

Essay #2:
**God Gives Us Power—
His Gospel in the Means of Grace Gives the Power
for a God-Pleasing Life**

Gottfried Herrmann
Germany

English translation prepared by Prof. James Danell

Introduction

As Lutherans we place great value on saying that we are justified before God by grace alone for Christ's sake through faith. That is the heart and soul of our faith. In a way that is unmistakably clear, the Bible says: God justifies us "by faith apart from the works of the law" (Romans 3:28).¹

But we also know that God nevertheless expects from us a life lived according to his will. We should live a holy life. It is not an accident that God had these words written in the Bible four times, "Be holy, because I, the LORD your God, am holy." This is written not only twice in the Old Testament (Leviticus 11:44,45; 19:2) but is also quoted approvingly two times in the New Testament (Matthew 5:48, 1 Peter 1:16).

God saves us through the forgiveness which Jesus Christ has acquired for us. By his grace we are born again as new people who gladly want to serve God. That is also what the theme of our conference says: "We are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works" (Ephesians 2:10).

1. The Holy Spirit as Creator

But then there is the question: How does God accomplish that we, as people who have been reborn, live in a way that is pleasing to him (e.g. Titus 2:11-14)? Also here the Bible gives us a clear answer. He does it through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit brings us to Christ. He awakens in us saving faith. (That was what the first essay discussed in detail). He wants to preserve us in faith until our blessed end. This entire work of the Holy Spirit we call "sanctification" (in the broad sense).

¹All Scripture quotations are from the NIV2011.

To that also belongs what we call “sanctification in the narrow sense.” We mean by it the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in those who believe. He “sanctifies” them by strengthening them in the struggle against sin and tribulation. And he gives them power for “good” works, that is, for works which not only appear before people as good, but are also good in God’s eyes—good works which happen out of love and thanks towards him.

That sanctification is the work of the Holy Spirit, is something all Christians agree on. Through faith, he makes us branches in Christ, the Vine, and in this way causes us to bear fruit. For the Lord himself said to his disciples, “If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5).

That means, only when a branch remains in the vine it can produce fruit. It needs the sap with the nutrients which is drawn from the roots in order to grow and to develop grapes. When the supply is cut off, the branch withers quickly. It becomes worthless and falls to the ground, dried up.

So it is also with faith. Only when we stay connected to our Savior Jesus Christ our faith can remain alive. Our faith needs new nourishment every day in order not to die off. This nourishment comes from the root, from the Savior himself. Through his death on the cross and through his resurrection he redeemed us. This redemption becomes ours through faith. It frees us “from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors” (1 Peter 1:18).

2. The Holy Spirit Works through Means

That the Holy Spirit effects our sanctification, is—as we said—undisputed among all Christians. But when one asks *how* the Holy Spirit brings forth fruits of faith in us Christians, then discussions start. In what way does he bring this about? How does he do that?

On the book market and on the internet there are many publications in our days which deal with this topic. Here one can hear much well-meaning and pious-sounding advice. For example, people like to cite Dwight L. Moody’s words, “God wants to take us into his service. The Holy Spirit has to give us the power for this. He gives us this power when we ask him for it.”

Or people say: God speaks to people; we just have to listen closely. Then we will hear his voice, for example, in a piece of music, during a walk in the forest, in meetings with other people. We just have to ask God fervently, then he will give us what we want to have. Has he not promised, "He who asks, receives"? That is well-meaning advice. But does the Holy Spirit really come to people in this way? Does he just fall from heaven like this and fill a person or a group of people, if they just pray enough to him for it?

Undoubtedly he can do so. If God wants, he can simply let his Spirit do his work directly. But that is not the normal way. And that's good. Because then we would wander around helplessly and would never know rightly where we can find him. No, our God is so gracious that he has told us clearly where he wants to give us his Spirit, through whom we believe in Jesus Christ and call him our Lord (1 Corinthians 12:3). This faith is kindled in us through the Word of our God. "Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ" (Romans 10:17). That is the way which God himself has indicated.

One can compare that with our bodily nourishment. As Creator of this world, God could also preserve our bodies immediately, without us having to eat every day. But that is not how he wanted to do it; that's not how he arranged it. Rather, he preserves our physical life by making food available to us on this earth.

Also for our spiritual life, for the sustenance of our new man, he gives us the necessary nourishment. He does that through his Word which he has entrusted to us in the Holy Scripture. That is the way established by God to come to faith in the Savior and to remain in this faith. Whoever looks for God's Spirit in other places stands in danger of falling victim to the temptations of the devil and going astray from his faith. This often happens among the enthusiasts. Martin Luther warns against it very emphatically in his Smalcald Articles.

In these matters, which concern the spoken, external Word, it must be firmly maintained that God gives no one his Spirit or grace apart from the external Word which goes before. We say this to protect ourselves from the enthusiasts, that

is, the “spirits,” who boast that they have the Spirit apart from and before contact with the Word. On this basis, they judge, interpret, and twist the Scripture or oral Word according to their pleasure. . . . This is all the old devil and old snake, who also turned Adam and Eve into enthusiasts and led them from the external Word of God to “spirituality” and their own presumption—although he even accomplished this by means of other, external words. In the same way, our enthusiasts also condemn the external Word, and yet they themselves do not keep silent. Instead, they fill the world with their chattering and scribbling—as if the Spirit could not come through the Scriptures or the spoken word of the apostles, but the Spirit must come through their own writings and words. Why do they not abstain from their preaching and writing until the Spirit himself comes into the people apart from and in advance of their writings? After all, they boast that the Spirit has come into them without the preaching of the Scriptures (Smalcald Articles, III, 8:3,5,6).²

3. The Gospel Gives the Power, not the Law

Up to this point we have heard that the Holy Spirit comes to us through the Word of God. And by that we do not mean some kind of uncertain, inner voice which a person claims to have heard. God has communicated this Word of his to us in written form in the Bible. The Holy Scriptures show us what God’s will is. In it we learn what pleases God and what are “good works” in his eyes.

For this purpose, for example, the Ten Commandments were also given to us. The prophet Micah summarizes it in this way, “He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8).

Here the distinction between law and gospel becomes important. Many Christians imagine, if the Holy Spirit works in the hearts of people through the word of the Bible and moves believers to a God-pleasing life, then everything is clear. Then everything

²All quotations from the Lutheran Confessions are from Kolb/Wengert, Fortress, 2000.

depends on holding God's commandments before people. Then they recognize their sin and are called to repentance. They learn how they should live, if God is to take pleasure in them.

I will explain this error with an example. A few years ago a young man said to me, "That is our problem as Lutherans. We preach a lot of gospel. But our listeners have known that for a long time already. We must tell them concretely what they are supposed to do. That is what people need."

That was well-intentioned, but it rests on a widespread mistake in one's reasoning. It is human thinking, perhaps even logically and pedagogically correct. But our God obviously thinks differently. He would like his children to serve him not out of compulsion or fear of punishment, but rather willingly and gladly. Out of love for our Savior and Redeemer we should do "good works," not out of fear and under pressure. We should serve him not as slaves but rather as loved children. The apostle John correctly says, "There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear." (1 John 4:18).

In this regard, we encounter wrong ideas also in many spiritual fellowships. They require of their members certain works, for example, offerings in the amount of the Old Testament tithe. And so they achieve amazing "results" with this, as for instance the magnificent buildings of the Mormons show. But from what motives do such works occur?

The law of God with its concrete instructions is very enticing for people. It agrees with our pedagogical ideas. A goal is set, and we are shown how one can reach it. Nothing is more preferable to people than when we can do something ourselves (a do-it-yourself mentality). And did not God himself say to the Israelites, "Keep my decrees and laws, for the person who obeys them will live by them" (Leviticus 18:5). What people unfortunately fail to recognize is that the law cannot at all accomplish what we expect of it.

That is the way also in conversion. No one is born again by the Holy Spirit through the law. "Through the law we become conscious of our sin" (Romans 3:20). That is what the law can accomplish. It shows us how much and how often we are against God's will. This is something that is absolutely necessary for us sinners.

But this does not lead a sinner to start to love God. When a person understands and recognizes his sins, that God is angry about them, that does not lead this person now to love God. Quite the opposite. He will hate him, because God demands from people what we not at all can achieve. The apostle Paul rightly says, “The law brings wrath” (Romans 4:15).

Only the gospel can open a person’s heart and awaken believing trust in God. Only when a person first experiences the endless love with which God pursues us sinners, and experiences how God gives us the gift of his grace and the forgiveness of our sins through faith in his Son Jesus Christ, then love will be awakened in his heart for this God.

Sanctification in the Christian life is similar to this. In his law, God shows us his will. But out of that does not yet grow the power or ability also to do this will. This power comes from the gospel. Whoever hears of the love with which the almighty God approaches us sinners in his Son—like the father in the parable of the lost son—such a one is overpowered by it. He can only bow down in worship and confess with the hymn writer Paul Gerhardt:

Love caused your incarnation;
 Love brought you down to me.
 Your thirst for my salvation
 Procured my liberty.
 Oh, love beyond all telling
 That led you to embrace
 In love, all love excelling,
 Our lost and fallen race!
 (*Christian Worship*, #18:2).

This has to do with the huge distinction which exists between law and gospel. What this distinction consists of is well illustrated by an example.

[The law is] like a road map. The map may show me how to travel from Chicago to Minneapolis, but if I have no gas in my car, I’m not going to go anywhere, no matter how clearly the map shows the way. Without the power supplied by the gospel, the Christian will not go in the direction the law maps out (Lange, *Sanctification*, p. 87).

The “fuel” for life as a Christian is something God gives us as a gift through the gospel, not through the law. Through the good news of God’s grace he gives us the power to live according to his will and command. Overpowered by his love, I cannot do otherwise than to do gladly and out of thankfulness what God would like to have from people.

Our Lutheran Confession says about this:

For the law indeed says that it is God’s will and command that we walk in new life. However, it does not give the power and ability to begin or to carry out this command. Instead, the Holy Spirit, who is given and received not through the law but through the proclamation of the gospel (Gal. 3[:2, 14]), renews the heart. Thereafter, the Holy Spirit uses the law to instruct the reborn and to show and demonstrate to them in the Ten Commandments what is the “acceptable will of God” (Rom. 12[:2]) and in which good works, “which God prepared beforehand,” they are “supposed to walk” (Eph 2[:10]). The Holy Spirit admonishes them to do these works, and where because of the flesh they are lazy, indolent, and recalcitrant, he reproveth them through the law. Thus, he combines both functions: he “kills and makes alive, he brings down to hell and raises up” [1 Sam. 2:6]. In this he functions not only to comfort but also to punish, as it is written, “When the Holy Spirit comes, he will reprove the world (including the old creature) because of sin and righteousness and judgment” [John 16:8]. Sin, however, is everything that opposes God’s law. St. Paul says, “All Scripture is useful for teaching, for reproof . . .” [2 Tim. 3:16], and reproof is the proper function of the law. Therefore, as often as believers stumble, they are reproveth by God’s Spirit from the law, and by the same Spirit they are restored again and comforted with the proclamation of the holy gospel (Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Article VI:11-14).

4. Where Do We Find the Gospel?

Through the gospel the Holy Spirit brings us to faith in Christ. This is what we have heard until now. But the Holy Spirit doesn’t just give the impulse for starting the motor—to stay with the com-

parison with a car. No, through the good news of the Savior Christ, he also gives us the fuel which keeps the motor running. But where do we get this fuel from? Where can we “fill it up?”

For that, God has given us his Word and the sacraments. The Augsburg Confession says in Article 5, “To obtain such faith God instituted the office of preaching,³ giving the gospel and the sacraments. Through these, as through means, he gives the Holy Spirit who produces faith, where and when he wills, in those who hear the gospel. It teaches that we have a gracious God, not through our merit but through Christ’s merit, when we so believe (Augsburg Confession, Article V, German text).

Here I come back once again to point #2. The Holy Spirit works in people in this world through means. The Lutheran Church calls them “means of grace,” because through them God’s grace is shared with us and assured to us again and again.

In the Word

The first thing to be mentioned here is the Word of God. God does not have the saving news of Christ communicated to us through unclear signs (symbols) or pictures, but rather through his clear Word. He gave us this Word in written form, and in a way every person can understand. The central message is so simple that one can understand it without extensive schooling: God let his beloved Son Jesus Christ die on the cross as the atonement for our sin and guilt! In one sentence: For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16).

For the writing down of this message, our God chooses languages which were used by many people at that time: Hebrew or Aramaic in the time before Christ’s birth and Greek in the time after. And with the choice of these languages, God evidently had as goal that his Word should be heard in all the world and therefore had to be translated into other languages. Let one think, for example, about

³The Latin text shows that with the expression “office of preaching” (*Predigtamt*) is not meant here first and foremost the church office and the ones who hold it. (That is what Article 14 deals with). *Institutum est ministerium docendi evangelii et porrigendi sacramenta* = the service of teaching the gospel and offering the sacraments was instituted.

the phenomenon of Hebrew parallelism (*parallelismus membrorum*), which allows one to carry the expression over into other languages without serious losses in content, which is different from the rhyming of our European languages.

In the *Old Testament* God had foretold the promised Savior. Like a chain of lights, the promises of the coming Savior run through this part of the Bible. In the words of the prophet Isaiah, for example, the message of salvation shines out so brightly, that people have called him the “fifth” gospel writer of the Bible (Möller, *Alttestamentliche Bibelkunde*, p. 320). Isaiah talks about the virgin birth of Immanuel (Isaiah 7:14) and about the vicarious suffering of God’s Servant for us (Isaiah 53:4-7). Already on the first pages of the Old Testament the Savior was promised to the first people, the Savior who will crush Satan’s head and destroy his kingdom (Genesis 3:15). From such words the believers of the Old Covenant drew strength and comfort. Think of Job, who could cry out in the midst of the greatest trouble, “I know that my Redeemer lives” (Job 19:25).

In the *New Testament* the fulfillment of these promises is reported to us. Again and again Matthew, for example, refers in his gospel to that fact that through the events which were portrayed, “the Scripture was fulfilled” (See Matthew 2:15,23; 4:14; 8:17; etc.) And the evangelist John reports to us in Jesus’ farewell discourses what the Lord Jesus especially laid on the hearts of his disciples before his death on the cross (John 14-16).

Here the Lord also speaks repeatedly about the Holy Spirit whom he will send when he is no longer visible on this earth. It is striking that he again and again calls the Holy Spirit the “Comforter” (or “Counselor”) in this connection. This is the case four times in these chapters (John 14:16,26; 15:26; 16:7). The word which in our Bibles is translated as “Comforter” is in the Greek text, *parakletos*, an expression which designates the advocate who is called over to help (Latin: *advocatus*). The root of the Greek verb *parakaleo* has an astonishingly broad spectrum of meanings. It extends from “to summon/to call for help” to “to call upon/admonish,” “to ask/request,” and “to encourage/comfort.” This broad palette of meanings does an excellent job of describing the work of the Holy Spirit.

In this way he works in our hearts through the Word of the Holy Scripture. Without his work, the good news would ricochet off our hearts, which are hardened by sin, like a stone. He helps us to obtain believing trust in the Savior. And he sees to it that our faith does not remain fruitless, but instead that it passes on to our fellow man something of the love it has received through Christ. But on the other hand, the Holy Spirit also holds God's law before us and warns us not to fall away again from faith. As Christians, we also need the Holy Spirit to serve us in this way again and again. In this way he keeps us from falling into self-righteousness and false security.

And finally, the Holy Spirit is also our "Advocate," who speaks up for us as our intercessor. The apostle Paul writes about it in his letter to the Romans. "The Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans" (Romans 8:26). In times, when we in our trials can't find the right words because of the sadness or pain, then the Holy Spirit jumps in for us and brings our prayer and pleading before our heavenly Father.

In the Sacraments

In addition to the Word as a means, we experience the power of the gospel above all also through the sacraments. Baptism and the Lord's Supper deserve priority above other church ceremonies (for example confirmation, wedding, funeral), because they were instituted by our Lord Christ himself. In addition, in them the Word is the crucial factor, "the main thing in the sacrament" as Luther says in the Small Catechism. The noteworthy thing, however, is that here the Word is joined with the outward signs of water or bread and wine. God acts, out of love toward us poor people, in order to make his gift of forgiveness completely certain (See *Gottes Geist*, KELK-Bekenntnis Teil 3, pp. 26ff).

In *Holy Baptism* our old sinful nature—the old Adam—is put to death, and through Christ the new man is born, who lives in righteousness and holiness before God. The apostle Paul says, "Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life" (Romans 6:3,4)

The water used with this sacrament shows us that our sin and guilt are washed away through Christ and thereby removed. The apostle Peter compares Baptism with the Flood at the time of Noah when he says, “This water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 3:21).

Many Christians think: Baptism belongs to the beginning of my life as a Christian. It is, so to speak, the initial starting of my motor for a Christian life. At that time I was reborn and became a new person. Now I am moving forward on the road of sanctification. Therefore, I don’t need Baptism anymore.

That is a dangerous error. For, thinking like this, one overlooks that while, to be sure, the new man of faith is born in us in Baptism, the old man of sin still hangs onto us like a leech in this life. Through him the devil, together with the world, tries to entice us away again from Christ. For this purpose he plunges us into much trouble and suffering.

Baptism is not merely an event in our past, without meaning for here and today. It has an inestimable worth for our daily life as Christians (Schmeling, “*Die Taufe*,” pp. 16ff). For through Baptism the Holy Spirit wants to effect this: “It signifies that the old creature in us with all sins and evil desires is to be drowned and die through daily contrition and repentance, and on the other hand that daily a new person is to come forth and rise up to live before God in righteousness and purity forever” (Small Catechism, Baptism, IV).

In the trials and struggles of daily life, it can happen that we fall into sin. In his Large Catechism, Luther uses the picture of Baptism as a ship (See 1 Peter 3:21). When we sin, the ship does not break to pieces, “because, as we said, it is God’s ordinance and not something that is ours. But it does happen that we slip and fall out of the ship. However, those who do fall out should immediately see to it that they swim to the ship and hold fast to it, until they can climb aboard again and sail on in it as before” (Large Catechism, Baptism, 82).

God has promised: “Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be

shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed, says the LORD, who has compassion on you” (Isaiah 54:10). With Johann Rambach (1693-1735) we can sing:

My faithful God, you fail me never;
 Your promise surely will endure.
 Oh, cast me not away forever
 If words and deeds become impure.
 Have mercy when I come defiled;
 Forgive, lift up, restore your child.
 (*Christian Worship*, #294:3)

By being called daily to repentance by the Holy Spirit and turning back to our Savior, we can again be joyful and daily begin anew with our life of sanctification. This the Holy Spirit effects through the gospel. For that reason, he is rightly called the Comforter.

But a Comforter is not a Moses or a lawgiver, who frightens with the devil, death, and hell; He is one who can fill a saddened heart with laughter and joy toward God, bids you be of good cheer because of the forgiveness of your sins, slays death, opens heaven, and makes God smile upon you (*Luther's Works*, Vol. 24, p. 115).⁴

In the *Lord's Supper* the Lord Christ offers us, under bread and wine, his body and his blood. So he seals to us the forgiveness of our sins. By putting his very body and his very blood into our mouth, he makes us completely sure that our redemption from sin, death, and the devil is an incontrovertible fact.

Luther writes in his Large Catechism:

We go to the sacrament because there we receive a great treasure, through and in which we obtain the forgiveness of sins. Why? Because the words are there, and they impart it to us! For this reason he bids me eat and drink, that it may be mine and do me good as a sure pledge and sign—indeed, as the very gift he has provided for me against my sins, death, and all evils (Large Catechism, Sacrament of the Altar, 22).

⁴That God (in Christ) “smiles on” us reminds us of the face which God kindly turns toward us (Deuteronomy 6:24-27, the Aaronic benediction).

What the prophet Isaiah announces is true also of the Sacrament of the Altar. “He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint” (Isaiah 41:29-31).

The Lord’s Supper is the promised gospel in a very personal way (*Gottes Geist*, p. 39). Our faithful God knows our deep need for certainty and strength in our battle against sin, Satan, and our own sinful nature. Therefore he says to us, “Take and eat . . . take and drink . . . for the forgiveness of your sins.”

Out of the certainty of forgiveness always grows new power for the believer for a confident life and for good works. With them, the Christian can thank his God and Redeemer by serving his fellow man.

Martin Luther emphasizes in a sermon:

The Holy Spirit has two offices. The first is to comfort and to raise up hearts or consciences to God, so that we are certain that God is favorable toward us and we are pleasing to him, after all our past sins have been forgiven and our imperfections or daily failures and mistakes have been wiped out. And all this for the sake of Christ, our Mediator. So we become certain that God is no longer angry with us but is instead gracious to us. No human reason, law, council, work can accomplish this action of the Holy Spirit; no, this honor belongs to him alone, that he is your Comforter.

The other office is to make bold, brave, courageous and to move a person to confess Christ outwardly, against the world and his princes, to teach, and to preach—that is, to raise hearts up against people and against all the anger of the devil. Just as the first encouragement happens before God, against his anger and the law, so this second encouragement happens before the world, against its anger and wisdom. And the latter bravery follows naturally upon the former. After the Holy Spirit has made you certain because of the grace and favor of God, so he also soon leads to the conclusion: Why then are you afraid of a person? If God is

for you, who can be against you? Be bold and brave. If you have overcome God's anger, how much more will you overcome the anger of people. (*Predigt am Sonntage Exaudi*, St. Louis/Walch²12:1900ff).

5. Power from God's Assurances

Here at the end, I want to come back once again to the topic of prayer. What role does prayer play in our effort for a holy life according to God's will?

Many Christians regard prayer as the most important means on the road to sanctification. Unfortunately, they do not consider that while prayer is, to be sure, an important part of our Christian life, it is not a means of grace. In the means of grace—the Word, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper—God deals with people. Through them he gives us as a gift the knowledge of his grace and the comfort of the gospel. With prayer, that is not the case. For in prayer, people address themselves to God; he does not address himself to us. We thank him for the good things he has done and ask for his protection and blessing. So prayer is definitely an important fruit of faith, but it does not produce faith; it also does not preserve it (Lange, *God So Loved the World*, p. 379).

I want to illustrate this with an example. Friedrich Brunn (1819-1895), one of the founding fathers of our Lutheran Free Church in Germany, came to a living faith in Christ as a student of theology in Leipzig. When he was serving as a young pastor in Steeden (near Frankfurt am Main), he suffered from many difficult trials. Again and again, he experienced the ups and downs of the life of faith and suffered because of it. As he looked back on his life, he wrote:

That tormented me a great deal. My soul was still lacking a completely objective hold on God's Word. My entire life of faith moved about in its own, wavering inwardness. In so doing, inward trials often overpowered me to such a degree that all my wrestling and praying against them did not help—yes, just (in fact) thereby they often really first became so aroused and alive that at the time I thought I would rather refrain from praying entirely. Then I realized again the incompleteness of my state of faith and imagined I had to help myself against it by praying. Therefore, I made the

decision one day not to get up from my knees until the Lord had given me that faith which overcomes the world, as he promises in his Word. So I actually prayed half the night, beginning again and again with new zeal, and I imagined I would have to wring it out of God. Finally, I was so worked up that I believed I had actually overcome. But it was a completely fruitless storming of heaven, and everything stayed the way it was with me. What was missing was the true foothold of faith in the Word of God.

Back then, I lamented to him [Karl Graul⁵] the entire time about my soul, my lack of inner clarity, firmness, and certainty, the entire state of my grace, my inner drought and emptiness, so often weighing down on me. How surprised I was when in response, my friend Graul replied: yes, now I was in exactly the right spiritual condition to become a Lutheran! Precisely that is Lutheran Christianity: in all poverty, darkness, and tribulation of soul to hang onto the Word and the promise of God and to hold tight, and to let these be sealed to oneself in the firmest way through the holy sacraments. For the first time in my life, I now experienced the meaning of the Lutheran doctrine of the means of grace, especially of the holy sacraments, and it became quite simple and quickly clear, that only here is the true, sure foundation on which one can stand. It was on the road of the inner need of the soul and of the living experience of the saving power of the Lutheran doctrine that Lutheranism gained the victory for me and my congregation (Brunn, *Mitteilungen*, pp. 20ff, 44).

What Friedrich Brunn learned at that time is important for every Christian. It is the knowledge that we find the power for a life of sanctification not in ourselves. Even our most pious efforts do not move us forward in this. To keep us in faith and to produce fruits is something only the Holy Spirit can effect. He does it through the gospel in the Word and in the sacraments. Through these means he reminds us daily of the forgiveness of our sins and renews us through this certainty. With them, he comforts us in all

⁵From 1848–1863 he was the first director of the Evangelical Lutheran Mission in Leipzig.

the setbacks and disappointments which we experience in ourselves and in others. He encourages us to do good works and gives us a confident and happy spirit which guards us against the wrong ways of despair or self-conceit.

In one regard, our prayers are not at all unimportant with respect to sanctification. In them we show whether or not we are looking for power for the sanctification of our life in the right place. When our prayers are filled only with requests and complaints, that is a sign that we are again trying to take control into our own hands. Only when we learn first to thank God for all the good he has done for us in body and soul does our praying start heading in the right direction. Our God would like us to take him at his word. We should hold on to his assurances and promises and “put a bug in his ear” about them, as Luther expresses it.⁶ Words like: “Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine” (Isaiah 43:1). Or: “God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it” (1 Corinthians 10:13). God likes such prayers and he most certainly hears and answers.

We conclude with the words of the apostle Paul.

For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good (Titus 2:11-14).

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⁶According to M. Ratzeberger’s report in 1540 in connection with Melanchthon’s severe illness (Brecht, *Martin Luther*, p. 210).

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