

# Fundamentals of Christian Doctrine

## Delivering the Gifts – Lesson #3

*Many people ask themselves, “Do I have enough faith? Have I really given my heart to Jesus? Why do I still have moments of doubts?”* A Lutheran pastor, the Rev. Dr. Ben Mayes, wrote a helpful article about this topic in which he reminds us that people, at times, have both certainty & uncertainty about **God**. **He** maintains that we are like the man in Mark 9:24 who said to **Jesus**, “**Lord**, I believe; help my unbelief.” Dr. Mayes says, “If you want certainty, you should not look to any work or decision you have made. Don’t think about yourself; instead, think about **God** and **His** gifts.” Mayes is referring to such gifts as *Baptism, Absolution, & the Lord’s Supper*.



*Faith IS NOT KNOWING  
WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS,  
BUT KNOWING  
who holds the future.*

My friends, we *Lutherans* have been taught that thru baptism we have been forgiven & adopted into **God’s** family; we are **children** of **God**; **He** loves us & wants to help us. Think about the words of **God’s** forgiveness & absolution the pastor speaks to us every Sunday. Think about the gift of the *Lord’s Supper* wherein **Christ** comes to us *in, with, & under*, the bread & wine. All these gifts have **God’s** promises connected to them. Our certainty of faith is not based on *our* act of faith; it is based on **God’s** promises. *Faith* is not just historical knowledge about what the **Triune God** has done; it also involves trust in **His** promises.

The certainty of faith is filled with **Christian** hope & the assurance that **God** is our loving **Father** and will keep **His** promises because of what **Jesus** has done. **God** will save us and give us the gift of *eternal life*, just as **He** has promised in **His Word**. **He** wants to help us; not harm us. Of that, we can be certain!



**Certainty** can also help you find **God’s** will for your life. In **His Word**, **God** gives us **His** moral law and the **Good News** about **His Son**, our **Savior**, **Jesus**. Beyond that **He** has given us a lot of freedom, which can be confusing at times. If **He** has not spoken about something, we must trust our minds and feelings and make a decision about it. If it turns out successful, we believe it was **His** will; but if it turns out badly, it raises issues. Does it mean we have disobeyed **Him**? This can be confusing. Sometimes our feelings are less than **Godly**. We **Christians** know that when **God** has forbidden something, and we go against **His** will, then we are clearly sinning and will suffer the consequences. We must always trust **God’s Word**, for we know what can come out of our hearts - -evil thoughts (Mark 7:21). Where **He** has not spoken, and we must use our reason, we must sincerely try to do what we think **God** would have us to do. In such cases, even if our decisions go wrong, we can have the certainty that what we are doing is acceptable to **Him**.



A wrong view of certainty of faith can lead to what some **Christians** call “*Security*.” i.e. “*Once saved; always saved; no matter what.*” Such **Christians** look at baptism & church membership as a ticket to heaven; they wrongfully think it doesn’t matter whether you repent or believe. Such so called security is much different than the *Biblical* certainty of faith, which is given by the **Spirit** to

*believers* who are sorry for their sins, repent, & pray for forgiveness from *God Who* is merciful for *Jesus'* sake.



## How Should We Pray ?

Why do we close our eyes when we pray, cry, kiss or dream? Because the most beautiful things in life are not seen but felt by the heart.

*How we pray is as important as what we pray.* We should pray “from the heart.” We love & honor the *Almighty*, our loving & caring *God Who* is genuinely interested in us & what we have to say to *Him*. We can approach *Him* confidently & comfortably because *He* is our Friend. We approach *Him* reverently & humbly. We pray thoughtfully & attentively, relentlessly fighting the temptation to let our minds wander. We pray gratefully, fully aware that we need this time with *Him* in prayer, even though we do not deserve the privilege of talking to *Him*. So, what kind of prayers should we pray?

*Prepared prayers are usually more elegant & complete*; they remind us about things we probably would not have thought about. However, *God* does not require masterpieces. No matter how simple the language, *God* welcomes any prayer that comes from a sincere & trusting heart. *He* promises to hear and answer all our prayers. Sometimes *He* answers “yes;” other times *He* answers “no;” (*it's not for our good*); and there are times when *He* says, “Not yet; the timing is wrong; wait!” We must always remember, *He* loves us & will do what *He* knows is best for us.



*Unfortunately, our culture often pits faith & prayer against reason*, causing reason to appear more like rationalism (*reliance on reason as the best guide to all knowledge*). Obviously, such an approach falsely puts humans at the center of authority, rather than *God* as the ultimate authority *Who* knows & wants what is best for us. While *God* employs human reason to reveal *Himself* to us, faith is necessary to grasp the fulness of *His* revelation thru *Scripture* and create belief, faith, & trust.

As *Lutherans*, we believe that the *Holy Spirit* motivated & inspired human authors to write the *Sacred Scriptures*. It is “*God-breathed*.” It is *His* revelation to mankind, *God's Word*, the highest authority & truth, and requires *reason* to understand, and *faith* to believe. – While *God* did not reveal everything about *Himself*, *He* has revealed just enough to create saving faith within us by the *Spirit* working thru the *Word*.



Many mysteries we encounter in *Scripture* are, by their very nature, difficult concepts for the human brain to understand because heavenly *spiritual* ideas are described in terms of earthly or *physical* ideas. Such teachings from *Scripture* may seem very contradictory, yet they are clearly taught from *Scripture* and it is necessary to believe *both* concepts, even if they go against our common sense.

Many early *Christians* had trouble trying to resolve the paradox of the two natures of *Christ* (both *God & man* at the same time). Martin Luther developed what he called the “*Theology of the Cross*” to aid his fellow *Christians* in how we humans think about the mysteries of *God*. Luther said: “*God* is truly revealed only thru *Christ* and *His* suffering & death for us. We cannot know *God* apart from *His* concealment in that revelation. *God* is hidden when we try to know or

understand **God** apart from **Christ**.”

*In our modern society some denominations try to explain something* about which the **Scriptures** are silent. They gravitate towards a “*Theology of Glory*” which tries to seek **God** apart from **Christ**; they try to “go up to **God**” by their own reason or strength.



In contrast, the theology of the cross pictures “**God coming down** to us” thru **His Son**, our **Savior** -- **Jesus** the **Christ**.



## What is the “Church” ?

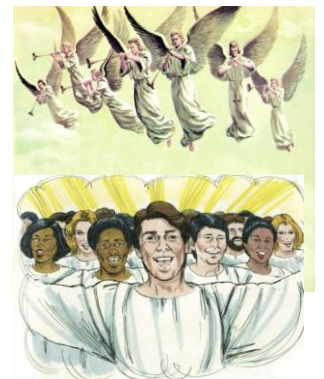


St. Paul told the **Christians** at Ephesus, “**Christ** loved the **Church** & gave **Himself** up for **her**, that **He** might sanctify **her**, having cleansed **her** by the washing of water & the **Word**, so that **He** might present the **Church** to **Himself** in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any other blemish, that **she** might be holy & blameless.” (Ephesians 5:25-27). The **Church** is **God**’s creation. Human traditions & ideas must always be subjected to **God**’s **Word**. In the **Apostles’ Creed**, we confess “**I** believe in the holy **Christian Church**, the communion of **saints**, the forgiveness of sins.” This is the basic meaning of “**Church**” (note the capital “**C**”). “**Church** is the *fellowship* of all those who are made holy by the forgiveness of sins thru faith in **Christ Jesus**.”



The Bible teaches us many things about the “**Church**.”

**The Church is One: Holy, Christian, Apostolic, Universal, Militant, and Triumphant** – **We** are **united with all believers of the past and the angels of heaven as we praise **God****. In a beautiful part of the Lutheran communion liturgy the pastor states: “*With angels & archangels & all the company of heaven, we laud & magnify **Your** glorious name, evermore praising **You**.*” – A beautiful picture! How comforting! **We** are singing not only with the believers in the pews around us, but with all the **saints/believers** of *all time past*, now in heaven.



The **Lord** knows those **who** are **His** (2 Timothy 2:19); only **He** can look into a person’s heart & know whether the person has genuine faith, or if the person is a hypocrite & is faking it. We can only go by what we hear the person say he/she believes. All congregations have *both* genuine **believers** & hypocrites (*The Greek word refers to a person wearing a mask, two-faced*). We continue to proclaim **God**’s **Word** through which the **Holy Spirit** can lead all persons to repent & receive & *keep alive* the gift of genuine faith.

**God** has promised that **His Word** will not return to **Him** empty (Isaiah 55:11). While all **our** works are tainted with sin, the **Church** (capital **C**) is made holy by the cleansing of the blood of **Jesus** for the forgiveness of sins (1 Peter 1:18-19). At the end of time, **Christ** will raise to life all **believers**, and **His Church** will live with **Him** forever in heaven. Unbelievers will be sentenced to eternal damnation. (Matthew 25:31-46; *parable of the sheep & goats; final **Judgment Day***).



God's Spirit uses the Word & Sacraments to bring & keep us in the faith. Lutherans confess that we are justified, declared righteous before God, solely by God's grace alone, for the sake of Christ alone, received by faith alone, as proclaimed thru the Word alone.



## Why Join a Church?

Within the walls of the building we call the church, the local congregation gathers to hear & proclaim God's saving message of salvation thru Jesus, "the Way, the Truth, & the Life." This is where you will see the "real action" of the Church commanded by God (2 Timothy 1:7)



- - "For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love, and of selfdiscipline." Here God's people (led by their pastor) worship, baptize, preach, teach, confess & forgive, gather at the Lord's Table, and teach others the saving message of Christ. Here God's people have the privilege of associating with other believers who are faithful to the Word & linked thru common beliefs. Here they build relationships with one another based on a strong foundation linked to Christ.

There are many different churches & denominations. Our culture tells us that everyone's belief is equally valid, even if they don't all agree with the Bible. But that is not true. We know that Satan weakens the Church by dividing followers of Christ. Divisions result when the Bible's focus on Christ is obscured or man-made teachings or traditions are mixed with the Gospel and the Sacraments. What is the answer? Should we ignore the differences, so we can all be united & get along? The answer is to "bring our differences together in love under the Word." ....But, how?



St. John (1 John 4:1) says "Test the spirits to see whether they are from God." St. Paul (1 Timothy 4:16) says "Keep a close watch on yourself & on the teaching so that you do not depart from Christ or the true Gospel." Church fellowship for believers is always around the preaching & teaching of the Gospel & the Sacraments given to us by God in the Scriptures. (See Romans 16:16-17; 2 Timothy 3:1-8; Titus 3:10-11). Therefore, we can have no genuine fellowship with other Christians whose teaching & preaching clouds the clear message of the Gospel of Christ and His work of salvation for us on the Cross. While only God can see into a person's heart, we are called to compare both our teaching & the teaching of others with the Holy Scriptures, so that we remain faithful to the clear Word of God.

## Conversion

By conversion we mean "the process by which a person is changed from someone who does not believe in Jesus, to someone who does believe." The Bible calls conversion to faith in Jesus, "being born again."





**Question:** Have you ever tried to convert someone? For example: Have you tried to convert a die-hard fan of *Ohio State's* football team, to become a powerful supporter of the *Univ. of Michigan's* football team? That would be a very difficult job! But, let's assume you were successful – *Who made it happen?* You probably did lots of talking. But, in the end, it came down to your *friend* deciding to make a change. But, there is a big difference between converting to *Christianity* and converting to another sports team.

The *Bible* tells us *unless & until* a person believes in *Jesus*, he/she is dead to any kind of relationship with *God*. The *Holy Spirit* calls people to faith and uses the *Gospel* to make it happen. When someone converts to *Christianity* & becomes a *believer* in *Jesus*, that person does not decide to do it by his/herself. It may seem like it, but it is not what happens. Any person who does not believe in *Jesus* as his/her *Savior* is “*dead in trespasses & sin;*” (Ephesians 2:1-2) “*has no spiritual life alive in that person's mind or heart.*” It's impossible for that person to come to spiritual life by him/herself.



Imagine you are with a friend when he has a heart attack. Does he decide *not* to have a heart attack? Can he choose *not* to be dead? - -No! -- But that is how *God* describes us before we



believe - - Dead!!



*Some Christian denominations teach* that being *born again* means to “*make a decision*” to ask *Jesus* to come into your heart. But this is *not* biblically correct. Consider the birth of a child; what did the child being born do? Nothing! It is *mom* who does all the work! The doctor & nurses may help somewhat, but the baby certainly does not. It cannot even ask to be born, let alone take any active part in the process. This is an illustration of being

changed from an unbeliever to a *believer* in *Jesus*; someone else does all the work. In conversion, that is the *Holy Spirit Who* gives new birth (*born again*) thru the message of *Scripture* that *God* gave *His* Son, *Jesus*, to suffer & die & pay the penalty for all our sins. That is the *Good News!* It is the power of *God* for *salvation* (Romans 1:16), and that faith comes from hearing the *Word* of *Christ*. It is that *same* message that enables us to grow in our faith & do good works!

You may ask: “How do I know if I have been born again?” Simply ask yourself: “*Do I trust in Jesus as my Lord & Savior?*” If the answer is “yes,” then even if your faith is new or weak, or even if you have doubts, you are still a *believer*, a child of *God* who has received *God's* gift of forgiveness & new life. *You* know this because *God* says: “*No one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit.*” (1 Corinthians 12:3), and “*If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord & believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.*” (Romans 10:9). You also have *God's* promise in *Baptism* wherein *God's* *Good News* was applied to *you* personally (Galatians 3:27).






When *we* put all this together from *Scripture*, *we* can't help but agree with Luther: "*I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to Him, but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified & kept me in the true faith. This is most certainty true!*"\*

*\*(Luther's explanation to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Article of the Apostles Creed)*




### Color Code:

 (Purple) Royalty - *God*

 (Red) Blood - *Jesus*

 (Green) Living - *Holy Spirit*

 (Blue) True - *Christians*

### RESOURCES

"Lutheranism 101" – Scot Kinnaman, Chief Editor; CPH, 2010.

"Summary of Christian Doctrine" – Ed & Alfred Koehler, CPH, 1952

"The Holy Bible" – English Standard Version, Crossway Bibles, 2001

Class Notes composed & assembled by the Rev. Hal Teuscher, MDiv, MST, MA; edited by Julia Teuscher

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