

Dear heirs of the Reformation, grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

In Saint John's revelation, an angel — a holy messenger of God — flies overhead with an eternal Gospel to proclaim, to every nation and people on earth. He also calls the world to repentance. “Fear God, give Him glory...”

There is an eternal, unchanging, wonderful Gospel. Endure in it, saints. It is your life and your sole source of salvation. “If you stay in my Word, truly you are disciples of mine.” (John 8:31). Stay in the Word of Christ alone. Stay in His body. Live in your baptismal grace. “Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus,” says Saint John (Revelation 14:12).

Another angel flies over John and the world saying that we should not, on the other hand, worship Satan. Do not reject your baptism. Do not reject the Lamb and His Name that has been give to every believer. Do not listen to another voice. Do not reject the living Word of God. (Revelation 14:9–11).

Dear Christians, many do reject His Word, listening to everything but God's Word. There are those who outright reject God's Word and refuse to listen at all. There are those who are more nuanced and subtle, who make it appear they are following and listening to God's Word, yet pick and choose what they like and do not like from Scripture.

Listen carefully, even amongst ourselves and we speak and hear talk and claims of faith in Christ alone. However, then the talks proceed to deconstruct portions of Holy Scriptures that we do not quite like. Sly talks of stating that portions of God's Word does not pertain to our modern culture - analysis of problematic texts that disagree with our not-so-humble opinions, and objections to those that are unwilling to compromise on those texts which very well may offend those who reject God's Word. It can be on very public topics that everyone can see, or even those little points which we don't publicly speak much upon.

Some will even go as far as to say, “The reason why I am not a Lutheran is because I do not follow man but Jesus.... Some of the practices of the Lutheran church are not biblical, and therefore, I will not exercise them.... Nowhere in the Bible does it say anything about being saved through baptism or communion.” This person rejected outright the efficacy of the Sacraments. The person believes that the Sacraments are basically meaningless and are the creation of men — accusing theologians like Luther of conjuring them up as rules to follow. There is this thought that I only need to believe in or follow Jesus. I can pick and choose what I like and reject what I do not like out of Holy Scriptures.

Though devils all the world should fill,  
All eager to devour us...  
The Word they [the devils, and those they tempt] still shall let remain,  
nor any thanks have for it...  
(A Mighty Fortress Is Our God, vs. 3–4)

They are there — the devil and his legions. They entangle so many with subtle yet evil craft. They prowl around like a roaring lion, seeking to devour you and me, tempting us to sin, to be slaves to sin, to forget about and reject the eternal, unchanging, truth of the Gospel. They attack and tempt the Christian to doubt the clear Word

of God, to trust our own sinful hearts and minds instead, to place our own reasoning and our own preconceived notions born out of our sin above trusting Christ and His Word. And here we mean not just trusting the parts of God's Word that we choose to like, that we are comfortable with, that we think make sense, that seem relevant to us. No, trusting Christ and His Word means trusting all of that Word, even if it makes the sinful flesh in you and me and our so called "modern sensibilities" squirm in discomfort.

This is nothing new under the sun for people to reject and chip away at the Gospel. In her first four hundred years, the Church endured heresy and schism often. Jewish Christians at the time of Paul tried to insist that Gentiles could not be Christians unless they were circumcised and observed Old Testament customs. Some would deny the full Divine Nature of Christ, leading to the Nicene council and creed. Today, on the Festival of the Reformation, we think of the centuries of accumulated errors that crept into the Church catholic where, gradually, men wanted to replace the Gospel, the salvation Christ had earned for them, with the Law of their own good works, with performing traditions and rituals. This led to a church which denied the central article of the faith — that we are justified before our Heavenly Father and reconciled to Him freely, by grace alone, through faith, given in Christ alone, his perfect life, suffering, death, and resurrection for you.

God does not forsake His faithful flock. God's Law can terrify us all in our darkest hours. *"Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin."*

Fast bound in Satan's chains I lay;  
Death brooded darkly o'er me.  
Sin was my torment night and day;  
In sin my mother bore me.  
(Dear Christians, One and All Rejoice, LSB 556, st. 2)

A slave to sin. Chained by the sin that brews in our hearts, without partial credit for our own attempts to free ourselves. No matter how free-thinking or free-feeling we imagine ourselves to be, we are by nature enslaved, bound to death and the grave, so firmly sin possesses me.

Dear Christians, one and all, rejoice! "The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. If the Son has set you free, truly free men you will be" (John 8:35-36). "[All] are justified by His grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation [a sacrifice in substitute] by His blood, to be received by faith.... For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the Law" (Romans 3:24, 28). There, in little words, the eternal Gospel once proclaimed in its truth, purity, and wholeness.

You see, the superstitions and rituals that plagued the church nearly 500 years ago are not the same as that which plagues us today. The sin is the same, the manifestations are always reshaped by Satan, and always taking away from God has given us in his Word. I don't imagine that any one of you spent the week doubting their standing before God while fasting and praying for hours and hours each day and doing endless acts of prescribed penance. Nor was John Tetzels hawking indulgences to your children in the town square. But make no mistake, you and I are mightily tempted to doubt the magnitude of our sin and the measureless grace of God by the "bad historical science" and the "idolization of human potential" that infects our age. There are new John Tetzels at work to abuse our children with indulgences of humanism and naturalism that are just as imaginary as purgatory.

Jesus came not to abolish the law but to fulfill it! Covenants were sealed with blood and He came to make a new covenant sealed with the blood of His cross! God put Him forth as a propitiation (a sacrificial payment) by His blood. To you he said:

Your ransom I Myself will;  
For you I strive and wrestle....  
Life will from death the vict'ry win;  
My innocence will bear your sin.  
(Dear Christians, st. 7-8)

What a blessed release! Your sins are forgiven by Yahweh! You are justified by God's grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. His forgiveness is so thorough, so completely cleansing. He buries you with him in the waters of Holy Baptism and says, "Baptism now saves you." (1 Peter 3:21)

Beloved, dwell on this truth! *If the Son sets you free...* – not nature – not some higher power – not some inner spark – *If the Son sets you free* (the bloodied, beaten, dead and buried Son of God) – *If the Son sets you free* (the risen, absolving Son of God) – (the one who says to you, "take eat, this is my body... take drink, this is my blood shed for you for the forgiveness of sins); *If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.* You are no longer a slave, but a son who will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Endure in the eternal Gospel, O Saints. All things are yours in Christ Jesus. This is most certainly true. In the name of Jesus. Amen.