

The Cloud

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News and Articles from the St. Cloud Circuit of the LCMS

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The Paul Issue

By Rev Joshua Reber (Trinity, Clear Lake; Faith, St. Cloud; editor)

There are 27 books in the New Testament – Paul wrote 13 or 14 of them¹, and helped Luke write the third Gospel and Acts. Jesus is the most influential man who ever lived. Is Paul second? Maybe. It's a worthy debate between Peter, Paul, and John. I rank the Beatles as John, Paul, George, and Ringo. I'll rank the most influential men as Jesus, Paul, John, and then Peter, with Luther being the 5th Beatle.

Paul wasn't afraid of controversy. He addresses church scandals, gender roles, closed communion, pagan lifestyles, and salvation by grace through faith. He's an Apostle for our time. This issue, like Paul, is as timely as ever.

¹ The official position of *The Cloud* is that Paul wrote Hebrews.

Romans: A Reader's Guide

By Rev Dr James Gimbel (St. John's, Kimball)

St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans is foundational to our understanding of fundamental Lutheran theological teachings. Jesus challenges every disciple to search the Scriptures. This reading plan through Romans in 31 days will immerse the reader in this treasure trove of theology.

To our best piecing together of history, Saul, prior to his conversion to Christianity, was a well-trained Jewish Pharisee lawyer. (Note: Saul was his Hebrew name; he was known as Paul in his Greco-Roman missionary contexts.) This letter reflects both the somewhat rambling, comprehensive "legalese" of the day and the deep logic used in debates with contemporary philosophers. Some whole paragraphs in Paul's writings were a single sentence in the original Greek, and the text has lots of passive voice and complex noun and pronoun shifts. Reread if necessary, working through the ramble to mine the gold.

St. Paul had likely not visited Rome before writing this letter. He probably dictated the contents to Tertius, his traveling companion, during a three-month winter stay in Corinth in 56-57 AD (see Acts 20:3-4). The epistle responds to conflict among Roman Christians from Jewish influencers (like Paul had once been) who were trying to require Gentile Christians to become ritual Jews first before becoming Christian. Paul clarified the distinction between the Jewish ritual laws and the Christian Gospel. Paul also indicates his desire to establish a missionary base in Rome, from where he hoped to travel with the gospel to Spain.

Lutheran Emphases in Romans

Martin Luther famously described Romans as "the chief part of the New Testament and the purest Gospel." Several doctrines stand out:

- **Original Sin:** Christianity doesn't make sense without a clear understanding of Original Sin. Romans articulates the realities of sin in Chapters 1-2, 7, setting up our need for the brilliant loving sacrifice of God's gift in Jesus.
- **Justification by Faith Alone:** Romans 3-5 articulates how sinners are justified (just-as-if-I'd never sinned) — and declared righteous (without sin) — by God's grace, solely through faith in Christ apart from human effort or works. This doctrine remains the heart of Lutheran theology.
- **The Law and the Gospel:** Back and forth in the letter, Paul distinguishes between the condemning function of the Law (which reveals sin) and the saving message of the Gospel (which offers forgiveness and life in Christ). He also describes that the Christian *wants to do good* (as part of Sanctification, guided by God's will in the law). This distinction is crucial for proper Biblical interpretation and preaching.
- **Baptism and New Life:** Romans 6 teaches about baptism as the miraculous means by which believers are united with Christ in His death and resurrection, empowering them to walk in newness of life through this *mysterion* (Sacrament).
- **The Work of the Holy Spirit:** In Romans 8, Paul describes the Spirit's role in sanctification, comfort, prayer, and assurance of salvation. The Spirit's work continues in chapters 12-15 describing His role in helping believers work and live together (like parts of a body) in the new life as the communion (community) of saints.

Daily Reading and Reflection:

Day	Reading from Romans	Topic
1	1:1-17	Introduction of Paul AND the Gospel
2	1:18-32	Original Sin leaves natural knowledge of God but no relationship
3	2:1-16	God's judgment against sin and sinners
4	2:17-29	Sincere faith versus outward ritual/religious practice
5	3:1-20	Condemns empty religion
6	3:21-31	Focuses on redemption, righteousness, and salvation
7	4:1-12	Old Testament examples describe faith
8	4:13-25	Reveals God's promises received by faith
9	5:1-11	Describes God's love for sinners through Christ
10	5:12-21	Compares and contrasts Adam and Christ
11	6:1-14	The miracle and impact of Baptism
12	6:15-23	Clarifies our transformation from sinner to saint
13	7:1-13	Reveals the Gospel's freedom to save
14	7:14-25	Discloses struggles with sin and need for Christ
15	8:1-11	Proclaims that in Christ we need not fear Judgment Day
16	8:12-17	Describes our adoption as heirs into Christ's family
17	8:18-27	Facing the world's hopeless condition/suffering with the Spirit
18	8:28-39	Promises God's inseparable love for believers
19	9:1-18	Rejects false religion against true faith in Christ
20	9:19-33	Harsh realities of Israel's rejection of Christ
21	10:1-13	Paul's sad assessment of Israel
22	10:14-21	Paul's/our mission means sharing the true Gospel
23	11:1-15	Grief over Israel's rejection of Jesus
24	11:16-24	A warm welcome of Gentile believers
25	11:25-36	God's wisdom, mercy, and grace
26	12:1-8	Life in the body of believers
27	12:9-21	Practical Christian character/characteristics
28	13:1-14	God established authorities in His place and expects our response
29	14:1-15:7	Relationships often challenge Christians
30	15:8-29	God's love for Jews and Gentiles
31	15:29-16:27	Paul's warm farewell and goal

May your time in Romans help you reflect anew on God's grace, faith, and the promise of salvation in Christ.

Ephesians: You Belong Here

By Rev Joel Kosberg (Love of Christ, St. Cloud)

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul wrote to a church not too unlike the church you attend. A church with lots of different opinions, difficulties, and disconnects. He writes about unity in Jesus. He writes about belonging. In Ephesians 2:19, he paints a picture of contrast: once strangers, now family. He says, **“You are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of His household.”** Do you hear the movement there? Once outside, now inside. Once excluded, now included. Once wandering, now home.

We all know what it feels like to be a stranger. To walk into a room where no one looks up. To feel like everyone else knows the inside jokes but you’re on the outside looking in. To wonder: is there a place for me here? Will anyone care that I came? That’s what it means to be a stranger: present but not connected, seen but not known, in the room but not belonging.

But Paul says that in Christ, something has shifted. You are no longer strangers. You are fellow citizens. You share rights, responsibilities, and dignity. You are members of God’s household. You are family, not guests. That’s the language of belonging. It isn’t something you earned by finally fitting in or proving yourself. It’s something Christ has done for you through His death and resurrection. He has taken those who were far off and brought them near.

This is why the early church that Paul was writing to in Ephesus was so radical. Jews and Gentiles, rich and poor, slaves and free, people who had no business being together, suddenly sat around the same table, shared the same bread, prayed to the same Father. Strangers became siblings. Outsiders became insiders. A household was formed where before there had only been dividing walls.

And that is not just their story. It’s ours. Jesus died and He rose for you! Every one of us was once a stranger to God’s promises. Every one of us knows what it is to feel like we’re on the outside of life, wondering if there’s a circle where we really belong. But in Christ, God says: Yes, you are home. Yes, you are family. Yes, you belong.

If belonging feels like home, then loneliness feels like being locked out on the front step while the lights are on inside. And if you’ve ever felt it, you know how painful it can be. Loneliness is the sense that everyone else has a place at the table while your chair sits empty. It’s walking into a room where the laughter is loud and the conversations are deep, but you’re not sure anyone would notice if you left.

Our world is filled with strangers. It is filled with people we don’t know, but also people who don’t know us. You can be surrounded by coworkers, classmates, neighbors, even family members, and still feel like you don’t belong to anyone. Loneliness shows up in little ways: eating dinner with your phone because there’s no one across the table, scrolling through social media late at night while feeling more and more isolated, lying in bed wondering if anyone will

check in tomorrow.

They call loneliness an epidemic now. Surveys say more than half of adults in America feel isolated most of the time. Gen Z has been called the loneliest generation. But you don't really need a survey to prove it. You know it when you remember that time you wanted to tell someone your story and didn't know who would really listen or understand. You know it when you find yourself in a crowd yet feel like a stranger, unknown, unclaimed.

And here's why it hurts so deeply: because we weren't made to be strangers. God created us to belong—to Him and to one another. We were meant for shared meals, for voices that call us by name, for someone who knows when the silence in your house isn't peace but sadness. When that is missing, we feel a deep disconnect in life.

This is the world into which Paul writes: a world of strangers, walls, divisions, and disconnection. And into that world, Paul proclaims: you are no longer strangers. In Christ, the God who knows your name has chosen you. In Christ, the outsider finds a place inside. In Christ, the lonely discover they are part of a household, a family, a people. In a world full of strangers Jesus creates a community of belonging.

Titus: A Lutheran Epistle

By Rev Bruce Timm (Redeemer, St. Cloud; 2nd VP MNN District

Titus is Lutheran. Or better, St. Paul is Lutheran since he wrote the letter to Titus. Or better yet, Luther derived some wonderful theology from the book of Titus.

Why do I say Titus is Lutheran? Well, first to be a little snarky and get people to think. Second, it is a way to say that Lutherans believe what the Bible says. If what we Lutherans believe and confesses is not what Scripture says it's time to look for another church. Third, Titus is quoted by Luther in the Small Catechism. Under the Third Part, Luther asks the question, "How can water do such great things?" Luther's answer includes Titus 3:5-8:

He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that having been justified by His grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. This is a trustworthy saying.

Here St. Paul confesses to Titus what we believe about Holy Baptism. God works in baptism:

- to save us
- to give us a second birth, to make us a new creation, to start our lives anew
- by the Holy Spirit
- to deliver the justification Christ won for us
- by grace
- to write us into God's will (making us heirs)
- that we might have the hope of eternal life.

This is most certainly true.

Another Lutheran doctrine found in Paul's letter to Titus is *the three estates*. There are three places / estates in which the Christian lives – the home, the church, and the state. In Luther's day there was some confusion about these estates – almost a wall of separation. Those in the home worked, those in the church prayed and served the Lord, and those in the state fought and ruled. If you wanted to serve in the church you had to forsake your family and your money, in a way forsake home and state, to become a monk or nun.

Luther, in his trials and study of Scripture, came to believe and confess that the Christian lives in all three estates simultaneously. This doctrine is expressed in the Small Catechism under the Table of Duties. He addresses **the Church** – Bishops, Pastors, Preachers, and hearers of the Word. He addresses **the State** – Of Civil Government and Of Citizens. Then Luther speaks to **the home** – to Husbands, Wives, Parents, Children, Youth, and Widows.

The letter to Titus can be read like a table of duties. In chapter 1, Paul talks about the duties of pastors, in chapter 2, he addresses the home – older men, older women, young women, younger men, and slaves. In chapter 3, Paul tells Titus to remind his hearers to be submissive to rulers and authorities (the state).

Titus is filled with exhortation. You should be doing good works. Pastors are to be hospitable, lovers of good, self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. Older women are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach younger women to love their husbands and children. Younger men are to be self-controlled. Everyone is to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to speak evil of no one, avoid quarreling, and the duties go on.

Two things will happen when you read the duties in Titus. The Holy Spirit will convict you of your sins and He will exhort you to do good works. That's good. That's what God's Word of Law is supposed to do – show you your sin and guide you in good works.

In addition to exhortation, you will find the incarnation of Christ in Titus. Right in the midst of those duties, you'll find Jesus. In Titus 2:11, Paul writes, **“For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people.” He says that Jesus “gave Himself to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.”**

There in the “appearing of God's grace” you have the answer to your sin and the reason for good works. You have been saved from your sins by Jesus. You are God's own possession in Christ. You are purified so you want to do good and can do good in the world.

Paul brings up the incarnation again in chapter 3, in that same section Luther quotes on baptism, when he writes, **“But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us.”** Once again, Paul links God's saving work in Christ to good works, **“The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works.”**

Do you see how Lutheran Titus is? Or perhaps the best way to say it is this – see how we Lutherans simply believe what God's Word says – about sin, about God's grace in Christ, about Baptism, and about good works. That's what you'll find in Paul's letter to Titus.

Should You Attend a Gay Wedding?

By Rev Joshua Reber (Faith, St. Cloud and Trinity, Clear Lake)

What does St. Paul say?

“Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in *orgies* and drunkenness, *not in sexual immorality and sensuality*, not in quarreling and jealousy” (Rom 13:13).

“Now the works of the flesh are evident: *sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality... envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these*. I warn you, as I warned you before, that *those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God*” (Gal 5:19-20, 21)

Peter, who didn't always get along with Paul, sees eye to eye with him on this point. **“live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God. For the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry. With respect to this *they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you*” (1 Pt 4:2-4).**

Okay, back to Paul. This one is a doozy. **“Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. *For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error*. And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, *they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them*” (Rom 1:22-32).**

Paul frequently tells us to *avoid* things (see 1 Tim 6:20; 2 Tim 2:16, 3:5; Titus 3:2, 9 in addition to these) **“Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to *avoid* God's wrath but also *for the sake of conscience* (Rom 13:5)”**.

“I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; *avoid* them” (Rom 16:17).

So should you attend? No. But what if it's someone I love? What if it's my kid or another relative or a dear friend? I'm sorry that you've been put in that position. Jesus is clear, though. **“If anyone comes to**

me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple” (Lk 14:26).

Why is this an issue now? It’s because of the cultural acceptance and legalization of it. Just because the government says it’s marriage, it’s still not marriage. You can’t actually go to a gay wedding because it’s not a wedding. Some have taken to calling it “Gay Mirage” and I see the merit in that. We shouldn’t get comfortable using words that blaspheme what God has made good and holy.

I’ve heard lots of people say they want to show up for support but not endorsement. But isn’t supporting someone in doing something against God’s will endorsement? Here’s a helpful thought experiment, and I know this is provocative, but we’ve got to be intentionally provocative here: Would you attend your son’s induction ceremony into the Ku Klux Klan? Why not? Because it’s clearly sinful? Don’t you love your son? The only difference between attending a Ku Klux Klan induction and a gay wedding is that one is culturally accepted and one isn’t. They’re both public displays of sin. Going to one won’t get you cultural hot water, while going to the other will get you fired. You wouldn’t say, “But I love my relative, so I want to show up to their neo-Nazi revival to show my support for them, even though I find the ideology repulsive.”

Paul admonishes us to speak the truth in love (Eph 4:15). Attending the wedding compromises our ability to speak the truth, and a truthless love isn’t love, but is vapid emotionalism. If you have a loved one who’s marrying someone of the same sex, I have sympathy for you. It’s tough. I pray that you would be able to speak the uncompromising truth of Jesus Christ to them, the bridegroom of the church, in love, so that they would repent, believe the Gospel, and be saved.

CIRCUIT CONVOCATION

Saturday, May 16, 2026 @ 9am
Holy Cross Lutheran Church, St. Cloud

**Worship, Fellowship, Presentation by District President Brady Finnern, Q&A
with the Circuit Pastors, BBQ**

**This is for ALL Members of Congregations in the St. Cloud Circuit
Registration Details to Follow**