

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

**[Intro]**

Just minutes ago, we heard the sword of God’s Law as He pronounced the Ten Commandments. These commandments are not God’s suggestions, but His commands. God is not Someone to be messed with. God means exactly what He says and He cannot be in the presence of any sin. The prophet Isaiah proclaims just that: **“[Our] iniquities have made a separation between [us] and God”** (Isaiah 59:2).

God tells us, **“I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate Me, but showing steadfast love to a thousand generations who love Me and keep my commandments”** (Exodus 20:5-6; Luther’s Small Catechism: Close of the Commandments).

Martin Luther tells us this means: *God threatens to punish all who break these commandments. Therefore, we should fear His wrath and not do anything against them. But He promises grace and every blessing to all who keep these commandments. Therefore, we should also love and trust in Him and gladly do what He commands.*

God tells us that we are to be holy. He tells us that we are to be with Him while set apart from the unbelieving world around us (2 Corinthians 6:17). But how could we do this? How could anyone obey every single commandment of God? I have never met a sinless person. I bet you haven’t either.

On our own, we cannot stand in the presence of God. We always fall short of obeying God’s commandments. Thus, we are all doomed to face God’s wrath and face eternal punishment. Is this our future? Well, this is the future for all unbelievers. This is not a bright and positive future. This is eternal death and damnation. But the triune God is a loving God. He knew His commandments were impossible in a sinful world. So, He sent His only begotten Son to suffer and die on our behalf.

### *[Life in Corinth]*

The city of Corinth was a melting pot. And, ever since the Romans conquered Greece, Corinth became the most important city in the region. Corinth was the leading cultural center and commercial center between Rome and the East. Under Roman rule, Corinth was a city of wealth, luxury, but also immorality. By the second century A.D., Corinth's growing population reached more than 300,000 free citizens with more than 460,000 slaves.

This was a city with a theater that seated thousands. This was a city with a stadium that seated thousands. This was a city of wealth. This was a city of distractions. Corinth was a city much like today's cities.

On top of this, the city of Corinth was filled with worldly wisdom. Both Jewish scribes and Greek philosophers sought worldly wisdom. The Jews and the Gentile Greeks may have been much different culturally, but they were much alike when it came to worldly wisdom since they each sought it.

### *[Worldly Wisdom]*

They each believed that salvation through a crucified man was foolish. For this, the Apostle Paul writes: ***“For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God”*** (1 Corinthians 1:18).

The problem is that worldly wisdom itself does not lead to salvation. Worldly wisdom would only lead people to eternal suffering in hell. So, these Jews and Gentile Greeks were ***“perishing”*** in their own wisdom. They were so sure and confident that they had all the answers to the problems of sin and guilt that they rejected God's truth, His divine and eternal answers to man's sin and guilt. Although they loved to debate, all of their worldly wisdom combined could not save a single soul.

For them, salvation through the cross of Christ was pure ***“foolishness.”*** It was the silliest thing that they have ever heard. And they were perishing because they thought the cross of Christ was foolishness. These Gentile Greeks wanted a religion that challenged their intelligence. They wanted philosophy, not a crucified Jew who made great claims about saving the world. They wanted something that made sense. They wanted something that appealed to their logic and reason.

As for the Jews, they sought wisdom through “*miraculous signs.*” Over and over again, they said to Jesus, “*Show us a sign,*” and Jesus gave them signs. Jesus healed the sick; He opened the eyes of the blind; He raised the dead; He preached the gospel to the poor. All of which fulfilled what the Lord inspired the Prophets to foretell that the long-awaited Messiah would do. But the Jews sought a different kind of sign because they wanted Jesus to be a different kind of Messiah. The Jews wanted a worldly Messiah, rather than the Savior from sin.

Even with Isaiah 53 before their eyes, which says, “*He was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed*” (Isaiah 53:5), they could only look to Deuteronomy 21:23, which says, “*For a hanged man is cursed by God.*”

To the Jew, the fact of the crucifixion was proof that Jesus was not the Son of God.

For the Jew and Gentile Greek, the preaching of Christ crucified, which Paul says is both “*a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles*” (1 Corinthians 1:23) is the truth. This was a barrier. This was revolting. This was laughable. This was ridiculous.

For these nonbelievers, they have set themselves up as the arbiters of truth. They believe in following worldly standards. But with the sinful mind, we can make some very inappropriate judgments.

### ***[Equality Act]***

Sadly, mankind has not changed all that much from the First Century way of thinking and living. Immorality is rampant as people seek worldly wisdom; often preferring it over God’s unchanging truth. Since 2015, the Equality Act has been introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives each year and it has never been approved by the U.S. Senate.

What few may realize, is this proposed legislation is simply more worldly wisdom. I’ve heard it said that “*Anyone who opposes this bill is just mean. We need it, because we have hate out there that gets in the way of the great American dream of equality.*”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.newsweek.com/schumer-condemns-despicable-transphobic-remarks-republicans-ahead-equality-act-vote-1572192>

Now, every American should be in favor of equality. We should all stand against discrimination. Like Corinth then, Christianity is viewed by worldly unbelievers as serving no benefit to society. So, instead of looking to God's wisdom, the culture has, like those First Century Corinthians, turned to worldly wisdom as their guide and source.

What you might not have known about the Equality Act is that anyone who believes in the Creation account of humanity to which God's Word says: ***"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them"*** (Genesis 1:27) and to which Jesus Himself confirms in Matthew 19 to which He said, ***"Have you not read that he who created them (Adam and Eve) from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'?"*** (Matthew 19:4-5), if we hold to God's truth, we would be found in violation of this proposed bill.

You see, worldly wisdom cannot undo how God created us. We are male and female, and no make-up, medication, or surgery can undo this. In fact, on the Last Day, when Jesus will come to judge the living and the dead as we confess in the Creed, we will all be as God created us and not as we choose to identify ourselves.

So, if we hold to God's Word, which teaches us this truth: that God created us male and female and we hold to His Word that marriage is only a union of a man and woman, *as the bill stands now*<sup>2</sup>, we would be in violation of the Equality Act and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and for this face legal action.

On top of this, the Equality Act, *as it is currently written*, would make abortion more readily available. The bill offers no protections for employers who morally object to covering abortion in their healthcare plans. On top of this, abortion would be paid for all at taxpayer expense.<sup>3</sup> So, healthcare professionals might also be forced to act contrary to their conscience and faith and be required to participate in an abortion, sexual reassignment surgery, and on and on.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.congress.gov/117/bills/hr5/BILLS-117hr5ih.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.adflegal.org/blog/why-equality-act-bad-news-unborn-babies-and-those-who-defend-them?fbclid=IwAR1jKkkHc2vETOJWa9IHs6yLErP2c7aSwJ5VU3vIIRkSCpXcCmvFo4yGTyI>

As we have witnessed in the past decades, the morality founded upon the Ten Commandments has eroded. And for those who follow God's commands, we are often ridiculed or mocked as homophobic, transphobic, and the like. In this bill, there are no religious exceptions, so any organization that adheres to God's Law in defining Christian morality could be punished by the Federal government, since the Equality Act designates schools, churches, and hospitals as "*public accommodations*" and as such they would be forced to accept the government's beliefs and mandates about sexual orientation and gender identity. This means that First Lutheran Church may be required to permit a biological male – *who identifies as a female* – access to the women's restroom.

Essentially, the Equality Act makes Christian morality bigotry on the Federal level. As long as we stand faithful to God's Word, this could mean that the Church would be forced to perform weddings for couples living contrary to God's Word, which would force us to declare along with Peter and the disciples in Acts 5:29, "***We must obey God rather than men.***" This could put our non-profit tax status in jeopardy, since we would be identified as a "hate group" all because of faithfully standing upon God's inerrant Word.

Again, nobody likes discrimination of any kind. We should seek equality, but not at the expense of the truth. Our Lord Jesus Christ tells us: "***I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me***" (John 14:6).

As Christians, we love and respect every person, just as Jesus loves and respects every person. Now, this love and respect, *as defined by Scripture and not the world*, is to inform our neighbor in the kindest way when he or she is on the wrong road. Loving and respecting is not saying we are fine with whatever decision a person makes. Fellow redeemed, as Luther's answer to the Fifth Commandment reminds us: "*We should fear and love God so that we do not hurt or harm our neighbor in his body, but help and support him in every physical need.*"

As followers of Christ, we are no better than anyone else, since we are all sinners in need of salvation. Thankfully, we know Christ and have been brought to faith by the power of the Holy Spirit working through the Word and Sacraments, but for much of the world, they are walking aimlessly in the darkness of their false worldly wisdom. So it is our vocation as a Christian to tell the world that forgiveness and salvation is found only in Christ to share God's Word with them in all its truth and purity. That is the truly loving thing to do, to tell them the truth.

There are many organizations that are supportive of this bill. But all of them, whether they be educators<sup>4</sup>, businesses<sup>5</sup>, politicians, or religious leaders<sup>6</sup> are simply employing worldly wisdom that is based upon the deceiver who peddles false truth.

Jesus teaches us, ***“If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free”*** (John 8:31-32). So, disciples of Christ cannot support this bill or similar legislation. This bill is designed to Federally eliminate gender differences altogether. This bill eliminates the differences between male and female and that is contrary to what God’s Word declares.

So, what can we do? We can share God’s truth that exposes the lie. We can inform each other. By remaining silent, we are implicitly agreeing that God’s Word is wrong and worldly wisdom is right. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer once said, *“Not to act is to act.”* For me, I would much rather be on the side of God, since I do not want to face His eternal wrath. As God says, He is wrathful to the evildoer, but He shows His steadfast love to the righteous. And with Peter and the disciples in Acts 5:29, we must remember and be faithful and steadfast. ***“We must obey God rather than men.”***

If you are upset that this is being preached from the pulpit, that is between you and God. Always remember this truth: God’s Law afflicts the comfortable, but His Gospel comforts the afflicted.

Also, do not be dismayed. Just as God protected the three men in the fiery furnace (Daniel 3) when they faced persecution for remaining faithful to the one true God, God will protect us too. Instead of choosing to fit in by bowing down to the false idol of Nebuchadnezzar, these three remained faithful to God even unto the fear of death. God indeed protected them. We have that same promise from God. He will deliver us from sin, eternal death, and Satan. We have this sure and certain promise through the crucified and risen Christ.

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[https://assets2.hrc.org/files/assets/resources/Orgs\\_Endorsing\\_EqualityAct.pdf?\\_ga=2.91380125.689156515.1614616995-126038101.1614616995&fbclid=IwAR3-NO5m7IjEwOwFHHMg6gILdxokKlrLpuVdilHwmXM6iZfhd8gbHQ1F8s](https://assets2.hrc.org/files/assets/resources/Orgs_Endorsing_EqualityAct.pdf?_ga=2.91380125.689156515.1614616995-126038101.1614616995&fbclid=IwAR3-NO5m7IjEwOwFHHMg6gILdxokKlrLpuVdilHwmXM6iZfhd8gbHQ1F8s)

<sup>5</sup> [https://hrc-prod-requests.s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/Keep\\_Updated\\_-\\_Company\\_List\\_For\\_Website\\_-\\_Business\\_Coalition\\_for\\_Equality.pdf?fbclid=IwAR3dUjvCiBkztdia66KUwmLrFzOeKQsW-ALi3OGb5JD3\\_OXQaqlgRP\\_WtHs](https://hrc-prod-requests.s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/Keep_Updated_-_Company_List_For_Website_-_Business_Coalition_for_Equality.pdf?fbclid=IwAR3dUjvCiBkztdia66KUwmLrFzOeKQsW-ALi3OGb5JD3_OXQaqlgRP_WtHs)

<sup>6</sup> See footnote #4.

This is a fiery furnace moment for the church. The question for us is, who are we loyal to? Are we loyal to the prevailing winds of culture, or are we loyal to God?

*[The Wisdom of the Cross]*

As the triune God teaches us all throughout Scripture, His Word is not a suggestion. His Word is truth. His Word is true wisdom. We have something that worldly wisdom will never have. We have true equality. As the Lord inspired the Apostle Paul to write to the Church of Galatia: ***“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male or female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus”*** (Galatians 3:28).

For everyone in Christ, we are not divided by outward appearance and put into separate groups. We are all one in Christ. We have all received reconciliation through Christ crucified. In Christ alone, we have received forgiveness of sins, which guarantees eternal life and salvation. And where we go wrong – *for which we repeatedly do* – through repentance, our sin is forgiven through the blood of Jesus. It is through the crucified and risen Jesus that we are united to Him and to His Father in heaven.

So, as the sinful world seeks wisdom through worldly things, God proves that man’s wisdom is foolish. The Jews saw the cross as proof of weakness, but God made that cross the world’s most powerful instrument for good. The Gentile Greeks saw the cross as proof of absurdity, but God made that gospel the greatest truth the mind of man can receive.

Today, worldly wisdom mocks Christians who actually believe God’s inerrant Word. As it was in First Century Corinth, the followers of Christ were laughed at and ridiculed, rather than to be listened to and respected. In many respects, we have returned to those times.

Remember, we preach Christ crucified and risen! It is only through the crucified Christ that we are saved. No social justice theory can save us. Banning books cannot save us. No environmental justice theory can save us. We are only saved through the Word of the Cross. We are saved through Christ crucified.

It is through the cross that God puts to shame and humbles all human wisdom and power. Human wisdom cannot lead to God since He reveals Himself in the message of the cross found only in His timeless Word. This is where we are forgiven. It is at the cross where salvation for the world was won. It is here where Christ accomplished His mission so that whoever would believe in Him would receive forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation.

Through Christ, our identity is that of a child of the heavenly Father. It is through His suffering, death, and resurrection that we have received this wisdom from God. By grace through faith in the crucified and risen Christ, we have received righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. So, what may be foolish to some is wisdom to all who believe! Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

✠ SOLI DEO GLORIA ✠