

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
[www.lutheranlccf.org](http://www.lutheranlccf.org)  
**First Sunday after Trinity, June 6, 2010**

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Hymns: 5, 283, 284, 285, 48.

Lessons: Genesis 3:8-15, 2 Timothy 3:14-17, Mathew 5:33-37.

Text: 2 Corinthians 1:13-14.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

“O tempora! O Mores! Senatus haec intelliget. Consul videt. Hic tamen vivit! Vivit! Immo vero etiam in senatum venit.” Those were Latin words I had to memorize once upon a time.

‘En arche ain ho logos, kai ho logos ain pros ton theon, kai theos ain ho logos. Houtos ain en arche pros ton theon.’ That was Greek, that I also had to memorize. That happened to be John chapter one, verse one,

‘Wir glauben an den einen Gott, den Vater, den Allmächtigen, der alles geschaffen hat, Himmel und Erde, die sichtbare und die unsichtbare Welt. Und an den einen Herrn Jesus Christus, Gottes eingeborenen Sohn, aus dem Vater geboren vor aller Zeit: Gott von Gott, Licht von Licht, wahrer Gott vom wahren Gott, gezeugt, nicht geschaffen, eines Wesens mit dem Vater; durch ihn ist alles geschaffen.’ That was German, the beginning of the Nicene Creed. Now I am not trying to boast of my education, but trying to make a point about communicating clearly.

You probably didn’t understand what I was saying in those three paragraphs. And you can be sure that that is not the kind of preaching you have come to expect in this church. But that strange language that you probably couldn’t understand is part of what St. Paul was writing about when he wrote “*For we do not write you anything you cannot read or understand.*” Today I want to emphasize that

**GOD WANTS US TO UNDERSTAND HIM**

- 1. St. Paul wanted the Corinthians to understand him.**
- 2. He was preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ with the goal of their eternal salvation.**
- 3. He was not speaking in words such as to deceive them.**
- 4. We, too, must preach the gospel of Jesus Christ with the goal of your eternal salvation.**

It is always my prayer that God’s Word may always be our great heritage, that Word and the truths of that Word that we have inherited from those who went before us, and that it may be our greatest possession. To that end we sang and we pray “Lord, grant, while worlds endure, We keep its teachings pure, Throughout all generations.”

I have known people who treasured an old Bible that belonged to a grandparent or great-grandparent. But the Bible was in a language they couldn’t read or understand, such as German or Norwegian. So while the antique Bible looked good on a table or a shelf, along with other antiques, it was of no use to them.

Is that the way the Bible, God’s Word is to us? Well, it certainly isn’t what St. Paul, speaking by the inspiration of God the Holy Ghost wanted the Christians in Corinth to regard and think of God’s Words.

As you read through the letter of Second Corinthians, you will discover that something has not quite been right between the Christians in Corinth and St. Paul. Somehow the warm shepherd-flock relationship has been strained. Ideally, on the Last Day, “*the day of the Lord Jesus*”, Paul will be the Corinthians’ cause for boasting, and the Corinthians will be Paul’s cause for boasting before God. They surely don’t want to and can’t boast of their own good works before God. When the Corinthians stand before the one who will come to judge the living and the dead and at that time confess faith in Jesus Christ, they will be able to do this because of Paul’s ministry among them. Paul will be their cause for boasting before the Lord.

And when Paul stands before the same Jesus, he will be able to point to the Corinthians as proof that he was faithful to his ministry. They will be his cause for boasting in the presence of the returning Lord. Paul had written in a similar manner to the Thessalonians: “*For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we*

*will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? Indeed, you are our glory and joy."* 1 Thessalonians 2:19-20.

He had written in his first letter to the Corinthians: *"For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel--not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."* 1 Corinthians 1:17-18. And a little later in that same book: *"Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord. When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified."* 1 Corinthians 1:31-2:2.

In this letter, he later writes *"we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake."* 2 Corinthians 4:2-5.

St. Paul's message was to plainly preach that Jesus Christ had died for the sins of all mankind, so that whoever believes in him will have eternal life, just by believing in Jesus Christ. They didn't have to earn salvation, they simply had to believe in and trust in the works of the crucified Jesus Christ.

From the beginning, St. Paul wanted to speak clearly so that people could understand the message of God. But something was disturbing the fellowship, the relationship between Paul and the Corinthians and in this way was threatening to rob both of them of experiencing great joy on Judgment Day. He is hinting that in some way he has been accused of being insincere and untrustworthy. Apparently some were giving the impression to the Christians in Corinth that 'Paul's motives were not sincere', and that 'his letters couldn't be trusted.' He wants the Corinthians to know that is not the case. But he goes on, in the words following our sermon text, to explain that he is confident that these misconceptions can be cleared up, if they have not been already.

He had just written *"Now this is our boast: Our conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, in the holiness and sincerity that are from God. We have done so not according to worldly wisdom but according to God's grace."* Paul was not sinless, of course, but he tried and was able, with the help of the Holy Ghost and great prayer, to accomplish his calling among them.

Paul is being accused by someone of double-talk in his letters, of saying one thing but of meaning something else. *"For we do not write you anything you cannot read or understand."* But, what he is writing to them is not something other than what they are reading when they come together for worship. They do not have to read between the lines to determine what Paul really meant. In addition, what they are reading they can also *understand*.

The purpose of the writings that come from the pens of Christ's apostles is not to obscure the truth but to reveal it. One basic principle of biblical interpretation is to take the words in their simple literal sense unless the context and the words themselves make it very clear that they are to be interpreted in a different manner. For example, when in John 10 Christ calls himself a "gate," it is clear that this is to be taken metaphorically. He is not literally a gate. But the principle still stands: Take the words of the Bible literally unless it is amply clear that it must be taken in some symbolical way.

We have all heard examples of people seeming to say one thing but intending to say something else. You are probably familiar with what have been called "weasel words". Those are words which allow someone to "weasel out of", or get out of something that you might have understood their words to say. Another way of saying this is "double-talk". That, too, is using words in such a way as to allow them to mean more than one thing. And very often we find the same kind of thing in promises or statements that don't mean what we think they are saying, such as has been illustrated by politicians seeking to be elected by a majority of the people.

We who call our ourselves the Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship look at our Lutheran Confessions, and believe and expect that they were written to clarify, to speak plainly, using words at their face value, and not trying to say things out of both sides of one's mouth, that is, not trying to make something say or mean both "yes" and "no". Especially in our twentieth-century confessions we admit the "weakness of

language. A person may not express himself as he intended the meaning, or others may read something into his words which is not there.” (Concerning Church Fellowship, Paragraph 65) But the sincere Christian will want to be clear in his speaking and writing and strive to use words that are plain, clear, and have no double meanings.

When we read or hear statements from heterodox church bodies, we become skeptical and think like one man wrote: “Doctrine must be simple for understanding like Luther’s catechism. If people start speaking in a complicated way this means they intend to cover some thoughts behind these phrases and multiple meanings of words.”

A former pastor in the Lutheran Church in America, the most liberal Lutheran church body in the United States at the time, until it became part of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the ELCA, who is one of the authors of “What’s going on among the Lutherans” writes “When I got out of sem[inary in 1973] we used the same words as our conservative counterparts, but we meant something quite different by them. Thus I might speak of the ‘empty tomb’ on Easter but I would not have meant that I believed that Jesus actually, physically rose from the dead.” (Page 119) There you have a good example, from one who actually did it, of deceiving people with smooth talk, as St. Paul warns us in Romans 16: ***“I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people.”*** Romans 16:17-18.

St. Paul was NOT trying to do that to the Corinthians. We are not trying to do that to anyone who listens to or reads our message. I am not trying to do that. I want to say what I mean and mean what I say. We want to communicate clearly. We want people to understand us when we speak and when we write, and I especially, as a teacher with a call from God want people to understand when I write or speak “This is what the Lord says”.

And what is it we want people to understand?

It is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is the message of salvation from our sins. It is a message that points out that all men and all women, and all children, to be very specific when we say “all men”, are sinners, condemned to eternal damnation before God because of their sins. That is what God’s Law teaches us. And the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the very Son of God, teaches us that God sent his only-begotten son to die in our place, to suffer the punishment of hell on the cross so that simply by believing in him we have eternal life because of him and through him.

We want you and everyone to understand ***“All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”*** 2 Corinthians 5:18-21.

That is the message which must be plainly proclaimed in our lives and to all the world. May God grant we keep that message pure! Amen.