

"Immunized or Vaccinated?"

Text: Philippians 4:4-13

*Oh let me loathe all sin forever, as death and poison to my soul
That I through willful sinning never, may see Thy judgment take its toll.
Amen. (TLH 315 Stanza 4)*

Dear Fellow Christians, you've undoubtedly noticed how the common usage of certain words can change suddenly and rather dramatically. This shift then provokes thoughts and debates where none formerly existed. "Transition," for example, now carries many in a direction they never would have imagined even two or three years ago. Same with "gender," "supremacy," "privilege," even "woman." It could be argued, however, that no word has undergone a more volatile and intense change than "vaccine." No word has experienced a more sinister transformation from something fairly bland to that which incites extraordinarily powerful and opposing opinions and emotions.

Despite the dramatic increase in its use and discussion, there is still confusion surrounding vaccines, especially as they relate to immunizations. Most seem to think the two refer to the same thing. They don't. This confusion persists despite the fact that a famous athlete identified the difference when he was asked if he had been "vaccinated against COVID." His answer was that he was fully immunized. When it was later discovered that he had not taken the COVID shot (which, of course, is not a vaccine) the media branded him a liar. He was not, of course. The question itself was fatally flawed. No one on earth has been vaccinated against COVID since no vaccine currently exists. Millions have, however, been immunized. A vaccine introduces a dead, weakened, or altered form of a virus or bacterium into the human body. "Immunized" refers to the body's ability to ward off a disease due primarily to a previous exposure. A body can be immunized by contracting the disease and recovering, or through vaccination. To put it another way, and assuming vaccines actually do what they are supposed to, every vaccinated body is immune, but not every immune body has been vaccinated. Immunity is most often achieved through contracting a disease and recovering.

So why in the world are we talking about something like this in the context of the study of God's Word? Our text for this morning is going to provide the application. Despite your views on medical or physical vaccinations and immunizations, when it comes to sin and the spiritual realm, God instructs us that vaccination is dramatically preferable to immunization.

The text that will guide and instruct us this morning is found in the Fourth Chapter of Paul's Letter to the Philippians, beginning there with the 4th Verse:

ESV Philippians 4:4-13 *Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. ⁵ Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; ⁶ do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. 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. ⁹ What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you. ¹⁰ ¶ I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. ¹¹ Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. ¹² I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. ¹³ I can do all things through him who strengthens me.*

This is God's Word, written for our instruction and growth, our redirection and comfort. That each one of us, personally, might gain such gifts – and countless others – so we pray, "**Sanctify us by Your truth, O Lord. Your Word is truth.**" Amen.

The "disease" we're talking about here is not physical but spiritual. It's sin – the one spiritual pathogen that can destroy the body of faith. Our fallen world has always been thoroughly sinful, but now we seem to be absolutely inundated in the slime – fairly awash in the stuff. Passages from God's Word sum up our current society: **God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves...And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. ²⁹ They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, ³⁰ slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, ³¹ foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. ³² Though they know God's righteous decree that those**

who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them. ^{ESV}(Romans 1:24-32) The words of the imprisoned and condemned Apostle Paul appear to be coming true before our eyes: **But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty.** ² **For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy,** ³ **heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good,** ⁴ **treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God,** ⁵ **having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people.** ^{ESV}(2 Timothy. 3:1-5)

Hopefully no one here needs anyone to tell them how wicked our society has grown. Focus instead on the last three words of the section of Scripture we just read: **Avoid such people.** This is exactly how and where God's Word introduces God's will concerning our protection against that which can destroy both soul and body in hell. God's Word always and only prescribes spiritual vaccination. There's a really good reason for that. When it comes to sin, vaccination is the only safe form of protection.

You will recall how, in the secular/biological world, immunization can be achieved either through vaccination or contraction/recovery. In the spiritual realm, when it comes to sin, God *never* advocates or promotes exposure. Can you guess the reason?

Think rabies (hydrophobia). In the unvaccinated, rabies has a mortality rate of 100%. That means that immunization is only possible through vaccination, since exposure and contraction of the disease results in death, not immunization. Yes but sin is not 100% fatal. If it were, no one would survive, for **"all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God."** Then consider the Ebola or Marburg viruses, where the mortality rate is said to be 50%. The disease is rare and there is currently no vaccine for either virus. If there was a safe and effective vaccine and the disease was as common as a cold or the flu, what would you do? Would you risk the disease for yourself or your *children* if there was a viable alternative?

That's exactly how God demonstrates his love for his children in connection with sin. We routinely fail to recognize sin for the terrible threat it represents. God never does. God also knows that exposing ourselves to sin, with the hope that we will not only survive but increase our immunity to further sin, is something akin to imagining that if we get gored by a bull or mauled by a lion we will thereby be protected against further attacks. Sin doesn't work that way. It doesn't strengthen us, it weakens us. It doesn't

protect us from further attacks, it makes us ever more susceptible. Yielding to sin just makes it easier to yield again.

Since God knows this, he never promotes exposure, with the hope of recovery. He tells us to **"avoid such people."** Over and over again he tells us to **"flee"** – from sexual immorality (1 Corinthians 6:18), from idolatry (1 Corinthians 10:14), from the love of money (1 Timothy 6:11), and from youthful passions (2 Timothy 2:22). He tells us to **"have nothing to do with"** busybody gossips, with those who are disobedient, those who stir up controversy and divisions. Through Solomon he told us to **"avoid the path of wickedness."** (Proverbs 4:15) Failure here bears terrible consequences. Despite his admonition to **"avoid irreverent babble and false knowledge,"** Hymenaeus and Philetus ignored God's warning and it cost them their faith. Exposure never strengthens. It always weakens, and eventually it destroys.

So if immunization through exposure is not the solution, what is? Vaccination, but what exactly does that mean in the context of sin and saving faith? What is a spiritual vaccination?

That's exactly why we meet here regularly, and with our God in his Word – to have God himself provide his vaccination against sin. A true vaccine, you will recall, is the introduction of a dead or altered form of the pathogen. In the Spiritual realm, God accomplishes that for us in two ways. First, he introduces sin benignly by simply identifying it. Labeling sin as sin is much different than wallowing in sin and hoping we recover.

The second part of God's vaccination program is to introduce into our hearts and lives that which provides active and effective resistance. You heard it in our text for this morning, but you might not have recognized it for what it was. Hear it again: **Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.** ⁵ **Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand;** ⁶ **do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.** ⁷ **And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.** 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.** ⁹ **What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me--practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.**

These words are intended by our loving God to be pure balm for his children's souls. They are blessings from a loving God designed to protect us from the sin that represents such peril to our souls. The basic truth here is that God's plan does not just involve ridding our hearts, minds, and lives of what is bad. The second part is just as important – filling our hearts, minds, and lives with what is good.

Aristotle is credited with first saying that “nature abhors a vacuum.” In reality, God taught that to his children long before Aristotle. Paul in our text was just another in the long line of God's messengers to remind us of this truth. Something will always fill an emptied heart. New thoughts will always occupy the emptied human mind. This is true even of actions. Remember the old song, *“Let's Do Something, Even if It's Wrong”*? Same basic principle. Young people know this to be true. Sit around bored, with nothing to do, and you and your friends will always come up with something – often not anything good. *“Let's Do Something, Even if It's Wrong.”* Nature abhors a vacuum.

That's exactly why God gave us the sort of direction he did in our text. He is telling us, in effect, *“Don't just empty yourself of bad things. We should do that, of course, but we should then replace those things – with things like prayer and thanksgiving. Focus on what is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent, or praiseworthy.”* His message could not be any more straightforward: **“Think about these things!”** Let this be that with which you replace the evil all around and within you. Drive the evil out, but don't forget to put this in.

Can that, will that, really protect us? God himself answered in our text: ***And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*** That's just an awesome promise. And again: ***Practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.*** It's all about Jesus Christ and the forgiveness that he earned for us when he offered his perfect, sinless life to pay what we owed. Forgiveness is ours through faith in him alone. There is nothing more just, nothing more pure, nothing more excellent. Nothing more worthy of thanksgiving and praise. That ***“peace of God”*** to which Paul refers is ours when we carry our burdens to him in prayer. ***“Surpasses all understanding”*** means that this peace from our God is greater than anything the mind of man could devise or provide. By God's wisdom and power we are truly protected. By Christ's death we are truly forgiven. By God's grace we are truly saved. Sin can have no power over hearts and minds filled with such amazing truths. Amen.

ESV **Isaiah 25:7-9** And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. ⁸ He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken. ⁹ ¶ It will be said on that day, "Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the LORD; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation."

ESV (**John 6:35-40**) Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. ³⁶ But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. ³⁷ All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. ³⁸ For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. ³⁹ And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. ⁴⁰ For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day."

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20th Sunday after Pentecost – October 15, 2023

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 738 (Brown Hymnal)

"Alleluia! Sing to Jesus"

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

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

The First Lesson: (Isaiah 25:7-9) Christians can often best appreciate certain Scripture readings only during difficult times. Perhaps that is part of the reason our God allows difficult times for His children. What a comfort to know that the final outcome is victory and eternal life with our God – always and alone by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ. God grant us his grace, especially during the difficult times, to remember that his love never fails.

Psalm 66 (Supplement page 37) (Brown Hymnal)

The Second Lesson: (John 6:35-40) The manna that God provided to the Children of Israel as they wandered in the wilderness was more than just the food that sustained physical life. It was a picture of Jesus and the Word of God he proclaimed. Jesus here identifies himself as the "bread of life." It is through Jesus that we are brought to spiritual life and sustained in that one true faith. What a comfort to hear our Savior promise that he will never reject sinners who come to him in faith.

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed – page 15. (Brown Hymnal)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 742 (Brown Hymnal)

"Praise, My Soul, the King of Heaven"

The Sermon – Text: Philippians 4:4-13 (Printed on the back of this bulletin)

"Immunized or Vaccinated?"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Post-Sermon Hymn – 366 (Stanzas 1-2, 5-7) (Brown Hymnal)

"One Thing's Needful; Lord, this Treasure"

The Prayers

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 51 (Red Hymnal)

"Now May He Who from the Dead"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States and around the world. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again.

Attendance – Sunday (43) Average (43)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
	-11:30 a.m.	– Meyer Baby Shower and WF meeting
Wednesday	-6:00 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
	-7:00 p.m.	– Midweek Bible Class
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/Holy Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour

CLC News – Pastor Neal Radichel has accepted the call to Messiah of Eau Claire. Pastor Terrel Kesterson is considering calls to the newly formed dual parish of Calvary of Marquette and St. Peter's of Iron River. Bernice Mueller, wife of Teacher Gerhardt Mueller, and Jan Sullivan, wife of Prof. Paul Sullivan, were both called home to their Savior's side this past week. Tina Eichstadt, wife of Pastor Wayne Eichstadt, suffered a serious heart attack this past week. Please remember her and her family in your prayers.

Baby Shower – The Hope Meyer baby shower is planned for this morning during the fellowship hour. The baby shower will be followed by a Women's Fellowship meeting. See Cindy Ollenburger with any questions.

Immanuel Lutheran College Visitors' Day – is scheduled for Friday, November 10th on the ILC campus in Eau Claire. Speak with your pastor if you're interested in attending. For questions, contact Academic Dean Paul Naumann. Office: 715-836-6636, cell: 253-228-8736, e-mail: paul.naumann@ilc.edu

Christmas Flowers – See the sign-up sheet on the mailbox table, or address any questions to Sandy Roehl.