

# "For Thine Is the Power"

Text: 1 Corinthians 1:10-18

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 **"Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, <sup>20</sup> for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body."** Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians, the recent election and subsequent inauguration should teach us something, but it probably won't. I've never seen an actual study on it, or any sort of statistical analysis, but my personal experience tells me that the *vast* majority of stress and angst in our society involves that which only *could* happen, but never does. Nor is the problem limited to a particular political party. While one side lived in fear that they would all be thrown into concentration camps on the 21<sup>st</sup>, you can probably remember many on the other side worrying that the then current president was going to create a crisis and declare martial law so that he could stay in office. None of it happened. In fact almost none of that which causes us such anxiety *ever happens*. What's even more puzzling is the realization that we stress over that which we couldn't change or prevent even if it were real.

I was reminded of that as we sat in the airport this past week. Fear of flying is still very real for many, and this despite several facts. First, stress and anxiety do nothing to prevent an accident. Second, the same people often experience no apprehension at all when they get behind the wheel of a car – which belies the fact that you are infinitely more likely to get hurt or killed in a car than you are in a commercial aircraft. Those who study such things believe a key factor is *control*, or, more accurately, the illusion of control. (You can control a car but not a plane.) Such fears are also immeasurably compounded by either forgetting or denying that God is in control. Preferable is the illusion of control that actually driving a car seems to afford. It's much harder to trust others (or God) to be in control.

There are obvious lessons to be learned here. First of all, learn what you can and can't control, and stop sweating the stuff you can't change. In fact there is an almost endless succession of things like that in life. There are things we can't do anything about, and there are things we can. How just plain dumb it is that we spend so much time, effort, and stress on what can't be changed, and then again so little on what can. This is nowhere more true than in connection with our Christian Faith. The text that will teach us more about this particular topic is found in the Apostle Paul's first recorded Letter to the Corinthians, the First Chapter:

<sup>ESV</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:10-18 **I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. <sup>11</sup> For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there**

**is quarreling among you, my brothers. <sup>12</sup> What I mean is that each one of you says, "I follow Paul," or "I follow Apollos," or "I follow Cephas," or "I follow Christ." <sup>13</sup> Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? <sup>14</sup> I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, <sup>15</sup> so that no one may say that you were baptized in my name. <sup>16</sup> (I did baptize also the household of Stephanas. Beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.) <sup>17</sup> For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. <sup>18</sup> ¶ For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.**

So far the very words of God. These are not only the words of God; here is where that same God has promised to meet with us, to calm us, to comfort and assure us. To prepare our hearts to meet here with our God, and to learn from him, so we pray, **"Sanctify us by Your Truth, O Lord. Your Word is truth!"** Amen.

Isn't it interesting how certain phrases that are very familiar to us take on a greater depth and meaning when we isolate them from their immediate context and examine them individually? Take our sermon theme for this morning. Most of us have said these words hundreds, even thousands of times as part of the doxology of the Lord's Prayer, and yet they take on a different character when we remove all but these five words: *"For Thine is the power."*

That's our goal this morning, to gain a greater understanding of these words, and we begin our examination with a question: *Does Scripture ever demand the impossible – something we are powerless to do or provide?* In the context of the law, yes. In the context of the gospel, no. When, for example, the Bible is addressing those who believe that they earn their way to heaven through their own works or goodness, then Scripture demands of them that which is impossible, that which they haven't the power to supply. This is what James was talking about when in James 2:8-10 he said: ***If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well. <sup>9</sup> But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. <sup>10</sup> For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it.*** James is obviously talking to those who believe that they have a chance at keeping the law perfectly, and thereby earning their way to heaven. His point was that when it comes to holiness, there are only two possible categories: pass and fail. To pass, you have to keep every single commandment perfectly. You *fail* if you break any commandment, even just once, and no matter how "trivial" it may seem to you. To fall short even just once puts you in the fail category. It also means you are instantly guilty of breaking

every commandment. Gossip just once, for example, and you are also a murderer and adulterer.

The point here is that whenever Scripture demands something beyond our ability to carry it out, it does so always and only in the context of the law, and it does so to crush in us any false hope of saving ourselves. The goal is always to make us despair of our own power and our own goodness and to recognize our need to *be rescued* by someone else – by a *savior*, by *the Savior*. So also when Jesus told us in the Sermon on the Mount that **"unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven"** his goal was not to inspire us to try harder and do better, but to recognize that we can never satisfy the demands of the law. We can never therefore even come close to saving ourselves. Supplying the necessary perfection is something that we need to out-source. We've got nothing in-house to fulfill this sort of demand.

Does that then mean that whenever we read a command in God's Word we are supposed to just ignore it, since we can't keep it anyway? Obviously not. Even as we recognize that we are saved by grace, rather than by our own works, so also now that new man in us *wants to do everything and only what our God wants us to do*. God himself worked that desire in us when he created saving faith in our hearts. That new man in us is the part in every Christian that wants to do the right thing – for the right reason.

This can be a difficult distinction to make. While the law always condemns us (because we know we can't keep it perfectly) the Christian now recognizes the law as a perfect statement of God's will for us, and therefore struggles to keep God's law perfectly, using that same law as our guide.

And it gets even more challenging. Christians need to learn to read God's Word with a God-given wisdom that teaches us to discern between what we can and cannot do. To understand, we'll look at examples of each. When the Jailer in Philippi asked Paul, **"What must I do to be saved?"** the answer given by Paul and his companion Silas was, **"Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved."** Some take that as a command that man has to fulfill, as though man must decide to believe, and only then will he be saved. If that were the case, the answer would have been *"believe in the Lord Jesus and you will save yourself."* By their answer, Paul and Silas were actually speaking against the very premise of the question. The Jailer had asked **"what must I do..."** The answer was, *"You cannot do anything."* Paul and Silas simply stated a fact, **"those who believe in the Lord Jesus will be saved."** The key verse comes next: **"And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house...and he was baptized at once, he and all his family."** Faith is a gift from God, worked in the human heart through the Word of God – whether spoken or connected with the water of baptism. It was through the spoken Word and the waters of baptism that

saving faith was created in the hearts of the Jailer and his entire household. It was not – could never have been – an act of human will.

Notice the start of a pattern here. Man wants the power to earn his own passage to heaven, so much so that even when he learns that Jesus earned his forgiveness for him, he manufactures the illusion that he has the power to decide to believe and accept Jesus as his Savior. Man desperately longs to be able to say, *"For mine is the power."*

God demands power from us only in the context of the law; that is, only when we imagine we can earn our way into heaven by keeping his commandments. When, for example, Jesus told the lawyer who had correctly summarized the law, **"Do this and you will live"** he did so to teach the man just how miserably he had failed to actually keep that law.

Note however that our past failure to live up to God's standard is never supposed to serve as our license to quit trying to live according to God's will. Our purpose for doing so changes, but not our ultimate goal, which continues to be perfect obedience. The difference is that where before we did it to try to earn God's love, now, knowing that Jesus has already done what we could not, we seek to offer a life-time of "thank you" through our obedience.

Which brings us to our text for this morning and the first exhortation or command we read there: ***I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment.***

How do you read those words? How do you hear them? What do they say to you? Do they sound to you like just another thing that our God demands of us but that we can't deliver? Unfortunately that's how most Christians in our society regard them. To most this is just another demand that our God doesn't really expect us to fulfill – so most today don't even regard this as something they should work at. In fact I can't tell you how many times I've heard *Christians* tell me that this sort of agreement just isn't possible today: *"Pastor, I'm sorry to break it to you, but you're just being naïve if you think that the members of your congregation agree with you on everything the Bible teaches. That's just not possible."*

The fact is this command was not given to be ignored or broken and then repented of. It was given by a God who fully expects us to carry it out – fully and completely – as he expects us to obey all of his other commands. That means, in the case of our text, that our God wants us to be perfectly united in all that we teach and believe. How is such unity possible in our day, when so many believe that "truth" is whatever you believe it is? More

to the point this morning, is this a command where we need to supply the power?

The false premise that needs to be discarded here is, first of all, the idea that there is no absolute standard of right and wrong. The standard is God's Word – the Bible. That is the rally point, and it does lie within the power of man, once brought to faith, to search out and acknowledge as objectively true everything God's Word teaches. Everything that is written in God's Word has one intended meaning, and that meaning represents objective, absolute truth. Our God fully expects us to acknowledge it as such.

The problem is that prideful man refuses to divest himself of his preconceived notions. Even Christians today often refuse to allow God's Word to dictate what they do and do not believe. Unlike coming to faith in the first place – which is something that God the Holy Spirit has to give to, or created in, each of us - knowing and following God's will after conversion involves conscious acts or decisions. It involves a resolution to simply let God's Word tell us what is and is not true, and therefore what we as individuals do and to not believe. Obviously this mindset requires not only careful study to learn exactly what God's Word actually teaches, but abject humility on the part of man. It requires that we throw away what we once regarded as truth and cling instead always and only to what God's Word actually teaches.

In practical terms, that means scrapping whatever we thought we knew about the age of the earth, and accepting instead only that which the Bible tells us. It means setting aside our own human experiences and believing instead that which we have never experienced, and that which is impossible according to everything we've ever seen. No virgin has ever given birth, but that is how Mary gave birth to Jesus. No corpse has ever been raised from the dead, but Lazarus was. Jesus was. No one could ever feed thousands with just a few fish and a few loaves a bread, but Jesus did. It means humbly accepting as my personal view of the truth that I could never bring myself to believe in Jesus Christ, but the Holy Spirit has created that faith in me – all because the Bible tells me that that's how it always is. It means refusing to commune with those who teach differently because God told us not to, despite the fact that it *seems* kinder and more loving to do otherwise.

It is, in fact, a mark of wretched sinful pride whenever we cling to any belief that God's Word does not allow. More to the point this morning, it is something that we have the power to correct – but only because God has given us that power, that ability. Having been brought to faith in Jesus Christ, we have become spiritual people – fully capable of discerning and believing the truth. That's why Paul in our text not only told the Christians to knock off with the factions in the congregation – as though Paul, Apollos, Peter and Jesus all taught something different – he also fully expected them to do it. This is undoubtedly part of what the Holy Spirit was communicating to us through Peter when he wrote: **"Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty**

**hand of God..."** (1 Peter 5:6) How arrogant and God-displeasing for any Christian to believe or reject anything contrary to what our God has taught us in his Word.

We have been made children of light. Let that light of God's Word drive every last remnant of darkness from your heart, clinging instead to the truth as God himself has revealed it to us in his Word. Recognize that there are always going to be two opposing forces (God and the sinful world) lobbying within your heart, pulling mightily in opposite directions. Humbly acknowledge again this morning the simple fact that **"God's Word is truth."** Acknowledge especially this morning (and take great comfort in) the last verse of our text: **"For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."** Amen.

## Scripture Readings

<sup>ESV</sup> **Isaiah 9:1-7** But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations. <sup>2</sup> The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined. <sup>3</sup> You have multiplied the nation; you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as they are glad when they divide the spoil. <sup>4</sup> For the yoke of his burden, and the staff for his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. <sup>5</sup> For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire. <sup>6</sup> For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. <sup>7</sup> Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Matthew 4:12-17, 23-25** Now when he heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee. <sup>13</sup> And leaving Nazareth he went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, <sup>14</sup> so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: <sup>15</sup> "The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles-- <sup>16</sup> the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned." <sup>17</sup> From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." <sup>23</sup> ¶ And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people. <sup>24</sup> So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, epileptics, and paralytics, and he healed them. <sup>25</sup> And great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis, and from Jerusalem and Judea, and from beyond the Jordan.

# ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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**The Third Sunday after Epiphany – January 22, 2017**

## The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

## The Opening Hymn – 16 (Red Hymnal)

"Blessed Jesus at Thy Word"

## The Order of Service – Hymnal page 15ff. (Red Hymnal)

## The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

**The Old Testament Lesson:** (Isaiah 9:1-7) We read the Old Testament not just as an assortment of writings about someone else at some other time. We read it with the understanding that the prophecies found there often refer to Christ Jesus, who is also *our* Savior. The good things that are there promised are therefore promised to believers of all ages, including Christians today.

**The New Testament Lesson:** (Matthew 4:12-17, 23-25) Our belief that the words of the Old Testament refer to Jesus Christ - and therefore have relevance to all Christians of every age - is often contested and denied, especially by the Jews. They, of course, acknowledge no reference to Jesus in the Old Testament. We therefore find it most helpful that the Bible itself confirms our belief concerning Old Testament prophecies, as also our New Testament reading verifies that the prophecy in our Old Testament reading was fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ.

## The Confession of Faith -

The Nicene Creed – (Hymnal page 22)

## The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 134 (Stanzas 1-4) (Red Hymnal)

"Songs of Thankfulness and Praise"

## The Sermon – Text: 1 Corinthians 1:10-18 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

**"For Thine Is the Power"**

## The Offertory – (Hymnal page 22)

## The Offering followed by the Prayers

## The Pre-Communion Hymn – 307 (Red Hymnal)

"Draw Nigh and Take the Body of the Lord"

## The Preparation for Holy Communion (Red Hymnal page 24ff)

## The Distribution

## The Nunc Dimittis (Red Hymnal page 30)

## The Benediction

## The Closing Hymn – 655 (Red Hymnal)

"I Pray Thee Dear Lord Jesus"

## Silent Prayer

**Welcome!** - We warmly welcome any visitors worshipping with us this morning and invite you to join us each Sunday at this time. We are glad you are here! **To our Visitors seeking an altar at which to commune** – Since we desire to follow the words of our Savior, we practice "Close Communion" – a practice that is not new to confessional Lutherans. This practice stresses both our concern for others, not wanting them to receive the sacrament to their harm (1 Cor. 11:27-30) and the importance of unity in confession and faith (1 Cor. 10:16-17). For this reason we ask that anyone who has not established this unity through membership in a CLC congregation please first meet with the pastor to discuss this Scriptural doctrine before communing. This is a practice that we follow out of love and concern for you, and out of obedience to God's Word.

## Attendance - Sunday (45) Ave (46)

### This Week at St. Paul:

<b>Today</b>	<b>-9:00 a.m.</b>	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Worship Service w/ Holy Communion
	<b>-11:15 a.m.</b>	– Fellowship/coffee time
<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>-6:00 p.m.</b>	– Confirmation Class
	<b>-7:00 p.m.</b>	– Midweek Bible Class
<b>Next Sunday</b>	<b>-9:00 a.m.</b>	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Worship Service
	<b>-11:00 a.m.</b>	– Fellowship/coffee time
	<b>-11:15 a.m.</b>	– Church Council Meeting

**CLC News** – Pastor Roehl is scheduled to conduct a call meeting next Sunday in Lemmon. Copies of the most recent CLC Financial Update are available on the entry table.

**Church Council Meeting** – A brief special Church Council meeting has been scheduled for next Sunday, January 29.

**ILC Tour Choir** – The ILC Tour Choir is scheduled to perform a concert here in Bismarck on Saturday, March 18<sup>th</sup> at 7:30 pm. 34 choir members will also need housing for that night. Plans call for an early departure for a Sunday morning concert in Jamestown. Please consider housing as many choir members as you can and record your intentions on the sign-up sheet on the mailbox table.

**ILC After Banquet Party** – The ILC After Banquet Committee is again looking for volunteers and/or donations to help with the project. Please see Pastor Roehl for more details.

**CLC Women's Retreat** – This year's theme is "Thy Will Be Done" and is based on Proverbs 3:5-6. It is scheduled April 21-23 in Winona, MN. See the poster on the entry table for further details.