

ILLINOIS LUTHERAN CONFERENCE

Topical Bulletin, July 2021

It's a fact that we Christians are declared righteous in God's sight by His grace through faith in Jesus, for Holy Writ declares: "now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God." (Romans 3:21-26; 5:1-2) However, we Christians still dwell in sinful flesh, for Ecclesiastes 7:20 relates, "there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not." Yes, we sin daily in thoughts, words, and deeds. Accordingly, we need to sincerely repent of our sins each and every day, turning to Jesus anew in faith, striving to amend our lives, and thereby showing, "We love him, because he first loved us." (1 John 4:19)

Fellow Christians, we are in danger every day as we are tempted to sin by the devil, the wicked world, and our own corrupt flesh. Make no mistake about it, for 1 Peter 5:8-9 urges, "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world." And, Galatians 5:16-17 advises, "This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would."

My friends in Christ, one of the devil's and the wicked world's biggest temptations is to use various attractive means to attempt to draw us away from keeping the Lord Jesus and His Holy Word first and foremost in our life. Therefore, the important and timely subject for this month's Topical Bulletin is: **Have God-pleasing proper priorities!**

Let us consider what the Holy Word of God says on the subject.

"No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon." (Luke 16:13)

"No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not

arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." (Matthew 6:24-34)

Comment: Observe that God's Word in both Luke's Gospel and Matthew's Gospel puts forth the same basic truths. Think about it. Mammon is earthly riches and wealth. Note that one cannot serve BOTH God and mammon; rather, it's an either/or situation. Jesus makes it quite clear that we are to SERVE GOD ONLY! We are not to take thought – we are not to obsessively worry – about our life in this world with its food, drink, and clothing, since our loving Lord God knows exactly what we need for this body and life. We are to always SEEK FIRST THE KINGDOM OF GOD and HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS, knowing He always does what is right and He desires that we always do what is right in full accord with His Word as we cling to Christ Jesus in heart-deep faith, since Jesus provides us with the perfect righteousness we need to enter heaven when we depart this life. We are to take one day at a time, not laying-up massive worldly wealth and possessions, but rather trusting in the good Lord God to take care of us and supply us with what we actually need each day.

"And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God. And he said unto his disciples, Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat; neither for the body, what ye shall put on. The life is more than meat, and the body is more than raiment. Consider the ravens: for they neither sow nor reap; which neither have storehouse nor barn; and God feedeth them: how much more are ye better than the fowls? And which of you with taking thought can add to his stature one cubit? If ye then be not able to do that thing which is least, why take ye thought for the rest? Consider the lilies how they grow: they toil not, they spin not; and yet I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. If then God so clothe the grass, which is to day in the field, and to morrow is cast into the oven; how much more will he clothe you, O ye of little faith? And seek not ye what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful mind. For all these things do the nations of the world seek after: and your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things. But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you."
(Luke 12:16-31)

Comment: Note the contrast between how the "nations of the world" – the unbelievers – conduct themselves and how the believers are to conduct themselves, for Jesus by way of a parable teaches us how foolish it is for one to set one's heart on worldly wealth and earthly good times instead of having one's heart focused in rich faith toward God. Let us never forget, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither

shadow of turning. Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures." (James 1:17-18) *Oh, God does NOT desire that we be lazy-bones who will not work, "For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread." (2 Thessalonians 3:10-12) However, WE ARE TO ALWAYS BE FOUND SEEKING THE KINGDOM OF GOD FIRST! The LORD GOD and HIS HOLY WORD are to be first and foremost in our life, NOT our jobs and other money-making ventures, NOT partying and other earthly good-times.*

"Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed." (John 6:27)

Comment: Observe that we are to work MORE for the spiritual food which Jesus supplies, rather than earthly food and the like. Fellow Christians, Holy Scripture plainly instructs: "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth." (Colossians 3:1-2) "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever." (1 John 2:15-17) God's Word is quite clear!!!

"Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven. Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it." (Matthew 10:32-39)

Comment: Note the importance of confessing Christ before other folks, lest He deny us before God the Father in heaven. We are to be positive witnesses for Jesus in word and deed, even at the expense of family relationships. Yes, we are to bear our own cross of suffering which will come upon us when we confess Jesus both by word and by our actions. For example, when given the choice between attending worship services or entertaining family and friends, or attending sports activities and events with those close to us, OUR WORSHIP OF THE LORD IS TO COME FIRST! We are to make the right God-pleasing choice!

"Now it came to pass, as they went, that he entered into a certain village: and a certain woman named Martha received him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus' feet, and heard his word. But Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to him, and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me. And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about

many things: But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.” (Luke 10:38-42)

Comment: Observe that Jesus commended Mary for making the right choice because Mary put the Lord and His Word first. Oh, both Mary and Martha loved the Lord Jesus, but Martha’s priorities were wrong and she was therefore rebuked by Jesus.

The LORD God says: “Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.” (Exodus 20:3-6)

“Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.” (Matthew 4:10)

Comment: Note well that the Lord God is to be first – number one – for each of us! We are to serve ONLY the Lord God, NOT self or anything else.

“And there went great multitudes with him: and he turned, and said unto them, If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish. Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage, and desireth conditions of peace. So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple. Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be seasoned? It is neither fit for the land, nor yet for the dunghill; but men cast it out. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.” (Luke 14:25-35)

“Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” (Matthew 5:13-16)

Comment: Being a follower of Christ comes with a cost on our part— JESUS MUST BE FIRST AND FOREMOST in our life, even over spouse and other family members. Being “salty” Christians means that we will sting some folks like salt in an open wound, for we will keep the Lord and His Word first in our life in this world, even if it somewhat hurts other folks feelings. For example, if we have the option of going

on a vacation or attending a church convention we will go to the church function since we value the things of God more than earthly pleasures. Making such a decision may sting our own sinful flesh and the folks we would have vacationed with, but God MUST BE FIRST in our life, and our right action will serve as a positive witness to others. We Christians are to be lights in a dark world in our manner of living by reflecting Jesus Christ the Light of the world in our words and deeds, thereby being positive witnesses for our Lord and Savior.

“Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.” (Psalm 73:25-26)

Comment: May the foregoing verses from Psalm 73 be the heartfelt confession of each and every one of us as we go forward valuing the Lord above all others, even self.

If we truly ponder all the aforementioned Bible passages found in this topical bulletin, we will have to admit that we have sinned against God at times. Let us therefore sincerely repent of our sins and amend our ways, for, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.” (1 John 1:9-10) “My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.” (1 John 3:18) **Let us have God-pleasing proper priorities!**

m.e.l.