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## CONTENTS

Sermon Series: The Ten Commandments.....	Frank Gantt
May We Be Found Faithful Stewards.....	David Schaller
Exegesis of Isaiah 55:6-11.....	Paul Naumann
Elijah's Mantle (conclusion).....	Paul Tiefel, Jr.

## BOOK REVIEWS

<i>Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions</i> .....	By Paul Timothy McCain, et al., editors (Reviewer: David Schierenbeck)
<i>Law, Life, and the Living God</i> .....	By Scott R. Murray
<i>The Spirituality of the Cross</i> .....	By Gene Edward Veith, Jr. (Reviewer: David Lau)

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## Sermon Series: The Ten Commandments

Frank Gantt

In our continuation of the sermon series on the Ten Commandments, a Reformation Festival sermon preached by Pastor Gantt on October 31, 2008 is included in this issue. We hope the reader finds it to be both edifying and a fitting complement to the sermon below on the Third Commandment.

### **The Third Commandment: *Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.***

Readings: Genesis 3:1-19; Hebrews 4:1-10

Sermon Text: Matthew 11:28-30

Grace, mercy, and peace are yours from God our Father and Christ Jesus, our Savior. Amen.

According to the calendar June 22 is the day we enter into the season of summer. For many people the summer months bring thoughts of lounging around by the lake, taking family vacations, picnicking, and so forth. I suppose the reason for such thoughts is that the school year has come to an end, freeing people from the tight schedule of having to get their children to school, to their various activities, and back home. It's nice to have a break from so much stress and so many demands on our time.

Honestly, though, do the summer months really mean less work and more relaxation? I know it doesn't hold true for me. Even when I go on vacation, there is still much work to be done. How many times have you heard someone say, "I'm glad to be home where I can have a vacation from my vacation"? It seems like the more we struggle to find rest, the further away such rest appears. Keep this in mind as we read our text for today from Matthew 11:28-30: "***Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.***"

Before we can begin to understand either our text or the Third Commandment before us today, we need to go all the way back to the Garden of Eden. Adam and his wife had disobeyed the command God had given them concerning the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The darkest consequence of that disobedience was death for both Adam and Eve and for all their descendants. Yet along with that consequence God laid two other burdens upon them. For the woman it would be the pain of bearing children. For the man God said: "***Cursed is the ground for your sake; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, and you shall eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you shall return***" (Gen. 3:17-19). Before the fall into sin Adam and Eve did work, but now their work would not always be pleasant. In many ways it would be hard. The land would not so easily yield its increase, as they and every subsequent generation would have to contend with weeds and thistles, with drought and flooding, with blisters and breakdowns, with blood, sweat, and tears.

Some six thousand years later, here we are, living under the same curse. Consider what has happened between then and now. In six thousand years of technological advances we have not been able to overcome the curse that God has put on the ground for man's sake. We have tractors with air conditioned cabs; we have electric pumps that perform a host of functions that would otherwise have to be done by hand; we have computers and machines that do the work that men had to do manually in former ages of history. We buy more and more equipment and tools and appliances, thinking that our labor will be lessened. Yet the curse remains: "***In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread.***" This curse was put into effect by God. No matter how smart or inventive man becomes, he will never be able to undo the curse. Only God can do that.

Enter the Third Commandment: "***Remember the Sabbath Day, to keep it holy.***" When it was given to the children of Israel through Moses on Mount Sinai, the LORD said to them: "***Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.***"

We tend to think of this commandment, along with the others, as nothing more than a command, a law that requires something of those to whom it is given. Of course, it is that primarily. However, when seen in view of Genesis 3, we can also understand that in giving the people this command, God was giving them a day to rest from the sweat and labor that had filled their work because of sin. For them the Sabbath was a respite from the temporal consequences of sin on man's work and also an opportunity to look to God for the removal of the curse as He invited them to come together, gather before Him, and listen to Him address and solve their greatest need, redemption.

Sadly, the children of Israel would eventually think it was their obedience to this command and to the others that would remove the curse of sin. They replaced God's redemption with their own works and looked on the Sabbath as just another opportunity to work their way back into fellowship with God. They refused to see that what this commandment required of them, they were incapable of producing. In their work-righteous fervor they added their own variations to God's Sabbath law. They specified how many steps one could take before it was work. They set their own limits on what a person could do to gather and eat grain on the Sabbath. They even forbade the carrying of one's bed on the Sabbath (cf. John 5:10). Of course, anytime man adds to God's Word, it cheapens it and deprives it of the Lord's intended effect (cf. Mark 7:13). The end result of the Jews' application of the Third Commandment to themselves was that people were lead further from God, not closer to Him. Sinners were being further oppressed, having no rest from the greatest burden of all.

Enter our text, our Savior's invitation: ***"Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."*** Whenever I read these words, I am reminded of a Christian missionary in China whose name was Watchman Nee. When a recent convert came to him, he was lamenting, "No matter how much I pray, no matter how hard I try, I simply cannot seem to be faithful to my Lord. I think I'm losing my salvation." Nee said to him, "Do you see this dog here? He is my dog. He is house-trained; he never makes a mess; he is obedient; he is a pure delight to me. Out in the kitchen I have a son, a baby son. He makes a mess; he throws his food around; he fouls his clothes; he is a total mess. But who is going to inherit my kingdom? Not my dog; my son is my heir. You are Jesus Christ's heir because it is for you that He died."

Watchman Nee's son had a kind of rest that cannot be obtained by the observance of a thousand Sabbath Day regulations. He had the rest of knowing his father's love. That is the kind of rest of which Jesus speaks and offers to the sinner. He has conquered sin, death, and the devil. Those things are the real cause of our restlessness. Those are the things that burden our souls, because they separate us from our God, in whom alone is to be found joy and peace. The sweat and the labor that accompanies our work serve as reminders that we are separated from our God because of our sin. Jesus came to undo that separation and bring us back to God. This He did in the great exchange of love that took place upon the cross. All of your sins were placed on Him, and He labored intensely under them as He endured the full burden of them all—total separation from God—the ultimate curse of our sin and its full and complete punishment. That is why He cried out those disturbing words, *"My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"* Yet having taken all the burden of our sins upon Himself, He gave us something else to carry with us: His perfect righteousness as our own.

What a light burden that is! It is light because it assures us that our status before God is secure in the perfect obedience of Christ fulfilled in our place. It is light because it gives us peace with God. It is light because it gives back to us what was lost through Adam's disobedience. It restores to us Paradise as our promised inheritance.

Now how do we come to Jesus and receive His rest? We come to Him as we open our Bibles and hear the Scriptures testify of Him and the sacrifice He made for us on Calvary. We come to Him when we gather together to hear His Word proclaimed in our church services. We come to Him as the Holy Spirit grants us faith to believe that testimony and trust that Word. In these ways Jesus promises to remove that burden of sin from us personally and to clothe each of us with His perfection.

For the Christian every day is the Sabbath, a day of rest for our souls. We can go to bed at night confessing our sins and claiming God's promise to us through His Son: *"Your sins are forgiven you!"* We can awake in the morning knowing and trusting that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Think of the joy and the peace which that assurance brings to our daily activities, even our work. We can face it all—in spite of the sweat that comes with it—with joy and with the knowledge that our labors are not in vain in the Lord.

In his Large Catechism Martin Luther reminds us what impact Jesus, our true Sabbath, has on our daily lives:

Indeed, we Christians should make every day a holy day and give ourselves only to holy activities—that is, occupy ourselves daily with God’s Word and carry it in our hearts and on our lips. However, as we have said, since all people do not have this much time and leisure, we must set apart several hours a week for the young, and at least a day for the whole community, when we can concentrate upon such matters and deal especially with the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and the Lord’s Prayer. Thus we may regulate our whole life and being according to God’s Word. Wherever this practice is in force, a holy day is truly kept. . . .

The Word of God is the true holy thing above all holy things. Indeed, it is the only one we Christians acknowledge and have. . . . But God’s Word is the treasure that sanctifies all things. . . . At whatever time God’s Word is taught, preached, heard, read, or pondered, there the person, the day, and the work are sanctified by it, not on account of the external work but on account of the Word which makes us all saints. Accordingly, I constantly repeat that all our life and work must be guided by God’s Word if they are to be God-pleasing or holy. Where that happens the commandment is in force and is fulfilled (*Book of Concord*, Tappert ed., p. 377).

The next time you’re at work, struggling to mend a fence or hammering nails or hoeing your garden—whatever work it is that you do—and you feel a bead of sweat rolling down your brow, let that serve as a reminder to you of the reason why you are struggling. Your toil was put in place by God as a reminder that He Himself is what was missing in your life. But let this moment also remind you that He has done everything necessary for you to have a renewed relationship with Him. He has taken away your sins by the blood of the cross of His Son, Jesus Christ. In Him you have rest for your soul through the forgiveness of your sins. And from Him you have the gospel which brings His rest to you. Amen!

### **The Constant Need for the Reformation**

Readings: John 17:1-17; Revelation 11:1-13

Sermon Text: Deuteronomy 11:16-23

Grace, mercy, and peace to you, who also have “fallen short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.” Amen.

Picture in your mind for a moment the one thing in your life that gives you the greatest pleasure. I’m talking about something earthly, the one thing or person that means the most to you here on earth. Is there someone or something that you value most, that gives you joy and brings you happiness? I imagine most of us would think of a person, like our spouse or children. Some may think of something material, like a gift passed on to us from a spouse or parent who is no longer with us. Whatever that person or thing is, I want you to think about it right now. Concentrate on it. Picture it. Think of the joy he, she, or it brings you.

Do you see it in your mind? Now imagine it gone, not just from your mind but from your life. It’s taken away, and you will never get it back. Now relax. Remember that you do still have it. Does that change anything for you? Does it change the way you will treat that person or that thing? Doesn’t the inevitable loss of that treasure make you want to treasure it all the more? Remember that too. We’ll come back to it in a few moments.

Today is Reformation Day, a day for us Lutherans to dump on the Roman Catholics. Well, at least that’s the way many see it. For those who do consider it that way, Reformation has been nothing more than an event from the pages of history. They put on their church clothes and go celebrate the Reformation this one day out of the year. Apart from this day, however, it seems to have made little impact on their lives.

Let’s be clear about this up front. We are not here this evening to celebrate the Reformation. We are here because we too are in constant need of reformation, the same kind of reformation which took place those many years ago. We read from Deuteronomy 11:16-23: ***Take heed to yourselves, lest your heart be deceived, and you turn aside and serve other gods and worship them, lest the LORD’s anger be aroused against you, and He shut up the heavens so that there be no rain, and the land yield no produce, and you perish quickly from the good land which the LORD is giving you. 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, that your days and the days of your children may be multiplied in the land of which the LORD swore to your fathers to give them, like the days of the heavens above the earth. For if you carefully keep all these commandments which I command you to do—to love the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways, and to hold fast to Him—then the LORD will drive out all these nations from before you, and you will dispossess greater and mightier nations than yourselves.*

For the past few months we have been reviewing the teachings of Luther's Small Catechism. The six chief parts of Christian doctrine contained in the Catechism are the basic and central teachings of Holy Scripture. The background leading up to the writing and publishing of the Catechism is telling. Listen to Martin Luther describe why he did so.

The deplorable conditions which I recently encountered when I was a visitor constrained me to prepare this brief and simple catechism or statement of Christian teaching. . . . The common people, especially those who live in the country, have no knowledge whatever of Christian teaching, and unfortunately many pastors are quite incompetent and unfitted for teaching. Although the people are supposed to be Christian, are baptized, and receive the holy sacrament, they do not know the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, or the Ten Commandments, they live as if they were pigs and irrational beasts, and now that the Gospel has been restored they have mastered the fine art of abusing liberty (Tappert, p. 338).

It's a rather bleak picture that Luther paints. Is it any wonder that few people questioned things like indulgences and prayer to the saints at that time? They had no idea what God's will was. Part of the reason for that was the lack of having the Bible in the language which they could read. While that circumstance was true enough, whose fault was it? It was everyone's fault. It was the fault of bishops. It was the fault of pastors and priests. It was the fault of fathers. Sure, it would have required much work, but what greater work could there be for pastors than to make sure people knew God's will? What greater work could there be for fathers than to put God's Word in front of their families?

In our text we listen to the Lord warn the children of Israel about failure to attend to this important work in their lives. He threatens them with famine. In reading from the prophets, we find out that it happened just as God had said it would. The people neglected the Word of God and fell into idolatry, and as promised, famines came upon the land. We read about no rain falling on Israel for three and half years during the time of Elijah. Jeremiah as well spoke time and again about the famine with which the Lord was sending on the people of Judah. Ezekiel too. The greater famine, however, was the one God declared through Amos: ***"Behold, the days are coming," says the Lord GOD, "that I will send a famine on the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD. They shall wander from sea to sea, and from north to east; they shall run to and fro, seeking the word of the LORD, but shall not find it"*** (Amos 8:11-12).

It happened in Israel during the Old Testament times. It happened in Europe during the Middle Ages. It can happen here as well. It is a terrible thing to have such a judgment from God. Understand well what a famine of the Word of God means. It means no grace and truth extended. It means no forgiveness and mercy proclaimed. It means no cross and Savior preached. It means no means of having a relationship with God and therefore no eternal inheritance. God has determined to save fallen mankind through the hearing of His Word. Take that Word of Life away, and there can be no salvation. God will not sit by like a doting grandfather who continually gives out candy to spoiled grandchildren who will only spit it on the ground and walk all over it. He is longsuffering and patient, far beyond what we deserve, but He will not always extend His loving hand to a people who despise His grace. Does this describe us?

Sadly, it does describe each one of us to one degree or another. It is so easy to let other things slip in ahead of Bible study and devotion time. Too often, instead of being guided by clear words of God, we permit our society to determine how we think, what is appropriate behavior, and what our pursuits should be. All the while that thing with the most value in our lives—the Word of God, the Bible—is left unheard by our ears and unopened on our shelves. But isn't it true that we went through Luther's Catechism? We already know what the Bible says, right? Only those who seldom open their Bibles would consider a few years' worth of catechism instruction sufficient for their spiritual well-being.

Listen again to God's desire for how we are to treat His Word: ***"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.”* God’s will for us is to have His Word in our thoughts and in our speech all the time. Every part of our lives is to be governed by His Word, and there are no choices we should make without considering God’s will on the matter.

That God commands it should be enough reason for us to do so. Yet we should also consider this fact that through His Word our Lord truly blesses us. In the last few verses of our text the Lord promised the blessings of a prosperous and secure nation to the children of Israel, but only in keeping with their calling to make His Word their greatest treasure. Though there is much wisdom in God’s Word that would lead to outward blessing for any nation or family who followed it, we recognize the greater blessings that come only through His Word. These blessings are the mercies which come to us through the gospel. These blessings include a conscience that is free from guilt because it knows that sin has been removed from our records through the suffering and death of Jesus Christ. Another blessing is the certainty of a life in heaven through the merits of Christ, yes, a life in God’s eternal presence that is free from all the consequences and effects of sin here on earth. These treasures are of more value than anything in the world. And it is through the Word of God that we come to know that we poor, sinful wretches, who deserve only wrath and rejection, are given the right to be called sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

The Word of God, it seems, has fallen on hard times in our society. Many churches claiming the name of Christ have forsaken the Bible as outdated and useless to our modern times. Many would say that Christianity is but a lifestyle and not a creed based on truth. This seems partly true, yet very much a lie. Christianity is a life which grows out of truth. Jesus Christ is “the Way, the Truth, and the Life.” He cannot be apprehended except through the Word of God. If you do not have His Word, you do not have Him. If you do not have Him, you cannot have life. For this reason the Bible is truly our most valuable treasure, yet not the kind to bury in the ground or hide in a vault. Its value is found only in its use. In those ways in which we too have despised His Word and failed to read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest it, we remain in need of reformation.

To this end, then, we pray the prayer which our Savior offered on our behalf. Sanctify us by Your truth; Your Word is truth. Amen!

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**May We Be Found Faithful Stewards**  
*In proclaiming the glorious richness of Christ*  
*to the unbelieving world*  
David Schaller

\* The following was originally presented at the 2008 CLC Convention, whose theme, “May We Be Found Faithful Stewards of the Mysteries of God,” was based on Colossians 1:24-29.

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In direct reference to “the saints”  
Paul writes in Colossians 1:27-28:  
***“To them God has chosen to make known***  
***among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery,***  
***which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.***  
***We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching***  
***everyone with all wisdom,***  
***so that we may present everyone***  
***perfect in Christ.”***

## **Introduction**

*“Does anyone want to come with me to the barber shop?” When I say those words in our house, I can be assured that within moments I will hear the excited patter of two pairs of little feet. My young daughters will race to put on their socks and shoes, practically knocking each other over to get to the back door. As you may suspect, however, they do not really care about watching me get a haircut. Rather, there is something else that attracts them to Bakeman Barbers in Dowagiac, MI. Last year the owner of the shop installed a large toy box in a corner of the waiting area—much to the delight of his younger visitors.*

Upon entering, the two go straight to that box and pull off the cover. They peer in over the edge of the large, football-shaped container, the younger one almost falling in headfirst. Such a treasure chest it is! It is full to the top with riches, and before long there are cars, trucks, books, and action figures being drawn from its depths.

Noticeably, though, the toys are not necessarily pulled out at random. If one watches for a moment, it is evident that a certain *stewardship* of these riches is taking place, a particular management that goes on between the two children at play. The older one rummages around in the box for a moment and pulls out a book. “Here is one that you would like,” she says to her sister, “because it has pictures of animals in it.” The younger one hands over a motorcycle she found. “Here is one for you,” she says. And so they go on, distributing the various treasures, having a certain idea which ones will be right for the other. Yes, they have the occasional tussle over particular toys, but overall, they are not bad managers of these great riches.

## **Our Treasure in Christ**

A treasure chest stands before us as well, given to us by the Almighty God. It has emblazoned on it in shining letters: THE GOSPEL OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.

The core of this gospel treasure, the very heart and center of it, is the death and resurrection of Christ. 2 Corinthians 5:21: **“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”** Romans 4:25: **“He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.”** Passages like these are the treasure box itself. They declare for us the whole matter in a moment. While we were still sinners, Jesus offered Himself in our place to satisfy the justice of Almighty God. The Apostle Paul again made clear the centrality of the cross and empty tomb when he wrote: **“For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified”** (1 Cor. 2:2).

This mystery, this work of God to redeem mankind, has been revealed to us. The Holy Spirit has called us by the gospel, enlightened us with His gifts, sanctified, and kept us in the true faith. The mystery has also been disclosed to us in a way that even the believers of old—the likes of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—did not have shown to them. For in these latter days we no longer need to look ahead in hope to Messiah’s coming, but we rejoice that the Christ has already arrived and has lived among us. The prophecies have been fulfilled. We look on a sacrifice already completed, on a grave already made empty. We have, as it is said, “the word of the prophets made more certain” (2 Pet. 1:19).

## **The Richness of this Treasure**

The Apostle Paul wrote to the believers in Ephesus: **“I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge”** (Eph. 3:16-19a). He understood that the gospel of Christ contained infinite treasures. He saw for himself, for them, and for us a never-ending stream of blessings and riches flowing from the wounded side of Jesus.

The simple message of the cross is the great treasure chest, containing riches into which even the angels desire to look (1 Pet. 1:12). On the outside one sees clearly that Jesus died and rose again, but then as the opened box is explored, there is more and more to be found. The moment one gospel treasure is discovered, there is another one behind it, and another one behind that, so that anyone who has studied the Bible, whether pastor, teacher, or lay person, will agree that the further one gets in his studies, the more he realizes how much there is yet to study, understand, and apply to himself and to others. A person cannot exhaust the riches contained in the

gospel of Jesus.

There is not just one particular word or phrase that the Bible uses to deliver to us God's kindness in Christ. Rather, we find a multitude of expressions!

Over here is 2 Timothy 4: ***The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom*** (4:18).

And here is Mark 2: ***When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven"*** (2:5).

Here is John 14: ***"In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you"*** (14:2).

Here is John 10: ***"I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand"*** (10:28).

Here is Hebrews 12: ***But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God.*** . . . (12:22).

*Finally, is there not the entire revealed Word of God, every syllable of which in some way deals with the gospel? The Scripture shares the gospel of Christ not just with one kind of sentence, but with many sentences, and each one a treasure being brought out of the box, if you will.*

**From the central gospel promise** that Christ died and rose again for us (e.g., 2 Cor. 5:21; Rom. 4:25) **spring many related promises.** These additional promises depend entirely on the truth of the cross and the empty tomb. Take, for example, the promise of Jesus in Matthew 28:20: *"Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."* Where would this promise stand without the resurrection behind it? Or take Jesus' familiar words in John 10:11: *"I am the good shepherd."* Could the Good Shepherd be a dead shepherd? Again, this promise of Jesus comes to us solely in view of His resurrection from the dead. If one pictures the gospel promises as a wheel with a center hub and spokes radiating from it, it is evident that a wide range of mercy, comfort, and joy is flowing from the gospel's very heart.

By these few paragraphs just completed, I wish to have the reader understand the **richness** of the gospel treasure, for we rightly speak of the *"riches of His grace"* (Eph. 2:7) and *"the glorious riches of this mystery"* (Col. 1:27). From the great atoning death of the Lord Jesus and His majestic return to life the third day comes a **variety of promises to match the variety of situations and circumstances encountered upon life's path.**

### **Stewards of this Treasure**

By faith we have the treasure and understand its richness. Now we are tasked with being good stewards of these riches. How is one to be a good steward (manager) of the gospel? Is there a particular type of management that best allows the gospel to go forth unhindered? Shall we manage the gospel like we manage our money or like we manage our households? Shall we steward the gospel in the same way we steward our time and talents?

I think again of my daughters being little stewards of the toy box. They hand gifts to one another as they see and recognize which ones would suit the other best. Cannot a similar approach be taken with the variety of riches God has given to us?

Being good managers of the gospel means noticing situations in which the gospel could be brought to bear for the benefit of someone else and then bringing it! It means that instead of hoarding the spiritual promises we have been given, we become aware of the many different circumstances under which the rich treasure can be introduced to others, especially to the unbelieving. It means being a **good distributor of the blessings of the Lord.**

Applying the gospel promises in daily life is far more difficult than applying the thunderings of the law, for the law is the bedfellow of human nature. How easily we can rear back and point the finger of accusation. The application of the law is mindless and uncreative in the sense that in order to apply it to a person, one merely needs to look at an activity, compare it with the applicable commandment, and pass the deserved judgment. It is the simple letter without breath and life.

On the other hand, bringing the gospel to bear requires a deep knowledge, concern, perception, and awareness of another's spiritual circumstances and level of maturity. It takes thought, prayer, and Christian judgment to determine which promises may best be brought to which hearts in which situations. In applying the gospel, one takes care not to give false comfort to the impenitent, while at the same time taking care to give enough comfort to those whose souls are dry and parched.



Applying the gospel is difficult because a person cannot look to two tablets of stone and say, “This is what must be done.” The gospel does not work on legal principles and does not lend itself well to applications guided by lists of rules and regulations. There is no wall chart for evangelical practice whereby one can look up what is to be done in every circumstance. Instead, one needs to be aware of the gospel’s vast riches and come to a decision about which promise-treasure to bring out of the box at a given time and how to put it into practice. How amazing it is that God has entrusted such a job to us earthen vessels!

The unbelieving people who surround us in this world are in need of these promises. They also live in a world corrupted and burdened by sin. They also have illness and sorrows, doubts and apprehensions. Things happen in their lives too which cry out desperately for the healing balm of the gospel of Christ. They pant for cooling streams of comfort, but they do not see the comfort that is already there for them in Jesus. Thus we open our treasure boxes to the needs of the unbelieving world. We find which promises suit their situations. In short, we *apply the gospel in their lives*.

### **Common Needs / Uncommon Promises**

In the section below the comments inserted after the passage or passages serve to show how one can connect the Lord’s promises to the heart of the matter, the cross itself.

**Anger.** Has someone you know spoken about being angry, bitter, or resentful? Could this present an opening for you to introduce a particular gospel promise?

Ephesians 4:31-32 ***Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.***

- The gospel treasure is at the end of verse 32 in the words, “. . . *just as in Christ God forgave you.*” The connection to the cross is easy to make from here.

**Earthly Worries.** When Jesus’ disciples were concerned about how they would be cared for in this life, Christ gave them a promise that applied directly to their concerns. We all know people with similar worries who do not yet know Jesus.

Matthew 6:26, 30 ***Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? . . . If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?***

Romans 8:32 ***He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?***

- *He who cared for you so well in sending you His only Son also promises to care for your body.*

**Earthly Focus.** Do you know people who express frustration and complaint at not having enough money, not having a good enough job, or are otherwise consumed with gathering the things of this world for themselves? Have you shared with them that there are greater treasures than these?

Matthew 6:33 ***But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.***

- We can serve God first in everything that we do, once He has claimed us through the gospel’s power working faith in our hearts. And from that faith grow the fruits, lives pleasing to Him, lived this way because we know that we are righteous in the Father’s sight by virtue of Jesus’ death and resurrection.

**Guilt.** Have others confided in you that they are troubled about things that have happened in their past? Do you see someone who is trying to deal with his guilt apart from the gospel of Christ? Have you noticed a person being eaten up by guilt such as David had? (Psalm 32:3: “When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long.”)

Hebrews 8:12 ***For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.***

1 John 1:9 ***If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.***

Psalm 103:12 *As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.*

- *The cross deals directly with guilt—not with the soothing words of the world, such as “What you did wasn’t so bad” or “Don’t worry, everybody is doing it”—but with the promise that in Christ our sins are gone from the sight of God in heaven forever!*

**Guidance.** When someone asks you for advice, do you consider it a possible opportunity to share a gospel promise? If an unbelieving friend asks you whether he should divorce his spouse, can you answer in such a way as to encourage the individual to look for God’s answers too?

Proverbs 3:6 *In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.*

Psalm 48:14 *For this God is our God for ever and ever; he will be our guide even to the end.*

Psalm 73:23-24 *Yet I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand. You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory.*

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

**Praying.** Has anyone ever complained to you that “God doesn’t listen to my prayers” or some similar statement? Even the unbelieving will try to pray, even often. Responses to comments, questions, or declarations others make about prayer will include gospel promises.

Proverbs 15:29 *The LORD is far from the wicked but he hears the prayer of the righteous.*

Psalm 145:18-19 *The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth. He fulfills the desires of those who fear him; he hears their cry and saves them.*

- Who are *the righteous who call on him in truth*? Answering this takes a person right to the cross and empty tomb.

**Times of Crisis.** How many times aren’t we called upon by others in times of trouble? When your unbelieving neighbor makes it clear to you that he is struggling with the pains and sorrows of life, how can you share with him the gospel that he needs?

Psalm 9:9 *The LORD is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble.*

John 16:33 *“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”*

**Birth of a Child.** An unbelieving friend or neighbor has just given birth to a new baby. Can you find a point of contact between the joy of this new birth and a gospel promise that applies?

Acts 2:38-39 *“Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.”*

The situations above are by no means a complete listing. You, no doubt, can add more on your own. Think about how *rich* the gospel promises are both in variety and usefulness. *Consider how many points of contact there can be* for the good news in the everyday lives of those who do not know Jesus! Each of the situations previously mentioned and others too can be used to point people to the cross, for there are promises associated with them, promises which are all dependent in one way or another on the death and resurrection of Christ.

*“Although I am less than the least of all God’s people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ”* (Eph 3:8). As it was given to Paul, it is also given to us to share the riches of Christ with the unbelieving people we encounter.

### **Obstacles to our Gospel-stewardship**

Satan tries to ruin every good gift from God, and above all he seeks to tear down the gospel. It is not surprising, then, to find obstacles which can hinder our management and distribution of the riches of God’s grace. Thankfully, such obstacles are also answered and remedied by gospel promises to us.

**Obstacle: Ignorance****Promise: *The Word gives light.***

Psalm 119:130 says: *“The unfolding of your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple.”* Before a person can apply the riches of God’s grace for the benefit of another, he must know what the riches are! If, for example, you saw someone who was struggling with guilt, but you were unaware that Jesus gave the only sure antidote for guilt, any comfort you offered would be useless or weak. That is perhaps an extreme example, but the point remains that it is *important for believers to keep in regular contact with the Word of God*. Through the Word the Holy Spirit prepares us to be witnesses by enlightening our minds. The more we see, know, and understand the treasures of God for ourselves, the better we are able to apply them in the lives of others.

**Obstacle: Fear of Ignorance****Promise: *The Spirit is with you.***

Sometimes a fear of our own ignorance hinders us from sharing the gospel with the heathen. This is the “I won’t know what to say” problem. Nevertheless, we have promises and evidence that God’s Spirit is with His Church (cf. the Day of Pentecost). We are not alone in proclaiming the gospel; God will enable us to speak according to His gracious will. Acts 4:31: *“And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.”* When you speak the Word, the Spirit can work through that Word, regardless of whether or not you have the knowledge of a doctor of theology.

**Obstacle: Fear of rejection****Promise: *God gives the increase.***

When we choose a gift to give to someone else, we always hope that it will be well received, namely, that the person will enjoy and appreciate the treasure. Likewise, when we give a gospel promise to someone, we pray that it will be received with faith and not be thrown away, misused, or forgotten. Sometimes, though, the seed we scatter does not take root, and this can be discouraging to us. Do not fear when this happens, for the growth of the seed is the Lord’s business. We can only sow and water.<sup>1</sup> Even Jesus Himself was rejected by His own people.<sup>2</sup> Go forth into the harvest field, clinging to that famous promise of Isaiah 55:10-12:

*As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it. You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands.*

**Obstacle: Doubting the power of the gospel riches****Promise: *It moves the heart.***

This obstacle involves our hesitation to apply the gospel for fear that it will not accomplish much. We have a natural tendency to think that the law is a more powerful weapon for moving human hearts and changing human behavior. When the pure gospel is preached, it is hard to keep from thinking, “Will it really work?” Yet Scripture promises that it really is a powerful word.

Colossians 1:6 *All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing.*

1 Thessalonians 1:5 *Our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction.*

**Obstacle: Misusing the treasure****Promise: *Salvation is free.***

Martin Luther once wrote: “This difference between the Law and the Gospel is the height of knowledge in Christendom. Every person and all persons who assume or glory in the name of Christian should know and be able to state this difference.”<sup>3</sup> When we share the gospel treasure, we would do well to take care that we are sharing it properly and not confusing it with the holy law, which has its own uses and purposes. It is tempting to share the gospel promises only as springboards for applying the law, as in saying, “Jesus promises you great things . . . as long as you do your part to live a righteous life!” The riches of God’s grace are not subject to conditions of any kind.

## **Obstacle: Grudges and prejudice**

**Promise: *Jesus is for all.***

Matthew 9:10-11: *“While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew’s house, many tax collectors and ‘sinners’ came and ate with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, ‘Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and “sinners”?’”* The Pharisees were unwilling to share the Word of God with those whom they considered to be “lost causes.” Sometimes this can be an obstacle to our own sharing of the gospel treasure. Do we ever hesitate to speak the promises of God because the other person is an enemy, or we’ve had a run-in with them before, or we think we know what the response to our effort will be? Do we ever approach the unbelieving person with an attitude of “This one never believed it before; he won’t believe it now.” Yet Jesus says, *“It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick”* (Matt. 9:12).

Regarding these and all other obstacles we may encounter in applying the gospel to the hearts of unbelieving people, we pray that our God would overcome them for their sake and ours.

## **Growing as Stewards**

*We wish to grow day by day in our ability to be good stewards of the gospel of Jesus. To this end there are a number of practical helps that can make it easier for us to make use of the gospel in the lives of the unbelieving. In particular we consider the following.*

- Sunday Sermons and Bible Classes. Here the pastor applies the gospel to daily life. As they are able, both pastor and parishioner take those applications into their own witnessing. Thus one can attend church or class also with an eye to growing in his ability to share the gospel of Christ.
- Topical Bibles and Bible Promise books. These resources organize the gospel in such a way that a person can more easily see the ways in which the gospel can be applied.
- Daily Devotionals. The Spirit opens up wondrous things day after day for us in His Word. Read the writings of your brethren (*Lutheran Spokesman, Journal of Theology*, etc.) and see how others make use of the gospel treasures in a wide variety of situations. Also included here, of course, is study of the Scripture itself. The Psalms are particularly rich in applying the gospel to many real-life situations.
- Gospel summaries. A pastor spoke once of keeping a “cheat sheet” of Bible passages handy for answering questions and passing on the gospel message. One could carry a small card in the pocket with some gospel applications written on it.

There are many other resources to be tapped and many other ways that the gospel can be mined for its vast array of treasures. We can use a variety of aids in becoming more mature and faithful stewards of the riches God has given to us.

## **Conclusion**

Just as the gospel has given meaning and happiness to our lives, so it can touch the lives of those who have not yet come to know Christ as their Savior. They live in the same sinful world. They have the same sinful nature. They need the same Lord in their lives and the same Savior from their sins. The treasure chest of God is vast, and His gospel promises can heal many different people in many different circumstances. As the Apostle Paul wrote, *“My God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus”* (Phil. 4:19). May God grant that we manage His gospel gifts wisely while distributing them liberally.

A glory Thou dost give me, A treasure safe on high,  
That will not fail or leave me As earthly riches fly.

– Paul Gerhardt, 1653

## **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> 1 Corinthians 3:6: *“I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow.”*

<sup>2</sup> John 1:11: *“He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.”*

<sup>3</sup> Martin Luther, Sermon on Galatians, 1532. (Internet search at <http://www.crcchico.com/covenant/luther.html>)

## Exegesis of Isaiah 55:6-11

Paul Naumann

In the chapters preceding Isaiah 55 the Lord has poured out His heart to His people Israel. In chapter 53 He has described the redeeming, sacrificial work of the Suffering Servant. In chapter 54 He has detailed the benefits which that sacrifice would avail for His chosen people. Now the prophecy expands. In chapter 55 it is revealed that the blessings of redemption shall extend beyond Israel, even to the remotest people on the globe—to every sinner of every nation, in fact, who will heed His gracious gospel call. Accordingly, this chapter of Isaiah’s prophecy has been called the “Invitation Chapter” or “the Luke 14:17 of the Old Testament.”<sup>1</sup>

The first five verses of Isaiah 55 provide the immediate context of the section under consideration:

Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, and let your soul delight itself in abundance. Incline your ear, and come to Me. Hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you—the sure mercies of David. Indeed I have given him as a witness to the people, a leader and commander for the people. Surely you shall call a nation you do not know, and nations who do not know you shall run to you, because of the LORD your God, and the Holy One of Israel; for He has glorified you.

### Translation of verses 6-11

The exegete’s translation of this section is arranged in a format to indicate the division of strophes and the parallelism of the Hebrew text.

- 6** *Seek the LORD while He may be found,  
Call upon Him while He is near.*
- 7** *Let the wicked abandon his way,  
And the evil man his thoughts;  
Let him turn to the LORD, and He will have mercy upon him;  
And to our God, for He will pardon abundantly.*
- 8** *“For My thoughts are not your thoughts,  
Nor are your ways My ways,” declares the LORD.*
- 9** *“For the heavens are higher than the earth;  
Thus are My ways higher than your ways,  
And My thoughts than your thoughts.*
- 10** *“For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven,  
And do not return there,  
But water the earth and make it bear and sprout,  
Giving seed to him who sows and bread to him who eats,*
- 11** *So shall be My Word that goes forth from My mouth;  
It shall not return to Me having been in vain,  
But it shall accomplish what I please,  
And it shall succeed in that for which I sent it.”*

### Verse Six

6 דְּרָשׁוּ יְהוָה בְּהַמְצָאוֹ קְרָאֵהוּ בְהִיוֹתוֹ קְרוֹב:

*Seek the LORD while He may be found,  
Call upon Him while He is near.*

Qal impv masc pl; *inquire; search, seek*  
Niph inf constr + pref beth + 3 m s suff; *find*

דְּרָשׁוּ [דָּרַשׁ]  
בְּהַמְצָאוֹ [מָצָא]

Qal inf constr + 3 m s suff; *be, exist*

בְּהִיְתוֹ [הָיָה]

### Grammatical Notes:

The *masorah parva*<sup>2</sup> informs us that the combination **יְהִי וְיִהְיֶה** occurs three times at the beginning of a verse. The other two instances are 1 Chronicles 16:11 and Psalm 105:4, which both have “Seek the LORD and His strength; seek His face evermore!”

Of interest here is the word **בְּהִיְתוֹ**. It demonstrates how an infinitive construct with an inseparable preposition is used to represent in Hebrew the content of a whole subordinate clause. When used in the Hiph'al, the literal meaning is, “Seek the Lord *in His being found*,” i.e., when He can be found, or during that time when He allows Himself to be found. This same construction with the Niph'al and the infinitive construct is sometimes called the *Niph'al tolerativum*.

### Commentary:

Verses six and seven are the first of four two-verse stanzas calling sinners to repentance. The Lord ceases to speak in the first person, and the prophet himself once again takes up the narrative. Many commentators see these verses as the beginning of a completely new section in which the Lord, having addressed the Gentiles, now turns back to His apostate people of Israel. Young, however, argues convincingly that there is no reason not to see this passage too as directed to all men, particularly as we have just seen in verses 4-5 “the nations” so emphatically included in the household of faith.<sup>3</sup>

The import of verse six is not, of course, that the Lord is some sort of local presence, always moving about and thus difficult to find. Rather, it emphasizes the *time of grace* and the fact that the period during which we may receive by faith the blessings of God's grace is certainly limited. This time—the human lifespan here on earth—is not to be squandered with delay and complacency. Sinners are urged to take immediate advantage of the free salvation God offers through His Son. These words are echoed in the warning of Christ: “*A little while longer the light is with you. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you*” (John 12:35). Cf. also the Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 6:2: “*Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.*”

And lest the sinner despair that his iniquities are so great that they have disqualified him from God's grace, the marvelous promise is repeated in the next verse.

### Verse Seven

7 יַעֲזֹב רָשָׁע דַּרְכּוֹ וְאִישׁ אָנוּן מִחֲשַׁבְתּוֹ וַיֵּשֶׁב אֶל־יְהוָה וִירַחֲמֵהוּ וְאֵל־אֱלֹהֵינוּ כִּי־יִרְבֶּה לְסִלּוֹחַ:

*Let the wicked abandon his way,  
And the evil man his thoughts;  
Let him turn to the LORD, and He will have mercy upon him;  
And to our God, for He will pardon abundantly.*

Qal impf (juss) 3 m s; <i>forsake, abandon</i>	יַעֲזֹב [עָזַב]
Noun m pl const + 3 m s suff; <i>thought</i>	מִחֲשַׁבְתּוֹ [מִחְשָׁבָה]
Qal impf (juss) 3 m s + waw-conj; <i>turn, return</i>	וַיֵּשֶׁב [שָׁוַב]
Piel impf 3 m s + pref waw + 3 m s suff; <i>love;</i> and in Piel: <i>have compassion, pity, mercy</i>	וִירַחֲמֵהוּ [רָחַם]
Hiph impf 3 m s; <i>multiply, increase;</i> before inf constr w pref lahmed: <i>do (something) much, do abundantly</i>	יִרְבֶּה [רָבָה]
Qal inf const + pref lahmed; <i>forgive, pardon</i>	לְסִלּוֹחַ [סָלַח]

### Grammatical Notes:

Hebrew is short on modifiers to serve as adjectives and adverbs. In this verse we have an example of the left-handed way by which the language can come up with an adverb. A Hiph'il verb is followed by an infinitive

construct with prefixed lahmed. Here *יִרְבֶּה לְסִלּוֹחַ* means literally: *He will multiply to forgive*, though the more fluent rendering equates the Hiph'il verb as an adverb: *He will pardon abundantly*.<sup>4</sup>

Most Hebrew verbs are tri-literal, with nouns most commonly being derived from verbs. Occasionally we run across the opposite: a verb that is derived from a noun. Such a denominative verb is *רָחַם*, which derives from the noun *רֶחֶם*, *womb*. This beautifully descriptive word helps illustrate the disposition of our God when He has mercy upon the sinner. God's mercy and love toward us are even deeper and more unconditional than the love of a mother for the child of her womb. Indeed, God has said, "*Can a woman forget her nursing child, and not have compassion on the son of her womb? Surely they may forget, yet I will not forget you*" (Isa. 49:15).

### Commentary:

Again the gracious gospel promise shines forth. Yes, there is also the stern warning to the wicked that he abandon his way and to the evil man that he forsake his evil thoughts. There can be no compromise on sin. It may not be petted or nurtured in one's breast, but must be brought out and forsaken in true contrition and repentance. "*He who covers his sins will not prosper*" (Prov. 28:13). But no sooner is repentance urged than grace is once again promised in terms that are all-inclusive. We are comforted in similar words spoken by the One who obtained God's pardon for us: "*I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance*" (Matt. 9:13).

Finally, we are reminded that to those care-worn souls who come to Him, God does not offer his pardon in a miserly or piecemeal fashion. He pardons *abundantly*; He will *multiply to forgive*. We may add iniquity upon iniquity, but God doesn't use addition. He *multiplies* His grace unto us. Here is the cure for the persistent whisperings of Satan: "There may be forgiveness, but not for you!" God counters: "Is there much sin? Very well! I will provide an even greater pardon!" Cf. Romans 5:20.

### Verses Eight and Nine

8 כִּי לֹא מַחְשְׁבוֹתַי מַחְשְׁבוֹתֵיכֶם וְלֹא דַרְכֵיכֶם דְּרָכֵי נְאֻם יְהוָה:  
9 כִּי־גִבְהוֹ שָׁמַיִם מֵאָרֶץ כֵּן גִּבְהוֹ דְּרָכֵי מִדְּרָכֵיכֶם וּמַחְשְׁבֹתַי מִמַּחְשְׁבֹתֵיכֶם:

8 "For My thoughts are not your thoughts,  
Nor are your ways My ways," declares the LORD.

9 "For the heavens are higher than the earth;  
Thus are My ways higher than your ways,  
And My thoughts than your thoughts.

f pl + 1 c s suff; *thought, plan* חָשַׁב = *think* [מַחְשְׁבֹתַי] מַחְשְׁבוֹתַי  
Qal perf 3 pl; *be high, exalted, lifted up; proud* גִּבְהוֹ [גִּבְהוֹ]

### Grammatical Notes:

This section is illustrative of the way in which Hebrew handles the comparative (greater, higher, longer, etc.). There are relatively few adjectives in Hebrew and no comparative adjectives at all. So the comparative is generally expressed by some verbal form with the inseparable preposition *מִן* connected to the noun of comparison. *גִּבְהוֹ מִכָּל־הָעָם*, for example, is literally *tall from all the people*, but really means *taller than all the people* (1 Sam 9:2).<sup>5</sup> So in verse nine *כִּי־גִבְהוֹ שָׁמַיִם מֵאָרֶץ*, literally rendered, *For the heavens are lifted up from the earth*, really means: *For the heavens are higher than the earth*.

### Commentary:

After the brief interjection of verses 5-6 by the prophet, God Himself resumes speaking in verse eight. The expression *נְאֻם־יְהוָה*, *declares the LORD* (lit. *declaration or oracle of the LORD*), occurs 253 times in the Old Testament (e.g., Gen. 22:16, 2 Kings 9:26, Ps. 110:1). It is similar to the expression *כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה*, *thus says the LORD*, which occurs 413 times (e.g., Exod. 4:22, Jer. 11:3, Ezek. 13:3). *נְאֻם־יְהוָה* is a formulaic expression that denotes the fact that the accompanying statement is authoritative. The prophet is merely the penman. This Word is handed down directly by Almighty God Himself.

These verses are often cited in support of the doctrine of God's inscrutability. While that teaching is amply attested elsewhere in Scripture, the contrast presented here may be less between the thoughts of God and the thoughts of man in general and more between *the righteous purposes of God* and *the sinful schemes of man* in particular. In accord with this view we note that the antecedent of "your thoughts" and "your ways" in verses 9-10 is not mankind in general, but the "wicked" of verse 7. To that effect August Pieper writes:

For the most part these two verses are clear. There is only one question: What is the point of contrast between the thoughts and ways of God and those of the persons addressed? Since our catechism days we have assumed that here the ways and thoughts of God are set in contrast to the ways and thoughts of men in general, to impress upon us the incomprehensibility of God's rule over the world, as in 40:13f; Romans 11:34, etc. But that is a mistaken interpretation. God's ways are here set in contrast to the ways of the *rasha*, and the thoughts of God to the thoughts of the *ish awen*. Their thoughts are evil and lead to destruction; God's ways and thoughts are good, just, and holy, and lead to salvation.<sup>6</sup>

What Pieper points to in general finds application in relation to the gospel and man's perception of it. Think of how often sinful mortals attempt to reduce God to their level. Not only in the attempt to understand and evaluate His will, but especially with regard to His plan of salvation. To save people solely by grace, to punish the innocent Substitute so that the guilty would go free—we never would have done it that way. That God would redeem and justify man with no contributions on man's part whatsoever—that is simply unthinkable in human terms. Man operates on the basis of merit and compensation, whereas God operates on the basis of grace and mercy. This gap between God's way and our way is vividly illustrated by the vast height to which the heavens tower above the earth. Without any knowledge of modern aircraft and space exploration, the ancient reader could appreciate the point of comparison. So should we.

### Verses Ten and Eleven

10 כִּי כַאֲשֶׁר יֵרֵד הַגֶּשֶׁם וְהַשֶּׁלֶג מִן־הַשָּׁמַיִם וְשָׁמָּה לֹא יָשׁוּב כִּי  
אֶם־תֵּרְוֶה אֶת־הָאָרֶץ וְהוֹלִיכָהּ וְהִצְמִיחָהּ וְנָתַן זֶרַע לְזֹרַע וְלֶחֶם לְאֹכֵל:  
11 כֵּן יִהְיֶה דְבָרִי אֲשֶׁר יֵצֵא מִפִּי לֹא־יָשׁוּב אֵלַי רִיקָם כִּי אִם־עָשָׂה  
אֶת־אֲשֶׁר חָפְצָתִי וְהִצְלִיחַ אֲשֶׁר שָׁלַחְתִּיו:

10 "For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven,  
And do not return there,  
But water the earth and make it bear and sprout,  
Giving seed to him who sows and bread to him who eats,  
11 So shall be My Word that goes forth from My mouth;  
It shall not return to Me having been in vain,  
But it shall accomplish what I please,  
And it shall succeed in that for which I sent it."

Qal impf 3 m s; <i>come down, go down, descend</i>	יָרַד [יָרַד]
Noun m s + pref heh + pref waw; <i>snow</i>	וְהַשֶּׁלֶג [שֶׁלֶג]
Hiph perf 3 m s; <i>to drink, be full, satisfied;</i>	הִרְוָה [רָוָה]
Hiph: <i>to give to drink, to water, satiate</i>	
Hiph perf 3 m s + waw-consec + 3 m s suffix;	וְהִצְמִיחָהּ [צָמַח]
<i>sprout, spring up; Hiph: cause to sprout, make grow</i>	
Adv; <i>in vain, for naught</i>	רִיקָם = <i>make empty</i> [רִיק]
Qal perf 3 m s; <i>take delight in, be pleased with, desire</i>	חָפְצָתִי [חָפַץ]
Hiph perf 3 m s + waw-cons; <i>split, break; succeed;</i>	וְהִצְלִיחַ [צָלַח]
Hiph: <i>to succeed, prosper</i>	

### **Grammatical Notes:**

יָרַד is a doubly-weak verb. So what looks like a present participle (יָרֹד) is actually an imperfect in



which the first root letter, yodh, has dropped out.

### Commentary:

The Lord directs attention to expected weather patterns as He makes the instructive comparison: “*As the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and do not return there. . .*” As several commentators point out, this does not mean that the Lord and His holy writer were unaware of evaporation.<sup>7</sup> The point of comparison is simply made that just as the rain does not return to the clouds before accomplishing its purpose of watering the earth and nourishing the plants, so God’s Word will never return to Him void, having failed to accomplish its mission.

No one can doubt the efficacy of the rain God sends upon the earth. In the state of Washington, for example, April and May are the months when the long-endured winter rains finally begin to alternate with frequent days of warmth and sunshine. During May especially, when a day of gentle rain is often followed by a day of hot sun, the grass grows so fast that it must be mowed every third or fourth day. Failing to do this, the grass will soon become a hayfield where there once was lawn. Suffice it to say that it would never occur to a person to ask, “Does the rain really help plants grow?” This is self-evident, taken for granted. It is an undeniable fact.

Somewhat less self-evident—but no less true—is the efficacy of the Word of God. “*For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart*” (Heb 4:12). No other book can do what the Good Book does. Our own hearts bear witness of this, for each of us believers, having been convicted of our sins by the law and delivered to the gates of heaven by the gospel, can personally attest to the miraculous efficacy of God’s Word. Moreover, we have also witnessed many examples of its power at work in the lives of others. We know the exponential growth in God’s kingdom that can follow when that precious Word of life is faithfully disseminated. Indeed, our Lord presents a range of parables to illustrate just this fact as He spoke of the mustard seed, the leaven, the sower and the seed, and so forth.

Striking is the fact that two of the roots found here in verse 11, *יָפֶן*, *be pleased*, and *יָצַח*, *prosper or succeed*, also occur in verse 10 of the well-known 53<sup>rd</sup> chapter. There, however, the focus is somewhat different. There the prophet reminds us that the good pleasure of God was principally accomplished by the sacrifice of His Son. Isaiah 53:10: “*Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him (וַיִּהְיֶה הַתְּפִיץ דְּכָאוֹ); He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand*” (וַיִּצְחַק יְהוָה בְּיָדוֹ יִצְחַח).

Here in Isaiah 55:11 the focus is on the Word. *So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please.* This passage has comforted especially the under-shepherds of Christ’s flock over many centuries. For it is the pastors who at times seem so eager to assume the responsibility for growth in God’s kingdom and to assume a load of guilt if such growth is not apparent. We look for an increase in church membership and excoriate ourselves if it is not forthcoming. We rack our brains and second-guess our ministry if stubborn congregational problems persist. Such self-critical analysis is unproductive and unnecessary at best. Paul reminds us: “*So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase*” (1 Cor 3:7). And here in Isaiah 55 God assures us that we are merely to be faithful planters of the seed; it is the Lord’s good pleasure to make it bring forth and bud according to His unsearchable purposes.

With such truths in mind we take to heart what Martin Franzmann provided in hymn 781 of the *Worship Supplement*:

Though some be snatched and some be scorched  
And some be choked and matted flat,  
The sower sows; his heart cries out,  
“Oh, what of that, and what of that?”  
Preach you the Word and plant it home  
And never faint; the Harvest-Lord  
Who gave the sower seed to sow  
Will watch and tend His planted Word.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Luke 14:17 is part of the Great Supper parable which Jesus told: “A certain man gave a great supper and invited many, and sent his servant at supper time to say to those who were invited, ‘Come, for all things are now ready’” (Luke 14:16-17).

<sup>2</sup> The *massorah parva*, or small *massorah*, are the marginal notes made by the Massoretes who worked in the ninth and tenth centuries. notes in the upper and side margins of the manuscript, are written in Aramaic abbreviations, and give details about the spelling, frequency, and usage of particular words and phrases in the text.

<sup>3</sup> Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972) 3: 380.

<sup>4</sup> E. Kautzsch, editor, *Gesenius Hebrew Grammar* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910) para 114, n2.

<sup>5</sup> Ronald J. Williams, *Hebrew Syntax: An Outline* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967) 17.

<sup>6</sup> August Pieper, *Isaiah II* (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1979) 488.

<sup>7</sup> Young 3: 383.

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## Elijah's Mantle

Paul Tiefel, Jr.

The writer has chosen the title of this series with the same hope and prayer expressed in the first verse of hymn 483 (*The Lutheran Hymnal*), which is quoted at the end of this article. In presenting the articles of this series and implementing the information provided, we ultimately look to the Lord to impart His wisdom through the experience gained and shared by those who have gone before us in the pastoral ministry.

In this last installment various topics and suggestions are briefly addressed to bring the series to a close.

### **Giving Communion to members suffering from Alzheimer's or other mental impairments**

God's Word reveals that the reception of the Lord's Supper, when done in accord with Christ's institution, is a great blessing to the faith of Christian communicants and thus should be used regularly. Yet Scripture also reveals that this sacrament can bring a harmful judgment if used improperly. And it was never intended by the Savior to be dispensed to every Christian, as is the case with Baptism. God's Word prescribes that a communicant should examine himself (1 Cor. 11:28). This self-examination assumes a certain level of Bible knowledge as well as the understanding and mental capacity to apply it to one's self.

So what should be done when a communicant member has mental difficulties that impair self-examination? If the condition is severe and irreparable in this life, it is easy to recognize that one can serve the member with the gospel only. However, when the condition comes and goes, how does a pastor know whether the communicant is able to examine himself? Sometimes the question often asked, “Would you like to have the Lord's Supper?” is answered with an almost obligatory “Yes.” A tip that has proved helpful is to place the private Communion set out in plain view and wait for some type of recognition from the member. The pastor could also ask the member questions about what he sees set in front of him. Also, when private Communion has been a regular practice for pastor and member, the familiarity makes it easier for the communicant to bring up the topic of the Lord's Supper himself and thereby start the process of self-examination.

### **Teaching the doctrine of excommunication**

When covering what Scripture teaches on church discipline, it is always a challenge to underscore and reinforce the Biblical concepts involved. Those in confirmation class and adult instruction class especially need patient assistance in grasping these aspects of excommunication:

- It is not a specific type of sin, but rather impenitence that initiates church discipline.
- Such discipline is to be carried out in love, not from anger or from a position of superiority.
- The final step of excommunication is taken by the congregation, not by the pastor, elders, or church council.
- Excommunication affects, first and foremost, the unrepentant sinner's standing in the Holy Christian Church; the relationship to the visible congregation is secondary.

Is there a way for the teacher to measure what the student has taken away from the lessons on church discipline? Try assigning as homework the task of writing a sample letter of excommunication. It is surprising how many students will sign the letter with “In Christ” or “The pastor.” When this happens, the pastor will have

to underscore the point that excommunication deals with the unrepentant as not “in Christ” and that the action is not taken by one person but by the whole group of Christians assembled in Christ’s name.

An additional benefit to this type of assignment is that students are led to ponder what Bible passages to use and how to measure the proper mixture of law and gospel.

#### **“The congregation may rise for...”**

There are various times in a worship service when a pastor will use this phrase. But timing is important. When the phrase is followed by a sentence or two, the congregation is put in an awkward position. They must either respond to the pastor’s directive while he is still speaking or wait for him to finish and then stand up. It is a small touch, but an orderly one, for the pastor to state the purpose for standing and end with the directive to stand.

#### **Showing the congregation how the sermon is constructed**

A Bible Class which covers the pastor’s steps in sermonizing can be helpful on several fronts. It informs the congregation of the process involved, including the use of pericopes, study of the text in its original language, the use of cross references, the role of commentaries, the formulation of a theme and parts, and the important ingredient of fervent and frequent prayer. It gives the opportunity to emphasize that the sermon is not the product of what the preacher wants to say, but is intended to be a faithful and comprehensive proclamation of what God says.

Such a class can also help members to see the need for the pastor to be diligent in studying and also for them to allow him such time for study. They then can expect, even hold him accountable for the faithful use of that study time made available.

#### **Preparing an obituary for a Christian’s “victory service”**

Writing an obituary can be done by just about anyone. The basic format does not really change, only the specific details. We’re familiar with what is commonly written: birth date, parents, marriage and children if applicable, references to education, work, and hobbies, death date, and surviving family members. Newspaper editors, funeral directors, and family members can put all of this together.

But even as we seek to point out in our ministry to the bereaved members and in the funeral service and sermon, there is much more to the life of a Christian, namely, that which transcends the earthly, what God has done in his baptism, confirmation, and service in God’s kingdom. What a wonderful opportunity we can find in the obituary to use the Word of God both to comfort the survivors and to give glory to God.

Jesus spoke of the scribe who is able to bring out treasures, old and new, from the Word (Matt. 13:52). The writing of the obituary for a child of God is a wonderful opportunity to draw from the wealth of God’s Word a personalized application to the member’s life, especially in reference to his life as a Christian.

See the Obituary sample at the end of the article for a potential format one could use. Another example is the obituary of C.M. Gullerud printed in the March 1995 issue of the *Journal* (p. 2).

#### **Final thoughts and a prayer**

In giving counsel and making suggestions from one generation to the next, a Word from God is certainly in order. We hear the Apostle Paul (one from the older generation) addressing Timothy (one from the younger generation) in 2 Timothy 2:1-2, 14-15:

***You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.***

***Remind them of these things, charging them before the Lord not to strive about words to no profit, to the ruin of the hearers. Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.***

Paul’s concern for the future of the gospel and its ministry is evident. We note especially his focus on Timothy’s careful use of *God’s* Word in order to pass that Word—given to Paul, then to Timothy—to the next generation and to many thereafter. Thus a line of succession has stretched down to us 2,000 years later, all accomplished in and by the grace of the Lord Jesus.

The prayer from our hearts, then, is that God would bless us with the same grace to pass faithfully what we have received to those who follow. The hymnist’s prayer puts it well:

1. God of the prophets, bless the prophets' sons;  
Elijah's mantle o'er Elisha cast.  
Each age its solemn task may claim but once;  
Make each one nobler, stronger, than the last.  
5. Make them apostles, heralds of Thy Cross;  
Forth may they go to tell all realms Thy grace.  
Inspired of Thee, may they count all but loss  
And stand at last with joy before Thy face. Amen. - TLH 483:1, 5

**Sample obituary for a service bulletin**  
The Obituary of Lisa Smith

**James 1:17** *Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.*

Lisa Smith was a gift of God to many and the recipient of many gifts from God. On January 13, 1924, in Ann Arbor, Michigan the LORD blessed Nathan Jones and his wife, Sally nee Berg, with the gift of a baby girl Lisa. She was the oldest of five children.

**Acts 2:38** *Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."*

On January 20, 1924, the Spirit of God gave Lisa the gift of the rebirth of her soul through the sacrament of Baptism and the gift of forgiveness of sins. The Spirit also blessed her with a Christ-centered education at home, and on May 29, 1938, she was confirmed in the Christian faith.

**Ephesians 3:7** (of the gospel) *I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power.*

On May 23, 1953, the LORD blessed Lisa with the gift of a Christian husband, Tim Smith. She thus started her ministry of the gospel as a Christian wife and, when the LORD blessed the Smiths with six children, her service also as a Christian mother. By the grace of God she served both roles very well and in a most loving and meek way.

**1 Peter 4:11** *If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.*

By the grace of God she also served faithfully as the helper to her husband. She was a concerned and helpful Christian friend to many. Her life of service to others was a reflection of the gracious love with which God blessed her through her faith in Jesus Christ and the way she glorified God.

**Romans 6:23** *For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Lisa and Tim retired and moved to Atlanta, GA in 1984. The LORD took Tim home to heaven on June 15, 2003. Mrs. Smith lived in their home until the spring of 2004, when she moved to Golden Years Assisted Living. In recent years she battled several health problems. Recently she went to the hospital where her health continued to decline. Finally on Dec. 14, 2008, the LORD gave Lisa the gift of eternal life. Her body was buried earlier today in Rest Haven Cemetery where it will await its resurrection on the last day. The time of her earthy pilgrimage was 84 years, 11 months, and 1 day.

**Ephesians. 2:8-9** *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.*

Lisa was preceded in death by . . . .

**Romans 5:17** *For if by one man's offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.*

Lisa leaves behind still in the time of grace . . . .

**2 Corinthians 9:15** *Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!*

## **Book Reviews**

**Paul Timothy McCain, et al., editors: *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions—A Reader's Edition of the Book of Concord*, 2nd edition, Concordia Publishing House, 2006, hardcover, 745 pages.**

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One of the pastoral challenges of our times is to instill in our members a deeper appreciation of both the Biblical and Lutheran confessional legacy that is theirs. As part of the last generation to have vivid personal memories of the events leading up to the birth, early struggles, and blessings of our synod, the Church of the Lutheran Confession, I have found it increasingly difficult, especially among the younger generation, to generate interest in the CLC story and its significance for our lives today. To our youth it is ancient history. To many of our older members it is a historical blur in which they trust their faithful shepherds to sort it all out and lead them accordingly. We pray that the Lord will use the upcoming Jubilee Anniversaries of both our congregations and church body to renew and heighten our awareness and appreciation of “the great things the Lord has done for us” (Ps. 126:3) as members of our own congregations and of our larger fellowship.

If the beginning of the CLC seems like ancient history to many today, can you imagine how the 428 year-old, Reformation-era *Book of Concord* is typically viewed? Yet it is doubtful that any human document more clearly and comprehensively summarizes, conveys, defines, and defends who we are and what we believe. With very good reason CLC pastors and teachers profess without reservation their allegiance to it in their ordination and installation vows and in their calls to service in the public ministry. With good reason it is part of our church constitutions to which every member subscribes.

In times of using Scripture diligently to deal with doctrinal confusion, the Biblical foundation of the *Book of Concord* has directed us to the truths of God's Word and the past errors that Satan often seeks to resurrect in somewhat different forms and settings (cf., for example, the Third Use of the Law controversy and Article VI of “The Formula of Concord”). “What we believe and teach” from God's Word and what we “reject and condemn” as contrary to Scripture remain to this day a clear and vital approach to the Lord's mandate to “test the spirits” (1 John 4: 1), which every Christian is called upon to do. In the *Book of Concord* we have been given a confessional standard that rests upon the rock-solid “foundation of the apostles and prophets” (Eph. 2:20). And “because” (*quia*, not *quatenus*, i.e., “in so far as”) we recognize the Lutheran Confessions as a true and correct exposition of Holy Scripture, in faith we wholeheartedly and without reservation subscribe to them.

Nearly forty years ago Concordia Professor William Arndt said it well: “*The Confessions are the brightest jewel in the crown of the Lutheran Church.* In speaking of our Confessions we dwell on facts that should make the heart of every Lutheran swell with joy and thanksgiving. We are looking here on one of the brightest pages of our history as a Church. It is true, I admit, that the laurels of our fathers must not become the soft bed of the children on which they repose in sweet indolence, and it may be that there is somebody who speaks about the achievements of his ancestors to such an extent that he entirely forgets about the plowing, harvesting, and threshing which he himself ought to do. But my plea is that we do not become so occupied with our daily tasks in the churches that we forget the magnificent treasures which are furnished us in our Confessions. To study them, to read them frequently, to ponder their content, is like traveling in a mountain country where the air is pure, the brooks sparkle, the birds sing their most beautiful songs, and the clatter of the noisy streets cannot disturb and intrude” (*Concordia Theological Monthly*, 20:9, pp. 679-680, emphasis Arndt).

### **Ever confessing**

The encouragement to and need for ever confessing our Savior and His Word are evident throughout Scripture. Consider what is said in the following passages.

- Psalm 119:46 *I will speak of Your testimonies also before kings, and will not be ashamed.*
- Matthew 10:32 *“Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven.”*

- Matthew 16:16 *Simon Peter answered and said, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”*
- Romans 10:9 *For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.*
- 2 Corinthians 4:13 *And since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, “I believe and therefore I spoke,” we also believe and therefore speak.*
- 1 Peter 3:15 *But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.*
- 1 John 4:2 *By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God.*

Our need to confess Christ and His Word will never change or diminish, especially in these last days. Many are the times when God’s people are called upon to give personal and corporate expression to their faith and beliefs and, in so doing, to praise, to proclaim, to teach, to witness, to unify, to defend, and to answer. The Lutheran Confessions serve well to carry out many of these purposes, as noted and aptly stated by the editors of this newest edition of the *Book of Concord*:

The Book of Concord is a book for all Christians, church workers and laypeople alike.

Christians who want to be true and faithful to the teachings of the Bible return, again and again, to this book. In these confessions of faith they find agreement, unity, and harmony in the truths of God’s Word. These documents never take the place of the Bible. They distinguish between what the Bible teaches and the false teachings of others, which undermine the use of God’s Word. They give Christians a common voice to confess their faith to the world. (p. xvi)

It is clear from the title, ***Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions—A Readers Edition of the Book of Concord***, that this edition is intended to bridge the gap between mere professional use by theologians and personal use by laypeople (of note here is the fact that laymen were involved in the original writing of the Book of Concord). This reviewer believes that this second edition has largely succeeded in achieving that goal.

### ***The Book of Concord***

The name “Concordia” means “with the same heart”—in *concord*—and reflects a commitment to the truth of Scripture so strong and deep it is as if all who confess it share the same spiritual heartbeat. The noble original purpose that brought the *Book of Concord* into existence remains to this day: to achieve doctrinal harmony among those who profess confessional Lutheranism.

Like most confessional writings then and now, the *Book of Concord* did not simply appear on the scene in its final form in 1580. The days following Luther’s death in 1546 were difficult ones for the Lutherans. Melancthon’s *leise treten* (“stepping softly”) resulted in conciliatory gestures extended to both Rome and the Reformed. Coupled with relentless assaults on the Lutherans from the Holy Roman Empire and the Roman Church, it appeared that the Reformation might be short-lived. Yet God wonderfully intervened again by raising up new Reformation leaders to produce first the Formula of Concord in 1577 and then the collection of faithful Lutheran symbols in the *Book of Concord* in 1580.

Under the guidance of Jacob Andrea the first draft of the *Book of Concord* was completed in 1579. After review by Martin Chemnitz and with Andrea’s preface and a final list of Formula of Concord subscribers added, the German *Book of Concord* was published in Dresden, Germany on June 25, 1580. In order to leave a wider testimony far beyond German borders, a Latin edition, primarily done by Nicolas Selnecker with assistance from Chemnitz, was approved in 1584.

Previous editions of the *Book of Concord* include Henkel’s in 1851, Jacobs’ in 1882, William Dau and Frederick Bente’s *Concordia Triglotta* (LC-MS) in 1921, Tappert’s (ALC) in 1959, and the edition of Kolb (LC-MS) and Wenger (ELCA) in 2000.

This newest edition was first a 2005 Concordia Publishing House product, put together by an LCMS editorial committee headed by Rev. Paul T. McCain. All 40,000 original copies were distributed quickly, and a second edition—what is here being reviewed—was printed in 2006.

### ***The text of Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions***

Not unlike our own newly revised CLC “Statement of Faith and Purpose,” questions have been raised about seeming textual difficulties between the German and Latin versions of the *Book of Concord*. None have proven to be of substance, but only involve language variation. While the German *Book of Concord* was the

original and official version, it is important to note that Martin Chemnitz was involved in the publication of both the German and Latin versions. Of greater concern to us would be the theological liberties taken by modern Lutheran scholars who, on the one hand, downplay the *Book of Concord* as a time-limited document with little significance or application for today's Lutherans and yet, on the other hand, seek to support liberal theology with out-of-context and unscriptural interpretations. Compare, for example, the ecumenical interpretation of Article VII, #2 of the Augsburg Confession: "For the true unity of the Church it is enough to agree about the doctrine of the Gospel . . . ."

This new *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions* appears to have no other agenda than to be faithful to the original and to make the English translation more user-friendly without changing the meaning of the Confessions themselves. To that end it has restated many Latin-based terms and removed much original Latin. It has reworked complex sentences having multiple subordinate clauses into shorter sentences that have independent clauses. It has also utilized more paragraph divisions. The resultant text is based on the "officially approved" 1580 German and 1584 Latin versions, just as the English version of *Concordia Triglotta* also was. Sometimes the translation of words from the other languages are added in parentheses to explain further or to clarify.

Somewhat more controversial may be the simplification of certain terms. While not done with any frequency, the reviewer's example may raise a few questions. With a modern understanding of the word "remission" in view—namely, the *lessening of disease symptoms*—rather than the *sending away* of sins (its former primary definition), the English word consistently used in *Concordia* is "forgiveness." Yet our people regularly encounter "remission" in Bible translations, hymns, and liturgy, hear it at the Lord's altar, and are rightly taught that our sins are indeed sent away by God.

In a 2006 *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* review of the first edition (2005), Professor John Brug also expressed concern over the translating and paraphrasing of some Latin terms. In Article III (Christ) of The Apology of the Augsburg Confession, the Latin term *naturaliter* is translated "naturally" in this shortened sentence: "Christ had to be in His mother's womb naturally and personally and become man." Brug suggests that "An English reader, especially one without theological training, is apt to understand 'naturally' as meaning 'in a natural way' or 'not supernaturally,' rather than the correct meaning, 'according to his [two] natures'" (*WLQ*, 103:1, p. 65). Brug's point is well taken, although the broader context in which this statement is made does help to clarify how the word "naturally" is to be understood.

### **Church and Ministry**

While knowing little about the general editor or other members of the editorial committee, it is apparent to this reviewer that they are deeply committed to Scripture and to the Lutheran Confessions. And yet claiming to be "old Missouri" or "conservative Missouri" in many doctrinal areas does not remove concerns about others—including Church Fellowship and the traditional LCMS position on Church and Ministry. Although there are no text alterations of the Confessions themselves, the introductory notes to each Confession article—generally of excellent quality and very helpful in understanding the article at hand—do leave room for subjective bias in the doctrinal area presented. In the introduction note to Article V (Ministry) of the Augsburg Confession, the *Predigamt* (preaching office) seems to be limited to the pastoral ministry, while in the article itself only a simple reference is made to the gospel ministry, as stated in the beginning of Article V of the Augsburg Confession: "So that we may obtain this faith, the ministry of teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted." Likewise, the introduction note to Article XIV (Order in the Church) points to the early church practice of ordination and laying on of hands as done to "ratify" (make valid or official) a pastor's "first call." Some of this thinking is implied in the historic wording of our 1941 Synodical Conference *Lutheran Hymnal* absolution: "I, by virtue of my office as a called and ordained servant of the Word . . . forgive you all your sins. . . ."

### **Useful features of *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions***

The following features of this edition have, in my judgment, made a reading and study of the Lutheran Confessions more interesting, understandable, and beneficial.

***Capsule summaries of each Confession* are given on pages xxxi-xxxii of the Introduction. As part of “An Overview of the Book of Concord” section, these summaries provide in table form succinct information on the date, author, and content of the confessions in this order: Apostle’s Creed, Nicene Creed, Athanasian Creed, Small Catechism, Large Catechism, Augsburg Confession, Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Smalcald Articles, Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope, and the Formula of Concord.**

*A reading guide* is also given in the book’s Introduction to provide a schedule to follow in reading the Lutheran Confessions in segments that span 52 weeks.

*A Reformation timeline* helps the reader track key events taking place around the world from 1436 to 1618. Events that pertain most directly to the Lutheran Confessions are indicated in boldface.

*Editor’s introduction notes to every creed and confessional article* are, for the most part, well done and provide useful information, both historical and doctrinal in content.

**Typeset** for this edition is very readable. The text of the article has a different font from the notes and introductions given. The use of marginal numbers (verses) for location is also helpful.

**Illustrations** come in the form of 16th century artists’ woodcuts (Albrecht Durer) and drawings that depict stories from the Bible and significant persons in Reformation history.

**Appendixes A-C and indexes** at the end include:

A) *Catalog Of Testimonies* (early Church Father writings attesting to the person and work of Christ);

B) *A Brief Exhortation to Confession* (Luther on Private Confession);

C) *Saxon Visitation Articles* of 1592 (a confession included in the Triglotta that rejects Calvinism);

Visual Overview of the Reformation (Color paintings and their stories);

A glossary of terms (very useful!);

Description of Persons and Groups (alphabetical);

Teaching and Preaching Illustrations (from the Confessions);

Bible Reference Index (indicating every passage used in the Confessions);

Subject Index (doctrinal);

Reformation Map.

## Conclusion

In spite of a few concerns already mentioned, I believe this volume will be a wonderful blessing to Christ’s Church. It should be helpful in narrowing the gap between the typical Lutheran’s perception of the Confessions as ancient, stodgy, highly theological, impractical documents and the reality of these Confessions as being a living, practical, faith-renewing treasure for our church and for our Christian lives today.

As one considers the current climate within the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod, one is struck by the bipolar theological elements struggling for control of this once great bulwark of confessional Lutheranism in our country. As a result of its failure to uphold Scripture in all areas of doctrine and practice, one can now find pastors, professors, and congregations with widely divergent views on a variety of doctrinal issues. On the one hand, we observe a publishing house which has produced an excellent new hymnal and this revised Book of Concord. On the other hand, one can point to theological articles in journals that would make Luther cringe and also to voices and practices clearly at odds with confessional Lutheranism that are being tolerated in their midst. Clearly and sadly, the intrusion of false teaching in the LCMS, an event which precipitated our own denominational origin, has taken its toll on the message and witness of this church body and, ultimately, on the faith of many who hear that message and witness. Yet we continue to give thanks for any and all efforts to echo and resound the voice of the Good Shepherd in His Word, including the production of materials that honor our Savior and His Word. This newest version of the *Book of Concord* would seem to fall into that blessed category.

In closing, may we take to heart the final words of Frederick Bente in his preface to *Concordia Triglotta*:

The Lutheran Church differs from all other churches in being essentially the Church of the pure Word and unadulterated Sacraments. Not the great number of her adherents, not her organizations, not her charitable and other institutions, not her beautiful customs and liturgical forms, etc., but the precious truths confessed by her symbols in perfect agreement with the Holy Scriptures constitute the true beauty and rich treasures of our Church, as well as the never-failing source of her vitality and power.

Wherever the Lutheran Church ignored her symbols or rejected all or some of them, there she always fell an easy prey to her enemies. But wherever she held fast to her God-given crown, esteemed and studied



her confessions, and actually made them a norm and standard of her entire life and practice, there the Lutheran Church flourished and confounded all her enemies.

Accordingly, if Lutherans truly love their Church, and desire and seek her welfare, they must be faithful to her confessions and constantly be on their guard lest any one rob her of her treasure. To strengthen this loyalty and to further and facilitate the study of our “Golden Concordia,”—such is the object also of this Jubilee Edition—the *Triglot Concordia*.

May God be pleased, as in the past, so also in the future, to bless our Church, and graciously keep her in the true and only saving Christian faith as set forth and confessed in the Lutheran symbols, whose paramount object is to maintain the gem of Luther’s Reformation, the blessed doctrine of salvation by grace only, which most wonderfully magnifies the great glory of our God, and alone is able to impart solid comfort to poor sinners. (p. IV)

– David Schierenbeck

**Scott R. Murray: *Law, Life, and the Living God—The Third Use of the Law in Modern American Lutheranism*, Concordia Publishing House, 2002, paperback, 250 pages.**

One of the disputes that troubled the Church of the Lutheran Confession in the seventies was the controversy over the so-called Third Use of the Law. The terminology concerning the third use comes from Article VI of the Formula of Concord, where we read in the first paragraph of the Epitome: “The law has been given to people for three reasons.” After the first two reasons listed, curb and mirror, comes this description of the third use: “Third, after they have been reborn—since nevertheless the flesh still clings to them—that precisely because of the flesh they may have a sure guide, according to which they can orient and conduct their entire life” (*The Book of Concord*, Kolb-Wengert, p. 502).

In the various papers on this topic presented among us, it was customary to make reference, first of all, to the Holy Scriptures and then to the Lutheran Confessions in the *Book of Concord*, as well as to the writings of Martin Luther, and maybe once in a while to *Christian Dogmatics* by Francis Pieper. I cannot recall that in our controversy mention was ever made of controversies on this topic in other church bodies, especially in the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod (LCMS), nor of the views of prominent theologians in Europe and America. Scott Murray—pastor of an LCMS congregation in Houston, Texas at the time of this book’s publication—has in these pages presented a most fascinating discussion of what has transpired in American Lutheranism with reference to the third use of the law. There is no reference to the CLC controversy, nor any mention made of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) or its sister church body, the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS). Murray concentrates on his own church body, and also on the views of prominent European theologians and those of leading teachers in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and its predecessor church bodies.

The introduction takes us back to the origin of Article VI in the Formula of Concord and then jumps ahead to the lectures of C. F. W. Walther on Law and Gospel. For some reason Walther did not discuss the third use of the law in his lectures. Murray says: “Walther focused on the accusing nature, or the second use, of the Law” (p. 26). But Law and Gospel was not a hot topic for American Lutheranism until Karl Barth became a prominent theologian in Europe. Barth proposed that the law of God was good news or gospel. Barth was opposed chiefly by Werner Elert, who, according to Murray, “flatly denied that the concept of the third use of the Law should be retained in Lutheran theology. First, Elert contended that Luther did not teach a third use at all. . . . Elert categorically denied the informatory use of the Law. Thus, if there is a ‘third use,’ it is merely the second use for the regenerate” (p. 27). Elert’s views were presented in English in a little pamphlet entitled “Law and Gospel.” Elert did not want Lutheranism to be swallowed up by Calvinism, which like its founder had exalted the third use of the law as its chief use. Elert, it would seem, was unable to distinguish between the third use of the law as Calvin taught it and the third use as presented in our Lutheran Confessions.

Murray’s second chapter discusses the period between 1940 and 1960 when the views of European Luther scholars were wielding great influence on American theologians. In general these Luther scholars tried to show that there was a big difference between the views of Luther himself and the orthodox theologians who drew up the Formula of Concord. Among those influenced in this way were Richard Caemmerer (LCMS seminary teacher), Jaroslav Pelikan (historian of the LCMS, who eventually became a member of an Eastern Orthodox congregation), George Forell, and William Lazareth (the last two associated with church bodies that were predecessors of the ELCA). Murray contends: “Both Lazareth and Forell denied the third use as

unevangelical and unLutheran. Here they followed Elert. Lazareth in particular presumed that the *usus legis* were independent and distinguishable. Thus, if the Law accused, it could not likewise instruct” (p. 61). There were those in the LCMS who opposed these views and tried to defend the position of confessional Lutheranism. Murray concludes: “The LCMS still gave lip service to Lutheran orthodoxy, but in reality it tended to deviate from orthodoxy” (p. 74).

The long third chapter presents the years from 1961 to 1976 as an era when the third use of the law was denied by the majority of theologians in both the LCMS and in the more liberal American Lutheran Church (ALC) and Lutheran Church in America (LCA), two church bodies who joined together in 1988 to form the ELCA. This was the era of “Gospel reductionism” at Valparaiso University (affiliated with the LCMS) when the doctrine of the Bible’s inspiration was tossed out in favor of letting the gospel alone determine doctrine and practice. Murray names and presents quotations from their writings. Here, for example, is a quotation from Stephen Schmidt: “The Ten Commandments can serve as no guide for Lutheran morality. The Law does not serve a Gospel function; it can only accuse” (Murray, p. 107).

These extreme views were opposed by LCMS president Jacob Preus, who rejected the view “that the Christians, as men who have been freed from the curse of the Law, no longer need the instruction of the Law to know what God’s will is for their life and conduct” (p. 133). Other LCMS defenders of the third use of the law included David Scaer, John Montgomery, and Kurt Marquart, who is quoted as saying: “In *chic* Lutheran usage, ‘evangelical’ means tolerant, and the ‘Gospel’ is identified with a kind of secular permissiveness” (p. 142). I think we can rightly regard the so-called Valparaiso theology as antinomianism.

In his fourth chapter Murray contends that the extreme antinomianism of the previous period was brought into better balance in the years from 1977 to 1998. Murray states: “The third use of the Law was given more eloquent defenses, in part because of new insights into the theology of Luther” (p. 167). In other words, Luther was not found to be so different from the theologians who wrote the Formula of Concord. Among the defenders of the third use Murray refers to Theodore Jungkuntz (of WELS background), Scott Ickert, and David Yeago. For example, we read: “Like Jungkuntz, Ickert is concerned about moral license and sees in the third use a defense against such moral deterioration in his church body” (p. 178). Along the same line Murray states: “Especially the younger ELCA theologians were alarmed at the moral excesses that were being excused on the basis of the freedom of the Gospel. They were concerned that a Law-free Gospel had given way to antinomianism” (pp. 185-186).

Five pages (pp. 187-192) are given to the views of Theodore Jungkuntz, who taught at Valparaiso University, but differed from the earlier Valparaiso theologians. He is quoted as saying: “The Law insists on the fact ‘that’ we should walk in the new life and it gives instruction as to ‘what’ the content of the new life is. But it is completely helpless when it comes to actually producing the new life in us. That remains purely and entirely the function of the Gospel” (p. 188). Murray summarizes: “The rejection of an immutable Law opens the door to the devil and all manner of immorality” (p. 188). “Jungkuntz felt that modern ethical relativism was a greater threat to the church’s life and teaching than was moralism” (p. 189). At the same time Jungkuntz did not want to minimize the accusatory function of the Law: “Yet this accusing character of the Law does not preclude its being an instruction to Christians about the nature and necessity of good works” (p. 190).

This sounds very similar to the statement approved by the Church of the Lutheran Confession at its 1996 convention. We quote pertinent sections from the Proceedings, p. 82:

4. The Law in all of its uses retains its full condemning force, even in the third use when it presents the fixed rule according to which the regenerate, because of their flesh, are to direct their lives (CT 805:1; 265:55).
5. The Law of God prescribes to believers good works, not solely for a didactic purpose and not solely for a condemning purpose. It shows and indicates that in this life good works are still imperfect and impure in them. “That his good works are imperfect and impure he recognizes from the Law. Rom. 7:7ff.” (Isa. 64:6; CT 969:21; 209: 198).

In a very brief concluding chapter Murray asks how the third use of the law has fared among Lutherans. His concluding sentence: “Many American Lutheran theologians found a legitimate place for the third use of the Law in contemporary Lutheran theology” (p. 219). We can certainly appreciate Murray’s efforts in doing all the necessary research to bring all of this information to our attention. We can again be grateful to our God for guiding the authors of our Lutheran Confessions to present this topic according to the Scriptures without going to extremes in the direction of legalism or antinomianism. Article VI of the Formula of Concord is still our confession today.

**Gene Edward Veith, Jr.: *The Spirituality of the Cross—The Way of the first Evangelicals*, Concordia Publishing House, 1999, paperback, 127 pages.**

It is always interesting to read an account and defense of confessional Lutheranism from someone who was not born and raised a Lutheran. Gene Edward Veith, Jr., has written many books having to do with American culture and Christianity. He has served as culture editor for *World* magazine and also as professor of English at Concordia University in Mequon, Wisconsin (affiliated with LCMS). At the present time he has an administrative and teaching position at Patrick Henry College in Virginia. In this short book Veith explains in simple language the basic elements of Christianity as confessed by confessional Lutherans. There are chapters on justification, the means of grace, the theology of the cross, vocation, and Luther's teaching on the two kingdoms (sacred and secular, or church and state). Even though he and his wife came into Lutheranism as adults, he is now very clear on the differences between general Protestantism and evangelicalism, on the one hand, and confessional Lutheranism, on the other.

I appreciated in particular his chapter on vocation. Martin Luther stressed the fact that as Christians we can serve God in just about every calling there is. Of course, God does not need our service, but our neighbor does. Self-chosen works in an attempt to bring about God's favor toward us are not pleasing to God. Veith points out: "The Christian's relationship to God is based on sheer grace and forgiveness on God's part; the Christian's relationship to other people, however, is to be based on love put into action" (p. 77) "For Luther, ascetic self-denials, God-appeasing rituals, and private moralistic attitudes are not good works at all—one must actually help somebody" (p. 78).

Veith also has a good understanding of the difference between church and state, an understanding that is rare in our day. I think that all the adult members of our congregations would be helped in their thinking about politics, economics, and culture by reading this book. Veith understands the difference between taking action as an individual citizen and carrying out one's duties as a government official or representative.

The back cover explains that Veith at one time in his life "embraced liberal theology" and also became a "raving, miracle-expecting fundamentalist." But by God's providence Veith and his wife found themselves attending a Lutheran service that was much more somber and serious than anything they had experienced before, and gradually they were drawn in. Veith explains: "We found the services—and the depth of the preaching and the richness of the doctrines I started reading about—so compelling that we decided to join. This was not easy either. . . . We had to take a class that extended over months, as thorough and as long as the college courses I had just finished in graduate school, but there was a lot, a lot, to learn" (pp. 109-110).

The Lutheran congregation they joined practiced closed Communion. With reference to this experience Veith says, "My wife and I knew we were not allowed to take Communion—we could not receive Christ's body until we had been thoroughly instructed, accepted into the fellowship, and knew what we were doing. Though all of the other churches we attended, considering the sacrament not quite such a big deal, were free and easy about who could take Communion, I was not put off by the Lutherans' closed Communion practices and strict fellowship rules. Such practices were alien to my experience, but they added to the sense that something monumental was happening with the Sacrament" (p. 109).

An appendix attempts to explain in a very brief way the differences between confessional Lutherans (whom Veith calls "the first Evangelicals") and other Christian groupings. His point of view back in 1998, when this appendix was written, was that the Missouri Synod and the Wisconsin Synod were both confessional churches, whereas the ELCA was not. At that time he believed that the greatest threat to confessional Lutheranism was not liberalism but evangelicalism. In his words, "Many Lutheran churches have been jettisoning their liturgy and their distinctive beliefs, in favor of emulating the evangelicals, adapting techniques from the church growth movement, singing 'praise songs,' preaching sermons on pop-psychology, and otherwise abandoning their spiritual heritage in favor of generic American Protestantism" (p. 121).

It is certainly good for us to be reminded of this danger. There are hints in Veith's book, however, that he has been influenced a bit by the "high church" sympathizers among Lutherans today. For example, among the "forthright" practices of confessionalism he mentions "no weddings during Lent" (p. 122). He also claims that "many of the most ardently confessional pastors, those who are most concerned to bring back the Lutheran traditions in both doctrine and worship, are those straight out of seminary" (p. 122). From our own observation of what is going on in LCMS seminaries today, it seems likely that many of these younger pastors are "high church" advocates.