic cadence for Evangelical Lutherans.

The manner of worship passed down to generations of Evangelical Lutherans since the Reformation includes both the seasons (liturgical year) used to guide believers through the teachings of Scripture and the order of worship (liturgy) used to lead believers in their praise and worship of God for his plan of salvation. Individual worship services or liturgies revolve around the seasons of the liturgical year, Advent through the post-Pentecost season. Consequently, the Scripture lessons, hymns, and orders of worship undergird the proclamation of the gospel through the spoken word and the words, which take flight on the notes of hymns and canticles. Just as the liturgical year serves the proclamation of the gospel, the liturgy with its individual parts of invocation, confession, absolution, prayers, litanies, Scripture readings, hymns, sermon, and specific orders for

⁴⁴ *Lutheran Service Book*, 306 (119).

the celebration of baptism and the Lord's Supper, and benediction, serve the proclamation of the gospel in the worship service—a cadence for the faithful.

One of the most conspicuous features of the liturgy is repetition. As in a military cadence, the repetition intrinsic to the liturgy serves the proclamation of the gospel by reinforcing the teachings of Scripture. Another conspicuous feature of the liturgy is the versicle and response. The versicle is a short statement made by the pastor to which the congregation responds. For example, when the pastor says, “The Lord be with you,” the congregation responds with, “And also with you.”⁴⁵ Or the pastor chants, “O Lord, open my lips,” and the congregation responds with, “and my mouth will declare your praise.”⁴⁶ The versicles and responses in the liturgy convey a sense of the nearness between pastor and people that characterizes the Body of Christ.

The liturgical year and the liturgy promote the proclamation of the gospel and inculcate scriptural truth. The liturgical year and the liturgy lead us from the Garden of Eden to the Garden of Gethsemane and onto the Garden Tomb; from Mount Sinai to the Mount of Transfiguration and from Mount Calvary to Mount Zion; from the Red Sea to the Jordan River and into the Promised Land; from Passover to the Upper Room and on to Pentecost; from the earthly Jerusalem to the Heavenly Jerusalem. Upon hearing the good news of salvation, the broken and contrite heart of sinful man leaps for joy, his tongue sings aloud of God's righteousness, his lips show forth praise, and he offers sacrifices of righteousness and praise (Ps 51:14).

⁴⁵ *Lutheran Service Book*, 172.

⁴⁶ *Lutheran Service Book*, 229.

Luther recognized the importance of worship in the vernacular. By writing hymns and orders for worship in the language of the people, Luther and his colleagues set the word of God to music; they retained those worship elements of the historic Christian church that were faithful to Scripture and provided worship forms for the people to participate fully in the worship service. John T. Pless describes Martin Luther's focus on the worship life of the church:

If the liturgy is the divine service of God to the congregation, the primary question does not have to do with the debate over *traditional* or *contemporary* language. Rather, the crucial question must always be, "Is the grammar of *sola gratia* preserved in the language of the worshiping congregation?" Important as the question concerning vernacular language in public worship is, it can never take priority over the question of the content. Luther was willing to allow the Mass to be conducted in Latin until such a time as the people might be prepared to hear the service in their native tongue. He was unwilling to allow unevangelical texts to remain in the liturgy even for a short time. The heart of the evangelical liturgy is the gospel itself.⁴⁷

Marching to the Cadence

Marching through the liturgical year to the cadence of hymns appointed for specific seasons reinforces the teachings of Scripture in the lives of believers. Advent, with its emphasis on preparing for the celebration of Christ's birth, reminds the believer to assume an attitude of preparation for Christ's Second Coming, that is an attitude of godly vigilance. Celebrating the birth of Christ in worship lifts the believer from despair to hope, from sadness to joy. The Epiphany season reminds believers that the invitation of the gospel goes out to all nations. The Lenten season commemorates Christ's forty days in the wilderness, where Satan attempted to thwart God's plan of salvation. The Passion narrative, hymns, and liturgical settings encourage the believer to engage in

⁴⁷ John T. Pless, "The Language of the Liturgy," in Fred L. Precht, ed., *Lutheran Worship: History and Practice* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1993), 230.

spiritual disciplines associated with contrition and repentance. The celebration of the resurrection, the apex of the liturgical year, harnesses the collective voice of believers into a united voice of praise and adoration. Ascension Day represents a paradox in the life of the believer. On the one hand, Christ's physical ascent into heaven meant the disciples no longer had Jesus physically talking to and walking with them. On the other hand, the angel's promise to the disciples after Christ's ascent into heaven points us to the promises in God's word, to a reliance on the work of the Holy Spirit, to the promise of Christ's bodily return, and the proclamation of the gospel. The celebration of Pentecost concentrates on the fulfillment of Christ's promise to send the Holy Spirit, who will work through the proclamation of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments. The Post-Pentecost season encourages the believer, having now received the good news of salvation and the Holy Spirit, to go forth with faith and fervor proclaiming the gospel to a broken world.

The Unequivocal Word in the Liturgy

The word of God, proclaimed through the liturgical year, takes the believer on the road to Jerusalem where Jesus was crucified, on the road to Emmaus where Jesus appeared after his resurrection and walked with two disciples, and on the road to Damascus where Paul was converted. The word of God, proclaimed through the liturgy, takes the believer on the road from the earthly Jerusalem to the heavenly Jerusalem where Christ will take all believers. Asserting that the liturgy is itself the word of God, William M. Cwirla, in an essay entitled, "Unfolding the Meaning of the Liturgy," offered the following explanation:

The liturgy is not the Word of God in the sense that God gave a particular form or setting for worship in the New Testament...There is no divinely established form

of worship in the New Testament, nor are there divinely mandated texts. There is only a pattern of teaching and table, Word and Sacrament, apostolic doctrine, the fellowship, that is, the breaking of the bread, and the prayer (Acts 2:42), and the various liturgical traditions that have been handed down to us through the ages. The liturgy is the Word of God because it is almost entirely composed of quotations from the Holy Scriptures. The traditional canticles of the Kyrie, the Gloria, Sanctus, and Agnus Dei are all taken directly from the Holy Scriptures. The creeds are nothing else than a summary of scriptural doctrine concerning the tri-unity of God and the person and work of Jesus Christ.⁴⁸

We live in a world that thrives on equivocation and extols evasiveness. The words in the liturgy, which are rooted in the word of God, lead the congregation in confessing their faith in the one true God with one true voice. That absolute certainty is established at the very beginning, in the preparatory portion of the liturgy, with the Invocation: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit (see Mt 28:19-20). Absolute certainty is reinforced with the orientation to law and gospel in the Confession and Absolution. We confess our sins and hear the good news of forgiveness pronounced by the pastor, the called servant of the word (Jn 20:22-23).

Following the Confession and Absolution is the Introit, an appointed Psalm, which begins the service. From the Latin *introitus*, entrance, the Introit is a psalm or portion of a psalm that summarizes the theme of the day. The Introit is preceded and followed by an antiphon.⁴⁹ Whether spoken or sung, the Introit reminds the worshiper that the Psalms have provided consolation to generations of believers (Ps 121). The consolation of God's word through elements of the liturgy intensifies with the *Kyrie eleison*—"Lord, have mercy" (Ps 25:16, 26:11, 41:4 and Mt 9:27 and Lk 17:13). The

⁴⁸ Grime and Nadasdy, 136.

⁴⁹ Charles J. Evanson, "The Service of the Word," in Precht, 408.

Kyrie eleison is “a cry for mercy that our Lord and King hear us and help us in our necessities and troubles.”⁵⁰

The somber tone of the *Kyrie eleison* shifts dramatically with the *Gloria in Excelsis*—“Glory be to God in the highest.” When singing the *Gloria in Excelsis*, believers recall the jubilation of the angelic hymn at Christ’s birth (Lk 2:14). For Sundays during Advent and Lent, seasons of repentance and preparation, the *Gloria in Excelsis* may be omitted.⁵¹

This portion of the liturgy concludes with the Salutation and the Collect. Essentially a greeting, the Salutation (Ru 2:4, 2 Th 3:16, Lk 1:28) illustrates the bond between pastor and people because it is a greeting exchanged among the people of God. The pastor says, “The Lord be with you.” The people respond, “And with thy spirit.” The Collect, a brief prayer, captures the thought of the appointed Gospel or Epistle lesson with the intent of preparing the worshipers to hear the word of God and receive nourishment from it.⁵²

Following the Collect, selected portions are read from the Old Testament, from an Epistle, and from one of the four Gospels. The readings follow a cycle based on the liturgical year. For example, the Scripture readings during the season of Advent will anticipate the celebration of the birth of Christ and emphasize watchfulness and preparation. While the Old Testament and Gospel readings often have a common theme, the Epistle readings generally follow a tradition of continuous reading, so that worshipers

⁵⁰ Evanson, 409.

⁵¹ Evanson, 410.

⁵² Evanson, 411.

will hear sequential readings from the same book for a series of Sundays.⁵³ After the Old Testament is read, the choir may sing the Gradual, an arrangement of portions of psalms, which prepares the worshipers for the reading of the Epistle.⁵⁴ Following the Epistle, the congregation sings the Alleluia verse in anticipation of hearing the Gospel. The Alleluia verse, reminiscent of Pss 113-118 (see also Rv 19:6), leads worshipers in a crescendo of praise as they prepare to hear the Gospel.⁵⁵ The preeminent position of the Gospel in the Divine Service is reinforced by the custom of the congregation rising for the reading of the Gospel.⁵⁶

The liturgy continues with the profession of the creed. Some congregations follow the custom of professing the Nicene Creed for services celebrating the Lord's Supper. The Creed serves to remind worshipers of their baptism and "functions as a specific response to the proclamation of the Holy Gospel."⁵⁷ Then the congregation hears the sermon, an exposition of God's word. Luther considered the exposition of God's word an integral part of the Divine Service and considered its omission an abuse.⁵⁸

Justification, the doctrine that sinful man is saved by grace, through faith, on account of Christ, serves as the central theme of the sermon; it is through the gospel that the Holy Spirit works to create faith in the message of grace. As mentioned above, Luther

⁵³Timothy Maschke, *Gathered Guests* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2003), 127.

⁵⁴Carl Schalk, "The Music of the Choir," in Precht, 254.

⁵⁵Maschke, 128.

⁵⁶Evanson, 413.

⁵⁷Evanson, 414.

⁵⁸Evanson, 415-416.

considered the sermon to be a battlefield. A sober awareness mingled with a sense of urgency takes up residence in the preacher's heart when he recognizes that each sermon might be the last sermon a believer hears before passing from this earthly life.

Upon hearing the good news of salvation in the sermon, the believer engages in stewardship of gifts, the offering, and praise in the offertory. "While the Offering symbolizes the 'spiritual worship' (Rom 12:1) of Christian lives offered in response to God, it also unites the faithful in an act of fellowship. Fellowship (*koinonia*) is a constitutive element in the worship and life of the apostolic congregation, as noted in Acts 2:42."⁵⁹ The offerings of gifts and praise are outward reflections of the believer's dedication to the Lord: "Therefore by him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to his name. But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased" (Heb 13:15-16). The offerings of gifts and praise join believers throughout the world into a mighty chorus giving the first fruits of God's blessings and the first fruits of praise and adoration. Along with the offering of gifts and praise, believers are joined in offering the prayer of the church. Maschke described the prayer of the church as the moment in which believers as the royal priesthood, bring "their requests and petitions to God's heavenly throne (Mt 18:19). Their concern is for all people as they offer prayers, supplications, and thanksgivings (1 Tim 2:1-4)."⁶⁰

Depending upon the administration of the Lord's Supper, the Lord's Prayer (see Mt 6:9-13 and Lk 11:1-4) may follow the conclusion of the Prayer of the Church. Prayer,

⁵⁹ Evanson, 417.

⁶⁰Maschke, 134.

as Paul reminded us, is an indispensable element of the believer's preparation for spiritual warfare (Eph 6:18). Following the Lord's Prayer is a collect. Below is an example of a collect for the church:

Almighty God, grant to your church your Holy Spirit and the wisdom that comes down from above, that your word may not be bound but have free course and be preached to the joy and edifying of Christ's holy people, that in steadfast faith we may serve you and, in the confession of your name, abide unto the end; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.⁶¹

The collect above demonstrates a reliance on the Holy Spirit to create faith in the heart of man through the word. The Holy Spirit works through the word to bring forth the fruits of faith in the lives of believers. The Holy Spirit works through the word to make the confession of Christ's name take root in the heart and spring forth from the lips of every believer. When the gospel has free course, Christ's holy people will be filled with joy and equipped for faithful living. As we prepare to depart the worship service, having heard the word and having joined in praise to Almighty God, we are praying for the gospel to have free course and not be bound in our homes, in our families, in our schools, in our work places, in our communities, in our country, and throughout the world; that the gospel will have free course in our lives making us bold witnesses of God's love to a broken world.

Worship began by invoking the name of the Triune God and concludes by pronouncing a blessing in his name. The LORD told Moses to instruct Aaron to bless the children of Israel with a specific blessing for in so doing it put God's name on the children of Israel (Nm 6:22). The Benediction concluding the worship service reminds us

⁶¹*Lutheran Service Book*, 305 (102).

that we do not want to undertake anything without God's blessing abiding with us (Pss 115 and 127).

The liturgy provides us with an order for hearing the promises in the gospel and asking God's blessing on our marriage and family, on our homes, on those who are ill or dying, and at the burial of a believer.⁶² The liturgy we follow in worship provides a model for us to follow in our daily devotions.⁶³ As the following prayer expresses, the liturgy leads us in seeking God's blessing and remaining in the attitude of worship throughout the week:

Faithful God, whose mercies are new to us every morning, we humbly pray that you look upon us in mercy and renew us by your Holy Spirit; keep safe our going out and our coming in and let your blessing remain with us throughout this day; preserve us in your righteousness and grant us a portion in that eternal life which is in Christ Jesus; through whom be glory and praise to you and the Holy Spirit, now and forever.⁶⁴

Mobilizing the Force through Hymnody

Interspersed through the liturgy are hymns. What is a hymn and what is its purpose? A terse definition of a hymn would be a Christian song of prayer and praise. Yet such a definition is woefully inadequate when one considers the prominence of the hymn in worship. Understanding that we are in the midst of spiritual warfare, the hymn is nothing less than a cadence for the mobilized force of believers marching on the battlefield with Christ as their victorious King leading them on to eternal life.

⁶²*Lutheran Worship Little Agenda*, 16.

⁶³*Lutheran Service Book*, 294-298.

⁶⁴ *Lutheran Worship*, 124 (105).

Hymns lead worshipers in praise and thanksgiving. For example, at the beginning of the liturgy believers can welcome the presence of God with the words of “God Himself Is Present” and trust that God’s blessing will abide with them as they sing “Lord, Dismiss Us with Your Blessing.”⁶⁵ Hymns also lead worshipers through the seasons of the liturgical year. Believers begin the liturgical year with Advent by singing, “Oh, Come, Oh, Come, Emmanuel,” and end the liturgical year with the Post-Pentecost season by singing, “Come, Thou Almighty King.”⁶⁶

Recognizing the power of God’s word joined with music, Luther encouraged believers to employ this potent weapon to wage a good warfare: “Thus David, too, often dispelled, or at least checked or weakened, the evil spirit for Saul with his minstrelsy (1 Sm 16:17). For the evil spirit is not at ease when one sings or preaches God’s word in true faith.”⁶⁷ To be sure, many believers have employed Luther’s hymn, *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God*, and put the enemy to flight. Compare the imagery in the first stanza of *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God* with Psalms 46 and 18:

A Mighty fortress is our God, a trusty shield and weapon;
 He helps us free from ev’ry need that hath us now o’er-taken.
 The old evil foe now means deadly woe;
 Deep guile and great might are his dread arms in fight;
 On earth is not his equal.⁶⁸

The hymns, together with the liturgy contained in a church’s hymnal, propagate and reinforce the public doctrine of the Evangelical Lutheran Church.⁶⁹ Every worshiper,

⁶⁵ *Lutheran Service Book*, 907 and 924.

⁶⁶ *Lutheran Service Book*, 357 and 905.

⁶⁷ Plass, 981:3098

⁶⁸ *Lutheran Service Book*, 656.

young and old, is invited to hold the hymnal in his hands and join in the worship life of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. When a worshiper holds a church's hymnal, he holds in his hands what that congregation believes, teaches, and confesses. Through the liturgy, the liturgical year, and hymnody, every believer marches to the cadence of faith and follows the guidon emblazoned with the victorious Lamb of God.

The Holy Spirit, through the gospel, inspires us to worship the one true God. Through the liturgical year and the liturgy, Evangelical Lutherans speak the same language in worship. United in prayer and praise, Evangelical Lutherans speak with one voice to God. Through the liturgical year and the liturgy, God brings people, broken by sin, together. He brings them together to bless them, to comfort them, to heal them, to instruct them, to strengthen them for service in his kingdom. Through the common language or words of the liturgy and the liturgical year, Evangelical Lutherans celebrate the contribution of Luther who put the liturgy into the language of the people.

⁶⁹ The Commission on Worship of The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod, “Introduction,” *Hymnal Supplement 98* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1998),4-5.

Discussion Questions:

1. *What is the purpose of the liturgical year?*
2. *What is the purpose of the liturgy?*
3. *Describe Martin Luther's contribution to worship life in the church.*
4. *How do the liturgical year and the liturgy reinforce the teachings of Scripture and promote the proclamation of the gospel?*
5. *How does the liturgy provide a common language for worshipers? Does it matter whether the language of worship is faithful to Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions?*
6. *How might the liturgical year and the liturgy assist believers in their personal and family devotions?*
7. *What is your understanding of the role hymns play in the life of the congregation? In your life?*

7. What Does It Mean to Be Catechetical?

O God, from whom come all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works, give to us, your servants, that peace which the world cannot give, that our hearts may be set to obey your commandments and also that we, being defended from the fear of our enemies, may live in peace and quietness; through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.⁷⁰

A Common Language

The armed forces require all service members to complete basic training. Basic training introduces recruits to military life and teaches recruits to speak a common language, the language of military life. A common language ensures that all service members understand orders and discharge their duties properly. This becomes all the more critical in the midst of confusion and chaos, which so characterizes battlefield conditions. Recognizing that a recruit could graduate from basic training and quickly thereafter enter battlefield conditions, instructors assume a grave responsibility in equipping recruits for the realities of war. Do pastors and congregations understand the gravity of instructing believers for spiritual warfare?

How does the church prepare believers for the realities of spiritual warfare? How do we approach the grave responsibility of instructing people in the faith? Are we teaching future generations the common language of faith? The pledge contained in The Rite of Confirmation identifies Luther's Small Catechism as a source for instruction in the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures as the inspired word of God and the doctrine of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, drawn from the Scriptures. Luther's Small and Large Catechisms present the teachings of Scripture for the believer's basic and ongoing instruction in the faith.

⁷⁰ *Lutheran Service Book*, 233 (410).

In the Preface to the Large Catechism, Luther cited Deuteronomy 6:7-8 for the purpose of admonishing believers to meditate regularly on God's word: "You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes." Luther explained God's command to study God's word, the law and the gospel, in light of the spiritual danger faced by believers. If believers resolve to stand firm in the midst of the fog and friction of the guerilla warfare waged by Satan, the only sure weapon is the word of God. Only the word of God can protect believers against satanic weapons of mass destruction.

With the language of warfare, Luther warned believers against forsaking the sacred weapons of the Lord's arsenal. "Oh, what mad, senseless fools we are, that while we must ever live and dwell among such mighty enemies as the devils are, we nevertheless despise our weapons and defense, and are too lazy to look at or think of them!"⁷¹ Luther encouraged regular use of the catechism for growth in the doctrines of Scripture and for personal devotions.

But this I say for myself: I, too, am a doctor and preacher, yea, as learned and experienced as all those may be who possess such presumption and this sense of security. Yet I act as a child who is learning the Catechism. In the morning and whenever I have time, I read and also recite, word for word, the Ten Commandments, the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, psalms, etc. And besides this I must also read and study every day. Yet I cannot master the matter as I desire but must remain a child and pupil of the Catechism and am glad to remain one.⁷²

⁷¹ *Concordia Triglotta*, 571.

⁷² Plass, 126:366.

Solidarity of the Faithful

To be sure, Luther's Small and Large Catechisms are among the treasures of the church. We ignore these treasures at our peril. When believers are instructed in the faith with Luther's catechisms, they are instructed in the teachings of Holy Scripture. Holy Scripture provides solid testimony for what has come to be known as the Six Chief Parts of Luther's Small Catechism: the Ten Commandments, the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer, the sacrament of holy baptism, the office of keys and confession, and the sacrament of the altar.

The devil, of course, will attempt to sabotage believers who engage in diligent instruction of scriptural truths and the world will certainly mock such instruction. For example, Luther encouraged the head of the family to lead catechetical instruction in the home. When the head of the family leads catechetical instruction, families grow in the solidarity of faith; parents and children build powerful alliances. Through catechetical instruction with Luther's catechisms, family members grow in their understanding of what it means to be a Christian family—a family that lives in repentance and forgiveness. Such a family, surrounded by God's wall of fire, finds protection against the forces of evil converging to destroy it. How dreadful indeed, when the head of the household abdicates responsibility for instructing the family in the faith. What better way for the devil to decapitate a family and thus prevent the noble and diligent instruction of Luther's catechisms than by neutralizing the head of the household?

The Chief Parts

In the first chief part, Luther explained that the Ten Commandments are a summary of divine teaching and the fountain through which the believer lives a God-

pleasing life. The believer learns that all the commandments proceed from the First Commandment, “You shall have no other gods.” The threats and promises contained in the commandments remind the believer that we cannot save ourselves; we cannot fulfill what God’s law demands. Only through faith in Christ does the Holy Spirit work the forgiveness of sins and produce good works, the fruit of faith in the lives of believers. Founded upon God’s command to instruct future generations, the first chief part of Luther’s Small Catechism leads believers to understand what it means to love God and to love our neighbor:

Only take heed to yourself, and diligently keep yourself, lest you forget the things your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. And teach them to your children and your grandchildren, especially concerning the day you stood before the LORD your God in Horeb, when the LORD said to me, ‘Gather the people to me, and I will let them hear my words, that they may learn to fear me all the days they live on earth, and that they may teach their children.’ Then you came near and stood at the foot of the mountain, and the mountain burned with fire to the midst of heaven, with darkness, cloud, and thick darkness. And the LORD spoke to you out of the midst of the fire. You heard the sound of the words, but saw no form; you only heard a voice. So he declared to you his covenant which he commanded you to perform, the Ten Commandments; and he wrote them on two tablets of stone. And the LORD commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and judgments, that you might observe them in the land which you cross over to possess (Dt 4:9-14).

“Thus,” Luther said, “we have the Ten Commandments, a compend of divine doctrine, as to what we are to do in order that our whole life may be pleasing to God, and the true fountain and channel from and in which everything must arise and flow that is to be a good work, so that outside of the Ten Commandments no work or thing can be good or pleasing to God, however great or precious it be in the eyes of the world.”⁷³ Indeed, the world will either attempt to expunge the Ten Commandments from every facet of life or present them in such a fashion that man on his own can fulfill their requirements.

⁷³ *Concordia Triglotta*, 669, 671.

Through sophisticated rhetoric, legalistic wrangling, and political machinations, the agencies of this world will attempt to rob every family of “the highest treasure given by God.”⁷⁴

Luther contended that we learn to know God fully through the second chief part, The Apostles’ Creed; we learn what we must expect and receive from God. In a clear and simple way, Luther’s Catechisms explain, according to the three persons of the Godhead, how God “revealed and opened the deepest abyss of his paternal heart and of his pure unutterable love.”⁷⁵ God the Father created us and sustains us: “I will praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Marvelous are your works, and that my soul knows very well” (Ps. 139:14). God the Son redeemed us: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him nothing was made that was made” (John 1:1-3). God the Holy Spirit sanctifies us, “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you” (John 14:26). In contrast to the Ten Commandments, which tell us what God demands, the creed tells us what God has done and continues to do for us.⁷⁶

God has created us, redeemed us, and called us by name. “For he has created us for this very object, that he might redeem and sanctify us...we could never attain to the knowledge of the grace and favor of the Father except through the Lord Christ, who is a

⁷⁴ *Concordia Triglotta*, 677.

⁷⁵ *Concordia Triglotta*, 695.

⁷⁶ *Concordia Triglotta*, 679.

mirror of the paternal heart, outside of whom we see nothing but an angry and terrible Judge. But of Christ we could know nothing either, unless it had been revealed by the Holy Ghost.”⁷⁷

Underscoring the benefit of using the Small Catechism for devotion and as a weapon forged by the word of God, Luther said,

Our shelter and protection rest in prayer alone. For we are far too feeble to cope with the devil and all his power and adherents that set themselves against us, and they might easily crush us under their feet. Therefore we must consider and take up those weapons with which Christians must be armed in order to stand against the devil.⁷⁸

Luther encouraged believers to pray with boldness, knowing that the prayers we offer are precious, holy and pleasing to God. God regards our prayer on account of his word. “Hence,” said Luther, “there is no nobler prayer to be found upon earth than the Lord’s Prayer which we daily pray, because it has this excellent testimony, that God loves to hear it, which we ought not to surrender for all the riches of the world.”⁷⁹ In his catechetical explanations of the seven petitions to the Lord’s Prayer, Luther exhorted believers to pray because God has commanded us to pray, invited us to pray, and promised to hear our prayers. Christ our Lord has taught us how to pray; the Holy Spirit makes intercession for us because of our weakness when we do not know what we ought to pray.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ *Concordia Triglotta*, 695.

⁷⁸ *Concordia Triglotta*, 705, 707.

⁷⁹ *Concordia Triglotta*, 703.

⁸⁰ *Concordia Triglotta*, 697, 699.

The Ten Commandments teach us what it means to love God and our neighbor; the Creed teaches us what God has done and continues to do for us through creation, redemption, and sanctification; the Lord's Prayer teaches us that "nothing is so necessary as that we should continually resort to the ear of God, call upon him, and pray to him."⁸¹ In praying the prayer our Lord taught us to pray, we pray in faith that our Heavenly Father will protect us against our archenemy the devil who, as Luther warned, "constantly seeks our life, and wreaks his anger whenever he can afflict our bodies with misfortunes and harm. Hence it comes that he often breaks men's necks or drives them to insanity, drowns some, and incites many to commit suicide, and to many other terrible calamities."⁸² Our heavenly Father, who commands us to pray, does not lie; we dare not doubt that he hears us. The omnipotent, all-loving God hears the prayer of his children and drives back the devil, who attempts to inject his vile, hellish poison into us by sinking his fangs into our souls.

Through the fourth chief part of Luther's Small Catechism, we learn that we are received into the Christian church through holy baptism. Christ said, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Mt 28:19-20). St. Paul professed the power of baptism in Romans 6: "What shall we say then? Shall we continue to sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Or do you not know that as many of us were baptized into Christ Jesus were

⁸¹ *Concordia Triglotta*, 697.

⁸² *Concordia Triglotta*, 731.

baptized into his death?” (Rom 6:1-3). In baptism God’s word, command and name are joined with the water. Through faith, the believer receives all the blessings of baptism: forgiveness of sins, life and salvation. In view of the riches of God’s grace bestowed on us in baptism, it should come as no surprise that the devil will blaspheme God by mocking baptism; hence Luther’s insistence upon teaching the efficacy and significance of baptism.

Baptism, said Luther, is God’s work and “God’s works...are saving and necessary for salvation, and do not exclude, but demand, faith; for without faith they could not be apprehended.”⁸³ Instruction in the sacrament of holy baptism exhorts the believer to “esteem his Baptism as a daily dress in which he is to walk constantly, that he may ever be found in the faith and its fruits, that he suppress the old man and grow up in the new.”⁸⁴ As St. Paul professed, “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all” (Eph 4:4-6).

In the fifth chief part of the Small Catechism, Luther explains how the office of keys and confession signifies the new life begun in baptism. Living in repentance, we confess our sins and hear the proclamation of the gospel, the forgiveness of our sins. The baptism we received once exercises itself in repentance. “Repentance, therefore, is nothing else than a return and approach to Baptism, that we repeat and practice what we began before, but abandoned.”⁸⁵

⁸³ *Concordia Triglotta*, 741.

⁸⁴ *Concordia Triglotta*, 753.

⁸⁵ *Concordia Triglotta*, 751.

Scripture recounts how Jesus charged his disciples with the authority to forgive and retain sins: Jesus “breathed on them, and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained’ ” (Jn 20:22-23). St. John said, “If we say we that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us” (1 Jn 1:8-10). St. James described the consolation that believers offer to each other with the words coming from the gospel, “And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much” (Jas 5:15-16).

The Augsburg Confession captures the beauty and power of the office of the keys and confession in this way: “The power of the Keys is set forth in its beauty, and they are reminded what great consolation it brings to anxious consciences; also, that God requires faith to believe such absolution as a voice sounding from heaven, and that such faith in Christ truly obtains and receives the forgiveness of sins.”⁸⁶ If we neglect the office of the keys and confession, we deprive ourselves of some of the priceless blessings that God wants to impart to his baptized children. Living in repentance is living in the power of our baptism and returning to Christ our Mercy-seat every day.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ *Concordia Triglotta*, 69.

⁸⁷ *Concordia Triglotta*, 753.

As with baptism, it should come as no surprise to the believer that the hosts of hell will mount a ferocious attack against the meal Christ instituted for us to receive his body and blood unto salvation. In the sixth chief part, Luther explained the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. In partaking of the Lord's Supper, we partake of a mystery; we receive the very body and blood of Christ under the bread and wine. Luther's instruction regarding the Lord's Supper replicates the admonition of St. Paul:

Now in giving these instructions I do not praise you, since you come together not for the better but for the worse. For first of all, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it. For there must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you. Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper. For in eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of others; and one is hungry and another is drunk. What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I do not praise you... For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till he comes. Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup (1 Cor 11:17-26).

In his explanation to the sacrament of the altar, Luther advocates the necessity of teaching three points:

What is it? What are its benefits? and, Who is to receive it? And all these are established by the words by which Christ has instituted it, and which everyone who desires to be a Christian and go to the sacrament should know. For it is not our intention to admit to it and to administer it to those who know not what they seek, or why they come.⁸⁸

Luther encourages the believer with the benefits of partaking of Christ's body and blood and exhorts the believer to engage in self-examination prior to partaking of Christ's body and blood.

⁸⁸ *Concordia Triglotta*, 753.

Battle Skills for the Faithful

In addition to the six chief parts, Luther's Small Catechism includes appendices, which provide instructions for the head of the family to teach his household how to pray through the day and selected portions of Scripture addressing various stations of life. The history of the children of Israel, replete with apostasy, reinforces the necessity of catechetical instruction. When the head of the household and the pastor of the congregation neglect the sacred duty of instructing believers in the faith, homes and congregations become ideal places for the subtle introduction of toxic teachings.

While the rite of confirmation serves as the public recognition in the congregation of a baptized believer undergoing instruction in the sacraments of holy baptism and the Lord's Supper,⁸⁹ Scripture reinforces the truth that instruction in the faith is continuous: "Hear, my children, the instruction of a father, and give attention to know understanding; for I give you good doctrine: do not forsake my law. When I was my father's son, tender and the only one in the sight of my mother, he also taught me, and said to me: let your heart retain my words; keep my commands, and live" (Prov 4:1-4). Catechetical instruction in Luther's Small and Large Catechisms is the guide for the believer to engage in daily devotion and meditation: "I will meditate on your precepts, and contemplate your ways. I will delight myself in your statutes; I will not forget your word" (Ps 119:15-16).

Luther's catechisms assist believers in honing their battle skills. As Luther declared, "For what do you think has hitherto accomplished such great things, has checked or quelled the counsels, purposes, murder, and riot of our enemies, whereby the devil thought to crush us, together with the gospel, except that the prayer of a few godly

⁸⁹ Maschke, 289.

men intervened like a wall of iron on our side?"⁹⁰ Through catechetical instruction, each believer is taught the doctrines of Scripture and the language of Scripture.

Yet how can the believer don the whole armor of God to withstand temptations and defend against false doctrines that attempt to slither into the church through the cleverly devised schemes of Satan if pastors and congregations ignore the responsibility for instruction? If people are not instructed in the teachings of Scripture, it makes it all the more convenient for Satan to introduce another Jesus, a different spirit, and a different gospel. Jesus warned his disciples against such deception: "Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, saying, I am the Christ, and will deceive many" (Mt 24:4-5). The command that our Lord gave us in Matthew 28:18-20 indicates instruction in the faith is inseparable from baptism and discipleship.

Working through the word of God, the Holy Spirit binds us to instruction in the faith. Through instruction with Luther's catechisms, the pastor leads catechumens in speaking a common language—the language of Scripture. The manner in which we approach catechetical instruction affects generations of believers. Through catechetical instruction believers acquire the knowledge and skill to wield the sword of the Spirit. The pastor, with the language of Scripture, instructs catechumens to confess their faith in the Triune God who loves them with inexpressible love: "For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth...Therefore you shall keep the commandment, the statutes and the judgments which I command you today, to observe them" (Dt 7:6, 11). When God's chosen people disregarded instruction in the

⁹⁰ *Concordia Triglotta*, 707.

faith, they traveled the road of apostasy by including, affirming, and accommodating other gods.

Through the teaching the common language of Scripture in catechetical instruction, the pastor fulfills the vow made in The Rite of Ordination to instruct both young and old in the chief articles of Christian doctrine. While catechetical instruction in Luther's Catechisms cultivates in the baptized believer the discipline of self-examination in preparation for the reception of the Lord's Supper, the sacraments steel the believer for the chaos and confusion on the battlefield. What a mystery we have in the sacraments! God makes a life-giving miracle with his word and simple water. God makes an extraordinary feast with his word and ordinary bread and wine. The next chapter will consider what it means to be sacramental.

Discussion Questions:

1. *How do Luther's catechisms equip believers for spiritual warfare?*
2. *How do Luther's catechisms promote a common language among believers?*
3. *How might believers use Luther's catechisms for devotions?*
4. *How are the first, second, and third chief parts related?*
5. *How are the fourth, fifth, and sixth chief parts related?*

8. What Does It Mean to Be Sacramental?

O God the Father, the fountain and source of all goodness, who in loving-kindness sent your only-begotten Son into the flesh, we thank you that for his sake you have given us pardon and peace in this sacrament, and we ask you not to forsake your children but always to rule our hearts and minds by your Holy Spirit that we may be enabled constantly to serve you; through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.⁹¹

Fellowship in Word and Sacrament

The armed forces celebrate military victories during their observance of service anniversaries. At such military observances, those gathered will honor combat veterans, recognized for valor on the field of battle. Military histories offer myriad accounts of ordinary individuals who performed extraordinary feats of heroism on the field of battle. The sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper celebrate Christ's victory over sin, death, and the devil. One cannot hope to survive on the spiritual battlefield without God's means of grace in the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Luther said, "If you could see how many knives, darts, and arrows are every moment aimed at you, you would be glad to come to the sacrament as often as possible."⁹² Fellowship in word and sacrament constitutes life in the church. Members of the body of Christ break bread together in a community of faith. If the body and blood of Christ are intended to strengthen the members of the body of Christ, how can the members be nourished if they do not have a hearty appetite? Why does the confirmand pledge to be faithful in the use of God's word and sacraments? Does it matter whether you make faithful use of God's word and sacraments? Does it matter that the pastoral

⁹¹ *Lutheran Service Book*, 218 (403).

⁹² *Concordia Triglotta*, 773.

candidate pledges to administer the sacraments in conformity with Scripture and the confessions?

Asking what it means to be sacramental cuts to the core of what it means to be Evangelical Lutheran because the Evangelical Lutheran teaching of the sacraments professes that God performs a miracle of grace for us and in us; God is the benefactor and man is the unworthy beneficiary: “The means of grace are the gospel and the sacraments: Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. By these means God imparts to man the grace merited by Christ.”⁹³ Luther presents a poignant description of Christ’s self-sacrificing love:

By his death on the cross he made such a sacrifice once for the sins of all the world (Heb. 7:27). The cross was the altar on which he, consumed by the fire of the boundless love which burned in his heart, presented the living and holy sacrifice of his body and blood to the Father with fervent intercession, loud cries, and hot, anxious tears (Heb. 5:7). That is the true sacrifice.⁹⁴

The Holy Spirit calls believers through the all-consuming love of our Savior to reflect on the miracle of the grace offered through word and sacrament. The devil and the world attack our sinful, frail flesh and say: “If God indeed gives grace in the sacraments, why don’t you feel it?” “If you are forgiven, as God says you are forgiven, you should feel the sudden urge to shout, do cartwheels, burst out in laughter!” “If you do not feel something, you are not really receiving grace or forgiveness in Baptism and the Lord’s Supper!”

Our feelings and emotions are wonderful gifts of God. Our God intends them to be a means by which we express joy and thanksgiving to him. We express sorrow over our sins with emotion and feeling and ask God to forgive us. We ask God to help us and

⁹³ Edwin E. Pieplow, “The Means of Grace,” in Theodore Laetsch, ed., *The Abiding Word*, Volume Two, 328.

⁹⁴ Plass, 190:551.

heal us when we are feeling sadness, pain or fear. When we suffer injustice or when we are offended at the harm that injustice has done to others, we express our anger to God and ask him to thwart evil and to console the powerless.

The devil and the world repeatedly seduce our sinful flesh to wallow in our emotions. If Satan has his way, our feelings will become tools of unbelief rather than serving as personal expressions of faith in God. Our emotions all too easily become idols.⁹⁵

Entrapped by Emotions or Liberated through Faith?

Our heavenly Father knows how susceptible we are to being entrapped by our feelings. F. R. Zucker asserted:

A Christian does not always feel God's grace working in his heart. He does feel the working of sin in his life, and he does hear the threats of the law. What more comforting and more strengthening help could there be to restore his sinking courage, to fill his heart with life and peace and joy, than these words of Christ's command: 'Take, eat and drink; this is my body and my blood, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of your sins,' for your reconciliation and salvation! Here all doubt is silenced.⁹⁶

Meditating on what it means to be sacramental reinforces our understanding of what it means to be evangelical, scriptural, creedal and confessional, liturgical, and catechetical. The new man and new woman rising out of the waters of baptism live before God in righteousness and thanksgiving manifested in obedience to and worship of the Triune God. In accordance with Christ's command (Mt. 28:19-20), the church instructs future generations regarding the sacramental presence of Christ. In the garden of Eden

⁹⁵ Robert Kolb, *The Christian Faith* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1993), 117.

⁹⁶ F. R. Zucker, "The Lord's Supper," in Theodore Laetsch, ed., *The Abiding Word*, Volume Two, 437-438.

Satan attacked and stole the identity of man created in the image of God, in holiness and perfection, but baptism gives us a new identity. Robert Kolb asserts:

For we receive our names, and our new identities as God’s children, from him whose name is God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We are incorporated into Christ’s death and resurrection, and thereby into the Father’s family, as the Holy Spirit effects his regenerating and renewing work in baptism. We confess the entire work of God when we baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit...Water and word do not work together in some magical process, however...Faith stands at the heart of human existence, as we have shown above. Thus, baptism’s recreation of the sinner into a child of God can never be separated from faith.⁹⁷

Here again, our flesh is tempted to succumb to the words of the devil and the world to nullify the mystery and miracle wrought through holy baptism. It is our identity as children of God that will be the target of an all-out attack by the forces of evil. The world mocks the grace we receive in the waters of baptism. The devil sneers at the promises of God given us in baptism. “Therefore it is pure wickedness and blasphemy of the devil” said Luther, “that now our new spirits, to mock at baptism, omit from it God’s word and institution, and look upon it in no other way than as water which is taken from the well, and then blather and say: How is a handful of water to help the soul?”⁹⁸

A Redeemed Identity—A Redeemed Community

Rather than trusting in the Name above all names (Phlm 2:9), we are tempted to trust our own name, scorning the new identity we have received through water and the word. But what happens when, because of mental incompetence, we forget our name? What happens if we are rendered totally incompetent in body and mind? What then becomes of our soul? What happens when we lose complete control of our bodily

⁹⁷ Kolb, 219.

⁹⁸ *Concordia Triglotta*, 735.

functions and the awareness of our mind vanishes? Are we to trust in our stockpile of past good works? How many good works would be enough to earn salvation for us?

For the believer, the mystery and miracle of holy baptism sound forth anew every day. Even if the faculties of our mind disappear, our mouth babbles unintelligibly, and we have no control over our body, the grace given to us in baptism makes us heirs of salvation. Why? Because the Holy Spirit works faith in us by the grace given in baptism, and since the Holy Spirit actively works through our baptism, even if incompetence renders us unable to articulate our faith or comprehend our faith, the grace given us on account of Christ's suffering, death, and Resurrection saves us (2 Cor 5:17). "Therefore," Luther declared, "our baptism abides forever...what a great, excellent thing baptism is, which delivers us from the jaws of the devil and makes us God's own, suppresses and takes away sin, and then daily strengthens the new man; and is and remains ever efficacious until we pass from this estate of misery to eternal glory."⁹⁹

If our baptism abides forever, why do we need the Lord's Supper? If baptism begins a life lived in daily contrition and repentance, what benefit could we possibly receive from regular participation in the sacrament of the altar? The devil, recognizing the power of baptism better than many believers, mobilizes the world and attacks everything associated with our faith: the word, the gospel, the confession of faith in the Triune God, worship and instruction in the Triune God, and the efficacy of the sacraments. Moreover, our contrition and repentance are never perfect because our sinful flesh taints even the most benevolent deeds with pride and pretense, guilt and fear.

⁹⁹ *Concordia Triglotta*, 751.

We need the Lord's Supper because we still remain in the flesh and face a constant onslaught of temptations, tribulations, and trials. The Lord's Supper, a food for our souls, nourishes us when we are faint, fortifies us when we are weary, and sustains us when we fall. The sacrament of the altar is rooted in the gospel, conducted in the creedal confession of the church, administered within the community of faith, and worthily received by those who believe the words, "Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins." While Adam and Eve were expelled from Eden after the fall into sin and had to toil for their food as one of the consequences of their sin, God the Father in his mercy invites us to his Table where he has prepared a feast for our salvation, the very body and blood of his Son.

Whereas the devil and the world join forces to rob us of our identity and turn us against our neighbor, baptism bestows on us a redeemed identity and the Lord's Supper invites us to live in a redeemed community. Through baptism you are "bathed in the blood of Christ"¹⁰⁰ and "into the truth that he died for you and by his death freed you from sins and death."¹⁰¹ In the Lord's Supper, God is speaking to you directly and intimately when you hear with your ear and receive in your mouth the body and blood of Christ.¹⁰² The redeemed community, by participating in the Lord's Supper, testifies "before God and angels and men that they are Christians."¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Plass, 46:127.

¹⁰¹ Plass, 47:129.

¹⁰² Plass, 809:2508.

¹⁰³ Plass, 812:2520

Luther exhorted baptized children of God to recognize the power of their baptismal grace and not to view themselves as helpless, hapless victims: “Therefore we Christians must be armed against temptation and must daily expect to be incessantly attacked. Therefore no one may go his way securely and heedlessly as if the devil were far from us. We must at all times expect and return his blows.”¹⁰⁴ Luther echoed the words of St. Paul who said, “For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor 10:3-5).

The believer will heed Paul’s instruction on the sacraments, because the devil exalts himself by attacking the institution and administration of baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Paul advised believers in Corinth that he received troubling reports regarding their observance of baptism (1 Cor 1:13 and 15:29) and the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor 11:17). Paul summoned the Corinthian believers back to the source by asserting that the teaching he delivered to them he had received from Christ (1 Cor 11:23 and 15:3).

Remember what is at stake. The salvation of our souls rests entirely on the word of God. Through the sacraments, God’s word—his promise—his covenant comes to us in a personal way. For the believer, it is of great comfort to know that the word connected with the sacrament of baptism is applied directly to the individual being baptized. The baptismal formula, “I baptize you,” leaves no doubt that the identity of a redeemed child of God is applied to that particular person. It is not a generalized, undifferentiated word;

¹⁰⁴ Plass, 1344:4318.

it is God's promise to a specific person. This sinner, being washed in the waters of baptism, has been forgiven and is sealed as a child of God and an heir of eternal life.¹⁰⁵

The certainty of our citizenship in the kingdom of grace through the waters of baptism stands in stark contrast to a world that revels in uncertainty. The trust in God's love, born out of our baptism, gives us the courage to live in a world that seduces the individual with success, wealth, prestige and power only to crush the individual with disappointment, despair, despondency and depression. When the devil and his hosts clamor at our doorsteps, hurling insults at us and calling us illegitimate, the sacramental presence of God gives us the power to stand up boldly and confess that we are redeemed children of God sealed with the blood of Christ.

As the baptized child of God grows in grace and faith, he grows in his understanding of God's grace and he longs to partake of the sacrament of the altar, which is a foretaste of the feast to come in heaven. Desiring to partake of the Lord's Supper in a worthy manner, the discipline of self-examination reinforces the truth that the words, "given and shed for you," apply directly to the person partaking of the sacrament. As in holy baptism, this is not a generalized word but a specific word to a specific individual.¹⁰⁶ This is Christ's own pledge to those who partake that he has given us his body and blood for the forgiveness of our sins. "Take the pledge, and be comforted and strengthened in your faith. As repentance precedes, so amendment must follow upon faith, for faith can exist only where there is an earnest purpose of amending our sinful lives."¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ J. T. Mueller, "Holy Baptism," in Theodore Laetsch, ed., *The Abiding Word*, Volume Two, 405.

¹⁰⁶ Zucker, 437.

¹⁰⁷ Zucker, 446.

A New Heart—A New Spirit

In accordance with Scripture, Christ's body and blood are really present in the sacrament under the bread and wine, which are received orally by each communicant. Christ is really present in the sacrament by virtue of his words, "This is my body; this is my blood."¹⁰⁸ Neither the character and qualities of the person administering the sacrament nor the character and qualities of the person receiving the sacrament affect the validity of the sacrament.¹⁰⁹ That Christ is truly present in the sacrament underscores the ongoing responsibility of the pastor and congregation to exhort communicants regarding the importance of self-examination.

The grace bestowed in the Lord's Supper serves to strengthen us:

1. In our faith.
2. In our union with Christ.
3. In our hope of the resurrection to eternal life.
4. In our love toward God.
5. In our love toward our neighbor.¹¹⁰

The manner in which Evangelical Lutherans celebrate the Lord's Supper will emphasize our faith, union with Christ, hope of the resurrection to eternal life, love toward God, and love toward our neighbor. For example, prior to receiving the Lord's Supper, members may say, "Peace be with you," to each other as they recall Christ's teaching on reconciliation in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5:24). Prior to receiving the

¹⁰⁸ Zucker, 429.

¹⁰⁹ Arthur E. Neitzel, "The Sacraments," in Theodore Laetsch, ed., *The Abiding Word*, Volume Two, 376-377.

¹¹⁰ Zucker, 435.

body and blood of Christ, each communicant may silently say, “Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof, but only say the word, and your servant will be healed,” and “What shall I render to the Lord for all his bounty to me? I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord.”¹¹¹

The Holy Spirit binds us to the sacraments, because the sacraments are never without the word. Remember the history of the children of Israel. God called them to be “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Ex 19:6). When the children of Israel distorted the meaning of circumcision to be only a circumcision of the flesh and not of the heart, they began their slide into apostasy: “For all these nations are uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel are uncircumcised in the heart” (Jer 9:26). When the children of Israel forgot the meaning of the Passover, they forgot the deliverance wrought by a merciful God (Jer 31:31). Furthermore, they forgot how circumcision and the Passover were connected to God’s word, their confession of the one true God, their worship of the one true God, and their instruction of faith in the one true God. But God, in his mercy, remembered his covenant and through the prophet Ezekiel said, “Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my Spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes, and you will keep my judgments and do them” (Ez 36:25-37).

¹¹¹ Commission on Worship, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and Synod of Evangelical Lutheran Churches, *Worship Supplement* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1969), 16.

For the baptized child of God, the power of baptism manifests itself in daily repentance—in a circumcision of the heart. Through faith, the child of God returns to the covenant of grace established by God in baptism and receives the forgiveness of sins, the grace to amend his sinful life, and the hope of eternal life.¹¹² Hermann Sasse provides a poignant description of the sacraments: “Every Lord’s Supper that we celebrate is a miracle, no less than the miracles that Jesus did during his days on earth. The same is true, although in another way, of baptism. As the preaching of the Lord was accompanied by his signs and wonders, so the proclamation of his church is accompanied by the sacraments.”¹¹³

What does it mean to acknowledge the gifts God has given to us in our baptism? The baptized child of God does not live in isolation from the body of Christ, the church. Members of the body of Christ read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest the word of God; they live in the gospel. Recognizing how the devil and the world wage a relentless assault on the word, believers gather for worship to receive the good news of salvation through the proclamation of the word and giving praise to God. Living in the grace of their baptism they draw upon Luther’s catechisms for instruction in the faith, maturation in the faith, and personal devotion. They examine themselves because they believe they receive Christ’s body and blood in the Lord’s Supper, whereupon they receive the forgiveness of sins.

¹¹² John Theodore Mueller, *Christian Dogmatics* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1955), 496

¹¹³ Hermann Sasse, *We Confess the Sacraments* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1985), 137.

While the armed forces celebrate military victories, we celebrate the greatest victory of all—Christ’s victory over sin, death, and the devil. In the sacraments, we honor Christ, who instituted the sacraments in which we receive the treasures of God’s grace. Strengthened by the sacraments, we enter the battlefield knowing that Christ has won the victory for us. Being born into the body of Christ through holy baptism means that we participate fully in the body of Christ.

Discussion Questions:

1. *How is the sacrament of baptism administered in your congregation?*
2. *How is the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper administered in your congregation?*
3. *Does it matter how the sacraments are administered in your congregation?*
4. *What does it mean to be baptized?*
5. *What does it mean to partake of the Lord’s Supper?*
6. *What does it mean when you partake of the Lord’s Supper in your congregation?*
7. *What are you professing when you partake of the Lord’s Supper in another congregation?*
8. *What does it mean when others partake of the Lord’s Supper in your congregation?*

9. What Does It Mean to Be Evangelical Lutheran?

Almighty God, grant to your church your Holy Spirit and the wisdom that comes down from above, that your word may not be bound but have free course and be preached to the joy and edifying of Christ's holy people, that in steadfast faith we may serve you and, in the confession of your name abide unto the end; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.¹¹⁴

Being Bound

The armed forces often name their installations, ships, aircraft, and tactical vehicles after individuals who have demonstrated conspicuous intrepidity in the midst of battle. This custom serves a twofold purpose: it honors the memory of those who fought valiantly to defend their nation and it instructs future generations regarding what is at stake on the field of battle. Regrettably, if one generation neglects to instruct another, apathy tends to take its toll; people forget why the installation, ship, aircraft, or tactical vehicle bears the name of a certain individual. Similarly, if one generation of Evangelical Lutherans neglects to instruct another, successive generations will forget what it means to be Lutheran and why being Lutheran matters.

The term "Evangelical Lutheran Church," as it is employed in The Rite of Confirmation and The Rite of Ordination, signifies the teachings handed to us from the Reformation, the teachings handed to us from the apostles and prophets. Being bound to the teachings of the Evangelical Lutheran Church means we are bound to the word of God taught in its purity according to the confessions contained in the Book of Concord, and the sacraments administered according to the gospel.¹¹⁵ Evangelical Lutheran congregations consist of those who gather at a definite place, believing, teaching, and

¹¹⁴ *Lutheran Service Book*, 305 (102).

¹¹⁵ Pieplow, 327.

confessing that faith.¹¹⁶ This understanding of the Evangelical Lutheran Church and an Evangelical Lutheran congregation reinforces the vital role of both the corpus of faith and the gathering of believers confessing that corpus of faith.

To the extent that one's understanding of the corpus of faith comes through a local congregation, it could be said that theology is local. Confirmands make their vows in the midst of a local congregation; pastoral candidates make their vows in the midst of a local congregation. Yet to the extent the local congregation binds itself to the teachings of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, theology goes beyond time and space, establishing continuity with the teachings bequeathed to us from the Reformation—the teachings bequeathed to us from the apostles and prophets. Do the members of the congregation and the pastor understand the gravity of that responsibility?

Every congregation and every pastor have been entrusted with the care of souls. How are Evangelical Lutheran congregations and pastors performing that sacred duty? Is it possible the devil and the world have deployed a spiritual type of carbon monoxide in the midst of congregations to poison them little by little, incrementally, imperceptibly? You cannot detect carbon monoxide unless you have a means of detection. Without Scripture and the confessions how can you possibly hope to detect satanic toxicity? At this very moment, political and socio-cultural words are rewriting Scripture. What God has called sin and worthy of eternal condemnation, the devil and the world have called virtue and worthy of commendation.

Remember the vows made in the rite of confirmation and ordination. Allow the words of these two rites to reorient you to what it means and why it matters to be a

¹¹⁶ Geo. H. Perlich, "The Lutheran Congregation," in Theodore Laetsch, ed., *The Abiding Word*, Volume Two, 447.

member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. In The Rite of Confirmation, the confirmand vows to renounce the devil and all his works and ways; to keep steadfast in the faith and suffer death rather than fall away from the faith. In The Rite of Ordination, the candidate vows to perform the duties of the pastoral office in accordance with Scripture and the confessions, and that means that all his teaching and administration of the sacraments will be in conformity with the Holy Scriptures and confessions. The words in both rites remind us of the only reliable source for words, namely, God's word.

Why it Matters

What does it really mean to be Evangelical Lutheran? As the pledge made in the vow of The Rite of Confirmation states: that you hold all the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures to be the inspired word of God and confess the doctrine of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, drawn from them, as you have learned to know it from the Small Catechism, to be faithful and true. Does it matter? Yes. It most certainly matters because the central doctrine of the Evangelical Lutheran Church is that sinful man is justified by grace, through faith, on account of Christ. Why does it matter? Christ has won the victory over sin, death, and the devil. It matters to us in a very personal way because The Rite of Confirmation reminds us of the promise made to us at our baptism: "I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." It matters to us in a very personal way as we partake of the Lord's Supper and hear: "Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of your sins." It matters to us in a very personal way as we face spiritual warfare knowing that Christ has already won the victory and that he will fight for us:

As sure as God's own Word is true,
Not Satan, hell, nor all their crew
Can stand against his power.
Scorn and contempt their cup will fill,

For God is with his people still,
Their help and their strong tower.¹¹⁷

Having reviewed the vows contained in The Rite of Confirmation and The Rite of Ordination, how might we renew the vows on a regular basis to understand the distinguishing characteristics of the Evangelical Lutheran Church and sharpen our skills of detecting a slow poison—a *schleichendes Gift*? One method of renewing our vows is to observe The Presentation of the Augsburg Confession, 25 June, as a day of renewal. Such a day of renewal could serve as the culminating event of a season of individual and congregational reflection on the distinguishing characteristics of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. For example, the annual observance could follow the sequence of chapters in this book and lead to a series of congregational reflections on our Evangelical Lutheran heritage and a reaffirmation of the teachings of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in observance of The Presentation of the Augsburg Confession. Congregations could also designate June 25 through October 31 as a time of reflection on our Evangelical Lutheran heritage with the renewal culminating on the observance of Reformation Day. Any method of reviewing and renewing the pledges we have made will have as its goal the proclamation of the gospel and the equipping of the saints.

Reviewing and renewing the vows made in The Rite of Confirmation and The Rite of Ordination will prompt members to acknowledge the grace given to them in their baptism and to renounce the devil and all his works and ways. Baptism, as Luther declares in the Small Catechism, is not simple water only, but it is the water comprehended in God's command and connected with God's word. The Holy Spirit,

¹¹⁷ *Lutheran Worship*, 300:3.

working through the water and the word of baptism, works the forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe the promises of God.¹¹⁸

It was the Holy Spirit working through the word that gave Elector John Frederick the courage to declare that they could rip God's word out of his cell but they could not rip it out of his heart. Reviewing and renewing our vows regularly will remind our clergy and our laity of our responsibility to equip members for spiritual warfare. Conversely, ignoring and shirking the binding nature of our vows leads us down the path of the children of Israel who forgot God's word and his grace, disregarded the confession of faith and worship of the one true God, allowed false teachings to flourish, and severed themselves from God's sacramental presence.

A People of the Word

We are a people of the word. Speaking the truth in love, we remind each other of the vows we made to the teachings of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. As a safeguard against toxic teachings, we evaluate our preaching, teaching, and practices according to Scripture and the confessions; this is ongoing and it requires vigilance.

History is replete with examples of the devil and the world colluding to lure gullible believers, in the name of unity, into compromising the truth of salvation through accepting counterfeit confessions of faith, worship orders, and catechisms.¹¹⁹ The gospel preached, taught, and confessed through our Evangelical Lutheran heritage is the antidote against Satan's slow poison. That is why the liturgy and hymnal we use in worship must

¹¹⁸ *Concordia Triglotta*, 551.

¹¹⁹ Bente, 185-187.

represent the teachings of Scripture. Through rigorous catechetical instruction and ongoing use of Luther's Small Catechism for personal devotion, men and women of God are taught to love God's word and recognize false doctrine. Through Luther's Small Catechism, men and women of God are taught how they can live in the power of their baptism and how to examine themselves for participation in the Lord's Supper, where they receive the true body and blood of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, looking forward to the day when we shall be united at his banquet table in heaven.

Being Lutheran is much more than referring to yourself as a Lutheran; being Lutheran is understanding and living our Evangelical Lutheran heritage to the glory of God and the edification of the body of Christ. It is not denominational arrogance to understand and foster an Evangelical Lutheran identity. In fact, understanding and living our Evangelical Lutheran heritage has become all the more critical because the schemes of Satan are ripping apart one Christian denomination and congregation after another. In the chaos and confusion of spiritual warfare, the greatest contribution Evangelical Lutherans can make to the Christian church is tenaciously holding to our confession.

Henry Hamann captured the essence of that obligation:

But the Lutheran remains Lutheran because in the Lutheran church that remains true to its confessions, each one has found the true witness to the marks of the church. Here the gospel is proclaimed in keeping with the Word of God; here Baptism is performed and understood in accordance with the mind of the institutor; here is the real and genuine Sacrament of the Altar. These marks of the church the Lutheran wants, keeps, defends, dies for; these cannot be given up. Union with other Christians can only be on the basis of the true marks of the church. It is the spirit and genius of Lutheranism to be liberal in everything except where the marks of the church are concerned...But over against the gospel and the sacraments, the Lutheran is unyielding...Take them away, and the Lutheran is done for, gone, destroyed. Every man and every woman will fight for his or her life and fight for it desperately; the true

Lutheran man or woman fights for his or her life also—the gospel and the sacraments, that is. Only a person who thinks like this is a true Lutheran at heart.¹²⁰

Wielding the Weapons of Faith

It is my fervent prayer that by reviewing the vows we made in The Rite of Confirmation and The Rite of Ordination, we will understand the distinguishing characteristics of the Evangelical Lutheran Church and renew the vows we freely made: to acknowledge the gifts given to us in our baptism and to renounce the devil and all his works and ways. Every believer is invited to draw from the Evangelical Lutheran Church an arsenal of weapons of faith with which to fight valiantly in the midst of satanic assaults on the church. Viewing congregational life through our Evangelical Lutheran heritage will assist pastors and congregations in determining if practices they have adopted conform to God's word. It is our Evangelical Lutheran heritage that rejoices in the victory won by Christ and reminds us through God's word that we shall live with Christ forever. We read the truth of our salvation in Scripture, we hear it proclaimed in the gospel, we confess it in the creeds and confessions, we celebrate it in the liturgy, we are taught it in catechesis, and we receive it in the sacraments. Only the antidote of the gospel can save us from Satan's slow poison.

The word of God will be foolishness to some and a scandal to others. Others, acting on behalf of the devil and the world, will attack the truth of how God saved sinful man. In his essay entitled "The Means of Grace," Edwin E. Pieplow declared, "For just in these last times, according to divine revelation, there will be at work many spiritual brigands who will perpetrate the grossest kind of deception. Christ has warned his church

¹²⁰ Henry Hamann, *On Being a Christian* (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 1996), 113.

again and again concerning the false prophets and the deceivers who would deceive the very elect if it were possible.”¹²¹

The elect of God trust in the promises of God and are made wise to salvation. The elect of God also live in a high state of alert. The salvation of souls is at stake. Are the words you are using only concerned with affirming and including people into an earthly organization or do they boldly profess that sinful man is saved by grace, through faith in Christ? Are the words you are using intended to empower people to exercise some sort of authority in an earthly organization, or are they stating unequivocally that to believe in Christ means to be a servant of Christ obedient to the word of God? Are the words you use rewriting Scripture, trying to improve on it to make it more palatable to the ambitions of culture and society, or are they bearing witness to the truth that the church, as the bride of Christ, seeks to be faithful unto death?

Will we not employ all the elements of our Evangelical Lutheran heritage to wage a good warfare? What better way for the devil to destroy the church than through one soul at a time and one congregation at a time? Consider again the manner in which the devil tempted Eve and the tactics he employed with Christ. Both temptation accounts demonstrate how the devil will manipulate, distort, and twist God’s word. We must be on our guard. Beware of the *Gift* that poisons. Acknowledge the gifts given in your baptism; these gifts were given you by the power of the Holy Spirit working through the word.

Love that sits by idly, passively, and complacently while those you love die of eternal poisoning for lack of the truth is not truly love. Have we succumbed to the satanic strategy of being oblivious to the spiritual warfare all around? Have we abandoned our

¹²¹ Pieplow, 322.

spiritual armor? Are we affirming another Jesus, a different spirit, and a different gospel? Listen to St. John: “By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God” (1 Jn 4:2).

We are at war, but would you know it from how many have already abandoned their spiritual armor? We are at war, but would you know it from how many have lost their fighting edge because they are not honing their battle skills by studying the word? We are at war, but when congregations make decisions, do they consult the creeds and confessions to ensure that those decisions are made in conformity with God’s word? We are at war, but would you know it from how irreverently worship is conducted, the word is preached, and the sacraments are administered? We are at war, but would you know it from how carelessly instruction in the faith is performed? We are at war, but would you know it from those who think they are entitled to rewrite Scripture to make it more tolerant, palatable, culturally relevant and socially acceptable? We are at war, but would you know it from organizations claiming to represent the Evangelical Lutheran Church without adhering to the teachings of the Evangelical Lutheran Church?

Our Evangelical Lutheran heritage assists us in detecting the poison that intends to kill us. Our scriptural heritage reminds us that in God’s word there is both judgment and grace (Jer 31:31 and Ez 36:25). Our Evangelical heritage reminds us that sinful man is redeemed from the curse of the law through the precious blood of Christ; we are made heirs of eternal life by grace, through faith alone (Gal 2:16 and Heb 11:1). Our creedal and confessional heritage reminds us that God the Father created us and still preserves us, God the Son redeemed us, and the Holy Spirit working through the word brings us to faith and sanctifies us (Jn 14:11 and 1 Jn 4:7). Our liturgical heritage reminds us that our

grateful response to the love of God is to offer a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving (Ps 95). Our catechetical heritage reminds us to sit daily at the feet of Jesus to learn of his ways and imitate them in our lives (Ps 119). Our sacramental heritage reminds us that through the simple means of water and the word, God ushers us into the kingdom of grace; through the simple means of bread and wine and the word of God we taste the mystery of salvation when we eat of Christ's body and blood (Mt 26:26 and 28:18).

May I challenge you to review the vows you made in The Rite of Confirmation and The Rite of Ordination? May I challenge you to renew the vows you made in The Rite of Confirmation and The Rite of Ordination? The vows contained in both rites remind us what it means to adhere to the teachings of the Evangelical Lutheran Church and why it matters. The devil wants us to fight and renounce each other; he does not want us fighting and renouncing him. By challenging each other to review and renew the vows we made, we demonstrate our love for each other because the salvation of our souls is at stake. By challenging each other to examine the words we use and the practices we adopt in our congregations, we will acknowledge the gifts God gave us in our baptism and renounce the devil and all his works and ways.

St. Paul said that we, "speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into him who is the head—Christ" (Eph 4:15). Only in Christ is there both truth and love. When believers are united in Christ's truth and Christ's love, they are united in one body, one Spirit, in the bonds of peace. United in Christ's truth and Christ's love, they speak the truth in love. United in the body of Christ, they do not give way to the devil, nor do they grieve the Holy Spirit, but they walk worthy of their calling and live to love and

forgive one another. In the body of Christ, truth and love, unity and calling, faith and life are inseparable.

Celebrating the Victory

With Paul we rejoice in the victory we have in Christ Jesus. The hope we have in Christ Jesus is the anchor of our souls. There is only one Jesus, one Spirit, and one gospel. It is this Jesus who said, "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8). May Almighty God so rule our hearts and minds that the blood of Christ, which has washed our sins away, not be diluted by heresy. May Almighty God so rule our hearts and minds that we continue to believe, teach and confess the word of life and so lead men to salvation. May God Almighty so rule our hearts and minds that the teachings of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, for which our Lutheran forbears pledged their lives, lead us to renew our pledge made at confirmation to continue steadfast in this confession and church and to suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from it.

Discussion Questions:

- 1. What does it mean when I pledge to adhere to the teachings of the Evangelical Lutheran Church?*
- 2. What does it mean for me to be a member of a congregation claiming to adhere to the teachings of the Evangelical Lutheran Church?*
- 3. What I am asserting when I make my vows of confirmation?*
- 4. What does the pastor assert when he makes his vows of ordination?*
- 5. Are the vows in The Rite of Confirmation and The Rite of Ordination binding in my congregation?*
- 6. Consider the following portions of Scripture: Psalm 22:25, 50:14, 61: 5-8, 66:13, 116:14-18, and Jonah 2:9.*

Appendix A

A Service Commemorating the Presentation of the Augsburg Confession

Service Notes: This observance of the Presentation of the Augsburg Confession will provide worshipers with an opportunity to gain a deeper appreciation for the vows we make in The Rite of Confirmation and The Rite of Ordination. While the hymnals and orders of worship used by congregations may vary, I recommend the hymns, renewal of vows, sermon, and The Litany that follow:

Hymns:

Opening Hymn—"Lord, Open Now My Heart to Hear" (*Lutheran Service Book* 908)

Confirmation Vow Hymn—"Lord, Thee I Love With All My Heart" (*Lutheran Service Book* 708)

Ordination Vow Hymn—"Holy Spirit, Light Divine" (*Lutheran Service Book* 496)

Closing Hymn—"Rise! To Arms! With Prayer Employ You" (*Lutheran Service Book* 668)

Renewal of vows: After the reading of the Holy Gospel, the pastor faces the congregation and says, "Brothers and sisters in Christ:

Pastor: Do you this day in the presence of God and of this congregation acknowledge the gifts which God gave you in your baptism?

Members: I do.

Pastor: Do you renounce the devil and all his works and all his ways?

Members: I do.

Pastor: Do you hold all the prophetic and apostolic Scriptures to be the inspired Word of God?

Members: I do.

Pastor: Do you believe the chief article of Scripture, namely, that we are saved by grace, through faith, on account of Christ?

Members: I do.

Pastor: Do you confess the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?

Members: I do so confess.

Pastor: Do you intend to gather with your fellow believers for worship to hear the good news of salvation and to sing praises, present your offerings, and offer prayers to Almighty God?

Members: I do so intend.

Pastor: Do you intend to be faithful in the use of Luther's Small and Large Catechisms, recognizing that they are sources for both instruction in Christian doctrine and devotion?

Members: I do so intend.

Pastor: Following the exhortation of St. Paul, do you intend to examine yourself and partake of the Lord's Supper, which is the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, a means of grace and a holy sacrament?

Members: I do so intend.

The Head Elder will come forward on behalf of the congregation and face the pastor.

Head Elder: Pastor, in the presence of God and of this congregation I now ask you: Do you believe the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments to be the inspired Word of God and the only infallible rule of faith and practice?

Pastor: I do.

Head Elder: Do you accept the three Ecumenical Creeds as faithful testimonies to the truth of the Holy Scriptures, and the Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church contained in the Book of Concord, as true expositions of the Word of God?

Pastor: I do.

Head Elder: Do you solemnly promise that you will you preach, teach, conduct worship, and discharge the duties of your office in accordance with Scripture and the Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church; will you demonstrate to the church a constant and ready ministry, admonishing the people to a lively confidence in Christ and holy living?

Pastor: I do.

Head Elder: Will you faithfully instruct both young and old in the chief articles of Christian doctrine?

Pastor: I will.

Head Elder: Will you administer the Holy Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, lead us in both corporate and private confession and absolution, forgive the sins of those who repent, and will you promise never to divulge the sins confessed to you; will you minister faithfully to the sick and dying?

Pastor: I will.

All: We intend, by the power of the Holy Spirit at work in us through Word and Sacrament, to continue steadfast in this confession and church and to suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from it.

Sermon: Even to Death

Text: Luke 8:26-40

Members of the armed forces receive Code of Conduct training. Code of Conduct training is designed to prepare service members in the event that they are captured and held as a hostage. What could be more ominous than to face the prospect of being taken by the enemy and detained as a hostage? History does not recount many stories of captors treating their hostages well. The purpose of taking hostages is to use them to compel your adversary to submit to your terms. Captors will exploit every possible technique to threaten, intimidate and torture their hostages to break their will for the purpose of compelling their enemy to submit to their demands. If captors break the will of their hostage, the hostage may turn against his own country. How, then, could the hostage return home with honor? Would such a hostage have a home to return to? Would such a person die an honorable death?

Our Gospel lesson recounts how Jesus healed a man who had been demon possessed for years. This man was held hostage and tortured by demons. The demons had so completely broken this man's will that he wore no clothes and did not live in a house, but lived in the tombs. Through this man, the demons were able to terrorize the local

community. The townspeople attempted to control him with chains and shackles but he broke the chains and was driven into the wilderness by the demons.

The evangelist Luke recorded many healings performed by Jesus. As a physician, Luke marveled at Christ's power to heal all manner of illness, disease, and demonic possession. Luke leaves no doubt about Christ when he records that the demons who possessed the man knew exactly who Christ was, namely, Jesus, Son of the Most High God. In particular, Luke emphasizes the reactions of the demons, the townspeople, and the healed man. The demons trembled at the sight of Christ. The demons, named Legion, begged Christ that he would send them into a herd of swine rather than into the abyss. Christ permitted the demons to enter the swine, which they terrorized and drove violently over a steep place into the sea. When the townspeople heard about this miracle they went out to see what had happened. They saw the man, who had once been demon possessed, now sitting at the feet of Jesus; he was clothed and in his right mind. In contrast with the healed man who begged Jesus to allow him to come along, the townspeople, seized with fear, asked Jesus to depart. Jesus told the healed man to return to his own house and proclaim what God had done for him. This he did. This man, who was once a hostage and used by the demons to terrorize the community, had now become a disciple of Christ and proclaimed the gospel to the community.

Luke's account of the demon-possessed man clearly indicates that we are in the midst of spiritual warfare. Would you know we are in the midst of spiritual warfare by the way many live their lives? Would you know it by the way you live your life? Several years ago, a man visited several congregations and said the following: "Oh, what mad, senseless fools are we that, while we must ever live and dwell among such mighty

enemies as the devils are, we nevertheless despise our weapons and defense, and are too lazy to look at or think of them!"¹²² The man who wrote those words was Martin Luther. You will find those words in the Preface to Luther's Large Catechism. Do Luther's words apply to us?

We see manifestations of spiritual warfare every day. We see it on the playgrounds and in the classrooms with our children: children bullying each other and disrespecting their teachers. We see it in our homes: marital discord and family disharmony. We see it in our communities: neighbors suing each other and shooting each other. We see it in all branches of our government: people who claim to be sophisticated and urbane engage in the most malicious slander. The devil spawns what Proverbs 6:16-19 refers to as the six things the LORD hates, seven things that are an abomination to him:

1. a proud look,
2. a lying tongue,
3. hands that shed innocent blood,
4. a heart that devises wicked plans,
5. feet that are swift in running to evil,
6. a false witness who speaks lies,
7. and one who sows discord.

On our own, we are helpless against the devil and the world. There is no aircraft carrier, tank, missile, or special operations unit powerful enough to vanquish the one who wants us to be condemned to eternal damnation. How ironic it is that our Victor, the One

¹²² *Concordia Triglotta*, 571.

who came into this world to save us, did not ride into town on a horse of war; he was not accompanied by a legion of soldiers, an armada, or a sky full of bombers. Our Victor rode into our lives on a beast of burden. He died the cruelest of deaths and in full view of everyone was forsaken by the heavenly Father for your sins and mine.

In Christ, we who were once hostages to sin, death, and the devil, have been healed. Sin, death, and the devil no longer have the power to torture and threaten us. In the gospel we are set free and invited to a home where our heavenly Father welcomes all who believe in Jesus, Son of the Most High God. Through Christ's death and resurrection, our sins are forgiven and we have the hope of eternal life. It was on Calvary where our Savior said, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." It was on Calvary where our Savior said, "It is finished." It was on Calvary that our Savior's blood was shed.

What does that mean for you and for me? What do the death and resurrection of Christ mean for you? What does it mean for you that someone considered you to be worth dying for? Our heavenly Father sent his Son to die the death we should have died. In the death and resurrection of Christ, your sins have been forgiven. Just as the man who was once held hostage by demons was given a new beginning and proclaimed the gospel in his community, we also, who were held hostage and now are set free through the blood of Christ, proclaim the good news of salvation in our communities.

In The Rite of Confirmation, one of the vows says, "Do you intend faithfully to conform all your life to the divine word, to be faithful in the use of God's word and sacraments, which are his means of grace, and in faith, word, and action to remain true to

God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, even to death?”¹²³ Do those of us who are confirmed remember making that vow? When we made that vow, did we consider the gravity of the vow, namely, to remain faithful even to death?

Today we commemorate the Presentation of the Augsburg Confession. As we ponder the gravity of the vow to remain faithful unto death, consider for a moment the faith of those who signed the Augsburg Confession. While some of us might be familiar with the events leading to the Reformation, few of us may have had the opportunity to reflect on the events leading to the Augsburg Confession, the confession of faith signed by those who followed the teachings of the Reformation.

On 21 January 1530, Emperor Charles V issued a proclamation to hold a diet, a deliberative assembly, at Augsburg. The Emperor’s proclamation began by drawing attention to the specter of a Turkish invasion and then stated that the diet would consider what must be done to resolve the divisions and separations in the church. Upon receipt of the Emperor’s summons to the diet, Elector John appointed Luther and others to prepare a written statement addressing those matters causing division. In addition to articulating what they believed, those professing adherence to an Evangelical Lutheran faith were faced with slanderous accusations; their opponents misrepresented their faith. The Augsburg Confession was read in public on 25 June.¹²⁴ According to Bente, 25 June 1530 is the real birthday of the Evangelical Lutheran Church:

From this day on she stands before all the world as a body united by a public confession and separate from the Roman Church. The lone, but courageous confessor of Worms saw himself surrounded with a stately host of true Christian heroes, who were not afraid to place their names under his confession, although

¹²³ *Lutheran Worship Agenda*, 110.

¹²⁴ *Lutheran Worship Agenda*, 15.

they knew that it might cost them goods and blood, life and limb. When the Emperor, after entering Augsburg, stubbornly demanded that the Lutherans cease preaching, Margrave George of Brandenburg finally declared: “Rather than deny my God and suffer the word of God to be taken from me, I will kneel down and have my head struck off.”¹²⁵

Four months after Luther’s death the Emperor seized the opportunity to compel those following the teachings of Luther by force of arms to return and submit to Rome. With his overwhelming military might, the Emperor easily triumphed in the Smalcald War of 1546 and captured Elector John Frederick. The Elector, armed only with the word of God written on his heart (for his captors deprived him of Luther’s writings and the Bible) made a bold statement of faith and would not recant:

Since now in my conscience I am firmly persuaded of this, I owe this gratefulness and obedience to God, who has shown me such unspeakable grace, that, as I desire to obtain eternal salvation and escape eternal damnation, I do not fall away from the truth of his almighty will which his word has revealed to me, and which I know to be the truth.¹²⁶

The Elector further asserted that while his captors could deprive him of his books they could not rip from his heart what he had learned from them. Elector John Frederick can inspire us to keep the vow we made in The Rite of Confirmation to die rather than depart from the faith.

We know that we have the victory in Christ. Our salvation rests securely in his all-atoning sacrifice. Therefore we live in the full confidence of faith, boldly promising that we will remain faithful even unto death. Like the man that Christ healed from demonic possession, we proclaim the good news of salvation so that others will know the

¹²⁵ *Lutheran Worship Agenda*, 23.

¹²⁶ Bente, 97.

joy of salvation. Like Elector John Frederick, the enemy might be able to rip God's word out of our cell, but he cannot rip God's word out of our hearts. Amen

The Litany

Pastor	Congregation
O Lord,	have mercy.
O Christ,	have mercy.
O Lord,	have mercy.
O Christ,	hear us.
God the Father in heaven,	have mercy.
God the Son, Redeemer of the world,	have mercy.
God the Holy Spirit,	have mercy.
Be gracious to us.	Spare us, good Lord.
Be gracious to us.	Help us, good Lord.
From all sin, from all error, from all evil; from the crafts and assaults of the devil; from sudden and evil death; from pestilence and famine; from war and bloodshed; from sedition and rebellion; from lightning and tempest; from all calamity by fire and water; and from everlasting death:	Good Lord, deliver us.
By the mystery of your holy Incarnation; by your holy nativity; by your baptism, fasting, and temptation; by your agony and bloody sweat; by your cross and passion; by your precious death and burial; by your glorious resurrection and ascension; and by the coming of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter:	Help us, good Lord.
In all time of our tribulation; in all time of our prosperity; in the hour of death; and in the day of Judgment:	Help us, good Lord.
We poor sinners implore you	To hear us, O Lord.
To rule and govern your holy Christian Church; to preserve all pastors and ministers of your	We implore you to hear us, good Lord.

<p>church in the true knowledge and understanding of your wholesome word and to sustain them in holy living; to put an end to all schisms and causes of offense;</p> <p>to bring into the way of truth all who have erred and are deceived;</p> <p>to beat down Satan under our feet;</p> <p>to send faithful laborers into your harvest; and to accompany your word with your grace and Spirit;</p>	
<p>To raise up those who fall and to strengthen those who stand; and to comfort and help the weak-hearted and the distressed:</p>	We implore you to hear us, good Lord.
<p>To give all peoples concord and peace; to preserve our land from discord and strife;</p> <p>to give to our country your protection in every time of need;</p> <p>to direct and defend our President and all in authority;</p> <p>to bless and protect our magistrates and all our people;</p> <p>to watch over and help all who are in danger, necessity, and tribulation;</p> <p>to protect and guide all who travel;</p> <p>to grant all women with child, and all mothers with infant children, increasing happiness in their blessings;</p> <p>to defend all orphans and widows and provide for them;</p> <p>to strengthen and keep all sick persons and young children;</p> <p>to free those in bondage; and to have mercy on us all:</p>	We implore you to hear us, good Lord.
<p>To forgive our enemies, persecutors, and slanderers and to turn their hearts;</p> <p>to give and preserve for our use the kindly fruits of the earth; and graciously to hear our prayers:</p>	We implore you to hear us, good Lord.
<p>Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God,</p>	we implore you to hear us, good Lord.
<p>Christ, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world,</p>	have mercy upon us.

Christ, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world,	have mercy upon us.
Christ, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world,	grant us your peace.
O Christ,	hear us.
O Lord,	have mercy.
O Christ,	have mercy.
O Lord,	have mercy. Amen ¹²⁷

¹²⁷ *Lutheran Service Book*, 288-289.

Appendix B

Observations on What It Means to Be Lutheran

I am grateful to those who on the pages that follow contributed their observations on what it means to be Lutheran and why it matters.

Wayne from Virginia wrote: “Being a Lutheran means knowing of the assurance of your salvation in Jesus Christ. Every Sunday School student who is taught John 3:16 knows this is true. This is expressed in the central doctrine of the church, the doctrine of justification -- **that we are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.** The saving grace of Jesus Christ provides us that assurance, not something that we ourselves merit or have to do to obtain his favor. This is, as Lutherans have been taught, the doctrine upon which the church stands or falls. All other Lutheran teachings must support and flow from this central doctrine.

Worship is a central part of our Christian experience. Lutheranism is unique in that we believe as we worship, and worship as we believe. Worship has always reinforced Lutheran beliefs in a very real and understandable way. All of the basic elements of our Lutheran faith are also found in the Divine Service: the Invocation of the Trinity, Confession and Absolution, the three Creeds, the liturgy of the Divine Service (much of which is taken directly from Holy Scripture), and the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion. Efforts to “modernize” the worship service by subtracting out these core elements of the worship service may, over time, subtly work to subtract out the core elements of our Lutheran belief system in the mind of the worshiper. For this reason, there needs to be continuity in Lutheran worship and practice, and an enduring emphasis on teaching and catechesis.

The problems facing American Lutheranism today touch closely on our overall identity as Lutheran Christians. There is an increasing effort to make the church more “relevant” to contemporary society through changes in worship forms, communion practices, and our relations with other Christian denominations – the assumption being that if we “do something different,” maybe we can bring more people into the pews on Sunday morning. Further, there are those in the church who assert that changes to longstanding church teachings and practices must be made in an attempt to make the church more attractive to outsiders and more relevant to contemporary society. Church meetings and activities often take on the aura and nomenclature of business meetings. That is the last thing we need – to focus on the business and management aspects of the church over and above its historic teachings. This is especially true for the Lutheran layman, whose stewardship of his time to the church should include learning, education and teaching, and not just the business management of the church’s temporal affairs.

Luther, in his explanation to the Third Article of the Apostle’s Creed, makes clear that the Holy Spirit works through the whole Christian church here on earth, not through our works, but through his word. The need to hold fast to the truths of the gospel and our Lutheran doctrines and teachings has never been greater. Only by returning to the Scriptures, the catechism and the confessions will Lutherans – clergy and laymen alike – be able to receive the guidance they need to sustain our Lutheran identity for future generations.”

Betty from Missouri commented on the importance of instruction with Luther’s Small Catechism: “We’ll start with the sacrament of Holy Baptism, which begins at birth. This sacrament first gives us hope of eternal salvation through the water and the word of

God. As St Paul said in Titus chapter three, being justified by his grace we have been made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. The Office of the Keys and Confession reminds us to confess our sins and to ask for forgiveness. The Sacrament of the Altar is where believers receive Christ's body and blood for the forgiveness of sins. Living in the peace of Christ, Christians live lives of thanksgiving and prayer. The Small Catechism is an outline for daily life; you begin each day with prayer. The Ten Commandments are the simple guide to decision making for our daily lives. The Small Catechism teaches us how to ask God's blessing and return thanks. The comfort of prayer, knowing that we are not alone and that we can call upon God for strength and courage is calming. Christ has saved us from sin and eternal death. We can truly rejoice in his love and mercy."

Richard from Oklahoma stated: "Our 21st century world consists of radical rapid-fire change. We wake up one morning to see the World Trade Center explode in fire. We end a day with the stock market at 12,500 and one year later it is at 7,500. One day we laugh and celebrate life in New Orleans and just days later the whole city is left in total devastation. Another day we casually put food to our mouth and the next day we are afraid this same food may be contaminated by an Anthrax spore. Our religious world has lost continuity. The average worshipper today may be affiliated with five different church denominations. Religious leaders have lost credibility and accountability. Some end up in prison while some are exposed for sexual impropriety. Lutheranism, with its liturgical worship, provides stability in a rapid-fire world. It has an invocation and benediction. Sandwiched between the beginning and the end is a journey. The journey does not change. The journey leads to a cross. The cross provides the dotted lines between which life needs to be lived. Those dotted lines (law) are the guidance we need to make sense of

our chaotic world. The journey between invocation and benediction leads to the cross where there is power of transformation (gospel). The law makes sense out of a world of chaos. The gospel is the impetus to change. When you eat the Anthrax spore, you become what you eat. When you eat the Bread of Life, you become what you eat. Liturgy as beginning and end, journey as law and gospel, the cross as point of transformation is what it means to be Lutheran. Is it important? Try to live in your chaotic world without it! You better get a never-ending prescription of pain killers!"

Nancy from Colorado wrote: "We are linked together through our faith in Jesus Christ. A recent object lesson was a paper chain with names of saints alive here on earth and alive with Christ in heaven. What a joy to realize that those who are no longer with us are linked to our lives in Christ. This is only possible through our Almighty Father's great love and concern for mankind. He gave his Son that we might live. "Grace through faith" has been the underlying force in my life. "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." God has given to me the gift of sensitivity in the struggles of those around me. He assists me in ministering to the health needs of others in a manner that shows Christ at work within me.

As I study the history of Israel and the conquest of Canaan, I am vividly reminded of God the Father's demand for strict obedience, his intolerance of not placing him first and foremost in my life. In Joshua and Judges he is consistent with his demands and promises. Joshua reminds the Israelites, Joshua 23:10, "One of you routs a thousand because the Lord your God fights for you just as he promised." He fights for us today. To be reminded that I am "a thousand stronger" with God's help is phenomenal. My struggles are in his hands.

As a child, the law of God was more predominant in my Lutheran education. The commandments with Luther's explanations were studied throughout elementary school. I took pride in memorizing much of Luther's Small Catechism. This has provided a reservoir of increased understanding as the demands of my life change. Life exposes us to many challenges. The devil would rejoice to see us falter and choose the offerings of the world and our sinful nature. It is imperative that I remain intact with my Lutheran heritage and the doctrines of justification and sanctification. Each Sunday as I say the creed with my fellow believers, I am reminded of the essence of my faith. I and those saying these words are linked to Christ through his suffering and death on the cross. There is no question in my mind as to the beliefs of the Lutheran Church.

My link to Christ and his blessings is through prayer. The word and prayer strengthen me every moment of my daily journey. Satan has an affinity to tear us away from our source of strength. Jesus Christ my Lord and Savior is always with me. He fights my battles, if I allow him to fight them. He gives me the confidence and hope to become actively involved in the lives of others. He allows me to weep with them when they are mourning and to provide strength in their weakness. Our celebrations of faith are linked together with the grace provided through the blood of the Lamb.

What a joy to have the hope of eternal life. My life on earth is but a hike partially up the mountain. The real destination is eternity in heaven. I am linked to all the saints around the globe through the blood of the Lamb. What a blessing to know this as my personal conviction."

Mike from Pennsylvania said: "I, like many Lutherans, was born into the Lutheran Church. Although at that time the differences between the different Lutheran

synods were not as severe as today. My family attended church and Sunday school weekly and in the summer we attended VBS. I went through catechism and was confirmed in the Lutheran Church. The lessons I learned in my Sunday school were taught to me in my formative years and so I never really questioned what I was being taught. By the time I was confirmed I understood the basic doctrines of the Lutheran Church but what I did not realize was that not all Christian churches believed and practiced those same doctrines.

Growing up, I did not think too much about the differences between the various Christian denominations, nor did I think about other religions. Where I grew up you were either “Christian” or an atheist. Most of my friends were churchgoers, albeit some more than others, and the Bible stories that they were learning in their various denominations were the same as those that I was learning. At that time the differences were not apparent to me.

It was not until I was married that I started to look at the differences between one denomination and another. My wife was raised in the Christian Reformed Church and so, upon graduating from college and moving to another state, we attended a Christian Reformed Church. At that time it seemed more important to her where we attended church than it was to me. In reading the catechism for the Christian Reformed Church, I did not, on the surface, see many differences with being a Lutheran.

After attending for a while, I started to delve deeper into their idea of “predestination.” The Christian Reformed understanding of predestination was their justification for a concept that I did not agree with, “limited atonement.” If we are predestined for salvation or damnation, then Christ’s death and resurrection were only for

those predestined for salvation. Enough said about this, as my purpose here is not to expound upon the differences between the Lutherans and the Christian Reformed Church. The point is that it was at this point in my Christian walk that I was starting to see the differences between different Christian denominations.

After almost 5 years in the Christian Reformed Church we moved to a city that did not have a Christian Reformed Church and I insisted that we attend the local Lutheran church. Coming back to the Lutheran Church, I started to get back in touch with my Lutheran roots. I started to appreciate the doctrines of our church and to realize that what we believe and are being taught is biblically based and we were not pulling one idea or verse from the Bible and basing our doctrines on that idea. The comfort that I have in the Lutheran Church is that I know that the beliefs, doctrines, Bible studies, sermons and our catechism taught us are supported and pulled from Scripture. What it means to me to be Lutheran is knowing the hope I have for eternal life is not through any actions of my own but by God's grace through faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ."

Barbara from Missouri wrote: "We tend to think of warfare as an external event. My spiritual warfare is certainly much more internal. Every day, there is an awareness of opportunities to either live my faith or hide it. Every day, in my language and behavior, there is an awareness of losing that war. But that's only part of the dilemma.

Much of my angst comes out of a feeling of "misfit." I was raised in the Lutheran Church. I was blessed with parents who considered education, especially Lutheran school education, a high privilege. All six of us kids attended eight grades of Lutheran elementary school. Much of the time was spent in a one-room schoolhouse for all eight grades; the teachers had received "calls" and most had gone through Lutheran schools for

their college education. All of our social contacts apart from family gatherings were around church, our Lutheran school, Sunday School, youth gatherings and other church related events. Three of us received higher education in the Lutheran system.

During my life, various schisms have decimated the Lutheran Church. While I have maintained my affiliation with the Lutheran Church, I have not always felt the warmth and acceptance, the sense of extended family, I experienced as a child. Sometimes I worry about the exclusivity and the insistence on specific conservatism. Those pieces of the Lutheran Church do not fit me. Those elements war with the pieces which fit me well: sermons which instruct by delivering both law and gospel; Luther's explanatory material via the Small Catechism; Luther's insistence on Christian education in the family; the liturgical emphasis which continues to thrive in some Lutheran parishes; the hymns which were memorized as a child and which now push up through the density of life. These hymns profess the law which condemns and the Gospel which provides comfort.

Often these days I wonder why I prefer the anonymity which is afforded in a larger congregation. I am relieved that not too much is asked of me as a member of a larger Lutheran congregation. I feel guilt when I acknowledge these feelings that reflect something less than the total commitment exemplified by our parents and grandparents.

My faith life has had some bumps. For many years after the death of my Dad, I did not believe my prayers were going anywhere. I continued to go through the motions for my young sons; but I believed there was only hollowness on the receiving end of things. Later, I worshiped very little, choosing instead to do my own private study of Bible readings and meditations. For a period, I could not make it through a worship

service. I was overcome with feelings of grief, which were somehow tied to my family, both my family of origin and my current family, consisting of my two grown sons and myself.

My current state is the anonymous worship I referred to earlier. I am once again worshipping with a large “downtown” parish. We follow the liturgical order in *Lutheran Worship* fairly closely. Our pastor’s sermons are biblical and instructive. We celebrate the Lord’s Supper on a regular basis. The congregation is growing. I know there is a blessing in my participation.

I am further blessed when I sit with my mother, who is now in a nursing home, recovering from a fall. Oftentimes in the evening before she goes to sleep, we read the day’s devotion from the *Portals of Prayer*. There is the Scripture reading, the devotional and then the prayer for the day from the booklet. Sometimes we say the Lord’s Prayer together or perhaps Luther’s Evening Prayer.

As children, we did not leave home in the morning without having the devotion. It followed breakfast. Sometimes I would listen to Daddy reading the devotion while looking out the window watching for the school bus. As I got older, I was allowed to read a portion of either the Scripture or the devotional meditation. Later on, while traveling by car with my mother, after Daddy had passed away, she would read the Bible passages and the meditation aloud while I drove.

Probably where this reflection leads is to an acknowledgement of the need for some recognizable structure. For me, it is probably the structure and the elements of the familiar “protocol” which keep me connected. It is likely those elements which the Spirit

uses to harness my angst, remove the idea of misfit, allow me to feel a part of the ‘body of Christ.’”

Jessica, a teenager from California wrote: “For me, being a Lutheran means that I believe in what Martin Luther taught and believed. We are constantly in the midst of spiritual warfare. We are up against the second greatest army in the universe, Satan and his angels. Martin Luther always preached that we need to realize that we have sinned, but when the devil confronts us with it we can say, “What of my sin? Jesus died for me and I am saved through his blood.” We need the gospel more than anything because it gives us the courage to get through temptations. The gospel also gives the hope for a better life after this earthly life. So if we die, we travel to a better place and life. The gospel also tells us that even if we fall, Jesus will pick us up again, brush us off, and sends us on our way. Though the gospel protects us, that is not the only thing. St. Paul told the Christians in Ephesus to put on the whole armor of God and to take their stand against the devil. Paul urged Christian not to trust in themselves but in the word of God.

In a way, our spiritual warfare and catechetical instruction go hand in hand. Luther’s Small Catechism prepares us for the world of sin. In the military, enlisted recruits must go through boot camp to see if they are physically fit enough to join. As Christians, even though we may be very young, we are engaged in warfare and therefore we go through a spiritual boot camp. I went through this also two years ago when my Dad led me through Luther’s Small Catechism. Our catechetical instruction cannot be taken for granted. Its importance is so significant in our lives as Christians and cannot be diminished. Before we take the body and blood of Christ, we need instruction so we know what we are doing. In effect, without the gospel we are vulnerable to the attacks of

the devil. We cannot go through life as Lutherans without the gospel of Jesus Christ. Catechetical instruction also needs to be a part of our daily lives.

Denis from Missouri stated, "Every day is a spiritual battle. We must remind ourselves that we have been re-created by Christ's sacrifice on the cross for our sins. Otherwise, we will be dragged down by the constant awareness of how far we are separated from God. This could be our daily "mini-hell." If we are overcome by this despair, this hopelessness, how do we face another day?"

Only by staying in the word can we find the source of the hope that we have within us. In the word we have God's promise that "It is finished," that we do not need to live in despair. Even if this despair does not deprive us of our own salvation, it can and will impact how we live our lives as light in the world of darkness around us. This is the beginning of the spiritual battle, the battle for the souls around us and around the world. As it says in Romans 10, how can anyone hear if the word is not preached? We need to live the word and be the word for those around us; and even this we do by the grace of God. If we are not light in the world, the world will truly be in darkness. Those who are caught by the web of despair, by the burden of their sin, will have been lost in the spiritual battle without a fight. Thanks be to God that this battle is the Lord's and not my own. My own sin and weakness would lead to failure. As it says in Ephesians 6, "Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." My own strength cannot prevail against these. It is with the power of Christ's redeeming blood that we fight this battle. These teachings are those that I have learned through the Lutheran faith."

Appendix C

Scriptural Support for the Vows

Almighty and ever-living God, you make us both to will and to do those things that are good and acceptable in your sight. Let your fatherly hand ever guide us and your Holy Spirit ever be with us to direct us in the knowledge and obedience of your word, that we may obtain everlasting life; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.¹²⁸

The Chosen People

Some people say that the armed forces employed toxins in warfare as early as the 6th century BC. Modern warfare divides toxic weapons into the categories of chemical, biological, and radiological. Toxic weapons vary in the method of delivery and effectiveness. Likewise with the toxic weapons employed by the devil and the world—they vary in method of delivery and effectiveness. While the history of Israel illustrates that they often failed to identify the weapons employed against them, it also reinforces the importance of the distinguishing characteristics in our vows.

Scripture records how Israel's trust or lack of trust in God's word permeated every element of their life. When God delivered the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt he wanted his people to believe, obey and trust in his word. Rather than deciding their course of action through consensus, God instructed his people to do as he had commanded them to do: "Thus all the children of Israel did; as the LORD commanded Moses and Aaron, so they did" (Ex 12:50).

God's relationship to his people was one of grace and deliverance—not indulgence and affirmation. God's relationship with his people was one of judgment and mercy—not accommodation. God promised to deliver his people. "And it came to pass,

¹²⁸ *Lutheran Service Book, 310 (187).*

on that very same day, that the LORD brought the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt according to their armies” (Ex 12:51).

God commanded his people to believe in and confess him alone as God and LORD; they were to reject all other gods: “For I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the LORD” (Ex 12:12). God’s covenant with the children of Israel meant that he would be their God and that they would be his people. No other gods were to be tolerated or included.

The faithful response of God’s people to his grace was worship. Their worship was synonymous with their confession of faith, for God said, “You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in the heavens above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them” (Ex 20:4-5). The seventh day was “a sabbath rest, a holy sabbath to the LORD” (Ex 16:23). Through regular worship, the children of Israel were reminded of their utter dependence on God.

To ensure that future generations of God’s chosen people were taught to believe only in the one true God, it was the sacred duty of the heads of the families to teach their children about God’s grace and how he delivered the children of Israel out of the house of bondage in Egypt: “And it shall be, when your children say to you, ‘What do you mean by this service?’ that you shall say, ‘It is the Passover sacrifice of the LORD, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt when he struck the Egyptians and delivered our households’ ” (Ex 12:26). The instruction, led by the head of the family,

galvanized the relationship between parents and children. Instruction joined past and present generations by repeating the history of salvation.

The Passover was to be a meal like no other (Ex 12:42); with every element of preparation, the meal declared how the very destruction God ordained for the Egyptians passed over the homes of the Israelites who smeared lamb's blood on their doorposts and lintel: "Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats...And they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses where they eat it. Then they shall eat the flesh on that night roasted in fire, with unleavened bread and with bitter herbs they shall eat it...No foreigner shall eat it...And when a stranger dwells with you and wants to keep the Passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as a native of the land. Not everyone was included in the Passover observance. For no uncircumcised person shall eat it. One law shall be for the native-born and for the stranger who dwells among you" (Ex 12:5, 7-8, 43, 48-49).

Fidelity or Apostasy

Let us compare the elements of Israel's life with the vows contained in The Rite of Confirmation and The Rite of Ordination. The account of the Exodus illustrates how God's word was at the center of Israel's deliverance. Through his word, God established a relationship with Israel that was based upon grace; God repeatedly demonstrated his love for Israel through acts of deliverance. God's people were to respond to God's grace with a confession of faith in the one true God. God's people were to worship the one true God and instruct future generations to do likewise. God's people, circumcised in their flesh and in their hearts, were to celebrate their salvation by observing the Passover.

When God's people distanced themselves from his word, they allowed themselves to be poisoned incrementally. Rather than separating themselves as God intended (Ex 19:3), they became inclusive and affirmed the beliefs and practices of the very people they were to avoid.

These emphases became distinguishing characteristics of Israel's fidelity. When God's people were no longer a people of God's word, every element of their religious life was poisoned and they fell from God's grace. Rather than confessing the one true God as all-powerful and all-loving, they included other gods and worshiped created things rather than the Creator. While ignoring their duty to teach future generations, they incrementally affirmed false prophets and tolerated their toxic teachings. Rather than living in a sacramental relationship with the one true God, they consented with their pagan neighbors and became a stench before God. The people that God bore on eagles' wings plummeted to the depths of apostasy; the people God called to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation tolerated false priests and profaned that which was sacred. God's people did not obey his voice; they did not keep his covenant. God's special treasure became a trash heap among the nations. (Please compare Ex 19:4 with Jgs 2, 1 Kgs 14, and 2 Kgs 21).

Josiah

The reforms implemented by King Josiah point to the power of God's word at work in the lives of his people. When God's people believed his word, the result was repentance and reconciliation, confession of faith in the one true God, worship of the one true God, and instruction in the one true God, all of which culminated in the celebration of the Passover.

1. **God's Word**—Josiah listened to God's word and repented: "Then Hilkiah the high priest said to Shaphan the scribe, 'I have found the Book of the Law in the house of the LORD.' And Hilkiah gave the book to Shaphan, and he read it...Now it happened when the king heard the words of the Book of the Law, that he tore his clothes" (2 Kgs 22:8, 11).
2. **God's Grace**—God responded with grace: "Concerning the words which you have heard—because your heart was tender, and you humbled yourself before the LORD when you heard what I spoke against this place and against its inhabitants, that they would become a desolation and a curse, and you tore your clothes and wept before me, I also have heard you, says the LORD. Surely, therefore, I will gather you to your fathers, and you shall be gathered to your grave in peace; and your eyes shall not see all the calamity which I will bring on this place" (2 Kgs 22:18b-20).
3. **Faith in the one true God**—Josiah eradicated false doctrines and led God's people to faith in the one true God: "Moreover Josiah put away those who consulted mediums and spiritists, the household gods and idols, all the abominations that were seen in the land of Judah and in Jerusalem, that he might perform the words of the law which were written in the book that Hilkiah the priest found in the house of the LORD" (2 Kgs 23:24).
4. **Worship of the one true God**—Josiah eradicated false worship, he removed the false priests, and restored worship in the one true God: "Then he removed the idolatrous priests whom the kings of Judah had ordained to burn incense on the high places in the cities of Judah and in the places all around Jerusalem, and those who burned incense to Baal, to the sun, to the moon, to the constellations, and to all the host of heaven" (2 Kgs 23:5).
5. **Instruction in the one true God**—Josiah taught the people God's word and led them in renewing their covenant with the one true God: "The king went up to the house of the LORD with all the men of Judah, and with him all the inhabitants of Jerusalem—the priests and the prophets and all the people, both small and great. And he read in their hearing all the words of the Book of the Covenant which had been found in the house of the LORD" (2 Kgs 23:2).
6. **God's Gracious Presence**—Josiah led the people in celebrating the Passover as God intended the Passover to be celebrated: "Then the king commanded all the people saying, Keep the Passover to the LORD your God, as it is written in this Book of the Covenant. Such a Passover surely had never been held since the days of the judges who judged Israel, nor in all the days of the kings of Israel and the kings of Judah" (2 Kgs 23:21).

Ezra

The reforms initiated by King Josiah were not permanent and the pattern of apostasy persisted. God's chosen people disregarded his word, fell away from God's grace, embraced false doctrines, worshiped idols and followed false priests, failed to instruct their children and those living among them in the faith, and did not celebrate the Passover as God intended. God allowed his chosen people to be taken into captivity in Babylon. In his compassion, God again delivered his people. God moved kings and raised leaders among his people who led his people back to Jerusalem. Again, those elements which became distinguishing characteristics defining Israel's relationship with God are evident in Ezra's account of how God restored his people after their captivity in Babylon: a return to God's word, once again in living in grace, confessing the one true God and rejecting all other gods, worshiping the one true God, teaching their children and those living among them of the one true God, and celebrating the Passover:

1. **God's Word**--"Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom" (Ezr 1:1).
2. **God's Grace**--"Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from him the right way for us and our little ones and all our possessions. For I was ashamed to request of the king an escort of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy on the road, because we had spoken to the king, saying, The hand of our God is upon all those for good who seek him, but his power and his wrath are against all those who forsake him. So we fasted and entreated our God for this, and he answered our prayer" (Ezr 8:21-23).
3. **Faith in the One True God**--"When those things were done, the leaders came to me, saying, The people of Israel and the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands, with respect to the abominations of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites...So when I heard this thing, I tore my garments and my robe, and plucked out some of the hair of my head and beard,

- and sat down astonished... Then Ezra the priest stood up and said to them, ‘You have transgressed and have taken pagan wives, adding to the guilt of Israel. Now therefore, make confession to the LORD God of your fathers, and do his will; separate yourselves from the peoples of the land, and from the pagan wives’ (Ezr 9:1, 3; 10:10-11).
4. **Worship of the One True God**--“Then Jeshua the son of Jozadak and his brethren the priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and his brethren, arose and built the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings on it, as it is written in the Law of Moses, the man of God. Though fear had come upon them because of the people of those countries, they set the altar on its bases; and they offered burnt offerings on it to the LORD, both the morning and evening burnt offerings” (Ezr 3:2-3).
 5. **Instruction in the One True God**--“For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel” (Ezr 7:10).
 6. **God’s Gracious Presence**--“And the descendants of the captivity kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the first month... Then the children of Israel who had returned from the captivity ate together with all who had separated themselves from the filth of the nations of the land in order to seek the LORD God of Israel” (Ezr 6:19, 21).

Christ

The distinguishing characteristics of Israel’s relationship to God illustrate symptoms associated with the lethal vapor that incrementally poisoned Israel. Israel inhaled the toxic gas and in their delirium drifted away from God’s word and God’s grace. Oblivious to the symptoms of poisoning, their nervous system, represented by their confession of faith, worship, and instruction, succumbed to convulsions. Finally, in their spiritual paralysis, they could no longer enjoy the gracious presence of God in circumcision and the Passover. Christ and the apostles in the New Testament confirm the same distinguishing characteristics. The Gospel according to St. Matthew records:

1. **God’s Word**—How Christ lived in perfect obedience to God’s word—“Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore

- breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 5:17-20).
2. **God’s Grace**—How the heavenly Father sent his Son to save the world—“And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call his name JESUS, for he will save his people from their sins” (Mt 1:21).
 3. **Faith in the One True God**—How our eternal life depends upon confessing Christ—“Therefore whoever confesses me before men, him I will also confess before my Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies me before men, him I will also deny before my Father who is in heaven” (Mt 10:32-33).
 4. **Worship of the One True God**—How believers gather in prayer and praise; God, through the word of salvation, heals and forgives his people—“Then Jesus went into the temple of God and drove out all those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. And he said to them, It is written, My house shall be called a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of thieves. Then the blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them. But when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying out in the temple and saying, ‘Hosanna to the Son of David!’ They were indignant and said to him, ‘Do you hear what these are saying?’ And Jesus said to them, ‘Yes. Have you never read, Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants you have perfected praise?’” (Mt 21:12-16).
 5. **Instruction in the One True God**—How Jesus taught—“Then he opened his mouth and taught them...And so it was, when Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes” (Mt 5:2; 7:28-29).
 6. **God’s Gracious Presence**—How Jesus was baptized and instituted the Lord’s Supper—“When he had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon him” (Mt 3:16). “And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, ‘Take, eat; this is my body.’ Then he took the cup, and gave thanks and gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you. For this is my blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom’ ” (Mt 26:26-29).

The Church

Acts 2 records how Peter, in his sermon to the “men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem” (Acts 2:14), boldly proclaimed how Scripture bore witness to the Christ. Peter asserted that the prophet Joel and King David prophesied of Christ (Acts 2:16-39). Peter proclaimed law and gospel: “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:39). Peter’s sermon to the household of Cornelius was a confession of faith in the Triune God: “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him” (Acts 10:38). Believers gathered for worship: “So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:46-47). Believers were instructed in the faith, received into the church through baptism, and celebrated the Lord’s Supper: “Then those who gladly received his word were baptized...And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:41-42).

The vows in The Rite of Confirmation and The Rite of Ordination replicate the distinguishing characteristics identified in the Old Testament and the New Testament. The devil’s assault on the believer will target these things: God’s word, the gospel, the confession of faith in the Triune God, worship of the Triune God, instruction of faith in the Triune God, and the sacraments instituted by the Triune God. The satanic assault will

be subtle, gradual, and imperceptible, but in the end the satanic goal is always the same: preach, teach, and confess another Jesus—a different spirit—a different gospel.

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul urged his hearers to don the “whole armor of God” in order to engage in spiritual warfare (Eph 6:10). Paul exhorted Timothy “to wage a good warfare” (1 Tim 1:18), “fight the good fight of faith” (1 Tim 6:12), and urged, “You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier” (2 Tim 2:3-4).

Paul exhorted the believers in Galatia and Corinth to be on guard for false words introduced incrementally into the life of the church. In the case of the Galatians, Paul wrote, “I marvel that you are turning away so soon from him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ” (Gal 1:6-7). Those perverting the gospel claimed that circumcision was necessary to complete the work of the gospel. Fearing those who maintained the necessity of circumcision, Peter affirmed this false teaching, which in turn led others like Barnabas to be “carried away with their hypocrisy” (Gal 2:13). In the case of the Corinthians, Paul wrote, “Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Cor 1:10). Not speaking the same thing resulted in the Corinthian believers being weakened and divided in regard to the defining characteristics of the faithful.

1. **God’s Word**--Rather than holding steadfast to the word, they became “puffed up” (1 Cor 4:18) and perceived themselves to be spiritually sophisticated (1 Cor 3:18).

2. **God's Grace**--By claiming to be of Paul, Apollos, or Peter (1 Cor 1:11), they displaced the gospel.
3. **Faith in the One True God**--By engaging in sexual immorality (1 Cor 5:1), they clearly indicated that they were not confessing faith in the Triune God with their lips and lives.
4. **Worship of the One True God**--By claiming superiority in spiritual gifts (1 Cor 12:1), their worship no longer glorified God or edified the body of Christ.
5. **Instruction in the One True God**--Their departure from instruction in the faith resulted in lawsuits against their fellow believers (1 Cor 6:1) and abuse of Christian liberty (1 Cor 8:1).
6. **God's Gracious Presence**--They distorted the meaning of baptism, for Paul had to say, "I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, lest anyone should say that I had baptized in my own name" (1 Cor 1:14-15). They did not discern the Lord's Supper (1 Cor 11:17): "Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper. For in eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of others; and one is hungry and another is drunk" (1 Cor 11:20-21).

Like toxic weapons introduced incrementally to unsuspecting victims, believers in Galatia and Corinth tolerated, affirmed, and included false teachings. Little by little, the believers in Galatia and Corinth empowered false teachers to poison the household of faith. Incrementally, the believers were led from the central truth of the gospel, namely, the resurrection of Christ: "Now if Christ is preached that he has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?" (1 Cor 15:12) Satan's tactic is a little here, a little there: attack God's word, subvert the gospel, pervert the confession of faith, contaminate the worship life, dilute instruction in the faith, and assail the sacraments.

Scripture provides support for our vows and reinforces the importance of the distinguishing characteristics in our vows. Reviewing our vows assists us in identifying and defending against the toxic weapons employed by the devil and the world.

Reaffirming our vows fortifies us against the tendency to fall prey to incremental delivery methods of satanic toxins.

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