

Apostles' Creed, Third Article - Of Sanctification

The Holy Ghost Works Through The Word

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INTRODUCTION

God the Father's work of creation has been completed. So also the work of redemption has been finished by God the Son, our LORD Jesus Christ. But without the work of God the Holy Ghost, we would benefit neither from our creation nor our redemption. As we walk together with the Triune God, we rejoice that God the Holy Ghost has given us the knowledge of our creation and the peace that comes from the forgiveness of sins in our redemption. As with the previous articles of the Apostles' Creed, then, this Third Article is not concerned with the work of man but with the work of God—the sanctifying work of God the Holy Ghost. It is the Holy Ghost who makes it possible for us to walk together with the Triune God, for through faith in Jesus as our Savior, the Holy Ghost dwells in us, makes of us temples of the living God, and conveys to us all of the blessings that God has prepared for those who are his children by faith in Jesus. And so we confess in this Third Article, "I believe in God the Holy Ghost."

I BELIEVE IN THE HOLY GHOST BUT NOT AS THE RESULT OF MY OWN THINKING OR CHOOSING

In my natural sinful state, the fact that God is my creator and preserver gives me no joy. The fact that the LORD Jesus redeemed me by his holy precious blood gives me no peace in my natural sinful state. In my natural sinful state, I am dead to all of the joy and peace that are from God. I am dead in transgressions and sins and by nature an object of God's wrath. The richest of spiritual foods can be presented to me, but I have already died of starvation. A plethora of spiritually stimulating experiences do absolutely nothing for the one who is stretched out on his spiritual coffin. To me, by nature spiritually dead and unregenerate, the fact that the Father created me and the Son redeemed me elicits either defiance or indifference. In order to benefit from the Son's redemption and rejoice in the creation and preservation of the Father and receive the Holy Ghost so that I believe, trust and walk with this Triune God, I must be made alive spiritually alive. The Holy Ghost does this. He gives me new birth "through the living and enduring Word of God." (1 Peter 1:23.) But in order to do this, the Holy Ghost must first convince me that I really am spiritually dead. He must convince me that I am by nature an enemy of God—a God-hater. I do not realize this on my own nor will I admit it. I have by nature a terminal spiritual illness but do not recognize it. Someone or something must reveal to me just how deathly ill I really am. And so the Holy Ghost uses the law to reveal to me my sin-sickness.

This is the alien, foreign or strange work of the Holy Ghost—the *alienum opus Dei*, the alien work of God. Through the law, the Holy Ghost must convince, convict and condemn me. He must show me that I am by nature spiritually dead and an object of God's wrath. (Ephesians 2:1-3.) And so he brings me to contrition—he consumes me by his anger and terrifies me by his indignation. (Psalm 90:7.) Before he can come with the healing, consolation, faith and peace of the gospel, he must bring to me terror and anxiety of conscience by the

law. Hearts that are secure and do not feel the wrath of God, despise the consolation of the gospel.¹ And so by the law, the Holy Ghost brings me to despair—to the “slough of despond.” But he does not push me over, for this is his alien work. His real work is to comfort me with the gospel. By the law, I have lost all hope of saving myself, but now by the gospel, the Holy Ghost brings me to see that there is hope and forgiveness for me “in the Son of God, who obeyed the law in [my] place and who suffered [my] punishment for [me] on the cross.”² It is in this gospel that I find true comfort.

I BELIEVE IN THE HOLY GHOST WHO CALLS ME TO FAITH BY THE GOSPEL

The Holy Ghost is true God, One with the Father and the Son, and he is therefore almighty. The gospel—the good news that Jesus Christ is my Savior—is also powerful. St. Paul states that the gospel “is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.” (Romans 1:16.) By the gospel, the Holy Ghost creates faith in the heart, so that the righteousness which God demands for salvation is “a righteousness that is by faith from first to last.” (Romans 1:17.) By the gospel I am born again, regenerated, renewed, converted. I am, like Abraham, made a friend of God. All this comes by the gospel. And this gospel comes to me—is brought to me—by means of the Word and Sacraments.

The gospel saves. It is the power of God for salvation. Hence whatever saves me, whatever delivers me from sin, death and the power of the devil, whatever rescues my soul from hell is of the gospel. The Word of God brings me this salvation, “Believe in the LORD Jesus, and you will be saved!” (Acts 16:31.) Baptism assures me of this salvation, “Repent and be baptized every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, so that your sins may be forgiven . . . the promise is for you and your children . . .” (Acts 2:38& 39.) And later in his epistle, Peter assures me, “Baptism . . . now saves you also.” (1 Peter 3:21.) And in the LORD’s Supper, I have the guarantee that Jesus’ body has been given for me and that for me his blood has been poured out for the forgiveness of my sins. (1 Corinthians 11:24f.) I know that this forgiveness of sins, life and salvation is for me personally, because the gospel states that forgiveness of sins has been obtained for all.

The gospel is the good news that the sins of the entire world have been forgiven. This is objective justification, namely, that while “all have sinned,” so also “[all] are justified freely by [God’s] grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.” (Romans 3:23&24.) Through this declaration that the entire world has been declared not guilty of all of its sins, the individual believer is assured that his sins too are forgiven. Thus by this gospel, the Holy Ghost works in me the faith and assurance that Jesus died for me. The Bible assures me that I could not make that confession of faith in Jesus unless the Holy Ghost himself moved me to make it, for “no one can say, ‘Jesus is LORD,’ except by the Holy Spirit.” (1 Corinthians 12:3.) To give me further assurance that forgiveness of sins, life and salvation are mine, the Bible tells me that God placed his Spirit in my heart as a seal of ownership—that I belong to him—and as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come, namely, the enjoyment of eternal life with him in heaven. (2 Corinthians 1:22.) The fact that the Holy Ghost is in my heart and in the heart of every believer is evident as believers confess Jesus Christ as LORD and Savior—the one who suffered and died on the cross for their sins. To timid hearts that are often troubled by self-doubt regarding their faith, to hearts that are assailed by the sects which demand a feeling of being saved and the receiving of special spiritual gifts as demonstrations of being in a state of grace—to such timid, troubled and harried souls, the Holy Ghost works by means of the good news of the gospel and assures us that we are children of God through faith in Jesus. The gospel comforts our timid souls and says, “You did not receive a

¹ *Apology of the Augsburg Confession*, Article IV, p. 265; in Triglot Concordia: The symbolical Books of the Ev. Lutheran Church (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1921). Unless stated otherwise, future references to the confessions will be taken from the *Triglot*.

² Siegbert W. Becker, *The Holy Ghost And His Work*, 2nd ed. (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 1984), p. 22. This adult Bible study is an excellent summary of the work of the Holy Spirit, well worth reading and re-reading. Note particularly the emphasis that the Holy Spirit works through means—the Word of God.

spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, ‘*Abba, Father.*’ The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children . . . heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ.” (Romans 8:15-17.) You and I and all believers truly do walk together with the Triune God, because of the work of the Holy Ghost calling us to faith by the gospel. That call to faith is made in the broadest possible terms so that the individual believer has no doubt that he is included. The LORD lays on the Messiah “the iniquity of us all” (Isaiah 53:6); “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29); Jesus is “the atoning sacrifice for our sins and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:2). Through this objective proclamation of the gospel of the forgiveness of sins in Jesus and through the universal application of that truth to the entire human race—“[all] are justified” (Romans 3:24)—the Holy Ghost assures individuals like you and me that we have forgiveness, life and salvation.

But faith in Jesus as my Savior is not the only work that the Holy Ghost accomplishes in me by the gospel. By the gospel, the Holy Ghost gives me many other blessings as well.

I BELIEVE IN THE HOLY GHOST WHO BY THE GOSPEL ENLIGHTENS, SANCTIFIES AND KEEPS ME IN THE TRUE FAITH

It is important for us to notice that this aspect of the work of the Holy Ghost is also accomplished by the gospel. This truth is lost somewhat in the English translation of Luther’s explanation, “the Holy Ghost has called me by the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.”³ In the German and particularly the Latin, the gospel as the means that the Holy Ghost uses to “enlighten . . . sanctify [keep] me in the true faith” is more clearly evident.⁴

5] Der dritte Artikel.

Von der Heiligung.

Ich glaube an den Heiligen Geist, eine heilige christliche Kirche, die Gemeinde der Heiligen, Vergebung der Sünden, Auferstehung des Fleisches und ein ewiges Leben. Amen.

6] Was ist das?—Antwort.

Ich glaube, daß ich nicht aus eigener Vernunft noch Kraft an Jeum Christum, meinen Herrn, glauben oder zu ihm kommen kann; sondern der Heilige Geist hat mich durchs Evangelium berufen, mit seinen Gaben erleuchtet, im rechten Glauben geheiligt und erhalten; gleichwie er die ganze Christenheit auf Erden beruft, sammelt, erleuchtet, heiligt und bei Jeu Christo erhält im rechten, einigen Glauben; in welcher Christenheit er mir und allen Gläubigen täglich alle Sünden reichlich vergibt und am Jüngsten Tage mich und alle Toten auferwecken wird und mir samt allen Gläubigen in Christo ein ewiges Leben geben wird. Das ist gewisslich wahr.

5] Tertius Articulus.

De Sanctificatione.

Credo in Spiritum Sanctum, sanctam ecclesiam catholicam, sanctorum communionem, remissionem peccatorum, carnis resurrectionem et vitam aeternam. Amen.

6] Quae est huius articuli sententia?

Responsio.

Credo me propriis rationis meae viribus Iesu Christo, Domino meo, fidere, aut ad eum accedere et pervenire nullo modo posse; sed Spiritus Sanctus per evangelium me vocavit, suis donis illuminavit, in recta fide sanctificavit et conservavit; quemadmodum solet totam ecclesiam in terra vocare, congregare, illuminare, sanctificare et in Iesu Christo per veram ac unicam fidem conservare; in qua ecclesia mihi et omnibus Christianis omnia peccata quotidie benigne remittit et nos omnes in extremo die a morte suscitabit ac mihi et omnibus in Christum credentibus vitam aeternam dabit. Hoc certissime verum est.

³ David P. Kuske, *Luther’s Catechism: The Small Catechism of Dr. Martin Luther and an Exposition for Children and Adults Written in Contemporary English* (Milwaukee, WI: WELS Board for Parish Education, 1982), p. 5.

⁴ The Small Catechism, Triglott, p. 542. Many thanks to Professor Martin Westerhaus of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary for the much needed assistance in analysis of the German and Latin that follows.

In the German explanation to the Third Article, the prepositional phrase, *durchs Evangelium* (through the gospel), can be construed not only with *berufen* (called), but also with *erleuchtet* (enlightened), *geheiligt* (sanctified), and *erhalten* (kept, preserved). In the Latin, the prepositional phrase, *per evangelium*, comes before both the direct object and the verb, *me vocavit* (calls me), and can also be construed with *illuminavit* (enlightens), *sanctificavit* (sanctifies) and *conservavit* (keeps, preserves). Without hesitation we confess that the Holy Ghost calls into faith and keeps us in faith by the gospel—*Spiritus Sanctus per evangelium me vocavit... in recte fide sanctificavit et conservavit* (the Holy Ghost by the gospel calls me ... in the right faith he sanctifies and preserves me), but it is also true that the gospel serves to enlighten me with the gifts of the Holy Ghost. Perhaps a less grammatically correct but more accurate statement in English would be: “By the gospel, the Holy Ghost has called me, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.” Thus the confessions “reject and condemn the error of the Enthusiasts, who imagine that God without means, without the hearing of God’s Word, also without the use of the holy Sacraments, draws men to Himself, and enlightens, justifies, and saves them.” (Epitome, 789, 13.) God’s warning to Israel through the prophet Isaiah is also for us, “To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn.” (Isaiah 8:20.) Through the gospel we are called into faith, kept in faith, sanctified and enlightened with the gifts of the Holy Ghost.

The gospel sanctifies us, that is it makes us holy and sets us apart. It makes us holy “through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.” (Titus 3:5b.) The gospel cleanses, purifies and washes away our sins. But the gospel also sanctifies us in that it sets us apart for the enjoyment of eternal life in heaven and for the doing of good works pleasing to God in this life. This sanctification to do good works necessitates that the gospel conveys to us the gifts of the Holy Ghost so that we might do those things that are pleasing to God and helpful to our neighbor.

The Christian is sanctified to do good works. The confessions state that we are justified to the end that “we may begin to do good works and to obey God’s Law. We are regenerated and receive the Holy Ghost for the very end that the new life may produce new works, new dispositions, the fear and love of God, hatred of concupiscence, etc.”⁵ The hatred of concupiscence—the evil lusts, desires, covetousness of the sinful nature, the Old Adam—is reflected in St. Paul’s anguished comment to the Romans (7:14,15,18,19&24):

I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing What a wretched man I am!

The new man created by the Holy Ghost through faith in Jesus hates this Old Adam with its evil lusts and desires. At the same time, the new man fears and loves God because the new man has, by the Holy Ghost in the gospel, been “created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.” (Ephesians 4:24.) And St. Paul mentions the new dispositions which are the work of the Holy Ghost in this new man, namely, “the fruit of the Spirit . . . love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” (Galatians 5:22.) The “new dispositions, the fear and love of God, [the] hatred of concupiscence”—which is the fruit of the Old Adam—are all produced in the Christian by the work of the Holy Ghost in the gospel. Justified by grace through faith, the Christian does good works—works which God has prepared in advance for him to do. (Ephesians 2:10.) And since the Christian by himself cannot produce good works—Jesus says, “Apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5b)—the Holy Ghost gives to believers his gifts, “for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.” (Philippians 2:13.) The Holy Ghost, by the gospel, is the source of both the power and desire to do good works and the spiritual gifts whereby the good works are done.

⁵ Apology, III, 217,218f.

Much has been written concerning these spiritual gifts, analyzing them and categorizing them. Appendix X of *New Life in Christ*⁶ by Forrest Bivens and David Valleskey has a thorough analysis of these “Gifts of the Spirit.” The following definition of spiritual gifts is helpful. “[Spiritual gifts] are special abilities granted by the Holy Spirit to all members of the body of Christ to equip them to serve Christ and one another within the Body (‘Body ministry’), the church.”⁷ Bivens and Valleskey distinguish between “spiritual gifts” and “the gift of the Spirit, which converts the unbeliever and makes him a true member of the Church.”⁸ The authors note those sections of God’s Word where spiritual gifts are listed, and make the important point that there may be more than the ones listed in the Scripture references. They then proceed with an analytical guide “for determining one’s spiritual gifts.” At the outset, however, they make the point that there is no command in Scripture to “discover” one’s spiritual gifts; rather, the Scriptures command, encourage and equip God’s people to serve. Believers are not to “become weary in doing good,” but rather, as the opportunities present themselves, believers are to “do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.” (Galatians 6:9&10.) In one’s zeal to discover his “spiritual gifts,” the Christian must not overlook the fulfillment of the responsibilities God has assigned to him in his various roles as father, mother, son, daughter, employer, employee. We must take care to avoid a new “monkery” which fails to see the fulfillment of God-given roles as part also of the work of his kingdom. The humble cobbler, who faithfully plies his handicraft, daily prays that all men might be saved, and trusts in his LORD Jesus for eternal life is more to be envied than all of monkery.⁹ So also are to be envied the husband and wife, the mother and father, who faithfully fulfill the roles which God has given them in this world. It is well to remember that when St. Paul wrote to Timothy concerning qualifications of overseers and deacons in the church—church workers—that he mentioned the management of one’s own family well. (1 Timothy 3:4&12.) Of course, the most important gift of the Holy Ghost is the gift of faith which comes through the preaching and teaching of the gospel. Siegbert Becker warned that in Pentecostalism, which is a great temptation especially for conservative church bodies, there is a distortion of the work of the Holy Ghost resulting in emphasis on the “relatively unimportant gifts of the Spirit,” so that the really important gift of faith is downgraded.¹⁰ “We need to keep in mind,” Becker continues, “that movements in the church which appear pious and religious may actually be works of the devil. St. Paul says, ‘Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness’ (2 Corinthians 11:14,15).”¹¹ Nevertheless, the Holy Ghost who works faith in the heart by the gospel, also by the gospel supplies different kinds of gifts for the building up of the body of Christ. Believers will desire to bring forth fruits of faith using those gifts which the Holy Ghost has given them.

And so by the gospel the Holy Ghost has called me into faith in Jesus as my Savior. By the gospel, the Holy Ghost has enlightened me with his gifts. By the gospel, he has sanctified me—cleansed me, forgiven me, of my sins and set me apart for eternal life. And by the gospel, the Holy Ghost has kept and preserved me in the true saving faith in Jesus. But the peace and joy that I have through the forgiveness of sins is increased even more. For I am not alone as a believer, but I am in the company of fellow-believers.

**I BELIEVE IN THE HOLY GHOST WHO BY THE GOSPEL
CALLS, GATHERS, ENLIGHTENS, SANCTIFIES AND PRESERVES
THE WHOLE CHRISTIAN CHURCH ON EARTH.**

I am in the company of fellow-believers, the whole Christian church. These fellow-believers are the “one holy Christian Church, the communion (gathering or assembly) of saints.” They are identified together because they are Christians—believers. And this church is composed only of believers regardless of

⁶ (Milwaukee, WI: WELS Board for Parish Education, 1986) pp.104-109.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Ewald M. Plass, *What Luther Says: An Anthology* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), II, 969, ¶ 3049.

¹⁰ *The Holy Ghost and His Work*, p. 40.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

denomination. This holy Christian church, along with me as an individual believer, has been sanctified, washed of all of its sins, through the blood of Jesus Christ, and set apart for the inheriting of eternal life. All of this has been done by the gospel. Moreover, this holy Christian church is composed not only of believers on this earth but also those in heaven. Those saints are now living in glory with the LORD Jesus Christ. They are the church triumphant. We believers who are still on this earth are living in the church militant—“We feebly struggle, they in glory shine.” (TLH 463:4.) The fact that there are saints triumphant is a great comfort to those believers still in this world as part of the church militant.

As pastors struggle with their own sinful flesh and with the backsliding and unfaithfulness of members and the indifference of the unchurched, it is a comfort to know that they one day will also join those saints in triumph. The joy of the church triumphant is a comfort to teachers when they face the often all-too-worldly complaints and dissatisfactions of parents. That church triumphant is a comfort to layman and laywoman who live and work in a world and society that is godless, irreverent, impious and wicked. The good news of these saints in glory is part of the message which the Holy Ghost brings to us in his Word, so that we too can “remain faithful, even to the point of death,” and in the end receive “the crown of life.” (Revelation 2:10b.) It is only by the gospel through which the Holy Ghost works that I and my fellow-believers remain members of the holy Christian church and heirs of eternal life with those saints in glory. This fact encourages pastors, teachers and lay-people to continue in the Word of Christ not only in worship and holy communion but also in private and family devotions.

It is by the power of the Holy Ghost at work in Word and Sacraments that the church exists. It exists as a group called to faith in Jesus and predestined to salvation. (Ephesians 1:4,5,11.) The church exists as a group called to proclaim the Word of God until the end of time. (1 Peter 2:9 & Matthew 24:14.) The church exists so that as a group it may support the work of bringing the gospel to others. (2 Corinthians 9.)

The church on earth is not a static entity. The apostle Peter writes,

You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. (1 Peter 2:9.)

In *The Large Catechism* (687,37), Luther states that “Holy Ghost effects our sanctification . . . by the communion of saints or the Christian Church, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.” The Holy Ghost “first leads us into His holy congregation, and places us in the bosom of the Church, whereby He preaches to us and brings us to Christ.” Later in this same section (693,55), Luther says, “Everything . . . in the Christian Church is ordered to the end that we shall daily obtain there nothing but the forgiveness of sins through the Word and signs [Sacraments], to comfort and encourage our consciences as long as we live here.” The Holy Ghost works faith in the hearts of people through the Word and Sacraments. That Word and those Sacraments are given to Christ’s church—the communion of saints, the assembly of believers. And those believers and that church proclaim that Word and bring those Sacraments to others. The function of the church is to offer the gospel in Word and Sacrament to others. But it was noted earlier that for me as an individual believer, the Holy Ghost had first to convince, convict and condemn me of my sin, through the law.¹² So also the church, through which “the Holy Ghost effects . . . sanctification,” must proclaim both law and gospel in its work of evangelism.

It is absolutely essential for the church—for us—to focus on this proclamation of the law and the gospel. Our attention can be drawn away from it with methodologies, mass media programs and outreach strategies. A congregation can complete a self-study, an opinion poll of the membership with regard to the work and effectiveness of the congregation, a community profile complete with demographic charts and interviews of the false prophets of the heterodox churches of the community—as Trinity, Morenci, has just done—and be deluded into thinking that significant work in the kingdom has been completed. That is not the case. People are

¹² *Supra*, pp. 1-3.

converted and brought to faith only when the law and the gospel are brought to them—to their ears and to their hearts. And while self-studies, community profiles and demographics may be useful, and while outreach strategies and use of mass media may have value in organizing our work and effort, it is only through the proclamation of the Word of God that the Spirit of God works to bring people to faith. And so the church, believers, you and I, are to proclaim the law which convicts the sinner of guilt and which terrorizes his heart and conscience with the sure and certain eternal wrath of God. And the church, believers, you and I, are to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ and him crucified which removes guilt, relieves terror and gives peace through the forgiveness of sins. “One who has not heard the thunder of Mount Sinai and has not seen Mount Calvary’s darkness will never yearn for the pearl of the Gospel: ‘Your sins are forgiven.’”¹³ True evangelism work then must include both the proclamation of the law and the gospel.

Moreover, it is essential that we understand the nature of “evangelism” and not confuse it with “friendship” in worldly terms. While on the one hand, the giving of an answer to those who ask us to “give the reason for the hope that [we] have” is to be done “with gentleness and respect” (the Greek says, “gentleness and fear”—1 Peter 3:15&16), yet on the other hand, the process of evangelism is neither friendly, nor is it “relational” as some have suggested. True evangelism which utilizes the law and the gospel will be, first of all, “confrontational.” “Hearts that are secure and do not feel the wrath of God loathe [the] consolation” of the gospel.¹⁴ The same Scriptures which are used to argue a “relational” approach to evangelism, provide examples of the confrontation of the law.

A Samaritan woman in Sychar is confronted by a Jew who asks her for a drink of water, accuses her to her face of adultery, and tells her that she and her fellow-Samaritans know nothing about true worship. (John 4:4-22.) That is confrontation! Peter in his Pentecost sermon confronts the Jews: “You, with the help of wicked men, put [Jesus] to death by nailing him to the cross.... God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both LORD and Christ.” (Acts 2:23&36.) That is confrontational! And the confrontational flavor of Steven’s speech to the Sanhedrin is obvious:

You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit! Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him (Acts 7:51&52.)

And this confrontation carries over into St. Paul’s Epistles. He confronts the Romans and the entire human race with universal spiritual depravity and condemnation. (Romans 1-3.) He parades before the eyes of the Corinthians their detestable immorality and rebellion against God’s Word as Paul had brought it to them. He calls the Galatians fools for having departed from the pure gospel he had brought. All of this is confrontational, not relational. It is only after this confrontation with the law has taken place that the good news of the gospel is brought to people. “Before God can make us glad, he must first make us sad.”¹⁵ This is the work of the law, and you and I as pastors, teachers, lay-people—believers—are to proclaim that law! You and I do not like proclaiming the law. We do not like being confronted with it ourselves. It makes us most unpopular—Stephen was killed because of it! At the same time, if people are going to have salvation, they need to be confronted with the law.

But neither can we pass up any opportunity to proclaim the gospel. This can happen as pastor, teachers and lay-people deal with one another. Our sinful natures refuse to forgive and trust one another. Our sinful natures desire to withhold from others the proclamation of sins forgiven in Jesus’ name, and yet this is the very activity to which the Holy Ghost has called us by the gospel into the fellowship of “the holy Christian church.”

¹³ Daniel Overduin, *Reflections on Luther’s Catechism, Book II: The Creed*, ed. Luther Poellot (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1980), p. 53.

¹⁴ Apology, XII, 265,51&52. *Supra*, p. 2, n. 1.

¹⁵ Becker, *Work of the Holy Ghost*, p. 11.

Moreover, we saw that by the gospel the Holy Ghost gave various gifts to the members of his church for the strengthening of the church and the extending of the church.¹⁶ St. Paul indicated that some were appointed to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up." (Ephesians 4:12&13.) These workers in the church were to be particularly careful about correctly handling "the Word of Truth." "Careful instruction" in God's Word was therefore to be given from one's youth—from infancy. (2 Timothy 2:15; 4:2; 3:15.) In his *Historical Introductions to the Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, F. Bente notes that Luther was keenly aware that "the future belongs to the rising generation" and that instruction of the young "became increasingly an object of [Luther's] especial concern." "If Christianity and its saving truths were to be preserved to the Church, the children must learn them from earliest youth."¹⁷ Again the Holy Ghost would provide the pastors and the teachers, but only through training and instruction in the Word. Times have not changed.

As this conference and the synodical convention in August weigh various alternatives in carrying on the function of the church which is to herald and proclaim the gospel, it will also be remembered that the Holy Ghost, by the gospel, trains those whom he will call into the preaching and teaching ministry in the future. There may be a number of ways to accomplish that training, but without it there will be no pastors and teachers to serve present congregations, let alone future home and foreign missions. Furthermore, because Satan is so active among the false prophets and heterodox churches, it is essential that thorough training—indoctrination—in the Word of God continue to be a top priority. God has blessed the Wisconsin Synod by giving it an excellent prep school system which has proven itself effective in providing workers who can correctly handle "the Word of Truth." If areas of the synodical budget have to be cut for the sake of economy, then it would be well to look at items outside of education first. Since it is by the gospel that the Holy Ghost works, then those agencies which train believers for full-time work in the gospel need to be supported, encouraged and extended.

The objective, of course, of training in the gospel and in the proclaiming of that gospel is that people might receive the forgiveness of sins through faith in Jesus as their Savior. This too is part of the confession that the believer makes in the Third Article.

I BELIEVE IN THE HOLY GHOST WHO BY THE GOSPEL FORGIVES MY SINS

I believe in "the forgiveness of sins." It is to the Christian church, the communion of saints, the assembly of believers, that the forgiveness of sins is given daily and richly. This forgiveness comes by faith alone—subjective justification. This justification through faith comes by grace alone as the Holy Ghost works in the objective proclamation of the gospel that the sins of the world have been forgiven through Jesus' blood and merit alone. Those who benefit from the forgiveness of sins, who have it for themselves, are members of "the holy Christian church." The faith and the forgiveness of sins which are received result from the gospel—the gospel that is proclaimed by the church. "Outside of this Christian Church, where the Gospel is not, there is no forgiveness, as also there can be no holiness [sanctification]."¹⁸ And as we have already seen, "the holy Christian church, the communion of saints," not only receives this forgiveness of sins but also dispenses it.¹⁹ To this church, Christ has given the keys of the kingdom—the law which locks heaven's doors to the unrepentant and the gospel which opens those doors to those who repent and believe in Jesus as their Savior. Jesus says, "If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven." (John 20:23.) Here it can be seen that believers co-operate with the Holy Ghost.

¹⁶ *Supra*, pp. 7ff.

¹⁷ Triglot, pp. 68 & 69.

¹⁸ The Large Catechism, p. 693,56.

¹⁹ *Supra*, pp. 12ff.

Since God wants all men to be saved (1 Timothy 2:3&4) through the forgiveness of sins in Jesus, and for that purpose has given the gospel which brings men to faith in Jesus, then as believers proclaim that gospel, they co-operate with the Holy Ghost. And so St. Paul could say to the Corinthians (2, 6:1), “As God’s fellow workers we urge you not to receive God’s grace in vain.” Paul refers to himself as a fellow-worker of God in the proclaiming of the gospel of Jesus Christ, so that through faith in that gospel, people could receive the forgiveness of sins. We too are co-workers with God as we proclaim the forgiveness of sins in Jesus’ name, in our homes, work place, schools, community and the world.

But the forgiveness of sins that is by grace through faith brings with it the sure, certain and guaranteed hope of eternal life in heaven.

I BELIEVE IN THE HOLY GHOST WHO BY THE GOSPEL RAISES ME TO LIFE EVERLASTING

The Holy Ghost raises all flesh, believer and unbeliever. Unbelievers, however, are raised to damnation in hell for both their bodies and their souls. In this hell there is only torment and agony (Luke 16:23&24); there is eternal “weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 22:13b); it is a place where “their worm will not die, nor will their fire be quenched” (Isaiah 66:24). This will be an everlasting separation from God, from his love, his grace and his kindness. Oh, what a delusion it is when we sometimes overhear the comment made concerning an unbeliever who has died after an extended or painful illness, “Well, at least he is at peace now.” Nothing could be farther from the truth! Real suffering for them has only just begun, and their agony and torment in hell will continue forever. But the resurrection from the dead for believers is completely different.

Believers’ bodies will be changed from “perishable” and subject to pain and death because of sin, to “imperishable,” sinless bodies in a state of true righteousness and holiness. (1 Corinthians 15:53 & Ephesians 4:24.) The new life which was begun in them on this earth by the Holy Ghost working faith in them through the gospel will be complete. And believers “will be with the LORD forever” in heaven. (1 Thessalonians 4:17.)

Moreover, all of the sorrows and troubles, pains and fears, disappointments, illnesses and diseases of earthly life will be over for them. “God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.” (Revelation 7:17b.) And believers will have all of this holiness, innocence and blessedness, because God the Holy Ghost by his grace worked faith in their hearts by the gospel!

I BELIEVE IN THE HOLY GHOST WHO BY THE GOSPEL MOVES ME TO SAY, “AMEN!”

To this Third Article of the Apostles’ Creed which concerns the Holy Ghost, his person, and his work through the gospel, the believer says, “Amen”—“Yes, this is most certainly true.” For by the gospel the Holy Ghost has led us to see, believe and confess that all of God’s promises are “‘Yes’ in Christ. And so through [Christ] the ‘Amen’ is spoken by us to the glory of God.” (2 Corinthians 1:20.) Through the gospel, God establishes us and sets us firm in faith in Christ Jesus, and he sets his seal on us, the deposit of the Holy Ghost, who guarantees what is to come. (2 Corinthians 1:21&22.) Our “Amen” is the confession that we believe in God the Holy Ghost who has worked that faith in us by the gospel.

But that same “Amen” is also the confession of our faith in “God the Father Almighty” and in “Jesus Christ, his only Son, our LORD.” By the gospel, the Holy Ghost has created and sustained in our hearts faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior, and the Holy Ghost has also brought us to the knowledge that through faith in Jesus we are now children of the heavenly Father and heirs of eternal life in heaven. All this comes from the Holy Ghost who works through the gospel.

CONCLUSION

The Third Article reminds us that we must continually return to God's Word, the law and the gospel. Without the law, we would not know our complete helplessness and the eternal doom and damnation that our sins have earned for us. Without the law, we would not know of the extent of God's anger with us because of our sins and that his anger and wrath against us are just.

But without the gospel—the good news of Jesus—we would not know that God himself took action on our behalf and in behalf of all mankind. Without the gospel, we would not have faith in Jesus as our Savior, and we would be lost forever. “But the Holy Ghost has called us by the gospel.” By the gospel he has worked faith in our hearts so that we know and believe in Jesus as our Savior and in his Father as our dear Father. As God the Holy Ghost has called us to faith by the gospel through the agency of the “holy Christian church, the communion of saints,” the body or assembly of believers, so now we, as members of that “communion of saints” have been called to bring that gospel to others. And so the Third Article encourages, commands and invites us continually to return to the means of grace, the gospel in Word and Sacraments. Through these alone the Holy Ghost works and preserves faith, so that we and all believers may walk with the Triune God in this life and live with the Triune God forever in the life to come. The Holy Ghost has done this for us by the gospel.

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