

“Know the Whole Will of God”

Children’s Devotion: Shepherd’s staff; what a shepherd does. He watches and looks after the flock. Jesus is our good shepherd.

Brother and sisters in Christ.

The Apostle Paul had known and worked with the church leaders of Ephesus for three years. As he made this farewell to them at a nearby city, he reminded them that he had instructed them in all of the truths of God’s word, that they were responsible for the care of their congregations, that there would be attacks from both outside and inside the church, but that the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, was with them. They were bought with God’s own blood, and built up with the word of his grace.

27 (For) I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God. 28 Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. 29 I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. 30 Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. 31 So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.

32 “Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

Are you ready? That’s the question that went through the minds of our confirmands last week. Thirty-three eighth graders and two additional high-schoolers who will be confirmed in May were all tested last week in a marathon session, twenty-five minutes per student with their families. This was our private examination of oral questions and answers from Luther’s Small Catechism.

What if I were to step out into the congregation and you some of their questions? How would you do?

- What does Triune mean, and who are the three persons of the Trinity?
- What is the two-fold work of God the Father?
- How long were the days of creation, and can you prove that either from Genesis or Exodus?
- What’s the Ninth Commandment?
- What are the two natures of Jesus Christ?
- What are the steps of Jesus’ humiliation and exaltation?
- What does it mean that Jesus died on the cross?
- When did the Holy Spirit put faith into your heart?
- What are the two sacraments?

- Who may baptize in an emergency, and what would they say and do?
- What kind of water should we use in baptism?
- What does baptism give or profit?
- What are the earthly elements in the Lord's Supper?
- What are the questions you should ask yourself before taking communion?
- According to the Bible, what people should not receive the Lord's Supper?
- How many books in the Bible? In the Old Testament? In the New?
- What is the message of the Old Testament? Of the New?
- If you were to die tonight, why can you be certain that you would go to heaven?
- What is your confirmation verse, and why is it important to you?

I'm happy to report that of the 35 young people we examined, all of them passed. All of them are ready to join our communion fellowship, and to join us at the Lord's Supper.

How did you do in this little reminder?

Whether you did well or whether you need a little work, I want to encourage you—as Paul does in our text—to remember that you have been trained in the **whole will of God, the full counsel of God**. Not that there isn't more to learn. There is always more to learn, more to study.

One of the easiest and most helpful ways to keep yourself versed in the basic doctrines of the Bible is read short pieces from your Catechism right before you and your family say the table prayer at supper time. Remember, fathers, or moms if there's no father right now, or grandmas or grandpas in some cases, you are the **shepherds** of the flock in your home. Luther's Catechism was written so that you could teach your children what they need to know and what we all need to remember.

Why is this important? First of all: These are the truths the God gives us for our instruction and for our comfort. This is so that we know what Bible says about who Jesus is, and what Jesus has done for us. These are the words of everlasting life.

But Paul gives us a second and a third reason. The second is that there is danger in the world—danger from the outside of the church, waiting to tear at us like savage wolves. Some false doctrines are taught in language that's very close to what the Bible already says, and can be hard to spot. Other things attack God's people by openly contradicting what the Bible says.

There are some savage wolves that use smoke and mirrors to divert our attention from the truth, attacking some of peripheral things of the church like the date of Christmas or of Easter—things that have no bearing on our faith, since it is the fact of the birth of Jesus that matters, infinitely more than the date of his birth. And it is the fact of the resurrection that matters—presented in the Bible by **Matthew and John** who were eyewitnesses, **Mark and Luke** who present the accounts of other eyewitnesses, and by **Paul**, who after mentioning many eyewitnesses who were still living when Paul wrote, confesses that even he saw the risen Christ when he appeared to him.

Besides attacks from the outside, there will be attacks from the inside. The church of God has always had attacks like this. When Moses was teaching the Israelites in desert, he had to deal with Korah and Dathan in the ranks, and even Aaron was led astray.

Sometimes these happen within families. When King David was trying to be a good leader for the nation, he lost sight of his own wives and sons, and there were rebellions and even a murder in his own house.

When Job got sick, his own wife and friends attacked his faith, attacked the way he lived his faith, and doubted whether he was righteous before God.

And then there's the fellowship of Jesus and the Apostles, when Judas Iscariot—who had healed the sick and driven our demons—was tempted, and let the devil enter in to betray his Lord.

We cannot promise that there will never be troubles within our families or within the church of God, because sin reigns in the world and sin corrupts hearts. But we can keep on reminding one another of what the word of God says.

SIN – It's pretty easy to slip up when it comes to staying watchful over our families. What are they being exposed to in a public university? In a classroom? In a discussion with a new circle of friends who don't know Jesus and don't look at the world from a Christian perspective at all? What happens when choices we make, not meaning to put ourselves into spiritual danger, and yet there it comes. There's the attack, as if we've invited in with open arms.

GRACE – Paul knows we slip, we fall, we doubt, we associate with people who attack our faith. But do you know what we have? Paul says it in verse 28, and it's one of the most amazing doctrinal passages in the whole Bible: The forgiveness that covers us, the peace offered to us happened in this way: “**God ... bought us with his own blood.**” Paul reminds us, as Peter reminds us and John reminds us and Matthew reminds us and Jesus says it himself at his trial: Jesus Christ is truly God. He, God, bought you back from your debt of sin with his own blood. He rescued you and made you his own.

Let's cover one more examination question: **Is there any sin so bad that you cannot be forgiven?**

The answer is “No.” Only unbelief damns. Jesus' crucifixion has paid for every single sin, every sin of yours, of mine, of all mankind for all time. We are rescued by Jesus. Share that with the people you love—and both the sharing and what you share are your part of the whole will of God. You're ready.

*Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace,
which can build you up
and give you an inheritance
among all those who are sanctified.*