

Essay #1:
**God Sanctifies Us—
He Makes Us Holy After He Declares Us Holy**

John M. Brenner
WELS

The Lutheran Reformation brought back to light the glorious truth that sinful human beings are saved by God's grace alone through faith alone apart from any human work or merit. In the course of his spiritual struggles, Luther was led to an understanding of the proper distinction between the law and the gospel and the proper relationship between justification and sanctification. Roman Catholic theology confused law and gospel and combined justification and sanctification in a way that robbed people of comfort and led them into work righteousness. Misunderstanding of the proper relation between justification and sanctification has been common throughout the history of the visible church and continues to plague much of Christianity today.

These two doctrines are precious biblical truths but they must be kept in the proper relationship to each other. On the basis of Scripture we will see:

**God Sanctifies Us:
He Makes Us Holy After He Declares Us Holy**

**The Need for Justification and Sanctification—
Adam's Fall and Human Sin**

When Adam and Eve fell into sin, they ruined the perfection of God's creation. They had been created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27; 5:1). They were endowed with righteousness and true holiness. Their will conformed to his will. But when they fell into sin they lost that image. They became corrupt and passed on their corruption to all of their descendants. "Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned" (Romans 5:12).¹

Children inherit a sinful nature from their parents. Jesus tells us, "Flesh gives birth to flesh" (John 3:6). Sinful parents cannot produce sinless children. In fact, from the very point of conception a

¹All Scripture quotations are from the NIV1984.

child is corrupt. Every human being must confess with King David, “Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me” (Psalm 51:5). Because of original sin, we stand condemned even before we have the ability to think or do anything. The Bible declares, “The result of one trespass was condemnation for all men” (Romans 5:18). Because we have inherited Adam’s sinfulness, we have inherited Adam’s guilt.

Original sin involves a total and complete corruption of our human nature. We could not know or understand the depths of this corruption if God had not revealed it to us in his Word. The Bible tells us, “You were dead in your transgressions and sins” (Ephesians 2:1). “The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so” (Roman 8:7). God declares, “every inclination of his [i.e., the human] heart is evil from childhood” (Genesis 8:21). St. Paul uses a series of Old Testament references to demonstrate the total corruption of our natural condition. He writes,

“There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.” “Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit.” “The poison of vipers is on their lips.” “Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness.” “Their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery mark their ways, and the way of peace they do not know.” “There is no fear of God before their eyes” (Romans 3:10-18).

We confess those truths in the second article of the Augsburg Confession:

Furthermore, it is taught among us that since the fall of Adam, all human beings who are born in the natural way are conceived and born in sin. This means that from birth they are full of evil lust and inclination and cannot by nature possess true fear of God and true faith in God. Moreover this same innate disease and original sin is truly sin and condemns to God’s eternal wrath all who are not in turn born anew through baptism and the Holy Spirit (Augsburg Confession, Article II:1,2, German text).²

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

Because we are by nature totally corrupt, we cannot save ourselves. Even our best efforts fall far short of God's demands. "All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags" (Isaiah 64:6). Coming close to God's standards is not enough. Jesus says, "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). "Whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it" (James 2:10).

We therefore reject every teaching that denies or minimizes original sin. For example, the Roman Catholic Church teaches that original sin is not a total corruption but only a weakening of human spiritual powers. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states, "As a result of original sin, human nature is weakened in its powers; subject to ignorance, suffering, and the domination of death; and inclined to sin. (This inclination is called 'concupiscence.')" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1994, #418).

The Basis for Justification—God's Grace and Christ's Merits

Already in eternity, before the fall into sin or the creation of the world, God saw our predicament and planned our salvation (Ephesians 1:4). His love, mercy, and grace moved him to provide a Savior for us.

Love, mercy, and grace are qualities or characteristics of God. These words describe an essential attitude or disposition of God toward his creation. The love of God is a selfless, undeserved love, which loves sinful human beings in spite of their transgressions, guilt, and hostility toward him. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son" (John 3:16). In his mercy God has not treated us as our sins deserved but has provided salvation for us. "He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy" (Titus 3:5). God's grace is entirely independent of our actions. We cannot buy, earn, or deserve it. "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast" (Ephesians 2:8,9). Grace and human works are mutually exclusive terms. "And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace" (Romans 11:6).

In eternity God saw our dilemma. In time he sent his Son to be our Substitute and Savior. "But when the time had fully come, God

sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons” (Galatians 4:4,5). God demanded perfection. Our Substitute needed to be perfect in our place. Therefore Jesus was made subject to the law to redeem us. In our Savior “we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin” (Hebrews 4:15). God credits his perfect obedience to us.

Because “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23), our Substitute had to die. God demanded Jesus’ lifeblood as the price of our salvation. St. Peter writes, “For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect” (1 Peter 1:18,19). Jesus’ sacrifice was good once for all. When on the cross he declared, “It is finished” (John 19:30), his redemptive work was complete. No other sacrifice is necessary. “Such a high priest meets our need—one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself” (Hebrew 7:26,27). St. John assures us, “He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:2). Jesus is “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).

Universal atonement means that Christ has redeemed the whole world, all sinners of all time. We therefore reject the Calvinistic doctrine of limited atonement, namely that Jesus did not die for everyone, but only for those whom the Father purposed to save.

Justification—God’s Declaration of Full and Free Forgiveness

Justification is a declaration. It is a courtroom term. To justify is the opposite of to condemn. That is how Scripture uses the term. “Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us” (Romans 8:33,34). God pronounces guilty sinners not guilty. Justification involves a change in status

before God's judgment seat. It takes place outside of us. The fact that God has justified us does not mean that we are no longer sinners. It means that he no longer treats us as sinners. He declares, "I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more" (Isaiah 43:25). God remembers our sins no more because he remembered them in Jesus. God does not count our sins against us because he counted them against his Son, our Savior. He has forgiven our sins. The apostle declares, "We have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins" (Ephesians 1:7). If God has forgiven our sins, he has justified us. Justification and the forgiveness of sins are simply two ways of saying the same thing. Indeed, "to obtain the forgiveness of sins is to be justified" (Apology, Article IV:76). We confess:

The word "justify" here means to pronounce righteous and free from sins and to count as freed from the eternal punishment of sin because of Christ's righteousness, which is "reckoned to faith by God" (Phil. 3[:9]). This is consistent with the use and meaning of this word in Holy Scripture, in the Old and New Testaments. Proverbs 17[:15]: "One who justifies the wicked and one who condemns the righteous are both alike an abomination to the Lord." Isaiah 5[:23]: "Woe to those who acquit the guilty for a bribe, and deprive the innocent of their rights!" Romans 8[:33]: "Who will bring any charges against God's elect? It is God who justifies," that is, who absolves from sin and pronounces free (Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Article III:17).

Universal Justification

Whom has God justified or forgiven? He has justified the entire world. Listen to the testimony of Scripture. "God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them" (2 Corinthians 5:19). God has reconciled the whole world by not counting people's sins against them. If God does not count the world's sins against the world, he has forgiven or justified the world. "Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life [literally, the justification of life] for all men" (Romans 5:18). Note the parallel between Adam's sin which brought condemnation for all mankind and the work of Jesus which brings justification for all mankind. "For all have

sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:23,24). Just as every human being has sinned, so also every human being has been justified. “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). If the sin of the world has been taken away, the world is forgiven. Just as Jesus, the Substitute for all sinners of all time “was delivered over to death for our sins,” he was also “raised to life for our justification” (Romans 4:25). Jesus’ resurrection was God’s stamp of approval on his work of atoning for the sins of the world.

Since the sins of the whole world have been paid for; God has declared the whole world not guilty, forgiven, pardoned. Luther described God’s universal forgiveness in this way:

Even he who does not believe that he is free and his sins forgiven shall also learn, in due time, how assuredly his sins were forgiven, even though he did not believe it. . . . He who does not accept what the keys give receives, of course, nothing. But this is not the key’s fault. Many do not believe the gospel, but this does not mean that the gospel is not true or effective. A king gives you a castle. If you do not accept it, then it is not the king’s fault, nor is he guilty of a lie. But you have deceived yourself and the fault is yours. The king certainly gave it (*Luther’s Works*, Vol. 40, pp. 366,367).

In the Apology, Philip Melancthon approvingly quotes Ambrose of Milan who says that God forgave the sins of the world in Christ at the cross:

“The law was shown to be harmful since all are made sinners, but when the Lord Jesus came, he forgave the sin for everyone, which no one could avoid, and he blotted out the bill of indictment that stood against us by the pouring out of his blood [Col. 2:14]. This is what Paul says [Rom. 5:20], ‘the sin abounded through the law; but grace superabounded through Jesus.’ For after the entire world was placed in subjection, he took away the sin of the entire world, just as John testified, saying [John 1:29], ‘Behold the Lamb of God, behold, the one who takes away the sin of the world.’ And so let no one glory in works, because no one is justified by their deeds” (Apology, Article IV:103).

The gospel is the clear declaration that in Christ God has forgiven the sins of all people of all time. He has justified the world.

Subjective or Personal Justification

Although God has forgiven the sins of the world, not everyone will be saved. Salvation comes through faith. Unbelief rejects God's forgiveness. As our Savior told Nicodemus, "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. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son" (John 3:16-18).

We are saved *by* or *through* faith not *because of* faith. "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast" (Ephesians 2:8,9). Faith is not something that God rewards. People are saved by God's grace, his undeserved kindness. Faith is not such a good work that it merits or earns salvation. The Holy Spirit rules that thought out when he says that salvation is a gift of God, not by works, so that no one can boast. If faith merited salvation we could boast because then we would have done something which God had to reward. But the Bible says we cannot boast because even faith itself is a gift of God. Faith merely receives what God has promised.

We are saved by faith *alone*. The Scriptures declare, "We maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law" (Romans 3:28). If salvation and the faith which receives salvation are gifts, then we cannot earn them. In the same way, if faith were a good work which merited salvation, then it wouldn't be a gift. In that case God would owe the believer salvation. St. Paul explains, "Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness. David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: 'Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the

Lord will never count against him'” (Romans 4:4-8). God has justified the wicked. That means that he has justified you and me. Believe it. As the Augsburg Confession states,

Furthermore, it is taught that we cannot obtain forgiveness of sin and righteousness before God through our merit, work, or satisfactions, but that we receive forgiveness of sin and become righteous before God out of grace for Christ's sake through faith when we believe that Christ has suffered for us and that for his sake our sin is forgiven and righteousness and eternal life are given to us. For God will regard and reckon this faith as righteousness in his sight, as St. Paul says in Romans 3[:21-26] and 4[:5] (Augsburg Confession, Article IV, German text).

We therefore reject every teaching that asserts that sinful human beings can either save themselves or at least contribute to their salvation in some way. For instance Rome claims,

If anyone says that justifying faith is nothing else than confidence in divine mercy, which remits sins for Christ's sake, or that it is this confidence alone that justifies us, let him be anathema [i.e., cursed, excommunicated] (*The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, Sixth Session, Canons concerning Justification, Canon 12).

Since the initiative belongs to God in the order of grace, *no one can merit the initial grace* of forgiveness and justification, at the beginning of conversion. Moved by the Holy Spirit and by charity, *we can then merit* for ourselves and for others the graces needed for our sanctification, for the increase of grace and charity, and for the attainment of eternal life (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #2010).

Conversion—the Bestowal of Faith by the Holy Spirit

The Bible is very clear about God's role in conversion. Jesus says, “You did not choose me, but I chose you” (John 15:16). Our Savior tells us, “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him” (John 6:44). The Scriptures generally assign the work of conversion to the Holy Spirit. St. Paul writes, “The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot

understand them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Corinthians 2:14). Without the Holy Spirit we are unable to believe God’s message of salvation because it seems foolish to us. But when the Holy Spirit works faith in our hearts he makes spiritual people out of unspiritual. God declares, “No one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:3). The Holy Spirit leads us to the conviction that Jesus is our Lord and Savior. He makes believers out of unbelievers. He works faith in our hearts.

The Holy Spirit works faith through the means of grace, the gospel in God’s Word and the sacraments. Just as no one can come to faith apart from the work of the Holy Spirit, so also no one will come to faith apart from the Word of God. St. Paul makes that very clear in his letter to the Romans. He writes, “‘Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’ How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!’ . . . Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ” (Romans 10:13-15,17). We cannot separate the Word of God from the work of the Holy Spirit or the Holy Spirit from the Word of God. Our Savior says, “The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life” (John 6:63).

God’s Word is the means through which the Holy Spirit converts us. St. Peter explains, “For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God” (1 Peter 1:23). The Augsburg Confession testifies to that truth:

So that we may obtain this faith, the ministry of teaching the gospel and administering the sacraments was instituted. For through the Word and the sacraments as through instruments the Holy Spirit is given, who effects faith where and when it pleases God in those who hear the gospel, that is to say, in those who hear that God, not on account of our own merits but on account of Christ, justifies those who believe that they are received into grace on account of

Christ. Galatians 3[:14b]: “So that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith” (Augsburg Confession, Article V:1-3, Latin text).

The Holy Spirit also works through Baptism to awaken or strengthen faith. As the Scriptures declare, “But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the *washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit*, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life” (Titus 3:4-7). Through Baptism we are born again and renewed by the Holy Spirit. St. Peter told his hearers on Pentecost, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). Ananias told Paul in Damascus, “Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name” (Acts 22:16).

Since we receive God’s forgiveness through Baptism we also receive salvation and a clean conscience toward God. If God has forgiven our sins, then we are saved from his wrath and all of our guilt has been removed. The Bible declares, “Baptism . . . now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God” (1 Peter 3:21).

Baptism can accomplish all of this because it is not just plain water or an empty ceremony. Luther puts it this way:

Baptism is not just plain water, but it is water used by God’s command and connected with God’s Word (Small Catechism, Baptism, I).

It is certainly not the water that does such things, but God’s Word which is in and with the water, and faith which trusts this Word used with the water. For without God’s Word the water is just plain water and not Baptism. But with this Word it is Baptism, that is, a gracious water of life and a washing of rebirth by the Holy Spirit (Small Catechism, Baptism, III).

In the Lord’s Supper we receive Christ’s true body and blood with the bread and the wine. Through the Lord’s Supper the Holy Spirit

strengthens faith. “‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.’ For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes” (1 Corinthians 11:25,26). Holy Communion offers and conveys the forgiveness of sins. Indeed, the new covenant is the forgiveness of sins. As we confess,

What blessing do we receive through this eating and drinking? That is shown us by these words: “Given” and “poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins.” Through these words we receive forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation in this sacrament. For where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation (Small Catechism, Holy Communion, II).

We therefore reject semi-pelagianism, which claims that sinful human beings can make a start toward God on their own which God rewards with grace to assist them in their conversion. We reject decision theology and every form of synergism, which claims that in order to be converted a sinner must ask Jesus to come into his heart or that to be converted an unbeliever must open his heart to the Holy Spirit. We also reject the teaching that the Holy Spirit creates and sustains faith apart from the means of grace.

Sanctification in the Wide Sense

The work of the Holy Spirit is called *sanctification*. To sanctify means to make holy, to set apart for God. Sanctification in the broad sense of the term refers to the entire work of the Holy Spirit to lead us to salvation, from conversion to preserving us in faith to the end. As Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, “From the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thessalonians 2:13,14). He wrote to the Corinthians, “To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 1:2). Again, “May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thessalonians 5:23).

Martin Luther summarizes the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in his explanation to the third article of the Apostles Creed. "I believe that . . . the Holy Spirit has called me by the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. In the same way he calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith" (Small Catechism, Creed, Third Article).

Sanctification in the Narrow Sense

The term *sanctification* is also used in a narrow sense. Sanctification in the narrow sense is the process through which the Holy Spirit leads Christians to abhor sin and to live a life filled with good works. Sanctification flows from justification. It is the response of a grateful heart to God for all that he has done for us. What is a good work? It is something that corresponds to God's will and flows from faith. In fact, "without faith it is impossible to please God" (Hebrews 11:6) and "everything that does not come from faith is sin" (Romans 14:23).

Through faith we have been delivered from the *power* of sin to control our lives. St. Paul writes, "For we know that our old self was crucified with him [Jesus] so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin" (Romans 6:6). We have been delivered from the power of sin so that we might live for the one who loved us and died for us. A person who has been converted is a new person. He has spiritual life where once there was only spiritual death. "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come" (2 Corinthians 5:17). To be in Christ means to believe in him.

When the Holy Spirit created faith in our hearts he renewed in us the image of God which Adam and Eve lost when they fell into sin. The renewed image of God is often called our new man or new self. Our new self has a different attitude from our old self, that is our old Adam or sinful nature. Our new self is created to be like God in righteousness and true holiness. According to our new man we want what God wants. Christians "have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator" (Colossians 3:10). Paul reminds us that we are different from what we were by nature when he writes, "You

were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness” (Ephesians 4:22-24).

The new life within us produces works that are good in God’s eyes. God created us anew for that very purpose. “For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Ephesians 2:10). There is no such thing as faith that doesn’t do good works. St. James explains, “Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. . . . As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead” (James 2:17,26). If a person has been converted or brought to repentance, he will automatically do good works because that is what faith does.

The power or ability to produce good works comes from God himself. Jesus says “No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:4,5). To remain in Jesus means to remain connected to him by faith. Good works flow from faith.

An unbeliever cannot cooperate with the Holy Spirit in conversion. By nature he is spiritually dead. He has no power to cooperate. However, when a person is converted, when new life is created in him, he can and does cooperate with the Holy Spirit in his life of sanctification by the power of the Holy Spirit that gives him that ability. He has been “created in Christ Jesus to do good works” (Ephesians 2:10). As the Formula of Concord explains,

As soon as the Holy Spirit has begun his work of rebirth and renewal in us through the Word and the holy sacraments, it is certain that on the basis of his power we can and should be cooperating with him, though still in great weakness. This occurs not on the basis of our fleshly, natural powers but on the basis of the new powers and gifts which the Holy Spirit initiated in us in conversion, as St. Paul specifically and earnestly admonished, that “as we

work together with” the Holy Spirit “we urge you not to accept the grace of God in vain” [2 Cor. 6:1]. This should be understood in no other way than that the converted do good to the extent that God rules, leads, and guides them with his Holy Spirit. If God would withdraw his gracious hand from such people, they could not for one moment remain obedient to God. If this passage were to be understood as if the converted person cooperates alongside the Holy Spirit, in the way two horses draw a wagon together, this interpretation could not be tolerated without damaging the divine truth (Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Article II: 65,66).

In justification faith is purely passive. In sanctification faith is very active. In his “Preface to the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans” Luther describes faith in a Christian’s life of sanctification.

Faith, however, is a divine work in us which changes us and makes us to be born anew of God, [John 1:12,13]. It kills the old Adam and makes us altogether different men, in heart and spirit and mind and powers; and it brings with it the Holy Spirit. O it is a living, busy, active, mighty thing, this faith. It is impossible for it not to be doing good works incessantly. It does not ask whether good works are to be done, but before the question is asked, it has already done them, and is constantly doing them. Whoever does not do such works, however, is an unbeliever. He gropes and looks around for faith and good works, but knows neither what faith is nor what good works are. Yet he talks and talks, with many words, about faith and good works.

Faith is a living, daring confidence in God’s grace, so sure and certain that the believer would stake his life on it a thousand times. The knowledge of and confidence in God’s grace makes men glad and bold and happy in dealing with God and with all creatures. And this is the work which the Holy Spirit performs in faith. Because of it, without compulsion, a person is ready and glad to do good to everyone, to serve everyone, to suffer everything, out of love and praise to God who has shown him this grace. Thus it is impossible to separate works from faith, quite as impossible

as to separate heat and light from fire (*Luther's Works*, Vol. 35, pp. 370,371).

Good works, however, don't save us. Good works are the visible evidence that we are saved. Good works don't make someone a believer, but a believer will do good works. Good works flow from faith; they do not precede faith. Good works demonstrate that the Holy Spirit has done his work in our hearts. St. James declares, "Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do" (James 2:18). The Augsburg Confession states,

Likewise, they [i.e., our churches] teach that this faith is bound to yield good fruits and that it ought to do good works commanded by God on account of God's will and not so that we may trust in these works to merit justification before God. For forgiveness of sins and justification are taken hold of by faith, as the saying of Christ also testifies [Luke 17:10]: "When you have done all [things] . . . say, 'We are worthless slaves.'" The authors of the ancient church teach the same. For Ambrose says: "It is established by God that whoever believes in Christ shall be saved without work, by faith alone, receiving the forgiveness of sins as a gift" (Augsburg Confession, Article VI, Latin text).

We reject every teaching that makes justification before God dependent on sanctification rather than recognizing that sanctification is a result of justification. Likewise, we reject every teaching that confuses justification and sanctification. Such teachings rob people of comfort and the certainty of salvation because sanctification will always be imperfect in this life. For example, Rome teaches, "Justification is not only the remission of sins, but also the sanctification and renewal of the interior man" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #1989). Lutheran Pietism brought a similar error into the Lutheran church. Philip Jacob Spener (1635-1705), the father of Lutheran Pietism, fell into the error of making justification dependent on sanctification when he wrote, "As the faith, which alone justifies us and makes holy, is inseparable from good works, so no one will be justified other than those who are intent upon sanctification" (quoted in Dale Brown, *Understanding Pietism*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978, p. 97).

Sanctification Remains Imperfect in this Life, But Christians Will Strive to Grow

Conversion is instantaneous. A person is either a believer or an unbeliever. Justification is full and complete. A person either possesses the forgiveness of sins and salvation by faith or he doesn't. There is no such thing as being half forgiven. But our life of sanctification is different. It is a gradual process. Sanctification has its ups and downs. Although Jesus has given us the victory over sin, we will not be totally free of sin until we are in heaven. We will retain our sinful nature until the day we die. Therefore sanctification will remain imperfect in this life. That is why Paul writes, "Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me" (Philippians 3:12).

In fact, there is a struggle in every Christian between his sinful nature and the new man the Holy Spirit has created in him. "For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want" (Galatians 5:17). St. Paul, the great apostle and model Christian, describes the inner struggle that he experienced:

I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! (Romans 7:18-25).

Because we know that our sinful nature is totally corrupt and will cling to us until we die, we reject every type of Christian perfectionism that claims or implies that a Christian can reach a point in this life that he no longer sins. Every Christian is *simul iustus et*

peccator, at the same time saint and sinner. We are righteous in God's eyes because he has pronounced us not guilty for Christ's sake. Nevertheless, we remain sinful human beings who sin every day and fall short of God's standards of perfection. That is why Jesus in the Lord's Prayer teaches us to pray, "Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us" (Luke 11:4). As Luther explains,

We pray in this petition that our Father in heaven would not look upon our sins or because of them deny our prayers; for we are worthy of none of the things for which we ask, neither have we deserved them, but we ask that he would give them all to us by grace; for we daily sin much and surely deserve nothing but punishment. So we too will forgive from the heart and gladly do good to those who sin against us (Small Catechism, Lord's Prayer, Fifth Petition).

Some Christians will be stronger spiritually than others. Individual Christians will also have ups and downs in their life of sanctification. That should not surprise us. As the Formula of Concord reminds us,

Because in this life we receive only the first fruits of the Spirit and our rebirth is not complete but rather only begun in us, the struggle and battle of the flesh against the Spirit continues even in the elect and truly reborn. For one can detect not only a great difference among Christians—one is weak, another strong in the Spirit—but within each Christian, who is at one moment resolute in the Spirit and at another fearful and afraid, at one moment ardent in love, strong in faith and hope, and at another cold and weak (Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Article II: 68).

Yet even though Christians cannot reach perfection in their sanctification in this life, they will strive to live according to God's will. Our Savior condemns indifference toward good works. To the church at Laodicea he says, "I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth" (Revelation 3:15,16).

Those who understand the gospel will want to do those things which please God. "For Christ's love compels us, because we are

convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again” (2 Corinthians 5:14,15). The Bible encourages us, “But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18). And again, “Finally, brothers, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more” (1 Thessalonians 4:1).

The Bible also points the way for growth in sanctified living. As Paul wrote to Timothy, “But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:14-17). Later essays will address this important truth.

Conclusion

In point of time justification and sanctification cannot be separated. When the Holy Spirit brings us to faith, at that moment we are fully and completely justified. God declares us holy. At that very moment the Holy Spirit also begins the process of sanctification, making us holy.

We can and must, however, distinguish justification and sanctification logically as we speak of cause and effect. Justification produces sanctification. We strive to do good works because we want to please the God who has forgiven all of our sins. Sanctification cannot produce justification before God because our sanctification in this life will always be imperfect and God demands perfection. We are justified because our perfect Substitute Jesus lived and died in our place. Justification is not dependent on our sanctification. However, sanctification is dependent on justification. Our God makes us holy after he declares us holy.

May God help us always to teach these two important doctrines clearly and without confusion. To him alone be glory!

For Discussion

Explain: A correct understanding of original sin is essential for a correct understanding of justification and sanctification.

Explain: Justification by faith alone guarantees that salvation is by grace alone.

Explain the relationship between faith, good works, and salvation.

Agree or disagree: Pastors should primarily preach sanctification to Christians rather than justification because they are already fully justified.

Explain: The only way to encourage fruits of faith is to encourage growth in faith.



John Brenner—Essay #1

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).

Bibliography

- Brecht, Martin. *Martin Luther, Vol. 3: Die Erhaltung der Kirche, 1532-1546*, Berlin, 1987.
- Brunn, Friedrich. *Mitteilungen aus meinem Leben*, Zwickau, 1983.
- Gottes Geist, KELK-Bekennntnis, Teil 3* (Eternal Word, Article III), English-German, published by the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church, Zwickau, 2006.

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

- Lange, Lyle. *God So Loved the World: A Study of Christian Doctrine*. Milwaukee: Northwestern, 2005.
- . *Sanctification: Alive in Christ*. People's Bible Teachings. Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1999.
- Luther, Martin. *Luther's Works*. American Edition. Vol. 24. St. Louis: Concordia, 1961.
- Möller, Hans. *Alttestamentlich Bibelkunde*, 3rd Edition. Zwickau, 2013.
- Schmeling, Gaylin. "Die Taufe—Quelle des Lebens" ("Baptism—Source of Life"). Guest lecture at the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Leipzig, Zwickau, 2003.
- Willkomm, Heinrich. *Die große Freude, Gedanken über die Taufe*, 4th Edition. Berlin, 1989.



Gottfried Herrmann—Essay #2

Essay #3:
**God Guides Us—
His Law in the Bible Guides Us in Godly Living**

Brester Msowoya
Malawi

The Identity of a Christian

The theme of this convention of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference (CELC) is *We Are God's Workmanship—Created in Christ Jesus for Good Works*. When I read this theme, I thought of an identity that every true Christian should seek. What distinguishing marks or characteristics will show that a Christian is totally different from the rest of the people in society? What can I do to show the people of the world that I am a Christian? In his Word, God has given us direction for our Christian life. The Ten Commandments are God's standard of what I should do and how I should live as a child of God. If I follow God's commands, people will be able to identify me as a Christian.

In Malawi, we have many different tribes that speak many different languages. Each tribe has its own unique culture, and this culture makes each group different from the others. For example, the Ngoni tribe has some traditional dances which are very different from the dances of the Chewa tribe. The traditional clothing that they wear is also very different. By looking at a person's costume and traditions, we can identify him as either Chewa or Ngoni.

If even the unchurched people of the world are looking for identity and recognition in society, how much more should Christians seek to establish their identity? Establishing our Christian identity will benefit not only us but even the whole world. And the benefits that come from it are not only temporal and worldly, but spiritual and eternal.

God Created Mankind for a Purpose

What does it mean that we are "God's workmanship?" It means that God created mankind for a purpose. And what is that pur-

pose? The apostle Paul said, “We are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus *to do good works*” (Ephesians 2:10).¹

It isn’t only Christians who want to do good works. Even worldly people do good because they want to look good in the eyes of other people. They do not want their names and reputations to be tarnished because they have done some shameful things. In short, people of this world do good works because they want others to regard them as good people.

On other occasions, people do good to others in the hope that they will be rewarded. In Malawi, there is a saying: *Mbale ya therere, imakoma n’kuyenderana* (“It is good to exchange a plate of okra”), meaning that when one has done good to you, you in turn should also do good to him.

These are some of the reasons why the people of this world do good works. Yet these good works are only acts of civic righteousness. People do them only to benefit themselves and to please others.

But believers do good works for a very different reason. Believers do not do good works to benefit themselves. They do everything for God. Even when they are working for the benefit of their fellow men, it is always God who moves and motivates them to do good works.

Reasons for Doing Good

The main reason why Christians do good is that God has justified us by his grace in Christ. He has set us free from our eternal punishment in hell. John 3:16 says, “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.” This is how God the Father showed his love for us: he did not spare his one and only Son, but gave him to the world to redeem it through his death as a sacrifice for sin. The apostle Paul said, “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast” (Ephesians 2:8,9). Paul also said, “Just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act

¹All Scripture quotations are from the NIV1984.

of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men” (Romans 5:18). With these words Paul means that God the Father has declared the world not guilty of sin by his grace, by sending his Son Jesus Christ to die for us. God did all this. We did nothing good to please him, so that he should declare us to be not guilty. No, it is by grace, by the undeserved love and mercy of our God! Although we are all sinners, God did not want us to perish, but to have eternal life.

God’s gracious gift of justification becomes my own through faith. Paul said, “‘Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.’ . . . The words ‘it was credited to him’ were written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead” (Romans 4:3,23,24). God credits the righteousness of Christ to everyone who trusts in him. This was God’s plan of salvation right from the very beginning with Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:15). “For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law” (Romans 3:28).

My point in all of this is not only to explain how one is saved. But in everything we do, there must be some reason or incentive or motive behind it. When believers do good works, the reason, motive and incentive is that God has justified them freely by his grace. The good works that they do are not to earn or merit God’s forgiveness, but only to show their thanks and gratitude for all that God has done.

It was by this work of justification that God created us anew in order that we might do good works. Going back again to Ephesians 2:10, the apostle Paul said, “We are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works.” God has done the work in us. “In Christ Jesus” he has created a new person in us, one who loves God and wants to obey his commands. God did this so that we serve him and other people with good works. And so St. Paul said to Timothy: “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed” (2 Timothy 2:15). With these words Paul encourages us to do good and godly work. Yes, it is true that God accepts all works that are done in faith, but let us “do our best” to produce good works of the highest quality.

Christians are “New Creations”

In what way is every Christian a “new creation?” When God first created mankind in the Garden of Eden, he made him to be perfect. The Scripture says, “God saw all that he had made, and it was very good” (Genesis 1:31). And again in chapter 2 it says, “The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. And the LORD God commanded the man, ‘You are free to eat from any tree in the garden’” (Genesis 2:15,16). These verses show that life was good before the fall. Adam and Eve were at peace with God. God would visit them and talk to them face to face in a perfect world, a world without sin. Adam and Eve did not lack anything. The whole world belonged to them.

Mankind’s perfect relationship with God was destroyed when Adam and Eve sinned. “God called to the man, ‘Where are you?’ He answered, ‘I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid’” (Genesis 3:9,10). Sin brought fear and shame into Adam’s heart. It destroyed his good relationship with God. From that time forward, life would no longer be easy. There would be pain and suffering. Human beings would have to sweat to find their food (Genesis 3:19).

But God restored the good relationship between himself and human beings through the promise of the Messiah. In Genesis 3:15, God said, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.” Adam and Eve believed these words about the coming Messiah. And when they believed, “God credited it to them as righteousness.” That was their spiritual creation, their spiritual rebirth.

In the same way, every Christian is made to be a new creation through faith in the gospel. The apostle Paul said, “Faith comes from hearing the message and the message is heard through the word of Christ” (Romans 10:17). Jesus also said to Nicodemus, “I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit” (John 3:5). This is the spiritual creation, the spiritual rebirth, that takes place when the gospel in Word and sacrament does its work of conversion inside the heart of man.

Expectations

Now what do the Lord's people do after this spiritual transformation? They live according to God's will by leading a sanctified life. They do good works of faith. This is the reason why Timothy could be "approved" as a workman (2 Timothy 2:15). God approved of Timothy because God himself had made Timothy to be a new creation. Now what are these good works that the Lord expects Timothy and us to do?

The apostle Paul said, "It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up" (Ephesians 4:11,12). This is what the Lord our God does in us and for his church. He chooses men, justifies them, sanctifies them, and appoints them to serve as called workers in his church. The public ministry is just one of the good works of faith by which we respond to God's love. We share the gospel in Word and sacraments as public ministers. That is what most of us in this room are doing.

Challenges

Is this easy? Not at all! In your home country, how might people respond when God calls them into the public ministry? In my country—Malawi—people might hesitate. They hesitate because when they look at the work of the ministry, they see a lot of problems. Pastors need to work with people who have very different backgrounds and very different ways of thinking. There will be financial challenges. Even compared to other "civil servants," a pastor will probably receive a very low salary. In some cases his salary may be less than 30 dollars in a month, about one dollar every day. It is very little compared to the standard of living in that country. Brothers, it is probably the same in your home country, too. From my observations, we all experience similar challenges, and yet we are committed to God's work. We know that it is the Almighty God himself who has called us to this work. He is the one who controls all of the challenges that we go through for the betterment of his people. May his name be praised as he continues to provide for us and sustain our lives as we do his work! All this requires faith and trust.

St. Paul says that God gave all these different public ministries “to prepare God’s people for works of service” (Ephesians 4:12). What are these works of service? Psalm 100 says, “Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth. Worship the LORD with gladness; come before him with joyful songs.” These are some of the works of service that Paul referred to in . Pastors are called to prepare God’s people to praise the Lord God and sing joyful songs for him in God’s sanctuaries.

Culture

Culture is another big challenge in Africa, particularly in Malawi.

The word sanctification can be used in two ways:

- 1) Sanctification in the *wide sense* refers to the whole work of the Holy Spirit. Through this work, the Spirit creates faith in our hearts and forgives our sin through the Word of God and the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Paul refers to sanctification in the wide sense when he says, “But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. He called you to this through our gospel” (2 Thessalonians 2:13).
- 2) Sanctification in the *narrow sense* refers to the Holy Spirit’s work of motivating, empowering, and guiding his people to live according to God’s will.

In my culture, people have some confusion about the first point, about purification and cleansing from sin. This confusion leads to problems in the second point, in how they live their lives.

Most tribes in Malawi practice customs of cleansing and purification as a way to please their ancestral spirits. People believe that if you do not perform this cleansing, then something bad will happen to you because of the evil you have done. These things happen from the time a person is born until the time he dies. For example, there are a lot of taboos that are observed when a child is born, which are connected to purification (“sanctification”). They call it cleansing.

When a baby is born, both the mother and the child are considered to be unclean until a ceremony of cleansing has been performed. No one is allowed to touch the baby until the cleansing is done. People think that if anyone touches the baby before the cleansing is finished, the baby will die. Two or three old ladies come with herbs. They take the child to a place in the village where rubbish is burned, because people think that the spirits live in that place. They put the baby on a mortar that is used for grinding grain. Then they bathe the child with African herbs. Only after this is done can people touch the baby.

The baby's mother is asked to stay away from other people for 30 days after the child is born. During this time, she is not allowed to cook any kind of food for her family, or even to put salt in it. She can cook only for herself. Until the 30 days are finished, the mother is not allowed to change her clothes. She must continue to wear the same clothes that she wore when the baby was born. She will not receive the Lord's Supper during this time of purification, not because anyone has forbidden her to do so, but because the woman considers herself to be unclean. When the 30 days have passed, the women shave the mother's hair and she takes a bath with traditional herbs. The clothes that she had worn during the 30 days are given to an old lady who represents the spirits of her dead ancestors. Then the mother is asked to cook food for all the people who are present on that day. That marks the end of the cleansing ceremony.

People in Malawi are confused by this. In their minds, the work of the Holy Spirit by which he purifies and cleanses us from sin (that is, Christian sanctification) is just the same as the traditional cleansing rituals that purify a mother after childbirth. They think, "If God demands that his people be sanctified or purified of their sins through the work of the Holy Spirit, then it cannot be wrong to perform traditional cleansing rituals to please the ancestral spirits."

What does this mean, especially to my brothers who serve people who are already full of these traditions? It means that it will take a lot of explanation and patience to differentiate between the traditional cleansing and the sanctification of the Holy Spirit from our sins.

False Teaching—Other Denominations

Another challenge that we face in Southern Africa comes from the false teachings of other denominations, especially the teachings of the Pentecostal churches. They teach that the Holy Spirit not only sanctifies us from sin, but that he also gives us power to heal and cast out demons. They think that if a believer does not experience these things, then it means the Holy Spirit has not sanctified him. But the one who has the Holy Spirit must speak in tongues, have visions and dreams, and perform healings.

In his first letter to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul did not say that all believers would receive these gifts from the Spirit. He says,

There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues (1 Corinthians 12:4-10).

Here the apostle does not say that everyone who has been sanctified by the Holy Spirit will automatically have all these spiritual gifts. Quite the opposite! He says: “All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines” (v. 11). I am not trying to limit the Spirit’s power in the lives of his believers, but we need to warn our people not to be enticed by these false prophets, who deceive people by talking about healings, prophesies, and tongues that are not really true at all.

Death

Another major cultural challenge in one area of my country when trying to bring this teaching of sanctification comes when a husband dies.

In Malawi, some people believe that one does not actually die until some rituals have been performed. These rituals are thought to remove the spirit of the dead person from his home and place it into the world of the spirits, which many believe is the graveyard.

For example, when a husband dies, many people believe that the spirit of the dead man is still in control of the bereaved wife until the act of cleansing is done. In other words, the act of cleansing removes the spirit of the dead man from the widow. The widow is to sleep with the dead husband before the dead body is taken for burial. But since at that time the woman becomes weak, sad, and helpless, this will not happen until later. A man from the village who is not related to the family comes at night and sleeps with the widow. This is supposed to chase the spirit of the deceased man away from the widow. This also is called cleansing. People believe that if this is not done, the spirit of the dead man will be unhappy and the whole village will die. The sad thing is that this is even practiced among believers, secretly at night. People do these things because they are afraid of death.

When people live such sinful lives, we need to preach God's law to them. We need to show our people from the Scriptures that this is not the cleansing of the Holy Spirit who sanctifies them and makes them holy. This is sinful and evil. Paul says, "The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God" (Galatians 5:19-21). This is what we need to teach our people who continue to practice such wicked acts as a part of their African traditional religion.

But more than that, when people are ignorant of the Holy Spirit's sanctifying work through faith in Jesus Christ, we need to preach the gospel to them. We need to tell them that "the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). And when they are afraid of death, we need to remind them that Jesus has won the victory over death. Paul said, "'Death has been swallowed up in victory.' 'Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your

sting?’ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 15:54-57).

This good news is not only for people who practice African traditional religion at funerals because they are afraid of death. It is for all of us who are afraid of death because of our sins. Scripture says that Christ has paid for our sins. Salvation is ours. Believe it!

God Guides Us

We have said many things about being God’s workmanship created in Jesus Christ to do good works. We have tried to explain in different ways what this means and how one is spiritually created. We have also suggested how one could live a sanctified life through works of faith even though there are countless challenges and difficulties.

Even in worldly matters, if a person is going to do good, he needs to be guided, controlled, and even motivated. For example: every state has its own rules and laws that help to govern the country. These laws tell people which actions are acceptable and which actions are not acceptable. If people do right according to the law, the government will protect them. If they do wrong according to the law, the government will punish them.

The Law as a Guide

God uses his law in similar ways. Through the law, he shows us what is acceptable and what is not acceptable. If we can live according to God’s law, God will bless us. But he threatens the punishments of death and hell on everyone who breaks his law.

Article VI of the Epitome of the Formula of Concord says the law has been given for three reasons:

- 1) “That thereby outward discipline might be maintained against wild, disobedient men,”
- 2) “That men thereby may be led to the knowledge of their sins,” and

- 3) “That after they are regenerate . . . they might on this account have a fixed rule according to which they are to regulate and direct their whole life.”²

Let’s focus on number 3 above. After a man has been converted to faith through the gospel in Word and sacraments, the law serves to guide him in living a sanctified life.

We need to remember that even after a man is converted to faith and has been born again, the sinful nature still remains in him. Therefore, even a Christian still needs the law of God to guide him. The Psalmist said, “Blessed are they whose ways are blameless, who walk according to the law of the LORD” (Psalm 119:1). But this has brought confusion to many people. Some say, “Yes, we believers still need the law in order to guide our day to day lives.” Others say, “No, we don’t need the law because we are now children of the light.”

Let me remind you that even Adam and Eve, who were perfect and who were living in a perfect world before the fall, still needed the law. God gave them one law: “You must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die” (Genesis 2:17). If God gave the law to Adam and Eve who had no sin, who are we to say that we don’t need the law? I don’t think we need someone with a doctorate degree to convince us that we still need the law to guide us in our everyday life. God’s Word is “a lamp to my feet and a light for my path” (Psalm 119:105). Because we are still in this sinful flesh, we need the law to guide us so that we can live a life that pleases God. And we live this God-pleasing life, not to win God’s favor, but because God has already rescued us from sin and death through his Son Jesus Christ. The fact that we often fail to obey the will of

²All quotations from the Lutheran Confessions are from *Concordia Triglotta*, Concordia, 1921. The full quote here is: “Since the Law was given to men for three reasons: first, that thereby outward discipline might be maintained against wild, disobedient men [and that wild and intractable men might be restrained, as though by certain bars]; secondly, that men thereby may be led to the knowledge of their sins; thirdly, that after they are regenerate and [much of] the flesh notwithstanding cleaves to them, they might on this account have a fixed rule according to which they are to regulate and direct their whole life, a dissension has occurred between some few theologians concerning the third use of the Law, namely, whether it is to be urged or not upon regenerate Christians. The one side has said, Yea; the other, Nay” (Formula of Concord, Epitome, Article VI:1).

God is a clear sign that we are not perfect. We need Jesus for the forgiveness of sins, and we need God's law to guide us how to live a godly life.

Gospel Motivation and Empowerment

The law can guide us in a Christian life, but the law itself cannot motivate or empower us to live according to God's will. The Formula of Concord says, "But we must also explain distinctively what the Gospel does, produces, and works towards the new obedience of believers. . . For the Law says indeed that it is God's will and command that we should walk in a new life, but it does not give the power and ability to begin and do it; but the Holy Ghost, who is given and received, not through the Law, but through the preaching of the Gospel, Gal. 3,14, renews the heart" (Formula of Concord, Thorough Declaration, Article VI:10,11). This means that the law on its own without the gospel is powerless to produce good works of obedience. It is only through the gospel of Jesus Christ that the law can be fulfilled in us. Only the gospel can motivate and empower people to do what the law requires.

The apostle Paul said to the Galatians, "Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? . . . He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit" (Galatians 3:2,14). It is through the gospel that we receive power from the Spirit to do what is required by the law.

Adiaphora and Christian Freedom

Through the law, God gives us very specific rules about what we must or must not do. But everyone can see that there are many things God has neither commanded nor forbidden. We call these things *adiaphora*. Because God does not command or forbid these things, Christians are free to do as they please in these areas.

Unfortunately, there are many people who do not understand Christian freedom. Some people take the Old Testament ceremonial laws—which are not binding for New Testament Christians—and try to impose them on the people. Although these things are *adiaphora*, they have turned them into rules that people must do in order to please God.

Other people set up and command their own rules or standards to please God. For example, some insist that you must not shave your hair. Others shave their hair and leave only their beards long. Some have forced people not to consume certain kinds of food and drink. Some have forbidden people to seek medication from hospitals when they are sick. Some have refused any sort of pleasure in this life. They are forbidden to watch televisions, or forbidden to exercise their right to vote for the leaders of their countries during the time of elections.

None of these things would be wrong if they were done as adiaphora in Christian liberty. But they become wrong if they are being forced on people as a way to earn God's favor and salvation. Whenever such things are commanded, two Bible principles are being violated: First, the principle that we are saved by grace alone through faith in Jesus, and second, that Christians are not bound by man-made laws, but are free to exercise their Christian liberty.

The Bible is completely clear that we are saved by grace alone, not by obedience to the law. The apostle Paul said, "It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast" (Ephesians 2:8,9). Again, Paul says to Titus, "He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy" (Titus 3:5). God alone did the work of salvation through his Son Jesus Christ who died on the cross to save us from our sins. This is God's grace—the undeserved love of God for mankind. As for us, we simply trust what God has done through Jesus Christ. In the Gospel of John it says, "What must we do to do the works God requires?" Jesus answered, 'The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent'" (John 6:28,29). This is what we should teach our people: there is no way man can please God for salvation apart from believing in Jesus Christ.

About Christian liberty and adiaphora, the apostle Paul said, "Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ" (Colossians 2:16,17). This is what the Bible says about adiaphora. Whether you do it or do not do it, there is no sin.

At the same time, however, Paul also said, “Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters. . . . Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother’s way” (Romans 14:1,13). Paul also said to the believers in Corinth, “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31,32). From this we learn that a Christian is free to do things that are adiaphora as an exercise of his Christian freedom. But if he sees that what he wants to do might cause his brother to stumble in faith, then the action does not glorify God and he should not do it.

These are the things that we should be teaching our people concerning adiaphora, things that the Scriptures do not command or forbid. We should never try to force any kind of adiaphora upon our fellow Christians. These things may be done in Christian freedom with a clear conscience. And if someone tries to force us to do some adiaphoron, then we can boldly stand firm in our Christian freedom. But we must explain these things clearly to those who do not understand the exercise of Christian liberty.

This is what I can say about Christian liberty and adiaphora. The specific applications may change from time to time and from one culture to another. But the principles and truths of Scripture never change.

On this issue of adiaphora, Edward Koehler said, “We cannot sin to the glory of God (Rom. 2:23.24; 6:1). But whatever otherwise we do in our several stations of life, if we do it from love of God and to the glory of God, is a service well-pleasing to him. Whenever God has placed us in life, . . . we should do our duty faithfully” (Koehler, *Summary of Christian Doctrine*, p. 163). So a Christian does not need to ask, “What are the works that I’m supposed to do, that please God?” Whatever works are done out of love for God and also for God’s glory from a good will, these are the works that please God.

Our Catechism says the same thing. It asks the question, “Why do I gladly do good works?” (Kuske, *Luther’s Catechism*, 1982, p. 200). The following passages are quoted:

Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again (2 Corinthians 5:14,).

[Jesus] 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 2:14).

From these verses, Prof. Kuske very properly concludes, "I gladly do good works to express my love and thanks to God for all his goodness to me" (Kuske, p. 200).

Furthermore, our Catechism also asks this question: "What is my guideline in doing good works?" (Kuske, p. 200). The Scriptures say:

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path (Psalm 119:105).

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will (Romans 12:2).

The law of God in the Holy Scripture guides us in living a life that pleases God, and warns us not to conform ourselves to the sinful pattern of this world.

There are a lot of challenges in trying to teach our people to do good works using the third use of the law (as a guide). One of these challenges is culture. The culture in Malawi and Zambia confuses our people a lot on this subject. People believe that everything happens for a reason—the good things and the bad things alike. Even death is considered to be something that cannot happen without a reason. When a person dies—even if he is very old—people think, "He must have been bewitched. Why did he die *now*? Somebody must be behind it." Or if a child is diagnosed with malaria, people will always ask, "Why only my child? Someone must have sent the mosquito to bite my child." These are some of the beliefs that are found amongst our people, especially those who live away from civilized life in urban areas.

Here is another challenge. People are often forced to do what others want them to do. This is a special problem when a person depends upon another for support. For example, parents might force their children to obey them, but what the parents command isn't always good. If the children do not do what the parents asked them to do, they are going to be in trouble. It is the same with wives. Women have to obey their husbands, and if they do not they are going to be in trouble. Chiefs may force their subjects to do things that the chiefs want, and if the people don't obey, they will be in trouble.

But human beings cannot decide what is good and right for us to do. Only God can, and he gives us his law to guide us in our Christian life. The gospel of forgiveness and salvation motivates us to obey that law, and to do all things to the glory of God our Savior. May God bless all believers so that this teaching from Scripture will be preserved for generations to come. Let us not forget that we are God's workmanship, created for Christ to do his work in us. Let each one of us remember to do whatever God has asked and empowered us to do for his glory.

Discussion Questions

This essay gives some of the challenges that Lutheran pastors in Southern Africa experience when teaching the doctrine of sanctification. What challenges do you face in your areas when you teach sanctification to your people? In what ways is your culture similar to mine? In what ways is it different?



Brester Msowoya—Essay #3

Essay #4:
**Honoring God—
We are Created to Love God According
to the First Table of the Law**

Petr Krakora
Czech Republic

“As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.”
(Proverbs 27:17 NIV2011)

By Way of Introduction

I am grateful that I was asked by the Planning Committee to write an essay on sanctification. Nevertheless, the assignment found me in a time when I myself wrestled with understanding of some of the issues related to this topic. I am sure you will be able to spot that in the following pages, seeing that I present some ideas with, perhaps, a slightly different approach than you may be familiar with or used to. I simply didn't want to cut and paste from the writings of more knowledgeable people. Instead of mere parroting, I wished to grab the subject matter with “my own hands,” so to speak, and formulate ideas as I have come to see them and live them.

Moreover, some thoughts of mine here presented are meant to be more like “open questions,” rather than solid statements. Therefore, it may happen, as you read or listen to this paper, that you find yourself disagreeing with some of the points suggested in the paper. I hope our following discussion and reflection will be fruitful for all of us.

And that is, in fact, *my aim when writing this essay*: I didn't desire just to repeat what you can easily find in more profound papers, and what everyone here agrees to without reservation. On the contrary, my aim was to stir us up into looking at familiar truths with, possibly, a new set of glasses or a fresh pair of eyes. It is, indeed, my prayer that *we all grow* in knowing our Lord Jesus and in admiring the depth and extent of his saving work.

Finally, I admit I have not focused on presenting this material as a *theological paper*, but rather as a *pastoral message*. That's why I have not written this paper in a systematic and exhaustive manner.

I am also going to quote portions of my past sermons, in which I explained some difficult concepts to lay people in simple, illustrative forms.

1. Sanctification in General

1.1 Definition of Terms

Sanctification comes from the verb *to sanctify*, which has its primary meaning *to make holy*—i.e. *to set apart* from the *common use or condition* for a *special use* or into a *special condition*. If we regard the sinful state of people in this world as the common condition, then sanctification of human beings means making them holy in terms of *perfect sinlessness*.

We use the term sanctification in a *wide sense*—where sanctification (i.e. *making* someone holy) comprises both justification (i.e. *pronouncing* someone holy or no longer subject to punishment) and sanctification in its *narrow sense*—where sanctification (logically) follows justification and signifies “making holy” in terms of *recreating* man’s spirit, soul, and body, and *transforming* man’s life unto holiness.

In a *looser way*, we also speak about sanctification as a *Christ-like life* of a believer on earth, a life characterized by and manifested in *good fruit* of godly attitudes, thoughts, words, and deeds.

1.2 Some Questions to Consider about Sanctification

With respect to sanctification we can ask *questions* like these: How is our sanctification related to our justification? Is sanctification a process, or an act of a moment? Is sanctification about becoming who we ought to be, or about being who we are created to be? Who is the object of sanctification and who is its subject (i.e. who does what in sanctification)? What is then the basis for sanctification? Let’s go and seek answers to these questions. They will prepare the ground for the second section of this paper—a treatment of the “loving God” part of sanctification.

1.3 Sanctification in Relation to Justification

There are *similarities between justification and sanctification* (understood in its narrow sense from now on). Both justification—i.e. God’s pronouncement of a “not guilty”

verdict—and sanctification—i.e. God’s “transforming” action—are based on *Jesus’ work*, are grounded in *God’s grace* (i.e. undeserved and endless love), and their benefit is realized by us *through faith*.

There are *significant differences*, on the other hand, *between justification and sanctification*. Justification, from a logical viewpoint, *precedes* sanctification.

Justification occurs *outside* of the believer and is a *judicial* act of God; sanctification occurs *inside* the believer and is an *operational* act of God.

Man is justified by God through faith in Christ’s *finished* work for *him*, while man is being sanctified by God through faith in Christ’s *continued* work *in* him.

In my justification *I receive for myself* what God says about me and what he did for me in Christ—namely, that while “in Adam” I was lost and dead in my sin (the law statement), “in Christ” I am now found and alive in his righteousness (the gospel statement). Then, in my sanctification, *I learn to live from and act upon* what God says about me and what he did for me in Christ—namely, that I am, indeed (!), truly dead in connection with Adam, but indeed (!), truly alive in connection with Christ.

Justification *alters* man’s *status* before God—from that of a condemned “child of wrath” to that of a forgiven “child of God.” Sanctification is about *living a new life* before God and men as a result of God *replacing* the heart, *renewing* the mind, and *residing fruitfully* in the person of his own Spirit.

Justification *declares* God-given freedom from *eternal guilt and punishment for sin/s*. Sanctification *displays* God-given freedom from *day-by-day power of sin/s*.

Although justification (logically) precedes sanctification, they are *inseparable* from one another. Man’s sanctification occurs (if viewed as a momentary event) or starts (if viewed as a process) at the same time as his (subjective) justification, i.e. at his conversion.

1.4 Sanctification—a Process or an Accomplished Event?

In theological papers you can find assertions that our sanctification is both a finished, onetime act, and an ongoing process,

unending on this side of eternity. For example, in Stephen P. Valleskey's essay from 1984, entitled "The New Man and the Old in the Believer," we read the following:

Thus the Scripture is at ease giving us sanctification in one place as the gracious work of God in the believer, and in another as the grateful response of the believer to God. . . . The image of God in renewed man is described in terms *both of being and becoming, the new man in the believer both as being complete and as "being formed" within him.* The new life of the believer is at the same time a hidden and a manifest thing (Valleskey, "The New Man and the Old in the Believer," Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary online essay file, paragraph 2).

Indeed, the Bible clearly presents both of these seemingly contradictory views. For instance, in his first letter addressed to the young church in Corinth, Paul writes: "To the church of God in Corinth, to those *sanctified* [Greek: perfect passive participle] in Christ Jesus and called to be holy [literally: called saints]" (1 Corinthians 1:2).¹ On the other hand, we read in Paul's letter to the Romans: "But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap *leads to holiness* [or *sanctification*], and the result is eternal life" (Romans 6:22).

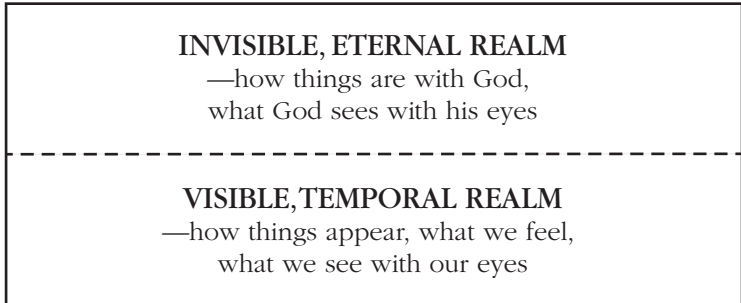
Now, is it possible to reconcile somehow these views of sanctification—both as a finished state, and as a continuing process? I have come across *an illustration*² that I find particularly helpful in dealing with sanctification. Not that it is able to harmonize every statement of the Bible and resolve all logical conflicts in it. But it does provide some practical insight into the core meaning and proper understanding of sanctification.

The illustration is based on Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 4:18, where the apostle says: "So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For *what is seen is temporary*, but *what is unseen is eternal*." From what Paul is talking about here we can infer that there exist two realms or spheres of existence. One is

¹All Scripture quotations are from the NIV1984, unless otherwise indicated.

²This illustration appears in *The Rest of the Gospel* by Dan Stone and Greg Smith, published by One Press in 2000.

temporal, consisting of things seen; the other is eternal, consisting of things unseen. We can picture this as follows:



In reality, there is no division line between these two realms. They exist simultaneously, and we all live in both realms (i.e. at least as long as we remain in this world).

Our sanctification as a *finished, onetime event* is what happened in the *invisible, eternal realm* the moment we believed in Jesus. Our sanctification as an *ongoing development* is what is now happening in the *visible, temporal realm*. In other words, because of Jesus, God always sees us as *perfectly sanctified* in the eternal realm from the time of our conversion (it can be defined as the moment we started “seeing” the invisible realm “by faith”). Yet, from that same time on, and also because of Jesus, we are *progressing in sanctification* in the *temporal realm*.

What’s important then, is that *Paul tells us to “fix our eyes” on what is unseen and eternal*. And faith does exactly that! Compare the well-known, yet not-so-well-understood definition of faith: “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the *evidence* [or conviction/persuasion] of *things not seen*” (Hebrews 11:1 KJV).

Faith, as a conviction of the unseen, is essential for both our justification and sanctification. At our *justification*, the eternal, invisible realm—with God’s grace all around, with Jesus being the Son of God, with his work on our behalf—was revealed in the gospel to us and believed by us. Now, in our *sanctification*, we continue by faith to “tap into” and “draw from” these eternal, invisible realities, as they are revealed to us more and more and as we “we live by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7). With Paul, we now

learn “to see by faith” what God always sees and how he sees—namely, how he sees himself (as totally dependable; as the source of all goodness and life—recall the names of God), how he sees us (as totally dependent on his goodness and life; as holy and complete in Christ), and how he sees everyone around us (in need of knowing him and knowing him better). We learn to see the way God sees and to agree with him.

Distinguishing between these two realms is critical for our living in this world. For in the visible, temporal realm we see that we are “wasting away” (outwardly!), that we are facing “troubles” (momentary ones!). Therefore, Paul immediately tells us to fix our eyes on what is unseen. He knows that by doing so we are “inwardly being renewed,” and that in the invisible realm we have “eternal glory in Christ that far outweighs” all current troubles in the visible realm.

So, as a believer in Jesus, I am told that in Christ I am a saint, a redeemed, perfect child of God. In the invisible, eternal realm it is so, and it is for real. I may not see it with my eyes. I may not feel it. I may not outwardly experience it. I may not always confirm it by my words and actions. But “the Bible tells me so,” the Father’s Spirit testifies with my spirit that it is so (Romans 8:16), and so I “see it by faith.” And as I “walk by that faith”—as I hear what God says about the invisible reality and I put these truths into practice in the visible realm (“work out my salvation”)—it is really God working in me to will and to do what he prepares for me in advance. And then others around me start seeing glimpses of the eternal in their temporal. That’s my sanctification in a nutshell.

1.5 Sanctification—Becoming Holy or Being Holy?

Sanctification, viewed as a onetime event in the invisible realm, is a done deal. Being united by faith with Christ, who was sanctified (set apart) by the Father (John 10:36), we became sanctified (set apart) by God. Sanctification, viewed as a continual process, therefore isn’t about *becoming holy*, becoming what we are not, but it is about *being holy*, being who we now are in Christ! It deals with our “coming to our own,” so to speak.

For only good trees can bear good fruit. So *being good trees* (in Christ we were made such!), rather than *becoming good trees*, is what results in good fruit in our lives. We are not hypocrites.

Some people speak about a “*sanctification cycle*.” They describe it as a *never-ending sequence* of repentance, forgiveness, trying hard, failing, repentance, forgiveness, trying hard, failing, and so on. This cycle is supposed to gradually build up a believer in his sanctification. In effect, however, it sounds more as if our position with God and the realities of the invisible, eternal realm are constantly fluctuating and very much depend on how we are doing, how we are measuring up.

Other people react to this “vicious circle” by highlighting the fact that our sanctification is not about our *trying*, but about our *dying!* To advance in Christian living we are not so much to “try harder” as we are to die and “get our old selves out of the way.”

To be more precise, however, we need to say that sanctification is about *considering oneself dead and alive in Christ*. Because that’s how we are now! We don’t daily bring about our death and we don’t daily bring about the resurrected life in us. These are God’s completed actions in the invisible, eternal realm and he alone (!!!) carried them out on the cross of Jesus and at our baptism (through which we were united with Jesus in his death and resurrection). Christian living can then be described as *reckoning on, being shaped by, coping with, acting upon, and living out what is God’s fact!* Our spiritual death and resurrection in Christ are reality, not wishful thinking.

In other words, we *advance in Christ-likeness* when we *adopt more and more of the new life of God* while *letting go more and more of our old and dead selves*. That’s why our death with Christ is so important. We are not daily becoming dead, but being dead and getting used to it. This is explained in this excerpt from my Good Friday sermon, entitled “When Death Means the End.”

But that’s not all that died on the cross of Christ on Good Friday night. Besides the end of a perfectly holy life of the Son of God and besides the end of all our sins and failures, there came another end. Remember that our problem wasn’t only our sins; it was our sinful self, our sinful heart, our sinful identity. The “who we are” was a bigger problem.

Because of Jesus’ shed blood, God has forgiven us all our sins. Hallelujah! But if he stopped there, he would eventually have with him in heaven a “bunch of sinners” whose sins

were forgiven, but who still want to flee from him, who still delight in themselves only, for whom the “language of self-giving love” is still just obscure gibberish.

That’s why on the cross of Golgotha, God put an end also to *our “sinful self,” to our Adam-like identity*. Jesus was “the last Adam” because he brought an end to all the copies of Adam. “We are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died” (2 Corinthians 5:14). In God’s eyes this happened on the cross of Christ two thousand years ago, but this *reality of God* becomes *our reality* through Baptism, because it is in our baptism that we are joined to Christ in his death and our old self is crucified with him.

Listen to the apostle Paul, how he speaks about it in Romans 6:3-11: “Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? . . . we have been united with him like this in his death . . . we know that our old self was crucified with him . . . we died with Christ . . . count yourselves dead to sin.”

Through our baptism we took part in the death and end of the “Adam-like way of living.” For us, Good Friday means an end of the old creation, of the old generation. It’s the end of the tyranny of the greatest slave driver called sin—simply because its slave, our old man, died and is dead. If you know that your old man is dead, you are no longer enslaved by sin. “Because anyone who has died has been freed from sin” (Romans 6:7).

How often people in Christian circles speak about “the new birth”—the birth from above, by the power of God’s Spirit, the birth into Christ. How little, in contrast, do we hear that *the birth of the new is connected with the death of the old!* Indeed, for the new to be born, it was necessary for the old to die. The more we know and believe and rely on this sure word of God about our old man being crucified with Christ, the more fully and clearly we will live the new life in Christ. For God created a completely new self in us, a new creation. In place of the old and dead identity (as “children of wrath”) he gave us a new one—the identity of God’s children, of Christ-ians.

Now, what does this all mean for our *daily living*? Well, do you remember the Israelites who went out of Egypt? The waters of the split Red Sea closed, splashing away the Pharaoh's army and putting a full stop to the slavery of God's people. They left Egypt, but Egypt didn't yet completely leave them. They were ready to learn to walk in the newly acquired freedom, in the free dependence upon their Lord, which was an everyday challenge for them, a new "learning experience." And it is for us, as well. For us, who know—and count on it—that on Good Friday the holy Son of God died, our sins died on him, and our old man died with him.

Are we then, in this newly acquired freedom, to go on living according to the "dead old Adam" in us? Or are we to live according to the "living Christ" in us? Are we to keep putting on our old "funeral garments"—garments of worries, desires and passions of this world, garments which no longer fit who we are now, which no longer belong to us? Or instead, are we to daily open the "new wardrobe" with tailor-fit custom-made garments that befit our new identity in Christ? Are we to go on talking the "old language of this world," or are we to speak our "new mother tongue," in which others can overhear Christ's voice?

Each time, before you decide, remember (as we did today) what Good Friday had brought death and end to. And remember you don't need to wait for the new life to the third day. By faith it is available now, in the resurrected Jesus, shining in your heart. "In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Romans 6:11). Amen.

To repeat, we are not daily *becoming dead*, but we are daily getting used to *being dead*. The other side of the same coin is that we are not *becoming alive* in Christ anew every day. We are getting used to *being alive* in him . . . and his being alive in us! This living and ruling of Jesus in us is commented on in my Easter sermon, entitled "Love Never Fails." (The text was 1 Corinthians 13—the *Agape* chapter. After putting the name "Jesus" in place of the word "love" in the text and showing that Jesus was patient and kind, was not boasting or proud, etc., there came the last trait of love.)

Love, i.e. Jesus, never fails, never ends. It seemed that his love didn't pay off, that it only brought troubles and death. But it was just appearance. The Easter night and Jesus' resurrection prove that love will never be conquered, that it will never fall to the dust as a "loser." It may appear otherwise to the world, but God made it clear to us by raising Jesus from the dead: *My agape never fails.*

For this reason we are invited by this love to become a part of it, to surrender to it, so that we do not fail and die forever either. Are you saying that you are not capable of such love? None of us is. But what if someone dwells in you who is capable of such love—who is the Agape itself? Who can love patiently and kindly even the troublemaking kids? Who simply cannot boast that he owns this or that? Who cannot envy what others have? Who can endure all unfairness and hardships? What if someone like "Love himself" dwells and reigns in you?

There is indeed only one real and perfect Lover—Jesus. He accepted us just as we were. He did that not only to cleanse us from the dirt of sin. He did that so as to dwell in us through his Spirit. It is only due to our union with him that we can get up in the morning, open the Bible and read the same words about love we read today, while substituting our name in the text:

"Because you are in me, Lord of Love, I am patient and kind, I don't envy and boast, I am not self-seeking, I am not easily angered, I keep no record of wrongs, I always protect, always trust, always hope, always persevere. That's my new self in you and it will never fail." Try and see what difference the Lord will thus make in this world through you. Taste and see that Christ in you is love. Amen.

1.6 The Object and the Subject—or Who Does What?

Some believers think that, because justification is "what Jesus did for us," sanctification must be about "what we do for Jesus." In fact, however, our sanctification, just as our justification, is *totally about Jesus*. He is the *subject* (producer); we are the *objects* (receivers) in his *transforming* operation of our spirit, soul, mind,

and body, as well as the *instruments (bearers)* in his *producing* God-pleasing fruit in our life for others.

Our spiritual oneness with Christ is vital for our sanctification. But the *roles* in our union are different for him and for us—just as they are in marriage and childbearing. Let’s see how this is clarified in my sermon, entitled “Christian Life is a Fruitful Life.”

I am going to ask you, as Christians: “How would you define the *Christian life*? How would you describe it or characterize it?” The answers I would get from you would most likely be of two kinds. Some of you would speak about the *outer side of the Christian life*—i.e. what such life looks like, how it is manifested in the behavior of a believer, in his relationships, in his decisions, in his priorities, in his reactions to injustice, in his handling temptations, emotions, and so on. Others, on the other hand, might look at it from another angle and would focus on the *inner side of the Christian life*—i.e. how such life comes into being, what it is drawn from, who produces it, how it is developed.

It is interesting how often I hear and read about the first part, the outer aspect of Christian living, and how little about the other part, the inner aspect of such living. How often I hear how I, as a Christian, should behave, how I should love my wife, my neighbor, even my enemy, how I should turn the other cheek, how I should not worry about tomorrow, etc., etc. The list goes on. Rarely, though, do I hear how I can do all of that, how I can achieve that, where I can get the strength and courage for all that!

It is obvious that these two sides of Christian life are closely connected and wedded with one another. The more I know and experience the inner facet of life in Christ, the more the outer facet of such life will work out and show itself. Why it is so we can illustrate with the *phenomenon of pregnancy and childbearing*.

Imagine a young woman who desires to get pregnant. She can read piles of books about pregnancy. She can constantly talk about pregnancy. She can dream about it day and night. Yet, to no avail. She can even stuff her T-shirt in her belly area with a pillow to pretend that she is expecting a baby;

still it won't be the real thing. Similarly, we can read books about the Christian life, we can talk about it every day, dream about it, what it would be like if . . . but it will serve no good. Some can even try to pretend they lead Christian lives, but it's only a stuffing. Just like a woman can never get pregnant by herself, a believer can never live a Christian life by himself. In either case, two are needed! *Two, who became one.*

A woman needs to know intimately her *physical union* with her man to get pregnant. We, as Christians, need to know intimately our *spiritual union* with Christ.

We don't need, in and of themselves, how-to books and self-help manuals. We need the living Christ in us for every good word and deed! We don't need to speak about Christian living or just dream about it; we have it available in the life-giving union with Jesus! United with him we will bear much good fruit for God! As he promised: "If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit" (John 15:5).

There are other important points we can ponder on the illustration about childbearing. When the woman is pregnant, it is hard to hide, isn't it? It shows. Sooner or later, others will notice. And some of those others may come to her and ask: "You are expecting a baby, aren't you?" And the woman will correct them and say: "No, *we* are expecting a baby—me and my husband." The woman knows that it is she who carries the baby in her womb. She knows it's she who is going to deliver the baby to this world. But she also knows the baby's father was involved in conceiving the baby. The woman carries the baby and gives birth to the child, but the man was irreplaceable in its conception.

How does that *relate to our Christian living*, you ask? Firstly, we see that good fruit in the Christian life (the outer side of it) comes, like a baby, as a result and product of a *closely shared life* of the Christian with Jesus Christ. Secondly, we see that when good fruit appears "on us," the world may notice and it may think that the fruit comes from us, that it is our worth and merit that we are kind, tenderhearted, loving, forgiving, rejoicing, encouraging. But we know

better. Although we may like to be flattered, we know that we are only carrying the fruit and that someone else is its begetter and author. It is he, with whom we are one, who is in us and we in him. And it may even happen that others will notice, in your words and acts of love, a resemblance of Christ. And since it is us who deliver these words and acts to this world, they also bear our unique flavor and scent. Just like children resemble both their father and their mother.

What is then the *lesson to take home*? Maybe this: If you come and ask me, "How should I live my Christian life?" I can give you only one answer: "I don't know *how you* can live it, but I know *who* can live it *through you!*" If you ask, "How can I turn the other cheek toward someone who hit me?" I again answer, "I don't know how *you* can do it. But I know *who* can do it through you." You ask, "How can I go the second mile with someone who makes me go one mile?" Or, "How can I give my coat to someone who stole my shirt? How can I suffer injustice and harm? How can I forgive and love someone who hurt me?" I say, "I don't know how. I just know who. I know who can do that through you. Christ Jesus can. I know he is up to that. And you are now and forever one with him!" If you ask, "How can I sacrifice for my wife who keeps barking at me? Or how can I submit to my husband who keeps neglecting me and the family? How can I honor my parents who are so crude? How can I?" I don't know how you can. But I know that the living Lord Jesus, who is one spirit with us (1 Corinthians 6:17), who is in us and who is greater than the one who is in the world (1 John 4:4), he can and he will. Just relax and trust him to do that.

In the meantime, I invite you to listen and meditate on the words of the apostle Paul from his letter to the Roman Christians: "So, my brothers [and sisters], you also died to the law [i.e., to rules and regulations] through the body of Christ [in which all your debts to the law were paid for], that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead [i.e., to Christ], in order that we might bear fruit to God" (Romans 7:4).

Pregnancy is visible. Your union with Jesus, your belonging to him, will also be visible in your Christian life. It's his promise that you can trust. Amen.

It is in our union with Christ that our intimate and fruitful “knowing him” takes place. In Christ, “his divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness” (2 Peter 1:3). By way of our fellowship (sharing) with the Father and the Son through the Spirit, we “may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires” (2 Peter 1:4).

Without being in Christ we can do nothing. When being in Christ, *who alone can fulfill God's law of love*, he can do impossible things through us . . . including loving God according to the *first table of the Decalog*. Only “Jesus inside” can and will lead us: 1) to have no other gods beside the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; 2) to use the name of the true God properly and not in vain; and 3) to remember the day of rest and keep it holy in its truest meaning. Only Jesus, the perfect law-keeper, can do through us what we can never even begin to approach rightly on our own.

In the second section of this paper then, the *first three Commandments of God* are treated as they pertain to the believer's sanctified life in Christ. Some ideas about these commandments are examined here, together with some common and subtle pitfalls for Christians to be aware of.³

2. Sanctification in Light of the First Table of the Law

2.1 Sanctification and the First Commandment

“You shall have no other gods!”

Only God is God. The true God—the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is and will always be the author and source of all good things. He is their permanent provider and supplier. The true God also possesses and exercises the highest authority above everything that is not him. The true God is thus the judge of all creatures, while at the same time being their merciful justifier. There is nothing that the true God demands which he wouldn't want to give. There is no other like him.

³I found inspiration in *The Ten Commandments* by Stuart Briscoe, published by Harold Shaw Publishers in 1993.

By our connection with Jesus, we have *his wisdom* to see God as he really is. We also have *his motivation* and *his power* available to us to live accordingly. We “are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption” (1 Corinthians 1:30).

What does it mean: accordingly? In spite of their oneness with Jesus, in spite of being called “children of God,” Christians remain *creatures*. Hence our sanctification cannot be viewed as some kind of journey *upward toward heaven*, toward lofty dignity. That’s just another twist of the old lie, “You shall be like God!”—if not immediately, by eating a fruit, at least by evolving into some form of independent gods. The proper view of sanctification is rather that of a journey *back down to earth*, to the business of being truly human, the kind of creatures God made us to be—namely, those who carry *his image* in the world, those who are *dependent expressions of his life, holiness, wisdom, justice, care, love, patience, kindness*, etc. We live “accordingly” when we live as those who carry Christ to this world—by being ourselves carried by him!

Any system of religion, therefore, is against the First Commandment if it tries to draw our attention away from Jesus Christ and his work *for us* (in justification), *in and through us* (in sanctification), and instead directs us to our own efforts and activities, focuses on our dedication and rededication, highlights our achievements or failures, and in short—is simply about us.

By contrast, the new creation that we now are, finds its center not in itself, but in Jesus. He is now our life. He is now our *point of reference* by which we see and deal with everything—our relations, values, priorities, finance handling, living in marriage, etc. As branches, we can just concentrate on the vine, not on ourselves, not even on our fruit—for it will grow naturally and automatically, as we see more and more what Paul saw, that “to me, to live is Christ” (Philippians 1:21).

No religious program, no spiritual exercise, no self-improvement activity can do what only God in Christ can do. Some of these things, like Bible reading and churchgoing, may serve as good *means to* “get us focused on and excited about Jesus,” and that’s all right. That’s what they are for. But if they become the goal in

and of themselves, then we have *turned means into ends*, and placed the horse behind the wagon. Even godly activities can take the place of God in our lives.

Besides conventional and popular idols, such as money, possessions, power, influence, or sex, even *things or places associated with God* can be “worshipped as gods” when they become *more important than people*. Worship equipment or places in modern Israel can take priority over human beings around us, whom God intends to re-create to his image again. “Such people will not sit in our beautifully carved church pews!” is a symptom that something is wrong here.

Likewise, presenting a church building as “God’s house” is lending itself to misunderstanding and idolatry. People may think they could keep God in there, visit him once a week, and otherwise lead their lives the way they want to. In fact, it’s the Christians inside the church building who themselves are “the temple of God” (2 Corinthians 6:16), the temple of the Holy Spirit who dwells in them. Indeed, “the Most High does not live in houses made by men” (Acts 7:48).

Making God in our own image, preferring one’s own imagination to God’s revelation, fashioning God in a popular style, reducing God to a vending machine (“Do this checklist and you will get what you want = put a coin here and what you want will come out”)—there are many different ways how even believers can slip up in regard to the First Commandment. Despite that, the Lord God remains faithful to himself and patient in his mercy.

2.2 Sanctification and the Second Commandment

“You shall not use the Lord’s name in vain!”

Only God is God. And his name is holy. What does his name signify? It stands for *reputation*—how he is known; it stands for *personality*—what he is like; it stands for *authority*—what he is able to do. Unlike false gods, who receive names from their creators, the true God reveals and informs men of his name. He takes the initiative. It is as if he said: “Don’t make me the way you want me to be. I am who I am. And I will demonstrate who I am. I am knowable by my names.”

By intimately *knowing* God's name, by *relying on* what his name represents, by *calling on* his name we begin to comprehend his faultless reputation, understand his marvelous personality, and experience his supreme authority in our lives.

The Bible tells us it is *Jesus* who reveals God's name to us, himself being the *fulfillment* of all that the names of God represent. Consider, in particular, some of the *compound names of God*. Jesus is called *Immanuel* (God with us—on our side); Jesus is really *Jehovah-Jireh* (the Lord provides—for all our needs); Jesus is our *Jehovah-Rapha* (the Lord heals—from sin and its consequences); Jesus is our *Jehovah-Nissi* (the Lord my banner—of victory); Jesus is our *Jehovah-Tsidkenu* (the Lord our righteousness); Jesus is our *Jehovah-Raah* (the Lord is the shepherd—the good one who gave up his life for his sheep); Jesus is our *Jehovah-Shammah* (*the Lord is present—now also in us*); *Jesus is Jehovah-Shalom* (*the Lord is peace—with God*); and *Jesus is Jehovah-Shuah* or *Jehoshua* (the Lord is salvation—from all perils and threats).

When looking at the Second Commandment we need to realize that we, as believers in Jesus, *bear on ourselves God's name*. His name was pronounced over us as we were *baptized into the name of the triune God*. We have the honor to carry the name Christians. We have been united with the one who fulfills all names of God. As a result, we have *the privilege and capacity of making the knowable God known*—as he expresses himself through the healing words he gives us, through the deeds of selfless love he prepares for us.

So how can believers take God's name in vain? Note that the word *vanity* shows that something was *emptied of content, rendered worthless, or made irrelevant*. One of the ways of “emptying” the Lord's name is in trying to *make a name for ourselves or the church* we belong to. Christians often do things “in the name of Jesus,” yet they may focus on creating *their own reputation*, or they do it with *their own authority* in the background. When you and I meet with unchurched people to talk about Jesus, do we ever forget to mention right away which church we are from? When we organize activities with Jesus as the center, do we ever forget to point out in the invitation that it is our church that runs or sponsors the event? Is getting a pat on the back ever the goal for which we do things for people as Christians?

Another way of making the name of Jesus irrelevant is in *prayers*. Believers often finish their prayers with “in Jesus’ name I pray,” even though, sometimes, all they have prayed for was *self*-focused, *self*-centered, and meant for *self*-gratification. No wonder that God doesn’t respond to prayers with wrong motives (James 4:3), however often the name of Jesus is appended to them.

There are other ways how believers can fall in regard to the Second Commandment. They can rejoice, however, that in Jesus’ name—adulterated in subtle or in gross ways by them—there still is their salvation.

2.3 Sanctification and the Third Commandment

“Remember the day of rest to keep it holy!”

Only God is God. And he is the same every day. Why a special day of rest then? Jesus said it was *made for man*, not the other way around (Mark 2:27). At least *four reasons* are mentioned in the Old Testament Scriptures. First, it was to *give man a break* from his daily toil so as to spare him. People are not robots and can’t keep going at their max seven days a week. Second, it was an occasion for God’s people to *demonstrate their trust in and dependence upon* their God. They were to believe he would take care of them even if they stopped working one day in seven. The third reason was to give believers *time to gather and worship* him, while remembering his acts of faithful love for them. It was an occasion for God’s people again to hear and ponder the great truths of the God who saved them. Last but not least, it was a sign to *point people to Jesus as the giver of spiritual rest*.

Believers today can *lose interest in common worship*. They may neglect occasions to hear God speaking to them, to share his life with and express his love to members of God’s family. One reason they do so is because they feel they are not getting anything new there. They sense they are lacking something in their “spiritual makeup,” and worship just doesn’t seem to deliver it.

Let me again quote here from a sermon of mine, entitled “Are You Hungry and Thirsty?” It was based on Jesus’ words spoken at a well in Samaria about the difference of his life-giving water and the regular drinking water (John 4:13,14).

Sometimes, we as Christians feel that what we have in Christ isn't all we spiritually need—as if there was more to achieve. We may think along these lines: “OK, I have Jesus in my heart. Now, give me a larger congregation, give me a nicer looking church, give a better preacher, give me modern songs of praise, give me high-tech equipment, . . . and then I will feel that I have all I spiritually need. Then I will feel fulfilled and satisfied. Then I am sure my Christian living is also going to work out much better for me.”

But Jesus here speaks differently. *No one and nothing can give us what we already have in Christ himself*—although perhaps we have it unknowingly or unprofitably. Indeed, at our baptism we were united with Christ, and with him we got everything! We were all given the one Spirit to drink and he, as the spring of living water, now abides in us, “waiting” to burst out, spring forth, flow, and spill into the lives of people around us. What hinders its outflow? Our misleading feelings? Our lack of trust? Our shyness to use and share with confidence what we have in Christ? Or do we still have ourselves as centers of our lives, rather than him? Believe that Jesus is enough. If you have him, you are complete and have with him everything you will ever spiritually need.

In our worship gathering then, we as Christians don't get anything above and over what we already have in Christ. But we come together as church to *discover*, to *remember*, to *reassure ourselves* of and to *enjoy* and *share* what is ours by faith connection with Jesus. We grow and are built-up “in knowing Christ” and his gifts, which he gave us at the time of our baptism so that we can use them by faith. God doesn't give us a piece of patience here and a piece of courage there, and a piece of kindness later on. No, we have the fullness of Christ always available. Our sanctification is then about stepping aside from the scene in every area of our living and letting Christ in us step in and do what only he is able to do—loving the Father and loving the unlovable neighbor. This way the word of the prophet will come true: “Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert. The burning sand will become a pool, the thirsty ground bubbling springs” (Isaiah 35:6,7). Let the

Spirit's living water in you go out so we refresh one another with it. Amen.

Another trap for believers with regard to the Third Commandment is its *painstaking observance*. Church on Sunday morning, another on Sunday afternoon, and one more on Sunday evening. It's the Lord's day, isn't it? Also, no games or no playing outside for the children on Sunday. Praying is allowed on Sunday, just as reading the Bible is or taking part in quiet family conversations.

In both attitudes, Christians can *miss the point* of the making holy the day of rest. Its point is *our rest in Jesus*—rest from our efforts to justify ourselves before God (justification); rest from our efforts to run our new lives on anything other than faith in Christ dwelling in us (sanctification).

2.4 Summary

As we have seen, the basis for our sanctified living—including our coping with the first three commandments of the Decalog—is our oneness, our vital connection, with Jesus. As sinners we were indeed *separated* from God by our sins and sinfulness. But God, through the cross of Christ, arched the gap between us and him, and through Baptism placed us in Christ, thus *joining us* to himself again. He separated us from our sins and sinfulness, and made us one with himself through Christ, who became our life.

“For *you died*, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, *who is your life*, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory” (Colossians 3:3,4).

We need to be *reminded* of these *invisible and eternal realities*—by the Word of God heard and read, by the Lord's Supper rightly received and understood. They affect how we live in the *visible and temporal realm*. They affect our *sanctification*. May this paper serve the same purpose.

Discussion Questions

1. In Jesus' parable of vine and branches, what represents justification and what sanctification? (See John 15:3 and John 15:2).

2. In the washing of the disciples' feet narrative, what in Jesus' response to Peter represents justification and what sanctification? (See John 13:10).
3. Sometimes our *thankfulness for justification* is presented as the motivation for and source of our sanctification. Why is that not true? Is our thankfulness a source, or a manifestation of our sanctification?
4. Remaking God and his message to fit the society's views is one form of idolatry. The Christian church always faces the tension of holding to the true revelation of God, yet communicating it to today's world.
 - In what ways are we tempted to *remain relevant* but *lose faithfulness*?
 - In what ways are we tempted to *stay faithful* and *lose relevance*?
 - Most importantly, in what ways can we remain *truthful about God* and become *relevant to the society* of people that doesn't know him but need him?
5. When the Israelites in the Old Testament took oaths, they called the name of the Lord, saying something like "as the Lord lives." In what way could it have been a *proper* use of God's name? In what way could it have been using God's name *in vain*?
6. How did Jesus—by his actions and his announcements—shed new light on what the day of rest was about?
7. What is the difference between the dwelling of a guest in your apartment and the dwelling of someone who is its permanent resident—especially in the area of sharing?

Essay #5:
**Sanctification—
Serving Others is the Christian's Seal**

Guillermo Carrera
Peru

Introduction

My dear brothers and sisters, on this occasion with the good will of those present and with infinite thanks to God for his multiple blessings, I come to expound on the topic of sanctification, which I am sure has already been ringing in your ears. Sanctification is a word directly associated with the church. Sanctification is the song that is heard every Sunday. Sanctification is the melody found deep in every sermon. Paraphrasing the words of James—without sanctification, faith is dead.

We are not the first to amble down this road. Many have already gone before us. Much ink and paper have been used to talk about sanctification. This theme is too wide to cover in a simple paper, but we are going to give it our best, and we ask the Lord for his help and his guidance so that we can say something edifying about sanctification.

I will start by presenting some basic concepts. First, we need to know what sanctification means. Holy Scriptures speak of sanctification in two different ways. Sanctification in the wide sense encompasses all the acts of grace by which the Holy Spirit leads a person from sin to holiness. Sanctification in the strict sense refers to the new life that God allows the Christian to lead in answer to his grace. It is a new life of thankfulness for everything that God has done for us. God first loved us, and then we give him thanks, doing his will.

In this paper we will be talking about sanctification in its strict sense. We will concentrate on the answer to God's grace that we give as Christians. Our emphasis will be sanctification according to the second table of the law. We have a responsibility to love our neighbor as ourselves. We serve others. In particular we will focus on three ways we serve our neighbor: maintaining sexual purity, with our vocation, and with our charity.

The Holy Spirit Gives Us the Ability to Lead a Sanctified Life

Natural laws cannot be broken without intervention of an exterior force. For example, water that comes from a hill will only rise as high as its source; it cannot go higher unless you use a pump. The same happens to human nature. Scripture informs us that our righteousness is like a dirty rag (Isaiah 64:6). For that reason we can't expect a sanctified life to come from a perverted human nature. Can fresh water come from a bitter well? In the same way as poisonous fruit doesn't grow on healthy trees that provide fruit to eat, you can't grow fruit good to eat on poisonous trees either. We can't expect to find a sanctified life in natural man for the reason that Jesus told Nicodemus: If you are not born again, you cannot enter the kingdom of God (John 3:3). Therefore it is vain and useless to think that sanctified life can sprout and grow in natural man.

Then the logical question has to be: "From where does sanctification come?" Our answer is that sanctification comes from a true conversion produced by the Holy Spirit through a spiritual birth that is only produced through the means of grace (Word and sacrament). Until the moment of our conversion, there isn't even a shadow of good in us. The Bible tells us that we are dead in our transgression and sins (Ephesians 2:1). In the eyes of the world we may have a decent reputation and be honorable, but in God's eyes we are nothing more than sinners. If we could see our hearts in the mirror of the law, we would see things there that would chase from our minds any concept of a sanctified life. Our heart is so depraved and lost that we are convinced that as long as nothing changes, it is impossible to find sanctified life in an unconverted and unjust man.

Sanctified life emanates from a constant spiritual influence worked on us from the time of our conversion until the time of our death. Psalm 1:2 tells us that the person is blessed "whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night."¹ We cannot pretend to have a sanctified life if we do not remain in his Word. In order to produce fruit we need to be watered by the streams of living water of the Word of God. It is

¹All Scripture quotations are from the NIV2011.

not enough to plant a tree and then leave it on its own, but we need to water it, fertilize it, etc. This happens to faith which is created in our hearts. If we do not feed it, it soon will be dead.

Besides, we are not independent trees but only branches grafted to the true vine. Sanctified life results *from a union with Christ*. We believe that as long as a man recognizes that and sits alongside of Jesus, he will live a fuller sanctified life. The very fact that Christ and the Christian are joined as one makes the Christian similar to Christ. Why does that branch produce grapes? The branch produces grapes simply because it has been grafted to the vine, and therefore participates in the very nature of the trunk. For that reason the only way that you can produce fruit for God is being grafted into Christ and joined with him. Therefore, sanctification results from the vital union with Christ. This union is established through faith. "If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit" (John 15:5). The branch which does not bear fruit is not a true and live branch. In the eyes of God a union with Christ which is merely formal and without fruit has no value whatsoever. Faith that does not influence sanctification in the character of the believer is no better than a faith like the demons have. It is a dead faith, not the gift from God. Where there is no sanctified life, there is no real faith in Christ. True faith works through love, and is moved by a deep thought of gratitude for redemption. True faith moves the believer to live for his Lord and makes him feel that all that he can do for Jesus who died for his sins is insufficient. He who has been forgiven much, loves much. He who has been cleansed with his blood, walks in the light. Whoever has a real and living faith in Christ purifies himself, just as he is clean (James 2:17-20).

Now, because we have been grafted into Christ Jesus and because the Holy Spirit lives in us, let us bear fruit. Let us love God and our neighbor. Let us be not only hearers of the Word but doers of the Word. "We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love each other. Anyone who does not love remains in death" (1 John 3:14). For this reason, let us respond to the work that the Holy Spirit has done in us. It is the will of God that we do good to all, especially to those who belong to the family of faith (Galatians 6:10). Let us show our seal as a Christian helping our brother in the different situations of his life.

I. Sexual Purity in a World of Impurity

Sexuality is one of the most wonderful gifts from God. Through it mankind can experience intimacy between two people and procreation. However, if one goes out of the limits marked by the Creator, sexuality is converted into brutal passion. A river is a blessing for agriculture, but when it goes out of its banks, it ruins everything. In the same way sexuality, which is a blessing, becomes a destructive weapon for the moral and physical life of mankind.

From History

If we want to understand what full and correct sexuality is in order to guide our sanctified lives, we need to return to creation. The Bible says that each species was made “male and female,” and when God determined to create the crown of his creation, man, he designed a companion for him. However, what was God thinking in those moments when he made a companion for man? If in creation he made her a “woman,” it was because he was making a sexual distinction and difference. He gave her a different sexual nature so that a specific end could be accomplished: “God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground’” (Genesis 1:28). And how can he multiply if he does not have a female? Then God observed the man, analyzed his need and his mission, and said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him” (Genesis 2:18).

Why this thought on God’s part? Was it because man did not have someone to wash his clothes? He didn’t have clothes. Was it because he needed a woman to clean his house, to cook for him, to make his food? He didn’t need any of this. Then, what moved God to make a companion for man? God saw man’s loneliness. He needed someone to complete him—a helpmate. He knew that man alone could not reproduce. It was then that God performed the first surgical operation in history. God put man to sleep, and took from his side a rib and formed the woman, and when the man woke and saw his companion he exclaimed: “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called ‘woman’ [Hebrew *Ishshabab*] for she was taken out of man [Hebrew

Isb]” (Genesis 2:23). The Bible goes on to say: “That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh” (Genesis 2:24). It is clear from these verses that sexuality between a male and female is a mutual service.

In the Garden of Eden Adam and Eve began to experience their sexuality without evil distortion or perversity. Man lived to satisfy his wife, and in the same way his wife satisfied her husband, because their bodies did not belong to themselves, but each one to the other. Paul reveals this principle when he affirms: “The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body but yields it to her husband. In the same way, the husband does not have authority over his own body but yields it to his wife.” (1 Corinthians 7:3,4). At this point in history man and woman were pure sexually before and after having a sexual relationship. This is the target that we aim for when we talk about sexual purity. Let us not look simply for our own satisfaction but the satisfaction of our spouse according to the order that God has established.

As we continue with the story of Adam and Eve we see that as long as they hadn’t disobeyed God, and the voice of Satan had not entered into their hearts, they lived for each other. But when sin entered, the first thing that man did was “see himself” and bury himself in this egotism that from that point forward would characterize all mankind. “Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and [*seeing themselves*] they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves” (Genesis 3:7).

This egoism, completely embedded in human nature, lead mankind into an attitude of looking to please himself, rather than mutual pleasing. Unbridled sexual passions appeared. Everything came through a process of degradation. If we study the book of Genesis, we discover that a great majority of the men of God practiced polygamy. Abraham had relations with his wife’s maidservant, with his wife’s consent (Genesis 16:1-3), since she was sterile and could not give him any descendants. God did not condemn this action, even though he didn’t like it. But he only recognized Isaac, the son of his wife. Jacob, in the same fashion, had other women besides his own wife with whom he had children. All of

these actions God allowed, but this tendency degenerated, because the main thought was procreation, and the legitimate wife authorized these relationships in order to present descendants to her husband. But the moment arrived in which man changed the end (having descendants) in order to look for a means (satisfy his carnal appetites). Then legislation about divorce came about (Deuteronomy 24:1-5). Jesus analyzed this reality, and gave his thoughts about divorce.

Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?" "Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.'" "Why then," they asked, "did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?" Jesus replied, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery" (Matthew 19:3-9).

Let us analyze the expression "your hearts were hard." Mankind began to abuse sexuality. Not only did they join together with other women with the approval of their wives, but they also began to do it simply for the pleasure without thinking about their wife's feelings. Even more, they abandoned their wives. They allowed themselves to be carried by their own carnal desires instead of following God's commands. This is what Jesus calls "hardness of the heart." But he affirms that God's purpose was not that, but an intimate union only between one man and one woman until death separates them.

In this way God, when he created a male and a female, did it for mutual satisfaction, but only within the permitted limits, that is, marriage. The Lord was permissive in some situations, but he could not tolerate so much depravity and the destruction of marriage. For that reason adultery and fornication are condemned as sin, and the foundation of marriage is the proclamation that "the

marriage bed [should be] kept pure” (Hebrews 13:4). This is what was given at the beginning and the aim toward which we lead our sanctified life.

Sexual Sins

It is natural for a man to lie down with a woman. But when this is done from the perspective of “freedom,” outside of marriage, the natural act enters into the dimension of sin which is breaking God’s law. Sexually speaking, there really are only two categories of sin: fornication and adultery. Adultery is a sexual relation between a married man and a woman that is not his wife, or between a married woman and a man that is not her husband.

Fornication expresses a sexual relationship before marriage and outside of marriage. Living together without marriage, and habitually practicing sexual relations with various women without being married, etc., is fornication. This attitude reflects a life dominated by the flesh, possessed by sin, and this is not keeping yourself sexually pure. “The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery” (Galatians 5:19). In both Greek and Hebrew, “fornicate” means any type of sexual immorality, and not only pre-matrimonial relations. It can be used to refer to adulteries (Matthew 19:9, Hosea 1:2), and also sexual acts that go against nature, such as homosexuality and lesbianism (Jude 7).

Therefore all action that misses the mark of what is laid down by God in his law is catalogued as sin. Even though sin is an infraction of the law (1 John 3:4), we can say that some actions can be considered more dangerous than others—not because God has different categories of sin, but because of the implications that sins have for those who commit the sin and how much they can affect our neighbor. For example, homosexuality affects the whole society. Practice it, and there is no more nuclear family, no more children, etc.

However, today there is a desire to legitimize homosexuality. Some create a defense and a theology of homosexuality, ignoring what the apostle Paul affirms when he says:

Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnat-

ural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error (Romans 1:26,27).

Mankind lives thinking that it is time for change. Some call this change “modernizing.” In the area of sexual relations many civil union groups have appeared. They think they need to accept homosexuals, because in the 21st century you cannot live stuck in the tunnel of times past. Some congressmen promote rights for homosexuals. But everyone forgets that God’s law does not change. God is immutable. For that reason, keeping ourselves pure sexually is not just for men who lived in the past but for every one of us today.

Is Sexual Purity Possible in Our Times?

In the time in which we live, sex has been converted into a profitable business. Among the illegal industries that are destructive and dominate the modern world, besides drug trafficking, illegal weapons trade, and corruption, there is sexual exploitation. This inducement to sexual depravity favors those who do business with prostitution, pornography, human trafficking, aphrodisiac medicines, and doctors who practice sex changes and abortion. To support this business of sex it is necessary to exploit the female image, using that which is attractive in a woman as a way to hook people with advertising, besides creating a series of theories that favor fornication and sexual perversion. One of these theories is the absurd affirmation that it is impossible to keep yourself pure for marriage, and recommending to teenagers to live an active sexual life, with industry promoting the use of a condom as a supposed guarantee of sexual protection.

In our world being a virgin for most women is a unicorn that lived in the past and in fantasy, because the reality is a great majority of the women arrive at marriage with some degree of sexual experience. And what about men? Men are encouraged to have early sexual relations. There are even fathers who take their sons to a brothel so that they can have their first sexual relation and become men. Others make fun saying that if you don’t have sexual relations you will get cancer. One of the missionaries was telling us

an anecdote from his life: when he was an adolescent he went to a camp and a girl told him that if he had not had sexual relations, then he had not lived.

The liberal tendency of society is to promote safe sexual relationships, accepting as normal fornication by adolescents and young people, and thereby creating advertising campaigns for the use of condoms to avoid sexually transmitted diseases. The message in the schools of Peru basically is that if you have sexual relations, be careful not to contract sexual diseases or become pregnant. The parents of a great majority of families will often tell their male children: "Son, if you're going to go out with your girl friend, then here is some extra money for your condoms." But little or nothing is done to promote the biblical principle of chastity, the only guarantee to prevent AIDS and the cause of the existence of thousands of single mothers or children without fathers, as well as the increase in the terrible cruelty of abortion.

We need to cultivate chastity in our lives following the biblical principle of holiness. Our children need to grow up from little on in the fear of God as the beginning of all wisdom (Proverbs 1:7), and with correct sexual education, in order to resist the tremendous sexual propaganda that feeds eroticism. We need to teach them from little on not to love the world, nor the things that are in the world. If they love the world, the love of God will not be in them. "For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever" (1 John 2:16,17). Here is where we need to emphasize sexual purity, defining the line between what is licit and illicit, right and wrong, good and bad, what is according to God's will, and the will of friends and mass media (the world). The seal of Christianity is following the will of God and not of the world.

It appears that in this age it is more difficult to keep ourselves pure sexually. However, we can say that the Corinthians suffered the same temptations that we have today. For example, in the city of Corinth there was a temple dedicated to the pagan goddess Artemis, where the religious rites included sexual activity. There were approximately 1000 priestesses who in reality acted as prostitutes. The pagan religion was closely connected

to sexual immorality. However, despite this reality, Paul tells the Corinthians that they should flee sexual immorality (1 Corinthians 6:12-20).

Today, however, we hear many talking about themes related with sexuality, even by church leaders. Sexual themes now are more brazen, more commented on. What are the themes of the television programs? What are the most awaited scenes on the *telenovelas* (Spanish soap operas)? Simply talking about sex. In our time sexuality is more liberal, people are less alarmed, and our sermons attack sexual immorality less. It is tolerated more, to the point that premarital sexual relationships are justified even by some members within our own churches. On one occasion a church member asked me: "Pastor, why did that seminarian stop attending the seminary?" I answered him: "Because his fiancée was pregnant." And he answered me: "What's so wrong with that?" For this church member it was a simple weakness; just a natural expression of love between two people.

In the middle of all this soft pedaling about sexual themes, God's call does not change in the least: God calls us to maintain ourselves in sexual purity because this commandment does not only have individual repercussions, but also affects our relationships with others. For example, it is egotistical on the part of the man to say to his girlfriend, "Give me proof of your love" (asking her to sleep with him). Another expression of egoism is to say that women are like Huggies diapers. You use them, and later you throw them away. Women have unfortunately been made a sexual object since ancient times: "The sons of God saw that the daughters of humans were beautiful, and they married any of them they chose" (Genesis 6:2).

We know that God has created us to respond differently to sexual stimulation. Men respond more to visual stimulation; women respond more to emotional stimulation: words, details. For this reason God made women beautiful, and put in the heart of every man gallantry and chivalry. But this blessing has been marred when we take advantage of it to seduce someone else to sin. For example, women, to feel wanted, dress up in clothes that accentuate their body. Some put on miniskirts, tight blouses. Men use their chivalry and their colorful language to seduce the women.

Let us remember that everything is born of desire, and later words are used, and it ends in the physical relation. But some people consider only the last thing something that is bad. The thought and the words are thought not to be that important. Jesus tells us: “But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matthew 5:28). Therefore without considering how far someone goes with another person, it’s enough just to wish for it with the desire in your heart and you have fallen from sexual purity.

But not only the thought but also the words can be bad. “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen” (Ephesians 4:29). So in order to keep us pure at this time we need to avoid things like dirty jokes, double entendres, and especially those things which suggest something sexual, lusty insinuations, relating stories of immoral adventures, etc. Let us not be a stumbling block for the rest, but as Luther says, let us lead a pure and decent life in words and actions (Small Catechism).

It is important to note that of all the evils that a person can do, the one that causes the most damage to his body is that of sexual immorality. “Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body” (1 Corinthians 6:18). The apostle Paul asks, “Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?” (1 Corinthians 6:19). Note the emphasis on temple, or sanctuary, and it is inconceivable that the Holy Spirit could dwell in a filthy or profane sanctuary.

By this time more than one listener is probably asking themselves: “How can we keep ourselves pure sexually?” Flee—that is the answer for the Christian. “Flee from sexual immorality.” We have examples in the Bible of men and women who were faithful to the Lord. We remember the life of Joseph, the son of Jacob, who was unjustly sold as a slave by his brothers, and after becoming a steward over all the house of his master, the wife of his master seduced him and tried to get him to sleep with her.

After a while his master’s wife took notice of Joseph and said, “Come to bed with me!” But he refused. “With me in

charge,” he told her, “my master does not concern himself with anything in the house; everything he owns he has entrusted to my care. No one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?” (Genesis 39:7-9)

Joseph was confronted by this sin but emerged victorious. Not because he himself was great but because he remembered the Word of God. The Word of God is our principal weapon. David asked God for a clean heart (Psalm 51:10). Prayer is another of the elements to fight against sexual temptations. Why did King David commit adultery? It was because he was idle. Work and sports are activities that help us keep our minds occupied so that the evil one will not have an opportunity to tempt us. Another element is not to use illegal substances and alcoholic beverages and drugs that stimulate sexual appetite. Let us flee from solitary places when we are with a woman. For example, you can avoid inviting your girlfriend to your house if you know that you're alone. Luther said that you cannot leave a young boy and a young girl alone and hope that nothing happens; it's like starting a fire in straw and hoping that nothing will burn.

The body is for the Lord! Your body has been given to you for a reason: to be an instrument to glorify Christ. Help others keep themselves pure, giving them the advice that has been previously mentioned. If we have a spouse, let us do everything in accordance with God's Word and not serve our egoism. We serve others by helping them remain sexually pure.

II. Vocation

Vocation can be understood in three different ways. It can refer to the proclamation of the gospel (being called to salvation), the place where God has called us as his children (occupation), or the calling to the pastoral office. Vocation has its origin in the Greek; it comes from the noun *klesis*. In his *Dictionary of New Testament Words*, William Barclay says: “This word has to do with one of the most basic and fundamental concepts of the New Testament. *Kalein* is a verb which means ‘to call’; *klesis*, the noun, means ‘called’; *kletos* is an adjective that means ‘called.’” Overall the base of these words is the calling.

Some interpret vocation as only the calling from God to serve within the ministry—that is, only to serve directly proclaiming his word. Roman Catholics in this aspect made a distinction between the profane life and the sacred life. They considered that service to God consisted only in the following: whoever kept the festivals, whoever prayed, whoever fasted, while the rest of the occupations were simply profane. It's because our natural tendency is to seek to serve God in the extraordinary when we should do it in the ordinary matters. Barclay in his interpretation of the word *klesis* said:

The Christian life is a calling to duty. The Christian is always called to carry out a task. God is continually offering the Christian something to do. In the *Republic* of Cicero (1.20, 33) Lelio is asked, "What do you believe we should teach the people that we have to instruct?" He responded, "Everything that will benefit the nation." God calls the Christian to be useful in this world.

God calls the Christian to a privilege. *Kalein* and *klesis* are intimately associated with an invitation to a festival, a banquet, to welcome someone to your table and home. God calls the Christian to come and rejoice in his fellowship, his hospitality, in his joy and riches of being his guest (*Greek Words of the New Testament*).

Therefore it is quite clear that the most appropriate way of understanding vocation is as the place in which God has put you to carry out your job faithfully whether it is an ecclesiastical labor or a "profane" labor. The Augsburg Confession mentions some examples of how we can carry out faithfully our "profane" calling: "that the father brought up his offspring, that the mother bore children, that the prince governed the commonwealth" (*Concordia Triglotta*, Augsburg Confession, Article XXVI:10). St. Paul says, "As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received" Ephesians 4:1. He confirms: "Each person should remain in the situation they were in when God called them" (1 Corinthians 7:20). It is clear that vocation is the place where God has put us, and we only need to be faithful to our calling. Vocation is what we do, or what we are supposed to do, in our various callings. But it is important for understanding the magnitude of this teaching to understand first the sense in

which vocation is God's work. God is milking the cows through the calling of the milkmaid, said Luther. According to Luther, vocation is "the mask of God." He is hidden in vocation. We see the milkmaid, or the farmer, or the doctor, or the pastor, or the artist, but, appearing behind this human mask, God is genuinely present and active in what they do for us and in what we do for others.

Martin Luther arrives at the following conclusion that is summarized by Gustaf Wingren: "A vocation is a "station" which is by nature helpful to others if it be followed. It is important to emphasize the fact that vocation is not confined to an occupation, but includes also what Betcke calls biological orders: father, mother, son, daughter" (*Luther on Vocation*, p. 4).

One premise that we should always emphasize is that vocation is especially connected with service to others. In modern culture the one who serves is considered inferior, but Jesus teaches us to serve. His words are: "Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve" (Matthew 20:28). God has commanded us to serve from the position in which we find ourselves. How beautiful is the expression: "I can help you," and doing it is even more beautiful! Jesus taught us: "Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all" (Mark 9:35). Also let us remember that God doesn't need our help, but our neighbor does.

When someone is born, he comes into a world full of opportunities. God is faithful and just. He calls everyone to live his or her special vocation; each person is assigned a role in the history of salvation of the world and assigned the means necessary to accomplish it. In his power God governs the world according to the law of variety. Nothing is ever repeated. God enriches each one of the called with a precise, exclusive, absolute, and new identity, laying out in each case a unique and unrepeatable road.

On this path Martin Luther makes a contrast between vocation and imitation: "Each is to do his own work, without eyeing others or trying to copy them. Christ is not to be imitated by us, but rather to be accepted in faith, because Christ also had his special office for the salvation of man, an office which no one else has" (*Luther on Vocation*, p. 172).

That is why it is extremely difficult to write a manual about how we are to respond in our life. The Christian life is not about learn-

ing a variety of courtesies, but serving everyone else from the position or situation in which we find ourselves. For example, let us analyze how each of the three people in the parable of the good Samaritan used the situation that they experienced and dealt with the individual who was severely injured. The priest, the Levite, and the Samaritan all handled it differently. The first two people simply passed by when they saw the man tossed to the side of the road. Perhaps someone could think that they were rushed because they had to get to worship, but it was not that way. The biblical text tells us that they were going down, that is they were already returning from worship which they had experienced in Jerusalem. Juan Carlos Cevallos considers that:

Apparently, they didn't offer help to the unfortunate soul for fear of ceremonial contamination, perhaps because they believed he was dead. It is possible that they were protecting themselves even from the shadow of a supposed cadaver, because the Pharisees believed that even the shadow could contaminate them. Their ceremonial laws were more powerful than compassion. Jesus' model was the exact opposite: touch the leper, the dead, the prostitute, and more (*Comentario Bíblico Mundo Hispano*, p. 198).

On the other hand the attitude of the Samaritan was different. He acted being moved by mercy. He did not think about laws, he didn't even think that this gentleman was not his countryman. He only saw an injured man who needed his help. He served his neighbor in the situation in which he found himself. This is the model for our vocation. When something enters into our life, we respond as Christians in the heart, not in name only. Not according to the law and what people would say, but according to love and mercy.

Another example we can see is the attitude of Joseph whom the Bible labels as "righteous" (Matthew 1:19). Joseph, realizing that Mary was pregnant even without him touching her, could simply not settle the situation by marrying her, as if the child were his; but he also didn't want to ridicule her publicly. Remember that according to Jewish law she could have been stoned. To avoid this, he decided to separate from her secretly, knowing that this action would set him up for all kinds of evil thought and criticism. Almost everyone would say, "He did not want to take responsi-

bility for his child. He is a bad man.” But even knowing all the consequences, Joseph wanted to separate secretly from her. This is to act in love. Joseph knew the law, but he acted in love.

God has put us in a work situation and from that point we serve him. God has a plan for each and every one of us. Every human being is unique and unrepeatable. Each person has been created to be a light and to shine the glory of Christ. We don't have our own light; we only reflect the light which is Christ Jesus. Let us reflect him. No one sees God naturally, but people see us, and for that reason it is important that we be the mask of God for others. Let us be children through whom others can praise him and not curse our heavenly Father. Let us serve others, fulfilling faithfully the vocation to which he has called us.

Christian Vocations

There are many vocations. Luther spoke of the callings of God in terms of three institutions which God has established, together with a fourth area of human activity. A particularly brief treatment of this theme can be found in the Augsburg Confession of 1530. After criticizing monasticism, through which some thought that they would receive salvation by merit, there is a contrast between these humanly invented orders with the orders which God himself designed. In the cited text, it talks of the three orders which God has established: the priestly office, the family, and civil government.

All those who are involved in the pastor's office or in the ministry of the Word are found in an honest, holy order and work. God is greatly pleased with this, when they preach, administer the sacraments, preside over funds for helping the poor, and direct the deacons and other ministers who help in such labors, etc.

On the other hand, those who are fathers and mothers, who govern their homes well and have children for God's service are also in a true holy state, doing a holy work and being members of a holy order. In the same way, when the children or servants are obedient to their parents or masters, this also is true holiness and those who live in such a state are true saints on earth.

Finally, the princes and governors, judges, officials and chancellors, employees, servants male and female, and all other servants, as well as all those who offer the service which they should ren-

der, are all found in a state of holiness and are living holy lives before God, because these three states or orders are all included in the word and command of God. Anything which is included in God's order must be holy, since the Word of God is holy and consecrates all it touches and all that it includes.

Above these three states and orders there is the common order of Christian love, by which we help not only those who belong to these three orders, but in general anyone who is in need, as when we feed the hungry and give drink to the thirsty, etc., just as when we forgive our enemies, pray for all people on earth, suffer all sorts of evil in our earthly life, etc.

III. Christian Charity

The term charity comes from the Latin *caritas* and is translated from the Greek word *agape*. Concerning the gift, Christian charity is mentioned in Romans 12:8, when it refers to "someone who has mercy, with joy," and urges everyone who has the gift, "may he share it, freely." The NIV gives us this expression—"if it is giving, then give generously."

The expression "give generously" has a full and rich meaning. The Greek vocable *metadidous* comes from a verb which means to make someone a participant of something. In Alfred Tuggy's dictionary we find this meaning: to share, to give, to impart, to distribute, to contribute. In Luke 3:11, you can see the meaning of "sharing." The central idea of the vocable is to give or share with others what is possessed, in order to satisfy their needs.

The Greek vocable *aploteti* means simply, generously, freely. This term is used often by the apostle Paul with the meaning of giving abundantly and generously (2 Corinthians 8:2). The word can also be translated "with sincerity" or "with all the heart" ("with sincerity of heart"—Colossians 3:22). Using the *Testament of Issachar* we can illustrate this better:

My father blessed me, seeing that I was conducting myself simply (*haplotes*). I was not completely focused on my actions, not ill-willed toward anyone, not envious of my neighbor, not speaking badly about anyone nor attacking the life of anyone, but only judging people with sincerity (literally—with *haplotes* in my eye). . . . I provided from my

bounties of the earth to the poor and afflicted simply (*bap-lotes*). . . . A simple person (*baplus*) does not desire gold, nor seduce his neighbor (*Testament of Issachar* 3:2-5,8; 4:2).

Many people give under obligation, and not as a fruit of a sincere attitude that goes far beyond all calculation or speculation. Many people give, well, because the Christian life demands that charity is the seal of Christianity. But the word of God declares: "Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:7). The seal of a Christian isn't just giving, but giving from the heart joyfully.

Many people feel extraordinary after they have done a small meritorious action and boast of this action as something that they should be proud of. When we work this way, these actions are not done in pure love, but because of egotism. They are done in order to win the recognition of others and show people how good we can become. At those times, we don't truly love others; we are not sons of light but of darkness; we are not Christians but Pharisees. The Word of God says:

Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you (Matthew 6:1-4).

True charity comes from a sanctified heart. The apostle Paul refers to this: "Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need" (Ephesians 4:28). We don't say "Become an honorable worker so that you can maintain your home." But we say: "Become a worker so that you are able to have something to give to those who are poorer than you." We don't say, "Soul, you now have enough for you," but "Soul, you don't have enough for your neighbor."

Every Christian has the responsibility of giving and sharing with others from that which he receives from the Lord. Let us remember that we are only stewards, since everything that we have belongs to God, so that we ought to be generous as we give. “Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously” (2 Corinthians 9:6). We cannot wait until situations present themselves so that we may display spectacular acts of charity; there are always opportunities. As one of our hymns says, “With your prayers and with your bounties You can do what God commands” (*The Lutheran Hymnal*, #496:3).

Charity is a gift from God that allows us to love above and beyond human possibilities. Charity is loving like God—of course, not with his perfection, but with his style and manner. Having been made in his image and likeness gives us the capability to love our neighbor sincerely. John Chrysostom says in this respect: “Nothing can make you such an imitator of Christ as concern for others. Even if you fast, even if you sleep on the floor, even if as it were you kill yourself, if you do not concern yourself with your neighbor you have done little, you are still far from the image of God” (*Homilia sobre la epistola a los Corintios*).

Charity is a concrete and plausible fruit of a Christian. Without charity there are no true fruits. Charity is not looking for one’s own satisfaction, but above all charity is service to others. We do not only take care of our own families, friends, and spiritual brothers, but also those outside of our family including our enemies. Let’s remember that people cannot see our heart, but they can see our actions. They cannot see our desires, but they can see our help. Tertullian relates this about charity:

Such work of love (for so it is) puts a mark upon us, in the eyes of some. “Look,” they say, “how they love one another” (for themselves hate one another); “and how they are ready to die for each other” (for themselves will be readier to kill each other). Yes, their indignation at us for using among ourselves the name of “Brothers” must really, I take it, come from nothing but the fact that among them every name of kinship so far as affection goes is false and feigned. But we are your brothers, too, by right of descent from the one mother, Nature. . . . But how much more fittingly are those both called brothers and treated as brothers who have come

to know one Father God, who have drunk of one Spirit of holiness, who from one womb of common ignorance have come with wonder to the one light of Truth! (*Tertullian's Apology*, Loeb Classical Library, p. 177).

Perhaps we do not have bread to help the needy. But whoever has a tongue has at his disposal a greater gift that he can distribute, because it is more important to quicken the soul that will live forever with the food of the Word, than to satisfy with earthly bread the body that is going to die. For this reason, no one should think that only providing material goods is charity. Rather, we believe that the fundamental reality of charity is giving spiritual gifts.

For this reason, offerings are an expression of our thankful response to the blessings of God. The offerings given in church are the means by which the church can fulfill its mission on earth. Our offerings are important because many people need our charity. Right now there are many people who are miserable, ready to be kindling in the eternal fire. They need our offering. They need to hear the gospel to pass from death to life.

No one has too much that he can give. But we do well to remember that the Christian ideal is to work, not to amass riches, but to share with the less fortunate. The story is told of a man who was picking up leaves from the ground to eat and thought that he was the most miserable person, but when he looked back he saw someone behind him picking up the leaves that he had rejected. Even if we think we are poor, we have something to share. Therefore let us serve others with what we have.

The Holy Spirit has empowered us to live in holiness. Let us live helping others—that is the seal of Christianity. Let us help everyone else. Let each and every one of us be faithful in our vocation. May the strong one protect the weak and the weak respect the strong; may the rich person give to the poor and the poor give thanks to God for providing someone who could satisfy his needs. May the wise person reveal his wisdom not with words, but with good works; may the humble person not boast about himself, but allow others to do it. Whoever is chaste in his body, let him not glorify himself, knowing that his chastity comes from God. May all glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Bibliography

- Barclay, William. *Comentario al Nuevo Testamento*. Tomo X. Barcelona: CLIE, 1995.
- . *Palabras griegas del Nuevo Testamento: su uso y su significado*. El Paso: Casa Bautista de Publicaciones, 2000.
- Cevallos, Juan Carlos and Rubén Zarsoli. *Comentario Bíblico Mundo Hispano*. Tomo 16: Lucas. El Paso: Mundo Hispano, 2007.
- González, Justo. *Historia del Cristianismo*. Tomo I. Miami: Unilit, 1994.
- Lange, Lyle W. *La Santificación: vivo en Cristo*. Milwaukee: Northwestern, 2005.
- Libro de Concordia: Las Confesiones de la Iglesia Evangélico Luterana*. Edited by Andrés Meléndez. St. Louis: Concordia, 2000.
- Lutero, Martín. *Obras de Martín Lutero*. Tomo I. Buenos Aires: Paidós, 1967.
- Mueller, Juan Teodoro. *Doctrina Cristiana: Manual de teología doctrinal para Pastores, Maestros y Legos*. St. Louis: Concordia, 1973.
- Tuggy, Alfred. *Léxico griego-español del Nuevo Testamento*. El Paso: Mundo Hispano, 1996.
- Vives, José. *Los Padres de la Iglesia*. Barcelona: Herder, 1988.
- Wingren, Gustaf. *Luther on Vocation*. Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957.
- www.modernreformation.org.



Guillermo Carrera—Essay #5