

Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom;
teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs,
singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

-Colossians 3:16

The Hymns We Sing

Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Thy Word

Martin Luther, 1541

Our Lord Jesus taught, "If you abide in My Word, you are my disciples indeed." [St John 8:31] The Lord's people delight to remain and abide in the Lord's Word.

The devil, on the other hand, despises God's Word, and is always trying to snatch it out of the hearts of God's dear people. If he cannot steal away the Word, then he twists it, giving us false doctrine and unhealthy teaching. So we are always praying that the Lord would keep us steadfast in His Word, that we would remain faithful to the Scriptures. This is exactly what Luther's hymn, 'Lord Keep Us Steadfast in Thy Word,' is: a prayer that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit would help and preserve us in the Lord's Word, and that God would bring to nothing all the stealing and distorting plans of the devil.

Martin Luther once inscribed the following words inside a Bible:

True it is that in this life the devil incessantly seeks and tempts us. In addition, the world incessantly lures and draws us to itself; and, apart from this, our own flesh is slow and sleepy in the service of God. These three enemies grant us no rest; everyone draws us to his way of living in order to make sure that we forget God. To combat them we have nothing but God's Word. With it we defend and exercise ourselves in the true faith against these three powerful enemies. But God assures us that we shall fare well and meet with success if we diligently read, hear, speak, and keep His Word. This means that we shall win through the Word. Amen.

[Plass, *What Luther Says*, p. 1492]

The three enemies of the Church (the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh) are always hounding us, chasing us toward unbelief, despair, and other great shame and vice. And yet the Lord has given us a weapon to fight them with: His Holy Word. "Take of the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God." [Ephesians 6:17] Armed with the Lord's Word, we stand "against the wiles of the devil." [Eph. 6:11] Christ's embattled Church on earth is always praying that the Lord would defend and keep her in this true faith and Word.

In 1541, the year of the hymn's composition, Europe was suffering a number of defeats from the Turkish armies. In August King Ferdinand suffered a defeat at Budapest. In October a hurricane destroyed the fleet of Emperor Charles V. These troubles, like all the troubles in our lives, teach us to pray and look to God for help and defense.

Luther's hymn has three stanzas, one for each person of the Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The first verse is a prayer to the Father to keep us steadfast and true in His Word, and that we would bring to nothing all the plans of the enemies of His Word. The original German of the second line is literally translated, "Restrain the murderous Turk and Pope," indicating that this prayer is against false teachers and those who teach against Christ, and use the sword to further their false teachings.

Verse two is a prayer to the Lord Jesus, the Lord of lords [see Deuteronomy 10:17; Psalm 136:3; 1 Timothy 6:15; Revelation 17:14;

19:16], that He would defend His church from all her enemies. Jesus is pleased to defend us as He has promised: "I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it." [St Matthew 16:18] Jesus' defense inspires our singing and praising God. "Defend Thy Christendom that we/ May evermore sing praise to Thee."

The third verse is a prayer to the Holy Spirit, the Comforter of priceless worth [see St John 14:25-31; 16:5-15]. This is a wonderful name for the Holy Spirit, that He is our Comforter who comes to us to comfort us with the forgiveness of all of our sins. The hymn continues as a prayer for peace and unity. These only come from God's Word. First, peace between God and man comes through the Word by the forgiveness of our sins. "Having been justified by Christ, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." [Romans 5:1] Second, unity also comes through the Word. [see St John 17:21 and 17:17] This peace and unity is a gift from the Holy Spirit to His church on earth, and it is ours even into heaven, as the Holy Spirit "leads us out of death to life."

For further study regarding the Lord's Word...

The three Scripture Psalms: Psalm 1, 19, and 119

**1. Lord, keep us steadfast in Thy Word;
Curb those who fain by craft and sword
Would wrest the Kingdom from Thy Son
And set at naught all He hath done.**

**2. Lord Jesus Christ,
Thy power make known,
For Thou art Lord of lords alone;
Defend Thy Christendom that we
May evermore sing praise to Thee.**

**3. O Comforter of priceless worth.
Send peace and unity on earth.
Support us in our final strife
And lead us out of death to life.**

The Lutheran Hymnal, 261