

# **ILLINOIS LUTHERAN CONFERENCE**

## **Topical Bulletin, March 2020**

A question that has been heard a number of times by members of our ILC churches when involved in a doctrinal discussion with professed Christians of other church bodies is: **Do you think that only people who are part of the ILC are saved?** The question is invariably asked by people who are attempting to defend their own association with an erring church body, for they usually add the statement: "I believe in Jesus as my Savior and that's all that matters." I urge such people to honestly and carefully think about what matters to Jesus whom they profess as their Savior, for Jesus says to all Christians, as He once said to the Jews of old who believed on Him, "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." (John 8:31-32)

*Note well that the Lord Jesus would have His followers continue in His Holy Word, learning from it and not discarding any of its doctrines, for He says, "If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me." (John 14:23-24) "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." (Matthew 7:21) "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen." (Matthew 28:19-20) Realize that ALL SCRIPTURE DOCTRINE IS IMPORTANT or Jesus would not have commanded such to be taught. Additionally, Holy Baptism is quite important or Jesus would not have commanded His disciples to baptize all nations into the Triune God— Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.*

**Concerning the question: Do you think that only people who are part of the ILC are saved? The answer is: we of the Illinois Lutheran Conference (ILC) do NOT teach that only people who are part of the ILC are saved. Rather, we teach exactly what Holy Scripture teaches, which is: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house." (Acts 16:31) "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." (Romans 6:23) Now stop and seriously think about what it really means to believe on Jesus as one's Savior, for note well that faith must be in the "Lord Jesus Christ" if one would be saved— that is, faith must be in the Jesus of the Holy Bible who is both true God and true man but one Christ, the Christ who was "born... in the city of David" and is the "Saviour, which is Christ the Lord." (Luke 2:11) "For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." (Colossians 2:9) Indeed, Jesus plainly declares, as He did to the Jews during His visible sojourn on earth, "if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins." (John 8:24) Yes, the real Jesus Christ is the LORD, the great I AM, for Jesus who cannot lie says, "Before Abraham was, I am." (John 8:58) Jesus Christ definitely IS TRUE GOD AND TRUE MAN, for "without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory." (1 Timothy 3:16) "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham." (Hebrews 2:14-16)**

*Bearing the aforementioned Biblical facts in mind regarding the true Jesus Christ and the importance He stresses concerning His Word and all its doctrines, let everyone who says – "I believe in Jesus as my Savior*

*and that's all that matters" – pause and seriously consider whether or not they wholeheartedly believe in the real Jesus Christ of the Holy Bible as their personal Savior and Lord, because God's Word commands: "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?" (2 Corinthians 13:5)*

*All sincere Christians should humbly hold and acknowledge that faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as one's personal Savior is itself a gracious gift of God wrought by Him in people's hearts through His Word when preached or attached to the waters of Holy Baptism, for it is written: "Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison; Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ: Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him." (1 Peter 3:18-22) "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith." (Romans 1:16-17) "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." (Romans 10:17)*

*Comment: note well that God's Word and Sacrament as instituted and commanded by Christ are the means of grace by which God normally gifts sinners with faith in the Lord Jesus Christ because God has chosen to graciously work in the hearts of human beings in such a manner. Sinful human beings are NOT to question why God has chosen to work through means but are rather to simply obey God's Word, for God says to us in His Word: "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." (Isaiah 55:7-11)*

*Indeed, genuine faith in Jesus Christ is a gracious gift of God wrought by God the Holy Ghost who works in the hearts of human beings by means of His Holy Word when preached and when attached to the waters of Holy Baptism, as the following Bible passages make crystal-clear: "Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed: and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost." (1 Corinthians 12:3) "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." (Ephesians 2:8-10) "Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish." (Ephesians 5:25-27)*

*Comment: God does the sanctifying; God does the saving, all of it, and He does so by working through the means of grace He has chosen— His WORD and SACRAMENT. A person's own good works are fruits of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ but do not and cannot precede faith, for "without faith it is impossible to please*

him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.” (Hebrews 11:6)

**Let’s consider a few more Bible passages regarding the real Lord Jesus Christ who must be believed in if one would be saved.** “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.” (John 3:16-18) *Comment: the Lord Jesus Christ is not merely “a son of God”; the real Lord Jesus Christ is “the only begotten Son of God” since the real Jesus Christ is God the Father’s natural Son while all believers are adopted sons of God, for “when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.” (Galatians 4:4-7) “No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.” (John 1:18) Thus, to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ is to believe in the real Jesus of the Holy Bible, the Jesus who is true God and true man but one Christ— the Jesus who is very God begotten of the Father from eternity, and is also sinless man conceived by the Holy Ghost and born in time of the Virgin Mary.*

*To actually believe in Jesus Christ as one’s personal Savior and Lord also includes believing that His redemptive work – the shedding of His holy blood while nailed to the cross of Calvary – is the price that has been paid for ALL of one’s sins in full, and that one’s own works contribute absolutely nothing toward one’s salvation since Holy Writ relates: “Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But 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. Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith.” (Romans 3:19-27) *Comment: observe that to have faith in Jesus Christ includes having “faith in his blood” since, “God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:5-9) Note that repentance, confessing one’s sins and turning from them, is necessary if one truly believes in the real Lord Jesus Christ who has paid for all sin with His holy and precious shed blood.**

**Accordingly, it behooves all professed Christians to pause and seriously think about whether they truly believe in the REAL Jesus Christ— the JESUS CHRIST OF THE HOLY BIBLE.** *We must always go to the Holy Bible for the full truth because, “...the holy scriptures ...are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for*

reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works." (2 Timothy 3:15-17)

*What is the first doctrine we need to know from the Holy Bible? The Holy Bible itself answers: "Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."*

*(2 Peter 1:20-21) Comment: Note well that the Holy Bible IS GOD'S WORD even though it was penned by men. Furthermore, Scripture must be used to interpret Scripture; no private interpretation. One dishonors Jesus Christ when one fails to compare Scripture with Scripture and instead puts one's own spin on Bible passages without considering the context involved and the available parallel passages concerning the same subject matter. One dishonors Jesus Christ and shows lack of faith in Him when one fails to hold that the entire Holy Bible is God's Word and absolute truth, for during Jesus' visible sojourn on earth He prayed to His heavenly Father on behalf of His followers, saying, "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth." (John 17:17) Additionally, one dishonors Jesus Christ and shows lack of faith in Him when one denies that ALL of Holy Scripture has been preserved in its full truth and purity to this very day, for Jesus Christ our Lord promises: "verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled." (Matthew 5:18) "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away." (Matthew 24:35) "Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away." (Mark 13:31) "Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away." (Luke 21:33)*

*Therefore, let everyone who confesses faith in Jesus Christ truly trust and confide in Him as their personal Savior and Lord— THE JESUS CHRIST WHO SAYS: "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." (John 10:27-28) Let us never forget that Jesus' sheep – Jesus' true followers – hear His voice (they listen to His Holy Word) while those who do not hear His voice (those who deliberately reject His Holy Word or any portion of it) are not truly His sheep, for Jesus once said to the unbelieving Jews who claimed to believe in God, "He that is of God heareth God's words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God." (John 8:47)*

*We of the ILC pray that all who profess they believe in Jesus as their Savior truly trust and confide in the real Lord Jesus Christ of the Holy Bible, and that they therefore desire to follow Him more closely by searching the genuine Holy Scriptures and highly valuing all its doctrines, and that they consequently demand the same in the congregation and church body in which they hold membership or attend. Think about what Jesus said to His disciples concerning the Pharisees who denied the Lord Jesus Christ and taught many false doctrines; Jesus said, "Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch." (Matthew 15:14) Let us therefore in heart-deep God-given faith cling to the Jesus Christ of the Holy Bible as our personal Savior and Lord, and let us strive to continue in His pure preserved Holy Word and all of its doctrines, "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables." (2 Timothy 4:3-4)*

m.e.l.