Dear Brothers & Sisters in Christ Jesus,

Due to the many rumors and misleading statements circulating of how and what we believe here in Wolf Lake, we will now with many fears confess openly what we believe. “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.” 1 Peter 3:15.

While there would be many topics to write on, we will briefly touch on a few.

1. Withholding of forgiveness.

We believe that a believer can freely preach the gospel to anyone who asks without exception or condition of any kind. Matt 6:14-15. “For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”

Luke 17:3-4. “Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him.”

These and many other Bible portions that give clear instructions on how we are to behave in this matter. Some in American Zion have attempted to suggest that in certain situations the gospel message can be and even must be withheld to avoid spiritual fornication. This type of doctrine is not according to scripture.

The history American Christianity, in particular the decade of the 1980’s, shows the folly of leaving the door open, even slightly, to this type of thinking that it was correct to withhold the gospel in some cases. Are we to think the enemy of souls will not slip thru and broaden the use of such action to suit his ends? The danger of beginning to examine hearts of those asking is simply too great. Living Christianity has long understood that the examination of the hearts of those asking for the gospel is incorrect. We ask you to ponder, how is it possible to withhold forgiveness without examination? By what means and criteria is forgiveness withheld? We are ambassadors of the Word of Reconciliation, not its masters. We are not in God’s stead. “I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy.” Exodus 33:19. The scriptures relate that some have planted, others watered, but God gives the increase. If someone makes only a repentance on one’s lips and yet the heart is far from God, certainly the fruits of such will show. Therefore, we can boldly proclaim the gospel to all creatures.

2. Robe of Righteousness

We believe that the Robe of Righteousness is the righteousness of Christ, perfect without blemish, gifted to us by faith when we believe. It is not stained by our sins and failures, but covers them. By faith, being owners of this garment of salvation, we are righteous before God without sin. Isaiah 61: 10. “I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and a bride adorneth herself with her jewels.”

Some have said we as believers stain this robe of righteousness, others suggest that we also wear another robe that we stain and clean. We believe neither is correct. A believer either wears

the righteousness of Christ as a grace gift through faith, or a person wears the filthy garments of unbelief.
Isaiah 64:6. “But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags…”
Zachariah 3:3-5. “Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and stood before the angel. And he answered and spake unto those that stood before him, saying, Take away the filthy garments from him. And unto him he said, Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment.”

3. The Word of God as the highest authority.

John 1:1. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

“For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.” 1 John 5:7.

While most concur with this concept of the Word of God being the highest authority in doctrine and life, a worrisome trend has been heard in recent years suggesting that the spirit in the congregation is equal and seemingly exceeds the Word of God. While it is true that God, the Word, and the Holy Spirit are equal, the triune God, nevertheless, if the voice of the spirit in the congregation begins to teach contrary to the Word of God, some other spirit is at work. “Believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.” 1 John 4:1.

The body of Christ which is the Church, the communion of saints here on this earth, is subject to the head, being Christ. Paul writes to the Ephesians, “Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also that which is to come: And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church. Which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all.” Ephesians 1:21-23. In summary, we conclude the Word of God alone judges all teachers and preachers and is the judge of all doctrine.

4. Continual forgiveness.

“I write onto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name’s sake.” 1 John 2:12.

In recent times this term has become a flashpoint. We believe that continual forgiveness and grace are the same thing, not different from one another, as some suggest. A child of God can believe that their sins are forgiven at every moment, not only after asking for a blessing. The grace of God toward a believer is not punctual or just momentary. God’s grace or forgiveness is only accessed by faith. Nothing else. If it were true that some action on our part is needed to lay claim to the immeasurable grace of God, it would no more be a free grace gift but of works. “Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.” Romans 4:4-5.

Some have suggested that believing of grace and that our sins are forgiven at every moment leads to, or could lead to permissiveness of sin. This is not possible since grace and truth are inseparable. If a person has a mindset that says within himself, because grace abounds, I can live in sin. We say as Paul, God forbid. Grace teaches."For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world." Titus 2:11-12 . If man rejects the truth, which is Christ and His doctrine, grace is also then rejected.

Others have erroneously concluded that if our sins are forgiven every moment by faith, that would mean that having once believed it would be impossible to fall from faith (once a believer always a believer). We reject this type of teaching. Scripture is full of examples of people who had begun to endeavor as believers but became shipwrecked in faith. We battle against the threefold enemy with the aid of the Holy Spirit. "For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so ye cannot do the things that ye would." Galatians 5:17. This battle between the Spirit of God that dwells within us by faith and the powers of Satan, the world, and our own flesh is the endeavor of faith.

But this treasure, the gift of faith, is yet in earthen vessels. We carry also the old portion that does not believe. All have experienced this burden of unbelief within us. Some have said that believing of grace continually would mean that we would never need the assurance of the gospel again. This false statement would only be true if we traveled the narrow way with only one portion. However, flesh and blood having fallen from the perfect image of God in the garden of Eden will continue to reap inherited corruption till our death. Living souls require spiritual manna or they die. The Gospel lifts us, comforts us, carries us to the destination.

An oft cited comment that needs further explanation is that "yesterday's, today's, and even tomorrow's sins are forgiven." And so it is, for Christ suffered and died for the sins of not only those who believe, but also the whole world from Adam to judgment day. But it all hinges upon believing. What use is it to us if we have believed yesterday? Former faith saves no man if we have turned aside after Satan. Of tomorrow we need not worry since we've no promise of its coming. What matters is today, at this moment, that we are believing that our sins are forgiven for Christ's sake before God. In other words, Christ's atonement work is of no benefit without faith. As the old saying goes "it gets left to believing." Personal faith of the heart saves.

5. The disinviting of speakers.

This regrettable course of action has been undertaken by several congregations toward the brothers serving our congregation at Wolf Lake. These brothers have in weakness preached the Word of God according to the doctrine of Christ and remain in the love of the local congregation and many believers elsewhere. We believe these decisions to be divisive, wrong, and sin. "But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. And if they were all one member, where were the body? But now are they many members, yet but one body. And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you." 1 Corinthians 12: 18-21.

"So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another." Romans 12:5.

Paul writes of being members one of another. How is it then, that some of you divide these brothers in Christ from your fellowship? Are we not then members one of another? Some have opined that this disinviting is out of love. Does love divide?

Scripture relates of the wisdom of Solomon's judgment. How did he discern between the two women who each claimed the living child to be her own? By suggesting cutting the living child into two, his judgment revealed the true love the correct mother felt towards her child. This love the false mother lacked. She said let it be neither mine nor thine, but divide it. Sadly American Zion has been at this street corner of scripture before. Those old enough or studious learners of history will remember the actions of those who fell from grace in the last heresy disinvited the Finnish brothers and gave birth to heresy. We ask you to consider, how is it different now?

6. Justification.

"Therefore we conclude that man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law." Romans 3:28.

Perhaps the very core of recent disagreements is over this question. How is man justified before God?
The Scriptures, especially Apostle Paul, in addition to Luther and the other reformers have written much on this subject. This material is available to those with interest to study. Justification was after all, the primary disagreement to which they could never compromise. Neither can we as today's believers.

For we are righteous by faith alone, by grace alone, by the merit work of Christ. The completeness of the merit work of our Lord and Savior is sufficient for those who simply believe. What then is to be believed? Many of Jesus' words answer this question. "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?" John11:25-26.

This question of Jesus is yet asked today. Many say that they believe, we suppose most of the world would so answer, however they only believe in, but don't live in Christ Jesus, hence He does not dwell in them.

It has always been and remains a difficult matter for people to believe that man is justified or made acceptable to God only by faith in the merit works of Christ. Our corrupt flesh always wants to add something of ourselves to God's salvation plan that was promised already to the first human pair. There is not a partnership of sorts between us and the Heavenly Father, in that, if we do our part, God will then perform His. Not so. After the original fall from grace, man became completely corrupt and incapable of any good thing. The Bible relates all have fallen short of the glory of God. The story of Adam and Eve illustrates this immediate corruption, how so? They manufactured garments of fig leaves to hide the shame of their nakedness. This man-made righteousness was unacceptable to God. Only the animal skin garments which God prepared were an acceptable clothing to cover the sin.

Nothing has changed, only the righteousness that God has prepared in his Son is acceptable. Adding something more than just believing upon Jesus is to return to the bondage of the law.

Paul writes to the Galatians, “Are ye so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?” Galatians 3:3.

It appears this same desire to add some of man’s work to Christ’s righteousness has bewitched some of our day also. Instead of circumcision as in the early church, the issue is private confession. A common, often heard phrase is “put sin away”. While the phrase itself is harmless, what exactly does it mean? Who is putting and where is away? If putting sin away is to be understood as, we by faith and believing have put our sins on Christ Jesus and away is the bottom of hell, where Jesus took them on our behalf, we would say amen. However, if it means that we do the “putting away” of sin via confession to rid them from our conscience then we have improved upon the righteousness of Christ and private confession has become a work to merit forgiveness /righteousness and is a misuse of this gift.

Some may surmise that, can I not believe mostly of grace and just a little bit of law or something I would need to do. Not so, Scriptures affirm the answer to this question. “A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.” Galatians 5:9. In other words, justification is an all or nothing proposition, all by grace or no justification. We then conclude, man is justified by faith alone, which is the righteousness of faith. If man adds anything to merit justification, be it private confession, observing of rules, or traditions of men, etc, the law has entered our justification. If then we allow the law to enter into the equation of how we are justified, we become debtors to the whole law, and have fallen from grace.

Some may then say, do we not need private confession? Or what of righteousness of life? We believe that being justified by faith we have peace with God. This means our sins are forgiven. Christ is the mediator that has come between us as sinful people and God. We have, by faith gained His forgiveness and favor. Despite these promises of God, we are slow to believe that all of our sins are covered. As is often the case, Satan tries to say otherwise. We can then turn to another believer for comfort and assurance that God’s promises are sure and unchanged, we yet have permission to believe. This gift helps us along the way, we are free to use it as much as we have need. But we are just as righteous before, as we are after. Private confession is separate from justification, it is not a vehicle by which sin is forgiven, or God’s grace is accessed. That is done by faith.

Righteousness of life follows after righteousness of faith, it is the fruits of faith. These fruits are as if on autopilot, they come by themselves. These good works are incited as Luther says by the Holy Spirit. We don’t live righteous, sober and godly lives, and then having done this good work, now we are eligible for the righteousness of faith. The world is full of this type of works righteousness.

This then is the mystery of faith, that we are righteous, holy, without sin, heaven acceptable, yet of ourselves unrighteous, full of sin and corruption.

We have written of how we have believed on some of the questions of our time, we ask you then, judge what we have written.

Roger W. Alajoki