

Dear Friend in Christ,

I would like to share with you the nuts and bolts of the Christian faith. I have also attached the cover page of recent church Newsletter. This includes an Easter message that solidifies why Easter makes the message of Christianity truly relevant. Please note that in the following presentation, I will not be making a lot of distinction between Christianity and the Lutheran Faith. In short, Martin Luther did not shape the Christian Faith, but rather he was God's tool to take the Christian Church back to its basics as recorded in the Bible. This is the way Jesus left his church, at the time in which he returned to his Father in heaven. Dr. Martin Luther was a Roman Catholic professor at the University of Wittenberg in the early 1500's. His teachings are strictly Bible-based, with an emphasis upon Jesus' finished work of salvation and not upon man's contribution. It would be impossible for any person to improve upon Christ's perfect work of salvation. In fact, if anyone ever made such an attempt it would be a real insult to Christ, who is true God.

First, let me summarize the Law and Gospel of the Christian faith. Bear in mind that the **Law** has four distinguishing qualities.

1. It is written upon people's hearts (as our consciences so testify), and it is written in the Bible.
2. It tells people what to do and not to do.
3. It holds out a real threat of punishment, ultimately eternal punishment in hell.
4. It always causes a person to do the right things because they HAVE TO.

Now this is the **Gospel** of Jesus Christ, which reveals God's unfailing love and gift of salvation. Here are its distinguishing qualities.

1. It is only found and recorded for us in the Bible. Indeed, that is its ultimate source even though many have written about it, as am I.
2. It tells us what Jesus Christ has done for us as our Substitute.
3. Instead of a threat of punishment, it holds out the sure gift and reward of eternal life in heaven, completely bought and purchased by Jesus.
4. Finally, it leads God's people to do the right things in God's sight, not because we have to but because we WANT TO.

In sharing this following presentation, let me start my asking you, "What if you were to die today, are you sure that you would have eternal life?" In other words, "If you were to stand before God almighty, and he were to ask you, 'Why should I let you into my heaven?' What would you tell him?"

Now with the predominance of today's philosophies, such as Existentialism, many would prefer to dismiss such a thought and question. They may say, "I don't believe there is a life after this one. When you're dead, you're dead." But how do they know for sure? Aren't those kind of people taking a very big gamble? Perhaps those same people may think I (a Christian) am taking a gamble by believing that there is a life to come. But if I win my 'gamble' I have eternal life. If I lose then I will only die, as they so imagine. But if they lose their gamble they have eternal death in hell. Don't you think it would be especially wise to find out what the Bible says about eternal life and how to get there?

There will be four main parts to this presentation.

1. **What God Demands.**
2. **What God Sees.**
3. **Man-made Remedies.**
4. **God's Remedy.**

1. Heaven clearly belongs to God. It is his home. Therefore, in order to enter his home and to one day stand in his presence we must be right with God.

This is What God Demands: Holiness minus any Sin = Life.

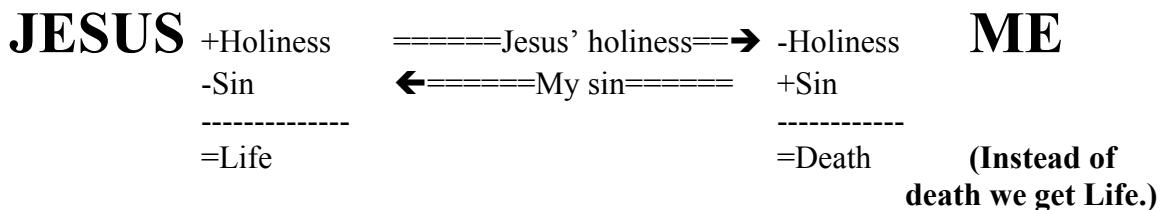
God tells us in the Bible, "Be holy, because I, the Lord your God am holy" (Leviticus 19:2). That means we cannot and must not have any flaws in our character or being. One day a man came up to Jesus and asked him, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus answered him with a question, "What is written in the law? How do you read it?" The man replied, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind"; and 'Love your neighbor as yourself" (Luke 10:27). Jesus then went on to assure the man that he had answered correctly. You see, God demands nothing less than perfection. This must consist of a perfect love for him at all times and a perfect love for our neighbor. "Do this," said Jesus to the man, "and you will live" (Luke 10:28). God's expectations for all people are very high. Perhaps you may think that they are unrealistic. But God is God and we are not. His word does not stutter with regard to his holy Law.

2. Next, we must face reality. God sees all. Nothing is hidden from his sight. Our thoughts, our actions and our spoken words are fully known to him. Therefore, we now must realize and admit **What God Sees: There is no Holiness and only Sin within each one of us. This equals Death.**

Even the non-Christian person has admittedly said, "No one is perfect". God does not disagree with that assessment. In fact, the Bible as God's Word says, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Imagine that in front of you is a deep canyon, 100 feet wide and one mile deep. Being absolutely perfect as God demands would be like being able to jump all the way across this canyon. Anything less is falling short. Suppose someone, who holds the world's long jump record, trains hard and jumps 40 feet, setting a new record. Another good athlete jumps almost 30 feet, another 10. And then there's another person who forgets to tie his shoelaces, so that right at the edge he trips over them and falls. In the end, what difference does it make? If you jump 40 feet or two feet, or even 90 feet, the result is still the same, isn't it? There is only death at the bottom of the canyon. I guess someone once said, "There's nothing more risky than trying to jump across a canyon in two leaps." You'll never get that second chance. So also, for all people, if we come up short of reaching God's glory, that is his standard of perfection, by even a little the result is death, an eternity of separation from God. The Bible also says, "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). That is our paycheck for living a sinful life and lacking any holiness.

3. Many civilizations and many individuals have pondered this reality of being unholy before God. So they have sought to correct their unholy status before God with their own innovations. **These are what we call Man-made Remedies.**
 - **Some chose to “try harder”.** This could be illustrated with the picture of a step ladder. The person may say, “I’ll have to keep trying my best to work my way up the ladder, by seeking to do what God wants me to do. Maybe at this point in my life I am only on the second or third rung. But if I keep on trying, maybe I can get higher up this proverbial ladder. However, God still makes it quite clear, “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” If you don’t get to the top, you will forever be short of what God demands.
 - **Some chose the “balancing act”.** This could be illustrated with a basic balancing scale. A person might say, “All right, I know that I have committed many sins which really weigh down the one side of the scale. But now I will try to counter balance the scale with some “good deeds”. Perhaps this person was impatient and mean to a co-worker. It wasn’t a good day. So to make it up, on another day, he will treat that co-worker to lunch. Thus, balancing the scale, you might call it. There is still a real flaw with this way of thinking. No matter how many “good deeds” that person does, he still can’t remove the sin that’s at the one end of the scale. This man-made remedy does not solve the problem of sin.
 - **Some chose to play the “comparison game”.** Finally, this is likely the most popular man-made remedy. We might also call it “justification by comparison”. A person may say, “I know that I’m not perfect, but I’m a lot better than a lot of other people.” In truth, it is not hard to find someone who appears to be a little worse than you are. Even a murderer on death row can think to himself, “At least I haven’t committed ten murders like the fellow in the cell next to me.” It’s as though God is a schoolteacher and grades on the curve, taking the upper 50% to himself and leaving the rest behind. Actually, God does want us to do some serious comparing. God wants each one of us to compare ourselves to Him. When we see our perfect Lord in the person of Jesus Christ, we see the God/Man without any sins of thought, word, action or neglect. He is holy and we are not! King Solomon wrote in Proverbs 16:25, as God led him to write, “There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.” The Apostle James makes it crystal clear that even just one sin is sever in God’s sight. He writes in James 2:10, “Whoever keeps the whole law, and yet stumbles at just one point, is guilty of breaking all of it.” Imagine an inflated balloon with the numbers 1 – 10 written on it in permanent marker. (These numbers would represent the 10 Commandments.) Now just take one sharp pin and drive it through one number, representing the Commandment that you most recently broke. The whole balloon will blow up. So too, with God’s law. In the end we broke it all by ourselves, but we cannot even begin to contribute to its repair. It is a job that only God can fix.
4. This leads us to see the dire need for God’s Remedy. And his remedy is the only one that works. This truth bothers some people. But if you think of it, this is a comfort. **God’s remedy is so perfect and foolproof that we need no other solution.** We must not doubt God’s full remedy to free us from sin, death and hell.

Here it is: We call it The Great Exchange. This Great Exchange centers upon the love and generosity of Jesus Christ. Jesus is God. About 2000 years ago, he stepped out of the realm of eternity, and was born on that first Christmas Day. There he was God clothed in flesh. Jesus met every one of God's demands perfectly. He did this as the substitute for every human being that ever lived and ever will live. At about the age of 33 he was brought before the governing officials of his day, with Jesus' enemies wanting nothing less than a death sentence for him. When it came time to bring forth the evidence and testimonies for such a conviction, the Bible tells us that "Many testified falsely against him, but their statements did not agree" (Mark 14:56). At that time you needed the testimony of at least two witnesses in order to make an accusation stick. Even to the very end, not one crime or sin could be pinned on Jesus. He was 100% innocent. (Fully holy and always without sin.) But to appease his enemies the Roman governor allowed for Jesus' execution. The death penalty was carried out by way of crucifixion. It was a most shameful and painful way to die. In a very real sense Jesus suffered our painful punishment of death and hell in our place. Now let me illustrate **this marvelous Great Exchange.**



Living this life without Jesus, is like trying to get into a movie theater with only a nickel in your pocket. Imagine standing before the cashier and offering just a nickel for admission. You must have the full payment in order to enter. Now suppose someone comes up behind you and says, "Don't worry about. I'll pay your way in." You'd get in, wouldn't you? That's exactly what Jesus did: He paid our way in. He paid the penalty in full, taking our sins upon himself so that we could be in a right relationship with God. With Jesus as the world's substitute we have no doubts about his payment being sufficient for you or me. The Bible also tells us that "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us so that in him (Jesus) we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21). So not only did God pay the debt of our sins with his Son's life, but he also credited the perfect life of Jesus to us.

Because of Easter, and Jesus' rising, we know that no more payment for sin is required. His substitute life, death and resurrection are all we need. Not only is this true, but now we know that the horror of death is vanquished and overcome. Because Jesus lives we too will live. In summary, Jesus tells us, "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life." God's Church, the Holy Christian Church, exists to share this message and to involve all people in this work. "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31). God's Word edifies and builds up this saving faith. And God's Word equips us in the living and sharing of this saving faith.

Feeling Victorious In The Face Of Death

When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (1Corinthians 15:54-57).

Have you been to good funeral lately?

Before you gasp with disapproval and shock at such a question from your pastor, read again those verses from First Corinthians, chapter 15, written above.

In the same way we are glad and happy for the advancements of our loved ones, so also we can be happy and glad for the child of God who dies with faith in Jesus. Confirmations, graduations, weddings and job promotions are all examples of real advancement in this life. Jesus has turned the ugly monster of death into a powerless pest. Temporal death is forever buried deep beneath Eternal Life.

Jesus' resurrection is the focal point of a Christian life. Because he lives we too will live. Imagine being a Christian without Easter. The Apostle Paul in the resurrection the great chapter, 1 Corinthians 15, asked a "what if" question. (Verses 12-20) "What if Jesus had not risen from the dead?" Paul tells us what it would mean if there were no Easter resurrection.

1. If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile
2. If Christ has not been raised, you are still in your sins
3. If Christ has not been raised, the Bible is not reliable
4. If Christ has not been raised, neither shall we be raised from the dead.

In short, we would be heading for hell if Christ did not rise. The best we could ever hope to have would be this earthly life. We would almost certainly go through life on earth with a philosophy of despair. "Eat, drink, and be merry ...for tomorrow we die." "Better get all the gusto out of life -- you only go around once."

But Paul says, "Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep." (1 Corinthians 15:20) No wonder we sing our Easter "Hallelujahs!" Our sins are forgiven. The greatest gift a person can possess is forgiveness from God. The resurrection is the stamp of approval by God on His Son's atoning work.

Christ's resurrection is evidence that the Bible is true. The Old Testament in Psalm 16 and Isaiah 53 as well as other places had stated that Christ would arise. Jesus Himself often spoke of His sufferings, death, and resurrection. That Word was kept perfectly. The fulfillment of the resurrection promise shows that the Lord will keep all of His promises to us. He promises to take care of us in good times and bad. He promises that all things shall work together for our good. He promises that there never will be a temptation or a problem greater than what we can bear. He promises a fabulous future and a perfect paradise in heaven with him. The Lord keeps His promises. Easter shows that! Paul later writes, "For no matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' in Christ" (2 Corinthians 1:20). The cemetery is not the end for us believers. Our bodies will be there for only a short time. Our risen Savior will return, raise up our bodies, and give us and all believers eternal life. If Christ had not risen, life would be miserable. But he has. Let us rejoice, and show our joy to all those around us!

Our title above is actually an understatement. We do not just "feel victorious". **We are victorious!** In the words of Saint Paul to the Romans, "We are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers . . . will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:37-39).