

Sermon Study and Sermon for Circuit Pastors' Conference

at

Our Savior Lutheran Church, McCall, Idaho

Presented by Rev. Michael L. McCoy

11 November Anno Domini 2003

Old Testament Reading for Reformation Day

31 October Anno Domini 2003

Jeremiah 31:31-34

"Behold, the days are coming," says the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant which they broke, though I was their husband," says the LORD. "But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," says the LORD: "I will put My Doctrine within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. And no longer shall each man teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." (RSV - MODIFIED)

♦ Isagogics for *Jeremiah*

- **Author** — Jeremiah, the son of Hilkiyah, priest of Anathoth.
Author of *Lamentations* — a man of integrity in the midst of a decaying church body. No compromise on proclaiming the pure truth ... stern Law ... sweet, consoling Gospel. God called him to be a "prophet to the nations" (1:5) — see 25:18-26 for list of nations. Baruch was Jeremiah's scribe (36:4 & 26 and 45:1).
- **Time** — Jeremiah's ministry covers about 65 years, from 627 BC to 561 BC.
Five kings of Judah: Josiah — Jehoahaz — Jehoikim — Jehoichin — Zedekiah.
- **Context** — General spiritual decay from the time of King Hezekiah with the leadership in the church and state calling for more tolerance of other gods and the Temple being the place for idolatrous worship. The reformation under King Josiah, triggered by a discovery and the re-reading of the Torah, stopped the trend for awhile. Following Josiah's death, the spiritual decay escalated. Leaders opposed Jehovah, Jeremiah, the worship of the LORD and the proclamation of the pure truth. When threatened, arrested and imprisoned, Jeremiah did not change his doctrine or practice ... he preached the sin and grace.
- **Place** — Southern Kingdom: Judah, Anathoth (village 3 miles NE of Jerusalem), Jerusalem & Egypt.

- **Occasion** — The following is a general chronology of the events during Jeremiah's prophetic service. The sources are *Jeremiah* by Dr. Theo. Laetsch and personal seminary class notes.

630 BC — Babylon is coming to power and conquering neighbors.
 627 BC — Jeremiah called to be the Lord's prophet. Josiah is king of Judah (crowned 641 BC).
 622 BC — The Book of the Torah is found in the House of the LORD (2 Kings 22:8).
 612 BC — The Fall of Ninevah
 609 BC — Josiah slain by Neco (2 Kings 23:29ff). Jehoahaz is king 3 mo.; captive to Egypt.
 608 BC — Neco makes Jehoikim king.
 605 BC — The "70 years" begins as Nebuchadnezzar takes some men to Babylon (Dan. 1:1-4).
 605 BC — Jeremiah's speech of Jeremiah 25 — the prophet in hiding chapter 36.
 601 BC — Jehoikim rebels and Nebuchadnezzar sends others after him (2 Kings 24:1-2).
 597 BC — Jehoikim is killed and 3,023 Jews taken to Babylon (Jer. 52:28).
 596 BC — 8-year old Jehoichim is king for 3 months; deported to Babylon (2 Chron. 36:1f).
 596 BC — Zedekiah becomes king.
 587 BC — Jeremiahs is arrested, beaten and imprisoned (Jer. 37).
 586 BC — Jerusalem is destroyed and most of the people are taken to Babylon.
 582 BC — Flight to Egypt?
 568 BC — Nebuchadnezzar invades Egypt and defeats them?
 562 BC — Nebuchadnezzar dies.

- **Recipients** — The Jews in Judah, Babylon and Egypt.
- **Sources** — The revealed Torah and the special revelations given to Jeremiah.
Historical events and documents of the time when Jeremiah was a prophet.
- **Purpose** — To call the Hebrew people to repentance & to be a prophet to the nations by proclaiming Law and Gospel; namely, Old Covenant and New Covenant.
- **Content** — Departure from the Torah necessarily brings Divine Punishment
The Old Covenant broken by man and the New Covenant of forgiveness and grace.

♦ **Canonicity for *Jeremiah***

While there are always challenges from liberal corners regarding form criticism, literary criticism and such chirping, there are no significant, scholarly objections to the canonicity of *Jeremiah*. Dr. Horace Hummel points out that liberalism is actually quite enamored with Jeremiah. (See *The Word Becoming Flesh*.)

[Those of a historical-critical bentness are encouraged to read two essays, *Fern-seeds and Elephants* by C. S. Lewis (wherein he addresses those professors of theology who stray from their academic degrees to the discipline of literature, of which they are wholly unqualified to speak or write) and *Flight from Dogma* by Hermann Sasse (an essay in *The Lonely Way, II*. CPH). Also a particularly precise exposure of the neutered wasteland of liberalism, legalism, fundamentalism, rationalism, modernism and post-modernism in American Christianity is a work by Craig Parton, *The Defense Never Rests - A Lawyer's Quest for the Gospel* (CPH 2003).]

♦ **Biblical Context of Jeremiah 31:31-34**

There are two major divisions in Jeremiah.

1. • chapters 1-45 — The Prophecies Concerning Judah
 - chapters 1-25 — The Faithfulness of the Prophet Jeremiah
 - chapters 26-36 — The Prophet in the Midst of Opposition and Persecution
 - chapter 30-33 — Promise of Comfort, Restoration and the New Covenant
 - **Jeremiah 31:31-34**
 - chapters 37-45 — Destruction
2. • chapters 46-51 — The Prophecies Against the Nations

♦ **Liturgical Context of Jeremiah 31:31-34**

Introit

The LORD of Hosts is with us:

the God of Jacob is our Refuge.

Therefore will not we fear though the earth be removed:

and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea.

God is our Refuge and Strength:

a very present Help in trouble.

Glory be to the Father and to the † Son and to the Holy Ghost,

as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

The LORD of Hosts is with us, (*Psalms 46*)

Amen.

Collect

O LORD God, heavenly Father, pour out, we beseech Thee, Thy Holy Spirit upon Thy faithful people keep them steadfast in The grace and truth, protect and comfort them in all temptations, defend them against all enemies of Thy Word, and bestow upon Christ's Church Militant Thy saving peace; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with the Father and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end.

Amen.

Epistle Reading for Reformation Day — Romans 3:19-28

Now we know that whatever the Law says it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For no human being will be justified in His sight by works of the Law, since through the Law comes knowledge of sin. But now

the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction; since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are justified by His grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, Whom God put forward as an expiation by His Blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in His Divine forbearance He had passed over former sins; it was to prove at the present time that He Himself is righteous and that He justifies him who has faith in Jesus. Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On the principle of works? No, but on the principle of faith. For we hold that a man is justified by faith apart from works of law.

Gospel Reading for Reformation Day — John 8:31-36

Jesus then said to the Jews who had believed in Him, “If you continue in My Word, you are truly My disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” They answered him, “We are descendants of Abraham, and have never been in bondage to any one. How is it that you say, ‘You will be made free’?” Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, every one who commits sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not continue in the house for ever; the Son continues for ever. So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed. I know that you are descendants of Abraham; yet you seek to kill Me, because My Word finds no place in you. I speak of what I have seen with My Father, and you do what you have heard from your father.”

Exegesis of Jeremiah 31:31-34

~yaB' ~ymj" hN6
 yTrkwhwy>an
 lar'fytBeta
 hdWytBeta,w
 `hvd'x] tyrB

hN6 — *Behold!* (LXX - **idou**) This word is often used in the form of introducing an announcement based upon a preceding event or something that is to come. This is used by God in His revelation or by man. For example, Abraham said, **Behold**, *I have taken upon myself to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust and ashes* (Genesis 18:27); and the LORD said, "**Behold**, there is a place by me where you shall stand upon the rock" (Exodus 33:21).

~ymj" — *days* (LXX - **himerai**) This can refer to 24 hour days, as in *Six days you shall labor, and do all your work; ... For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it* (Exodus 20:9 & 11), or to extended periods or eternity, as in Psalm 23:6 — *Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days* (in construct **ymj" l K**) *of my life; and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD for ever* (“to the days length” ~ymj" %rad).

hwy>ad' — *declares the LORD* (LXX - **fhsin kurioj**) The prophet is stating exactly what the LORD God reveals to him and wills to be written. The five Hebrew words translated - *Behold, the days are coming says the LORD* - are used 14 times in the Old Testament and 13 of them are in Jeremiah. (Amos 9:13 is the other.)

~yaB' ~ymy" hNē
 yTrkw hwy> an
 lar'fyt tyBeta
 hdWyt tyBeta w
 `hvd'x] tyrB

yTrkw... tyrB — *I will cut ... a covenant* (LXX - diaqhsomai ... diaqhkhē - “I will covenant ... a testament”). The same words are used in the next chapter of Jeremiah, *I will make with them an everlasting covenant, that I will not turn away from doing good to them; and I will put the fear of Me in their hearts, that they may not turn from Me* (Jeremiah 32:40). In all five cases where *I will cut* is used, it is a one-sided covenant that the Lord makes and is for the benefit, sake, welfare and good of His Church ... His people (see Ezek. 34:25; Ezek. 37:26; and Hosea 2:20).

hdWyt tyBeta w lar'fyt tyBeta — *with the House of Israel and with the House of Judah* — “house” in this verse stands very much in opposition to the “sons” of Jeremiah 32:32 — *because of all the evil of the sons* (lar'fyt yB) *of Israel and the sons* (hdWyt yB) *of Judah which they did to provoke Me to anger -- their kings and their princes, their priests and their prophets, the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. God will have His House even if those who are sons fall away. [May we liken this to Church and members?]*

hvd'x — *new* — This *fresh* covenant was necessary because the old covenant was broken by man (the Law given on Mt. Sinai). This adjective not only points to the old, but also leads to an explanation of how the old was broken, which God reveals to Jeremiah and via the prophet’s hand, to us.

verse 32

rva] tyrBk; al {
 ~tAa]ta, yTrk'
 ~dyb. yqzkh, ~AyB.
 #rame ~ay'ahl.
 hMhervaj ~yr'cmi
 ytjrB-ta, Wpē
 yTi.[B' ykiaw
 `hwy> an ~b'

tyrBk; al { — *not like or not as* (LXX - ouvkata - *not according to*). The new covenant or testament will not be like or according to the old covenant (the Law).

yqzkh{... ~ay'ahl. — Here are two hiphil verbs that demonstrate that it was the LORD Who delivered their fathers from Pharaoh’s enslavement. *I kept hold of* (them by the hand) *to cause them to go out*. This is Divine monergism, even as the Church confessed on the far shores of the Red Sea, *The LORD is my strength and song, and He is become my salvation* (Exodus 15:2).

~yr'cmi #rame — *from the land of Egypt*. This refers to the deliverance out of Egypt when the Lord led them out of the land of bondage and slavery.

Wpē — This is another hiphil verb (3rd person plural). The context is the breaking of the old covenant; that is, *They caused it to be broken ... or ... violated*.

~b' yTi.[B' ykiaw — *though I was lord* (or *husband, master*) *over them* — The Hebrew word (yTi.[B') is used in Deut. 9:9 and in Jeremiah 3:14 where it was understood more in the line of *master*. Thus, *Return, O faithless children, says the LORD; for I am your master* (LXX — katakurieusw). Though the nation

(or each individual human being) is faithless through the breaking of the old covenant given on Mt. Sinai (or the violation of the law written in the heart as taught in Romans 2:14-15), still God remains faithful to His Word of the Savior, first stated in Genesis 3:15). Indeed, concerning Christ, *if we are faithless, He remains faithful -- for He cannot deny Himself (2 Timothy 2:13).*

hwya~an — *declares Jehovah* — This verb is used with *LORD* 253 times (out of 357) and communicated by the prophets. The word is not **ma'** which is more common regarding speech, *Thus says Benhadad: (1 Kings 20:2).*

verse 33

rva] tyrBh; tazOyKi
 tyBeta, trka,
 ~ymh; yra; l aefyl
 hwya~an~hb'
 ytr'AT-ta, ylt'n"
 ~BrqB.
 hNb,Tka, ~Bl'il [y
 ~h]' ytyhw
 hMw~yhl'ale
 ~[l. yl iWhyl

yKi — *but or indeed* — In contrast to the old covenant which the fathers broke, the LORD now will declare what the new testament will be. This He does in verses 33-34.

l aefyl tyBeta, — *with the House of Israel* — See the note on verse 31. Once again, though the fathers and the sons fall away, the LORD is faithful to and will sustain His Church, which is here called *the House of Israel*. Why is only Israel noted and not Judah as in verse 31? There are two facets of one possibility to consider. First, there may be the emphasis that there is only **one** people of God. In the divided kingdom the congregation of the faithful in Judah and the congregation of the faithful in Israel are **one**. God is the husband of one - the lord of one. This leads to the other point, namely, that the LORD God is decaring His Promise to the Church; that is, *the House of Israel*. The Apostle Paul, in speaking of those who are a new creation in Christ Jesus (because of the new covenant), writes to the Church that *Peace and mercy be upon all who walk by this rule, upon the Israel of God (Galatians 6:16)*. Here *Israel* is the Church and not the nation, and one does well to note that *not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, (Romans 9:6)*.

ytr'AT-ta, ylt'n" — *I will put My Torah within them* — Generally, it may refer to an entire body of doctrine or teaching that one would convey to others, especially by the words of one's mouth. For example, Asaph invited, *Give ear, O my people, to my law: incline your ears to the words of my mouth (Psalm 78:1)*. Scriptural parallelism gives definitions or synonyms: *For I give you good doctrine, forsake ye not my law (Proverbs 4:2)*. **ytr'AT** may refer to the Law, as in Proverbs 3:1 — *My son, forget not my law; but let thine heart keep my commandments*. When the meaning is the Gospel, God's Torah is foolishness and a stumbling block, as it was to Ephraim, of whom the prophet declares, *I have written to him the great things of My Law, but they were counted as a strange thing (Hosea 8:12)*. Thus, it may be the content of the new covenant; that is, the pure Gospel as in Isaiah wherein the Lord invites His Church to *Hearken unto Me, ye that*

rva| tyrBh; tazOyKi
 tyBeta, trka,
 ~ymh; yræ; l æ'fyl
 hwny>an>~hæ'
 ytr'AT-ta, yT'n"
 ~BræB.
 hNb,Tka, ~Bl'il [w
 ~h,l' ytyhw
 hMw~yhl æle
 ~[l. yl iWhy

know righteousness, the people in whose heart is My Law (51:7). This is the meaning of in Jeremiah 31:33; namely, *I will put My Gospel within them*. This is particularly demonstrated in the fact that the Law was already written in their hearts from the beginning (Romans 2:15) and the Law on stone tablets scribed with the finger of God (Exodus 31:18) and mouth of Moses had already been given. Grace and truth would come through Jesus Christ (John 1:17). This Good News is the guts of the new testament that the LORD puts in their inward parts (~BræB).

Note 1 — In the other five places that this word — ~BræB.— is used in the Old Testament, the translation is *among* or *in the midst of*. Thus Jehovah is the God Who comes among His people and is graciously promised to be, and is found, among us. This is Emmanuel; *God with us*, and thus, *the Word became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14)*. Therefore, according to His Promise, *the Kingdom of God is in the midst of you (Luke 17:21)*.

This Divine Dogma — ytr'AT — is to be inscribed by the LORD God on the souls or hearts (hNb,Tka, ~Bl'il [w of His saint-sinners, and is the source, message and on-going basis for the communion of holy God and sinful man.

Note 2 — One of the challenges for the pastor as preacher and teacher is to understand the proper distinction of Law and Gospel. Another is like it; namely, to communicate the truth that the word *Torah* is a word that might mean body of doctrine (Law and Gospel), Law (all three of God's uses), or Gospel (that always comforts the faithful). The difficult part comes when the parishioner gets a handle on the differences between Law and Gospel, and then sets about applying that to the reading of Scripture. Thus he reads ...

*Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,
 nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers;
 but his delight is in the Law (tr'AT) of the LORD,
 and on His Law (tr'AT) he meditates day and night.
 Psalm 1:1-2*

This presents us with the opportunity not only to teach the difference, but to make use of, and set before the people of God, such wonderful, winsome words as *doctrine* or *dogma*. Hence, blessed is that man or woman or youth or child whose *delight is in the Gospel* (the Law of the new covenant) *of the LORD*.

~[l. yl iWhy hMw~yhl æle~h,l' ytyhw — literally: *I will be to them to God and they to Me to people*. The intended purpose and consequent result of the new covenant is that, as a result of the God's doings alone, He will make it be such that the LORD God is the Church's God, and in turn, the Church is the LORD God's folk. This would not and could not be so under the old covenant of the Law, and therefore it will not be done by man either

doing good works or refraining from this and that. Thus God reveals the Good News through Jeremiah - *I will be their God and they shall be My people.*

verse 34

vyai dA[WML y>al {
 vyai>Wh [reta,
 WD>rmale wxi'-ta,
 ~LWk-yki hwy>ta,
 ~Nj qml . yta WdyE
 hwy>an~l AdG>d [w
 ~n0l ; xlsa, yki
 al {~taJx:l W
 s `dA[-rKza,

vyai>Wh [reta, vyai dA[WML y>al { — *No longer will each man teach his neighbor and each his brother to know the LORD. — In the House where the LORD God is in the midst of His people there is no need to tell one another: WD>hwy>ta, (“know the LORD”). This knowing is a personal, intimate knowledge. The word is used by Satan when tempting Eve, you will be like God, **knowing** good and evil (Genesis 3:5), and as a result, they **knew** they were naked (Genesis 3:7). The word is used to describe the intimacy of sexual intercourse as Adam **knew** Eve and she conceived (Genesis 4:1). This is also the knowledge that God has of His own; for example, the LORD is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; He **knows** those who take refuge in Him (Nahum 1:7). Pharaoh admits, I do not **know** the Lord (Exodus 5:2). In the following two verses we are able to understand what it means to be known by and to know the LORD our God: And I will betroth you to Me for ever; I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love, and in mercy. I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness; and you shall **know** the LORD (Hosea 2:19-20). The Lord works faith in the heart of the individual and calls him or her to Himself. This God-given gift of faith in the LORD is **knowing** the LORD — being one of God’s people in the House of Israel; that is, in the Church.*

yta WdyE~LWk-yki — *for all of them shall know Me — All of those who are God’s true people have been given the gift of faith in the LORD God. This is the same in the New Testament as in the Old Testament. From the least or youngest (~Nj qml) members of the Church (indeed, from the eight-day-old circumcized/baptized infant who is able to do nothing) to the greatest or oldest (~l AdG>d [w*

hwy>an — *declares Yahweh — This is a marvelous positioning of this; as if to say that the preceding is most certainly the revealed Word of the LORD and what follows is the same. This is neither the prophet speaking a bit of commentary nor is it idle talk (as if God’s Word ever were!). What preceded was what the Good News of the New Covenant will accomplish. What follows is the basis for it being able to be. This is the purpose of the preposition yki which reveals the reason why this is Gospel ... for ...*

s `dA[-rKza, al {~taJx:l W~n0l ; xlsa, — *... for I will forgive their iniquity and I will not remember (or recall) their sin (or sinfulness) again (or any more). The exterior motivating cause for this new covenant was the Fall of Adam and Eve into sin. This cause God had beforehand and*

vyai dA[WdM y>al {
 vyai>Wh [reta,
 Wd>rma lewxi'-ta,
 ~LVk-yKi hwhy>ta,
 ~Nj qml. ytAa WdyE
 hwhy>an~l AdG>[w
 ~r[Q]; xl sa, yKi
 al {~taJxlW
 s `dA[-rKza,

He worked through the events of history to make it come about (the instrumental and external efficient cause). The verbs **xl sa**, (*pardon*) and **dA[-rKza**, al { (*I will remember not*) are critical and are the chief end and result of God's Gospel. In verse 34, this Good News is declared in antithetical parallelism; namely, what God will do — *I will pardon their iniquities* — (in this case it is an expression of His grace) and then what He will not do — *I will remember their sins no more* (an expression of His mercy), thus establishing a blessed state of fellowship with His own (peace). The first verb (**xl sa**) is used a couple of times in Jeremiah and especially relevant to our text is 50:20 — *In those days and in that time, says the LORD, iniquity shall be sought in Israel, and there shall be none; and sin in Judah, and none shall be found; for I will pardon (xl sa) those whom I leave as a remnant.* Notice that this first verb is a Divine, forensic declaration.

The second verb (**rKza**) is also a declaration made by the Judge. This comes from the root qal verb (**rKz**) which is to *remember, recall, call to mind*. The penitent pleads with Jehovah: **Remember not** (hT'a;ylirkz> *the sins of my youth, or my transgressions; according to Thy steadfast love remember me, for Thy goodness' sake, O LORD! (Psalm 25:7).* This may be expressed in the noun form as *remembrance* or *memorial*; for example, *And the LORD said to Moses, "Write this as a memorial in a book and recite it in the ears of Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the remembrance (rkzfta) of Amalek from under heaven" (Exodus 17:14).* With the negative it means not to remember, as in Genesis 40:23 *Yet the chief butler did not remember (rkz' al { Joseph, but forgot him.*

The pardoning of iniquities and the forgiveness of sins *is* the essential difference between the Old Covenant given by Jehovah on Mt. Sinai (the Law) and the New Covenant wrought by the Paschal Lamb on Mt. Calvary. It is not that God is not capable of “remembering our sin,” but rather, because of the One Sacrifice for sin wrought by the Incarnate Son of God on the cross, the LORD God will not “re-call” or “re-member” or “bring to mind” or “re-visit” sin again. *Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin (Hebrews 9:22)* and this is accomplished in the Lord Jesus *in Whom we have redemption through His Blood, even the forgiveness of sins (Colossians 1:14).* The Father does not want to re-call the sins which have been sufficiently been atoned for by His Son. The Son does not want to re-visit the sins of the world which became His on the cross, which He has paid for and which He left in the grave. The Holy Spirit bears witness to Christ and brings this Good News of pardon and forgiveness to the soul. Thus says the LORD, *I will pardon their iniquities and I will remember their sin no more.*

In faith, the Old Testament Christian was blessed to be able to look forward to the Savior Who would be the One *Whom God put forward as an expiation by His Blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness,*

because in His divine forbearance he had passed over former sins (Romans 3:25). In faith, the New Testament Christian looks back to the Savior Who is the expiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2). Through this Word of forgiveness wrought by Christ and given by the Holy Spirit through Word and Sacrament, the Christian infant and the Christian aged are saved by the grace of God through faith in Christ. Thus the LORD our God — the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost — forgive our iniquity and remember our sin no more. This is the LORD's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes (Psalm 118:23)!

Major Themes and Doctrines of Jeremiah 31:31-34

- Justification by the grace of God through faith in Christ
- The Distinction between the Law and the Gospel
- The Doctrine of Sin
- The Attributes of God

From *The Lutheran Confessions*

- ◆ *Apology of the Augsburg Confession* — Of Love and the Fulfilling of the Law.

1] Here the adversaries urge against us: If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments, Matt. 19, 17; likewise: The doers of the Law shall be justified, Rom. 2, 13, and many other like things concerning the Law and works. Before we reply to this, we must first declare what we believe concerning love and the fulfilling of the Law.

2] It is written in the prophet, Jer. 31, 33: I will put My Law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts. And in Rom. 3, 31, Paul says: Do we, then, make void the Law through faith? God forbid! Yea, we establish the Law. And Christ says, Matt. 19, 17: If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. Likewise, 1 Cor. 13, 3: If I have not charity, it profiteth me nothing. 3] These and similar sentences testify that the Law ought to be begun in us, and be kept by us more and more [that we are to keep the Law when we have been justified by faith, and thus increase more and more in the Spirit]. Moreover, we speak not of ceremonies, but of that Law which gives commandment concerning the movements of the heart, namely, the Decalog. 4] Because, indeed, faith brings the Holy Ghost, and produces in hearts a new life, it is necessary that it should produce spiritual movements in hearts. And what these movements are, the prophet, Jer. 31, 33 shows, when he says: I will put My Law into their inward parts, and write it in their hearts. Therefore, when we have been justified by faith and regenerated, we begin to fear and love God, to pray to Him, to expect from Him aid, to give thanks and praise Him, and to obey Him in afflictions. We begin also to love our neighbors, because our hearts have spiritual and holy movements [there is now, through the Spirit of Christ a new heart, mind, and spirit within].

5] These things cannot occur until we have been justified by faith, and, regenerated, we receive the Holy Ghost: first, because the Law cannot 6] be kept without [the knowledge of] Christ; and likewise the Law cannot be kept without the Holy Ghost. But the Holy Ghost is received by faith,

according to the declaration of Paul, Gal. 3, 14: That we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. 7] Then, too, how can the human heart love God while it knows that He is terribly angry, and is oppressing us with temporal and perpetual calamities? But the Law always accuses us always, shows that God is angry. [Therefore, what the scholastics say of the love of God is a dream.] 8] God therefore is not loved until we apprehend mercy by faith. Not until then does He become a lovable object. (*Concordia Triglotta*)

◆ *Apology of the Augsburg Confession* — Of Love and the Fulfilling of the Law.

For we have said above that renewal and the inchoate fulfilling of the Law must exist in us, according to Jer. 31, 33: I will put My Law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts. If any one should cast away love, even though he have great faith, yet he does not retain it, for he does not retain the Holy Ghost [he becomes cold and is now again fleshly, without Spirit and faith; for the Holy Ghost is not where Christian love and other fruits of the Spirit are not]. (*Concordia Triglotta*)

From the Fathers of the Church

In the following quotations, take particular care in noting the progression from the golden age of Luther, Chemnitz and Gerhard, to the silver of Walther, to the bronze of Pieper, to the clay of others.

Martin Luther

⇒ Notice in the following the reference to Jeremiah 31:33 and God writing His Law into our hearts being a promise of grace:

For there are two kinds of promises—something to which we have frequently called attention. The promises of the Law have their support, so to speak, in our works, such as this one (Is. 1:19):⁶⁷ “If you do this, you will eat the good things of the earth”; likewise (Ex. 20:6): “I am God, who shows mercy to thousands of them who love Me.” Of such sort was also the one given above (Gen. 4:7): “If you are good, there will be lifting up.” But in most instances these promises of the Law have threats added to them.

The other kind are the promises of grace, and these do not have threats added to them. Of such kind are (Deut. 18:18): “I shall raise up a Prophet like you”; likewise (Jer. 31:33): “I shall write My Law into their hearts”; also (Gen. 3:15): “I shall put enmity between you and the Seed of the woman.” These promises are not dependent on our works, but simply on the goodness and grace of God, that He Himself wants to fulfill them. Thus we have the promises of Baptism, of the Lord’s Supper, of the Keys, etc., in which God sets before us His will, His mercy, and His works.

(Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, vol. 1: “Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 1-5,” Genesis 4:16)

⇒ Here notice the connection between the writing of God’s Law into the heart and the Ministry of the Word of God by His called servants.

There are, however, three things which he wanted to be remembered at these three festivals. In the Festival of the Passover they should recall the Exodus from Egypt. This was the first of all the festivals and the chief one at the beginning of the year, because of the first and highest miracle shown them, namely, their liberation from Egypt. At the Pentecost Festival they should remember the receiving of the Law on Mt. Sinai, since, of course, the Law was given in the third month after the Exodus, almost fifty days after the Passover. At the Feast of Tabernacles they were to remember all the physical benefits shown in all those forty years in the desert. So you see that the festivals are established, not for the sake of luxury, leisure, or pleasure but for the sake of our salvation and the glory of God, that the Word of God may be heard and His blessings remembered, that we may be instructed, nourished, and preserved in faith and love.

All these festivals—and whatever others there may have been—we celebrate by an allegory of the Spirit in one festival. For we observe the Passover every day, when we eat and sacrifice Christ, the Lamb of God; that is, as Paul explains in 1 Cor. 10, 5 we proclaim and believe that He was offered up for us. So daily we have Pentecost, when we receive the new Law, the Spirit, into our hearts (Jer. 31:33) through the ministry of the Word. Daily we celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles, when we teach and experience that we are strangers in this world and sojourn in the tabernacles of our bodies, which last but a short time. For we know that our ... citizenship or living and dwelling, is in heaven (Phil. 3:20), where meantime we are and live by faith; and here we die daily, until our tabernacle will be put away, etc. (2 Cor. 5:1 ff.). Thus we rejoice before the Lord at these festivals with the leaven of sincerity and truth (1 Cor. 5:8), that is, in the food of the pure Gospel and in the life of the Spirit, without traditions and human faults; and we offer up our first fruits of praise and thanksgiving (Heb. 13:15).

(Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 9: "Lectures on Deuteronomy," Dt 17:8)

⇒ Here is declared the necessity, not only God's promise of grace and mercy, but of the Lord's gift of faith which trusts such Word of God.

It is not enough that there is a sign, unless the sign is impressed and sealed. But this means that there be faith, namely, to receive the Gospel and have it impressed by faith. So Christ says through Jeremiah (Jer. 31:33) that He will write His law on their hearts, not on dead parchment. For they write and speak the words of the Gospel in a fine manner, but not faith. But faith is the "perfect law of the Lord" which "purifies their hearts," as we read below in Ps. 19:7.

(Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 10: "First Lectures on the Psalms I: Psalms 1-75," Ps 2:9)

⇒ Here the new law reminds one of the "law of liberty" from the Epistle of James (for example, 2:12 — *So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty.*)

For thus He promised, John 6:45: "They will all be taught by God," and, Jer. 31:33: "I will give My law into their hearts." In this way also He spoke to the prophets who said: "The Word of the Lord came to me." Then they always understood the mysteries of the new law.

(Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, v 10: "First Lectures on the Psalms I: Psalms 1-75," Ps 60:1-6)

⇒ Notice the Church in the reference below ...

So also we read in Isaiah 33 [cf. v. 24]: "The people who will dwell in the new Jerusalem will

be called *Nesu awon, levatus peccato*: a people forgiven of all sin.” And Jeremiah 32 also promises another, a new, covenant in which not Moses with his covenant shall reign, but rather, as he says: “I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more” [Jer. 31:34]. This is, indeed, a covenant of grace, of forgiveness, of remission of all sins eternally. That cannot, of course, be effected by the sword, as the blood-thirsty Kokhbaites aspire to do. No, this was brought into the unworthy world by pure grace through the crucified Messiah, for eternal righteousness and salvation, as Gabriel here declares.

(Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 47: “The Christian in Society IV,” pages 304-305)

⇒ Here again is commentary on the “law of the new testament” ...

The law of the Spirit is one that is written with no letters at all, published in no words, thought of in no thoughts. On the contrary, it is the living will itself and the life of experience. Furthermore, it is the very thing that is written in the hearts only by the finger of God. Rom. 5:5 states: “God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit.” Jeremiah, too, speaks of this (31:33), as the apostle quotes him in Heb. 8:10 and 10:16: “I will put My laws into their minds and will write them on their hearts.” This light of understanding in the mind, I say, and this flame in the heart is the law of faith, the new law, the law of Christ, the law of the Spirit, the law of grace.

(Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 27: “Lectures on Galatians,” Ga 2:20)

⇒ Here Luther shows the difference between the two covenants by demonstrating that the old one was temporal and the new one is eternal.

But Christ, the true paschal lamb [I Cor. 5:7], is an eternal divine Person, who dies to ratify the new testament. Therefore the testament and the possessions therein bequeathed are eternal and abiding. And that is what he means when he contrasts this testament with the other. “A new testament,” he says, so that the other may become obsolete [Heb. 8:13] and no longer be in effect. “An eternal testament,” he says, not temporal like that other one; not to dispose of temporal lands and possessions, but of eternal blessings. “In my blood,” he says, not in the blood of a lamb [Heb. 9:12]. The purpose of all this is that the old should be altogether annulled and should give place to the new alone.

What then is this testament, or what is bequeathed to as in it by Christ? Truly a great, eternal, and unspeakable treasure, namely, the forgiveness of all sins, as the words plainly state, “This is the cup of a new eternal testament in my blood, which is poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.” It is as if Christ were saying, “See here, man, in these words I promise and bequeath to you forgiveness of all your sins and the life eternal. In order that you may be certain and know that such a promise remains irrevocably yours, I will die for it, and will give my body and blood for it, and will leave them both to you as a sign and seal, that by them you may remember me.”

(Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 35: “Word and Sacrament I,” page 85)

⇒ Ponder the substitution of the word “synod” for the word “nation” in the following, and the signs of such decay ...

For, as the experience of all times bears out, it usually happens that when a godly nation and one that acknowledges God has come to an end, another nation far worse and more godless takes its place. Thus it is stated in Judg. 2:10: “And all that generation also were gathered to their fathers, and there arose another generation after them, **who did not know the Lord** or the work which He had done for Israel.”

Thus in the church of the New Testament heretics immediately followed the apostles. Likewise bishops who did not *know the Lord*. Later came the monks, and finally the entire papacy and the whole sacrilege stand in the holy place (Matt. 14:15). And all these cried out: “Let us *serve God somewhat more ardently* and with *greater piety*! For the *apostles overlooked much* that *must be added* to the church; the fathers had *too little in the way of devotion and ceremonies*. *Let us accumulate more rites and acts of worship!*” In this manner *ceremonies were increased* in the church, for the devil mixed *truth with falsehood*, and *the descendants gradually rushed into what was worse*.

Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, “Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 45-50,” Ge 47:27

⇒ In the following Luther is referring to Jeremiah 31:31-34. Notice the faithfulness of God and His Word, even in spite of the faithlessness of man ...

This beautiful passage embraces many points, but since the Jews always flit and flutter from one subject to another when they feel themselves trapped, you must avoid all the others at this time and tenaciously stick to the issue for which this passage is now cited—namely, because the Jews claim that the promised Messiah’s advent is being delayed as a result of their sin. Quite to the contrary, God here declares that he will make a new covenant or law, unlike Moses’ covenant or law, and that he will not be prevented from doing this by the fact that they have sinned. Indeed, precisely because they failed to keep the first covenant, he wants to establish another, a new covenant, which they can keep. Their sin or their breaking of the previous covenant will not deter him. He will graciously forgive their sin and remember it no more.

Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 47: “The Christian in Society IV,” page 70

Martin Chemnitz

⇒ Notice here also the declaration of verse 33 as Gospel and that this is accomplished by the means of the ministration of the Word of grace.

The old law was written on tablets of stone, Ex. 31:18 and 34:1; Deut. 9:10, but the new covenant is inscribed through the Spirit of God in the hearts of believers, Jer. 31:33, “I will put My law in their inward parts and write it in their heart”; and 2 Cor. 3:3, “You are the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but in the fleshly tables of the heart.”

Martin Chemnitz, *Loci Theologici*, vol. II
“The Difference Between the Old and New Covenants,” page 662
translated by J. A. O. Preus

Likewise it is also a matter of certainty that the word which was set forth from Zion and Jerusalem which went out into all the world is the doctrine of the Gospel or the Word of faith concerning free justification, the giving of the Spirit, salvation, and eternal life for the sake of Christ. Or to put it briefly, it is the doctrine of the benefits of Christ the Mediator. For “the law out of Zion” and the “Word from Jerusalem” [Isaiah 2:3 & Micah 4:2] have been spread into all the world. Therefore this is also the definition of the new covenant according to Scripture.

Now having laid this sure foundation, it is no longer difficult for us to apply these ideas and understand why the one is called the old and the other the new covenant. We shall briefly note the main points: ...

But the sense of these passages [Jeremiah 31:31 & Hebrews 8:8] is not that before the appearance of Christ, the teaching concerning the free reconciliation of God for the sake of Christ had not been given, or that now after Christ has appeared the doctrine of the Decalog is no longer to be taught; but that we should know that the teaching of the Law, insofar as it is the ministration of death and condemnation, wherever it is in Scripture, pertains to the old covenant. The Calvinists indeed raise this objection against us that since the new covenant was not known to the patriarchs. But this is fallse. For it made itself known to them through revelation and the announcement of God, just as the life to come is already known to us. For unless the new covenant had been known to them, how could Abraham and the other faithful men have possessed the Holy Spirit and eternal life, since it is the new covenant which is the ministration of the Spirit and life?

Martin Chemnitz, *Loci Theologici*, vol. II
“The Difference Between the Old and New Covenants,” page 663
translated by J. A. O. Preus

Johann Gerhard

⇒ Under the chapter title of *That Holy Baptism is an Effectual Means Through Which the Holy Spirit Regenerates People*, Gerhard writes concerning the benefits of Baptism ...

3. That God establishes a covenant of grace with us in holy Baptism, which, however, consists of the forgiveness of sins and the bequeathing of the Holy Spirit — both of which occur in Baptism, Jer. 31:31, 33, 34 - *See, the time is coming when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Jacob. And this will be the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel, says the Lord: I will give My law in their heart and write it in their souls, and they shall be My people. Thus I will be their God. - I will forgive them their iniquity and never again remember their sin.* That God the Lord now in holy Baptism establishes a covenant of grace with us, we indicate thus: ...

Johann Gerhard, *A Comprehensive Explanation of Holy Baptism and the Lord's Supper*, page 78.

⇒ In the chapter, *Whether One Should Make Use of Baptism More Than One Time*, Gerhard continues ...

Even though we have a daily need for the forgiveness of sins, it does not follow we should even seek or receive forgiveness of sins by such a repetitious means. Rather, God the Lord establishes a covenant of grace with us in holy Baptism which consists of this: that God no longer will remember our sins any more, Jer. 31:34. We can comfort ourselves throughout life with this promise and grace-covenant, and [whenever] we, through sins, deprive ourselves of the blessings of this covenant, the way and entrance still remains open to us. Through repentance and conversion, we are able to obtain God's grace and forgiveness again. Consequently, it is not necessary to re-establish this grace-covenant by being baptized again since, from God's perspective, it [this grace-covenant] remains irrevocable at all times.

Johann Gerhard, *A Comprehensive Explanation of Holy Baptism and the Lord's Supper*, page 188.

C. F. W. Walther

⇒ Within the content of Thesis V (The first manner of confounding Law and Gospel is representing Christ as a new Moses or lawgiver, etc.), Walther writes ...

This Protevangelium, this First Gospel in Genesis, was the fountain from which the believers in the Old Testament drew their comfort. It was important for them to know: “There is One coming who will not only tell us what we must do to get to heaven. No, the Messiah will do all Himself to bring us there.” Now that the rule of the devil has been destroyed, anything that I must do cannot come into consideration. If the devil’s dominion is demolished, I am free. There is nothing for me to do but to *appropriate* this to myself. *new covenant*, then, God is going to make. Note this well. This covenant is not to be a legal covenant like the one which He established with Israel on Mount Sinai. The Messiah will not say: “You must be people of such and such character; your manner of living must be after this or that fashion; you must do such and such works.” No such doctrine will be introduced by the Messiah. He writes His Law directly into the heart, so that a person living under Him is a law unto himself. He is not coerced by a force from without, but is urged from within. “For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more,” — these words state the reason for the preceding statement. They are a summary of the Gospel of Christ: forgiveness of sin by the free grace of God, for the sake of Jesus Christ.

C. F. W. Walther, *Law and Gospel*, page 71.

Franz Pieper

⇒ Notice in these two quotations that the writing of the new law on the heart is ascribed to the law ...

The Word of the Gospel, presented in Scripture, has the inherent power to write God’s Law into the heart of man, that is, so to change man inwardly that he gladly subjects himself to God’s Law and willingly and with delight walks in the ways of God according to the new man, which is created in him through faith in the Gospel. Human strength and human training cannot accomplish this change. Rom. 8:7: “The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the Law of God, neither indeed can be.” “*Lex praescribit, evangelium inscribit.*” (Jer. 31:31ff.)

Franz Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, volume I, page 316.

The Law indeed demands that our life be “united with God,” that we keep His commandments, but it cannot produce such sanctification; only the Gospel of the forgiveness of sins for Christ’s sake can. This covenant of the forgiveness of sins replaced the covenant of the Law in order that the Law might be written in hearts men. That truth was declared in Jer. 31:31ff., and Paul repeats it: “Sin shall not have dominion over you; for ye are not under the Law, but under grace” (Rom. 6:14).

Franz Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, volume II, page 365.

R. C. H. Lenski

⇒ In commentary on Hebrews 8:10-12, Lenski presents a view that appears to be consistent with Calvinism ...

... This *knowledge* is the basis of the *holiness* in their hearts (v. 10). ... From the time of Moses prophet after prophet appeared who brought message after message. Jeremiah, who is quoted, is one of them. This explains why one citizen and brother had to inform another. ... One had to tell another. Even the words and deeds of Jesus were at first communicated in this manner. ... The complete revelation came in Jesus, God’s Son. After Pentecost the Spirit spread it far and wide. Although it was at first transmitted in the old, imperfect way this complete revelation was soon fixed for all time

in a final canon to which all have full and free access. We are no longer dependent on merely what one may hear from another. ... We have all of God's Word; and each has it in his own hand.

R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Epistle to the Hebrews and the Epistle of James*, page 268.

Sermon

“The Gospel is God's Announcement of Forgiveness”

Jeremiah 31:31-34

Grace, mercy and peace to you in the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Dearly Beloved,

There is a poem titled “The Ornament” that makes you wonder what it is all about. Listen to it and perhaps you might ask, “What does this mean?”

The Ornament is copied and Ornament'ly hung
With enthusiastic passion the Ornament is sung,
 “Oh here and there, and everywhere!”
 The Ornamental shout.
 'Tis shared and cared, and so declared
 To gift to those without.
“What is the Ornament?” you ask,
 “What is it that is meant?”
The glassy-eyed have all replied,
 “Why, 'tis the Ornament!”

There is a religious leader who makes you wonder what he is talking about. When asked what the mission of the church ought to be, his words of “doing the Gospel” speak for a generation of like-minded and mimic-mouthed religious people. Listen to his Gospel words and perhaps you might ask, “What does this mean?”

“I'm high on Lutheran Christianity. And that's because we have a powerful understanding of the Gospel, a proper distinction between Law and Gospel. Our Gospel theology is unequaled in all of Christianity. I believe our church is poised to make huge inroads with the Gospel.”

Now, let's be up-front here. The word “gospel” is spoken of quite often and it is often pointed out that this means “good news.” All fine and well, but simply saying those words do not tell us what the Gospel is. The Gospel is God's Word of the forgiveness of sins achieved for the world by Jesus Christ Who died on the cross and rose again from the dead. Talking “about” the Gospel and telling the Gospel are two very different things. In the words of a Christian theologian,

“The Gospel is this and nothing else: that in Jesus Christ there is forgiveness of sins, in Him alone and nowhere else in the world, but also truly in Him. A sermon that did not say that, a sermon in which this real Gospel was not mentioned would not be a Christian sermon.” (H. Sasse, *The Lonely Way II*, 1943)

This is the truth of God's forgiveness ... His Word of the remission of sins that the LORD God Almighty

wanted the Christian Church to hear in the days when the Prophet Jeremiah was His messenger. Please listen to the Old Testament Reading for Reformation Sunday and hear that ... *The Gospel is God's Announcement of Forgiveness*

"Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD. But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My Law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each man teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

Thus far the Word of the LORD our God.

The situation in the state and in the church in the days of Jeremiah were really no different than with us today. Corrupt national officials set the example for the citizens in the ways of the tolerance of immorality and the departure from that which was good and right in God's eyes. The fallen people, eager to do what was satisfying to the old sinful self, adopted the evil agenda and lived in the fleshly cesspools of society. Such seepage found its way into the church through the religious leaders. These false teachers and sinful leaders spoke with such passion that their lies found a fertile bed in ears that itched for something new and in hearts that hankered for other gods. Within such a religious organization that tolerates everything except the Truth and the pure teaching of the Word of God, the Church is hidden.

The LORD God is neither unknowing concerning the evil doings of man nor uncaring concerning His Bride, the Church. He will attend to both. The further a nation, a city or a people depart from God's will, the more impending is a wrathful visitation by the Living God. When those cities in the direction of Zoar exceeded the cup of sin, the LORD rained down fire and brimstone, destroying the Sodomites. Preceding such destruction the God's Church is delivered. The same destruction and deliverance happened earlier, at the time of the Flood. Thus, in the days of King Zedekiah, the One True God permits the hordes of Babylon to spill across the earth and descend upon the Holy City.

No wonder the prophets made such statements as we have recorded in the Bible from Elijah and Isaiah. The former said, *"Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!"* (Isaiah 6:5); while the latter confessed, *"I have been very jealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the people of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant, thrown down Thy altars, and slain Thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away"* (1 Kings 19:10).

Ah, yes, ponder what man does with God's covenant and what covenants man fashions to coerce God. As the city is besieged, the leader, whose days in office are numbered, in an attempt to staunch the impending tide and to rally the people and to ignite the fire of enthusiasm, started a new program. "Wavering between despair and hope, the vacillating king, willing to strike a bargain with God as long as he did not have to humble himself by an unconditional surrender, sought to gain God's favor by persuading the people to do away, by a solemn covenant, a long-standing injustice (ch. 34:6-10), the enslavement of their poverty-stricken brethren, a flagrant violation of God's Law (Ex. 21:2f.)" (Laatsch's "Jeremiah," p. 4). Such man-made attempts at divine-coercion, covenant-making and reformation are an abomination in the sight of the LORD.

To the Church, in the midst of such a state of affairs, comes the Word of God via the mouth of His messenger.

The prophet proclaims the Law and the consequences of sin, for this is the Word of the LORD, and declares the Gospel, for this is the Announcement of God's Forgiveness. *"Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD. But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My Torah (My Doctrine - My Word of Truth) within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each man teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."*

To know the Lord is not just to know the historical facts and not just to know about Him. Rather, the command to know the Lord is an evangelical imperative similar to "Take and eat - repent and be baptized - take and drink - repent and believe in the Gospel - depart in peace - *know the LORD.*" In the House of Israel; that is, in the Church, it is not necessary for those whom God has wrought the gift of faith in Christ to know the LORD, for they shall know Him ... for we all here do know Him, from the least of them ... of us, to the greatest in the Church; from the newly born again infant baptized in the Name of the Holy Trinity to the aged soul about to enter eternal Paradise.

This situation is like a household - a family where the man who is husband and father, along with the woman who is wife and mother, provide for, care, feed and tend to all within the house. There is no need for any one of the children to say to another, "Know the father," for they all know him ... from the youngest of his children to the oldest. The master of the House calls them His own and this one cares for his bride and "this is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the Church" (Ephesians 5:32), for surely God "has a unique community in the world. It is the mother that begets and bears every Christian through the Word of God" (Large Catechism).

People become a member of this House by God's Word of the New Covenant. Now as God has declared through the prophet Jeremiah, this is *"not like the covenant which I made with their fathers when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD."* Indeed, the new covenant will neither be a two-party covenant nor a conditional covenant. The new testament is all dependent upon God and it will surely come to pass for He has promised.

This is the work done by the Messiah and accomplished by the Christ. Jesus, the Incarnate Son of God, gave His Body unto the Sacrifice wherein God's wrath against sin was fully and completely vented, shed His Blood of the new testament in order for all to be sprinkling with the Blood that speaks more graciously than that which cries out for vengeance. This Jesus did in His Life for the world and in His death on the cross for all *"for without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness"* (Hebrews 9:22). This redemption Christ sealed when He rose again from the dead, without the Resurrection of Jesus the Christ we are still in our sin (1 Corinthians 15:17).

And within the Church, *"no longer shall each man teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will pardon their perverse depravity, and I will remember their sin no more."* God will not visit your sins, for He has already visited them when Christ was crucified on the cross. He seeks to pardon the sinner and has provided an accomplished salvation for all. He will do this, not by us doing the deed and fulfilling the requirements of the old covenant of the Law given on Mt. Sinai, but by the new testament of the Gospel offered on Mt. Calvary. Indeed, *"this is the LORD's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes"* (Psalm 118:12).

Ah, what a glorious and wonderful proclamation of forgiveness of all sin on account of Christ is ours! Ah, how quickly it is lost if one is not mindful of the one thing needful! We are reminded of that with examples in history, particularly this day, whether Martin Luther posted the truth and remained steadfast in the faith. The message from the religious leader was the selling of indulgences to buy souls out of purgatory and earn or buy one's right to be in heaven. Luther would have none of this wicked chicanery and instead, proclaimed the full forgiveness of sins, eternal life and salvation by the grace of God alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, as revealed in the Scriptures alone.

Each congregation is always within one generation of no longer being the Church and each Christian is always within one day of no longer being a Christian. The call of Christ is for each of us to remain steadfast in the faith, to hear that you are forgiven of all your sins in the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit, and to "*remain faithful unto death and be given the Crown of Life*" (Revelation 2:10). The congregation is called to continue to hear and to abide in the Word of God preached and taught in all its truth and purity, and to be nurtured and nourished on the Sacraments as our Lord Jesus instituted them.

Such a sobering thought ought to lead us to a proper fear, true repentance and the fount of God's grace as we continue to be witnesses to what is happening in various religious bodies where the Word of God is denied and cast aside. In such places and at such time, we behold that the basis for reformation no longer exists in such groups. Beware, for base fellows have besieged the Church and are continuing to wreck havoc on many. God's Word remains true even when it is denied. Or as the Bible says, "*the saying is sure: If we have died with Him, we shall also live with Him; if we endure, we shall also reign with Him; if we deny Him, He also will deny us; if we are faithless, He remains faithful -- for He cannot deny Himself*" (2 Timothy 2:11-13).

Remaining steadfast in the faith and abiding in the Church "can come only if our churches return to the diligent use of the means of grace, to a serious study of the Word of God and the confessions of the Reformation. And this must be done in all 'stations' of the church. Our church leaders must become better theologians and ... professors of theology again must have not only ecclesiastical experience, but must live and work in close contact with the pastor and congregation. Otherwise they teach an abstract theology which does not help the church. ... Just as the church government deteriorates into mere church politics if it is not based on sound and profound theology, so the theologian who loses contact with the real life of the church becomes a mere theoretical scholar who speaks of God like a shoemaker of his leather, as Luther characterized that professionalism which is the danger of all theology. The pastors who have no solid theological training and are not studying any longer become mere organizers, and their sermons or 'sermonettes' cease to be a preaching of the pure Gospel. The lay people who do not live up to the divine 'stations' which they have by virtue of the universal priesthood may become good business managers in congregation and synod, church council and committee, but what they are building is not a Christian congregation in the sense of the NT and the Lutheran Confessions. It is rather a sort of religious society, a society for furthering of religious interests. They may be well-meaning, pious people, eager to build the 'kingdom,' but they know neither what the kingdom of God nor what the church of Christ is. They do not realize that it is 'God's' kingdom which 'we' cannot build, that it is the church of 'Christ,' who by his Gospel and his Sacraments builds his church. If these men try to establish church unity, they can think only in terms of human sociology."

Hermann Sasse, "*The Lonely Way*" II, p. 265

This day is called Reformation Sunday and, though the Church continues to be attacked by foes from outside her walls and by traitors from within, yet she will remain steadfast in the Word and Work of the LORD God Almighty. She will live under the gracious promise of God in the new covenant. May God grant that you and I continue to hear the Gospel, the Good News, which is God's announcement of forgiveness, and to continue to trust in the LORD God Who has declared through His called servant, "*I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.*" Amen.