

# The Comfort of Assurance

*Heidelberg Catechism 2013-2014*

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**Bible Text:** Romans 8:35-39  
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On this first Lord's Day of the year 2013, we turn in our Bibles to Romans 8, our Scripture reading for this morning's message. Romans 8, you'll find in your pew edition Bible on page 944, is a chapter in which the Apostle Paul explains at length the gift and the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The ministry of the Holy Spirit, among other things, is to confirm in our hearts, to assure us of the promises of our heavenly Father, of a God who is not simply the Ruler and Creator of all things but he is our Father. We cry, "Abba, Father," to him. In other words, we live before a God who is sovereign but also we live within that intimate relationship, the closest kind of relationship you could ever imagine.

I'd like to pick up at verse 12 and read through the end of the chapter. The Apostle Paul writes,

12 So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. 13 For if you live according to the flesh you will die."

"The flesh" here, as Paul often uses that term "flesh" signifies that which is at war with the Gospel, that which is at war against God.

but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. 14 For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God [are children of God]. 15 For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" 16 The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,

And notice very carefully here, notice how Paul, by the Spirit's guidance, so beautifully describes and links together this teaching with the practical application. What does it mean, then, if we're children of God? Verse 17,

17 and if children, then heirs--heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. 18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. 19 For the creation

waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. 20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. 22 For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. 23 And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. 24 For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? 25 But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. 26 Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. 27 And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. 28 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. 29 For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. 30 And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. 31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? 33 Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. 34 Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died--more than that, who was raised--who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.

And now our text.

35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? 36 As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." 37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Here ends the reading of God's word from Romans 8, and on this first Lord's Day of 2013, we turn to the word of God summarized for us in the Heidelberg Catechism. Lord's Day 1. How providential and how wonderful. I think about that with my students again returning to class today. Sometimes parents wonder, sometimes certainly students wonder why do I make them commit these things to memory. It's not just the tedium of that memorization, I know it's hard work, especially for some students it's especially hard and

I'm very sympathetic to that, but I want this Confession to be part of our vocabulary, part of our way of thinking it. I want it to be for us the very fabric of our world and life view and Lord's Day 1 states so beautifully and succinctly the great comfort that we have in our Lord Jesus Christ.

We'll read the response only this morning of the first two Questions and Answers in the Catechism. Congregation,

Q. 1. What is your only comfort in life and in death?

That I am not my own but belong body and soul in life and in death to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ . He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil. He also watches over me in such a way that not a hair can fall from my head without the will of my Father in heaven, in fact, all things must work together for my salvation. Because I belong to him, Christ by his Holy Spirit assures me of eternal life and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him.

And let me encourage all of you, especially parents with young children: teach your children to memorize that Lord's Day, and I'm talking to those of you with young children. Make it part of your vocabulary at family devotions.

Then Question and Answer 2. Congregation,

Q. 2. What must you know to live and die in the joy of this comfort?

Three things. First, how great my sin and misery are. Second, how I am set free from all my sins and misery. Third, how I am to thank God for such deliverance.

Let's join together in prayer.

*Father in heaven, we thank you that in your providence you have given us such a beautiful summary of the Gospel; that in times of great adversity, at times of great violence, you have directed your servants to compose a statement which so eloquently summarizes that which gives us great comfort. It is ultimately our only comfort. And Father, my prayer this morning at the beginning of this year is that each one who hears this message this morning, each one who has read this particular Lord's Day of the Catechism, would come to embrace that truth and they would come to know personally, directly, intimately, the comfort of this confession of faith, to belong to a faithful Savior Jesus Christ. I pray that your Spirit would impress that upon the hearts of each one this morning, that we would see that in the face of adversity, in the face of competing religions and competing worldviews, all that we really have and all that we would really want to have is our Lord Jesus Christ, the one who will never fail us, the one who will*

*never disappoint us, the one who has secured for us all things. So Father, bless this word to our hearts we pray, for Jesus' sake. Amen.*

Brothers and sisters in our Lord Jesus Christ, many people have made the comparison between Romans 8 and Mount Everest. We are at the summit this morning of Mount Everest. I want you to think about that imagery this morning. The highest peak, the highest elevation. The view is grand. It's beautiful. It's amazing, breathtaking, and the journey up Everest is a long and at times arduous and even a painful treacherous one. In fact, many have commented that as we make that journey in Romans 8 from the base of the mountain up to its pinnacle, to its peak, the only thing that we have to hold onto like a rope, a guide rope, is the Gospel of Jesus Christ, what Jesus Christ has accomplished for us.

Now maybe when you read Romans 8, you don't think of Mount Everest, you don't think of this great soaring summit, and maybe that's because we have lived up on the top of that summit for too long and we don't appreciate how breathtaking the view really is, but put yourself this morning in the shoes, in the situation, of someone who does not have the security of this confession of faith, who does not have and does not cling to the promise of Romans 8. What do people have to look forward to? What is their source of confidence and assurance? What gives them hope in the face of doubt for the coming year? That's a very important question to ask. What gives life meaning and purpose?

I thought about that this past week, in particular with something that happened recently in our news, in light of the terrible tragedy in Newtown, Connecticut. I don't know how many of you listened to or watched the press conference or the speech delivered by our President, I believe it was on Sunday, December 21. I saw it that night, my wife and I were watching it, and I was struck by, among other things, the President's references to Scripture. You remember he started that speech off by quoting the Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians. Now before you become cynical about this and say, "Well, he doesn't really believe this." Or, "I can't trust what he says." That's not my point this morning. My point is simply to make a comparison between how the President sought to comfort a grieving nation and a grieving community, compare that with what the Catechism and what the Scripture says.

I'll quote to you briefly what he said in that speech, what struck me. He says, "Why are we here? What gives our life meaning? What gives our acts purpose? We know our time on this earth is fleeting. We know that we will each have our share of pleasure and pain; that even after we chased after some earthly goal, whether it's wealth or power or fame or just simple comfort, we will in some fashion fall short of what we had hoped." All of which, I think, you could agree with. That's what struck me about his message. "We know that no matter how good our intentions, we'll all stumble sometimes in some way." So far so good. "We'll make mistakes, we'll experience hardships, and even when we're trying to do the right thing, we know that much of our time will be spent groping through the darkness, so often unable to discern God's heavenly plans." That's a remarkable statement by our President, by the way, but then he went on to say this, "There is only one thing we can be sure of," and I thought what a wonderful opportunity, what a

wonderful moment to present the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He said, "There's only one thing we can be sure of and that is the love that we have for our children, for our families, for each other. The warmth of a small child's embrace, that is true. The memories we have of them, the joy that they bring, the wonder we see through their eyes, the fierce and boundless love we feel for them, a love that takes us out of ourselves and binds us to something larger, we know that's what matters." Do you sense when you hear that, did you sense maybe when you watched that speech on television or heard it on the radio, I sensed him groping, trying to find something, trying to cling to something in a moment of intense pain and sorrow. All of us I think who watched carefully what happened in Newtown were just overwhelmed by the tragedy, the violence. Who could inflict such a terrible thing upon 5 year old children?

He concluded by saying, "We know we're always doing right when we're taking care of them and we're teaching them well, and we're showing acts of kindness. We don't go wrong when we do that." And I thought, I appreciate very much a President trying to comfort the grieving, he needs to be applauded for that, but I thought, what a shame. What a shame that the only real source of comfort was never touched upon. The comfort was not simply our love for one another or our love for children or our children's love for us, with all due respect to the President, that is not ultimately what we cling to. It's the language here of the Catechism that gives us hope and that comforts us in our sorrow and pain.

Think about this: what is your only comfort? The Catechism doesn't go into a lengthy theological explanation of the doctrine of God. It's not abstract. It's not deeply theological. It's practical. The language is plain and simple. That's what I think is what makes it such a beautiful document. It speaks to us where we're at. It speaks to us in our ordinary affairs of life because life doesn't always go well for us; it's not always one joy after another. We face sorrow. We face darkness. We face hardship and disappointment and failure. In the coming year, we will be wronged and people will hurt us. We may suffer. We may grieve. We may find ourselves deeply frustrated. Where do you turn to? The Catechism says the only comfort in a life that is filled with all sorts of sorrow and pain, is the knowledge that we belong to a Savior Jesus Christ.

Comfort literally means with strength. What fortifies you? What encourages you? Where do you look to when things couldn't possibly get worse for you, or so you think? The Catechism says you turn not to yourself, not to your own resources, you turn to the Lord Jesus Christ, and I think what parallels that statement is our text from Romans 8. I want to briefly consider with you two things this morning. First of all, the challenge that the Apostle Paul lays before us. The challenge is simply this: what shall separate, who shall separate us, who is going to drive a wedge between you and the love of God in Jesus Christ? It's a rhetorical question but it's a very pertinent question, especially at the beginning of this year. What will separate you from the love of God in Jesus Christ? That's the challenge, and then, secondly, an affirmation. There is an affirmation upon which assurance rests.

This language of the Catechism in Romans 8 is full of assurance, it's full of confidence, it's full of strength, and certainly what's more appropriate for the beginning of a new year than to be reminded of that. The economic forecasters predict gloom and doom, certainly it's going to be a long difficult year economically. Politically, all sorts of instabilities. Morally, I sent many of you this past week a column from Eric Zorn from the Tribune. Basically I may summarize what he said, he said gay marriage is here to stay and if you don't like it, that's too bad. You're going to have to learn to live with it, you hateful, bigoted people who oppose gay marriage. That's the summary of what he was saying, and I tell you, it's a thought, it's a sentiment shared by many people in our nation, people militant to see this change, this radical change of moral values in our nation. In one sense, it could be very depressing, couldn't it? But I think we of all people ought to be the most confident, the most optimistic, the most joyful, in the new year.

First of all, the challenge. You have your Bibles open to Romans 8, Paul has been issuing a series of these rhetorical questions, a series of them, simply to provoke the believer, the reader here, you and me, to think about the security, the assurance, the confidence that we have because of what God in his sovereign purpose has done in Jesus Christ. That's the whole point of Romans 8. What God has ordained he brings to completion and nothing, nothing can thwart his work.

Notice carefully the way in which the Apostle Paul constructs his questions. He doesn't simply say who can be against us because you and I could rattle off any number of things or people or movements in the country, movements in the world, that are opposed against us, but he poses the question or he states the question in this way: if God is for us, if God is the one who directs all the courses of human history, if God is the one who directs our lives, if God is the one who holds us in his hands, who can be against us? That's the point he's making. The question is not simply will God give us all things, that, in itself, is a question we can answer but we may have our doubts, we may have our questions, we have our hesitations and say, "Well, will God give me everything I need for this coming year?" But Paul says not only will God give us all things but he says, "He who did not spare his own Son, he who gave the costliest gift of all, he who did not spare the one who was closest to him, if he did that, what makes you think he's going to be stingy with you in the coming year?"

It's not simply who will bring a charge against God's elect, our consciences convict us of our own shortcomings, our own sins. Satan is there always accusing, always pointing the finger, and the world mocks us and tries to expose hypocrisy. But Paul says, "Who will bring a charge against us? No, the one who elected us, God, and the one who justified us in Christ Jesus," and the certainty and the assurance of Romans 8 is this in legal terms, it's a court scene here, Paul says, "If you have been acquitted, if you've been declared righteous in the presence of God because of what Jesus Christ has done, there is no double jeopardy. You will not be condemned again." Does someone condemn? No. Christ Jesus, who not only died, not only rose, but Jesus Christ who is there pleading your cause before the Father, Paul says to all of that, in the face of that, "Really what can overwhelm us?" Then he asks the question, "Not simply can anything separate us, can anything discourage us, can anything drive you into the ground," because you can name

all sorts of things that want to crush you or that feel like are crushing you, but Paul says, "Who can separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ?"

He lists seven things that might possibly separate us from God's love. He speaks of trouble and hardship and persecution, first of all those three, people dealing with the pressures of opposition, the pressures of difficult circumstances, and all of you in one way or another can relate to what Paul is talking about. The opposition of the world. The opposition of our own flesh. Remember now, this comes on the heels of Romans 7 where Paul is describing this inner turmoil. This inner turmoil, he says, "Who will deliver me? Who will deliver me from this, this struggle I have?" And for young Christians in the first century, there was the real possibility of not only social rejection but also having their homes taken away, their property taken away, their livelihoods destroyed, their family wanting nothing to do with them, and so someone could say theoretically, "Of course these things are poised to destroy us, they can crush us, they could make life absolutely miserable for us." And we do well to think about Christians today, and as you know, I pray often in the congregational prayer for Christians who suffer persecution, we do well to think about that because we often take our freedom and our privileges for granted. We think it's a burden to have to come twice for a worship service on the Lord's Day, and I think of others who through the world will walk for miles – think about that, boys and girls – they'll walk for miles to attend a service. Or they'll meet in secret, knowing full well that if somebody finds out, they could be thrown in jail. There are people who have given their lives for the sake of Jesus Christ.

Will these things separate us from God's love? Are they indications, Paul asks, of the Lord's displeasure or the Lord abandoning us? You understand, of course, how all those things in the course of this year might prey upon our minds. If I face this hardship, if I face these troubles, if I see persecution, should I not draw the conclusion, as Satan did with Job, "Take away all these blessings and they'll curse you." Paul asks the same question. If we struggle, if we suffer, is it a sign of God's disfavor? Paul answers the question later on but his answer is no.

Famine and nakedness, which simply mean here, boys and girls, being deprived of the basic necessities of life: food, clothing. And then he talks about danger and sword, very real threats throughout the church's history and certainly in Paul's own day. Paul is contemplating the very prospect of his own execution. Will that separate us from God's love?

His list is realistic. His list is sober-minded. There is no place here for glibness, complacency. It's not Paul here, it's an ivory tower speculating about these things. He's facing real life issues, things that you and I have to confront on a daily basis. What are the challenges? What are the obstacles? What are the difficulties? What are the trials that will seek to drive a wedge between you and the love of God in Jesus Christ in the year 2013? What will it be? Are you cognizant of that? Are you aware of that? Do you struggle with that? That's the question I want to pose to you this morning, it's what the Catechism calls us to think about as well. Are you sure, are you confident that God has not only sovereignly brought these things into your life, but that he brings this adversity,

he brings this trouble and this sorrow into our lives by his ordained will for your benefit? So if you struggle for the basic necessities of life, if you struggle to pay your bills, put your kids through the Christian school, you just can't seem to get ahead of things, is this an indication that God somehow is displeased with you? Paul's answer is no, emphatically no, that God can use poverty, God can use hardship to shape and mold us into the image of Christ, drawing us closer to himself.

The challenge is what will separate us, and the affirmation, secondly, upon which our assurance rests is simply this, verse 37 and following. He says, "No. No." Emphatically no. Is there anything that will thwart, anything that will frustrate, anything that will derail God's plan for us?

And notice how the Apostle Paul describes that plan, and I love how the apostle does this by the Spirit's guidance. God's plan is described, it's characterized as love. Think about that. I spoke about this before in connection with some other Lord's Days, 9 and 10 in particular. It's one thing to acknowledge God's omnipotence, that he has all imaginable power at his disposal. It is an awesome thing to contemplate, by the way, someone with that much authority, that much power, that much might as his disposal, but you understand, of course, how terribly frightening that can be. What if a despot, what if a thoroughly evil person, a cruel person, had that kind of access to that kind of power? What would he make of that power? It would make life utter misery. It would make it hell. Then Paul says when God exercises his authority, his power, when God puts his purposes into effect in your life and mine, it is the working out, it is the flowing like a river of love. Of love. Of that kindness. Of that compassion. Of that mercy and pity for us. Think about that. Someone with all this power at his disposal, that he channels that through love. Through love.

My only comfort is that I belong to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ. He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil. Because I belong to him, Christ assures me of eternal life and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him. Paul puts it even more specifically here. He says in all these things, in the face of adversity, in the face of hardship, in the face of deprivation, in the face of this ongoing battle against sin in our own lives, it's the awareness of our own shortcomings, in the face of all of that, who are we? Are we just groping around trying to find our way?

Remember the story of Sisyphus in Greek mythology? Sisyphus who had to roll this huge rock up the hill only to have it roll back down again? He has been the rest of his life, the rest of his days, rolling that rock up and down. It's an exercise in futility. Paul says that's not how it is for the believer.

We are more than conquerors. The language here in the original is we are hyper-conquerors, super-conquerors through him who loved us. What's the basis of that confidence? With all due respect to our President, it's not simply that we have love for one another, as important as that may be. The answer is found in the Catechism. The assurance, the basis of that confidence is that we belong to another and the world simply

scratches its head and says, "How can you find comfort in that?" Or they become hostile because they want their freedom, what they think is freedom. They want their independence. They want to be lord and master of their own life and over against that, we confess, you and I confess, that the greatest comfort of all is that we don't belong to ourselves, that if left to ourselves, we're doomed. We'll never reach the pinnacle of Mount Everest, to use the imagery here in Romans 8. If we're going to reach the summit, it's only by clinging to Jesus Christ.

In answer to the question, Paul uses the strongest possible language. He says, in the ESV it says, "For I am sure." The other versions, older versions say, "For I am persuaded." I am absolutely persuaded. I am convicted, settled, unalterable. What? Nothing can separate us, neither life nor death, and Paul here uses the imagery of extremes and I want you to think of those last few verses in that way.

Life and death. Of course, we know how death can be a very fearful thing but for the believer who clings to Jesus Christ, you can say with the Apostle Paul, "For me to live is Christ, to die is gain." To die is gain. To say that in the face of death, what a remarkable thing. But for many people, what's even scarier is life itself, life with all of its hardships, with all of its troubles, with all of its uncertainties, and Paul says, "In the face of all the uncertainties of life and all the troubles of life, nothing in that life will separate you from God's love."

Neither angels, nor demons. In other words, the whole heavenly realm, nothing is going to frustrate God's purposes.

Neither the present nor the future. Think about that as well at the beginning of a new year. All the predictions, all the prognosticators who are indicating how things are going to go, how they think things are going to go, Paul says it may go badly, it may be difficult, it may result in you losing everything, but not even that will separate you from God's love in Jesus Christ.

Not height nor depth. Powers. And to make sure that he covers all the bases, he says not anything in the whole created order can separate you.

Let me close this morning and have you think about this from Lord's Day 1: God wants you to live in the assurance of certainty of his purposes for your life. He does not want you to live in fear. He does not want you to live in doubt. He does not want you to be bitter and resentful when things go badly for you. God wants you to be strong. He wants you to be comforted. He wants you to be joyful.

How can that be? The Catechism here spells it out very clearly and I draw your attention to it in closing by pointing us to the three persons of the Trinity. How can we be joyful in the face of adversity? How can we be certain in the face of so much uncertainty? Think of God your Father. God your Father who designs all things and has adopted you as his child. For what purpose? Not to crush you, not to alienate you, but to make you heir of all things. He also watches over me in such a way that not a hair can fall from my head

without the will of my Father in heaven. In fact, all things, joy as well as sorrow, pleasure as well as pain, poverty as well as riches, work together for my salvation.

God the Son grants us assurance. How? He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood. He has set me free from the tyranny of the devil. And as Paul will say in Romans 8, he is interceding for you. So when things seem their darkest, their most bleak, look to Jesus Christ, your Savior, your intercessor, your brother.

Thirdly, the Holy Spirit. Because I belong to him, Christ by his Holy Spirit assures me of eternal life and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him. We often forget, I think many people forget that Romans 8 really has its focus upon the person and work, the ministry of the Holy Spirit and his primary work is not to have us speaking in strange tongues, strange languages, and performing miraculous signs and wonders. More and more I'm convinced as I read the Scriptures and as I study and preach the Scriptures, the ministry of the Holy Spirit is above all else to confirm in our hearts the salvation that we have in Jesus Christ, and he does that by drawing our attention away from ourselves and always pointing to the Son.

Many people describe the Spirit as the shy person of the Trinity. I don't know that I'm comfortable with that. I think that that doesn't give justice to the ministry of the Spirit. I like to think of him as the deferential person of the Trinity. In other words, he always says, "Look to Christ. Look to Christ. Look to Christ."

Will you look to Christ in this coming year? Will you be confident? Strong and courageous? Will you be assured that nothing, not even the worst hardship you could imagine in this coming year, nothing will ever separate you from the love of God in Jesus Christ? I can't think of a better way to begin the year 2013.

Let's pray.

*Father in heaven, it is a wonderful thing to climb to the summit of Mount Everest with your word and to be shown this beautiful spectacular view of what we have now and who we are in Christ Jesus. I pray that each person here this morning, young and old, would come to embrace these glorious truths; to acknowledge them, not only, not simply as truths to be believed, but as that which instills confidence and courage, that which gives consolation and comfort in a life, in a world that is often filled with sorrow. So Father, bless this word to our hearts for Jesus' sake. Amen.*

Let's respond this morning to the word of God. If you'll turn to #470, "Abide with me, fast falls the eventide." I think of that fourth stanza in light of our text for this morning.

"I fear no foe, with Thee at hand to bless.  
Ills have no weight, and tears no bitterness.  
Where is death's sting? where, grave, thy victory?  
I triumph still [we are more than conquerors], if Thou abide with me."

Let's rise to sing the five stanzas, 470.

1 Abide with me: fast falls the eventide;  
The darkness deepens; Lord, with me abide:  
When other helpers fail, and comforts flee,  
Help of the helpless, O abide with me.

2 Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day;  
Earth's joys grow dim, its glories pass away,  
Change and decay in all around I see;  
O Thou Who changest not, abide with me.

3 I need Thy presence every passing hour;  
What but Thy grace can foil the tempter's power?  
Who, like Thyself, my guide and stay can be?  
Through cloud and sunshine, Lord, abide with me.

4 I fear no foe, with Thee at hand to bless.  
Ills have no weight, and tears no bitterness.  
Where is death's sting? where, grave, thy victory?  
I triumph still, if Thou abide with me.

5 Hold Thou the cross before my closing eyes;  
Shine through the gloom, and point me to the skies:  
Heaven's morning breaks, and earth's vain shadows flee:  
In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me.

The offering this morning is destined for Illiana Christian High School. Let's consecrate these gifts for prayer.

*Father, we give you thanks that in your providence classes will resume this week for our students at Illiana Christian High School, and we pray that you would bless the efforts to instruct our covenant youth in the ways of the Lord, of instilling within their hearts and minds a worldview that recognizes the Lordship of Jesus Christ. We pray that our offerings this morning would be used to that end, to equip covenant youth, not simply for career training but for kingdom service. So Father, bless these offerings for Jesus' sake. Amen.*

We thank the Lord for the gift of music and for the praise that God's people can offer to the Lord.

Let me draw your attention at the close of our service this morning to our new doxology for this morning. The new doxology, if you'll notice in the bulletin, is #211 in the psalter hymnal and there is a minor correction here. I caught this after it was printed but it should

be stanzas 1 and 23, and as I was talking to Linda about that, she didn't realize there were 23 stanzas in the song. I made the comment to her that I would love some Sunday just to walk up to the podium or to the pulpit and say, "Let's sing all the stanzas." But we won't do that this morning and you can thank me for that later, but we'll rise to sing stanzas 1 and 23, the first and the last as our doxology. But first, receive now the Lord's parting blessing. Shall we stand together?

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit abide with you all now and forevermore. And all of God's people together said, Amen.