

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
[www.lutheranlccf.org](http://www.lutheranlccf.org)  
**Reformation Sunday, November 3, 2103**

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)  
Hymns: 262:1-3, 261, 264, (283 as offertory) 266, 262:4.  
Lessons: Psalm 138, Galatians 2:9-21, Luke 8:1-21.  
Sermon Text: John 8:31-32.  
Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

(John 8:31-32 King James Version) *"Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."*

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

On October 31, 1517, Martin Luther, a Roman Catholic teacher of theology proposed a debate specifically on the subject of indulgences as they were being sold by Roman Catholic preachers. People were led to believe that *"Indulgences were ... for sale by the Catholic Pope in Rome that allowed you to think you were buying your way into Heaven."* ([http://wiki.answers.com/Q/What\\_was\\_the\\_sale\\_of\\_indulgences](http://wiki.answers.com/Q/What_was_the_sale_of_indulgences)) Today the Roman Catholic Church would dispute that definition but people in Luther's day were buying such pieces of paper with that understanding. Men were selling indulgences and making lots of money for the church and deceiving people into thinking they could buy the forgiveness of sins. The Roman Catholic Church still teaches that indulgences, which can be acquired in a number of ways, will shorten your time in purgatory, an unscriptural place where you must spend time to "purge" yourself of certain sins. Luther had learned from the Word of God the truth that *"it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast."* (Ephesians 2:8-9)

He had learned from the Bible that God wanted all men to have that knowledge and to be saved. We today also want to share that truth, and so we look again at the Word of God.

Are you going to hear some remarkable outstanding new ideas? No. I hope and pray you will hear the same truth of God's Word that has been proclaimed since the time of Jesus – and before. You will hear the same message that has been preached in the congregations of the Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship for 30 years. You will hear the same message that Martin Luther preached after he, by the grace of God, had the Scriptures opened to him. As we look back today, we recognize that

**"GOD'S WORD IS OUR GREAT HERITAGE"**

- 1. The Law of God – and what it means for us.**
- 2. The Gospel of God – and what it means for us.**

If we were to look forward today, we would want to claim and pray and plead that "God's Word is – and will be – our great heritage" (The Lutheran Hymnal 283). Luther taught the Word of God to adults and to children. One of his greatest works is the Small Catechism, written so that "the head of the family should teach it in the simplest way to those in his household." Parents, that is your responsibility! But let's look at the catechism today.

One of the first things we learn as we study Luther's Small Catechism would be that all Scripture – the Holy Bible – is given by inspiration of God. That means it is not merely man's ideas. It is God speaking to mankind. It is God's Holy Word. That means that all the words of the Bible are God's Word because God the

Holy Spirit taught the human writers not only the thoughts but even the words they wrote. *"All scripture is given by inspiration of God."* (2 Timothy 3:16 King James Version)

Because it is God speaking to mankind, we cannot take liberties with the Scriptures, the Bible, the Old and the New Testaments. God forbids us to add to his word, to subtract from his word, or to twist or to change its meaning in any way.

As we study the Bible, we learn that its two chief teachings, its main doctrines are the Law and the Gospel.

A quick way of remembering the essence of the Law is the letters SOS. The Law SOS, shows our sins, shows our sinfulness. When we look more carefully we find three uses or purposes for the law.

First, the law serves as a curb in the outward lives of all people, believers and unbelievers alike. In the same way that a curb alongside a residential street can sort of keep cars from driving on your lawn, God's law as a curb in a sense keeps the wickedness of mankind in bounds. Men fear to do something when they know they will be punished for it. In the same way that in the median of a highway the 4 or 5 or 6 foot high concrete curb in the middle can help prevent vehicles from getting into the oncoming lane, the law of God prevents to some degree the coarse outbreaks of sin in the world. Even civil laws serve as a curb when people fear to break them because they are afraid that they will be punished. So much the more with God's laws and the threat of eternal damnation if we disobey God's commandments.

Secondly, the law serves as a mirror in the hearts of all people, believers and unbelievers. When you look in a mirror, you see yourself exactly as you are. You do not see an imaginary person, you do not see a person who is perfect, you do not see a person with no flaws and so the law of God shows us exactly as we are. We read in Hebrews 4:12: *"For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart."* And what are the natural attitudes of man's heart? God's Word says *"every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood."* (Genesis 8:21)

And third, the law serves as a guide, a guideline, a straightedge for the believer. It shows us what God wants us to do and what not to do. It shows us how God wants us to live. The law as a guideline might be compared to the lane markers painted on the highway. The believer will want to stay in God's lane.

God's Law was first written in the heart of man at creation. Adam and Eve knew what God wanted, but they didn't do a very good job of obeying him. They sinned, and that sin has been passed down to every human being. Later, God wrote the law down on tablets of stone for the people of Israel through Moses on Mount Sinai. He gave three kinds of laws to his chosen people.

God gave the civil laws to govern them as a nation. For example the civil law established the punishment for crimes such as injury to another person or damage to another person's property. The law established penalties when men sinned against God or their fellow man.

God gave the ceremonial laws to rule their worship lives. These were laws like the sacrifice of lambs and other animals, such as using the blood of an unblemished lamb for the first Passover to save God's people from death in Egypt. All these ceremonial laws pointed forward to Jesus Christ, the very Son of God who came into the world to spill his blood to redeem mankind from all their sins. Jesus lived a sinless life and then was punished for sin, for all the sins of all mankind. A number of recent Ministry-By-Mail sermons have talked about these things.

And the third kind of law given by God through Moses is the moral law, which is still in effect for all mankind. This is God's will for all people of all time and is summarized in the Ten Commandments.

So if we examine the Ten Commandments one by one we will recognize ourselves and our sins. We would not see a checklist of all the things we have done right, but a catalog of all we have done wrong. We must admit, as you heard the pastor say earlier in the liturgy for all of us that *"we poor sinners confess unto Thee that we are by nature sinful and unclean, and that we have sinned against Thee by thought, word, and deed."* Then we joined in confessing *"O most merciful God, who has given Thine only begotten Son to die for us, have mercy upon us and for His sake grant us remission of all our sins."*

And that remission, that forgiveness of all our sins is the message of the Gospel.

You then heard the pastor say “*Almighty God our heavenly Father has had mercy upon us and has given His only Son to die for us and for His sake forgives us all our sins. To them that believe on His name He gives the power to become sons of God and has promised them His Holy Spirit. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.*” That is the Gospel, the other chief teaching of the Bible.

The Law of God says “Do this. Don’t do that.”

The Gospel says “Jesus did it all for you.” A quick way of remembering the essence of the Gospel is also the letters SOS. The Gospel SOS, shows our Savior.

The Law of God was written in man’s heart and then later in the Bible. But the Gospel is written only in the Bible. It was first recorded with the promise of a Savior to Adam and Eve after the first sins, and repeated throughout the history of the Old Testament, up through all the books of the Bible, especially the four books we call the Gospels. They are the books that especially tell us of the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God’s Only Son, our Savior. Then we have the rest of the New Testament which tells us more of the application of that Gospel for our lives.

The Gospel tells us that everything for our eternal salvation was done by Christ. The Gospel tells us that we have the gift of eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ. And the Gospel makes the believers in Jesus Christ want to do God’s will, and seek to obey his commandments. It becomes a joy to follow God’s commands. They become a guide, a guideline, a straightedge for our lives because we want to please God.

But there is no boasting here. God did it all. ***“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.”*** (Ephesians 2:8-9) And he even gives us the faith to believe the Gospel.

It is God’s grace, his undeserved love and mercy that saves us. And so there is no fear of eternal death in hell for believers. Jesus said ***“Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom.”*** (Luke 12:32)

Without Christ, all men are servants, are slaves of sin. We rejoice in these words of Scripture: ***“But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness. I put this in human terms because you are weak in your natural selves. Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness.”*** (Romans 6:17-19)

In Christ there is deliverance from sin, true freedom. Only those people are truly free who have accepted the salvation of Jesus; only they have a will which is interested in good works and able to perform them.

The Gospel sets men free from sin, from eternal death, from the power of the devil.

On judgment day we’ll look back with great clarity. We’ll fully appreciate Jesus’ words: ***“be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee.”*** (Matthew 9:2 King James Version)

***“Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”***

The continuing or remaining in the Word of Christ is the characteristic of the true disciples of Christ, clinging firmly to the Word which he has given for our instruction in the Bible. There we find Jesus revealed, and through the understanding of Jesus as the Christ we have true knowledge, the knowledge of the truth; and that knowledge is the only thing which will give us true liberty.

So to summarize: In this life, God’s Word has a two-fold action, to condemn sin and to save. These two very different results come from God’s Word of Law and His Word of Gospel. We need this living and active Word of God. It is simply to bring us safely into God’s rest. We need the Law to direct us away from unbelief and disobedience, and the Gospel directs us to faith in Jesus Christ, the One who was fully obedient to God, who brings us to our eternal rest.

So with that Word of God living and active in our lives, leading us to always place our full confidence in Jesus Christ our Savior, let us strive to enter God’s eternal rest. Listen carefully as we sing hymn 283 “God’s Word is our great heritage” as our offertory after the sermon. May we hold to Jesus’ pure teaching in the Bible. May we continue in God’s Word! And may that Word of God be ours forever! Amen.