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(Reviewer: David Lau)

Is Your Head In The Clouds?*

John K. Pfeiffer

* The "President's Address," at the graduation service at Immanuel Lutheran College, May 23, 1998.

If, then, you have been raised with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory (Col. 3:1-4).

In Christ Jesus, who has ascended to the right hand of the Father, there to rule in power and glory, fellow redeemed and especially you, the graduates of Immanuel Lutheran High School, College, and Seminary:

Have you ever heard someone say, "You've got your head in the clouds?" This is said of a person who has dreams that are so unrealistic that they are beyond the possibility of fulfillment. He has lost contact with the realities of life. Such a person cannot function well in the real world, because he cannot find a place in life that measures up to his dreams.

I am sure that in the minds of some people, ILC is a "head in the clouds" kind of school . . . as though we teach some kind of unrealistic philosophy that disables our students. If we are constantly looking for a new life to come, we will not function well in this life. So the world thinks. Christianity is seen as a kind of drug that puts us in a stupor and suppresses our will to achieve.

Is this true? Do we graduate students that are going to be failures in life? As president of an institution of higher learning, I am sure that the world expects me to hold before you the wonders that

are out there. They expect me to talk like this:

“Graduates of Immanuel, no generation has been given more opportunities than yours. As you stand here on the threshold of your future, a big, bright, wonderful world awaits you. Technological advances have opened doors that had been closed since the dawn of time. With diploma in hand, you can go forth and achieve what no other generation has achieved. Indeed, with all that the world has to offer, you can accomplish whatever you put your minds to.”

That’s what the people of this world want me to say. They want to make their world appear as a wonderful jewel, sparkling with facets of power and riches and wisdom and pleasure. The world would be very disappointed, even angry to hear the thoughts expressed at an Immanuel graduation.

Do we turn out graduates who have their heads in the clouds? Are we dreamers? I certainly hope so. That is why I ask each of you graduates this question:

IS YOUR HEAD IN THE CLOUDS?

This question is twofold. The first part has to do with your Head. The second has to do with your head.

The vast majority of us are followers. I know of very few people who actually walk on a pathway apart . . . a pathway of their own making. This goes for dreamers, too. We may have our own dreams, but so often these are really not original, but are the dreams that someone else has implanted in our minds. Who has ever had an original dream?

Jesus of Nazareth is One who has. But His was not an impossible dream. His was not a dream beyond reality. His was a dream of reality. I call it a dream, because it was conceived in the mind of God long before there was any way or reason to have this dream.

This was a dream of gathering to Himself a glorious band of men, women, and children . . . a grand assembly upon whom He could lavish the manifold gifts of His love. These would be creatures who would delight in His love with every ounce of their being. What a dream this was!

But there was a nightmare in His dream . . . something so dark and terrible that it caused Him to cry out in anguish from the depths of His soul. From the shadows of Gethsemane: **“My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me . . .”** From the darkness of Calvary: **“My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?”**

That cry has echoed through the ages and has pierced our very soul. In order to fulfill His dream, He had to take upon Himself the vile pollution of our wickedness. And having done so, to take upon Himself the unthinkable agony of separation from His Father and from all that is good, for this was the punishment for our sins.

He did it. He suffered the nightmare and overcame it. He conquered sin and death, rising to life on the third day. Forty days thereafter, He ascended up on high, there to take His rightful place at the right hand of His Father.

How wondrously our Savior has brought about the realization of the dream. Through the word of His suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension, He has been gathering to Himself this band of people . . . people made glorious by His cleansing blood and by the imputation of His righteousness.

You are that band of people, you Christians. You are that band, you graduates. You have been raised from the death of your sinfulness and have been joined to Him who sits at the right hand of God.

So, the answer to our question is, “Yes.” Yes, your Head is in the clouds. He has ascended into the clouds and beyond. Jesus is your Head and you are His body. This is no dream. This is reality.

For us there is yet a dream. If our Head is in the clouds . . . if He has brought His dream to reality, shall not we join Him there? ‘For where the Head is, there full well I know His members are to dwell when Christ shall come and call them’ (*The Lutheran Hymnal*, 216:1).

Didn’t He promise this? **“I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there you may be also”** (John 14:2f.). Jesus is your Head. Therefore, it is true: your Head is in the clouds.

As you stand here on the threshold of your future, do you do so with your head in the clouds? Now I am not speaking of Christ, but of you. Where is your head this day? As your mind hurtles into your future, what is the focus of your thoughts?

As I have already indicated, the world wants us to focus on dreams of power and riches and intelligence and pleasure. Is that where your mind is? But, children of God, these are things of the world . . . things that fade away so quickly and are gone forever. These are dreams of smoke and vapor.

Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. Above the clouds . . . that's where your real life is. It is hidden with Christ in God. Hidden: the world cannot see it. But, you know it to be true. Christ is your life . . . your life this day, your life tomorrow, your life forever. From the Head flows down the Spirit who breathes the life of Christ into these souls, which were dead in sin. Now we are alive unto righteousness.

We dreamers have our heads in the clouds, all right. That's why you dedicate your lives to Him who dwells above the clouds. You dedicate your future education to Him. You dedicate your future power and riches to Him. You dedicate your future family and your job to Him. Everything to Him, because your head is not on the earth where there is death but in the clouds where there is life.

Let the world mock us as dreamers. They will soon learn the truth of it all. One day, sooner than we think, our Head is going to return with the clouds of heaven. Then they will see Him and they will see us. Then our hidden life will be revealed, as we are transformed to be like Him who first dreamed of this glorious band of people.

As you receive your diplomas today and walk off this stage and into your future, I hope and pray that you will do so with your head in the clouds. I pray that all of you will spend the rest of your life seeking those things which are above the clouds, where Christ sits at the right hand of God. Even so, O Lord, grant us all such a mind set.

Family Life Under Christ

Stephen C.F. Kurtzahn

I. Christian Marriage

Genesis 2:21-24: And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the LORD God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man. and Adam said: "This *is* now bone of my bones And flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

It should be obvious to us all why a study of Christian marriage is necessary. As we look around our 20th century society, marriage has been perverted and abandoned by many and the family appears to be in serious trouble. All you have to do is read the newspaper -- every day there is a listing of births at our local hospitals. Have you noticed over the years how more and more of those who are brought into this world are born to unwed mothers? It is also a fact of life nowadays that over 50% of those couples who do get married end up divorcing each other. We are shocked when surveys are published which show that a majority of married men and women have affairs outside of marriage. We all know people who are living together outside of the marriage bond, and they feel there is nothing wrong with it, and there appears to be no guilt. And the television we watch every day doesn't help the situation either. Sex is rampant in the afternoon soap operas, and in the evenings our children are taught on their favorite shows that sex is OK as long as it is safe. Celebrities such as Magic Johnson are now considered heroes, while thirty years ago they would have been disgraced for their way of life. And when we look at ourselves and our own lives, we must admit that our own marriages and our own families are not what they should be. We also feel the effects of an immoral world in our

own lives and in our own homes. Because of the pressures and temptations of everyday life, we are not the husbands and wives that we should be, nor are we the parents that God wants us to be. We all need help!

These are just a few of the reasons why we present a discussion of the Christian family. We need to be very careful, however, that we do not think that if we live our lives the way God wants us to everything is going to be rosy. We should not endeavor to keep God's precepts with the opinion that if we follow all of His guidelines to a T He will bless us with success, good fortune, prosperity and happiness all the days of our lives. We also need to remember that sin is ever present right down to our innermost beings. Yes, we want to live God-pleasing lives, but we do so out of response to His great love for us. We should want to conduct ourselves according to His will--not because of what we can get out of it, but because of what He has done for us--that is, in response to the Savior's suffering and dying in our stead so that we could be saved from hell. We love--we love both Him and our fellow human beings, including our husbands and wives--because He first loved us.

Our text takes us back to the sixth day of creation. God had created Adam by forming him out of the dust of the ground and breathing into his nostrils the breath of life. God then had all the animals come before Adam so he could name them. But there was no companion suitable to Adam to be found anywhere. The Lord then caused a deep sleep to fall upon this first man; He removed a rib from his side and formed the first woman. It is significant that Eve was not taken from Adam's head, to be ruler over him, nor was she taken from his foot, to be stepped on and tyrannized by him. But she was taken from his side--to be a helper and a companion. And then we have the first marriage ceremony. But instead of the father of the bride leading the woman down the aisle, we have God bringing her to the man. Adam then tells us about marriage in his own words, "This *is* now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman, because she was taken out of Man.' Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh."

How blessed that first marriage must have been! There were no arguments, no fights, no hurt feelings, no taking advantage of the other spouse. All was perfect--until Satan came onto the scene as a serpent, that is. And when this old evil foe approached Eve and sin was conceived in her heart, she made a decision without consulting her husband; she made a decision which would affect her children to the end of time. She ate of that tree of which God told her not to eat.

Because of sin, we then have the first family argument. Adam blamed the woman God had given to him, and Eve blamed the snake for their disobedience to the Lord's Word. Because of sin, we also behold the judgment of God--Adam would have to work and toil and sweat in order to provide for his family. Eve would suffer pain in childbearing, and her desire would be for her husband. They and their descendants would also have to suffer death. But God in His love would not leave His creatures comfortless--He promised a Savior, who would crush the head and power of Satan--who would save us from all sins!

Now, as we continue reading through the Old Testament, there are several references to marriage and family life. We have the examples of the patriarchs, men such as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and how they endeavored to find God-fearing and believing women to be their spouses--women such as Sarah, Rebekah, Leah and Rachel. But we are also informed of their weaknesses and the problems they brought upon themselves and their wives and children. In the book of Proverbs, chapter 31, wise King Solomon speaks of the virtuous wife. It would be good if every couple would read these words. "Who can find a virtuous wife? for her worth *is* far above rubies. The heart of her husband safely trusts her; so he will have no lack of gain. She does him good and not evil all the days of her life." And then throughout the Old Testament prophets the relationship between God and His people is pictured as a marriage.

But it is not until the New Testament that the Lord gives us specific guidelines for Christian marriage. Jesus blesses marriage at the wedding of Cana. He also deals with the subject of divorce in some of His discourses when He walked among us. The Holy Spirit, through the apostle Paul, deals even more specifically with marriage and divorce in his epistles to the Corinthians. But it is not until we come to the epistle to the Ephesians that we have specifically set before us divine guidelines for Christian marriage.

Paul begins chapter 5 of Ephesians by saying, "Therefore be imitators of God as dear children.

And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.” Throughout this chapter, and to the very end of the epistle, for that fact, Paul speaks of our Christian sanctification--how we can live as the redeemed children of God in an unbelieving and corrupt world. The example we are to follow is that of our Savior Himself. And this even gets more specific when He speaks of marriage. Listen to what the Spirit says through His apostle: “Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so *let* the wives *be* to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord *does* the church. For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife *see* that she respects *her* husband.”

What a wonderful example we have to follow here! Just as Jesus sacrificed Himself upon the cross and shed His blood to redeem us from hell and to wash us clean of all our iniquity, even so husbands are to have a self-sacrificing love for their wives. They are to give themselves and their whole being to make sure that wife and children are fed and clothed. They are to sacrifice of their time and energy to make sure the home is a happy one. They are to make the necessary sacrifices to make sure that the children receive a Christian education and grow up knowing Jesus as their loving Savior. They are to bend over backwards to assure their wives that they are loved and cared for. And this is all to be done willingly, from the heart, not because the husbands have to, but because they want to!

And just as the Church is subject unto Christ in all things, as both spouses, therefore, are to submit themselves to Christ, their Head, so also wives are to have a self-submitting love for their husbands. This doesn't mean that a wife cannot voice her opinion. This doesn't mean that she is a slave or a possession of her husband. This doesn't mean that she is forced or coerced to do things her husband wants her to do. But she recognizes that her husband is the head of the household as Christ is the head of the Church. This, too, is done from a willing heart.

So often this headship principle is misunderstood and misapplied. We have all known husbands, and maybe we have even been one ourselves, who treat their wives as slaves sometimes. This is not following the example of Christ. And then there are wives who misunderstand what it means to be self-submissive to their husbands. Some simply don't want to, and they try to wrestle the headship away from their spouse. Others may take advantage of a Christian, loving husband and demand this and that in order to keep them happy. Others put up with all sorts of abuse, both physical and verbal, because they feel that's what it means to be submissive.

In order to understand this Scriptural headship principle within the family and within the marriage, one must know and experience the love of Christ. If we don't know and recognize how Christ has given Himself up for us, if we have not experienced the forgiveness of the Savior through Word and Sacraments, we can never hope to follow these guidelines for a God-pleasing marriage. Jesus Himself said that He came to this earth not to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many. Even so, as followers of Christ within the marriage bond, we should never be thinking, “What can I get out of this relationship for myself?” but we should be thinking, “What can I give to the other person in this relationship?”

There are many other things we could speak of when we consider marriage--for instance, what happens when two Christian people find themselves divorcing each other? How do we endeavor to follow God's will for our lives when the other spouse might not be a Christian? One could probably think of several other questions. May all of us take seriously the words of Scripture and apply them to our own lives. And just as Christ has loved us, may we love one another. Just as Jesus has forgiven us our sins, may we forgive the sins of our spouses. And just like Joshua in the Old Testament, may we stand and confess with our wives and children, “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord!”

II. Raising Christian Children

Ephesians 6:4: And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.

As we continue our meditations on the theme, "Family Life Under Christ," we are going to consider the raising of Christian children. We learned from Holy Scripture what God wants us to know about marriage. One of the main reasons the Lord instituted holy matrimony was to bring children into this world. Listen to what the Creator told our first parents, Adam and Eve: "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living things that moves on the earth."

"Be fruitful and multiply ..." Sad to say, however, there is a paradox in our modern American society concerning children. On the one hand, ever since the start of the baby boom the commercial world has been geared to the youth of our nation. Just look at the advertising on television--we are sold one product after another which are aimed at children, or which are intended to make us feel younger and younger. But, on the other hand, children have lost their importance in our society--we have all heard of latch-key kids, children whose parents both work, or who have a single parent who works full time, so they must come home from school to an empty house and are left to their own devices. Studies have shown that children are now the poorest part of American society, and they suffer real poverty more than any other segment of our population. Almost every day in our newspaper we read about abused and neglected children, who are scarred emotionally and oftentimes physically for the rest of their lives. Since 1973 unwanted children have been able to be legally aborted. And many young married couples today let selfishness get in the way, and so they don't decide to have children until they have fulfilled other goals in their lives, usually materialistic goals.

But what does God's Word have to say about children? Listen as the Holy Spirit speaks to us in Psalm 127: "Behold, children *are* a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb *is* a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so *are* the children of one's youth. Happy *is* the man who has his quiver full of them; They shall not be ashamed ..." Yes, children are a tremendous blessing, given to us by God in heaven. But how do we raise them? Some have suggested, tongue in cheek, of course, that it's too bad children are given to young, inexperienced adults, instead of to the old, who have gained a lifetime's worth of wisdom.

But we have not been left without direction. God has given us His Word, and when we begin to discuss this subject of raising Christian children we need to remember what God has told us in His Word about our youth. There are some general, Biblical truths that we always need to keep in mind above all else: Even though we conceive our children and give birth to them, they are not our own, but God's. We are but stewards of these precious little gifts from heaven. And so we always need to remember that we raise our children with one main goal in mind--we want to see our children in heaven someday with us at the side of Jesus, our Savior. This will color and influence the way we view child-raising and how we mold our young ones as they grow up.

How we all need to remember this! As parents, we want our children to have the best of everything. We want them to eat healthy food and get a lot of exercise so that they grow up with healthy bodies. We want them to have the best teachers and schools so that they can grow up and become productive citizens. We may spend tremendous amounts of money to send them to good colleges and universities so that they can get a high-paying job. In 20th century America we gear our children for this life.

But how easy it is to neglect their spiritual training and upbringing for the eternal life to come! Bring them to the Lord through the Sacrament of Baptism? My schedule is busy enough the way it is--I don't have the time to make arrangements for that with the pastor. Teach them to say their prayers at night before they go to bed? The kids are so tired from watching TV that all they want to do is go to sleep! Bring them to Sunday School? That's too early and it's the only day I have to sleep in! Enroll them in the Christian Day School if one is available in the congregation? They don't have all the modern conveniences of the public school system! Send them to Immanuel Lutheran College where

they can get a Christian higher education? That's too far away from home, and what kind of job can they get with a degree from there? Read them a Bible story every night before they go to bed? I'm too tired after a long, hard day at work! Be an example to them by living a Christian life? You can't get ahead in this world by being nice! As Christian parents, we need to stop making excuses, and do our utmost to bring our children to the Savior, for their eternal welfare and salvation depend on it!

Let's take a look and see what the Bible has to say about all this. The Spirit says through Paul in Ephesians: "And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord." Notice how God places the responsibility for such Christian training on the fathers, the heads of the households. We also have the example of Jesus Himself in Matthew's gospel: "Then little children were brought to Him that He might put *His* hands on them and pray, but the disciples rebuked them. But Jesus said, 'Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven.' And He laid *His* hands on them and departed from there." We have the example of the Old Testament believers, who were told by Moses in the Book of Deuteronomy, "Therefore you shall lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul, and bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall teach them to your children, speaking of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates ..." And then there are those words of Solomon who said, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it."

Now in any discussion of the Christian training of our children two other subjects also naturally come up. The first one has to do with discipline. The second one has to do with grown children of ours who appear to have fallen away from their faith in Christ and who appear to reject the Savior they have learned about at home. Let's first consider discipline.

A great deal has been written and said about discipline in the past 30 years. In the 1960s we had Dr. Spock, and in the late 1970s and early 1980s we had Dr. James Dobson, with his "Dare to Discipline" series of books and movies. We could perhaps learn something from both these schools of thought. Almost 500 years ago Dr. Martin Luther, the Reformer of the church, told his people that parents should have a stick in one hand, but an apple in the other, when it came to disciplining children. But what, again, does the Bible say?

We are all familiar with Solomon's words from Proverbs, "Spare the rod and spoil the child." But it is the same Spirit who says through Paul in our text, "Do not provoke your children to wrath." Are these two contradictory statements from the same Bible? No. But what we learn from this is that discipline should be done in a loving and understanding way. Discipline doesn't always have to be performed physically, but our young ones do need to know, sometimes in a very concrete way, what the difference is between right and wrong. They need to know the meaning of the word "no." They need to understand that they can't have the world handed to them on a silver platter. Just like the twigs of a young fruit tree are bent and shaped so that it can grow up to bear a multitude of apples, so also Christian parents are to use discipline as a tool so our children can grow up to be responsible, productive Christians in an unbelieving world. By proper discipline, our young ones can grow up to be the salt and the lights the Lord Jesus wants them to be.

But because of our sinfulness sometimes Christian parents can get a little carried away with discipline. Anger can fill a father's or a mother's heart, and the little spanking can turn into actual abuse. Because of our sinfulness the spanking can turn into a beating, and a child's spirit can be broken, and a young one can actually end up hating the parent. This is what Paul was referring to when he said, "Do not provoke your children to wrath." We can't forget that there are other ways to discipline a child than by spanking. You can take a toy away for a while. You can remove a privilege which the child holds dear. But in any discipline, as followers of the Lord Jesus, may we take the example of our heavenly Father who still disciplines us His children for our eternal, everlasting good. Listen to the writer to the Hebrews as he speaks of this: "... you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: 'My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the LORD loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives.' If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then

you are illegitimate and not sons. Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected *us*, and we paid *them* respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened *us* as seemed *best* to them, but He for *our* profit, that *we* may be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.”

The second subject we need to deal with is that of grown children who appear to have rejected their spiritual heritage--as adults they appear to have turned their back on the Savior they grew up to love.

In situations such as this, we need to remember that the Lord does not allow His Word to return to Him void, but that Word accomplishes exactly what He wants it to. We also need to remember that the Good Shepherd always knows when a sheep or lamb of His has strayed from the fold, and He will do everything in His almighty power to bring that sheep back. Nor was Solomon blowing hot air when he said, “Train up a child in the way he shall go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it.”

The Lord desires to bring back His lost sheep. We may not see it in our lifetimes when it comes to our straying children, but we need to put our trust and confidence in Christ, the Good Shepherd. I personally have been involved in several situations where people have been staring death in the face. These people were brought to baptism by Christian parents; they were taught about the love of Jesus who suffered and died and rose again to save them from hell; but when they became adults it appeared as if they had forsaken their Lord. They didn't go to church. They didn't want anything to do with the Word. They didn't appear to have any desire to receive the Lord's Supper. But there on their death bed, all the Christian training came back to them. They remembered their faithful Savior, to whom they had been so unfaithful. They remembered those Bible passages which at one time had brought such great comfort to their hearts and souls. And they died in peace, knowing once again that their sins had been washed away in the blood of the Redeemer, and that they could stand justified before God in the robes of Christ's righteousness. Our Lord keeps His promises!

If we have children who have strayed from the Savior--or grandchildren, or brothers and sisters--may we in prayer place them in the hands of our Good Shepherd. Let's not suffer guilt over such situations either--as parents we all have our faults. We all could have done things differently with our children--but if we raised them in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, we have given them the best gift possible, for we have brought them to Jesus. In doing so we have nothing for which to apologize; we have nothing of which to be ashamed. And where we may have failed, where we may have made mistakes with our little ones, the Lord forgives us and washes us clean, and in His own way and in His own time He straightens out those mistakes. If we were blessed to have been raised in a Christian home ourselves, may we be eternally grateful to our God for bestowing on us such a great gift. If we have children of our own living under our roofs today, may we lead them to the Lord Jesus in His Word as those parents did so long ago who brought their babies to the Savior. And if we are single, if we never had the opportunity to have our own children, let's remember those we do know in our daily prayers. Let's make it our concern that they learn about Christ. Let's pray that they will also grow up to know the love of Jesus.

III. Children's Relationships With Their Parents

Ephesians 6:1-3: Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother, which is the first commandment with promise: that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.

How things have changed over the years, and over our own lifetimes, when it comes to the way children relate to their parents! I remember my own folks telling me when I was small, “Children are to be seen and not heard.” In the home where I grew up you never, ever, sassied back at Mother and Father. We valued the opinion of our parents. We were taught to honor and respect our aunts and uncles and grandparents and everyone else in authority.

Those who grew up in the 1920s, 30s and 40s were probably raised to have even more respect

and honor for parents and superiors. In many instances, especially during the Great Depression, basic family survival often depended on it. But during the 1950s a change started taking place. Americans became more prosperous. Parents were able to do things and buy things for their children that they could never dream of having in their own youth. The young people in our country gradually became spoiled. Many of our youth began to expect to have the world handed to them on a silver platter. Our children then began to rebel, and many of us can still remember the chants and slogans of the late 60s and early 70s when the young people in our country revolted against almost everything their parents believed in and stood for.

Well, the children of the 60s and 70s are now having children of their own. And in many instances, the picture is not pretty. There is little or no respect for elders. Little ones don't hesitate to "mouth off" at their mothers and fathers. And in areas where there is a rather large elderly population, we find that many end up in nursing homes and retirement centers, totally forgotten and abandoned by their children.

Someone has suggested that if you want a glimpse at the attitudes and the morality of our present-day American culture, all you have to do is turn on the television set. If you would look at many of the popular TV shows going back to "All in the Family" and Archie Bunker in the early 70s, you can see how respect and honor for parents and those in authority have virtually disappeared. Life on TV centers around the children. The kids are the ones who are smart; they have the answers to every problem; and the world revolves around them. Parents, on the other hand, are dumb. They are the ones who need to learn the important lessons of life. They are the ones who need to be controlled and disciplined. Government officials are pictured as always corrupt. Church officials are depicted as greedy or spineless. It shouldn't surprise us that children have little or no respect for their elders and superiors in our day and age.

But apparently this was also a problem in the days of the Apostle Paul, for he addresses the subject very bluntly in his epistle to the Ephesians. We read in our text, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother, which is the first commandment with promise: that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth." When this letter was first sent and read to the gathered believers in this congregation, they must all have sat at the end of their chairs, listening to the Holy Spirit speak to them through the words of Paul. How the children must have perked up and listened when they heard Paul address them specifically: "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right." Obey your mothers and fathers. Love them. Honor them. Respect them. Do what they tell you to do, because this is what your Savior, who suffered and died to save you from your sins, wants you to do. This is the right thing to do. And then to show how important this matter is to God, Paul simply quotes the Fourth Commandment: "Honor your father and mother, which is the first commandment with promise: that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth."

Do we truly realize how important this is to our God? Look at all the commandments--all ten of them. "Thou shalt ..." "Thou shalt not ..." Only one of them has a promise attached to it, however, and that is the one that has to do with parents. God wants us to honor our parents and superiors because they are His representatives through whom He would give us His blessings, such as food, clothing, shelter, education, protection, the Word of God itself, and many other blessings which are too numerous to mention.

There are many other portions of Holy Scripture which speak of this same thing, and not just our text, and not just the Fourth Commandment. In Romans, chapter 13, Paul speaks of our obedience to the secular government, "Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves." In Hebrews, chapter 13, the holy writer speaks of honoring those who are over us in the church, such as our pastors and Sunday school teachers, "Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you."

But what we are mostly concerned about today is the relationship between children and their parents, how they should treat and interact with Mother and Father. The Scriptural principle is simple:

Honor your mother and father, for this is right. We have several examples of how this is to be done, and not to be done, throughout the Bible. The best example we have is that of our Lord Jesus, who was the perfect Child. We are told in Luke's gospel that "He was subject" to Mary and Joseph, and that He "increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men." On the other hand, we are given examples not to follow. At the time of David and the prophet Samuel in the Old Testament, the high priest's name was Eli, and aged Eli had two sons, Hophni and Phineas, who "hearkened not unto the voice of their father ..." They were both killed in battle. We are all familiar with the story of King David's son, Absalom, who rebelled against his father and tried to take the throne away from him. Absalom's long, flowing hair got caught in a tree, and he, too, was killed by a soldier loyal to King David. And then we have these very powerful words from Solomon in the book of Proverbs, "The eye *that* mocks *his* father, and scorns obedience to *his* mother, the ravens of the valley will pick it out, and the young eagles will eat it."

We also need to address how grown Christians should respond and react to their older parents. Yes, the little ones need to hear what God has to say about obeying Mom and Dad, but we older ones, who have left the nest, so to speak, also need to know what God expects of us when it comes to our elders. Needless to say, the Fourth Commandment still holds true, no matter how old we are: "Honor your father and your mother ..." Does this mean then, for example, that a person who is 30 or 40 years old, with a family of his own, must do everything his mother or father tells him to do? Relationships change. We become the heads of our own households. We become mothers and fathers to our own children. And to answer this question we need again to go back to Jesus, who is the perfect example for us. Remember when the Lord was at the wedding of Cana with Mary, His mother, and with His disciples? The bridal couple ran out of wine to serve their guests. Mary came up to Jesus, thinking that He was the same boy who obeyed her every word at home in Nazareth. She simply said to Him, "They have no wine." But Jesus was now a man, and He had also entered into His public ministry. The relationship had changed, and Jesus tells her so--but yet He treats her with love and respect: "Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come." And then we have Jesus as He hung dying upon the cross. After three days He would rise from the grave and ascend to His heavenly Father. He wanted to make sure that Mary, His mother, was provided for, so He placed her into the care of the Apostle John. "Woman," Jesus said, "Behold your son!" and to John He said, "Behold your mother!"

So also, as followers of Christ, we should hold our own parents in love and honor, even to their old age. This means that if our parents offer us advice when we are 30 or 40 or 50 years old, we should take that advice into serious consideration. But we are now ultimately responsible for ourselves and our own families. Listen to what God says in the Book of Leviticus, "You shall rise before the gray headed and honor the presence of an old man, and fear Your God: I *am* the LORD." This also means that if our parents need to be taken care of and provided for in their old age, we do it. Listen to Paul as he writes to Timothy, "... let them first learn to repay their parents; for this is good and acceptable before God." And again he says in the same book, "But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever."

As children and as adults, as we look back upon our own past lives, we will have to admit that we have not honored our parents as we should have. How often we disobeyed them. How often we treated them with disrespect. How often we blamed them for our problems when they were trying their hardest, under sometimes very difficult circumstances, to raise us in a Christian home. How we all need to fall before the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ and pour out to Him all of our sins and transgressions. How we all need to cry out with David in the 25th Psalm, "Do not remember the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions; according to Your mercy remember me, for Your goodness' sake, O LORD."

And this same Lord forgives us. He washes us clean in His holy, precious blood. And the thing we need to remember the most is that our Lord's goodness and perfection covers over and makes up for our evil and our sinfulness. As Jesus grew up under the roof of His parents, He was subject unto them in all things. He was the perfect Child. He fulfilled all the commandments perfectly. His obedience covers over our disobedience. His honor to His mother and step-father makes up for our

dishonor. His submission makes up for our rebellion. His righteousness covers over our unrighteousness. And so when we stand before God on the Day of Judgment, we will not be condemned for the sins of our youth, for we will stand there in the beautiful white robes of Christ's righteousness, purchased for us on the cross.

Children, in response to the Savior's great love for you, may you honor your moms and dads as the Lord Jesus wants you to. Listen to them and obey them, for this is the right thing to do. And for those of us who are older, and who still have parents living, may we honor them and respect them. May we provide for them and help them in their old age. May we remind them of our love, for this is the right thing to do. And for those of us whose parents are not here anymore, may we honor and respect their memory, and may we thank our God in heaven that He has raised us and led us through life to the point that we find ourselves today gathered around the Word with fellow believers.

IV. Living as a Christian in an Unbelieving World

Matthew 5:13-16: You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all *who are* in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.

As we sit in our living rooms with our spouses, our children, and our parents, and look out into the real world, everything looks so exciting and enticing! It's almost like Eve in Genesis, chapter 3, where we are told, "When the woman saw that the tree *was* good for food, that it *was* pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make *one* wise, she took of its fruit and ate." We aren't exactly tempted with fruit trees, but my goodness, there is a lot of money to be made out there! There's power to be had! There are places to go, pleasures to be enjoyed, and lusts to be gratified.!

But the beauty of this world is only skin-deep. The grass really isn't greener on the other side of the fence, for under all of the glitzy, enticing make-up of this world is a dirty, filthy cesspool of sin. Jeffrey Dahmer, from all outward appearances, looked like your normal, midwestern young man. Who could have imagined in his wildest dreams the crimes which he committed and the pain which he inflicted on so many families! We have paraded before us several smiling presidential candidates who are all saying what they think we want to hear, all of whom want to be the leader of our land. But how much dirt and how much corruption and how many skeletons are being dragged out of some of their closets! Millions of people throughout the world have contracted the AIDS virus, mostly as a result of trying to gratify their sinful flesh! And how many have used religion and the facade of a Christian ministry in order to bilk millions of dollars out of hard-working people, just to fill their own pockets! We can go on and on with example after example of how crooked and corrupt this world really is!

The Bible has a great deal to say about this sinful world and the people who live in it, and it's not very pretty. Paul is very blunt in Romans, where he writes, "There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one. Their throat *is* an open tomb; with their tongues they have practiced deceit; the poison of asps *is* under their lips; whose mouth *is* full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet *are* swift to shed blood; destruction and misery *are* in their ways; and the way of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes."

It's definitely not a pretty picture out there when you remove all the make-up and window dressing. But we never should forget that in His mercy, God has called us out of this sinful, unbelieving world to be His children. He has called us out of this darkness by His sweet gospel into His marvelous light! The Holy Spirit has worked faith in us; He has worked through the Word and through the Sacraments so that we can now take hold of the Savior who has redeemed and delivered us from eternal destruction. That same Lord, risen from the dead and ascended into heaven, is now preparing a place for us in His Father's house of many mansions, so that we will have a wonderful home to live in for all eternity. It's just as the hymn writer wrote,

I'm but a stranger here, Heaven is my home;
Earth is a desert drear, Heaven is my home.
Danger and sorrow stand round me on every hand;
Heaven is my fatherland; Heaven is my home.

Being washed clean in the blood of Christ, being clothed in His beautiful white robe of righteousness, we are now the adopted children of the heavenly Father. Yes, we are still in the world, but we are not of the world. Our bodies may be down here, but our eyes are pointed heavenward, looking for the return of our Savior to take us to our real home, where we shall sit on the lap of our God as His children and where we will live in peace with all of our brothers and sisters in Christ forever and ever.

So how do we then live as strangers in a strange land? How do we conduct ourselves during this earthly pilgrimage? There are those Christians who would just like to huddle up on a corner and forget about the rest of the world while they wait to be taken home. This occurred in the Middle Ages with all of the monasteries and cloisters throughout Europe. Christians were trying to hide and protect themselves from an evil world. We have basically the same thing going on in our own time when we find Christians forming and living within their own little societies and communities, trying to stay out of the world as much as possible. One author writes in a book recently published about a town in California:

Letting their fingers do the walking through the Christian Yellow Pages, [people] could buy a car from a born again dealer, get their taxes prepared by a devout CPA, get their necks uncricked by Christian chiropractors, consult Christian lawyers for Christian divorces, purchase their fashions from a Revelation outlet, get their carpets cleaned by a Christian operated hydro-steam unit, have their coiffures trimmed at Hair After, have their pools cleaned by New Life Pool Maintenance, have their drains unclogged by Agape Plumbing, and get their pests fumigated by Golden Exterminators, Inc.

Does our Lord want a new kind of monastic life for His children on earth? Or does He tell us something else in His Word? Listen as Jesus speaks in our text: "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lamp stand, and it gives light to all *who are* in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."

The Lord doesn't want us to hide in a hole somewhere while we live out our lives in an unbelieving world. Instead, using the picture of salt and light, He encourages us to influence the world around us. As long as our God leaves us here living and breathing, He has something more for us to do before we go home. Salt was used in ancient days as a way of preserving meat and other foods. There were no refrigerators back then. The Christian is to be a salt in the sense that, with our presence in society, those who have not yet come to faith in the Savior are spared for the moment from destruction. They are given more time to repent of their sins and turn to the Lord Jesus in faith.

The Christian is also a light. When the lights in your house go out during a bad thunderstorm and you light a candle to see, you don't put a bowl over it-- that would defeat its purpose! but you hold the candle up high in the center of the room so it can shed its light on everything and everyone. So also the Christian lets his or her light shine by living a different life from the rest of the world by living a life of good works, so that others take notice and may be led to the Savior as He reveals Himself to us in the Word.

"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven." The Holy Spirit put it this way as He spoke through the Apostle Peter: "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always *be* ready to *give* an answer to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear."

I think it is safe to say that all of us have memories of things that happened to us years ago, but we remember them as if they had occurred yesterday. It seems like only yesterday that I sat in the junior religion class of the Lutheran high school I attended. We were talking with our professor about marriage and family life and the bringing of children into this world. One student made the comment

that he wasn't sure if he wanted to have little ones growing up in such a corrupt and evil society as ours. Well, the professor did not hesitate for a moment to point out that a Christian child who grows up to be a Christian adult is not a bane to society but a blessing, for the Christian is a salt and a light to those around him.

But there are dangers and difficulties in living as a salt and a light in an unbelieving world. Back in the days of the early Christian church, before Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire, believers lost their lives for confessing Christ. Yes, they caught other people's attention, but it often landed them in the Coliseum.

But Satan has learned over the years that such outward persecution actually increases the number of believers in the world, and so his persecution is much more subtle and dangerous today. There is the very real possibility that when unbelievers realize that we are different, that we have a Savior we want to please by our actions, and that we look for a heavenly home, they start to treat us differently. Maybe it is a sly word. Maybe they start talking behind our backs. Maybe they don't give us the job promotions and recognitions that we feel we deserve. Maybe they outrightly mock and ridicule our faith and generally make life difficult for us! Satan directs these subtle persecutions towards us maybe through neighbors, maybe through co-workers, maybe even through friends and relatives, and many times, yes, even through members of our own families! We all need to remember Jesus' words when it comes to persecution for living the Christian life: 'If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before *it hated* you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also.'

Another danger of living as a Christian in an unbelieving world is that we ourselves start behaving like those around us. Even though we have been called out of this sinful world by the gospel of Christ and have been born again as children of the heavenly Father, we are still afflicted with a sinful flesh. On the one hand, the new person within us wants to do the will of God. but on the other hand, our sinful flesh wants to fulfill its own lusts and desires. How often we suppress the fact that we are Christians, simply to be accepted by those around us! How often we behave as the unbelieving world, because we don't want anyone to know that we are different! How often we succumb to our sinful lusts and desires, because we think we should be able to enjoy life, even if it does mean breaking a commandment or two in the meantime!

And so the Christian always has a struggle going on within himself, just like the Apostle Paul did so long ago. It's as if we are going to be torn apart from the inside! Paul tells us in Romans, 'For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but *how* to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will *to do*, I do not do; but the evil I will not *to do*, that I practice. ... O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God; through Jesus Christ our Lord!'

'I thank God; through Jesus Christ our Lord!'

Left to our own devices we have nothing to look forward to but eternal death and hell, for we are sinners. But God has sent His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, to bear our sin and to suffer the wrath of the Father in our stead. This He did upon the cross. And when we now fall in weakness, when we succumb to the temptations of this world, when we start to behave like the unbelieving world ourselves, that Savior is always there, and His forgiving blood washes away a multitude of sins. His arms are always open. His love never fails.

And so, as Christians living in an unbelieving world, may we by our words, and by our conduct and by our behavior lead others to the Savior. And by our witness may those who do not yet know the Lord also learn to fall down before the cross where we have all been reconciled to our heavenly Father. "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ ..."

This brings to an end our study of "Family Life Under Christ." We pray that these meditations will bring us closer to one another in our families and in our personal relationships. But more importantly, we pray that they will bring us closer to Christ, our Savior and Redeemer. As David wrote in the 127th Psalm, "Unless the LORD builds the house, they labor in vain who built it; Unless the LORD guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain." May the Lord bless our families, our

children, our parents, and our witness to the world around us. May He continue to bless us and help us in every trouble and lift us up in every affliction through His Word and Sacraments, through which alone He showers upon us every spiritual blessing. In Jesus' name.

A Comparison of Πράσσω and Ποιέω as Used With Reference to Sinning (Galatians 5:21). Does the Former Prohibit Entrance Into the Kingdom of God?*

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Why do we ask whether πράσσω prohibits entrance into the kingdom of God? To begin with, the Christian may indeed recognize the works of his own sinful flesh in the apostle's listing or supply "the like" of verse 21. In the continual battle against the flesh, Christians fall repeatedly into sin and into certain sins. It is with us as Paul confesses to the Romans: "The evil I will not [to do], that I practice (πράσσω)." The question is whether such repetition of sinful deeds constitutes the "practice" that prohibits entrance into the kingdom of God.

I.

A comparison of πράσσω and ποιέω

As we might expect, ποιέω is by far the more widely used of the two verbs and possesses a great variety of meanings. We offer the following representative summary: **DO** (Acts 5:35); **MAKE** (Acts 17:24,26); **PRODUCE** (Matt. 7:17-19); **CAUSE** (Rom. 16:17); **PRACTICE** what is good (John 3:21; Luke 1:72; etc.); **COMMIT** sin (John 8:34; 2 Cor. 11:7; 1 Pet. 2:22; etc.).

In 32 of the 37 times the verb πράσσω appears in the New Testament, it may be rendered "**DO**," "**COMMIT**," or "**PRACTICE**" (exceptions: Luke 3:13; 19:23; Acts 19:19; Rom. 2:25; and 1 Thess. 4:11).

One would think that Romans 1:28-2:3 would provide us with some clear and consistent distinction between these two similar verbs, since both are used so often in these verses. W.E. Vine thinks there is such a distinction (*Expository Dictionary*, 330); Lenski says there is not (*Interpretation of Romans*, 125). In view of the fact that the one who "judges" others is said to "practice" (πράσσεις) the same things in 2:1, and is charged with "doing" (ποιῶν) the same in 2:3, I see no moral distinction between the verbs in this context, although perhaps a distinction is being made between the doing of an evil deed and the habitual practice of it.

However, John 3:20-21 surely seems to tie πράσσω with evil and ποιέω with good. For there Jesus speaks of "practicing evil" (φαῦλα πράσσων) as opposed to "doing the truth" (ποιῶν τὴν ἀλήθειαν). The same distinction is found at John 5:29 where Jesus speaks of the resurrection of those who "have done good" (ἀγαθὰ ποιήσαντες) and those who "have done evil" (φαῦλα πράξαντες). Likewise in Romans 7:19 we find ποιέω associated with ἀγαθόν and πράσσω linked with κακόν.

We would make a statistical argument to show that πράσσω is most often used to speak of committing an evil deed: In over half of its 37 occurrences in the New Testament, πράσσω is used for the doing of evil. Ποιέω is so used in less than one tenth of its New Testament appearances (approximately 45 of 550 times, by my count). Furthermore, of the six times the noun πράξις occurs, four of these speak of evil deeds.

A more useful distinction in terms of our assignment is between "doing" something and "practicing" something in a repeated, habitual manner; this distinction is represented by ποιέω and πράσσω, respectively.

In 2 Corinthians 5:10 we are reminded that we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, "that each one may be recompensed for the things [done] through his body, according to what he has practiced (ἔπραξεν), whether good or bad. Morally, πράσσω is neutral here, as it refers to both good and bad activity. Yet it may be that πράσσω is used here because the apostle is not speaking so much of a deed or deeds done in the earthly body, but of the "*habitus*" or way of life in the body.¹

“Generally speaking, in Paul’s Epistles, ποιέω denotes an action complete in itself, while πράσσω denotes a habit” (Vine, 330). However, in 1 John 3:4-9, we find that apostle using the present tense of ποιέω to speak of a practice or habit of doing something: “Whoever practices (ποιῶν) sin also practices (ποιεῖ) lawlessness ... the one practicing (ποιῶν) righteousness is righteous ... The one practicing (ποιῶν) sin is of the devil ... Whoever has been born of God does not practice (ποιῶν) sin ...”

In his treatment of the synonyms ποιέω and πράσσω, Trench mentions that scholars have been studying the difference between these two verbs for over two thousand years (“since Prodicus” — Greek sophist of the 5th century BC). Trench appears to agree with many of their conclusions. We quote some of his remarks:

++ “ποιέω brings out more the object and end of an act, πράσσω the means by which this object is attained” (361).

++ “The idea of continuity and repetition of action is inherent in πράσσειν = ‘agere’ or ‘gerere,’ ‘handeln,’ ‘to practice’; but not necessarily in ποιεῖν = ‘facere,’ ‘machen,’ which may very well be the doing once and for all; the producing and bringing forth something which being produced has an independent existence of its own; as ποιεῖν παιδίον, of a woman, ποιεῖν καρπούς, of a tree; in the same way, ποιεῖν εἰρήνην, to make peace, while πράσσειν εἰρήνην is no more than to negotiate with the view to peace” (361).

++ “πράσσειν,’ in the words of a recent German scholar, ‘ist die geschäftige, ποιεῖν die schaffende Tätigkeit” (‘πράσσειν is the busy, ποιεῖν the productive action’) (362).²

++ “It is not to be denied that very often where the words assume an ethical tinge, the inclination makes itself felt to use ποιεῖν in a good and πράσσειν in an evil sense” (363).

Two general conclusions may be drawn from the New Testament usage of πράσσω and ποιέω: (1) Of the two verbs, πράσσω speaks more specifically of doing evil; (2) whereas ποιέω generally points to the deed done, the product itself, πράσσω most often points to the doing, the on-going activity, the practice, or habit.

II.

The practice of sin which prohibits entrance into the kingdom of heaven.

It is helpful not only to compare the word “practice” in Galatians 5:21 with the same word in Romans 7:19, but to compare the contexts of these verses as well. We could use pages drawing parallels between Galatians 5:16-25 and Romans 7:14-8:17. For our purposes we shall be content to sketch very briefly the material relationship of these passages in the following chart:

Romans 7:14-25	Galatians 5:16-25
An objective, doctrinal setting (justification)	A subjective, practical setting (sanctification)
Acknowledges the battle between flesh and spirit	Acknowledges the battle between flesh and spirit
Tells ‘how it is!’	Tells, not only ‘how it is,’ but ‘how it should be.’
Emphasis: We are engaged in a spiritual warfare, where the flesh often wins so that we fall repeatedly into sin, and are saved from this ‘body of death’ only through the mercy and redemption	Emphasis: We are engaged in a spiritual warfare, but as Christians we ‘have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.’ So let us ‘walk by spirit’ that we may not fulfill the

that is in Christ Jesus.

lust of the flesh.

Without question, the ‘practice’ of sin in the context of Galatians 5:16ff. does indeed prevent the inheritance of the kingdom of God. The activities described here are the ‘out-workings’ of the flesh. And in-so-far as the Christian is flesh, he too will cry out: ‘That’s me!’

But then, the Christian relates just as easily (and with a sigh) to the embattled apostle’s words in Romans 7:14ff. For in that passage of Scripture, so dear to our fearful hearts, Paul confesses: ‘The good that I would, I do not do; but the evil I would not, that I practice (πράσσω)’ (v. 19). But quickly he adds: ‘Now if what I would not, that I am doing (ποιῶ), **no longer am I myself working it out, but the sin dwelling in me**’ (v. 20).

Paul says the same thing in verse 17. In verse 25 Paul proclaims his only hope and ours, giving thanks to God ‘through Jesus Christ our Lord.’ Then he sums up ‘how it is’ for the Christian who ‘practices’ the evil he ‘would not do’: ‘Accordingly, therefore, **I myself** with the mind am serving the law of God but **with the flesh** the law of sin.’

What is it that really constitutes the ‘practice’ of sin that keeps the soul from heaven? It cannot be merely the repetition of evil, implied by the bare verb πράσσω, for Paul ‘practices’ sin, too — yet only so far as sin dwells in him (vv. 17, 20), in his members (v. 23). The real Paul, the redeemed and believing Paul — the one God regards in mercy for Christ’s sake — the ‘**I myself**’ in this context, does not practice sin!

How can this be? What are the inner motions involved here? In the Galatians setting, the ‘works of the flesh’ are practiced **willfully**. The condemned in this passage are those who feel secure in the flesh; they go about to fulfill the lusts of the flesh. Luther comments regarding Galatians 5:21b:

This is a very hard and terrible saying, but yet very necessary against the false Christians and careless hypocrites, which brag of the Gospel, of faith and of the Spirit, and yet in all security they perform the works of the flesh. (LW, XXVII, 92)

In Romans 7:19 Paul expresses the frustration of every true Christian when he cries out: ‘But (ἄλλα) the evil **I would not** (οὐθέλω), that I practice (πράσσω).’ The will of the Christian has no interest in practicing sin. Why not? Because ‘those who are Christ’s **have crucified the flesh** in its **passions and desires**’ (Gal. 5:24).

By one radical act in the past, at our conversion, the Holy Spirit brought us to faith! At that moment the Spirit of God Himself helped us to dethrone the will of the Old Adam from our hearts. Romans 6:6 speaks similarly of how through the power of baptism ‘our old man was crucified with Christ, so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.’ The Christian ‘has sin,’ but he does not willfully ‘commit’ or ‘practice’ sin (cf. 1 John 3:4ff.), in the sense that sin has free and total rule over him. For ‘sin shall **not** have dominion’ over him, since he is ‘**not** under law, but under grace,’ as Paul says later in that same ‘baptism’ chapter at verse 14.

Now, if the Old Adam, the ‘flesh,’ was once crucified with its lusts at our conversion, and if it can also be said that those who ‘are Christ’s have crucified’ the flesh (as Paul surely does), then let not the Christian permit the activities, passions, and desires of the flesh to rise up again and carry him back into absolute dominion of sin! For ‘if you keep living according to the flesh, you will die; but if with spirit you keep putting to death (θανατοῦτε) the deeds (τὰς πράξεις) of the body, you will live’ (Rom. 8:13).

We should keep in mind when considering such passages as Romans 8:1-17, Galatians 5:16-24, and also 1 John 3:3-9, that, while the ‘practice’ of sin cannot keep the Christian from his heavenly inheritance, the ‘practice’ of sin **can** destroy saving faith. For the apostle says in Romans 8:13, quoted above, ‘If you keep living according to the flesh, you will die.’

1 Cor. 6:9ff. warns: ‘Be not deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners shall inherit the kingdom of God.’ Gal. 5:21, Eph. 5:5, Rom. 8:13, Col. 3:6 make the same statement. Quoting these passages, the Lutheran Confessions declare: ‘The false Epicurean delusion is to be earnestly censured and rejected, namely, that some imagine that faith and righteousness and salvation which they have received can be lost through no sins or wicked deed, not even through willful and intentional ones’ (Trig. 947, F.C., Sol. Decl., IV, 31-32). Faith cannot endure

in the heart which is given to sin because, as Scripture so plainly tells us, the Holy Spirit, who is the *causa efficiens* of faith, is grieved by evil works and will finally depart from the heart. Hence the earnest admonition of Scripture: "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption" (Eph. 4:30). The Holy Spirit is not only "the spirit of faith" (2 Cor. 4:13), but also the Spirit of sanctification and good works. He incessantly admonishes and urges believers to avoid the evil and perform the good. And if the Holy Ghost is persistently thwarted in this part of His work, He will cease to perform the other part, the preservation of faith. The Christian Church has always taught that evil works destroy faith. (F. Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, III, 23-24)

In conclusion, let us call to mind the importance of yet another paradox of the Christian faith: The "flesh," the "body of sin," the "Old Adam," was crucified in our conversion by the Spirit of God, and we ourselves have crucified it! Yet we must keep on putting it to death by repentance and renewed faith in our dear Savior. Those who practice the works of the flesh willfully and intentionally in unbelief are naked before God and cannot "inherit the kingdom of God" in that spiritual condition. But the believing child of God is ever regarded by the heavenly Father as completely holy because of Christ. The sins still "practiced" by the flesh, which still clings to the Christian and wars against his spirit, are entirely covered by the precious blood of Jesus. He has also delivered us from this body of death! Thanks be to God! All glory be to Him forever and ever!

NOTES

¹ In his commentary on 2 Corinthians, J.P. Meyer states that Paul "has in mind the practice and attitude of a man, whether he was motivated by faith, or by the *opinio legis*." With this, I can agree. I believe he goes too far, however when he writes: "'Α ἔπραξεν does not refer to the individual good or bad deeds, but to the spirit in which a man's life is conducted" (*Ministers of Christ*, 87; emphasis added).

² In Acts 26:9-10 we have an example of this distinction, I believe: "Indeed, I myself thought I must do (πράξει) many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. This I also did (ἐποίησα) in Jerusalem, and many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests . . ."

Gambling -- Win or Lose, YOU LOSE*

Bruce Naumann

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It has been variously described as the devil's tool, a form of harmless recreation, and a "volunteer tax." Different religious leaders have condemned it, tolerated it, or even promoted it for their church's enrichment. People travel long distances to indulge in it, yet it can also be found as close as the nearest gas station or convenience store. It is nearly as old as mankind, yet it is making its fastest inroads into the future through the Internet. It is gambling, and its tremendous growth in recent years should move us to take another look at its impact on the world, and on Christians in particular. Consider the following facts:¹

The Explosive Growth of Legalized Gambling:

- * Legalized gambling increased 3,200 percent between 1974 and 1995, from \$17 billion to \$550 billion in revenues.
- * In 1995, more money was spent on casino gambling than was spent on movie tickets, theater, opera and concerts combined.
- * 23 states allow casino gambling, either by native American tribes or commercial interests.
- * 37 states and the District of Columbia have a lottery.
- * Every state except two (Hawaii and Utah) allows some form of legal gambling.

What is it, exactly?

Since the word “gamble” has been used in a variety of ways, it would be good to establish a working definition for it. People may use the word “gamble” for any kind of risk that is taken, such as the start of a small business or the purchase of stocks. However, the kind of “gambling” that will be discussed in this paper has these characteristics in common: (1) The betting of money or anything of value, (2) The conscious element of risk (uncertain outcome), (3) The hope of gain at the expense of others, (4) An outcome that is determined by chance or accident, and (5) A prize of some value.² The most common forms of this kind of gambling in our society are casinos and state-run lotteries. Business and investment risks are not “gambling” by this definition, first of all because the money that is put at risk actually purchases something of value. In addition, it is not necessary for other people to lose their money for such a venture to be successful, and the outcome is not determined by mere chance. Likewise, promotional sweepstakes do not fall into this category, since they do not involve the betting of any money. One could argue at great length about whether one or another activity can be classified as “gambling.” For the sake of simplicity, let us concentrate on the two most common forms of gambling today -- casino gaming and state-sponsored lotteries. These forms of gambling certainly do fit under the definition given. They have also become so common that even Christian people are becoming desensitized to their effects on the general public, as well as on our own hearts. So what’s wrong with casinos and lotteries? Consider the following five points:

1. The motive to gain from the loss of others involves the sin of coveting.

Gambling, by definition, involves the desire to gain from your neighbor’s loss. This also happens to be a good definition for coveting. Many may quickly object, saying “Of course I would like to win, but that doesn’t mean that I want anyone else to lose.” Such a person should realize that if he ever does win, it will only happen because other people get nothing for their money. The fact that other people willingly give up their hard-earned money for nothing does not make it right to benefit from their losses. Both casino gaming and lotteries entice people to play by offering winnings that come directly from the losses of others, and that is what invariably links these activities to coveting. It’s true that a statement such as “Thou shalt not gamble,” or “gambling is sin” is not found in the Bible. Yet, the Bible does address the subject when it addresses the sin of coveting. Consider the following:

- * Coveting is plainly forbidden by God’s Word.
- * The desire to gain what others (not you) have worked for is nothing else than coveting.
- * Gambling (as defined above) always involves this enticement to gain from the losses of others. If it did not, no one would play.
- * Therefore, gambling (as defined above) always involves the sinful desire called “coveting,” whether the participant’s conscience tells him so or not.

A person who claims, “I don’t care at all whether I win,” is only indulging in self-delusion for the sake of excusing his behavior. The motive to win is always involved. Here we encounter the argument of the “recreational gambler.” This is a person who sets a certain limit which he will wager at the casino or the lottery ticket counter. It is money that he feels he can afford to lose, and he considers it to be part of his entertainment budget, spent much the same as for dining out or for movie tickets. Is there a difference between this kind of “recreational” gambling, in comparison with those who gamble strictly for the money? The answer is yes -- but the difference is only one of degree. The man who is addicted to gambling, who throws away his family’s means of support and then commits crimes in order to support his habit, certainly does sin in ways that the casual purchaser of an occasional lottery ticket does not. Both, however, have this in common: they act on an inner motive to gain what others must first lose. Therefore, one covets “only a little bit,” while the other is consumed by covetousness. “A little bit” of coveting may seem to be a minor matter, but it is still wrong, in the same sense that “a little bit of lust” is wrong. That’s why the Scriptures urge us to do away with

coveting completely:

(Colossians 3:5) “Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.”

2. The aim to gain at the loss of others is the opposite of the Lord’s command to “love your neighbor as yourself.”

In summarizing the two tables of the Law, our Lord gave us the command to seek the highest good for our neighbor, that is, our fellow man: (Matthew 22:37-39) Jesus said to him, “‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’”

This standard is, of course, out of reach for us. Since we still have a sinful flesh, there will always be a part of us which is completely self-centered, as long as this life continues. The fact remains, however, that anything less than this perfect standard must be regarded as sin. St. Paul put the command this way:

(1 Corinthians 10:24) “Let no one seek his own, but each one the other’s well-being.”

If we truly “loved our neighbor as ourselves” we would want our neighbor to keep what he has and prosper even more. In other words, we would always want him to win, rather than desire to come out ahead as a result of his loss. If we would happen to come by something he had lost, we would not gleefully say “I’m a winner!” No, we would do our level best to return it to him. This, of course, is contrary to the whole purpose of pulling the slot machine handle or scratching the lottery ticket. Whenever I do those things, I am demonstrating a sinful love for myself, which wants to be enriched at the expense of others. When a person gambles, he is not seeking his neighbor’s benefit at all. On the contrary, he is trying to take advantage of his neighbor’s misfortune. This attitude and action is completely at odds with Jesus’ command to “love your neighbor as yourself.”

Besides the fact that gambling winnings come as the result of our neighbors’ loss, there are also many social ills that are besieging our country because of legalized gambling. These ill effects include an increase in bankruptcies, increased crime to support gambling habits, and the siphoning off of resources from low-income families for the necessities of life:

“Gambling victimizes the poor. The poorest citizens spend the largest percentage of their incomes on gambling. Those who can afford it the least gamble the most; both public and private gambling businesses target advertising directly at the weakest individuals in society because they are gambling’s best customers.”³

Love for our neighbor -- and our country as a whole -- should move us to oppose legalized gambling, not participate in it! It is an activity that simply cannot fit in with the Lord’s will that we love our neighbor as ourselves. The fact that we are incapable of practicing that kind of love perfectly is no excuse to do the opposite on purpose.

3. Seeking “easy money” undermines the Biblical work ethic.

One of the great strengths of a moral people is the reputation for honest, hard work. For Christians, this does not come by accident, for the Christian is directed by God’s Word to seek the blessings of God’s daily bread by genuine effort:

(Proverbs 28:19-22) “He who tills his land will have plenty of bread, But he who follows frivolity will have poverty enough! A faithful man will abound with blessings, But he who hastens to be rich will not go unpunished. . . A man with an evil eye hastens after riches, And does not consider that poverty will come upon him.”

The enticement of gambling, by contrast, depends on “Lady Luck” to bring unearned dollars into

the coffers of the winners. The Scriptures warn us that this is a demoralizing influence and a trap:

(1 Timothy 6:9-10) "Those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows."

Instead, the Lord's will is for us to look solely to Him for our welfare, and to be satisfied with the blessings that He gives us through honorable means, such as gifts or inheritance, but especially diligent work:

(1 Thessalonians 4:10-12) "We urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more; that you also aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you, that you may walk properly toward those who are outside, and that you may lack nothing."

The desires of our hearts are not to be placed on luck or blind chance, which might bring us thousands or millions of dollars which others have lost. Instead, the Bible tells us:

(Hebrews 13:5) "Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.'"

As a matter of common sense, even apart from the Lord's specific instruction, it is easy to see that a pervasive culture of wagering has a corrupting influence on ourselves and our children:

"Gambling presents a bad example to our children. Gambling promotes the idea that luck, not education and hard work, is the key to success. Gambling produces no wealth for society, and suggests that productivity is not important. Gambling sets up artificial risks and glorifies individuals who take the biggest, most foolish risks."⁴

4. Gambling is poor stewardship of God's blessings.

A "steward" is one who manages the goods of another. The Christian recognizes that none of this world's goods truly belong to him, because the Lord is the creator and rightful owner of all things. The steward is simply put in charge of the Lord's goods for a time. He is expected to make good use of God's things while he lives in this world, until the Lord comes and asks for an accounting (See the Parable of the Talents, Matt. 25). The Bible gives us a clear idea of what constitutes a God-pleasing use of these gifts:

- A. To provide for one's own needs and for the needs of the family (1 Tim. 5:8). "But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever."
- B. To support the work of the gospel (2 Cor. 9:6-7). "But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver."
- C. To help others in need (Heb. 13:16). "But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased."
- D. To pay taxes (Rom. 13:6-7). "For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing. Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor."

People have attempted to classify their gambling "budget" as a God-pleasing expenditure under each one of these categories, without success. As mentioned before, many consider their gambling money as part of their family's needs, in the category of "recreation and entertainment." However, since the "entertainment value" is always linked with the desire to benefit from my neighbor's misfortune, this is better described as coveting, not as a personal or family need. Sadly, many church

organizations have tried to promote bingo and raffles as a means of supporting the church. But the support for the gospel is supposed to come from hearts that are overflowing with thankfulness for God's love in Christ, not from hearts that eagerly desire the next jackpot or door prize. Gambling does not fit under the category of "taxation" for Christians either, since it is not something that the government requires anyone to participate in. As for charitable efforts toward our neighbor, gambling undermines this as well. It is often promoted as a great boon to society, because some of the profits fund educational or charitable causes. However, the opportunity to do a true good work by supporting such things is ruined by the self-serving motivation. The motive for personal gain kills true charity.

5. Coveting, poor stewardship, and disregard for one's neighbor are not matters of Christian liberty.

The word "adiaphoron" is a technical term for something that is a matter of Christian liberty and good judgment. It is something that is neither commanded nor forbidden by God's Word. That means that there can be circumstances where a certain activity may be wrong, but it is not always so. For instance, the use of alcohol is an adiaphoron. People are neither commanded nor forbidden to partake of alcoholic beverages in the Bible. There are several places in the Bible that describe a beneficial use of alcoholic wine, for instance (Ps. 104:14-15; Matt. 26:27-28; 1 Tim. 5:23). The Scriptures are clear, however, that drunkenness is a sin (Prov. 23:29-31; Isa. 5:11; Rom. 13:13; etc.). The Lord explains to us through St. Paul how it might be necessary to refrain from certain freedoms that we would otherwise have, so that others will not be led astray (see Rom. 14 and 1 Cor. 8). This would be another good reason to abstain from drinking alcohol. It is clear, though, that the moderate use of alcohol need not be a sinful thing, assuming that it does not lead to drunkenness and does not set a trap for others to fall into. The use of alcohol, therefore, is a good example of an adiaphoron, something we may or may not do in a God-pleasing way, depending on the circumstances.

Many people consider gambling to be an adiaphoron in this same sense. For instance, the Wisconsin Synod, in its monthly magazine, the *Northwestern Lutheran*, has taken this position on the subject. As part of a series of articles published in 1988, Pastor Thomas Franzman wrote:

Some think the Bible does not speak about gambling at all; therefore the church should not attempt to teach right and wrong regarding it. Others think that gambling is almost always a sin against the seventh commandment, a form of stealing; therefore it should be soundly condemned. In between are the majority, we think, who see gambling as an adiaphoron. Therefore the individual Christian may make his or her own decision regarding it, depending upon the circumstances . . . to say "gambling is sinful" is a blanket statement difficult to prove from Scripture in all situations.

Thus, in the *Northwestern Lutheran*, the Wisconsin Synod legitimized lotteries and casino gaming as matters of Christian choice and judgment.⁵ This conclusion is incorrect, and the Wisconsin Synod has done its members a disservice by making allowances for these worldly things. The desire to gain as a result of someone else's loss is always a desire that is born of the flesh, and not of God. As such, it is not something to ponder and then enjoy in moderation. Rather, it is something to be avoided as much as possible. Our conclusion must be, then, that gambling (at least in the case of casino gaming and lotteries) is not a matter of Christian liberty at all, since it is invariably bound together with coveting, poor stewardship, and disregard for the well-being of one's neighbor.

Conclusion -- Is this our biggest problem?

With all the violence, immorality, and godlessness out there in the world, is it really worthwhile to focus our attention on what many consider to be a harmless activity, or at worst, a minor vice? Isn't all the false doctrine that is being propagated, to the great harm of many souls, of far greater consequence?

It is true that our role in the world as believers is to be witnesses to the truth of the gospel. It would not be right to have, as our main objective, the cleaning up of social ills. Neither would it be right to conclude that someone who has purchased a lottery ticket or visited a casino must therefore be an unbeliever. Our commission is to use the means of grace, the proclamation of law and gospel, so

that sinners can know their lost condition and find in Christ their full salvation. That having been said, it should be a cause for grave concern that our entire society has, in recent years, been given over to the promotion of legalized gambling. It should be a cause for grave concern that, where churches once firmly denounced the ill-gotten gains of gambling for Scriptural reasons, they are now making allowances for it, for earthly reasons. We should not be hesitant or ashamed to speak out against the worldly influences that war against our souls, whether or not most people consider them to be of minor consequence.

Rationalizations for gambling and exceptions to the rule can go on endlessly. "My buddies and I play golf, and we wager a nickel a hole. Is there really any harm in that?" One could well answer: Isn't the scorecard enough? But why waste time discussing every possible example of a "gray area"? Any moral question can be argued to its logical extremes and be made to look ridiculous. That does not take away from the principle of the matter, which is God's command to work with our hands, be content with what we have, and not to yearn after a quick gain from other people's losses.

(Rom. 12:2) "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."

When we do refrain from going along with the world's infatuation with "Lady Luck," what should our motivation be? Surely, it should not be legalism, pride in personal holiness, or a feeling of superiority over others. Rather, we should be motivated by the gospel of a crucified Lord, thankfulness for God's many blessings, and an eager desire to do all things for His glory. Then, our life and conduct will be a clear witness that speaks of the Lord's grace shown to us. May the Lord so lead us in His own right way.

NOTES

¹ Statistics cited from the National Coalition Against Legalized Gambling (NCALG) Internet Resource Center -- www.ncalg.org

² From *The New Encyclopedia Britannica*, 5:104, "Micropaedia."

³ From the National Coalition Against Legalized Gambling (NCALG) Internet Resource Center - www.ncalg.org

⁴ NCALG.

⁵ Interestingly, the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS), which is a sister church body to the WELS, disagrees with this conclusion. In the June, 1997 edition of the *Lutheran Sentinel*, Prof. John Molstad writes, "In our ELS Explanation of Dr. Martin Luther's Small Catechism, we find this comment: 'We get our neighbor's money or goods in a dishonest way by such sins as cheating, gambling, bribing, overcharging, giving false measure, and filing false tax returns.' ... This writer continues to stand on the Scriptures and feels that 'recreational gambling' is improper, just as the gambling condemned by the church in ages past."

Abbreviated List of Resources

Grams, Rick -- "Recreational Gambling," presented to the Minnesota Delegate Conference, September 1987.

Libby, Douglas -- "Observations from Scripture Regarding Participation in State-sponsored Lottery," presented to the Minnesota Pastoral Conference, November 1994.

Lutheran Sentinel, (ELS), June, 1997.

The National Coalition Against Legalized Gambling Homepage, www.ncalg.org.

Northwestern Lutheran (WELS), January - April, 1988.

Steadfast -- A publication of the ELCR in Australia, 33:1

Sydow, Michael -- *Martin Luther's Small Catechism*.

PANORAMA

The Only Honest Liberal?

Stephen C.F. Kurtzahn

Dr. Gerd Luedemann recently criticized attempts by liberal theologians to reinterpret Christian doctrine so they could continue to describe themselves as Christian. "They don't [really] believe what the confession of faith says,"¹ Luedemann stated, adding that he found liberal theology "contemptible." He also went on to say, "I don't think Christians know what they mean when they proclaim Christ as Lord of the World. That is a massive claim. If you took that seriously, you would probably have to be a fundamentalist. If you can't be a fundamentalist, then you should give up Christianity for the sake of honesty."² Since 1983 Luedemann has been Professor of New Testament and Director of the Institute of Early Christian Studies at the University of Goettingen in Germany.

Interviewed about his upcoming book, *The Great Deception--What Jesus Really Said and Did*, Luedemann told *Idea*, the information service of the German Evangelical Alliance, "I no longer describe myself as a Christian." He also said, "A Christian is someone who prays to Christ and believes in what is promised by Christian doctrine. So I asked myself: 'Do I pray to Jesus, do I pray to the God of the Bible?' And I don't do that. Quite the reverse."³

This isn't the first time Dr. Gerd Luedemann has rocked the theological boat. He is also the author of *The Resurrection of Jesus*, published by Augsburg Fortress of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA). Concerning the events of the first Easter Sunday, he wrote, "We can no longer understand the resurrection of Jesus in a literal sense..."⁴ And, "about the fate of Jesus' corpse: Did it decay? At any rate I regard this conclusion as unavoidable."⁵ The professor also suggested that Jesus was born after Mary was raped. Two years ago he was suspended as a church examiner by the Confederation of Protestant Churches in Lower Saxony after he described ordination on the basis of the Bible and the creeds as "schizophrenia."

It is always difficult for a child of God to read such blasphemy. But it is necessary for confessional pastors and professors to know what is being promoted as "theology" out in the world of academia. Dr. Luedemann is a living example of what finally happens when "a little leaven leavens the whole lump" (Gal. 5:9). Like the so-called "Jesus Seminar," he has arrived at the final, logical end-point of what used to be known as "Gospel-reductionism" and the "historical-critical" method of Bible interpretation.⁶ It is truly sad that the largest Lutheran body in the United States, the ELCA, is travelling down that same road.⁷ But at least Luedemann is honest in confessing that he is no longer a Christian. Why couldn't the ELCA be so forthright?

NOTES

¹ Ecumenical News International article, March 23, 1998, reprinted in *Christian News*, March 30, 1998, 23.

² *CN*.

³ *CN*.

⁴ Quoted in *Christian News*, March 30, 1998, 1.

⁵ *CN*.

⁶ Now referred to as the "new theology" or the "new thinking" in such publications as *What's Going on Among the Lutherans?* by Patsy A. Leppien and J. Kincaid Smith (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1992, 15).

⁷ Examples of such ELCA apostasy:

"Today it is impossible to assume the literal historicity of all things recorded. What the biblical authors report is not accepted as a literal transcript of the factual course of events. Therefore, critical scholars inquire behind the text and attempt to reconstruct the real history that took place" (Carl E. Braaten, *Christian Dogmatics*, 2 vols., eds., Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jensen, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984, 1:77, quoted in Leppien/Smith, 56). *Christian Dogmatics* is the primary dogmatics text in ELCA seminaries today.

"... the story of the descent of the Son of God to earth and his ascent into heaven cannot be taken literally. The question is whether the meaning of the myth of the incarnation can be saved without taking it literally yet without getting rid of its mythic structure" (Braaten, 1:529, quoted in Leppien/Smith, 90).

“But what does it mean to speak of Jesus as ‘divine’? Does not this word call for some interpretation? Theologians today are concerned to interpret the divinity of Jesus in a manner which avoids turning him into a bizarre, mythological creature who contains both a divine and a human nature” (Paul Jersild, *Invitation to Faith*, Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1978, 100, quoted in Leppien/Smith, 99).

“Truly, the Trinity is simply the Father and the man Jesus and their Spirit as the Spirit of the believing community” (Robert W. Jenson, *Christian Dogmatics*, 1:155, quoted in Leppien/Smith, 102).

“Contrary to other ‘resurrection’ stories in the Bible, Jesus is not perceived as having returned to this life. His resurrection was not a resuscitation indicating that in certain exceptional instances people can be returned to their former state of life” (Hans Schwarz, *Christian Dogmatics*, 2:558, quoted in Leppien/Smith, 115).

BOOK REVIEWS

Uncle Sam and I, by Russell Schmitt, Christos Basileios Publishing, 153 N. Agency St., Eagle Lake, MN 56024, 1998, paperback, 552 pages.

Russell Schmitt, a member of our congregation in Mankato, Minnesota, is an unusual young man, and he has written an unusual book. Perhaps we can say that he has written two books and combined them into one.

One part of his book is Schmitt’s account of his experiences in the United States Navy. The other part of this book is a defense of the Christian faith and Christian lifestyle over against such currently prevalent satanic lies as evolution, abortion, unionism, sexual immorality, and decision theology. There is, of course, a connection between the two parts. In his life as a Navy sailor Schmitt tried to confess his Christianity by word and deed. This led inevitably to verbal and physical persecution by his peers and superiors. As he tells this story, Schmitt does not present himself as a pious do-gooder but as a sinning Christian struggling against his own sinful flesh. One of the things he likes to write about in both parts of his book is God’s grace, and he stresses that God’s grace is unconditional.

For example, while he is describing his early training in the Navy, Schmitt says (34):

In addition to my introduction to nuclear propulsion comes the introduction to the conditional grace taught by many religious faiths. Conditional grace is a false teaching of deeds that a person must do to receive the grace of God; but grace is a largess, an unearned, generous gift. I begin to study more than simply nuclear related material; I study so that I might learn why I believe what I believe. One of my roommates ... is one such example of this teaching. He is certain that he must remove himself from even moderate consumption of alcohol in order to receive the grace of God, but the restriction that he alone places upon himself is too much for him to bear. He then hurls his belief to the other extremity shown by his drunkenness and disobedience of a base rule by storing alcohol in our room.

Schmitt’s experiences in the Navy are divided into two clearly different phases. In the first phase Schmitt is doing excellent work and is moving up rapidly in the Navy’s Nuclear Power Program. But then he is the victim of an automobile accident in Idaho and spends 15 days in a hospital, recovering from serious head injuries.

After this accident Schmitt is unable to make progress in his training. Yet for some reason the Navy expects him to do as well as before the accident. This leads to one failure after another, demotion to kitchen duties, and eventual discharge. He is continually being faulted and scolded for not carrying out his assigned duties when it should have become clear to his superiors why he was unable to carry out these duties.

In his description of Navy life Schmitt calls attention to the incompetence, laziness, drug abuse, sexual immorality, and foul language of his associates. Most of the time Schmitt wisely refrains from quoting the actual filthy words spoken in his presence. Nevertheless, there are a very few examples of blasphemy and obscenity that may trouble some Christian readers.

There are also many examples of the author’s sense of humor, even in the middle of unpleasant

circumstances. Early in the book (11) the military's fondness for acronyms is lampooned in the following sentence:

After all, the SOP for US SSN's and SSBN's directed by the DOD of the USA, not the FBI or CIA, regardless if GOP or DFL appears as the DMV at sea, and disregards the EPA, but favors the NRC RADCON which appears to the USSR as the NFL on an NHL rink.

Our reading of this book should make us more aware of the temptations, dangers, and persecutions that are experienced daily by Christians in the military, or, for that matter, by Christians in any walk of life where unbelievers are in control. We are living in a wicked world. Many nominal Christians escape the persecutions by living or at least talking like the ungodly, and in fact they themselves are the ungodly. Some of Schmitt's severest words are reserved for the so-called Lutheran teachers and leaders of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), which has seemingly surrendered to Satan in matters of doctrine and lifestyle. In spite of all of this, Schmitt returns more than once to the comfort of Romans 8:28: "We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose."

Since Schmitt's book is self-published, and since writing and publishing a book such as this is no minor feat, we can expect to find some flaws in style, grammar, spelling, etc. Proofreading is not easy. When I was editor of the Lutheran Spokesman, I don't think I ever put out an issue that did not have at least one error. The proofreading in the first chapters of Schmitt's book seems to be much better than that of the later chapters. If another printing is made, these errors ought to be corrected. The bibliography at the end of the book indicates that the author has done a lot of reading of sources as dissimilar as Charles Darwin and the Lutheran Spokesman.

Job, by Rudolph E. Honsey, in the People's Bible series, paperback, 364 pages, Northwestern Publishing House, 1992.

The series of books known as The People's Bible is now almost complete. All that remains to be finished are commentaries on the prophet Isaiah and the prophets Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah in the Old Testament and in the New Testament commentaries on Paul's letter to the Romans as well as on James, 1 and 2 Peter, 1 and 2 and 3 John, and Jude. Perhaps by the time this review is printed the entire series will be available.

The fourteen years since the first volume in this series was published have gone by faster than this reviewer has been able to read the books as they appeared in print. No doubt many users have been using them as reference books for the understanding of specific chapters or passages rather than reading them from beginning to end. Yet even as the Bible itself ought to be read in its entirety so that we grasp the whole context of a chapter or passage, so also these commentaries are best read from cover to cover.

I certainly recommend that the commentary on Job by the highly respected Bethany College professor Rudolph Honsey be read in this fashion. For it is easy to misunderstand an individual phrase or sentence or section in the book of Job if we do not comprehend the plan and organization of the entire book.

What, then, is the meaning of the book of Job? There is no doubt that the book of Job grapples with some of the most profound questions of life on this earth: the wisdom and power of the Creator, the reason for human suffering, the character of Satan as a cruel tempter and accuser, the relationship between the justice and the mercy of God, and especially the horribleness of the feeling of being forsaken by God. Martin Luther said that parts of the book of Job can be "understood only by those who also experience and feel what it is to suffer the wrath and judgment of God, and to have his grace hidden" (Luther's Works, 35: 252)

Professor Honsey's Introduction points out that Job is presented in Scripture as a real person rather

than as a fictional character. Nevertheless, we cannot positively say where or when Job lived, nor can we know for sure whom God used as the human author of the book of Job.

The main theme of the book is the meaning of suffering. Job's three 'friends' (Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar) defended the thesis that 'great suffering is a direct consequence of some special sin' (8), and that Job therefore should repent of whatever secret sin he had committed that had caused his suffering. Job, on the other hand, proclaimed his innocence and accused God of injustice and his three friends of lovelessness. The young man Elihu then pointed out that 'God uses troubles and afflictions to test and strengthen the faith of a Christian' (8). In the end God Himself appeared to Job, not to justify or explain His treatment of Job, but simply to manifest His inscrutable majesty. Job then humbled himself before this mighty God and God 'later blessed him even more richly than He had earlier blessed him' (7).

We are familiar with Job's bold confession of his Savior in Job 19: 'I know that my Redeemer lives.' But Professor Honsey points out that there are in the book of Job also 'other passages that point forward to our Savior' (9). In fact he agrees with the German exegete Franz Delitzsch, who wrote: 'The real contents of the book of Job is the mystery of the Cross: the Cross on Golgotha is the solution of the enigma of every cross; and the book of Job is a prophecy of the final solution' (9).

When Job was first afflicted by God, he spoke the well-known words: 'The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised' (Job 1:21). Professor Honsey comments: 'In his patient submission to the will of God during his deep affliction Job gives us an Old Testament preview of that Person who suffered even more, and not for His own sin -- our Savior Jesus Christ' (23). Later, in connection with the prolonged physical and spiritual suffering of Job, Honsey says: 'It is questionable whether any other human being except our Savior has suffered more severely than Job' (55).

In chapter nine we find Job expressing his hope like this: 'If only there were someone to arbitrate between us (that is, between Job and God), to lay his hand upon us both, someone to remove God's rod from me' (Job 9: 33-34). Professor Honsey comments: 'Job's words in this passage surely appear to point forward to that one God-Man, Jesus Christ, the Mediator between God and men' (74).

In Job 14:16-17 Job says to God: 'Surely then You will count my steps but not keep track of my sin. My offenses will be sealed up in a bag; You will cover over my sin.' Honsey's comment: 'What a beautiful expression of God's forensic act of justification! God would not hold Job's sins against him' (102).

In Job's complaints against God recorded in Job 16: 6-14 Honsey sees a similarity to the language of David's Psalm 22 that described 1000 years in advance Christ's suffering on the cross. 'There are a number of striking parallels between Job's suffering and Christ's. Although Job was a sinner, his suffering was not directly related to any particular sins of his own. Likewise, the sinless Jesus Christ suffered not for any sins of His own, for He had none, but for the sins of the world. In both cases Satan was responsible for their suffering' (112).

In connection with Job's complaints in Job 19:13-20 Honsey says: 'Job appears to have hit an all-time low. He was in the dumps. He felt desperate. We might safely say that, of all the characters in the Bible, none was more forsaken than Job -- except one, Jesus Christ. ... Unlike even Job, He suffered the pangs of hell for all of us, including Job, you, and me' (126).

In describing Job's complaints in Job 30 Honsey says: 'Job felt the heavy hand of God pressing down upon him as he looked forward to nothing better than death. Jesus felt the heavy hand of God pressing down upon Him as He bore the sins of all others. ... There are truly many striking parallels between the suffering of Job and the suffering of Jesus. But there are also many striking differences. ... Although at first Job did not complain, in due time when he felt his afflictions so intensely he did complain bitterly, as everyone else would complain under these conditions -- except Jesus' (217-218).

When we come to the young man Elihu's words in Job 32-37, we find Professor Honsey supporting the view that Elihu was a true gospel preacher, especially in Job 33: 23-30, telling Job 'that God is loving,

that He redeems and restores people from the clutches of suffering and sin. ... Who is the individual described in verse 23? ... We believe that He is none other than our Savior Jesus Christ. ... In a true sense Jesus Christ the God-Man is the Mediator between God and men" (248-250). Yes, Elihu speaks of 'a mediator, one out of a thousand, to tell a man what is right for him, to be gracious to him and say, 'Spare him from going down to the pit; I have found a ransom for him!'" "Jesus Christ is plainly in view!

There are other fine features of Professor Honsey's commentary on Job apart from his emphasis on Jesus Christ. He disagrees with the attempts made by many to correct or emend the Hebrew wording when it is difficult. He interprets Scripture by Scripture. He shows how practical the book of Job is in the consideration of such current issues as evolution, abortion, decision theology, and sexual immorality. But above all we recommend Honsey's commentary for its emphasis on Jesus Christ and His saving work in our behalf.

iscovering the Plain Truth -- How the Worldwide Church of God Encountered the Gospel of Grace, by Larry Nichols and George Mather, paperback, 141 pages, InterVarsity Press, 1998.

Larry Nichols and George Mather are Missouri Synod Lutherans who want the world to know what an amazing transformation has taken place in the religious organization known as the Worldwide Church of God (WCG). No doubt most of us have heard of Herbert W. Armstrong and his son, Garner Ted Armstrong. The senior Armstrong founded the WCG in Oregon in 1933 and controlled it with an iron hand until he died in 1986 at 94 years of age. For many years Garner Ted Armstrong, born in 1930, was the chief spokesman of the WCG through his popular programs (The World Tomorrow) on radio and television. Father and son had a falling out in 1978, and Garner Ted Armstrong then founded his own church called the Church of God International (COGI).

The WCG has also been known for its attractive magazine, The Plain Truth, and its Ambassador College in Pasadena, California. In 1974 attendance at Ambassador College and two other WCG educational institutions reached a high of 1400 students. The highest circulation The Plain Truth ever reached was about 6,000,000. But in Herbert Armstrong's last years both father and son were alleged to have been involved in sexual sins such as incest, adultery, and unscriptural divorce. These scandals and divisions caused by these scandals led to membership loss even before Herbert Armstrong's death.

In their little book Nichols and Mather delineate the many false doctrines taught by Herbert W. Armstrong and his church. He denied the doctrine of the Trinity, claiming that the family of God is now comprised of two Persons, Father and Son, and that in the future many thousands of disciples will be born again and be Persons of God like Father and Son. Armstrong taught that Jesus died with a human body but that He rose from the dead with only a divine nature. He taught that hell does not mean eternal death. Armstrong's system involved obedience to all kinds of regulations such as triple tithing, and observance of Saturday as the Sabbath as well as the observance of other Old Testament feasts such as Passover and the Feast of Tabernacles. Armstrong also strongly promoted the view that Great Britain and the United States are the ten lost tribes of Israel and as such are foretold and described in advance in the Bible. Much of Armstrong's teaching was plagiarized from others. We can see certain resemblances to Mormonism, Seventh Day Adventism, and Jehovah's Witnesses. About the only thing positive one can say about Herbert W. Armstrong is that he taught that the Bible is the final authority for the Christian, even though for him the Bible was not his real authority.

A very strange thing happened after Herbert W. Armstrong's death. The man hand-picked to succeed him, Joseph Tkach, Sr., while at first teaching Armstrong's doctrines faithfully, began to allow debate and discussion on the church's teachings with the Bible as authority. In this debate Armstrong's doctrines were shown to be his own opinions rather than Bible teaching. One by one his false doctrines fell, and Biblical teachings began to take their place. In fact a WCG preacher in Atlanta, Georgia began to preach salvation by grace through faith in Christ, rather than salvation by obedience to laws. When Joseph Tkach, Sr. was

invited to address the Georgia congregation on this issue, he realized that if he preached law, half the congregation of 1500 would leave, and if he preached grace, the other half would leave. Although Tkach, Sr. tried to urge moderation, division was inevitable. Joseph Tkach, Sr. died in 1995, less than a year after this confrontation in Georgia.

His son, Joseph Tkach, Jr., is continuing to carry out the reforms that were begun when his father was in charge. At the present time, as revealed through interviews printed as appendices in this book, the present leaders of the WCG openly admit that their founder taught many false doctrines. Most remarkable of all is this statement of the present leader, Joseph Tkach, Jr.:

If you were to ask me ten years ago the classic question that D. James Kennedy asks in *Evangelism Explosion* -- you're standing before Jesus and he says, "Why should I let you into my kingdom?" how would you answer? -- I would have been one of those who said, "Because I have been striving to be the best man I can be." That's how I would have answered ten years ago. Of course now I would give a totally different answer, because it's Christ's righteousness imputed to me (106).

Such a radical change in position is bound to bring about great struggles among the members of the WCG. Many have left the church and formed splinter groups loyal to their founder and his teachings. Others have left because reform has not come as quickly as they have desired. But at present there are still 425 WCG congregations in the United States served by 230 full-time pastors. The world total is 450 pastors serving 530 congregations (115). The Plain Truth now has only 125,000 subscribers. Since 1990 40,000 people have left the WCG without joining one of the many splinter groups. Among those giving encouragement to the WCG leaders in their doctrinal reforms are Missouri Synod leaders such as President Alvin Barry (whom Joseph Tkach, Jr. calls "big Al, the preacher's pal" -- 79), Roger Pitelko, Rod Rosenblatt, Paul McCain, and Don Matzat. Other Protestant groups have also welcomed the changes. The WCG has even been accepted as a member of the NAE (National Association of Evangelicals).

In spite of some Lutheran influence, however, the WCG does not seem to be moving in the direction of confessional Lutheranism but in the direction of a rather tolerant or loose ecumenical evangelicalism. For example, the last paragraphs of the book show the WCG leadership as favoring the Reformed view of Baptism and the Lord's Supper rather than the Scriptural doctrine confessed in the Lutheran Book of Concord. Nevertheless, we can rejoice that the Holy Spirit in very strange ways and in unusual circumstances has drawn at least some away from the fatal darkness of Armstrongian legalism into the light of the glorious saving gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us continue to pray that God's name may be hallowed and His kingdom come through the preaching of the true gospel among those formerly led astray. We thank the authors of this book for making us aware of this miraculous work of God.

Their Blood Cries Out -- The Untold Story of Persecution against Christians in the Modern World, by Paul Marshall with Lela Gilbert, hard cover, 336 pages, Word Publishing, 1997.

The Lord God said to Cain, the first human murderer: "The voice of your brother's blood cries out to Me from the ground" (Gen. 4:10). When the Lord God became man in the person of Jesus Christ, He likewise spoke of Abel's blood and "all the righteous blood shed on the earth" (Matt. 23:35) from the beginning until His own day. The author of this book claims -- and proves his claim -- that the righteous blood of believers like Abel is still being shed today, and their blood cries out. But who is listening?

It is the contention of Paul Marshall in this book that we who are confessing Christians ought to be listening. That which is "untold" ought to be told by those who know, and the rest of us ought to be listening and praying and doing something about it as we are able. I believe Paul Marshall is right. For it is written: "Remember the prisoners as if chained with them -- those who are mistreated -- since you yourselves are in the body also" (Heb. 13:3). If we are to remember our fellow-Christians who are being imprisoned for their faith, how much more should we remember those who are being put to death for their

confession of Christ!

But is it really true that Christians are being put to death just because of their confession of Christ? Paul Marshall says: "There are people now, as I write -- as you read -- who are being imprisoned, raped, sold into slavery, and tortured to death. Christians should note that in orthodox Christian theology, this must be treated the same as Jesus being tortured to death" (231). Again Paul Marshall is right. For when our Lord Jesus addressed the Pharisee Saul as he was on the road to Damascus to persecute and torture Christians there, He asked him: "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" And when Saul responded by asking, "Who are You, Lord?" the answer came back: "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting" (Acts 9: 4 - 5). Should we do nothing when we see our Lord Jesus "imprisoned, raped, sold into slavery, and tortured to death"?

But is it really true? Marshall's book does not refer to any persecution taking place in our own country at the present time, although we can be sure there is some. Rather, he circles the globe and gives us authentic reports of what is going on. In Sudan, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Egypt Christians are being persecuted and killed by Muslim fanatics in power. The section on Sudan is especially horrifying. "Non-Muslims are given the choice of converting to Islam or being denied food, clothing, and shelter. The unconverted are left to die, naked in the blazing sun" (21).

The holy book of Islam, the Koran, does not teach such cruelty. "Historically, other religions of the book, Christians and Jews, were allowed to continue their religious practices within Islam provided they accepted dhimmi status -- a protected position that was also distinctly second-class" (42). One of the biggest problems for Christians today, however, is that those who are Muslims cannot ever legally leave Islam. "People who want to leave Islam can face death. In some situations, if they refuse to return to the fold, they may be killed -- by anyone -- with impunity" (43).

Christians also face serious persecution in those countries that are controlled by Communists: China, Vietnam, Cuba, and North Korea in particular. In these countries the Christians are not usually put to death, but they are worn down by continual discrimination and repression.

Christians are also persecuted to some extent in those countries whose populations are predominantly Buddhist or Hindu: India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Mongolia, Bhutan, Burma or Myanmar, and Cambodia. Because of our association with the Church of the Lutheran Confession of India (CLCI) and the Bharath Evangelical Lutheran Church (BELC), also in India, we are especially interested in how Christians are being treated in India. Paul Marshall refers to the growing power of the BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party), the largest Hindu political party. He says that this party is "a threat to India's twenty-five million Christians." Persecution of Christians in India, he says, generally takes three forms: "discrimination, especially against lower caste Christians; restrictions on changing one's religion or talking to people about changing one's religion; persecution and communal violence directed against Christians, who are often accused of undermining Hinduism" (100). Let us pray that our Lord God will continue to bless the work of our Christian brothers and sisters in India and deliver them from persecution if it is His will or strengthen them in spite of persecution if that is His will.

Marshall's book includes a chapter on Christians being persecuted by other Christians. Some of the Orthodox churches of Russia and Eastern Europe have a long history of making life difficult for those Christian groups not associated with the official state church, that is, the Orthodox Church. Some of the "evangelical" groups that are now trying to establish themselves in Russia face restrictions of one kind or another.

Adherents of the Roman Catholic Church, likewise, have made life difficult at times for non-Catholics in South America and Central America, and especially in Mexico at the present time. "On September 11, 1994, the Evangelical Covenant Church in San Pablo Yaganiza was raided during Sunday worship and church members were driven out and beaten. The evangelical pastors in the area have all received death threats, church members have had their water and drainage services cut off and farm animals taken" (139-140). Many such examples are reported in this book.

There is even one country predominantly Lutheran, Estonia, that has restricted religious efforts by other religious groups, such as the Roman Catholics and the Russian Orthodox.

One of the most revealing chapters in this book is Marshall's discussion of American apathy in response to all of this persecution of Christians in the world. What are the reasons for this apathy? One reason is that news reporters in general do not consider religion, especially the Christian religion, an important element in modern life. Another reason, as stated by the Reverend David Stravers, vice president of the Bible League: "American Christians for the most part are not interested in anything that happens outside the boundaries of the United States, and in many cases outside the boundaries of their own little community" (152).

A third reason is that American Christians cannot really fathom what it is like to be persecuted for their faith and therefore refuse to believe that persecution is taking place elsewhere.

Paul Marshall lists some other reasons for American apathy:

The popularity of health and wealth theology that teaches that living a Christian life leads to prosperity, not persecution;

The confusion of Christianity with American patriotism;

An obsession with prophecy of future events;
A desire to keep all funds for our own American projects;
A lack of information.

My conclusion is that I think it would be good for all of us to read Marshall's book or a nother like it and seriously consider what is going on in the world, and how Christians are faring. Then the least we can do is pray regularly for the Christians who are being persecuted and tortured and killed for their confession of Christ. Then we can go on to getting ourselves more informed particularly with respect to those in Nigeria and India whom we recognize as brothers and sisters in the faith. Christians in Nigeria face dangers from their Muslim neighbors. Christians in India face dangers from their Hindu neighbors. Christians in these countries are in the minority. Maybe there is something we can do for them beyond praying for them.

Let us also realize that we confessing Christians in America may also be a minority, and that we can expect persecution to arise and increase also in our own land. Are we ready? Our Lord Jesus says: "Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer; indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until (to the point of) death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Rev. 2:10).

- David Lau