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## What Does Biblical Exhortation and Admonition Mean For Lutheran preaching?

Mark P. Surburg

It seems that the discussion about exhortation and admonition in Lutheran preaching always ends up back at the same point. No Lutheran in the discussion will explicitly deny the third use of the law—after all it is confessed in Formula of Concord article VI. But at the same time we are told that the preacher can't control how the law strikes the hearer. The law always accuses and so we must assume that it will function in its second use for most hearers. The preacher can't control how the law strikes the hearer (only the Spirit does this). Therefore, practically speaking, there really is no third use of the law because *we can never know* that it will be used by the Spirit in this way. We are therefore told that we should just preach law—which means we should speak in ways that are most commonly associated with convicting people of sin. Exhortation and admonition are avoided because it is considered to be “just more law” that will convict people of sin and rob them of the Gospel. The idea that they should be important elements in Lutheran preaching is dismissed as “neo-Methodism.”

Yet in fact, this approach stands contrary to the apostolic practice in Scripture and the position confessed in Formula of Concord article VI. In addition, it does not withstand examination as a theological argument. It should not be allowed to determine how we think about the law in the preaching task as Lutherans.

The question arises because the New Testament in general, and Paul's letters in particular, are filled with exhortation and admonition for Christians to live in new obedience. Within Paul's letters these statements are always grounded in what God has done for us in the death and resurrection of Christ, and through the work of the Holy Spirit—they find their source in the Gospel. So in Ephesians 1:3-14 and 2:1-10 Paul has stated the Gospel in the most explicit terms possible. Next in 2:11-3:13 he contends that this Gospel has united all people in Christ—both Jew and Gentile. Paul wants the Ephesians to understand this love (3:14-21) and then describes the unity that they have as the Body of Christ (4:1-16).

In 4:17-6:9, Paul engages in an extended section of exhortation and admonition aimed at new obedience by the Christians in their lives. He begins by saying:

Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of

God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. But that is not the way you learned Christ!—assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off the old man (*τὸν παλαιὸν ἄνθρωπον*), who belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new man (*τὸν καινὸν ἄνθρωπον*), created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. (Eph 4:17-24; ESV, modified)

Paul’s references in Ephesians to baptism (4:5; 5:26-27) and the parallels in language with Colossians where the new man is connected with baptism (see: Col 2:12-13; 2:20; 3:1-4; 3:5-11; 3:12-16) indicate that for Paul this a reality grounded in baptism. This text introduces a lengthy section in which Paul exhorts and admonishes Christian to live in new obedience (4:25-6:9). He deals with many different aspects of life as he describes life that results from the Gospel. Though not the explicit rhetorical focus, the Gospel grounding for this new obedience continues to appear (see: 4:31-32; 5:25-28).

The text of 4:17-6:9 leaves little doubt about what Paul intends to accomplish. He wants the Gospel to produce the results of new obedience in lives of Christians. He wants Christians *to do certain things* and *to avoid other things*. He explicitly states this. For instance, because of Christ he wants husbands to love their wives in acts of self-sacrifice (5:25-28). The perlocutionary intent of his words is *not* to make them see their sin so that they will repent and receive forgiveness in Christ. Instead, the entire section is built on the forgiveness they already have in Christ and it describes the life this now produces in the Christians (see the explicit statement in 4:32). No doubt, readers will recognize that they are sinful because they are not doing all of this. But to assert that this is Paul’s true intent runs contrary to the structure and content of the text.

Formula of Concord article VI seeks to describe and explain what Paul is doing in texts like Eph 4:17-6:9. It explicitly distinguishes the topic of article VI, “third use of the law” from the second use in which people are led through the law “to a recognition of their sins” (FC Ep. VI.1). Instead it describes the purposes of the third use of the law as being: 1) To prevent Christians from making up their own works (FC Ep. VI.4; SD VI.3, 20) 2) To compel the old man against his will to follow the Spirit and be led by it (FC Ep. VI.4, 7; FC SD VI.6, 9, 12, 19, 24). It says that the reason this use of the law is needed *with baptized*

*Christians* is because of the old man is still present and battles against the new man (FC SD VI.18-19, 23-24). Like Paul in Ephesians, the goal described by FC VI is for the Gospel to produce the results of new obedience in the lives of Christians – for Christians *to do certain things* and *to avoid other things*. In explaining this, the Solid Declaration states:

Therefore, in this life, because of the 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]. And again, 'I punish my body and enslave it, so that after proclaiming to others I myself should not be disqualified' [1 Cor. 9:17]. And again, 'If you do not have that discipline in which all children share, you are illegitimate and not his children' [Heb. 12:8]. Similarly, Dr. Luther explained this in great detail in the summer part of the Church Postil, on the epistle for the nineteenth Sunday after Trinity (FC SD VI.9).<sup>1</sup>

The Solid Declaration points to Luther's Church Postil as a key resource for understanding this aspect of the third use of the law and the manner in which the SD VI wants to be understood in speaking about it. The Church Postil on the epistle for the Nineteenth Sunday after Trinity comments on Eph. 4:22-28. There Luther writes:

#### DUTY TO NEW AND OLD MAN

1. Here again is an admonition for Christians to follow up their faith by good works and a new life, for though they have forgiveness of sins through baptism, the old Adam still adheres to their flesh and makes himself felt in tendencies and desires to vices physical and mental. The result is that unless Christians offer resistance, they will lose their faith and the remission of sins and will in the end be worse than they were at first; for they will begin to despise and persecute the Word of God when corrected by it. Yea, even those who gladly hear the Word of God, who highly prize it and aim to follow it, have daily need of admonition and encouragement, so strong and

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000).

tough is that old hide of our sinful flesh. And so powerful and wily is our old evil foe that wherever he can gain enough of an opening to insert one of his claws, he thrusts in his whole self and will not desist until he has again sunk man into his former condemnable unbelief and his old way of despising and disobeying God.

2. Therefore, the Gospel ministry is necessary in the Church, not only for instruction of the ignorant – such as the simple, unlettered people and the children – but also for the purpose of awakening those who know very well what they are to believe and how they are to live, and admonishing them to be on their guard daily and not to become indolent, disheartened or tired in the war they must wage on this earth with the devil, with their own flesh and with all manner of evil.

3. For this reason Paul is so persistent in his admonitions that he actually seems to be overdoing it. He proceeds as if the Christians were either too dull to comprehend or so inattentive and forgetful that they must be reminded and driven. The apostle well knows that though they have made a beginning in faith and are in that state which should show the fruits of faith, such result is not so easily forthcoming. It will not do to think and say: Well, it is sufficient to have the doctrine, and if we have the Spirit and faith, then fruits and good works will follow of their own accord. For although the Spirit truly is present and, as Christ says, willing and effective in those that believe, on the other hand the flesh is weak and sluggish. Besides, the devil is not idle, but seeks to seduce our weak nature by temptations and allurements.

4. So we must not permit the people to go on in their way, neglecting to urge and admonish them, through God's Word, to lead a godly life. Indeed, you dare not be negligent and backward in this duty; for, as it is, our flesh is all too sluggish to heed the Spirit and all too able to resist it. Paul says (Galatians 5:17): "For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh...that ye may not do the things that ye would." Therefore, God is constrained to do as a good and diligent householder or ruler, who, having a slothful man-servant or maid-servant, or careless officers, who otherwise are neither wicked nor faithless, will not consider it sufficient once or

twice to direct, but will constantly be supervising and directing.<sup>2</sup>

Note that Luther is explicit in saying that Paul is providing admonition so that Christians will actually lead a godly life – so that they do what they are supposed to do and avoid the things they should not. The Solid Declaration has referenced this Luther text in explaining how it understands the third use of the law. Luther makes no mention about showing people that they are sinners. Instead, in a text referenced by the Confessions, Luther clearly indicates that *Paul's intent is to prompt Christians to live in new obedience.*

The approach that avoids admonition and exhortation would have us ignore the plain intent of the biblical texts like Eph. 4:17-6:9 and the manner in which the Confessions explain them. There is no doubt that Paul admonishes so that Christians *will actually live in new obedience.* Those who say that this cannot be our intent when speaking the law are asking us to ignore what we find in Scripture and the Confessions and instead to engage in a completely different approach.

Those who avoid admonition and exhortation are doing so on the basis of a theological argument that does not withstand scrutiny. As stated at the beginning of this article, advocates of this approach note that that we can't control how the law strikes the hearer. The law always accuses and so we must assume that it will function in its second use for some, if not most, hearers. They say that *we can never know* if the Spirit will use the law in the third use and so we are told that we should “just preach law.” Yet, the true presumption is that since “the law always accuses,” this actually ends up being the second use of the law that shows people their sin.

The argument says:

1. We can't decide how the Spirit is going to use the Law.
2. The Spirit *can* use the statement of admonition to show a person his sin.
3. For this reason we must assume that *all* admonition is second use of the law that shows a person his sin.

Now the first two points are absolutely true. However, the third one does not necessarily follow and, in fact, it runs contrary to apostolic practice. The error of this approach can be illustrated by asking a

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<sup>2</sup> Martin Luther, *Sermons of Martin Luther* (ed. John Nicholas Lenker; trans. John Nicholas Lenker and others; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1983), 8:256-257.

question about the Gospel. When the pastor says, “Jesus died on the cross for your sins,” is this Law or Gospel? One must admit that it can be either. While clearly it is a very common way to express the Gospel, the statement can also strike a person as Law: it could make him realize that he is so sinful that the Son of God had to die for him. If we follow the argument above we could say:

1. We can't decide how the Spirit is going to use Gospel statements.
2. The Spirit *can* use Gospel statements to show people their sin.
3. For this reason we must assume that *all* Gospel statements show people their sin.

Clearly #3 here is absurd. But for the same reason, so is #3 above. It is true that we can never decide how the Spirit is going to use the Law. It is true that the Spirit *can* use admonition to new obedience in order to show people their sin. But when the apostle Paul uses admonition (again and again as Luther notes), this is clearly not his goal. Instead his goal is that the Christian will live in new obedience – that they will do certain things and not do other things in life.

It should not escape our notice that Paul is no more able to control the Spirit's use of the law than we are. Yet in spite of this fact he repeatedly engages in exhortation and admonition as he seeks to lead Christians to engage in new obedience. He shows no hesitancy about speaking in this matter. In fact, as Luther observes above, “Paul is so persistent in his admonitions that he actually seems to be overdoing it” (paragraph 3).

In doing so, Paul provides the apostolic pattern that we need to follow. In fact we can go beyond that assertion. For while Paul can't control the Spirit's use of the law, in the mystery of the inspiration of Scripture what Paul *writes is exactly what the Spirit wants to be said*. The apostolic model of exhortation and admonition affirmed by Luther and described by FC VI in relation to the third use of the law is in fact *the Spirit provided model and pattern of addressing Christians*.

Our theologizing about the nature of the law and the manner in which the Spirit may or may not use it cannot be allowed to become something that precludes pastors from speaking the way Scripture speaks. Theological constructs about *the individual's experience of the law* that have their roots in Elert and the twentieth century cannot be

allowed to preempt preaching and teaching that employs the language of the inspired, apostolic pattern.<sup>3</sup>

The notion that we should “just preach law” contradicts Scripture itself because it denies we should do the very thing that Paul does – admonish and exhort Christians with the intent of having them actually engage in new obedience. Furthermore this is not something that Lutherans should consider acceptable because it also contradicts what Formula of Concord article VI says about the third use of the law. The confessors developed this article based on what Scripture actually says. The Formula of Concord does not consider the third use to be a hypothetical possibility, but rather something that the Spirit does. And so in turn it presumes that preachers will employ admonition and exhortation.

Practice that reflects the theology of the FC VI will use language that says what Scripture says. Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions teach us to address Christians with admonishment and exhortation to new obedience, for in this way the law serves to lead the Christian, who is old man and new man at the same time, to live in godly ways. The Gospel is the source of Christian living and the new man led by the Spirit freely engages in new obedience. Yet Paul’s language and the text of FC VI make clear that because of the continuing presence of the old man, preachers will also need to employ admonition and exhortation in order enable this new obedience to be carried out by Christians.

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<sup>3</sup> See Scott R. Murray, *Law, Life, and the Living God: The Third Use of the Law in Modern American Lutheranism* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2002).



## Two Kinds of Righteousness and Pastoral Care

By Jordan Cooper

Lutheranism is founded upon the great doctrine of justification by grace through faith. This teaching is at the heart of our piety and pastoral practice. When a sinner is struggling with their guilt, there is no better teaching than that of justification to comfort the conscience. However, where the church has often failed is in offering pastoral help to those in the opposite situation, those who abuse the Gospel as an excuse to be lazy, to live in sin rather than righteousness. The church's focus should always be on the Gospel, but there are many pastoral issues that simply are not addressed by the traditional Law-Gospel schema, and the proclamation of the free grace of God in Christ. Pastors would do well to implement Luther's foundational teaching of the "Two Kinds of Righteousness" in their preaching and teaching alongside of the traditional Law-Gospel approach. These are not competing paradigms, but both address different important pastoral issues which need to be dealt with.

### Defining Two Kinds of Righteousness

The distinction between the two kinds of righteousness arises from a sermon that Luther preached in 1518. In this sermon, Luther defines the first kind of righteousness as "alien righteousness, that is the righteousness of another, instilled from without."<sup>1</sup> Luther uses the context of marriage to explain what this alien righteousness is. As in a marriage, all that belongs to the wife then becomes the husband's, and all that is the husband's now belongs to the wife, through faith Christ grants all that is his to the believer. This righteousness is a vertical righteousness, establishing one's relationship with God. Through faith, human beings are justified freely by grace. This righteousness is passive. The human being does not do anything to create or earn this righteousness, but it is given by God freely, apart from works.

The second kind of righteousness described by Luther is "that manner of life spent profitably in good works, in the first place, in slaying the flesh and crucifying the desires with respect to the self."<sup>2</sup> This second kind of righteousness is not divorced from the first, but is its result. As opposed to alien righteousness, this second type is active.

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<sup>1</sup> Luther, Martin. "Two Kinds of Righteousness" *McMurry University* <<http://www.mcm.edu/~eppleyd/luther.html>>, 1. This is found in print form in: *Career of the Reformer: I*, vol. 31 of *Luther's Works*, ed. Helmut T. Lehmann and Harold J. Grimm (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1957).

<sup>2</sup> Luther, Two Kinds of Righteousness, 6.

Though human beings are passive in justification, they are active in this world through love. Active righteousness has no part in justification, but it does play a part in the believer's relationship to the broader world. Luther writes that when the believer understands free justification by grace: "then the soul no longer seeks to be righteous in and for itself, but it has Christ as its righteousness and therefore seeks only the welfare of others."<sup>3</sup> Good works are then taken away from one's vertical relationship with God, as if they have a place in determining one's justification *coram deo*, and they are placed in the realm of the neighbor. The Christian's action in the world is thus not for his own good, but for the good of others.

In 1520, Luther expounded upon this topic in his treatise *On Christian Liberty*. Luther lays out the thesis: "A Christian man is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian man is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all."<sup>4</sup> Luther distinguishes between two aspects of the human person. On the one hand, the person is a soul, living before God in grace; on the other, he has a human body, living in the world among other people. Before God, one is justified solely by grace. Luther contends that "The Word of God cannot be received and cherished by any works whatever, but only by faith. Hence it is clear that as the soul needs only the Word for its life and righteousness, so it is justified by faith alone and not by any works."<sup>5</sup> This is passive, or alien, righteousness whereby the believer is justified freely by grace apart from works. Faith unites one to Christ, and consequently receives all that is his, including his righteousness, life, and salvation. This is Christian liberty, wherein before God the believer is perfectly free and subject to no one. In terms of justification—one's relationship with God—there is absolute freedom. Luther summarizes his point here writing: "From this any one can clearly see how a Christian man is free from all things and over all things, so that he needs no works to make him righteous and to save him, since faith alone confers all these things abundantly."<sup>6</sup>

Free justification is not an excuse for licentious living. Rather, the freedom one has before God establishes an active life of love and service before the world. Luther contends:

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<sup>3</sup> Luther, *Two Kinds of Righteousness*, 9.

<sup>4</sup> Luther, Martin "Treatise on Christian Liberty," in *Works of Martin Luther Volume II* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1943), 313.

<sup>5</sup> Luther, *On Christian Liberty*, 315.

<sup>6</sup> Luther, *On Christian Liberty*, 325.

Although, as I have said, a man is abundantly justified by faith inwardly, in his spirit, and so has all that he ought to have, except in so far as this faith and riches must grow from day to day even unto the future life; yet he remains in this mortal life on earth, and in this life he must needs govern his own body and have dealings with men. Here the works begin; here a man cannot take his ease; here he must, indeed, take care to discipline his body fastings, watchings, labors and other reasonable discipline, and to make it subject to the spirit so that it will obey and conform to the inward man and to faith, and not revolt against faith and hinder the inward man, as it is the body's nature to do if it be not held in check. For the inward man, who by faith is created in the likeness of God, is both joyful and happy because of Christ in Whom so many benefits are conferred upon him, and therefore it is his one occupation to serve God joyfully and for naught, in love that is not constrained.<sup>7</sup>

Good works then, are necessary for the Christian, but not necessary for justification. They are not done to earn justification, or so that one can have something to measure the reality of his justification; rather they are done freely and joyfully. Being set free from sin and death, the believer chooses to freely become a servant of all people. Luther purports that: "I will therefore give myself as a Christ to my neighbor, just as Christ offered Himself to me; I will do nothing in this life except what I see is necessary, profitable and salutary to my neighbor, since through faith I have an abundance of all good things in Christ."<sup>8</sup>

### **Implications for Pastoral Ministry**

Theology is never abstract, but Biblical teaching impacts the way in which the believer lives his or her Christian life. Because of this, it must also necessarily affect pastoral care. Luther's teaching of the Two Kinds of Righteousness, thus has several practical implications. Charles Arand notes that:

God has established distinct estates or walks of life within which people serve. In these walks of life people are given "offices" or responsibilities that Christians recognize as callings or vocation from God. On the eve of the Reformation, many believed that God had structured the human life to be lived in

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<sup>7</sup> Luther, *On Christian Liberty*, 328.

<sup>8</sup> Luther, *On Christian Liberty*, 338.

three situations: home (both family and economic activities), the political realm, and the church. By virtue of their creatureliness, people are commissioned to discharge complementary tasks in these offices for the good of creation and human society. By virtue of their Baptisms, Christians are given the task of confessing the name of Christ within every walk of life. All Christians bring the message of repentance and forgiveness of sins in ways appropriate to their walks of life. In other words, Luther stressed that by virtue of Baptism, every Christian had the responsibility and privilege to share the Word of God with others.<sup>9</sup>

Since every Christian serves in various vocations in the world, the pastor must have a role in establishing how one lives in these various areas of life. All church members are also part of a family, community, and broader society, and thus the pastor must equip them to serve in all of these areas. Where this does not occur, the congregants are likely to divorce the Christian life which is active on Sunday mornings, from their every-day activities which occur throughout the week.

All human beings live in the midst of two kinds of relationships; they are in relationship to God, and in relationship to other human beings. For the non-believer, the relationship with God is a negative one, as his grace is rejected. However, for the believer, this relationship with God is established through the righteousness of Christ imputed to the sinner by faith. In other words, man does not establish this relationship, but it is a purely passive one. God establishes it by his divine act of grace by creating faith in the sinner's heart and bringing himself to dwell within the believer. These same people are also in relationship with others. Here they are not to passively receive, but God calls them to be active through loving and serving the broader world.<sup>10</sup> It is the role of the church to equip the saints in living out both of these relationships in the two realms in which the human being was created.

### **Passive Righteousness in Pastoral Practice**

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<sup>9</sup> Arand, Charles. "The Ministry of the Church in Light of the Two Kinds of Righteousness," *Concordia Journal* 33.4 (2007), 344-356, 346.

<sup>10</sup> Jacobs discusses this relationship in terms of the two different aspects of faith: "Has faith, then, more than one office? It has two, one receptive and apprehensive, by which man takes to himself the righteousness of Christ, and the other operative, by which the justified man is active in works of love." Jacobs, Henry Eyster. *A Summary of the Christian Faith* (Fairfield, IA: Just and Sinner, 2014), 237.

Passive righteousness is at the center of the pastoral call. As a minister of the Word, one is commissioned to deliver God's grace in the form of Word and Sacrament to the congregation, and that congregation receives these gifts passively, being granted a righteousness from God that is through faith. This is the heart of the ministry of the church. The people of God are established as his children and justified, not by anything that they have done, but by the free grace of God in Christ.

It is essential for the congregation to understand their roles in the worship service as those who receive God's gifts, not as those who work for them. The pastor stands as the one who offers God's gifts during the worship service, and the people receive them for the forgiveness of their sins. The pattern of each worship service is that God first grants his gifts, and consequently the people respond with praise and thanksgiving. This approach to the worship service is centered on God's passive righteousness, that which God grants freely and which is received by faith.

There are several issues which can arise in the congregation that a proper understanding of passive righteousness can help to solve. First, an understanding that the worship service is about divine imputation rather than human effort helps defend the congregation against false views of worship which pervade the American culture. Many view the worship service as a place to become motivated. It is believed that the service should be as entertaining as possible, and should coerce the attendees to believe in God's Word and to obey his will. Second, this approach to worship demonstrates that moralism is the essence of the Christian life. Many in the church view justification as a one-time reality that is in the past, with no practical value in sanctified living.<sup>11</sup> Finally, understanding passive righteousness helps to defend against an obsessive emotionalism which pervades the contemporary church. The service is not about subjective feelings, but about God's objective work. These correctives will be examined in light of the sacraments: Baptism, the Holy Eucharist, and Absolution.

### Baptism as God's Work

Much of the contemporary church views baptism as a work that man does in demonstration of his faith. It is a response to God's call. It is only believers who can be baptized, and they are baptized by immersion, symbolizing a death and resurrection to sin that occurs

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<sup>11</sup> On the continual nature of justification, Jacobs notes that: "while instantaneous, [justification] is an act of God, that is constantly repeated. Man's nature, until the end of life being infected with sin, needs, when regarded by itself, constant forgiveness." Jacobs, Henry Eyster. *Elements of Religion* (Fairfield, IA: Just and Sinner 2014), 196.

through regeneration. In this view, there is no intrinsic connection between regeneration and the baptismal act. Baptism is not an act done by God through the hands of the minister, but instead is something that an individual believer does to demonstrate his faith to the broader community. The Baptist Faith and Message states:

Christian baptism is the immersion of a believer in water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is an act of obedience symbolizing the believer's faith in a crucified, buried, and risen Saviour, the believer's death to sin, the burial of the old life, and the resurrection to walk in newness of life in Christ Jesus. It is a testimony to his faith in the final resurrection of the dead. Being a church ordinance, it is prerequisite to the privileges of church membership and to the Lord's Supper.<sup>12</sup>

This perspective on the sacrament of baptism is predominant in Baptist, Pentecostal, and even Barthian theology.<sup>13</sup>

A clear understanding of baptism from the perspective of passive righteousness demonstrates that this view of the sacrament is highly mistaken; it is not a work of man, but of God.<sup>14</sup> There are several places in Scripture where this is made apparent, but for the sake of brevity, one example will be discussed. In Acts 2, Peter preaches his great Pentecost sermon: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). There are several things to note about this text. First, it is important to examine the context of this statement and what Peter is responding to. In the narrative, Peter tells the Jews that they have rejected the divinely sent prophets and have killed the messiah. Luke writes: "when they heard this they were cut to the heart" (Acts 2:37). The listeners felt the guilt of their sin, and were waiting for Peter to give them an answer to this dilemma. Baptism is then given as the solution to the problem of guilt, because through it sins are forgiven. It would make no sense in response to this dilemma to speak about a symbolic act of baptism which does not forgive sins.

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<sup>12</sup> "The 2000 Baptist Faith and Message" (Southern Baptist Convention) <<http://www.sbc.net/bfm/bfm2000.asp>> Baptism and the Lord's Supper, VII.

<sup>13</sup> On Barth's view of baptism as man's work, see: Barth, Karl. G.W. Bromiley (Trans). *The Christian Life: Baptism as the Foundation of the Christian Life (CD IV.4)*. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1969).

<sup>14</sup> Voigt explains: "Baptism confers the Holy Spirit and remission of sins, and thereby regeneration and entrance into the church." Voigt, A.G. *Biblical Dogmatics* (Fairfield, IA: Just and Sinner, 2014), 211.

Second, βαπτισθητω is a passive verb, describing an action that is happening *to* someone. One does not baptize themselves, but is baptized by someone else. Finally, the language in this text is clearly instrumental: “εις αφεσιν των αμαρτιων υμων” (for the forgiveness of sins); there is simply no reason to assume that the text means anything other than its plain meaning.<sup>15</sup>

In a congregational context, such a view of baptism will have profound implications on the manner in which people view their Christian faith and the function of the church. Baptism is the instance in which one becomes a part of the church. Therefore, what one thinks about baptism will formulate their view of Christian identity. If baptism is a symbolic action by which a person publically declares their faith, then the Christian life finds its beginning in the action of the believer. Henceforth, the Christian life will largely be viewed as the individual’s actions in obedience to God’s commandments. When the Biblical doctrine of baptism is held firmly, God’s people will understand that their relationship with God is a passive one, established by grace.

#### The Lord’s Supper as God’s Gift

Similar in many respects to the sacrament of baptism, the Eucharist is often viewed, in the contemporary American church, as a work of man. In evangelical churches, the Supper is usually viewed primarily as an act of remembrance, and of professing Christ before the world. The Baptist Faith and Message states: “The Lord’s Supper is a symbolic act of obedience whereby members of the church, through partaking of the bread and the fruit of the vine, memorialize the death of the Redeemer and anticipate His second coming.”<sup>16</sup> This doctrine of the Supper is a confusion of active and passive righteousness, as the Supper is primarily viewed as the Christian’s activity rather than God’s gift.

The idea of remembrance is indeed Biblical, as the Gospel of Luke quotes Jesus saying: “This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me” (Luke 22:19). This is not, however, exhaustive of the church’s understanding of Holy Communion. It is only Luke who includes the anamnesis in his account of the last supper, which indicates that Matthew and Mark did not view it as the central purpose of the Eucharist. In Matthew’s Gospel, when Jesus is giving the cup he says: “[F]or this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured

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<sup>15</sup> Kretzmann notes, commenting on this text: “Baptism is not a mere symbol or form of initiation into the brotherhood of believers, nor is it a work by which remission of sins is earned. The water of Baptism, through the power of the Word which is in and with the water, transmits and gives the remission of sins as earned by Jesus Christ.” Popular Commentary, Acts 2:38.

<sup>16</sup> 2000 Baptist Faith and Message, VII.

out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Matt. 26:28). It is the testamentary character of the Supper which needs to be remembered in these texts, as it appears in each account of the Supper. The Supper is a testament, or a divine promise that Jesus gives to his people, which is ultimately for the forgiveness of sins. The Supper is taken in remembrance of Jesus’ sacrifice, but is not then divorced from that sacrifice as a purely human act. The forgiveness that Jesus won on Calvary is imparted through the elements. Thus, the Eucharist is a gift of God offered to man, not a work of man offered to God.<sup>17</sup>

Where this is essential in pastoral practice is that it assures the Christian that his entire Christian walk is one of grace, dependent upon God’s gifts rather than human effort. The Supper is that sacrament which defines the ongoing nature of the Christian life because it is done repeatedly. Baptism initiates the Christian life, and Holy Communion helps this life to be sustained and to grow. Thus, if the Eucharist is viewed as a human work done purely in remembrance of a past act of salvation, the ongoing Christian life is framed primarily around active righteousness, and the continual nature of forgiveness is lost. In a congregational setting, this will cause the congregation to lose sight of the gospel, and instead focus on their own moral transformation. Where the pastor rightly emphasizes the gracious nature of the Eucharist, the essence of the Christian life is then founded upon the passive righteousness that God gives. If the sacrament is God’s gift wherein he offers forgiveness and mercy, then the continual Christian life is one of reception. This defends against the moralistic account of the Christian life emphasized in popular culture.

### Holy Absolution as God’s Gift

The two chief sacraments of Holy Baptism and the Lord’s Supper are still celebrated in most Protestant churches. What has sometimes been labeled the “third sacrament” of absolution is not practiced in many theological traditions.<sup>18</sup> A modified form of absolution is practiced within some Reformed congregations and in the Anglican tradition, but the broader evangelical world has abandoned this practice. This is an

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<sup>17</sup> Stump purports that “the Lord’s Supper is much more than a mere memorial. If it were only that, Matthew and Mark would not have omitted the words, “This do in remembrance of me.” It is a sacrament, and conveys grace to men. Like the Word and baptism it is a Means of Grace through which the Holy Spirit not only makes known to men the grace of God, but works in their hearts.” Stump, Joseph. *The Christian Faith: A System of Christian Dogmatics* (Minneapolis: Muhlenberg, 1942), 347.

<sup>18</sup> Absolution is referred to as a sacrament in the Apology XIII.4, and the Large Catechism 74.

unfortunate fact of history, because where absolution is forgotten, the structure and emphasis of the worship service is greatly affected; the congregants no longer look to an objective promise of God, but are left to search for a subjective experience during worship

Holy Absolution, or the office of the keys, is discussed three different times in the Gospels. In Matthew 16, Jesus grants the keys of the kingdom to Peter saying: "I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matt. 16:19). Jesus is granting to Peter, the chief of the apostles, the authority to forgive sins. Two chapters later, Jesus reiterates this promise to all of his disciples saying: "Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matt. 18:18). John tells of an instance after the resurrection where Jesus tells his disciples similarly: "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained" (John 20:22-23). According to these texts, the apostles are given authority to forgive sins. This authority is given to the church, and the ministers are those in the church who use this gift.

How one begins a worship service, or any type of service for that matter, frames the rest of the service. In the same way that the beginning of a film sets the tone for the rest of the movie, so does the beginning of a gathering in the church. In many contemporary settings, the church service begins with twenty minutes of emotionally intensifying worship music. This frames the entire service around subjective feeling, and this shapes the message preached and how individuals live out their faith throughout the rest of the week. If absolution opens up the service after the first hymn, the entire service then flows from the objective action whereby the minister declares the forgiveness of sins unto the congregation. This again demonstrates the emphasis in terms of action. With contemporary worship music opening a service, the emphasis is on the emotion and words of the congregation given to God; if absolution begins the service, it is passive righteousness which frames the rest of the mass. If the objective word spoken in Holy Absolution is taught by the pastor to be the central liturgical action that it is, then the emotionalism which has taken hold of many congregations can be guarded against.

### **Active Righteousness in Pastoral Practice**

Though passive righteousness is the primary context in which the pastor is placed in relation to the congregation, he is also called to equip and encourage the congregants unto lives of active righteousness

in the world. The pastor is not primarily placed in his office to be a motivator to the congregation, but he must teach people that the passive righteousness received in faith always leads to active righteousness of love out in the world. An understanding of active righteousness solves several common congregational issues in Lutheran churches. Understanding active righteousness will give the people an understanding that the Christian faith affects all areas of their lives, not simply Sunday mornings. It also puts the mission of the church in reaching out with works of love and service in a proper and helpful context. Finally, teaching active righteousness helps to build the understanding of the church as a community.

### Vocation

It is a constant danger in the Lutheran church for people to assume that the Christian faith is only relevant to their lives on Sunday mornings. Because of the emphasis the church places on the forgiveness of sins, there are many congregants who go to church Sunday mornings to receive their forgiveness for the week in the sacrament and then leave the service ready to ignore their Christian faith until the next Sunday morning. They simply have no place for the Christian life in their daily activities, because what is talked about in church is the relationship one has with God, but during the week, one has to focus on their relationship with fellow human persons. It is easy for one to assume that the Christian faith is not relevant to ordinary life.

An understanding of active righteousness, especially in the context of vocation, will give the congregants a manner in which they can connect the forgiveness received on Sunday to their active life in their jobs, families, and communities. Luther argued that the faith has a profound impact on daily living, because God has called Christians into various vocations in the world. These vocations are opportunities to serve one's neighbors, as God uses people as his own hands to serve the world.<sup>19</sup> Paul addresses the importance of vocation in several parts of his epistles. For example, in 2 Thessalonians he writes:

Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is living in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us; we were not idle when we were with you, we did not eat any

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<sup>19</sup> The classic work on this subject is: Wingren, Gustaf. *Luther on Vocation* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1957).

one's bread without paying, but with toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not burden any of you. It was not because we have not that right, but to give you in your conduct an example to imitate. For even when we were with you, we gave you this command: If any one will not work, let him not eat. For we hear that some of you are living in idleness, mere busybodies, not doing any work. Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work in quietness and to earn their own living. (2 Thess. 3:6-12)

There were apparently some in the Thessalonian church who thought that the Christian faith had given them freedom from work. They had believed the Gospel, received the forgiveness of sins, and now they could simply wait around for Jesus to return. This was a confusion of active and passive righteousness. They assumed that passive righteousness was the manner in which both one's relationship with God and the world were established. In response to this attitude, Paul reminds the Thessalonians that he himself had worked, and that it was their Christian responsibility to work in quietness and to earn their own living. One's work is not, then, divorced from the Christian faith but is informed and strengthened by it.

Pastors need to teach on this doctrine of vocation on a regular basis. The congregants need to understand that the Bible speaks, not only to their relationship with God in the church, but to their place in the broader community. The grace of God gives one motivation to serve the neighbor in their job, and also within the family life. Paul gives extensive exhortations to husbands, wives, parents, and children (Eph. 5:21-6:9). This need not happen in the context of motivational speeches during the Sunday service on how to be a good father, or husband. But as does Paul, the pastor can give such admonitions in light of the free forgiveness of sins that comes through the Gospel.

### Active Righteousness and the Mission of the Church

Luther's doctrine of active righteousness does not only affect the individual's relationship to their family, co-workers, and neighbors, but also informs the function of the church. The church's primary mission is to proclaim the Gospel, but the church also must actively serve the community. It does this through providing for the spiritual and physical needs of others. The church must be active in bringing the Gospel to the broader culture, proclaiming the forgiveness of sins to those who do not yet believe it; it also needs to be active in providing the community with various needs that it has.

The Great Commission was given not only to the apostles, but to the entire church. Thus, it is the church that is to make disciples in the world. Lutherans have never been the best at evangelism efforts, as the most popular outreach methods and events have generally been led by Arminian evangelicals, and therefore is dependent upon a faulty view of conversion. But with a proper understanding of the distinction between passive and active righteousness, evangelism efforts can be strengthened and renewed. Christians are not to evangelize because they are afraid of God's anger at them for not doing so, or with the thought that it is somehow up to the human person to convert someone else, but believers do it simply because God desires it. They do it in thanksgiving for the Gospel. Because God has been merciful, one then desires to tell others about this mercy. Evangelism then becomes something that is joyful, rather than a burden.

Works of love and service are also intimately connected to the task of the church. It is incumbent upon the church, not only to provide for the spiritual, but also the physical needs of the community. This can be done in several different ways. Some churches run soup kitchens or food banks, whereas others donate gifts to the poor in some other manner. What often happens is that the church views its relationship to the community as one of reception. The community is viewed as a resource which the church should draw on to raise funds. This is why fund raising events are the norm. However, when it is understood that one's relationship to the world is not passive but active, then the church will begin to see itself as a resource to the community rather than vice versa. It is here that actual outreach can begin.

### The Church as a Community

There is often a failure of the church in recognizing itself as a community of believers. People sometimes see only the vertical dimension of the service while failing to understand the importance of Christian fellowship on the horizontal level. They go to church for the purpose of hearing the sermon and receiving the Sacraments, and then leave the doors of the church without any further interaction with those in the congregation on Sunday morning. When this happens, the fellowship tears itself apart, and it hampers visitors from returning to the church. When someone visits a church, they are often looking for fulfillment of both the vertical and horizontal relationships in their lives. They want good preaching, but they also want some sense of community and fellowship. Lacking this aspect of horizontal righteousness will ruin the local church and opportunities for outreach.

The New Testament is very concerned about the nature of the relationship developed between fellow believers in the congregation.

Paul urges the Galatians to “do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of faith” (Gal. 6:10). This informs us that the Christian’s duty horizontally is not only outward toward the unbelieving world but also, and even principally, to those who are in the church. This is why Paul spent time tackling the divisions that occurred within the Corinthians church admonishing: “I appeal to you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree and that there be no dissensions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment” (1 Cor. 1:10). This lack of horizontal fellowship between Christians almost ruined that congregation. At the inception of the church this intimate fellowship was experienced perhaps more profoundly than ever in the church’s history. Luke writes: “Now the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had everything in common” (Acts 4:32). It is apparent that the unity and fellowship of believers is a central concern of the New Testament.

There are several practical steps that a congregation can take toward correcting this problem. First, there should always be a time of fellowship during a coffee hour either before or after the service. This encourages the notion that one does not simply attend church to receive forgiveness and then leave as quickly as possible, but demonstrates the importance of Christian fellowship. Second, the pastor should encourage fellowship and Bible study between men in the congregation. It is common for women to get together for Bible studies and other events during the year, but men are often left without such fellowship. The bonding of men in the congregation then gives an example to the women and children who are under his roof. Finally, the young adults in the congregation should have a regular time to get together. The church has historically emphasized children’s and youth ministry, and Bible studies for adults. Young adults are often left out of both groups, without fellowship and anything to encourage them in the Christian faith. Making a conscious effort to reach this age group is incumbent upon the church.

## **Conclusion**

The distinction between active and passive righteousness is not a theological abstraction, but is immensely helpful in practical pastoral ministry. On the one hand, passive righteousness helps the believers to understand who they are in Christ. A proper understanding of the righteousness that comes from God by imputation guards against contemporary issues in the church such as pragmatism, moralism, and emotionalism. On the other, active righteous is a necessary teaching to

instruct the church in its manner of acting in the broader world. A proper understanding of this second type of righteousness helps the church to understand its mission in giving to the spiritual and physical needs of the outside world, as well as encouraging fellowship within the body of Christ.

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## **This May Be Our Theology, But Was it Luther's? The Homiletical Limitations of Today's Version of "The Two Kinds of Righteousness"**

By Michael T. Badenhop

During the pivotal years of the Reformation, Martin Luther developed his understanding of the two kinds of righteousness in the context of the proclamation of God's Word. "There are two kinds of Christian righteousness, just as man's sin is of two kinds," Luther proclaimed in his 1519 sermon entitled "Two Kinds of Righteousness."<sup>1</sup> It was no historical accident that Luther developed the distinction between the passive righteousness of faith and the active righteousness of good works homiletically. Indeed, the distinction has extensive kerygmatic implications, affecting the way we preach God's Word to His people. In recent years, however, what many Lutheran pastors and theologians have touted as the "two kinds of righteousness" has oversimplified Luther's distinction, creating serious hermeneutical and homiletical deficiencies in today's understanding of the distinction. At the same time, many of today's Lutheran scholars have also overstated the centrality of today's simplified interpretation of the two kinds of righteousness to Lutheran theology, claiming that "it is impossible to understand the Lutheran tradition without recognizing and employing it."<sup>2</sup> Defined too narrowly, the modern understanding of the two kinds of righteousness diminishes the scope of God's law in distinct contrast to its historical precedent, impoverishing the sermons of those who use it as a framework for preaching Biblical texts.

Is the Two Kinds of Righteousness an "Antinomian" Problem?

When it comes to the realm of homiletics, today's narrow understanding of the two kinds of righteousness paradigm restricts our ability to proclaim the fullness of God's law to our congregations. This limitation comes as a great surprise to those who identify the distinction with the heart of Lutheran theology since they hardly intend to restrict the preaching of God's Word. Rather, many theologians believe the two kinds of righteousness expands our freedom to preach

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Luther, "The Two Kinds of Righteousness," in *Career of the Reformer: I*, vol. 31 of *Luther's Works*, ed. Helmut T. Lehmann and Harold J. Grimm (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1957), 297.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Kolb, "Luther on the Two Kinds of Righteousness; Reflections on His Two-Dimensional Definition of Humanity at the Heart of His Theology," *Lutheran Quarterly* 13, no. 4 (1999): 465.

the law. Charles Arand, for example, believes that the distinction “restores the law of God and the structures of life to their original place of importance.”<sup>3</sup> Likewise, some hold that the paradigm “expands our vision of Christian living,” giving us more room to talk about Christian morality than the traditional law/gospel distinction.<sup>4</sup> No matter how lofty these ideas are, however, the two kinds of righteousness paradigm cannot deliver the fullness of the law to the Christian preacher or to his congregation. Though unintentional, preaching strictly according to the two kinds of righteousness distinction deprives the pastor of the first table of the law, robbing him of part of his arsenal for delivering the law to God’s people by effectively limiting the scope of God’s law in preaching.

Perhaps the way we talk about the two kinds of righteousness distinction these days demonstrates this restriction most clearly. We often use a common visual aid to describe active and passive righteousness: a vertical line to represent mankind’s relationship with God and a horizontal line to represent relationships with God’s creation. By this image, we understand that “God’s human creatures are right—really human—in their vertical relationship because their faith embraces the God who loves them through Jesus Christ...[and] they are right—really human—in their horizontal relationship with God’s other creatures when they live a life which is active in reflecting his love through the deeds deliver his care and concern.”<sup>5</sup> Together, these two dimensions depict “what it means to be fully human,” accounting for our identity as God’s creatures in relationship with Him and for our activity toward the rest of His creation.<sup>6</sup> On the surface, this sounds like a perfectly fine and even cruciform depiction of the Christian life. However, if we reduce the scope of preaching to a vertical dimension realized by faith in Christ and a horizontal dimension realized by activity toward neighbor, we leave our options for preaching the first table of the law in a precarious position. We must either subsume the first table under vertical passive righteousness or account for it within the scheme of horizontal relationships with God’s creation.

Though incorporating the first three commandments into our understanding of passive righteousness creates obvious theological difficulties, it provides the most natural understanding of how the first

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<sup>3</sup> Charles P. Arand, “Two Kinds of Righteousness as a Framework for Law and Gospel in the Apology,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 15, no. 4 (2001): 434.

<sup>4</sup> Arand and Biermann, “Why the Two Kinds of Righteousness?” *Concordia Journal* 33, no. 2 (2007): 128.

<sup>5</sup> Kolb, “Luther on the Two Kinds of Righteousness,” 453.

<sup>6</sup> Arand and Biermann, 127.

table of the law might fit into the paradigm of two kinds of righteousness. Some proponents of the distinction tend toward this direction. For example, Robert Kolb writes, “By differentiating the two dimensions in which human creatures were created to be human, or righteous, Luther was establishing as his fundamental hermeneutical principle what Jesus was referring to when he divided the law into two parts: loving the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, and mind, and loving our neighbors as ourselves.”<sup>7</sup> As persuasive as this may sound, Kolb equates the two great commandments, love of God and love of neighbor, with vertical passive righteousness and horizontal active righteousness respectively. By this reasoning, passive righteousness corresponds to the love of God while active righteousness corresponds to the love of neighbor. Understanding Jesus’ words as a division between these two dimensions of humanity illustrates a great limitation in the two kinds of righteousness distinction. Insofar as Christians keep the first table of the law, loving the Lord with all their heart, soul, and mind, relating the greatest commandment to our vertical relationship with God remains plausible. The failures of God’s people, however, give us reason to question the relationship between the first table and passive righteousness. What happens, for example, when we do not fear, love, and trust God above all things? As long as the first table correlates to the vertical relationship and therefore to passive righteousness, failure to love God creates uncertainty about the righteousness of faith. In other words, failure to keep the first table forces us to question the reality of our passive righteousness before God. Of course, no right-minded Lutheran or proponent of the two kinds of righteousness distinction would ever claim that breaking the first table calls passive righteousness into doubt, but the way we divide between vertical and horizontal relationships blurs the line between the two kinds of righteousness by bringing those commandments which deal with the way we relate to our Creator into the passive, “vertical,” dimension of Christian righteousness.

Not only do today’s proponents of the two kinds of righteousness obfuscate the distinction between active and passive righteousness by mixing the first table of the law with passive righteousness, but they also solidify their error by imagining an active righteousness devoid of the first table of the law. Just as the first table sneaks into the vertical relationship, it also finds a way to abscond from the realm of active righteousness. The way in which recent theologians describe active righteousness lacks any connection between the first table of the law and a Christian’s proper righteousness. Instead, active

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<sup>7</sup> Kolb, “Luther on the Two Kinds of Righteousness,” 451.

righteousness consists of only the horizontal dimension of life, for “God’s human creatures... are right—really human—in their horizontal relationship with God’s other creatures when they live a life which is active in reflecting his love through deeds that deliver his care and concern.”<sup>8</sup> The two kinds of righteousness model insists that “active righteousness must remain on earth within the realm of our relationships with our fellow human creatures.”<sup>9</sup> Consistently described in terms of relationships with God’s creation, the active righteousness of works includes only part of God’s law, hounding God’s creatures to serve others but offering nothing of His will for how God designed His creatures to act toward Him. When “the active righteousness of works serves the well-being of creation by looking after our neighbor and God’s creation,” it defines Christian living only in terms of outward activity toward other created beings.<sup>10</sup> While certainly representing a significant portion of God’s will for His creation, limiting active righteousness to love of neighbor only gives Christians part of the picture by disregarding the commandments upon which the second table depends. As Luther’s Small Catechism teaches us, after all, each commandment requires that we first of all fear and love God in obedience to the first table.<sup>11</sup> Whether wittingly or not, by defining the two kinds of righteousness in terms of a vertical, passive relationship with God and a horizontal, active relationship with God’s creation, a narrow understanding of the distinction entirely neglects the first table of the law.

For this reason, though it attempts to guard against antinomianism, the two kinds of righteousness model invents a new kind of “antinomianism” when we oversimplify it into a two-dimensional model for Christian life and identity. While it certainly stops far short of claiming that “the reborn do not learn from the law new obedience or the good works in which they are to walk,” today’s paradigm instructs the believer to new obedience with only a portion of the law.<sup>12</sup> Either by neglecting the necessity of the first table for active righteousness or by precariously mixing the first three commandments with passive righteousness, our narrow understanding of the two kinds of righteousness tries to redefine the law by cutting it apart or by calling it gospel.<sup>13</sup> In this sense, the two kinds of righteousness

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<sup>8</sup> Kolb, “Luther on the Two Kinds of Righteousness,” 453.

<sup>9</sup> Arand and Biermann, 121.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

<sup>11</sup> SC, 1-20.

<sup>12</sup> FC SD VI, 2.

<sup>13</sup> The second possibility, mixing the first table with passive righteousness, comes the closest to the historical error of antinomianism by

paradigm has the potential to create precisely the error it seeks to avoid.

As a result of our adherence to a flawed interpretation of the two kinds of righteousness, our preaching also becomes functionally “antinomian” when we define the active righteousness too narrowly to the neglect of the first and greatest commandment.<sup>14</sup> Our sermons act out “against the law” when we omit the first table from our proclamation of active righteousness. Thus, while we may not be antinomian in our doctrine, in practice we show otherwise. If we hold strictly to today’s understanding of the two kinds of righteousness in our preaching, we call the first table of God’s law something other than law. We either by omit the first table from our proclamation and thereby deem it insignificant to God’s will in active righteousness, or we or include it in passive righteousness and thereby equate it with the gospel. Therefore, because it does not account for all of God’s commandments, the two kinds of righteousness model limits our preaching of Christian living solely to love of neighbor without regard for the command to fear, love, and trust in God. This does not provide a more expansive view of what it means to live as God’s children; it offers a very narrow view of life in Christ.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, the assertion that “the distinction of two kinds righteousness restores the law of God and the structures of life to their original place of importance,” though it sounds promising, simply does not describe the reality of preaching under the paradigm of two kinds of righteousness.<sup>16</sup> What begins as an attempt to create new possibilities for preaching actually limits the pastor’s understanding of what it means to proclaim the fullness of God’s will to His people, creating a new kind of functional

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essentially asserting “that this teaching is not to be presented from the standpoint of the law because the reborn have been liberated by the Son of God, have become temples of the Spirit, and thus are free” (FC SD VI, 2). What else would it mean if we were to bring the first three commandments of God into our passive righteousness through Christ? We would either have to admit to the mixture of law and gospel, or we would be forced to call the first table of the law something other than what it is, equating it with the gospel or passive righteousness.

<sup>14</sup> Here, by “functionally antinomian” I do not mean antinomian in the strictly historical sense of the term, but in the sense that we act out “against the law” either by omission or by equating the first table of the Decalogue with passive righteousness in our preaching.

<sup>15</sup> Arand and Biermann, 128, claim that the paradigm “expand[s] our vision of Christian living.”

<sup>16</sup> Arand, *Framework*, 434.

antinomianism among those who use the distinction as a model for preaching.

For all these reasons, today's two kinds of righteousness model also fails to provide the overarching paradigm or presupposition for the proper distinction between law and gospel. Because the law requires right activity toward both God and His creation, and since the two kinds of righteousness distinction does not provide an adequate model for preaching the first table of the law, the assertion that "Law and Gospel fit within the paradigm of the two kinds of righteousness" overstates the case.<sup>17</sup> A paradigm which only expresses part of the law cannot provide the overarching means by which we comprehend and proclaim the entirety of God's will. Preaching law and gospel must go beyond proclaiming the narrow sense of active and passive righteousness to God's people, or else the law will have been emptied of what Jesus identifies as the greatest commandment.

Therefore, by restricting our vision with regard to the first table of the law, the two kinds of righteousness paradigm betrays one of its greatest limitations: its inability to provide a comprehensive framework for proclaiming God's will to His people. While the paradigm may describe an anthropological distinction within theology, namely that there are two relationships to be had, one of which depends on faith and the other of which depends on works, it does not adequately describe the complexity of those relationships or of God's will for human life. Instead, dividing our relationships into vertical and horizontal dimensions oversimplifies our understanding of God's word and of the preaching task, curbing our ability to preach the first, second, and third commandments of the Decalogue. As it currently stands, the two kinds of righteousness paradigm unnecessarily restricts our ability to preach God's will to His people, impoverishing our sermons by neglecting the first table of God's law.

#### Active Righteousness in Luther's 1519 Sermon

At risk of "getting back to Luther," perhaps a look at Luther's understanding of the two kinds of righteousness would help today's pastors and theologians expand their narrow understanding of the paradigm beyond identifying active righteousness solely with the second table of the law. Luther's sermon entitled "Two Kinds of Righteousness" provides an early glimpse into the reformer's own understanding of the distinction, and it does so in the form of homiletical material. As a result, the sermon delivers Luther's teaching and, at the same time, presents it in a form which helps us understand

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<sup>17</sup> Arand and Biermann, 128

the function of the two kinds of righteousness in proclamation. In contrast to today's understanding of the two kinds of righteousness, we do not see a narrowing of active righteousness to the realm of the second table of the law in Luther's sermon. Instead, Luther presents active righteousness in its fullest sense without mixing the demands of God's law with the passive righteousness of faith.

Even though we tend to limit our understanding of active righteousness to works of love done for the benefit of our neighbors, Luther's 1519 sermon proves far less restrictive. Within his understanding of active righteousness, Luther includes not only the Christian's relationship with the rest of creation but also his right activity toward himself and God. Luther says as much immediately after introducing the second kind of righteousness, proclaiming, "This [proper righteousness] is that manner of life spent profitably in good works, in the first place, in slaying the flesh and crucifying the desires with respect to the self...In the second place, this righteousness consists in love to one's neighbor, and in the third place, in meekness and fear toward God. The Apostle is full of references to these, as is all the rest of Scripture."<sup>18</sup> Instead of excluding the first table of the law, Luther defines active righteousness in a way that includes more than our ethical activity in the realm of creaturely relationships. Activity, attitude, and disposition toward God all factor into the reformer's understanding of active righteousness along with the mortification of the flesh. Therefore, Luther's perception of the two kinds of righteousness becomes more nuanced than a simple split between vertical and horizontal dimensions of the Christian life. In Luther's sermon, active righteousness includes all the law, requiring the proclamation of the entirety of God's will to His people.

Adding further nuance to the two kinds of righteousness, Luther connects the first and second tables of the law so that the mortification of the flesh, love of neighbor, and devout life toward God become inseparable. Active righteousness not only consists of the entirety of God's will for His creatures, but also insists that no part of His law stands alone:

This [proper or active] righteousness goes on to complete the first for it ever strives to do away with the old Adam and to destroy the body of sin. Therefore it hates itself and loves its neighbor; it does not seek its own good, but that of another, and in this its whole way of living consists. For in that it hates itself and does not seek its own, it crucifies the flesh. Because it

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<sup>18</sup> Luther, "Two Kinds of Righteousness," 299.

seeks the good of another, it works love. Thus in each sphere it does God's will, living soberly with self, justly with neighbor, devoutly toward God.<sup>19</sup>

As a result, "in each sphere [active righteousness] does God's will, living soberly with self, justly with neighbor, devoutly toward God."<sup>20</sup> Because right activity and disposition toward self, neighbor, and God comprise the entirety of God's law, Luther neither separates them into distinct "vertical" or "horizontal" dimensions of Christian living, nor does he simply omit the first table or the mortification of the flesh from active righteousness because they do not fit into a neatly packaged framework. Rather, he presents the entirety of God's law as the requirement of the believer's proper righteousness, forgetting nothing that God commands. In contrast to current trends in Lutheranism, Luther's sermon presents an expansive perspective of active righteousness by including and interrelating both tables of God's law, not just those commandments which pertain to ethical behavior in society.

In spite of this more comprehensive and complex understanding of active righteousness, some might counter with the observation that Luther's sermon still explains active righteousness primarily in terms of the second table. Luther certainly narrows his focus to good works shown toward neighbor throughout a majority of the sermon, acknowledging the place of the first table in active righteousness but devoting little time to it. Instead, he focuses on the fact that "the soul no longer seeks to be righteous in and for itself, but it has Christ as its righteousness and therefore seeks only the welfare of others."<sup>21</sup> Luther also adds that the Word of God as preached in his sermon evinces "how one must conduct himself with his neighbor in each situation."<sup>22</sup> Such statements illustrate the centrality of the love of neighbor in Luther's sermon. This might lead us to ask whether or not Luther primarily identified active righteousness with the second table of the law and only mentioned the first table in passing. If true, such an observation could potentially support today's emphasis on horizontal relationships when it comes to active righteousness.

One important detail tempers our enthusiasm in this direction, however. Perhaps the most significant yet most overlooked aspect of "The Two Kinds of Righteousness" is its form. Luther's sermon is

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<sup>19</sup> Luther, "Two Kinds of Righteousness," 300.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Luther, "Two Kinds of Righteousness," 300.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 303.

precisely that, a sermon, not a theological treatise but a proclamation of God's Word to His people. As a sermon, "The Two Kinds of Righteousness" proclaims the Word of God, and in this instance focuses on a specific passage from the Scriptures. From the very beginning Luther assures the congregation that a Biblical text is at the heart of his sermon by quoting the passage under consideration: Philippians 2:5-6.<sup>23</sup> On the basis of this text, Luther makes the often quoted assertion, "There are two kinds of Christian righteousness," the "alien righteousness" of faith (later called passive righteousness), and the "proper righteousness" of good works (later called active righteousness).<sup>24</sup> We should not ignore the fact that Luther works with a Biblical text in mind, because it clarifies his intentions in making the distinction. Had Luther intended to write a theological exposition concerning an overarching paradigm for all of Lutheran theology, we would likely find it within the canon of his works. However, the 1519 sermon provides homiletical material dealing with a specific text of Scripture and so identifies two kinds of righteousness as a teaching within the Word of God. This at least raises some questions for our understanding of the two kinds of righteousness. First of all, we might fairly question whether or not Luther designed his sermon to define a theological paradigm which was to become the "nervous system" of his theological thought.<sup>25</sup> Second of all, we might also wonder whether the two kinds of righteousness became a working presupposition that guided Luther's proclamation or if, instead, it arose as a description of humanity from Luther's reading of the Scriptures.<sup>26</sup> Regardless of our

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<sup>23</sup> Luther, "The Two Kinds of Righteousness," 297.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 297, 299.

<sup>25</sup> Robert Kolb, "God and His Human Creatures in Luther's Sermons on Genesis: The Reformer's Early Use of His Distinction of Two Kinds of Righteousness," *Concordia Journal* 33, no. 2 (2007): 173. Kolb likens the two kinds of righteousness to "a nervous system or a circulatory system through the entire body, shaping a number of the specific topics" of Wittenberg theology.

<sup>26</sup> Many theologians who write on the two kinds of righteousness understand the distinction to work as a "paradigm," "framework," or "presupposition" which guided Luther's proclamation. For example, Kolb, identifies the two kinds of righteousness as the operative presupposition that "guided the proclamation of what Luther found in the book" of Genesis (Kolb, "God and His Human Creatures," 170). While beyond the scope of this study, it might be helpful for today's pastors and theologians to examine whether or not the two kinds of righteousness in fact serves as a presupposition for the proclamation of God's word, or if, instead, the teaching is simply an outgrowth of what the reformer read from Scripture. In other words, is the two kinds of

answers to these questions, when we read Luther's sermon, it helps if we understand it as a proclamation of God's Word before dissecting its implications for Luther's theology and for our own.

Because Luther's sermon focuses on a specific text, we learn something of Luther's purpose for preaching "The Two Kinds of Righteousness." Luther's sermon simply proclaims what he sees in the text of Philippians 2. The reformer illustrates the reliance of his sermon on this passage throughout, identifying his homily as an exposition of God's Word. As a result, both active righteousness and passive righteousness correlate with what Luther sees in the passage at hand. For example, Luther returns to the text as he describes the relationships of the passive righteousness of Christ and the active righteousness of works, noting the example of Christ: "This [proper] righteousness follows the example of Christ in this respect and is transformed into his likeness. It is precisely this that Christ requires. Just as he himself did all things for us, not seeking his own good but ours only—and in this he was most obedient to God the Father—so he desires that we also should set the same example for our neighbors."<sup>27</sup> Explaining themes from Philippians 2, Luther speaks of the two kinds of righteousness in terms of the text. Therefore, Luther may not develop an overarching hermeneutical or homiletical framework so much as he identifies specific points of law and gospel in the text of Philippians 2. While Luther could possibly interpret Philippians 2 in light of the distinction between two kinds of righteousness, it seems more likely that he proclaims active and passive righteousness precisely because he sees the concept in the text.

Luther's textual focus also explains why the preacher narrows his description of active righteousness primarily to the love of neighbor. While acknowledging that active righteousness includes mortification of the flesh along with a devout life toward God, Luther concentrates on the life toward neighbor precisely because the text demands it. The second chapter of Philippians encourages the love of neighbor following the example of Christ's love and humility. In other words, the passage identifies the passive righteousness of Christ as the source and cause of the Christian's right activity toward his neighbor. This does not limit all of active righteousness to a horizontal dimension, but rather identifies the love of neighbor as the textual application of what God's will commands His people to do. Luther himself makes this observation from the text, proclaiming, "This is

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righteousness Luther's lens for reading and proclaiming God's word, or is it that which he saw through his interpretive lens?

<sup>27</sup> Luther, "The Two Kinds of Righteousness," 300.

what the text we are now considering says: ‘Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.’ This means you should be as inclined and disposed toward one another as you see Christ was disposed toward you.”<sup>28</sup> Luther does not thereby limit active righteousness to the love of neighbor or identify it primarily as such. Rather, he explains the Christians’ proper righteousness as a function of Philippians 2; since this passage of God’s word commands Christians to love their neighbors, Luther focuses his discussion of active righteousness on loving others. By preaching active righteousness in such a way that he stays true to the text without limiting it to a strictly horizontal dimension, Luther upholds the textual significance of the love of neighbor without compromising the necessity of all of God’s law to the Christian’s active righteousness.

Given Luther’s comprehensive view of active righteousness in “The Two Kinds of Righteousness,” we might wonder why much of today’s scholarship focuses so exclusively on love of neighbor. At best, it seems as though distinguishing the two kinds of righteousness in terms of vertical and horizontal axes attempts to counterbalance the overextension of the distinction between law and gospel. If we were to describe active righteousness in Luther’s terms, and if it were to include both tables of the law, little would differentiate the law/gospel distinction from the two kinds of righteousness other than nomenclature.<sup>29</sup> If, however, active righteousness receives a narrower definition, then a plausible difference remains. Many supporters of the two kinds of righteousness paradigm share their concerns precisely for the overextension of law and gospel beyond the realm of dividing God’s Word. For example, Arand and Biermann, fearing that the law/gospel distinction does not provide an adequate framework for comprehending ethics or systematics, assert that “the two kinds of righteousness address the nature and purpose of human life as the context within which the Lutheran Law-Gospel distinction carries out its work.”<sup>30</sup> So, too, do others attempt to make sure that the accusing work of the law’s proclamation does not describe the totality of the Christian’s

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<sup>28</sup> Luther, “The Two Kinds of Righteousness,” 301.

<sup>29</sup> Though beyond the abilities of this study, perhaps a more careful distinction between these two ought to be defined. When active righteousness includes all of God’s will for human life, not just good works toward neighbor, what differentiates the two kinds of righteousness, one of which comes as pure gift through faith and the other of which commands right Christian living, from the distinction between law and gospel?

<sup>30</sup> Arand and Biermann, 123.

experience of the law.<sup>31</sup> Perhaps the history of Lutheranism even warrants this concern for the overextension of the law/gospel distinction.<sup>32</sup> After all, the proper division between law and gospel is a hermeneutical and homiletical distinction, guiding the interpretation and proclamation of God’s Word without limiting all of theology to its terms.<sup>33</sup> That being said, the two kinds of righteousness distinction also proves inadequate as an overarching framework within which law/gospel functions since it cannot account for all of God’s law; as a result, the distinction counterbalances our overreliance on law and gospel by eliminating part of God’s will. If anything, the narrow understanding of active righteousness seems like a misguided attempt to provide alternative terminology without thinking through the implications of doing so.

At worst, however, the narrow definition of active righteousness could be yet another manifestation of a poorly disguised moralistic tendency within Lutheranism. Instead of holding to the tension between justification and sanctification, moralism attempts to resolve the tension through a return to the law as the motivation for Christian living. Many of today’s theologians tend toward this pitfall, trying to “rescue” Christian morality by means of the law. To accomplish this, they rely too strongly on the proclamation of the law when it comes to producing Christian active righteousness. For example, Arand and Biermann contend that “the Gospel returns us to our responsibilities within creation where the Law provides the specific needed direction.”<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, they add that the “[narrow] definition of active righteousness provides the necessary theological space for reflection on the place of the social sciences, ethics, and moral theology for Christian living” without recognizing that such a moral theology could hardly be called Christian apart from the absent first

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<sup>31</sup> Timothy E. Saleska, “The Two Kinds of Righteousness! What’s a Preacher to Do?,” *Concordia Journal* 33, no. 2 (2007): 143. Saleska shares his concern precisely for this when he writes, “the Law does not only threaten and accuse our conscience. It is also a delight because it shows us what God wants us to do, and it echoes the delight of our new hearts!”

<sup>32</sup> So Arand and Biermann argue on page 124 of their essay.

<sup>33</sup> FC SD V, 12. The formula defines law and gospel in terms of proclamation, not as the distinction which guides all of systematic theology. Insofar as God’s word is proclaimed and heard, however, it must be understood in terms of law and gospel: “Everything that proclaims something about our sin and God’s wrath is the proclamation of the law, however and whenever it may take place. On the other hand, the gospel is the kind of proclamation that points to and bestows nothing else than grace and forgiveness in Christ.”

<sup>34</sup> Arand and Biermann, 128.

table of the law.<sup>35</sup> Arand even goes one step farther, claiming that Christians attain active righteousness “by human ability” and “apart from the Holy Spirit.”<sup>36</sup> We might wonder what motives stand behind these claims of the significance of the love of neighbor devoid of concern for right faith and right motivation.<sup>37</sup> The insistence on the possibility of a “positive” experience of the law even in preaching also seems to lead in the same direction while stretching the law’s abilities.<sup>38</sup> Though preaching must always include the proclamation of the law, the law cannot function as the pastor’s tool for “persuading his hearers to act in God pleasing ways.”<sup>39</sup> Contrary to the moralistic tendency which underlies the restriction of active righteousness to the second table of the law, proclaiming the law cannot produce what God’s will commands.

Therefore, when we preach active righteousness, we must not imagine that the proclamation of active righteousness will cause Christians to do good works. While the Formula of Concord affirms that God’s “written law and Word... is a certain rule and guiding principle for directing the godly life and behavior according to the eternal and unchanging will of God,” it also maintains that preaching the law cannot create obedience to it.<sup>40</sup> Instead, the Formula defines the boundaries of the law’s ability by insisting that preaching the law does not effect good works in the lives of Christians:

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

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> Arand, “Framework,” 421, 422.

<sup>37</sup> FC SD IV, 8 gives us reason to question whether or not such works of love for neighbor can even be called good works apart from faith.

<sup>38</sup> Arand, “Framework,” 436. Here, Arand writes, “where the distinction between law and gospel runs the risk of affirming only a passive righteousness while ignoring our active righteousness, recognizing the two kinds of righteousness carves out more room to speak in a positive way about the law.” The only way to speak positively about the law appears to be removing the first and greatest commandment!

<sup>39</sup> Saleska, 145.

<sup>40</sup> FC SD VI, 3.

not through the law but through the proclamation of the gospel renews the heart.<sup>41</sup>

Preaching the law, whether by that name or by the name of active righteousness, cannot create obedience. Instead, believers do good works when they live “according to the unchanging will of God, as comprehended in the law, and do everything insofar as they are reborn from a free and merry Spirit. Works of this kind are not, properly speaking, works of the law, but works and fruits of the Spirit.”<sup>42</sup> Even when Christians obey the law, they do so not because they have heard the law, but because their hearts have been renewed by the preaching of the Gospel. Therefore, proclaiming active righteousness does not in itself have the ability to lead Christians to do works of active righteousness; only the gospel produces the fruit of the Spirit. This does not negate the necessity of proclaiming God’s law, but simply affirms that what the law demands it cannot create.

When we return to Luther’s “The Two Kinds of Righteousness,” we avoid both potential pitfalls of today’s narrow definition of active righteousness. Proclaiming the fullness of God’s law without compromising the first table and holding to the tension between active and passive righteousness without attempting resolution, Luther expands our understanding of the two kinds of righteousness paradigm in a way that frees us to preach the text faithfully. Neither limiting us in our proclamation of active righteousness nor mixing the active and the passive, we are free to proclaim the fullness of God’s commandments to His people without fear that doing so will deprive them of the gospel. At the same time, we may preach the full sweetness of the gospel, of our passive righteousness on account of Jesus Christ, without fear that doing so will only give way to licentiousness. Presenting the two kinds of righteousness with all of its complexity and nuances, Luther’s sermon maintains the place of the distinction in preaching all the while upholding the tension between our incomplete active righteousness and always complete passive righteousness in this life.

### Moving Forward with the Two Kinds of Righteousness

Keeping all of these things in mind, perhaps recourse remains for according the two kinds of righteousness its proper place in homiletics in spite of the recent oversimplification of the paradigm within the Lutheran tradition. While it would require doing away with

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<sup>41</sup> FC SD VI, 10-11.

<sup>42</sup> FC SD VI, 17.

the “horizontal” and “vertical” terminology which is so familiar to us today, we could account for the first table of the law within the Christian’s active righteousness as Luther did in 1519. Instead of referring exclusively to “a horizontal axis for life with our fellow human creatures and the non-human creation,” active righteousness could account for the entirety of God’s law, including those commandments which pertain to right activity, attitude, and disposition toward God.<sup>43</sup> Not only would this solve the problem of neglecting the first table of the law, but it would also provide a more comprehensive view of Christian morality by acknowledging the significance of our attitudes and motivations in addition to our outward activity toward God and neighbor. If we were to make this correction to our understanding of the two kinds of righteousness, however, we might simply return to the realm of law and gospel, distinguishing between the active righteousness demanded by all the requirements of God’s law and the passive righteousness we receive by grace through faith. Freed from our narrow understanding of the two kinds of righteousness, we would simply be left to preach active righteousness, the active fulfillment of all of God’s law, and passive righteousness, the benefits of Christ apprehended through the gospel.

What, then, should today’s preacher to make of the two kinds of righteousness? When understood in its fullest sense as Luther describes in his sermon “The Two Kinds of Righteousness,” today’s pastor need not fear using the distinction as a means of illustrating the distinction between justification and sanctification. However, he must also realize the limitations of the paradigm in preaching. As Paul says in 1 Timothy 1:8, “we know that the law is good, if one might employ it lawfully.” That is to say, the law of God is certainly good in and of itself and does not require our protection whether by means of moralism or by means of the two kinds of righteousness paradigm. How we employ the law in preaching makes all the difference. As pastors, we must not take the law beyond its limits and imagine that proclaiming active righteousness will create what it demands of our people. While not expecting too much of the law, we must also guard against demanding too little by limiting our proclamation of the law to the outward activity of our congregation toward its neighbors without concern for right actions, attitudes, motives, and disposition toward self, God, and neighbors. Rather, holding law and gospel in proper tension, we must proclaim both active and passive righteousness with the understanding that the Lord will work through the proclamation to accuse by means of His law and to raise to life by means of the gospel.

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<sup>43</sup> Arand and Biermann, 118.

The two kinds of righteousness distinction cannot function apart from this reality. When we uphold this tension in our sermons, we may well proclaim with a good conscience and with full confidence what Luther preached so long ago: “There are two kinds of Christian righteousness” in this life, the passive “righteousness of Christ by which he justifies through faith,” and the active righteousness, “that manner of life spent profitably in good works.”<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Luther, “Two Kinds of Righteousness,” LW 31: 297, 299.

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## An Evaluation of Beth Moore's *The Patriarchs* Study in View of the Two Kinds of Righteousness

By Lisa Cooper

In the contemporary church, there is a profound lack of popular, accessible, Biblically-based Lutheran women's Bible study material. As a result, we, the women in the Lutheran church, striving to learn more, yearning to make connections with other women of faith, end up in Bible studies that fall extremely short. This happens in a few different ways: 1) The Lutheran women travel to a church of a different faith confession to participate in Bible study; 2) The women in the Lutheran church are greatly influenced by teachers outside of the Lutheran confession due to a lack of Lutheran study materials, and teach their studies accordingly (e.g. health and wealth gospel, etc.); 3) Women's Bible study is led by women of limited understanding, and the study becomes a time to share personal stories and feelings, and thus departs from Scripture.<sup>1</sup> In rare instances, a woman of good theological training volunteers to lead the study at the church. This generally occurs when there is a deaconess serving a congregation, or if the pastor has a theologically-literate wife who wishes to lead a study. But, in all of these cases, we can be sure that the pastor, being the man that he is, is most certainly not the one teaching these studies, and is most likely not even present during them. In many instances, the pastor delegates the task of choosing Bible study material to the women who runs the study without necessarily reviewing the theology of those whose materials is being used.

Due to the popularity of Beth Moore women's Bible Studies,<sup>2</sup> it is imperative that Lutheran women, and even more so, Lutheran pastors, become aware of the theology promulgated in her writings and videos. When reviewing the Patriarchs study, it becomes apparent that Beth Moore's theology is incompatible with that of the Lutheran Confession.<sup>3</sup> This is evidenced by the way she answers fundamental

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<sup>1</sup> Although, many women who are frustrated by women's Bible studies simply attend co-ed studies led by the pastor instead.

<sup>2</sup> In fact, if you search for "Women's Bible studies" on Google, Beth Moore's name comes up as the top suggested search. And, she is the ninth most popular religious leader on Twitter, right behind C.S. Lewis.

<sup>3</sup> For the sake of the length of the paper, and because I intend to include arguments based on the written Bible study, the video sessions that coincide with it, and the reactions of the group of which I am a part, I am including only the first "Four Weeks" of her Patriarchs study, dealing only with the story of Abraham in the patriarchal narrative.

questions pertaining to the Christian faith: “What is Scripture and how do we read it?” and, “How do we understand the doctrine of two kinds of righteousness?” Because her views are contrary to that of the Lutheran Confession in such a drastic and irreconcilable way, her studies should not be supported by the Lutheran Church.

### What is Scripture and How do We Read it?

As opposed to her contemporaries in popular “Evangelical” ministries, Moore asserts a high view of Scripture that informs all of her assertions found in her Bible study.<sup>4</sup> While this is helpful to the women participating in the Bible study, it unfortunately does not make up for her poor interpretation. In fact, it often confuses participants more because they come to think that reading for a Moore study is comparable to reading Scripture.<sup>5</sup> Although she defines terms like “hermeneutics” and “typology” in the margins of the study book,<sup>6</sup> her regular method of reading Scripture employs neither of those tools. Moore then privileges an emotive way of reading Scripture, emphasizing an allegorical and speculative hermeneutic over against the Lutheran grammatical-historical method of interpretation.

Moore’s high view of Scripture asserts that it is inspired, inerrant, and most of all, important for the Christian life. This lines up well with Lutheran teaching, even though we would most certainly interpret Scripture differently; in this particular sense, Moore is on target. She asserts that, “All Scripture is God-breathed. So that means when God breathed a name in a sentence, he meant it to be there on purpose.”<sup>7</sup> In video Session One, she makes it clear that Scripture is wholly the word of God, and that it does not err. Moore continued, explaining that God is consistent from Old Testament to New Testament, old covenant to new covenant.<sup>8</sup> By making these truth claims about Scripture, she affected the study group positively. Many women made comments about how they had never heard such positive

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<sup>4</sup> This is not to say that there are not teachers who use Scripture, but they do not, generally speaking, teach by going through passages of Scripture like Moore does. Often other teachers use Scripture as proof texts instead, preaching thematically or without a specific passage in mind.

<sup>5</sup> When I asked the leader of the group, “Where is this found in Scripture?” She responded by pointing me to something Moore said in her study book.

<sup>6</sup> Moore, Beth. *The Patriarchs: Encountering the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob* (Nashville, Tennessee: Life Way Press), 2005. Print, 31, 48.

<sup>7</sup> “Session One.” *The Patriarchs*. DVD. Directed by Lee Sizemore (Nashville, Tennessee: Life Way, 2005), 8:18-8:24.

<sup>8</sup> “Session One,” 41:46-41:50

affirmations of Scripture and its teaching authority in their churches, nor had they heard about the uniformity of God's promises between the Old and New Testaments. Moore does a good job of debunking the idea that God somehow changed from the wrathful God of the Old Testament into the merciful God of the New Testament. She does not shy away from delving into difficult Old Testament passages, nor does she divide God's intentions between the two testaments. Moore stresses, even more-so, the importance of Scripture in living a Christian life. "It is not enough that we just try to exercise faith if we don't have words to base our faith on."<sup>9</sup> The fundamentals of the Christian faith are not plainly evident in nature; we need the special revelation of the holy Word of God to inform our faith and to work that saving faith in us.<sup>10</sup> Likewise, as Lutherans we would posit that, "Believers are dependent on God's revelation of himself and on his telling of what He has done for them."<sup>11</sup>

Although Lutherans would agree with Moore about the authority and inerrancy of Scripture, we would go a step farther in saying that the Word of God is a means by which God brings grace to those who hear it. Kolb and Arand make this clear in their book *The Genius of Luther's Theology*:

God's Word in its oral, written, and sacramental forms delivers the benefits of what Christ accomplished in dying and rising. Each articulation of the Word in these forms aims at revealing God and his gracious will for his human creatures. Every use of God's Word is part of his plan to accomplish the death of the sinful identity of the hearer and the resurrection of the new creature in Christ<sup>12</sup>

Scripture is not simply a guide book, informing Christians about how to live more Christ-like lives; instead, Scripture is a regular means that God uses to reach people, to impart grace, to bring the spiritually dead

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<sup>9</sup> "Session One," 11:10-11:12.

<sup>10</sup> Although, the power of Scripture to "work faith in us" is maintained by Moore, she views saving faith in a fundamentally different way. For Moore, saving faith is linked to obedience, while Lutherans would mark saving faith as being a faith which clings wholly to Christ, and only then does it bear the fruit of love toward neighbor and obedience toward God. This will be discussed later in the essay.

<sup>11</sup> Kolb, Robert and Charles P. Arand. *The Genius of Luther's Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2008), 165.

<sup>12</sup> *Genius*, 166.

to life in Christ.<sup>13</sup> Moore, however, ascends to the former primarily, and forsakes the true sacramental nature of the Word of God.<sup>14</sup>

In conjunction with this, Moore also departs from a Lutheran understanding of Scripture when, instead of reading a historical account as a historical account, she makes stories in Genesis about us today, allegorizing characters and events to appeal to women's sensibilities instead of appealing to their intellect. As much as she asserts the true historicity of Genesis, she fails to exegete in this way. One example of her failed attempt to read Scripture is when she discusses Lot's capture in Genesis 14 and the battle thereafter. She explains:

In Genesis 13:12 Lot "pitched his tents near Sodom." In 14:12 Lot was taken captive "since he was living in Sodom." In my estimation, near and in are two different things. That's the trouble with pitching our tents near something persuasive. If we're not careful, we tend to move on in. And when we move in, we soon fall captive to the captors of our environment. That's what happened to Lot.<sup>15</sup>

Lot is therefore made into an example of how we should not "move on in" by participating in sinful culture, or even placing ourselves near exposure to such things. Instead of discussing that Lot was the only faithful person in all of Sodom, she uses him as a negative example. She continues later: "Write a prayer for a Lot you know. Ask God to deliver him or her and make yourself available for the Lord's use in the task."<sup>16</sup> This is neither accurate to the text, nor is it helpful. By asking women to write prayers for a "Lot" that they know, Moore incites an attitude of superiority to others, and provides women in the study with an

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<sup>13</sup> This topic is further explained in the Passive and Active Righteousness sections of this essay.

<sup>14</sup> She does, however, believe that some type of grace comes through studying Scripture. That grace takes the form an emotional "feeling" in your heart, or is directly linked with your obedience to cause a change in your life. This stems from a differing view of grace entirely. Grace, then, is about your cooperation with Scripture to effect a change, and privileges an emotional response—a burning in your chest—of sorts to prove that the Word is truly working in or through you. Lutherans believe that the grace the Word offers is offered because it is the nature of God's Word to do so. But, this topic merits another paper entirely, and will not be delved into much further in this essay.

<sup>15</sup> Patriarchs, 25.

<sup>16</sup> Patriarchs, 27.

opportunity to gossip about those who are not present. This type of allegorizing happens countless times in her Bible study.

Moore also excites emotion in those participating in her studies by forcing them to read into the text. Conjecture is her main hermeneutic. This is evidenced when she writes, in the context of discussing God blessing Sarai and renaming her Sarah, “Possibly Abraham thought Sarai was the obstacle to the fulfillment of God’s promises” (regarding their inability to have children), she continues, explaining that that is why God spoke the blessing to Abraham instead of to Sarah herself, “Abraham needed to stop seeing his wife as the hang-up and start seeing her as the ‘how.’” She then draws the application:

We can look back at the narrative and see how absurd Abraham’s deductions were, yet we so often encumber ourselves with similar thinking. We think to ourselves, \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in the blank) is the reason why God is not freed up to work in my life. His or her unbelief, unresponsiveness, unhealthiness, uncleanness, unwillingness to tithe (for crying out loud), or total unawareness (“He doesn’t have a clue!”) is the problem. He or she is unbalanced, uneducated, unyielding, unchurched, uncooperative, or unbroken. God can’t fulfill his promises to me because of my pastor’s, my employer’s, my business partner’s, my children’s, my parents’, or my spouse’s ‘uns.’ Yep, everybody else’s ‘uns’ are my problem. Atomic uns. So powerful they break God’s promises<sup>17</sup>

Thus, her reasons why the text is pertinent today is based entirely on conjecture. Nowhere in the text does it say that Abraham believed Sarai’s barrenness was more powerful than God’s promises,<sup>18</sup> nor is the implication of the text that we should stop viewing others as “hang-ups” in our lives. For Moore, God’s blessing for Abraham and Sarah was not enough; when Scripture says, “Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness,” (Genesis 15:6) it was not referring, as she says here, to his belief that God could bring him a son through Sarah. We know, having a cohesive view of Scripture that allows passages to interpret one another that this is indeed false:

He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years

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<sup>17</sup> Patriarchs, 46.

<sup>18</sup> Patriarchs, 46.

old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. That is why his faith was “counted to him as righteousness.” But the words “it was counted to him” were not written for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification (Romans 4:19-25 ESV).

Where Moore should have simply read the New Testament passages concerning the text that she was teaching on, she instead adds to the text, forcing new motives behind Abraham's actions, in an attempt to make an application that suited her own agenda: excite emotion instead of read the Bible. As much as people in the study identified with the sinful line of thinking that Moore writes about here, Moore does a disservice to those participating by failing to read what Scripture says.

### **How Do We Understand the Doctrine of Two Kinds of Righteousness?**

The issue with Beth Moore's doctrine of two kinds of righteousness is twofold: In one sense, she misses the passiveness with which we receive Christ's benefits, and therefore privileges our active obedience in a way that causes it to contribute to our justifying relationship with God; in another sense, she calls her readers out to live extraordinary lives as Christians, forsaking their “Usual Routine” (Ur),<sup>19</sup> as if there is no blessedness in an ordinary life lived in faith in God and love toward our neighbor.

#### **Passive Righteousness**

Even the most discerning of the women in my Bible study did not understand Moore's assertions about passive and active righteousness. This is not to say that they would necessarily understand the Lutheran terminology, but they see no issue with how Moore discusses faith and subsequent action. This is the most pivotal doctrine from a Lutheran perspective: Justification by grace through faith alone in Jesus Christ.<sup>20</sup> Our passive reception of the righteousness

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<sup>19</sup>Patriarchs, 15.

<sup>20</sup> “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works,

won by Christ is the doctrine on which the church stands or falls. And, to define exactly what passive and active righteousness are from a Lutheran perspective:

The distinction between the two kinds of righteousness allowed the reformers without qualification to extol the gospel by removing human activity as a basis for justification before God. At the same time, it clarified the relationship of the human creature to the world in which God had placed him or her to live a life of ‘active righteousness’ for the well-being of the human community and the preservation of the environment. The two kinds of righteousness, however, are inseparable from one another. The passive righteousness of faith provides the core identity of a person; the active righteousness of love flows from that core identity out into the world.<sup>21</sup>

With this in mind, it is apparent that Moore’s exposition of the identity of human relationship with God and with our neighbors is entirely flawed.

While many comments that Moore makes seem correct, in Session One of her video series, she gives a context for how she views the term “faith” and how God credits that faith to us. She further develops that view throughout her study. Without this interpretive framework, what Moore says in the pages of her study can seem very appealing. In video Session One, Moore posits that faith is an act of obedience that we perform in response to God. To put this in context, Moore was delving into the famous Scripture: “Abraham believed the Lord and he counted it to him as righteousness” (Genesis 15:6 ESV). She says: “He is going to count it as righteousness that we believe... He is going to credit your faith—my faith as righteousness.”<sup>22</sup> This sounds as if it could be right; as Lutherans, we believe that:

This faith justifies. Not because it is an act that merits or earns justification. No! In no sense. Christ has earned it. Faith only lays hold of and appropriates Christ and a ‘gift of God,’ as the Scriptures declare. He that has the faith is justified, acquitted,

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which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:8-9 ESV).

<sup>21</sup> Genius, 26.

<sup>22</sup> “Session One,” 30:12-30:24.

forgiven...Faith justifies in so far as it grasps, holds, rests in and trusts in Christ alone.<sup>23</sup>

It is a subtle difference, but instead of believing that the righteousness credited to us is from Christ, Moore makes faith the thing that is being counted toward our righteousness. As Lutherans, we let Scripture interpret Scripture. Romans speaks about Abraham's faith, and lends pertinent information to this particular passage:

For if Abraham was justified by works, then he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness." Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness. (Romans 4:2-5)

Therefore, we would read the famous Genesis passage, knowing full well that Abraham's faith is from God; he passively received it because he did not work to obtain it.

Moore goes on: "I can tell you with so much failure in my past, I started thinking about how many times I had failed [God] and I thought to myself: 'you know what? I'm going to have to live to be 175 to make up for this.'" Then, she talks about the "great scale in the sky," that so many religions believe in, how God simply sits back and weighs good deeds against bad deeds done in a lifetime. Shaking her head, denying that falsehood: "God is not up there doing the math on our sins. He is doing the math on our opportunities that we seize to believe him." Then, to further express her point, she makes tally marks with her hands and continues: "She believed me--whack! She believed me again--whack! That, child, brings the grin of God."<sup>24</sup> This is a desperately flawed understanding of justification, of the passive nature of our relationship with God. It is true that God is not "up there doing the math on our sins," but this is the case because Jesus died a sinner's death in our place so that our sins would not be counted against us.

Obedience is therefore the mark of faith and the means by which we obtain righteousness in the sight of God for Moore. She explains: "Do you know what brings the holy 'nod' of God more than anything on the planet? Faith! Crediting it into our account as

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<sup>23</sup> Gerberding, George. *The Way of Salvation in the Lutheran Church*, ed. Jordan Cooper (Fairfield, Iowa: Just and Sinner, 2013), 144.

<sup>24</sup> "Session One," 32:23-33:38

righteousness.”<sup>25</sup> In other words, faith is the thing that is being credited as a righteous thing in our account. As Lutherans, we know that the holy “nod” of God is only directed toward the one who has no sin: Jesus; and that “nod” is therefore extended to us through faith in Him by grace. In fact: “God accepts the person and the works of the believer. Just as God accepts the sinner for Christ’s sake, so he also accepts this broken, halfway, and blemished obedience; he accepts it as total obedience.”<sup>26</sup> In this sense, obedience is counted in our account as righteousness; this is not because our obedience merits anything, however, it is because God has esteemed us entirely guilt-free, and our flawed actions entirely righteous because of Christ. “God has entrusted us with an outpouring of his presence, and his purpose, and his spirit on our lives in an increasing measure since we were obedient to him in this role.”<sup>27</sup> Because of our obedience, Moore explains, we are blessed in this life. We are graced with his presence, the Holy Spirit, because of our obedience. In stark contrast to this, we believe:

[T]he new life, thus quickened, has nothing to do with Justification, except as it is the inevitable result of Justification. Probably the relation cannot be better stated than this: Wherever there is faith, there is love and a holy life, because wherever there is faith, there is Justification, and wherever there is Justification a holy life immediately begins. If the new life that accompanies and follows faith were made a concurrent instrument in Justification, the ground of Justification would no longer be the merits of Christ alone, but it would be partly the merits of Christ, and partly our own holiness.<sup>28</sup>

Our obedience, therefore, is only a result of our first being justified by Christ. This stands opposed to Moore’s assertion that it is only by our obedience that God pours out his spirit in our lives.

### **Active Righteousness**

The beauty of the Lutheran view of active righteousness is that we are not expected to lead extraordinary lives as Christians. This very doctrine played an extremely important role in my conversion to Lutheranism. Mainline “Evangelicalism” is obsessed with conversion

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<sup>25</sup> “Session One,” 31:24-31:33.

<sup>26</sup> Genius, 124.

<sup>27</sup> “Session Two.” The Patriarchs. DVD. Directed by Lee Sizemore (Nashville: Life Way, 2005), 26:04-26:15.

<sup>28</sup> Jacobs, Henry Eyster. *Elements of Religion*, ed. Jordan Cooper (Fairfield, Iowa: Just and Sinner, 2013), 194-195.

stories, privileging extraordinary experience over everyday living. One of my friends in college once confided in me that she felt like “less of a Christian”<sup>29</sup> because she grew up in the church and, because of the teaching of her parents and the grace God extended to her, she kept the faith throughout her life without wavering. Lutheran theology is profoundly different. Lutheran theology encourages parents to raise their children in the faith with the hope that they will never waver. It expresses a deep reverence for the ordinary life lived in love of God and service toward our neighbor. You need not travel across the world and become a missionary just to prove that you are indeed a Christian; instead, you can live out your Christian life in a normal, creaturely way because, “Faith frees us from ‘the perennial human tendency to devalue what is close at hand and seek to do something extraordinary,’ so that we can instead embrace the ordinary, everyday activities of daily living.”<sup>30</sup> Kolb and Arand delve deeply into Luther’s thoughts on active righteousness, explaining:

In one sense, for Luther the Christian life is distinctive in that Christians do not live for the purpose of glorifying themselves or justifying themselves (in any case, we cannot see motivations). But in another sense, the Christian life looks quite ordinary and mundane with regard to the activities that are carried out.<sup>31</sup>

Luther frequently used the most ordinary activities as examples of the life of a Christian in his writings because “Faith embraces the most menial activities, for God’s Word has given them his stamp of approval.”<sup>32</sup>

Moore distinguishes herself drastically from the Lutheran view of active righteousness by privileging a departure from our “Usual Routine” and our spiritual “ruts” over the ordinary life of a Christian. Her main charge from the beginning of the Patriarchs study is:

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<sup>29</sup> I dislike this phraseology, but it is truly a common idiom in the church. There is no such thing as a “lesser” Christian because, by the grace of God, we have all been bought by Christ for the same price; Jesus’s death is equally necessary for all Christians, and no one person merits it more than another. This is a terrible, saddening misnomer in the church today, and does a great disservice to our brothers and sisters in Christ by privileging the “more holy,” or “more sanctified” people in the church over us “normal” or “everyday” Christians.

<sup>30</sup> Genius, 111.

<sup>31</sup> Genius, 103.

<sup>32</sup> Genius, 112.

Join me on a journey leading us far away from our ‘Urs.’ What is Ur to us? Let’s adopt the name of Abram’s former home as an acronym for ‘Usual Routine.’ God calls us to leave our familiar spiritual countryside—our ruts, our comfort zones, and every hint of mediocrity—and ‘go’ to a place He will show us. Let’s not settle for Haran. Let’s go the distance.<sup>33</sup>

For Moore, studying Scripture should instill in us a desire to do great things for God, things that prove our love of God. She cites an important presupposition in video Session One: “Wherever you are is not where God wants you to stay. We’ve got a place to go with God, and he’s told us ‘leave your country, leave what’s usual to you because we’ve got a place to go together.’”<sup>34</sup> She continues: “You and I want to go with God. We want to go where the presence of God is going in our lives. We don’t want to dry up in a place where we’ve served for years.”<sup>35</sup> This is a false presupposition. She explains that if the spirit of God is not with us in whatever we are doing, then we need to move on. Moore assumes then, that whatever place we are in our Christian lives, that the spirit of God is not with us unless we feel it, unless we experience it.<sup>36</sup> But, we know that Scripture teaches, “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, ESV). The gift of the Holy Spirit is not something we can lose by staying in one place too long. Nor is it contingent upon our feelings. Moore’s false presupposition drives away any assurance of calling in the Christian life, and privileges the uncertainty of a new uncomfortable situation over serving our neighbor in an ordinary way.

To further illustrate this, later in the written study, Moore offers an anecdote in the pages of the study book:

A dear Bible teacher once shared with me her frustration with a particular senior adult women’s class. Though they were faithful to attend and were thoroughly involved in the weekly lessons, she found most were too set in their ways to let God’s Word continue to transform them. Thankfully, many senior adults are exceptions and rise up in stark contrast to that small group. Most of my favorite letters through the years have come

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<sup>33</sup> Patriarchs, 15.

<sup>34</sup> “Session One,” 5:12-5:48

<sup>35</sup> “Session One,” 5:48-5:55.

<sup>36</sup> “Session One,” 5:55-6:04

from women in their 70s and 80s who still seek and serve God, letting Him change them ‘from glory to glory’ (2 Cor. 3:18, HCSB).<sup>37</sup>

They were “too set in their ways to let God’s Word continue to transform them.” What does this mean? Somehow we can inhibit the sacramental nature of God’s Word by being set in our ways. We must, then, allow God to change us by consistently putting ourselves in challenging circumstances. She harkens back to the necessity of being confused, of wrestling with God’s Word as if that is the means by which we are blessed by it.<sup>38</sup> We know, however, that the nature of God’s Word spoken and written, preached and received brings grace with or without this act on our part of wrestling. Moore asserts:

Sometimes you have to leave the classroom. There are many, many things, we are pruned the word of God says in John chapter 15, by the Word. In other words, if you and I want God to do a mighty work on us, a lot of what can be accomplished can be accomplished through us studying God’s word and responding obediently to it.<sup>39</sup>

This brings the sanctifying work of God, the means by which God changes our hearts to love and serve our neighbor more, into the realm of our own obedience. We are obedient, therefore God chooses to change us. Henry Eyster Jacobs in his dogmatic theology, *Elements of Religion* describes the efficacy of God’s Word in a strikingly opposite way: “Nor even does the efficacy of the Word depend upon man’s faith. Faith is always necessary to the reception of the efficacy, but not to its presence.”<sup>40</sup> In other words, while Moore claims that our obedience must be present in order to receive the benefits of God’s Word, Jacobs posits that through faith we receive what God has already given in the Word. Active righteousness is dependent upon faith because the desire to be obedient would not exist without faith, but a distinction can be made between passive and active righteousness because active righteousness is incomplete:

The righteousness that we have been given by faith is a complete righteousness, and the righteousness we manifest in

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<sup>37</sup> Patriarchs, 59

<sup>38</sup> “Session Three”

<sup>39</sup> “Session Three,” 16.58-17.16

<sup>40</sup> *Elements of Religion*, 146.

love is a partial righteousness. It is complete when viewed as God's approval of us and as our possession of the righteousness of Christ; Christ's righteousness is a totality, and the believer participates in it totally. It is partial when viewed from the standpoint of the world's approval of us and as a new beginning for human beings along with a new obedience.<sup>41</sup>

In no sense can we perform completely obedient acts toward God in our lives, but the total righteousness given as a free gift from God through faith manifests itself in our lives as loving service toward our neighbor, and in a new desire to be obedient to God.

### **Conclusion**

Beth Moore's theology, though it clearly teaches a high view of Scripture, greatly skews God's Word. She forces an emotionally driven allegorical interpretive framework onto the text, causing the Word of God to be a guide book, filled with helpful life advice instead of the means of grace that it is. Moore stresses obedience as the primary means by which we can obtain the grace given in Scripture, but the work of God is only evidenced by an external or internal "wrestling" on our part and a subsequent "feeling" of God's presence. She also demonstrates her irreconcilable theology when addressing the doctrine of two kinds of righteousness. When discussing the nature of passive righteousness, Moore misses the entire passive nature of our relationship with God; she makes the righteousness imputed to us by Christ a righteousness that we somehow obtain by faith and obedient action. Faith for Moore clings to obedience, not to Jesus Christ's life, death, and resurrection. Similarly, Moore posits that the righteous actions that we perform in this life are somehow only valid if they are extraordinary. We must do a "mighty work" for God, "forsaking all mediocrity," and not allowing our own habits to inhibit God's working in our lives. God's action in changing us through his Holy Spirit is contingent upon our obedience and our willingness to be challenged or to be made uncomfortable.

There are practical consequences for these teachings. A woman came to me after the video session and asked me some questions, knowing that I am the wife of a pastor. Sarah,<sup>42</sup> a seventy-five year old woman who had converted from being a teacher in the TM movement

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<sup>41</sup> Genius, 124.

<sup>42</sup> This is not her real name, for the sake of privacy.

ten years ago,<sup>43</sup> was struggling with much of what Moore says. She confided in me that she was terribly afraid that God was going to call her out like Abraham to do something extraordinary. She was terribly afraid not because she was not willing, but because she is seventy-five years old and lives in a nursing home; she is not capable of going anywhere on her own (she gave up driving years ago), and she needs help doing everyday tasks. This fear comes directly from Moore's views on how to read Scripture and her views on active righteousness. Sarah also fretted over her assurance of faith because she did not do anything to prove her faith was real. She had not helped anyone convert to the Christian faith, and she was not a leader in the church, so she worried that God would not esteem her a real Christian. She had not suffered for the Christian faith, and could not call to mind any Christian she knows who had not suffered terribly. "I don't want to suffer!" She told me, with tears in her eyes, "But I know that I will have to if I am really a Christian." Her greatest fear, she told me, was that she would die and end up in Hell even though she knows the truth because, by some fluke, she did not do what she needed to do in this life to get the approval of God. How horrifying! What a devastating fear to deal with! I did my best to assure her that there is nothing we can do to merit God's favor because it has already been won for us by Christ. But, instead of accepting my consolation, she pointed to passages written by Moore that said otherwise. Moore's problematic doctrine of passive righteousness caused this woman to despair. Luckily, Sarah and I are scheduled to get together soon to discuss these things further. Moore's theology is not only bad in theory, but it can cause real-life despair, and real-life fear. That despair, that fear are not necessary or helpful for the Christian life.

Beth Moore is obviously not the only problematic Bible study leader in the church today, nor will she be the last, but it is the duty of the pastor to protect his sheep from such teachings. I urge you pastors to be aware of what study materials your women's groups use. I urge you women to practice discernment, and to not be afraid to say that someone is teaching something contrary to Scripture. Moore is only one example of a way in which the greater "Evangelical" culture is leaking into the Lutheran church. Because her views are irreconcilable with a Lutheran confession of faith, we should not try to use her resources, even if we were to exercise great discernment.

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<sup>43</sup> TM is the popular term used for the Transcendental Meditation movement. There is a huge hub of Meditators in Fairfield, Iowa, which happens to be the same town that the Bible study is in. Although it is unusual to meet converts to Christianity, it is not unheard of.

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## ***Lutheran Theology* by Steven D. Paulson<sup>1</sup>**

### **A Review Essay**

by Eric Phillips

It is unlikely that you have ever heard a theology book referred to as “rollicking.” That’s a reserved for action movies and wild parties—usually. In the case of Steven Paulson’s 2011 monograph *Lutheran Theology*, however, the word fits. This book rollicks. Here’s the first sentence: “Lutheran theology begins perversely by advocating the destruction of all that is good, right, and beautiful in human life” (1). And it keeps going like that for 272 more pages. Whatever else can be said about him, Steven Paulson is not boring. He pulls very few punches, and says everything in the freshest, most dynamic, and most provocative way he can. His ability to sustain the tempo is impressive. He’s brilliant and creative, and can really turn a phrase. If he’s trying to write like Martin Luther, I don’t think he quite gets there, but he’s probably closer than anyone else I’ve read.

This is not an unmitigated advantage, though. The book is engaging and vivid, but hard for the reader to put together, to understand as a whole. Paulson is going in so many directions at the same time with his allusions and asides, at such a rate of speed, while inventing so many new ways of saying things, that it becomes bewildering in places. He needs a strong organizational principle to hold it all together, to keep like things with like, but this he does not have. The structure of the book just exacerbates the problem. It is loosely organized as a commentary on the book of Romans—very loosely. He goes chapter-by-chapter, but not verse-by-verse or section-by-section, so it isn’t really a commentary; it’s a work of systematic theology organized like a work of exegetical theology. It’s unsystematic Systematics. Because Paulson is a gifted communicator, you can usually follow him from sentence to sentence and paragraph to paragraph, but when it comes time to summarize and evaluate his big-picture ideas, the reader has to do a lot of synthesis, drawing from all over the book and figuring out how to resolve the contradictions that arise. For instance, he explains in one place that the Law cannot save because “the law is not spiritual, meaning that it cannot create anything, especially not a new heart” (80), and in another place that it cannot save “because the law is spiritual—not incarnate Christ” (181). We will have another example, on a more consequential point, below.

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<sup>1</sup> Paulson, Steven D. *Lutheran Theology* (New York: T&T Clark, 2011).

This combination of small-picture eloquence and quotability with big-picture convolution and uncertainty has helped the book make inroads in Confessional Lutheran circles. On every other page there's a robust turn of phrase to express some interesting new angle on something they already believe, while the difficulty involved in putting the big themes and doctrines together makes it hard to detect—or at least to prove—the serious errors that Paulson is weaving through the whole work. Uncertain what to do with all that, and with a few of the small-picture statements too, Lutherans focus instead on the things they do understand, and appreciate the force and wit with which he says them. If you think about it, Lutherans as an audience have been conditioned to like this sort of thing, because Luther himself was such a master of the quotable remark. So we don't understand everything he says, and there seem to be some contradictions, but those things remind us of Luther too! We feel at home. We're ready to quote the stuff we really identify with, and willing to assume that the stuff we didn't quite get must be good too, whatever it means.

And Paulson knows his audience. He teaches at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota, an ELCA school, but he is too conservative to be very popular in that denomination. Confessional Lutherans are the ones who are most likely to be drawn to his work. So throughout the book, whenever he criticizes a liberal theological idea, he names the man who taught it, but whenever he teaches contrary to the Formula of Concord, he stops naming names. The reader has to be on top of things to catch it. Paulson mentions the Formula, or the men who authored it, only when he agrees with them. In this way he creates the impression that he himself is a Confessional Lutheran in the same sense as the bulk of his fans, but this is not the case. In *Lutheran Theology* he takes a number of positions contrary to the Formula. He teaches and greatly expands the error of Mathias Flacius with regard to Original Sin (condemned in Article I); repeats the error of Nicholas Amsdorf, who called good works “injurious to salvation” (condemned in Article IV, Paulson 234); and condemns the Antinomianism of Agricola, but for a different reason than the Formula does (Article V, Paulson 185-6). Accordingly he denies the Third Use of the Law (Article VI) and ends up with a new kind of Antinomianism in which the Law of God still needs to be preached, but has no positive value. These errors with respect to Original Sin and the Law lead him also into Christological heresy, to a rejection of the substitutionary Atonement, and the erection in its place of a new theory of Atonement that not only contradicts Article III, but has outright blasphemy at its center.

The Flacian error lies at the root of the mischief. This error teaches (in the words of the Formula) that, “There is now, since the Fall,

because the nature is corrupt through sin, no difference whatever between the nature and essence of man and original sin” (I.1). The Concordists rejected this teaching for two main reasons:

(1) Therefore corrupt man cannot, without any distinction, be sin itself, otherwise God would be a creator of sin; as also our Small Catechism confesses in the explanation of the First Article, where it is written: I believe that God has made me and all creatures, that He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still preserves them. (*Solid Declaration I.38*)

(2) Now, if there were no distinction between the nature or essence of corrupt man and original sin, it must follow that Christ either did not assume our nature, because He did not assume sin, or that, because He assumed our nature, He also assumed sin; both of which ideas are contrary to the Scriptures. But inasmuch as the Son of God assumed our nature, and not original sin, it is clear from this fact that human nature, even since the Fall, and original sin, are not one [and the same] thing, but must be distinguished. (*Solid Declaration I.44*)

Now, Mathias Flacius was in many ways a hero of Lutheran orthodoxy, a controversialist who opposed Philip Melancthon’s compromises with Roman practices and Roman teaching on the role of the free will in salvation. His criticisms of these things are upheld and given confessional status in the Formula of Concord, articles X and II respectively. It was in the process of his debate over the role of the free will in salvation that he went too far in the opposite direction and overstepped the bounds of orthodoxy himself. He is thus a sympathetic figure in many ways, and as Benthe notes in his introduction to the *Triglotta*, historians have tended to exonerate him of the title *heretic*. Paulson seems to be benefiting from some of this same reluctance to go after a theologian who is manfully battling for the truth on other fronts. “But whatever may be said in extenuation of his error,” Benthe continues, “it cannot be disputed that the unfortunate phrases of Flacius produced, and were bound to produce, most serious religious offense, as well as theological strife, and hopeless doctrinal confusion” (151). And since this was noted so clearly back in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, in the capstone of the Lutheran Confessions, Paulson has much less of an excuse than Flacius did. And as we shall see, his error is worse.

According to Flacius, it is only *since the Fall* that the essence of humanity has been Original Sin. He was *trying not* to teach that God is

the Creator of Evil. He did not succeed, but at least he made the attempt. Paulson just cuts to the chase, and denies the Fall. “The legal scheme assumes that it knows what death is because it imagines that the free will once stood as a master of sin, ‘able to sin and able not to sin’ (*posse peccare et posse non peccare*) at its own discretion” (158). In other words, there was never a free will for Adam and Eve to lose. Bondage to sin is not a result of the Fall, but simply part of being human, *i.e.* essential to human nature as it was created by God. Adam and Eve did not have the ability to obey any more than we do, because God withdrew His Spirit from them and left them to their own natural powers, which although no sin had corrupted them yet, were already completely impotent. “Sin is God’s withdrawal of the Holy Spirit that hands us over to free will” (83), Paulson says, both for them and for us. There is no difference between their pre-Fall ability to resist temptation and our post-Fall ability to resist temptation. And so throughout the book he uses the term “Original Sin” to refer not to the first sin in the Garden, and the inherited corruption resulting from it, but to a basic definition of sin that all human beings fall into equally: “ ‘I believe... I cannot believe’ [quoted from the Small Catechism, I.3]. What does that mean? It means free will ends at the Holy Spirit, and there is also the end of original sin (believing in one’s own belief)” (196-97).

This leads to the conclusion, as the Formula of Concord rightly says, that God is the Author of Evil. He created human beings as sinners, *to be* sinners. The reason they didn’t resist sin is that they were *constitutionally unable* to do so, just as we are, except without justification, because *they* hadn’t sinned yet. The next domino to fall, then, is the Justice of God. He designed Adam and Eve in such a way that they had to sin, then He punished them for sinning. This means the Law of God has nothing to do with Goodness and Justice, only with unexplained Wrath. And that is exactly how Paulson talks about it all through the book. “As long as God’s anger at sin, his law, is his righteousness, then his righteousness is in the process of destroying the whole cosmos” (41). “God’s wrath was supra-legal, bigger than it should have been according to the law; it operated outside reason, outside the free will.... When this dawned on Luther he was forced to conclude that God’s *will*, the *law*, and the *good* were not synonymous” (42). “Reason revolts at the very idea of God’s wrath, since God’s anger cannot be confined to the law, and thus it is immoral and unjust. Divine wrath undermines morality, destroys faith in God’s law, and (adding fuel to the fire) God intends it that way” (66).

This is why Paulson everywhere opposes “the legal scheme,” his catch-all diagnosis of false religion. Man naturally thinks that he can work his way to God by following some law, but he cannot. In

Scripture and Confessional Lutheran theology, the reason he cannot is that he is fallen. There *is* a legal ladder to heaven, but sinners are not capable of climbing it. “The law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin” (Rom. 7:14). Having dispensed with the Fall, or any concern for Divine Justice, Paulson can only go after the Law instead. “The legal scheme” is the problem. There is *no* legal relationship that man can have with God, whether good or bad. Pure wrath replaces condemnation (*i.e.* judicial wrath), and there is no way for anyone to *merit* salvation—not even Jesus Christ. The ladder simply doesn’t *exist*.

The idea of sacrifice is central to the legal scheme as Paulson defines it:

When people have no preacher, the universal relation of sinners to God is sacrifice: *do et [sic] des*. One gives a token/sign to God, destroying one part of creation (plant, animal, or person) that is used as a symbol by burning the sacrificial victim in order to placate God’s wrath; then when peace has been re-established, one eats the remainder of the sacrifice in a cultic meal that establishes communion though this symbol with the God and one’s enemies. This is called “worship,” in which God is imagined to have been given his due (*deum justificare*). (231)

You will look in vain for the part of the book where Paulson explains what separates a pagan sacrifice from the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, or even from the animal sacrifices that God demanded in the Old Testament. He isn’t talking about *pagan* sacrifice in this paragraph. He’s talking about *sacrifice*, period. He denies that Jesus Christ saved us by means of a sacrificial offering to the Father, because that would be “the legal scheme.” That would involve the Law *getting its due*. “The legal scheme... forced a series of unsuccessful theories of atonement that brought Christ’s ‘work’ on the cross under the confines of the law” (88-89). “Even Christ’s own sacrifice is revealed as non-cultic, since from the beginning the precise receiver of the sacrifice of the cross has been unclear: did the Father need to receive Christ’s sacrifice in order to cease his wrath? Did the law—or perhaps Satan—require payment? (233). Instead of the classical Lutheran doctrine of the atonement suggests Forde’s metaphor of a man who is killed by a truck “while throwing an endangered child to safety,” and concludes that if we understand the cross in that way, “Christ could rightly be said to have died for our sakes, without attempting to explain the cross as something the law required...” (233).

This brings us back to Christology, and thus to the Formula of Concord's criticism that Flacianism leads to heresy in that doctrine as well. We see this prediction borne out in Paulson's book. He interprets the *communicatio idiomatum* not as God the Son sharing in human nature, but sharing in human *sin* (92). He interprets the Patristic dictum, "What was not assumed cannot be healed," in the same willfully twisted way: "what Christ assumes from sinners is their sin" (103). As if I wanted my sin to be healed! No, *I* want to be healed *of* my sin! That is what the dictum actually means. He rejects the Definition of Chalcedon also, regarding the two natures of Christ. He writes, "'Nature' was being used as something bigger than God which could then divide up all of the cosmos into a divine type nature and a human...Worse yet, these two natures were presumed to be 'in opposition to another.' This effort was doomed to failure; incarnation does not mean that 'human nature' was added to divine nature—or that Christ assumed 'humanity' as a category" (96).

So the question arises, according to Steven Paulson *how* could Christ save us, if neither His active obedience (His perfect life) nor His passive obedience (His sacrificial death)—both being legal realities—were able to overcome the extralegal wrath of God? And how could Christ even live a perfect life or make a fitting sacrifice of Himself in the first place, if taking Human Nature meant taking Original Sin? Paulson's two great errors flow together in his treatment of the Atonement, and the result is nothing short of appalling. How did Jesus save us? By breaking the Law Himself:

Christ goes deeper yet into flesh to take our sin. Although he did not commit a sin, he not only ate with sinners, but *acknowledged* sins as his own, that is, he confessed (*confessio*) them. This is like a man whose son has committed a crime, and out of selfless love the father steps in to take the punishment, but then goes too far—he irrationally comes to confess this crime so vehemently that he believes he has committed it—and as Luther famously said, "as you believe, so it is." ...Unfortunately, Christ suffered on the cross the cost of anthropological projection of the heart's faith, where he came to believe that his Father was not pleased with him, thus multiplying sin in himself just like any other original sinner who does not trust a promise from God. ...Then finally in the words on the cross, "My God, my God..." he made the public confession of a sinner, "why have you forsaken me?" Confessing made it so, and thus Christ committed his own, personal sin—not only an actual sin, but the original sin. He felt

God's wrath and took that experience as something truer than God's own word of promise to him ("This is My Son, with whom I am well pleased"). (104-5)

Here is a contradiction much more confounding than the one mentioned above. "He did not commit a sin," Paulson writes, and then less than a page later, "Christ committed his own, personal sin." The first statement is what we expect to hear any Christian confess, but the second statement, the blasphemous one, is carefully justified and explained much differently than the confusing stuff in the middle about "irrationally coming to confess" the crime of a loved one. "He felt God's wrath and took that experience as something truer than God's own word of promise to him." That's exactly how Paulson defines Original Sin in another part of the book: "It is to receive a word from God in the form of a promise, and then to accuse God of withholding something of himself—calling God a liar" (152). Paulson attempts to resolve the contradiction by distinguishing between obedience to the Law and obedience to God: "This does not change the fact that the Son was obedient to the Father; it only confirms the fact that obedience to his Father is not the same thing as obedience to the law..." (107). But even that doesn't work, because he has accused Jesus not only of violating a commandment, but of "calling God a liar." That is, the sin Paulson accuses Him of was committed directly against the Father, so what does he hope to gain by suggesting that Jesus could disobey the law while obeying the Father? It seems he must mean that the Father *told* Him to sin, and so by sinning He was really obeying the Father, even if the Law had to condemn Him, not being in on that little secret.

And how is this supposed to work salvation for sinners, that the spotless Lamb should join them in the mud? Paulson says that by identifying so deeply with human beings as to take their sin and actually experience the act of sin, He confessed not just that He was a sinner, but that He was *every* sinner, the *only* sinner. The result of this confession, for some reason, was that "once the Law accused Christ, it looked around and found no other sin anywhere in the world and suddenly, unexpectedly, when Christ was crucified, its proper work came to a halt" (110). It is not clear at all by what principle this works. It seems a bizarre and inadequate theory to prefer to the Substitutionary Atonement taught in the Lutheran Confessions, but this is what Paulson means when he says that Christ "fulfilled the law" (e.g. 183).

His use of this terminology is misleading at best, because the way you fulfill a law is by *obeying* it, and that is the opposite of what he means. He means only that the law is spent, used up, passed away. "The

law is eternally in the past for those who have been put to death in baptism; it is a memory. Their future is without any law, since a good heart does the works of the law—without any law at all—perfectly freely” (225). This means there can be no Third Use of the Law. “Melanchthon... lost the forest for the trees..., introducing a novelty called ‘the third use’ of the law as a guide to Christians that utterly confused Paul’s use of the *Simul* and freedom from the law” (186-7). “There is no potential for doing the law in the new creature” (179). He also denies the distinction between the moral and ceremonial Law (81), and the concept of the Law as an eternal expression of God’s will and character: “The law remains eternally, but it is not an eternal law in the sense of ruling or making any demands of Christians—nor is it the very mind of God itself” (224). He is not quite an antinomian, because he recognizes that Christians still need to hear the Law in order that their flesh might be mortified, but this is the only good thing he has to say about it. “[Christ] rids us of the old creature—the law was *established* for this purpose, it is not discarded, but it surprisingly brings death instead of justification” (225). The Law is entirely negative.

Is there any good theology in *Lutheran Theology*? Yes, there is. He’s good on Baptism, and the way it puts the Christian into a new Aeon—making him a member of Christ’s Kingdom, the World that is to Come, even while he’s still stuck in this world and battling with stubborn sins—and he’s very good on the importance of preaching. The Word is needed in order to sustain that hidden baptismal life. The New Man lives by his ear (177) and must take refuge in the Promise he hears when all the evidence of his eyes tells him that Baptism changed nothing. “On the face of it, Luther’s proposal was not of ‘reform’ not was it modest, though it was excruciatingly simple: it was to replace the papacy with a sermon. ... There was no greater authority in the church than the preacher in the act of preaching” (8). His exploration of life *with* a preacher as compared to life *without* a preacher is useful too: “Fate is having an almighty God who never speaks” (22). And there are plenty of other nice insights and formulations scattered throughout the book, although I found them hard to appreciate in context, especially on my first read-through. If you proceed to read the book, hopefully the warnings in this review will help you do so profitably. There are many bones to spit out, and they are jagged. Let the reader beware.

## Book Reviews

**Washer, Paul.** *Gospel Assurance and Warnings (Recovering the Gospel)*. Reformation Heritage Books, 2014.

Review by Richard P. Shields

I am writing this review as someone who is outside the Reformed/Evangelical community, namely as a pastor in the confessing Lutheran tradition, but also one who is keenly aware of the need to challenge much of what passes as the Christian faith.

### The Good

There are many things to like about this book. Washer takes on the current evangelical emphasis of “salvation prayer and asking Jesus into your heart” theology. In Washer’s words: “Churches reduce the gospel message to a few creedal statements, teach that conversion is a mere human decision, and pronounce assurance of salvation over anyone who prays the sinner’s prayer” (p. ix). He points out the extended problems with such an approach: 1) “hardens the hearts of unconverted,” 2) “deforms the church,” 3) “reduces evangelism and missions to little more than a humanistic endeavor driven by clever marketing strategies,” 4) “brings reproach to the name of God” (pp. ix–x).

Such an analysis of the problem facing much of the Reformed/Evangelical is sadly accurate. Even more so, those trends, especially #2 and 3, have had significant influence beyond the Reformed/Evangelical strain, extending also to Lutheranism. So, Washer’s book is a wakeup call for any Christian, and especially preachers who have been led astray by such short-sighted, and worse, wrongheaded approaches. As Washer writes: “Thus, men have traded their mantles for methodologies, prophecy for pragmatism, and the power of the Holy Spirit for cleverly devised marketing strategies” (p. 4).

As per the title, the book is arranged in two parts: Biblical Assurance (chapters 1-14) and Gospel Warnings (chapters 15-19). The first part presents the positive side of salvation, the second the negative side, namely false assurances of salvation.

There are some excellent chapters in the first part of the book, particularly chapter 10 “Confessing Christ.” He states: “We will begin with a declaration that might be considered somewhat radical or even avant-garde to many in the evangelical community—Christianity is

about the person and work of Jesus Christ” (p. 100, emphasis in original). In chapter 14 “Believing in Jesus” Washer clearly identifies critical problems with what is “faith” in contemporary evangelical circles.

### **The Not-so Good**

For all of Paul Washer’s spot-on identification of problems in the Reformed/Evangelical movement, there is a serious flaw in the entire book. His solution is not any more helpful than the problems he identifies. The problems are based on a poorly stated law, and yet he offers only another version of the Law, namely Law-based performance in one form or another. The problem is even in the title of the book, *Gospel Assurance and Warnings*. If the Gospel is what God has done for sinful humans through the work of Jesus Christ, then it is free of any kind of condemnation (warnings). Yet, repeatedly he offers the “gospel warnings” as the solution. In reality, that is only Law compounded upon problem he is trying to fix, namely poorly presented Law.

Even in the first part, “Biblical Assurance,” Washer presents 14 criteria for looking upon the person’s life to determine whether he/she is saved. Notice that each of them, while good to explore, lead the person to performance, based on the Law. Yet, the Gospel invites the person to see how Jesus Christ has met all those requirements for us sinful humans.

Washer’s statements lead to a contradictory approach: “Understand that this is not a call for ministers or lay people to become judges of others, but to put away the belief in and proclamation of a superficial and powerless gospel...” (p. 17). And yet throughout his book, Washer is indeed judging others. Of course, if the entire book is really based on the Law, then judging is the expected result.

This confusion of Law and Gospel is highlighted in one section of “The Small Gate” (chapter 16). In one sentence he clearly gives the gospel foundation, yet contradicts that very clear word at the end of the same sentence. “Our assurance of salvation should not be founded upon a comparison of our sanctification with that of other believers, but upon our relying on the merits of Christ alone and our recognition of God’s providential sanctifying work in our lives (p. 184, emphasis added). So, is it Christ’s work alone? Or is it our contribution in sanctification that is the foundation of our assurance?”

And then, he offers this muddled advice to preachers: “After the evangelist preaches the gospel, he must make a passionate call for all to come to Christ. However, he must give this call in accordance with the Scriptures. He must not compromise or tone down the demands that

Christ places upon those who would enter the kingdom...” (p. 185). On the next page he continues, “When the demands of the gospel become part of the gospel presentation, then the gospel will once again be a scandal...” (p. 186). Note that if there is a “demand” in the gospel, then it is no longer gospel (Galatians 1:6-9). The scandal of the gospel is that God became flesh and took upon himself the sins of the whole world (1 Corinthians 1:18-25), not that there is additional demands on the person.

The further I read in Part 2, the more discouraging was Washer’s presentation. The law was not only prominent, it was oppressive by the end. Note how he applies the “bad tree-bad fruit” analogy. “A bad tree cannot bear good fruit, and an unregenerate heart cannot fulfill the righteous requirements of the law” (p. 224). That is a half truth; he should continue with this: “And neither can a regenerate heart fulfill the righteous requirements of the law.”

The worst part is that Washer does not point to the true solution to the errors of the church. That is, the gospel of Jesus Christ in the written Word, in baptism (baptism now saves...through the cleansing of the consciences, 1 Peter 3:21), in the Lord’s Supper (“body of Christ given for you” and the “blood of Christ shed for you for the forgiveness of sins,” 1 Corinthians 11:23-28) in the absolution (Matthew 18:18-20). The places where Jesus has promised to be, where he remembers us (that is the Gospel, not us remembering him) are neglected. Each of these is external to the Christian (*extra nos*), and because they are true Gospel bring the very thing that Washer desires. And none of it is tainted with our feeble attempt at keeping the Law.

Paul Washer identifies critical problems in the contemporary Christian Church. For that we can thank him. But sadly what he offers is Law based approach that will fail in the end. I can not recommend this book to the people in my church, because of the confusion regarding Law and Gospel. What offers the Christian assurance is that Jesus Christ has fulfilled the Law entirely for every person, and he suffered death as payment for the sins of every person—that is the assurance of the Gospel. Nothing more, nothing less.

Thanks to Cross Focused Reviews (A Service of Cross Focused Media, LLC) for a copy of the book for an unbiased review.

***Schumacher, William H. Who do I Say that You Are? (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2010).***

Review by Jordan Cooper

Arguing from an anthropological perspective, William H. Schumacher purports in this work that the Finnish school of Luther interpretation, as taught by Tuomo Mannermaa, has misinterpreted Luther's theology by replacing Luther's theology of the word with an ontologically focused approach to the human person. For Schumacher's Luther it is God's word of address to the sinner, as a creative word, which has primacy. This is distinguished from Finnish writers who propose that the human creature is defined by ontological union with God.

For Schumacher, the traditional Lutheran approach to justification and Mannermaa's school are incompatible with one another. Justification is either theosis (Mannermaa) or forensic (the Book of Concord). Thus Mannermaa's approach to justification is essentially an attack on the entire Lutheran tradition after the Osiandrian controversy. Schumacher purports that the Finnish school is "if not a complete rehabilitation of Osiander, then at least the attempt to salvage key elements of his system which has been previously rejected by the Lutheranism of the Formula of Concord" (91). Schumacher points out that the Osiandrian error involved more than a denial of the unity of Christ's two natures, but also the prioritizing of the incarnation of Christ over his death and resurrection, leaving the cross in a subsidiary position. Schumacher's argument here is partially correct. There is an overemphasis in many of the Finnish writers on the incarnation, which makes salvation primarily an ontological reality, displacing the objective event of the cross. The solution to this problem is not, however, to reject ontological categories, and the soteriological significance of the incarnation as Schumacher does, but is to have a balanced approach to the soteriological significance of all events in Christ's life. In Lutheran soteriology (along with that of Paul), the cross is always the central salvific event. A more balanced approach would be to take the Finnish theology of incarnation, and place it within the context of the Formula's forensic emphasis. While the forensic elements of salvation may be primary, there are also strong ontological themes in Luther's thought which need not be neglected.

One of the problems with Schumacher's contention that the Finnish school is essentially Osiandrian is that he fails to discuss the primary problems with Osiander's theology according to the Formula of Concord. The Formula isn't condemning the concept of ontological union, or the importance of Christ's indwelling; rather, the Formula is

seeking to clarify that the infusion of love and other virtues does not precede justification. In other words, the concern of the Formula is salvation by works, not the idea that Christ is present in faith. I think the problem here begins with the Finnish interpretation which concludes that the Formula is opposed to Luther. Such a division is overstated. Luther places salvation in both juridical and participationist categories. The Formula focuses on the forensic elements (rightly so I think) because of the necessity of clarifying these issues in light of Osiander's teaching. This shouldn't be pitted against Luther's own theology, when Luther was willing to approve of Melancthon's writings on justification with primarily (at times exclusively) forensic language.

The most interesting chapter in Schumacher's work is in his evaluation of Luther's own writings. Schumacher rightly points out that the Finnish school tends to conflate the early and late Luther, ignoring the development of Luther's thought, especially his great Reformation discovery. It is somewhat surprising that one of the most significant passages for the Finnish school comes from a Christmas sermon in 1514, when Luther hadn't yet developed his mature understanding of justification. In some of the more extreme forms of the Finnish approach (Karkkainen for example), the Reformation discovery is almost completely ignored, and one wonders why the Medieval church would even have an issue with Luther's view of justification if this interpretation were correct. Here is where Schumacher paints with too broad a brush. While many in this school ignore the categories of imputation, and even *sola fide*, Mannermaa is careful to place these categories in the context of Luther's overall thought, though it is a valid criticism to say that he downplays their importance. This chapter demonstrates that some of the language used by the Finnish school does not mean what they claim in the context of Luther's own writings. However, I remain convinced that the central thesis of Mannermaa, that Luther teaches that an ontological union with Christ is the metaphysical basis for God's gracious imputation, has *some* validity.<sup>1</sup> Faith itself is a kind of union with Christ, through which Christ's benefits are given to the believer. In other words, Christ is truly present in faith, giving himself to the Christian as righteousness, especially through his perfect fulfillment of the law, his death on the cross, and

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<sup>1</sup> Mannermaa fails to distinguish between the *unio fidei formalis* and the *unio mystica*, which is why he is in disagreement with Article III of the Formula of Concord. We must distinguish between the union with Christ that is faith itself (as in Luther's common marriage metaphor regarding the great exchange), and the indwelling of Christ which sanctifies. Osiander did not make such a distinction and thus conflated justification and renewal.

Christ's victory over the devil according to both natures in the resurrection; this does not neglect the fact that the union of God and man in the incarnation is also a necessary part of the Christian's righteousness.

In response to the Finnish school, Schumacher convincingly demonstrates that the influence of the Greek fathers on Luther has been overstated. Luther's primary influences, rather, were Augustine, Ambrose, Jerome, Bernard, and the German mystical tradition. He correctly points out that deification language in Luther is taken from medieval mysticism, and is thus not identical with Eastern conceptions of theosis. I would point out, however, that there are many commonalities between the mystical tradition which Luther praises and the Eastern fathers. Whether the Eastern fathers had any significant influence on Bernard, Tauler, or the *Theologia Germanica* remains to be demonstrated, but one cannot help seeing certain common themes. The *Theologia Germanica*, for example, states: "God assumed human nature or humanity. He became humanized and man became divinized. That is the way amends were made."<sup>2</sup> It seems unthinkable to me that Luther would promote and publish the *Theologia Germanica* and the works of Tauler if he didn't agree with their conviction that salvation is in some sense an ontological event.

Schumacher's book is a fascinating read, and is essential to grapple with for any interested in this issue. Schumacher points out some of the genuine flaws in Finnish Luther research, which often lets an ecumenical agenda guide research, rather than letting the evidence speak for itself. However, in doing this, Schumacher swings too far in the other direction, ignoring the ontological soteriological concepts that are prominent in such works as "On Christian Liberty," "Two Kinds of Righteousness," and the 1535 Galatians commentary. He leaves no place for the traditional Lutheran doctrine of the *unione mystica*, which relies heavily on traditional substance ontology. The fact that Luther could promote both Melancthon's works which deal almost exclusively in legal categories, and the *Theologia Germanica* which deals almost exclusively in ontological categories demonstrates that both sides in this debate have often set up a false dichotomy which is foreign to Luther. Salvation is both forensic and participationist.

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<sup>2</sup> The *Theologia Germanica* of Martin Luther, 63.

## Sermon

### CALLING ALL SINNERS (Matthew 9:9-13)

By Rev. Dr. Curtis Leins

Grace be unto you and peace from God Our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

#### INTRODUCTION: CALLED BY GOD

I am NOT asking you to raise your hands with this first question. However, I am asking you to think seriously about it. How many of you have been *called by God*? Now, I am going to clarify the question just a bit. Again, no hand-raising please. How many of you have been called to a holy vocation? The Gospel text that is before us tonight gives us a wonderful opportunity to learn from Our Lord Jesus Christ an unexpected answer to these questions. In fact, not only will we learn with the Apostle Matthew about a Holy Calling, but we will learn from Dr. Martin Luther a fuller understanding of a holy vocation.

#### A HOLY CALLING

Jesus had just healed a paralyzed man, while forgiving his sins. You remember that the religious leaders accused Jesus of blasphemy for forgiving a sinner. In tonight's text, Jesus continues walking. He comes to a Tax Collectors booth. Jesus *calls* the Tax Collector, "Follow Me." The very next verse finds Jesus in Matthew's house. There is a big party. The religious leaders again are critical of Jesus. He eats with Tax Collectors and sinners. The response of the Savior, "I have come not to *call* the righteous but sinners."

I have some ideas about this: some of them I am sure about, some I am just wondering. We are sure that Matthew also was called Levi. But, we do not know if this is because he was from the tribe of Levi. We do not know if Matthew (Levi) was from a house of Levitical Priests. We are sure that Matthew is very well-studied in the O.T. Especially, he is highly sensitive to the religious language of Righteousness. Matthew's Gospel uses the term almost three times as often as all of the other Gospels combined. He thinks and writes about Righteousness a lot! Also, we are sure that Matthew has chosen to reject the Jewish notion of Righteousness as taught by the Temple Priests and instead embarked on a life that is considered traitorous to his nation and sinful to his religion.

I have a guess about this, or at least a question that I want to ask Matthew when I see him. Was Matthew from the line of Temple

Priests? Was Matthew a student of the O.T. and very attuned to Scriptures about Righteousness? If so, was he very aware of those passages that declare that no one is good, not one is righteous, no not one? (Ps. 14) I'll bet. Did Matthew see the hypocrisy of the Sadducees and Pharisees and did he reject the Priesthood that lay before him? I think so. Did he respond with leaping heart and new revelation when he heard the Word of God through Jesus Christ? Yes. "I have come to *call sinners*, not the righteous." Matthew understood that there were NO Righteous. Matthew knew that he was a sinner. All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. If we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. Not one is good. No, not one.

But, Jesus forgave sins and spoke and ate with sinners. By His own Word, Jesus came to *call sinners*. Did you notice the *instantaneous nature* of Christ's relationship with Matthew? In verse 9, we learn that Jesus has *called* Matthew. In verse 10, Jesus is in Matthew's house, reclining, eating, and teaching. There is an immediate relationship. Jesus does not require a probationary period. There is no requirement that Matthew prove himself worthy. Other rabbis and groups have a provisional period of testing and evaluation lasting up to 3 years. Not Jesus! His Word goes out. Grace is given. A disciple is made.

What has happened here? What is Christ teaching us through the life of Matthew? Let me put this in Lutheran Terms. Matthew has brought nothing to the relationship. He is dead in his sin (Col. 2, Eph. 2). We all are. Matthew is contributing nothing in order to be accepted, received, or redeemed. He has not merited the love of Christ. He has not earned the mercy of God. Everything for Matthew's favor, forgiveness, and righteousness is provided by Jesus Christ. *Satisfatio Vicaria* is the theological term. It is the complete and all-sufficient vicarious sacrifice of Jesus Christ to atone for and redeem the sinner. Matthew is the *passive recipient*. Jesus is the *active redeemer*. Luther calls this Passive Righteousness that Christ gives through faith. By grace through faith, the Righteousness of Jesus Christ is given to Matthew.

## II. YOUR HOLY VOCATION

Now, let's explore a bit more of what Luther would tell us. The final verse of tonight's Gospel says, "I come not to call the righteous but sinners." Pastors have been trained to read this in Greek and recognize the verb Καλέω, to call. What we might not be trained to read, as Luther would, is the Latin of the same verb. "To call" in Latin is the verb *Vocare*; the noun is *vocatio* or Vocation. Christ has Called Matthew and all Sinners to a new *Vocatio*, a new

Vocation. You see, in Matthew's day, the only ones who were considered to be righteous were the religious leaders. But, Jesus had a powerful Word that changed the understanding of righteousness and sin and forgiveness. In the same way, in Luther's day, the only ones who were considered to have a call or a *holy vocation* were priests. Luther had a Word from God to change our understanding of Calling and Holy Vocation.

First, Luther explained that every child of God has a Vocation or Calling. We are a Holy Priesthood of All Believers. Jesus Christ has come *to call sinners*. The first vocation or calling of every believer is *faith*. Are you Called of God? Yes! Do you have a Vocation? Absolutely! According to Jesus Christ and according to Martin Luther, every believer has a Holy Calling. It is Faith in Jesus Christ. This is your first and greatest calling, *Vocatio*. But, this is not the extent of it. God has called you to Himself; then He has placed you in the world. In the world, you have multiple Vocations. Luther spoke of three institutions that God has established: 1) the pastoral office or holy orders, 2) the household or family, and 3) civil government or society. In other words, a Pastor is given a Vocation from God. But, father, mother, child, parent, brother, sister, husband, and wife; these also are Holy Vocations. They are holy because they are established by God and are lived out through God. The third institution involves judges and mayors, servants and maids, builders and workers. This is a third Holy Vocation because God has established it and blesses it. Instead of your faith removing you from the world, your faith places you in the world, as the hands and heart of Christ.

Luther said, "God is milking the cows through the Vocation of the Milkmaid." God is at work, working through the farmer and physician, the artist and the Pastor. God is at work through you, using you to bless others. You can see that you have a Vocation, a Calling to represent Christ and to give service to Christ, wherever God has placed you. Christ is working *in you*, through your Vocation. Now, we understand Matthew and his great party. Having come into the presence of God (*coram deo*), he has been sent out into the world (*coram mundo*). This is Christ at work. Yet, this is Matthew's Vocation. What an example to every one of us; Matthew is sharing his faith with the world.

### III. THE VOCATION OF THE HOLY MINISTRY

By elevating the Vocation of everyone of God's children, Luther does not diminish the importance of the Vocation of the Holy Ministry. Here again, Matthew is a great example. He is Called by Christ to be an Apostle, one who rightly handles the Word of God. We give honor to

Matthew and to those who occupy the Office of the Word and Sacrament. We give honor to them, not because they are any better or more holy than the rest of us, but because they have been Called by God into the Office of the Holy Ministry. The Pastor is a gift that God gives to the church. The Pastor is to deliver to the people of God the gifts that Christ has given to His whole Church. The Pastor is rightly to preach the word, both Law and Gospel. He must be apt to teach and so well studied that he is capable of providing us with right teaching and refutation of false and heretical teaching. He is to administer the means of grace in their purity: Holy Baptism, Holy Communion, and the declaration of Absolution of Sins.

The Pastor is to provide an example for the flock. The Bible says that he will be judged by a higher standard. There are difficult requirements that a man must meet in order to be Called to the Ministry. Lutheran doctrine declares that when a Pastor is serving in the Office of Holy Ministry, he represent Christ. When he declares the forgiveness of sin on account of the all sufficient atoning sacrifice of Christ, it is as Christ Himself and should be received as from Christ. When he declares the Word of Christ over the elements of bread and wine, on account of the Word, they are for us the very, true Body and Blood of Christ. When he baptizes a child or adult into the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ by the Word of God, it is the washing of baptismal regeneration and the forgiveness of sin.

## CONCLUSION

How is a Call or Vocation given and how is it accomplished? The answer to these Questions is Jesus Christ. The Word of Jesus has called you. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of Christ. Christ has not only called you, and not only forgiven you, and not only counted you Righteous, He has *changed you*. Jesus lives in you. His Spirit has made you His Temple. Through daily fellowship with Him and regular reception of forgiveness of sins and Sacrament of the Altar, Jesus provides you with renewed faith and strength to serve Him in your Calling, your personal Vocation.

When you stand *coram deo*, before God, you are a passive recipient of His righteousness. This is Passive Righteousness. But, once changed, you bear good fruit because you have good roots, in ground soaked in the blood of the Lamb. You turn from *coram deo* to *coram mundo*, before the world. Who lives in you? Christ! What do you do now? Serve Christ by serving others. This is called Active Righteousness, that comes from Christ and is in Christ. If I were to ask, how many of you have been *called by God*, (you know that this is a question asking if you have faith in Jesus Christ) how

many would raise your hands? If I were to ask, how many of you have been called to a *Holy Vocation*, (husbands, wives, fathers, mothers, farmers, teachers, artists, and pastors) how many would declare, “Yes, by the help of God!”