

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

It's hard to say, "This is the Gospel of the Lord," when the Gospel is filled mostly with law ... condemning law. "*For from within, out of the heart of man*" comes this whole list of evil thoughts, words, and deeds. And Jesus concludes our Gospel, "*All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.*"

This is Law—spoken by the Word of God incarnate Himself, out of whose mouth extends "*a sharp two-edged sword*" (Rev. 1:16)—the living and active word of God that pierces "*to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and [discerns] the thoughts and intentions of the heart*" (Heb. 4:12). Jesus knows the heart of mankind, and in this teaching destroys every foolish thought that man is essentially good. No! "*[T]here is none who does good. ... The children of man ... have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one*" (Ps. 53:1-3).

Yet man is loath to give up on the idea that there is a remnant of good in him—something that is he himself can redeem. And so man hangs onto the notion that if only I refrain from doing certain manifest things—lie, cheat, steal, murder, commit adultery—then I'm doing okay. After all, he thinks, no one really knows what I'm thinking, the anger I'm harboring, the lustful thoughts that fill my heart, the evil thoughts that occupy my mind. Nobody really knows what I do in the darkness when no one is looking (John 3:19). Surely, I can't be found guilty of my hidden sins—for no one knows of them but me. But, of course, we are guilty—and before the God who knows all things, who knows "*when [we] sit down and when [we] rise up,*" who discerns our "*thoughts from afar*" (Ps. 139:2), we do stand condemned even for the things we hide.

But it's even worse than that, for God declares that we are guilty from the time we were conceived in the womb. David proclaims, "*Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me*" (Ps. 51:5). Paul proclaims, "*Nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh*" (Rom. 7:18). And Jesus here proclaims, "*from within, out of the heart of man,*" come our sins.

You know this from your catechism. You know it as the doctrine of original sin, the sin that we inherited from Adam—"the Old Adam in us," as Luther calls it (Small Catechism, Baptism, Fourth). Jesus and all of Scripture reminds us that we are sinners even before the first actual sin we commit, and all the sins we do commit proceed from our sinful nature—from within. That's why when we, as Lutherans, come here and make our corporate confession, the first thing we confess is that we are "poor, miserable sinners." Then we confess "all [our] sins and iniquities with which [we] have ever offended" the Lord and "justly deserved [His] temporal and eternal punishment" (LSB, 184).

Sin comes from within—out of our hearts. It's not eating food with ceremonially unwashed hands that defiles us. And when we have Christ, it not even eating food that was once declared to be unclean. Jesus says, "*Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him,*" and Mark explains: "*Thus he declared all foods clean.*" St. Paul emphasizes the same: "*Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink .... These,*" he says, "*are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ*" (Col. 2:16-17). St. Peter would have to get a second dose of the message to let it sink in. Jesus said to him: "*What God has made clean, do not call common*" (Acts 10:15); and Jesus was not just referring to food, but to people.

Of course, this fact — that we are sinful and unclean within — might lead one to think, then, logically, the remedy for our sin must also come from within. He thinks, neither can something applied to us from the outside make us clean. After all, we like symmetry; we like things balanced; we like things to fit our logic. And so, if our defilement comes from within, we think, so must our cleanness. Somehow we must muster something up inside of us to take care of our sin problem. But that's not how it is — not according to God's ways. Your salvation is not your own doing. It's a gift from God.

It is the gift of God's own Son. "*For God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son.*" And this Son, God gave up unto suffering and death, placing on Him the debts we owed, the punishment we deserve — that's gift. And by the blood He shed, He gives us the cleansing of forgiveness— "*the blood of Jesus [God's] Son cleanses us from all sin*" (1 John 1:7). It's God's doing. "*According to [His] steadfast love; according to [His] abundant mercy, [He blots] out [our] transgressions*" (Ps. 51:1). It comes not from within, but from without—outside of ourselves.

This is the Gospel that we revel in, in God's grace: that although our sin is from within, our salvation is from without. "*God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved.*" And again, "*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*" (Eph. 2:4-5, 8-9). And so we just sang, "By grace, I'm saved, grace free and boundless" (LSB566).

Moreover, this grace is bestowed upon you through the external things Christ has given to His church whereby to distribute His gifts: His word of forgiveness, baptism, the supper of His body and blood—all things that come from without. By these things, He applies the fruit of His blood sacrifice and effects His cleansing. He who loved us and gave Himself up for us, is the same one who sanctifies us and cleanses us by the washing of water with the word. He makes us to be "*without*

*spot or wrinkle or any such thing, ... holy and without blemish*” (Eph. 5:25-27).

He’s the one who “*purges [us] with hyssop*” that we may be “*clean.*” He’s the one who “*wash[es] us*” that we may be “*whiter than snow*” (Ps. 51:7).

He’s the one who “*blots out all [our] iniquities,*” who “*creates in [us] a clean heart, ... and renews a right spirit within [us]*” (Ps. 51:9-10). He’s the one who gives us His cleansing blood to drink in His sacrament—as we proclaim His death for us, and we are reminded that there is no forgiveness for us apart from the shedding of His blood. By these, He covers us with His armor “*that [we] may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.*”

This is “*the mystery of the Gospel*” we proclaim. “Your works, not mine, O Christ” atone for my sins. Your wounds, not mine ... Your stripes, not mine ... Your cross, not mine ... Your death, not mine ... Your righteousness, O Christ, Alone can cover me” (LSB565). For we are defiled from within, from our corrupt hearts filled with sin; but we are cleansed from without, by Jesus, by His sacrifice, by His blood, by His grace that gives us new hearts and spirits, and gives us the joy of our salvation. This is the Gospel of the Lord.

In the name of the Father and of the ✝ Son and of the Holy Spirit.