

Dear members and friends of St. John Lutheran,

Lutherans for the past 500 years or so, have been accused of 'cheap grace.' What's that? Well, it's the notion that what's **solely important** is the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ, because good works can never and will never earn us a place in heaven. So, people live in the state of grace like it's a license to do whatever they please. Help a neighbor in need? If you feel like it, but it doesn't matter for salvation whether you lift a finger to help or not. Grow in the wisdom and knowledge of God by reading the Bible, going to Bible study, and daily devotions? It doesn't matter, since we are baptized and know about Jesus' death and resurrection. Come to church on Saturday night or Sunday morning? It's not going to matter one way or another, so do what feels good. That's 'cheap grace.' Are we guilty as charged?

Maybe we need to step back and read what the first president of the Missouri Synod had to say on this subject, Rev. Dr. C. F. W. Walther:

*"Finally, then, brothers, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God, just as you are doing, that **you do so more and more.**"<sup>2</sup> For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus" (1 Thess. 4:1-2, ESV).*

It's a heavy task the apostle Paul places before all Christians in this passage. **A Christian should never think that since he has faith and stands by God in grace that there is no danger for him and he can look forward peacefully and without care to a blessed eternity.** No, the apostle says, a Christian should never think he is finished. Indeed, he should never be satisfied with himself, but rather should say with Paul, *"Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me His own"* (Philippians 3:12). **The Christian should be a person of progress.** He should never stand still, but always seek to go forward. He should always be found actively doing the will of God, always in battle for the treasure, always in the race for the crown of glory. With each day, he should come closer to the goal, that is, seeking to become holier and more like Christ. In the narrow sense, sanctification is nothing but the restoration of the image in which God created us, that is, in His image. There are **three parts to sanctification: (1) an always greater illumination of the mind, (2) an always greater purification and renewing of the heart, and (3) an always greater zeal for a life of good works.**

Therefore, **a Christian should not think it is enough if he knows only as much of the right doctrine as is necessary for salvation.** No, Paul says, a Christian must always seek to become more complete in his knowledge. He must desire the Law of the Lord and meditate on it day and night. Without ceasing, he must seek, investigate and study God's Word to become better able to distinguish pure doctrine from false and to discern how the revealed doctrine fits together. He will then be able to answer more completely the question, "What do you believe?" He will cite Scripture more clearly and refute more powerfully those who contradict it. Christians should earnestly seek to *"attain ... the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and*

*carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes”* (Ephesians 4:13-14).

In addition, **a Christian should not think his goal is merely to remain in the good state in which he is now placed by God’s grace**, being careful not to fall into gross sin. No, says the apostle, a Christian should always become more perfect in purifying and renewing his heart. Where impurity, malice, corruption, or something else ungodly still shows itself in his heart, he should, with all earnestness, seek to sweep it out of every corner of his heart. He should also seek to become stronger in faith, more devoted to God’s will, more heavenly minded, more humble before God and man, more burning and unselfish in love, more pure in his desires, and more watchful over his thoughts.

Finally, **a Christian should not think that his goal in life is merely to give no one offense**. No, Paul says, if he wants to be a Christian, he must always become more perfect in his zeal for a life of good works, for the service of God, for prayer, and for the hearing and reading of God's Word. He must always be more frank in the confession of his faith, more faithful in his office and calling, more friendly and zealous and peaceful toward everyone, more forgiving toward his enemies, more consoling toward his friends, more conscientious in his trade, more generous and charitable toward his poorer brothers, and more willing to devote himself to the things of the Church and the kingdom of God. In short, he must become an example for all and let his *"light shine before others, so that they may see [his] good works and give glory to [his] Father who is in heaven"* (Matthew 5:16). [Reprinted from "God Grant It – Daily Devotions from C. F. W. Walther," St. Louis: CPH, c. 2006, pp. 270-272].

Based on what Dr. Walther has said, **all of us**, from time to time, **have fallen into the trap of ‘cheap grace’**. But know this: We have a loving God that forgives us for all of the times that we have used His grace as a license to do nothing. However, we must never be satisfied with ourselves and our behavior. The end of the Church Year is a time of reflection on what is not good in our lives. It’s also a time of reflection on the only thing that *is* good: Jesus Christ. A time to review what God desires for us, and that includes the way He wants us to live-out our Christian faith, from day to day. No one should ever use the excuse, “I’m forgiven, so I can do whatever I want.” This is not Christianity – it’s a pagan religion, and the consequence of living in this lie is eternal death. How can we turn from the sin of ‘cheap grace’? It starts with daily prayer. We must ask our Lord to help us put other people first. We must ask Him to put us in the position of providing help to others in need. We must ask Him to help us make weekly worship, and daily Bible study a high priority in our life. Next, we can act! We can take advantage of church Bible studies, devotional materials, and daily reading plans for Scripture. Find a Christian friend or get your spouse to be your accountability partner. Drive each other to Bible study. Meet a few times a week (or more!) to do a devotion together. Join a volunteer agency in town, or help out in your church.

The Christian life was meant to be a life where **Christ lives in you!** It’s never a game that is played one hour a week in worship. It’s a new and better life that uses the gifts and talents that our Lord has given you to further His kingdom on earth. It doesn’t have to be done in some grandiose

effort, but is found in the day to day activities that God places you in, and the opportunities that are placed before you. May our Lord help us to avoid the trap of 'cheap grace' this coming Advent season, and shows us a better way!

Pastor Travis