

# "For Thine Is the Power"

Text: 1 Corinthians 1:10-18

<sup>ESV</sup> **(Philippians 4:8) Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Amen.**

Dear Fellow Christians, when you conclude the Lord's Prayer with the doxology ("**For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen**") what do you think about? What, in other words, are you declaring to be true? What do the words *mean*? What do *you* mean when you say those words?

Since "kingdom" refers to God's rulership in the human heart (Jesus himself said, "**The kingdom of God is within you**") by praying "**For Thine is the kingdom**" we are acknowledging that all rulership is ultimately God's alone. We are praying that he alone would rule, as he alone can. When we pray "**For Thine is the... power**" we are acknowledging that the God to whom we are praying is indeed *able* to grant all that we have just asked of him in the Lord's Prayer. Nothing is impossible for our God. Finally, when we pray "**For thine is the...glory**" we are not only acknowledging that all glory belongs to God alone, we are reminding ourselves that when our prayers answered, as they surely will be, our God alone deserves *our* thanks and *our* praise.

That's the short explanation. This morning we will examine the second part of the Doxology in greater detail: "**For Thine is the power.**" 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.**

This is God's Word. 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.

It's 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. So also with our sermon theme for this morning. Most of us have said these words hundreds, even thousands of times as part of the Lord's Prayer, and yet they take on a different character when we isolate and examine 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 God's will for sanctified Christians, no. When, for example, the Bible is addressing those who imagine 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 into 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 one, and even just only once - 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 condemned as 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 to earn heaven, 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 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 said **"Do this and you will live"** to the lawyer who had correctly summarized the law, 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 forgiveness, now, knowing that Jesus has already done what we could not, we seek to offer a lifetime 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 an alarming (and growing) number of Christians in our society regard them. To them this is just another demand that our God doesn't really expect us to fulfill – so they have given up trying. 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 that we will struggle 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 ourselves* need to supply the power?

The false premise that needs to be discarded here is the idea, first of all, that there is no absolute *standard* of right and wrong. The standard is God's Word – the Bible. "Thine is the power." That is the rally point, and God does supply man with both the will and the ability, 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. True unity is achieved when we actually and truly do that.

What is it that prevents or works against that command for unity? First and foremost it is prideful man's refusal to let go of his preconceived notions, his personal ideas of right and wrong. God's all-powerful Word alone must dictate what we do and do not believe. What that Word also teaches is that unlike coming to faith in the first place (which is something that God the Holy Spirit alone has to give to, or created in, each of us) knowing and following God's will after conversion can also involve conscious acts or decisions on the part of God's children. That doesn't mean we sanctify ourselves. That too is the Holy Spirit's work as he separates us more and more from that which is unholy, and works in us ever-increasing godliness. That is all and only God's power. Yet if we imagine that we play no role in our sanctification, then the passages that tell us to **"put off the old man"** and to **"put on the new"** are meaningless – as is every encouragement toward fleeing evil and pursuing righteousness. If we are just passive recipients in connection with sanctification (as is the case with justification, which was God's unilateral declaration that he forgives our sins for Jesus' sake) then we needn't bother with church, Bible study, confirmation class, or Sunday school. The reality is, however weakly and as those who have been brought to spiritual life, God calls us to participate in our sanctification or spiritual walk and growth. The Holy Spirit alone freed us from our slavery to sin and death, but in so doing he also freed us to struggle to obey him. We can open our Bible and avail ourselves of its power and comfort. We can "put off" our old ways of thinking and allow that Word to tell us what is and is not true. Obviously this mindset requires not only careful study (to learn exactly what God's Word actually teaches,) but abject humility. 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. The power is God's, but he gives it to us and he expects us to use it. That's how unity is achieved – frail human beings humbling themselves to the all-powerful, inerrant Word of God.

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. Walking seven times into the Jordan River cannot cure leprosy, but it cured Naaman.

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. You and I have been made children of light, and God expects this same unity among us today. We achieve that when we allow the light of God's Word to drive every last remnant of darkness from our hearts, clinging instead to the truth as God himself has revealed it to us in his Word. 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."** God's power saved us, and that same power has freed us. Amen.

<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.

<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.



# ST PAUL LUTHERAN CHURCH

BISMARCK, NORTH DAKOTA

# ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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**The Third Sunday after Epiphany – January 22, 2023**

## The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

## The Opening Hymn – 16 (Red Hymnal)

*"Blessed Jesus at Thy Word"*

## The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

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

**The OT 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 Psalm of the Day – Psalm 8 (Page 27)

**The NT 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 – (Projected on screens)

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

*"Songs of Thankfulness and Praise"*

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

***"For Thine Is the Power"***

## The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

## The Prayers

## The Pre-Communion Hymn – 315 (Stanzas 1-2) (Red Hymnal)

*"I Come, O Savior, to Thy Table"*

## The Preparation for Holy Communion (Brown Hymnal page 17)

## The Distribution

## The Nunc Dimittis and Thanksgiving (Brown Hymnal page 20)

## The Benediction

## The Closing Hymn – 52 (Red Hymnal)

*"Almighty Father, Bless the Word"*

## 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 Holy Communion** – In obedience to God's Word, we practice "Close Communion." This practice stresses both our concern for others, not wanting anyone 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 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, not in judgment of anyone's Christian faith.

## Attendance – Sunday (42) Average (36)

### 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 Hour
	<b>-11:30 a.m.</b>	– Church Council Meeting
<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>-6:00 p.m.</b>	– Confirmation Class
	<b>-7:00 p.m.</b>	– Midweek Bible Study
<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 Hour

**CLC News** – Due to ongoing health issues, Pastor Michael Eichstadt has determined that he must resign his office as president of the CLC. The CLC Constitution dictates that the current Vice President, Pastor Michael Wilke, will serve as President until the 2024 CLC Convention. We thank the Lord for the gifts he gave us through the service of Pastor Eichstadt and pray that he would now guide and equip President Wilke. Pastor Andrew Schaller is considering the call to Luther Memorial of Fond du Lac. That congregation has also called Pastor David Ude to serve as vacancy pastor. Pastor Wayne Eichstadt is considering the call to Messiah of Eau Claire.

**Congratulations** – Aaron and Kimberly Unterseher were married at the church on Tuesday. May God bless them as they begin their lives together as husband and wife.

**Church Council Meeting** – The Church Council is scheduled to meet during the Fellowship Hour this morning. Please bring any questions or topics for discussion to the attention of a Council member.