

To God Alone Be The Glory

My dear young friends, Emily, Sadie, and Ethan. I'm really glad you're teenagers right now. You're old enough to know what laughter is. So you've had some good days. You're old enough to know what crying is. So you've had some bad days. You have enough experience now that you've started drawing conclusions about life. Your conclusions haven't always been right. Some things you thought were 'super awesome' turned out to be 'eh.' Some things you just knew were 'terrible' turned out to be 'not so bad.' Your ability to draw conclusions, however, is getting better. During this last year of catechism class, I told each of you that you don't have to be confirmed. You thought about it and you've drawn a conclusion about life: walking in the ways of the Lord is a blessed thing. So you're here to be confirmed today.

I'm glad you're still young teenagers right now. You haven't been chewed up and spit out by high school. Don't get me wrong. You'll have lots of good days in high school. But if you think you've known sadness in your first 13 to 14 years, you'll soon be better acquainted with it. I'm not trying to scare you. Or maybe I am. Just a little. Satan goes to high school too. And he never graduates. It's not

that he's so dense he can't pass the tests. He goes there because he knows how much high schoolers are open to trying new things, how much they want to fit in and have friends and explore relationships. Satan knows how turn these good things into temptations, and therefore how vulnerable high schoolers are to his attacks. He's desperate to get you away from God. It's not that he's all gushy-gushy in love with you. Quite the opposite! He hates you! You are redeemed children of God!

Time for review. What kind of a term is 'redeemed'? It's a grocery store term. Let's say you have a coupon: \$4 off a box of Cheerios any flavor. Let your imagination stretch reality a little in order to bring out the meaning of 'redeem.' You are holding the coupon hostage. The store is willing to pay you a \$4 ransom for their coupon. You fork over the coupon and they reduce your bill. They buy back (redeem) their coupon. *All of us were like coupons in the hands of Satan. Everyone is born a hostage of the devil. God wanted us back. So Jesus spilled his blood to buy us back, to redeem us. The ransom wasn't paid to Satan, but when the ransom was paid, Satan had to give us up. You are redeemed children of God. And, frankly, Satan is not happy about it. He was going to get to have you in hell

where he could spend eternity coming up with new ideas to make you miserable. But thanks to Jesus, Satan lost you.

I have tried to teach you about secret idolatry so that when Satan walks you down a path that looks like it's going to be fun—and who doesn't want to have fun?—you'll be able to spot that secret idolatry in yourself and say, "That sneaky foe! He's got me trying to please those school mates I want as friends. I have been more concerned about getting their approval than I am about keeping God's approval!" Secret idolatry. Right now, after several years of Bible study, you're probably able to spot secret idolatry in your heart as it pops up.

But high school's a comin'. And if you're like most high schoolers you'll be tempted at least once to think that church is just about the worst way to spend a Sunday morning, especially if your parents let you stay out a bit late on a Saturday night. Did you know that many of the Christians who lose their faith, lose it in high school? Another large segment loses it in college—can't handle all that freedom. Got to explore life, find out where the demons dwell. I'm not trying to scare you. Or maybe I am. Just a little. I'm certainly scared for people who think they can go to high school or to

college or to work without regular contact with God's Word.

Remember when you were about five or six years old? Maybe you were making something or tying your shoe. You were struggling just a little. So someone tried to reach in and help you. But you pulled away and said, "I can do it myself." Remember that? Yeah, you may try that a few dozen more times before you really learn to appreciate the help of others—even as you are doing things yourself and mastering them. In high school and college you'll still have people in your life who love you. If you choose a reckless path, they'll say things like, "I don't think that's a good idea." And you'll say (maybe just in your own head), "Never mind what you think. I can decide this for myself." And off you'll go, only to find out the hard way that the person who loves you was right.

You can learn the hard way. Especially in America you have a perceived right to be s-t-u-p-i-d. But the Holy Spirit, speaking through the apostle John, is trying to help you learn at least a few things the easy way. ²⁴*See that what you have heard from the beginning remains in you.* Why do you think we made you go to catechism class for at least three years? So that now, at the beginning

of your adult life, you have heard the Word of God, God's truth, God's wisdom, and so that it remains in you. Your whole church wants you to be well-versed in the law and especially in the gospel.

The law. The 10 Commandments. You remember one of the main reasons the Lord gave us the 10 Commandments: he wants us to be happy, or better said, blessed. Keeping the Commandments leads to blessing after blessing. Take the 4th Commandment for instance. If you always do what your parents tell you... if you honor your agreements with them... if you come home when you're supposed to... if you do your homework to the best of your ability instead of goofing around... if you are where you said you were going to be when they check on you—all this builds up your parents' trust in you. And with trust comes more responsibility and more freedom, and more importantly a better relationship with your parents and others in authority. Talk about one blessing after another! Do you know how many kids would love to have a great relationship with their parents and don't know how? You do know how. Your part is: Honor your parents, just like God said in the 4th Commandment.

But start experimenting with alcohol or other drugs instead of studying, start coming home late, or go to a party instead of the library where you said you were going to be, and just watch how fast your parents' trust plummets. God wants your life to be filled with blessings. So he gave us the law.

²⁴See that what you have heard from the beginning remains in you.

But the Christian life is not just about the law. The gospel is far more important. You remember why, right? Because you can't keep the law. Try, yes. Try to keep the law as if your salvation depended on it. But don't be surprised when you sin. Instead remember what you have heard from the beginning. Tell yourself: "*God so loved the world. I'm part of the world. God so loved me that he gave his one and only Son. That would be Jesus, my Savior. Whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. My sin is bad, but Jesus was good for me. And he died for me. My sin is paid for. God loves me in this way!*"

²⁴See that what you have heard from the beginning remains in you. John is especially talking about the gospel remaining in you. We know this because he says, *If it does [remain in you], you also will remain in the Son and in the Father.* That's where you want to be. We know because you want to be confirmed. But the dos and

don'ts of the law won't keep you in the Son and the Father because you won't keep the law perfectly. Only the gospel can keep you in the Son and the Father. ²⁴*See that what you have heard from the beginning remains in you, even in high school, and in college, and beyond. That means keep coming to church, even when you don't feel like it. It means starting to read your Bible daily, or continuing to read your Bible daily. If you do this, then what you heard in the beginning will remain in you. And if it does, you also will remain in the Son and in the Father.* All of us here want this for you. We want you to be active members of this church. We especially want you to have what God promised. ²⁵*And this is what he promised us—even eternal life.*

You're old enough that you can imagine what eternal life is going to be like. Living with God in his heavenly home is going to be so different from our experiences here on earth that it's hard to say for sure exactly what eternal life will be like. But the Bible lists things that will be absent from heaven. Think about some of the sadnesses you've already experienced in your short life. Won't it be great never to have another sadness again? In a few years when you are even better acquainted with sadness, you'll notice that 'thinking about heaven'

will become sweeter and even more joyful than it already is for you.

In catechism class you were asked the question, "When will Jesus come back?" The answer: only God knows—Jesus could come back at any time. Maybe this afternoon. Maybe next week. Maybe in 120 years when all of us are dead. I'm not trying to scare you. Or maybe I am. Just a little. Since we don't know when Jesus will come back, Emily, Sadie, and Ethan, it would be really wise for you to stick with Jesus. Or as John puts it, ²⁸*And now, dear children, continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming.* The only way to be confident and unashamed on Judgment Day is to continue in Jesus. The Holy Spirit plans to help you through God's Word and the Sacraments. He wants to hold you close to himself so that when Jesus comes back you won't be scared, not even a little. My dear friends, CONTINUE IN JESUS.