

... Peace be to you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, Amen. I always love it when somebody says, "Well, God knows my heart," as if that's something comforting. We usually say that when we do something that we intend for good or maybe it's misunderstood. "Well, God knows my heart. He knows what I'm thinking." And then we have Jesus saying, "Well, out of the heart of man comes evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness." Yeah, God knows your heart and this is what He sees. That's not a very comforting phrase. And this is what we are here to talk about today. Every passage that we talk about, even in the Old Testament was about the Law of God. And of course, we think of the Law of God, we particularly think of the 10 Commandments. And the 10 Commandments though, are meant to be good and righteous.

In fact, that's what they say in Deuteronomy. How great is it that we have a God who is so close to us, who gives us such clear demands, such clear statutes and laws? This is amazing. It is wonderful and glorious and beautiful. And yet how often do we think of the 10 Commandments in that way? More often than not, we think of the 10 Commandments as God pointing His finger at us and accusing us. "You failed, you failed and you failed. You need to try harder and do better." And in a sense, that's indeed what the law does initially. But we sang "By grace, I'm saved," and that was intentional as well because it is not about you following the law for your salvation. We need to make it very clear that it is by grace, we are saved. By the work of God that He chose us, that He brought us into the family, adopted us as His children in baptism.

Abigail didn't do anything for her baptism, but she received it nonetheless. She doesn't understand what went on yet she got it nonetheless. Faith is not our intellectual understanding or our commitment to follow after God's laws. Faith is a gift given to us and we misunderstand what God has intended when we fail to understand the distinction, the proper distinction between the Law of God and the Gospel of God. Both are good, both are given to us by God, both are a blessing, but they do different things. The Law of God is a gift given to us by God, and it is very clear. We have no doubt where we stand before God and our God is unique in that. Do you think the worshipers of Zeus had any clue what was good for him or for them? They made stuff up and hoped some of it worked.

Same thing with Baal. Same thing Asherah. Same thing with all the other gods of all of the other religions. There's not a clear distinction of what is good and what is not good. You just hope for the best. Not our God. He has made it very clear. We know exactly what is demanded by God. Now, unfortunately, the first thing that we learn when we know exactly what God demands of us is that we have failed. We have not lived up to it. I mean, we question. When we think about our faith, we

often think, "Well, have I done enough? Am I worthy of the love of God?" And the answer to that question is no, you've not done enough and no, you are not worthy of the love of God, at least not by what you've done.

See, that's the beauty and that's the gift given to us by the law. It makes it very clear that we are not saved by what we do and that we don't have to try harder every single day in the hopes that we might find security in our salvation by what we've done. Think about this. If you spend every waking day of your life thinking, "Well, if I don't serve God faithfully, maybe I'm not going to be saved." I've talked to people at the end of their lives where they say, "I don't think I've been a good person. I don't know. I don't know if I'm going to go to heaven," which is one of the saddest things I've ever heard. Because yes, the law condemns us. Yes, the law makes it clear beyond a shadow of a doubt, we cannot do enough to be saved by our own efforts. It kills us, the law that's what it does. It kills us.

And that is a good thing because when we are killed by the law, we go looking for the answer someplace else outside of ourselves, and we find the answer in Christ on the cross. We find the answer, I have not done enough, but He did. I am not good enough, but He is and was. I have not earned my salvation, but He has earned salvation for me. And so when I stop looking for assurance in my own efforts and my own ideas, then I look to my assurance in Christ.

What a blessing that is because let's face it, as much as I'd like to say that I'm a pretty good person all the time, you and I know that neither one of us really live up to our own ideas of ourselves. We know the thoughts that go on in the back of our minds and we know we've not lived up to what God wants us to do. But I thank God that I don't have to be worried about that and fret about that. Yes, I do confess my sins because the law has shown me I'm a sinner. But then that law drives me, forces me, pushes me to look at something else outside of myself, for my hope. And we find that in the mystery of the Word of God, that Word of God that we are clothed in when we put on the armor of God, which is what Paul was talking about in Ephesians.

You notice when he talks about Ephesians, the first thing he talks about is fastening on the belt of truth. The truth of the matter is that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, but are redeemed by grace through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. The truth is both the law and the gospel in their proper place. The law drives us to the gospel, the gospel assures us of our salvation and then encourages us to seek to follow the law, to give Him glory and honor. And when we fail to go to Him for hope and assurance once more, that is our life in Christ.

But the truth of God, the full counsel of God is what binds everything together. This is why we don't look to human reason or tradition or any other source except God's Word for our hope and our understanding of what He has for us. And then

you look at the rest of these, the helmet of salvation, the breastplate of righteousness. You notice it's the breastplate of righteousness, but it's not your righteousness that you put on. It's not like, "Well, I'm a righteous person and I'm going to depend on my righteousness for my defense against all those flaming arrows of Satan."

My righteousness has a lot of holes in it. My breastplate of righteousness, if it's just mine, is not very good, not very strong, but it's not my righteousness that I've received, but it's the righteousness of God, the righteousness of Christ that is given to me. It is His righteousness that is my protection. It is His righteousness that keeps me safe. The helmet of my salvation. I don't make a decision for God. I don't choose God, but it is given to me as a gift to protect my mind and my thoughts and my soul.

Now, if any of you have ever seen a knight getting armored up, you look at all those old movies and you see the knight getting armed up, does the knight arm himself and put on his own armor? No, he can't do it. He's got a scribe or a page that comes around and puts the stuff on him. He's just standing there. He's standing on the firm foundation and somebody else is putting the armor on him. It's the same with us. We are standing on the foundation of Christ of what He has done. That is our firm foundation. That is what we find in the Word of God. And in that firm foundation, then God places upon us the helmet of salvation, the breastplate of righteousness, the shield of faith, the belt of truth, the sandals for the readiness of the gospel and everything else.

These are not things that we need to try every day to put on. These are things that are already put on us by God and His gift of salvation to us. What we are called to do is to use the one offensive weapon that is listed in this, the Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. That is what reminds us, it's God who has saved us. That is what teaches us what truth really is. That is what offends and defeats Satan. What did Jesus do when He was tempted in the wilderness after fasting for 40 days and 40 nights?

It is written. It is written. It is written. Christ himself relied upon the Word of God, which is where our source of comfort and our assurance resides. The Word of God, that is what helps us and reminds us that we are armored by His word. We are protected by His grace because the law has made it clear I can't do it myself, which then drives us to look for hope elsewhere, which is the gospel, which says He has done it all for us.

So the full counsel of God, the law is good and right and salutary and useful for instruction. But the gospel lets us know that our hope is found in Christ alone. And so even though our hearts are filled with all of these evil things, we know that they're washed away in the blood of Christ in our salvation. We were adopted as

His children in baptism. Why? Because the water can do such amazing things? Nah, it's just plain water. We got it out of the tap. There's nothing special about the water except that it was connected with the Word of God, and with the Word of God that water becomes a life-giving source. So the water with the word. What we receive, the bread and the wine, it's just bread and wine. But when it is connected with the Word of God, it is strength and nourishment for our soul, it is the body and blood of Christ for salvation, it is faith given to us. The Word of God does that.

And so we rely upon the word to defend us, to guard us, and to keep away Satan through faith in that word and what the word has done for us, through the righteousness of the word given to us, through the truth that we hear in the word. It's all about God's word. And now if you allow me, I'm going to do a little bit of a plug for my catechism class because the Word of God is a sword. And this little book right here, the small catechism is what we call an [inaudible 00:12:22]. An [inaudible 00:12:25] is a small dagger.

So just like the Bible is a big book, and the small catechism is a small book. The Bible is a sword, the Sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, it's a big sword. The catechism is a small dagger. They look alike. They serve the same purpose, just one's bigger than the other. And that's why we rejoice in what was given to us in the small catechism, not because it's brilliant in and of itself, but because it says what God's word says in a much shorter form. And so we rejoice in God's word and we rejoice in the catechism given to us. And we study both because they both serve the same purpose, because they both are the Word of God. The full counsel of God is a sword. The reduced focus word is the [inaudible 00:13:21], the small catechism.

These are the things, these are the tools that God has given to us so that we might be washed and renewed, not just once in our baptism, but every day, every day the Word of God comes to us. Every day when we wash our face, we remember that God's word came to us and washed us clean, buried us with Christ in His crucifixion and raised us to new life in His resurrection so that we can stand firm. Because let's face it, this world out there is doing some crazy things. And it's easy to get frightened. It's easy to get scared. It's easy to get upset. And not only that, there's turmoil in our own lives, our own problems, our own issues, our own maladies, our own illnesses, our own aches and pains, our own doubts and worries. But what helps us to stand firm? Same thing that Paul says, the Word of God, the armor of Christ, which enables him to stand firm when he's in chains.

See, we don't need to be afraid of this world, nor do we need to be afraid of anything that happens in this world because we know this is not our hope, nor is it our home. Our home is with Christ. And someday we're going to be there. And

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that's the goal, that's the promise. That's the hope to be with God for all eternity. So if we know we're going there, we don't need to be afraid when we're here. Even if we're in chains, even if we're suffering, even if we have doubts and worries, even if the world seems to be falling apart, we don't need to be afraid because God's word is with us and we are His children. And He's armored us, and He has protected us, and He will keep us to the day of salvation in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. May His grace and His mercy and His peace be and abide with you always now and forevermore, may His full counsel and His full armor be with you now and forevermore unto life everlasting. Amen.