

"The Active and Passive of True Christianity"

Text: 2 Thessalonians 3:1-6, 10-16

May each one of you live ready at all times to leave this rotting world behind and to welcome your Savior Jesus when he returns to judge the living and the dead. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians:

For any nation to remain strong, it needs the vast majority of its population to be good citizens. To be a good citizen requires passive as well as active compliance. Passive compliance means that citizens have to allow themselves to *be* governed, *avoid* breaking laws, *refrain from* taking the law into their own hands, and so on. Citizens also have to excise active compliance, which means they have to work, pay taxes, fight to defend against outside aggression, protect the weak, and carry out all of the other functions of a good citizen.

The death of any nation or society comes when the active and passive are transposed. Those who refuse to fight to defend their country will obviously be overrun, but it runs deeper than that. As brought to light during the recent government shutdown, in America today nearly 42 million citizens (roughly 12.5% or 1 in 8) rely on their neighbors to feed them in the form of food stamps (currently disguised as "SNAP *benefits*." And it's not just the poor. Many wealthy citizens spend substantial amounts of money on lawyers and accountants in an effort to avoid paying taxes. While some today are unemployed and would like to work, a substantial number prefer to live off the work of others, and they feel entitled and justified in so doing. This represents a death-sentence for any society so afflicted.

Our text for this morning speaks to these things, and much more. While mixing the active and passive requirements of good citizenship spells doom for any society, that is as nothing compared to the transposition of the active and the passive in connection with the Christian faith. There we are clearly taught the paradoxical truth that no one can be active unless he is passive. The text that will guide and instruct us in the understanding of this apparent absurdity is found in Paul's Second Letter to the Thessalonians, the Third Chapter:

ESV 2 Thessalonians 3:1-6, 10-16 Finally, brothers, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored, as happened

among you, ² and that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men. For not all have faith. ³ But the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one. ⁴ And we have confidence in the Lord about you, that you are doing and will do the things that we command. ⁵ May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ. ⁶ ¶ Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us. ¹⁰ For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. ¹¹ For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies. ¹² Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living. ¹³ As for you, brothers, do not grow weary in doing good. ¹⁴ ¶ If anyone does not obey what we say in this letter, take note of that person, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed. ¹⁵ Do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother. ¹⁶ ¶ Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in every way. The Lord be with you all.

This is the Word of God. Desiring at all times to be comforted and instructed by our God through the study of his Word, so also now we pray: ***"Sanctify us in the truth, O Lord. Your Word is truth. Amen."***

An obvious and disturbing shift has occurred in our society. Not that long ago, even those at the point of starvation refused to accept charity. Today there is an entitlement mentality that is clearly in conflict not just with the principles of good government but with the clear word and will of our God – as revealed in our text for this morning. There we are told: ***"If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies. Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living."*** Pretty straight-forward. Work if you can and live off what you earn. Some will inevitably ask, *"What about the poor?"* I'm not sure we even know what "poor" means in our country today. A study by the Heritage Foundation found that the majority of those labeled as "poor" live in their own home (with air conditioning), own at least one car, a refrigerator, washer, dryer, microwave, two color televisions, cable or satellite reception, a music system, access to medical care, enough money to cover their basic necessities, and have never gone hungry. Most of the rest of the world would love to be that kind of poor.

While all of this is a national shame that will inevitably destroy our republic without some sort of intervention (human or divine), it pales in comparison to the problems man creates when he mixes active and passive in the spiritual realm. In fact it could be argued that the confusion of active and passive is the number one *spiritual* killer on our planet, and it represents the root cause of the rejection of true Christianity. It is therefore critically important that we identify and understand the problem before you and I are drawn in as well – and destroyed.

When it comes to how mankind is saved, from man's perspective it's always passive. We don't save or rescue ourselves; we *are* rescued, *are* saved. The jailer asked Paul: ***"What must I do...?"*** Paul's answer: ***"Believe on the Lord Jesus and..."*** Not, *"You will save yourself."* ***"You will BE saved."*** So also we *are* justified, *are* sanctified, *are* redeemed, washed, forgiven, preserved, strengthened, comforted, protected, nourished, loved. Note – all passive all the time. God is the one who does this for and to us. We are and remain the impoverished recipients of God's incredible gifts and sacrifice. We are the battered, bloodied, destitute travelers that need to be rescued by the Good Samaritan Jesus.

Consider again this morning what an easy, mankind-friendly salvation plan God formulated. Man had no way to actively provide for his own spiritual needs, so God actively provided them for us. We could not keep the law perfectly, so Jesus kept it perfectly for us. We could not bring ourselves to believe that Jesus has done this for us, so God the Holy Spirit worked saving faith in our hearts. We cannot now preserve ourselves in this faith, so God the Holy Spirit does that for us as well. From first to last we are beneficiaries, recipients, debtors. God did it all.

Think now of all the different ways that mankind perverts God's plan simply by changing the passive into an active. Instead of God declaring us righteous because of what Jesus did for us on the cross, man is told to make himself righteous by his actions. Instead of being forgiven, man is told he must forgive himself – chiefly by denying his sin. Instead of being redeemed, we are told to redeem ourselves – again by our actions. In general, all non-Christian religions teach that we must do what needs to be done to save ourselves.

As if that's not bad enough, society then takes the very things we are supposed to actively pursue and turns *those* into negatives. Where Scripture says repent and confess, man advocates denial and stubborn inaction – since sin isn't really sin if you can just convince yourself it isn't.

We return to the startling paradox mentioned earlier: *No one can be active unless he is passive.* That is, a Christian becomes a Christian only when he is lead to recognize that he has nothing whatsoever to give to a holy God and is instead the beggar who must rely 100% on the spiritual largess of another – Jesus Christ. Only then (only when the sinner is brought to faith) can he do anything at all that is active or positive, since ***"without faith it is impossible to please God."*** (Hebrews 11:6) Yet even then the active things that the Christian can do never secure his place in heaven or pay in any way for his sin. They are acts of gratitude for what God actively accomplished for us. And God did *actively* accomplish our salvation. Even here man mixes things up by promoting the idea that God will just passively accept sin (and therefore also sinners) on Judgment Day. Nothing could be further from the truth. God will without question punish sin and unbelief on Judgment Day. Had Jesus not actively paid our sin-debt for us, no one could be saved.

Once we get this straight, every single bit of Scripture becomes that much more clear and that much more meaningful. Our text for this morning is no exception. Break this text down into its various components and you will find this to be true.

So it is that Paul begins our text with an active: ***"Finally, brothers, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored, as happened among you, and that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men."*** This is an active that the members in and around Thessalonica could do, they could pray. Yet note that those prayers could only be effective (would only be heard by God) because they flowed from the hearts of Christians – from ***"brothers."*** To this end Paul did not (and would not ever) encourage *unbelievers* to pray – an exercise in futility.

Did you catch the passive in that section? The brothers in Thessalonica could actively pray, but their prayer was that Paul and his companions might ***"be delivered from wicked and evil men."*** Paul didn't believe that they could deliver themselves; they had to be delivered. So also Paul continues in verse 3: ***"But the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one."*** As always, God does. God provides. Man is the recipient.

In verses 4 & 5 Paul continues: ***"And we have confidence in the Lord about you, that you are doing and will do the things that we command."*** There is the active part – the fruits of faith that man can actively produce, but only because of what Paul adds next: ***May the***

Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ."

Our text continues with an enumeration of more active fruits of faith: 1. Keep away from idle gossips, 2. work hard and eat the labors of your own hands, 3. don't grow weary in doing good, and 4. avoid all those who disobey what God through the pen of Paul is here teaching. Even if the Thessalonians were to carry out these exhortations of Paul flawlessly and with perfect consistency, what would it earn them? Nothing, of course – just as saying thank you for a gift does not earn that gift. God's Word describes such perfect obedience as ***"reasonable service."*** Again, God did all the earning. Good works are just a thank you, never a payment on a debt. So also our text ends: ***"Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in every way."*** Here again, God gives, man receives, as also James reminds us: ***"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. ¹⁸ Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures."*** (James 1:17-18)

Yet all of this can and will remain somewhat detached and abstract unless and until we plug these truths into our own personal lives. You have to do that for yourself; no one can do that for you. This is part of the *active* effort that God wants to see in his children – the personal effort and application of his words to our own individual lives. Again, no one can do that for you, but we often share common failings. Are you, like me, far too active in the pursuit of your own wealth and comfort and far too passive when it comes to the needs of God's Church? Are you overly active in the pursuit of worldly pleasure and entertainment and passive in the study of God's Word? Are you active in the love of self and passive in the love of your neighbor? With these faults we continue to struggle, taking comfort in the forgiveness *that Jesus provided*.

Eternal thanks and praise be to God for his plan of salvation – that plan where he supplies all that is needed, since you and I would certainly fail under any other plan. Rejoice then again this morning in the comfort and assurance that God himself has completed all that needed to be done to secure your forgiveness and cleansing, and let your faithful obedience serve as the thanks you return for the gift of eternal life you have received. Amen.

ESV **Malachi 4:1-6** "For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the LORD of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. ² But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall. ³ And you shall tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet, on the day when I act, says the LORD of hosts. ⁴ ¶ "Remember the law of my servant Moses, the statutes and rules that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel. ⁵ ¶ "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. ⁶ And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction."

ESV **Luke 21:5-18** And while some were speaking of the temple, how it was adorned with noble stones and offerings, he said, ⁶ "As for these things that you see, the days will come when there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down." ⁷ And they asked him, "Teacher, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when these things are about to take place?" ⁸ And he said, "See that you are not led astray. For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am he!' and, 'The time is at hand!' Do not go after them. ⁹ And when you hear of wars and tumults, do not be terrified, for these things must first take place, but the end will not be at once." ¹⁰ ¶ Then he said to them, "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. ¹¹ There will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and pestilences. And there will be terrors and great signs from heaven. ¹² But before all this they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name's sake. ¹³ This will be your opportunity to bear witness. ¹⁴ Settle it therefore in your minds not to meditate beforehand how to answer, ¹⁵ for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict. ¹⁶ You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and some of you they will put to death. ¹⁷ You will be hated by all for my name's sake. ¹⁸ But not a hair of your head will perish."

ESV **2 Thessalonians 3:1-6, 10-16** Finally, brothers, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored, as happened among you, ² and that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men. For not all have faith. ³ But the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one. ⁴ And we have confidence in the Lord about you, that you are doing and will do the things that we command. ⁵ May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ. ⁶ ¶ Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us. ¹⁰ For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. ¹¹ For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies. ¹² Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living. ¹³ As for you, brothers, do not grow weary in doing good. ¹⁴ ¶ If anyone does not obey what we say in this letter, take note of that person, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed. ¹⁵ Do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother. ¹⁶ ¶ Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in every way. The Lord be with you all.



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The 23rd Sunday after Pentecost – November 16, 2025

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 137

"Come Away from Rush and Hurry"

The Order of Service – Hymnal page 31ff. (Blue Hymnal)

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

The First Lesson: (Malachi 4:1-6) As is our custom, as we near the end of the Church Year our Scripture readings focus our attention on both the Second Coming of Christ and on the end of this world as we know it. As we look forward to that day, Scripture reminds us that the peace and joy that is now ours in the certain knowledge of forgiveness in Jesus Christ is but a small foretaste of the heaven that God has created for those who believe in Jesus Christ.

The Psalm of the Day – Psalm 66 (Page 77)

The Gospel Lesson: (Luke 21:5-18) As our attention is directed in this lesson to Christ's Second Coming, we are also reminded that although that Day holds no terror for us, the same is not true for unbelievers. Be wise. Read the signs of the times and be reminded to work and witness now, so that as many as possible might be spared the terrible wrath that on Judgment Day will crush all who deny Jesus Christ.

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed *(Blue Hymnal page 34)*

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 207

"Speak, O Lord"

The Sermon – Text: 2 Thessalonians 3:1-6, 10-16 (See back page)

"The Active and Passive of True Christianity"

The Offertory – (Projected on Screens)

The Post-Sermon Hymn – 403

"This Is He"

The Prayers of the Day, Followed by the Lord's Prayer

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 200 (Alternate Melody)

"God Has Spoken by His Prophets"

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 (41) Average (38)

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
Wednesday	-6:00 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
	-7:00 p.m.	– Midweek Bible Study
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
	-11:30 a.m.	– Church Council Meeting

CLC News – Pastor Matthew Ude has returned the call to Messiah of Eau Claire. Pastor Tom Schuetze is considering the call to Trinity of Spokane. Pastor Jonathan Schnose is considering the call to Living Hope of Appleton, WI. Pastor Michael Gurath has accepted the call to Peace Thru Christ of Middleton, WI. Pastor Aaron Ude has returned the call to Trinity of Spokane, WA.

A Note on This Morning's Hymns – In our ongoing effort to "sing to the Lord a new song," several of our hymns this morning will likely be new to many. Though often a bit difficult at first, that's how we learn. Feel free to provide feedback to Pastor Roehl or to a member of the Church Council.

Church Council Meeting – The Church Council is scheduled to meet next Sunday, November 23rd, during the fellowship hour.

Usher/Cleaner/Server List – As is the case every year at this time, the Usher/Cleaner/Server list is being edited for next year. Please let Phil Pfennig know if you would like to be added or taken off the list. Those who agree to serve, please also let Phil know of any times when you would not be able to serve so that we can minimize the horse swapping.

Christmas Party – This year's Christmas party is scheduled for December 6th. See the sign-up sheet on the mailbox table for additional information.

Thanksgiving Baskets – Thanksgiving baskets will be assembled next Sunday. See Allison or Cindy for more information.