

The Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference



The Eternal Word: A Lutheran Confession for the Twenty-First Century

Article VIII

Sanctification

TO THE READER

The eighth triennial convention of the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference was held at Lima, Peru on May 30–June 2, 2014. Those of our worldwide fellowship who gathered there focused attention on the doctrine of sanctification under the theme “We Are God’s Workmanship—Created in Christ Jesus for Good Works.”

Dr. John Brenner of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod presented an essay on “God Sanctifies Us—He Makes Us Holy After He Declares Us Holy.” Dr. Gottfried Herrmann of the Evangelical Lutheran Free Church (ELFK, Germany) provided the essay “God Gives Us Power—His Gospel in the Means of Grace Gives the Power for a God-Pleasing Life.” Rev. Brester Msowoya of the Lutheran Church of Central Africa—Malawi offered an essay entitled “God Guides Us—His Law in the Bible Guides Us in Godly Living.” Rev. Petr Krakora of the Czech Evangelical Lutheran Church submitted the essay “Honoring God—We Are Created to Love God According to the First Table of the Law.” Rev. Guillermo Carrera of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Peru put forth an essay on “Sanctification—Serving Others is the Christian’s Seal.”

The essays prompted beneficial discussion at the convention and then later were reviewed and edited into the unified document you have before you by the CELC’s Commission on Theology, chaired by Dr. John Brenner (WELS, USA). The commission’s membership included Rev. Andreas Drechsler (ELFK, Germany), Rev. Davison Mutentami (LCCA–Zambia), Dr. Ugis Sildegs (CLCL, Latvia), and Dr. Michael Smith (WELS, USA).

It is our prayer that Article VIII dealing with sanctification will be another uplifting addition to the doctrinal series, *The Eternal Word: A Lutheran Confession for the Twenty-First Century*, and that all who study it will be better equipped to live a Christ-like life through the means of grace. To Him alone be the glory!

Rev. Gaylin Schmeling, President
Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference

THE ETERNAL WORD: A LUTHERAN CONFESSION FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

ARTICLE VIII

SANCTIFICATION

I. GOD MAKES US HOLY AFTER HE DECLARES US HOLY

Adam and Eve were 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).

Children inherit a sinful nature from their parents. “Flesh gives birth to flesh” (John 3:6). Sinful parents cannot produce sinless children. From the very point of conception a 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 result of one trespass was condemnation for all men” (Romans 5:18).

Original sin involves a total corruption of our human nature. We could not understand the depths of this corruption if God had not revealed it to us in his Word. The Bible tells us that we “were dead in [our] 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” (Romans 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 that total corruption: “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” (Romans 3:10–12; see Augsburg Confession II:1–2, German text).

Because we are by nature totally corrupt, we cannot save ourselves. Even our best efforts fall far short of God’s demands. Coming close to God’s standards is not enough. Jesus says, “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:48). James adds, “Whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it” (James 2:10).

The Basis for Justification: God’s Grace and Christ’s Merits

Already in eternity, 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 did not treat us as our sins deserved but 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).

God 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. 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. “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” (Hebrews 7:26–27). Jesus “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). Universal atonement means that Christ has redeemed the whole world, all sinners of all time.

Justification: God’s Declaration of Full and Free Forgiveness

Justification is a declaration. It is a courtroom term. Justification is the opposite of condemnation. “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). If God remembers our sins no more, he has forgiven our sins. 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 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])” (Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration III:17).

Universal Justification

God has justified the entire world. “God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s [Greek = their] sins against them” (2 Corinthians 5:19). 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 brought 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 and was 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 in Christ (see Apology IV:103).

Subjective or Personal Justification

Although God has forgiven the sins of the world, not everyone will be saved. Salvation comes through faith alone. Unbelief rejects God’s forgiveness. “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). People are saved by God’s grace, his undeserved kindness. Faith does not merit or earn salvation because 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* (see Romans 3:28). If faith and salvation are gifts, then we cannot earn them. In the same way, if faith were a good work which merited salvation, then it would not 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; see Augsburg Confession IV).

Conversion: The Bestowal of Faith by the Holy Spirit

God converts. We are completely passive (see Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration II:89). Jesus says, “You did not choose me, but I chose you” (John 15:16). “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him” (John 6:44). 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. “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. “‘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. “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). “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 Holy Spirit also works through Baptism. “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; emphasis added). Through Baptism we are born again and renewed by the Holy Spirit. “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). “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. We are saved from his wrath and all of our guilt is removed. “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).

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 (see Small Catechism, Communion 6). Indeed, the new covenant is the forgiveness of sins.

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 wide 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. "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). "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).

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. A good work 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 God delivered us from the *power* of sin to control our lives. "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). A person who has been converted is a new person. "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

When the Holy Spirit creates faith in our hearts he renews the image of God in us. The renewed image of God is our new man or new self. Our new self is created to be like God in righteousness and true holiness. Christians "have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator" (Colossians 3:10). We are different from what we were by nature. "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 good works. 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 does not 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).

The power or ability to produce good works comes from God himself. "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.

A person cannot cooperate with the Holy Spirit in conversion. Faith is purely passive in justification. It only receives. In sanctification, however, faith is very active. When new life is created in him, a Christian can and does cooperate with the Holy Spirit in his life of sanctification. He has been “created in Christ Jesus to do good works” (Ephesians 2:10). 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 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 II:65–66)

Good works, however, do not save us. Good works are the visible evidence that we are saved. Good works do not 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; see Augsburg Confession VI).

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 or he does not. There is no such thing as being half forgiven. However, 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 retain our sinful nature until the day we die. Therefore, sanctification will remain imperfect in this life. 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).

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.

Therefore, 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). “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” (Romans 7:18–23).

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.

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 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: “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 also points the way for growth in sanctified living. “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).

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 between 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 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. Sanctification is dependent on justification. Our God makes us holy after he declares us holy.

We therefore reject as contrary to Scripture:

1. Every teaching that denies or minimizes original sin.
2. The Calvinistic doctrine of limited atonement, namely that Jesus did not die for everyone, but only for those whom the Father purposed to save.
3. Every teaching that asserts that human beings can either save themselves or contribute to their salvation in any way.
4. 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.
5. 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 an unbeliever can open his heart to the Holy Spirit.
6. The teaching that the Holy Spirit creates and sustains faith apart from the means of grace.
7. Every teaching that makes justification before God dependent on sanctification rather than recognizing that sanctification is a result of justification.
8. 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.
9. Every type of Christian perfectionism that claims or implies that a Christian can reach a point in this life that he no longer sins.

II. GOD GIVES THE POWER FOR A GOD-PLEASING LIFE

As Lutherans we believe, teach, and confess that we are justified before God by faith alone “apart from observing the law” (Romans 3:28). Salvation and eternal life are God’s free gifts of grace to those who believe (John 3:16). But we also believe, teach, and confess that saving faith is never alone. The new man God created in us is always living and active to do good. Martin Luther pointed this out in his Preface to the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans (1522/1546): “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” (*Luther’s Works* 35:370; *Weimar Ausgabe, Deutsche Bibel* 7:10; St. Louis Edition 14:99).

What does this mean? God not only set us free from the consequences of sin and death and made us children and heirs of his kingdom through faith in Christ, he also freed us to live God-pleasing lives in loving service to God and our neighbor. The Holy Spirit empowers and strengthens us in this new life through the good news of our salvation, the gospel in Word and sacrament.

The Holy Spirit Connects Us to Christ Through Faith

Through faith, the Holy Spirit makes us branches in Christ and in this way causes us to bear good

fruit. Jesus is the true Vine. He said to his disciples, “If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). Through our connection with Christ we are declared holy in God’s sight (sanctification in the broad sense) and we are empowered to live holy lives (sanctification in the narrow sense) as it is written, “Be holy, because I am holy” (Leviticus 11:44; see also Leviticus 19:2; Matthew 5:48; 1 Peter 1:16). By God’s grace we are born again as new people who gladly want to serve God (Ephesians 2:10).

This new life in Christ is the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit. When we stay connected to our Savior Jesus Christ our faith will remain alive and our love will grow. Consequently, our faith needs new nourishment every day in order not to die. 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 is ours through faith in Christ our Savior. He freed us “from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers” (1 Peter 1:18). He is the power source for our life in faith to daily “be made new in the attitude of [our] minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness” (Ephesians 4:23–24).

The Holy Spirit Builds Us Up Through the Means of Grace—The Gospel in Word and Sacraments

God has told us clearly in his Word that the Holy Spirit does not work faith or strengthen faith apart from the means of grace, the gospel in Word and sacraments. We remember how Jeremiah was sent to unmask the false ways in which his opponents were looking for divine revelation:

“I have heard what the prophets say who prophesy lies in my name. They say, ‘I had a dream! I had a dream!’ How long will this continue in the hearts of these lying prophets, who prophesy the delusions of their own minds? They think the dreams they tell one another will make my people forget my name, just as their fathers forgot my name through Baal worship. Let the prophet who has a dream tell his dream, but let the one who has my word speak it faithfully. For what has straw to do with grain?” declares the LORD. “Is not my word like fire,” declares the LORD, “and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces? Therefore,” declares the LORD, “I am against the prophets who steal from one another words supposedly from me. Yes,” declares the LORD, “I am against the prophets who wag their own tongues and yet declare, ‘The LORD declares.’ Indeed, I am against those who prophesy false dreams,” declares the LORD. “They tell them and lead my people astray with their reckless lies, yet I did not send or appoint them. They do not benefit these people in the least,” declares the LORD. (Jeremiah 23:25–32)

Our God is so gracious that he has told us clearly in his Word where he wants to give his Spirit. “No one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:3). Saving faith that believes in Jesus Christ and calls him Lord is kindled in us through the gospel, the Word of Christ: “Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ” (Romans 10:17). Through the good news that God saves sinners the Holy Spirit turns our hearts from unbelief to faith. The same thing happens in Baptism: “[God] 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” (Titus 3:5–6). In the same way, the Lord’s Supper is given to strengthen our faith. These are the means which God himself

has instituted to give his Spirit and create saving faith.

But God also gives us the necessary nourishment for our new man to stay alive and grow. He does that through the same Word entrusted to us in the Holy Scriptures. That is the way established by God to come to faith in the Savior and to remain in this faith. The psalmist compares the Word of God to streams of water. Believers whose “delight is in the law of the LORD” are like fruitful trees: “He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers” (Psalm 1:2–3). In the letter of James we are encouraged, “Humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you” (James 1:21).

Whoever looks for God’s Spirit and the power to live a God-pleasing life in other places beyond the Word and sacrament stands in danger of falling victim to the temptations of the devil and going astray from his faith. Martin Luther very emphatically warns against this form of enthusiasm 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. (Smalcald Articles III, VIII:3, 5)

The Gospel Gives the Power, Not the Law

The Holy Scriptures show us clearly what God’s will is. In them we learn what pleases God and what are good works in his eyes. What God calls good and beneficial is summarized in the Ten Commandments. When Jesus was asked about the greatest commandment in the law he quoted the Old Testament: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’” (Matthew 22:37–39). Accordingly, the prophet Micah had summarized the will of God in this way “[The Lord] has showed you, O man, 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). However, by stating what is good and right in God’s sight the law, instead of giving power and joy, only increases the awareness of our lost condition (Romans 7:7).

Lutherans emphasize the proper distinction between law and gospel. The law convicts. The gospel converts. The law shows us our sin. The gospel shows us our Savior. The law works dread and fear. The gospel works faith and hope. The law makes us hate God’s justice. The gospel makes us love and rejoice in his salvation. The law leads to death and damnation. The gospel brings true peace and eternal life.

We know from Scripture that preaching the law to people will not produce God-pleasing good works. To compare oneself with the accomplishments of others or to substitute God’s law with man-made rules and regulations will either serve to inflate our own ego or it will lead to utter despair. Paul warned his fellow pastor Timothy that in the last days “people will be lovers of themselves ... having a form of godliness

but denying its power” (2 Timothy 3:2, 5). The apostle Paul himself had learned the devastating effect of trying to find peace in keeping the law: “When the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died. I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death” (Romans 7:9–10).

Preaching the law, whether divine commandments or man-made rules and regulations, seems to produce impressive results. Our old sinful nature wants to do something to work out its own salvation (*opinio legis*). But without the proper motivation of faith in Christ there are no truly good works because such works do not flow out of genuine love for the true God. Therefore, Paul in his letter to the Colossians warned against this form of self-serving religiosity: “Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence” (Colossians 2:23).

Only the gospel can open a person’s heart and awaken trust in his Savior. Only the gospel is “the power of God for ... salvation” (Romans 1:16). Only when a person first experiences the endless love with which God pursues us sinners and how God gives us the gift of his grace and the forgiveness of our sins through faith in his Son Jesus Christ will genuine love for God be awakened in his heart (1 Timothy 1:15–16). “Blessed” is what the psalmist calls such a man, in whom God the Holy Spirit has worked saving faith through the gospel. He continues: “[His] delight is in the law of the LORD” (Psalm 1:2). Believers love the law of God: “Your statutes are my delight; they are my counselors. ... I run in the path of your commands” (Psalm 119:24, 32).

Consequently, the power for sanctification comes only from the gospel. In his law, God shows us his will. God’s law does not give the power or ability also to do this will. Only he who again and again 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—is overpowered by it and is enabled to lead a God-pleasing life. “For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found” (Luke 15:24). This is the new life in Christ who “came to seek and to save what was lost” (Luke 19:10).

While the law of God can be compared to the perfect “road map,” the gospel with its motivating power can be compared to the “fuel” that drives our lives as children of God. Without the power supplied by the gospel, the Christian will not go in the direction the law maps out. We receive this “fuel” entirely as a gift of God through the gospel, not through the law. Through the good news of God’s grace in Word and sacrament we receive the power to live according to his will and command. Overpowered by his love, we cannot do otherwise than to do gladly and out of thankfulness what God would like us to do. Our Lutheran Confessions state:

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 reproves 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 reproved 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 VI:11–14)

The Means of Grace: The Gospel in the Word

Through the gospel the Holy Spirit brings us to faith in Christ. The Holy Spirit always uses the same means to work and strengthen faith, namely the good news of forgiveness through the suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ. The gospel comes to us in the written and proclaimed Word of God and in the divinely instituted sacraments where God connects his promise with a visible element. The sacraments have been called the “visible word” (*verbum visibile*). 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. The Augsburg Confession states in Article V, “To obtain such faith God instituted the office of preaching,¹ 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” (German text).

The gospel is the written and proclaimed message of salvation as recorded in the Word of God, the Holy Scriptures. God gave us the message of the gospel in simple and clear language that can be understood by everyone. While it is true that the gospel is foolishness to human reason (1 Corinthians 1:18; 2:6–16), even a child can comprehend and believe the basic message of the gospel (Matthew 18:6). God sent his beloved Son Jesus Christ to live a perfect life and die on the cross as the atonement for the sins of the world and our sins as well (1 John 2:2). Jesus truly rose from the dead on the third day and rules everything from the right hand of God. He will come back in glory and bring us to glory. The Word of God is clear because it means what it says: “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).

To reach out to all nations and even to the ends of the earth God revealed the saving message of the

1 The 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, but the “gospel-ministry” or “ministry of the Word” itself. Article XIV deals with church offices and the legitimate call. Article V states: *Institutum est ministerium docendi evangelii et porrigendi sacramenta* = the ministry of teaching the gospel and administering the sacraments was instituted.

gospel in languages which were used by many people in biblical times: Hebrew and Aramaic in the time of the Old Testament and Greek in the time of the New Testament. In his providence God not only preserved his inspired Word but also made it accessible for everybody in all the world. Just think of the thousands of languages and dialects in which the Bible or parts of it have been translated over time. Consider, for example, the phenomenon of Hebrew parallelism, which allows one to carry the meaning over into other languages without losing the content.

The way of salvation through the message of the gospel is essentially the same throughout the Holy Scriptures. “Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness” (Genesis 15:6; Galatians 3:6). Concerning the message of the gospel there is no essential difference between Old and New Testament times. Beginning with the first promise in the Garden of Eden the gospel has always been the “power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16). The main difference consists in this: in the Old Testament God again and again *promised* the Savior and revealed more and more details about his person and work of salvation (Genesis 3:15; Isaiah 7:14; 53:4–7; Job 19:25). In the New Testament God *revealed* the Savior who fulfilled the work of salvation completely (Matthew 1:20–23; John 19:30). Believers in *Old Testament* times looked forward in faith to the promised Savior. They put their trust in the promise that God would surely accomplish salvation. Believers in *New Testament* times put their trust in the Savior who has come. They look back in faith to the accomplished fact of their salvation. Consequently, saving faith has always been worked and sustained by the Holy Spirit through the power of the gospel.

The Means of Grace: The Gospel in the Sacraments

To create and strengthen faith, God has joined the gospel promise of forgiveness to visible means in the sacraments. The sacraments of the New Testament are Baptism with water and the Lord’s Supper. Both sacraments were instituted by Christ himself: the Lord’s Supper “on the night he was betrayed” (1 Corinthians 11:23) and Baptism before he ascended to heaven when he sent his disciples and told them, “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19). In the sacraments the powerful Word of our Lord is joined with an outward sign: water (in the case of Baptism) and bread and wine (in the case of the Lord’s Supper). God acts out of love toward us poor creatures in order to make his gift of forgiveness completely certain.

In Holy Baptism the Holy Spirit is at work creating faith in our hearts: “Baptism is not simply plain water. Instead it is water enclosed in God’s command and connected with God’s Word. ... It brings about forgiveness of sins, redeems from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe it, as the words and promise of God declare” (Small Catechism, Baptism 2, 6). Baptism has a life-long significance for the Christian: “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 12). In 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. When the Holy Spirit calls us daily to repentance and we turn 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. We are reminded of the cleansing and righteousness in Christ God has granted to us in Baptism (Mark 16:16; Titus 3:5–6; Romans 6:4).

In the Lord's Supper the Lord Christ offers us, under bread and wine, his body and his blood. "Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ?" (1 Corinthians 10:16). In the Holy Supper the Holy Spirit seals to us the forgiveness of our sins. By putting his very body and his blood into our mouth, he makes us completely sure that our redemption from sin, death, and the devil is an undeniable fact. The Lord's Supper is the promised gospel in a very personal way. 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. ... Drink from it, all of you ... for the forgiveness of sins" (Matthew 26:26–28). With the words of the psalmist we are encouraged, "Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him" (Psalm 34:8).

Prayer Is Not a Means of Grace but a Fruit of Faith

David prayed, "May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer" (Psalm 19:14). Prayer in the name of Christ is an important part of our Christian life of sanctification. However, prayer is not a means of grace. In the means of grace, God gives us the knowledge of his grace and the comfort of the gospel. In prayer, children of God address themselves to their heavenly Father. In prayer we speak to God; he does not address himself to us in prayer. Prayer is an important fruit of faith, but it does not produce faith nor does it preserve faith. When we pray we thank God for the good things he has done. We put before him our sorrows and needs and the needs of others. We ask for his forgiveness and help, his protection, strength, and blessing in our life of sanctification.

Prayer is an important part of our life of sanctification because it flows from faith as a fruit of faith. In it we ask God to protect and strengthen our faith. "Increase our faith!" the apostles prayed (Luke 17:5). James reminds us, "You do not have, because you do not ask God" (James 4:2). Our prayers show whether or not we are looking for power for the sanctification of our life in the right place. Jesus told his disciples, "If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him" (Luke 11:13). When our prayers are filled only with requests and complaints, it is a sign that our faith is weak and we are again trying to take control into our own hands. God-pleasing prayer will be in accordance with the Word of God. It will flow out of the meditation of the Word of God and it will be modeled after the Word of God. "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10).

We are encouraged to pray. Our heavenly Father would like us to take him at his Word. Therefore, believers will hold on to his assurances and promises in Christ and "put a bug in his ear" about them, as Luther expressed it.² Our heavenly Father reassures us again and again to come to him in prayer: "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened" (Matthew 7:7–8).

2 According to M. Ratzeberger's report in 1540 in connection with Melancthon's severe illness (Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: The Preservation of the Church, 1532–1546*, tr. James L. Schaaf [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993], 210).

As redeemed and beloved children of God we can confidently come before the throne of grace for Christ's sake and in his name: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine" (Isaiah 43:1). We know that God will work out everything for the good of his elect: "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 stand up under it" (1 Corinthians 10:13). God likes prayers that remind him of his promises and he most certainly hears and answers such prayers.

We therefore reject as contrary to Scripture:

1. That the Holy Spirit creates and sustains faith and spiritual life apart from, or alongside the means of grace (enthusiasm).
2. That we find the power for sanctified living outside the means of grace (Reformed theology).
3. That the law has in itself the power to motivate God-pleasing works of sanctification (moralism, e.g., Kant's Categorical Imperative, legalism).
4. That fear or a reward for obedience motivates us to do what God commands.
5. That the gospel is just sacred information but not the transforming power of God (Reformed theology).
6. That the sacraments are not effective means of grace but mere acts of men (ordinances) we follow out of obedience to God.
7. That prayer is a means or way God communicates with or reveals himself to us (Charismatic Movement, Pentecostalism).

III. GOD'S LAW GUIDES US IN GODLY LIVING

We do not need anything more than the Word of God for Christian living. The Bible contains all we need for our faith and life. The Bible teaches us about Jesus Christ our Savior. It teaches us about our salvation. It also helps us understand what God wants us to do and what he forbids us to do. In order to properly govern us, God has given us the law. This law helps us know how to live as Christians. Therefore, it is important for us to know how God uses his law to guide us in godly living.

God Guides Us Through the Law

God wrote his law on the heart of every human being. This law, known as "the natural knowledge of God," uses man's conscience to testify to the existence of God. However,

when Adam and Eve fell into sin, the knowledge of the law was clouded but not obliterated. The conscience, a spiritual emotion within us, testifies that we are accountable to God for our actions. It either approves of what we do or condemns us for what we do. ... It tells us that we are accountable for our actions to God.³

3 Lyle W. Lange, *God So Loved the World: A Study of Christian Doctrine* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2005), 102–103.

It is important to understand that the guidance of God in godly living is based on the third use of the law. The apostle Paul emphasizes the importance of the law in godly living. He says, “What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, ‘Do not covet’” (Romans 7:7). The Holy Scriptures give us a clear understanding of God’s law. We know God’s will by what he commands or forbids us to do. We do not base our understanding of God’s will on descriptive passages in Scripture, but on prescriptive passages, that is, on God’s commands to us.

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

The law has been given to people for three reasons: first, that through it external discipline may be maintained against the unruly and the disobedient; second, that people may be led through it to a recognition of their sins; third, after they have been reborn—since nevertheless the flesh still clings to them—that precisely because of the flesh they may have a sure guide, according to which they can orient and conduct their entire life. In this connection a dispute occurred among a few theologians over the third use of the law. It concerned whether the law is to be urged upon the reborn Christians or not. The one party said yes, the other no. (Formula of Concord, Epitome VI:1)

The Third Use of the Law

The third use of the law is the law as a rule or guide. After a person has been converted to faith through the gospel in Word and sacrament, the law serves to guide him in living a sanctified life.

We need to remember that even after a person 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.” But we teach that the law is needed for both the impious and the pious: “In the church, the doctrine not only of the gospel but also of the law must be preached as the Word of God, not only to the impious and unbelievers but also to those who are pious and truly believe.”⁴

Even Adam and Eve, who were perfect and who were living in a perfect world before the fall, still received guidance. God gave them a command: “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 guidance to Adam and Eve who had no sin, who are we to say that we do not need the guidance of the law? 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 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 as to how to live a godly life. Our Confessions have

4 Quenstedt, *Systema*, part IV, chap. 1, sect. II, qu VI, thesis, p. 46.

guided us on this subject:

For this reason, too, believers require the teaching of the law: so that they do not fall back on their own holiness and piety and under the appearance of God's Spirit establish their own service to God on the basis of their own choice, without God's Word or command. As it is written in Deuteronomy 12[:8, 28, 32], "You shall not act ... all of us according to our own desires," but "listen to the commands and laws which I command you," and "you shall not add to them nor take anything from them."

Furthermore, believers also require the teaching of the law regarding their good works, for otherwise people can easily imagine that their works and life are completely pure and perfect. However, the law of God prescribes good works for believers, so that it may at the same time show and indicate, as if in a mirror, that they are still imperfect and impure in this life. For we must say with our dear Paul, "Even if I am not aware of anything against myself, I am not thereby justified" [1 Cor. 4:4].

Therefore, since Paul admonishes the reborn to do good works, he expressly holds the Ten Commandments before them in Romans 13[:9], and on the basis of the law he recognizes that his good works are imperfect and impure (Rom. 7[:7–13]). David says (Ps. 119[:32]), "I run the way of your commandments," "but do not enter into judgment with your servant, for no one living is righteous before you" (Ps. 143[:2]). (Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration VI:20–21)

The Gospel Motivates and Empowers Us

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,

However, it is also necessary to explain very distinctly what the gospel does, effects, and creates for the new obedience of the believers and what the law does in relationship to the good works of believers.

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. (Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration 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.

Christians Still Need the Law for Guidance

Though Christians are free from the law, this does not mean that they do not need the law. Christians need the law because of the old Adam that lives in them (Romans 7:14–25). This helps refute the teaching of antinomianism, the belief that God’s law does not apply to believers. The antinomians were against the preaching of the law. They rejected the preaching of the law completely, even the use of the law that should be preached to bring people to repentance. They insisted that only the gospel should be preached. Our Lutheran Confessions dealt with antinomianism this way:

Indeed, if the faithful and elect children of God were perfectly renewed through the indwelling Spirit in this life, so that in their nature and all their powers they were completely free from sin, they would need no law and therefore no prodding. Instead, they would do in and of themselves, completely voluntarily, without any teaching, admonition, exhortation, or prodding of the law, what they are obligated to do according to God’s will, just as in and of themselves the sun, the moon, and all the stars follow unimpeded the regular course God gave them once and for all, apart from any admonition, exhortation, impulse, coercion, or compulsion. The holy angels perform their obedience completely of their own free will.

Since, however, believers in this life are not perfectly, wholly, *completive vel consummative* [completely or entirely] renewed—even though their sin is completely covered by the perfect obedience of Christ so that this sin is not reckoned to them as damning, and even though the killing of the old creature and the renewal of their minds in the Spirit has begun—nonetheless, the old creature still continues to hang on in their nature and all of its inward and outward powers. On this subject the Apostle wrote, “For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh” [Rom. 7:18]. And then, “I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate” [Rom. 7:15]. And, “I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin” [Rom. 7:23]. And, “What the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want” [Gal. 5:17].

Therefore, in this life, because of these desires of the flesh, the faithful, elect, reborn children of God need not only the law’s daily instruction and admonition, its warning and threatening. Often they also need its punishments, so that they may be incited by them and follow God’s Spirit, as it is written, “It is good for me that I was humbled, so that I might learn your statutes” [Ps. 119:71]. (Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration VI:6–9)

Christians need the law to curb their old Adam. They need the law as a mirror to keep them in their humble attitude of a sinner who merely throws himself on God’s grace. The Formula of Concord says,

As far as the old creature, which still clings to them, is concerned, it must be driven not only by the law but also by tribulations, because it does everything against its own will, under compulsion,

no less than the godless are driven by the threats of the law and are thus kept obedient (1 Cor. 9[:27]; Rom. 7[:18, 19]).

For this reason, too, believers require the teaching of the law: so that they do not fall back on their own holiness and piety and under the appearance of God's Spirit establish their own service to God on the basis of their own choice, without God's Word or command. As it is written in Deuteronomy 12[:8, 28, 32], "You shall not act ... all of us according to our own desires," but "listen to the commands and laws which I command you," and "you shall not add to them nor take anything from them."

Furthermore, believers also require the teaching of the law regarding their good works, for otherwise people can easily imagine that their works and life are completely pure and perfect. However, the law of God prescribes good works for believers, so that it may at the same time show and indicate, as if in a mirror, that they are still imperfect and impure in this life. For we must say with our dear Paul, "Even if I am not aware of anything against myself, I am not thereby justified" [1 Cor. 4:4].

Therefore, since Paul admonishes the reborn to do good works, he expressly holds the Ten Commandments before them in Romans 13[:9], and on the basis of the law he recognizes that his good works are imperfect and impure (Rom. 7[:7–13]). ...

For the old creature, like a stubborn, recalcitrant donkey, is also still a part of them, and it needs to be forced into obedience to Christ not only through the law's teaching, admonition, compulsion, and threat but also often with the cudgel of punishments and tribulations until the sinful flesh is completely stripped away and people are perfectly renewed in the resurrection. (Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration VI:19–21, 24)

Legalism

Legalism is an attempt to produce Christian living through the law. It tries to produce good works through threats of the law rather than the motivation of the gospel. Legalism will force believers to do the will of God because that is what they must do, not because of God's love for them. People become legalistic when they set up rules or guidelines and impose them on others as a way of trying to produce Christian lives. Legalism is a very big challenge. It becomes an impediment when it comes to teaching our people to do good works using the law as a guide. One of these challenges is culture. Because of man's sinfulness, most cultures have dictatorial tendencies. People are often forced to do what others want them to do.

Adiaphora and Christian Freedom

Through the law, God gives us rules about what we must or must not do. But we 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. These Christian freedoms vary from place to place due to the differences in customs. A custom that applies in one area may

not apply in another area. For example, Paul instructed the Corinthians about the roles God assigned to men and women, and he made the application that in the Corinthian society women should have their heads covered to reflect that they understood the principles regarding the relationship between men and women (1 Corinthians 11:3–16). That application was appropriate because of the customs in Corinth. In most societies today we would not make that same application because head covering would not convey the same meaning that it did in Corinth. God’s law is very clear. The principles do not change but applications may vary according to circumstances.

Therefore, we believe, teach, and confess that the community of God in every time and place has the right, power, and authority to change, reduce, or expand such practices according to circumstances in an orderly and appropriate manner, without frivolity or offense, as seems most useful, beneficial, and best for good order, Christian discipline, evangelical decorum, and the building up of the church. Paul teaches how one may yield and make concessions to the weak in faith in such external matters of indifference with good conscience (Rom. 14[:1–23]), and he demonstrates this with his own example (Acts 16[:3] and 21[:26]; 1 Cor. 9[:10]). (Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration X:9)

In applying the principles that guide us in decision making of what we are to do in matters of adiaphora, we are to consider doing all things to the glory of God. Paul advised, “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31). We will not be glorifying God if we cause offense to our weak brother by insisting on our liberty: “Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God” (1 Corinthians 10:32). We will not be glorifying God if we insist on our rights and cause offense against our weak brother by forcing him to do what he thinks is wrong. The world is full of human rights that may not comply with the Christian conscience. We should give up such rights for the sake of the conscience of others. This is another way of glorifying God. 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. Wherever God has placed us in life, ... we should do our duty faithfully” (*A Summary of Christian Doctrine*, 163).

The apostle Paul further advises on Christian liberty and adiaphora, “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). We do not limit Christian freedom by insisting on something that the Bible does not command or forbidding something that the Bible does not forbid: “If some unbeliever invites you to a meal and you want to go, eat whatever is put before you without raising questions of conscience. But if anyone says to you, ‘This has been offered in sacrifice,’ then do not eat it, both for the sake of the man who told you and for conscience’ sake—the other man’s conscience, I mean, not yours. For why should my freedom be judged by another’s conscience? If I take part in the meal with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of something I thank God for?” (1 Corinthians 10:27–30).

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). From this

we learn that a Christian is free to do things that are adiaphora as an exercise of his Christian freedom.

These are the things that we will want to teach our people concerning adiaphora, things that the Scriptures do not command or forbid. We will not ever want to force any kind of adiaphora upon our fellow Christians. Matters of adiaphora may be done in Christian freedom with a clear conscience so long as they are wise and loving. And if someone tries to force us to do some adiaphora, 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.

May God bless all believers so that this teaching from Scripture will be preserved for generations to come. Let each one of us remember to do whatever God has asked and empowered us to do for his glory.

We therefore reject as contrary to Scripture:

1. Antinomianism: the belief that God's law does not apply to believers.
2. Legalism which attempts to produce Christian living through the law.
3. That rites, ceremonies, and observances of certain days can be imposed on God's people as necessary.
4. That rites, ceremonies, and observances of certain days and other matters of adiaphora can be abolished in a way that suggests that God's people are not free to use these things in the best interests of the church.

IV. WE ARE CREATED TO LOVE GOD ACCORDING TO THE FIRST TABLE OF THE LAW

Contrary to much of modern thought, human beings were created by God (Genesis 1–2). They were not simply a part of God's overall creation, but were the pinnacle of God's creative work when he formed the universe (Genesis 1:26–31). Humans were created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27), meaning that they knew God's will and were perfectly holy and righteous (Ephesians 4:24; Apology II:18). They were created with souls (Ecclesiastes 12:7), something that the other creatures lacked. Humans were also given the privilege and responsibility to rule over the earth (Genesis 1:28). God gave them a special place to live, a garden that truly was paradise (Genesis 2:8). The Creator even fashioned a special "helper" for the man (Genesis 2:21–22), thereby also creating marriage as a relationship unique to humankind (Genesis 2:24). No other created being was as special as were humans.

Prior to the fall into sin, humans were quite pleased to obey their Creator and carry out the tasks he had given them: ruling over the earth, caring for the garden, and not eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. By obeying God, they showed their love for him as their Creator and Provider. According to the way God created them, humans were to love him, such love being reflected in their obedience to him.

Satan interrupted this pristine setting by tempting Adam and Eve to sin, to disobey God whom they loved. After they sinned, their relationship with their loving Father severed. They were ashamed even to be in his presence (Genesis 3:8). The sin of Adam and Eve brought about what God had said would result:

death (Genesis 2:17). No longer connected to God, Adam and Eve were spiritually dead (Ephesians 2:1), and eventually their bodies would also die (Genesis 3:19).

But the all-loving Creator promised a re-creation. Immediately after Adam and Eve sinned, God pronounced not only a curse (Genesis 3:16–19) but also a blessing (Genesis 3:15). He promised that there would come One who would undo what Satan had done, who would suffer while carrying out his work but who would ultimately triumph. This promised One would eventually be known as Jesus.

Through his innocent life, sacrificial death, and glorious resurrection, Jesus reversed the insidious work of Satan. God the Father considered everything Jesus did as having been done in the place of all people (Romans 3:24). To those who believe in Jesus' vicarious work, God grants new life (Romans 6:4), re-creating them to be holy as humans were originally created.

We Are New Creatures in Christ, Created to Love and Serve Him

When God brings us to believe in Jesus as our Savior, he re-creates us (2 Corinthians 5:17); he restores us to a relationship with him as our loving Father. Granted, as new creatures in Christ we are not perfect in the same way that Adam and Eve were perfect when they were created, because we still have sin clinging to our mortal bodies (Romans 7:21–23; Galatians 5:17; Formula of Concord, Epitome VI:3; Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration II: 34, 64, 85; VI:8, 18; Smalcald Articles III, III:40; Apology IV:169). As new creatures, however, we want to serve our Father in joy just as Adam and Eve did before they sinned. St. Paul explains what our re-creation by God means for us: “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; cf. Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration IV:7). God’s plan for humans from the beginning was to have them serve him, to have them do good works. When God forgives our sins because of the work of his Son Jesus, he creates in us the motivation to do those things that are pleasing to him (Philippians 2:13; Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration II:14).

As people who have been created by God and then re-created through faith, we are also led to love our gracious Creator. St. John writes, “We love because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19; cf. Apology IV:141). Our Father’s love for us, shown most tangibly in sending his Son as the one to live and die in our place, produces in us a gratitude that shows itself when we express our love for him.

We Worship God Alone

When Jesus was asked to name the chief commandment, he responded, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” (Matthew 22:37). Loving God is thus not only a response of a thankful heart, it is also a duty. This command to love God above all else is explicated in what is referred to as the first table of the law, the first three of the Ten Commandments.

The Triune God Is the Only God

God was very clear in establishing priorities for his people with the First Commandment he gave to

them: “You shall have no other gods before me” (Exodus 20:3). Scripture clarifies that to worship anything other than the God it proclaims is idolatrous, since the triune God is the only God. That God is triune is clear from the very beginning of the Bible, since God (the Father), the Word (the Son), and the Spirit are mentioned within the first verses of Genesis. That the triune God is the only true God is demonstrated by God himself. He makes the clear claim to be the only God, especially since he is the only one who can rescue people from destruction (Isaiah 45:21). King David attributes to God the distinction of being the only one who had indeed repeatedly saved his chosen people from disaster (2 Samuel 7:22). Only the true God would be able to complete such rescues. Luther paraphrases Scripture accordingly: “Whatever good thing you lack, look to me for it and seek it from me, and whenever you suffer misfortune and distress, crawl to me and cling to me. I, I myself, will give you what you need and help you out of every danger. Only do not let your heart cling to or rest in anyone else.” (Large Catechism, Ten Commandments 4) When Jesus prayed his High Priestly Prayer, he makes it clear that people can only be saved eternally by believing in his Father and himself (John 17:3). St. Paul refers to the Father and to Christ Jesus as the God “through whom all things came and through whom we live” (1 Corinthians 8:6). The triune God is the source of all things and he is the one who sustains his creation, especially humans.

God’s Law Forbids Open Idolatry

God’s people, therefore, show their love for him by worshipping him alone. With the First Commandment God prohibits the worship of anyone or anything other than him, since such worship would constitute worshipping an idol. When they were gathered at the foot of Mt. Sinai waiting for Moses to return from meeting with God on the mountain, God’s people—freshly rescued from their slavery in Egypt—built a golden calf and worshipped it. God showed his extreme displeasure with their idolatry and punished them (Exodus 32).

Throughout history sinful human beings have continued in such idolatry. St. Paul summarizes how people have wantonly broken the First Commandment when he wrote in Romans that they “exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles” (Romans 1:23). This sin was not unnoticed by God and he allowed such sinners to plunge deeper into immorality as a result of serving created idols instead of the One who created them (Romans 1:24–25). God’s children are to avoid idols at all costs (1 John 5:21).

Another manifestation that blatant idolatry can take is denying anything having to do with the nature of God. Jesus clearly made claims to be God, claims which angered his enemies (John 5:18). In spite of such objections and opposition, Jesus stated directly that dishonoring him, the Son, was the same as dishonoring the Father (John 5:23). Not recognizing Jesus as the second person of the Trinity is another infraction of the First Commandment. In fact, denying that Jesus is the Son of God excludes one from the Christian Church (1 John 2:23).

God’s Law Forbids Secret Idolatry

Not only does God forbid us to worship idols in the sense of actively and openly worshipping anyone or anything other than him, he also prohibits his people from putting anyone or anything ahead of him in

our lives. Such sin constitutes “secret” idolatry because it is not an overt attempt to replace God. Loving the world or the things in this world more than loving God drives God out of our hearts (1 John 2:15; Psalm 62:10; Jeremiah 17:5). Even if the object of such love were members of our family, such idolatry is forbidden (Matthew 10:37). Anything that draws our attention away from God and his work for us and to ourselves becomes an idol in our hearts.

In his Large Catechism, Martin Luther asserts that “the most common idol on earth” is money or material goods. The one who trusts in such is so secure in his sin that he deludes himself into thinking he inhabits paradise itself (Large Catechism, Ten Commandments 5–9). But “mammon” is not the only idol that Luther cites as problematic.

So, too, those who boast of great learning, wisdom, power, prestige, family, and honor and who trust in them have a god also, but not the one, true God. Notice again, how presumptuous, secure, and proud people are when they have such possessions, and how despondent they are when they lack them or when they are taken away. Therefore, I repeat, the correct interpretation of this commandment is that to have a god is to have something in which the heart trusts completely. (Large Catechism, Ten Commandments 10; cf. 28)

We Show Honor to God’s Name

After making clear in the First Commandment the need to worship him alone, God continues to show how we are to love him when he gives the Second Commandment, forbidding his people to misuse his holy name: “You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God.” (Exodus 20:7). With this commandment, God desires that we avoid certain thoughts and actions, but also that we make positive steps in our lives of sanctification.

What Is God’s Name?

Showing love for God according to this commandment is more complicated than might be understood at first glance. One reason for this is that God’s “name” is not just a word or set of words, not just one of the many titles used of God in Scripture. Indeed, God’s name includes every expression that God uses to refer to himself in the Bible. The list of such names is quite long; “Yahweh/Jehovah,” “Elohim,” “Alpha and Omega,” “Adonai,” and “Immanuel” are but a few examples. God’s names for himself reflect his reputation, personality, and authority. God’s words to Moses in Exodus 3:14–15 summarize the essence of God’s name: when he refers to himself as “I AM” (in connection with his name Yahweh), he expresses not only his eternal nature but also how he is “over all and through all and in all” (Ephesians 4:6). God also revealed his gracious and just essence when he told Moses that he is “compassionate and gracious, . . . slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness” who forgives sin but also punishes the unrepentant wrongdoer (Exodus 34:6–7). This emphasis on God’s gracious nature, an aspect of who God truly is, is borne out in the New Testament when the angel announced to Joseph that his wife Mary was to have a son, one he was to name “Jesus” (Matthew 1:21). This name means “Yahweh saves,” again highlighting God’s plan of salvation for all people.

God Revealed His Name to Us to Bless Us and Save Us

Thus it is clear that God revealed his essence to us not to frighten us, not to make us cower in submission to him, but to show us his undeserved love, thereby also revealing his intention of rescuing us from eternal damnation. Whenever we remember this about God, he promises to be with us and bless us (Exodus 20:24). We call out to God for mercy, trusting that he saves us from death and hell (Joel 2:32; Romans 10:13). When we were baptized, God placed his name on us (Matthew 28:19), giving us a daily reminder of his blessings to us.

How God's Name Is Dishonored

It is possible to break the Second Commandment in multiple ways. We dishonor God's name when we use it to curse another person when we should be using it to bless them (James 3:10), especially those who do us harm (Romans 12:14). We misuse God's name if we use it to swear when it is unnecessary (Leviticus 19:12) or if we use it to make an oath or promise in uncertain situations, such as Herod did in Mark 6:21–28, rashly promising half his kingdom to Salome. Whenever someone teaches false doctrine, God's name is dishonored because the false teacher purports to be proclaiming God's Word (Jeremiah 23:31) when they are actually proclaiming man-made teachings (Matthew 15:9; Large Catechism, Ten Commandments 54; Apology XII:143; XV:5; Smalcald Articles II, II:2). When someone claims to honor God and his name but in their heart they have a different allegiance (Matthew 15:7–8), they dishonor God's name by their hypocrisy, claiming to believe but having unbelieving hearts. People may appear to be holy and faithful to God, but their external appearance does not match what they actually hold in their hearts (Matthew 23:25–28). Such a person also dishonors the name of God.

How God's Name Is Honored

How does a Christian honor the name of the Lord who created and redeemed them? Whenever we are in trouble, we remember that God has promised to deliver us from our distress when we call on his name (Psalm 50:15; Large Catechism, Ten Commandments 64). The simple act of praying on a regular basis is another way we demonstrate that we honor the Lord's name (1 Thessalonians 5:17; Large Catechism, Ten Commandments 64). In fact, because he is the essence of goodness, God assures us that he will only give us good things when we pray to him (Matthew 7:7–11), thereby showing that we honor his name. Praising God's name, an action that is a daily one for us (Psalm 145:2), shows great honor to God. In addition, when we tell other people about all the mighty things God has done (Psalm 145:10–12), when we “let [our] light shine” for others to see, we invite others to share in giving honor to God's name (Matthew 5:16). Finally, we show honor to God and his name whenever we give thanks to him for all he is and does, especially how he loves us (Psalm 118:1) as demonstrated by sending our Savior to redeem us (Ephesians 5:19–20).

The Importance of God's Word

In the Third Commandment, God adds an additional facet to how we are to show our love for him: we need to acknowledge that his Word is vital in various ways. “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy” (Exodus 20:8), he says. This commandment does not bind us to observe a particular day as more holy

than another, be it Sunday or any other day. As Christians living under the new covenant, we are no longer bound to the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament (Colossians 2:16–17; Augsburg Confession XXVIII:43, 44; Apology XXVII:14; Large Catechism, Ten Commandments 82). Rather, we adhere to God’s will for our lives as expressed in this commandment when we do not “despise preaching or God’s Word” but instead “keep that Word holy and gladly hear and learn it” (Small Catechism, Ten Commandments 6). This commandment appropriately emphasizes the importance of the Word of God in the lives of his people. As Luther states in his Large Catechism, “When we seriously ponder the Word, hear it, and put it to use, such is its power that it never departs without fruit. It always awakens new understanding, pleasure, and devotion, and it constantly creates clean hearts and minds. For this Word is not idle or dead, but effective and living” (Ten Commandments 101).

The Bible is not generally held in high regard in the twenty-first century. Even many within the visible church believe it to be merely a book written by fallible people to express religious thoughts. In the minds of these critics, the Bible is only God’s Word in the sense that it expresses what certain people believed about God. The Bible certainly did not come from God, critics believe.

The Bible itself claims otherwise. When praying to his Father in behalf of his disciples, Jesus said, “Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth” (John 17:17). Jesus makes this definitive statement about the Bible’s truth because it comes from God. We call this the “inspiration” of Scripture, to which Paul testifies in 2 Timothy: “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness” (3:16). In other words, God “breathed out” the very words that the holy writers recorded. The words of the Bible come directly from God. The writers of Scripture did not simply write whatever they wanted, but they were led by God the Holy Spirit to record what he desired (2 Peter 1:21).

We Are No Longer Bound by Old Testament Sabbath Regulations

While trusting that the words of the Bible are completely true and do not change at people’s whims (Matthew 5:18), we also recognize that the application of the words of Scripture does change in certain ways. Since we now live in New Testament times, we are not bound to obey God’s Third Commandment in the same way his Old Testament people were. That is, we do not follow certain prescriptions pertaining to the Sabbath as if we still lived under the old covenant. For example, we are no longer restricted to observing the Old Testament Sabbath (Friday sundown through Saturday sundown) as a day of worship. Under the new covenant, we may worship on any day, as long as we set time aside for worship. The reason we have been freed from this particular regulation is that Jesus himself, the Lord of the Sabbath (Matthew 12:8), is the fulfillment of the Sabbath (Hebrews 4:1–10). The Sabbath laws pointed forward to Christ and he fulfilled them for us (Colossians 2:13–17).

What God Wants Us to Do

Since the Bible is God’s Word and absolutely true, it holds a special place in the lives of his people. Holy Scripture reveals his amazing plan of salvation to us: he sent Jesus to rescue us from sin, death, and hell. We respond to this good news by loving our heavenly Father and by having an eager desire to study his Word even further. This is the same eagerness that the Jews in Berea displayed when Paul proclaimed

to them the good news of Jesus: they “examined the Scriptures every day” to see if Paul’s message was the same as the Scripture’s message (Acts 17:11). This is the same eagerness that Mary, the sister of Lazarus, displayed when she sat at the feet of Jesus when he came to their home. Her devotion to hearing her Lord’s Word was so intense that it caused her sister Martha to complain that she was shirking her other responsibilities! Jesus praised Mary for her willingness to hear the Word (Luke 10:38–42). Learning God’s Word is not an optional activity for Christians (Large Catechism, Ten Commandments 98).

We also demonstrate love for God and his command to hold to his Word by gathering together with fellow Christians to worship him. Such worship of the Lord causes Christians to rejoice (Psalm 122:1) because they are happy to be in his presence. Listening to the Word being read and preached, seeing and feeling the Word in Baptism, touching and tasting the Word in the Lord’s Supper—all while being surrounded by fellow believers—is indeed a foretaste of the bliss of heaven. Through regular worship God serves his people and assures them of his grace. Worship is therefore vital to our spiritual health and is not to be avoided or ignored as if it were inconsequential (Hebrews 10:25).

Finally, we show love for God and his Word when we gladly and actively share that Word with others throughout the world. Prior to his ascension, Jesus gave his followers a simple yet powerful command: “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19–20). We view Jesus’ Great Commission not simply as a directive to be followed, but as a privilege to pursue. It is our joy to share the gracious forgiveness of our Lord with those around us and with those distant from us (Luke 24:46–47; Apology XII:29–30; Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration XI:28) because we know what blessings he bestows through his Word.

We therefore reject as contrary to Scripture:

1. Any theory of human evolution that denies the divine creation of the universe in six, 24-hour days.
2. The idea that perfection of a human being is possible in this earthly life.
3. The conviction that all so-called gods are equal and that there is more than one way to heaven.
4. The belief that Jesus is not fully God.
5. Any name or pronoun for God that does not correspond to His revelation in Scripture.
6. The idea that false doctrine is to be met with a spirit of toleration.
7. The view that the Bible is not the inspired and inerrant Word of God.
8. The opinion that regular worship of God is optional for the Christian.
9. The teaching that Christians are required to worship on a particular day of the week.

V. SERVING OTHERS ACCORDING TO THE SECOND TABLE OF THE LAW

The Bible speaks of sanctification in two different ways. Sanctification in the wide sense encompasses all the acts of God’s grace by which the Holy Spirit leads a person from sin to holiness. However, sanctification in the strict or narrow sense refers to the new life that God allows the Christian to lead in response to his grace. In the following treatment, our sanctification will be described through the works of the second

table of the commandments and the duties of our vocation.

A natural man cannot produce a sanctified life. In the eyes of the world people may have a decent reputation and be honorable, but in God's eyes they are nothing more than sinners. Only when sins are forgiven and sinners are justified in Christ, the new creation is established (2 Corinthians 5:17) and the process of sanctification has started. Only after the miracle of new birth in Christ, sinners are transformed into good trees capable of bringing forth good fruit (Matthew 7:17–18). Then we are branches grafted into the true vine, receiving the flow of sanctified life from Christ: "If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit" (John 15:5). Through the power of the Word and sacraments, the new life is nourished and produces a rich harvest in our lives.

This fundamental truth is described by the words of the apostle Paul: "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). Also, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (2 Corinthians 5:17). It means that Christ has become not only our wisdom and justification, but also holiness and sanctification (1 Corinthians 1:30). All who have this hope in Christ purify themselves, just as he is pure (1 John 3:3). One who has been forgiven much, loves much (Luke 7:47). One who follows him walks in the light (John 8:12).

New hearts and changed minds are created in us by the work of the Holy Spirit through the means of grace. He awakens in us new spiritual powers, abilities, and freedom to love and serve God. As new creatures in Christ, we are moved to live a holy life and to express our faith in love. Thus, our life is renewed in spite of our old nature. And we, who belong to Christ, crucify our flesh with its passions and desires, in order to live by the Spirit, keep in step with the Spirit, and produce the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22–25).

As far as we live according to the Spirit, our actions spring from thankful love and from the power of the example of Christ (Philippians 2:5). We want to let our light shine before others, so that they may see our good deeds and glorify our Father in heaven (Matthew 5:16). In the power of God's mercy, we no longer look only to our own interests, but to the interests of others. We are compelled by the love of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:14) to help and serve a neighbor in need. The Lord describes this willing service, "For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me" (Matthew 25:35–36).

Thus, the main motivation for our sanctification is always the gospel. "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship" (Romans 12:1). We are urged to be imitators of Christ's love and the reflection of God in this world (Ephesians 5:1–2). St. John wrote, "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. ... Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth" (1 John 3:16, 18).

God's Authority Behind Everything

But where is such a renewed life lived? Where do we do these good works? What are life stations, occasions, and circumstances where we identify our sanctification today? Our life seems so secular, earthly, ordinary. Our external world and worldly occupations often appear so disconnected from our faith, when even believers often capitulate to the God-forsaken vision of the world. We are tempted to accept a secular worldview, while losing sight of God's presence and providence in our everyday dealings.

Nevertheless, the Lord is not "far from each one of us, 'For in him we live and move and have our being'" (Acts 17:27–28). The Bible clearly teaches God's all-embracing governance, where "he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else" (Acts 17:25). All of humanity and each individual life in its every stage from conception to death is governed by his order, design, and purpose. Everything God has created, including the earthly and secular sphere, is ruled by the almighty and all-knowing Lord.

On these grounds, the Christian faith cannot be assigned only to the inner, private, and subjective sphere, but it has to uphold the Bible's claims about the objective universe. Since the whole existence is formed, ruled, and organized by the Creator, inevitably he is at work also in the so-called secular world. All natural processes, moral laws, cultural structures, and societal hierarchies are derived from his created order and institutions, by means of which he designs, creates, and sustains human life. All of that works for our benefit. In that way, God promises to work through the agency of family, work, and organized community, giving human beings particular parts to play in his vast design.

It is important to realize that God stands behind everything. He is operative in all beneficial human callings, and he claims the ultimate authority behind all human authorities. "Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God" (Romans 13:1). Paul says that God's authority finds expression in the authority borne by civil officials. Thus, for example, all the supervising jobs, such as employers, leaders, teachers, and the other human office holders receive their authority from him, who is the only true authority. As believers, we should always recognize this greater authority of God, by submitting to his human agents and instruments who fulfill his tasks (1 Peter 2:13–17).

Luther has shown the basis of authority in the Fourth Commandment: "Honor your father and mother." He extols the parental authority which, next to God, is the very highest (Large Catechism, Ten Commandments 107), and from that all other authority flows and is propagated. For where a father is unable alone to educate his child, he delegates and confers his authority and government upon others who are appointed for the purpose. Hence these are called fathers in the Scriptures, as those who in their government offices perform the functions of the father and should have a paternal heart toward their subordinates (Large Catechism, Ten Commandments 141–142). Therefore, St. Paul encourages Christians to be diligent to honor this authority "that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth" (Ephesians 6:3). The Lord promises to defend and protect us in doing that. As we submit to the authorities in faith, our lives will be blessed and we will have a joyful conscience (Large Catechism, Ten Commandments 148).

Charity Toward Human Life

In all of God's creation, human life is the most extraordinary gift of all, given to us without our deserving it. Life preconditions all other gifts, coming from the hands of God. The Bible attests to that: "Your hands shaped me and made me" (Job 10:8). "I am fearfully and wonderfully made ... I know that full well." (Psalm 139:14). God, as the Author, Provider, and Protector of life, extends his care over human beings from birth to death, to every minute aspect of human life, numbering even the hairs of our head (Matthew 10:30). His lovingkindness covers everyone. The heavenly Father "causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous" (Matthew 5:45). Hence, we, as children of our Father, are called to show the same benevolence and care for our neighbors, be they good or bad.

The sanctity of life is affirmed by the Fifth Commandment: "You are not to kill." Being a sovereign Creator and Ruler, he is the only one with the final right to decide in the matters of life and death. "See now that I myself am He! There is no god besides me. I put to death and I bring to life, I have wounded and I will heal, and no one can deliver out of my hand" (Deuteronomy 32:39). Taking another's life is not permitted to anyone, except only his representatives, temporal government, acting as an agent of God's wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer (Romans 13:4). Every kind of killing (murder, abortion, suicide, etc.) is strictly forbidden by the Lord.

The great value of human life is emphasized in the Bible even after the fall into sin and corruption, insisting that every human life was created in his image (Genesis 9:6). Still more forcefully, the precious value of every life is affirmed in the work of salvation. By giving his Son "for the life of the world" (John 6:51), God showed his willingness to restore every lost soul. "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men" (Titus 2:11). St. Paul stresses that "now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2), and the time we spend on earth is very precious. For every human being, life is a God-given time of grace when the gospel is available. Yet, our time is short and fragile. Our days pass quickly, and we fly away. The Bible teaches us to number our days, so that we may gain a heart of wisdom (Psalm 90:11–12). We die once, and after that we face judgment (Hebrews 9:27).

In that biblical perspective, God teaches us to show charity to every single human life. We are all co-travelers on this road toward God-given eternal life. We are given grace to help each other along the way. Our faith is not meant to serve just our pious enjoyment or personal glorification, but the spiritual and physical needs of others. There will always be a danger to become absorbed in an egoistic spirituality. However, a true Christian charity urges us to assist our neighbor not only in physical needs, including food, clothing, shelter, etc., but especially in spiritual needs, providing them with the true bread of life, our Savior Jesus Christ. We will want our loving service always to be expressed in real sacrifices of our time, money, and effort helping others in need, be it feeding of the hungry, visiting the sick and imprisoned, clothing the naked, etc. (Romans 12:20; Matthew 25:35–36; 1 John 3:16–18).

Marriage

The biblical teaching on marriage is clear: men and women are created distinctly different as male and female, joined together as one flesh, so that their marital union is faithful and permanent in this life. From

Jesus we hear that marriage is God's act where the Lord himself fits and fastens two persons to each other (Matthew 19:4–6). Regrettably, we no longer live in paradise and we carry original sin in us. Moreover, the society around us advances moral chaos and corrupt values, immorality, and promiscuity, calling “evil good and good evil” and putting “darkness for light and light for darkness” (Isaiah 5:20). Chastity, which was once praised as a virtue, has now come to be regarded almost as a vice.

In other words, we need to recover the blessing of marriage as God's gift and holy ground, where the Christian husband and the wife are sanctified and united on the basis of faith. Ideally each one of them ought to be joined to Jesus first, so that both can be united in the Lord. Becoming “one flesh” implies more than simply a physical union. It is the most intimate partnership, friendship, and love, where the Lord himself is their Head, Uniter, and Sanctifier. Thus marriage is built on the strongest possible foundation, making it holy by the Word and sacraments, which constantly renew this union by the gospel of grace and forgiveness.

In his Large Catechism, Luther calls marriage “the first of all institutions,” based on God's creation, order, and command. The Creator himself has designed it so that we may “be true to each other, to be fruitful, to beget children, and to nurture and bring them up to the glory of God” (Large Catechism, Ten Commandments 207). In that way, marriage is the framework established by God himself, within which human sexuality might be freely expressed, given, and received as a blessing with a good conscience between the husband and the wife (1 Corinthians 7:1–5). Luther writes that when “husband and wife live together in love and harmony, cherishing each other wholeheartedly and with perfect fidelity,” their example “is one of the chief ways to make chastity attractive and desirable” (Large Catechism, Ten Commandments 219).

St. Paul describes marriage as a “profound mystery,” saying that it resembles the union between Christ and the church: “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies” (Ephesians 5:25–28). Likewise, wives are encouraged, “Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior” (Ephesians 5:22–23).

Although marriage is not a holy sacrament, yet this God-given order cannot be surrendered to the profane and detached from God. Hence, marriage should be esteemed very highly as the union created and sanctified by God, where he wants to bless the relationship and make it a holy ground with his gracious presence. Both a man and a woman, each in their distinctive gifts, roles, and tasks, are urged to serve each other in a union of fidelity and love, to serve human life through the gift of children, and to restrain and heal anarchic sexual impulses.

At the same time, the Scriptures condemn all sins and transgressions against the Lord's own established order of marriage. Homosexual relations are condemned as unnatural and shameful. In Romans 1:26–27, St. Paul argues that people do not just dishonor each other's bodies by engaging in unchaste behavior, but they dishonor God himself and deserve his punishment. All adultery, fornication, and other kinds of immorality and infidelity are banned. Also, cohabitation and sex outside of marriage is prohibited

(Ephesians 5:3–4; Matthew 5:27–28; 1 Corinthians 6:9–10).

Stewardship

The foundational story in Genesis depicts the Lord as the sole Creator of everything, where human beings are the crown of his creation, intended for procreation, productivity, dominion, and stewardship of the earth. Our world is shown to be radically dependent on the generosity of God who continues to give everything good despite human depravity and crookedness. He continues to bless this world. “Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows” (James 1:17). From the very outset, human beings have been appointed to act as the rulers and stewards over his entrusted property (Genesis 1:28).

We have a generous Father in heaven, and, being his children, we are called to be like him. Our goods, possessions, and properties are not given for our selfish advantage, but granted and designed to be used for the benefit of God and our neighbor. The Lord wants us to manage everything wisely and properly. In Matthew 25:14–30 Jesus says that we are constantly trading with our master’s money, buying and selling, until the master returns and demands accounting. We are not supposed to bury our talents, but put them to good use and multiply them. Most frequently, it is in the management of our time, money, skills, and efforts that we demonstrate our genuine priorities and the true devotion of our heart.

God wants his gifts to be used in ways that honor and glorify him. With all our gifts and talents, our assets and properties, we are enabled to be good stewards. The Lord wants us to be diligent and faithful as we fulfill our daily responsibilities to serve our neighbor with a sincere heart and generous spirit. But we have to pay close attention to the specific places and stations in our life where God has appointed us to be his stewards: in our family, neighborhood, and social and political settings, as well as our church.

The first and most basic duty is clearly to support one’s family. St Paul goes as far as to say, “If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” (1 Timothy 5:8). These duties are connected with the smallest circle of our life and they lie closest at hand. The love required of us starts at home with our family which cannot be overlooked.

Secondly, our conscience should also recognize other people: our neighbors who are poor, neglected, lonely people left without any support. God calls us to be our brother’s keeper and to show compassion where it is most needed. The lack of compassion is a sign that a person does not acknowledge the love of God: “If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?” (1 John 3:17).

Thirdly, we are called to become good citizens and serve the wider circle of society, state, and government. Although as believers we live like strangers in a strange land, nevertheless, we remain permanently involved with secular governance. St. Paul encourages us to acknowledge authorities as “God’s servants” and to work side by side with non-believers as well, for the Lord works through all social orders and every secular authority. He urges us to “give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue,

then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor” (Romans 13:6–7).

Fourthly, we are called to offer service and support to our church. God’s great mission to spread the gospel and save sinners throughout the world is accomplished through the church as his instrument. In view of the overabundant blessings we receive through the church, the Lord compels every believer to participate in that mission, to share not only our spiritual talents, but also material and financial means. “Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9:7). Scripture teaches us to be willing givers, who provide our offerings in a regular, proportionate, generous manner, according to our means and possibilities (1 Corinthians 16:2; 2 Corinthians 9:6–7).

Unfortunately, progress in such charitable works is often restrained by greed and love for money. The deceitfulness of riches chokes the Word, making it unfruitful (Matthew 13:22). The power of mammon makes people anxious, hard, self-indulgent, proud, and unwilling to sacrifice; thus it remains a constant threat even for believers (Luke 16:13). We need to resist the spirit of materialism by realizing that we possess greater treasures in heaven and by gaining an inner freedom in spirit to surrender our possessions. It is a constant exercise in faith to give up all selfishness and divert our benevolence to the needs of our neighbors. For freely we have received and freely we give (Matthew 10:8).

Vocation

As previous points have shown, there are different vocations and stations in life where we are placed to live our sanctified life. Luther describes these vocations as “masks” of God, under which he hides himself even in the most mundane day-to-day human activities. The Lord is present in our everyday endeavors in our workplace, family, society, and church. Those stations are his masks where he is at work daily. As we serve in our various capacities and according to our different talents in our God-given vocations, we participate in his work and fulfill his approved good works for our neighbor’s benefit.

The biblical doctrine of vocation is especially important today, when so many struggle to see meaning in their daily duties and consider their work as a merely secular matter. Even believers sometimes lose sight of God’s presence and workings through these callings. Therefore, it is vital to restore the view of God’s omnipresent activity in these rather ordinary human callings, such as being fathers, mothers, husbands, wives, children, employees, employers, rulers, citizens, etc. All of these vocations are established by God and remain beneficial despite sinful people occupying them. Thus, willingly or unwillingly, everybody continues to serve God’s good purposes and the general well-being of family and society by means of these vocations.

However, as believers, we are called to recognize God’s hand behind them, in order to live worthy of our callings (Ephesians 4:1), and to glorify God in everything we do (1 Corinthians 10:31). Such biblical perspective is very helpful to transfigure our ordinary life with the presence of God while restoring a sense of blessing to our everyday work. In spite of the failures, the hardships, and the frustrations that we encounter in our vocations, God promises to bless us in doing these works. In spite of all temptations to quit and give up on our callings, we can be certain that God keeps on working even through the crosses in our vo-

cation. Henceforth, it is a matter of remaining faithful to our vocations where God has placed us, accepting our callings as from the Lord and serving our neighbor wherever it might be: in the family, work, community, and church. Whenever we humbly bow under our vocations and keep performing even their most lowly tasks, we can go about them with a joyful confidence, certainty, and security, knowing that these tasks are pleasing to God and beneficial to our neighbor.

We therefore reject as contrary to Scripture:

1. Any kind of striving after holiness and sanctification apart from God's own means in the Word and sacraments.
2. A legalistic approach where sanctification is primarily motivated by the demands of the law.
3. An idea that there is an innate spark of divinity and holiness in a natural human being, which needs to be rekindled.
4. An ecstatic and sentimental mysticism that imagines a direct experience of God apart from the means of grace and a mixing and confusion of the soul's essence with the divine essence.
5. All self-devised and self-constructed roads to sanctification which ignore God's own order, commandments, and institutions.
6. Anarchic, anti-social, and anti-establishment attitudes that do not recognize God's authority behind the ruling authorities.
7. Teaching that gender is a social construction and any sexual acts are beyond good and evil.
8. The idea that a marital union between a man and a woman is an obsolete, outdated institution that should be replaced by something new and better.
9. The corruption of the gospel making it a message of health, wealth, and prosperity, which are taken as signs of holy and sanctified life.