

Everyday FAITH Family Page

New Testament 5

Law/Gospel

I sin when I believe that I can understand and trust in God on my own. **By the power and work of the Holy Spirit through His Word, the Spirit grants me faith in Jesus and empowers me to will and do that which is good and God pleasing.**

From the catechism The Third Article of the Apostles' Creed

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

What does this mean?

I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.

In the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith.

In this Christian church He daily and richly forgives all my sins and the sins of all believers.

On the Last Day He will raise me and all the dead, and give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ.

This is most certainly true.

God Sends the Holy Spirit

Acts 2:1–21

Jews living in other nations came to Jerusalem for annual Passover and Pentecost festivals, fifty days apart. Because of travel time and cost, people often stayed for both festivals. This means that many witnesses of Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection during Passover in AD 33 also experienced the birth of the Christian Church at Pentecost.

Before Jesus ascended, He told His disciples to stay in Jerusalem and wait for the Holy Spirit. Ten days later, on Pentecost, Jesus' disciples were all together in one place when God fulfilled His promise.

The Holy Spirit arrived with the sound of a powerful rushing wind. Divided tongues as of fire appeared and rested on each disciple, and they began to speak in languages they had not studied. Jewish pilgrims heard God's Word in their own languages, a gift of the Holy Spirit.

The hearers felt amazed and perplexed. What did this mean? Some mockingly accused the disciples of drinking too much wine.

Peter stood and denied drunkenness. He quoted God's promise through the prophet Joel to pour out God's Spirit on His people.

Then Peter said, "Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves know—this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised Him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for Him to be held by it" (Acts 2:22–24).

When the people asked what they should do, Peter said, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). About 3,000 people were baptized that day.

Today, the Holy Spirit still works through God's Word and Sacraments to deliver the benefits of Jesus' perfect life, death, and resurrection—faith, forgiveness of sins, new life, and salvation.

Prayer

Lord God, give us a burning desire to receive Your grace through faith in Christ Jesus, our Savior. In His name we pray. Amen.

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Disability and illness are physical symptoms of sin in the world.

Through His Son, God gives me forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation—the cure for all sin.

Bible Words

Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out.
Acts 3:19

The Big Picture

Caiaphas, the high priest, and the members of the religious Council who condemned Jesus to death still oversaw the temple when the Twelve taught in Jerusalem. Despite this, the apostles did not avoid the leaders or the temple. They worshiped there daily.

When the healing of the lame man caused a ruckus, the high priest and Council questioned Peter and John. They told the apostles not to speak or teach in the name of Jesus.

Peter and John replied, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:19–20). Jesus’ disciples were eye-witnesses of His words and actions.

Peter and John Heal the Lame Man

Acts 3

Walking into the temple for evening prayer, Peter and John met a lame man begging for alms, which might include money or food for the poor. More generally, alms include any acts of mercy.

Hearing the man’s cry, Peter responded with the only mercy he had, the command to walk in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. Peter helped the man stand. With strengthened ankles and feet, the man leaped up. He began to walk and entered the temple with them, “walking and leaping and praising God” (v. 8).

People recognized the man and felt astounded. They ran to see the three men in Solomon’s Portico, a covered porch inside the temple. Peter spoke boldly about the power that healed the man. He said, “You killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. And His name—by faith in His name—has made this man strong whom you see and know, and the faith that is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all” (vv. 15–16).

Peter acknowledged that the people acted in ignorance. He called them to repent, receive forgiveness of sins, and know Jesus, the Messiah promised by the Old Testament prophets.

This same mercy flows to us from Christ’s perfect life, death, and resurrection. We hear, receive, and experience this mercy through the hearing, teaching, and preaching of God’s Word, Baptism, Confession and Absolution, and the Lord’s Supper. In these ways, God gives us what Christ accomplished on the cross for us, the forgiveness of our sin.

Because of Christ’s work, we stand before God confident in His love and forgiveness.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, open our hearts to hear Your Word, repent of our sin, and receive Your mercy, the forgiveness of sins. Amen.

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Sin brings disorder and chaos. **Christ brings order and control to the chaos of my sin with His grace and mercy.**

Bible Words

[Forgive] as the Lord has forgiven you.

Colossians 3:13

The Big Picture

Why were the Jewish religious leaders free to kill Stephen when they were not allowed to inflict the death penalty upon Jesus? Rome controlled Judea when Jesus was arrested, and only a Roman official could impose the death penalty (John 18:31).

Dr. Andrew Steinmann suggests the high priest and Council killed Stephen during a power void. Procurator Pontius Pilate was distracted by trouble with the Samaritans. Then Vitellius, the Roman governor of Syria, dismissed Pilate, and Tiberius Caesar insisted he appear in Rome to answer a Jewish complaint. Pilate sailed to Rome, but Marcellus, his replacement, had not yet arrived.

With Pilate distracted or absent, the Jews exerted their power against Stephen and violently persecuted the Church.

See *From Abraham to Paul: A Biblical Chronology*, Dr. Andrew Steinmann, copyright © 2011 CPH, p. 301.

God's Servant Stephen

Acts 6–7

The Early Church experienced growing pains as more people believed in Jesus. When Greek Christians complained that the Hebrews neglected their widows during the daily distribution of food, the apostles decided the Church needed more leaders. They asked the Church to pick seven men with good reputations, filled with the Spirit and wisdom, to manage food distribution.

The Church chose Stephen as one of the seven men to do this work. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, Stephen also did great wonders and signs among the people. However, some people in the synagogue accused him of false teaching and took Stephen to the religious Council for judgment.

When questioned, Stephen spoke about the Jew's pattern of rejecting God's messengers. He said, "You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit" (7:51). Stephen said this resulted in killing Jesus, the Righteous One.

Enraged, the leaders ground their teeth. Full of the Holy Spirit, Stephen gazed into heaven and said that he saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God. Incensed religious leaders dragged Stephen out of the city and threw rocks at him until he died. Stephen asked Jesus to receive his spirit and became the first Christian to die for faith in Christ.

Saul, a respected Pharisee, witnessed and approved of Stephen's death. Later, Saul became the prolific Christian missionary we know better by his Greek name, Paul.

All people sin. We are stiff-necked people with uncircumcised hearts and ears. We resist God's Word and hate rebuke. Accusations crush and enrage us. But the Law shows us our sin and propels us to repent. Christ Jesus offers forgiveness of sins. He quiets us and assures us of God's love.

Prayer

Jesus, the Lamb of God sacrificed to pay for our sin, lead us to repentance and forgive our sins by Your grace. Amen.

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Trusting in my sinful reason, I cannot understand the need for or the work of Christ. **God grants me faith through His Word and Sacrament so that I trust in His Son, Jesus, as my Savior.**

Bible Words

So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

Romans 10:17

Fun Facts

- The Ethiopian, a Gentile, believed in the God of Israel, and probably had converted to Judaism.
- Only the most wealthy people could afford a handwritten scroll of Scripture and could travel by chariot with drivers.
- Candace was not a personal name, but a title for African queens, similar to Pharaoh for kings.
- In ancient times, people almost always read aloud, as trained. Ancient books were often difficult to read. For example, ancient Greek used uppercase letters with some punctuation marks but no spaces.

Philip and the Ethiopian

Acts 8:26–40

Stephen's death at the hands of the Jewish religious leaders began a great persecution of the Church in Jerusalem. A Pharisee named Saul captured many men and women and took them to prison. As a result, most fled the city; only the apostles stayed in Jerusalem (Acts 8:1–3).

The scattered Christians took God's Word throughout Judea and Samaria. Philip, one of the other men chosen to serve food with Stephen, went to Samaria, preached about Christ, and healed and baptized many.

When an angel of the Lord told Philip to go south to the road from Jerusalem to Gaza, he obeyed. There, he saw an Ethiopian official in charge of the treasury of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. Apparently riding in a moving chariot, the man was reading Isaiah 53.

Prompted by the Holy Spirit, Philip ran to the Ethiopian and asked if he understood what he read. The man said no and invited Philip into the chariot. Philip explained Isaiah's extraordinary prophecies and how Jesus fulfilled them by suffering and dying for our sins and rising from the dead, defeating the power of sin, death, and the devil.

After instruction, the Ethiopian asked to be baptized. Stopping, Philip baptized him, but when they came out of the water, the Holy Spirit carried Philip away (v. 39). The Ethiopian did not see Philip again and continued his travels. Philip appeared in Azotus on the Mediterranean Coast and preached from there north to Caesarea.

Just a few years after Jesus ascended, the Holy Spirit led the Church to smash social barriers to teach the Gospel of Christ to Gentiles (non-Jews) and Samaritans (a part-Jewish splinter group with its own religious system). The Holy Spirit gave them faith the way He still does, through His Word and Sacraments. Through these, the Holy Spirit calls, gathers, enlightens, sanctifies, and keeps us in the one true faith in Jesus.

Prayer

Dear Lord, by Your Word and Sacraments, keep us faithful to You and Your Word. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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Because I am a sinner, I fail to stand up for Christ in the world, and I fear persecution. **As a member of Christ's Body, the Church, I receive God's love and forgiveness in Christ and am strengthened in faith through His Word and Sacraments to live as His child, reflecting His love to the world.**

Bible Words

If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.
2 Corinthians 5:17

Fun Facts

- Saul was a Pharisee, a student of respected teacher and Pharisee Gamaliel (Acts 22:3).
- The Bible records other accounts of Saul's conversion in Acts 21:37–22:21; Acts 26; and Galatians 1:11–24.
- It seems that Saul did not marry (1 Corinthians 9:5, see context), but he called Timothy his child in the Lord (1 Timothy 1:2; 2 Timothy 1:2; 1 Corinthians 4:17).
- We have thirteen letters Paul wrote to the churches in the New Testament.
- Already in Peter's second letter, written about AD 68, he referred to Paul's writing as Scripture (2 Peter 3:14–16).

The Conversion of Paul

Acts 9:1–31

The life of a Pharisee named Saul fills two-thirds of the Book of Acts. Saul first appeared as an approving observer at the killing of Stephen. Soon after, he fervently opposed, arrested, and imprisoned believers in Christ. With letters from the high priest to the Damascus synagogues, Saul set off to arrest Christians there.

The Lord had other ideas. On the Damascus Road, Jesus appeared to His persecutor. Blinded, Saul was led to Damascus by his fellow travelers. After Saul fasted and prayed for three days, God sent His disciple Ananias to restore Saul's sight and baptize him. The Lord told Ananias that Saul was "a chosen instrument of Mine to carry My name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of My name" (vv. 15–16).

After his conversion, Saul immediately taught that Jesus is the Son of God in the Damascus synagogues. Offended Jews plotted to kill him, but he escaped in a basket lowered through an opening in the city wall.

In Jerusalem, Saul tried to join Jesus' disciples, but they feared him because of his adversarial reputation. Barnabas bravely brought Saul to the apostles and informed them about his conversion and preaching in Jesus' name. The apostles accepted Saul, and when the Jews tried to kill him once again, they helped him escape to his hometown of Tarsus.

Later, Barnabas brought Saul to Antioch in Syria to teach the faith. At the Holy Spirit's command, Saul and Barnabas became missionaries in Asia Minor, telling Jews and Gentiles about Jesus and establishing Christian churches. Two other journeys with several other companions followed.

Saul became known as Paul, the Greek version of his Hebrew name. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, Paul witnessed to Jews, Gentiles, and kings, and suffered for Jesus' name, as Christ prophesied. Paul was scourged five times with thirty-nine blows, beaten thrice with rods, stoned, shipwrecked, and endured many other hardships. Yet he remained faithful to Jesus, forever changed by the love and sacrifice of his Savior.

Prayer

Lord God, show us Jesus and His work for us so that we may believe and follow faithfully. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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By nature, I seek glory for myself in all that I do, even my outward good works. **When Christ shines His forgiveness on me, I am transformed to live for others to the glory of God.**

Bible Words

Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.
Matthew 5:16

Sing

Oh, that the Lord would guide
my ways
To keep His statutes still!
Oh, that my God would grant me
grace
To know and do His will!
Order my footsteps by Thy Word
And make my heart sincere;
Let sin have no dominion, Lord,
But keep my conscience clear.
Make me to walk in Thy
commands—
'Tis a delightful road—
Nor let my head or heart or
hands
Offend against my God.

"Oh, That the Lord Would Guide My Ways,"
stanzas 1, 2, 4, by Isaac Watts, *Lutheran
Service Book 707*, copyright © 2006 CPH.

Dorcas

Acts 9:36–43

She wasn't well-known. She didn't do miracles or seek attention. No one wrote a book about her. This believer in Christ lived a quiet life in Joppa, a first-century seaside town.

Dorcas, a kind believer in Jesus, was full of good works and helped the poor. Dorcas used her time and talents to sew clothing for people. She loved others as Jesus loved her and forgave her sins. (Dorcas was her Greek name; Tabitha was her Aramaic name.)

Sadly, Dorcas became ill and died. Family and friends prepared her body for burial and laid it in an upper room. Hearing that the apostle Peter was in a nearby village, the disciples sent messengers to ask him to come to Joppa, and he did.

When Peter arrived, they took him to Dorcas's body in the upper room. Widows who loved Dorcas wept and showed him garments she made. Peter asked them to go outside. He knelt and prayed. Turning to Dorcas's body, Peter called her name and commanded her to rise. Dorcas opened her eyes and sat up. Peter took her hand and helped her stand. He called the widows and disciples to come in and see Dorcas.

As news about Dorcas's resurrection spread, many people believed in Jesus. Dorcas and the new Joppa believers were saved by grace through faith in Christ, just as we are. Their actions did not save them, but Jesus re-created them to do good works, just as He does to us.

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:8–10)

Prayer

Lord, thank You for saving us by grace through faith in Christ Jesus, our Savior. Amen.



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Jesus is the judge of the living and the dead and rightfully condemns me to death and hell because of my sin. **Because of His saving work on the cross, Jesus forgives my sins and promises me eternal life.**

Bible Words

Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.
Romans 10:13

Sing

Jesus loves me! This I know,
For the Bible tells me so.
Little ones to Him belong;
They are weak, but He is strong.

Yes, Jesus loves me!
Yes, Jesus loves me!
Yes, Jesus loves me!
The Bible tells me so.

Jesus loves me! He who died
Heaven's gates to open wide.
He has washed away my sin,
Lets His little child come in.

Yes, Jesus loves me!
Yes, Jesus loves me!
Yes, Jesus loves me!
The Bible tells me so.

"Jesus Loves Me" by Anna B. Warner, *Lutheran Service Book* 588, copyright © 2006 CPH.

Peter and Cornelius

Acts 10

The first followers of Jesus were Jews who believed He was the promised Jewish Messiah, God's Son, and their Lord. However, they may not have understood when they saw Him heal and teach non-Jewish Gentiles and Samaritans.

At His ascension, Jesus told His disciples to "Go therefore and make disciples of *all nations*, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19–20, emphasis added). To help the disciples understand what *all nations* meant, the Holy Spirit gave them God's Word, experiences, and revelations.

The Spirit lead Peter to Cornelius, a Roman centurion serving with the Italian Cohort in Caesarea. A devout God-fearing Gentile, Cornelius gave generous alms and prayed continually to God. In a vision, an angel of God appeared to Cornelius and told him to send for Peter in Joppa. He immediately sent three men to ask Peter to visit.

Around noon the next day, God gave Peter three identical visions. He saw all kinds of animals, reptiles, and birds descend on earth. A voice said to kill and eat. Peter refused. He did not understand; he never ate the unclean foods of the Old Testament covenant. While Peter was pondering all this, the Spirit told him not to hesitate to go with three men who'd arrived from Caesarea.

Peter invited the men to spend the night and they traveled to Caesarea the next day. When Peter met Cornelius, the meaning of his visions became clear. He said the law forbade Jews from associating with or visiting those of another nations, but God revealed to him that no one was common or unclean. Peter preached about Jesus, and the Holy Spirit fell on Cornelius, his relatives, and his friends. All were baptized for the forgiveness of sins.

Sin makes all people equally unclean. Through God's Word and Baptism, the Holy Spirit delivers faith in Jesus, our Savior, and forgiveness of sins. In Christ Jesus, we are clean and acceptable.

Prayer

Jesus, open our hearts and minds to Your Word. May we, by faith, receive Your forgiveness of sin and eternal life. Amen.

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In this world of sin, the Church of God will be persecuted on account of Christ, resulting in suffering for me and all believers.

God works through His Word to break the chains of sin, relieve the suffering it causes, and sustain His Church.

Bible Words

[Jesus said,] "What is impossible with man is possible with God."
Luke 18:27

The Big Picture

- Herod Agrippa I, King of Judea from AD 41–44, was the last Judean ruler with a royal title.
- Agrippa was the grandson of King Herod the Great, who ruled at the time of Jesus' birth.
- Herod the Great sent Agrippa to Rome's imperial court after ordering the murder of his own son Aristobulus, Agrippa's father.
- Tiberius Caesar educated Agrippa alongside his son Drusus and future emperor Claudius. Agrippa also befriended Caligula, who later freed him from jail and made him a Judean king.
- While jailed in Caesarea, Paul witnessed to Christ in his plea to Agrippa I's son and daughter, Agrippa II and Bernice.

Peter's Escape from Prison

Acts 12

The Early Church flourished even as opposition increased from the Council of Jewish religious leaders and the Roman government.

The Council that arrested Jesus also arrested Peter and John for healing in Christ's name. They seized and executed Stephen for preaching boldly about Jesus. The Council's high priest gave Saul consent to arrest and imprison believers.

Herod Agrippa, Rome's appointed ruler, murdered James the apostle. Seeing that this pleased the Jews, Herod arrested Peter too. Since it was Passover, he imprisoned Peter until after the feast.

God had other plans. The night before Herod planned to kill Peter, the Lord sent a rescuing angel. Asleep and chained to two soldiers, Peter awoke to a light in the cell and a smack in his side. The angel said to get up quickly and get dressed. The chains fell off Peter's hands.

The angel led Peter past two guards and through an iron gate into the city. Peter thought he was dreaming. When the angel disappeared, Peter realized he was awake and free. He made his way to Mary's house, where Christians had gathered to pray. He knocked on the gate. Rhoda, a servant girl, responded.

Recognizing Peter's voice, Rhoda did not open the gate but ran to announce his presence. No one believed her; she was crazy! Rhoda insisted, and Peter kept knocking. Finally they opened the gate and felt amazed to see Peter. He told them how God rescued him, and asked them to tell James and the other leaders of the Jerusalem Church. Then Peter left for Caesarea.

The next day, soldiers searched but could not find Peter. Herod examined and sentenced the sentries to death, the penalty planned for Peter. God saved Peter to continue the work of building His Church. The Lord used the death of James to build His Church in a different way.

We find hope in the promise that "The Spirit helps us in our weakness. . . . We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:26, 28).

Prayer

Jesus, rescue us from sin that imprisons us, and surround us with Your eternal love and forgiveness. Amen.

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When I despise the preaching of God's Word, do not hold it sacred, and do not gladly hear and learn it, I sin and support Satan's cause. **The gates of hell will not prevail against the Church and God's Word, through which sinners are converted and in which I receive the grace of God.**

Bible Words

[Jesus said,] "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations."
Matthew 28:19

Fun Facts

We can trust the eyewitness accounts of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection in the New Testament. All New Testament books were written before all the apostles died in AD 100.

We have 5,686 ancient Greek copies of these works and over 19,000 copies in other languages. Many date to the third century, others to the second and first centuries.

No other ancient documents have that many copies from sources so close to the events. For example, we only have 7 ancient copies from Greek scholar Plato, 49 from Aristotle, and 643 of Homer's *The Iliad*. Most date to 900 years or more after the subject's death.

Paul's First Missionary Journey

Acts 13–14

The persecution of the Church after Stephen's death scattered Jerusalem's Christians as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch in Syria. Believers shared the Word of Christ with other Jews. In Antioch, they first witnessed to Greeks, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord. Disciples were first called Christians or "little Christs" there.

Hearing this, the apostles in Jerusalem sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he saw that the Holy Spirit gave faith to non-Jews too, he traveled to Tarsus to find Paul and bring him back to Antioch to teach the faith.

Later, through the Church at Antioch, the Holy Spirit called Paul and Barnabas as missionaries. On their first journey, they sailed west to the island of Cyprus and then north to visit cities in modern-day Turkey.

On land, Paul and Silas walked on roads the Romans built to transport their armies. In each town, they preached the Good News about Jesus, the long-awaited Messiah, to the Jews in synagogues first.

Some gladly received the message of salvation through Christ, but others loudly and sometimes violently opposed them. Angry Jews from other cities found Paul in Lystra, dragged him out of the city, and stoned him. "But when the disciples gathered about him, he rose up and entered the city" (14:20).

Gentiles also frequented synagogue services, either as full converts or half-fledged converts known as God-fearers. Most believed in the coming Messiah and eagerly received Paul's message that Jesus the Christ had come, died, and risen again for them.

Paul and Barnabas also preached to Gentiles in marketplaces and public places. The disciples taught that Jesus, the Son of God, never sinned, but offered Himself as a sacrifice on the cross to pay for our sins, and rose from the dead. As the Holy Spirit worked through God's Word and Sacraments, many believed in Jesus. Through Christ, our Savior, "whoever believes and is baptized will be saved" (Mark 16:16).

Prayer

Dear Lord, guide and protect us on the road of life and bring us safely to our heavenly home. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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I sin when I believe that Jesus is not enough for my salvation or when I think that I must do something, however small, to contribute to my salvation. **Jesus has done it all perfectly for me. In Him, my salvation is complete.**

Bible Words

[Peter said,] "But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will."

Acts 15:11

The Big Picture

This meeting of the apostles and elders became known as the Jerusalem Council. Later, Church councils met when false teaching arose. Using Scripture as their source, the Church preserved the purity of the Gospel.

Martin Luther wrote that the Holy Spirit dwells in the hearts of believers. So, if council members represent the people of God, the council is true and ruled by the Spirit. A true council gathers God's faithful people to preserve and teach the pure Word of God.

Paul and Timothy

Acts 15:1–16:5

As the Holy Spirit brought Gentiles to faith in Christ, questions arose about whether they should submit to the requirements of the old covenant, especially circumcision. Although Jesus fulfilled these ceremonial laws, many Jewish Christians continued to practice them. Some believers, including Christian Pharisees, insisted that the Gentiles had to keep the Old Testament laws to be saved.

The Church in Antioch sent Paul, Barnabas, and some others to the apostles and elders in Jerusalem to ask whether God saved us by the grace of Christ alone or by grace plus rites, ceremonies, and practices.

The apostles and elders gathered and debate ensued. Peter, Paul, and Barnabas spoke about seeing the Spirit save Gentiles and cleanse their hearts through faith in Jesus. Led by the Holy Spirit and Scripture, not human reasoning, the group concluded that we are saved by grace through faith in Christ alone.

But to avoid offending Jewish believers, the leaders advised Gentiles to "abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality" (v. 29).

The first and last things avoided confusing Christian teaching with practices of idol worshipers. Refraining from sexual immorality also honors the body, a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:18–20).

Not eating blood or strangled animals avoided offending Jews who did not eat these things and felt appalled at those who did (Romans 14:20–23). This showed love and respect for the Jews, so that nothing would hinder them from receiving faith in Christ.

Later, Paul circumcised Timothy, son of a Jewish mother in Lystra, to avoid offending the Jews on their next missionary journey. Circumcision did not save Timothy, but made him acceptable to Jews with whom they hoped to share the Good News about Jesus Christ.

Prayer

Holy Spirit, keep us in true faith in our risen Savior, Christ Jesus, our Lord. In His name we pray. Amen.

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Because I am sinful, I cannot find God on my own. **Though the Lord is everywhere, Christ locates Himself and His saving gifts for me in specific places: His baptismal font, His pulpit, His altar—wherever His Word is spoken, sung, poured, eaten, or drunk.**

Bible Words

Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved. Mark 16:16

The Big Picture

After traveling over land, Paul and Silas sailed to Neapolis, a seaport where travelers often landed to connect to the Via Egnatia, the great military road. The Romans built this 696-mile highway from the Adriatic to the Aegean Sea in the second-century BC.

From Neapolis, Paul and Silas traveled to Philippi, about ten miles inland. Greek historian Appian described Philippi as the gate between Europe and Asia. Here, Paul preached the Gospel for the first time in Europe.

Prayer

Holy Spirit, guide us through Your Word and Sacraments to receive the gifts of our Savior, Jesus. In His name we pray. Amen.

Lydia

Acts 16:11–15

On their second missionary tour, Paul and Silas traveled to Philippi, a prominent Roman city filled with many retired soldiers. Paul usually went to the synagogue first to tell the Jews that their Messiah had arrived, but Philippi did not have a synagogue. (The Law only required one if more than ten Jews lived there.) So the disciples of Jesus went to the riverside on the Sabbath, hoping to find a place of prayer.

The missionaries sat down and began talking with some women. They met Lydia from Thyatira, a worshiper of God who sold purple goods. “The Lord opened her heart” to hear the message about God’s love and forgiveness delivered through Christ Jesus (Acts 16:14). Lydia and her whole household were baptized. She insisted the disciples stay at her home, saving Paul and his friends from paying their own expenses.

The Holy Spirit gave Lydia faith in Jesus through His Word and Baptism, the ways He delivers faith and spiritual blessings to us too.

From the Catechism: Baptism

First

What is Baptism?

Baptism is not just plain water, but it is the water included in God’s command and combined with God’s word.

Which is that word of God?

Christ our Lord says in the last chapter of Matthew: “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” (Matt. 28:19)

Second

What benefits does Baptism give?

It works forgiveness of sins, rescues from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, as the words and promises of God declare.

Which are these words and promises of God?

Christ our Lord says in the last chapter of Mark: “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.” (Mark 16:16)

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Everyday FAITH Family Page

New Testament 5

Law/Gospel

The world hates Christ and His followers and rejects me because of Him. In my sin, I dislike and would avoid this persecution.

The Spirit pours the peace of Christ into me, forgiving, strengthening, and sustaining me in Christ.

Bible Words

[God] desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

1 Timothy 2:4

The Big Picture

A Roman civil war erupted after the assassination of Julius Caesar. It ended with the battle of Philippi, where Mark Antony and Octavian defeated assassins Marcus and Gaius in October 42 BC. The victors released Roman officers and soldiers from duty and encouraged them to colonize Philippi. Octavian directed other soldiers to retire there as well. Philippi became filled with retired soldiers, Roman citizens, and Roman pride. Nearby gold mines and the seaport of Neapolis made the city an important stop on the Via Egnatia, the famous Roman road that crosses modern-day Albania, Greece, Macedonia, and western Turkey.

Paul and Silas in Prison

Acts 16:16–40

Missionaries Paul and Silas enjoyed many rights as Roman citizens. For example, citizens had the right to a legal trial, to defend themselves against accusers, and to appeal lower court decisions, even to Caesar. No one could imprison or punish them without a legal hearing.

Their citizenship came into play in Philippi, a Roman colony, where Paul and Silas met a slave girl possessed by a future-predicting demon. The girl followed them for many days, shouting and vexing them. Annoyed, Paul turned and commanded the spirit to come out of her in Jesus' name. It did, losing her owners' lucrative income.

Her owners angrily seized Paul and Silas and dragged them to magistrates in the busy marketplace. The crowd attacked them. The magistrates had them beaten with rods, jailed, and locked in stocks.

All these actions violated the rights of Roman citizens, yet Paul and Silas did not reveal their status. Instead, they endured the abuse, sang hymns to God, and prayed as the other prisoners listened. Around midnight, a great earthquake struck, damaging the jail foundation. All the doors opened and all the bonds released.

Seeing this, the jailer thought the prisoners had escaped and drew his sword to kill himself, the punishment he'd receive for losing the prisoners. Paul called out and assured the jailer that no one left.

Trembling, the jailer rushed in and took Paul and Silas to his house. He asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" They answered, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." The missionaries spoke God's Word and baptized the whole household.

In the morning, when the magistrates tried to release Paul and Silas, they refused. They listed violations of their citizenship and asked the magistrates to release them personally. The judges fearfully apologized, released the men, and kindly asked them to leave the city.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, give us courage to follow wherever You lead.

In Your name we pray. Amen.

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Everyday FAITH Family Page

New Testament 5

Law/Gospel

In sinful despair, I let the pains of the present overtake me; I doubt God and do not trust His redeeming love. **Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever, rides out the storms of life with me, granting me hope through my redemption in Christ.**

Bible Words

[Nothing] will be able to separate us from the love of God.

Romans 8:39

The Big Picture

Early Church Fathers report that Emperor Nero killed Paul and Peter in Rome as Christian martyrs. Roman historian Tacitus (AD 56–AD 120) said Nero blamed Christians for a fire others suspected that he set. It burned two-thirds of Rome. Tacitus also said Christ died “at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilate.”

Sing

We praise You for Saint Peter;
We praise You for Saint Paul;
They taught both Jew and Gentile
That Christ is all in all.
To cross and sword they yielded
And saw Your kingdom come;
O God, these two apostles
Reached life through
martyrdom.

“By All Your Saints in Warfare,” st. 19, *Lutheran Service Book* 518, copyright © 2006 CPH.

Paul Sails for Rome

Acts 27

Before Paul went to Jerusalem for the last time, the Holy Spirit revealed that he would soon experience affliction and imprisonment. God expanded this message through His prophet Agabus. Christians urged Paul not to go, but he replied, “What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 21:13).

As prophesied, the Romans arrested Paul in Jerusalem to rescue him from an angry mob. While Paul was in jail, religious leaders and others who opposed him and the Gospel of Christ plotted to kill him. When the Roman tribune found out, he secretly moved Paul to the seaside town of Caesarea under the escort of 470 Roman soldiers. There, governor Felix imprisoned Paul, hoping to receive a bribe to release him.

After two years, Porcius Festus replaced Felix. The Jewish religious leaders asked Festus to bring Paul to Jerusalem so they could ambush and kill him on the way. Instead, Festus said they could bring charges against Paul in Caesarea, and they did.

When Festus wanted to return Paul to Jerusalem for trial, Paul appealed to Caesar for a trial instead, a right of his Roman citizenship. Festus granted his appeal. Acts 27–28 records this journey under the guard of a Roman centurion named Julius. Paul witnessed to Christ despite ill winds, mutiny, danger, and shipwreck.

In Rome, Paul was imprisoned and guarded by a Roman soldier, but had freedom to receive visitors and talk with anyone he pleased. He preached ceaselessly to anyone who would listen.

Early Church Fathers reported that Paul died in Rome as a martyr, killed because of his faith in Jesus the Messiah. As he said he would willingly do, Paul died for Christ, the one who died to pay for our sins and offer new life and forgiveness to all who believe in Him.

Prayer

Dear Lord, thank You for faithful teachers and preachers of Your Word. Keep us in true faith in Christ, our Savior, in whose name we pray. Amen.

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