

THE ABSOLUTE AUTHORITY OF THE WORD OF GOD IN MATTERS OF FAITH AND LIFE

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It is indeed significant and very fitting that just this subject should be the topic of the doctrinal essay at our district convention during the centennial year of our Synod. Faithful adherence to this truth is the noteworthy blessing which God granted to our Synod during its first century, and faithful adherence to this truth is at the same time the vital gift which we shall want to implore for the new century which lies before us. The founding fathers of our Synod, though they may not have been fully clear on every point of Lutheran doctrine, wished to be Lutherans and were intent upon founding a Lutheran synod. Implied in this intention to found a Lutheran synod was a recognition of the absolute authority of the Word of God in matters of faith and life. For it is indeed truly Lutheran to bow with unswerving loyalty to the Word of God as the sole norm of faith and life.

The first decades of the newly-formed synod's existence were marked by inner struggles in endeavoring to bring its teaching and practice into full harmony with the Word of God. These endeavors culminated in the founding of the Synodical Conference. In faithfulness to the Word of God our synodical fathers severed their ties with their unionistic benefactors in the Evangelical Church of Germany, though it was not a light or easy thing for them to dispense with the financial aid and the supply of workers which had come to them from the German mission societies, nor an easy matter to bear the charge of ungratefulness. Here in America they also withdrew from the newly-organized General Council when it likewise failed to take a clear stand in confession and practice on the basis of God's Word. They also came to a parting of ways with another group of Lutherans who had been in close contact with them but who, contrary to Scripture, espoused the principle of "open questions" in the field of Christian doctrine. In the Synodical Conference they now expressed their bond of fellowship with Lutheran synods faithful to the Word of God, though these were the very ones who had heretofore testified against their weaknesses in practice and whose criticism was not always expressed with full understanding. Within this larger fellowship the Lord has graciously kept our Synod intent upon meeting and solving every issue of Christian faith and life in uncompromising fidelity to the absolute authority of the Word of God. It was our Synod's stand when the Synodical Conference was shaken from within by controversy on the doctrines of predestination and conversion and suffered sad defections from its ranks. It has been our Synod's stand over against the new allurements to unionism which have made an impact upon the Synodical Conference in the very recent decades. As we are now entering the second century of our life and work as a synod we ask God in earnest prayer to grant us grace to continue to bow with unswerving faithfulness to the absolute authority of His Word. It is this prayer in our hearts which lets us feel a need and desire to dwell during this convention upon the topic assigned for the doctrinal essay: The Absolute Authority of the Word of God in Matters of Faith and Life. To express the truth involved even more clearly permit me to state it in the form of a sentence: *The Word of God is the absolute authority in matters of faith and life.* In dwelling upon this truth let us consider:

1. The basis on which we confess this truth.
2. The false authorities which we reject in contending for this truth.
3. The positive implications of faithful adherence to this truth.

I.

The Basis On Which We Confess This Truth

In discussing any statement it is essential that there be clarity concerning all the terms that are used to express it. Any term which might be subject to misunderstanding and unclarity should be properly defined. Thus it is quite proper that at the very outset we pause to consider whether any clarification is necessary concerning the statement that *the Word of God is the absolute authority in matters of faith and life*. I am sure that in our own midst we understand all the terms in one and the same manner. In confessing that the Word of God is the absolute authority in matters of faith and life we mean to say that only the Word of God can finally tell us what may properly be an object of our Christian faith and what properly belongs to a God-pleasing life. Every other norm or guide that we may use for our Christian faith and life, even Luther's Small Catechism or any other confessional writing of our Church, can properly serve as such a guide only because it agrees with God's Word and presents the Word of God. It has no authority of its own, but whatever true authority it has is derived from the Word of God. There is no other independent authority, norm, or guide for our faith and life, supplementing the authority of the Word of God.

Yet what do we mean by the term: the Word of God, concerning which we confess that it is the absolute authority in matters of faith and life? I am sure that in our own midst also this term leaves no room for unclarity or misunderstanding, that also here we all mean one and the same thing; we mean the Holy Scriptures of the Old and the New Testaments, concerning which we hold that they are God's inspired Word in every word and statement and that they are the only Word of God which we have for our faith and life. Since this is contested by many Lutherans in our land and abroad outside the Synodical Conference, it is a matter which will receive further consideration later. Here where we are merely concerned about assuring clarity concerning the statement under discussion, let it suffice to say that the Word of God and the Holy Scriptures, the Bible, are considered to be interchangeable terms. We mean one and the same thing when we say: The Word of God is the absolute authority in matters of faith and life, or when we say: Holy Scriptures are the absolute authority in matters of faith and life.

This truth, however we express it, we confess on the basis of the Holy Scriptures themselves. In doing so we are not begging the question but proceeding in a very proper way as Christians. For through the Holy Scriptures we have come to our blessed faith. Through its message of the law we have been convicted of our own guilt, and condemnation before God; and through the Gospel in Holy Scriptures, through its message of our Savior Jesus Christ and His blood-bought forgiveness of sins, we have come to saving faith, to the assurance of a gracious God, and to the certainty of eternal salvation. In such blessed faith we have the testimony of the Holy Spirit in our hearts that God is speaking to us in Holy Scripture. Now we quite naturally are moved to go back to the Holy Scriptures to hear what God tells us about the nature and the scope of their authority. What we find is just this that the Holy Scriptures claim to be the absolute authority in matters of faith and life.

This claim rests first of all upon Holy Scripture's assertion of being the inspired Word of God in every word and statement. To unfold this assertion in full detail would in itself require a number of essays. We need to content ourselves with a selection. Divine inspiration is clearly asserted of the Old Testament. Let us listen, first of all, to the Old Testament itself. In Joshua 1:8–9, we hear God telling Joshua: "Only be thou strong and very courageous that thou mayest observe to do according to *all the law*, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest. This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to *all that is written therein*." In I Kings 2:3 we find aged King David telling his son Solomon: "And keep the *charge of the Lord thy God*, to walk in *his* ways, to keep *his* statutes, and *his* commandments, and *his* judgments, and *his* testimonies, as it is written in the law of Moses ..." This is clearly asserted: All that is written in the law of Moses, in the Pentateuch, the five books of Moses, is the Word of God.

The assertion is just as clear concerning other books of the Old Testament. A quotation from *Fundamentals* (volume 7, page 30) sums up the testimony very nicely: "We find Isaiah saying, 'Hear the word of the Lord' (Is. 1:10); and no fewer than twenty times does he explicitly declare that his writings are the 'words of the Lord.' Almost one hundred times does Jeremiah say, 'The word of the Lord came unto me,' or declare he was uttering the 'words of the Lord,' and the 'word of the living God.' Ezekiel says that his writings are the

‘words of God’ quite sixty times. Here is a sample: ‘Son of man, all My words that I shall speak unto thee receive in thine heart, and hear with thine ears. And go get thee to them of the captivity, unto the children of thy people, and speak unto them, and tell them, Thus saith the Lord God’ (Ezek. 3:10, 11). Daniel said, ‘And when I heard the voice of His words’ (Dan. 10:9). Hosea said, ‘The word of the Lord’ (Hosea 1:1). ‘The word of the Lord came to Joel’ (Joel 1:1). Amos said, ‘Hear the word of the Lord’ (Amos 3:1). Obadiah said, ‘Thus saith the Lord God’ (Oba. 1:1). ‘The word of the Lord came unto Jonah’ (Jonah 1:1). ‘The word of the Lord that came to Micah’ (Micah 1:1). Nahum said, ‘Thus saith the Lord’ (Nah. 1:12). Habbakkuk wrote, ‘The Lord answered me and said’ (Hab. 2:2). ‘The word of the Lord which came to Zephaniah’ (Zeph. 1:1). ‘Came the word of the Lord by Haggai the prophet’ (Hag. 1:1). ‘Came the word of the Lord unto Zechariah’ (Zech. 1:1). ‘The word of the Lord to Israel by Malachi’ (Mal. 1:1). And in this last of the Old Testament book, is it twenty-four times said, ‘Thus saith the Lord.’ ”

What the Old Testament says of itself is also confirmed in the New Testament. Pertinent statements from the Old Testament are again and again simply quoted as God’s, Word. Matthew 2:15 introduces the statement from Isaiah 11:1: “Out of Egypt have I called my son” by saying that the Lord spoke thus through the Prophet. The Apostle Peter in Acts quotes Joel’s prophecy of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and simply says: “Saith God.” In Acts 4:25 the opening verse of Psalm 2 is applied by stating that the Lord spoke thus through the mouth of David. In this way the New Testament treats every word of the Old as God’s Word. In Romans 3:2, where Paul points to the Old Testament Scriptures as the chief advantage of the Jews, he simply designates them as the oracles, the words, the utterances of God, □□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□ Peter writes (2 Peter 1:20, 21): “Knowing this first that no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.”

Decisive for us above all is the fact that in the Gospels we find Jesus our Savior treating every word and statement of the Old Testament as the inspired and infallible Word of God. Again a few examples must suffice. Having rebuked the Sadducees for not knowing the Scriptures He points to just one such word of Scripture that should have kept them from denying a resurrection. Yet note how he introduces it: “Have ye not read *that which was spoken unto you by God*, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” (Matt. 22:32). Note also that the whole weight of His argument rests on the copula “am” which, though not outwardly expressed, very definitely lies in the Hebrew construction of a nominal sentence in the quoted Scripture text. On another occasion as He quotes a statement of two words from Psalm 82 against His bitter Jewish enemies, Jesus significantly adds: “And the Scripture cannot be broken.” With this addition He reminds them how conclusive is the authority of every statement of Scripture. He could not possibly have expressed Himself more clearly on the point that for Him every word of the Old Testament is the very Word of God. Thus He also repeatedly declares that all things must take their course as they are written, especially also the smallest details of His life, passion, and death: “All things must be fulfilled which were written in the law of Moses and in the prophets, and in the Psalms concerning me” (Luke 24:44). Yet just as unquestionably true for Jesus are other Old Testament statements which do not directly speak of Him. Without hesitation, without qualifications of one kind or another He appeals to its statements concerning the creation of Adam and Eve, concerning Satan as the one who first deceived man, concerning Abel and his murder, concerning Noah and his entrance into the ark, concerning Sodom and Gomorrah and their wickedness and doom, concerning Lot’s wife and her disobedient unbelief, concerning Moses and his experience at the burning bush, concerning David and the shew bread, concerning Elijah and the widow of Zarephath, concerning Elijah and the leper Naaman. Jesus knows of no distinction between parts that are fully inspired and others that are less fully inspired or not inspired at all. All of the Old Testament is for Him the Word of God.

Just as definitely is divine inspiration in every word and statement asserted for the New Testament, the word of the apostles. In the Gospels we hear how Jesus entrusted His apostles with the proclamation of His Word. In His high priestly prayer Jesus speaks of His future disciples as those who would believe through their word. For this great task Jesus promised them the gift of the Holy Spirit. “For it shall be given you in that hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you” (Matt.

10:20). “But the comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you” (John 14:26).

What the Lord promised the apostles experienced. They clearly assert that they are proclaiming not their own but the Lord’s word. It was for St. Paul a matter of ceaseless thanksgiving that he could say of the Thessalonians: “When ye receive the word of God which ye heard of us ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God” (I Thess. 2:13). The apostles also clearly identified their written and spoken word. In his first epistle John says: “That which ye have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us, and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full” (I John 1:3, 4). Thus also Paul tells the Corinthians: “The things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord.” And again: “We speak not in words which man’s wisdom teacheth but which the Holy Ghost teacheth.” Also this do the apostles assert that their word is of the same nature as the Old Testament Scripture. In I Peter 1 the apostle states that the prophets of the Old Testament prophesied of the future grace of Christ through the spirit of Christ in them and then adds that the same things have now been preached by the apostles through the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. And again Peter says: “This second epistle, beloved, I write unto you ... that ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, *and* of the commandments of us the apostles of the Lord and Savior ...” Paul says in Romans that he is “separated unto the Gospel of God which he had promised afore by his prophets in the Holy Scriptures.” Just because the New Testament is of the same nature as the Old, it is also covered by Paul’s word in 2 Timothy 3:16: “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God.” All of it is God-breathed, inspired from beginning to end. No part of it, not a single word, was produced by human will and ingenuity. We confess verbal, plenary inspiration of the Holy Scriptures not as a theory, as those who deny it like to assert, but upon Scripture’s own assertion we confess it as a fact, without attempting to grasp it or to make it intelligible to our reason.

In thus confessing the verbal inspiration of the Bible we are also not overlooking, forgetting, or discounting any human factor in this miracle, as those who deny it again like to assert. We confess all that Scripture itself states. In revealing His eternal saving thoughts God indeed did not employ a divine language of His own, for who would have understood if God had revealed His grace in such unspeakable words as Paul heard when he was momentarily caught up into Paradise? Since God gave us His Word for our salvation He employed ordinary human language which in its grammar, syntax, rhetorical figures, carries all of the characteristics of common human speech. He also used just those languages which enjoyed a widespread and popular usage at the time when the various portions were written.

The individual books of Holy Scripture also bear the clear imprint of the personalities, gifts, station, experiences of the human instruments through whom they were written. Over against the elevated poetic style of Isaiah we meet with the simple, unpolished language of Amos. The book of Job is highly dramatic and abounds in pictures and figures of speech. The epistles of Paul are characterized by a keen dialectical development of thought. In the epistles of John a series of sentences follow upon each other like so many proverbial statements to carry out a unified thought. In Genesis we astound at the writer’s wonderful aptitude for narration. The Gospel of Mark reveals the writer’s keen eye for detail. Luke through his accurate use of medical terms shows himself as the physician. In Matthew’s Gospel the former publican is evident who is used to putting things into columns, lists, and categories, in that he groups the Savior’s parables, miracles, and discourses. The writer of *Ecclesiastes* is obviously a man of the highest station, one acquainted with all the pleasures, riches, and wisdom which the world may offer. Paul in his epistles reveals a knowledge of Greek poets and Greek athletic contests and gives clear evidence of his former Rabbinical training. At reading John’s Gospel we note in the writer the disciple who had stood closest to the Lord during His earthly sojourn.

The very emotional setting in which the holy writers found themselves at the time of writing often clearly shines forth in what they wrote. At reading the second epistle to Timothy we clearly feel that Paul was awaiting execution and in the certainty of salvation was anticipating the joy in his Lord and Savior’s presence. In Galatians Paul’s keen anxiety over the inroads of false doctrine among the Galatian congregations is just as

evident. Ephesians radiates with the writer's jubilant rejoicing over God's marvelous plan of salvation in gathering His one church out of the midst of Jews and Gentiles.

Also outward inducements for writing are manifest. In the transcription of the fifty-first Psalm we read, for example, "A Psalm of David when Nathan the prophet came unto him, after he had gone into Bathsheba." Paul states that he has been led to write to the Corinthians because of certain reports concerning evils in their congregational life, which have reached his ear. Luke states that he is writing his Gospel that Theophilus might know the certainty of those things wherein he has been instructed and avows that he has gathered his material with great care from eye and ear witnesses.

Yet all this is embraced in the miracle of the divine inspiration of the Holy Scriptures. And we are not to think of an accommodation of the Holy Spirit according to which He was reduced to the necessity of anxiously searching for those who might somehow serve His purpose as writers and then making the best of them. No, God who speaks to us through His inspired writers is also the God of providence who Himself prepared them for His purpose, who for His purpose endowed them with their characteristic temperament and gifts, who arranged for their specific training and station in life, who led them through the fitting experiences, and who also placed them in the situations out of which He wanted them to write; and He did it all that they might write the things which He desired them to write and in the precise manner and in the very words in which He desired them to be written. Thus saith the Scriptures. That is why we believe in the verbal inspiration of Holy Scripture, rejoice in it, confess it, contend for it.

Yet Scripture not only affirms that it is the inspired Word of God but also that as such it, and it alone, has been given to us for our faith and life. This is the further basis of our confession that the Bible, the Word of God, is the absolute authority in matters of faith and life. Ever since God has deigned to impart His written Word to men, His church has been directed to it for its faith and life. No man was permitted of himself to add to it or to subtract from it. It was for God Himself alone to add to it until His revelation through the written Word was complete. Joshua directed the people to the "Book of the Law of Moses" and warned them that they "turn not aside therefrom to the right hand or to the left." Isaiah exhorts: "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." In His account of the rich man and poor Lazarus Jesus clearly directed His hearers for salvation and a godly life to the Scriptures, for in respect to his brethren here on earth the rich man is told: "They have Moses and the prophets: let them hear them ... if they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead." For His New Testament church God has added to the Old Testament Scriptures also His revelation through His Son, in the Word of His apostles. Beyond this we are to look for no further revelation of God to guide us in our faith and life. "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son." This final revelation we have—to say it once more—in the New Testament word of His apostles. Paul in Ephesians teaches us that the New Testament church is built upon the foundation of "the apostles and prophets"—not upon their persons but upon their inspired words.

There is one further vital matter forming the basis on which we confess that the Word of God is the absolute authority in matters of faith and life. It is the asserted clarity of Holy Scriptures. The Holy Scriptures, which assert that they are the inspired Word of God and that as such they are the sole norm for our faith and life, also lay claim to clarity for the fulfillment of this purpose and function. Particularly the Psalms abound with statements affirming this clarity. "The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes" (Ps. 19:7b, 8). "Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way. Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (119:104). "Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O Lord, and teachest him out of thy law" (94:12). Only because the Word of God possesses clarity, only because it is able to convey and impart its message can it be compared to a light and a lamp. Only thus can it make wise, give understanding, impart blessedness, move us to hate every false way.

This clarity which Scripture ascribes to itself is, first of all, an outward clarity. It consists in this that in the words and sentences of intelligible, comprehensible language Scripture clearly expresses all the truths which it wishes to teach and which we need to know for our faith and life. Any rational human being who reads and

studies the statements of Holy Scripture, carefully marking and observing the meaning of the words which it employs, the grammatical construction with which they are joined together in sentences, the figures of speech, if any, in which the statements are clothed, and the context and setting in which the statements are found, will have to say: This and this alone is what Scripture is stating. Take, for example, Romans 3:22–24: “For there is no difference: for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God: being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.” Even the unbeliever who reads these statements, carefully marking the meaning of every word as Paul uses it and observing also the whole context, will have to say, though he refuses to bow under the verdict and accept the truth: Here Scripture teaches that all men are of themselves under condemnation before God, and that justification in His sight is a gift of God’s grace for Jesus’ sake. So throughout, Scripture clearly expresses what it wishes to say and teach. That the unbeliever will more often than not let his own prejudices and misconceptions hinder him in ascertaining even the outward meaning of Scripture is, of course, due to the sinful depravity of his inborn nature.

This outward clarity is affirmed by every exhortation of Holy Scripture that we use it to recognize the truth, every exhortation which bids us to use it to ward off error and false doctrine, every exhortation which bids us to use it to detect and reject false teachers. This clarity is also asserted in every earnest warning against adding anything to God’s inspired Word or subtracting anything from it. For how could anyone know whether he were adding or subtracting, if Scripture were not clear. “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine . . .” Scripture clearly presents the truths: the truths of original sin, of our total depravity, of our separation from God, of our inability to make restitution or to contribute anything to it; the truths of God’s free and unmerited love, of His justification of the whole world through the atoning sacrifice of His incarnate Son, of the personal justification of the sinner through faith, of faith as the gift of God, of the new life of the Christian as the creation of the Holy Spirit. Yes, Scripture clearly expresses every truth that we need for our Christian faith and life. In his work of reformation Luther firmly clung to the outward clarity of Scripture and never lost sight of it. Also we need ever anew to do so with him. That there are great differences of doctrine in the outward Christian church, doctrinal differences even in the outward Lutheran churches, is not due to any unclarity in the Holy Scriptures themselves. The unclarity always comes from man who is using the Scripture. Unclarity arises when man consciously or unconsciously refuses to cast all of his own prejudices and preconceptions aside and will not let the clear meaning of Scripture stand. It arises when man omits something, changes something, adds something of his own. We will again return to this matter when we come to the false authorities which we need to reject.

From what has been said it should be clear that we do not mean to say that every part of Scripture will immediately be clear to everyone who reads it, but rather that it is clear in itself. That it be clear also to us calls for careful, patient study, some parts more, others less. We need to let Scripture explain Scripture, to compare Scripture with Scripture, considering all the texts in which Scripture teaches any certain truth. We need to study every statement of Scripture carefully, also in its closer and wider context to gain full understanding, for Scripture is not a collection of disconnected definitions for our faith and life, though it also abounds with many passages which sum up vital truths in a very precise manner, as for example the Romans text previously mentioned. We also do not want to say that not a single passage will remain obscure and difficult to understand even for the diligent student of Holy Scripture. There are passages which, though clear in themselves and perfectly intelligible to those who first heard them when they were written, are difficult to us in one point or another because we no longer possess the exact meaning of this or that term used in the original language. Thus, for example, it may be impossible for us to identify all of the precious stones which were found in the Old Testament high priest’s breastplate. Yet this does not in any way impugn the clarity of Scripture as the absolute authority in matters of faith and life. For though every statement contained in Holy Scripture is to be accepted as true and inspired, not every statement establishes a truth or is an article of faith. Some merely illustrate them. The statement; that each of the twelve stones of the high priest’s breastplate, inscribed with one of the names of the twelve tribes of Israel, was a specific precious stone does not establish but illustrates and symbolizes the truth that each of these tribes was a precious part of God’s chosen people in whose name the high priest was to function. This is also true of many historical statements of Scripture. Though they contain elements that

illustrate certain truths of faith and life and are therefore all written for our learning and worthy of our earnest study, they do not in themselves establish an article of faith and life. But Scripture does not cease to be a clear authority for our faith and life even though this or that statement which actually teaches an article of faith should for one reason or another remain unclear for us. For the truths for our faith and life are not expressed merely once in Holy Scriptures, but are taught again and again in a great abundance of texts, not to mention at all that they are clearly illustrated by a wealth of examples. Each of the truths are taught in such simple, lucid statements that even a child can comprehend them, as the Scriptural proof passages in our Catechism show.

Yet the clarity which Holy Scripture asserts for itself goes much deeper than this outward clarity, vital though it is. The clarity of Scripture is above all a spiritual one and consists in this that it possesses the power to win acceptance for the truths of faith and life which it clearly teaches. It has the power to effect in us a spiritual understanding and comprehension of these truths, a blessed comprehension of faith. Paul tells Timothy: "And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." Scripture and Scripture alone can make us wise unto salvation and it makes us wise through faith in Christ Jesus. There is only one way of salvation for sinful man and that is through the free gift of God's grace, through the gift of the perfect righteousness which His Son Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, has won for us with His holy life and His innocent suffering and death. Salvation is through this gift appropriated by us sinners in faith. The one great message of Scripture is the message of this gift of salvation through Christ Jesus. All that the Holy Scripture tells us serves the purpose of imparting this gift of salvation to us through faith and of making us blessed, rich, and fruitful in its possession for time and eternity.

All Scripture, given by inspiration of God, is profitable for reproof. Natural man, though he may outwardly understand Scripture's message of sin and grace, of himself rejects it. Vainly he wants to work out his own salvation. Vainly he insists on recognition of his own merits. Yet Scripture is equal to the situation. Scripture has power to reprove natural man, to convict him of his utter guilt and condemnation before God. Scripture manifests this power through its message of the law. "By the law is the knowledge of sin."

Yet even when the sinner is thus reproved and convicted of his sin and condemnation he is still at enmity with God. Of himself he has no power to trust in Jesus and His grace. But Scripture is profitable for correction. Through its Gospel message it awakens grace in the sinner's heart and in such faith comforts him with the assurance of forgiveness, life and salvation.

Finally Scripture is profitable for instruction, for training. It constantly nourishes, strengthens, preserves the believer in faith, fills his heart with thankful love, helps him to fight against all that is sinful, constrains and guides him in striving ever anew and ever more fully after all that is pleasing in God's sight.

Scripture and Scripture alone has such power to reprove, to correct, to instruct, such power to produce and to sustain spiritual life, has it because it is inspired, God-breathed from beginning to end, because it is the Word of God. What does this really mean? To express it forcefully and clearly let me quote from one of Professor Meyer's expositions: "There are people who imagine that God at some time in the hoary past revealed Himself to selected men and spoke to them. Then they recorded what they heard. Thus the Scripture is a record of God's revelation, or, as some say, the history of God's revelation. Paul claims much more for the Scriptures: They are the Word of God itself. What does this imply? Jesus once said: 'The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life.' When you hear the Scriptures, or when you read the Scriptures, it is the same as though God Himself were standing before you in person in all His holy majesty, and were addressing personally to you the words of His love. The Scriptures are not a record of a past revelation of God, they are His ever-present and powerful revelation. The Gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation." Only when we see and understand Scripture thus, not as a record of a past revelation of God, not as "a compendium of God-given definitions of faith and rules of conduct," but as God's ever-present and powerful revelation, as the bread of life, ever full of the power of the Holy Spirit—only then are we fully understanding what it means that the Holy Scriptures are the absolute authority in matters of Christian faith and life. When we do so understand it, then every part of the Holy Scriptures will be precious to us and we will want to "hear, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them," that "by patience and comfort of His holy Word we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life which He has given us in our Savior Jesus Christ."

II. The False Authorities Which We Reject In Contending For This Truth

Which are they? All false authorities which men have set up, by which they consciously or unconsciously contest the absolute authority of the Word of God in matters of faith and life—all these authorities in the last analysis amount to one and the same thing, namely an exaltation of the proud reason of man, their own or that of others, above God and His inspired Word. Yet it serves our purpose here to group the various manifestations. Even so we cannot hope to treat them exhaustively.

Let us consider the appeal to human reason itself as a first false authority which we need to reject. We have already pointed out that it pleases God in His inspired Word to speak to us and to reveal Himself to us through the medium of human language. When with our God-given faculties of a rational mind to understand such language according to the words, sentences, grammar, progression of thought we have ascertained what God is saying to us, their the function of our mind and reason stops. We dare not presume to set up our reason as a judge over that which God clearly tells us in His Word, deciding on its merits.

This, however, is the very thing which Reformed theology has done with its axiom that “nothing is given by inspiration that is an offense to reason.” Thereby an authority superior to that of Holy Scriptures is really assigned to human reason; it is made the final arbiter. Luther met with it in the days of the Reformation in his discussions with the Swiss reformers on the Lord’s Supper. It is familiar to us all that Luther pointed out that in the words of institution the Savior clearly says: This is my body; this is my blood. He also showed that the entire context indicates no figure of speech. Yet the Swiss reformers would not let the “is” stand, because the real presence of the Savior’s body and blood in Holy Communion seemed impossible to their reason. Because their reason could not grasp the truth, they made the Savior’s words say what they do not say, and taught accordingly. That they still let other truths of God’s Word stand was only a happy inconsistency. For the natural reason of man finds none of the truths which God tells us for our salvation acceptable and reasonable. “The natural man receiveth not the things of the spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (I Cor. 2, 14). We also see from the history of Reformed Protestantism that in the measure in which its false axiom was consistently applied one truth of Scripture after another has been rejected, even the central Gospel truth of the Savior’s vicarious atonement.

The Lutheran Church has rightly rejected the axiom which accords to human reason the position of a final judge over the clear statements of Holy Scriptures. Nevertheless, the substance of the error has cropped up also in sections of the Lutheran Church and is still much in evidence. Our synodical fathers met with it in the controversy on predestination and conversion. Let us just consider the latter in this connection. Scripture states, Eph. 2, 8: “By grace are ye saved through faith: and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast.” Here and also in numerous other places Scripture clearly teaches that if anyone believes in Jesus as his Savior and is saved, this is due solely through the grace of God. Again Scripture says of those who do not believe, though they hear the same Gospel: “Ye would not,” and thereby teaches that it is wholly man’s fault, if he is lost. Our reason cannot harmonize these truths. But our fathers, together with all those who remained in the Synodical Conference, let both truths stand upon the authority of God’s Word. Then antagonists throughout various Lutheran synods, however, sought to find an explanation for their reason why some come to faith and others not when the same Gospel, God’s power unto salvation, is proclaimed to them. Without the authority of Scripture they made a distinction between a natural and a willful resistance against God’s grace, teaching of the latter that those who come to faith have suppressed it by powers at their disposal. Thus, in spite of all protestations to the contrary, they were in effect making conversion in a certain respect dependent upon man himself. The error has still not died out.

Faithfulness to the absolute authority of the Word of God does not permit us to establish a harmony of its truths and doctrines or of a relation of one to the other beyond the harmony and relation which Scripture itself teaches. Neither does it permit us to draw logical conclusions from the truths of God’s Word except those which Scripture itself draws and which he inherent in its statements. The only logical conclusions permissible are those of an analytical kind which are an unfolding of what Scripture actually says and which apply the truths

according to the scope which is indicated in the statements themselves. Take for example John 3, 16. That I, a sinner, apply this glorious statement to myself and glory in the truth that God so loved me that He gave His only begotten Son for me that believing in Him I may not perish but have everlasting life, is covered by the statement itself; for I also am included in the world of which this Word of God speaks. This proper use of Holy Scripture also makes it an article of faith that the Pope is the very Antichrist. For though the Pope in Rome is not expressly named in the Scriptures, “the elements of the Papacy are clearly indicated in Scripture as the characteristics of the Antichrist.” In the same manner our opposition to the Masonic Order, to certain veterans’ organizations, and to the Boy Scouts is likewise clearly founded on Scripture.

Excluded, however, is also the figment of an entirety of Scripture, of Scripture as a harmonious whole, *das Schriftganze*, when it is taught as a source of articles of faith and Christian life in contrast to the individual texts which clearly set forth the various truths. This fiction of human reason has caused much confusion in the outward Lutheran Church in the past and is still troubling it. There is no entirety of Scripture beyond the sum of all the truths established and taught by the individual longer or shorter portions of Scripture which clearly state and express them.

Again, human reason is virtually accorded the position of a judge over God’s Word by all those in the outward Lutheran Church who deny the verbal inspiration of Holy Scriptures. Just this is one of the great obstacles standing in the way of true unity among Lutheran synods. The manner in which verbal inspiration is opposed varies. There are those who hold that only those parts of Holy Scripture are the inspired Word of God which teach the way of salvation through Christ while all the rest is man’s word, subject to all the limitations of human knowledge to be expected at the time when it was written. Others affirm inspiration for the entire Scripture, but, intimidated by the assertions of secular historical research and by the theories of hypotheses of scientific learning, teach an inspiration which leaves room for errors and discrepancies in historical, scientific, and geographical data. They speak of divine guidance in the composition of the Scriptures, of an inspiration of persons and thoughts, rather than of every word. Now it is very true that the message of Christ is the heart and center of Holy Scriptures but this is true not in the sense that I am now to decide what is inspired and not inspired in Scripture, but rather in the sense that I am to see everything in Scripture in the light of Christ. There is nothing merely historical, geographical, and scientific in the Bible, but all is somehow bound up with its one message of grace and with its purpose of making men wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus and of making them blessed, rich, and fruitful in such faith. We have seen how clearly Scripture teaches that it is the inspired Word of God in every word and statement. Why then are many Lutherans denying it? They do it, consciously or unconsciously, because they are giving greater confidence to their reason which finds certain parts of Scripture unacceptable, particularly statements pertaining to historical, scientific, and geographical matters.

Yet the temptations to exalt human reason above the authority of God’s Word do not merely come to us from without, but also from our own flesh which is continually offended by the truths of God’s Word. Through the power of God’s Word and grace we need to crucify our presumptuous Old Adam in daily contrition and repentance.

Also the reborn, enlightened reason of the Christian can never assume the role of an independent authority in matters of faith. Such presumption would merely indicate that it is really not the new man but rather the Old Adam of the Christian who is manifesting himself. For it lies in the very nature of our reborn, enlightened reason to look to God’s Word for understanding, assurance, and certainty, “casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.” Jesus says: “He that is of God heareth God’s Word” (John 8, 47). His Apostle Paul tells the Corinthians (I Cor. 14, 37): “If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual let him acknowledge that the things I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord.” And He adds: “But if any man be ignorant,” *i.e.*, if anyone thinks he has the spirit and does not recognize my written word as a norm, then “let him be ignorant,” *i.e.*, let him be regarded as a false prophet. Whether they are fully aware of it or not, all who deny verbal inspiration are presuming to substitute their renewed, enlightened reason as the absolute authority in matters of faith and life in the place of God’s Word. For it must decide for them what in Scripture is

really God's infallible Word and what is mere accommodation to the limited knowledge of the human writers: it must decide for them how much or how little really belongs to God's inspired message of salvation, and how much may be left unheeded as the word of men. Thereby the foundation of Christian faith is made uncertain and ultimately lost.

This leads us to point to every form of human authority in the church which does not rest on God's Word as a false authority which we need to reject. We meet it in a crass form in the Catholic Church. For that very reason it is probably a less dangerous form, though the numerous defections in our congregations testify that many do not recognize it in its true light. The Roman Catholic Church assigns supreme authority in matters of faith and life to the pronouncements and the Scripture interpretations of the church and primarily of its head, the "infallible Pope." They are wont to base this on Matthew 28, 20 where Christ promises His gracious presence to the church until Judgment Day. But the Savior's promise says nothing in favor of their claim. Christ is present in His Church through His Word which He commissioned His Church to preach. The Church has no doctrine outside of Christ's Word. Christ is her *ἡεὶς διδασκαλός*, her *ἡεὶς κατηγεγεμετός*, her one master and teacher. (Matt. 23, 8. 10.) And Christ's Word—must we say it again?—she has solely in the word of the prophets and apostles. The Pope is neither an apostle nor the successor of an apostle. When he claims to be the vicar of Christ and the infallible interpreter of Scripture in the Church he brazenly institutes himself as the oracle of God and reveals himself as the very Antichrist.

Yet the error of human authority in the church beside and above the Holy Scriptures is not restricted to the Catholic Church. It raises its head also in Lutheran circles. Do we not often hear our people say: This is what our pastor, our church, our synod teaches; our pastor, our teacher, our church approves this and is against that; our synod has spoken in this matter? Of course, there is nothing wrong involved, if they really mean to say, as is often the case: Our pastor teaches this because it is God's Word; our church is against these things because they are against God's Word. We also know, however, that many do not mean it in this way, that they show very little interest and concern to be personally convinced that what their pastor and their church teaches, approves, and opposes rests firmly on God's Word.

The ascended Savior truly gives gifts to His church for its edification, as we know from Eph. 4: "And he gave some apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ: that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the slight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ." The ascended Savior still gives His gifts to the Church, He gives them to the local congregations, He gives them to the church at large, gives pastors, teachers, gives visiting elders, district presidents to watch over doctrine and practice, synodical presidents, professors, theologians, gives them all that they may build up His believers with His Word in Christian faith, joy, comfort, understanding, hope, and love. As believers we will cherish these gifts of the public servants of the Word and will want to profit by their service. Yet Christians are not to put their confidence in matters of faith and life upon their person, upon what they say because they say it, but upon the pure Word of God which they proclaim and with which they are faithfully shepherding the flock of Christ.

Another way in which human authority raises its head in the church lies in the appeal to numbers. How can this or that matter of Christian practice possibly be wrong when even the Lutheran Churches almost universally approve it? And then also the opposite conclusion is generally drawn: How can a small minority which condemns it possibly be right? Let us realize that there is authority for matters of faith and life neither in a majority nor in a minority, but solely in the Word of God. Those who stand in a minority on some point of doctrine or practice have every reason to examine their convictions most carefully in the light of Holy Scriptures. We know that Luther did just that when he stood in a most appalling minority. But we also know that when upon conscientious examination and reexamination he was firmly convinced that his teachings rested on the Holy Scriptures he was ready to stand against the whole world. Rightly so, for whoever in matters of Christian faith and life has Scripture on his side has the full weight of authority in his favor. Scriptural precept

and warning example likewise bids those who stand in the majority in a matter of faith and life carefully to examine their convictions in the same light of God's Word.

We have such a warning example in I Kings 22. We are here told how Jehoshaphat, the God-fearing king of Judah, was tempted by wicked Ahab of Israel to make common cause with him against the threatening power of the Syrians. In the law of Moses God had repeatedly urged His Old Testament believers to trust only in Him for defense and safety against all their enemies and promised them help and protection as they remained faithful to Him. Even after the division of the kingdom God promised to consider as His people not only Judah but also the northern tribes which formed the Kingdom of Israel, as long as they remained faithful to Him. Under wicked Ahab Israel was unfaithful to the Lord, however, and walked contrary to His Word. Thus Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, was apprehensive about making common cause with faithless Israel and its wicked king. Still Ahab was able to muster four hundred prophets who made pretensions to be speaking in the name of the Lord and who prophesied His rich blessing upon the unionistic endeavor. One of them, Zedekiah, even dramatized the message, put on horns of iron and said: "Thus saith the Lord, with these shalt thou push the Syrians, till thou have consumed them." Only one prophet, Micaiah, dissented. Of him Ahab said: "I hate him; for he doth not prophecy good concerning me, but evil." Also on this occasion, when reluctantly summoned by Ahab, he again showed himself intransigent and irreconcilable. Faithful to God's Word he announced God's displeasure and judgment upon the unionistic endeavor. Though he was cast into prison for it Micaiah alone was right. Jehoshaphat, who weakened upon the false testimony of so great a majority, had to learn by sad experience that authority in matters of faith and life lies not in a majority but only in God's Word. We find joy in knowing that the Lord graciously led him to repentance.

This warning example against trusting in the testimony of a majority in matters of Christian faith and life, inasmuch as it is at the same time a warning against unionism, lets us think of another dangerous form in which human authority manifests itself in the church. We mean the principle of "open questions," which is the prolific mother of all unionistic endeavors. Our fathers rejected it. We, too, need to reject it under the new names under which it makes its appearance.

What is meant with "open questions?" Not those things which are indeed open questions and must ever remain such. For example: Scripture does not tell us anything about the exact time during which the fall of the evil angels took place between Creation and the fall of man; nor does it describe the manner of their fall. Hence these are questions which must forever remain open. The advocates of the principle of open questions, which our synodical fathers rejected, had questions in mind, however, which are actually answered in Holy Writ, even articles of faith which are expressly taught in Scripture. They contended that it is only necessary for Christians to agree in fundamental doctrines, that agreement in non-fundamental doctrines need not be divisive of church fellowship. The distinction between fundamental and non-fundamental doctrines may render a certain service if it is merely to point out that there are certain doctrines that belong to the very heart and essence of our faith while others, though also a part of it, lie more on the periphery. There are certain doctrines of Holy Scriptures, which if denied make Christian faith impossible, *e.g.*, the doctrine of man's sin and guilt, the doctrine of Christ's deity, and of His vicarious atonement. These are called fundamental doctrines. There are other doctrines of which a Christian could possibly be ignorant and still remain in faith, *e.g.*, the doctrine of the angels. For though the truth of the ministration of the holy angels in carrying out God's provident care is a great comfort to the Christian in his faith, yet faith could still be possible without a knowledge of this truth. Hence it is called a non-fundamental doctrine. It is a gross misuse of this distinction, however, when it is made a basis for determining church fellowship and when it is taught that it is neither possible nor necessary to agree in all non-fundamental doctrines of Holy Scripture. Contrary to God's Word, human authority thereby decides what is essential for unity of faith.

Behind the principle of "open questions" was also the thought that only agreement in those Scriptural doctrines which are set forth as articles of faith in the confessional writings of the Lutheran Church should be required as a basis for fellowship. Behind this thought again lurks an appeal to human authority, as though it were the church which establishes doctrines and articles of faith by pronouncing them such in its confessional writings. No, it is Scripture alone which establishes doctrines, articles of faith. Our confessional writings do not

presume to do that, as they themselves affirm. In the Smalcald Articles we read: “The rule is this: the Word shall establish articles of faith, and no-one else, not even an angel.” What our confessional articles want to be, and what they are, is an emphatic testimony to the clear truths of Holy Scripture over against specific errors which have faced the church and which the church felt a need to reject at the time when these confessions were made. It is true enough that in this testimony to God’s pure Word which we have in our Lutheran confessions most of the doctrines of Holy Scripture are expressly covered, even as almost every error which has arisen in the church is therein rejected. Still those truths of Holy Scripture which are not expressly set forth in the confessional writings, because they were not called into question by errorists at the time, are nevertheless just as binding for us.

Our fathers rejected this principle of “open questions.” We just quote Theses 7 of the fifteen on this matter which Dr. Walther prepared and concerning which the representatives of the Wisconsin as well as the Missouri Synod were in full agreement:

“No man has the privilege, and to no man may the privilege be granted to believe and to teach otherwise than God has revealed in His Word, no matter whether it pertains to primary, or secondary fundamental articles of faith, to fundamental or nonfundamental doctrines, to matters of faith or of practice, to historical matters or others that are subject to the light of reason, to important or seemingly unimportant matters.” The principle of “open questions” still faces us in those Lutherans who contend for “an allowable and wholesome latitude of theological opinion on the basis of the teaching of the Word of God.” We need to reject it, and with it the unionistic endeavors that are built upon it, in faithfulness to the absolute authority of the Word of God in matters of faith and life.

We shall point to tradition as a last false authority in matters of faith and life which we need to reject. In its crass form we again have it in the Roman Catholic Church in her tradition for which she makes the claim that it is the orally transmitted word of the apostles. Now we have already noted that in their inspired writings the apostles distinctly state that their written word contains the same truths which they preached orally. Thus if any oral word of the apostles were really faithfully transmitted, it could not present any new or supplementary truths. On the other hand the Apostle Paul earnestly warns against the false principle of tradition which was already asserting itself in the Apostolic Church; there were pseudo-writings and pseudo-utterances of the apostles afloat. Therefore St. Paul warns the Thessalonians: “Be not shaken in mind or be troubled, neither by spirit or by word nor by letter as from us.” He directed them for truth and enlightenment to the instruction which he was giving them in his written epistle. Only in the New Testament have we the certain word of the apostles. In II Thessalonians 3, 17 Paul states that he is writing the salutation in all of his epistles with his own hand that they might recognize them over against spurious epistles and in the true ones have the certain apostolic word.

Yet we need not only reject the tradition of the Catholic Church but ever be on guard against every form of traditionalism in our own midst. Those who have gone before us in the church, especially also our fathers in the Synodical Conference, having thoroughly searched the Holy Scriptures, expressed these precious truths in certain phrases, expressions, and statements according to the specific needs of their day. Often these phrases and statements took on a special coloring on account of the specific error over against which they were to assert God’s truth most emphatically. There is the danger that we may simply repeat and retain the phrases and statements and let the truths themselves slip away. There is also the danger that being no longer conscious of the specific errors which they were meant to refute we make the statements say something which they were never meant to say, and which God’s Word does not say. There is only one protection from the false authority of such traditionalism, namely this that we personally search the Scriptures and for ourselves draw out of them all the blessed truths of faith and life. Then we will also be enabled to express them anew and in a fitting way over against the particular problems and errors of our day. Then we will likewise be able to understand more fully the expressions and statements of our fathers. This really leads us into the final part of our essay.

III.

The Positive Implications Of Faithful Adherence To This Truth

The negative implications of faithful adherence to the Word of God as the absolute authority in matters of faith and life we have discussed at length. It is this that we reject every false authority that is set up to take the place of God's Word or to supplement it, and that we refuse to make common cause with those who advocate them. But we cannot content ourselves with merely recognizing the negative implications, lest the charge which is increasingly hurled against us that our Christianity is a negative thing be actually true and cease to be a cross which we are humbly, yet joyfully hearing for our Savior's sake.

But what are the positive implications of faithful adherence to the Word of God as the absolute authority in matters of faith and life? We have already summed them up at the end of the first part of our essay, summed them up in the exhortation that we faithfully appreciate the Holy Scriptures as God's food for our souls, as the living bread given from heaven, as the Word of God through which He speaks to us with all the blessed power of His saving grace in Christ Jesus, which for that very reason we will want to share richly with others.

With such faithful appreciation of God's Word the Holy Spirit once adorned the faith of the Pentecost congregation. We are told that all its members gladly received the word of the apostles and that they continued steadfast in the apostles' doctrine. They saw their supreme treasure in the pure Gospel of Jesus Christ which the apostles had received as eye and ear witnesses of the Savior, and which the Holy Spirit now enabled them to teach and to preach in all of its purity. From the apostles down all the members of this congregation clung with their whole heart to this pure Gospel, truly believed it and earnestly shaped their lives in accordance with it. They were not only one in faith, but one in the true faith. Not one of all these three thousand and more members either openly or secretly objected to any part of this word. They gladly put aside and renounced their own human thoughts and ideas. They were happy to know the full way of salvation in Christ. With their whole heart they rejoiced over the pardon, peace, comfort, and eternal hope which God through the word of the apostles held out to them as sinners.

Just because their hearts were filled with a deep appreciation of God's Word of grace they also made diligent use of it. Ever anew they came together to have the riches of this Word unfolded to them and sealed to them through the Lord's Supper. The apostles themselves were most concerned that they give their undivided attention, time, and strength to proclaiming and unfolding this Word. Lest they be unduly distracted they called for helpers to take care of the externals in the ministration of Christian charity in their midst.

Let it be our Centennial prayer that the Holy Spirit may also adorn our Synod, every congregation, and every member anew in faith with this spiritual pearl of a faithful appreciation of God's Word as the bread of life. The Holy Spirit bestows such appreciation through the Word itself. As we richly live in it and draw from its treasures of grace for our faith and life He ever deepens such appreciation. Therefore let us use the Word of God richly in our family circles, let us eagerly come to hear the Word of God as it is proclaimed to us in our public services, ever mindful that it is the Word of God which we are hearing, through which the Holy Spirit is working in our hearts, extending and imparting the most precious gifts to us. Such an attitude will purge us of the passive manner of listening to a sermon which often veritably defies the pastor to get a point across and to make it stick. It will move us to stir up all of our faculties and keep them at full attention so that we may actually follow the exposition of the sacred text, take careful note of the truths which it sets forth, and fix them in our memory. For only through the Scripture truths which are taken up in our mind and which are before our soul can the Holy Spirit do His work of leading us to understand them spiritually, with the comprehension of blessed faith. In this way let us also make a fuller use of our Bible classes to grow in Christian knowledge, understanding, and judgment.

Faithful appreciation of God's Word should also move us to strive for a wider circulation and use of our church papers, the *Gemeindeblatt*, the *Northwestern Lutheran*, and *Junior Northwestern*. Let us remember that the *Gemeindeblatt* made its valuable contribution in the early days of our Synod toward helping our church to a truly Scriptural and Lutheran stand in confession and practice. It faithfully reported to our Synod's members every new step taken on the basis of God's Word at the various Synod meetings toward this end. It played an important part in bringing about an affiliation in the Synodical Conference with truly Lutheran Synods. The *Gemeindeblatt*, read by the pastors of our Synod and its congregational members, rendered invaluable aid in

building them up in Christian faith, judgment, knowledge, and zeal through its sound expositions of Scripture, through its articles on doctrine, through Scriptural evaluations of unionism, false doctrine, and practice.

At the same time the *Gemeindeblatt* also pursued the purpose of being helpful in that building of the church which takes place through gathering ever more people around the Word and Sacraments so that they may be brought to faith in Christ and to salvation in Him. It acquainted its readers with the work of their missionaries. It set before them the needs which they might supply to foster their work, encouraged them by reports on the God-given successes in the mission fields, kept them informed concerning their newly-established educational institutions in which pastors and teachers were being trained to labor in the church, encouraged them to support these schools adequately, exhorted Christian parents to induce their children to prepare themselves for direct service in the vineyard of the Lord. As encouraging and stimulating examples it reported what other congregations were doing in the way of erecting churches and schools for the proclamation of the Gospel.

Our church papers still serve a very similar purpose. They are to be an auxiliary agency in bringing the Word of God, the whole council of God in Christ Jesus to the members of our church to build them up in Christian faith, knowledge, judgment, hope, and in the joy and certainty of salvation. It wishes to fortify and strengthen them with God's Word against all danger and falsehood that is rampant in the world in which they are living, to strengthen and fortify them with God's Word against error, indifferentism, doctrinal laxity, unionism, and every other unscriptural trend which raises its head in the visible church. On the other hand, it seeks still to let our Christians see how their Synod in all its work offers them rich opportunity for participating in the blessed work of bringing the saving Gospel to sinners far and wide, that they may be moved to say: This is my work, which I will want to cherish, which I will want to help foster and support with my prayers, and in ever increasing measure with my gifts and talents.

Faithful appreciation of God's Word, the sole norm and guide of Christian faith and life, will move us to be deeply concerned that the youth of the church be thoroughly grounded and trained in this Word. It will make us vitally interested in fostering, maintaining, and supporting Christian day schools where children may daily walk with the Savior and in the light of His blessed Word, where the sacred truths which are the sole source of Christian faith and life can be brought to them in a thorough way through Bible History, catechism, Christian hymns, and the Bible itself, and where a unified training for Christian faith and life can take place in that under Christian teachers the children are given to see all things in the light of God's saving Word. Faithful appreciation of God's Word will likewise move us to foster, maintain, and support our higher Christian schools, especially that pastors and teachers may be thoroughly grounded and trained in God's Word to teach and preach it to others. Those of us who are called to be the public servants of the Word as pastors and teachers will want to become ever more fully steeped in God's Word that we may learn ever better to divide the Word of Truth to others. We will want to draw abundantly, unceasingly from the treasure store of Scripture, in order to learn ever better to present the law in all of its humbling severity, the Gospel in all of its sweetness, and a life of thankful service with truly winsome and practical force.

Because the members of the Pentecost church deeply appreciated God's Word as the Bread of Life and daily lived in the Word, the Holy Spirit could also add the lustrous gem of fervent, active love upon the pearl string of their faith. In their common, blessed faith, richly nourished by the Word, these Christians felt more closely bound together than physical brothers and sisters. We are told: "And all that believed were together and had all things in common; and sold their possessions and goods and parted them to all men as every man had need." It was not communism which they put into practice. Private property was not abrogated among them. Yet every member looked upon his goods and possessions as something that the Lord had entrusted to him for the purpose of meeting not only his own needs but also those of his brethren. In their love they really gave thought and care for one another. Because so many among them were really poor and needy those more richly blessed readily and gladly offered of their means. Though only a short time before these people had not as much as known each other, one after another sold his possessions and goods and brought the money received to the apostles that they might distribute to those in need, so that no one might be lacking. It was all done without compulsion. These manifestations of love were spontaneous fruits of faith.

Also in our day where faith is richly nourished through God's Word it will only be necessary to call attention to needs. If gifts are necessary for the purpose of God's kingdom in the local congregation or in the mission field, if gifts are needed to prosper programs of Christian education, endeavors of Christian charity, love which flows out of a richly nourished faith will want to give according to ability. Christians whose hearts have been filled with thankful love through a joyful faith in their Savior will not let themselves be robbed of the joy of giving. They recognize their Savior in their brethren, needy in soul and body; they hear His voice in the appeal of His church. For why should it not seem the most natural thing for us to give and to give ever anew is we live richly in God's Word? For there we see ever more fully how God the Father gave, gave His dearest, His Son for our redemption, and with Him gives us all things. There we see ever more fully how God's Son gave, gave Himself into death for us. There we experience how the Holy Spirit gives, gives the supreme blessings of peace, comfort, joy strength for godliness, and eternal hope. The Christian who through the Word daily enjoys all these gifts of grace with a thankful heart will not become weary in giving. Faithful appreciation of God's Word will prosper the work of the church and take care of its needs.

We have a sure prophetic Word
 By inspiration of the Lord;
 And though assailed on every hand,
 Jehovah's Word shall ever stand.

By power of empire banned and burned,
 By pagan pride rejected, spurned,
 The Word still stands the Christian's trust
 While haughty empires lie in dust.

Abiding, steadfast, firm, and sure,
 The teachings of the Word endure.
 Blest he who trusts this steadfast Word.
 His anchor holds in Christ, the Lord. Amen.